

Family, Work and Leisure in a Hosiery
Town
Hinckley 1640-2000

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Abstract

My research concentrates on a social history of the hosiery industry in the Hinckley area. The work undertaken may be divided into three parts – the historical background which commenced with the introduction of the framework knitting machine into Hinckley by William Iliffe in 1640; an outline of power-driven factory production which commenced in the mid nineteenth century; and, oral history research into factory life and the social lives of people from managing directors, supervisors through to overlockers, linkers, folders, baggers knitters, mechanics, counterman and union officials. The research relies heavily on the wealth of recorded memories carried out over a number of years.

Framework knitting degenerated rapidly from a respected craft in the early years into a depressed trade. The framework knitter had little choice but to employ the help of his family in order to eke out a living. Parliamentary Papers highlight the plight of the families. Nevertheless, people were reluctant to change to factory-based production. However, by the 1890s the inevitable change had taken place.

The hosiery has dominated and shaped the lives of people in the Hinckley area for generations. Manufacturers followed fathers, grandfathers and great grandfathers into the workplace, and whole families were employed in the manufacture of hosiery and knitwear. Manufacturers have highlighted the importance of updating machinery and attending exhibitions and fashion shows in order to remain competitive in an industry dependent on the 'whims of fashion'. Respondents have provided a unique insight into the types of work and its influence on their lives. They have described the 'larking-about', camaraderie and activities in the workplace as well as highlighting that they not only worked together but played together - the 'monkey run', dancing and the cinema have all been discussed.

The research has highlighted the unique and dominant nature of the 'hosiery' in the Hinckley area. However, the industry has been in decline for a number of years and many of the factories have now been demolished or renovated for housing and apartments.

Contents

Abstract	p. i
Contents	p. ii
Acknowledgements	p. iii
List of Plates	p. iv
List of Figures	p. vi
List of Tables	p. viii
Chapter 1: Introduction: A Social History of Hosiery in the Hinckley Area, Leicestershire, 1640-2000	p.1
Chapter 2: The Early Years, 1640-1840	p. 26
Chapter 3: Transition from Domestic Industry to Factory Production, 1820-1920	p. 48
Chapter 4: The Factory: Technological Development and Changes in Working Practices, circa 1845-2000	p. 74
Chapter 5: Factory Life: Lives of Respondents in and Around the Factory, 1920-2000	p.109
Chapter 6: Work, Pleasure and Leisure in a Hosiery Town, 1920-2000	p.139
Chapter 7: Conclusion	p.173
Appendix 1: Working Life Histories of Respondents	
Appendix 2: Population, Hosiers and Factories	
Appendix 3: Questionnaire	
List of Sources	

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List of Plates

Photographs

Chapter 1

p. 16

Plate 1. Arthur Amos. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

Chapter 4

p. 99

Plate 2. Advertising fully fashioned stockings. Flude Hosiery. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

p. 105

Plate 3. Harold Cash at work on the Mellor Bromley '4-at-once', during the early 1960s. Bird and Yeoman, Hinckley Road, Earl Shilton. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

Chapter 5

p. 130

Plate 4. Hinckley Co-operative Society's Children's Gala. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

p. 135

Plate 5. Doreen Marvin's, aunt Florrie, first right and Doreen's father, Hubert Sansome, standing behind her. Photo taken in 1924 in the warehouse of Bennett Bros Ltd. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

Chapter 6

p. 163

Plate 6. Sylvia, carnival queen, with her attendants. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

Chapter 7

p. 176

Plate 7. The Argee, Keats Lane, Earl Shilton. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

p. 178

Plate 8. A shift of knitters at Bennett Bros Ltd. Cliff Maund, centre back. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

p. 179

Plate 9. 'Rubery Owen Pumps Ltd'. Emblazoned across the front of the old J. Toon and Son hosiery factory. It's trade name, 'Premier Works', can be seen over the doorway, on the left hand side of the building. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

p.180

Plate 10a. Timothy Jennings & Sons Ltd built late 1920s. The building where he set up in business can be seen in the background. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

Plate 10b. The extension to factory in the late 1930s. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

List of Figures

Maps

Chapter 1

p.2

Fig. 1. Map showing the county of Leicestershire. Note Hinckley situated in the south west, approximately 1 mile from the border with Warwickshire. Earl Shilton has been omitted from the map but lies 4 miles directly north east of Hinckley, just east of Barwell. Shepshed and Bottesford are also shown on the map and Wigston has been highlighted.

(W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant. The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village*). End of volume).

Chapter 2

p. 38

Fig. 2. Plan of the Town of Hinckley 1782. Framework Knitting had by the late eighteenth century become an industry which employed over half the population of the town, which in 1782 stood at 4,500

(Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

p. 43

Fig. 3. Map showing the distribution of stocking frames in the East Midlands in 1844 (D. Smith, 'The British Industry at the Middle of the Nineteenth Century: an Historical Study in Economic Geography' in *Transactions and Papers of the Institute of British Geographers*, 32, 1963, 130.)

Chapter 3

p. 72

Fig. 4. Map of Hinckley dated 1925 showing urban development alongside industrial development. The population of the town had doubled between 1871 and 1921 from 6,779 to 13,930 owing to the development of powered factory production. (The Records Office for Leicestershire. XL11.NE. 6" to 1 mile.).

Chapter 4

p. 79

Fig. 5. Hinckley 1889 - showing industrial landscape (The Records Office for Leicestershire. XL11.8 25" to a mile)

p. 95

Fig. 6. Fig.6. Hinckley 1938. It has been estimated by Bill Partridge that there were 99 hosiery factories in the town in 1939. (The Records Office for Leicestershire. XL11.NE. 6" to 1 mile).

Chapter 7

p. 181

Fig. 7. Highlighting an area of Hinckley which still retained its industrial heritage in 1991. (The Records Office of Leicestershire. SP4294).

List of Tables

Chapter 1

p.18

Table 1: Summary of respondents (comprising oral history recordings, written contributions, questionnaires and unrecorded interviews).

Chapter 1

Introduction:

A Social History of Hosiery in the Hinckley Area, Leicestershire, 1640-2000

The focus of my research is the social history of the hosiery industry in south west Leicestershire and in particular the market town of Hinckley and relies heavily on a wealth of recorded memories. The main theme of my thesis is the pervasive and continuing influence of the hosiery industry in this region over more than three centuries, and the massive technological and social change since the introduction of the framework knitting machine in about 1640. I will argue that over generations the lives of individuals, families and communities have been influenced by the industry. Their lives and prosperity have been dominated by the work provided. Even today, there is a sense of pride in the contribution made by individuals and families. Many now feel regret at the demise of the hosiery industry over recent years, and feel a sense of the loss of a shared heritage, recalling fond memories of a working environment that has probably changed forever. While there is an awareness of possible nostalgia for a perceived 'golden age', respondents were remarkably positive about the influence of the 'hosiery' on the lives of themselves and their families. It is not my intention to depict a utopian community; it is a community, similar to many others, in which people have made the best of their lives in the situation which they found themselves.

Over the centuries there have been severe depressions in the industry. There have been riots against new machinery and new ways of working which threatened traditional ways of life. The community under question was witness to the changes which took place with the introduction of powered factories which began to proliferate during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The industry has always been susceptible to fluctuations in trade due to boom and slump conditions in world markets. Those working in the 'hosiery' during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries have had no choice but to adapt and take 'short time' work and substantial

pay cuts at various periods in the industry's history. Although it must be stated that the 'hosiery' has been very generous to its workers, particularly during periods of the twentieth century, when it has been stated by F.A. Wells that they were the best paid textile workers in the country.¹ People working in the industry have had to continually adapt to new ways of working and to learn to live with redundancy and the ever present threat of closure of hosiery and knitwear factories particularly since the 1970s due to overseas competition.



Fig. 1. Map showing the county of Leicestershire. Note Hinckley situated in the south west, approximately 1 mile from the border with Warwickshire. Earl Shilton has been omitted from the map but lies 4 miles directly north east of Hinckley, just east of Barwell. Shepshed and Bottesford are also shown on the map and Wigston has been highlighted. (W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant. The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village.* End of volume).

¹ F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry. Its History and Organisation* (1935, Newton Abbot, 1972 edn), p. 214-216. Also discussed in Chapter 6.

Housing and living conditions were dominated by the hosiery industry. Perhaps, though, unlike the poor living conditions endured in more heavily industrialised centres of the late nineteenth century, Hinckley, with its rows of terraced housing and factories, may have resembled, on a smaller scale, the more positive picture portrayed by Marilyn Palmer in her description of Leicester. She writes, ‘The late transition to factory production in the hosiery industry has resulted in a landscape reflecting late Victorian prosperity – well built factories, terraced housing with very few back to backs’². The map on page 3 shows the position of Hinckley which lies 13 miles south west of Leicester and 4 miles from Earl Shilton. Hinckley stands just 1 mile off the Warwickshire border, with Nuneaton just 5 miles to the west with easy access to many major roads including the M69, the M1, the Watling Street and the Fosse Way.

General introduction to the hosiery industry in Hinckley and the research undertaken

The research is essentially about people’s lives based to a large part on oral history. This has been supported by primary and secondary sources of information, particularly for the early years of the industry before people’s recollections begin. Although there is evidence of research into the hosiery industry in the East Midlands, notably Nottingham and Leicester, little or no research has been carried out in the Hinckley area and this particularly applies to the use of recorded memory. The emphasis of the research undertaken focuses on, approximately, the 80 years between 1918 and 1998. The reason for this is that the oldest people who volunteered to record their memories were born in the early 1900s, the youngest born in the 1980s. However, in order to place into context a discussion on a community which was heavily reliant on this one industry for its employment for approximately 360 years, it is proposed to cover the early history of the town and chart the growing dependency of its inhabitants on the knitting of hose and other knitted garments.

² M. Palmer, ‘Housing the Leicester Framework Knitters: History and Archaeology’ in *Transactions of the Archaeological and Historical Society*, 2000, p. 77

The study consists of seven chapters and they have been arranged to run chronologically from the introduction of the first knitting frame into Hinckley in 1640 to the demise of the industry from the 1970s. It concludes in 2000. While each chapter covers specific aspects of the hosiery industry in the local area, the theme of both continuity and change is considered. Successive generations of family members worked in the industry. Initially, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, domestic industry prevailed where all members of the family worked in the home producing wrought hose, the staple commodity manufactured in the area. With the establishment of power driven machinery during the mid to late nineteenth century members of the same family were encouraged to take up work in a local factory. Indeed both manufacturers and employees have talked of the generations of families who have worked in the 'hosiery' and they have also spoken of the hosiery as being 'inbred'. Chapter 1, the current chapter, provides an introduction to the research undertaken and outlines the aims, significance and sources of information consulted, as well as detailing the methodology adopted in taking oral histories and the ordering of the thesis. Chapter 2 looks at the 200 years between 1640 and 1840 and attempts to show the gradual dominance of this one industry over people's lives. It relies primarily on secondary sources but towards the end of the chapter makes use of the Parliamentary Blue Books and in particular the *1845 Royal Commission looking into the Conditions of the Framework Knitters*. The fascination of the Parliamentary Blue Books is that they reproduce actual interviews of people living in the local area including Hinckley, Earl Shilton, Barwell, Burbage, Stoney Stanton and Sapcote. They can perhaps be viewed as the oral history of their day giving us a glimpse into the lives of these people who lived and worked in the local area over 160 years ago.

Information from the Parliamentary Blue Books is also used in Chapter 3 which discusses the slow transition from domestic industry to powered factory production and covers the 100 years between 1820 to 1920. The implementation of power to knitting machinery came late to the hosiery industry for a number of reasons – there was a reluctance to change traditional ways of working but difficulty was also apparent in converting the fully fashioned knitting machine to steam. Exploitation of the workforce was clearly apparent and not only included low wages, but the truck and stinting practises which have been highlighted by the *Royal Commission looking into*

the Conditions of the Framework Knitters, 1845; the Children's Commission, 1863; The Truck System, 1870; the Factories and Workshop Act, 1876. One's attention is also brought to the implementation of compulsory education for all children which took place during the 1870s. It was the education acts that led to the demise of domestic industry which relied on the family, including children, to work as a unit of production. While heavily reliant on the Parliamentary Papers, Chapter 3 does, towards the end of the chapter, introduce oral history – particularly for those older respondents who were able to talk about their early years in the industry. They described 'half time' work and also discussed their parents' and grandparents' migration to the local area to work in the local factories.

Chapter 4, *The Factory*, covers a period of approximately 160 years between the 1840s and 2000. An attempt is made to piece together the early history of the first factories including technological development. As in all chapters there is an emphasis on the spoken word. Where this hasn't been possible, however, other academic research, local history studies, Trade Directories, local press, manufacturers' anniversary brochures and respondents' written testimony have been used. It has been possible to consider the establishment of the family business, and look at how these small family businesses responded to the continually changing demands of markets and fashion. The growing dominance of the warehouse and the subsequent growth and power of the chain stores by the mid twentieth century has also been addressed.

Chapter 5 continues with the theme *Factory Life*. It looks at respondents' lives 'in and around the factory, and covers over 80 years of the twentieth century. It uses respondents' testimony to consider the family economy and its relationship to work in the hosiery industry. Children, although not involved in domestic industry, continued to be part of the economic unit and contributed by running errands, looking after younger siblings, even earning small amounts of money by carrying out chores for neighbours. The interdependence of the 'close-knit' community - workers, managers and factory owners, is clearly apparent. Manufacturers relied on a loyal workforce to recommend family and friends for employment in the factories. In turn manufacturers were hugely influential in the local community and involved in all aspects of social life.

The 'life history' approach to oral history has yielded much information and given great depth to the evocation of respondents' lives living and working in a hosiery dominated area. Information has been gathered which would not have been possible by any other type of research. Chapter 6 covers the same time period, the 80 years between 1920 and 2000, and is titled *Work, Pleasure and Leisure in a Hosiery Town*. Its anecdotal approach conveys the collective experience and shared language of those whose working, social and family life converged. The descriptions of 'hi-jinx' and 'larking about', the practical jokes and the banter evoke the vitality and camaraderie of the work place. High wages could be earned, significantly higher than national average wages for men and women working in the textile industry, but the respondents emphasised, 'we worked hard.' They described being 'packed in like sardines with work all round us.'

Chapter 7, the concluding chapter, draws on the information from the preceding chapters, to reach conclusions on the significance of the information gathered and the consequences of the long establishment of this prominent industry on the town of Hinckley and its people's lives.

It was felt a historical background to people's involvement in the hosiery industry was essential before embarking on a narrative of recollections. The historical discussion commences with the introduction of the first stocking frame over 360 years ago. By the early 1700s Hinckley was dominated by this one industry. I wanted to identify the reasons for this and so Chapter 2 concentrates on the early history of the industry and suggests why framework knitting became such an influential industry. The seminal work of W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: The Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village* has helped to highlight this. Although he does not write about Hinckley he wrote about Wigston, covering a period of over one thousand years – its people, its place in middle England, and most interesting for me, the introduction and growing dominance of the hosiery industry from a cottage industry to factory production.³ D. Levine in his study, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* has compared and contrasted four communities – Shepshed, Bottesford,

³ W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: the Economy and Social History of a Leicestershire Village*. (London, 1965).

Terling and Colyton – two being industrial villages and two being agricultural communities. He brings one's attention to Shepshed, situated in north west Leicestershire, an industrial village, dependent on framework knitting in contrast to Bottesford, in East Leicestershire which was a farming area and very much under the control of the ruling family. What is so relevant to my work, however, is their discussion on the social aspects of the framework knitting communities. They both discuss the early age at marriage, overcrowded 'jerry built' housing, and the prevalence of 'inappropriate behaviour' which was frowned upon by the middle classes 'respectable society'. Hoskins also discusses how fever and disease which were rife in these communities killed so many.⁴ He saw life as becoming debased because of the introduction and domination of this one industry which controlled people's lives. People who had once been independent were now, by the mid nineteenth century, totally dependent on the hosiery industry for their livelihoods. K.D.M. Snell, however, suggests that cottage industry or proto-industrialization was beneficial to the poor and dispossessed. It enabled these people to earn a living by renting a cottage and a knitting frame thus keeping the poor in employment.⁵ Proto-industrialization usually took place in areas of pastoral farming where its inhabitants were often unemployed or underemployed at certain times of the year and framework knitting, one of the many rural industries, took up the slack times. Historians such as D.R. Mills⁶, R.W. Malcomson⁷ and M. Berg⁸ discuss the concept of open and closed villages in relation to domestic industry and how domestic industry or proto-industrialization thrived in open villages. Closed villages were usually owned by a lord of the manor and they controlled the number of people who moved into the area and the type of industry carried out in them.

Other historians have dealt with the early industry through to the twentieth century but, similar to the above historians, with limited reference to the geographic

⁴ D. Levine, *Family Formation in an Age of Nascent Capitalism* (London, 1977).

⁵ R.A.B. Houston and K.D.M. Snell, 'Proto-industrialization? Cottage Industry, social change and the Industrial Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, 27 (1984).

⁶ D.R. Mills, 'Rural industries and social structure. Framework knitting in Leicestershire, 1670-185', *Textile History*, 13 (1982).

⁷ R.W. Malcomson, *Life and Labour in England: 1700-1780* (London, 1981).

⁸ M. Berg, 'Industries in the countryside' in F.J. Fisher (ed.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1961); M Berg, *The Age of Manufacture: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain, 1700-1820* (London, 1985).

area of concern. So firstly, I will consider those historians who have written extensively on the hosiery industry from its origins. I will also talk about the introduction of powered machinery in the mid nineteenth century through to the state of the industry in the late twentieth century. Those historians of concern include S.D. Chapman, F.A. Wells, L.A. Parker, S.A. Royle, D. Wykes, P. Head, R. Gurnham and H. Bradley. They have written articles on various geographic areas and in some instances have referred to Hinckley while discussing framework knitting or hosiery for instance in Leicester and Nottingham. S.D. Chapman has written extensively on the hosiery industry in the Nottingham area but has also written various articles on the Illiffe family and their influence on framework knitting in the town of Hinckley. His research has been informative in that it gives an idea of the early hosiers and their involvement in this industry with specific reference to Hinckley.⁹ F.A. Wells discusses the hosiery industry from its introduction in the seventeenth century to its demise in the twentieth century and again I have taken into account what is applicable to Hinckley for the purpose of my research.¹⁰ P. Head's research, although focusing on Leicester, describes the machinery used and highlights the role of truck masters and middlemen. It also considers the payment of frame rent, the involvement of the family and the injustice of half-time work.¹¹ Similarly, H. Bradley's Ph.D thesis has been referred to quite extensively along with her other work. She writes with great enthusiasm and provides a fascinating account of this one industry. She draws attention to the paternalism which was evident within the industry – the Christmas parties, outings and other activities which took place which helped to forge relationships between the manufacturer and his employees. Indeed the employment of members of a family over generations was extremely important to both employer and employee. From their work it is possible to piece together the early history of the framework knitting industry and the slow transition from domestic industry to steam-driven factory production in the Hinckley area.¹² Royle, Head and Wykes have written specifically about Hinckley and

⁹ S.D. Chapman, 'The genesis of the British hosiery industry 1600-1750', *Textile History*, 3 (1974); S.D. Chapman, *Hosiery and Knitwear. Four Centuries of Small-Scale Industry in Britain c.1589-2000* (Oxford, 2002).

¹⁰ F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry* (1935, Newton Abbot, 1972).

¹¹ P. Head, 'Industrial Organisation in Leicester, 1844-1914' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Leicester, 1960); Alongside his Ph.D, Head's article has also been of interest. See P. Head. 'Putting out in the Leicester hosiery industry' *Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* (1961-2).

¹² H. Bradley, 'Degradation and Regeneration: Social and Technological change in the East Midlands Hosiery Industry 1800-1960 (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Durham, 1987). Other publications

highlight a particularly depressing time during the mid nineteenth century when framework knitters and their families experienced severe hardship. It was also these historians who brought my attention to the Parliamentary Papers which proliferated during the nineteenth century and helped to highlight family involvement in this one industry between the 1840s and 1870s.¹³ The thesis is essentially about people – their work and their way of life, and the main priority has been to use the work of historians to portray a way of life in the Hinckley area.

Proto-industrialization was dictated by world markets with trade dependent on supply and demand. Because of intense competition from abroad, hosiers had no choice but to invest in steam powered factories. Fully fashioned stockings the staple commodity of the area was often exported though competition with other countries was strong. The first inroads into using steam driven machinery began during the mid 1840s using circular knitting machines. The transition from domestic industry to factory production, however, was a slow process. The fully fashioned knitting machine was eventually adapted to steam during the 1860s and it was during the 1880s that steam driven factory production became fully established in the local area. Historians such as Bradley, Head, Wells and A.V. John discuss working life in the early factories. A number of these give descriptions of work carried out particularly from a women's point of view. The census returns have also proved to be extremely informative and highlight the changes that were taking place from the mid nineteenth century. Bill Partridge, who started work at Atkins at the age of 16 in 1935, devoted much of his retirement to researching the local industry. He wrote, *Life as it was 120 years ago in the Lower Bond End of Hinckley (As revealed by the 1881 Census)* is an interesting account of a small area of Hinckley and gives evidence of the transition from domestic industry to steam powered factory production.¹⁴ Oral history comes into its own,

by Bradley include H. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's work: A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Cambridge, 1989) and an article, 'Technological change, management strategies and the development of gender-based job segregation in the labour process' in David Knights, *Gender and the Labour Process* (Cambridge, 1986).

¹³ S.A. Royle, 'Aspects of the social geography of Leicestershire towns, 1837-1871' (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Leicester, 1976); S.A. Royle, 'The spiritual destitution is excessive – the poverty overwhelming: Hinckley in the mid-nineteenth century', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 54 (1978-9).

¹⁴ B. Partridge, *Life as it was 120 years ago in the Lower Bond End of Hinckley. As revealed by the 1881 Census*; B. Partridge, 'The hosiery trade in Leicestershire. Early Price Lists' in S. Barton and R. Murray, *Twisted Yarns. The Story of the Hosiery Industry in Hinckley*; B. Partridge, 'The Daniel Payne story',

however, in the discussions of the setting up of the family business from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as discussed in Chapter 4.

The evidence from respondents covers the early history of the factories and extends into the inter-war years. This latter period was characterised by depression and high unemployment in some areas of the country, such as the North East and South Wales, while areas such as the Midlands and the South East were relatively prosperous. There was a growing demand for young workers. It was in the prosperous areas that good wages could be earned and ‘money wages for boy and girl wage-earners in a range of industries, had increased by between 300 and 500 per cent since the pre-First World War period’.¹⁵ Historians such as Andrew Davies, David Fowler and Selina Todd also bring ones attention to the idea that as well as there being wage disparities between different areas of the country, wage differences were also evident within the family because of the relatively high wages that young people could and did earn.¹⁶ Numerous social surveys took place from the mid-nineteenth century into the early twentieth century and they continued well into the twentieth century. The above historians draw attention to these later surveys carried out by the likes Joan Harley in the 1930s, and Mark Abraham’s in the late 1950s.¹⁷ Much of the young wage earners’ disposable income was spent at the local cinema and in the dance hall – the ‘principal areas of commercialized entertainment’, the cinema and the dancehall, were patronized predominantly by the 16-25 age group.¹⁸ Young people were criticized for their behaviour – Joan Harley, for instance, complained that young people were adopting the Hollywood accents, hairstyles and mannerisms of their favourite actresses to a

Knitting International, 1991. I would also like to acknowledge, Joe Lawrance, who over the years has worked quite closely with Bill on various projects. Both Bill and Joe attempted to give me an understanding of the more technical aspects of knitting machinery. Joe also agreed to record his memories for the Arquetex Textile Heritage Project and Local Hosiery and History. Detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1.

Bill Partridge recorded his memories with a member of Ruddington Framework Knitting Society and I was able to take copies of these. Detailed information in Appendix under Respondents. I also met Bill on numerous occasions.

¹⁵ D. Fowler, *The First Teenagers. The Lifestyle of Young Wage Earners in Interwar Britain* (London, 1995), p. 93

¹⁶ Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, p. 171, Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, pp. 95, 99, 111.

¹⁷ Fowler, *The First Teenager*, in particular Chapter 4, ‘The Teenage Consumer in Interwar Britain’, pp. 93-115.

¹⁸ A. Davies & S. Fielding, *Workers’ Worlds, Cultures and Communities in Manchester and Salford* (Manchester, 1992), p. 13.

ludicrous degree, copying the American stars they went to watch at the cinema.¹⁹ Fowler uses the term, '*The First Teenagers*' in the title of his book, which discusses the lifestyle of young wage earners during the inter-war years. By 1939 Fowler states that 70 per cent of 14 year olds had started full time employment.²⁰

A great deal of pleasure was also found on the factory floor. It has been stated by various social observers that the factory was seen more like a social club than a place of work, where young people went to meet their friends and chat about the latest films. 'Most girls in Manchester worked either in a workshop or factory – these establishments were attractive to girls partly because of the social contacts they provided'.²¹ Factory-floor culture has been well documented – the practical jokes, the messing about – the fun which people had is highlighted in Chapter 6 of my own research. But people actually worked very hard, especially when they went onto piece rate. Piece rate, it has been observed, was a control in itself – it kept the workers at their knitting machines and at their finishing machines. Factory workers on piece rate knew exactly how much they earned in any one week – this money went towards the rent, the mortgage, a new washing machine, new curtains, a family holiday or new shoes for the children. The work ethic was deeply ingrained in these people, young and old. They worked because they needed the money. Hinckley was full of factories churning out stockings, socks, cardigans, jumpers and underwear. Local people lived and breathed this industry and this is what this research is all about – a community which was dependent on this one industry – one generation following another in the mass production of stockings and knitted garments.

Oral History

Reading the oral history studies which have been undertaken over the years has added depth to my own work, so that it does not only include working life but the family life of respondents, and their social lives in and out of the factory. Andrew Davies uses oral history to discuss working class leisure in Salford and Manchester during the interwar years and describes activities such as the 'monkey parade', which

¹⁹ Fowler, *The First Teenager*, p. 100.

²⁰ Fowler, *The First Teenager*, p. 2.

²¹ Fowler, *The First Teenager*, p. 64.

was completely unknown to me.²² This involved young people, in their best clothes, walking round a certain areas of the two cities, eyeing up the opposite sex. Then, when recording an interview, I was fascinated to hear her use a similar phrase, the ‘monkey run’ which was held every weekend in Hinckley, and called the ‘bunny run’ in the more rural areas. The link between academic research and real life was clear. Davies suggests the increase in more regulated and commercialised leisure, as discussed by E.J. Hobsbawm and S.G. Jones, came into existence from the late nineteenth century. Davies, however, stresses the continued importance of working-class street life – hanging around in street gangs, late night shopping at the Saturday market to pick up cheap food and the weekend ritual of the ‘monkey parade’.²³

Oral historians such as S.Caunce, P.Thompson, E.Roberts, J. Sarsby, and A. Davin have been a great inspiration while working on this research. As stated by Thompson, ‘Oral history gives history back to the people in their own words...[oral history] can help to create a truer picture of the past, documenting the lives and feelings of all kinds of people’.²⁴ Davin in her *Growing up Poor*, ‘has skilfully woven together oral history, school records, literary and other sources to reconstruct the daily life of home, street and school among the labouring poor’.²⁵ Roberts has written extensively on women’s lives, and focuses on three Lancashire towns, Barrow, Lancaster and Preston. She looks at women at work and their place in the home during the twentieth century.²⁶ Sarsby’s book is, ‘a study of an occupation and a community as seen through women’s eyes. It attempts to provide a self-portrait of the women of the Potteries through oral history’. Oral history has been greatly criticised in the past for being unreliable, being subject to the vagaries of memory. However, Thomson, ‘a social historian, and a great advocate of oral history, was committed to a history which drew upon the words and experience of working class people’. He defended oral

²² A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working Class Culture in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1932* (Buckingham, 1992), p. 4. Also pp. viii & p. ix.

²³ Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty*, p. 4. S. Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family, 1918-1950* (Oxford, 2005), p. 196.

²⁴ P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History* (1978, Oxford, 1988).

²⁵ A. Davin, *Growing up Poor: Home, School and Street in London, 1870-1914* (London, 1996).

²⁶ E. Roberts, *Working Class Barrow and Lancaster, 1890-1930* (Lancaster, 1976); E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1984); E. Roberts, *Women’s Work, 1840-1940* (Oxford, 1988); E. Roberts, *Women and Families. An Oral History, 1940-1970* (Oxford, 1995).

history against more conservative historians who saw oral history as ‘memory that becomes distorted by physical deterioration and nostalgia in old age’.²⁷

A major part of the work undertaken has been the wealth of recorded memories carried out over a number of years, based on personal research and the various local history projects with which I have been involved.²⁸ The personal memories a respondent has agreed to share with me are unique – the way a person talks and expresses him or herself in order to describe their life experiences is fascinating. Some people have spoken very easily and have painted a vivid picture of what they are describing. Others have found it far more difficult to express their thoughts. As discussed by Paul Thompson, ‘informants vary from the very talkative, who need few questions, just steering, or now and then a very specific question to clarify some point which is unclear, to the relatively laconic ...’²⁹ The majority of contacts have been through word-of-mouth, with people often agreeing to see me out of curiosity, remarking that they did not ‘really have anything to say.’ Two hours later, after a very interesting meeting, they have remarked on how memories of the past came ‘flooding back’. Thompson has also highlighted this, ‘many people will protest that they have nothing useful to tell you, and need reassurance that their own experience is worthwhile.’³⁰ Similarly Elizabeth Roberts in her work has commented on the surprise that respondents have felt that someone should be interested in their ‘uneventful lives’.³¹ It can’t be emphasised enough, however, that without respondents’ contributions there would be no oral histories and no lasting memories. As stated by D. Hey, ‘Oral history can create intimate portraits of people, places and communities in a

²⁷ R. Perks & A. Thompson, *The Oral History Reader* (London, 2006), p. 3.

²⁸ The research undertaken originated from my personal contribution to the Arqueotex Textile Heritage Project which was an EU research funded project on which I was employed as a research assistant at North Warwickshire and Hinckley College between June 1997 and December 1998. A major component of my work was to compile an oral history archive. The research culminated in my contribution to a book, *Twisted Yarns. The Story of the Hosiery Industry in Hinckley (Leicester, 1998)* and in the production of the Hinckley Heritage Trail and alongside this was the compilation of a photographic archive.

I have also been involved in various local history projects, both voluntarily and in a professional capacity with Leicestershire Adult Learning Service: Recorded memories with retired miners in Bagworth, Leicestershire; Recorded memories with residents living on the Eyres Monsell housing estate, Leicester; Reminiscence at Earl Shilton Age Concern; Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive; Barwell Bits and Shilton Snips Heritage Group.

²⁹ P. Thompson, *The Voice of the Past. Oral History* (1978, Oxford, 1988 edn), p. 200.

³⁰ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 207.

³¹ E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940*, (Oxford, 1984), p. 2.

way that other historical methods can't; and it allows the lives of ordinary people...and of groups who are under-represented in the records of the community to be given their proper place in the overall scheme of things'.³² Indeed oral history is about ordinary people, sometimes referred to as 'history from below', and to quote S. Caunce, 'oral history offers a means of preserving not just individual lives, but also many different ways of life, from vanishing into obscurity'.³³ However, obtaining oral histories requires the interviewer to be extremely aware of his or her potential influence on the outcome of the recorded memories, and again as quoted by Thompson, 'As you write, you are aware of the people with whom you talk...in writing you strongly wish to share with others the insights and vividness of the life stories which have held your imagination'.³⁴ The significance of oral history and the role of the interviewer are discussed later in this chapter.

My work does not specifically focus on factory legislation, trade unionism, wages, and women's work. It is about those people who lived and worked in these hosiery-dominated communities and is very much dictated by the recorded memories. The bulk of the information comes directly from respondents who agreed to record their memories. The oral history part of the work evolved as I became more and more interested in local people and their lives. What started as recorded memories specifically about working in the hosiery and knitwear industry – where people worked, the type of work they did, the ages they started work, wages earned, types of machinery used – eventually developed into more of a life history approach. People talked about the things that interested them – about their parents and grandparents, particularly their mothers, and the type of work their mothers did. Some mothers went out to work in the local hosiery or boot and shoe factories, juggling home and work. Others worked at home, stitching and seaming for one of the numerous factories, and it was taken for granted that children would be there to help in any way they could.

Anything and everything has been talked about which was relevant to the lives of these people who grew up in the 'hosiery' during the twentieth century. Lilian Coley for instance, who was the youngest of 11 children and born in 1904, talked about her

³² D. Hey, *Family History and Local History in England* (London, 1987).

³³ S. Caunce, *Oral History and the Local Historian* (London, 1994).

³⁴ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, pp. 238-239.

grandmother who was a young mother during the 1860s. This was the time of the 'cotton famine'. The American Civil War, although many thousands of miles away, impacted on the framework knitters of south west Leicestershire – they relied on the cotton which was imported from the southern states of America to knit fully fashioned stockings but because of the war production of cotton had ceased. People were starving because of a lack of work and Lilian spoke of her grandmother and how she would feed her children as best as she could - she would be content with a few crumbs. This may sound rather sentimental but the poverty and deprivation that had existed during the early 1860s was within living memory particularly for those respondents born during the early years of the twentieth century. Again the first and second world wars are not referred to in the main body of the thesis but respondents did talk about these issues of going off to war at the ages of 18, 19 or in their early 20s. Arthur Amos who was married when he was 20 in 1938 was 'called up' in the early years of the Second World War and he talked of his sadness of not having seen his daughter until she was four years old – Arthur being a complete stranger to her.³⁵ Arthur's photo can be seen in Plate 1. Female respondents spoke about their time in munitions and as land army girls and at a slightly later date male respondents spoke of their time doing National Service.³⁶ Doreen, however, who was only 15 when the war came to an end in 1945, talked about how everyone in the factory was waiting for the announcement, over the wireless, to tell them officially that the war had ended. She described how she and the other girls decided to make an effigy of Hitler, 'and he'd got a moustache and he got his hair, you know, coming down over his forehead and put a rope round his neck, well it must have been waste I suppose, and hung him by his neck from the steam pipe and pelted him with waste. And everyone else joined in pelting him with waste.'³⁷

³⁵ Arthur Amos. Recorded Memories. The Arqueotex Textile Heritage Project and Local Hosiery and History. Detailed information in Appendix under Respondents.

³⁶ Many of the hosiery factories in Hinckley were requisitioned by the War Effort. Other factories were consolidated and brought under one roof.

³⁷ Doreen Marvin. Memories. Detailed information in Appendix under Respondents in Appendix 1.



Plate 1. Arthur Amos, July 1944
(Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

What has come across from the meetings with respondents is their genuine enthusiasm and enjoyment of their working lives. They took pride in their work and took pleasure in relating the type of work they did, often going into quite intricate detail of a specific job. A few women respondents still had their mending hooks which they continue to use to repair knitted garments. Knitters and mechanics have spoken about the intricacies of knitting machines and finishing machines, and the problems caused by the use of different types of yarns. Women who worked as overlockers, flatseamers, linkers, welters, folders and baggers attempted to describe their work and the skill involved in making stockings, socks and knitwear, using technical terms such as ‘English foot’ and ‘wales.’ Quite a few respondents spent time at evening classes learning more about their jobs. Joe Lawrance remembers attending the local technical college learning as much as he could about knitting machinery. He believed, as a mechanic, that he should know how to operate every machine under his care – not only the knitting machines but also overlockers, linking machines and other finishing machines, ‘it was no good telling them if you couldn’t do it yourself...me a mere male showing them how it should be done!’³⁸ Maureen Smart learnt her job while still at school working at a local factory after school and Saturday mornings. She had already decided that she didn’t want to start at the ‘bottom’; she wanted to get onto piece rate as soon as possible. She not only went to technical college to improve her skills, but with her growing expertise and knowledge of the industry also taught new recruits at the,

³⁸ Joe Lawrance. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1.

‘local tech’. Maureen was also a very keen union member and spent quite a bit of time in lively discussion about time rates with the managers. She was also a regular union member at the annual conferences.³⁹

Respondents often took great pains to explain to me technical processes in the hosiery industry, and the debates surrounding them, for example on the difference between ‘cut and sew’ and ‘fully fashioned.’ The age-old prejudice against ‘cut and sew’ still very prevalent – not so much for hosiery, because tights from their introduction, in the mid 1960s, were knitted on circular knitting machines, but fully-fashioned knitwear is still deemed as superior to cut and sew garments and thus demands a higher price. As far as I was concerned it was very much about ‘learning on the job’. Respondents were obviously very knowledgeable about their industry and highly articulate in the specialist vocabulary. Thompson discusses the importance of preparation, through reading and in other ways, when embarking on a local project and includes comments made by Roy Hay, ‘one’s own ignorance can be turned to good use. On many occasions older workers have greeted my naïve questions with amused tolerance and told me, “Naw laddie it wasn’t like that at all”, followed by a graphic description of the real situation.’⁴⁰ Stephen Caunce in his introduction to *Oral History and the Local Historian* reflects how I felt when first embarking on recording memories: ‘No practical grasp of what I was undertaking...would I come back with tapes with nothing on them, could I think of appropriate questions, could I keep the conversation on topics that were relevant...’⁴¹ These doubts, and more, were quite common when I first started this research, never having had anything to do with recording memory and knowing nothing about the hosiery industry.

Oral History Methodology and Interpretation

While the thesis is based on examination of a wide variety of sources of information, a major part of the work relies on recorded interviews, meetings, discussions and written evidence provided by respondents. This has allowed the lives of working people who live in the Hinckley area, and who worked in the hosiery industry,

³⁹ Maureen Smart. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁴⁰ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 199.

⁴¹ S. Caunce, *Oral History and the Local Historian* (London, 1984).

to be pieced together. Table 1 summarises details of the respondents. Fuller information is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 1: Summary of respondents (comprising oral history recordings, written contributions, questionnaires and unrecorded interviews)

Position*	Men	Women	Total
Managing Directors/ Directors	12	0	12
Managers/Technologists	11	0	11
QC*, Supervisors, Mechanics, Office	13	12	25
Shop Floor***	17	71	88
Manufacturer's Association	2	–	2
District Union Staff	3	1	4
Hinckley College (knitting)	4	–	4
Not in Hosiery	3	4	7
Total	65	88	153

* Based on highest position achieved as many worked in various capacities during their working lives

** QC - Quality Control

*** Includes knitters, linkers, baggers, cleaners as well as other occupations

Of the respondents 110 were recorded in taped interviews

It is clear from the summary table that information has been obtained from a wide spectrum of people, from managing directors through to shop floor workers. Evident is the bias in the industry to women occupying the shop floor and shop floor supervisory positions; while men occupied the higher staff, management and technological positions. Information was obtained from 65 men and 88 women. Of the total of 153 respondents, 88 were from the shop floor. Of those volunteering information on their working lives and social lives, 12 were managing directors who agreed to meet and talk about their involvement in the family business and talk about work practices in general. A few people gave written accounts of living in a hosiery town, and included are the 34 people who filled in questionnaires (see Appendix 3), some of which were very detailed.

The recorded interviews were many and varied and did not all take place on a one-to-one basis. Out of the 110 people who agreed to record their memories, 75 were with individuals; the other interviews were made up of couples and small groups of between three and five people. Everyone who agreed to record their memories, as individuals, couples, or as part of a group, however, have been included separately in the overall number of recorded interviews. A number of respondents were keen to

meet up on more than occasion, sometimes doing two or more interviews and also encouraging a partner (husband or wife), a friend or friends, to participate. For instance Bert Hall, who I met on several occasions, was very keen to record his memories working as a master dyer at Bennett Brothers in Hinckley. His wife, Ann, also agreed to record her memories of working in the 'hosiery'. Similarly Roy Bonser did a few interviews and also encouraged his wife, Sylvia, to take part. Mary Maund introduced me to her husband, who had recently been made redundant from Nicholls and Wileman in Earl Shilton and not only encouraged Cliff to record his memories but she also recorded her memories, although never having worked in the industry herself. She was able to talk about her own mother's working life in the hosiery industry. Other couples such as Joan and Worrall Pegg, and Cliff and Kathleen Ball, did joint interviews. Recording sessions were also made up of twin sisters and a session with three sisters. A further group included a husband, wife and friend. The largest group, however, was made up of five friends – two couples having already recorded their memories on two separate occasions, John Cobley and Marion Godfrey recommended that I should meet up with Keith and Dorothy Lockton and it was then agreed that I should meet up with another two of their friends, Gladys and Len. Other group interviews included staff based in the Knitting Department at Hinckley College. Ironically, this was just before they were being made redundant due to the closure of the department. All interviews were by recommendation from friends, family and work colleagues and perhaps highlight the integral nature of the industry in the local area. The recording sessions were sociable affairs, more often than not taking place in a respondent's house where tea, coffee, biscuits and sometimes a glass of wine would be offered before, during or after a recording session. Other interviews were carried out in the work place, for example the factory, union office, the manufacturer's association office or the college.

The age range of people who volunteered to record their memories, complete questionnaires, write accounts of the hosiery or discuss their working lives were between 17 and 95. Of those respondents who volunteered, the majority were 60 plus and by studying the respondents' information found in Appendix 1, three people started work before 1920, 10 started during the 1920s, 22 during the 1930s, 28 during the 1940s, 30 during the 1950s and 22 during the 1960s. The number of respondents then decreases for the 1970s, 80s and 90s and information from 24 respondents were

received during this period – so it can be seen that the majority of respondents started their working lives in the ‘hosiery’ during the first half of the twentieth century, particularly from the 1930s to the early 1960s. Those who started work during the 1940s would have recently retired from the hosiery industry or from other employment when they agreed to talk about their lives. Those who started work during the 1950s and 1960s would still have been employed in the industry. By talking to people born during the first half of the twentieth century it was possible to chart the changes which took place in the factory during most of the twentieth century. It was also possible to highlight continuity with one generation following the next into the local hosiery factory, particularly up to the 1960s.

Respondents who worked in the hosiery industry from the 1970s onwards were often more willing to complete questionnaires than take part in interviews. This was in part due to the fact that they had less time to meet up to do a recorded interview because of work commitments. The questionnaires were handed out to managing directors, managers and supervisors during visits to the various factories. It was also while visiting local factories that I was able to talk informally to factory floor workers, supervisors, managers and managing directors. The information gathered from these visits both from the conversations and the filled-in questionnaires, although not directly discussed in the study, nevertheless added to the overall understanding of the hosiery industry in the Hinckley area.⁴²

What is the significance of oral history?

It is necessary to address a number of important considerations in undertaking and evaluating the reliability of oral history. The main points and the significance to the work undertaken are outlined below and it is important to address these issues in answering the overall question: *How reliable is the evidence?*

Paul Thompson perhaps provides the most definitive text not only on the significance but the methodology appropriate in obtaining oral histories, which relies heavily on the techniques employed by the interviewer and the questions asked. Oral

⁴² All factory visits were carried during my time as a research assistant on the Arqueotex Textile Heritage Project.

evidence opens up new avenues of enquiry and a broader perspective of the lives of people not adequately represented by other means of research, and ‘allows the direct collection of information from those whose knowledge is first hand’.⁴³ There is a tendency to concentrate on political and world events, but the fine-grained nature of individual people’s lives fills in the gaps and provides depth and body to ‘official’ history. It provides evidence of the influence and views of working people not obtained from a study of newspapers, Trade Union literature, political publications and the like, which may be tainted by the political or commercial agenda at the time of writing. The significance of oral history, however, must be evaluated in the same way as any other form of historic evidence. Indeed a careful sifting of the information, supported by other information allows a truer picture to emerge and while it is argued by some historians that oral history provides an unreliable source of information, this is an argument that can be levelled against most sources of historic data. As pointed out by Samuel Raphael, ‘It is remarkable how much history has been written from the vantage point of those who have the running – or attempting to run – other people’s lives’.⁴⁴

Thompson, like many other social historians also brings one’s attention to the more classic sources of historic information such as the census, registrations of birth, marriage, death and Royal Commissions – he saw all these as being biased, referring to the Royal Commissions as ‘a particularly intimidating form of interview’.⁴⁵ Indeed the parliamentary papers, although a rich source of information, have been described as being ‘insidious’ and ‘heavily class biased’ with witnesses often being led ‘sometimes consciously and more often unconsciously’.⁴⁶ The numerous social surveys carried out during the nineteenth century, however, like the parliamentary papers, were from a middle or upper middle class point of view and Carl Chinn regards the social investigators, who viewed the slums of the inner cities in a very ‘different light’ from the people who lived in these poverty stricken areas. These were, on the whole, upper and middle class men observing the working classes from their own comfortable

⁴³ S. Caunce, *Oral History*, p. 220.

⁴⁴ R. Samuel, *Village Life and Labour*, p. xv

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 104-105.

⁴⁶ Samuel Raphael, p. xvi; John Burnett, *Useful Toil: Autobiographies of Working People from the 1820s to the 1930s* (1974, 1977 edn.), p. 9.

existence. As observed by Chinn they were ‘righteously shocked and disturbed by what they saw in the ‘ghetto’, ‘the abyss’, ‘the jungle,’ and the justifiable horror of the living conditions of the poor extended to a horror of the poor themselves.’⁴⁷ Chinn referred to the men who wrote in this very descriptive way as being ‘impressionistic’ and who regarded themselves as explorers entering an unknown continent which was made up of the slums of England’.⁴⁸ As with all forms of research it is essential to be able to support information by referring to a range of sources. It was with the growing interest in oral history that ordinary working people were, at last, given a voice of their own. Indeed, oral history has proved to be an essential research tool in researching people’s lives – their childhood, schooling, the work they did, their interactions with others, their place in a community. It is a medium that can be used where ‘official’ history has no place

The Interview - how was the oral evidence obtained?

Recording memory can take many forms, ranging from the informal, conversational approach to the more controlled style where specific questions are asked. Thompson gives an example of two different types of interviews – the ‘highly structured interview’ and the ‘free flowing interview’, the former is where the interviewer keeps control of the topics covered, the latter is where the conversation is allowed to wander and is generally undirected.⁴⁹ Both approaches have their faults though both may yield valuable information. In my own interviews it was felt necessary to adapt myself to each respondent being interviewed. Some respondents needed continual prompts, others enjoyed a two-way conversation and would ask me questions about myself. Because of the relatively free flowing type of interview which worked best for me, I felt I had to answer as fully as possible, because that’s what I expected from them. Some respondents could talk for one or two hours with very few interruptions from me.

⁴⁷ Chinn, *They worked all their lives*. p. 7.

⁴⁸ Chinn, *They worked all their lives*. p. 5. According to Chinn it was the 1880s which were to witness the full flowering of this descriptive form and included ‘*How the Poor live*’, ‘*In Darkest England*’, ‘*In Darkest England and the Way Out*’, ‘*The People of the Abyss*’, ‘*The Nether World*’.

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 200.

Group interviews, were different again and respondents would chat and argue about people, the workplace and type of work they did and, ‘as they argue and exchange stories among each other, some fascinating insights can emerge’.⁵⁰

Apart from the interviewee having a genuine interest in the subject being discussed, it is also extremely important that when conducting an interview that both interviewer and respondent feels relaxed – recording memory, where possible, should be an enjoyable experience (of course this does depend on the type of memories which are being recorded). The tape recorder should be unobtrusive, working away in the background. For my research I used a Sony recorder with a small table-top microphone. The recorder could then be put out of view and the microphone placed on a table or as near as possible to the person being interviewed. For a group interview the microphone would be placed in the centre of the group so that everyone’s voice would be picked up. Respondents did, however, often feel nervous about being recorded but this apprehension, in the majority of cases, soon passed. One person, however, who did agree to be interviewed could not talk when the recorder was switched on – the young woman in question, a very talkative and chatty person with some wonderful observations of the hosiery industry completely ‘dried up’ when the recorder was switched on – she could not string a sentence together. One or two other people wrote out what they wanted to say and when the recorder was put on they read from a transcript.

Does the oral and written evidence provide a cross-sectional view of society?

Table 1 indicates the wide spectrum of people, both employers and employees, who have provided evidence, along with information from others not directly employed in the industry but whose lives have been interwoven with this dominant industry. The evidence from all those interviewed, those who have completed questionnaires and those who have provided written evidence, is generally consistent and what appears from the evidence is that of a close community in which all participated to ensure its survival. Every effort has been made not to bring into interviews any bias and to listen to what people had to say, while attempting to direct conversations where topics of interest arose. The majority of respondents who agreed to record their memories of

⁵⁰ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 205

working in the hosiery industry were contacted though knowing a friend, relative or acquaintance. These were mainly the shop floor workers. But efforts were made to contact other more prominent people such as managing directors and those not directly involved in the industry in order to gain a rounded representation of views. In most cases an initial contact was made with the respondent to outline the aims and purpose of the research. This allowed time for the respondent to order and consider his or her thoughts before an interview or written submission. In the case of oral interviews a further discussion took place before recording commenced. Speaking to a respondent either over the phone or face to face, and explaining to them the type of questions that were going to be asked, helped to prepare people for recording sessions. It was often during the initial conversations that people disclosed information that was of particular interest, and they were encouraged to subsequently elaborate upon these topics. The initial discussions helped to set the scene. While respondents were informed of what it was hoped would be gained from the interview, they were encouraged to discuss areas of family, working and social life that were of particular interest to them. This could be deemed more of a life history approach to obtaining oral history; not leading a person because answers to specific topics were needed, but asking more open ended questions that allowed the respondent to explore his or her feelings and memories. As quoted by Thompson, ‘the strongest argument for a completely free-flowing interview is when its main purpose is not to seek information or evidence of value in itself, but to make a “subjective” record of how one man or woman looks back on their life as a whole, or part of it...’⁵¹ Although the interviews were within the context of the local hosiery industry, respondents spoke about a wide variety of topics that built up a picture of their lives and the influence that the ‘hosiery’ had over their lives.

How was the evidence evaluated?

Attempt has been made to verify and support oral and written evidence by comparison between the responses provided by different respondents, but also by comparison with other sources, mainly academic. As the number of interviews increased a consistent picture emerged of the dominance and influence of the hosiery industry over people’s lives. What started out as basic questions such as: respondents age at the commencement of work; reasons for going into the factory; the type of work

⁵¹ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 199.

undertaken; descriptions of the work process; wages and changes over time, developed into more insightful discussions as the picture of respondents lives unfolded. Questions and discussions extended into the more social aspects of working in a factory and life outside the factory and covered family history and parents and other relations involvement in this one industry over time. While each interview was unique to that person, the evidence from respondents was essentially consistent in terms of the influence of the hosiery industry on the community as a whole. The differences between interviews were the result of the respondent's personal responses and circumstances.

Concluding Comments

Chapter 1 has described the intentions, the argument and main thrust of this thesis which is to highlight the lives of the people in and around the Hinckley area of south west Leicestershire between the period 1640 to 2000, and their dependency on the hosiery industry for their livelihoods. This was the dominant industry in this area during the period. The chapter also describes the sources of information consulted and the methodology used in obtaining oral histories which permeate and link the contents of Chapters 3 to 6. I will explore the continuing themes of the dependence of the individual, the family and community on the hosiery industry and develop the theme of technological and industrial changes which impacted on the workforce.

