



WELCOME TO ACTON: Lord Johnny (left) and Lady Lucinda “Percy” Acton of England are on a local whirlwind tour, including his keynote address at the Absolutely Acton Speakers Series, a fundraiser for Heritage Acton. Monday night (left photo) Lord and Lady Acton toasted with Heritage Acton Chair Ron Birrell at Tanner’s Pub. On Tuesday, Lord and Lady Acton visited several Acton schools, including St. Joseph Catholic School, where he met with Heritage Acton’s Kathy Sanford (left) and Principal Sonia Bien. – Ted Tyler photos

Acton marks the 25th anniversary of the closure of Beardmore Tannery

Twenty-five years ago on September 12, the Beardmore Tannery closed its doors, ending an era – for 147 years it had been Acton’s largest employer, and the closing caused shock waves through the town.

When it closed in September 1986, 105 employees still had not found jobs, and 224 had found other work or taken early retirement. Acton then began the transformation from an industrial town to a bedroom community.

At one point, Beardmore’s was the largest tannery in the British Empire and it gave Acton its nickname of “Leathertown.”

Under the Beardmore’s ownership, the tannery became an integral part of Acton – the company built worker housing, operated a co-operative store, built tennis courts, a golf course a boathouse and an outdoor arena on Frederick Street.

At its peak, Beardmore employed approximately 20 per cent of Acton’s 6,500 residents and put \$8-million into local pay packets. The 160-acre tannery property now sits idle. Environmental cleanups have been completed and the land is the subject of a special study area by the Town for future development.

Early History

The name Beardmore has

been known in the leather and shoe industry for more than 120 years, almost since George L. Beardmore arrived in Canada from Devon, England. He brought with him capital to invest, part of a fortune left by a relative, and spent his first few years in Canada learning the tanning business in a plant in Toronto.

In 1844, George

Beardmore acquired a one-storey stone structure in Hamilton, and began the first of the Beardmore tanneries. His was the oldest account on the books of the Bank of British North America, now merged with the Bank of Montreal.

A few years later the Hamilton tannery was

destroyed by fire, and Beardmore opened a warehouse in Toronto and, in order to continue to supply leather to his customers, purchased a tannery on the Grand River near Guelph. In 1865, he bought a tannery at Acton. It also was destroyed by fire in 1872, but was rebuilt the same year on the

same foundations. By 1875, the company was turning out between 18,000 to 20,000 sides of sole leather per year and using 2,000 cords of bark in the tanning process.

George L. Beardmore died in 1893, leaving a successful basic industry to his successors.

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