



MADE IN EAST ANGLIA

A History of the Region's Textile & Menswear Industries

GILLIAN HOLMAN

PASOLD RESOURCES IN TEXTILE HISTORY, 1

Made in East Anglia

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Industries

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Published by the Pasold Research Fund
2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to many people for their help in this work. First to Christopher Gurteen and his cousin Jack Smart whose company history stimulated my interest in the region's textile and clothing background. To the late Peter Walters, to David Harmer, Brian Whittaker and the former manager of the Gainsborough Silk Mill in Sudbury for allowing access to their records and for answering my many questions. To Andrew Phillips, formerly of the Colchester Institute, who set up the Colchester recalled project and permitted me to use recordings from that study and then supplied photographs to me. The demise of all the firms in Colchester would have been extremely difficult to research without his help. I am indebted to the librarians and other staff at libraries and County Record Offices for their unflinching helpfulness and courtesy in supplying information, particularly to Martin Everett, former librarian of Saffron Walden library whose enthusiasm was always encouraging. Last but not least to all those former employees of Gurteen who gave their time to talk to me, (sadly most of whom are no longer with us) the work would be incomplete without memories of their working lives.

Through many personal problems which arose during the years when I tried to write up my studies into a coherent whole, the support of my former tutor, Tony Kirby was invaluable. To Professor Richard Wilson, my thanks for his patient editing, and to Giorgio Riello of the University of Warwick, my thanks for his patience and encouragement.

Finally to my late husband Mike, whose own work in supplying textiles to the men's neckwear trade inspired my interest and desire to know more of the men's clothing industry, my love and thanks, and to Ivor who persuaded me to return to my work after a long period of time, my love and thanks.

Gillian Holman, January 2015

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PREFACE

Living in East Anglia in the 1990s whilst working for a post graduate degree in the History of Textiles and Dress at the Winchester School of Art, I started to examine the region's long tradition of weaving and of manufacturing men's clothing, I became aware of how this part of the region's industrial history had been neglected by academics. I began by looking particularly at Haverhill and the Gurteen enterprise which built the town alongside expanding their business, thereby providing work and homes for an increasing workforce. I went on to study some other towns whose backgrounds were inextricably bound into these industries and to measure their importance in the development of those places where they were situated. This involved much travelling around the region, visiting archives and talking to those people still involved in the businesses that survived. Extensive use was made of both local and national newspapers and of literature based on the area's history.

I was asked to catalogue the archives for the Gurteen company which gave me an in depth knowledge of the firm's history and I was later privileged to set up the company's museum. Subsequently I was fortunate to be able to interview and record memories of Christopher Gurteen and his cousin Jack Smart, David Harmer of Harmers of Norwich, Peter Walters of Stephen Walters of Sudbury, and a number of former employees of the Gurteen company, sadly many no longer with us. I was also able to use some recordings from the Colchester Recalled project in researching the industries in Colchester.

Time did not allow for study of some towns in the region with a background of weaving and those whose history I have not included are left for others to pursue. Because I had access to the extensive Gurteen archive the history of that firm and of Haverhill, my study of their progress is almost a book in itself. It has therefore been used as a complete part two. I examined other towns with textile and menswear industries to compare with Gurteens in Haverhill, hence the clothing firms in Colchester and Norwich were studied as were the weaving industries of Braintree and Sudbury. Although the Courtaulds business was based in Braintree for many years it became such a vast enterprise that I have allowed more space to the firm in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries than to some other firms. In focusing on these businesses I hope to have drawn together information and written a coherent academic study of some of those people and towns in East Anglia whose lives were governed by the manufacture of textiles and subsequently of the clothing industry for over three hundred years. There has been some previous work on the production of wools and worsteds in Norwich and articles on the silk industry in general; some of these are used for reference. The wool and silk industries of Suffolk have been largely ignored and apart from Coleman's study of Courtaulds and Brown's more general work on the history of

Essex, study of the county's textile production has been similarly neglected. Likewise the manufacture of those goods for the plebian market has been disregarded despite there having always been a wider customer base for ordinary dress than for more exclusive items. This work looks at the fortunes and failures of weaving and of the men's wear trades of Norwich, at the silk and horsehair trades of Suffolk, particularly of Sudbury and Glemsford, and of the weaving and clothing industry in Haverhill. It examines the several factories making men's ready-to-wear clothes in Colchester and the weaving industry in Essex which survived only because of the vast development of the Courtauld business. It goes on to look at the spinning and weaving of horse-hair fabrics used in both clothing and ancillary trades as well as in upholstery. Finally it includes an in depth study of Gurteens and their impact on Haverhill.

Social history of ordinary people, their lives, work and apparel makes this an important area of study. During the latter part of the twentieth century social and dress historians have concentrated their work on major industrial centres whilst neglecting the businesses which were so vital to rural areas. Despite the existence of several major seaports down the eastern coasts of England, for many years East Anglia was regarded as somewhat isolated. Though rail links were built in the mid-nineteenth century, in comparison with other much more commercial and industrial regions such as the North West and the Midlands, road networks remained comparatively poor. Delderfield's well researched novel about the business of a Victorian haulier illustrates the lack of transport facilities during the third quarter of the century¹. The author makes it clear that before the advent of rail transport local textile trades and agriculturalists had problems shifting goods. The region's remoteness was reflected in local wages and property prices which in turn made it attractive to businessmen looking for cheap labour and inexpensive premises. Such low costs encouraged the migration from Spitalfields in London to Essex and Suffolk of master silk weavers such as Warners and Walters during the late 1700s and this was repeated a hundred years later when several clothing manufacturers chose to settle in Colchester. Norwich had been a centre of excellence for the woollen and worsted industries at least as early as the time of Edward III, as had other towns in the region. The availability of locally produced raw materials and imports through ports along the east coast which served merchant shipping from Northern Europe (sometimes distributed through the inland waterways system) combined with a work force of trained weavers and spinners meant that the Eastern Counties were ideal for settlers. Newcomers came from London, but also, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the area provided a refuge for those fleeing religious persecution in the Low Countries.

Such development was not exclusive to East Anglia; other areas including rural Lancashire experienced a similar growth immediately after industrialization.

¹ R F Delderfield, *God is an Englishman*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1970) pp 188/9

A tradition of cottage weaving in the farming community and the ready availability of coal and fast flowing rivers adjacent to the huge port of Liverpool created massive expansion and an influx of large manufacturers and labourers. The Manchester ship canal went through many of the mill towns around Manchester and on down to the Mersey, thus allowing goods to be transported quickly and cheaply for exportation. 'Canals and railways were built, English and Irish workers came here in their thousands'².

The last forty years of the twentieth century saw the growth of industrial estates on the outskirts of many towns across the country, including those in East Anglia. These have provided bases for small and medium sized firms and have created employment for local people, in some cases taking up the slack from the declining textile and clothing trades, but also causing problems for those traditional businesses by offering less labour intensive work and often better pay. There is little doubt that the difficulties of recruiting, training and keeping operatives contributed to the demise of many textile and clothing businesses. In the last thirty years of the twentieth century, both of these industries in the Eastern Counties have seen a steady decline until, by the year 2000 only a handful remained. This loss is due to many factors: industrial growth in the third world resulting in cheap imports; changing work patterns, and social mobility have all contributed. Until recently many firms remained in the same family for generations. That is no longer so, sons do not follow their fathers into business as a matter of course. Some small manufacturers have been swallowed by large conglomerates; many have closed down as competition increased and profits decreased. Successive generations of families working as operatives no longer work for the same employer. When firms close or relocate much of their history is lost; few realise the importance of retaining archives, for companies are not museums. Storage of written material is not always feasible, thus the few firms in the region which remain, and particularly those in family ownership are a rare and valuable resource.

During the latter years of the twentieth century road networks in the region improved and those families who for previous generations have lived and worked in the small villages and towns of East Anglia, in common with the young across the western world, have begun to move away. Such mobility undoubtedly broadens horizons and gives greater insight into other cultures as people are able to travel and work away from home both in this country and abroad and this must be regarded positively. One of the negative aspects to such freedom of choice is that unless research is undertaken now, local history relating to occupations, dress, regional accents and customs will be lost. Local and social historians and such organisations as County Record Offices are acutely aware of the need to

² William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End, An Extraordinary Childhood*, (Halifax, Ryburn, 1993) p 296.

record and preserve such information whilst it is available. Thus the oral history tapes completed during this research are lodged with the County Sound Archive at County Records Offices in Ipswich and Chelmsford to enable others to study the contents for subsequent work. It is worth noting that the transcripts are verbatim as far as possible.

INTRODUCTION

ORIGINS OF THE TRADE

Much of East Anglia owes some of its early 'quality' textile production to the Flemish weavers who settled in this country in the reign of Edward III in the fourteenth century. Certainly this was so in Sudbury and in Norwich, Colchester and Halstead - the weavers were brought over to instruct their English counterparts in the production of the fine woollen and worsted cloths that were made in northern Europe. Inevitably this created local resentment but the foreigners' skills were so important that in 1337 there was legislation to protect them and allow them to practice their craft without undue interference. In order to further protect the home cloth trade franchises were promised to the 'fullers, weavers, dyers and other cloth workers who live mainly by this mystery', and, with the exception of Royalty, nobility and those paying annual rents of £30 or more, people were banned from wearing foreign made cloth³. It was a needless point of law since few could afford imported goods.

Most of the textile towns of the region had their own wool hall where the masters would bring their goods for storage and use the premises to conduct deals with buyers and suppliers. Some of these buildings still survive along the river Wensum in Norwich. Larger businesses had their own warehouses but whilst weavers worked on handlooms in their homes and completed goods were freighted onwards on a weekly basis, it was rarely necessary for manufacturers to finance large business premises, thus the wool hall or Duddery was the town's trading centre.

The textile trades of the country as a whole and the region in particular have always been subject to wild fluctuations with times of plenty superseded by near destitution. In the Tudor period there were attempts to prevent the cloth trade from spreading to rural areas from the major cloth producing towns due to the hardship being suffered by urban cloth workers, in the event a futile effort to protect locals from the lower wages of their rural neighbours. Nonetheless in Norwich as elsewhere, masters sent out yarn to weavers in outlying villages for generations. Raw materials and goods were frequently transported by the flat bottomed wherries along the river Wensum which runs through the city. As early as 1622 at the Privy Council of James I there were complaints of distress owing to weavers and spinners being out of work:

³ E Lipson, *The Economic History of England*, 1, (London, Adam and Charles Black, 1937ed.) p 475.

It was unfitting that clothiers should at their pleasure dismiss their work people: for those who had gained in profitable times must now be content to lose for the public good until the decay of trade was remedied⁴.

In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries business declined and prices fell, even wealthy manufacturers of Essex and Suffolk were unable to continue trading as cloth previously bought in the Levant and Russia was no longer exported. Use of machinery, which at that stage was in its infancy, was cited as a main reason for the downturn in trade, a claim used by thousands of weavers over the last three centuries. John Kay invented the flying shuttle in 1733 and spinning machines were patented five years later, these led to riots in Norwich and in other towns where machines were destroyed as it was considered their use would make operatives redundant. Frauds in manufacture were blamed and high duties levied on English cloth made it unsalable in previously excellent export markets⁵. It was claimed that trade had been captured by manufacturers in France, Italy and Germany. Just after the mid-century the weavers of Essex petitioned parliament to prevent a proposed increase on duty for Portuguese wines:

As our Bays, Says, Perpetuanas etc. go nine tenths of them to Portugal and Spain, if a new imposition be laid upon wines, the King of Portugal ... then will prohibit our manufactures ... which will prove fatal to us as the stagnation of the blood. It will totally destroy the woollen manufactory of Essex for 50,000 or 60,000 families as Spinsters, Weavers and Combers who are employed therein⁶.