Chapter 2

The Early Years, 1640-1840

Historical Background

In order to place in context the discussion of a community which was heavily reliant on one industry for its employment up until quite recent times it is proposed to cover the early history of the town, and chart the growing dependency of its inhabitants on framework knitting. Indeed the family as a unit of production became the mainstay of the industry. Frames were rented out to a framework knitter who in turn employed his family as knitters, seamers and bobbin winders. Generation followed generation into an industry which was becoming more depressed as the mid-nineteenth century approached.

Hinckley has been involved in the manufacture of stockings for approximately 360 years. According to J. Nichols 'The first stocking frame was brought into Hinckley, before the year 1640 by William Illife and it is said to have cost him £60, at that time a very considerable sum'.¹ Indeed Hinckley has been described as the 'Cradle and Home of the Hosiery Trade', the frame having been introduced into Hinckley thirty years before its introduction to Leicester.² The first mention of framework knitting as an occupation in the town of Hinckley is found in St Mary's parish records dated 1681 which refers to a John Stevenson as 'a silk stocking maker'. The parish records also refer to a Samuel Ward who is described as a 'hosier'.³ Also of note is a John Bates of Hinckley referred to as a framework knitter in a probate inventory, who died in 1692, and who as part of his personal estate owned three frames 'for the makeing and knitting of stockings' and these were valued at £18⁴. A Joseph Goosey of Burbage, 'FWK'

¹ J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire*, vol. 4, part II (1811, Wakefield, 1971), p. 679; A.J. Pickering, *The Cradle and Home of the Hosiery Trade. 1640-1940* (Hinckley, 1940), p. 17.

² Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 1.

³ The reason why these two men were included in the records was that they had both been accused of either not being baptized themselves or of not having their children baptized. Information taken from a transcription by T. Hall from St Mary's parish records, Hinckley.

⁴ L.A. Parker, 'Industries', in W.G. Hoskins and R. A. McKinley (eds), *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 3, (1952), p. 7.

was noted as having one frame to the value of £8'.⁵ Indeed it has been stated 'In this town [Hinckley] the most extraordinary industrial specialisation had occurred by the end of the seventeenth century with the introduction of framework-knitting and that a third of the craftsmen in Hinckley recorded in probate inventories between 1675 and 1699 were engaged in the textile trade'.⁶ S.D. Chapman in his article 'Genesis of the British hosiery industry' states when discussing the Iliffe family 'By this period [1680s] the Hinckley business was clearly a prosperous one for in 1684 the first William Iliffe had taken a lease of a house, a warehouse and workshop next to the Bull Inn, at the centre of Hinckley', and after his death in 1689 'the lease of the Hinckley property was renewed in 1693 and the family interest expanded in various directions'.⁷

The framework knitting industry in its initial development in the Midland counties of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire had operated on a craft system. The better-off yeoman farmers, mercers and other people with dealings in the wool trade, owned their own frames and put their younger sons to apprentice in the art of framework knitting. The knitting frame used by William Iliffe and other men would have been similar to that invented by the Reverend William Lee, a machine, 'engine' or 'loom as it had been referred to in numerous wills and inventories. The knitting frame, because of its bulk and complicated nature, needed two people to work it and due to its high price was not a piece of equipment which could be afforded by the poorer sorts. During the seventeenth century framework knitters were still regarded as 'highly skilled workmen and their frames represented a significant investment of fixed capital' and required the services of skilled craftsmen in their construction and in their maintenance'.⁸ It was deemed a respectable trade where a young man could earn a good living and in time become a master himself. Thus it could be said that 'the typical stockinger of the seventeenth century was an independent entrepreneur, the owner of

D. Wykes, 'The origins and development of the Leicestershire hosiery trade', *Textile History*, 23, (1992) p. 46.

⁵ The probate inventory was dated 1711. See Wykes, 'The origins and development', p. 47.

⁶ H.T. Graf, 'Leicestershire small towns and pre-industrial urbanisation' in *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, LXVIII (1994), p. 101.

⁷ S.D. Chapman, 'The genesis of the British hosiery industry 1600-1750', *Textile History*, 3 (1974), p. 34. Of further interest and discussed by Chapman in 'Genesis': William and his wife Elizabeth (Elizabeth was the daughter of the Vicar of Hinckley, the Reverend John Cleveland) had ten children, only three surviving to adulthood, and one of these, Elizabeth, born in 1651 married Edward Atwood, a framework knitter, of St Botolph's, Aldgate and it was her children (Edmund, William, John and Elizabeth) who came to Hinckley, as orphans, after her death in 1685, pp. 33-34.

⁸ Chapman, 'Genesis', p. 10; Wykes, 'Origins and development', p. 31.

his frame and likely to be engaged in agriculture' or possibly 'a small property owner' and in general worked three or four days a week.⁹ However, the knitting of hose, rather than farming or a combination of both, was becoming more lucrative to numerous local families. And consequently Hinckley 'contained men of substantial wealth dependent on the hosiery industry',¹⁰ and was increasingly becoming a place where 'hardly any of the more prosperous inhabitants were now involved in farming'.¹¹ An example of this would be William Hurst 'whose family had been major figures in the Leicestershire hosiery trade since the early eighteenth century'.¹²

Reasons why framework knitting became dominant in the East Midlands

There has been much conjecture as to why the hosiery industry became dominant in the East Midlands, especially Leicestershire, and L.A. Parker observes, 'Leicestershire does not seem to have possessed any natural advantages which make it especially suitable as the home of the hosiery industry'.¹³ Similarly J. Thirsk states: 'There is no certainty or finality in any explanation for the growth of a rural industry in one district rather than another'.¹⁴ However, it has been acknowledged that domestic industries or proto-industrialisation¹⁵ 'gathered in areas suited only to pastoral husbandry'¹⁶ and M. Berg further enhances the complexities which historians have attempted to address relating to the 'transition from an agrarian to an industrial world'¹⁷ by stating that: 'Thirsk has argued that industries in the English countryside grew primarily in regions not only dominated by pastoral farming but where there was no

⁹ D.R. Mills, Rural industries and social structure. Framework knitting in Leicestershire 1670-1851, *Textile History*, 13 (1982), p. 189.

¹⁰ J. Goodacre, *The Transformation of a Peasant Economy. Townspeople and Villages in the Lutterworth Area 1500-1700* (1994), p. 27.

¹¹ Goodacre, *Peasant Economy*, p. 18.

¹² Wykes, 'The origins and development', p. 43. William Hurst 1727-93 became High Sheriff of Leicestershire and a Deputy Lieutenant of the County. Eventually he came to own the major part of the Manor of Hinckley as well as the Lordships of Stoke Golding, Higham on the Hill and Dadlington'

¹³ V.C.H. Leicestershire, 3, p. 1.

¹⁴ J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside' in F.J. Fisher (ed.), *Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1961), p. 71.

¹⁵ 'In the early 1970s an ugly new word 'proto-industrialization' entered the literature of economic history and since then has rapidly colonized books, articles and even undergraduate essays...The concept of proto-industrialization is a contribution to the long debate on the industrial revolution, and more generally, on the genesis of industrial capitalism'. See L.A. Clarkson, *Proto-Industrialization: the First Phase of Industrialization?*, (London, 1985), p. 9.

¹⁶ Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside', p. 106.

¹⁷ According to Houston and Snell, 'There is little reason why cottage industry should receive prime attention'. See R.A.B. Houston and K.D.M. Snell, 'Proto-industrialisation? Cottage industry, social change and the Industrial Revolution', *The Historical Journal*, 27, (1984), p. 192.

strong framework of co-operative farming'.¹⁸ W.G. Hoskins discusses the demise of the peasant community which originated during the thirteenth century in Wigston 'a populous village with no lord and many freeholders',¹⁹ which was found to be increasingly dominated by the framework knitting industry and thus 'about one out of every six households was largely dependent on framework knitting by 1700'.²⁰ Indeed, 'since the last quarter of the seventeenth century the village had been attracting the dispossessed and unemployed from outside'.²¹ Hoskins in this extremely illuminating study of Wigston goes on to state that the enclosure Acts of the 1760s saw the 'wholesale conversion of arable to pasture, the engrossing of farms by large graziers at much enhanced rent, the displacement of peasant farmer'.²² It is important to stress, however, that prior to government enclosure of common land in Leicestershire which took place from about 1750, the knitting frame was already relatively widespread concentrating in the towns and villages situated in the south western half of the county. As noted by J. Goodacre, 'At this time hosiery was not essentially a town based industry so that the substantial hosier or woolcomber living in Hinckley depended on an activity spread through the villages'.²³ Daniel Defoe on visiting Leicester in 1705 and again in 1706 commented on the great amount of industry evident not only in the county town but also in the surrounding villages: 'They have considerable manufacture carried on here, and in several of the market towns round for weaving of stockings by frames; and one would scarce think it possible so small an article of trade could employ such multitudes of people as it does; for the whole county seems to be employed in it'.²⁴

¹⁸ M. Berg, *The Age of Manufacture: Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain, 1700-1820* (1985, London, 1995 edn), p.

¹⁹ R.W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England. 1700-1780* (London, 1981), p. 44.

²⁰ Malcolmson, *Life and Labour*, p. 44.

²¹ W.G. Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant: the Economic and Social History of a Leicestershire Village*. (London, 1965), p. 262.

²² Hoskins, *Midland Peasant*, p. 261.

²³ Goodacre, 'Peasant Economy', p. 27.

²⁴ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain* (1723, Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 408. Interestingly Wykes brings one's attention to the fact that 'Daniel Defoe, himself was once engaged in the London hosiery trade'.

Origins of framework knitting in the East Midland counties

Framework knitting had originally been practised in London under the strict regulations of the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters where stockings were made of silk.²⁵ However, due to increasing demands for stockings which were a much sought after item of clothing, not only as a necessity but also as a fashion accessory by all manner of people, it became increasingly advantageous to merchants/entrepreneurs to look for other sources of labour. London framework knitters demanded high wages and it was in the entrepreneurs' interests to find cheap labour elsewhere in the country and thus the emergence of the knitting of stockings by the means of a machine, less than fifty years after its invention began in the midland counties. Hinckley and surrounding villages had many of the prerequisites for the new industry. In particular, surplus poor and cheap labour was available due to a, 'weak manorial framework [which] could and did permit an unusually rapid growth of population through immigration in regions where there was land to attract the landless'.²⁶ There were also men of relative wealth ready to exploit the situation, some being descendants of peasant/yeoman stock such as William Iliffe and William Hurst.

Hinckley had obtained a market charter in the early years of the fourteenth century and already had connections not only with local people but with people from a distance who were involved in the buying and selling of various commodities, namely wool. Goodacre surmises that 'There is a possibility that even before 1600 a yeoman dealing in wool from mutton animals was selling direct to weavers in the Hinckley area'.²⁷ Chapman when discussing the Iliffe family and the introduction of the stocking frame into Hinckley, although acknowledging, 'evidence is very slight', William Iliffe 'brought the stocking frame into the midlands as a consequence of an early trading connection with the metropolis, conceivably (in view of his youth in 1640) as a

²⁵ Framework knitting came into being with the invention of the knitting frame by the Reverend William Lee in 1589 and it was in 1657 that the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters was incorporated as a London chartered company to regulate the craft. See Wykes, 'Origins and development', p. 36;

²⁶ Thirsk, 'Industries in the countryside', p. 76.

²⁷ Goodacre, *Peasant Economy*, p. 157; Pickering affirms this in *Cradle and Home* when he discusses the fact that the 'wool trade had been well established in the town long before the introduction of the stocking frame' and he brings one's attention to 'Shakespeare's allusion to Hinckley Fair' which may have been an Annual Wool Fair. Pickering also discusses Shakespeare's *Henry IV*, whereby 'Justice Shallow is asked by his man Davy whether he means to stop any of William's wages about the sack he lost the other day at Hinckley Fair', p. 38.

consequence of having served an apprenticeship there'.²⁸ The Iliffes' interests in the hosiery industry were not only based on Hinckley, and Leicester by the 1720s but also on London where William Illife II, 'seems to have been based', and where the family kept their merchandise at the Cross Keys Inn, in Wood Street.²⁹ It has also been suggested that, 'Midland hosiers often apprenticed their sons to London merchants and family connections were common'.³⁰ This perpetuated and increased the business links between London and the East Midlands.

H. Graff highlights the fact that Hinckley along with Hallaton and Market Harborough held prominent horse fairs and that they were 'linked to the national market system, and that they adjusted themselves to meet the demand for coach- and work- horses in the bigger county towns and London'.³¹ Hinckley also had the advantages of just being off the Watling Street and the Fosse Way and, 'long distance carriers did operate between East Midland towns and London by the mid seventeenth-century'.³² Hand knitting was also an occupation already in existence in the area. As discussed by Chapman, 'a hand knitting industry had been established in the sixteenth century on the ruins of Leicester's medieval wool trade and manufacture, and at the Restoration it was probably the town's most prosperous industry' and in 1674 a group of employers, 'kept constantly at work about 2,000 poore people, Men, Woman and Children of the Towne of Leicr & the adjacent villages'.³³

²⁸ Chapman, 'Genesis', p. 34.

²⁹ Chapman, 'Genesis', p. 34, and indeed Robert Iliffe who had settled in Leicester 'was certainly in a substantial way of business by 1726', p. 34

³⁰ F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry: Its History and Organisation*. (1935; Newton Abbott, 1972 edn), p. 59.

³¹ H.T. Graff, 'Leicestershire small towns and pre-industrial urbanisation', p. 111. In fact horse fairs did not come to an end in Hinckley until about 1940. These fairs were held every September.

³² M. Palmer and P. Neaverson, *Industrial Landscapes of the East Midlands* (Leicester, 1992), p. xii.

³³ Chapman, 'Genesis', p. 35.

Chapman suggests that it was probably for this reason that, ‘framework knitting at first shunned Leicester, settling instead in Hinckley, thirteen miles south-west of the county town.’³⁴ Indeed ‘hand knitting was organised in the second half of the seventeenth century by capitalist hosiers in Leicestershire who began to turn their attention to machine made hose in the 1690s’.³⁵ Thus a combination of the above mentioned factors must have played an important part in the emergence, growth and eventual dominance of framework knitting not only in the Hinckley area but also in other areas of the East Midland counties before parliamentary enclosure began.

Cottage industry or proto-industrialization in the East Midlands

Population in England and Wales increased quite dramatically in the latter part of the sixteenth century thus putting more stress on the land and expanding towns and cities by the early seventeenth century. It was the dispossessed and landless labourers who became the ready employees of an industry which very early on in its development became based on a capitalist system of production. It has been argued, ‘the coming of some domestic industries could make the difference between destitution and decency for the poor and dispossessed’.³⁶ Houston and Snell also discuss this and stress that proto-industry rather than being the ‘child of poverty’ often emerged during periods of rising real wages and frequently enhanced the wages of industrial commodity producers particularly before the late eighteenth century’ and ‘allowed a higher standard of living among the hand and framework knitters in Leicestershire’.³⁷ As discussed by Hoskins ‘Framework knitting was a domestic industry and it required no capital to hire a frame from a hosier or an undertaker for a shilling a week and knit the yarn provided by him’.³⁸ Hinckley, then, during the early to mid-eighteenth century, was similar to other towns and villages in south-west Leicestershire, becoming heavily industrialised, and these villages were attracting numerous families and the young and single. As highlighted by Hoskins ‘[Wigston] an industrialized village not only gave some sort of alternative employment to its own dispossessed peasantry but attracted those of the

³⁴ Chapman, ‘Genesis’, p. 33.

³⁵ Mills discusses hand knitting for sale in his article ‘Rural industries and social structure’ and states ‘In Leicestershire hand knitting preceded framework knitting’, p. 195. Berg points out, however, that ‘Many villages which took up framework knitting had previous traditions not so much in hand knitting as in woollen or worsted weaving’, Berg, *Age of Manufacture*, p. 218.

³⁶ Berg, *Age of Manufacture*, p. 101.

³⁷ Houston and Snell, ‘Proto-industrialisation’, p. 478.

³⁸ Hoskins, *The Midland Peasant*, p. 261.

purely farming villages around'.³⁹ This increase in the landless had come about as a result of 'the contagious enclosure of Leicestershire parishes throughout the [seventeenth] century and the almost invariable conversion to pasture for large scale grazing'.⁴⁰ This resulted in 'the displaced people of these parishes drifting to towns like Leicester and Hinckley where the framework knitting industry was growing rapidly after 1670'.⁴¹ Indeed Hinckley which had a population of 1000 in 1640 and was described as 'a relatively poor town with one hundred and forty-three houses excluded from the hearth tax, had by 1717 increased its population to 2,250'.⁴² (See Appendix 2 for population growth over the years).

Framework knitting tended to become established in 'open villages' such as Hinckley, Barwell, Earl Shilton, Wigston, Countesthorpe, Shepshed and Loughborough and the county town of Leicester, to name several of the newly industrialising towns and villages which have been described as 'populous, sprawling and rather unruly and a magnet for migrants looking for work'.⁴³ D. Hey also suggests that 'Open communities were regarded with suspicion if not downright hostility by the respectable classes who considered them as shabby, ill disciplined, lawless, radical in politics and religion or worse still heathen'.⁴⁴ Interestingly D.R.Mills found by using hearth tax assessments that 'the villages which depended heavily on framework knitting in 1844 were those which in 1670 had been the largest and had contained a high proportion of poor households'.⁴⁵ Closed villages under the close supervision of a Lord of the Manor where cottage accommodation was strictly limited to those who worked on the local farms, positively discriminated against an influx of landless labourers and the setting-up of industry. Indeed, as graphically described by R.W. Malcolmson, in such villages 'one man by virtue of his overwhelming predominance as an owner of land, was able to

³⁹ Hoskins, *Midland Peasant*, p. 261.

⁴⁰ Hoskins, *Midland Peasant*, p. 212.

⁴¹ Hoskins, *Midland Peasant*, p. 212.

⁴² Palmer & Neaverson, *Industrial Landscapes* (Leicester, 1992), p. 11; S.A. Royle, 'Aspects of the Social Geography of Leicestershire Towns, 1837-1871' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, Leicester University, 1976), p. 49.

⁴³ D. Hey, *Family History and Local History in England* (London, 1987), p. 197.

⁴⁴ Hey, *Family History*, p. 199.

⁴⁵ Mills, 'Rural industry', p. 193.

control most of the locality's economic destinies and opportunities and the conditions under which people would be employed'.⁴⁶

Abuses and contempt towards the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters

As it expanded the hosiery industry, which had been originally set up as a craft industry under the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters, became degraded. Indeed it has been noted that 'Leicester and the country adjacent had never acknowledged the Company and abuses within the industry became common place'.⁴⁷ There were in particular increasing numbers of apprentices being employed. The Company's charter which had been amended several times 'restricted each master to two apprentices, and a revision made in 1671 insisted that each boy should be at least 14 years old and apprenticed for eight years'.⁴⁸ The Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters had appointed Deputies or Stewards to safeguard the Company's interests but to no avail, and as early as 1709 a George Ward sen. and a Henry Preston both of Hinckley 'were ordered to appear before the County Justices 'to answer their imposing illegal Oathes upon her Ma[jes]ties subjects and restraining p[er]sons using the trade of Frame work knitting from takeing Apprentices'.⁴⁹ In 1726 Michael Wire the Deputy stationed in Hinckley reported that:

for these four (monthly) Courts last past all [is] silent so that I am really ashamed to attend and have nothing to do for I must assure you that both you and us are grown into great contempt...there is several in our town and other neighbouring towns and indeed all over the county that keeps some two, some three, four or five boys a piece, all bound [apprentice] as the other and the masters of such boys not admitted [to the Company]...⁵⁰

By 1731 Deputies in Hinckley, Leicester and Nottingham had resigned 'believing any continued attempts to uphold the privileges (of the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters) to be hopeless'.⁵¹ It was also becoming common practice with the continuing expansion of the hosiery industry in the East Midland counties for

⁴⁶ Malcolmson, *Life and Labour*, p. 41.

⁴⁷ R. Gurnham, *A History of the Trade Union Movement in the Hosiery and Knitwear Industry 1776-1976*, (Leicester, 1976), p. 3.

⁴⁸ Chapman, 'Genesis', p. 14

⁴⁹ Wykes, 'Origins and development', p. 37.

⁵⁰ Chapman, 'Genesis', p. 15.

⁵¹ Wykes, 'Origins and development', p. 37. Also Chapman 'Genesis' p. 15-16.

overseers of the old poor law ‘to apprentice to the master framework knitters the growing number of paupers left in their charge’.⁵² In Hinckley it was said ‘some masters employed as many as a dozen apprentices’.⁵³ These numbers increased as the century progressed and climaxed during the French Wars when pauper apprentices were brought into the county and borough from the neighbouring counties of Northamptonshire and Warwickshire. It has been stated that estimates of 600 or more apprentices were to be found in Hinckley at this time and between the years 1788 and 1791 the number of apprentices increased from 174 to 251.⁵⁴ Pickering gives a very interesting account of how a number of master-stockingers made a fortune by taking an unlimited number of parish apprentices and in 1810 two master framework knitters employed between them one hundred apprentices.⁵⁵ Pickering also brings one’s attention to the predicament that many apprentices found themselves in during certain times in the eighteenth century when ‘masters purposely ill-treated their apprentices to obtain the bounties for their enlistment. During the Peninsular and earlier wars Hinckley contributed more soldiers than any other place in England for the size of the town’.⁵⁶ Indeed a recruiting bill circulated about this time offered ten guineas to those volunteering to the armed force ‘i.e. Five Guineas in hand, and Five more when passed at Headquarters.’⁵⁷

Thus the industry which had been growing rapidly in the midland counties during the early half of the eighteenth century reached ‘a position shortly after 1800 when over 90 per cent of the industry was centred in the east midlands’.⁵⁸ There was a tendency for woollen and worsted to be manufactured in Leicester and the surrounding area, silk in Derbyshire and cotton in Nottingham. However, there were exceptions to this and a far greater diversity was in evidence. Indeed cotton had become the staple yarn in the Hinckley area by the early nineteenth century. As already noted the knitting

⁵² V.C.H. *Leicestershire*, p. 8.

⁵³ V.C.H. *Leicestershire*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ V.C.H. *Leicestershire*, p. 8; *1845 Royal Commission Inquiring into the Conditions of the Framework Knitters*, p. 396.; Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 74 A Joseph Brown apprenticed in the town by his parents from the age of nine to nineteen (between 1811-1821) had this to say about the lot of an apprentice ‘I do believe at that time with a very few exceptions, they were more like slaves than anything else’, p. 75. Indeed it was a local tradition ‘that apprentices were chained to the frame to make them work’, p. 76. See Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 70.

⁵⁵ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 76 and p. 73.

⁵⁶ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 76.

⁵⁷ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 76

⁵⁸ Palmer and Neaverson, *Industrial Landscapes*, p. 11.

of hose had become a full-time occupation rather than one based on a mixture of farming and framework knitting by the mid eighteenth century. The knitting frame had also undergone various changes and could by 1725 be worked by just one person rather than two. It had also been reduced in price considerably and accordingly the 'reduction both in cost and the level of skill required were without doubt essential to the diffusion of the frame in Leicestershire'.⁵⁹

Due to its relative cheapness numerous people not otherwise involved in the hosiery trade could readily purchase knitting frames. These people included malsters, innkeepers and (on a smaller scale) widows along with others wishing to improve their income. Investment was not only in frames but also in some instances in cottages in order to house a family and a framework knitting machine. Cottages and frames were rented out to landless and dispossessed labourers who were already in evidence in the town and other industrial villages and also to those who migrated to these industrial areas in search of work. During more prosperous times the industry attracted people from other occupations such as farm workers and domestic servants who had been able to set money aside in order to learn a trade of their own and live a more independent life. According to Wells they would pay out between £5 and £10 to learn the craft of framework knitting. It was also very common for a gentleman's servant, who had saved £150 or £200, to learn the business and then set up with a few frames as a small master.⁶⁰ Indeed it has been recorded that frame renting was already being practised in Hinckley by 1730.⁶¹ The large influx of people into the framework knitting areas of the East Midlands had at times a great influence on profitability when supply exceeded demand. As early as 1740 the saying, 'as poor as a stockinger', was already in circulation.⁶² Many families by this time had become the 'unit of production' dependent on wage labour and an inquiry set up by parliament in 1753 highlighted the poverty into which many people had fallen.

⁵⁹ Wykes, 'Origins and development', p. 32

⁶⁰ Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 80.

⁶¹ Wykes, 'Origins and development', p. 76.

⁶² S.A. Royle, 'The spiritual destitution is excessive – the poverty overwhelming', Hinckley in the mid-nineteenth century', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 54 (1978-9), p. 52.

Saturation of industry

Increases in the population of Hinckley, partly via migration from surrounding areas, dictated systematic changes in the layout of the town, with cottages being built to accommodate the increased population. In 1768 the number of houses in Hinckley had stood at 697 which according to Nichols ‘have since been greatly augmented by new erections and by outbuildings in yards having been converted to dwelling-houses’.⁶³ Indeed Hinckley as with other small market towns, had ‘contained (in its main streets) many farmhouses with yards and outbuildings behind’.⁶⁴ However, with the gradual dominance of manufacturing, farmhouses were adapted to the needs of entrepreneurs or publicans’.⁶⁵ Cottages were built in the yards and other vacant areas, as the population of the town increased during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, creating the yards, jitties and entrances now characteristic of the town. By 1782 Hinckley contained 750 houses and was described by Nichols: ‘in each of the front houses were five persons and in the yards and back buildings where there are many children and apprentices the number is much more considerable’. By 1801 housing stock had increased to 919, housing 966 families.⁶⁶

The parliamentary enclosure of open fields in 1760 added impetus to a phenomenon which had been in progress for many years. This was the growing dependence of the masses on wage labour based on the putting-out system or cottage industry, as the prime source of employment. It has not only been suggested by K.D.M. Snell that Leicestershire ‘might lay claim to being the most acutely transformed county of all by enclosure, with its movement to pasture’,⁶⁷ but also that the ‘extension of cottage industry probably provided alternative employment for those displaced from open field arable’.⁶⁸ Snell further enhances this, when discussing the effects of enclosure on Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire, by stating that ‘one is struck by the continuity before and after enclosure...It seems probable that the considerable conversion to pasture here, the growth of rural cottage industry, and the proximity of

⁶³ Nichols, *The Antiquities of Leicestershire*, p. 672.

⁶⁴ Royle, ‘Spiritual destitution’, p. 52.

⁶⁵ Royle, ‘Spiritual destitution’, p. 52.

⁶⁶ Nichols, *The Antiquities of Leicestershire*, p. 672.

⁶⁷ K.D.M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor: Social Change and Agrarian England, 1660-1900* (1985, Cambridge, 1987), p. 164.

⁶⁸ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 164.

growing urban areas capable of absorbing rural migrants served to counteract the effects of enclosure we have seen elsewhere'.⁶⁹

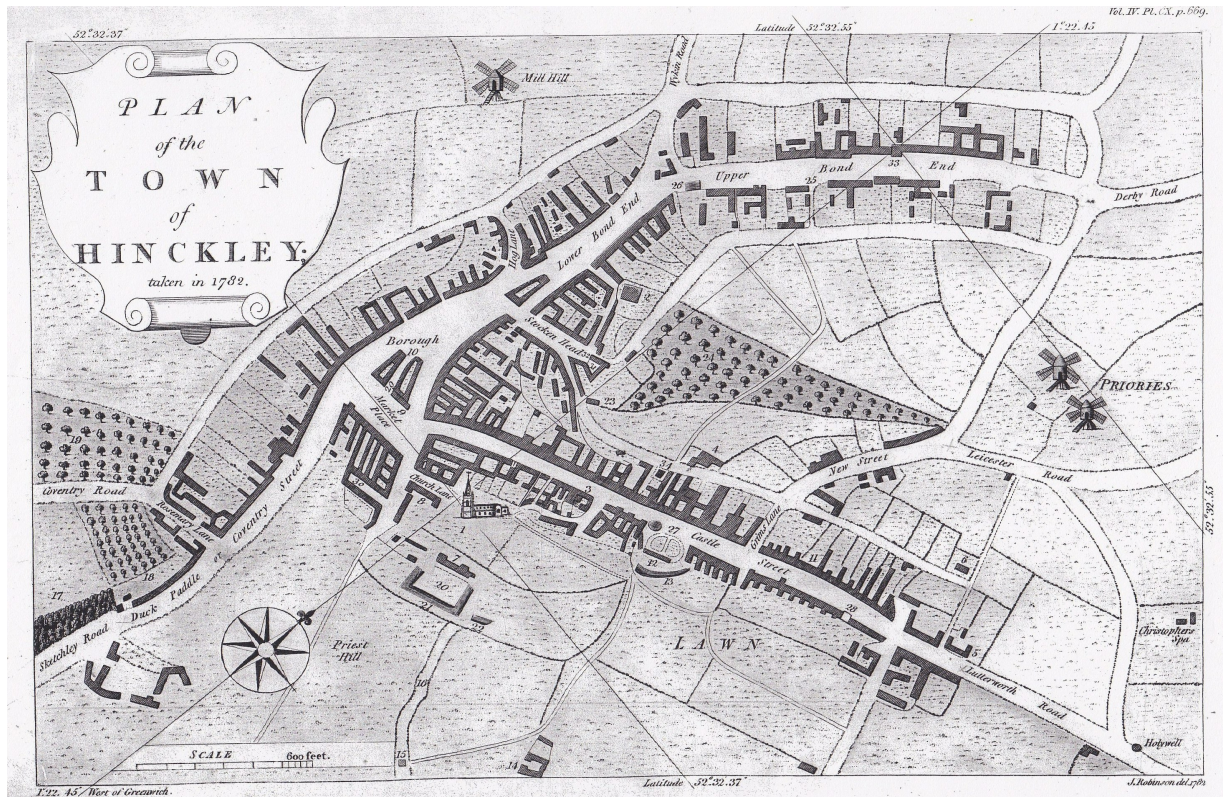


Fig. 2. Framework Knitting had by the late eighteenth century become an industry which employed over half the population of the town, which in 1782 stood at 4,500 (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

Framework knitting had by the late eighteenth century become an industry which employed well over half the population of the town of Hinckley and a plan of the town for 1782 can be seen in Figure 2. Interestingly ‘a larger quantity of hose is supposed to be made here than in any town in England [and] frames [are] employed on strong serviceable hose of a lower price in cotton thread and worsted’.⁷⁰ Nichols calculated that there were ‘1000 framework knitters and 200 in the villages adjacent’, adding that ‘many of these frames belong to masters at Hinckley but some are the property of workmen’.

⁶⁹ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 151.

⁷⁰ Nichols, *The Antiquities of Leicestershire*, p. 672.

The population also included 300 seamers, 55 woolcombers, 30 frame-smiths and setters-up of frames and 1,000 spinners, doublers and twisters.⁷¹ It has also been noted that in January 1791 there were 259 journeymen working in the town along with 251 apprentices and of these apprentices, 160 were the sons and daughters of framework knitters. By 1801 out of a population of 5,070 - 2,624 were employed in 'trade and manufacture'.⁷² A trade directory of 1791 listed nineteen Manufacturers of Hose; in 1805 William Holden's Directory stated 'The chief manufacture is stockings and fine ale...'.⁷³ and in 1811 there were '1,550 stocking frames being worked by 1,244 families and 362 apprentices'.⁷⁴ Appendix 2 shows the population increase of Hinckley and gives some figures for the number of hosiers who rented out frames to the framework knitters in period 1640 to 1854.

The family as the unit of production

Levine gives an invaluable insight into the life of a framework knitter and his family in Shepshed and it is quite acceptable to adopt this as a description of life in Hinckley and other framework knitting areas. Levine explains that framework knitters usually had larger families 'were more likely to be married, married earlier, had more children living at home and in addition, more frequently, shared their households with other families'.⁷⁵ He also states that framework knitters had the 'largest proportion of working wives, also, children most likely to work from an early age and it was quite common for two, three, four or five or more household members to be employed in some branch of the hosiery trade'.⁷⁶ The work of Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm is also of interest to the study being undertaken in that they discuss the family in relation to proto-industrialization. They emphasise the fact that changes took place within the family structure in order to deal with proto-industrialization which according to them took place from the mid-eighteenth century.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Nichols, *The Antiquities of Leicestershire*, p. 672.

⁷² Nichols, *The Antiquities of Leicestershire*, p. 672.

⁷³ *William Holden's Trade Directory 1805*.

⁷⁴ Nichols, *The Antiquities of Leicestershire*, p. 672

⁷⁵ D. Levine, *Family Formation in an age of Nascent Capitalism* (London, 1977), p. 51 H. Bradley, 'Technological change, management strategies, and the development of gender-based job segregation in the Labour Process' in D. Knights, *Gender and the Labour Process*, p. 59.

⁷⁶ Levine, *Family Formation*. P. 51.

⁷⁷ P. Kriedte, H. Medick, J. Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization*, (Cambridge, 1981).

However, historians such as M. Berg, Snell or L.A. Clarkson, while agreeing with much of the above work have disputed certain statements. For instance Levine and Kreidte, Medick and Schlumbohm state that early age at marriage came about as a result of the introduction of proto-industrialization. Cottage industry or proto-industrialization, as it has been termed, was a far more gradual process than it would at first appear. From the early seventeenth century or possibly before, there had been large numbers of people who were either unemployed or underemployed and framework knitting along with other cottage industries was able to take up this excess labour. Indeed research carried out by Berg would suggest that a majority of families were already working in market-based industries before the eighteenth century.⁷⁸ However, the work of Levine is seen as being particularly influential. He highlights quite graphically the social consequences which resulted from the dominance of framework knitting. The conditions in which framework knitters lived (and indeed the behaviour of the working classes as a whole) were often criticised by upper- and middle-class social observers.⁷⁹ Levine and Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm give explanations as to why these groups of people lived in the way they did. Much of the criticism was aimed at the state of their dwellings – many being most offensive ‘There are whole classes of houses without privies or conveniences...and young people, girls and boys, sleeping in the same rooms, and in the same beds, no doubt’.⁸⁰ The commentator, however, does blame this state of affairs on ‘the construction of the dwellings; there not being a sufficient number of sleeping-rooms, there being several beds in the same room, and the principal room being obliged to be adapted to the frames, as a workshop’.⁸¹ A most interesting study of a small area of Bond Street, Hinckley, an extract of which follows, highlights the crowded conditions and indeed the dominance of the industry in the town between the 1840s and 1870s:

In 1841 32 Bond Street (two rooms and an attic) was occupied by ‘Thomas Harrison, framework knitter and his wife Lydia who ‘lived in overcrowded conditions with their seven children’. By 1851 Lydia was dead and one of his sons had married Ann Worthington, a seamer of stockings, who had given birth to a son; one of his younger sons, Thomas Elijah, was working as a butcher’s boy... and his eldest daughter Maria, was working as a framework knitter, while Hannah, aged fifteen, was seaming

⁷⁸ Berg, *Age of Manufacture*, p. 136.

⁷⁹ C. Chinn, *They Worked all their lives. Women of the urban poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1988).

⁸⁰ *1845 Royal Commission Inquiring into the Conditions of the Framework Knitters*, p. 290.

⁸¹ *1845 Royal Commission* p. 290.

stockings. By 1871 the cottage was occupied by George Davey a hosiery trimmer and his wife Emma who worked as a looper 'and they had a female factory hand as a lodger'.

In 1841 No.34 (two rooms and an attic) was occupied by Joseph Stretton, an eighty year old woolcomber and his wife, Ann. By 1851, however, they were both deceased and Mary Stretton, their widowed daughter-in-law, was working in the premises as a framework-knitter. She shared the cottage with Joseph's daughter who was a seamer, a lodger who worked as a framework-knitter and a widowed aunt who was on parish relief. By 1871 the cottage was occupied by John Mason, a hosiery trimmer, his widowed mother, a framework knitter and his wife Elizabeth, a factory hand.⁸²

Levine describes the type of housing being built for the industrial workers as 'jerry built houses, mean cottages, low and narrow and badly lit, fronting on street or around common yards'.⁸³ It had also been stated that 'They all intermarry; the whole parish are connected in that way'.⁸⁴ Their way of life, however, was dictated by the nature of the work undertaken, framework knitters along with framesmiths, woolcombers, woolstaplers and weavers for instance were 'becoming heavily depressed and exploited trades'.⁸⁵ In order to survive it was becoming essential that members of the same family worked together to maintain a subsistence standard of living. Sons and daughters would follow their parents into an industry which by the 1820s was extremely overpopulated. And indeed framework knitters along with woolstaplers and others were classed among those workers included within the poorer trades and because of their poverty 'were especially liable to take their parental settlement'.⁸⁶

The above stresses the point that framework knitting was very much a family occupation with one generation following another with little or no opportunity for members of the family to follow an alternative occupation. Royle highlights this by taking a 50% sample of all marriages involving residents of the town between 1837 and 1851:

⁸² D.J. Knight, *Museum Cottages*, (Hinckley, 1994) pp. 10-17.

⁸³ Levine, *Family Formation*, p. 68.

⁸⁴ *1845 Royal Commission*, p. 290. Hoskins noted in his study of Wigston that 'puerperal fever carried off more mothers and consumption killed young men and women in their 20s and 30s with ever increasing speed' due to the bad housing which was built for the framework knitters.

⁸⁵ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 330.

⁸⁶ Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor*, p. 340.

Of the total sample of 374 marriages, 165 (44.1%) involved bridegrooms whose fathers were framework knitters and, of these grooms, no fewer than 146 (88.5%) were also employed in some aspect of the textile production. One hundred and thirty-five of the brides in the samples who had their occupation recorded on the marriage certificates had fathers who worked in the textile industry and, of these, 130 (96.3%) worked in the same trade themselves'.⁸⁷

They could not, because of the sweated nature of the industry, afford to set themselves up as independent workers or indeed pay for their children to learn a craft which would enable them to better themselves. They were very much dependent on the vagaries of supply and demand and in the first half of the nineteenth century faced extreme hardship due to oversupply in the market, to war, to the whims of fashion, to exploitation by hosiers, middlemen and bagmen who charged frame rents, employed the notorious truck system and other dubious practices. Indeed, following the Napoleonic Wars 'wages dropped, declining by as much as 30 to 40%'.⁸⁸ As a consequence of this 'framework knitters took on more and more frames in an effort to increase their earnings as well as to ensure a run of work from the manufacturer and middlemen whose frames they rented. These extra frames were worked not by apprentices but by their own children who grew up with no other knowledge than framework-knitting'.⁸⁹ Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of the frames in the east Midlands around 1844.

Levine suggests that in order to counteract low wages and subsistence living framework knitters lived in over-crowded conditions, often with parents or other members of the family and/or lodgers. There was no incentive to postpone marriage, in fact early marriage was an advantage as 'Maximum income opportunities were based on the maximum work capacity of both marriage partners, which reached its optimum at a comparatively early age'.⁹⁰ A cottage and frames could be rented by a newly married couple and this is depicted in an anonymous ballad where a proposal of marriage is being made:

⁸⁷ Royle, 'Spiritual destitution', p. 56.

⁸⁸ V.C.H. *Leicestershire*, p. 13.

⁸⁹ V.C.H. *Leicestershire*, p. 13.

⁹⁰ Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm, *Industrialization*, p. 56.

We have courted, Mary, two long years come Burbage wake;
 I'm sick and tired of journey work, with drunken sprees and bother,
 I'm promised a three-legger soon, a nice house I've found and shop,
 But without you're willing, Mary, all this happy plan must stop;
 For I want you, that is Mary' – Thomas began to stutter –
 If I get the legger working, will you come and be my footer?⁹¹

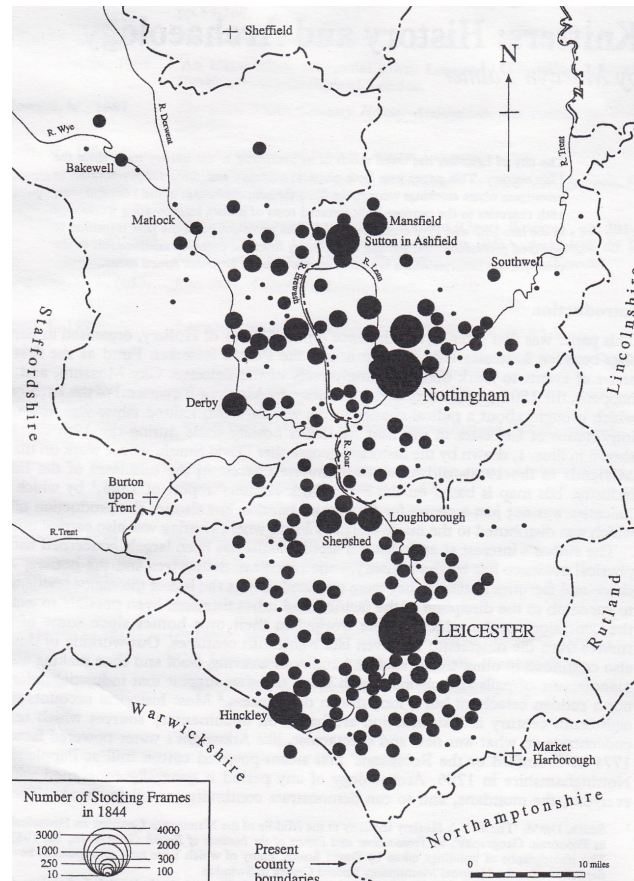


Fig. 3. Map showing the distribution of stocking frames in the East Midlands in 1844
 (D. Smith, 'The British Industry at the Middle of the Nineteenth Century:
 an Historical Study in Economic Geography' in Transactions and Papers of the Institute of British
 Geographers, 32, 1963)

A way of life

It would seem that a framework knitter in his early twenties would look for a wife, aged about eighteen or nineteen, proficient in framework knitting. In fact a 'woman's ability to work as an artisan, demonstrated before marriage, determined her

⁹¹ R. Palmer, *The Folklore of Leicestershire and Rutland* (Leicester, 1985), p. 96. The Love of Thomas and Mary was published in Hinckley in 1859. Reference to this ballad is also made by Mills in 'Rural industries and social structure', p. 185 and in Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 88. There are four verses and the poem was originally printed in *The Hinckley Journal* on Saturday 13 August 1859.

value as a marriage partner'.⁹² The conditions in which framework knitters lived are most graphically illustrated by the *Royal Commission* looking into the Conditions of Framework Knitters. One of its witnesses, William Spencer, a manufacturer in Earl Shilton, testified that young persons of 15 or 16 in his employment could earn the same as adults and a young single girl of that age 'would earn her 8s. a-week, first hand without any hindrance'.⁹³ William Spencer was also questioned thus:

Do young persons so circumstanced, that is, lads and young women of 15 or 16, or a little older, frequently intermarry? – Oh, very frequently; or perhaps they do worse and have bastard children. And then do they marry? – And then I believe it is pretty much the case that they will marry after that; it is the liberty they like'.⁹⁴

The father as head of the family was very much dependent on individual members of his family taking an active role in contributing to the family wage. It was quite normal for both the husband and wife to work a frame and for children from as early an age as four to be employed in seaming stockings and winding. However Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm suggest that because of the nature and type of work undertaken 'they (parents) possessed no sanctions against adolescent children who wanted to leave the home and found a nuclear family unit'.⁹⁵

When trade was good these young people could earn decent money and live comfortably. They had been brought up from an early age to work and contribute to the family income, and it would appear that they were more independent having worked and socialised with the opposite sex from a very young age, possibly working in the same room as other young people knitting, seaming or winding bobbins. Indeed 'For the children of weavers, spinners and knitters, the work within their family of origin frequently took the place of work as servants in other households'.⁹⁶ Up until about the mid eighteenth century it had, in the majority of cases, been the norm for both young men and women to learn a trade in their own right, as domestic servants, as agricultural workers, as framework knitters and so on. They would have lived-in with the family to whom they were apprenticed and restrictions on their behaviour and the

⁹² Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm, *Industrialization*, p. 56.

⁹³ *1845 Royal Commission*, p. 301.

⁹⁴ *1845 Royal Commission*, p. 301.

⁹⁵ Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm, *Industrialization*, p. 56.

⁹⁶ Kriedte, Medick, Schlumbohm, *Industrialization*, p. 55.

quality of their work would have been strictly observed. Marriage would have taken place about five years later than was the norm in framework knitting areas and in other domestic industries, the man being 27 or 28, the young woman being about 22 and each person would have saved towards their future marriage. A trade directory dated 1877 noted that 'in manufacturing populations marriages are almost invariably more numerous and the mean age at marriage lower, than in agricultural populations'.⁹⁷ Research by R.M. Carpenter shows that 'wives of landless labourers and framework knitters were twice as likely as farmers and frame owners' wives to be pregnant at marriage'.⁹⁸ The Reverend Longhurst, who had been curate of the parish of Earl Shilton for 24, testified that, 'All manufacturing girls are married in the family-way; they never think of coming to be married till they are close to their confinement', he continues, 'I am sometimes in trepidation lest they should be taken ill whilst I am marrying them at the altar'.⁹⁹ However, with early marriage came an increase in the number of children born and the following question and answer highlights the situation in which a couple would find themselves 'If they have a family they are reduced to distress immediately, I suppose? – They begin with nothing, and of course, as trade has been these last few years, they have not an opportunity to get anything.'¹⁰⁰

Indeed Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm refer to this type of marriage as being a 'beggar's marriage', that is a marriage 'between partners without a considerable dowry or inheritance'.¹⁰¹ The *1845 Royal Commission* again highlights the predicament in which a family was placed once children were added to the household. Job Whitmore, a framework knitter in Earl Shilton brings one's attention to the dependency adults had on the labour of their children:

⁹⁷ *White's Leicestershire and Rutland Trade Directory* 1877, p. 50.

⁹⁸ R. M. Carpenter, 'Peasants and Stockingers. Socio Economic Change in Guthlaxton Hundred, Leicestershire 1700-1851' (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Leicester, 1994), p. 20 These findings are based on examination of pre-nuptial pregnancy rates between 1800-50.

⁹⁹ *Royal Commission*, p. 290. Reverend Longhurst also added that there were exceptions to the above statement and further states that 'I have a Sunday-School of 180 children', p. 290.

¹⁰⁰ *Royal Commission*, p. 301.

¹⁰¹ Kriedte, Medick and Schlumbohm, *Industrialisation*, p. 56. Medick adds that a marriage 'between two people who can join together two spinning wheels but no beds' was frequently criticised by contemporaries. See p. 56.

At what age do your children commence the seaming? – At different ages; some they will put to it at four and a half and five years. We are obliged to put them to it as soon as they can hold a needle in their hand. I was obliged to put one of mine to it under five years of age. Do these young children work long hours at the seaming? – Oh yes, from 7 o'clock in the morning till 11 or 12 o'clock at night in the winter time; many of them till they fall asleep upon the stool or chair they are sitting on...¹⁰²

A woman with an infant to look after would be compelled to hire a 'nurse girl' in order to carry on her work in the frame. This young girl would vary in age 'from 8 perhaps to 11 and 12'.¹⁰³ and would be employed not only to look after the infant but also to seam stockings, while the child in her care slept. She would be paid 1s.6d for tending to the child and a further 1s.0d, or more, depending on her skill at seaming.¹⁰⁴ At the age of 11 or 12 both boys and girls would be put to learn the 'art of framework knitting', thus Joseph Taylor a framework knitter with three children rented five frames, one for himself, one for his wife and one each for his three children. His oldest daughter aged about fifteen had worked in the frame about three years, the second daughter, aged about fourteen, had worked in the frame 'about half a year or a little better' and the boy nearly twelve 'about three months'.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

It has been possible to trace the hand frame back to 1640 when William Illife introduced the framework knitting machine into Hinckley. Hinckley at this time was still an agricultural community with its farms and outhouses built in the town. The framework knitting industry by the early eighteenth century had become the dominant industry in the area with the majority of local people employed in it. Cottage industry where all members of the family were employed in production became the norm and because of its nature attracted the 'dispossessed and the landless' to the 'open' towns and villages not only in south-west Leicestershire but in the whole of the East Midlands. These people needed to earn a living. Working together as a family unit

¹⁰² *Royal Commission*, p. 287-289.

¹⁰³ *Royal Commission*, p. 283.

¹⁰⁴ See *1845 Royal Commission*, page 283 for further descriptions of the role of the young nurse and of further interest 'Do they board themselves? - The girls do. They bring their food with them, if they are at a distance from home and it is not convenient to go home to their food'.

¹⁰⁵ *1845 Royal Commission*, p. 284. There are also many instances where children are put to work in the frame at an earlier age. For example 'a strong lad would be put in at nine, a weakly lad would go a year longer', p. 301.

with all members of the family involved in the production of hose became essential. Framework knitters were often criticised for their way of life but they had no choice but to earn a living in the best way they could – one generation followed the next into an industry which had become a ‘sweated industry’. The *1845 Royal Commission* offers us an extensive and definitive insight into the lives of the framework knitter and his family – their living conditions, their dependence on their children to earn a living, and the poverty in which they lived. Domestic industry was in existence for over 200 years before change began to take place. In Chapter 3 I will look at the resistance to change and consider why changes did begin to take place during the mid nineteenth century.

Chapter 3

Transition from Domestic Industry to Factory Production, circa 1820-1920

The changes which began to take place during the mid nineteenth century were due to a number of factors: the extreme poverty experienced by the stockinger and his family; increasing competition from abroad for overseas markets; the abolition of the truck system and the implementation of various Education Acts during the 1870s resulting in compulsory education. Change it would seem was inevitable and the power-driven factory system was established by the 1890s. These changes will be discussed, where possible, within the context of the family, as manufacturers or operatives – one generation following another into the hosiery industry albeit domestic or factory production. To emphasise the importance of family in the industry it is proposed to introduce the oral history evidence of various respondents who were born in the first twenty years of the twentieth century. Memories of their own lives and also of parents and grandparents have proved of the utmost importance in attempting to piece together life in a community dominated by one industry. Thus, respondents recollections along with the various Parliamentary Papers, academic research and work carried out within the local area will be used to chart the changes which took place from the end of the Napoleonic Wars up to the early twentieth century.

Between 1820 and 1870 the industry experienced period of extreme depression and it was only with the introduction of power-driven factory production that the industry and indeed the conditions of the people involved in the knitting of hose began improve. The factory-based system came late to framework knitting. This was, in part, due to conservatism on both sides – masters and men – neither wanted nor thought change would be of any benefit to them. As far as manufacturers were concerned, there was no real need for change. The putting-out system, with its massive reserve of man power, suited both employer and employee despite the sweated nature of the industry. The injustices which the framework knitter endured were considered far preferable to the unknown factory system whereby independence and liberty would be eroded. The framework knitter was suspicious of change and down through the centuries had often

rejected the introduction of new types of machinery because it threatened employment and traditional ways of working.¹

Introduction of new machinery

Frame-breaking and rioting during the latter part of the eighteenth century and particularly during the second decade of the nineteenth century had been relatively widespread in certain areas of the East Midlands. Framework knitters demonstrated against the use of the wide frame which it was claimed produced spurious or fraudulent articles known as 'cut-ups' or 'straight downs'. These articles were regarded as inferior to the far superior fashioned hose which had been the most common type of stockings knitted. The wide frame also reduced the amount of people needed to produce stockings because of its ability to knit several stockings at a time.² Indeed a great deal of skill was needed in the manufacture of wrought hose whereas the stockings knitted on the wide frame according to F.A. Wells required little expertise.³ With increasing demand for more and cheaper stockings, however, the wide frame soon became a common sight particularly in Leicester thus superseding the narrow frame. The narrow frame remained the most common machine in use in the Hinckley area and indeed in the county of Leicestershire.⁴ According to Felkin when compiling information for the *1845 Royal Commission Inquiring into the Conditions of the Framework Knitters*, whereas 1700 narrow frames were employed in the local area only 30 wide frames were in use.⁵ Indeed the evidence of the *1845 Royal Commission* further highlights this, stating that George Woodcock employed about 400 frames all on wrought hose with the

¹ F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry. Its History and Organisation* (1935; Newton Abbot, 1972 edn.), p. 80; H. Bradley, 'Degradation and regeneration: Social and technological change in the East Midlands hosiery industry 1800-1960' (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Durham, 1987); H. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work; A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Cambridge, 1989)p. 137; P. Head, 'Industrial organisation in Leicester, 1844-1914' (Unpublished PhD. Thesis, University of Leicester, 1960); S.A. Royle, 'The spiritual destitution is excessive – the poverty overwhelming: Hinckley in the mid-nineteenth century', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 54 (1978-9).

