

W & T Avery Labels

Observations and Conclusions

By Mal Campbell

Although the business that was to later become W & T Avery commenced about 1730, the focus of this article is from the time of William and Thomas Avery taking control of the company in 1816. But it is important to briefly mention the company's earlier history.

Circa 1730 John Barton had a thriving stilliard business in Birmingham; his son William Bridges Barton took over c 1762 and sold to Thomas Beach in 1782. Beach retired in 1797 and his business was taken over by Joseph Balden (married to Thomas Beach's niece). Balden died in 1813 and the business passed to his elder son, Joseph Balden Jr, aged 18 at the time, who was not a trained scale maker and was subsequently compelled by the family to hand the business over to Balden's elder sister's husband, William Avery, with other trustees, one of whom was Thomas Beach. William Avery's brother, Thomas, also joined the company. The business improved, and it was legally purchased from Balden in 1816.¹ Thomas Avery died in 1823, Thomas Beach died in 1824, and William continued to build foundations of what was to become the very successful company of W & T Avery.

This article includes several examples of W & T Avery labels, that I am aware of, as mainly found on portable scale boxes and on the inside of drawers of larger scales. Predominantly they are on scales I have purchased, but other sources are individually acknowledged. This article is based on my observations from here in Australia, and I have examined labels on the internet, articles from *Equilibrium*,² an early Avery 1830s catalogue,³ early Avery trade cards circa 1850,⁴ and an 1880 Avery catalogue.⁵

I am aware there were also Avery labels for folding gold balances in both English and foreign markets, diamond scales and coin scales, but as they are outside

my area of focus, I will leave that for others who have greater knowledge of these scales to separately examine labels for these scales.

From my copy of an 1880 Avery catalogue and subsequent catalogues, I note that labels depicted are not sufficiently clear to identify the wording, although they are more substantial in detail than the earlier examples shown in this article.

I would be delighted to find out about any corrections to my thoughts or observations; other copies of the labels as detailed below; and other Avery box and drawer labels which have existed over the life of the company. As for stamps as have appeared on scale pans, beams, and lever lifters, and trademarks, they are another topic. It would be great to hear if others have details of the period in which the various labels were issued.

The book, *The Avery Business*⁶ indicates that the words "late T. Beach" disappeared from published references to the W & T Avery name by the time of the death of William Avery in 1843. However, in the same book is a copy of a W & T Avery trade card circa 1850, which has a reference to "Late T Beach".

Eric Parish, W & T Avery Museum Curator in 1984,⁴ in a letter to the owner of a set of box beam scales and a steelyard scale, both having stamps "Late T Beach", indicated that the museum considered the age of both sets of scales to be between 1818 and 1840. I purchased the steelyard scale.

I also agree with the school of thought that the company would have printed a stock of labels and would have continued to use up the existing stock of labels on box lids and drawers until such time as the stock was exhausted. This explains why examples of this label have been observed on scale boxes which date from the 1860s to the 1880s.



Figure 1: I expect this label, that was shown on *Equilibrium* page 1379, "W & T Avery" Late BALDEN, Successor to T. BEACH" is probably the earliest known Avery label due to reference to both Balden and Beach. As pointed out in the *Equilibrium* article, this stamp block was an altered version of Thomas Beach's stamp block of 1785. 11 Digbeth was the home and workshop of John Barton, stillard maker, from 1746 until his death in 1761, then was the address of his son, William Bridgers Barton until 1781. Then his successor was Thomas Beach.



Figure 2: Probably earlier than the labels shown in later figures. I have another example of this label which is on green paper. This label is smaller than subsequent labels, and it has a less sophisticated border and description of the services offered by the maker. This was a change from the previous ornate label as shown Figure 1 above. It was possibly an early attempt at relying on their own name rather than their predecessors. I also note that there is no reference to Late T Beach; so possibly it is before his death in 1824.

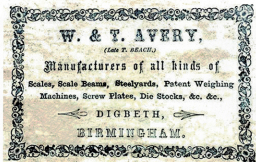


Figure 3: The earliest of the larger stamp blocks which describe the company and the services offered. This label would be dated after 1824 and based on the simplicity of style is earlier than subsequent labels shown.

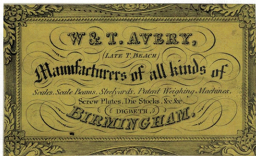


Figure 4: This label appears on page 4 of the W & T Avery Catalogue 1830s.² I have not yet otherwise seen this version of W & T AVERY LATE T BEACH label on the actual box or drawer of a balance, so it is most interesting. The border is significantly different to that of all of the other labels other than in Figure 5 and 5a.



Figure 6: This label comes in a number of different background coloured paper, I have scale boxes of this type with labels which are yellow, orange, light pink, and light green in colour. The borders and wording of this label have many similarities to subsequent labels; hence I conclude that this LATE T BEACH label is more recent than the label in figures 1-5. It is also apparent (to me) by looking closely at these images and those of subsequent labels below, that the stamp block for Figure 7 label was created by the removal of the words "LATE T BEACH".



Figure 7: These labels would have been used after the removal of the reference to LATE T BEACH.



Figure 8: The same as Figure 7 except for the 3rd last line where the wording to describe products changes from "Screw Plates, Die Stocks, &c. &c." to "Brass & Iron Weights, &c. &c.". I have observed from my copy of the 1880 Avery catalogue that there was no longer any reference to Screw Plates or Die Stocks in this catalogue. On that basis I would date this label circa 1880 and was used until the company became a limited company in 1881.



Figure 9: The first reference to "Limited". Avery became a private company in 1881 and a publicly listed company on the Stock Exchange in 1884. The works were still at Digbeth at this time; so I conclude that these labels were issued from 1881 through to 1887.



Figure 10: Represents a move of the business from Digbeth to Soho Foundry. In 1894 Avery purchased James Watt & Company's Soho Foundry and the Avery business was relocated there in 1897. I conclude that these labels were issued from 1897 onwards.

I hope that this article stimulates interest and discussion about the chronology of labels of W & T Avery and as I said above, I would be pleased to find out about any I have missed or corrections to my thoughts or observations.

mal.campbell@cam.ac.uk
Melbourne Australia

Acknowledgements:

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References:

1. D F Crawford-Hitchins, 3-part series on Thomas Beach in *Expeditious Issues* 1991 & 1992, pages 1499-1513, 1538-1548, 1572-1580
2. As purchased from Andrew Leont, curator & archivist of the Avery Museum ("The Leont-Avery Archive")
3. From one of a large number of trade cards (79 pages) purchased from a private collector in Australia, I believe to be circa 1830
4. 1880 Avery Catalogue, photocopy
5. Broadbent I. H - *The Avery Business*, page 25
6. A letter dated 21 Dec 1984 from Eric Parish, W & T Avery Museum Curator to J M Rowley, Leicester

To Patent Weighing Machine-makers.
WANTED at the Original and superior Scale-beam, Stockyard, and Scale Manufactory of W. and T. AVERY, a Machine-maker. No one need apply who cannot turn out his work equal to any man in the kingdom.
N.B. Avery, Diamond, and Bankers' Scales upon a new principle.—Screw Plates, Dog and Die Stocks, English and Foreign Weights, &c. &c.

Averys were still making screw plates for threading screws, pipes or rods, and stocks that held tubular parts used for fitting and turning dies in 1829 (and they did so until 1837.)