In 1505 the Merchant Adventurers were granted the monopoly on export of English-made cloth to Germany and the Low Countries and this was extended in 1615. The Iberian Peninsula was then a major trading area for East Anglian manufacturers; possibly climatic conditions in the region do not lend themselves to sheep rearing thus creating dependence on English-made woollen cloth.

At the end of the seventeenth Daniel Defoe, campaigner, chronicler and novelist, acknowledged that countries that had previously bought English cloth now produced their own, but wrote of better quality goods being exported in quantity:

Henry VII opened their eyes to the Blessing and put them upon manufacturing it. Heaven bestowed the wool upon them, the life and soul, the origin of all their commerce ... after they had, for almost 1000 years of ignorance, sold it to the diligent Flemings and even bought their own Cloaths of them again, after they were made with it abroad ... Their glorious Queen shewed them the way to find a market for it when manufactured, she opened the sluices of Trade

⁴ Lipson, *Economic History*, 3, p 311

⁵ W F Quinn, *The History of Braintree and Bocking*, (Suffolk, Lavenham Press) p 52.

⁶ Quinn, *Braintree and Bocking*, p 58.

to them and Trade opened the sluices of money. In a word she made them a trading nation, and that has made them a rich nation⁷.

In his *Plan of English Commerce*, Defoe wrote that ‘The poor farmers could get no dairy maids, the wenches told them in so many words they would not go into service for 12 pence a week when they could get 9/- a week at their own hands ... for they all run away to Bocking, to Sudbury ... and other manufacturing towns of Essex and Suffolk’⁸. Defoe is reputed to exaggerate wildly!

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries strict legislation on employment of apprentices in the cloth trade affected the major centres of London and Norwich. In the late seventeenth century, in Coggeshall, a small town near Colchester, largely dependent on its weaving trade, the wool combers complained of those entering the trade without having served formal apprenticeships; whether this was so or not has been impossible to verify but there is no doubt that local trade guilds did all they could to protect their members. In the reign of Charles I a report on poor relief commented ‘Multitudes that have lived by work from the clothiers of whom thousands owing to the decay of the trade live in much want and can hardly subsist’⁹. As late as 1707 the Governors of the Dutch Bay Hall in Colchester stipulated that only those who had served a full seven year apprenticeship were permitted to manufacture the bays (baize) for which the town was so famous. In addition to strict rules of employment there was legislation to protect the wool trade from the impact of cotton goods brought in from India and in 1721 the importation and wearing of calicoes was banned and it was even ruled that burial shrouds be made of wool. Defoe commented that such legislation would give necessary protection to the woollen industry and that there were instances of attacks on people wearing cotton clothing. Policing such a law proved impossible and it fell into disuse and was eventually repealed.

The Norwich, Braintree, Coggeshall and Colchester areas were rightly famous for their production of high quality bays and says, (baize and serge) these were known as the ‘New Draperies’ because of their close weave and fine finish which contrasted with the coarse, loosely woven homespuns of wool, linen and hemp, traditionally made in the region. South West Suffolk may also have been involved in the manufacture of the New Draperies though the weaving of items such as bunting suggests that Sudbury wove the ‘old’ traditional coarse English woollen cloth, while Haverhill weavers concentrated on fustians and checks, both primarily used for workers’ clothes. Why this should be when other towns in the region produced quality goods remains unclear. Haverhill fustians and drabbetts, were probably originally for the home market, but they may also have been exported with the better quality fabrics and other assorted goods to Europe and

⁷ Daniel Defoe, *A Plan of English Commerce*, (undated and publisher un-named) p 152.

⁸ Defoe, *Plan of English Commerce*, p 153.

⁹ Lipson, *Economic History*, p 311.

the Americas. Trevor Fawcett's study of Gt. Yarmouth port records show quantities of fabrics being exported with assortments of unrelated items¹⁰. In Ewart Evans excellent East Anglian oral history work, he quotes the saddler from Debenham: 'They grew hemp in this area and prepared it as well, so work in canvas was well within the harness-maker's traditional craft'¹¹, Young wrote of hemp being both grown and manufactured into cloth in and around Sudbury¹².

It is surprising that so little research mentions the fustians, checks and drabbetts woven in such quantity in Haverhill and possibly elsewhere in the region. The raw materials of wool, hemp and flax were produced throughout the eastern counties, as indeed they were in much of the country. All lend themselves to production of strong, hard wearing and inexpensive cloth traditionally worn by those in rural occupations, as well as the fine, high quality woollens for which the region was famous. Perhaps this is again evidence that until recently research into the history of textiles has concentrated on the production of more expensive goods. Hopefully this work will go some way to correct the imbalance.

¹⁰ Trevor Fawcett, *Argonauts and Commercial Travellers*, (Textile History 16) p 162.

¹¹ George.Ewart Evans, *Where Beards Wag All*, (London, Faber & Faber, 1970) p 51.

¹² Arthur Young, *A General View of Agriculture in the County of Suffolk*, (London, Macmillan, 1804) p 55.

PART ONE

1.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

In order to set the often unhappy situation of the textile workers of East Anglia in context, it is necessary to examine some of the social and economic factors which affected the country as a whole during the nineteenth century and to look particularly at the way government actions or lack of them, impacted on the textile trades.

In 1800 Britain was at war with France, thus the government inevitably concentrated its efforts on success in the conflict and on stabilizing British influence in Europe. The use of man power in such a prolonged conflict was prodigious and with the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815, 400,000¹ men previously in the armed forces were thrown back into the labour market. Possibly those who, during the war years had worked in ancillary occupations such as armament production added to the numbers now seeking work. Textile manufacturers who had been stockpiling goods during the war in the hope of being able to sell abroad once the European markets reopened found that economic and political chaos on the continent prevented this to a great degree² and as a result many thousands in this country were unemployed. Income tax, which had been introduced at ten per cent on incomes in excess of £200 in order to raise money for war with France was abolished in 1816 in an abortive attempt to relieve working class distress. Since pay for the average worker was only a few shillings a week this made no impact where it was most needed. Textile workers incomes clearly did not fall into the tax bracket but perhaps it was hoped that by reducing the outgoings of those who provided employment capital would be freed for investment which in turn might create work. The Corn Law was passed in 1815, designed to prevent imports of grain until home grown corn had reached the price of eighty shilling a quarter³. For the poorest in the country this meant even greater poverty as the price of bread became prohibitive.

Protection for the wool trades had been introduced in 1720 but was short lived. Protection for the silk industry which had been enacted in 1766 similarly limited imports in an attempt to protect the home trade. Such shelter was not afforded to the textile industry as a whole and in 1774 the Spitalfields Act was introduced in an attempt to give silk weavers in the capital a living wage, all failed in their intention. Imported silks remained desirable to those with money to spend and

¹ Rodney Castleden, *British History, A Chronological Dictionary of Dates*, (Bournemouth, Paragon, 1994) p 208.

² Castleden, *British History*, p 208.

³ Castleden, *British History*, p 207.

high fashion in mind. During the ten years following the Corn Law various measures were introduced to either relieve distress or to control the workers' militant response to their poverty. The Factory Act was passed in 1819 as were laws to curb riots and prevent political meetings. In that year the 'Peterloo' massacre in Manchester resulted when a meeting agitating for political reform was broken up. It became a symbol of the fight by radicals against repressive government.

Subsequently the laissez-faire attitude in government gained ascendancy, largely following the doctrine of Adam Smith and his belief in 'natural order'. A.J.P Taylor describes this as opposition to any government activity beyond a duty to protect against foreign foes and maintain justice⁴. Taylor quotes Nassau Senior's views in referring to the early part of the century: 'the duty of government is to keep the peace and protect [its] subjects from violence, fraud and malice and leave them to pursue what they believe to be their interests in the way in which they deem advisable'⁵. Two major Liberal politicians of the early middle years of the century, Cobden and Bright were staunch supporters of non-intervention and it was Cobden who voiced the opinion that those silk manufacturers who could not survive without protection should be allowed to fail. Robert Peel continued dismantling protective legislation during 1842 and three years later in his budget of 1845 all export duties and many import duties were removed. The Corn Laws which had caused such hardship were axed in 1846 as the movement towards free trade policies gained momentum. Like Robert Peel, Cobden came from a Lancashire cotton manufacturing family and it was among the industrialists of the north where much support for his policies came⁶. Pugh's work supports this view, saying that manufacturers of cotton goods were largely opposed to protectionism, partially because their raw materials were imported without heavy duties⁷. Most European Governments maintained high import tariffs in order to protect their own businesses, 'largely out of fear of British competition'⁸ doubtless overseas manufacturers took the same jaundiced view of British tariffs. This situation improved for a while after the 1860 Cobden treaty with France; French duties on imported manufactured goods were limited to a maximum of thirty per cent, still very high but exports and imports in both directions doubled⁹. While many in the textile industries struggled other factors led to mid-Victorian prosperity; the railway system grew rapidly as did the

⁴ Arthur J P Taylor, *Laissez-Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth Century Britain*, (London, MacMillan, 1972) p 13.

⁵ Taylor, *Laissaz -Faire*, p 25.

⁶ Taylor, *Laissez-Faire*, p 25.

⁷ Martin Pugh, *State and Society, British Political History*, (London, Edward Arnold, 1994) p 3.

⁸ David Thomson, *Europe Since Napoleon*, (London, Pelican, 1966) p184.

⁹ Thomson, *Europe Since*, p 255.

telegraph network, creating speed of communication which must have been as radical then as internet technology in the late twentieth century. The discovery of vast gold reserves in the colonies and North America produced revenue to fund massive expansion in many areas, particularly in heavy industries.

The economic see-saw during the second half of the nineteenth century brought political change. In 1861 the American Civil War prevented both production and export of raw cotton from the Southern States, thus creating a 'cotton famine' which caused enormous hardship for much of the textile industry. This was particularly so in the cotton mills of Lancashire which relied entirely on imported supplies of raw materials from America and many of the operatives there suffered terrible deprivation and starvation. In her novels *North and South* and *Mary Barton* Elizabeth Gaskell wrote of the appalling damage the American situation wrought around Manchester and Delderfield described the effect of the famine on the mill towns:

He had looked for torpor in the cotton belt where he knew most of the looms were silent now that the bales to feed them arrived in a trickle from blockade runners ... but not this, not a plague that hung over the huddle of towns like a new Black Death that would ultimately carry off half the population and reduce King Cotton to beggary¹⁰.

Although imports of Indian cotton rose at the time and some use was made of alternative fibres such as hemp, these were insufficient to alleviate the problems. Possibly shortage of cotton for their weaving factory encouraged firms such as Gurteens in Haverhill and Harmers in Norwich to develop their ready-made clothing operation rather than extend their loom sheds, though no doubt awareness of the growing need for inexpensive ready-made clothing created by general industrial growth was the most important single factor influencing such decisions.