² The wide frame originally made fancy stockings but was by the nineteenth century able to knit various articles of underwear and outerwear. See Head, 'Industrial organisation', p. 45.

³ 'The genuine wrought or full-fashioned hose was shaped on the frame as it was made, the narrowing being done by reducing the number of loops with each course; thus a selvedged edge was produced, the loops of which were joined in seaming so that even if the selvedge gave way the fabric did not suffer'. See Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 80.

⁴ N.G. Osterud, 'Gender divisions and the organisation of work in the Leicester Hosiery industry' in A.V. John, *Unequal Opportunities. Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, pp. 51-52.

⁵ S. Barton and R. Murray, *Twisted Yarns Twisted Yarns. The Story of the Hosiery Industry in Hinckley* (Leicester, 1998), p. 39. See *1845 Royal Commission Inquiring into the Conditions of the Framework Knitters*, p. 99.

‘exception of a few wide frames’ and similarly ‘William Sills employed about 800 frames but only recently had introduced a few wide frames’.⁶ Joshua Clarke, a Hinckley hosier, at the time of the *1845 Royal Commission* employed 300 frames ‘all on wrought hose’.⁷ In 1846, however, he had attempted to establish the factory system by fitting up wide frames in extensive premises at Stockwell Head.⁸

Criticism was levelled against the framework knitter for his apparent lack of discipline and refusal to work within the confines of a ‘factory’.⁹ Edward Kem Jarvis was just one of a growing number of local men who wanted to see change. In many areas, notably Leicester, framework knitting in workshops or ‘factories’ had become the norm by the 1840s where up to forty or fifty knitting frames were in use. Large workshops, however, were not in common usage in the Hinckley area and John Sketchley stated ‘Generally the frames are in small shops, containing two or three or four frames; some half a dozen’. He also added, however, that there were two shops in the town which contained 17 and 30 frames respectively.¹⁰ It would appear that there was a marked distinction between the country areas and the borough of Leicester where wide frames in large workshops were more common. Indeed it was Leicester, where cut-ups were produced in bulk and retained a monopoly of overseas markets specifically because of the greater quantities made, thus adding to their cheapness. The mass production of these ‘fraudulent’ or ‘spurious’ articles alleviated the worse of the depression for those living within the borough. For those living in the country districts, however, where the majority of stockings manufactured were the more expensive wrought hose depression was most severe.¹¹ Joshua Clarke highlighted the predicament in which the Hinckley hosiers and their employees found themselves ‘It is seldom we can get any orders for shipping for wrought-hose - very seldom indeed. They cannot go

⁶ L.A. Parker, ‘Industries’, in W.G. Hoskins and R. McKinley (eds), *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 3, (1952), p. 12.

⁷ *V.C.H., Leicestershire*, p. 12. See *1845 Royal Commission*, p. 99.

⁸ These extensive premises ‘had long been unoccupied and were built by the late William Brown for the combing of wool and the spinning of worsted yarn’. See *Whites Leicestershire and Rutland Trade Directory*, 1846, p. 554.

⁹ *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 3, p. 16. The use of the word ‘factory’ does not refer to the use of steam power. It is used as a means of describing a number of hand knitting frames collected together in larger premises than was usual during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Other local men had also attempted to establish ‘factories’ in the town: William Williams or Wilkinson was noted in an old parish rate book of 1836 of occupying a factory in Back Lane. See A.J. Pickering *Cradle and Home of the Hosiery Trade* (Hinckley, 1940), p. 48.

¹⁰ *1855 Report of the Select Committee on the Stoppages of Wages*, p. 239.

¹¹ *V.C.H., Leicestershire*, 3, p. 12 and 16.

the price we charge for them'.¹² Similarly Geoffrey Woodcock observed 'where perhaps, 7 years ago, a London house would buy their brown cotton hose in Hinckley, they now go to Leicester for the great bulk of them, because they can get a greater proportion of straight-downs made there'.¹³ Not only had the country districts to compete with Leicester but also with framework knitters from Saxony who were exporting to the United States. As discussed by William Biggs a Leicester hosier 'Hinckley goods are now beaten out of the United States market by the manufacturers of the continent. The articles in which we have been superseded by the Germans are men's and women's brown and coloured hose and half-hose'.¹⁴ It had also been observed, however, by Thomas Allsop, with great optimism and pride that they did not bother about the Saxon or anyone else; there was no place in the world that could compete with Hinckley either for beauty or stability of the article. The workmen were adapted to the machinery, and could beat the world!¹⁵ It had also been stated by Richard Wileman that although competition from other sources had increased, many thousands of dozens of socks were being sent from Hinckley to America every year.¹⁶

Abuses in the industry

The framework knitter, had not only been active in frame-breaking and rioting but had lobbied Parliament against injustices in the industry over the years. A number of petitions had been instigated by framework knitters in the East Midlands from about the 1740s but it took a further hundred years or more before any real changes were to take place. The government enquiries initiated between the mid 1840s and early 1870s brought widespread attention to the plight in which the framework knitters found themselves. A major impetus for change, however, was the abolition of the truck system in 1874. Hosiers, but more specifically middlemen also known as bag hosiers,

¹² V.C.H. *Leicestershire*, 3, p. 12; See *1845 Royal Commission*.

¹³ V.C.H. *Leicestershire*, 3, p. 12; See *1845 Royal Commission*.

¹⁴ V.C.H., *Leicestershire*, 3, p. 12; See *1845 Royal Commission*. The stockings made in Saxony were produced far more cheaply than those produced in Hinckley. According to Richard Wileman 'German stockings were made by women who live principally upon porridge, made of herbs; they never eat meat; their bread is black'. It is also believed they lived in mud huts and had little or no rent to pay. See *1845 Royal Commission*.

¹⁵ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 96. Thomas Allsop, a framework knitter gave this observation while giving evidence to members of the *1845 Royal Commission*.

¹⁶ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 96. Richard Wileman, senior, a manufacturer in Earl Shilton was giving evidence to the *1845 Royal Commission*. He had visited America and did business with 'two houses in Philadelphia' adding that the great bulk of hose being sold to that market was half-hose.

undertakers and putters out,¹⁷ were blamed for the notorious abuses endemic in the industry. These men had made their appearance during the mid to late eighteenth century as the industry in the East Midlands expanded. They had, according to Peter Head, come into existence ‘largely as a convenience for hosier and framework knitter alike’.¹⁸ However, in a comparatively short time they had become extremely powerful and in many instances the hosier had no direct dealings with his workers. The hosier being the person who purchased the yarn which was in turn given out to his workers via a middleman. The finished product was then returned to the hosier who would distribute the knitted garments via his warehouse which was usually situated in the grounds of his house or in rooms sectioned off from the living quarters. Hosiers, but more specifically middle men, often had other occupations. The *1845 Royal Commission* along with the *1855 Select Committee on Stoppages of Wages* and the *1871 Report of the Truck Commission* highlighted the predicament in which numerous framework knitters found themselves: of having no choice but to comply with the unscrupulous behaviour of certain employers – namely the middleman or truck master. These men were more prominent in villages such as Earl Shilton and Barwell and other villages throughout the western half of Leicestershire. They, more often than not, owned small grocery businesses and had invested in frames and had over the years become middlemen who gave:

Out their work the same as the other hosiers, and they take it in the same. They do not, perhaps, take it in the grocery shop, but they have a room above-stairs where they take in the work, and pay the hands their money in that room and the hands have to pass through the shop in coming out of that room, and there they lay out their money, or pay off the bill for the goods they have had the previous week.¹⁹

They, it was stated, were the instigators of the abuses which had become endemic in the industry particularly during times of depression. This was not always stated but it was an understanding between the employer and the employee. As discussed by Job Whitmore when giving evidence to members of the *1845 Royal Commission*: ‘Mr.--, the

¹⁷ There had been great confusion as to the terminology used ‘some witnesses testifying before the *1855 Select Committee* described themselves as undertakers or middlemen, while others made a distinction: some used the terms bagmen and middlemen as being synonymous. Indeed it would seem that apart from the bagman’ there was no real difference in function between these types. ‘They all acted as intermediaries some owning their own frames others working in a frame as well as renting them out’. See P. Head, ‘Putting out in the Leicester hosiery industry’, *Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, (1961-2), p. 49.

¹⁸ Head, ‘Putting out’, p. 47.

¹⁹ This statement was given by Isaac Abbott, a framework knitter in Earl Shilton. See *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 3, p. 10.

hosier, he carries it on to a great extent. He pays his hands in ready money, but he keeps a book in the shop and at the week's end he goes to look what the hands lay out of their earnings'.²⁰

The grocery store which many were compelled to shop at was not always in the name of the manufacturer but in his son's, his father's or his wife's name. John Homer, an Earl Shilton hosier when questioned about this practice replied that the shop where 200 of his 300 employees bought their provisions had been in his wife's family. Indeed it was also the custom of some hosiers and or middlemen, who became known as truck masters, to pay their workers in kind. As explained by Joseph Taylor, Frame-work Knitter, when asked whether he had 'Ever worked under a truck master entirely, that is have you ever received your wages in goods only?', replied, 'I have been under that way to Mr Homer, sometimes; but I have not worked to him now for nearly two years'.²¹ A Committee member of the newly established Co-operative system in Hinckley was also able to relate how 'An elderly Stockinger with his wife had to carry a half-stone of flour to Stoke-Golding instead of a part of their wages'. This member also revealed that 'certain Manufacturers who insisted on paying his employees such a small moiety of cash, that did the poor stockinger have such extravagant tastes as to wish for a bit of meat, he had to take his ticket to the Grocers-cum-Manufacturer, and exchange his grocery at the Butchers-cum-Manufacturer's shop lower down the street'.²²

During a particularly bad period in the late 1850s John Sketchley had written a letter to *The Midland Express* on behalf of his fellow framework knitters. In this letter John Sketchley had discussed the abuses prevalent in the industry and had accused an employer of being a 'truck-master'. William Frederick Taunton, a young journalist and owner of the paper was subsequently sued for defamation of character by the employer for publishing this letter. Fred Taunton lost his case and was left with expenses of £650 and a number of years later was to recall:

So ill-attired were some of his leading witnesses, that, to enable them to leave their homes clad in a manner that would not shock the susceptibilities of their more

²⁰ Job Whitmore, Frame-work Knitter, Wrought-hose Branch, examined, *1845 Royal Commission*, p. 287.

²¹ *1845 Royal Commission*, p. 284.

²² *Hinckley and District Industrial Co-operative Society, Limited. A Brief History of its Rise and Progress, 1861-1911*. Published as a Souvenir of its Fiftieth Anniversary (Hinckley, 1911), p. 4.

fortunate brethren, various means had to be resorted to in order to obtain the necessary clothing. Boots, hats, trousers, and other things, had to be secured, and one witness appeared in the discarded boots of a Church of England curate, the waistcoat of a Catholic priest, the 'unmentionables' of a 'ranter' and a coat of many colours and patches (rivalling Joseph's) which had been kindly lent for the occasion by the clerk of a Methodist chapel.²³

Although quite humorous it does highlight the predicament in which the framework knitter found himself. His standard of living had dropped quite dramatically over the years. Depression in the industry having become increasingly worse after the cessation of the Napoleonic Wars. Over manning in the industry had become endemic owing to soldiers coming back from war and taking up their old employment on the knitting frames. Wages had also been falling and as John Sketchley, who in 1855 had worked as a framework knitter for 39 years, testified 'When I first learnt to work in a frame the wrought-hose hands in Hinckley could earn 13s. and 14s. a week'.²⁴ The wages earned by hands in Hinckley, observed Mr Ginns, had been reduced 'one-half since that time'.²⁵ His meagre wages would not allow the purchase of new clothes even for such an important event as acting as witness in the Court of Exchequer in London. This case had also come to the attention of *The Times* and *Daily Telegraph* newspapers. Both papers discussed the poverty of the framework knitters and wrote sympathetically on their behalf stating that framework knitters' were paid a miserably low wage from which deductions were made for frame-rent, candles and other items'. *The Times* likening their situation to that of the London seamstresses and the Irish peasantry.²⁶

Stinting and Frame Rent

It had also been the practice of numerous employers to employ stinting whereby an employer would spread what little work he had amongst as many workers as possible. One witness proclaimed that people from Barwell and Earl Shilton would take the three mile journey into Hinckley on three consecutive days before they could get any work. When taking their work back on the Saturday they would still 'have to

²³ B. G. Miller, 'William Frederic Taunton Sued for Libel', *The Hinckley Historian* (Hinckley, 1996), p. 26. This libel case ruined him financially and Fred Taunton became an actor under the name of Walter Pelham and a professional humorist but continued to dabble in journalism. This case is also referred to in Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, pp. 35-36 and Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, pp. 100-102.

²⁴ *1855 Select Committee*, p. 242.

²⁵ *1855 Select Committee*, p. 242.

²⁶ Miller, 'Taunton', pp. 22-25. Her references include *The Times* 22.12.1859, p. 9 and the *Daily Telegraph* 22.12.1859, p.4. cols. e & f.

pay full rent'.²⁷ It was 'the object of some to delay the workmen as much as possible, so as to have as little work done as the hosier possibly can have'.²⁸ Similarly, frame rent of 1s 0d or in some cases 1s. 3d would still be exacted by hosiers and middlemen even though frames may have been left idle for weeks on end. Some unfortunate stockings found that they owed their employer money and one example of many tragic cases is used to give an idea of the dire circumstances in which people found themselves. The woman concerned was married to an agricultural labourer who due to bad weather was unable to get any work:

For four weeks during the hard frost, which was at the time the woman was confined, he had but two or three days' work during those four weeks. I believe that in the sixth week the woman did nine dozen of hose, at 3s. 6d. a dozen; at the time she was going to the warehouse the children were crying for bread; they had nothing in the house, nor a halfpenny to purchase anything with; she promised them a bit of bread when she came back; when she got to the warehouse Mr. Payne asked her what they should do; she told him she was willing to pay the rent by a little a week; that is the rent she had run bad during the time of confinement; he told her, he should stop the 3s. 6d., and that she must pay him 2s. more the next week.²⁹

John Sketchley explained, 'It is the general system in practice; every workman when he takes a frame knows that he shall have stopped from his earnings so much a week for rent'. It had also been explained by the witness that in times of good trade there had been no objection to the 1s. frame rent, however, 'As wages have got lower we have found that rents have remained the same as they were when wages were higher, and consequently they bear more heavily on the workmen now than they did at former periods when wages were higher.'³⁰ It was also common practice among various manufacturers and middlemen to employ young girls and boys, women with children, and also the elderly. These were not as quick or experienced as the man in his twenties or thirties but for many the rental system proved a form of profit even in times of depression. It had also come to the attention of the members associated with various government bodies that a number of manufacturers used their discretion in certain circumstances. Rather than charging the usual frame rent of 1s. they would charge just 9d where there was illness in the family or when elderly people were working in the frames.

²⁷ 1855 Select Committee, p. 229.

²⁸ 1855 Select Committee, p. 229.

²⁹ 1855 Select Committee, p. 231. Mr Payne, the manufacturer she worked to at this time was one of the leading manufacturers in Hinckley.

³⁰ 1855 Select Committee, p. 228.

William Sills, for instance, had for two weeks taken half rent but because no other manufacturer had followed suit he was obliged to revert back to normal practice. He could not afford to carry on his new system and in order to survive as a manufacturer he needed to be able to compete.

The industry and those involved in it were very much at the mercy of market forces – there were too many people working in the industry producing brown cotton stockings which was the staple product of the area. Framework knitters in order to survive had no other choice but to employ their families in an industry which Wells described as being in a condition of ‘utter stagnation’. He further observed ‘the stockingers and the manufacturer generally seemed to have been left in the backwash of industrial progress’.³¹ Many manufacturers had sold frames finding it difficult to survive in the depression which had taken hold of the industry. John Sketchley when testifying to the *1855 Select Committee* discussed the plight of one manufacturer, William Sills, who during the severe depression had sold the majority of his 800 frames.³² These frames he had rented out to numerous framework knitters living in the local area. It was the framework knitter and his family who took the brunt of the depression however.

Thus the abuses in the industry were perpetuated and the employer frequently used his position to his own advantage. It would appear that the prolonging of cottage industry was an advantage to the hosier. Frame rent provided a lucrative form of income to the owner of the frames albeit a hosier, a middleman or an independent person such as a tailor, baker, shoemaker, bricklayer, butcher, publican or framesmith.³³ The knitting frame would be paid for over and over again, those sold at auction being sold for between £2 and £5. Boulton Brooks, a master frame-smith, had stated when giving evidence to the *1845 Royal Commission* that he could keep in capital repair any

³¹ Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 106.

³² *1855 Select Committee*, p. 237. William Sills was left with 150 frames. In March 1850 a pamphlet had been printed advertising the sale of ‘77 Valuable Stocking Frames’ to be sold at auction at the Bull’s Head Inn, Market Place, Hinckley. It was stated that the frames had modern carcasses (many of them being suitable for widening) and that six months credit would also be available. See Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 95.

³³ Head cites these people as the most likely to purchase a knitting frame or frames specifically for their rental value and very interestingly ‘If contemporaries wished to discuss the old, and still most typical, method of organisation for some decades after the forties, they referred simply to the “frame rent system”’. See Head, ‘Putting out’, pp. 53-5.

number of narrow frames at 3d to 3 1/2d a week. When questioned about such abuses John Sketchley replied 'We find ourselves entirely helpless in the hands of the employers; whatever they dictate we are compelled to submit to. We depend on them entirely for our employment; and our wages are such that we are almost at starvation point.'³⁴ John Sketchley again highlights the predicament in which so many found themselves by using the circumstances experienced by Phoebe Robinson:

she is a married woman; she and her husband are both framework-knitters; she works to a bagman of the name of Aldridge; during the first weeks in the four weeks preceding Easter week, all the work she could obtain from the warehouse was material to make three pair of hose, at 3s. a dozen; out of that three pair she did not receive a halfpenny; the following week she received stuff to make three more pair, at 3s.3d. a dozen; that was 1s. 6 3/4d. for six pairs of hose in the fortnight; she had to go to the warehouse seven times; and at the end of the fortnight her employer gave her 3d. and kept 1s. 3 3/4d. for himself, out of 1s. 6 3/4d.³⁵

He was also able to comment on a new system introduced by Mr. Payne, who:

takes full rent and in addition compels the workman to pay a per-centage upon the work he has from the warehouse; at the time we were receiving this 24 dozen of half hose for the three frames we could have done more work; but that was all he would allow us to do for the full rent and if we took a pound more in he would take 3s. more out of that pound, as a poundage as he called it for the favour of receiving so much work than he thought we should receive for the full rent.³⁶

Abject poverty

The framework knitter, it was said, was not suitable for other types of work and as observed by Isaac Abbott, 'the farmers are not willing to take stocking-makers as labourers; they believe they are not able to do the work.'³⁷ Stone breaking, a form of employment given out by the parish or union was also regarded with trepidation as it was felt that such work would harden the hands 'and rob them of the manual dexterity needed to work a frame'.³⁸ This labour, however, was something which many had no choice but to partake of when trade was at its most depressed. During one particular period of depression in 1842 framework knitters, owing to their dire circumstances, asked the guardians of the local workhouse for further assistance. The guardians

³⁴ 1855 *Select Committee*, p. 237.

³⁵ 1855 *Select Committee*, p. 232.

³⁶ 1855 *Select Committee*, p. 272.

³⁷ 1855 *Select Committee*, p. 119. He did testify, however that he had been employed on outdoor work under Lady Byron, for which she 'allowed 13s. a week, but we took the work by the job, and got something more,' 1855 *Select Committee*, pp. 116 & 121.

³⁸ Royle, 'Spiritual destitution', p. 55.

responded by allowing a framework knitter, who had broken stones for the whole of the week, an additional 2d per child to each man with at least three children. This allowance because of the continuing depression was extended to a third child.³⁹

The terrible conditions in which framework knitters and their families found themselves were also experienced by numerous other industries in which thousands of working people toiled for long hours for a pittance. Similarly truck was not a unique or new phenomenon specifically attributable to the hosiery industry. It was something which was very much in evidence in numerous trades and had been in existence for many years, having first been prohibited during the reign of Edward IV. The working man, where possible, fought against these injustices. This is shown in the various pamphlets, broadsheets and other documentation which began to proliferate during the nineteenth century and handed down over the years to successive generations of local families: 'No Work, No Bread, No Hope' was a pamphlet circulated in the town and district in 1842 which aimed:

To consider and to adopt such Resolutions as are required by the present times, in which the Hosier has little Trade and no Profit; the Landlord no Rent; the Shop-keeper no Custom; the Stockinger neither Bread nor Hope; and in which the heavy Poor-Rates are involving the Householder and the neighbouring Farmer in one Common Ruin.⁴⁰

Their lives were often cut short because of the nature of their work. Living conditions had deteriorated quite significantly during the early nineteenth century due to the continual influx of people from the countryside into the expanding urban areas which were providing work for those left destitute by improvements in agriculture.

³⁹ S. Drodge, 'Hinckley Poor Law Union Workhouse: People of the workhouse', Part 2, *Hinckley Historian* (Hinckley, Autumn 1998), pp. 15-18. A pamphlet dated June 2, 1837 in its 'Address to the Inhabitants of Hinckley and its Vicinity' described the poverty in the town and district, thus: 'The present sudden and unexpected suspension of the employment of the industrious classes, in this Town, by which many hundreds are reduced to the painful necessity of applying for Parish Relief...From an hasty calculation, it is believed that at least 3,000 persons are now dependent upon Parish Relief'. The pamphlet goes on to discuss the limitations of the New Poor Law explaining that 'though proposing to effect many excellent objects, [the New Poor Law] have very materially changed the system of Relief, and the directions of the Commissioners have so limited the sympathy and discretion of the Guardians that they are bound down to a scale of the strictest economy in their calls upon the Public Purse...though the Guardians do all they dare for the relief of the present distress, yet every one who considers, will admit the relief is very inadequate to the wants of the people'. The writers then go on to ask those 'whose station in society will give weight to their good intentions, and those whose wealth enables them to dispense out of their abundance, to their poor and half-starved neighbours, will come forward, and sanction a Private Subscription', See Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 106.

⁴⁰ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 87.

With increasing industrialisation infant and child mortality had increased. It had also become common practice to use syrups such as Godfrey's Cordial to make an infant sleep. These soothing syrups' were used by women whose labour was essential in the family economy and it was suggested that they were detrimental to the health and well being of the child and could ultimately cause death and as stated by S. Aucott in her study of Leicester which at this time, similar to Hinckley, was dominated by the hosiery industry: 'Between 1868 and 1902 the average infant mortality rate for England was 149 per 1,000 live births, whereas in Leicester the rate was considerably higher.'⁴¹ W.G. Hoskins noted in his study of Wigston that 'puerperal fever carried off more mothers and consumption killed young men and women in their 20s and 30s with ever increasing speed'.⁴² The plethora of information published from the mid nineteenth century also testifies not only to bad housing being built for the masses but insufficient drainage systems which gave rise to noxious fumes particularly during warm weather with effluent running into open drains. Indeed framework knitters as observed by Mr. John Moore, Surgeon, 'are a small and slender race and inferior in bodily condition to the other classes. Even their arms, which are in constant use, are deficient in muscle'.⁴³ It had also been noted while interviewing parents and children in their homes that the physical condition of many adults and children was a cause for concern. For example 'in a chair by the fire here was one of the daughters, a young woman, apparently in deep consumption and with a cough terrible to hear'; her brother, a young man of 20 looked about '14 or 15'.⁴⁴

It is also worth mentioning, however, that the cases highlighted by the various Parliamentary Papers were in the main the most severe. Each Commission had a specific goal and set out to examine grievances and injustices within a particular industry. They were able to bring attention to the nation at large the plight of those less fortunate. But it is also important not to transfer our standards on those people living 150 years ago. Expectations on work, housing, cleanliness and standards of living

⁴¹ Infant mortality could be compared to that of Manchester and Liverpool. See S. Aucott, *Mothercraft and Maternity. Leicester's Maternity and Infant Welfare Services 1900-1948* (Leicester, 1997), p. 9. Also Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 107.

⁴² 'In the non-parochial registers for Wigston at Somerset House the cause of death is frequently given between 1805 and 1816. One death in six was that of an infant, one in three that of a child under five. See Hoskins, *Midland Peasant*, p. 272.

⁴³ *1863 Royal Commission on Children's Employment*, p. 292.

⁴⁴ *1863 Children's Employment*, p. 288.

change with time. It is also worth noting that more often than not it is only the extremes which come to our attention. Ordinary everyday life is not newsworthy; then as now, it was the extremes which were reported and made much of. Taking these observances into consideration, however, one should not be detracted from the conditions in which many people lived and worked. A poem written in the 1840s depicting the plight of a family, though very stilted and stylised, nevertheless does highlight the situation in which the framework knitter and his family found themselves:

A weaver of 'inckley sot in 'is frame
'is children stood mernfully by,
'is wife pained with 'unger, near naked with shame,
As she 'opelessly gazed at the sky.
The tears rolling fast from 'er famishing eyes
Proclaimed 'er from 'unger not free,
And these were the words she breathed with a sigh,
'I weep, poor 'inckley, for thee.⁴⁵

The implementation of compulsory schooling

The abolition of frame rent by Act of Parliament in 1874 made the renting out of frames, paying workers in kind, stinting and other practices carried out by various hosiers, middlemen and bagmen illegal. The dependence of domestic industry on child labour, which was 'a powerful factor in sustaining the domestic system', also collapsed.⁴⁶ This was due to the implementation of the Education Acts of 1870 and 1876 which hastened a phenomenon already in evidence: the increasing use of steam power which made it necessary for the manufacturers to invest in building factories to house new machinery driven by steam. These factories from the beginning came under the various Factory and Workshop Acts which prevented the employment of under-age children. Those children still employed in workshops or in domestic industry, however, were harder to locate and consequently it was more difficult to regulate their hours of work and age of employment.

Framework knitter's children had been among the least likely to attend school owing to the dependence of parents on their children's labour. Lack of education meant that in many instances children remained illiterate. As stated in *Whites Leicestershire and Rutland Trade Directory* of all those married in 1871 nearly 1 in 5 males and 1 in 4

⁴⁵ H.J. Francis, *A History of Hinckley* (Hinckley, 1930), p. 129. Royle, 'Spiritual destitution', p. 53.

⁴⁶ V.C.H., *Leicestershire*, 3, p. 16.

females could not write their names'.⁴⁷ This inability to write one's name, it was reported, was more apparent in manufacturing areas than in agricultural areas. S.A. Royle in his detailed research of six Leicestershire towns found that by taking a 50% sample of all the marriages involving residents of Hinckley between 1837 and 1851, 53.3% of marriage partners were unable to sign their names.⁴⁸ He was also able to conclude by studying the 1851 census enumerators' books for Hinckley that 26.5% of all of the children under 15 were in employment. In comparison, in Lutterworth the figure was 3.1% and in Melton Mowbray the figure stood at 1.8%.⁴⁹ Mr. Mead, a scripture writer, when giving evidence spoke about the absence of framework knitters' children at the schools in the town 'At the present moment very few of the stocking makers' children attend day schools at all'. He then went on to furnish the committee with information which he had been collating:

The first school I called at was that connected with the Hinckley district church, which is a day school with about 40 children in attendance, and out of this number only five were the children of stocking-makers...Then there is the free school kept by Mr Oliver free of charge, except for books; the number on the books is 60 boys and 55 girls...there were only 10 of the male children who were the children of stocking-makers present, the rest being children of tradesmen or labourers.⁵⁰

He also reported that a school kept by Mr Parker, where clothes were distributed to the children was also very badly attended by framework knitter's children. However, the Roman Catholic school, Mr Mead was able to relate, had the best attendance of stocking-makers' children, even though there was a charge of 1d a week. The only explanation for this being that 'the school is in the locality in which the stocking-makers are very numerous'.⁵¹ It had also been noted that the attendance of the stocking-makers' children at the Sunday school is very good.⁵² Sunday being the only day that parents allowed their children a day off from employment. Although Mr. Mead acknowledged the fact that in some instances children were prevented from

⁴⁷ *Whites Leicestershire and Rutland Trade Directory 1876*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Royle, 'Spiritual destitution', p. 56. Included in the 50% sample were Anglican, Roman Catholic, non-conformist and civil weddings making a total sample of 374 marriages. By carrying out in-depth research of the six Leicestershire towns he found that in Lutterworth 21.4% of newlyweds and 20.5% of Melton Mowbray's newlyweds could not write their names.

⁴⁹ Royle, 'Spiritual destitution' p. 56.

⁵⁰ *1855 Select Committee*, p. 277.

⁵¹ *1855 Select Committee*, p. 277.

⁵² *1855 Select Committee*, p. 282.

‘Coming to Sunday school in consequence of their not having clothes to come to school in’.⁵³

Numerous witnesses to both the *1845 Royal Commission* and subsequent enquiries had testified to the dependence on their children’s labour. Joseph Dare, Minister of the Domestic Mission in Leicester, had also explained to the members of the *1863 Children’s Employment Commission* that ‘The condition of those who are called the neglected and dangerous classes is just the same here as it was 20 years ago. Leicester’s poorer children received hardly any education...due to the fact that they were not only working class but working.’⁵⁴ Parents, in many instances, were very much aware of their children’s lack of schooling and early age of employment. Robert Corbett discussed his own children’s employment, ‘They do begin very young, but you see we’re so used to it we take no notice’. He then went on to describe the ages which they started work:

My boy Robert aged 10 years and 4 months has been at work 6 years...daughter Alice, aged 6 and near 7, has been a seamer 2 and 3 years, and her sister Annie, aged 8, began at about the same age...Alice and Annie would each do 6 or 7 pair of hose in a day working till 8 or 9 at night...On Friday night they both of them stop at work till 1 and 12.⁵⁵

The *1863 Children’s Employment Commission*, similar to other Parliamentary Papers, again offers insights into the lives of the framework knitter and his family. Members went into the homes of various families, and the following extract allows a glimpse into the domestic industry of a labouring family over 140 years ago. It would seem from this extract that the amount of work given to a child learning a skill was well thought out in a loving and considerate environment. William Hadden, aged seven, informs the Commission that he:

winds for three frames in this (the living) room, and has done so for between one and two years. Also adding that he sometimes goes to school for half a day when he isn’t winding. His brother Edwin aged four informs the Commission, ‘Am going five. Willie learns me to wind. Can wind three bobbins in an hour’. William then continues to inform the commission that Edwin has only begun winding this week, and ‘winds for two hours in the morning, from 10 to 12, and does the 6 bobbins which father sets him. Next week he will wind after dinner, and leave off when it gets dark. I shall seam till

⁵³ *1855 Select Committee*, p. 282.

⁵⁴ *1863 Children’s Employment*, p. 292. Joseph Dare testifying. See Head, ‘Industrial organisation’, p. ixvi.

⁵⁵ *1863 Children’s Employment*, p. 287.

candle light, when Edwin gives over. Edwin will not wind by candle light till he is almost as big as I am now. Little Emily (his sister who was in the room when I entered) is going on five...She seams my father's legs from breakfast till tea at 5. She has begun for 4 weeks and does 10 legs in a day.⁵⁶

To many middle-class and upper-class observers the labouring poor were noted for their pallid colouring, their lack of clothing, their ignorance, their filthy and crowded habitation. These people coped, however, in the best way they could. They had little choice but to put their children to work in the frame at knitting stockings, seaming stockings and winding bobbins from an early age, even though many realised it was not only detrimental to their children's health but also limited their schooling.

The persistence of domestic industry

The reaction of the local people to compulsory education for their children is unknown but it must have been extremely worrying for many families who had depended on the work that their children did. Mr William Adams Todd, who had been master of the National school in Hinckley for four years, admitted that children as young as five or six would be absent from school. The reason given for this absenteeism was invariably connected not only with their parents continued dependence on the essential work carried out by children in the production process but also of the industry's dependence on children. It was common in the school to hear remarks such as 'He's left, he's winding' and 'She's left she's seaming'.⁵⁷ According to Mr Todd, however, absenteeism had declined since 'The girls are allowed to bring their seaming to school in the afternoon...The object of it is to keep the girls longer at school', further adding that 'Since that change the numbers in the school have doubled, of boys as well as girls'.⁵⁸ Mr Todd was also able to inform the *1863 Children's Employment Commission* that boys attended school until they were about nine or ten and girls until they were eight or nine. Parliamentary papers again become indispensable tools in bringing one's attention to specific problems such as those discussed by Henry Thornhill, Esq when acting as a witness for the *1876 Minutes of Evidence of the Factories and Workshop Act* 'if you drive through any of the villages about here, you will see all those children sitting at the doors seaming stockings'. While giving

⁵⁶ *1863 Children's Employment*, p. 287.

⁵⁷ *1863 Children's Employment*, p. 287.

⁵⁸ *1863 Children's Employment*, p. 287. This practice of being allowed to take seaming to school had been in existence for four years.

evidence Mr. Thornhill expressed his frustration in this matter explaining ‘there are no people more difficult to deal with than seamers because they are in private houses...in fact every cottage almost has one or two children, and sometimes they have other children to help them’.⁵⁹ It had also come to his attention, of the existence of seaming schools in Hinckley noting that there were ‘half-a-dozen at Hinckley’.⁶⁰

Seaming Schools

The existence of seaming schools in Hinckley, however, was not new. They had been noted by members of the *1863 Children’s Employment Commission* who had visited Hinckley. Elizabeth Jennings spoke of one of her daughters who at the age of five was sent to school to learn seaming, ‘It is called a seaming school, and they perhaps read a little, too. She used to go in the morning at about 8 o’clock... and ought to come away at 6, but if there was much work it used to be 9 most Fridays’. Adding that she ‘was a very good girl, and her governess was very fond of her for working so well’. It was also recorded that the girl ‘never got anything by it for herself except a ‘knob o’suck’ on Saturdays generally. When she first went her mistress promised her a penny at the end of the nine months if she was a good girl all the time, ‘but though she said she was a good girl she never gave the penny after all’.⁶¹ Another witness, Mary Ann Russell, also described a similar type of school to which her daughter was sent, although she referred to it as a ‘days school’.⁶² She explained:

Children often begin [seaming] at about 6, and at that age sometimes are put out to a woman for a year to learn. A mistress takes, perhaps, from 1 to 4 girls and teaches a little reading once in the morning and once in the afternoon. The children pay nothing and give their work for their teaching. Sometimes the children are kept on late and a halfpenny given her for it, but very rarely’.⁶³

Joseph Dare was also very critical of these schools. He had come across them while working with the labouring classes during his years as a minister with the

⁵⁹ *1876 Minutes of Evidence of the Factories and Workshop Act*, p. 385.

⁶⁰ *1876 Factories and Workshop Act*, p. 385.

⁶¹ *1863 Children’s Employment*, p. 288. The reason she did not receive her penny was that the witness would not allow her daughter to stay a fortnight over the time as the mistress wished. A person had told the witness that the mistress was ‘getting a deal out of the child’, and witness thought that she had got ‘plenty out of her, and it was not fair’.

⁶² *1863 Children’s Employment*, p. 288. Mary Ann Russell also explained that ‘there are not so many of them [days schools] now as there were, because there is so little work now’.

⁶³ *1863 Children’s Employment*, p. 288.

Domestic Mission in Leicester. He considered ‘dames schools’, as he referred to them, as ‘evil’ where children are kept from all instructions and the ‘women are generally ignorant themselves, and unable to give any due moral training’.⁶⁴ Mr. Thornhill, in his evidence to the members of the *1876 Factories and Workshop Act* thirteen years later after visiting Hinckley was also able to testify that as far as he was concerned no teaching was carried on in these establishments.⁶⁵ He described them as little more than workshops where girls as young as seven would be working for about ten hours a day. As a factory inspector he was able to use his authority and make these children attend school. Under the *1876 Factories and Workshop Act* it had become law for those children working in houses and workshops to attend school for ten hours a week. However, Mr. Thornhill had observed that this system was ‘not only inconvenient, but as most children went to school in the afternoons, they arrived fagged, weary and half asleep’.⁶⁶

Half time was also being practised and was a particular characteristic of the textile industries. This was a procedure whereby children, once they had reached a certain age and had achieved a certain standard of education, were allowed to attend school for just half-a-day rather than a full day. The other half-a-day was spent in paid employment in a factory. This system which came under the Factory Act of 1844, was often abused and in fact did not apply to the hosiery industry as the factory system had only just come into existence but it was an activity which was in evidence in the Lancashire cotton mills. It did, however, affect those children working in the many workshops and domestic settings which were a characteristic of the industry. It had come to the notice of a factory inspector giving evidence for the *1876 Factories and Workshop Act* that in one particular workshop in Leicester half-timers worked up to nine hours a day and this excluded the compulsory hours spent at school. These

⁶⁴ *1863 Children's Employment*, p. 292. Evidence given by Joseph Dare. Joseph Dare had kept annual reports of his work with the ‘neglected classes’ since the 1830s when he became minister of the Domestic Mission which was run by the Unitarian Chapel. A former inhabitant of Hinckley he had been influential in setting up various educational bodies in Hinckley and also ran the Unitarian Sunday School before moving to the city to carry on his work with those less fortunate than himself. See Jack Simmons, ‘A Victorian social worker: Joseph Dare and the Leicester Domestic Mission’ *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, 46 (1970-1), pp. 65-80.

⁶⁵ ‘Do not they pretend to teach anything else in those schools?—Nothing’. See *1876 Factories and Workshop Acts*, p. 385. Henry Thornhill, Esq. likened the seaming schools to that of straw plaiting schools. He became aware of the existence of seaming schools through the school board at Hinckley. See his evidence, *1876 Factories and Workshop Act*, p. 385.

⁶⁶ *1876 Factories and Workshop Act*; See Head, ‘*Industrial Organisation*’, p. ixii.

children would work from 6.30 to 8.30 am, then attend school for three hours until 12, and work from 12.30 to 1.00 and then from 2 till 8 p.m. This was 30 years after government legislation had restricted the hours worked by half-timers to six-and-a-half hours a day.⁶⁷

Compulsory Schooling

The implementation of the 1880 Education Act schooling for all children between the ages of five and ten was made compulsory and in 1894 the minimum age that a child could start work was raised from ten to twelve.⁶⁸ The half-time system, however, was still in operation and was not abolished until 1918 when it was decreed by law that all children under 14 were to attend school full time. However, right up until this Act was put into force children, parents and their employers in the local area did take advantage of the half time system and it has been possible to use evidence from a very limited number of oral history recordings to highlight the changes which were taking place between the 1880s and early 1920s. Mrs. Snow who was born in 1885, for instance, gives a rare view of her own early working life as a half-timer at the age of 11 in 1896. Her first job was to sew buttons on men's shirts and pants, 'three on for a dozen, that was thirty-six for three farthings'.⁶⁹ The understanding of half time, however, differs to that given in the various Parliamentary Papers, Mrs. Snow went on to explain that in order to qualify as a half timer 'They took the names of us that wanted to go in for the special exam. If you passed you could go to work half time. If you failed you still kept at school until you were thirteen in them days'.⁷⁰

Other respondents have also testified to the situation whereby if you had reached the required standard and had also attained good school attendance children were allowed to leave school a year before the compulsory leaving age. Lilian Coley who

⁶⁷ *1876 Factories and Workshop Act*; See Head, 'Industrial Organisation', p. lxxx; Anna Davin discusses half time and how girls were still needed in the home to help with household chores. Some did industrial work and others worked in small workshops. Davin also comments on the fact that teachers disliked the half-time system 'half timers being irregular even in the attendance they made, unsettling to other pupils and harder to get through examinations. Anna Davin in her *Growing up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (London, 1996).

⁶⁸ Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p. 214. Davin discusses compulsory education and the effect on poor families in London during the latter part of the nineteenth century and up to 1914 and how compulsory schooling more than 'labour legislation limited children's work, unwaged as well as waged'. See Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, p. 214.

⁶⁹ D.J. Wood, *Putting Life into History. Memories of years gone by.* (Hinckley).

⁷⁰ Mrs. Snow was born in 1885. Beavin and Wood, *Hundred next Birthday*.

was born in 1904 and twenty years later than Mrs. Snow was still able to recall a similar situation and commented on the fact that it was a very strange law that enabled a young person to leave school if he/she had been bright enough to pass their examination.⁷¹ Norah Skeffington, however, related how disappointed she was in not being able to leave school at the age of 13. Her school attendance had been particularly bad owing to rheumatic fever during her childhood. Her friends, however, were able to leave school having, 'made their attendance'. Her sister who was thirteen months older also left school at thirteen to start her working life in one of the local factories, just up the road from where they lived.⁷² This idea of work, however, was instilled in children from a very early age. It was essential that a child should contribute to the family economy in whatever way he or she could – working half time, leaving school early to work in a local factory or by helping with 'outwork' which was work carried out in the home by women with childcare and other domestic responsibilities.

Information from census returns and oral history

The workshops along with domestic industry were fast disappearing and parents had no choice but to send their children to school as decreed by government legislation. The reaction of the local people to compulsory schooling for their children is unknown but it must have been extremely worrying for many families who had depended on the work that their children did. Absenteeism, however, remained high particularly for girls who were often involved and indeed were depended upon to look after younger children and helping with household chores. Wash days, according to Davin in her study of girls from poor families in London, 'were notoriously bad for attendance'.⁷³

Factory production was proving to be successful and the numbers of factories continued to increase, although it must be emphasised the transition to full factory production was quite a slow process. By the early twentieth century the factories could be said acted as a magnet to all and sundry. Not only to those living in close proximity to their place of work, but to those coming in from outlying villages and also from Nuneaton and other Warwickshire villages. In many instances people migrated from

⁷¹ Lilian Coley. Recorded memories. More detailed information in Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷² Norah Skeffington. Recorded memories. More detailed information in Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷³ Davin, *Growing up Poor*, p. 102.

neighbouring counties such as Northamptonshire and Derbyshire as well as from various areas in Leicestershire to live and work in an area which over time became more prosperous. However, it is important to note that a study of an area of Hinckley using the 1881 census returns does not show a high number of new migrants into the area. The majority of those included in the census are recorded as being born in Hinckley. Others are from quite short distances such as Burbage, Broughton Astley and Earl Shilton. A study carried out in Earl Shilton shows a similar pattern to that of Hinckley where the majority of inhabitants were Earl Shilton born and bred. However, although migration into the area was not huge it did nevertheless take place and respondents in their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s have helped to provide a rich source of information about parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents who not only moved into the area to work in domestic industry, as framework knitters and as new recruits in the new factories. There were many and varied reasons as to why these people moved to the area such as marriage, to establish oneself in business, to help out in a family crisis and so on.

The information given is quite scanty but does give an added dimension and substance to the statistical evidence. So rather than being just a number or name in a table or census return it is possible to add human dimension to what would otherwise be quite anonymous statistical evidence. For instance, Roy Bonser, by investigating his family tree, was very surprised to find that successive generations of his family were involved in framework knitting, as knitters and stitchers. His great-great-grandfather George Panter was listed as a framework knitter in the census return for 1841, his place of birth being a village in Northamptonshire.⁷⁴ Don Loxley still has a letter in his possession addressed to Ralph Loxley, Don's great grandfather, born in 1794, who moved from Derbyshire in 1834 to work as a framework knitter in Earl Shilton. The letter from his sister, implored him to be good. Ralph settled in the village and married an Earl Shilton girl and Mr. Loxley's own father was born in 1891.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Roy Bonser. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. His grandfather eventually became the landlord of the Dog and Gun in Earl Shilton. He also became a professional cricketer. The Bonser side of the family were all noted as framework knitters and living in Keats Lane, Church Street and Almeys Lane in Earl Shilton. In 1881, however, people began working in the newly established boot and shoe industry.

⁷⁵ Don Loxley. Recorded memories. More detailed information in under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. The Loxley family became boot and shoe manufacturers and Don's father, also Ralph, married into the Gilbert family who had established Earl Shilton Building Society in 1857.

Ted Felce while tracing his family history discovered that his uncle came to live in Barwell, after leaving the family home in Wellingborough. He opened his own shoe factory in the village. Mr. Felce's paternal grandmother also came to live in Earl Shilton, the reason being her sister had died leaving a husband and young family. She subsequently married her deceased sister's husband much to the disapproval of her family. She was only seventeen at the time – he was a man in his forties.⁷⁶ Mrs. Woodward has spoken about her grandfather who she has described as a tramp 'He walked all the way from Loughborough'. He settled in Hinckley and worked as a winder at Davis's.⁷⁷ Muriel Goode's grandfather had originated in Rugely and as discussed by this respondent she had no idea why he came to Hinckley. He had apparently been one of the sons of quite a well-to-do family. On his move to Hinckley he became a foreman packer for Davis and Sons in New Buildings, where he stayed all his working life.⁷⁸ People left their family homes for many and varied reasons, the main reason, however, in most instances, was employment. Hinckley along with Leicester and Loughborough were by the turn of the twentieth century centres of hosiery production.

It had also been common for girls from areas where there was lack of work for the female population and also from rural areas to leave the family home at a relatively young age to work in domestic service. During the middle to latter part of the nineteenth century domestic service had been the main employment of young women. Muriel's maternal grandmother who had originated from a small village outside Hinckley, had worked as a maid for members of the Atkins family.⁷⁹ Norah Skeffington's grandmother had also both worked as a maids for the Atkins family and had originally come from Nuneaton. Her mother-in-law, however, had come to Earl Shilton from Leicester where she had worked as a knitter in one of the big factories, and similar to many other young men and women, the reason for moving away from her family home, was because of her marriage. She moved to Earl Shilton after her

⁷⁶ Ted Felce. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷⁷ Nora Woodward. All information is taken from written notes. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷⁸ Muriel Goode. Written information. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷⁹ Muriel Goode. Written information.

marriage at the age of 29 and ‘got herself a job back winding down at Toon’s’.⁸⁰ Many young people, then, came into the area, to work in domestic service or in the hosiery and consequently married into local families. Joan Pegg’s mother, for instance, came to work in a big house in Church Street, Earl Shilton. She changed her job, however, and became a knitter at Bradbury’s hosiery factory in the village, and she was soon followed by her sisters who also worked as knitters. Their brothers continued to work on the family farm in Warwickshire. These young country women met and married local men and settled in Earl Shilton raising their own families.⁸¹ Joe Lawrance’s mother originated from Woodhouse Eaves, her family were farming people, and as a young girl she worked in an elastic factory in Loughborough. She came to Earl Shilton to work in domestic service in the ‘Mansion’ and earned £10 a year.⁸²

Two respondents, however, have spoken about their grandmothers who they referred to as gypsies ‘Oh yes, Grandmother Ellis smoked a clay pipe and wore a bandanna...and had thirteen children’. Mr. Lockton, however, never met his grandmother, she died in 1917 a year before he was born.⁸³ Similarly, Kathleen Dean, who spoke of her grandmother with affection observed, ‘Oh she was one of the Wolvey gypo’s, she came and settled in Cork Hole’.⁸⁴ Grandmother Baines had fourteen children, twelve survived into adulthood, and she died in 1945 at the age of 83. She earned money by acting as the local midwife and also by laying out the dead. Her daughters all worked in the local factories: Lydia as a maker, Abigail as a linker. Kathlene’s mother worked at Moore, Eady and Murcote, Goode. Her uncle Bill and Uncle Jack worked as navvies on the council.⁸⁵ Bill Lumley whose parents lived in Birmingham were finding things very difficult. His father had been gassed during the

⁸⁰ Nora Skeffington. Memories.

⁸¹ Joan Pegg. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁸² Joe Lawrance. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Joe’s mother married a local baker.

⁸³ Keith Lockton. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Grandfather Ellis, according to Mr Lockton, was a framework knitter with a shop in the back garden which ‘operated just like a factory’. His youngest daughter, Keith’s mother, became a knitter and worked until she was 65 in several Hinckley factories. His father began his working life as a trimmer, but because of short time work was taught knitting by his wife.

⁸⁴ Kathleen Dean. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix. Kathleen compared the houses in Cork Hole with those in Grove Street which were little tiny houses adding that, ‘They had back doors...we didn’t’. Cork Hole was an area of Hinckley which consisted of back to back terraced housing and was considered a poor area and demolished during the 1930s. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix.

⁸⁵ Kathleen Dean. Memories.

First World War, and Bill at the age of three was sent to Earl Shilton to be looked after by his uncle aunt. They both worked at Toon's hosiery factory, his uncle as a counterman and his aunt as a knitter on the S&Gs. This couple adopted Bill and brought him up as their own child. His uncle had moved from Earl Shilton as a young man to find work and had married into a Birmingham family. Bill's aunt had been a Marvin before her marriage and her family had been Earl Shilton people for generations.⁸⁶

The above examples are given to highlight the comings and goings of a small number of people and give an indication of the continual changes in society at any one time. N. Pye highlights the situation whereby young people moved into urban areas to take up employment in the newly established factories and he also found that where the hosiery and boot and shoe grew together, then population growth was more rapid.⁸⁷ This was certainly the situation not only in Hinckley but also in Earl Shilton and Barwell which became the centres of the boot and shoe industry in south west Leicestershire. This situation came about because of the depression in the domestic framework knitting industry, and similar to the situation in the seventeenth century whereby merchant hosiers were looking for cheap labour in the Midland counties, so the Leicester boot and shoe manufacturers found cheap labour among the depressed framework knitters living in Hinckley, Earl Shilton and Barwell.⁸⁸ In Hinckley, population increased quite significantly from 1,000 to 4,500 between 1640 and 1780 when the demands of the framework knitting industry was expanding into markets outside London (see table in Appendix 2). The period, however, between 1811 and the 1861 was of a very slow population increase from 6,058 to 6,461 with a decrease in

⁸⁶ Bill Lumley. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1

⁸⁷ N. Pye. *Leicester and its Regions*.(Leicester, 1972), p. 439.

⁸⁷ In Earl Shilton the first person to become a boot manufacturer was William Cotton who combined this occupation with farming. The first manufacturer in Barwell was a grocer and carrier and both men set up in business in 1877. Interestingly 'what was probably one of the earliest factories in the county was started in three cottages on the main road at Earl Shilton. Four girls are said to have been sent from Leicester to teach local workers how to use the machines. See *V.C.H., Leicestershire*, 3, p.24. The cottages referred to are known as 'Chelsea Row' and have the distinctive long windows characteristic of a framework knitter's cottage and are now under a conservation order. The 'basket work' was carried out in small outhouses built in the backyards of the cottages.

