



Sir Swire Smith

**Champion of
National Technical
Education, of Keighley
Mechanics' Institute and
Keighley Carnegie
Public Library**



Sir Swire Smith (1842-1918) was the son of the founding family of Prince Smith & Son, Keighley combing and worsted machinery makers. He was first educated in Keighley at the National Schools in West Lane, then a private school and then Sheffield's Wesley College. He was eventually apprenticed to John Brigg to learn the processes of worsted manufacture and trading. **He later owned Fleece Mills, then Springfield Mills.** Painting by Solomon Joseph Solomon, Cliffe Castle Museum, Keighley, (www.artuk.org).

Keighley Mechanics' Institute helps to "Wake up, England!"

Smith, like many others of his class and interests, was quick to join Keighley's early Mechanics' Institute and he became secretary to the drawing class in 1857. This became the District School of Art in 1864. **His interest in education, and technical education in particular,** is said to have been sparked in part by the inadequacy of the general education of those students attending the Institute's drawing class. His concerns were also a reflection of those of the government regarding the nation's developing industry and manufacture. Following the first great World's exhibition in London in 1851, in which Britain had seemed lacking compared to some other countries such as France and Germany, the government set up the **Department of Science and Art in South Kensington** to promote instruction and expertise in the industrial arts, especially drawing and design. A system of national scholarships was also established towards qualifications as designers for manufacturers and art workers.

Sir Swire Smith was himself involved in manufacture and so was naturally keen that Keighley's own Institute should play its part in improving standards. To this end, in 1872 he visited France, Germany and Switzerland to study how their schools were organised.

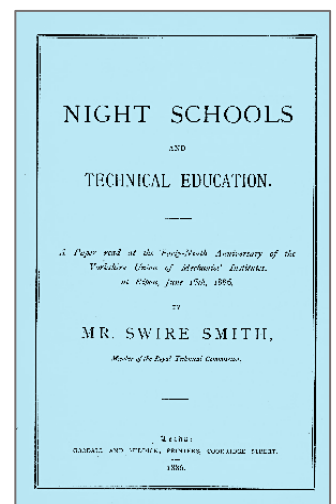
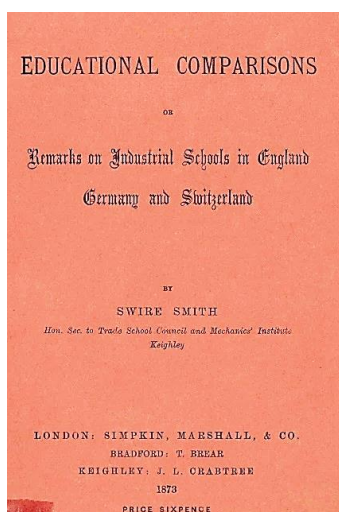
Under his influence

and encouragement, he helped to make the Keighley Mechanics' Institute a pioneering establishment in technical education and its students some of the most prolific in the country at winning awards and exhibitions from these national Schools.



In 1877, Swire Smith reported that four out of six students selected from Keighley, “from comparatively poor parents”, had gained exhibitions in London from the South Kensington School Science and Art Departments, (*The work of Mechanics' Institutes in our towns* (1877)). By the mid-1880s, the money value of the Government Grants, studentships and exhibitions won by the Institute's students came to £16,500. Swire Smith went on to champion education, technical education in particular, both locally and nationally and continued as

Honorary Secretary of what became Keighley's Technical Institute until 1904, when the Institute was adopted by Keighley Corporation.



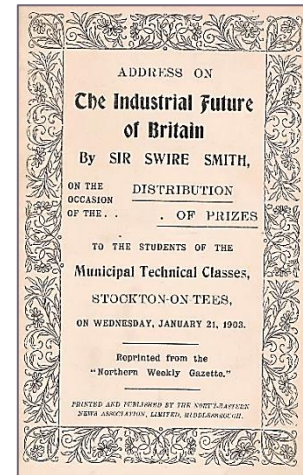
Swire Smith was a champion of and executive member of the newly formed National Association for the Promotion of Technical Education. He served on the **Royal Commission on Technical Instruction (1880)**, representing the wool industry and contributed papers to the **Technical Education Bill** (Technical Instruction Act, 1889) and its committee. This promoted the establishment of Technical Schools throughout the country, including Bradford Technical College that also benefited from Sir Swire Smith's expertise.

He also encouraged manufacturers in the promotion of their products at world trade exhibitions, contributing to catalogues, including a chapter on British textiles for that of the influential World's Fair at Chicago in 1893 that is claimed by some observers to have changed America.

Such was Sir Swire Smith's success and national recognition as a pioneer contributor of the movement to, "Wake up, England!" to the needs of improving technical education that he was chosen



as the London newspaper, the *Mayfair* magazine's "Mayfair Gallery Men of the Day", 28th February 1914 with a colour portrait and full 2-page report, (KLS 001.KEI/SMI). The same newspaper also sent up a reporter to write about the lively entertainments that made up the renowned annual *Conversazioni* held by Keighley's Institute.



Great Affection for Keighley

Sir Swire Smith's obituary (*Keighley News*, 23 March 1918), states that, despite his busy

national and international commitments, Sir Swire Smith always returned to Keighley, "with zest and affection" that seems to have been returned in kind, such was his, "genial, buoyant, companionable" nature and lively sense of humour. As a promoter of elementary education, he became Chairman of the newly formed **School Board in Keighley**. He was made a Justice of the Peace in 1893. **He was a founder member of the Keighley Chamber of Commerce and became its second president and he represented Keighley Division from 1915 as a Liberal MP.**

Honours:

Honorary Freedom of the Clothworkers' Company of the City of London. Knighthood in 1898 for services to the Royal Commission.

Medal of the Society of Arts for contribution to the Technical Education Bill.

Degree of LLD in 1912 from Leeds University.

Freedom of the Borough of Keighley in 1914 and the founding of a Trade & Grammar School scholarship in his name.

After the 1962 fire, the main hall in the new building was named the Sir Swire Smith Hall.

**Keighley Carnegie
Public Library and
Andrew Carnegie**

A chance meeting on a trans-Atlantic liner with the Scottish American industrial magnate, Andrew Carnegie, led to a visit to Keighley by Carnegie and his wife, Louise, in the photo above, Sir Swire Smith is second from the right, next to a seated Mrs Louise Carnegie, (KLS archive, BK36/409).



Conversations with Sir Swire Smith on the voyage had revealed the great success of students from Keighley Mechanics' Institute at winning local and government scholarships and Carnegie wanted to visit it and see the students himself.

Carnegie, also wanted to meet one of his heroes, Sir Isaac Holden M.P., who was President of the Mechanics' Institute. **The Carnegies were so impressed by their visit that Andrew later offered the town £10,000 towards the building of a free public library so that students could continue to aspire to a good education and successful future employment, as he himself had done in Pittsburgh.** Keighley's library became the first in England to be financed by Andrew Carnegie, who then went on to finance the building of other free public libraries in England and eventually all over the world.

Archives and works in the library by Sir Swire Smith

Technical Education. Keighley a Pioneer (1912) BK2/22/2h

Notes on Technical Instruction for the Royal Commission, 1883. Shelf 378.99KEI

The work of Mechanics' Institutes in our towns (1877) is just one of the published pamphlets and lectures given all over the country and across Europe by Sir Swire Smith and they are available to view in archive BK453. For a full list, please see the folder charting the history of Keighley's Mechanics' Institute at the counter.

The Master Spinner, a biography of Sir Swire Smith by Keighley Snowden, is at 920 on the open shelves and is available for loan.