Briggs wrote of the tragic situation of many working class communities in the mid-nineteenth century:

There were years of economic crisis in 1857 and 1866 with business bankruptcies and great working class distress ... general prosperity did not save large sections of the population from social distress ... according to Mathew Arnold ... machinery had added to the national wealth but was continuing to produce a multitude of miserable, sunken and ignorant human beings.¹¹

¹⁰ R F Delderfield, *God is an Englishman*, (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1970) p 350.

¹¹ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People*, (Chicago, University Press, 1965) p 12.

Undoubtedly growth in some parts of the country led to failures in others and this was particularly so in textile production; as the northern counties factories grew many of the small producers in East Anglia failed.

For a long time the East and West of England ... were the chief wool manufacturing districts. When the steam engine, the spinning machine and the power loom arrived the less wealthy and more strenuous people of the north captured the trade by developing the factory system. They had abundant soft water ... and underneath their feet was the best of coal ...¹²

Thus it was in areas where there was little work that the masses suffered terribly and with little help available. Parishes had a duty to provide 'outdoor relief' to supplement the incomes of those working below the bread line, sometimes described as the 'deserving poor' and each town had its own workhouse as a last resort. Though desperate people had no option the workhouse was generally regarded as degrading, not only because of the regime it enforced but because it was for the 'undeserving poor', i.e. those unable or unwilling to work. Families dreaded the segregation of men, women and children that was forced upon them and in some cases starved rather than enter such establishments. In many communities the local vestry and after 1834 the board of guardians, 'exported' unemployed families to the colonies in the hope that they might find better conditions there, thus conveniently relieving local organizations of the need to fund the poor.

In the last twenty-five years of the nineteenth century home industry was under pressure from competition and the rest of Europe was fast gaining ground on the 'workshop of the world'. According to Taylor the stagnation of the export market led to many businessmen changing their political allegiance as they fought for reforms of tariffs on imported goods¹³. It was during this time that there was a series of slumps which affected many of the manufacturing industries across England and agriculture was hit as hard as any. All of these must have led to financial hardship cascading rather than trickling down through the business hierarchy to those working in the industries which, in better times created wealth not only for entrepreneurs but for the whole country and provided a living for the working masses. For the duration of the Crimean War (from 1854) the textile and clothing trades prospered as orders for much needed uniforms were processed by manufacturers able to mass produce. However this resurgence was short lived, Europe remained unsettled and the Franco Prussian conflict which began in 1870 created political instability. The rest of Europe awaited the outcome and this must have affected the British export market as much as the wars of a hundred years

¹² Lectures in British Commerce, *The Woollen Industry*, (London, Pitman, 1912) p 260.

¹³ Taylor, *Laissez-Faire*, p 40.

earlier. Coleman wrote of debate among historians about the truth of there being a 'Great Depression' lasting from 1873 to 1896¹⁴ and it is clear from those historians quoted in this work that the debate continues. Concurrent with the worsening situation in manufacturing was a major and long lasting slump in agriculture.

By 1871 a mere eleven per cent of the working population was employed in agriculture while British manufacturing produced something like fifty per cent of the cotton goods in the world¹⁵, an enormous shift from a hundred years earlier. Three years later the agricultural economy collapsed, cheaper wheat was imported from North America in such quantities that British farmers suffered and it was in 1874 the agricultural workers of Eastern England went on strike demanding better pay. A year on and agricultural depression had worsened with farm workers now paid less than most factory operatives¹⁶. George Ewart Evans quotes an East Anglian agricultural worker: 'At the end of the week they drew a wage of 9s. or 10s. barely enough to keep body and soul together'¹⁷. Pugh claims that 'further slumps in the mid-1880s and first half of the 1890s fed the view of a twenty year depression', and adds that British farming was slow to adopt modern machinery¹⁸. If this is so, and there is no reason to doubt Pugh's findings, then surely the size of the labour force in rural areas must have encouraged slow modernization and thus meant that money available for wages had to be continually spread thinly. This would be particularly so in the Eastern Counties where agriculture was the only large scale alternative employment to the textile trades. Agriculturalists blamed a combination of cheap imports and bad weather for their decline whilst failing to tackle the root causes. In fact there was international deflation during much of this time with falling prices and profits forcing many businesses to close and it is unlikely that Britain suffered any more or less than other trading nations. According to Pugh the gross domestic product was fifty per cent higher in 1890 than it had been twenty years earlier, though annual growth slowed and individual productivity dropped¹⁹.

By 1880 Britain was still a world leader, though it had now been overtaken by the USA and Germany was fast catching up, nonetheless those cotton, other textile and clothing manufacturers

¹⁴ David C Coleman, *Courtaulds, An Economic and Social History, I*, (Oxford, University Press, 1969) p 155.

¹⁵ Pugh, *State and Society*, p 3.

¹⁶ Castleden, *British History*, p 253.

¹⁷ George Ewart Evans *Where Beards Wag All*, (London, Faber & Faber, 1970) p 94.

¹⁸ Pugh, *State and Society*, p 7.

¹⁹ Pugh, *State & Society*, p 7.

who had survived the lean years continued to be profitable with at least half their production given to export markets²⁰.

During the difficult years between 1870 and 1890 many manufacturers met with business difficulties and food prices fell in response to agricultural recession at home and cheap imports, this combined with stability in the cost of rented housing supposedly led to 'an increase in real wages of one third between 1875 and 1900'²¹. Results of research from those campaigning for better conditions for the working class show that contrary to this view, many families incomes were below the breadline.

Writing of the industrialization of textile industries, Pugh comments that in the early years it was possible to launch a business without much capital, but that such methods were insufficient during the latter part of the nineteenth century²². Capital outlay necessary in the textile and clothing trades was probably small in comparison with heavy industries such as rail and steel, nonetheless, for businesses which for centuries had been based on domestic methods any investment in factory buildings and machinery may have been more than some masters could afford. As more sophisticated equipment became essential in order to survive and compete effectively it is not difficult to see why so many failed. Perhaps this was particularly so in rural areas such as East Anglia where lack of access to main industrial centres meant increased costs of transportation of goods and equipment and possibly difficulty in providing training for operatives needed to use the equipment. It must also be remembered that in 'light' industries such as textiles and clothing women were the main workforce, that the majority were poorly paid and many part-time which encouraged politicians to disregard their effect on the economy. Women made up sixty per cent of employed labour in the Lancashire cotton towns²³. The same was true of women's work in the textile and clothing towns of East Anglia, progressively so after industrialization as women were physically strong enough to use power looms where hand-loom weavers were more likely to be male with women working as spinners and winders.

The advent of the sewing machine from the 1850s, used in both factory and home meant that more families were dependent on the earnings of their female members despite the general view of men as the breadwinners. While this undoubtedly increased the disposable incomes of families and led to a general improvement in prosperity it did not greatly relieve the burden on women. The sewing machine meant that output was considerably greater than in the days of hand sewing but they continued to work long hours for low pay in addition to shouldering the domestic burden. In E H Hunt's work *British Labour History*, he

²⁰ Pugh, *State and Society*, p 7.

²¹ _____ p 41.

²² _____ p 12.

²³ _____ p 59.

quotes from an 1824 study on cotton spinning ‘The women have only themselves to support, the men generally have families. The women can afford to labour for less than men’²⁴. Such claims are repeatedly disproved by the work of social campaigners for women’s rights. Throughout the century most women’s income was essential to the family budget regardless of whether they were married women trying to juggle their domestic role with that of working mother or single daughters living as part of the family.

One author writes of the preparedness of the cotton industry to adapt to power looms creating ‘the isolated communities around water-powered mills’²⁵. The same might be said of those companies in East Anglia which flourished despite, and in some cases because of external conditions which affected them. It is clear that despite great industrial growth, there were long periods of depression and economic crisis during the second half of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, with the exception of Courtauld’s industrialization in the early years, it was largely during this period that those textile and clothing manufacturers in Eastern England who were to survive began to plan and to invest considerably in both factories and machinery. In such rural areas where the depressed agricultural economy was the only real alternative employment, finding and keeping staff would not be difficult, most would be glad of regular work, particularly as it often meant the availability of inexpensive housing owned by the employers. Despite the coming of the railway to most towns and many villages, poor pay and long hours still made it preferable to work locally. It is interesting to note that in common with Cobden and Bright the Courtauld and Gurteen families were staunch liberals and non-conformists whose views strongly reflected the ‘gospel of work’.

No one factor can be held responsible for the problems of the British economy and consequent failure of many textile producers during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, Coleman’s work on the Courtauld business and Pamela Clabburn’s book on the Norwich Shawl Industry both shed some light on this. The Liberal party was in power for most of the period between 1846 and 1874 and it is possible that their insistence on free trade impacted poorly on some manufacturers, though at the time there were instances of European textile business failures where high import tariffs were in place to protect the home trade. Despite the widening of the franchise in 1867 and 1884, the Factories and Workshop act of 1878 and the acceptance of trade unions, which brought greater concern for those employed in major industries, much hardship continued and many less efficient businesses failed. Perhaps the education acts of 1870, 1880

²⁴ E H Hunt, *British Labour History 1815-1914*, (London, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1981) p 25.

²⁵ Ron Fitzgerald, ‘*Development of the Cast Iron Frame in Textile Mills*’, (Industrial Archaeology Review, No.2, 1988) p 127.

and 1890 played a part in that youngsters in urban areas where there was greater choice of work now had sufficient basic skills to look away from those occupations that had employed their parents.

It was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century that campaigns for better conditions for the working classes gained ground. Mayhew's journalism had been instrumental in drawing attention to the plight of those employed in manufacturing earlier in the century and encouraged campaigning against conditions in which many worked, he wrote 'labour had become a commodity organized and cheapened to suit the needs of the purchaser'²⁶. Shaftesbury, Dickens and Gaskell all kept awareness of such poverty in the public eye, as did Charles Booth, but, apart from Clementina Black, most concentrated on those living and working in London and other large industrial cities. Booth, himself a successful ship owner, was appalled by the concentration on the creation of wealth regardless of its impact on much of the population and himself funded a large research project into the *Life and Labour of the People of London*. The work of such men and women was thorough and they measured the costs of basic commodities against income in specific types of work and regions of the country. Thus they were able to illustrate quite clearly which occupations and industries provided inadequate incomes for those employed therein. Perhaps it was pressure from these campaigners who were so influential in their own fields which partly led to greater state intervention. It was during these years that both the board of agriculture and the board of education were established and as a result of the 1870 Education Act there was an increase in spending from three quarters of a million in 1870 to £7 million in 1895. During the last thirty years of the century the tiered system of local government was introduced. County councils, rural district councils, town councils and parish councils were established with members drawn from the communities they served; this must have led to greater awareness of local needs, though their powers were limited. There was still no financial support in time of illness or unemployment, this was left to individuals contributing to friendly societies and to the philanthropy of employers if they were so inclined, thus such help was very much a lottery. Pugh comments that: capitalism's failure to address poverty led to a sort of coalition of socialists and liberals – 'Hobhouse, Hobson and Masterman urged the state to accept a duty to promote a programme of socio-economic reform'²⁷, Pugh also suggests that it was the move away from the doctrine of individualism which prevailed during the middle years of the century that led in 1890 towards a more 'sophisticated modern form of government' which inevitably led to greater state intervention

²⁶ Pugh, *State and Society*, p 44.

²⁷ Pugh, *State and Society*, p 53.

and the employment of many more government workers to administer the growing number of offices and departments which resulted²⁸.