⁸⁸ Interesting to note that 'neither at Hinckley nor at Barwell – both now considerable footwear centres – was there any trace of an industry in 1870. However by the mid 1890s Hinckley was the second largest centre in Leicestershire for the boot and shoe industry with fifteen manufacturers (Anstey being the first with seventeen manufacturers), Earl Shilton was the third with twelve manufacturers and Barwell fourth with eleven. See *V.C.H., Leicestershire*, 3, p.23

1831 and 1851 of about 400. People were leaving the town, some even emigrated in order to escape the utter depression which had engulfed the area. The 50 year period, however, between 1871 and 1921 showed that the population doubled from 6,779 to 13,930 reflecting the new prosperity which had come about due, not only, to the introduction of powered factory production but also to the newly established boot and shoe industry. The layout of the town in 1925 is illustrated in Figure 4.



Fig. 4. Map of Hinckley dated 1925 showing urban development alongside industrial development. The population of the town had doubled between 1871 and 1921 from 6,779 to 13,930 owing to the development of powered factory production.
(The Records Office for Leicestershire. XL!!..NE. 6" to 1 mile).

Conclusion

The nineteenth century saw many changes in the fortunes of Hinckley and the surrounding area. The beginning of the century was one of relative prosperity but was soon followed after 1815 by a depression which lasted until the 1860s. Framework knitting became a sweated industry. There were too many people involved in an industry which was overproducing and wages fell by 30-40 per cent. Wrought hose which was a staple of the local industry was becoming too expensive compared to the 'fraudulent' and 'spurious' articles which were produced on the wide frame. In order to survive, all members of the family were involved in the production of hose as knitters,

seamers, bobbin winders. Framework knitters' children were usually uneducated because of family reliance on their work. The framework knitter and his family were also at the mercy of exploitation – truck and stinting being well documented in the various Parliamentary Papers published between 1845 and 1871. The steam based factory system had begun to make tentative inroads in the county during the 1840s, truck was abolished in 1871 and owing to various education acts during the 1870s schooling became compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 10 by 1880.

Framework knitters were resistant to change in working practices. They preferred the familiarity of sweated labour with the injustices metered out to them by master hosiers, rather than confront the changes to factory production being imposed on them. Power driven factories were being built to fulfil the demands of national and international mass markets. Government legislation was also having a big impact on family life and the economic contribution of children to the household was coming to an end. Nevertheless, continuity of employment of the local community in the hosiery industry is evident throughout this period. In Chapter 4 I will look at the development of the power driven factory system from the mid nineteenth century up to 2000 and its impact on the family, operatives and manufactures alike. Attention will also be drawn to the power of the warehouse and the subsequent dominance of the 'chainstore' which dictated the 'whims of fashion'.

Chapter 4

The Factory: Technological Development and Changes in Working Practices, circa 1845 to 2000

Technological developments inevitably had a huge impact on the hosiery industry and in this chapter I will discuss the invention of power driven machinery, both circular and fully fashioned. The response of local manufacturers to the changes taking place will also be looked at. Attention will be given to the building of the first factories and the continual building and re-building which took place in order to accommodate new and improved knitting machinery, as a requirement to the ever-changing demands of fashion. It was fashion which propelled the textile industry. The involvement and power of the warehouses and later the chain stores on factories will also be discussed.

The Circular Knitting Machine

The textile industry has over the centuries and particularly during the last forty years of the twentieth century needed to be innovative and dynamic to keep ahead or abreast of new fashions. It has been necessary to change from one type of manufacture to another, to find a niche in the market during times of intense competition but it has also been important to market the manufactured products by attending exhibitions and fashion shows. Competition is something with which a manufacturer has always had to contend and how they have coped with new fashion demands and distributing his goods has always been part of the manufacturer's success or failure. Changes in fashion resulted in the diversity of knitwear which began to appear during the eighteenth century. There were thus demands to adapt and invent new ways of manufacture to accommodate different yarns and fashion accessories. Machinery was and is at the forefront of any new designs and changes in fashion. In order to advance rather than stagnate new machinery, particularly that driven by steam power, needed to be implemented in the early days. Garments made by steam power were far cheaper than those produced by hand. It was also possible to produce more

stockings, and as machinery was improved more and better quality garments were continually being manufactured. A rise in the populations' living standards also became more discernable from the 1870s and 1880s and thus there was a growing market for the knitwear being knitted in the East Midlands.

The early knitting machinery driven by steam was relatively simple and knitted either tubes or lengths of cloth which in the case of the tubes needed steaming in order for it to be given shape. The lengths of material, similar to that knitted on the wide frame had to be cut to shape and sewn and so for many involved in the industry this type of manufacture was still seen as inferior to that made on the narrow frame.¹ The early steam driven knitting machines had been developed from an invention by Mark Isambard Brunel which he patented in 1816. This simple stocking frame, called the 'tricoteur' was 'small and compact enough to be screwed to a lady's work table [and] capable of making loops of stocking faster than the eye can follow it. A seamless sack is produced'.² Felkin stated in his description of the tricoteur that the only similarity between the aforementioned machine and Lee's stocking frame was the use of the bearded needle.³ Brunel's tricoteur, however, found little favour with manufacturers and was ignored by them at an exhibition held in Nottingham in 1840.⁴

Changes and innovations

Many manufacturers believed that because of the complexities of the hand frame, fully fashioned hose would never be knitted by steam power. Indeed the idea of application of steam power to the stocking frame had been laughed at, 'All the better classes of hosiery

¹ W. Felkin, *History of the Machine Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufacturers* (1867; 1967); F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry. Its History and Organisation* (1935, Newton Abbot, 1972,edn); R. Gurnham, *A History of the Trade Union Movement in the Hosiery and Knitwear Industry, 1776-1976* (Leicester, 1976); H. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work: A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Cambridge, 1989).

² Felkin, *Machine Wrought Hosiery*, p. 117; This machine, according to Gurnham, had been adopted commercially both in America and in Continental Europe but had very largely remained a mere curiosity in England, Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 22.

³ There had been other variations of the tricoteur or 'round stocking frame' prior to that patented by Brunel that have been attributed to Decroix in 1798, Aubert in 1803 and Leroy in 1808. See Felkin, *Machine Wrought Hosiery*. p. 17.

⁴ 'A frame on the tricoteur principle was "one of the most curious machines" on show at a Nottingham exhibition. See Felkin, *Machine Wrought Hosiery*', p. 17.

must continue to be made by hand at home'. Other comments included, 'to produce good or wrought fashioned stockings from steam power, is yet beyond the ingenuity of manufacturers'.⁵ However, while the prejudice continued to exist about the circular knitting frame and resistance to its use continued, Paget's of Loughborough in 1844 'noiselessly alighted upon the circular machine, the tricateur of Brunel, and constructed many of that principle, and between 1844 and 1860 several patents had been made and eventually the tricateur had been modified so that with various operations the circular knitting machine could produce a circular stocking with fashioning'.⁶ While Paget's were adapting Brunel's tricateur using steam power, a Belgian named Peter Claussen was also working on this machine and took out a patent in 1845 which made 'looped fabric...with certain altered and combination of parts'. He took out another patent in 1847 which proved more successful and it was probably the improved version that was sold to Thomas Payne of Hinckley in 1855. Appendix 2 shows the increasing population of Hinckley over the years and gives an indication of the number of factories operating under steam family. Other manufacturers who were introducing steam-driven circulars were Thomas Collins of Leicester and also Messrs. Harris of Leicester who were said to be 'experimenting with power-driven machinery in great secrecy'.⁷ While these adaptation's and innovations were taking place Matthew Townsend in 1849 produced a 'practical "self-acting" needle, the latch needle as we know it today'.⁸ This according to T. Nutting 'could be said to be the 'invention that really created the modern circular knitting industry'.⁹

⁵ P. Head, 'Industrial organisation in Leicester, 1844-1914' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Leicester, 1960). Also noted, 'much more difficult was the production of fashioned work by power...', pp. 81 and 96; "'Stockings cannot be made by power", said a Belper manufacture in 1844'. See Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear Industry*, p. 17.

⁶ Felkin, *Machine Wrought Hosiery*, p. 498. The first steam powered factory, however, was opened in Loughborough by Messrs Cartwright and Warner in 1840 and they used 'steam power to drive the frame engaged in the shirt branch of the trade'. See L.A. Parker, 'Industries' in W.G. Hoskins and R. A. McKinley, *V.C.H. Leicestershire*, 3, p. 16. Parker also states that in 1845 Paget's of Loughborough turned the Zouch Mills into a hosiery factory by installing steam-driven rotary frames for making caps, shirts, and straight-down hose.'

⁷ R. Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 17.

⁸ D.R. Goadby, 'Fully-fashioned to seamless: productivity and fashion' in *Four Centuries of Machine Knitting. Commemorating William Lee's Invention of the Stocking Frame in 1589*, J. Millington and S. Chapman (Leicester, 1989), p. 166

⁹ T. Nutting, 'Salient features of knitting technology' in *Four Centuries of Machine Knitting. Commemorating William Lee's Invention of the Stocking Frame in 1589*, J. Millington and S. Chapman (Eds), 1989, p. 58. The bias against circular knitting and the cheap 'leg bags' they produced, however, resulted in Townsend migrating to America where his invention was by the end of the nineteenth century being exploited by various American machine builders.

D.R. Goadby stated that ‘the invention of the latch needle was the key which opened up the potential of the small diameter hosiery machine. By 1870 Henry Griswold had perfected a hand operated sock knitting machine. In 1879 a power operated machine was developed and in 1887 needle “pickers” were added allowing the shaping of the heels and toes’.¹⁰ These inventions and innovations culminated in the building of the ladies Model K knitting machine in 1915. According to D.R. Goady, the Model K knitting machine was built when Scott and Williams did a ‘William Cotton’ – they put together the best parts of all the known circular knitting technology, using their own ideas, to produce ‘the world famous ladies’ automatic hosiery machine’.¹¹ The Model K became the precursor of subsequent knitting machines which were destined to knit ladies stockings well into the twentieth century.¹² The knitting of men’s and boy’s socks followed along the same lines as that of the knitting machinery for women’s hose: In 1900 Stretton and Johnson invented the double cylinder knitting machine – the XL, and it had incorporated into its make-up, a 1895 patent belonging to Spiers and Grieves. The S and G knitting machine, as it was known, became widely used in the local area for knitting half-hose. In 1912 the Komet knitting machine appeared on the ‘scene’ and the Bentley Komet during the early 1920s, setting the ‘standard and the scene for the knitting of men’s hosiery to the present day’.¹³

The fully fashioned knitting frame

While the circular knitting machine was being changed and improved in accordance with various inventions and adaptations, William Cotton, a framesmith from Loughborough, did eventually solve the problem of knitting wrought hose on steam driven machinery. He was granted a patent for his multi-head fully-fashioned machine with a

¹⁰ Goadby, ‘Fully-fashioned to seamless’, p. 166.

¹¹ Goadby, ‘Fully-fashioned to seamless’, p. 166.

¹² Goadby, ‘Fully-fashioned to seamless’, p. 166.

¹³ Goadby, ‘Fully-fashioned to seamless’, pp. 166 & 167. Nellie Skelton worked the XL knitting machines at H.J. Halls and Lilian Coley worked on the S&G knitting machines at Bradbury’s in Earl Shilton. According to Joe Lawrance the S&Gs were very similar to a Griswold knitting machine but rather than being screwed to a table they were on stands and driven by belts. For more detailed information about Nellie Skelton and Joe Lawrance see Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

‘moveable needle bar with the needles in a vertical plane’ in 1863.¹⁴ The Cotton’s Patent knitting machine became available on the open market during the 1870s and Atkins Brothers were the first company in Hinckley to purchase this type of machinery which was installed in their newly built factory on Lower Bond Street.

The first steam driven factory in Hinckley, however, was established by Thomas Payne in 1855. It has been recorded that ‘Mr Payne had examined M’Clawson’s machines, exhibited at the Bull’s Head Hotel in Hinckley where they were put to work. Being satisfied with the samples produced, he made further investigations as to the various kinds of work introduced by this class of machinery, and resolved at once to fit up his factory with forty ‘heads’, and to put down an engine and boiler’.¹⁵ The factory which fronted Wood Street and backed onto Castle Street was followed by other well established Manufacturers of Hose: Atkins Brothers built their factory on Lower Bond Street in 1875 which was used to accommodate Cottons Patent knitting machines; Samuel Davis built his factory on New Buildings; Daniel Payne had a factory built on Factory Road. Also of note, Alfred and James Toon built a factory in Earl Shilton about 1860. This was apparently the only factory to be built outside the main manufacturing areas of Leicester, Loughborough and Hinckley at this time.¹⁶ The transition from the putting-out system, or cottage industry, to steam driven factory based production had been more or less completed by 1899 when it was recorded in a Trade Directory that 24 Hosiery Manufacturers were working from various locations in the town.¹⁷ Alongside the newly built steam driven factories there appeared the rows upon rows of red brick terraced housing to accommodate the factory worker. Much of this housing was built to the north of the town and as discussed by Marilyn Palmer, ‘The town of Hinckley in Leicestershire probably preserves the typical industrial landscape of the steam-powered hosiery production better than anywhere else in

¹⁴ Nutting, ‘Salient features’, p. 58.

¹⁵ A.J. Pickering, *Cradle and Home of the Hosiery Trade, 1640-1940* (Hinckley, 1940), p. 49.

¹⁶ Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 51. Also *William Whites Directory of Leicestershire*, 1862.

¹⁷ *Bennett’s Business Directory*, 1899. The Ordnance Survey map of 1887 shows 14 ‘Manufactories’ along with three boot and shoe factories, one clothing factory and 27 public houses. See B. Partridge, ‘The Daniel Payne Story’, *Knitting International*, (February 1991), pp. 88-90.

the East Midlands'.¹⁸ The industrial landscape of Hinckley in 1889 can be seen in Figure 5.



Fig. 5. Hinckley 1889 - showing the industrial landscape
(The Records Office for Leicestershire. XL11.8 25" to a mile)

The Framework Knitter

Within two generations the local hosiery industry had grown significantly from a point where the industry was stagnating mid nineteenth century to a position, at the turn of the twentieth century, where the local factories at times found it difficult to fill their vacancies. The early factories had been met with much suspicion – the factory imposed a discipline on both the framework knitter and the manufacturer which had been unknown. Indeed in a number of instances the *1845 Royal Commission* and subsequent Inquiries often refer to a lack of discipline among the framework knitters and their refusal to change their style of working. Edward Kem Jarvis, a manufacturer in Hinckley, ‘experimented with a

¹⁸ M. Palmer, *Framework Knitting* (Prince Risborough, 1984), p. 28.

large factory’¹⁹ and installed ‘fifty-four improved frames on the factory system’ and William Pickering highlights the problems that he encountered:

he induced a number of men to leave their homes and work there, but after a short time had to give it up as a failure. His frames were now being worked in the home. When he employed the men in his workshop Mr. Jarvis said they made as much as 12/- to 24/- weekly, the only deduction being for winding. The average earnings included boys from ten years upwards. There was regular work at all times, the hours being from 7 o’clock in the summer and 8 in the winter to 8 o’clock at night. The sole reason of his giving up the factory, the witness stated, was on account of his not being able to keep the men to any hours at all. The habits of the stockingers were so singular that they would work all night sometimes and play all the day. They would come in and work a day, and then go away, although they could earn half as much again as in their own homes. When he remonstrated with them, they laughed and said they did not like being shut up, as they could not see what was going on. They preferred their liberty even if it meant less pay.²⁰

A similar explanation was given by William Woodcock, ‘In the first part of the week very little work is done at the frames, as the men, with few exceptions, idle them and work very hard at the end of the week, and some through Friday night and up to Saturday morning.’²¹

Framework knitters prided themselves on their independence, they enjoyed their freedom: St Monday it would seem was still observed, and it would appear, the majority of the work was crammed into the latter part of the week. Hence the late night work for young children and all night work for the women. Ivy Pinchbeck when discussing women workers in the domestic lace industry included this statement by a woman worker, ‘We have our liberty at home, and get our meals comfortable, such as they are’. And she continues, ‘Although their hours were excessive, domestic workers regarded discipline and regularity with so great a horror’.²² Wells when discussing a framework knitter’s

¹⁹ V.C.H, Leicestershire, 3, p. 16. Mr. Jarvis did not charge frame rent or standing charges, as was customary in small shops.

²⁰ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 92. Pickering refers to a James Jarvis but Parker in V.C.H, 3, p. 16 refers to Edward Kem Jarvis. Of interest, ‘He [Mr. Jarvis] had then five frames in one shop in the town, some worked by youths under 14 who earned 17s to 18s a week clear, but these were steady, expert workmen who worked regularly and orderly, and strove to do their best’.

²¹ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 108.

²² I. Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (1930, London, 1969), p. 237; According to Head, ‘[stockingers] could work feverishly for two to three days and then idle away their time. Women and children working at seaming were often kept up all Friday night for this reason). St. Monday

(perceived) liberty and independence states, ‘children followed their father’s trade as a matter of course...the extremely irregular conditions of work in the hosiery trade had reacted on succeeding generations of stockingers and produced a type of worker who was, almost by nature, irregular in his habits “Each man has full liberty to earn what he likes and how he likes and when he likes; we have no factory bell, it is our only blessing”’.²³ He also commented, however, that, ‘it was this obstinate clinging to liberty in working conditions that kept the hosiery worker in his squalid domestic workshop’.²⁴ Regular hours of work between stipulated times laid down by factory legislation, however, soon became the norm with the increasing numbers of factories being built.

Factory discipline

The early machinery used in the newly established factories could mean a considerable outlay by the manufacturer if they were investing in powered rotary frames and Cotton’s Patent knitting frames. The hosier, under the domestic system, was in a position to make a considerable profit solely from the renting of frames. To change from the domestic system where profit from frame rents was quite substantial to a system whereby the hosier was in direct control of his workers and the work they produced, was initially a difficult change of mind set. The hosier according to Peter Head, would be the greatest potential loser if the system failed to function. The cost of machinery could be prohibitive; the circular patent frame cost £18 per head or £108 for six heads. The improved Derby rib frames which were first bought by Corah’s cost £120 each.²⁵ Manufacturers needed to keep their machines working for as many hours as possible in order to reap the benefits of steam driven machinery, and new inventions and improvements in machinery led to an increase in production. The Derby rib, for instance, increased the production of circular stockings by one workman 10 or 12 fold; the ribbed wide rotary making 12 six inch tops at once producing about 320 dozen a week – more

observed and frequently extended to Tuesday or Wednesday. Head observing, however, that work, ‘was spasmodic’. P. 224.

²³ Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 122.

²⁴ Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 122.

²⁵ Head, ‘Industrial organisation’, p. 225-227. ‘The family business of HJ Hall & Son in Stoke Golding was started by John in 1882 in his home village of Stoke Golding, after having requested an overdraft of £1200 in order to build a factory’. He also had £500 in savings and his wife added a further £500 by raising a mortgage on their house’. See H.J. Hall & Son *High Quality English Hosiery since 1882*.

were made in a week than were formerly made in a year.²⁶ A pair of fully fashioned stockings made on the narrow frame cost about 5s., a sum which was too high for the majority of working people. Stockings made on steam powered machinery could be sold for 1s. 6d. and thus demand for these goods increased rapidly because of the lower price.

It became imperative that a manufacturer not only invested in new machinery but also invested in buildings in which to house such machinery. With this change came more responsibility and overheads – the cost of building a factory, depreciation of machinery, wages, not only for knitters working on steam driven machinery, but also for framework knitters, auxiliary workers, framesmiths, engineers and overlookers and of course the cost of coal and gas to drive the newly installed engines. For this reason machinery had to be used to its fullest capacity – knitters had no choice but to be at their machines at a time dictated not by the manufacturer but by factory legislation. During summer time, hours worked were from seven o'clock in the morning to seven o'clock at night. Women and children worked less hours but nevertheless still worked to a strict timetable as legislated by the Factory Acts. Fines were introduced for irregularity and absenteeism and the introduction of shift work in order to work the machines to their full capacity was essential.²⁷ The introduction of the hosiery factory was exempt from the dreadful stigma which had attached itself to the early factories. They had been likened to prisons and had been built along the same lines as those places of punishment with hours of work being excessive. The newly built factories were, it was agreed, far more congenial and healthier places to work. They were felt to be superior to the overcrowded workshops and homes in which all stockings and their families had worked until the introduction of steam power.

People living and working in the town and local area were well aware of the changes taking place. Factories operated by steam power were already being established during the 1850s and both William Woodcock and John Atkins refer to steam factories already in existence. John Atkins also commented that the steam factories, 'have displaced a great amount of hand frame hosiery' and John Corbett when describing the ages that

²⁶ Felkin, *Machine Wrought Hose*, p. 573.

²⁷ Head, 'Putting out', p. 225-227; Children under the age of 10 were not allowed to work in a factory and the working day for women and children was ten and a half hours. See Pickering, p. 107.

children started work in the frames added that with the establishment of the factory, 'there are fewer now [girls] since the factories have been started, as they go there to work the stitching machine'.²⁸ A number of letters to the local press also acknowledged the changes which were taking place and how these changes were for the betterment of the working classes:

The lot of the stocking-maker has been the least remunerative of any other class...for many years they were at the bottom of the labour market. But by the change that has and still is taking place in the machinery and manufacturers of the district much has been done towards bettering the condition of the workmen. On the change, depends, the future welfare and prosperity of the neighbourhood.²⁹

A letter from a 'F.W.K.' also echoes much of the above but also discusses the changing attitudes of the local manufacturers in that they were establishing factories which used different types of machinery and he enthuses on the uses being made of steam. Also of great benefit was the employment of girls and young women in the new factories:

The trade in this district is undergoing a thorough change...twenty years ago we used to have full work about five months in the year and for the remainder only part work or none at all. One of our great complaints, our manufacturers had not spirit enough to embark on the various branches into which the hosiery trade was then multiplying itself. Now our present masters have struck out a path for themselves...a change is taking place amongst us, and every man with his eyes open must say for the better...the introduction of steam and factory labour for our children is working wonders...of the female part of those employed at the new branches of trade and a corresponding benefit among their families and parents. The circular and wide-wrought frame and all that are compelled to labour in them. The applicability of steam power to the manufacture of wrought stockings is a 'great fact' and it behoves in the framework knitters of the neighbourhood to prepare for it. To look the monster in the face, and prepare for the change, not by thinking to avert it but by arming ourselves to take advantage of it for the benefit of ourselves and our children.³⁰

Factory Workers

Evidence would suggest that workers in the early powered factories were girls and young women. Felkin had observed that women had been employed on, 'at least the

²⁸ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, pp. 107,108 , 109.

²⁹ *Hinckley Journal*, May, 21st, 1859.

³⁰ *Hinckley Journal*, June 4th, 1859.

smaller circular knitting machines from the first years of factory production'.³¹ These steam driven circular machines were quite simple in construction and were said to be easy to operate and according to Thomas Collins, 'These frames require nothing of mechanical skill, you have nothing to do but to turn the handle by the hand'. Apparently anyone was capable of doing this 'even a child of five'.³² These machines were based on 'Brunel's tricatuer' with needles set in a circle and they knitted long tubes of fabric and these tubes were pressed and steamed into the shape of stockings. The heavy unpowered rotary knitting machines which were built with the needles set horizontally, along with the wide flat frames, still required considerable skill and were operated by men. These machines produced broad pieces of fabric, which were then cut up and stitched together to form garments.³³

Young girls and boys would have started their working lives in these factories, probably straight from school at the age of ten, others would have already been working under the domestic system. Winders had entered the early factories along with the knitters and by the late 1850s hosiery and knitwear firms were advertising for young women who can 'sew well' and also for 'learners'. The continual development of circular knitting machines and the invention of Cotton's Patent fully fashioned knitting machinery resulted in the production of more knitted goods. This in turn increased the demand for female workers such as seamers, stitchers, embroiders, buttonholers, folders, pressers and packers. Similar to the continual adaptation and invention of knitting machinery, finishing machines were also being invented and adapted for various uses and sewing machines powered by steam were being used by the late 1850s along with linking machines which closed the toes of a stocking.³⁴ Seaming which had always been deemed a skilled job and because of its

³¹ Felkin, *Machine Wrought Hosiery*, p. 517; R. Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 34.

³² Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work*, p. 136, 137 and 67; H. Bradley, 'Technological change, management strategies and the development of gender-based job segregation in the labour process' in *Gender and the Labour Process*, D. Knights, *Gender and the Labour Process* (Cambridge, 1986).p.61. He had established a successful factory with 55 rotary machines. Thomas Collins employed mainly girls aged 13-17 and claimed to have turned away streams of applicants.

³³ Head, 'Industrial organisation' p. 260; 'Because the circular frames were small and relatively cheap, a very large proportion of those employed in this section were to be found working for very small firms'. Rotary frames, however, because of their expense were usually found only in the larger factories. See Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 34.

³⁴ Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work*, p. 137.

intricacy continued to be carried out in the home for many years until the invention, in the late 1880s, of a machine known as an 'overlocker' which did the work of seaming and stitching.³⁵

The job descriptions 'factory hand', 'factory operative', 'machinist', 'linker' and 'mender' were becoming more common on the census returns particularly from 1881 onwards. Their ages ranged from 14 up to 28 with a few aged just 12 and a small number aged 40 and over. Foxwell and Joyce were looking for '50 young women who can sew well as Finishers to the Clothing trade to whom constant employment will be given'. They were also advertising for '20-30 girls (12-16) as Learners to whom regular wages will be given for a term of years'.³⁶ Men and boys were being employed as trimmers, warehousemen and overseers and again they were usually young men. In February 1859, Messrs. Flavell and Abell were advertising for 'two active counterman, 3 trimmers and also fifty female stitchers'.³⁷ These were the first generation of young people to begin work in the local factories. Bill Partridge, who started his working life at Atkins in 1935 at the age of 16, became friendly with a number of the older knitters, men such as Bill Taylor, who had started work for Atkins in 1886 as a footer operating a, 'small frame on which was knitted the foot-bottom section to the English Foot style of fully fashioned stockings and socks'.³⁸

³⁵ Overlocking is trimming and sewing over a raw edge to prevent fraying and was necessary to obtain a satisfactory seam on garments cut from fabric produced on circulars. See Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work*, p. 137; The powered overlocker machine sewed a permanent seam in knitted fabric. See N. Grey Osterud, 'Gender divisions and the organisation of work in the Leicester hosiery industry' in A.V. John, *Unequal Opportunities. Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, p.63; 'Seaming and stitching was still being carried out in the home and earnings were very poor – never more than 7s. a week and usually no more than 5s. and similar to framework knitting these occupations were found in the smallest hamlets and villages throughout Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire'. See Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 47; Head, 'Putting out', p. 285.

³⁶ *Hinckley Journal*, July 16th, 1859. Foxwell and Joyce ran a sewing factory which was situated at the corner of the Lawns in Hinckley. The building had previously been an extensive steam corn mill built in about 1845 at the cost of £10,000 and run by two steam engines. See Pickering, *The Cradle and Home*, p. 49.

³⁷ *Hinckley Journal*, February 19th and 26th, 1859.

³⁸ B. Partridge, *Life as it was 120 years ago in the Lower Bond End of Hinckley. As revealed by the 1881 Census*.

Mr. Partridge also knew Stan Arnold who began his working life at the age of 13 in 1909 as a helper to the buff cotton patent hose legger.³⁹ Other early recruits to Atkins included:

Thomas Beasley who was working as a circular footer (cotton) but had started his working life 'winding outside' from 8 years of age in 1855 and on the 'hand frame, inside' for 42 years.

Charles Blower, a hose legger, born in 1845 and at the age of twelve began working for the firm and in 1871 started working at the factory.

John Baker, a patent footer started work for Atkins in 1882 at the age of twenty.

William Baker, worked on the Cotton's Patent rib top and began working for the company in 1882 at the age of eighteen.

Frederick Bass, born in 1863 started working for Atkins in 1878.

Joseph Bloxham, a Niantic footer, began working for the firm in 1901 and his brother Marshall born in 1894 was, at the age of twelve, working as a Cotton's Patent hand.

John Frederick Baggots, a Cotton Patent Hose Legger began his working life at the age of eleven in 1893.

Clara Wills who commenced work for the firm at the age of thirty in 1902 was also working in Room 14 alongside the above as a winder.

In Room 8 Ada Blower, a Forewoman Shirt Finisher, began her working life at Atkins on June 8th, 1888 on her thirteenth birthday and Emma Avin, a Forewoman mender was working in Room 4 at the age of forty in 1910.⁴⁰

The above is quite a unique example of people working in a local factory during the transitional years of factory production. The information given about Thomas Beasley can be used to highlight this – he began his working life as a winder at the age of eight, presumably working in a small workshop or more probably in the family home. All, except a few, were young people when they first began working at this well known factory. These boys and young men in particular would have been the first to have learnt the trade of powered machine knitting as helpers and as hands to the experts. They in turn would pass on their experience and knowledge to future generations of knitters, mechanics and other members of staff.

The establishment of powered factories

³⁹ A photograph of Stan Arnold working the old hand frame can be seen in Atkins commemorative brochure *Atkins of Hinckley 1722-1972*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ The above information which had been collated by Atkins Brothers for insurance purposes, was given to me by Dr. P. Lane.

Many manufacturers started their working lives as employees of already well established companies in the town but took the opportunity of becoming manufacturers in their own right. For instance, H.J. Hall and Son was founded by John Hall, 'Honest John', who had worked as a foreman at Atkins before setting up in business in Stoke Golding in 1882. He established himself in trade 'by requesting an overdraft of £1200' using his savings of £500 'to which his wife added a further £500 by raising a mortgage on their house'.⁴¹ As commented by Bill Lumley when discussing local manufacturers, 'They learnt their trade in the big firms'.⁴² Arthur Keen, of Keen and Felce a small company in Earl Shilton, had learned his trade as a counterman at Toon's Hosiery Factory, Toon's being the biggest factory in the village employing up to 800 people during its heyday. Arthur Felce had worked as a mechanic for Norton and Bradbury, again a well established company in the village.⁴³ Similarly Timothy Jennings, grandfather of David Jennings, set up his own business in 1918, having worked as a knitter for Atkins.⁴⁴ John Bennett when asked about his grandfather's introduction into owning his own business, jokingly stated, 'Oh, he had a shed up the back garden'.⁴⁵ And this, it would seem, is how many of the family businesses in the local area started especially from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Nicholls and Wileman, a well respected company in Earl Shilton, began in a small way in 1919 with only 'four employees on the pay roll.'⁴⁶ Tom Smith a silk ribbon weaver living in Bulkington set up his business during the 1890s.

⁴¹ Discussions with Neville Hall, H.J. Hall and Sons. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; H.J. Hall & Son' S. *High Quality English Hosiery since 1882*; Barton and R. Murray, *Twisted Yarns. The Story of the Hosiery Industry in Hinckley* which discusses the continuity, setting-up and dissolving of businesses of local people in the manufacture of hose over the last 300 years.

⁴² Bill Lumley. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; Head, 'Industrial Organisation', p.188.

⁴³ Ted Felce. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁴⁴ Discussion with David Jennings and recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*.

⁴⁵ Discussion with John and Jamie Bennett. More detailed information under in Appendix 1. John Bennett's son also worked for the family business.

⁴⁶ *Nicholls and Wileman Ltd. 1920-1950*. 'Today the firm pays wages to nearly 400 happy, contented workers' and of further interest 'it is interesting to note that the original factory is now a Ladies Cloakroom in which each female operative has an individual heated coat rack and a personal locker'. The business originally operated from a stable on land owned by his in-laws. Work knitted on these premises was handed to a respondent's mother-in-law to be finished. She lived in a cottage alongside the stables. This information is word of mouth.

He worked from his own terraced house and as the business expanded into hosiery after 1918 his home became a factory. The business remained on these premises up until quite recently, the factory having expanded into a couple of houses and extended out into the garden.⁴⁷ Respondents have often referred to local manufacturers as being one of us, 'just ordinary working men, with no education who decided to have a go'. They were probably young men with ambition who thought perhaps they were under-valued or could do a better job than their employer. Ted Felce stated that his father, Arthur Felce, had asked Mr. Bradbury for a rise. He felt he deserved this because of the long hours he worked as a mechanic but was refused. He was told that he earned the most money of all the employees at the factory, indeed he earned more than his boss.⁴⁸ Harry Flude had worked for Atkins as a knitter but decided it was time to set up on his own and worked from an old stable block on Stockwell Head when he first set up in business in 1926.⁴⁹

Many of these manufacturers had responsible jobs in the hosiery before establishing their own companies. These young men had grown up in the trade, their parents had been framework knitters or among the first generation of factory workers. They perhaps started their working lives in the very first factories and it could be said they were there at the right time – when factory production was taking off as it were. They could use their experience as mechanics, knitters and counterman to their own advantage when setting up on their own – they knew their trade and if they had relations and or friends working as manufacturers then all the better. Timothy Jennings, for instance bought a set of ten knitting machines for the sum of £100 off William Puffer, a family friend, both attended the same chapel.⁵⁰ Arthur Davenport was the son of Thomas Davenport, a framework knitter, who became the first full time secretary of the Hinckley Co-operative Society.⁵¹ Brian Moore, a third generation manufacturer, whose grandfather set up in partnership with Joseph Ginns also had good connections. Brian Moore while tracing his family history found that members of

⁴⁷ Michael. Smith. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁴⁸ Ted Felce. Memories.

⁴⁹ Discussion with Simon Flude. More detailed information under in Appendix 1.

⁵⁰ David Jennings. Memories.

⁵¹ Charles Davenport. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; *Hinckley and District Industrial Co-operative Society Limited. A brief history of its Rise and Progress. 1861-1911*. Published as a Souvenir of its Fiftieth Anniversary (Hinckley, 1911).

his family were trading as grocers in the town during the early 1820s and the family had continued as trades people, possibly owning their own knitting frames.⁵² Arthur Felce was also well connected in that his own father had been a shoe manufacturer in Earl Shilton. Arthur's father had died, however, when Arthur and his brother were very young still very young but they had uncles and other family members who were also connected with the shoe industry as manufacturers.⁵³ The Wileman family was a well established Earl Shilton family and had been prominent manufacturers in Earl Shilton during the early to mid nineteenth century. Richard Wileman, senior when giving evidence to the *1845 Royal Commission* claimed to be the oldest manufacturer in the Kingdom. Both he and his sons had prospered as manufacturers in their own right, each owning considerable numbers of frames.⁵⁴ So in some instances even though they could be said to be ordinary working men learning their trade in well established companies they often had connections through family and friends that could be said was advantageous in setting up on their own.

Manufacturers and their family history

By encouraging manufacturers to talk about their lives in the industry one is impressed by the continuity of family involvement. The foregoing provides examples of manufacturer's families in the local hosiery and knitwear industry over two, three, four or more generations. Each one of the manufacturers mentioned above was able to give information on family background: of brothers, fathers, grandfathers, uncles involved in this one industry. In some instances a son of a well established company would break away from the established business and set up on his own. Jim Davenport who had worked for the family firm, Arthur Davenport and Sons, began manufacturing in the fully fashioned knitwear industry. His brother Charles, a third generation manufacturer, continued to work for the family business, Arthur Davenport and Sons on Wood Street, Hinckley, until its liquidation in 1973 when Charles Davenport took the opportunity to retire.⁵⁵ It is also

⁵² Brian Moore. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁵³ Ted Felce. Memories. Arthur married into the Orton family who became well established boot and shoe manufactures in Earl Shilton. The factory closed down in 2007.

⁵⁴ Richard Wileman, senior, had originally been a truck master but had given up this practice. His son, Thomas, had been made bankrupt because of lack of funds and he had blamed the local people for this stating they did not pay their bills at his shop. See *1845 Royal Commission*.

⁵⁵ Charles Davenport. Memories. See Barton & Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 58.

interesting to note that Arthur Davenport had dissolved a partnership with Joseph Ginns in 1894 and had subsequently set up in business with an Atherstone hosier. This partnership was short lived and Arthur Davenport eventually set up on his own in 1898 as Arthur Davenport and Sons. Ginns, Son and Moore subsequently arose following the demise of the partnership between Davenport and Ginns. What is of interest is that Ginns, Son and Moore operated from the premises originally owned by Thomas Payne and according to Pickering, Thomas Payne had purchased the site:

with adjoining cottages from John Glover, a hosier, in 1848. After sixteen years of prosperous business Thomas Payne went into retirement ...in January 1875 he conveyed the premises to William Crow, who apparently had purchased the business and rented the premises from 1871. At a later date Mr. Crow took into partnership William Truslove, and extended the premises...When in 1892 financial difficulties overtook the firm of Crow and & Truslove, the premises were conveyed by the official receiver to Joseph Ginns and Arthur Davenport.⁵⁶

Ginns, Son and Moore ceased trading when Brian Moor, grandson of Robert Moore retired.⁵⁷ The formation and dismantling of companies is something which has always been very prevalent within the industry. David Jennings grandfather, for instance, had originally been in partnership with a Mr. Bolesworth and this partnership was dissolved when Timothy Jennings decided to introduce his sons into the business. David Jennings while discussing the family business explained that the reason for this was that his grandfather had three sons, whereas Mr. Bolesworth only had one and thus equal shares in the business would not be possible. T. Jennings and Son is now run by David and his nephew Michael, a fourth generation manufacturer and the son of Basil Jennings who retired from the business several years before.⁵⁸

By studying the Trade Directories one realises the enormous number of hosiers and manufacturers who have come and gone over time. Trade Directories also, however, highlight the continuity and involvement of the same families in the hosiery industry. In 1836 it had been noted in an old parish rate book that there were 13 hosiers or 'occupiers of warehouses' in the town and these included John Patch, William Sills, John Colver,

⁵⁶ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 50.

⁵⁷ Brian Moore. Memories. Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 58

⁵⁸ David Jennings. Memories. The business now operates from a small factory unit in Barwell. Originally a boot and shoe factory.

Geoffrey Smith and William Williamson, who was not only noted as having a warehouse, but also having a factory on Back Lane.⁵⁹ By 1840 it had been noted that there were seventeen, 'Manufacturers of Hosiery' in Hinckley and among these were Joshua Clarke, John Glover, Abraham Murcotte, Thomas Murcotte, John Patch, Thomas Payne and William Sills.⁶⁰ In 1850 *Slater's National Directory* noted 18 hosiers, five of these being situated in Earl Shilton and included Joshua Clarke, William Cooper, John Hancock, John Homer and Richard Wileman. By researching the local archives one finds that many of the manufacturers before the introduction of factory production and after had been involved in trade in some way or another. The Toon family who were first noted in *William White's Directory of Leicestershire* in 1862 had lived in Earl Shilton for generations and it was Job Toon, trading as a:

grocer and licensed victualler with an urge for progressive enterprise, invested in the purchase of his first stocking frame, thus laying the foundation of J. Toon & Sons Ltd. This first frame he worked with the help of Matilda in his own home, adding to it as he gradually progressed, by purchasing more stocking frames which he rented to members of the community, paying them for their products, which he marketed to traders and merchants in Leicester'.⁶¹

The Atkins Brothers were very proud to note that they could trace their family involvement as manufacturers back to the first Robert Atkins who came to Hinckley in 1722 as a newly qualified framework knitter. He was joined in the 1740s by his nephew, also Robert Atkins, and in the church registers one can take note of their deaths, one Robert Atkins dying in 1763, the other Robert Atkins dying in 1777.⁶² Pickering also noted the deaths of other hosiers found in the church registers:

⁵⁹ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 48. William Williamson had a 'factory' on Back Lane (later called Factory Road) and a warehouse on The Roundhill; 'The warehouse, part of the stock in trade of every hosier worth his name, often adjoined his house and notice of sales at this time frequently included both residence and warehouse...it was from his warehouse that final operations were performed and stocks housed. See Head, 'Industrial Organisation', p. 119.

⁶⁰ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 48. Also included are seven framesmiths, eight needlemakers, four sinker makers and 1 dyer and trimmer.

⁶¹ *A Century of Hosiery Manufacture. J. Toon & Sons Ltd.* J. Toon and Sons became a private Limited Company on February 22nd, 1919 'being one of the oldest enterprises in Leicestershire specialising in this branch of women's wear [hosiery]'; Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 51

⁶² *Atkins of Hinckley, 1722 to 1972*; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 53. See Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 45. Pickering also noted two marriages - Thomas Grundy married 1772 and Tomas Reeve in 1774, both noted as hosiers.

James Estlin, senior, aged 67	died 1761
Thomas Hollier	died 1763
Joseph Wallin	died 1773
Elliott Dawson	died 1774
John Alsop	died 1774
Thomas Brown	died 1776
Thomas Estlin	died 1776
John Parsons	died 1778

One, however, has only to look at parish registers, the trade directories, inventories, wills and census returns to realise the huge number of hosiers and manufacturers who came and went before and after the transition to factory production. Unfortunately, however, unlike the Atkins they did not leave any documentation of their family business.

Atkins – from framework knitting to factory production

Atkins Brothers, because they have left documentation of their family and business history, can be used as an example of how a business adapted and expanded from a cottage based industry to a steam powered factory from the 1860s. The following extracts are taken from the *Atkins of Hinckley* commemorative brochure written and published in 1972 to celebrate 200 years of business. The family which included John and Elizabeth Atkins and their five sons, John, Thomas, George, Hugh and Arthur, lived in a double fronted house on Lower Bond Street and similar to other hosiers their warehouse was situated in the back garden of the property.⁶³ This is where yarns and finished hose were stored and where business transactions and wages were dealt with.⁶⁴ Mending had also been an activity which had been carried out in the numerous warehouses dotted around the town and according to P. Head, the women and girls who worked in such places were from

⁶³ John Atkins, Bond Street is noted in *Slater's National Directory* in 1850 along with other Hinckley hosiers including: Thos. Abel, Castle Street, Henry Berridge, Castle Street, James Burdett, Priory Row, Thos. Flavell, Castle Street, William Lee, Church Street, Thos. Murcotte, Castle Street, Thos. Payne, Castle Street, Wm. Sills, Upper Bond Street, Geo. Woodcock, Castle Street, Wm. Wykes, Church Lane. See Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 51.

⁶⁴Head, 'Industrial Organisation', p. 119; The *Hinckley Journal* related how a workman digging a well for the warehouse fell in but was apparently unhurt. *Hinckley Journal*, February 1859.

better-off families and in many instances well educated.⁶⁵ Business for the Atkins family must have been prosperous because in 1875, Joseph Goddard the Leicester architect, was commissioned to design a very substantial two storey building.⁶⁶ This newly built factory fronted Lower Bond Street and stood adjacent to the family home. In 1877 John and William Harrold, local builders, invoiced Atkins Brothers for the sum of £4836.13.6d for, ‘the Erection of New Warehouses and Premises at Hinckley in the County of Leicester’.⁶⁷ The factory was continually extended over the years and in 1886 a communication was received from an ‘Observer’ criticising the laziness of the workers: ‘It would pay you to look after your men who are at work on Mr. Atkins Roof. I never saw such idle men in my life they waste half their time’.⁶⁸ In 1887 at the age of 17 Clive Ernest Atkins began his working life for the family firm and as recorded by his son, John Spencer Atkins, ‘When he joined the firm the number of workpeople employed was about three hundred, when he died in 1953, the number exceeded 1,250’.⁶⁹ Clive Ernest Atkins had seen the original factory being built and extensively extended over the years and in 1910 a third floor was added to the two storey factory. John Spencer Atkins at the age of five remembers being ‘allowed to go up to the top room of the Bond Street block (no. 4) which was just being added as an extension; it was a wonderful room in which to learn to ride a bicycle where you could fall off and not get hurt much!’.⁷⁰ Indeed by examining Planning Office registers one can note the changes which were taking place, not only at Atkins factory but many of the factories which had been established from the late nineteenth century.⁷¹

The continual building and extension work to factories in the town reflected not only the growing prosperity and demand for stockings and other types of knitwear but also the need to keep adapting to changes in fashion. This frequently necessitated the need to build new rooms to house, for instance, a set of seamless circular knitting machines or a set

⁶⁵ Gurnham, *Trade Union Movement*, p. 47. He states that menders earned ‘substantially higher wages than the seamers and stitchers – usually about 10s. or 12s. per week, p. 47; Head, ‘Industrial Organisation’, p. 119.

⁶⁶ G. Brandwood and M. Cherry, *Men of Property. The Goddards and Six Generations of Architecture*. (Leicester 1990), p. 110. Joseph Goddard was also commissioned to design Samuel Davis’s factory on New Buildings in the same year. This building was demolished in 1988 and incorporated Ebenezer Chapel.

⁶⁷ *Atkins*, p. 8.

⁶⁸ *Atkins*, Postcard from an ‘observer’ referring to 1886 front main building, p. 18.

⁶⁹ *Atkins*, p. 22.

⁷⁰ *Atkins*, p. 23.

⁷¹ *Planning Office Registers*. Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council Offices.

of fully fashioned knitting machines and the information given in the Atkins commemorative brochure does highlight the changes which were taking place and the way in which the company met the continual changes and demands in fashion. In 1925 Clive Ernest Atkins went ahead with building a three storey spacious building for seamless hose machinery. This building was situated over the boiler and engine house and 'has proved to be a wonderful block and is still the seamless block today'.⁷² It has also been recorded that round about 1930 a 'substantial number of 300 needle Model "K" Machines were purchased through the firm of George Blackburn & Son for £158 each – considered in those days to be a high price'.⁷³ Because of their continuing success, land was purchased in 1928 on Regent Street, and in 1930 a one-storey factory was built above an arcade of shops 'Which was to hold the interlock machines and be the warehouse for men's and boys' High Cross Underwear'. This factory was further extended into a two storey building in 1935.⁷⁴

Further extensions also continued at the original factory on Lower Bond Street and during the years, 1933 and 1962, the 'progress of the fully fashioned department shows wonderful development 'reflecting the demand for fully fashioned hose, underwear and outerwear'. Thus 'plans went ahead with the Architects Messrs. Goddard, Symington & Pike, with the idea of building a new and completely up-to-date factory to house fully fashioned hose machines on the Druid Street side'. This extension consisted of a two storey building which was to house a modern plant of Cotton's Patent fully fashioned machines and 'what wonderful rooms they were, and in fact still are today, but of course not making fully fashioned stockings'.⁷⁵ The 'cost of 42 and 45 gauge machines purchased from Wm. Cotton Ltd during 1935 and 1936 was about £2000' each.⁷⁶ Owing to a great demand for fully fashioned hose in pure silk, rayon mixture and lisle, however, 'the Architects Goddard, Symington & Pike were again approached in 1939 and asked to get out plans for a further extension to house a batch of between 24 and 30 fully fashioned

⁷² *Atkins*, p. 24.

⁷³ *Atkins*, p. 25.

⁷⁴ *Atkins*, pp. 24-27.

⁷⁵ *Atkins*, p. 24.

⁷⁶ *Atkins*, p. 27.

machines. These machines, because of the difficulty in obtaining either German or English machines, were the first 245 gauge, 26 at once Reading machines from America'.⁷⁷

While demand for both fully fashioned and seamless hose expanded, Atkins similar to other companies, met the demand by extending its premises and introducing new machinery. The Druid Street fully fashioned block plus a canteen were completed following the cessation of war in 1945, and 'fully fashioned Reading 100 machines were imported and installed on the new Druid Street site with further extensions in 1949 and 1951. In 1954 because of the continuing demand for fully fashioned stockings a further extension was built on the Druid Street side'.⁷⁸



Fig.6. Hinckley 1938. It has been estimated by Bill Partridge that there were 99 hosiery factories in the town in 1939 (Leicestershire Records Office XL11.NE 6" to 1 mile)

⁷⁷ *Atkins*, p. 27.

⁷⁸ *Atkins*, pp. 28,29, 30, 31.

The whims of fashion 'They'll never cut out fully fashioned seaming'

The Hinckley industry was based on the more basic needs of society and stockings, half-hose and underwear were the main garments being manufactured. However, fashion decreed that stockings become more of a fashion item as skirts and dress lengths rose during the 1920s and Hinckley's prosperity became based on circular seamless stockings.⁷⁹ Trials were carried out by Courtaulds at William Puffer's factory on Druid Street to dye the new yarn known as rayon or artificial silk.⁸⁰ It was this yarn along with silk which could be seen to have revolutionized the industry in the years between the two World Wars and output of rayon increased. Silk was still very much a high quality yarn and more expensive than the newly invented rayon, hence the reason for the demand for artificial silk stockings along with the more basic stockings knitted in cotton and lisle. Companies were reaping the benefits in the demand for ladies stockings. Lisle, art deco, silk, cotton, woollen, and cashmere stockings were being manufactured alongside boys and men's half-hose. Larger companies diversified into a number of branches with different departments producing different types of stockings and socks which included the more expensive and more up-market fully fashioned silk stockings while other companies specialised in underwear and outerwear. When *The Cradle and Home of the Hosiery Trade. 1640 to 1940* was written by A.J. Pickering, local hosiery and knitwear companies were invited to advertise their goods thus highlighting the diversity of garments being made locally. It also brings one's attention to the large number of factories that had been established in the town, and the following gives examples of a number of the factories (refer to Figure 6 for an indication of the density of the centre of the town, in 1938, which was largely due to the expansion of the hosiery industry):

A. Bradbury Ltd. Of Earl Shilton were Manufacturers of Ladies' Fine Gauge Pure Silk Hose, Rayon Hose, Plated Hose, Lisle Hose, Over-Sox, Men's Hose, Half Hose, Boys' Fancy T.O.T Hose.

A. Davenport & Sons Manufacturers of Boys' and Girls T.O.T., Hose and Gym Hose, Men's Plain and Ribbed Half-Hose, fine and coarse Ladies' Hose: Cashmere, Cotton, Art Silk and Mercerised.

⁷⁹ Gurnham, *Trade Union*, p. 100.

⁸⁰ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p. 41. Pickering writes 'I have the authority of Mr. W. Puffer for stating that the first pair of artificial silk stockings produced in this country were made in Hinckley. This was in 1911-12.

James Bennett Ltd. Manufacturers of 'Art. Silk Ladies' Interlock and Fine Rib Underwear'.
Samuel Davis & Sons Ltd. Manufacturers of Underwear and Outerwear in Men's, Women's and Children's in all Weights and Gauges. Ribbed, Plain and Purl.
H. Flude & Co. Ltd. Manufacturers of Full Fashioned and Seamless Hosiery.
A. Harding of Burbage Hinckley. Manufacturers of Ladies Slim-fitting Vests and Pattee Sets in Fancy Patterns & Design.
The Iway Hosiery Co. Ltd. Manufacturers of Stockings of Elegance and Distinction and advertised their "Sheer as Silk Chiffons which were a speciality in Rayon & Lisle Hose".
Manchester Hosiery Manufacturing Co. Ltd. Manufacturers of Cotton, Cotton and Wool Plated, Wool and Merino Underwear, Circular Interlock and Full Fashioned Boys' and Men's Underwear, Shorts and Pants, Athletic Vests and Trunks, Ladies' Artificial Silk Hose, Interlock Vests and Combs, R.S.U. Fancy Vests and Patees in Cotton, Art Silk and Wool.
W.T. Parsons Limited. Manufacturers of Gent's Half Hose (Plain and Ribbed) and a speciality was an All Wool Half Hose made from the finest Botany Wool, which was described as two-fold and spliced to give extra long life. Made in all the latest colours. The Sock for discerning Men.⁸¹

Indeed, because of the demand for fully fashioned stockings, circular hose were given mock seams and other embellishments to make them look as much like the real thing as possible and of course for less cost. However, as with all fashion, the craze for fully fashioned stockings began to wane from the mid to late 1950s and the circular seamless stockings began to become more popular owing to the 'bare leg look' of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The circular hose knitting machine which had always been seen as inferior to the fully fashioned knitting machines were now predominant and the fully fashioned knitting machines were made redundant along with quite a number of fully fashioned knitters.⁸² The 'bare leg' look, which had initiated the demise in the fully fashioned industry, was to last a number of years. With the introduction of the mini-skirt in the mid 1960s the circular knit stocking gave way to the invention of tights, a necessity, as skirt lengths got shorter and shorter. The sale of stockings took a nose dive and tights made on circular knitting machines went from strength to strength. Many fully fashioned knitting machines were made obsolete; others were used in the production of women and children's underwear. Changes in fashion did not only affect knitters and Maureen Smart was able to highlight the need for female operatives to be able to change and adapt to new ways of

⁸¹ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*. The above is just a small example of companies and the goods they manufactured. In all fifty-five companies, the majority based in Hinckley, not only advertised their goods but also showed photographs of the factory building, and the different people involved in the many and varied jobs.

⁸² *Atkins*, p. 33.

working. She began her working life at Ridley, Spriggs and Johnson in 1944 as a fully fashioned side linker where she stayed for two years:

And then the machines advanced and they cut out...they were cutting out side-linking and making round heels so I thought at the time “Well if they are cutting side-linking out they’ll gradually in time cut out toe-linking” and I thought, “They’ll never cut out fully fashioned seaming, there’ll always be fully fashioned stockings”- foolish! And I worked from cotton, lisle, rayon, pure silk and then gradually into nylon and through the different deniers of nylon.

The last twenty-odd years of her working life Maureen spent as a tights overlocker.⁸³

The type of yarns being used also played a major part in the fashion industry. Rayon or artificial silk, as it was often referred to, took the place of wool and other cotton yarns and it was the rayon hose to which the town’s wealth can be attributed and the most desired yarn during the inter-war years. As rayon stockings had become immensely popular and desirable between the two wars, so nylon became an even more desirable commodity and ‘was the most perfect knitting yarn then devised due to its versatility.’⁸⁴ Nylon had first appeared before the Second World War but it was not until peace time that its true potential began to be realised. Initially only small amounts of nylon were allowed to each company and firms would do anything to get hold of this new revolutionary fibre. As the mid 1940s gave way to the 1950s nylon became more abundant and it became the main yarn used in the production of both fully fashioned and circular hose. Nylon stockings became the embodiment of perfection, everyone wanted them. Joan Pegg remembers how they used to queue up for their pair of nylons. They had been making them at Toon’s where she worked but were not allowed to have any from the factory. The drapery shop across the road from the factory stocked them and the girls were allowed to buy just one pair from this one outlet.⁸⁵ A shop assistant working at Fenwicks department store in Leicester remembers the queues for fully fashioned nylon stockings – everyone wanted a pair. At this time in the 1950s stockings were kept boxed, each pair was wrapped

⁸³ Maureen Smart. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁸⁴ *Atkins*

⁸⁵ Joan Pegg. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

in tissue or cellophane and one asked for a particular size, no small, medium or large in those days. Stockings and socks were made in half sizes for a perfect fit.



Plate 2. Advertising fully-fashioned stockings, Flude Hosiery.
(Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

Advertising, Warehouses and Chain stores

Advertising also began to play a much bigger part in the selling of the various manufactured commodities. Bennett Brothers became known by their brand name of Tudorose for fully fashioned stockings. Mr. and Mrs. Percy while on honeymoon in London in the late 1940s were surprised and excited to find a shop window full of Tudorose stockings.⁸⁶ Miss Goode while working in London was also surprised to see fully fashioned stockings emblazoned across bill boards on the London underground during the early 1960s.⁸⁷ Atkins adopted the brand name of Highcross and this became synonymous with high quality for boys' and men's underwear and Lucky Charm became synonymous with the stockings made at their factory. Flude's made stockings with the brand name of Dorothy Vernon. This name they acquired from Simpkin, Son and Emery when they went

⁸⁶ Jim and Joan Percy. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. They both worked for Bennett Brothers, Jim as a knitter and Joan as a mender. F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry. Its History and Organisation* (1935, Newton Abbot, 1972 edn), p. 191

⁸⁷ Muriel Goode. Written information.

into liquidation during the 1950s. Nicholls and Wileman used the brand name of Dignity. All these names, and there were many more besides, evoked luxury and romance and were a far cry from the often dingy, overcrowded and noisy factories in which they were manufactured.⁸⁸ The photograph, Plate 2, helps to portray the glamour and sophistication of owning a pair of these sought after stockings. According to Sidney Bennett, who dealt with the marketing for the family business, explained that, 'Manufacturers' brands in those days were confined to very large manufacturers and they would have their own reps in competition with the army of travellers employed by wholesalers'.⁸⁹ The most important and most lucrative way of doing business, however, was by dealing with the wholesale warehouses which up until the 1950s were the 'major players' in the distribution of stockings and other textiles and their 'buying power was awesome'.⁹⁰ It was the wholesale warehouse which would deal directly with factories in the town and would distribute socks, stockings and other garments to the numerous drapery shops, men's outfitters and other outlets which began to proliferate during the nineteenth century in towns and cities up and down the country. As discussed by J.S. Atkins:

From an old book dated 1802 it would appear that in the early days we traded with a great number of small distributors. These no doubt developed, and in the latter half of the 19th century became leading Wholesale houses, so that at the turn of the [twentieth] century our trade was carried out with Manufacturing Wholesalers, Wholesale Warehouses and Shipping Houses.⁹¹

⁸⁸ M. Roberts, *A Glimpse of Stocking*, (Hinckley 1999), p. 46. Dorothy Vernon, for instance, was a young woman who eloped with her lover, disguised as a forester on the occasion of her sister's wedding in 1563. Their marriage was happy and they had four children; Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 191.

⁸⁹ S. J. Bennett. Letter. More detailed information under Letters and written information from respondents and others' under List of Sources. Sidney Bennett was the grandson of one of the founders of Bennett Brothers, Southfield Road. Doreen Marvin's father, Hubert Sansome, had worked as a commercial traveller for Bennett Brothers, as well as being a counterman and they often had 'Travellers' staying at their house on Springfield Road in Hinckley. Doreen Marvin, *Memories*.

⁹⁰ S. J. Bennett. Letter; S.D. Chapman gives a good account of the power of the warehouses and their demise in S. Chapman, 'Marketing and distribution: How today's system evolved', *Four Centuries of Machine Knitting. Commemorating William Lee's Invention of the Stocking Frame in 1589*, J. Millington & S. Chapman (Ed.), 1989, pp. 32-37; Well, *Hosiery and Industry*, p.193.

⁹¹ *Atkins*, pp. 32-33. Between 1857 and 1861 some of the firms Atkins were dealing with are as follows Foster Porter, Corah & Sons, W. B. Hine Parker & Co., I & R. Morely. Samuel & James Watts, J. H. Rylands & Sons. See *Atkins*, p. 4.

These warehouses then, similar to those which had existed in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth century, were able to keep abreast of the latest fashions and it was they who dictated colours, quantity and style of a particular garment.

The warehouses, it would appear, also dictated the cost at which articles were bought and sold and correspondence between Ginns, Son and Moore during 1895 perhaps gives some indication of the relationship between the distributors and the factories supplying the goods. In early February 1895 Flerheim & Co. were very much bothered about prices:

Please quote lowest prices for all weights of garter hose - especially 2.0, 2.4, 2.8, & 3.4 on which weights the order would probably run. We have a buyer here tomorrow so don't fail to quote by return & quote low or you will miss a good order'. Correspondence received on the 19th February, 1895 also emphasised the need to keep prices down, 'If the prices quoted on the 15th ins. are your lowest nothing further can be done. A little inducement might enable our Customers to give out the order but our margin is so small we cannot reduce or would do so to secure the order'.

Other correspondence also reflected the continual need to keep costs down:

We have an enquiry for 1/2 Hose 100 dzs No.8=50 dzs 18m & 100 dzs All Navy quality of 18m Please let us have your present lowest prices per return of post - How soon could you deliver'. Correspondence also highlighted the need for the company to send samples of their work, 'Samples to hand for which we thank you. Will send you our very best offer by tomorrow Thursday night's Post'.

R.D. Warburg & Co., Nottingham, however, wrote to complain, 'Another day & no sample of your Hose whatever. [What] are you doing with these samples its really too bad, they must come at once'.⁹²

The influence of the warehouse, however, began to waiver and by 1946, dealings with the warehouses had been reduced to just fifty percent.⁹³ Chain stores such as Marks and Spencer, Woolworth, British Home Stores and Littlewoods took over from the warehouses and the early to mid 1960s it was these shops which began to increase in number in the

⁹² Brian Moore. Memories. He has all the original correspondence between various distributors and the company for 1895. All correspondence was written on postcards and some correspondence was received the same day it was sent.

⁹³ Chapman, 'Marketing and distribution, p. 34.

town and city centres, and in turn led to the demise of the drapery shops. Chain stores began to dictate fashion, style, size, yarns and cost and wholesale warehouses had all but disappeared. During the heyday of the warehouse, however, and because of the power which they yielded in the market place it was 'frowned on' if a company had dealings with a particular chain store. During the 'latter part of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century the great "home trade" houses situated in places such as London, Manchester and Glasgow handled 90 per cent of all the hosiery and knitwear produced in the UK'.⁹⁴ According to Sidney Bennett it was like, 'hunting with the hare and running with the hounds'.⁹⁵ In fact a warehouse because of its power could destroy a manufacturer's business just by ceasing to buy its goods because it had attempted to sell by any other means other than through the wholesale warehouse. Charles Davenport also commented on the fact that because of the warehouse's monopoly it was 'a bit cloak and dagger' to produce work for both chain stores and the warehouses.⁹⁶

However, it would seem that many companies were actually involved in producing their own brands, selling to warehouses and when the opportunity arose selling directly to the newly emerging chain stores such as F.W. Woolworth and Marks and Spencer. Charles Davenport's father, Arthur Davenport, had met F.W. Woolworth off the boat in Liverpool with samples of men's socks which had been made at the Hinckley factory. This was in 1912 when there were only five Woolworth stores in the country and this business relationship between Woolworth and Davenport's continued up until the demise of A. Davenport and Son in the 1970s.⁹⁷ Michael Smith while relating the early years of Tom Smith and Son Limited mentioned a meeting between his father and grandfather which came about, 'out of the blue', between, 'a man who knew Lord Marks...when he'd still got the Penny Bazaar'. From this accidental meeting a 'tremendous relationship' was stuck up and the company 'manufactured non stop for Marks and Spencer from approximately

⁹⁴ Chapman, 'Marketing and distribution', p. 33.

⁹⁵ S. J. Bennett. Letter. Several departmental and variety chain stores are known to have dealt directly with their respective producers but it was not until Marks & Spencer took the initiative in the 1920s that the warehousemen's control was openly challenged and their control very gradually superseded. See Chapman, 'Marketing and distribution', p. 33.

⁹⁶ Charles Davenport. Memories.

⁹⁷ Charles Davenport. Memories.

1923/4 to 1967'. Tom Smith had originally set up on his own as a ribbon weaver but when his son came back from serving in the First World War very little business was being carried out and it was not until the very early 1920s that father and son went to Blackburn's in Nottingham and bought 80 B5 knitting machines and began manufacturing ladies cotton stockings. These stockings, as was the norm, were sold to warehouses all over the country and each day 'there were so many parcels to go out to so many places'.⁹⁸

Dealings with Marks and Spencer was very beneficial and the company prospered because of their position with this well respected and very influential retail business and it would appear that Marks and Spencer paid particular attention to their long serving suppliers.⁹⁹ The Argee in Earl Shilton was owned by two brothers and had relocated to Earl Shilton from the East End of London during the first months of the Second World War and most of their workers had relocated with them so that continuity of work and work processes were not affected.¹⁰⁰ They began to manufacture exclusively for Marks and Spencer during the 1950s and specialised in ladies underwear which continued up to the early 1990s. Nicholls and Wileman, also did work for Marks and Spencer manufacturing ladies stockings and subsequently tights. All factories expected good quality workmanship from their workers but some factories appeared to be far stricter than others and Margaret for instance much preferred the easy going nature of Minard's to that of Nicholls and Wileman.¹⁰¹ Mrs. Clowe went to work at Davenport's after World War Two because of a general lack of work in the hosiery at this time, a place she would never have dreamt of working at when she first started her working life as a young girl of fourteen. It was known as being very strict. Mrs. Clowe commenting that although the women she worked with were older she really enjoyed working with them, 'we all got on lovely together till Arthur

⁹⁸ Michael Smith. Memories; Marks and Spencer in order to maintain their supplies appointed 'a secret agent in Leicester (Leslie Hinmer of Turk Smith Ltd) who negotiated coded deals with important W.T.A. - recognised firms such as Wolsey, Pool Lorrimer and Tabberer and Foister and Clay and Ward'. See Chapman,, 'Marketing and distribution' p. 34.

⁹⁹ Chapman, 'Marketing and distribution', p. 36

¹⁰⁰ The Argee. Information from recorded interviews with various respondents including Harold Cash, Mr. Massey and the O'Rourke sisters. For more detailed information see Working Life Histories of Respondents.

¹⁰¹ Norah Skeffington, Arthur Amos, Roy and Sylvia Bonser, Peter Haywood – these are few respondents who worked at Nicholls and Wileman. It must be added that all companies expected high standards from their workforce but some companies were more relaxed than others. For more detailed information see Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

come round. You daren't have anything on your counter other than your work. You daren't put anything on, say a little personal thing, he'd say "take that off." She also explained, 'we had hand brushes, we had to sweep the counters with them. We were in socks and we were dress mending them and turning them over. I suppose there were a lot of fluff come off and you used to have a different hand brush for a different colour. When I think of it now it were really funny'.¹⁰²

The dominance which the wholesale warehouses had exerted could now be seen to be reflected in the behaviour of the big chain stores and it was they who began to dictate fashion, style, size, yarns and prices. In particular Marks and Spencer had by the 1970s, 60 or 70 factories supplying them with goods.¹⁰³ In 1967 Tom Smith and Son, however, decided to cease trading with this company. As a family business they felt their position was too precarious and that they 'should try to look for anything that was different in order that we avoided the main stream of mass production' and so as a result of marketing and subsequent meetings they eventually began work for Scholl, a company which specialised in medical hose and footwear.¹⁰⁴ This they did by investing in new machinery which could knit this type of hose, and alongside knitting specialised medical hose and footwear, they used existing machinery to supply Woolworths and other retailers. Similar to other manufacturers they continued to visit exhibitions not only in the UK but on the continent in order that they keep up to date with latest trends in fashion and machinery.¹⁰⁵

Indeed because of intense competition many local manufacturers sought to find a niche in the market, finding it more beneficial to produce for more than one chain store. T. Jennings, for instance, manufactured tights for the bigger lady – up to 50 inch hips for

¹⁰² Mrs. Clowe. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; R. Mckibben, *Classes and Cultures*. England 1918-1951 (Oxford, 1998).

¹⁰³ Chapman, 'Marketing and distribution', p. 36;

¹⁰⁴ Michael Smith. Memories; According to Chapman small firms were more vulnerable to volatile movements of fashion and could be left with unsold stock. See Chapman, 'Marketing and distribution', p. 36.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Smith. Memories. The reason for selling out to Scholl was the death of Tom Smith in 1968. It was felt by the family that they would stand a far better chance of surviving in the market place by becoming part of Scholl. They felt they would secure not only their future but also that of their employees. They began manufacturing for Scholl in 1968 and in 1973 Tom Smith and Son sold out to Scholl for whom they continued to manufacture 'in a very special world'; One possible danger of becoming unduly dependent on one big buyer, however, could result in monopoly exploitation, especially when a manufacturer has lost his other trade contacts. See Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 190.

which specialised machinery was needed. Davenport Knitwear since their establishment in 1956 had been involved in fully fashioned knitwear supplying catalogues, Littlewoods, British Home Stores and also supermarket chains such as George at Asda's. Similarly James Bennett and Sons manufactured their cut and sew garments for a variety of shops including the usual chain stores and supermarkets but also fashion outlets such as Dorothy Perkins and Topshop. James Bennett originally founded the company manufacturing underwear – men and women's combinations which were worn by all classes of society in the first thirty to forty years of the twentieth century. During the 1960s, however, they decided to cease manufacturing underwear and to diversify into the cut and sew section of the textile industry. One respondent commented on how she had worked at Jimmy Bennett's all her working life but did not want to change her style of work. She was used to working with underwear, she was a flatlocker, a highly skilled job which required much concentration and so she went to work at Manchester Hosiery.¹⁰⁶



Plate 3. Harold Cash at work on the Mellor Bromley '4-at-once', during the early 1960s. Bird and Yeoman, Hinckley Road, Earl Shilton. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

¹⁰⁶ Betty Knights. Recorded memories . More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Betty retired from Manchester Hosiery when she was in her 70s.

Over the years both manufacturers and their workers have had to adapt and learn new ways of working in an extremely competitive industry, employees often having had to move from one factory to another in order that they were able to continue working in the 'hosiery'. The following extract helps to highlight the situation which many operatives found themselves in, 'it's been fun working in the hosiery. I've come from fully-fashioned to circular to knitwear, gloves and socks – I went through the whole industry and finished on the sewing machines'. Harold Cash started his working life at Moore and Osborne's at the age of 14 in 1942 as an apprentice to the countermen, which he hated, he left there and went to learn the fully fashioned knitting at Atkins.¹⁰⁷ After four years he did his National Service and although his job was kept open for him he didn't 'fancy it'. 'The manager, he used to sit on a big dias above all the workers, and he could look right down the factory floor...they were that strict in those days'. So he got himself a job at Moore, Eady and Murcotte Goode in Burbage on the circular knitting machines. From there they brought the machines to the Hinckley branch on Stockwell Head. Within two years, however, Harold was looking for another job which he got working at Percy Beasley's as a fully fashioned knitter on the Mellor Bromley 4-at-once machines.¹⁰⁸ While working at Beasley's he was stopped by the 'MD' of Bird and Yeoman and asked if he would go and work for them on the newly installed Mellor Bromley's, which he did and Plate 3 shows him at work on a Mellor Bromley '4-at once' fully fashioned knitting machine. After working for this company for a while, 'fully fashioned went out of business and we set the men up on B5s' and shortly after this Harold was looking for work again, Bird and Yeoman having also gone out of business.¹⁰⁹ 'A lot of the lads had started to go down to what was called Fine Jersey. I started there as a shift supervisor and after 12 months [I was] asked if I'd like to go on the mechanicking on the circular machinery making fabric...it was a nice job, lots of young chappies.

¹⁰⁷ Moore and Osborne, Druid Street, Hinckley. The factory has now been converted to apartments. The 'art deco' frontage having been preserved. Atkins original factory building designed by Goddard has been preserved and has been bought by North Warwickshire and Hinckley College.

¹⁰⁸ Moore, Eady and Murcote Goode was converted to a theatre in the 1960s and the area where they installed the Mellor Bromley's is now The Stage Door Restaurant.

¹⁰⁹ The factory where Bird and Yeoman operated from on Hinckley Road, Earl Shilton is now a private housing estate. It was originally a Boot and Shoe factory.

I was there 25 years when it closed'.¹¹⁰ From there Harold went up to LMS Knitwear on West Street, Earl Shilton where they knitted socks, leg warmers, gloves and fabric. After about a year Harold was out of work again due to a fire which destroyed the factory and he applied for a job as a sewing machine mechanic at the Argee. Sewing machines were thought of as being far more complicated machinery to repair than knitting machines and Harold was questioned quite intensely by the manager who interviewed him for the position. He doubted Harold's ability to do the job but he was given the chance to prove himself:

what have you done?...all the mechaniking jobs I've done and the electrical courses etc I've been on in Germany. 'Oh', he said, 'this is far more intricate job than that', he says. 'I don't think so'. Harold then made a bargain with the manager, 'Give me a month and if I'm no good boot me out of that door'. After the month was up the manager was very complimentary and offered Harold a permanent job along with a pay rise, 'We are amazed, we didn't think you'd take to it like this. Here's a rise and you'll have another one at Christmas'.

Within a couple of months Harold was made head mechanic and had proved himself capable of the job required and he remained at the Argee until his retirement in 1990.¹¹¹

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the changes which needed to take place in order that the hosiery and knitwear industry remained competitive. Steam driven factory production was imperative in order to compete with overseas markets and with increasing technology more people were needed to work in the factories particularly female workers who were employed on the finishing tasks. By talking to third and fourth generation manufacturers it has been possible to discuss the factories being set up by grandfathers and great grandfathers, who had started their working lives in the early years of the transition from domestic industry to powered factory production. It has also been possible to discuss the changes which took place – the continual development of new machinery in order to keep abreast of new fashions which in turn necessitated the building of extensions to house the

¹¹⁰ Fine Jersey, Hurst Road, Earl Shilton had originally been William Cotton's Boot and Shoe factory. It had also been occupied by Nicholls and Wileman. The factory has now been demolished and a small private housing estate, Cotton Mews, has been built in its place.

¹¹¹ Harold Cash. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

most up to date machinery. What has also been shown is the adaptability of the workforce – the almost constant need to be able to change their way of working as demanded by the ‘whims of fashion’. The power of the warehouses and subsequently the power of the chain stores have also been discussed and highlight the dynamism and intensity of the hosiery industry and its constant need to be innovative and adapt to the changing needs of society.

Despite the massive technological and industrial changes, the continuity of family involvement persisted and in the next chapter respondents’ testimony becomes crucial to an appreciation of the influence of the hosiery industry on people’s lives.

Chapter 5

Factory Life: Lives of Respondents in and Around the Factory, 1920 to 2000

This chapter portrays the continuity of family involvement in the hosiery industry. The voices of respondents are extremely important in the piecing together of the background to the work being undertaken. Indeed continuity of family involvement in the local industry from one generation to the next has been highlighted time and again by respondents. Parents and grandparents lives have been discussed – where they came from, the type of jobs they did. Respondents have discussed their own childhoods and the jobs they were expected to do before starting full time paid employment; their introductions into the industry and of their parents' influence on the type of work they should do. The first day at work and the feelings respondents experienced have also been discussed and thus adds depth to the work undertaken. The above has been achieved by focusing on discussions, oral history interviews, written accounts and completed questionnaires and covers the twentieth century. Those who have participated have ranged from managing directors, supervisors, welters, overlockers, flatlockers, linkers, knitters, mechanics, folders, baggers, countermen, union officials and manufacturing association representatives.

It has been possible to create an intimate picture of the local community from the early twentieth century to the present day from the memories of the 100 or so people who have volunteered information. These people have drawn on recollections of their own experiences, and the lives of parents and grandparents, and have thus contributed to a vivid picture of a local community, not only of 'the factory' but also a social background to a community which was dominated by the 'hosiery'. For instance, Joan Pegg's grandfather worked as a stoker at Bradbury's in Earl Shilton, just round the corner from where the family lived, 'And people who worked at Bradbury's used to go down to grandma's for

their hot water to mash their teas'.¹ This apparently inconsequential comment is one of many which give an indication of the communal significance and involvement of the local people in the hosiery and such recollections should not be ignored. By compiling an oral archive, life in all its diversity is made visible, and a fullness of life which would not otherwise be recorded. The comings and goings of ordinary working people are made accessible by using the medium of a tape recorder. As stated by Stephen Humphries, 'Oral history draws upon the memories of people whose experiences have often been neglected and excluded from history books'.²

The family economy

'We were always having to better ourselves'

Connie's father was a trimmer and worked for Cartwright's in Loughborough. He was a devoted union man and was very proud of the fact that he tried help his fellow workers attain better money and working conditions. In most instances it would seem that life was still pretty tough for the majority of working families. The need for children to begin work as soon as they possibly could, was the norm and as discussed by Selina Todd, 'young wage-earners contributions to the family economy continued to constitute a large proportion of household income between 1918 and 1950'.³ Connie who started work in 1921, commented on the fact that she and her brothers and sisters were always having to better themselves, 'Mother depended on the money we could earn and she was always telling us to ask for more money'.⁴ Ray who started work in the early 1930s as an apprentice counterman was encouraged by his mother to change occupation as well as factory because of the difference in wages he could bring home:

From Simpkin Son and Emery I went to Hood and Masons in the Trim Shop where they used to pull stockings on boards. I was known as a "legger". You had to join the union to get a job in there but the pay rates were so much better. I went onto

¹ Joan and Worrall Pegg. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

² S. Humphries, *The Handbook of Oral History. Recording Life Stories* (London 1984), p. ix

³ S. Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918-1950* (Oxford, 2005), p. 210.

⁴ Connie Smith. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Connie was brought up in Loughborough and lived and worked in Leicester after her marriage.

about 15s.a week there as opposed to, I think it was, 7s. 9d. at Simpkin Son and Emery as a trainee warehouse boy.⁵

Doreen's mother had met with much disapproval when she decided to get married at the age of 24. She had worked at Moore, Eady and Murcott, Goode from the age of 13 in 1910 and had become a foremisses. Her weekly wage had been extremely important addition to the family economy and would be severely missed. Indeed this dependency on the wages brought home by working children could greatly affect the living conditions of the family. Doreen remembers her mother telling her how her father (Doreen's grandfather) had suffered an accident which had left him incapable of work and thus the wages brought home by her children were essential to the well being of the family.⁶ A number of respondents have also recalled instances of ill health and early death of fathers owing to poverty stricken childhoods or through being gassed or wounded during the First World War or even the Boer war. One respondent whose parents had parted and subsequently divorced, lived in a particularly deprived home, and was often absent from school because of the many chores which she was required to do. These included visiting the pawn shop on a regular basis with various items of clothing. She was also expected to scour the local shops for bargains and became a well known figure in the town as she was seen with a big old fashioned pram which was used for all her purchases.⁷

Indeed the dependency on a child's employment did not begin when he or she started work but was something which was encouraged from quite an early age. Connie, for instance, as a young girl, looked after a woman with arthritis and would carry out certain chores before going to school and then other chores after school. She told of how her father born in the 1880s had had a very poor childhood often going bare foot which in later life resulted in ill health and his early death at the age of 37 when Connie was just nine

⁵ Mr. and Mrs. Ray Bateman. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; ...'you hadn't got any choice, duck, we'd no choice because we'd got to go for the biggest penny in the pot'.- J. Sarsby discusses the need for young wage earners to move form one job to another in order to earn more money. See J. Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Home and at Work* (Milton Keynes, 1988), pp. 58-59.

⁶ Doreen Marvin. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1

⁷ Kathleen Dean. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

years old.⁸ David Fowler also brings one's attention to the fact that many young girls and boys did indeed begin earning wages before they officially left school at the age of 14.⁹ The money earned by these children before they started work was essential to the family economy and their help in the home with younger brothers and sisters, running errands, earning money by looking after elderly relations or neighbours was indispensable.¹⁰

It is impossible for us in the early twenty-first century to imagine how these people managed, they had no recourse to social security or dole money. If the husband earned a small wage or was employed in seasonal work, was ill or enjoyed a drink and a smoke, there could be a severe effect on the family. In the early years of the twentieth century the workhouse or the 'Bastille' as it was more commonly known was still very much a place of shame and degradation. One respondent told of how at the age of 12, in 1932, she was admitted to the workhouse and spent fifteen months as an inmate. All her personal belongings were taken away, her hair was cut and she had no choice but to wear the workhouse uniform¹¹ Many families would have resorted to handouts from various charities which were still in evidence at this time. Connie for instance remembers the boots she was given every year.¹² Joe remembers with pride his green suit given to him by the trustees of the Alderman Newton Charity. At certain times of the year the boys who were given the suits were required to parade around the village visiting the various dignitaries such as the local JP and manufacturers. In order to receive this suit, however, the recipient and his family had to be members of the Church of England and attend church on a regular basis.¹³

⁸ Connie Smith. Memories.

⁹ D. Fowler, *The First Teenagers. The Lifestyle of Young Wage-Earners in Interwar Britain* (London, 1995), p. 18.

¹⁰ A. Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870-1914* (London, 1996). She discusses the dependency of working class families on the work their children did and their reliance on help with domestic chores, running errands – in fact, anything and everything that was of help to 'mother'. Chapter 10, pp.175-197.

¹¹ Kathleen Dean. Memories. Davin, *Growing Up Poor*, states that 'Children's load always increased in poverty and crisis', p. 180. J. Sarsby brings one's attention to the ill health of respondents' husbands – men who had worked in the local pits and died of pneumoconiosis, for instance. See J. Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Home and at Work* (Milton Keynes, 1988). p. 102; E. Roberts, *Women's Work, 1840-1940* (Oxford, 1988), p. 46.

¹² Connie Smith. Memories.

¹³ Joe Lawrance. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. There were numerous charities still in operation during the early twentieth

Numerous historians have over the last 20 years or so written about the lives of the working classes using autobiographies and oral history. Historians such as Paul Thompson, Elizabeth Roberts, Carl Chinn, Stephen Humphries, Stephen Caunce, Anna Davin and John Burnett among others have added greatly to the growing interest in the views and lives of the working classes. As discussed by Humphries 'Oral history, or life history as it is sometimes called, springs from living memory. It draws upon the memories of people whose experiences have often been neglected and excluded from history books'. Indeed he continues 'oral history can create a more accurate and authentic picture of the past'.¹⁴ Through the research of the above historians and others, it is now possible to write about the work, childhood, marriage, household management and social activities of a class of people who were more often than not discounted by earlier historians, their lives were incidental to the overall scheme of things. However, oral testimonies of the day-to-day lives of members of a community are essential to the research being undertaken and highlight a close knit community which was dependent on each other in many ways.

When asking respondents about their first impressions of the factory many were able to recall having gone into the factory from an early age. Lillian Coley, as a young girl, delivered breakfast to members of her family who worked at Hurst Cotton's in Earl Shilton, breakfast being between 8 o'clock and 8.30. She used a short cut through the fields to the factory and remembers taking pains to avoid a bull kept in one of the pastures. This was one of her chores before going to school, 'My mother used to send me down there with the breakfasts for three of them. Sometimes they used to have eggs...bacon and eggs, you know, like in sandwiches, you see'. She also took them a 'can of tea'.¹⁵ Joe Lawrance, for instance, did various jobs after school and included in these was cleaning in one of the local factories.¹⁶ Bill Ball, as a school boy, worked at a small hosiery factory situated down the side of the Red Lion pub, he went from 12.00-1.30 and then again from 4.00-6.00. His

century. The Alderman Newton charity is still extant and is now available for young people needing monetary assistance while completing their education.

¹⁴ S. Humphries, *The Handbook of Oral History*, p.p. ix-x.

¹⁵ Lillian Coley. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹⁶ Joe Lawrance. Memories.

grandmother was determined that this young lad earned his keep.¹⁷ The above respondents were all born during the first fifteen years of the twentieth century but this familiarity with the factory continued to influence the lives of young people sixty or seventy years later as one young woman related that she was already working in a knitwear factory before she left school in the early 1990s. She worked for a couple of hours after finishing school so that she could earn herself some pocket money.¹⁸

Respondents, not only remember taking meals to parents and grandparents but would often call into the factory, after school, to say 'hello' to their mums or for a chat. Roy Bonser, for instance, whose mother worked in the 'boot and shoe' in Barwell would sometimes call in to see his mum and was amazed by how fast she worked.¹⁹ Similarly Worrall Pegg recalled how his dad, who had also worked in the 'boot and shoe', would vibrate along with the machine he worked.²⁰ Dorothy Lockton, born in 1918, remembers as a child sitting on her father's lap and being made a fuss of by all his fellow knitters.²¹ Mrs. Woodward would watch her grandfather through the window at Bott's factory, he worked in the basement as a trimmer and could be seen by passers by who cared to look!²² Norah Skeffington commented how she had the job as a young girl of selling poppies in the local factories.²³ Arthur Amos often popped into Howe's factory in Stoney Stanton where his mother worked on the back winding. Joan as a young girl would often pop into Bradbury's factory to see her mum.²⁴ The factories were everywhere – hosiery and boot and shoe – employing people numbering from just a few to many hundreds.

¹⁷ Bill Ball. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹⁸ Recorded memories. This young woman on leaving school worked in a local boot and shoe factory along with her mum, dad and sister. They continued to go home for their lunch together while they worked together.

¹⁹ Roy Bonser. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²⁰ Worrall Pegg. Memories.

²¹ Dorothy and Keith Lockton. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²² Mrs. Woodward. Unrecorded information. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²³ Norah Skeffington. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²⁴ Joan Pegg. Memories.

Mothers work

'Oh she were a darling',²⁵

A number of respondents have also spoken about their mothers' monetary contribution to the family income. Hilda Trigg's mother had worked in the hosiery and after having children did all sorts of things to earn a little extra and had quite an enterprising business making and selling trousers for neighbours' children. Neville Evan's remarked how as a young girl, his mother's first job on leaving school was not in one of the hosiery factories but in a factory making footballs and it was her job to sew up the various sections of leather.²⁶ Ted Felce, who was born in 1914, commented on how hard his mother worked, working for the family boot and shoe business. Before starting work each morning, however, it would be part of her duty to prepare breakfast for her father and brothers and see to her invalid mother. This she combined with looking after her own husband and only son. Ted lamented the fact that he wasn't really brought up by his own parents but a family not far from where they lived.²⁷ Similarly Mary Maund was able to relate that from the age of six weeks she was looked after by a childminder in their home village of Sapcote. Her mother continued working full time as a welter at Toon's hosiery factory and cycled to work in Earl Shilton, a round trip of about eight miles a day. The woman who looked after Mary had been a good friend of her mothers when they had worked together, and she talked about this family with great affection noting that she was regularly taken on holidays by them. Mary's mother had begun her working life in 1912 at the age of 12 alternating between local factories in Hinckley, Earl Shilton and Stoney Stanton but had always preferred factory work in Leicester where she had started her working life while living with her older sister.²⁸

²⁵ Hilda Trigg. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Hilda Trigg and Neville Evans were brother and sister.

²⁶ Neville Evans. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²⁷ Ted Felce. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix.

²⁸ Mary Maund. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

Other respondents with working mothers were often looked after by grandparents or other relations who more often than not lived next door or 'just down the street' and Roy was very close to his grandmother who had been like a mother to him.²⁹ Betty as a young child, during the 1930s, had been looked after by aunt Liz and in turn her own son was looked after by the same aunt, when she went back to work part time at Toon's, in 1950. Aunt Liz had apparently looked after 'no end of kids' in her lifetime.³⁰ This inter-dependency between families and neighbours was possible because of the close proximity of work and home, there was always someone to look after a child while the mother was at work. Doll related how after the birth of her first son in 1934 she went back to work and had an old lady to mind him but after a short time, because he cried every time she left him, she 'packed it in'. It was then decided that her own mother would give up her job in the shoeing, 'Me mother she stayed at home and I went back work full time and she looked after the children and that's how we done, and as they went to school she [mother] done some machining...some shoeing at home and that's how we paddled along'. Also commenting that she couldn't really afford to stop at home. Her husband had hurt his finger very badly on a knitting machine and was at home for nearly a year for which he received 30s. 0d a week 'and he'd been back work three months and he were called up for the bloomin army then, weren't he!'³¹

Not all mothers went out to work but were, nevertheless, still involved in the comings and goings of factory life, Worrall was to state that his mother did not go out to work but 'used to cook for people who went to work' adding that she also did their washing and ironing. She worked mainly for Mrs. Wormleighton who lived in the same street. The mother, father and daughter all worked at Toon's hosiery factory just round the corner from their home on Melton Street. The prepared ingredients would be dropped off on the way to work and the cooked meal would be ready to be picked up at dinner time.³² It was also

²⁹ Roy Bonser. Memories.

³⁰ Betty Starbuck and Doll Coe. Recorded memories. Betty and Doll Coe were sisters. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³¹ Doll Coe. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³² Joan and Worrall Pegg. Memories; Elizabeth Roberts discusses the role of married women working part time and included was dressmaking or alterations, some took in lodgers, cleaning, cooking and childminding. See E. Roberts, *Women's Work*, pp. 49-50.

normal practice that women would take in an employee from one of the local factories and provide them with their dinner alongside their own family and Mary related how her mother paid 1s. 6d. a week for her dinners. Similarly Roy would have his dinner at his grandmother's along with his granddad, and his uncles who all worked in the 'boot and shoe', and not forgetting the young office girl who also shared the mid-day meal with the rest of the family. This was a time when the majority of people still had their main meal at mid-day. Indeed respondents who worked in Hinckley had one-and-a-half hour's dinner break in order that operatives could go home for their dinner.³³

A married woman with a family and working full time needed the help of those around her albeit family, neighbours or childminder. A number of respondents have spoken about how it was their job, as school children, to deposit the uncooked dinner at a local bake house on their way to school in the morning and pick-up the cooked meal on their way home at mid-day. It was Keith Lockton's job to deposit the tin of prepared but uncooked vegetables and meat at Squires, a local bakery, on his way to school and to pick up the cooked meal on his way home. This enabled the family to sit down to a cooked meal at dinner time as both his parents worked full time as knitters.³⁴ Bill remembers having to light the gas as soon as he got in from school at dinner time, again so that dinner would be ready when his aunt and uncle arrived home from their morning shift at the factory.³⁵ This help was essential in the smooth running of work and family and it would seem it was the responsibility of the mother to juggle work and family life as best she could.

Many women were involved in outwork and would often be busy at work all day, stitching, seaming, examining and packing. They found that working at home was far more manageable when looking after a house and family, the help from children, however, was still seen as essential.³⁶ Muriel's mother for instance would help her mother to stitch

³³ Cliff and Kath Ball. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³⁴ Keith Lockton. Memories.

³⁵ Bill Lumley. Recorded memories. More details under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³⁶ Roberts, *Women's Work*, p. 41. Davin, *Growing up Poor*, p. 192.

jerseys for a factory on Factory Road and it would also be her job to take the finished articles back to the factory in a big old pram.³⁷ Anne's mother used to stitch stockings at home and it was Anne's job as a child of five to turn the stockings ready for her mother to stitch.³⁸ The above are comments made by respondents – of no real importance – this is how things were. It was not considered a hardship, children were expected to carry out these chores. Indeed children of working class parents had always been encouraged to work, it was deemed 'good for the child'. Doll remembers, as a child, having to go to uncle Abraham for strips of leather and thread for her mother who did shoeing at home 'and there used to be this trap door and he'd slam this trap door and he used to say "What do you want?". 'A bit of strip please and a bit of thread for me mother.'³⁹ There were no arguments 'you did what you were told'. Helping with housework and outwork, running errands, doing jobs for neighbours all helped in the smooth running of a household and children's work, paid or unpaid, was essential. Davin also gives a very interesting account of the role of the child in the day-to-day running of the home and how dependent 'mother' was on this unpaid assistance and states 'Most children were their mothers' auxiliaries in the incessant round of cleaning, cooking and service in the home'.⁴⁰ One respondent gave a particularly good insight into her own mother's housework routine. Both parents worked full time, mother as a mender, father as a maker and in order to save time her mother 'used to dust while she was upstairs and dust as she came down the stairs' and each day of the week would signify a particular chore.⁴¹ Roy's mum, after a full day's work, would come home – put the tea – and then start on the washing, cleaning or ironing.⁴²

In respondents testimonies, reference to mother is frequently in evidence, although respondents do talk about their fathers it would seem that 'mother' had more of an influence over their lives. It was mother who was there to deal with anything and

³⁷ Muriel Goode. Written information. More information Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³⁸ Ann Hall. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³⁹ Doll Coe. Memories. Uncle Abraham Abbott was a boot and shoe manufacturer.

⁴⁰ Davin, *Growing up Poor*, p. 175.

⁴¹ Diane Crowther. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1

⁴² Roy Bonser. Memories. Roberts in her studies discussed the 'endless accounts of women working all day in the mill and then struggling through a large part of the night to keep the house and family clean'. See Roberts, *Women's Work*, p. 47.

everything in the daily routine. Chinn also discusses the role of 'mother' and how lower-working class children were devoted to their mothers.⁴³ However some respondents have spoken about their fathers with much affection and Norah remembers going to visit her dad who worked as an ironmonger just up the road from where they lived and she would sit on the bench watching him work.⁴⁴ Connie remembers sitting at the bottom of the stairs while her father was ill in bed and she would do what she could to help him.⁴⁵ But as far as the organisation of the household was concerned it was mother who ran the house. It was usually the wife and mother who held onto the purse strings, she was the person everything revolved around. Roberts has discussed the role of the mother within the household and the power which she held especially in the early years of the twentieth century and stated, 'Many [respondents] recounted heroic battles against poverty waged by their families, a struggle in which all family members played a part but one in which the mother appeared to have the most crucial role'. This power she feels diminished as the twentieth century advanced.⁴⁶

Various historians have also discussed the choice of jobs available to young people and that in the majority of instances it was the parents who decided where their son or daughter started their working lives.⁴⁷ Indeed the majority of respondents who recorded their memories commented on how 'mother' decided on where her son or daughter worked. Ray who became a full time union rep in later years was very much influenced by his mother and his testimony reveals her concern that he should earn as much money as possible. Neville, Nuneaton born and bred, also spoke about his mother's influence in his choice of job, 'Me lad', she said, 'go to Hinckley', she says, 'you'll have to work hard'. But she used to say 'It's the hardest penny you'll earn but it's good money'.⁴⁸ Similarly Arthur Amos was found work by his mother in a slipper factory 'painting heels' which he

⁴³ C. Chinn, *They worked all their Lives. Women of the Urban Poor in England, 1880-1939* (Manchester, 1988), p. 45. Chinn discusses children's devotion to their mother and that there was a tendency for daughters and to a lesser extent sons to live as near to their mother as possible. Read Chinn's chapter, 'The power of mothers', pp. 45-83.

⁴⁴ Norah Skeffington. Memories.

⁴⁵ Connie Smith. Memories.

⁴⁶ Roberts, *A Woman's Place*, p. 45; E. Roberts, 'Women and the domestic economy, 1890-1970: the oral evidence' in M. Drake, *Time, Family and Community; Roberts, Women's Work*, p. 129.

⁴⁷ Fowler, *Teenagers*, p. 25.

⁴⁸ Neville Evans. Memories.

detested and after one week ‘walked out...and got myself a job in the hosiery at J. Toon’s and Sons as an apprentice to the counterer’.⁴⁹ However, it has also been quite evident from a number of respondents comments that ‘father’ also had a say in the future working lives of his children and comments made by various respondents can perhaps be highlighted by the comments made by Ann who started work at the age of fifteen in the early 1950s and was given no choice as to her place of work ‘well I didn’t with my father’ he was adamant that she would work in the factory even going as far as taking her to the factory gates of one particular factory in the town.⁵⁰ The dominance of this one industry was all pervading and the following extract perhaps highlights the control the industry had over people’s lives ‘My school report said suitable for office work, but parents took you straight to the factory’, and she went on to add ‘I had a relative married to the Moore’s [Moore and Osborne’s] that’s why I got took on. Office went for a burton’.⁵¹

Factory work ‘a dead end job’

However, it must be acknowledged that not everyone ended up in the local factory. One respondent wrote an extremely detailed account, not only of her own life but that of her family and also of the various manufacturing families in the town. She was quite vociferous in her condemnation of the factory and rather than being encouraged to work in the factory it had been her mothers wish that her children should do something different, ‘The factory was the bogeyman of our lives. We were to be educated so that we did not go in the factory’. Describing the Hinckley factories thus: ‘The infernal noise from the factories was always with us’. Muriel’s mother had been a teacher, having won a scholarship to the local grammar school, the only one of six children to break the connection with factory work, her brothers and sisters were all connected with the industry in one way or another.

⁴⁹ Arthur Amos. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix. Arthur did not stay at Toon’s very long – he left there and went to work at Nicholls and Wileman and retired in 1983.

⁵⁰ Anne Hutt. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁵¹ A conversation with a woman in her seventies while attending a coffee morning at the United Reformed Church in Hinckley. These conversations were not recorded and were conducted over cups of coffee and biscuits; Being ‘spoken for’ was the normal way for a girl to get her first job. See Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners*, p. 58; Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, p. 24.

Her four sisters worked at Atkins during the early years of the twentieth century. These young women had good jobs and in most instances married into manufacturing families or married men with senior positions within the factory workforce.⁵² Her maternal grandfather worked as a foreman packer at Samuel Davis' all his working life and her paternal grandfather worked as a mechanic at Bennett's. Her paternal grandmother had been employed as a maid by the Atkins family at The Manor and Muriel's father was christened Arthur Hugh after his father's friendship with both Arthur Davenport and Hugh Atkins.⁵³ It had also been the wish of one respondent's parents that their children also aim higher, to better themselves. Factory work was viewed by these parents as being 'dead-end' even though both parents and other members of the extended family had worked in the industry all their lives and maintained a good living from factory work. They wanted their children to have other opportunities. The factory was counted 'as the lowest work and office work and anything else was better'.⁵⁴ The aim of my work is not to criticise, compare or contrast the work of factory people as opposed to those who worked in offices or other types of jobs. It is purely about a community which was dominated by this one industry. The above example of family involvement in the hosiery trade is not unique and many other examples could have been given. Indeed everyone living in this community, even though they may not have worked in the industry themselves, knew people or had relations working in the hosiery or one of the subsidiary industries which had been established alongside. Mrs. Bateman, for instance, was very proud to observe that she had never been inside a factory in her life and had no wish to do so. She had worked as a telephonist during the 1930s and during the war years. She then became a full time housewife looking after her three children and husband who had worked in the industry until his retirement at the age of 65 in 1982. He had not only worked on the shop floor but also as a full-time union man.⁵⁵

⁵² Muriel Goode. Written information. More detailed information under in Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁵³ Muriel Goode. Written information. Her father had a farm but when he died in the late 1930s the family came back to live in Hinckley and Muriel's mother took up a situation as a teacher in a local school.

⁵⁴ Diane Crowther. Memories.

⁵⁵ Mrs. Bateman. Memories. Mrs. Bateman had never worked in the industry she was able to offer a valuable contribution to the research being undertaken.

Opportunities for other types of work was very limited for older respondents who started work during the first forty years of the twentieth century but for those starting working in the 1950s, 1960s and after, other opportunities and choices began to expand thus making it easier for young people to possibly make their own choices and decided on their own futures.⁵⁶ Mary for instance went to the local grammar school and started her working life at the age of fourteen at Burgess Engineering.⁵⁷ Cynthia Bowler and Elaine Baggott had both started their working lives in the early 1960s in the offices of Atkins factory on Upper Bond Street, Cynthia's mothers had worked at local factories as a young women but she had been encouraged by her parents to stay on at school in order to gain some qualifications and to learn to do shorthand and typing so that she would be able to go into office work.⁵⁸ The Education Act of 1944 introduced compulsory free secondary education thus making it easier for young people to stay on at school. This, however, depended on the family, not all parents could afford the cost of allowing their children to continue with their education, the cost of books, uniforms and sporting equipment were still prohibitive to many working class families even though free grammar school education became available to the masses. The loss of earnings was deemed as being too great.⁵⁹

Having no choice 'They were both very clever'⁶⁰

It would seem that in the majority of cases young people accepted their fate even though there were instances when respondents talked of missed opportunities, not only for themselves but for their parents and brothers and sisters. Maureen for instance when talking about her brother and sister, who started work during the 1930s, had this to say:

⁵⁶ Todd, *Young Women*, pp. 66-72; Through oral evidence Roberts found that, 'more and more working class girls, especially those aspiring families, who had perhaps had an extra year at school, or who had been to the technical school or even to a grammar school entered clerical occupations. Roberts, *Women's Work*, p. 38.

⁵⁷ Mary Maund. Memories.

⁵⁸ Cynthia Bowler and Elaine Baggott. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Cynthia and Elaine have been life-long friends. Elaine's husband had worked as a knitter until he was made redundant in the late 1990s.

⁵⁹ S. Todd, *Young Women*, p. 67.

⁶⁰ Maureen Smart. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

Well yes there wasn't anything much else there and it was...They were both quite clever really, but going on to say, grammar school and ought like that, you'd have had to have paid and you hadn't got...If you weren't so well off you couldn't always afford to do it and that was it, you see. But they were both very clever.⁶¹

Lillian who started work at the age of 13 in 1917 often wished that she could have done something different and being a very religious person remembers as a young girl praying to God for something better! She also spoke, with regret of one older brother, in particular, who would, if things had been different, gone into the medical profession. He was, however, able to use this special skill as a member of the St Johns Ambulance Brigade and also a first aid officer in his place of work.⁶² Similarly Mrs. Robinson who began her working life in 1959 had wanted to be a nurse but because of the insistence of her father that she had to 'get a job' she had no choice but to start work at the age of fifteen. She did, however, become the first aid officer in various factories where she has worked over the years.⁶³

People living in Hinckley and the surrounding area, similar to the people living in other working class communities, had no choice other than to work. It was the parent's duty to instil in their children the necessity of work in order that the family, similar to pre-factory days, earned enough money to survive. This concept of a 'shared mode of life' can be used within this context – families in the town and villages dependent on the hosiery for their livelihood came from similar backgrounds. They had survived the extreme poverty of the middle years of the nineteenth century and like it or not the majority of young people found themselves working in one of the local factories. They followed mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends as operatives in the many and varied jobs which existed.

Roy tried a couple of jobs before eventually becoming an apprentice counterman in 1941 and has many fond memories of his working life as a counterman before leaving to do

⁶¹ Maureen Smart. Memories.

⁶² Lillian Coley. Memories. Her family had been Baptists for generations and all worked in the local boot and shoe industry.

⁶³ Mrs. E. Robinson. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

various other jobs.⁶⁴ Gordon's ambition had been to be a carpenter, even staying on at school an extra year until he was 15. The opportunity of becoming a carpenter, however, did not arise and after a year working for Burgess Engineering he went to work at Flude's in 1947, at the age of 16, to learn 'mechanicking' which he thoroughly enjoyed, 'What more could you ask for than working with all those women - fantastic!'⁶⁵ One respondent, now in his nineties, who started work at the age of fourteen observed that when he started work in 1928 'you got what work you could'.⁶⁶ Others have also commented on the fact that there wasn't really much choice and factory work for the majority was quite acceptable even looked forward too. Betty Knights for instance had the chance of staying on at school but could not wait to leave so that she could start work at James Bennett's factory at the age of 14 in 1933 where she learnt her trade as a flatlocker.⁶⁷ Bill felt he had made the transition from a boy to a man – earning his own money thus contributing to the household budget.⁶⁸ As discussed by Todd, 'many welcomed the opportunity to "repay" their parents for childhood dependency' and 'becoming a wage-earner was a significant step towards adulthood.'⁶⁹

As discussed by various respondents, the opportunity of going to the grammar school did not arise for the majority of young working class people. The cost would have been prohibitive even if a child at the age of eleven had passed the eleven plus examination or won a scholarship. Books, uniforms and sports equipment were still an expense which most families could not afford. Ken Chamberlain and his brother had both passed their eleven plus but there had been no question of their going to the grammar school, their father had died when he was just seven years old. His mother had five children to bring up and similar to so many other families the employment of these young people was essential and he started work in 1946 at the age of 14.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Roy Bonser. Memories. Roy left the hosiery industry when the counterman's job was beginning to be phased out in the early to mid 1960s.

⁶⁵ Gordon. Memories.

⁶⁶ Joe Lawrance. Memories.