This then is the background in which some businesses developed and strengthened and where many others failed. It was a century of extremes, the establishment of heavy industries made possible by the industrial revolution of the previous century, the population shift to the growing towns from rural areas and the making of great wealth. Such dramatic changes also led to periods of absolute destitution for many and it was in these changing circumstances that the East Anglian clothing industry became established and the textile manufacturers of the region who survived consolidated their position.

²⁸ _____ p 57.

2.

GROWTH OF THE READY TO WEAR INDUSTRY

Prior to industrialization and mechanization those living and working in the countryside had worn smock-frocks or fustian breeches and waistcoats but the growing need for clerical staff, and workers in heavy industry moving into towns created a need for different and often more formal clothing. This population increase into areas where work was plentiful and largely factory based, had a knock-on effect, first in the growth of the building industry which then encouraged the growth of small businesses, shops and offices to service the needs of the industrial communities. Where parents and grandparents had neither needed, nor had the funds to buy formal wear, those now employed in commerce and industry needed to conform to the emerging patterns of workwear:

The greatest range of clothing is seen not among patricians and aristocrats, but throughout the much larger sections of the population from the lower professional classes downwards. This variety was recognized at the time and seen as an important confirmation of one's place in society. Any deviation attracted ridicule or condemnation for 'aping your betters'. In his painting 'Work' Ford Maddox Brown used the distinctive clothing of different groups as a visual metaphor for their occupations ... the difference between broadcloth worn by one class and fustian of another was particularly striking¹.

Dress historian Sarah Levitt quotes from an 1875 article on the ready-to-wear industry in Bristol, saying 'Orders flow in from all parts of the world'². It is clear from surviving press reports that markets created by the expatriate communities in the colonies combined with the growth of domestic trade resulted in tremendous expansion in the clothing industry as a whole. Rimmer, writing of Marshall's flax spinning company in Leeds comments on the importance of an increasing colonial market in the (textile) industries development³, an observation equally relevant to clothing production.

Flora Thompson writing of her Oxfordshire village in the 1880s described the clothing of country men in terms which exactly reflected the changing pattern of Gurteen's production:

¹ Sarah Levitt, *Cheap Mass-Produced Clothing in the 19th Century and Early 20th Century*, (Textile History 22, 1992) p 179.

² Levitt, *Cheap Mass-Produced Men's Clothing*, p 148.

³ W G Rimmer, *Marshall's of Leeds, Flax Spinners*. (Cambridge, University Press, 1960) p 4.

The carter, shepherd and a few of the older labourers still wore the traditional smock-frock ... but this old country style of dressing was already out of date; most of the men wore suits of stiff, dark brown corduroy, or in summer, corduroy trousers and unbleached drill jacket⁴.

Then as now, it seems that older generations were unconcerned with fashion and continued to wear what they had always worn and considered to be practical for their way of life. There are several published studies of consumption covering changes during the second half of the nineteenth century, all discuss changes in work patterns and increased disposable income of which a larger percentage was spent on clothing. Social and labour historian, Asa Briggs, wrote of the benefit to manufacturing industries which resulted from the growth of the rail network: 'For real wages continued to rise as well as prices. The general reduction of taxes on food and the shortening of the length of the working day permitted unparalleled working class progress'⁵. Pay rose sharply in the early 1870s, with increases in food prices minimal, thus releasing a larger part of the family income for spending in other areas⁶. Hamish Frazer in his work on the development of retailing explained the growth of the men's wear trade:

(From) 1850 to 1914 a clerk (white collar worker) had to wear a frock coat, but by the end of the nineteenth century needed a lounge suit for informal wear. In order for the husband to dress properly the wife had to dress-make for herself and the children⁷.

This supports Thompson's comments on women's clothing, and shows why, at least in part, growth of the men's wear trade was far greater than that for women. Census returns show that as well as domestic sewing for their own needs, every town and village had dressmakers or seamstresses who would sew for better off women in the community. May claims that during the middle years of the nineteenth century the ready-made clothing market in this country was minimal⁸, previous quotations in this chapter show that this may have been so for women's clothing but men's wear was a rapidly growing and consumer led industry.

Despite some reduction in working hours for the masses, factory rules for 1877 show that employees still worked a long day, and this was the norm in textile and clothing as well as in other industries. Courtauld and Gurteen factories still operated a twelve hour day, as did most clothing manufactories in the region.

⁴ Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, (London, Penguin, 2008ed.) p 36.

⁵ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People*, (Chicago, University Press, 1967) p 10.

⁶ David Thomson, *England in the 19th Century*, (London, Penguin, 1967) p 139.

⁷ Hamish Frazer, *The Coming of the Mass Market*, (London, Macmillan, 1981) p 62.

⁸ Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760-1970*, (London, Longman, 1987) p 313.

Oral history testimony from factory operatives in Haverhill, show that their parents and grandparents who were employed during the latter part of the nineteenth century had worked twelve hours plus overtime when the need arose.

One area which probably stimulated the enormous growth in the clothing industry was the rapid expansion of credit shopping. Newspapers and magazines of the period show advertising at both local and national level, all encouraging readers to buy with various methods of deferred payment. Clothing clubs sprang up across the country, initially run by local retailers but later as a large and well organized source of borrowing. Retailers of all sizes offered credit and in many cases discounted the price for prompt payment. A study of accounts of two town centre retailers and two village draper/grocers in Cambridge and its rural hinterlands show that all allowed customers credit⁹. E J Clark, a general shop in the village of Bourn supplied a number of customers with one outfit a year, almost all were breeches and vest (waistcoat), most paid off the £1.6s. or £1.8s. at monthly intervals, with a replacement bought as soon as the debt on the previous items was clear¹⁰. Many of the outfits were of corduroy, but both drab and fustian goods were purchased at times. (fustian is sometimes used as an alternative term for corduroy or as a generic name for heavy work-wear) A study of the census for Bourn shows that most of Clark's customers were farm labourers. Smarts, a middle price range shop in central Cambridge, which sold bespoke and ready-to-wear goods, advertised their club shopping by means of a savings box specifically to put money aside to spend in their shop. Josiah Chater, who served an apprenticeship in the fabric and clothing department of Eaden Lilley, a Cambridge store, prior to opening his own draper's shop in the city, kept detailed diaries for much of his life. He wrote of the store staying open on specific evenings to allow members of clothing clubs from outlying villages to be bussed into the city¹¹. One must wonder whether this was because evenings were when most working class customers would be free to shop or if the clubs brought in such large numbers it would be difficult to contain them during the normal opening hours, or to save their smarter city customers from the realization that they also supplied the labouring classes. Fraser summed up the growth of credit thus:

The retailing trade was adjusting to a new and increased demand, but shopkeepers were also coming to realize that they had a function in not only satisfying demand, but also in stimulating it ... even in the smallest budget there was an order of priorities which, under sales pressure, could be altered ... in some ways the most

⁹ Gillian Holman, *Shopping in Cambridgeshire, unpublished Essay*, Winchester School of Art, 1993.

¹⁰ Cambridgeshire County Records Office, R82/102, E J Clark Accounts.

¹¹ Museum of Cambridge, Accession not listed, *Josiah Chater's Diaries*.

effective bait that shopkeepers could offer was credit and the giving of credit was at the heart of retailing, at all levels of the market, in the second half of the nineteenth century¹².

In comparing the British and American clothing trades in the nineteenth century Andrew Godley comments that the ready-to-wear market was stimulated by 'innovative retailing practices ... it was the retailers who initiated the substitution of ready-made garments for bespoke goods'¹³; He claims that it was the standardization of sizing rather than technological development which promoted mass production¹⁴. While both these points are valid and undoubtedly affected manufacturing methods, it appears that the most important single factor was the changing requirements of working men.

In London and other major manufacturing centres such as Leeds this growth resulted in either sweated labour or the use of sub-contractors. In many cases the two were synonymous, for sweating was the only way that every level in the hierarchy could earn. Inevitably the lower down the pile the smaller the percentage, consequently it was the operatives who made the goods who fared worst. Sweating was the practice of employing large numbers, working in often crowded and appalling conditions for very little money, sadly a situation which still exists in some parts of the world.

John Barran of Leeds, originally a tailor and 'clothes dealer', began to develop in the 1850s, producing similar goods to those made in the Eastern region, including smock-frocks. He set up his first factory when sewing machines became commonly available in the 1850s*. Initially Barran had between twenty and thirty sewing machinists on site but the fabric was still hand cut and that itself limited output. Again it seems to have been response to increased demand that made Barran invest in band-knife cutting which allowed expansion. (The band-knife cut through several inches depth of cloth, therefore multiplying the supply from cutter to machinist many times, thus giving scope to occupy more machine operatives). Barran's factory was sited in central Leeds and expansion meant several moves to larger premises; By 1867 Barran carried stock of ready-made clothing to the value of £10,000 and within two years this had risen to £15,000¹⁵. Like Beverley Lemire, Godley writes of the ready-made industry starting with the needs of soldiers and that 'by 1851 the cheap labour was supplied in the port towns of the south-west and the market towns of East Anglia as well as from the vast metropolitan army of the underemployed in London's East End'¹⁶. It is a sad

¹² Frazer, *Mass Markets*, p 85.

¹³ Andrew Godley, *British and American Clothing Industries*, (Textile History 28, 1997) p 72.

¹⁴ Godley, *Clothing Industries*, p 71.

¹⁵ David Ryott, *John Barran of Leeds*, (Private Publication, 1951) p 7.

¹⁶ Andrew Godley, *Singer in Britain*, (Textile History 27, 1996) pp 59/76.

fact that most studies of the growth of the clothing trades refer exclusively to those manufacturers based in and around Leeds, Manchester and London while the very considerable industry in the Eastern Counties is either mentioned in passing or totally ignored.

The main growth in the sale of sewing machines in this country was between 1860 and the turn of the century. Initially sold mainly to working tailors, the successful advertising in national and local papers and magazines, combined with Singer offering credit terms opened up new markets and led to an enormous growth in their use. Many firms bought machines not only for their factories but to install in their outworker's homes, though in many cases female employees had to pay the employers back over an extended period. Godley writes of 'Singer's New Family model', brought out in 1865 and sold to domestic and industrial markets alike¹⁷. In addition to its business use a sewing machine became a domestic status symbol and often graced the corner of the living room of people's homes. The increase in quantity of output from what had been small workshop manufacturers who were now able to develop factory production must have been manifold. Singer sales between 1871 and 1880 amounted to 440,000; in the following ten year period that increased to 960,000; the number of garment workers in England and Wales in 1871 was reckoned to be 540,000, ten years later this had risen to 612,000 and by 1901 to 750,000¹⁸. It has been remarked that far from relieving the situation of seamstresses the invention of the sewing machine led to an enormous growth in subcontracting and piece work but despite this many women were still better off than they had been in the days of hand sewn garments¹⁹. Inasmuch as women employed as machinists could produce greater quantities than when hand sewing this may be true, nevertheless many were still appallingly badly paid for working long hours either at home or in the factory. By the time the master and the various layers of subcontractors had taken their money there was little left for the women who put the garments together. There is no clear evidence of a sub-contracting system in the East Anglian towns dominated by the clothing industry; all appear to have made entire garments on the premises.

¹⁷ Godley, *Clothing Industries*, p 72.

¹⁸ Godley, *Clothing Industries*, p 69.

¹⁹ Maxine Berg(ed) Alexander Hay, *Technology and Toil in 19th Century Britain*, (London, Humanities Press, 1979) p 49.

3.