⁶⁷ Betty Knights. Memories.

⁶⁸ Bill Lumley. Memories.

⁶⁹ Todd, *Young Women*, p.73

⁷⁰ Ken Chamberlain. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Even in 1951 most young people did not remain at school...many parents

Diane's mother, however, did go to the grammar school having won a scholarship but because of the dependence of her parents on their children's wages spent most of her working life as a mender in several local factories.⁷¹ Keith Lockton's brother also went to the grammar school but as commented by Keith he still became a counterman learning the trade on the factory floor 'What was the point of all that learning, it didn't help out in the work place'.⁷² He also felt, however, there was still a lack of opportunities for ordinary working people even if they had been educated. This again perhaps emphasises the dominance of the hosiery and knitwear industry. There was no real incentive to stay on at school. There were jobs in the local factories for boys and girls. As discussed by Anne, 'it was deemed a good job' and probably the most important factor was that 'you could earn good money'.⁷³ Education for itself was not thought of as being important, the work ethic, perhaps being too strongly ingrained in the majority of working people.

Children of manufacturers, their education and choices

The majority of young people left school at the relevant leaving age: at 14, 15, 16 depending on the legislation in force at the time. If a young person had reached the required leaving age during the spring term then they would leave in the Easter holidays and the same for the summer and winter terms. In the majority of instances, youngsters left school on the Friday and started work the following Monday. Some teachers, however, lamented the fact that children were not being given the opportunity to show their true potential. It was usually the children of better-off parents, notably manufacturers and other professionals who sent their children to the grammar school – those who could afford the fees, the uniforms and the books which were essential. Ted Felce for instance attended Market Bosworth grammar school where he kept the company of other sons of manufacturers. These young lads would cycle back and fore to school every day, some were from Barwell, others from Hinckley and some from Earl Shilton. It had been his father's intention that his son become an accountant but due to ill health was to leave

simply could not afford secondary education particularly prior to the late 40s. See Todd, *Women's Work*, p. 71.

⁷¹ Diane Crowther. Memories.

⁷² Keith Lockton. Memories.

⁷³ Ann Hall. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

school and begin his working life as an apprentice knitter in 1933. Father and son both worked at Atkins.⁷⁴ Muriel who attended Hinckley grammar school during the 1940s also recalls the many and varied pupils at the grammar school, again many of whom were the sons and daughters of manufacturers.⁷⁵

The wealth and the prominence of a manufacturer determined the type of schools his children attended. Arthur Davenport's three sons all attended Hinckley grammar school – two sons going to university, while Charles left school at sixteen to join the family firm 'I was into the arts and at this time one must have French to go to university and I didn't have this'. He added, however, that it had been assumed by his teachers that he would be going into the family business anyway.⁷⁶ Brian Moore of Ginns, Son and Moore, a third generation manufacturer, went to Hinckley Grammar school and from there Loughborough University where he studied economics.⁷⁷ The above is an indication of the education given to the sons of manufacturers. Third generation sons, however, were usually educated privately. These young people were not being educated at the local grammar school, Brian Moore being an exception, but at private establishments locally or further afield. Neville Hall, for instance, a third generation son in the family business attended prep school from the age of seven, then spent a number of years at Uppingham and completed his higher education at Leicester School of Art and Technology.⁷⁸ John Bennett, again a third generation manufacturer, attended private school in Hinckley and then attended Clarkes College in Leicester alongside other manufacturer's sons and daughters.⁷⁹ Ian Davenport, a fourth generation manufacturer and a nephew of Charles attended private schools and completed his education by studying for a degree in business at a local university.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ Ted Felce. Memories.

⁷⁵ Muriel Goode. Written information.

⁷⁶ Charles Davenport. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷⁷ Brian Moore. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷⁸ Neville Hall. Meeting. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 56.

⁷⁹ John Bennett. Meeting. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 56.

⁸⁰ Ian Davenport. Meeting. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 56.

Although the education of a manufacturer would often differ from that of his employee there was always a job waiting for the son of a manufacturer in the family business. A number of manufacturers reflected that under different circumstances they would have liked to have done something different. John Bennett, for instance, would have liked to have joined the navy but the right job never materialised.⁸¹ David Jennings had hankered after being a farmer but had decided against this because of various reasons, one of them being the difference in wages – by working for the family business he could earn £35 a week, working in farming he would only be earning £7.⁸² Tom Atkins one of the last of the Atkins to be employed by Atkins Brothers, when discussing his involvement in the family business met with much opposition when he joined the Marines. He had initially wanted to be a farmer but with time became a member of the company retiring just after the take-over by Coats Viyella in 1992.⁸³ Simon Flude had no intention of joining the family business but after a number of years of travelling and doing other jobs he did become a member of staff and eventually managing director.⁸⁴ Ian Croxall had trained as a print designer and only became involved in his father's hosiery business due to the illness of his mother – his father needed help at this time to run the business while he spent more time looking after his wife.⁸⁵ Neville Hall, however, joined the company straight from university stating that it had always been assumed that he would do so.⁸⁶ Similarly Ian Davenport joined the family business straight from university commenting that he had always expected to go into the family business and had never really considered doing anything else and worked alongside his father Jim Davenport.⁸⁷

Manufacturers of Hose, master framework knitters, stockings and their families continued to work in an industry, albeit changed by the introduction of the factory system.

⁸¹ John Bennett. Meeting.

⁸² David Jennings, Meeting; More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 56.

⁸³ Tom Atkins. Meeting. More detailed information in Appendix 1; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 56.

⁸⁴ Simon Flude. Meeting. More detailed in Appendix 1; Barton and Murray, *Twisted Yarns*, p. 56.

⁸⁵ Ian Croxall. Unrecorded conversation.

⁸⁶ Neville Hall. Meeting.

⁸⁷ Ian Davenport. Meeting.

Families as manufacturers continued as employers, the stockinger and his family became knitters, trimmers, countermen, overlockers, linkers, welters, menders, toe stitchers and so on. As emphasised by numerous respondents 'there was always a job waiting when you left school'. It would appear, to a great extent that working in the factory became a natural progression of working in the home. Young people, over the generations, were brought up in an environment dominated by the 'hosiery' – factories 'up every entry... hundreds of them'⁸⁸ – a factory in the middle of the street and at the bottom of the street. The manufacturer, the factory manager, the foremen and foremisses would more often than not live locally and similar to the operatives would live within walking distance of the factory. In the early days of factory production those in authority would often live in a house attached to or in the grounds of factory premises.

A close-knit community

Lives were intricately intertwined by this one industry. Maureen who worked in the industry all her life, from the age of fourteen to retirement at sixty, spoke about her own parents and other relations who had worked for various manufacturers in the town. Maureen recalls how her mother worked until giving up her job in Davenport's factory in 1930 on giving birth to Maureen, her fourth child, 'She never went out to work again'. She did, however, 'Start doing a bit of cleaning and what-not for Mrs Davenport across the road.'⁸⁹ Manufacturers, with increasing prosperity, would live in houses which were bigger and far grander than anything an employee could afford, but nevertheless, in the majority of instances, it was in close proximity to the factory. This closeness of work and home is further highlighted by a respondent's description of his great uncle Charlie's introduction to the working environment. As a young lad, he worked for one of the largest manufacturers in the town and would, 'Fetch one of the Atkins bosses. He used to live at The Manor, as it is now. That was one of the Atkins houses. He used to go down in the mornings with the pony and trap and bring him to work. That was one of his jobs'.⁹⁰ This inter-dependency, was not only apparent within the industry but also affected the rest of town life. Again

⁸⁸ Neville Hall. Meeting.

⁸⁹ Maureen Smart. Memories.

⁹⁰ Tony Smith. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. The Manor which became a hotel has now been demolished for private housing.

Tony describes the work of another uncle who, though not employed in the hosiery trade, also had dealings with the Atkins family. He was a cobbler, 'The old fashioned cobbler. He used to make the shoes for the Atkins bosses, riding boots, they were all big horsy-hunt people. And one of them was a cripple so he had to have boots specially made. Uncle George used to make them for him'.⁹¹

Patrick Joyce states, 'In the Pennine valley hinterland of Huddersfield mechanisation was only in process in the third quarter of the century and many masters were still little glorified "putters-out"'.⁹² This description of a textile community in the West Riding of Yorkshire fits that of Hinckley and the surrounding area. This was a community involved in an industry which came late to mechanisation and again as discussed by Joyce: 'Master and men were invariably on first name terms, master sharing many of the interests of the workers, such as Co-op membership'.⁹³ In Hinckley the Co-operative Society was established in 1861 and those included in its early organisation and membership were involved in the hosiery industry and indeed their sons and grandsons became manufacturers. For example Solomon Flude was described as a china dealer and cow keeper and also a framework knitter in a number of trade directories.⁹⁴ His descendants became hosiery manufacturers. Similarly James Davenport, a framework knitter, became the first full time secretary of the Hinckley Co-operative Society and his descendants became successful as knitwear manufacturers in the town.⁹⁵ The Atkins brothers donated a free library to the inhabitants of the town in remembrance of their brother Arthur.⁹⁶ John Atkins was also influential in establishing the Mechanics' Institute, an organisation set up specifically for the betterment of the working man and it was stated in a notice to be distributed around the town:

⁹¹ Tony Smith. Memories.

⁹² P. Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics. The Culture of the factory in later Victorian England* ((1980), p. 166.

⁹³ Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, p. 167.

⁹⁴ *Hinckley and District Industrial Co-operative Society Limited. A Brief History of its Rise and Progress 1861-1911* (Hinckley, 1911).

⁹⁵ James Davenport was secretary of the society from 1868 to 1900. See *Hinckley and District Industrial Co-operative Society Limited*.

⁹⁶ *Atkins of Hinckley, 1722-1972*; H.F. Warren, *The History of the Hinckley Public Library, 1888-1938* (Hinckley, 1938).

From the necessitous condition of a large portion of the population of our Town, Children are taken at a very early age from school. What they can acquire there, it should be born in mind, is but a very small part of what ought to be the Education of the people; and hence the necessity, - not only in youth but in after life - that all should have within their reach the means of further development...⁹⁷

Manufacturers were involved in establishing the technical college during the 1890s and had also been instrumental in supplying the town with its first cottage hospital; employees of the various factories were also instrumental in raising funds. Many local hosiers, with increased prosperity, became guardians of the local workhouse, became school governors, JPs and became local councillors. Hosiers both before and after the transition to factory production had permeated all aspects of community life.



Plate 4. Hinckley Co-operative Society's Children's Gala, 1924.
(Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

Manufacturers would have known their workers, whether or not they had just started up in business or had been involved in a family business. Those who had just started up would have employed knitters whom they knew, perhaps having worked with them while they were employees. Ken Chamberlain's parents had both worked as knitters

⁹⁷ John Atkins, Hon. Sec., Hinckley Mechanics' Institute. 25 September, 1854. John Atkins was one of five sons whose parents were George and Elizabeth Atkins. George along with his brother Robert, according to written information loaned by Tom Atkins, 'inherited a well established business just before the great trade depression of the early 19th century, before the Napoleonic wars had ended'.

alongside Harry Flude and his wife and when Harry Flude decided to ‘go it alone’, his father and mother went to work for their one-time working colleague.⁹⁸ Other manufacturers because of longer involvement in the industry, would have first hand knowledge of those who worked for them perhaps initially under the putting out system and subsequently in the new factories. It cannot be emphasised enough these people knew each other. Hinckley, at the beginning of the twentieth century was still a relatively small town with a population of about 11,000 (see Appendix 2). These people not only knew each other but in many instances were related to each other - first, second, or third cousins, uncles, great uncles, aunts, great aunts, grandparents and great grandparents. As commented by one respondent, Jim Percy ‘Oh yes, lots of us – up a cat’s alley’.⁹⁹ This meant people living in Hinckley, Earl Shilton, Barwell and Burbage for instance were often connected through marriage in one way or another. Indeed comments about the local people all being in-bred would not seem much of an exaggeration.

Influence of family and friends ‘You want a job do you, me duck?’¹⁰⁰

This personal knowledge of a manufacturer or even the presence of a manufacturer in the town or villages led to a familiarity. As already been stated many manufacturers had started their working lives as employees in the various factories in Hinckley and Earl Shilton. They were local people who had decided to ‘have a go’ – to set up in business and would probably have employed people who were known to them. Norah Skeffington, for instance, who worked at Nicholls and Wileman from the age of 14 in 1921 to the outbreak of the Second World War knew the Wileman family. Both families had lived at the top end of Earl Shilton. She was determined that she would get a job in this newly established factory as a linker. She had learned the linking from a neighbour who took in outwork and on leaving school had then worked for a Leicester firm which had a factory in the village. On seeing Mr. Wileman she told him that she could do so many dozens and he gave her a

⁹⁸ Ken Chamberlain. Memories.

⁹⁹ Jim Percy. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret Read. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

job ‘flicking my hair as she left.’¹⁰¹ Jim Percy began his working life as an apprentice to a fully fashioned knitter in 1934. His job was secured by the acquaintance between his father, who was a postman, and the German manufacturers who were manufacturing from a factory on Station Road in Earl Shilton. This relationship had grown because Jim’s father spoke a little German and enquiries had been made as to the prospective employment of the young lad. It had been deemed convenient that he start work in the August although his fourteenth birthday was not until the October.¹⁰² Joan Pegg had started her working life at Bradbury’s – her mother, aunties and grand father were already working there. She did not stay too long, however, she wanted her independence and got herself a job ‘down Toon’s’.¹⁰³

Historians such as Roberts, Sarsby, Fowler, Todd and Ross McKibben discuss the influence that family and friends had over a young person’s place of work.¹⁰⁴ For instance, Peter Haywood when asked about his introduction into the hosiery industry stated that he already had a good idea of what he would do when he left school as he had a friend who had already started work as an apprentice to the countermen, ‘I’d got one of my school chums already working at Nicholls and Wileman. He seemed as though he were getting on OK...settled in well. If it were good enough for him it was probably good enough for me. So off I went’. Adding ‘I went up with my mum just for a job interview’.¹⁰⁵ As far as the manufacturer was concerned it was more convenient and beneficial for him to employ those young people recommended to him by family and friends. More often than not jobs would be waiting for a young person on completion of his or her education. Mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, friends would, ‘put a good word in’ for these young people. Margaret who started work in 1944, remembered her introduction to working life quite vividly:

¹⁰¹ Norah Skeffington. Memories.

¹⁰² Jim Percy. Memories.

¹⁰³ Joan Pegg. Memories.

¹⁰⁴ Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, pp.29-30, R. McKibben, *Classes and Cultures. England 1918-1951* (Oxford, 1998).p.119-120; Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners*, see Chapter 4, pp. 50-68. As stated by Sarsby, ‘For a girl leaving school going to work on the pots was the most natural thing in the world’, p. 65.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Haywood. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

In them days, you know, you'd know you'd got to go to work. So anyway, I'd got an aunty – an elderly aunty that worked at Minard's: "Oh!" she said, "There's a job going up Minard's. They want somebody to learn the mending." I said "I'm coming up aunty." "Just come in to me", she said, "And then I'll take you to see Mr. Minard." He was elderly, he were nice, old Mr. Minard were. "You want a job do you me duck", he said.¹⁰⁶

The influence of family and friends was evident up to very recently albeit to a lesser degree due to the ever increasing closure of local factories owing to, among other factors, overseas competition. A shift foreman at Flude Hosiery referred to the existence of a 'certain nepotism...we all look after each other'.¹⁰⁷ He was also able to describe where his own family had worked, many of whom had worked at Flude's over the years. Cliff after his marriage to Mary came to live in Sapcote in the early 1950s and began working as a knitter at Bennett Brothers. Mary's family were very friendly with Neville Smith, a mechanic at the factory, and enquiries were made as to what vacancies existed at the factory.¹⁰⁸ Denise Evans, who started work at James Bennett Ltd in the mid 1970s, spoke of how her dad, who knew one of the directors at the factory, got her a job 'And that's usually how we all work 'cos it's a small company and everybody knows everybody. And a lot of people on the shop floor we know from school'.¹⁰⁹

Claire Archer when she started to look for work in the mid 1980s was told by her parents to go round the local factories, which she did and by the end of the day she had a choice of two jobs – one of them being at Bodycote's on Stockwell Head – she chose this job because she knew some of the people who worked there – they drank at her mum and dad's pub and as commented by Claire, 'they were familiar faces' and they had told her they'd 'look out for her'.¹¹⁰ Lindsay Orton and her friends had also left school in the mid 1980s and got themselves jobs at the Argee – the Argee had been there forever as far as they were concerned – they needed a job and it seemed as good as anything else.¹¹¹

Although Claire and Lindsay did not have relations or friends working in the factories they

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Read. Memories.

¹⁰⁷ This conversation took place on a tour of Flude Hosiery.

¹⁰⁸ Cliff and Mary Maund. Memories.

¹⁰⁹ Denise Evans. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹¹⁰ Claire Archer. Conversation. 2008

¹¹¹ Lindsay Orton. Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

worked at, they were local girls and had grown up amidst all this industry. The hosiery and boot and shoe industries in Earl Shilton and Barwell were still continuing to employ huge amounts of people and Hinckley was still dominated by the 'hosiery'. Family and community involvement in the industry has benefited both employer and employee over the years. Recruitment of future employees by word-of-mouth was influential in building up 'a core of long-serving workers'.¹¹² As discussed by Charles Davenport they never had many dealings with the labour exchange, 'They had nothing to do with us...we preferred to take on people recommended by mothers. We knew where we were then'.¹¹³ The labour exchange was associated more with claiming dole money not somewhere where one went to find a job.¹¹⁴

Starting work

So it would appear in many instances a new employee would have been quite familiar with the factory, they would have passed them on the way to school, when they were out and about with friends and family. They often lived in the same street or 'round the corner' from the factory. This familiarity with the factory, however, did not prevent a young person feeling nervous on their first day at work. Many respondents have talked of how apprehensive they felt and Margorie vividly remembers her first day at work together with her twin sister:

My mum had already got us a job at Toon's hosiery factory. I remember she put a little piny on us...a pair of scissors and off we went. And it was a very big factory and we were very shy. But anyway we sat on these little wooden stools all day and Mrs. Coley learnt us how to clip and she was an old lady. At the end of the day we had to have plasters on our fingers cos we'd got big blisters where the scissors cut into us!¹¹⁵

Bill Lumley remembers being sent to work as an apprentice to the countermen at Bradbury's, at the age of 14 in 1928. He wore a blue suit which consisted of a jacket and

¹¹² D. Nash and D. Reeder, *Leicester in the Twentieth Century*, (Leicester, 1993) p.171.

¹¹³ Charles Davenport. Memories.

¹¹⁴ In 1927 it had been found by the Ministry of Labour 'as regards placing work, the public agencies in England and Wales as a whole do not deal with more than 20 per cent of the situations or of the juvenile workers...and that very likely the percentage is less than 20'. See Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, p. 29.

¹¹⁵ Mary Kind and Marjory Grouse. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1.

blue knickerbockers and his aunt was very surprised at the mess he got into – his smart blue suit was filthy. His first day and quite a few to follow had involved sewing-up bags, and in the early days of his working life he sometimes went off and hid in a corner. He hated his job and often wondered what on earth he was doing.¹¹⁶ Jim, who had started work in short trousers, was shocked by the awful noise made by the knitting machinery. Doreen who worked at Bennett Brothers on Southfield Road was quite nervous because everyone looked at her. They all knew she was the daughter of Hubert Sansome, ‘He worked in the office as well as working in the warehouse department. And I’d got mum’s sisters, they worked on mending, you see. So really I’d got to try to behave a little bit. She also acknowledged the fact that her sister had not worked at Bennett’s, ‘that’s why Betty wouldn’t go to work at Bennett’s. Yeah, because there were too many family. She were a bit wiser than I were somehow’.¹¹⁷ Plate 5 shows a photograph of the countermen and menders at Bennett Brothers and includes Doreen’s father and aunty.



Plate 5. Doreen’s aunt Florence first right and Doreen’s father, Hubert Sansome standing behind her. Photo taken in 1924 in the warehouse and mending department, Bennett Brothers. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

¹¹⁶ Bill Lumley. Memories.

¹¹⁷ Doreen Marvin. Memories.

The above, then sets the scene for factory life, it offers one a glimpse of life in this small area of south-west Leicestershire. The lives of these people, their experiences, difficulties, stresses of attempting to 'make ends meet' are in many respects comparable to those of millions of other people who strived to make a living during the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their lives were geared to one dominant industry which dictated the lifestyles both in and out of the factory. The concept of 'a shared mode of life' is integral to the study undertaken. Doreen when talking about her family observed that it was her grandmother's brothers who set up in business in 1918, trading under the business name of Bennett Brothers. Her husband who worked as a fully fashioned knitter at Marvin's on New Street in Earl Shilton was a nephew of the manufacturer.¹¹⁸ Doll mentioned that her maternal grandparent was a Toon through marriage and she was also related to the Abbott's who were boot and shoe manufacturers in Earl Shilton. She commented, however, that they were the poor relations. What is of interest is that the above mentioned respondents all worked for the respective family firms, as did their own parents, aunts and cousins. This closeness was possible perhaps because of the insular nature of the area in which they lived and worked. The people not only lived in the same streets and went to the same schools, they attended the same churches and chapels.

The Atkins family until the early part of this century were Unitarians and many of their workers attended chapel. The Toon's were Primitive Methodists. The Davis family patronised the Church of England and as discussed by a member of the Davis family when talking about the employees at the factory 'It was nothing to do with being religious, it was in their best interests to attend Sunday services'.¹¹⁹ This relationship was also beneficial to newly established manufacturers, who, as in the case of Timothy Jennings, were able to buy second hand machines off a fellow Methodist, William Puffer.¹²⁰ What is noticeable from looking at various records at the Unitarian Chapel in Hinckley are the number of people who were not only prominent members of the congregation but were also either

¹¹⁸ Doreen Marvin. Memories. Bennett Brothers (Hosiery Mfrs & Dyers) Ltd occupied an extensive site on Southfield Road employing many hundreds of people from both Hinckley and Nuneaton. They continued in business until 1977 when the business went into receivership. The factory buildings have now been demolished and apartments have been built in their place.

¹¹⁹ Discussion with Nick Davis. The family business, which is first mentioned in a Trade Directory of 1850 is no longer in existence. A B&Q store now stands on the site where the factory once stood.

¹²⁰ David Jennings. Memories.

manufacturers or held responsible positions in the local factory and community. For instance, Mr Hugh Atkins who died at the age of 73 in 1911 was, 'A life member of our church and for years acted as organist, choirmaster...he was a man much loved by all who knew him'. Others included:

Mr. Arthur Edward Beasley (a partner in Beasley, Smith and Company) who died in December 1930 and according to his obituary 'rendered invaluable services as a Trustee, a member of the Chapel Committee, a choirmaster and for many years a teacher and secretary of the Sunday School'.

Mr Arthur Davenport died in 1935 at the age of 76 and was, 'Most diligent in business as a Hosiery Manufacturer...He was a generous supporter of the Great Meeting'.

Mr John Bailey died at the age of 80 in 1943 and was held in great respect, not only in our circle, but by town's people in general in his office of Hosiery Trade Union Secretary'.¹²¹

Members of manufacturing families (both male and female) played leading roles within the religious community: they were Sunday school teachers, choirmasters and choristers, organists and members of the church dance band; they organised the sewing club, the literary and drama groups. They presented prizes at Prize Giving evenings and Mrs. Atkins of Middlefield organised 'an excellent tea' for scholars and others following the march around the town, as was the custom during the annual Sunday School Treats when all members of the chapel would be in their Sunday best.¹²² The Treats were looked forward to by all members of the local community and members of each chapel would parade around the town displaying their banners, singing hymns and the girls would often be carrying baskets of flowers. Hundreds of youngsters would participate in these rituals from one year to the next. Tea which usually consisted of sandwiches, cake and cups of tea was often followed by games in the church hall or sometimes on the vicarage lawn. The 'Sermon's' was also a 'big day' and a number of respondents have affectionate memories of being bought new outfits for this special occasion. Sunday Schools would have their own savings clubs where, 'so much' a week was saved towards new clothes. It was these young people who would, in time, become the next generation of factory workers and or manufacturers. These youngsters, in the majority of cases, did what was expected of them:

¹²¹ Taken from the Calendars of the Great Meeting, Baines Lane, Hinckley.

¹²² Calendars, August 1907

the manufacturer's son would join the family firm, after completing his grammar school or private school education, the factory operatives' sons and daughters would become employees in one of the local factories, after completing his or her education at the local school. It was natural progression – this is what you did.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the continual dependency of local people on the hosiery industry during the twentieth century and includes the lives of both operatives and manufacturers. Using recorded memories it has been possible to highlight the comings and going of every day life including the dependency on children to help wherever possible with household chores, running errands and earning a little extra money which was essential for the family economy. Parents, particularly a mother, influenced where a child started work and in most instances the young person had 'no choice – you did what you were told'. Respondents also talked about 'missed opportunities' and how under different circumstances they would have done other types of work. Through oral history respondents also touched on family background – parents and grandparents involvement in this one industry. It can be said that the 'hosiery' did permeate all aspects of work, family and community life. Manufacturers in the majority of cases lived locally and were involved in the churches and chapels, they were local councillors and JPs, they were governors of the local schools and colleges and they were as dependent on their workers as workers were on them.

Family involvement in the 'hosiery', which is evident from shortly after the introduction of the framework knitting machine in 1640, as discussed in Chapter 2, continued well into the twentieth century despite massive social and cultural changes, including two World Wars. In Chapter 6 I will take a more light hearted approach in a discussion on work, leisure and pleasure in a hosiery town which extends the dialogue from the workplace to home life and social life, in order to convey the camaraderie, hi-jinks and factory romances which were spoken about in many of the recorded memories.

Chapter 6

Work, Pleasure and Leisure in a Hosiery Town, circa 1920-2000

The use of recorded memories will add depth and personality to the work undertaken and will concentrate on those people who worked in the local factories between the 1920s and 2000. The majority of respondents who volunteered to record their memories, however, started their working lives at the age of 14 or 15, when they were little more than children, during the 1930s, 40s and 50s. It is these middle years of the twentieth century, the 1930s to the 1960s, which will be discussed in most detail. Care is essential in the collection and dissemination of oral history based on people's recollections of the past. Some tend to paint a rosy picture and gloss over or forget the harder times. Anyone working in the field of oral history is aware of possible omissions of memory or more deliberate selective recall. There may also be reluctance on the part of a respondent to dwell on more negative aspects of their past experience. Others have a reverse perspective tending to concentrate on the hardships and tribulations of life. There must also be awareness that people may have a tendency to exaggerate or embellish reflections to make their story more interesting. One must also be conscious of not putting words into people's mouths while recognising that, 'Memory is in general less precisely reliable on a matter of chronology, or a brief once-for-all incident, than on the detail of a recurrent process of work or social or domestic life. Much oral evidence, springing from direct personal experience like an account of domestic life in particular is valuable precisely because it came from no other source'.¹ Paul Thompson continues to defend the use of oral history and states, 'our way of life, our personality, our consciousness, or knowledge are directly built out of our past life experience. And it would be fanciful to suggest that the typical life story would be largely invented'.²

¹ Thompson, *Voice of the Past*, p. 240.

² P.Thompson, *The Voice of the past. Oral History*, p. 240.

I attempt to portray the vitality and dynamic nature of the hosiery industry and the enjoyment that respondents appear to have experienced during their working lives. Stephen Caunce states, 'everyday life, though taken for granted at the time becomes strange and incomprehensible, after time elapses. It then becomes difficult to rediscover...oral history allows the direct collection of information from those whose knowledge is first hand'.³ Efforts have been made to gain insight into topics not only that respondents wished to discuss but other avenues of interest which might otherwise have been glossed over. A main thrust of the work was to gain a rounded picture of people's lives and relationships within the context of a 'hosiery town'. Topics covered in this chapter such as timekeeping, the journey to and from work, first wages, learning a trade, high wages earned, short time work, friction and bad feeling are discussed in an anecdotal and light hearted way against a backdrop of 'hi jinks and larking about', factory romance and social life. This chapter, which provides a snapshot of people's lives, will discuss the factory whistle, time keeping and will include travelling to work – walking, cycling or catching one of the many buses which were laid on to pick up workers from up to a 20 mile radius of their place of work.

It is intended to include the social aspects of factory work and bring one's attention to the camaraderie which was quite evident – the larking about, Friday afternoon treats *Music while you work*, factory romances, days out and factory do's. These activities spilled over into after work activities. As observed by Joan and Worrall Pegg who were young wage earners during the 1940s and early 1950s 'You didn't only work together you played together – dancing...pictures. You always seemed to go out in a crowd, catch the bus, get a taxi, walk or get on your bike'.⁴ Friends often went to work at the factory together, many already had friends working at the factory and more often than not other members of their family would already be working there and indeed as discussed by numerous respondents the 'hosiery' was 'inbred'. The majority of these people lived together, they worked together, and they went out together – to the local cinema, dancing, on the 'monkey run' and an annual week away by the sea. Marriages were celebrated by dressing up the bride or

³ S. Caunce, *Oral History and the Local Historian* (London, 1994), p. 33.

⁴ Joan and Worrall Pegg. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

groom and in some cases both. Many of the factories also entered the annual carnivals and organised inter-factory football and cricket matches which, during their heyday, were watched by thousands of people. Gardening clubs and weekends away were organised by some factories. Plays were performed by members of the Argee workforce.

Getting to work and timekeeping 'The factory had a steam whistle'

It could be said that the factory had permeated all aspects of life – the factory whistle went off at certain times of the day. Bill Lumley, who started his working life at the age of 14 in 1928 at Norton and Bradbury's factory on Keats Lane in Earl Shilton, attempted to give an idea of the influence of the factory on people's lives and uses the factory whistle as an example:

The factory [Toon's] had a steam whistle which could be heard all over the village and was blown every day at 7.50 am and 1.50 pm to remind workers that they should be on their way to work. At these times there was a surge of people in the streets as most of the villagers worked in the village.⁵

Norah Skeffington, when talking about the numbers working in the local factories between the 1920s and 1960s likened the workers to those found in the paintings by Lowry 'bent forward and rushing off to work'.⁶ Another respondent likened the crowds to those found going to and leaving a football ground 'the pavements would be crowded with people', either rushing to work or rushing to get home or to catch one of the many buses used by the factory workers coming into the area from outlying villages. Indeed a number of respondents have spoken of the busloads of people who came into Hinckley, Earl Shilton and Barwell to work in either the hosiery or boot and shoe industries from the surrounding villages, in both Leicestershire and Warwickshire. It would appear that people were prepared to travel miles in order to work in the thriving factories which began to proliferate during the early late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. These factories

⁵ Bill and Doris Lumley. Letter. More detailed information in Bibliography and under Respondents in Appendix 1. Toon's situated in Wood Street, Earl Shilton, was a company which employed up to 800 people during its heyday.

⁶ Norah Skeffington. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

were not only producing stockings in lisle, silk, cotton and cashmere, socks of all sizes and descriptions, but also jumpers, cardigans and underwear.

Lilian Coley, who started work in 1917 at the age of 13, when talking about her fellow workers who came to work at Bradbury's from outlying villages explained that 'some used to come from Newbold and others Barlestone. There used to be coach loads'. But as commented by Lilian 'some came on their bicycles'. She was referring to a particular friend of hers who cycled from Ibstock to Earl Shilton, a distance of about ten miles to work and ten miles home – a round trip of 20 miles a day. She went on to explain that these fellow workers would then 'stand up all day because they worked S&Gs'.⁷ Doris Lumley, who started work in the early 1930s at Atkins described her journey to work from Stockingford: 'The journey to work from Stockingford meant walking to Nuneaton about three miles, then taking the train from Nuneaton to Hinckley...then walking from Station Road to Bond Street'. She explained that the 'trains were very reliable, always on time [and] the train we caught was known as the "girls" train, as most of the commuters worked in the hosiery'.⁸

Similarly Neville Smith who worked as a knitter at Bennett Brothers in Hinckley also described the journey from Nuneaton to Hinckley, and how during his working life between 1934 and 1985 the Long Shoot, particularly in the summer, would be chock-a-bloc with people cycling to work.⁹ Gordon when talking about his family's involvement in the hosiery industry spoke of how his father during the mid to late 1930s used to cycle all the way from Leicester to work as a counterman at Arthur Davenport's in Hinckley. At this time he could not find work in Leicester and the family eventually moved from the city to Hinckley in order that Gordon's dad did not have to cycle 20-odd miles a day to and from work. The hosiery industry in Hinckley and Earl Shilton employed thousands of people from the town and village itself, but also from the surrounding villages where coal mining and quarrying were the major industries. These industries required male workers, and the

⁷ Lilian Coley. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁸ Bill and Doris Lumley.

⁹ Neville Evans. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. The Long Shoot is a stretch of road between Hinckley and Nuneaton.

hosiery factories and boot and shoe factories gave employment to vast numbers of women from these outlying areas. Indeed by 1930 the number of factories in Hinckley numbered 56, Earl Shilton had 12 factories, Stoke Golding two and Stoney Stanton had one factory.

Irregular hours of the stockinger and their distaste of being 'shut up' inside a factory had by the early twentieth century become a thing of the past. The factory imposed a discipline of its own. In the early part of the twentieth century factory workers started at 6 o'clock, stopped for breakfast between 8 o'clock and 8.30 worked until 1 o'clock, an hour for dinner and then back to work from 2 o'clock until 6 o'clock.¹⁰ A morning start of 8 o'clock then became the norm and some respondents have spoken of some manufacturers as 'tyrants.' They have memories of their boss waiting at the factory gates for late comers. Arthur Davenport would be standing outside the factory at three minutes to eight every morning, 'And by gum if you weren't in he'd shut the door in your face'.¹¹ Norah Woodward remembers that if you did not get to the factory [Puffers] by 8 o'clock, '[the] yard man would lock the gate. Arrive at 8.30 you would be locked out until 8.45. Arrive at 9 o'clock you would be locked out for the day'.¹² John Cobley remembers his first boss, Percy Taylor:

Woe betides poor timekeepers. He was there first thing in the morning and he was there last thing at night. He was strict. He used to work early, say 6 o'clock in the morning. Now we didn't used to start work till 8 o'clock but if you wasn't there before 8 o'clock he'd be gone home for his breakfast and you had to stand outside 'til he came back.¹³

¹⁰ The normal working week was forty hours in 1969 as against forty-eight hours before the war. In 1924 the average weekly hours of both male and female were forty-four hours (to be precise 44.2 hours). See F..A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry. Its History and Organisation* (1935, Newton Abbot, 1972 edn), p. 203

¹¹ Mrs. Clowes. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹² Mrs. Woodward. Non-recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹³ John Cobley. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

**‘Picture mad’, first weeks wage and learning a skill
‘There would be photos of film stars everywhere’¹⁴**

Factories were a hive of activity and hosiery workers, although acknowledging that their work could often be boring and tedious, nevertheless found time to enjoy themselves.¹⁵ David Fowler in his, *The First Teenagers. The Lifestyle of Young Wage Earners in Interwar Britain*, brings ones attention to the idea that the factory was often seen more as a social club than a place of work and that the films of the day had a great influence over young people at this time.¹⁶ Mary and Marjorie, who began their working lives at Toon’s in Earl Shilton in 1944, talked about how as young girls they were ‘picture mad then, you know, with Robert Taylor and all them and all over the wall - there would be photos of film stars and everybody would be saying, “have you been to pictures”. It used to be great’.¹⁷ Doreen, as a young teenager in 1945, also spoke of the influence that the popular films of the time had on her and her friends, ‘you weren’t very grown up at all when you were 14. And we used to watch the films, you see, the American films and we based ourselves on that really, the Betty Grable, Rita Hayworth, Dorothy Lamour. And you tried to look like them because you admired them so much’.¹⁸ This enjoyment – the chatting, the carrying out of practical jokes and hi-jinx was something that was in the main instigated by younger people before they went onto piece rate or ‘on your own time.’ Respondents also spoke of their first week’s wage, ‘we were that excited. We ran into the room where me mother worked on the welting and gave her this money. Oh! we were thrilled up and she gave it to us back, our first week’s wages’.¹⁹ Some years later, Rose Turton who started work in 1966, on packing, could still remember the thrill of that first

¹⁴ Mary Kind and Marjory Grouse. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹⁵ D. Fowler, *The First Teenagers. The Lifestyle of Young Wage Earners in Interwar Britain* (London, 1995), pp. 63-67

¹⁶ Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, pp. 64 & 100.

¹⁷ Mary Kind and Marjorie Grouse. Memories.

¹⁸ Doreen Marvin. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Fowler using a study carried out by Joan Harley of wage-earning girls in Manchester also remarked that ‘When girls in Manchester were not ‘at the pictures’ they were, it seems, either talking about films or reading about them’ See Fowler, *The First Teenagers*, p.101

¹⁹ Mary Kind and Marjorie Grouse. Memories.

wage, 'my first week's wage, £4.17s. 6d., and it was like...wow'. Out of this she bought her mum an iron.²⁰

Hosiery workers, similar to other factory workers, were usually paid on 'boss's time' while they learnt their trade. Respondents spoke of how they would learn their job usually from an older more experienced person. Doreen when she first started at Bennett Brothers on Southfield Road was taught the splicing by an old school friend, who was just a year older than herself. She explained that after about a year she went on the welting and it took her about four weeks to learn her job and to build up her speed. It was also a policy in the factories that the person who was designated to teach a young employee had his or her wages 'made up' because while they kept an eye on a youngster and showed them what to do they were losing money:

And then when I went to learn the welting after about a year. This lady who taught me the welting, her name were Flo, and she was lovely as well. She'd be watching you for say three weeks and checking your work to see you were doing it all right. And then the foreman would come round and say "Is she alright? Is she going to take to it? Is she wasting your time?" Their money had to be made up 'cos they kept stopping to see that we were doing it right. "She'll be OK, you know. "We'll get her off these odds". Odds were work that 'ud already got some faults in them. It was lovely when you had a good bundle of work - we'd made it! I should say a month had gone by, easily, before you went on perfects. They paid you for so long until you got your speed up. Everything was done properly'.²¹

When a young person first went into the factory he or she did all sorts of jobs. Joan Pegg, for instance, started her working life at Bradbury's in 1939 but left within a very short time to work at Toon's on Wood Street in Earl Shilton. 'When I first went down Toon's, I were in the warehouse, they used to call it running about and you used to give work out and things'. Joan had originally wanted to be a mender but when she found out that she wouldn't be able to become a qualified mender, on her own time, for at least two years she decided that she would prefer to work in the factory and she eventually became a toe stitcher. Toe stitching was a simpler process than mending and took less time to learn. The warehouse and the factory were part of the same place but separate in that the warehouse

²⁰ Rose Turton. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²¹ Doreen Marvin. Memories.

was where all the finishing operations took place and where the menders and countermen worked. As commented by Joan, 'of course they were the best jobs, mending, in the warehouse'.²² Margaret Read who worked as a hosiery mender explained that when a young girl first started she would not have been put straight on the mending but, 'had to do lots of bits and pieces, you know, anything. The first day I went I sat there turning [stockings] all day and then cutting welts and doing things like that. All the jobs in the packing department you had to be able to do'. Emphasising the fact that at this time she was working on stockings not tights:

you had to tab the stockings, you did two stockings together, that were quite easy. You did them and put them in a box of a dozen and sealed it down. Other jobs you did were sorting work, sorting different shades, putting so many of the different shades in a box. You used to, what you call transfer, put a transfer and it told you what it was, like silk, you know. In them days, as I say, there was no nylons so it was all art silk, pure silk and lisle, the pure silk was very fine. Oh and I had to sweep up, do any job – make the tea'.²³

The countermen also worked in the warehouse and the counterman's job was considered to be highly skilled and they were deemed to be, 'the gentlemen of the trade,' always going to work in a collar and tie. 'They were the cream. What you did was the finished product. Everything had to be paired – toes, heels, splicing, fashion marks, seams everything had to be paired'.²⁴ It was the counterman who ensured that the stockings went out of the factory in perfect condition. As an apprentice, however, similar to other jobs in the factory 'you did anything and everything 'a general dogsbody'.²⁵ Bill Lumley who started his 'apprenticeship' in January 1929 was sent out rent collecting by Mr. Bradbury who owned a number of houses in Earl Shilton. One of Roy Bonser's jobs as a young lad during the early to mid 1940s was to put out the mousetraps on a Saturday morning and collect them first thing on a Monday morning, because at this time, 'there were no end of mice in the factory'.²⁶ Peter Haywood, who started his working life at Nicholls and Wileman in Earl

²² Joan Pegg. Memories.

²³ Margaret Read. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Margaret started work at the age of 14 just before Christmas 1944.

²⁴ Worrall Pegg. Memories.

²⁵ Bill Lumley. Recorded Memories. Bill spoke quite extensively on his working life over a number of meetings.

²⁶ Roy Bonser. Recorded Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

Shilton in 1946, and his friends took the outwork to the numerous women who worked at home. This was all carried out on foot because of petrol rationing. The boxes of unfinished stockings would be packed in boxes and delivered, on what Peter described as ‘sack barrows’:

sort of two wheels and a lift on the front that you can balance the boxes on... and you'd tie them on one way or another. I mean, in some cases we used to walk from Nicholls and Wileman which was in the Hollow right down to Elmesthorpe with outwork, in all weathers – snow, rain, sleet and sunshine and then we used to walk the other way to Barwell, and there were three of us used to do this. Start this every Monday and it used to take us till Wednesday to get this work out and bring it back again.

Peter adding that this job did have its good bits ‘some of the ladies used to give us a bottle of pop or 6d or a bag of sweets.’ They would also have ‘a crafty smoke’ while out on their rounds if the opportunity arose.²⁷ One respondent went as far as referring to his seven year apprenticeship as ‘a bit of a farce’. Tony Smith started as a ‘warehouse lad’ at the age of 15, in 1955 and he was the tea masher, the cleaner. He did, however, eventually start his training on half-hose – from kiddies socks up to adult socks. From here he progressed to lisle, cotton, silk and wool which were stockings made mainly for the elderly. And as with other trainee countermen he was only allowed to begin training on fully fashioned hose which he described as ‘15, 20 or 30 denier’ towards the end of his apprenticeship. He added that, ‘it was always vital to have a pot of cream to hand. Essential to have soft hands. Rough hands could result in snags in stockings’.²⁸

Wages earned ‘The best paid piece workers in the Midlands’²⁹

Once a factory worker went on to their ‘own time’ or ‘piecework’ every minute they wasted was lost money. This was a production line and an employee was only paid for what he or she produced and it must be emphasised that these people worked hard. According to Ann Hutt, ‘it [piecework] gives you an incentive to work, the more you work

²⁷ Peter Haywood. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²⁸ Tony Smith. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

²⁹ Neville Evans, Memories.

the more money you'd come out with and that's what it's all about isn't it – that's why we go to work'.³⁰ The hosiery industry was well known for paying good money and as commented by a factory manager, 'years ago people came into the hosiery industry because they could earn good money – a new car, a new house – you were the tops.'³¹ As discussed by F.A. Wells, 'In 1931 men hosiery workers had the second highest earnings in the textile and clothing groups and women hosiery workers were the best paid. By 1955 men hosiery workers had become by far the best paid and the women's earnings exceeded those in all the clothing trades and in 1969 man-made fibres head the list for male textile workers – indeed hosiery was well ahead and the same applied to women whose earnings were exceeded only by those in the narrow fabrics industry'.³²

Ann remembers earning between £20 and £22 a week as a linker in 1962. Her husband at this time, who worked as a plumber, was earning £15.00 a week. Ann started her working life at the age of 15 in 1957 and described her training as lasting for a few months, 'It was such fine work at that time – it were nylon stockings'. As a trainee linker she started on '30 denier' and progressed to '15 denier' stockings, explaining that the stockings 'on the making machine they're only like a – what can I say – a pipe, if you like, until they're separated by the maker, and then you've got the stocking with the hole where your toes would come through if we didn't link them. And you had to put every stitch on and if you don't get every stitch on you'd get a hole – that's ruined you know'.³³

Respondents have talked about various workers who worked like lightning to earn the top wages. One respondent referred to one operative as 'bionic woman' because she worked so fast.³⁴ In order to earn the top wages, however, a worker had to be totally focused on what he or she was doing. As explained by Maureen Smart:

³⁰ Ann Hutt. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³¹ R. Dixon. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³² Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*, p. 214-216.

³³ Ann Hutt. Memories.

³⁴ Diane Crowther. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

A skilled worker has got herself so timed that she'd even have a clock in front of her. I wear my watch like that (inside of wrist) because it's easy to look at as I'm working and I know how many stockings I've got to do in a certain time to earn my money. So you're working by the clock. And that is where the stress comes in because the machine goes wrong, your yarn breaks, your work's not right, faulty work, anything like that could put you out of your rhythm – with rhythm once it gets broken you're losing your money. So therefore your time is governed by the clock and anybody works by the clock has got stress'.³⁵

One respondent explained that she used to go into work early so that she could prepare her work ready to start at 8 o'clock, 'every minute wasted was wasted money'.³⁶ Lilian as a girl of 15 in 1919 was told that she was earning too much money when working a machine which made coloured tops for boys' socks. She found this job very easy and she soon picked up speed and became 'a bit quick'. Adding that, 'I could throw different colours and I earned a lot of money, £3.9s.0d. Some men didn't earn that and the bosses didn't like it'. She remembers being summoned to the office 'the boss were there, his son were there and the manager were there and they asked me how old I were and they said, "Don't you think that's a lot of money for a young girl your age?" And they settled to give me a regular wage of £2.15s 0d a week'. From working this machine she went back to working the S&G's, not in the room where she had started which was a comparatively new room, but in a much older part of the factory which she remembered had concrete floors and 'a big belt over me head'. She also remembers always having cold feet. At the age of 21 Lilian decided she'd had enough of all this 'aggro' and left Bradbury's, 'to learn the welting at Minard's where she stayed until she was 47. Her favourite job, however, was at Bird and Yeoman's packing the stockings ready for despatch to the warehouse or shops.'³⁷

Respondents also compared the wages they could earn in the factory with family members who worked in other jobs such as the railway, the pit, the quarry, shops and offices. In most instances young wage-earners were able to enjoy a much higher standard of living than the rest of their family and although this is apparent during the 1930s for some young wage-earners it became more noticeable during the 1950s. David Fowler discusses a

³⁵ Maureen Smart. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

³⁶ Mrs. Woodward. Memories.

³⁷ Lilian Coley. Memories.

study carried out by Mark Abrams in 1959 who found that young working class wage-earners between the ages of 14 and 25 found themselves with a high disposable income as a result of being employed in highly paid factory occupations.³⁸ Neville compared his money with his dad who worked on the railways, ‘my dad weren’t on a lot of money. In fact when I first went on the knitting at Hinckley at eighteen (1938) I was earning more than me father. It must have been about £5.00 or £6.00 a week. Me dad was only on £3.00’. He added, ‘at one time in the hosiery we must have been the best paid piece workers in the Midlands’.³⁹ Olwyn Taylor who came to work in Hinckley from Nuneaton at the age of 15 in 1950 was earning about £8.00 a week when she went on piece rate, her sister who worked in an office earned £1.17s.6d. Her father who worked as a miner was earning between £12.00 and £14.00 a week as a face worker in 1953, while her husband working as a fully fashioned knitter was earning £21.00 a week.⁴⁰ According to Lynette Hill, however, who carried out research in Hinckley between 1960 and 1980 there could be resentment in a family because of the high earnings which could be earned in the ‘hosiery’ and as one of her respondents observed, ‘looking back now, I suppose it was difficult for mam and dad to see us spending as if there was no tomorrow, they had so little, we could afford so much’.⁴¹

Factory operatives working on their ‘own time’ had a good idea of how much they would earn in a week and workmates would ask each other ‘what are you working for this week’ – some would be working towards paying the mortgage, others for their two weeks holiday in the sun, a new pair of curtains or in Susan’s case ‘half a chair’. She knew down to the last penny how much she would earn in one particular week and she also knew that

³⁸ ‘The money wages of teenage wage-earners as a whole during the 1950s had increased by 400 per cent from their pre-war levels’. See Fowler, *First Teenagers*, pp. 93-97.

³⁹ Neville Smith. *Memories*. A survey carried out in 1938 found that, ‘Few men earned more than £3 per week in Lancashire. Men in the Midlands were earning between £3 and £5 per week. Few women were found to take home more than 32s. In the Midlands the average wage for a woman over 18 was 35s. Some could expect to earn up to £3 per week. See R. Gurnham, *A History of the Trade Union Movement in the Hosiery and Knitwear Industry, 1776-1976* (Leicester, 1976) p. 112; S. Barton & R. Murray, *Twisted Yarns. The Story of the Hosiery Industry in Hinckley* (Hinckley, 1997), p. 64.

⁴⁰ Olwyn Taylor. *Memories*.

⁴¹ L. Hill, ‘Do women have choices. A study of hosiery workers in Hinckley 1960-1980’ (Undergraduate final year dissertation, University of Leicester, 1997), p. 14. Lynette had worked in the hosiery industry and so had first hand experience of factory life.

this money was going towards a three piece suite.⁴² Set amounts were agreed between the unions and the manufacturer for a particular job – some jobs demanding higher rates of pay than others depending on the type of work such as counterering, fully fashioned knitting, linking, overlocking, cup seaming and fully fashioned seaming. The amount of pay an operative earned also depended on the speed of the operator. Some operatives, as already discussed, worked ‘like lightening’ while others worked at a slower pace and would never achieve the rates made by their ‘whiz-kid’ colleagues. Arthur, for instance, was able to treat his bride to two weeks honeymoon in Blackpool when they were married in 1938 because he had been earning £7 a week as a fully fashioned knitter.⁴³ Mary talked about how she and her husband-to-be saved hard and just about managed to put a deposit down on a plot of land in Barwell. Mary was working as a seamer, her husband worked as a fully fashioned knitter. They moved into their brand new semi-detached house with its own bathroom and indoor toilet on their wedding day in 1938.⁴⁴ Maureen loved going away on holidays and she first went abroad to Austria in the late 1940s. She could afford to do this because she earned such good money as a fully fashioned seamer.⁴⁵

Hill found that hosiery workers, because of the high wages they could earn, would go into Leicester on a Saturday ‘and come back with bags of stuff – shoes, clothes – everything we wanted...hot pants, mini’s’.⁴⁶ Shirley remembers that by the time she was 17 or 18 in the early 1970s she could earn £100 a week on the overlocking. Tights were the ‘new craze’ and they couldn’t produce them quick enough.⁴⁷ Respondents have also spoken about how they could finish one job in the morning and start another in the afternoon – work was so abundant. The hosiery industry because of its competitiveness and fast pace of work did not suit everyone and the industry, has over the years, suffered

⁴² Susan Judd. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁴³ Arthur Amos. Recorded memories. . More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁴⁴ Mary Kelham. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁴⁵ Maureen Smart. Memories.

⁴⁶ Hill, ‘Do women have choices’. p.12.

⁴⁷ A conversation.

from a high turnover of workers and so it was possible to change employers ‘at a whim’.⁴⁸ Pat Pierce who came to live in Hinckley in the early 1970s was surprised to find that you could walk in and out of any factory job. She worked as a pattern cutter and by the mid 1980s was earning £200 a week – she was a ‘top earner’ and everyone ‘thought I was plugged into the mains’. She did say, however, that although the factory ‘earned me a very good lifestyle, it does destroy your body.’⁴⁹ H. Bradley, referring to a study carried out by Edwards and Scullion, stated that, ‘the older women are self-motivated to work as hard as they can to achieve high wages, and there is not much evidence of high levels of pace-setting and output restriction.’⁵⁰

The ‘hosiery’ had always been a seasonal industry and suffered fluctuations in trade. There could often be a lack of work during the early part of the year (usually between the New Year and Easter) and operatives would find that they had to spend some time on the ‘dole’, sometimes up to three months. Nellie Skelton, who worked XL machines at H.J. Hall’s for most of her working life between 1928 and 1974 remembers when she and her workmates, ‘had to walk from Stoke Golding into Hinckley twice a week to sign on for the sum of 7s. 6d. a week’ during short time work at Hall’s during the 1930s.⁵¹ Cliff Ball who worked at various factories as a counterman between 1936 and 1987 also experienced short time work and explained that ‘you’d have so many on the dole, so many in work. You’d probably do a week on and a week off’. You’d take it in turns going on the dole’.⁵² Cliff Maund who had worked in various factories between 1954 and 1998 including Bennett’s, Corahs and Nicholls and Wileman, as a knitter, also spent a

⁴⁸ Hill, *Do women have choices*; p. 12. Harriet Bradley also discusses this and quotes from Edwards and Scullion who did a study of a Leicester hosiery firm, ‘management control is tight, with firm supervision and a very fast pace of work. Piece-rates, highly set, are perhaps the most important mechanism of control in the industry... Turnover rates are very high, especially among young girls, and this remains the major management problem in many firms. See H. Bradley, ‘Technological Change, Management Strategies, and the Development of Gender-based Job Segregation in the Labour Process’ in D. Knights, *Gender and the Labour Process* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 70.

⁴⁹ Pat Pierce. Unrecorded. Pat left the industry after approximately twenty years. She decided that she needed something less demanding. She became a supervisor in a care home.

⁵⁰ Bradley, ‘Technological Change, Management Strategies’, p. 70.

⁵¹ Nellie Skelton. Letter and recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁵² Cliff Ball. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

couple of months, out of the working year, claiming dole.⁵³ One couple who worked for the same factory spent every other Friday off work and spent this time going on shopping trips into Leicester or other Midland towns. Joan commented, however, that at Toon's if you were short of work on the toe stitching and there was plenty on another job they'd put you on it, 'That was the joy of the hosiery, they always put you on something else if that job was short'.⁵⁴

It was also acceptable for an employee to finish at one particular factory because of a lack of work, and then find work in a factory that had plenty of orders. The operative would then go back to the original factory when the work picked up. This is something that Ann Hutt did – it wasn't a problem – a good worker was valued and he or she would always be encouraged to go back to his or her original factory.⁵⁵ It would also appear that various factories did have a policy of working together – borrowing each others operatives when the need arose. Bill spoke of how he was borrowed by Marvin's when they had a big order which had to be processed within a specific period of time. Cliff Ball also experienced this and spent six weeks at Lockley's in Barwell:

you see in the hosiery they used to run a scheme with countermen, if your firm was short of work and there was another firm in the district that was flush for work they'd loan you out for two weeks, three weeks, a month – whatever length of time this other firm required you. They always ran a scheme like that in the hosiery with the countermen. It was a loan scheme – you just swapped firms for a period.

Sometimes, however, people were reluctant to move if it meant travelling from Earl Shilton to Hinckley or Burbage – so what they did was put people's names into a hat and the countermen whose names was drawn were sent to the relevant factory.⁵⁶

⁵³ Cliff Maund. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁵⁴ Joan Pegg. Memories.

⁵⁵ Anne Hutt. Memories.

⁵⁶ Cliff Ball. Memories.

Friction, bad words and practical jokes 'There'd been a smash-up'

The 'hosiery' was a very labour intensive industry and rows upon rows of benches with numerous men and women, young and old, could be found busy at their work – clipping, mending, overlocking, flat seaming, welting, linking, toe stitching and packing, and of course there were rooms full of knitting machinery churning out all manner of garments. Joe recalls how when he first started work at H.J. Hall's in Stoke Golding in 1938, 'a tiny country hamlet', after working at Bradbury's in Earl Shilton for 10 years, 'there was no provision in the factory to get a cup of tea, you had to go across the road to the houses to get a mashing of tea. I pointed this out to Mr. Hall, that's Neville's, the present boss's granddad and I said, "look you get me a cylinder with a coil in it and I'll fix it up to the steam from the boiler"'.⁵⁷ Mrs. Wood who started her working life in 1932 commented on how things had changed over the years. When she first started at a factory on Hill Street, the factory had gas lighting, but even then she considered this factory as somewhat primitive. James Bennett's and Flude's, however, she referred to as being very modern factories, these factories having been built during the 1920s and early 1930s.⁵⁸ One respondent who worked as an overlocker at James Bennett's remembers how when it was very hot they would roll their stockings down and tie newspapers to the shafting which ran under their benches in order to create a draft. Jimmy Bennett, who established the business in 1913 would often take a walk round the factory floor to see how things were going, would shout, 'I can see you me wenchies'.⁵⁹ There were also heated arguments about draughts, 'some wanting windows left open, others wanting them closed'. The heat generated by the knitting machines could also become unbearable and a knitter would often be stripped down to the waist in his attempt to keep cool.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Joe Lawrance. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁵⁸ Mrs. Wood. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁵⁹ Recorded memories. This was part of a small group interview where five respondents varying in age from mid 60s to 80 had a very lively discussion about their working lives.

⁶⁰ Of interest – fully fashioned knitting machines were constructed with a combination of iron and steel, copper and brass, each needing a coefficient of expansion making them highly susceptible to changes in temperature, needing a minimum of 75-80 degrees to be efficient. See Hill, 'Do women have choices', p. 3.

Comments have also been made about workmates, Doll who began her working life at Toon's in 1923 described an old woman who did the backwinding as a 'droll cup of tea'.⁶¹ Backwinding was often something which 'older ladies' were employed in doing. Many respondents have spoken about how times have changed and that years ago nothing was wasted – hence the use of backwinding, which used up all the damaged stockings and turned them back to yarn to be re-knitted into perfect stockings. Lilian, worked at Bradbury's between 1917 and 1925, and as a young girl would often get quite upset by some of the behaviour of her fellow 'makers' when the S&G and XL machines they were working on had a 'smash-up'. Smash-ups occurred usually because of bad yarn:

I worked in an alleyway, you see, there were three machines each side, and just space for you to work and we were working back-to-back. I had been brought up very sheltered, you see, and I worked in this place and the girls – woman rather, she were getting on, she were alright, oh but she did use some big swear words. It horrified me for a start. I remember saying to her, "Oh you are a bad woman".

Lilian also spoke about one of the men who worked the XL machines, 'there'd be a big smash-up and this man, he put his hands on his hips and he'd say all the bad words he could think of to this machine. She added that, 'it got that he didn't distress me at all', and reflected, 'Isn't it funny how you get used to it. I didn't adopt it mind'.⁶² Ray also commented on some of his fellow workers in the trim room at Hood and Mason's where he worked, for a short time as a young lad in the early 1930s, and described them as, 'a rougher kind of individual who bet a lot and swore a lot and if you didn't behave yourself they could be a bit brutal'. Ray explained that he didn't feel he was like the majority of leggers he worked with, explaining that they were 'the rougher element' and 'came from much poorer families'.⁶³ The leggers (or trimmers) put the stockings onto shaped leg

⁶¹ Doll Coe. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁶² Lilian Coley. Memories.

⁶³ Ray Bateman. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. In his recorded memories Ray talks about the area around Derby Road in Hinckley as being the poorer area and Diane Crowther relates a story of how her mother who was brought up in this area always made sure that no one found out where she lived. Todd discusses the idea that factory workers could be deemed as being 'rough' and that certain areas were also seen as being rougher than others. See S. Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family, 191 -1950* (Oxford, 1950), p. 153; In my research factory people from Hinckley often thought of Nuneaton girls being rough and also people from the mining areas around Coalville.

boards which were then put into ovens to be steamed into shape. These stockings were knitted on circular machines and the steaming process shaped the stocking into a leg shape.

There could be friction and backbiting – complaints were made that so-and-so was getting the best work, leaving the more difficult and less well paid work to others, sometimes female operatives would be found in ‘floods of tears’ in the managers office. Complaints were made against the mechanics – while a machine stood idle no money was being earned, ‘you were paid on what you produced, piece rate’. Some respondents learned to repair their own machines having a set of tools at the ready. Rose remembers when she first went to Jennings to work at 15 no one spoke to her ‘everyone was in their own little clique and if you worked too hard you were called a scrat’.⁶⁴ The bosses, foremen and foremisses were also criticized for their strictness, for their weakness, for their eccentricities. Joan while talking about her boss explained that sometimes you would go in to work and the toe stitching machines that she worked on had been taken out. Her boss much preferred the better finish which was produced on a linking machine. She went on to comment that, ‘you’d end up doing any old job...backwinding or cutting up waste, something like that’.⁶⁵ One of the foremen that Anne Hall worked under during the late 1950s/early 1960s, she described as being lovely, ‘but such a weak, weak man’. The reason for describing him in this way was that he allowed the Nuneaton girls to do more or less what they liked ‘they’d go for cigarettes, you know, and they’d stand talking for ages’.⁶⁶ Doreen who worked at Bennett Brothers for seven years from the age of 14 in 1945 remembers that she and five other girls had to do a special type of work one day a week. She really hated doing this work and the woman who was in charge, they referred to as ‘fat Nell’ ‘and she used to come storming down the road, “who’s number so-and-so,” and she’d shout, “do those buggers again”’.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Rose Turton. Recorded memories

⁶⁵ Joan Pegg. Memories.

⁶⁶ Ann Hall. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁶⁷ Doreen Marvin. Memories.

Hi jinx and ‘Music while you work’ ‘We decided we wanted music all day’

The factory system of production fostered a close working community not least because of the proximity of the various machines and benches. It must also be acknowledged that many of the respondents who are now in their 60s, 70s, 80s and 90s are looking back to when they first left school – they were only 14 or 15 years old at the time – little more than children.⁶⁸ The messing about and hi jinks were part of growing up which they did within the confines of a factory. Mary and Marjorie related a practical joke which was played on their foreman, when one of the girls decided to ‘borrow’ his bowler hat, ‘he always used to wear these hard bowler hats and well you know what you’re like when you’re sixteen, you’re lairy aren’t you? Well she put his hat on – this bowler hat – and she started dancing round the room and pulled it and the whole brim came right off. Oh he were angry, he were!’⁶⁹ Peter remembers one incident when he was found up one of the many apple trees in the factory grounds. He had been encouraged to climb the tree by his so-called friends and being discovered by Mr Wileman himself, ‘and what do you think you are doing up there.’ He was ordered to take all the apples he had picked down to Miss Hampson’s shop, Miss Hampson being Mr. Wileman’s sister-in-law. On another occasion Peter and a ‘couple of mates’ were sent home for playing football in the cellar ‘and the manager told us we could come back in the morning and see, “if you’ve still got a job”’.⁷⁰

Lilian as a young girl, during work breaks, was taught to dance the Charleston by one of the girls she worked with on the old S&Gs and they would practise their steps for the various dances up and down the alleys between the rows of knitting machines. They

⁶⁸ M. Glucksmann, *Cottons and Casuals. The Gendered Organisation of Labour in Time and Space* (Durham, 2000), p. 33.

⁶⁹ Mary Kind and Marjory Grouse. Memories; Todd, *Young Women*, p. 160; As discussed by Sarsby, ‘they would have gone into the pots as children’. See J. Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Home and at Work* (Milton Keynes, 1988), p.59. Three of my respondents, Connie, Lilian and Doll died this year – Lilian was born in 1904, Connie was born in 1907 and Doll was born in 1909.. These women saw so many changes in their life times. They all began working at the age of 13 or 14 – Lilian who had been the youngest of eleven children looked after her mother until she died in her nineties, Connie brought up her family and worked in various factories in Leicester, Doll brought up her family and continued to work into her 70s doing a cleaning job. I feel so privileged to have been able to spend time with these women – the three of them were very enthusiastic and eager to tell me about their lives and the intricacies of their particular jobs in the hosiery factories.

⁷⁰ Peter Haywood. Memories.

would also sing songs, ‘there was about six of us working together and we used to sing a lot and this singing it were dreadful. She explained that ‘we all used to sing a different song and all begin together. It was a horrible noise!’⁷¹ At Hall’s factory in Stoke Golding, however, Joe compared the quality of the singing to that of a choir. During the Second World War, operatives at the factory would ‘strike up a hymn’. Joe explained that at that time the majority of people working in the factory went to the local church and chapel. Everybody would join in and we got such a quality of singers in the factory that it was like a real choir’. He recalled that one of the favourites was the sixty-fifth psalm and all the men would be banging and thumping when it came to a particular line.⁷² At Bennett’s on Southfield Road during wartime, *Workers Playtime*, was held in the factory canteen and artists such as Bert Weedon would come and perform for the factory workers during their dinner breaks.⁷³ Doreen as a youngster straight from school remembers that they used to listen to *Music While you Work*, ‘it used to come on at half-past-ten. You could hear all this singing all over the top of these noisy machines. It was a really nice atmosphere – all these lovely old dance band songs’. And because they enjoyed the music and singing so much Doreen and her workmates decided on a plan:

We six who were the youngest crowd at the end of this splicing table, we decided we wanted music all day, and I’d got this wind-up gramophone which belonged to me and me brother, and I said, “I’m sure Brian will let me borrow this gramophone,” so I asked him and he said, “Yes”. He’d even help me to smuggle it in! So there were three or four girls and Brian and myself and we smuggled this wind-up gramophone into the factory one lunch time. We got it in, got it on the table, piled work all round it so no one could see it. And then soon as Mr. Holland, the foreman, went out, “Wind it up,” “OK - off we go.” And we six got this music playing.

They were, however, warned by the older women, ‘You’ll be in a row, you’ll get the sack’. But nobody told on us, no. Until of course one day we did get caught. Mr. Holland sent for us and we got reprimanded but he didn’t tell the boss but he did tell me dad.’⁷⁴ Ann,

⁷¹ Lilian Coley. Memories.

⁷² Joe Lawrance. Memories.

⁷³ Bert Hall. Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷⁴ Doreen Marvin. Memories. Mr. Holland, who worked in a supervisory role at Bennett’s was also a friend of the family. ‘From the late 1930s an increasing number of firms introduced *Music While you Work*...this

who worked at numerous factories during the 1950s, has very fond memories of the early days of her working life: 'You were like sardines. They packed so many people in at that time and the work seemed to be all over the place. It were good fun, you could have a talk, have a laugh, friendly, that sort of thing...the radio was on and we'd all be singing along to it'.⁷⁵ Susan recalls when she started work in the late 1960s at the Argee, as an overlocker, that they were allowed to play records during the afternoon. These records were saved-up for by the girls and included, 'Elvis, Gene Pitney and Bobby Vee'. And all the girls who liked a particular song would wave to each other across the room. Susan commenting that looking back it seemed a silly thing to do, 'but that's what you did'. She also remembers as a young girl of 15 having just left school being fascinated by the older girls, 'they'd switch off their machines at ten to five', in order to do their hair and putting on their make up before meeting up with their boyfriends straight from work.⁷⁶ Similarly Florrie Lee commented on how in the 'in the old days', referring to the late 1950s, when she first started work, 'we'd go to work with our rollers in. Tie headscarves round our rollers and come home-time switch machine off and dash up to the toilet and do your hair'. She also did a workmate's hair who wasn't very good at backcombing, 'we used to do all that, straight after we'd finished work – off out to the pictures or wherever'.⁷⁷

Friday treats and factory romances **'She was the Earl Shilton beauty queen'**⁷⁸

Respondents also have memories of special treats on a Friday afternoon. They would celebrate the end of the week, by treating themselves in various ways. Lilian commented that, 'we always used to have a special cake, you know, one of those luscious ones'.⁷⁹ Joan and her work colleagues used to 'take fruit and cream in and have cream cakes, cups of tea and it always lasted longer than it should have'.⁸⁰

trend and factory workers' own propensity for group singing at their benches when permitted were frequently noted in propaganda as signifying high moral...'. See Todd, *Young Women*, p. 161

⁷⁵ Ann Hutt. Memories..

⁷⁶ Susan Judd. Memories.

⁷⁷ Florrie Leigh. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁷⁸ Roy Bonser. Memories.

⁷⁹ Lilian Coley. Memories.

⁸⁰ Joan Pegg. Memories.

Ann remembers, 'we used to be paid Friday morning – Friday dinner time we'd all go out and get sweets', explaining that, 'when we came back everybody went round the machines, whether you were there or not, you'd have a sweet off the different individuals'. She also remembers how on a Friday afternoon, '[we would] sit there in our rollers, as teenagers, ready to go dancing at night'.⁸¹ Richard, a factory manager, remembers joining a small group of women who worked the flat lock machines which he described as a very difficult job 'and round about 3 o'clock on a Friday afternoon I used to go round to Mrs P and her mates, four of them and me, would just have a little port and brandy just to set the weekend off'.⁸² The factory was not just a place of productivity. These people knew each other, many had gone to school together and were often related. Marion Godfrey while discussing her working life talked about the camaraderie which existed between workmates, 'you made life-long friendships. We still mix socially with the people we worked with years ago'.⁸³

The recorded memories undertaken over several years emphasise this concept of shared experiences and there is a real sense of belonging to their community, to the factory, to their family, to their friends. The majority of respondents went into the factory already knowing people who were working there and these included mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents – their extended families. Other respondents may not have had any relations in the factory but they would have known workmates as neighbours, they would have been friends of friends. They would also have known, or at least, heard of their bosses – they would have heard about the characteristics and eccentricities of the manufacturers. These people grew up together and this concept of belonging and familiarity led to the factory being not only a place of production but the, 'source of a considerable social life'.⁸⁴ This included larking about, playing jokes on fellow workers, the gossip and the teasing. Joe as a young lad in the late 1920s worked on some very old machines with patterned wheels, and because some of the older men thought he 'had some ability', he went as a mechanic working as an 'oily rag' for six grown-up

⁸¹ Ann Hutt. Memories.

⁸² Richard. Dixon. Memories.

⁸³ Marion Godfrey. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1. Todd, *Young Women*, p. 201.

⁸⁴ Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics*, p. 193.

mechanics, ‘that meant that I had to do all the dirty work for these chaps’, adding that, ‘they taught me quite a lot. I mean it was an experience, really, that was quite invaluable even though it was not an official apprenticeship’. It was while working as an ‘oily rag’, and consequently as a mechanic at Bradbury’s, that he experienced quite a bit of teasing from the girls and women whose machines he repaired. The majority were older married women who had known him as a child and because of this familiarity – the teasing and messing about was all taken in good fun. Joe commented on how lovely these women were also adding that he received quite a few valentines over the years and there was one particular lady who he referred to as being, ‘quite beautiful’.⁸⁵

Doreen and Gordon remember how as youngsters they used to mess about and Doreen and her friends used to race through all the knitting machines so that they would be noticed by the lads and get thrown in the skips, ‘we used to love it.’⁸⁶ It was all quite innocent fun. A few respondents also talked about how some operatives would disappear during a break to meet up with their boyfriend or girlfriend. Ray, for instance, talked about how, as a young knitter, he would disappear from his knitting machine during the evening while working at John Gents to meet his girlfriend, who later became his wife. He always turned his machine off while he was away. Mrs. Bateman explained that she lived down Leicester Road and that she daren’t be anywhere near where her dad might see them ‘cos I was scared stiff, ‘We’d have a snog and then he’d go back’.⁸⁷ Ray did, however, explain what would happen if a knitting machine was left on and unattended for more than an hour, ‘Horace, who used to work at John Gents, he was a young knitter, ex- grammar school lad, he used to go out courting. Unlike myself he used to leave his machines running’. Ray explained that at the time, ‘you had to separate them [stockings] individually with a pair of scissors. And if you were away too long they used to ravel up like string and that of course, meant that it took you almost the rest of the night to get straight again’. He also explained that the machines would start running out of yarn and the knitter had to replace that and it was also his responsibility to tie the stockings up into dozens, in twenty-fours.

⁸⁵ Joe Lawrance. Memories.

⁸⁶ Doreen and Gordon. Memories.

⁸⁷ Mr. and Mrs. Bateman. Memories. Ray was suspended for one week.

Factory romances, it would seem, were inevitable with all these people working together, particularly young people. A number of respondents spoke of how they did 'fall' for a fellow worker. Kath Ball, started work in 1937, and met her husband at Wolsey's which was situated on Station Road in Earl Shilton. She was learning 'the mending' and Cliff was an apprentice counterman:

we was in the same room. And I used to say, "I'm not going out with him". You know how you are when you're about 16 but anyway we got together...you know go to pictures and then I wouldn't see him for a little while and then kept going from one to another. Then the war came and he used to come and see me on leave. He rang me to tell me he was coming home on leave and he says about getting married and I thought, "Oh dear, shall I, shan't I, shall I." But anyway I made my mind up all of a sudden.⁸⁸

Roy met his future wife while working at Nicholls and Wileman, and he described how as an apprentice counterman he would come down the stairs from the warehouse and this one particular morning Roy was racing down, 'like lightning', balancing a pile of boxes and Sylvia who had been Earl Shilton carnival queen and someone 'you looked at from a distance', was walking through the yard to the seamers room. Roy hadn't seen her because of the pile of boxes he was balancing in his arms and he threw them all over her, Roy continuing, 'she looked round at me and said "you silly devil."' She couldn't have minded too much, however, because they started seeing each other and were married in 1953.⁸⁹

Gordon, when working at Flude's as an apprentice mechanic at the age of 16, met the girl of his dreams: 'I met my wife, Jean, at Flude's'. Jean who was a linker, and very good at her job [and she] sat at a bench alongside her fellow linkers. The mechanics kept a work book on the bench and this work book was next to Jean's linking machine. 'Any machine that was broke down the girl would go up to it, put the date, write her name and what was wrong with the machine and the mechanic used to go and see what machine was 'off' and go to it.' After looking at the work book on one occasion he said to Jean, 'I'll marry you'. Jean, however, was seeing someone else at this time. True to his word, however, Jean and Gordon did get married three years later, when they were both 19, and

⁸⁸ Kath and Cliff Ball. Memories. Kath and Cliff were married on VE Day 1945. Todd, *Young Women*, p. 156.

⁸⁹ Roy Bonser. Memories.

he described how and when they did start going out together: 'We were up the George on Saturday night or Friday, cos I was always up the George, and she came over and, it was 'a lady's privilege', asked me for a dance and from then on it didn't stop'.⁹⁰



Plate 6. Sylvia, carnival queen, with her attendants
(Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

There was also a tradition within the factory that a young person who was getting married was dressed up by his or her work mates and a number of respondents have spoken about their own experiences of being dressed up or having been involved in dressing up a bride or groom. It was also a custom to tie up the machine that the operative worked on. These young people were often tied to a lamp post for everyone to see them, Susan admitting that she tied her friend to a lamp post in Barwell and was told off by the police because she had left her 'in a most precarious place,' adding, however, that her friend was totally oblivious 'because she was so drunk.'⁹¹ Chris for instance when he was married during the 1970s was dressed as a fairy, 'a seventeen stone rugby prop'.⁹² Marjorie described how they used to make the bride-to-be 'a lovely big hat and make paper roses and put her long dress on and she'd go all round the factory giving everybody cake and a drink', admitting that at one time they went a 'bit too far' when both the bride and groom-

⁹⁰ Gordon. Memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁹¹ Susan Judd. Memories. Todd, *Young Women*, p. 157.

⁹² Chris Startin. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

to-be both worked at the factory. ‘They put them in one of these big trolleys, what you shove the work in, and we took them outside and over the zebra crossing and to the Co-op and tied them up so they couldn’t get out’.⁹³ Tony who was married one of the office girls in the early 1970s remembers:

They took me coat out from where it was hung, sewed the bottoms of me sleeves up, piled talcum powder and confetti in there and I had to wear that. They painted your face up as well – lipstick and all that. Traipsed you all round the different departments, looking like a clown. Then they would give you the present from the boss as well.⁹⁴

Celebrations, days out and holidays ‘Oh we’d put up so many decorations’

As already discussed the factory was a hive of activity. Men and women working in close proximity to each other, two or three generations of the same family worked under the same roof. Manufacturers and factory workers knew each other and they knew each other’s families and thus a familiarity between workers and their bosses existed. As discussed by Joe, he had not only worked with Neville, the present owner of Hall’s, but also with his father, Peter and his grandfather, Frank. H.J. Hall’s commemorative brochure highlights the tradition of family involvement in the factory stating, ‘By its centenary in 1982, H.J. Hall & Son employed over 250 people, many from the same families that joined John Hall when he established the company a century before’.⁹⁵ Indeed quite a few of the respondents were able to relate the number of years they had been with one particular company – Joe Lawrance, Nellie Skelton, Bill Partridge, Maureen Smart, Arthur Amos, Bradley discusses the tradition of family employment at Hall’s and Atkins and the long service of many of their workers. Bert Hall, Peter Haywood and Cliff Maund were just a few respondents who spent the majority of their working lives working for one company.

⁹³ Marjorie Grouse. Recorded memories.

⁹⁴ Tony Smith. Recorded memories.

⁹⁵ *H. J. Hall & Son High Quality English Hosiery since 1882*; Sarsby discusses the fact that her respondents enjoyed working for a family firm - they valued the interest that their boss took in them – always coming in to say ‘good morning’, and always attending the funeral of a retired worker. See Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners*, p. 54-65; Bradley discusses the tradition of family employment at Hall’s and Atkins and the long service of many of their workers. See H. Bradley, ‘Degradation and regeneration: Social and technological change in the East Midlands hosiery industry 1800-1960’ (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Durham, 1987), p. 208., ‘Degradation and regeneration’, pp. 213-222.

Many other respondents also worked in the 'hosiery' all their lives, but owing to lack of work, redundancy and for more personal reasons, moved from one company to another, such as Cliff Ball, Lilian Coley, Arthur Cash, Mrs. Clowe, Margaret Read, Maureen Warren. Many have very fond memories of their retirement do's and receiving long service awards such as a gold watch and also receiving flowers, chocolates and so on from fellow employees. Peter, who started his working life at Nicholls and Wileman at the age of 14 in 1944, spoke about his surprise retirement 'do' from Nicholls and Wileman in 1995, 'I didn't know what was going on.' He then went on to describe the send-off he would never forget:

It turned out that they'd got this tape recorder at the back of me and they played this Tina Turner record, *It's Simply the Best*, and out of the corner of my eye I saw this red dress coming down with this superb wig on and high heeled shoes...it turned out to be our finishing mechanic. And I am not kidding you he was brilliant. Bearing in mind all the factory were there...and he came down these stairs, he looked tremendous. He got hold of me, gave me a kiss before I realised who it was. But it was a great send off...it were well appreciated at the time...51[years] really on the date I started that's counting the service in the forces. That was the end.⁹⁶

Peter and Lilian were also treated to a holiday in Scotland, 'and stacks of other things'.⁹⁷

Respondents were able to look back at the wonderful Christmas parties held at the various factories. Brian who worked as a mechanic at Atkins has very fond memories of Bertha Taylor and her friends, who turned up in these 'funny clothes' which consisted of 'long voluminous red, white and blue drawers.' And they would drink damson wine and reminisce about the 'old Sunday School Treats in Hinckley'.⁹⁸ Doreen remembers having 'jelly and blancmange', Gordon remembers 'we had wine and beer.' 'Oh we'd put up so many decorations...it were wonderful'.⁹⁹ Many factories had a savings club and operatives would put away so much a week towards the annual Christmas party which was more often than not held in the factory and machinery and benches would be moved to the sides of the room. 'When it came prior to breaking up, we used to put tables up the centre of the room

⁹⁶ Peter Haywood. Memories.

⁹⁷ Peter Haywood. Memories.

⁹⁸ Brian Simpson. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

⁹⁹ Doreen Marvin. Memories

with tablecloths on, knives and forks, you name it, we got it, wines, spirits, plenty of food and a good time was had by one and all'.¹⁰⁰

Respondents have also talked about the 'do's' that some factories put on for their employees celebrating Christmas, the New Year or in the case of Toon's, their centenary 'do' held at Earl Shilton Working Men's Club in 1950. There was no expense spared, the menu for the sit down meal was soup followed by a ham salad and finished off with fruit and cream and cups of tea. The drink flowed and it was all free 'there were a few sore heads the following day'.¹⁰¹ The Argee organised numerous dinner and dances which were usually held at Earl Shilton Working Men's club. Everyone wore their best dresses and suits and after the meal there would be dancing to a well known band. Harold Cash felt very honoured when he was asked to give the after-dinner-speech and joined, 'the Cedars Speakers Club', in order that he did justice to the honour of being asked to do such a privileged thing.¹⁰² Flude's held a 'Miss Lovely Legs' competition every year. Bennett's held the 'Hosiery Queen' beauty competition at The George Hotel. Bert and Ann Hall very entertainingly talked about the various stars who were hired to entertain employers, employees, friends and family at the annual dances which were held at The George Hotel, or other prestigious venues. Bert for instance organised dances at The George Hotel where well known stars of the day such as Harry Roy and *Ivy Benson and her All Girl Band*, would perform. Bert commented that 1,100 people turned up to see Ivy Benson in the late 1940s. During the 1950s they had singers such as Jack Parnell and Eric Delaney'.¹⁰³

Days out holidays

'We not only worked together we played together'

The annual carnival was something else that many factories took part in and there was strong competition as to which factory would win the factory section of the carnival. Schools, church and chapel, scouts and guides and the local pubs would also have their own floats. Sport was also a big feature of factory social life – many of the local factories had

¹⁰⁰ Tony Smith. Memories.

¹⁰¹ Worrall and Joan Pegg. Memories.

¹⁰² Harold Cash. Memories.

¹⁰³ Ann and Bert Hall. Memories. .

their own cricket and football teams along with darts and dominoes. Yvonne Teasdale's family had been involved in the Argee drama club and her aunt was very keen amateur actress who thoroughly enjoyed taking part in the various plays which were put on.¹⁰⁴ Bert Hall, a very keen gardener, enjoyed being a member of the wonderful gardening club that had once thrived at Bennett's.¹⁰⁵ Quite a few of the bigger hosiery factories also organised days out and the following gives an idea of the geographical area in which people lived and were prepared to travel in order to work in the thriving factories at this time. The trip organised by Nicholls and Wileman was described in the local press thus:

Works outing by special to Blackpool on Saturday. Train started from Leicester and collected parties at the various stations on route to Nuneaton. Pick-up points for the buses were at Coalville, Ratby, Desford, Peckleton, Kirkby Mallory, Earl Shilton, Thurlaston, Huncote, Stoney Stanton, Barlestone, Newbold Verdon, Market Bosworth and Stoke Golding...the special left Hinckley at 7.45 and arrived in Blackpool 11.30 – over 550 in the party and they sat down to lunch at the restaurant of R.H.O. Hill (Blackpool) Ltd. Party included W.A. Wileman, CC, MD and Mrs Wileman, Mr. Mrs Keith Wileman, Mr.Mrs. A Godfrey and a number of trade friends'.¹⁰⁶

Lilian remembers a trip to Rhyl where she tasted fresh salmon for the first time.¹⁰⁷ Mary and her friend, however, were too frightened to go on a trip to London organised by Toon's because they had been told that, 'we could be abducted'.¹⁰⁸ They decided it was far better to stay at home where they felt safe. Days out would start with catching the train at 6 o'clock or 7 o'clock in the morning and usually arriving back home in the early hours of the following morning. A few respondents also mentioned that the destination of a particular outing often depended on whether or not the manufacturer had relations living in the town. As commented by Maureen, 'well we always went to Rhyl because old Harry [Flude] had his brother living there'.¹⁰⁹

Various historians have discussed the factory 'do's', the sport and the days out which were organised by various factories and stated how these social occasions helped to

¹⁰⁴ Yvonne Teasdale. Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive. The O'Rourke sisters were also involved in amateur dramatics.

¹⁰⁵ Anne and Bert. Hall. Memories.

¹⁰⁶ *Hinckley Times*, 20 June 1953.

¹⁰⁷ Lilian Coley. Memories.

¹⁰⁸ Mary Grouse. Memories.

¹⁰⁹ Jean Smart. Memories.

forge strong ties between the boss and the worker.¹¹⁰ These activities also emphasised community and family involvement because more often than not husbands, wives, girlfriends, boyfriends, mums and dads would be invited to a dinner and dance. They would also go on the day trips and would support their son, boyfriend or husband at the inter factory football and cricket matches. Respondents have also talked about how a group of people, sometimes a group of young people, as young as fourteen or fifteen, sometimes a mixed family group and friends, would go on holidays together.¹¹¹ They would save up for their bed and board, their travel money and of course spending money, and this one week by the sea was looked forward to and spoken about with great expectations. Some saved into a holiday club at work, sometimes called the ‘didim club’, others saved privately. Respondents have talked about how it was quite common for a family to take their food with them¹¹² – garden peas, would be stuffed into shoes, tins of salmon tucked in amongst holiday clothes and all modes of transport would be used. People have memories of walking down to Elmhurst station with their cases or hiring a horse and cart to take them to the station. It was quite common to catch the night train and arrive at their destination first thing in the morning. Trains at this time did not always have corridors and one particular group of girls catching the night train decided that they would have to use a little boys bucket as a toilet because there was no access to a toilet and there was no way they could ‘go all night’ They did treat the lad to a new bucket and spade!’ Some groups hired a taxi to take them to their holiday destination. Flo Clarke remembers going away with a small group of friends as a girl of 17 in 1931 – she had never been away before. She had never seen the sea, and remembers having a beautiful new dress to take away with her, but her mother insisted that she should wear her vest at all times!’¹¹³

It was also quite normal for boyfriends and girlfriends to go away together, they would, however, be part of a group of males and females, family and friends – the men and boys would share one room and the girls and women would be in another – all sharing double beds and single bed, ‘it was surprising how many you could cram into one room!’

¹¹⁰ Joyce; H. Bradley;

¹¹¹ J. K. Walton, *The British Seaside. Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester, 2000); J.K. Walton, *Beside the Seaside. A Social History of the Popular Seaside Holiday* (London, 1978); Pimlot,

¹¹² Mrs. Clowes. Memories, Bill Lumley. Memories.

¹¹³ Flo Clarke. Memories.

Doll remembers one particular holiday in Blackpool while settling themselves in their seats at the theatre, to watch the *Desert Song* and who should be sitting further along the row was, 'Carey Toon' who when seeing a group of his employees, commented 'I can't get away from you lot can I?'.¹¹⁴

Hinckley during the annual week's holiday would be deserted and with the introduction of holiday pay after the Second World War more and more people were able to afford their annual holiday by the sea. By the 1960s two weeks holiday pay was the norm and Rocky spoke about how as young lads they went to Spain. This was when package holidays for the working classes were first being introduced in the mid to late 1960s. Lindsay and a few friends started their working lives at the Argee in the mid 1980s and recalled how they saved every penny they could to go on a trip of a lifetime to Los Angeles. They were fans of the 'brat pack' and they would meet at each others houses and watch the same films over and over again while saving for this 'trip of a lifetime'. Two weeks in Los Angeles was a 'dream come true' for these teenage girls. Unfortunately they were quite limited in what they could do – American law stating that in order to drink and go into licensed bars 'you had to be over 21'.¹¹⁵

Working life and social life merged together friends from the factory and old friends from school met up for sport, dances and the cinema. Gordon remembers going to watch Leicester City on a Saturday afternoon and on the way back on the train he got a mate of his to teach him to do the Bepop, 'when we first started going up the George it was Bop – Bepop. I didn't know how to Bepop but he did, "learn me how to Bop." And there we were up and down the coaches'.¹¹⁶ He was also taught to do a Windsor knot which again was the latest fashion trend and mentioned that everyone had a 'birds eye'. The 'birds eye' was the name of the suit that all the fashion conscious young lads were wearing at the time. By the late 1950s early 1960s young men were having their suits made at 'London Tailoring on Regent Street' in Hinckley and rock n' roll was all the craze, although the 'MD' at The

¹¹⁴ Doll Coe. Memories.

¹¹⁵ Lindsay Orton. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Working Life Histories of Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹¹⁶ Todd, *Young Women*, p. 217.

George did try and stop young people from doing this latest dance.¹¹⁷ Doreen and her best friend often had a ‘snooze’ on a Saturday afternoon so that they would be ‘really with it for the evening because we’d be out until about 12 o’clock. She explained that when she first started going, ‘up the George’, when she was about 16 her brother always came along and he made sure that she ‘got home safe’.¹¹⁸ These young people often went dancing on a Friday and Saturday night and pictures followed by the ‘monkey run’ on a Sunday evening. The monkey run which many people remember with great affection was when all the young people would dress in their best clothes and walk round a particular area of Hinckley, ‘eyeing up the talent,’ shouting and laughing and being constantly moved on by the police – no one was allowed to stop.¹¹⁹ Many of these young people learnt to dance at the established dancing schools in the town such as Maggie Marshall’s and Rueben Garratt’s. Doreen as a teenager during the mid to late 1940s was also taught the jitterbug in the school playground, ‘the older girls teaching the younger girls how to jitterbug and that sort of thing’.¹²⁰

Banners, a coffee bar, was a place where many young people would also congregate, drinking their steamed coffee while listening to the latest pop records. Tony Smith also remembers with affection the ‘tanner hop’ held at Barwell Liberal Club, he and a few friends would take their own record player and the latest records. Older respondents also have memories of the ‘tanner hop’ which ran from the Great War to the 1940s and was organised by Mrs. Titley, Reverend Titley’s wife. Here young people from about the age of fourteen, and younger, would learn the latest dances and if they had any money they could buy a cup of tea and a cob for 6d. From these organised church dances young people progressed to the George, The Earl Shilton Working Men’s Club, Nuneaton Co-op Hall, Barwell Liberal Club and further afield to Coalville, Leicester and Coventry.

¹¹⁷ Gordon. Memories. ‘Birds eye’ was the name of the material the suit was made out of. Brian Bradley loved going to the George and remembers the ‘MD’ trying his hardest to stop young people from doing the rock n’ roll.

¹¹⁸ Doreen Marvin. Memories. Doreen and her friends always used a ‘Marcel’ to set their hair and their hair felt like cardboard; Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners*, p. 76; Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, p. 69

¹¹⁹ A. Davies, *Leisure, Gender and Poverty: Working Class Cultures in Salford and Manchester, 1900-1939* (Buckingham, 1992); Todd, *Young Women*, p. 217; Fowler, *The First Teenagers*; E. Roberts, *A Woman’s Place: An Oral History of Working-Class Women, 1890-1940* (Oxford, 1984).

Roberts, *A Woman’s Place*, p. 69, Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners*, p. 71.

¹²⁰ Doreen Marvin. Memories.

Conclusion

By the late nineteenth century, factory workers became disciplined and obeyed the factory rules. Irregular hours and St Monday became a thing of the past, the factory whistle, clocking in and out of the factory became the norm and determined the times that people would get up for work. If they were not there by a stipulated time they were sometimes locked out by their boss and they would certainly have been docked an amount from their pay. As many respondents testified, people came flocking into Hinckley, Earl Shilton and Barwell every day to work not only in the thriving hosiery industry but also in the Boot and Shoe industry. The town and villages were crowded first thing in the morning and early evening with people coming to work and leaving work. The factories were a hive of activity with young and old working side by side. As discussed by various respondents, there could be friction – they were working on piece rates and every second wasted was wasted money.

It would seem, however, that the majority of people who volunteered to record their memories did enjoy their working lives. The vast majority were no more than children when they started work at the age of 14 or 15 during the 1930s, 40s and 50s. Many made lifelong friendships – they had a laugh and a joke with fellow workers, in some instances they married each other. They enjoyed days out on the company, and Christmas parties were seen as the highlight of the working year with money being saved all year towards food and drink. They celebrated each other's birthdays, weddings and retirement. And what is apparent throughout the chapter is the sense of community and belonging – these people not only worked together but they also 'played together'. They did each other's hair, they taught each other the latest dance steps, they went dancing together, to the pictures and on the 'monkey run'. They saved up for their annual holiday by the sea, and they usually went on that with friends and family from the factory.

Close community and family involvement in the hosiery continued well into the twentieth century. This persisted despite significant changes in working practices, trade, and social and economic upheaval. However, the industry has now been in severe decline

for a number of years with the closure of many factories and is a 'remnant' of its past glory. The workforce has found alternative employment not associated with the hosiery, as discussed in Chapter 7. This last chapter draws conclusions from the work undertaken and discusses in greater depth the downturn in the 'hosiery'.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

I have made an attempt to discuss an industry which dominated the Hinckley area for over 300 years, from the introduction of the first framework knitting machine by William Illife in 1640 to its gradual demise in the latter part of the twentieth century. Generation followed generation into an industry which was very much dependent, not only on the ‘whims of fashion’ but also from overseas competition and boom and slump economic conditions. Framework knitting was introduced into the East Midlands because there already existed a surplus of cheap labour and cottage industries often settled in areas of mixed pasture. London hosiers wanted to break away from the stronghold of the master framework knitters situated in London who demanded high prices for their silk stockings. Cottage industry or proto industrialisation, as it became known, thrived in the East Midland counties, and framework knitters and their families worked as a unit of production in order to combat the highs and lows of an industry which suffered from severe depression during certain periods of its history. As early as 1740 the term ‘as poor as a stockinger’ had already been heard and framework knitters first petitioned parliament in the mid 1700s bringing attention to their plight.¹

The framework knitter and his family lived and worked in a way suitable to their way of life – everyone being involved in the production of hose. One only has to look at the census returns for the local area – framework knitters and their families lived in close proximity to each other and streets, yards and courts were full of people churning out stockings. Indeed, ‘all family members were dragged into the struggle for survival’²

¹ J. Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicestershire*, vol. 4, part II (1811, Wakefield, 1971), p. 679; A.J. Pickering, *The Cradle and Home of the Hosiery Trade. 1640-1940* (Hinckley, 1940), p. 17;

² H. Bradley, ‘Technological change, management strategies, and the development of gender-based job segregation in the Labour Process’ in D. Knights, *Gender and the Labour Process*, p. 59; R.A.B. Houston and K.D.M. Snell, ‘Proto-industrialisation? Cottage industry, social change and the Industrial Revolution’,

Parliamentary Papers continued to be published throughout the nineteenth century and provide a fascinating insight into the lives of the framework knitter and his family, and highlight the desperate poverty in which they found themselves, not only because of exploitation by hosiers and middlemen, but because of severe depression in the industry. Framework knitters also had to contend with the introduction of the wide frame which was in common use in the larger towns and cities by the early to mid nineteenth century. The area under discussion, however, still knitted wrought hose or fully fashioned stockings that were seen as being superior to those 'spurious' or 'fraudulent' articles knitted on the wide frame. They were also more expensive and the demand for the 'leg bag' because of its cheapness increased, adding to the misery of the domestic worker who could find only a decreasing market for his stockings.³

Change was necessary. In order to compete not only with the domestic market but with overseas markets, the hosiery industry had to modernise. Very gradually Hosiers began using steam power to operate the simple circular knitting machines along with the heavier and more complicated rotaries. In 1870s William Cotton's fully fashioned knitting machines became available on the open market. Other changes also took place during the 1870s including compulsory schooling along and abolishment of Truck. People who had worked under the domestic system of production were now working at the local factories – men on the William Cotton fully fashioned machines and heavier and more complicated circular machinery while women worked on the less complicated circular knitting machines. The majority of women, however, were employed in the numerous finishing operations. By the 1890s it could be said that Hinckley was a typical factory town with twenty-four factories operating from various sites around the town. Factories were often built on sites which had already been occupied by hosiers as living accommodation and or warehouses. For instance the Atkins family had their factory built next to the family home on Lower Bond Street, the Toon's also had their factory built next to the family home on Wood Street in Earl Shilton. Thomas Payne's factory had

The Historical Journal, 27, (1984), p. 192; D. Levine, *Family Formation in an age of Nascent Capitalism* (London, 1977), p. 51.

³ F.A. Wells, *The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry. Its History and Organisation* (1935; Newton Abbot, 1972 edn.), p. 80;

been purchased along with cottages on Wood Street in Hinckley. Other sites had been in use over the centuries, for instance William Williamson's factory or warehouse on Upper Bond Street became a thriving factory up until the 1950s.⁴ Flavell's sewing factory had originally been a steam mill.⁵

The factory, as discussed by Peter Head, could incur high costs from the hosier and for this reason he demanded commitment from his workers – fines were imposed for bad time keeping – operatives had to be at their machines by a certain time and worked regular hours as laid down by factory legislation – irregular hours of the stockinger became a thing of the past.⁶ Men, such as John Hall, Arthur Davenport, Arthur Moore, Tom Smith, Timothy Jennings, James Bennett, Billy Wileman and numerous others started their working lives in the early factories. These young men who set up in business during the latter years of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century often established their factories on sites owned by the family. They started in a small way, in their own homes, 'a shed in the back garden', 'a nissen hut'. In some instance they were able to buy second hand machinery from friends of the family.⁷ The men mentioned above all became successful manufacturers with sons and grandsons following them into an industry which was thriving. They employed thousands of people not only from the town of Hinckley and villages of Earl Shilton, Barwell, Burbage and Stoney Stanton but much further afield – Barlestone, Desford, Bagworth, Ibstock and over the border in North Warwickshire including Nuneaton, Bulkington and Wolvey.

The hosiery industry had always been highly competitive – there was a constant need to keep ahead or abreast of fashion – new styles, new yarns necessitated the need to adapt and modernise machinery and factory buildings – from stable buildings, terraced housing, sheds, nissen huts and old warehouses there arose some very imposing factories

⁴ A.J. Pickering, *Cradle and Home of the Hosiery Trade* (Hinckley, 1940)

⁵ Pickering, *Cradle and Home*, p.

⁶ P. Head, 'Industrial organisation in Leicester, 1844-1914' (unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Leicester, 1960); F.A. Wells, *Hosiery and Knitwear*; .R. Gurnham, *A History of the Trade Union Movement in the Hosiery and Knitwear Industry, 1776-1976* (Leicester, 1976).

⁷ Interviews with Neville Hall, John Bennett, David Jennings, Simon Flude, Ian Davenport, Michael Smith, Charles Davenport and Brian Moore,

– the Atkins factory for instance designed by Goddard, the Leicester Architect, was one of the first to be built in order to house Cotton’s Patent machinery and it has been possible by using *Atkins of Hinckley, 1772-1972* to note the changes, adaptations and extensions to this one factory in order to highlight the changes which took place over time in the majority of factories in Hinckley and Earl Shilton.



Plate 7. The Argee, Keats Lane, Earl Shilton.
(Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

Factories were a ‘hive of activity’ producing all manner of knitted garments in what could often be described as dingy, noisy, cramped surroundings – rooms were sometimes hot, sometimes cold, depending on where one worked – rooms of knitting machines dominated by men, rooms full of benches with women and girls sitting on stools carrying out numerous finishing operations as shown in Plate 7, which shows a room full of very smart young operatives. There were also the trimmers, dyers, examiners and many other operatives too numerous to mention – the majority of the work in the factory being skilled or semi-skilled.⁸ Each task needed a specific amount of time before a young operative became proficient and went on his or her ‘own time’. Indeed

⁸ Wells, *Hosiery and Industry*, p. 204.

piece rate was a discipline of its own – one could only earn what one produced – wasted time was wasted money.⁹ As already discussed the majority of people who worked in the ‘hosiery’ followed parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and friends and it has also been commented on that the hosiery was indeed ‘inbred’. It would seem in many ways that there was a natural progression from domestic industry where all members of the family worked as a unit of production to factory production where operatives were paid for what they produced. The ‘hosiery’ dominated the local area for over 300 years with local people adapting to the needs of this one industry – framework knitting in the home gave way to factory production and intense competition meant that change and adaptation to new ways of working was essential, as highlighted by the inclusion of a few respondents testimonies, ‘they’ll never get rid of side-seaming – silly me’. From working fully fashioned knitting machines to working as a mechanic on sewing machines – it would seem that Harold Cash thrived on the challenges which he encountered during his working life. Cliff Maund began his working life at Bennett’s in 1953 and graduated, ‘onto B5s making rayon stockings, twelve in a set. They used to make splicing, mock seaming and also put fashion marks on the back of the hose’. Cliff while observing the changes that had taken place in the ‘hosiery’ during the forty-odd years he had worked in the industry, stated, ‘At one time a knitter had ten or twelve machines. At the present time, depending on the type of garments being knitted, he can have up to sixty machines’.¹⁰ Plate 8 shows a photo of one shift of knitters at Bennett Bros during the mid 1950s.

The constant upgrading and development of new machinery – both knitting and finishing machinery – meant that many jobs became obsolete or required less operatives and the extract included explains the function of a Detexomat machine:

I went down to the Turn Stitch Turn Department. The work came off the knitting machine and this machine it turned it [stockings] on the wrong side, closed the toe and then turned it back again by suction. I mean, given at this time we had twenty-four female Turn Stitch Turn operators, and when these new Detexomat machines came in they were either made redundant or we found them other jobs within the factory.

⁹ Wells, *Hosiery and Industry*, p. 213.

¹⁰ Cliff Maund. Memories. Cliff was made redundant from Nicholls and Wileman in about 1996

Because this work it goes through that quickly, one Detexomat machine, I should think, does the work of about four operators.¹¹



Plate 8. A shift of knitters at Bennett Brothers (c1956). Cliff Maund, centre back.
(Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

The well respected, highly paid counterman also came under threat during the early 1960s with the introduction of automatic machinery for pairing was developed, thus eliminating the ‘core skill’.¹² Many of the men employed in this occupation left the industry altogether, others stayed put and became members of staff involved in quality control and other managerial roles.¹³ The counterman’s job was broken down into various parts and women were then given the job of pairing, folding and packing. With the introduction of tights, however, the attention to detail which stockings had demanded whereby shade, fashion marks and welts all had to be matched up in order to make a perfect pair was obsolete. Fully fashioned knitting which had been a highly prestigious job, and demanded high wages, was also affected by changing fashion and many extremely expensive fully fashioned knitting machines were smashed-up, exported to

¹¹ Peter Haywood. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1.

¹² H. Bradley, *Men’s Work, Women’s work: A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 141.

¹³ Peter Haywood and Tony Smith went into management – Peter at Nicholls and Wileman and Tony at Davenport’s, Bill Lumley, who worked as a counterman at Bradbury’s continued his working life at Marvin’s. He had been ‘borrowed’ by Marvin’s. Roy Bonser decided to move into another job and worked at Rubery Owen which had set up work in the old Toon’s factory. Worall Pegg went to work for the electricity board. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1.

newly expanding textile areas in Eastern Europe and China or adapted to making women's and children's underwear.¹⁴



Plate 9. 'Rubery Owen Pumps Ltd'. Emblazoned across the front of the old J.Toon and Son hosiery factory. It's trade name, 'Premier Works', can be seen over the doorway, on the left hand side of the building. (Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive).