EARLY AND NINETEENTH CENTURY NORWICH

In mediaeval times Norwich was the most important textile centre in the region and indeed in the country; as the seat of the early worsted trade it was regarded as the second city of the realm and until the mid-eighteenth century was the most populous in the provinces. As has been shown in previous chapters, from the fourteenth century onwards successive waves of European immigrants introduced the high quality cloth which came to be known as the 'New Draperies'. The earliest of the newcomers were invited here specifically to pass on their skills to the local community; previously weavers in East Anglia had produced rough woollen cloth similar to those made across the country. In 1564 in the reign of Elizabeth I it was reported that the trade of Norwich was failing and that immigrants were being given permission to settle:

The commodities of worsted making is greatly decayed ... many citizens both merchants and artisans that had their whole living and great numbers of the poor of the city were set on work spinning, weaving, dyeing, callendering and shearing, were now to give themselves to other exercises and trades to maintain their families ... Strangers of the low countries were now come to London and Sandwich and had got licences of the Queens Majesty - to exercise the making of Flanders commodities made of wool - which Strangers came over for refuge against persecution then raised against them by the power of the Duke of Alva, principal for the king of Spain¹.

Rickards translation of the report of the Norwich Strangers arriving in the city reads:

Elizabeth by the grace of God, Queen of England, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith ... as well for the help, repair and amendment of our city of Norwich, by placing in the same men of knowledge and sundry handicrafts as also for their relief and convenience, placing of certain Dutchmen of the Low Countries of Flanders, being very skilful therein ... do licence, give and grant full power, liberty ... to exercise the faculties of making bays, arras, sayes, tapestry, mockadoes, staments, carsay and such outlandish commodities as hath not been used to be mayde within our realme

¹ D L Rickards, *The Norwich Dutch & Walloon Strangers Book of Orders, 1564-1643*. (University of East Anglia, Unpublished Thesis, 1989) p 73.

of England. You shall not occupy buying and selling of any kind of merchandise or any foreign commodity other than such as you shall work and make within this city. Every quarter alyens to yield accounts of their doings to two aldermen of the city, of all customers, duty to be paid to the city².

The newcomers became known as ‘the strangers’ and the number coming to the city was sufficient to merit them being granted not only freedom to work; though within these very strict limits, but to have their own cloth halls which were separate from those of native workers and their own places of worship. The goods were checked for quality and sealed accordingly; perfection in the finished piece was paramount and those guilty of producing faulty goods could be fined. If beyond redemption the whole piece was ‘torn in twain’ and returned to the maker. Seals applied to each piece made it clear which community had produced it and the discipline which supported the sealing system was extremely harsh, though possibly not regarded so by the standards which then prevailed. There were reports of men and women being publicly whipped in the Market place or ‘dragged through the streets at the tail of a cart’ for having ‘sold yarn false’³. This was when piece lengths were marked inaccurately or there were flaws in the weaving. Such jurisdiction was partly due to flagrant nationalism, but also to protect the reputation of cloth bearing the city’s seals. Disputes frequently arose between Strangers and the local populace, who whilst wanting the trade the foreigners brought in, still complained that they took their business and bribed carriers to take goods direct to London to obtain a better price rather than sell through their local wool hall. In 1575 there was a report that ‘By their means our cittie (sic) is well inhabited...The Merchants by their commodities have great trade as well within the realme as without the realme’ and at the same time from the English that the Strangers were taking their living away⁴.

Despite many problems the Strangers must gradually have been assimilated into the City’s business life, though most reports suggest that for many years they retained their cultural identity, to the extent that a ‘French Church’ continued in the City until 1834. Presumably they were eventually fully integrated into the local community. Many Norwich families must be descended from the incomers who settled in the City during those years.

As well as the city dwellers involvement in the weaving trades, those resident in the surrounding villages relied on the Norwich masters for their work. In the early eighteenth century Defoe wrote:

² Rickards, *Norwich Strangers*, p 74.

³ Sir Frank Warner, *History of the English Silk Industry*, (London, Drane 1921) p 268 & p 278.

⁴ Warner, *History*, p 270.

An eminent weaver of Norwich gave me a scheme of their trade, calculating from the number of looms employed in the city of Norwich only, besides those employed in other towns in the county, that there were 120,000 people employed in the woollen and silk manufactures of that city only ... this shows the wonderful extent of the Norwich stuff-weaving trade, by which so many thousands of families are maintained ... Their trade indeed felt a very sensible decay and the cries of the poor began to be very loud when the wearing of painted calicoes was grown to such a height in England as was seen about two or three years ago, but an act of Parliament having been obtained in the year 1720 for prohibiting the use and wearing of calicoes, the stuff trade revived incredibly⁵.

The act proved impossible to police and fell into disuse before being repealed; to enforce such legislation would have required the checking throughout the land of people's apparel. By 1771 trade seemed to have improved for Arthur Young described the city having 38,000 to 40,000 inhabitants and:

Staple manufacture of crapes and camblets plus an abundance of damasks, sattins (sic) etc. The earnings of the manufacturers (masters) are various, but in general high. Men on average do not exceed five shillings a week but many women earn as much. Draw boys (and girls) from ten to thirteen (earn) two and sixpence a week. Pipe boys and girls, (winders of yarn), from five years to nine years, nine pence. Dyers fifteen shillings, hot pressers fifteen shillings and women for doubling silk eight shillings....There are regular exports to Rotterdam each six weeks of up to £480,000. Twenty-six tons of goods are sent by broad wheeled wagons ... Weekly to London at £500 a ton an average of 13,000 tons per annum, value £676,000 ... Occasional ships and wagons to various places £200,000 ... In Norwich each loom employs six people, combers, spinners, doublers, pressers, dyers, warpers and weavers. The number of looms is 12,000 and the number of people 72,000⁶.
[Employed in the trade]

The river Wensum runs through Norwich behind many of the old textile trade buildings and for much of the time when the city was dominated by the weaving industry, wherries, the shallow river boats, were plying their trade carrying goods in and out of the city. It was disputed by the late Ursula Priestley (in conversation

⁵ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (Exeter, Webb and Bower, The Promotional Reprint Company, 1992) p 24.

⁶ Warner, *History*, p 280.

with the present author) that this means was used to transfer both raw materials to the weavers and piece goods out to the port of Yarmouth for export to northern Europe. Young's report, written at a time when trade was booming, indicates that water transport was used, though surely greater quantities were sent by wagon to professional London factors for ongoing shipment; then as now, these were the people who would have the expertise and the contacts to increase trade and to ensure the flow of goods and cash ran as smoothly as possible. Trevor Fawcett quotes port records as showing evidence of goods going out through Yarmouth but he qualifies this by pointing out that cargo documents at that time were at best imperfect but concludes that they nevertheless gave general guidance on 'volume and direction of trade'⁷. All three reports suggest a wide distribution network which fed both export and home markets.



Figure 1: The Little Norwich Shawl Worker, engraving by Tomas Overton 1862. Courtesy of Norfolk Museum Services.

⁷ Trevor Fawcett, *Argonauts and Commercial Travellers*, (Textile History 16, 1985) pp 151-156.

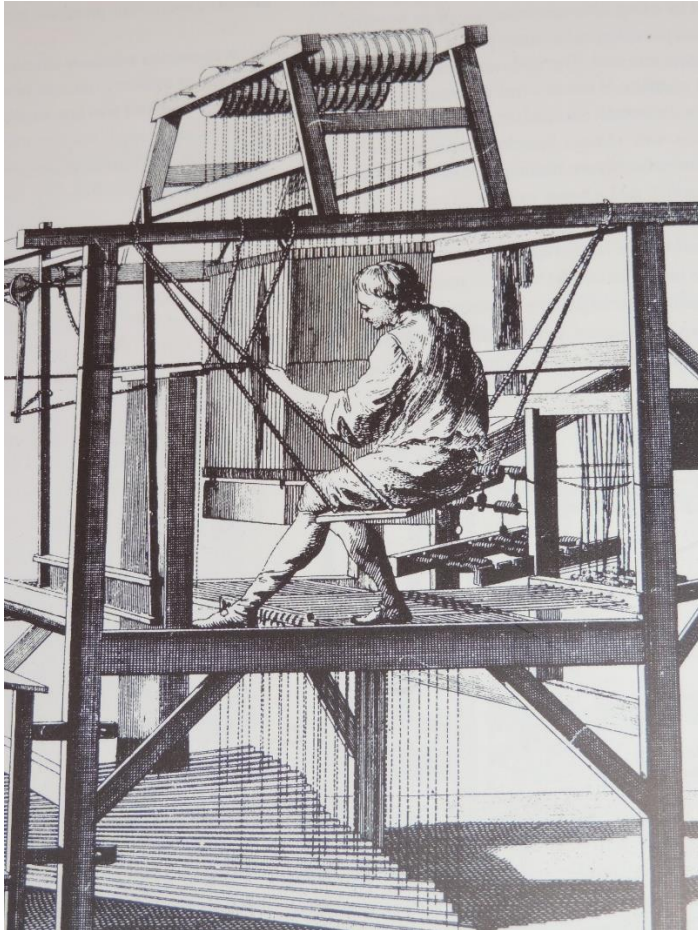


Figure 2: Engraving of 18th century draw-loom with draw-boy at work. Courtesy of University of East Anglia, Centre for East Anglian Studies.

Norwich suffered in the middle of the eighteenth century but in later years and until the fashion changes in the late 1870s some local manufacturers achieved great success weaving fashionable fine wool and silk shawls, both square and rectangular. Initially printed, painted or hand embroidered (Figure 1) and later with woven designs there were a number of manufacturers who prospered while producing these sought after items. They were woven from wool, silk or wool and silk mixtures⁸, and before the advent of the jacquard loom were extremely time consuming and costly to make. They involved long hours of work for weavers and for the young draw boys and girls perched above the loom, (Figure 2) lifting

⁸ Pamela Claburn, *The Norwich Shawl*, (London, The Norfolk Museum Service & HMSO, 1995) p 11.

groups of warp yarns to achieve the required design. Edward Burrows, a major weaver in the city is reputed to have produced the first shawl in 1780 and this was rapidly followed by other manufacturers, the most notable perhaps being the firm of Hervey, who wove in worsted or silk/worsted mixtures and who in 1792 produced their own token coinage⁹. One report cited in the *Victoria County History* claims that the elaborate brocaded patterns made by an expert weaver only progressed at the rate of one inch per day and that the preparation of the loom was as lengthy and costly as the weaving itself, this is confirmed in Clabburn's writing on the shawl industry of Norwich. The finished items could retail between twelve and twenty guineas each with the more ornate examples costing as much as fifty guineas, though the weavers reputedly earned in the region of 24s.10d per shawl, out of which they had to pay ancillary workers and running costs¹⁰.

Campbell comments that in Paisley 'wages were high, wealth diffused and the workers lived in easy, opulent circumstances, all this due initially to their burgeoning silk gauze trade'¹¹. Competition from the Scottish industry damaged Norwich's shawl business in the early and middle years of the nineteenth century supposedly by 'pirating' designs and then flooding the market, thereby ruining the exclusivity offered to owners of a Norwich shawl. However, Campbell claims that Paisley's trade was highly organized before they began to weave shawls; silk for the gauze weavers was brought in via London and the boxes returned carrying finished goods. These were sold through manufacturers own offices in Dublin and London, or through their overseas agents¹². Again there were appeals for protective legislation for the East Anglian capital, which were largely ignored, though one positive result was the registration of designs which in itself afforded some protection¹³. The introduction of more power looms helped, and use of the jacquard mechanism in the early 1800s cut costs, though there were strong objections to their use. The height of the new looms made it impossible to accommodate them in weavers' homes and this meant that factory work was inevitable; for men used to working independently the idea was abhorrent, consequently it was not introduced into the city until 1830¹⁴. If Campbell's writings on the Paisley industry is accurate the Scottish weavers were readier to accept modernization, she says: 'Though it was a comparative latecomer to the trade, the Paisley shawl industry soon surpassed the long established shawl making centers of Edinburgh and Norwich ... By the mid-nineteenth century,

⁹ Clabburn, *The Norwich Shawl*, p 11.

¹⁰ Clabburn, *The Norwich Shawl*, p 40.

¹¹ Kimberley C Campbell, *Paisley Before the Shawl*, (*Textile History*, 33, 2002) p 168.

¹² Campbell, *Paisley Before*, pp 165-168

¹³ Clabburn, *The Norwich Shawl*, p 19.

¹⁴ _____ p 54.

Paisley was synonymous not with silk gauze, but with shawls¹⁵. Trade in Norwich gradually declined and the 1838 Royal Commission on weaving claimed that of the 5,075 looms in the city 1,021 were unemployed. It was inevitable that only the most efficient survived and though Clabburn and Sons (Figure 3) won Gold Medals at both the first Paris Exhibition in 1850 and the London Exhibition in 1862, (it is not recorded if they won medals at the 1851 Great Exhibition) the number of manufacturers shrank steadily. Throughout the century trade continued to a greater or lesser degree but the city of Norwich never regained its former prominence. [The Norwich museum service holds a splendid collection of shawls] (Figure 4) Strangely there is little information of other worsted manufacturers who must still have operated in the city though the evidence that some manufacturers in the early nineteenth century were endeavouring to pay their weavers with goods instead of wages (truck system) suggests that some other items were produced. A newspaper of 1826 claimed that weavers were paid in cheap goods and ends of ranges such as fustians, blankets and expensive shawls which they were unable to resell, which in turn aggravated their poverty¹⁶.



Figure 3: Woven Silk Shawl, circa 1865, probably from Clabburn of Norwich. From the Author's own collection.

¹⁵ Campbell, *Paisley Before*, p 173.

¹⁶ Clabburn, *The Norwich Shawl*, p 56.



Figure 4: Printed Silk Gauze shawl, mid-19th century, possibly Paisley or France. From the Author's own collection.

There were some silk manufacturers in Norwich during the nineteenth century; Grout, Bayliss and Company, a London firm, opened there as well as in Bocking and Saffron Walden, and there were probably others equally anxious to use the skills of the many made redundant by the shrinking woollen industry. Certainly mourning crape was successfully produced there though by how many firms and in what quantities is unclear. Finally fickle fashion took its toll, during the 1860s and early 70s women's clothing was such that an all round distribution of fullness in the skirt made it still possible to wear a shawl, though perhaps less elegantly than in the Regency period. The shift to a straighter front skirt and ever growing bustles behind made the shawl impractical and little jackets or spencers were adopted to complement the wearer's dress.

As the Norwich weaving trade of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries suffered first from decline of the overseas woollen market, and later from fashion's pendulum many firms went out of business or transferred their

skills to other products. The firm of F W Harmer was such a one, late seventeenth century records describe them variously as Worsted Weavers, Wool Combers, Yarn Makers and Merchants. In 1825 the cloth merchants firm of Rivett and Harmer was formed and remained a partnership until 1859 when Rivett retired at which time F W Harmer and his descendants took over completely, changing the name accordingly¹⁷. According to David Harmer by the early years of the nineteenth century the firm had ceased manufacturing cloth and had become wholesalers or factors for manufacturers of the Northern counties. Unfortunately there are no surviving records to explain when or why they ceased weaving and began trading as merchants and it was not until about 1850, shortly after the invention of the sewing machine that the firm began its capital investment in machinery and started to manufacture apparel. As with other clothing entrepreneurs of the period additional expansion followed and what had initially been a speculative move developed into a clothing factory, complete with steam boiler and band-knife cutting. Under the direction of F W Harmer the Norwich factory grew in tandem with the needs of the ready-to-wear industry and in or about 1887 moved to new purpose built premises¹⁸. The company history shows a number of salesmen employed during the middle and late 1800s and by the end of the century they were selling goods through their London office and sending a sales force out from there and from Norwich to bring in orders.

During those early years many of the firm's employees stayed with them for most of their working life. Their 1925 publication includes written memoirs of four members of staff, one of whom joined the firm as a clerk and finished as their general manager, and three salesmen. Clearly in publishing such accounts the firm would exercise selectivity, it is unlikely they would print unflattering memories. Nonetheless, the words of the travellers are particularly relevant in comparing the life of a salesman during the latter part of the nineteenth century with that of his late twentieth century counterpart. Mr. Hewitt who joined the firm in 1887 wrote:

My memory does not go back to the time when travellers conveyed their samples on pack horses, but for many years I drove on my rounds with a horse and four-wheeled wagonette. I have been run away with in my trap more than once ... On one occasion my trap was wrecked by a train ... on another my horse was nearly carried off its legs and drowned as I was crossing Welney Wash ... Workmen wore printed cloths and moleskins or velveteens or cords

¹⁷ F W Harmer & Co. 1825-1925, *A Short History of One Hundred Years*, (1925, Private Company Publication) p 8.

¹⁸ Harmer, *A Short History*, p 9.

that were printed and called Partridge and Pheasant Cords. We also sold broadcloths¹⁹.

His colleague, Mr. Shields, who started his life with Harmers in the warehouse recalled:

The conditions of the Wholesale Clothing Trade have altered very much since I started work folding up sleeved waistcoats made of Chinese velvet. The firm sold large quantities of these goods which were bright coloured and embroidered with flowers of a different shade. The waistcoats were sold for about 20s. (£1) each and were worn by agricultural labourers. Though they must have been expensive garments to purchase from our customers, (retailers) they lasted the wearer a lifetime and nothing could wear them out. People liked fancy garments in those days, and even the smocks which were worn by the labourers had coloured glass buttons sewn in the embroidery. In the early stages I drove on my rounds with a horse and wagonette ... I have seen many changes, but I think the present times are quite the best ... it rejoices me to see how well people of today are clad as compared with the indifferent manner in which they were clothed when I started work in 1875²⁰.

Having worked for Harmers for over fifty years, Mr Shields illustrates with these few words the main reason, along with parallel development of machinery, how and why the clothing trade grew so rapidly in the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Industrialization brought the need for a greater variety and quantity of clothing, this was fuelled by a considerably larger disposable income for many of the retailers' customers.

¹⁹ Harmer, *A Short History*, pp 32-33.

²⁰ _____ *A Short History*, pp 32-33.

4. SUDBURY

I know nothing for which this town is remarkable, except for being very populous and very poor. They have a great manufacture of says and perpetuanas and multitudes of poor people are employed in working them, but the number of poor is almost ready to eat up the rich¹.

An eighteenth century Frenchman travelling in England wrote that quantities of broadcloths made in the town were exported to northern and eastern Europe as well as to the Iberian Peninsula and Scandinavia, and of the 'superiority of the homes of the English workers compared to those in France'. He described the Sudbury textile trade as:

Woollen and silk stuffs. The silk all for the London Market, being funded by merchants from the capital who get the work done here at the lowest rates. There is a much greater number of woollen looms ... The cloths are coarse and thin a kind of double serge, good for clothes for working women. The trade of the town is as considerable as it can be, that is to say all hands are employed in it ... In the American war it languished and was reduced almost to nothing but it has recovered its former vigour².

Like many towns of the region, Sudbury's wool weaving was well known in mediaeval times though never apparently as important as Norwich, Colchester or Braintree many of the population were entirely dependent on the trade. Fourteenth century records list a hundred and sixty households of whom thirty were either 'big weavers' producing broadloom cloth, or 'little weavers' making narrow goods³.

Assigned to be residence of the Flemings whom Edward III (1327-77) induced to settle in this country to instruct the English in the various branches of the woollen trade. This manufacture formed the staple for many years and was succeeded by those of silk goods,

¹ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (Exeter, Webb & Bower, The Promotional Reprint Company, 1992) p 20.

² Francois De La Roche Foucauld, trans. Norman Scarfe, *A Frenchman's Year in Suffolk*, (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press, 1988) pp 110-111.

³ Peter Walters, Unpublished lecture notes.

says, crapes, (later called crepe) and buntings of which branches still continue to exist⁴.

Apart from this little is written about the textile trades of Sudbury until the eighteenth century. These opposing views of Defoe and de la Roche Foucauld illustrate the difficulties of drawing accurate conclusions as to the state of the trade, the Frenchman compares Sudbury very favourably with rural towns in France while Defoe used the larger and more affluent East Anglian textile centres as his yardstick. De La Roche Foucauld comments that: 'They say though, that as for camlets and calendered cloths, France is beginning to take their business'⁵. Despite these views there is evidence that French weavers also suffered loss of work. Nonetheless some of the surviving buildings in the town suggest reasonable prosperity in Georgian times; there are a number of quite substantial properties containing the large first floor windows needed to give light to weavers working at their looms.

Arthur Young described the town as 'an exceedingly dirty but a great manufacturing town ... they possess a great number of hands who earn their livelihood ... weaving it into says and burying crape which are their principal articles'⁶. The *Victoria County History of Suffolk* describes Sudbury in the 1780s as still dominated by the woollen industry and 'The road side spinners which had long been one of the sights that most struck passing travellers throughout the eighteenth century' having gradually disappeared as the wool trade gave way to production of other textiles⁷. The VCH lists three silk and five woollen manufacturers, but gives no indication of their size.

Census returns for the town in 1841, excluding all the outlying villages, show a population of just over 2000. Involved in the textile and clothing trades were 22 tailors, all male, and 12 dressmakers, all female. Two hundred and twenty men are listed as weavers, predominantly silk, with one hundred and sixty-one women weavers, again mainly in the silk industry. Fourteen women are variously described as winders, combers and warpers, some are described simply as weavers. Unfortunately there is no indication as to how many were self-employed as opposed to those working for one master. Undoubtedly all weaving was on hand-loom. Perhaps this is an indication of Sudbury's weavers unwillingness to adapt, for the town is on the river Stour which was surely fast flowing enough to harness water power to run at least some of the looms. Equally it might indicate that the owners of the town's businesses could not raise the money needed for

⁴ VCH, *County History off Suffolk*, 2, (London, Constable, 1907) pp 273-4.

⁵ De La Roche Foucauld, *Frenchman's Year*, p 111.

⁶ Arthur Young, *A General View of Agriculture in the County of Suffolk*, (London, Board of Agriculture, 1804) p 143.

⁷ The *Victoria County History of Suffolk*, 2, (London, Constable, 1907) p 274.

such investment, and it is known that East Anglian weavers were resistant to mechanization feeling it threatened their jobs.

In 1813, Young described Sudbury's wool and silk manufacture with:

Hemp ... grown, harvested and spun and woven in the county ... the weaver buys it who converts it into cloth. The spinners earn better and more steady wages than by wool ... Nor is the trade ... subject to great depressions, there being always more work than hands. ... The fabrics wrought in this county from their own hemp have great merit⁸.