Along with the continuing demise of various jobs in the 'hosiery', the almost constant need to be able to change their way of working, as demanded by the 'whims of fashion', so the powerful influence of the warehouses began to waiver and the chain stores became hugely powerful. A few manufacturers were able to give good accounts of how their own businesses were affected by both the warehouse and chain stores and indeed 'make or break a company'. Cheap imports from abroad, however, were also a major influence on whether or not a local firm was able to compete in the market place. In 1998 David Jennings was working from a factory on John Street in Hinckley producing tights for the 'bigger lady'. Davenport Knitwear's outlets included various catalogues along with Littlewoods and British Home Stores. James Bennett's were manufacturing for, among other shops, Dorothy Perkins and Topshop. H.J. Halls continued to manufacture Hall's 'Indestructible' socks along with many other brands of half hose for men. Flude's continued to manufacture their tights and stockings for various

¹⁴ Gordon. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1.

outlets. Nicholls and Wileman were manufacturing children's socks along with men's and women's hose. Richard Robert's continued manufacturing fully fashioned outerwear. Tom Smith's operating under Scholl moved its machinery and workforce from Bulkington to an industrial estate in Hinckley during 1998 but shortly afterwards the business relocate to Cornwall taking some of its old workforce with it.¹⁵



Plate 10a. Timothy Jennings & Sons Ltd The factory was built in the late 1920s. The building where he set up in business can be seen in the background.
(The Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)



Plate 10b. The extension to Jennings factory in the late 1930s
(The Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive)

The changes and demise in the industry has continued – David Jennings and his nephew now operate from a small unit in Barwell. The original building which Timothy Jennings had built on Upper Bond Street in Hinckley is shown in Plate 10a with an extension to the factory shown in Plate 10b. The factory was demolished during 1998 to make way for a Magistrates' Court. Many other factory buildings have also been demolished and small housing estates have been built in their place. Some factories have been converted to luxury apartments. Bradbury's factory, on Keat's Lane in Earl Shilton, the chimney of which could be seen on one's approach to Earl Shilton, along the A47, from Leicester is now but a distant memory.¹⁶ The photograph Plate 9 shows Toon's hosiery factory which was situated on Wood Street in Earl Shilton. Toon's closed in the mid 1950s and the building was taken over by Rubery Owen Pumps, an engineering company. The building was eventually demolished and a couple of industrial units now

¹⁵ Interviews (unrecorded and recorded) with Michael Smith, David Jennings, Neville Hall, Charles Dunne (H.J.Hall's), Ivan (Nicholls and Wileman), John Bennett, Ian Davenport, Charles Davenport, Richard Dixon (Richard Roberts), Simon Flude and S.J. Bennett.

¹⁶ The O'Rourke sisters when they recorded their memories talked about how when they came back from visiting their family in London the first thing they could see as they came along the A47, and up the hill into Shilton, from Leicester was Bradbury's chimney.

take its place. Bird and Yeoman's old factory on Hinckley Road now contains a small private housing estate called Yeoman's Close. Similarly, Cotton's boot and shoe factory, which became Fine Jersey and was then taken over by Nicholls and Wileman, is also small private housing estate. So many factories and so many memories – this is where Lilian Coley, as a young girl brought breakfasts for members of her family. She would have walked down through the fields from her home on Vicarage Street – just one of the jobs she did before going to school. Along with the demise of the hosiery industry and the demolition and/or conversion of factories for other uses so the dependency of parents on their children's help has also more or less come to an end. It can be said that a way of life so richly recorded is now all but memories.



Fig. 7. Highlighting an area of Hinckley which still retained its industrial heritage in 1991. (The Records Office of Leicestershire. SP4294)

The hosiery and knitwear industry which has employed huge numbers of people over the years has more or less come to an end. However Figure 6 shows a number of factory buildings still present in 1991. The number of hosiery and knitwear factories has declined in recent years although there are still a few businesses operating from old

factory buildings and modern units in Hinckley and Earl Shilton. This is nothing, however, compared to the industry's heyday when Hinckley town centre was 'choc-a-bloc' with people, buses, cars and cycles; when the shops in Earl Shilton were thriving because of the business they did with the 'factory girls' who also sent out orders for their bacon and sausage cobs for their breakfasts each morning. Aspirations have also changed, where at one time young people were content to work at a local factory following their mums, their aunts, their dads and uncles – they now want something different. Parents also wanted something better for their children – a better education 'to do something with their lives' and working in a factory was not seen as a 'good opportunity'.¹⁷ Young people, particularly from the 1970s onwards also had far more opportunities than their parents – they could stay on at school and learn a skill – nursing, cookery, shorthand and typing, boys could do apprenticeships and become carpenters, plumbers, plasterers and bricklayers – they did not have to go into a hosiery factory – they had a choice. Many more young people had the chance of going on to university.

Respondents also talked about the stress of working in a factory – this was something, they said, that did not happen years ago 'you know, you never went work worrying. Like everybody says today that they are stressed out with the jobs, you weren't stressed-out years ago...in the last ten years of your working life you used to come home literally drained, but in the years before you didn't. Like I say everybody were nice'.¹⁸ The phrase 'rat-race' began to crop up in conversations with respondents – they spoke about the stress and strains of working life – working in the 'hosiery' had always been intense but the community spirit, camaraderie and friendliness which seemed to characterise the industry was not deemed as strong as it once was. When recalling the larking about, Christmas parties and dressing-up brides and grooms, Tony Smith commented that 'those are what you might call the good old days – things changed over the years – they still do dressing up when you're getting married but not the fun and

¹⁷ S. Todd, *Young Women, Work, and Family 1918-1950* (Oxford, 2005), p. 226 and 223; J. Sarsby, *Missuses and Mouldrunners: An Oral History of Women Pottery Workers at Home and at Work* (Milton Keynes, 1988), p. 98.

¹⁸ Margaret Read. Recorded memories. Arqueotex Textile Heritage Project. Mrs. Read had worked in the hosiery all her working life and retired at the age of 60 in the early 1990s.

games we used to have in the good old days'.¹⁹ Days out on the firm had also become a thing of the past which could be said had fostered a sense of paternalism, camaraderie and goodwill between workers and their employees. Hours of work had also been decreased, Saturday morning work had become a rarity and dinner time which had lasted between one-and one-and-a-half hours whereby everyone went home for their mid-day meal had also been phased out. Firms began introducing 'flexi-time':

In the early years, the time you had to work, were from 8 o'clock in the morning to 5 o'clock in the evening, but after about six years they brought in the flexi-time and I used to be at work for just gone 7 o'clock in the morning and work until 5 o'clock or half-past five in the evening, and then would finish at about 11 o'clock on a Friday morning'.²⁰

Along with flexi-time came other changes, Friday treats became a thing of the past because more often than not the majority of factory workers finished early on a Friday as a result of the extra hours they did between Monday and Thursday. More often than not girls now took their own personal stereos and ear phones and listened to their own music while they worked away on their machines. From the mid to late 1960s onwards a vast amount of government legislation was introduced bringing about changes in working practices: Industrial Training Boards, The Redundancy Payment Act, The Protection of Employment Act, Equal Pay, Sex Discrimination and Health and Safety legislation all had an effect on the industry. The continuing increases in cheap imports and the oil crises of the early 1970s also had a serious impact on the home market. Things it would seem had changed 'all round':

some for the best, some not for the best. The girls on the shop floor have got better conditions, far better conditions. The work space, itself, whereas in the old days you were walking around falling over the work all over the place, now the environment is clear. You've got the work by the machines and you've got health and safety rules and have got to adhere to them. It's a rat race, though; it is definitely a rat race.²¹

¹⁹ Tony Smith. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1. Tony retired from Davenport Knitwear when he was 65 in 2005.

²⁰ Susan Judd. Recorded memories. More detailed information under Respondents in Appendix 1. Susan started work in 1967.

²¹ Tony Smith. Memories.

Much of the legislation and changes in working conditions proved beneficial to both working and living standards but this appears to have resulted in a loss of community spirit. People lives seem to have become more insular but this could also be perceived as a reflection of society in general. However, family life is still extremely important to local people – families still live in close proximity to each other and a few respondents who have spent time tracing their family history have found that their ancestors have lived in Earl Shilton for generations, some being able to trace their family back to the mid to late seventeenth century. These people possibly migrated to the area from the more rural areas of Leicestershire to work in the early framework knitting industry which had begun to make inroads into East Midlands.²² Then as now families worked in a way best suited to their needs. With the gradual decline in the hosiery industry from the 1970s, people have had to adapt to the changes which have taken place. One hundred years earlier local people, the majority having worked as framework knitters, found themselves moving into the boot and shoe industry which had been introduced into the local area during the mid to late 1870s because of the severe depression in the hosiery industry at this time.²³ The mid nineteenth century had also saw the introduction of the steam driven factory and again younger members of a family were able to take up work in the early hosiery factories. People had no choice but to adapt themselves to the changes taking place. Nowadays, with the continual demise in the hosiery and knitwear industry, people have found themselves jobs in the service industry sector; more jobs have also become available in the care industry – many women working as carers in residential homes and as carers visiting the old and infirm in their own homes. And so life continues – the hosiery which had dominated peoples' lives for such a long time is now a fading memory. Skills learnt over many years have been lost. The odd factory buildings remain, such as the Atkins building, preserved for future generations, and one is given reminders of the hosiery industry in the names of streets and luxury apartments which were once sites of intense industry churning out thousands upon thousands of pairs of stockings a day.

²² Family history has been undertaken by Roy Bonser, Jim Lord, Marlene Bates to name just a few respondents who have been able to trace their families back to the mid to late seventeenth century in Earl Shilton. Jim Lord also traced Lilian Coley's family history for me. Information is available to be looked at.

²³ L.A. Parker, 'Industries' in W.G. Hoskins and R.A. McKinley (eds) VCH, 3, pp. 23-24.

APPENDIX 1

Working Life Histories of Respondents

The table in Appendix 1 includes all those people who volunteered to record their memories, meet up for discussions about the 'hosiery', fill in questionnaires and submit written information. (Refer to Methodology in Chapter 1 for more information). The majority of interviews were undertaken during my time as a research assistant for the Arqueotex Textile Heritage Project, June 1997 to December 1998 and collected under the title of *The Arqueotex Textile Heritage Project* (Arqueotex). Those undertaken after December 1998 were for further research and were collected under the title *Local Hosiery and History*, (Hosiery) *The Earl Shilton and Barwell Photographic Archive* (Archive) and *Barwell Bits and Shilton Snips* (BBSS). All include respondents name, date of birth, age and date when started work. The table also includes the type of work people did and the factories in which they worked; their introduction into the industry and family involvement (if known). Information is also given on the type of interview or contribution to the research i.e. recorded, unrecorded, a meeting, filled-in questionnaire or written information.

The majority of recorded memories (approximately 110) took place on a one-to-one basis but I also have small groups and couple interviews. Most interviews took place in respondents own homes.

Small group and couple interviews with:

Keith, Marian, John, Len and Gladys (friends and work colleagues – Marian and John did a couple interview and Keith and his wife Dorothy also did a couple interview)

Harry, John, John S and Trevor (work colleagues, Textile Department, North Warwickshire & Hinckley College)

Chris and Denise (work colleagues, James Bennett)

Kate, Sheila and Rose (work colleagues, T. Jennings & Son)

Alice, Lynne and Emmy O'Rourke (sisters)

Dolly and Betty (sisters)

Mary and Marjorie (sisters)

Peggy and Betty (friends and neighbours)

Doreen and Gordon (friends and neighbours)

Cynthia and Elaine (friends)

Tony, Olwyn and Diane (couple and friend)

Jill and Janet (work colleagues)

Bill and Doris (couple) and Bill and Vera (friends and neighbours)

Cliff and Kathleen (couple)

Joan and Worrall (couple)

Cliff and Mary (couple)

Paul and Sheila Hassle (couple)

All tapes are in my possession and I have full transcripts of some of the tapes and extracts from others. A number of the tapes have been deposited with the East Midlands Oral History Project.

Interviews with managing directors and retired managing directors of family firms

Tom Atkins. (retired) Atkins of Hinckley. Bought out by Coats Viyella in 1995. Meeting April 1998.

John Bennett and Jamie Bennett. James Bennett Ltd. (Third generation). Founded in 1913 by James Bennett. The knitwear business traded from premises on Coventry Road purchased by James Bennett in about 1920 (grandfather and great grandfather of the present manufactures). Interview with John and Jamie Bennett was not tape recorded but a hand written report is in my possession. Meeting October 1997.

***Charles Davenport** (retired). A. Davenport & Sons. (Third generation). (See Working Life Histories).

Ian Davenport. Davenport Knitwear PLC. (Second generation). Company founded by James Davenport in 1956. Meeting October 1997. (See Working Life Histories).

Simon Flude. Flude Hosiery. (Third generation). The company was established by Mr. Harry Flude in 1926. Meeting April 1998.

Neville Hall. H.J. Hall and Sons. (Fourth generation). The business was established in Stoke Golding in 1882 and in 1977 it was transferred to Coventry Road, Hinckley. Interview with Mr. Hall was not recorded but a detailed hand written report is in my possession which was approved by Mr. Hall. Meeting October 1997. (See Working Life Histories).

***David Jennings.** T. Jennings and Sons. (Third generation). David Jennings, grandson of Timothy Jennings, founder of T. Jennings and Sons in 1918. The original factory on Upper Bond Street was demolished in 1998 to make way for a magistrates court. The first meeting with David Jennings was not recorded but a detailed hand written report is in my possession. Subsequent meetings were recorded. (See Working Life Histories).

***Michael Jennings.** T. Jennings and Sons. (Fourth generation). (See Working Life Histories).

***Brian Moore** (retired). Ginns, Son and Moore Ltd. (Third generation). (See Working Life Histories).

***Michael Smith.** (Third generation). Originally Tom Smith and Sons, taken over by Scholl International in 1973). . The business known as Tom Smith and Sons was bought out by Scholl International during the 1970s and only relocated to industrial units on Sketchley Lane Industrial Estate during the latter part of 1998. The business then relocated once more – moving down to Cornwall. Employees were given the option of moving with the company. The family connection came to end after three generations with the relocation to Cornwall. Michael's son decided to change direction having worked for the company since leaving school in 1970. Michael's sister, Gill, also worked for the company but retired when relocation of the company to Cornwall was announced. Meeting October 1997. (See Working Life Histories).

Alan Turnbull, Director, Cherry Lewis Ltd. Established in 1980. (See Working Life Histories).

(* Recorded memories)

Working Life Histories of Respondents										Page 1
Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Date of interview & project	
		Age	Year							
Started work pre 1920										
Lilian Coley	1904	13	1917	(1917-1965) Norton&Bradbury, A.G.Minard, J.Toon&Sons, Nicholls&Wileman, Bird&Yeoman	Knitter (S&Gs), Welting, Fully Fashioned Seaming, Boxing	Aunty	Family in B&S. Family History-FWKs	Questionnaire&Memories	Arqueotex 1997, Hosiersy 2001-2	
Ellen Stephens	1904	14	1917	Howes, Nicholls&Wileman, J.Toon&Sons	Run-about, Clipper, Overlocker	Friends	Father-Quarry	Memories	Hosiersy 2001	
Vera Wileman	1904	13	1917	Norton&Bradbury, Nicholls&Wileman, Argee	Run-about, Clipper, Mending	Family	Family	Memories	Hosiersy 1999-2000	
Started work during 1920s										
Connie Smith	1907	14	1921	(1921-1971) Goneston, Nottingham Manufacturing Co., Cartwright and Warner's, Nottingham Man.Co., Thomas Morely, Bakers	Runner-on, Knitter (Trent Machines), outwork, Dress mending, Linking	Family	Family-Hosiersy, Father-Trimmer	Memories	Hosiersy 2000	
Frank Dudley	1907	16	1923	(1923-1974) Atkins of Hinckley	Office, Managing Director	Manager at Atkins	Father-draper's shop in Hinckley	Memories	Arqueotex 1998	
Dolly Coe	1909	14	1923	(1923-circa 1985) J.Toon&Sons, B&S, Nicholls&Wileman. Worked as a cleaner for the same family for 20-odd years retiring when she was in her 70s	Run-about, Backwinding, Linker	Family	Father-Farmer. Family-hosiersy&B&S.Husband-knitter (sister-Betty Starbuck)	Memories	Hosiersy 2000	
Norah Skeffington	1909	14	1923	Nicholls&Wileman	Linker	Family	Family-Hosiersy&B&S; Father-Blacksmith	Memories	Hosiersy 2000	
Norah Woodward	1912	14	1926	W.Puffer&Son, (Green's (B&S), Canteen work, supervisor)	'Scrattin'-out', Seamer on 'Marvel Mender', button sewing, (canteen work-became supervisor)	Family	Family	Memories-unrecorded	Arqueotex 1997	
Hilda Trigg	1914	14	1928	Norton's(Nuneaton), S.Davis& Sons, (Munitions), S.Davis&Sons	Overlocking	Mother	Family-Hosiersy;Father-Railway,Family;(brother-Neville Evans)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998	
Florence Clarke	1914	14	1928	(1928-1975) Simpkin,Son&Emery, Hinckley Fine Gauge	Runabout, Mender, Overlocking	Family	Family-Hosiersy; Father-carpenter	Memories	Hosiersy 2001	
Joe Lawrance	1914	14	1929	(1929-1990s) Norton&Bradbury, HJ Hall&Sons. (Joe continued to work part time after retirement until he was in his 80s)	Runner-on, Knitter (S&Gs), 'olly rag', Mechanic	Family	Father-Baker, Mother-elastic factory, domestic service; Sister-hosiersy; Wife-hosiersy	Memories, Questionnaire, written accounts	Arqueotex 1997,Hosiersy 2000,Archive 2003	
Bill Lumley	1914	14	1929	(1929-1979) Norton&Bradbury, King&Marvin, (Armed Forces), A.G.Minard. He was 'borrowed' by Marvin's where he continued to work for 35 years	Apprentice Counterman, Counterman	Family	Family-Hosiersy,Uncle-Counterman,Aunt-Knitter; (Wife-Doris Lumley)	Memories, Questionnaire, letter	Arqueotex 1998,Hosiersy 2000	
Nellie Skelton	1914	14	1929	(1929-1978) HJ Hall&Son	Warehouse, Knitter on XLs	Friends		Memories, Letter	Arqueotex 1998	

Working Life Histories of Respondents										Page 2
Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Date of interview & project	
		Age	Year							
Started work during 1930s										
Peggy Faulks	1916	14	1930	(1930-1980-Betty retired when she was 64) J.Toon&Sons, outwork (Nicholls&Wileman), Nicholls&Wileman, Atkins, Argee	Mender, Pairing-up, Examining,	Family	Family-B&S	Memories	Hosiery 2000	
Doris Lumley	1916	14	1930	Atkins	Overlocker	Family&friends	Family-Hosiery; Husband& husband's family-Hosiery (Bill)	Questionnaire & letter	Arqueotex 1998	
Maude Wood	1918	14	1931	(1931-1977) Franois&Wilbur, Flude Hosiery, James Bennett, Simpson's, Barbara Nicholls	Transferring, Mending	Family	Family	Memories	Hosiery 2001	
Mary Kelham	1917	15	1932	J.Toon&Sons, Nicholls&Wileman	Fully fashioned seamer	Aunty	Family-Hosiery; Father-professional footballer	Memories	Hosiery 2004	
Arthur Amos	1918	14	1932	(1932-1985) J.Toon&Sons, Nicholls&Wileman, (Armed Forces), Nicholls&Wileman	Apprentice Counterman, Knitter, Mechanic	Mother	Family-Hosiery; Father-Miner; Wife-hosiery	Memories, Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1998 & Hosiery 2001	
Ray Bateman	1918	14	1932	(1933-1982) J.Gent, (RAF), J.Gent, A.Tomlin, B.Peach, Atkins of Hinckley, National Union of Knitwear&Hosiery Workers	Apprentice Counterman, Knitter (Standard Trumps), Mechanic, Mechanic cum Director, Knitter (Bentley Twin Feed Fully Fashioned), District Secretary of Southern Region	Mother	Family	Memories & Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1998	
Keith Lockton	1919	14	1933	(1933-1984) Flude Hosiery, (Armed Forces), Flude Hosiery, Hinckley Warehouse Association, National Union of Hosiery Workers	Apprentice Counterman, Counterman, Secretary, Assistant District Secretary	Parents	Family-Hosiery; Father-Trimmer, Knitter; Mother-Knitter; Brother-Knitter (Wife-Dorothy Lockton); Family History-FWKS	Memories & Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1998 & Hosiery 1999	
Kathleen Dean	1920	14	1934	Domestic Service, Moore&Osbourne	Overlocking		Family-Hosiery	Memories	Hosiery 1999	
Betty Knights	1919	14	1933	(1933-1990s) James Bennett Ltd, Manchester Hosiery. (Betty continued to work after her retirement until she was in her 70s)	Flatlocker	Friend	Family-Hosiery; Father-Counterman&Traveller, Mother-Mender, Brother-Knitter, (Sister-Doreen Marvin)	Memories	Hosiery 2001	
Mrs. Bateman	1919	15	1934	She never worked in hosiery-has given information on social life and her own work as a telephonist.	Hinckley Telephone Exchange			Memories	Arqueotex 1998	
Neville Evans	1920	14	1934	(1934-85) Bennett Bros, (Armed Forces), Bennett Bros.	Apprentice Counterman, Knitter	Mother	Family-Hosiery; Father-Railway (Sister-Hilda Trigg)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998	
Jim Piercy	1921	13	1934	(1934-1985) Turk-Schmidt (taken over by Wolsey), (Armed Forces), Bennett Bros, Atkins	Knitter	Father	Family-B&S; Father-Postman; (Wife-Joan Piercy)	Memories	Hosiery 2001	
Ted Felce	1920	16	1935	(1935-1978) Corah's, Atkins, Newby, Groves&Meakin, (Frank Whittle)	Knitter, Engineering	Father	Family-Hosiery&B&S; Father-Knitter/Hosiery Manufacturer (Keen and Felce); Mother's family - B&S Manufacturers (Orton's); Wife-Hosiery	Memories	Hosiery 1999-2000	
Bill Partridge	1919	16	1935	(1935-1986) Atkins of Hinckley	Office, Manager&Technologist (stockings&outerwear)	Written application & interview	None. Father-Railway	Memories, Questionnaire, letters&articles	Arqueotex 1997	
Joan Piercy	1921	14	1935	Atkins, Manchester Hosiery, Bennett Bros Ltd, Hinckley Knitting	Mender, Overlocking, (Canteen-supervisor, School meals supervisor)	Family	Family	Memories	Hosiery 2001	

Working Life Histories of Respondents

Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Page 3
		Age	Year						
Started work during 1930s continued									
Cliff Ball	1922	14	1936	(1936-1987) Wolsey, Moore&Osborne, (RAF), Bird&Yeoman, A.G. Minard, Burgess Products, Jambotex Ltd. (During his working life he was also 'borrowed' by various factories)	Trainee Counterman, Counterman		Family (Wife-Kathleen Ball)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Marian Godfrey	1922	14	1936	(1936-1982) Iway Hosiery	Welter	Family	Family (Partner-John Cobley)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Dorothy Lockton	1922	14	1936	Atkins, (Munitions)	Toe-stitching, Overlocking	Family	Family (Husband-Kaith Lockton)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998 & Hosiery 1999
Kathleen Ball	1923	14	1937	Wolsey, J.Toon&Son, Wolsey, (Munitions), Balitto, outwork (Bradbury's&Bird&Yeoman), Seklecta (office), Bradbury's, Rubery Owen, outwork	Mender	Family	Father-Knitter; Sister-Hosiery; Brothers-B&S; (Husband-Cliff Ball)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Mrs. Clowes	1924	14	1938	W.Oldham&Co, Flude Hosiery, (War Work), A.Davenport&Sons	Mending	Family	Family	Memories	Hosiery 2001
John Cobley	1925	14	1939	P.Beasley&Co (made redundant-worked for engineering company)	Counterman	Family	Family (Partner-Marian Godfrey)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Joan Pegg	1925	14	1939	(1939-1987) Norton&Bradbury, J.Toon&Son, King&Marvin, Norton&Bradbury, J.Toon& Sons, Nicholls&Wileman	Run-about, toe closing on Rosso machine	Family	Family-Hosiery; Mother-knitter; Aunts-Knitters; Grandfather-Stoker-(Norton&Bradbury); (Husband-Worral Pegg)	Memories	Arqueotex 1997 & Hosiery 1999

Working Life Histories of Respondents

Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/ or Questionnaire	Page 4
		Age	Year						
Started work during 1940s									
Len Wildbure		14						Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Gladys Wildbure		14						Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Alice O'Rourke	1916	23	1940	(1930-1990) (Worked as a tailoress before coming to Earl Shilton) Argee, (War Work), Parrot's (Alice was 74 when she retired from Parrot's)	Did all jobs in factory- Foremiseses, Cutter	The company she worked for relocated from London to Earl Shilton.3 sisters came together	Sisters:(Sisters-Lynne & Emmy)	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Lynne O'Rourke	1920	19	1940	Argee, (War Work)			Sisters:(Sisters-Alice & Emmy)	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Emmy O'Rourke	1923	16	1940	Argee, (War Work), Parrot's	Cutter		Sisters:(Sisters-Alice & Lynne)	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Betty Starbuck	1927	14	1941	Nicholls&Wileman, J.Toon&Son, Nicholls&Wileman	Welting	Family	Family-Hosiery&B&S;Husband-Hosiery Mechanic;(Sister-Dolly Coe)	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Charles Davenport	1925	16	1941	(1941-1972) A.Davenport&Sons (Armed Forces), A. Davenport&Sons	Managing Director	Family business	Third generation	Memories	Arqueotex 1997 & Hosiery 1999
Harold Cash	1928	14	1942	(1942-1993) Moore&Osborne, Atkins (Armed Forces 1944-1946)), Atkins, Moore,Eady&Mircotte Goode,Percy Beasley, Bird&Yeoman, Fine Jersey, LMS, Argee	Apprentice counterman, trainee fully fashioned knitter, knitter (Mellor Bromley 4-at-once fully fashioned knitting machines, B&S circular machines) knitter/mechanic, mechanic, head mechanic		Father - groundsman for Hinckley cricket ground	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Worrall Pegg	1928	14	1942	(1942-1993) J.Toon&Sons, Nicholls&Wileman, W,Orrill&Sons, Abbot Hosiery, Parrot's, Percy Taylor Ltd, King&Marvin, A.G. Minard (Made redundant 1974, spent remainder of working life with Electricity Board)	Apprentice Counterman, Counterman, Meter Reader	Mother	Family-Hosiery&B&S;Father-B&S;Wife's family-Hosiery (Wife-Joan Pegg)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998 & Hosiery 1999
Bert Hall	1917	25	1942	(1942-1982) (Started his working life in the 'Hating' industry in Atherstone) Bennett Brothers, (chairman of J&R Swift Ltd), Scholl PLC	Journeyman hatter, Master Dyer, Hosiery Manufacturer	Family&friend	Wife-Hosiery, (Ann Hall)	Questionnaire, Memories & written accounts	Arqueotex 1998
Roy Bonser	1929	15	1943	(1943-1999) Nicholls&Wileman, (National Service-1946-48), Nicholls&Wileman, Marvin's (Made redundant-Rubery Owen Pumps, Electricity Board until his retirement in 1994 and then worked part time until 70)	Apprentice Counterman, Counterman,	Family	Family-B&S; Wife-Hosiery (SyVvia Bonser)	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Don Loxley	1928	16	1944	Whitemore's		Family	Father-B&S manufacturer,	Memoires	History & Archive 2003
Marjorie Grouse	1930	14	1944	J.Toon&Sons, Nicholls&Wileman, Fine Jersey	Clipping, Mending, overlocker	Mother	Family-Hosiery;(Sister-Mary Kind)	Memoires	Arqueotex 1998
Mary Kind	1930	14	1944	J.Toon&Sons, Nicholls&Wileman	Clipping, Mending, Overlocker	Mother	Family-Hosiery;(Sister-Marjorie Grouse)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Margaret Read	1930	14	1944	(1944-1990) A.G.Minard, Nicholls&Wileman, Pex	Mender, Folder&Bagger	Aunty	Family-B&S	Memories	Arqueotex 1997
Tony Taylor	1930	14	1945	(1945-1995) Percy Taylor Ltd, Bennett Bros, Sketchley Dyeworks, Couture Marketing	Trainee knitter, Knitter, (Mellor Bromley fully fashioned), Stentor operator, maintenance	Father	Father;(Wife-Olwyn Taylor)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Doreen Thomas	1930	14	1945	Argee, J.Toon&Sons, Argee	Overlocker, Toe-stitching, Seaming-mock seams	Mother/Friends	Father-B&S, Mother-hosiery	Memories	Arqueotex 1998

Working Life Histories of Respondents

Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Date of interview & project
		Age	Year						
Started work during 1940s continued									
Doreen Marvin	1931	14	1945	Bennett Bros, Nicholls&Wileman, Childminder	Clipping, Weiting, Overlocking	Family	Family-Hosiery; Father-Counterman&Traveller; Mother-Mender; Brother-Knitter; Husband -Fully fashioned knitter; (Sister-Betty Knights)	Memories	Hosiery 2000-2003
Maureen Smart	1931	14	1945	(1945-1991) Wrigley, Spriggs&Johnson, Flude Hosiery. She was also a Union Rep most of her working life	Fully fashioned side linker, FF Seamer, overlocker	Family	Family-Hosiery; Father-landscape gardener; Mother-Hosiery, brothers&sisters-Hosiery	Memories	Arquetex 1997, 1998
Ken Chamberlain	1931	15	1946	(1946-1997) Bennett Bros. (National Service); Bennett Bros (Chemical Works 1976-1982); Flude Hosiery	Apprentice Counterman, Counterman, Knitter (came out of hosiery 1976-1982), Assistant Shift Foreman, Assistant Manager, (Union rep)	Family	Family-Hosiery; Father-Knitter, Mother-Knitter; Brother-Counterman; Sisters-they had all worked at Fludes; (Wife-Margaret)	Memories	Hosiery 2001
Margaret Chamberlain	1931	15	1946	Manchester Hosiery, (professional dancer, family butchers)			Father-Butcher; (Husband-Ken Chamberlain)	Memories	Hosiery 2001
Muriel Goode	1931	16	1947	Never worked in 'hosiery' but spoke about family involvement	Office work		Family-Hosiery; Father-Farmer; Mother-Teacher	Written accounts	Hosiery 2000
Peter Haywood	1932	14	1946	(1943-1997) Nicholls&Wileman (National Service), Nicholls&Wileman	Apprentice Counterman, Counterman, Supervisor in Finishing Departments	Friends	Family-B&S; Wife-Hosiery	Memories	Arquetex 1997
Mary Maund	1932	14	1946	Spoke about family involvement and social life in Sappcote.	Office		Father-Quarryman; Family-Hosiery-Mother, brother and husband, (Husband-Cliff Maund)	Memories & written accounts	Arquetex 1998
Trevor Taylor	1932	14	1946	HJ Hall&Sons	Service Hand, Toe Closing Dept (booking work out to dye house)	Factory Manager asked his father	None	Questionnaire	Arquetex 1997/98
Frank Edwards									
Lilian Bonser	1932	14	1947	Nicholls&Wileman, George Watts, Fine Jersey	Run-about, Seamer, Mender, Overlocker, Examiner, Supervisor	Friends & Family	Family; (Husband-Roy Bonser)	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Ernest Lee	1933	14	1947	HJ Hall&Sons	Knitter (XL, Bentley Comet)	Local		Questionnaire	Arquetex 1997/98
Mr. Massey	1919	28	1947	Argee	Accounts/book-keeping	Interview	None	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Gordon Kaylis	1934	15	1948	(1946-2000) (Burgess Products); Flude Hosiery, A. Tomlin, Lockley&Garner, Elite Hosiery	Trainee mechanic, Mechanic	Family-Hosiery; Father-Counterman; Wife-Linker	Family	Memories	Hosiery 2000-2003
Brian Simpson	1928	21	1949	Atkins	Mechanic	Family	Family	Memories	Arquetex 1998

Working Life Histories of Respondents

Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Page 6
		Age	Year						
Started work during 1950s									
Oiwyn Taylor	1935	15	1950	(1950-1995) Percy Taylor Ltd, Nicholls&Wileman, Pex Socks Atkins. (National Service) Electricity Board, Bennett Bros, Chrysler UK, Bennett Bros, Trinity Dye Works,Scholl	Examining Trainee maker,Meter Reader, Trimmer (peg boarding), Track Worker, Trimmer	Friends Family	Father-coalminer Family	Memories Questionnaire	Arquetex 1998 Arquetex 1997/98
Terence Hiser	1936	15	1951						
Diane Crowther	1936	16	1952	Never worked in hosiery but talked about social life and her parents who worked in the hosiery	Office		Family	Memories	Arquetex 1997
Harry Haywood	1936	16	1952	(1952-1998) Bentley's, Hinckley College (made redundant from NW&HC)	Engineer, Lecturer	Family	Father and brother worked at Bentley's	Memories	Arquetex 1998
Margaret Perrin	1937	15	1952	Ginns.Son&Moore, Steve,Harris,Clay, Atkins, Francis&Wilbur, HJ Hall	Linker, Examiner (stockings) Examiner(fold&pair socks)	Father took her to factory gates	Sisters	Questionnaire	Arquetex 1997/98
Michael Smith	1933	18	1952	T. Smith&Son (in 1973 taken over by Scholl plc)	Mechanic, Manager, Managing Director. (B5 & Model K/modern knitting&Finishing machines)	Family business	Third generation	Meeting, Memories	Arquetex 1997
David Jennings	1936	18	1954	T.Jennings&Son	Third generation	Family business	Family	Meeting, Memories	Arquetex 1997
Respondent did not wish to be identified	1938	16	1954	Hosiery Union	Trainee Knitter, Knitter, Full time Union rep	None	None		Arquetex 1997
Cliff Maund	1933	22	1954	(1954-1997) Bennett Bros, Corah's, College Hosiery, Nicholls&Wileman (made redundant at 84)	Knitter	Friend	Wife's family (Mary Maund)	Questionnaire & Memories	Arquetex 1998,Hosiery
Maureen Warren	1939	15	1954	(1954-2201) Klynton Davis Smallshaws, Mill Hill, Hinckley Knitting Co,SK Fashions	Lockstitcher, outwork, Straightening, Overlocking	Family	Family-Hosiery&B&S	Memories	History 2003-2005
Kenneth Grewcock	1940	15	1955	Arthur Rivets, Bennett's,Iway Hosiery,Trinity Dye Works,(Chrysler), Iway Hosiery, HJ Hall&Son	Warehouse Lad, Counterman, Inspecting, Hosiery Trimmer (Peg Boarding machine), (Production line), Calendar Operator (Press for rolls of fabric),Sock Trimmer (Peg Boarding machine)	Father	Father	Questionnaire	Arquetex 1997/98
Janet Mann	1940	15	1955	Tom Smith&Son, Scholl	Counterhand,Marvel Mending, Examining&Pairing,Supervisor, (union rep)	Friend	None	Questionnaire&Memories	Arquetex 1997/98& Hosiery 2002
Tony Smith	1940	15	1955	(1955-2005) Atkins of Hinckley, Davenport Knitwear	Apprentice Counterman, Counterman, Quality Control Knitter (Bentley Double Cylinder)	Family	Family	Memories	Arquetex 1997
Samuel Gorman	1940	14	1955	HJ Socks	Transferring (iron), Examining&Pairing	Advert	None	Questionnaire	Arquetex 1997/98
Pamela Taylor	1940	15	1955	Tom Smiths,Scholl	Minister-The Great Meeting, Hinckley (1972-2002)	Mother	Mother	Questionnaire	Arquetex 1997/98
Peter Hewis	1940							Meetings/transcript of talk	Arquetex 1997/98
Ann Hutt	1941	15	1956	Flude Hosiery, HJ Hall&Son	Linker	Step-mother	Step-mother	Memories	Arquetex 1997
John Gilbert	1935	21	1956	Earl Shilton BS	Manager (1961)	Family business, Est.1857	Family	Memories	History 2001
Anne Bowers	1941	16	1957	Pex, G. Ginns, DeMontfort Hosiery Mills,HJ Hall&Son	Examiner,Rosso operator, Toe-closing, Training Officer	Advert in Leicester Mercury	None	Questionnaire & Memories	Arquetex 1997
Eileen Padmore	1942	15	1957	Davenport Knitwear, Pickering's, Klynton Davis, L.Grewcock&Co, G.R.Bodycote, H,Flude&Co, (maternity leave), Bodycotes, W.Oldham&Co, (8yrs break), Richard Roberts	Overlocker,Cover Seamer,Taber Feller,Trims Cutter,Lockstitcher, Toe Stitcher,Supervisor (overlock section)	2 years (1 day a week) learning trade at college	None	Questionnaire	Arquetex 1997/98
Florie Lee	1942	15	1957	Corah's, Robinson Pickford,Debutant,James Bennett, Breconshire Hosiery,Twyford Textiles	Run-about, Overlocking, Lockstitching	Sister-in-law	Sister-in-law	Memories	Arquetex 1997

Working Life Histories of Respondents

Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/ or Questionnaire	Page 7 Date of interview & project
		Age	Year						
Started work during 1950s continued									
Ann Hall	1942	15	1957	Flude Hosiery, Bennett Bros, J&R Swift	Overlocker, Examiner, Forelady	Family	Family-Hosiery,(Husband-Bert Hall)	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Carol Bramley	1942	15	1957	Pex (Mental Health Nurse)	Linking	Family	Family	Memories	Hosiery 2001
Patricia Gilbert	1944	15	1959	Tom Smiths,Scholl	Transferring,Linking	Mother	Family	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Paul Hassle	1944	15	1959	Smallshaw's, Castle Knitwear, Tonelli's, Garner's, T.Jennings, Trafford Knitwear, Atkins, Grewcock's	Knitter		Family	Memories	Hosiery 2002
Sheila Hassle	1944	15	1959	Atkins, Richard Roberts, Flude Hosiery, Hinckley Knitting, Grewcock's	Overlocker		Family	Memories	Hosiery 2002
Brian Moore		21		Ginns, Son & Moore	MD	Family business	Fourth generation	Memories	Hosiery 2001
Eileen Robinson	1944	15	1959	George Ward (Mancetter), S.Davis, Iway Hosiery, Hinckley Knitting, Parrots, HJ Hall	Shoing,steam press, linking,cup seaming,buttonholing, ticator,button sewing,'floater','get-up'	Family	Family	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Diane Elliott					Office		None	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Kate Berridge	1944	15	1959	T. Jennings&Sons	Marvel Mending, Bagging&Folding		Family	Memoires	Arqueotex 1998
Jim Lord	1943	15		Worked in building trade-gave information on social life in Earl Shilton and family involvement in hosiery and B&S	Bricklayer	Apprenticeship	Family-Hosiery and B&S. Family History-FWKs	Memories	History 2003
Pauline Gazey	1944	15	1959	Atkins,Davenport's,Bullen's,Bees Transport,John Martin Textiles,Davenport Knitwear	Linking,Running on, cleaning,Examiner Supervisor, Tagger (tagging garments)	Application form&interview	Family	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98

Working Life Histories of Respondents									
Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Page 8 Date of interview & project
		Age	Year						
Started Work during 1960s									
Trevor Gregory	1945	15	1960	Mansfield Hosiery, Pretty Polly, Flude Hosiery	Trainee Mechanic, Mechanic, Production Manager		Family-Hosiery	Meeting/tour of Flude's	Arqueotex 1997/98
Ann Gallagher	1945	15	1960	Denham Knitwear, Reliant Motor Co, Self employed, Cherry Lewis	Lockstitch, Trimmer, post office/shopkeeper/, Bartack				
Marlene Bates (nee Wileman)	1945	15	1960	Argee, Israel&Openhimers, A. Davenport, Bradbury's	Lockstitching, Hosiery Examiner, Lockstitching	Friends	Family-Hosiery&B&S; Father-Burgess Products; Family History-FWKs	Memories	Hosiery 2004
Cynthia Bowler	1945	15	1960	Atkins	Office Junior	Mother		Memories	Hosiery 2002
Bill Boggan	1929	32	1961	(1961-1995) Manufacturers Association	Secretary	Interview	None	Meeting, Memories	Arqueotex 1997
Ivan Sharpe	1946	15	1961	Jones&Shipman, Goulds, Turner&Jarvis, Cherry Lewis	Engineering Apprentice, Mechanic (V-Bed)	Mother	Family; Father-Trimmer	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Elaine Baggott	1946	15	1961	Atkins	Office Junior	Friend	Father-B&S	Memories	Hosiery 2002
Neville Hall	1942	21	1963	HJ Hall&Sons	Managing Director	Family	Family business-fourth generation	Meeting	Arqueotex 1997
Trevor Ainge				North Warwickshire&Hinckley College (made redundant from NW&HC)	Textile Lecturer				Arqueotex 1998
John Sampson	1948	15	1963	(1963-1998) North Warwickshire&Hinckley College (made redundant from NW&HC)	Textile Lecturer		Family; Wife-Hosiery	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Respondent did not wish to be identified	1940	23	1963	Davenport Knitwear, Richard Roberts	Apprentice Engineer, Study Engineer,			Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Geraldine Allinson	1948	15	1963	Beddingfields, Leaveisy, Wolsey, Grattan, Co-op Dairy, Hinckley Golf Club, HJ Hall&Son	Trainee Cutter, shop work, office, receptionist			Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Valerie Flanagan	1942	19	1963	Flude Hosiery, Scholl	Linking	Sister	Father-miner; mother-B&S	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/1998
Dorothy Arnold	1949	15	1964	Davenport Knitwear, Atkins, Davenport Knitwear	Fully Fashion Cup Seamer				
John Chinn	1950	15	1965	(1965-1998) North Warwickshire&Hinckley College (made redundant from NW&HC)	Textile Technician	Family	Family-Hosiery; Wife-Hosiery	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Peter Smith	1946	19	1965	Geo. Brettle, Courtaulds Hosiery, HJ Hall&Sons	Lab Tec&Shift Dyer, Dye House Manager (overseeing dyeing operations), Dyehouse Manager (overseeing dyeing&boarding operations)	None-looking for chemistry orientated occupation	None	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Linda Letts	1949	17	1966	Richard Roberts	Lockstitcher	Mother	Family	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Mary Dyer	1949	18	1967	H.Flude	Overlocking	Friend	None	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Susan Judd	1952	15	1967	Argee, College Hosiery, Nicholls&Wileman	Overlocker, Button sewing (School dinner lady, carer)	Mother	Father-baker, Family-hosiery	Memories	Arqueotex 1997
Gill Smith	1936	31	1967	Tom Smith&Son, Scholl	Variety of work	Family	Family-third generation	Memories	Hosiery 2002
Mary Watts	1953	15	1968	(1968-1978) S. Davis&Sons, Atkins, Hinckley Knitting	Overlocking, flatlocking	Interview at school/youth employment agency	Family	Memories	Hosiery 2000
Michael Jennings		16		T. Jennings&Son	Managing Director	Family	Fourth generation	Memories	Arqueotex 1998, Hosiery 2001
Sheila Abbott		15	1969	T. Jennings&Son	Folding&bagging	Family	Family	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Rose Turton		15		T. Jennings&Son	Folding&bagging	Sister	Family	Memories	Arqueotex 1998

Working Life Histories of Respondents

Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Page 9
		Age	Year						
Started work during 1970s									
Diane Moore	1956	15	1971	Atkins, Thirteen Amp, Ray Allen	Flatlocking, Elasticater, Buttoner, Lockstitching, Bartacker, Overlocking, Stripper, Binder, Hemmer				Arqueotex 1997/98
Steven Minard	1957	15	1972	George Ward (B&S), T. Jennings, Nicholls&Wileman	Warehouse man, Finishing Machine Mechanic (maintenance and repair of all making-up and ancillary equipment, ordering spares etc)	1 year course at college and night school	Family-Gt. Grandfather set up in hosiery business	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Pat Pierce	1944	30s	1972	Army wife, moved to Hinckley-	Cutter	Interview	None	Memories-unrecorded	Hosiery 2008
Bill Randells				Manufacturers Association	Secretary	Interview	None	Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Denise Evans		16	1975	James Bennett Ltd	Overlocker, Quality Control	Father knew director at Bennett's		Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Chris Startin	1960	16	1976	James Bennett Ltd	Warehouse Manager			Memories	Arqueotex 1998
Ivan Taylor	1960	16	1976	Nicholls&Wileman	Production Manager	Interview	Family-B&S&Hosiery	Meeting	Arqueotex 1997
Respondent did not wish to be identified	1961	15	1977	KFAT	Overlocker, Full time union officer	Friends		Memories	Arqueotex 1997
Nicholas Smith	1960	17	1977	Bennett's, Couture, Scholl	Knitting Mechanic (Matec, Negata, Lonati, Production Manager	Family	Family business (Tom Smith&Son)	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Anne Moore	1961	15	1977	Hinckley Knitting(Hinckley&Atherstone), Cherry Lewis	Hand Cutter (cutting out full garments from fabric panels), Cut&Sew(shears), Fully Fashioned hand cutter (shears, cutting necks out of fashioned knitwear), Supervisor of make-up room			Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Stuart Knifton	1956	21	1978	Simpson, Wright&Lowe, Nicholls&Wileman	QC Manager, Tech.Dept Manager, Greige Make-up Manager, Development Technologist, Technical Coordinator(Design Quality Issues)	Responded to advert in newspaper for 'new' textile course at Leicester Polytechnic	None	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98

Working Life Histories of Respondents

Name	DOB	Started Work		Employer(s)	Job title/description/machinery	Introduction	Family Involvement	Recorded memories and/or Questionnaire	Page 10 Date of interview & project
		Age	Year						
Started work during 1980s and 1990s									
Alan Turnbull	1959	21	1980	Cherry Lewis Ltd	Director	Assisted in setting up business		Meeting	Arqueotex 1997/98
Neil McCann	1964	16	1980	Calgary Textile Services, HJ Hall&Sons	Hosiery Machine Technician (fit electronic patterning kits on old m/c's), computer work for new m/c's, install Italian m/c's, refurbish old Komet m/c's, maintenance of single cylinder m/c's	Uncle	Family	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Margaret Ward	1964	17	1981	Davenports	Overlock, Mock Linker, Stoller, Neck Linker	Advert	Mother	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Judith Sherwood	1963	20	1983	Scholl	Trainee Linker	Job Centre	None	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Daniel Bradley	1950	34	1984	Scholl Hosiery	Store person, QA Manager (Quality&Quality System)	Family	Family	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Michelle Grey	1961	25	1986	Moisey (became Courtaulds)	Clipper	Advert	Father's family had worked at Woisey	Memories	Hosiery 2008
Lindsay Orton	1968	18	1986	Argee	Overlocking	Interview		Memories	BBSS 2005
Patricia Timmons	1950	37	1987	Scholl	Examining&pairing support hosiery	Friend	None	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Claire Archer	1975	16	1989	G.R. Bodycote, Richard Roberts	Packing, lockstitching, buttonholing, button sew	Interview	None	Memories-unrecorded	Hosiery 2008
Ian Davenport	1969	21	1990	Davenport Knitwear	Director	Family	Family business-second generation (family member of A.Davenport)	Meeting	Arqueotex 1997/98
Dawn Simmons	1975	15	1990	Philip Charles, Ghia, Jambotex, Philip Charles, PCFR, HJ Hall&Son	Rosso&Packer,Rosso,Examine&Cut,Rosso&Overlock,Rosso	Mother	Mother	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Leah Harrold	1972	19	1991	Flude Hosiery, Mill Hill Knitwear, Davenports	Staightener, Lockstitcher	Neighbour	None	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1997/98
Sally Bailey	1975	16	1991	Worked in hosiery while at school Whitmore&Son (B&S)		Parents	Family	Memories	History 2003
Rachel Grewcock	1974	21	1993	Davenport Knitwear	Folder&Bagger				Arqueotex 1997/98
Kelly Moore	1980	16	1996	Horizon	Machinist (embroidery on jumpers, socks, tee-shirts, coats, hats, caps etc)	Friends	Family	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1998
Carrie Hackett	1981	16	1997	James Bennett Ltd	Knitter (12 Lilliputs, 6 Scamar Braiders, 2 Colli Collar, 3 Somar Collars, 2 Reepex Braider)	Advert in local press	None	Questionnaire	Arqueotex 1998

APPENDIX 2

POPULATION, HOSIERS AND FACTORIES

YEAR	POPULATION	HOSIERS"	NUMBER OF FACTORIES"
1640	1000	-	-
1717	2250	-	-
1780	4500	-	-
1791	-	22	-
1801	5070	-	-
1805	-	18	-
1809	-	26	-
1811	6058	28	-
1822	-	16	-
1828	-	21	-
1830	-	21	-
1831	7180	30	-
1835	-	30	-
1840	-	16	-
1841	6448	17	-
1848	-	17	-
1851	6177	-	-
circa 1855	COMMENCEMENT OF STEAM POWERED FACTORY PRODUCTION		
1861	6461	-	-
1871	6779	-	-
1881	7891	-	-
1894	10500	-	24
1895	-	-	34
1899	-	-	24
1900	11000	-	>20
1901	11304	-	-
1911	12837	-	-
1921	13930	-	-
1931	16210	-	-
1933	-	-	80
1939	-	-	99
1941	32000	-	65
1951	39094	-	-
1961	41608	-	-
1971	47985	-	-
1973	-	-	56
1981	45000	-	-
2001	37700	-	-
2004	38620	-	-

"Trade Directories and other varied sources (likely to be minimum numbers as all hosiers and factories may not be identified)

APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire

They were filled in by some of the respondents and also by people working in the various factories visited. A number of people went into quite a lot of detail when filling in the questionnaire and give a good insight into how jobs changed over time, working conditions, family connections and personal opinions.

(Questions asked over 5 pages):

Name

DOB

Address and telephone number

Employment History

Could you please provide answers to the following questions:

What age were you when you first entered the textile industry and was this straight from school.

Has your family traditionally been involved in the textile industry and how did you first become employed in the industry (eg. family/friend connections)

What form of training was given (eg apprenticeship)

What views do/did you have on the type of work in which you are/were involved (eg. favourite and least favourite jobs, dangerous, monotonous, skilled, satisfaction etc)

Do/did you feel there is/was a close community within the workforce and how do/did the employees relate to management and vice versa.

Has and how has the industry and working conditions changed with time.

What views do/did you hold on holidays and celebrations (eg. Hinckley fortnight, holiday pay, firms outings, Christmas festivities)

Do/did new employees and those getting married experience 'initiation rites' and what form did these take.

Have you any views on the role and status of men and women in the textile industry and what are they.

What are/were your views on working conditions (eg. noise levels, ventilation, lighting, operation of machinery).

How do/did you feel the textile industry compares with other industries (eg. standard of living , wages/salaries, prospects and has this changed with time).

Would you encourage your children to enter the textile industry.

Do/did you belong to a Trade Union and have they helped employees in the industry (eg. relating to pay, working conditions and holiday entitlement).

What are/were your leisure pursuits, interests and activities outside working hours (eg. sport, church, committees, the pub and have these changed with time).

Do/did working in the textile industry influence family life and how (eg. childcare, family/domestic routines).

What overall views do you have of work in the textile industry (eg. relating to pay, working conditions, friendliness, authority, hours of work).

Do you feel that the compilation of experiences and oral histories of people who worked and continue to work in the industry is of interest and why.

Please make any further comments which you feel may be of interest, whether they be anecdotal and directly relevant to the textile industry or to life in Hinckley and its surrounding villages.

Thank you for your time and contribution in completing this form which will go towards providing a valuable insight into the textile industry in Hinckley and its surrounding villages.

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