Hemp was certainly grown locally and was infinitely cheaper than silk and wool. It was used to make sacking and inexpensive cloth for aprons and sometimes mixed with cotton or linen to make fustian and drabbett, it was therefore probably a steadier trade without the fluctuations in sales of wools and silks. However, much of it was woven in the local workhouses and the present author has found little evidence to suggest that hemp alone provided much work.

By 1844 the woollen industry in Sudbury was in serious decline, though bunting for ships flags was still produced and there were four large establishments employing a considerable number of hands in the manufacture of silk, velvet and satin. Again this is noted as being the result of labour costs driving London silk masters out of the capital to East Anglia⁹ claims which had been made of the growth of Paisley's trade some eighty years earlier. In 1838 there were about 600 looms in the town and neighbourhood 'but half of them were out of employment in consequence of the general depression', it was claimed that these provided work for 270 men, 250 women and 80 boys. At that time most production was of plain fabrics, mainly umbrella silks, all were hand loomed. The Walters brothers, Stephen and Daniel, were originally weavers of umbrella silk in London and it may have been during this period that they opened their workshop in Sudbury. Records do not survive to give firm dates or the reasons for extending their business to Suffolk. By 1875 the manufacture of buntings had ended and there were 9 silk mills using 250 looms; an average of 27 looms in each mill so most were probably small units, plus two mat factories, though there is no record of when they were established or how many they employed. The few weavers of luxury silks such as velvets and satins were able to earn 12s. per week, but employment was extremely irregular and most suffered considerable hardship. Those producing the cheaper plain fabrics earned little over half that amount, the weavers generally considered themselves to be worse off than agricultural workers¹⁰.

⁸ Young, *A General View*, p 55.

⁹ VCH, p 274.

¹⁰ White's *Suffolk Trade Directory*, (White's Directory, 1844) pp 571-4.

Peter Walters, former managing director of Stephen Walters Ltd. in Sudbury, wrote of the trade in the nineteenth century:

A girl would be able to look after six or eight spindles, so it was very labour intensive ... the throwing mills were almost the first factory development in the industry ... there was a seventy two hour working week [presumably when there was enough work to go round] ... an agreement with a girl [aged about twelve] was bound in the sum of one shilling, to work six days a week for twelve hours a day.... In around 1824 they [the government] took off the heavy duty on imported raw silk so that it could be imported more reasonably. In 1820 the imports of raw and thrown silk are given as one million six hundred thousand pounds. [in weight] By 1828 this had gone up to four and a half million pounds weight¹¹.

During the early nineteenth century protection for the silk industry was gradually dismantled. Coleman writes: ‘for forty years or so after the first draught of free trade the British silk industry grew but in the process many firms and employees were hard hit’¹². The Board of Trade reported: ‘The silk manufacture in all its branches has spread into various districts and is conducted on a scale not seen before ... such as to place the products of our own silk looms within the reach of the humbler classes of the community in the country but (also) to enable us successfully to compete in other markets’¹³. By 1830 British made exports of silk goods were valued at £521,000, by 1833 at £737,000 and two years later to £972,000¹⁴. In view of some considerable weight of contradictory evidence quoted by such historians as Lipson and Plummer, and descriptions of clothing given in literature of the period, it seems likely that the opinion expressed by the Board of Trade on the ability of poorer people to dress in expensive fabrics might be due to wishful thinking rather than fact.

By the second half of the nineteenth century in Sudbury and nearby Glemsford, the silk workers were suffering from poverty created by the fluctuation in demand and the advent of free trade which led to price reductions. In 1850 local papers such as the *Bury Free Press* and the *South West Suffolk Echo*, published articles and letters demanding consideration be given to the plight of the weavers; thirty years later lack of work still dominated the papers. Despite this White’s directory of 1844 had ten weaving firms listed in the town.

¹¹ Walters, Unpublished lecture notes.

¹² David C Coleman, *Courtaulds, an Economic and Social History, 1*, (Oxford, University Press, 1969) p 65.

¹³ Coleman, *Courtaulds, Economic*, p 65.

¹⁴ Alfred Plummer, *The London Weaver’s Company*, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972) p 358.

Thos. Kemp and Sons; Kipling, Payne and Co; Keith and Co; Chris. Norris; Daniel Walters in North Street and Stephen Walters in Acton Square; Jones and Co; Brown and Garrard; Bailey, Fox & Co; and Vanner and Son¹⁵. The latter firm was large enough to exhibit at the Gt. Exhibition in 1851 and to produce designs specifically for this and other international shows, they must have employed good designers for they were awarded design medals at the Paris exhibition in 1855¹⁶. It is not clear when Vanners opened their Sudbury base but their ability to show successfully at major exhibitions supports the view that their early operations in Sudbury were merely warehousing, otherwise it might be assumed that had such a successful firm manufactured there on a large scale they would have been instrumental in relieving distress amongst the weavers of the town. Was this because Vanners contracted out to local independent weavers, or did they ship goods down from London to facilitate transport to the continent? Unfortunately records do not survive to explain this.

It is impossible to judge how successful most of these businesses were, the majority were known to be migrants from the capital or outposts of London firms needing greater capacity than was feasible from Spitalfields. By then Daniel Walters had taken over the Panfield Lane factory in Braintree from Courtaulds and Stephen Walters was established in Haverhill, though whether this was a production unit or warehouse at the time remains questionable. The local press rarely mentioned the factories of Gurteens and Courtaulds in Haverhill and Halstead where work was relatively plentiful. The *Victoria County History* comments specifically on the silk weavers in Haverhill in the nineteenth century:

There were about seventy looms engaged in weaving umbrella and parasol silks for Mr. (Stephen) Walters of London, the work was more regular than at Sudbury. A weaver could make sixteen yards in a week and the average wage for a full week, when expenses had been deducted, was about 8s¹⁷.

As late as 1891 there were reports in the local press that the majority of Sudbury weavers were still out of work but there was hope the situation would improve due to a new master about to start business in the town. One man claimed that there had been little work for over a year and talked of disputes about pay. Weavers were entitled to 3s.6d per day subsistence when their looms were idle, but felt that if they claimed the money they were unlikely to get work in the future¹⁸. As late as January 1894 there was a petition from local weavers to the High Sheriff of the County asking that he press the Queen to dissolve

¹⁵ White's *Suffolk, Trade Directory*, (Sheffield, White's Trade Directory, 1844) p 493.

¹⁶ Stanley Chapman, *Vanners in the English Silk Industry*, (*Textile History*, 23) p 79.

¹⁷ VCH, pp 273-4.

¹⁸ Gurteen Company Archive, South West Suffolk Echo, (23rd May 1891) p 3.

parliament so that an administration based on ‘the principles of protection against Foreign competition to every class of British Industry could be introduced¹⁹. A meeting between the workers and the High Sheriff was subsequently arranged, but inevitably no action resulted.

Despite claims that after the partial adoption of a free trade policy, the silk trade enjoyed a period of rapid growth, it is probable that only those in a healthy state were in a position to expand both their markets and production. Poverty in the silk industry was not exclusive to Sudbury; Campbell writes of similar hardship suffered by Paisley’s silk workers very early in the century²⁰. Reasons for the downturn in trade were discussed at length in both local and national press. The last of the protection previously sheltering the trade was dropped in 1860 as part of the Cobden/Chevalier treaty between Britain and France. Sir Robert Peel who was instrumental in dismantling the protection of the English silk industry, was the son of a Lancashire cotton manufacturer, a trade not afforded any shelter. Possibly this factor influenced Peel’s thinking that silk manufacturers should be able to stand alone, thus creating a situation where only effectively run and profitable businesses would survive. There were many claims that such political change was the cause of decline and that the home market was now flooded with cheap foreign imports. One manufacturer said that he could visit Germany, buy and import umbrella silk, and make up the finished product for less than the cost of English silk, inevitably there were contrary arguments²¹. At the international silk conference held in Manchester in 1887 it was pointed out by the Swiss silk manufacturer Robert Schwarzenbach of Zurich, that power machinery, fuel and labour were all less expensive in England than in Switzerland. He claimed that with proper investment and without protection he could open a mill in England with total confidence in its success²². Perhaps the survival of Mr. Schwarzenbach’s business in Zurich until the end of the twentieth century is a monument to his early planning and investment.

It may seem strange that despite such public debate about the situation with Sudbury’s silk manufactures, new factories continued to open in this and other towns, probably attracted by the availability of a trained labour force. Vanners opened an additional plant at Glemsford in 1871 and subsequently in Haverhill, both of which are described by Stanley Chapman as warehouses used to service the produce of local hand-loom weavers rather than factories. He points out that from the opening of these two factories in Suffolk to the end of the century there was ‘almost uninterrupted decline in the English silk industry’²³. A Haverhill silk

¹⁹ GCA, Bury & Norwich Post, Undated cutting, 1894.

²⁰ Kimberley C Campbell, *Paisley Before the Shawl*, (Textile History, 33, 2002) p 173.

²¹ Gurteen Company Archive, The Manchester Guardian, 26th October 1887.

²² Guardian, 26th October, 1887.

²³ Chapman, *Vanners*, p 74.

worker, writing in the local press commented that the silk trade there was in acute decline but that many local silk weavers had family members employed in other factories in the town (presumably Gurteens) and therefore survived rather better²⁴.

In 1891 the *South West Suffolk Echo* announced that a number of Sudbury weavers had 'at last found an employer. Mr. England of the firm England and Co. of London has within the past week given out work to a good many weavers ... It is hoped that those of the craft who have not yet been favoured with employment will be the recipients at an early date'²⁵. There is no further mention of Mr. England giving work though by the turn of the century William Kemp is reputed to have employed a hundred hand-loom weavers in the town, but apart from this it appears that Vanners and Walters remained the main providers of work for the silk weavers of Sudbury.

²⁴ GCA, *South West Suffolk Echo*, 6th June, 1891, p 3.

²⁵ *SW Suffolk Echo*, 6th June, 1891, p 3.

5.

GLEMSFORD & LONG MELFORD

Glemsford is a small village in rural Suffolk, near to Sudbury, Haverhill and Bury St. Edmunds. An unknown researcher described the village's early textile industry:

In the second half of the eighteenth century the advent of powered machinery, driven by the fast flowing streams of the Pennines, and by the coal from the new and more extensively developed coal industry, work had moved North, especially to Yorkshire. This left in East Anglia, a skilled, but cheaply paid work force readily available to the new industrial entrepreneurs. In the aftermath of the economic difficulties brought about by these industrial changes and by the long drawn out Napoleonic Wars, parish officers in the localities felt it necessary to attempt to alleviate the increasing distress. The traditional independence of Suffolk people, the adaptability of the workers and the interest of the gentry caused the parish officers in Glemsford, one of the villages much affected by the removal of the old textile industries, to take action. They borrowed £500 from people such as Thomas Mortlock, a successful Farmer from Glemsford, with which to build a factory and on June 18th, 1821, the following advertisement appeared in London Newspapers.

To Silk Manufacturers

Any person desirous of an establishment in the country may have an advantageous situation in a parish were there is (sic) nearly four hundred hands capable of being employed in the trade, many of whom are good weavers. A large manufactory recently erected for the purpose may be had free of every expense. Application to be made to the Parish Officers of Glemsford, near Long Melford, Suffolk¹.

There is little published information about the industry in the village, perhaps with a comparatively small population and in close proximity to three major weaving centres it did not merit much interest. However, the original mill was for *throwing* silk, not for weaving, and has remained where it was, still used for the same purpose and for some years past dyeing yarn as well as throwing. Built on a stream, the power was harnessed by a water wheel giving six horse power and this small unit provided work for two hundred people. According to the last managing director of Arnold and Gould's horse hair factory in Glemsford, in the early years of the nineteenth century the Church (presumably led by the vicar)

¹ Arnold & Gould, Company Archive, (quote from un-named newspaper, 18th June, 1821) p 1.

pressed local landowners to create employment by investing in industry. The resultant development gave work to local people and brought in additional workers. From the evidence available it is not clear which manufacturer(s) took up the offer of premises and a trained workforce, though it appears that the silk industry was established prior to that of dressing horsehair.

Kolles started their business in Glemsford in 1844, cleaning and dressing horsehair for use as upholstery filling, and for weaving both upholstery and interlining fabrics. Brian Whittaker, the last managing director of Arnold and Gould considers it doubtful if at any time Kolles wove textiles in the village, but supplied dressed hair to weaving factories and furnishing companies as well as to the brush makers. The 1851 census for Glemsford shows 379 people employed in horsehair work, velvet weaving and cloth industries, with 29 in the cocoanut (sic) mat trade. There were 229 agricultural workers, and 59 in the building trade or traditional country crafts such as thatching, therefore over fifty percent of the working population was involved in textile related industries. A local paper from 1891 claimed that Glemsford recently had two hundred and fifty hands employed in the silk industry, 'now there are no more than thirty'². No further records for Glemsford have been found but it is safe to assume that the textile trades of the village were affected as much as those in the larger neighbouring towns in Suffolk.

Presumably Kolles move to the village was motivated by cheaper premises and labour as were the migrating silk masters. They are reputed to have employed nearly 500 people in 1855 and by 1885 the employees numbered 700, possibly the increase taking up some of the slack from the silk industry. It is not clear how this divided into home and factory work, but many must either have travelled in from surrounding villages or worked at home, for the population of Glemsford could not have provided such numbers. Astonishingly for so small a village, Tomkins, another hair factory operated there for much of the same period and in direct competition to Kolles. Sadly none of their records remain.

Throughout the period of decline in the region's silk industry local press commented on lack of design training for youngsters going into the trade. Arguments appeared for and against protection and there was constant pressure for investment in education for design and weaving. In 1891 the local paper pleaded that some of the £2,000 set aside by the local authority for technical education should be used to train designers for both mat making and silk weaving as well as funding education in agriculture, commenting that the money was raised from duty on beers and spirits and would not cause any hardship to ratepayers: 'We wish our friends in Haverhill, Glemsford, Hadleigh, Lavenham and Sudbury, who may be either mat makers or silk weavers to get a fair share of

² Gurteen Company Archive, South West Suffolk Echo, 23rd May, 1891.

all that can be got out of the grant³. As far as is known such arguments were ignored and records do not show where the ‘whisky’ money was spent.

LONG MELFORD

Although little has been written about textile production in the village early parish records show that there was a considerable trade there. The magnificent church is symbolic of wealth which wool manufacture brought to Long Melford. By the late nineteenth century there was little evidence of surviving textile business though there were a few handlooms still in operation subcontracting to the Sudbury masters, presumably weaving silk⁴. There was a mat factory owned by George Wittles; a local history publication describes a youngster starting there in 1890 at the age of twelve and his family regarding it as a wonderful opportunity for him. The informant commented that the men were proud of their skills and would come in early to complete orders on time. The factory employed 160 men and boys but very few women. In common with other factories in the region employees worked a twelve hour day with meal breaks and a half day on Saturday. Mat making in Long Melford is reported to have died when the skill was introduced in prisons which undercut factory prices and consequently many were unemployed⁵. It was probably this decline which brought Mr. Byham and his friends to Haverhill where Gurteens were persuaded to start mat manufacture. There were also two hair weaving factories in Long Melford employing up to 400 people, some working on the factory site and others with looms at home. A local man described seeing small children picking out the horsehair ‘two black, one white’ and handing it to their mother to weave⁶.

It is appropriate at this juncture to look at the differences and similarities between this area and Coventry, where, as early as 1852 the silk weavers, particularly in ribbon production, had access to design teaching; as did the lace makers of Nottingham. William Andrews, a weaver of high repute, wrote in his diary of going to the School of Design at the City Art College and of being awarded a number of prizes there during the 1850s. On one such occasion the awards were clearly judged nationally, for he says: ‘Annual meeting of School of Design. A medal is presented to me at St. Mary’s Hall by Mrs. Cope. Others beside me were ... Coventry had six medals, Birmingham eight, Spitalfields nine, Nottingham seven, Macclesfield three⁷. Andrews went on to write of designing

³ South West Suffolk Echo, 23rd May 1891.

⁴ Barry L Wall, *Long Melford Through the Ages*, (East Anglia Magazine, 1986) pp 24-5.

⁵ Ernest Ambrose, *Memories of Melford*, (Long Melford Historical Society, 1972) p 53.

⁶ William Andrews, *Master Artisan in Victorian England*, (London, Evelyn, Adam & Mackay, 1969) pp 16-7,

⁷ Andrews, *Master Artisan*, p 17.

for national and international exhibitions⁸, later he was offered work as manager of a silk mill with three hundred looms, but was advised against it because of the appalling state of the city's trade⁹. Joseph Gutteridge who was a silk weaver at the same time in Coventry wrote of the long periods of hardship he suffered, the first due to his not being able to afford his own loom after finishing his apprenticeship. Compelled to work in a silk factory because of this he wrote of hating factory work and longing to buy a loom so that he could work at home. He was later able to buy his equipment but when business was poor, was forced to sell it to afford necessities, complaining that it had cost him £50 to buy and he was not able to recoup the initial expense¹⁰. If Gutteridge's views on the iniquities of the factory system in comparison with self-employment are typical of textile workers, they must surely have hindered industrial progress.

It is particularly interesting to note Gutteridge's views on the reasons for the downturn in the trade after the Cobden treaty in 1860:

Although the Tories made capital out of this depression in the ribbon trade and averred that the Cobden treaty with France was the ruin of the trade, no greater deception could have been used to further their political ends, for they well knew that other causes than the French treaty were at the root of this terrible stagnation. The most important cause was the revised American tariff, which practically excluded English manufactured goods from American ports by duties varying from forty to sixty per cent. This also affected France and Switzerland, who had, like England, largely depended upon the American trade for the sale of their goods. Another important cause of the decline was the silkworm disease in France and Italy. Prior to 1846 the production of silk in France alone had averaged 24,000 tons of cocoons, yielding over 2,000 tons of silk annually, but in 1865 the quantity had gone down to less than one fifth that amount. This disease, by enormously enhancing the price of the raw material, practically closed the demand for silken goods as an article of adornment. No wonder then, with the principal market closed by prohibitory duties, together with the failure in the silk crops increasing the price of the raw material almost to a famine price, that silken goods should go

⁸ _____ *Master Artisan*, p 69.

⁹ Joseph Gutteridge, *Master Artisan in Victorian England*, (London, Evelyn, Adam & Mackay, 1969) p 122.

¹⁰ Gutteridge, *Master Artisan*, p 178.

out of fashion simply because they were beyond the means of the millions who had previously used them for dress and ornament¹¹.

Gutteridge commented that ribbon manufacturers in Coventry had reduced from eighty to less than twenty, causing a drop in population of more than five thousand. ... 'Ribbons, as articles of adornment, were superseded by gimp trimmings, lace, and feathers'¹², these were produced by different manufacturers. [It must be made clear here, that this astonishing drop in numbers employed needs verification which has not been possible thus far.] Gutteridge had worked for a number of manufacturers in the city as foreman, making 'plain and giured silken goods':- he also built looms. In 1867 Gutteridge was chosen as one of two representatives of the ribbon trade to visit the Universal Exhibition in Paris to study the continental trade and compare conditions of labour and production. This was part funded by the Society of Arts¹³. Despite his clear ability and the respect in which he was held within the trade, he and his peers suffered the same privations as the weavers of East Anglia. He wrote of weavers forced to sell household goods to survive and of people literally dying of starvation¹⁴. Like other towns with a weaving history, many occupants of Coventry were encouraged to emigrate to seek a more prosperous and secure future in the colonies.

Despite the claims of the English industry that the French had ruined their trade, in 1834 the weavers of Lyon had rioted because of the appalling state of business and the hardship they were suffering. Some thirty years later Gutteridge wrote of his visit to France's silk centres in 1867:

Lyons contains over a million of inhabitants and ranks next to Paris in importance, being the second city of the Empire. Its staple trade is the manufacture of rich silken velvets, broad silks for dresses and velvet ribbons, engaging in a prosperous time, nearly one hundred thousand looms. The trade at the time of our visit was in a most distressed condition. Nearly two thirds of the looms were standing idle and as a result of such a condition of things, hundreds were literally starving. It is calculated that in good times of trade the ribbon industry was the means of support for families whose numerical aggregate was between two and three hundred thousand men, women and children¹⁵.

¹¹ _____ p 178.

¹² _____ p 184.

¹³ _____ p 180.

¹⁴ Gutteridge, *Master Artisan*, p 190.

¹⁵ _____ p 190.

Combined with Campbell's writing this shows that the French, Scots and English suffered similar privations¹⁶; this was disregarded by those complaining that the continental industry had ruined the English trade and has been largely ignored ever since. Gutteridge's writing is taken from notes made during his working life and put together for publication in his retirement; there can be little reason to doubt his veracity. Sir Frank Warner, in his excellent book on the English Silk Industry, refers to complaints from English weavers being repeated at intervals over a period of two or three centuries. While it is true that there was competition between European and British manufacturers, many of the fluctuations in trade must have been due to a number of factors, changes in fashion, financial influences, import and export legislation, and periods of international unrest all contributed to loss of trade and resultant unemployment of large numbers both in this country and in France.

Both mats and hair fabrics were manufactured in other towns and villages in the region. Hair cloth was woven in Lavenham and Long Melford as well as Haverhill and Glemsford. This part of the textile industry was always entirely dependent on hand looms, and, according the *Victoria County History* while the spinning of hair was a female occupation, weaving horsehair employed an entirely male work force as it was considered too heavy for women to handle¹⁷. Not a view upheld in the first half of the twentieth century as the workers in the hair factory at Gurteens were almost entirely female. Photographs of Tomkins hair dressing factory in Glemsford also shows a predominantly female workforce.

¹⁶ Kimberley Campbell, *Paisley before the Shawl*, (Textile History 33, 2002) p 172.

¹⁷ Victoria County History of Suffolk, 2, (London, Constable, 1907) p 155.

6.

EARLY AND NINETEENTH CENTURY COLCHESTER & COGGLESHALL

COLCHESTER

Colchester, like other towns in the region was an early centre of quality bays and says, and, in harness with the town's commercial activities and importance as a port, much of its wealth was founded on the textile industry. Like Norwich there was settlement in the town by immigrants from the Low Countries by the late sixteenth century. Eleven Dutch weaving families settled in Colchester in 1570, fleeing religious persecution at home. The State Papers of 1580 refer to a 'Supplication of the town of Halstead to Lord Walsingham', to enforce the return of 'twenty families or more of the Dutchmen now removed from Colchester, there to continue their trade of bay-making, their departure having much impoverished the neighbourhood'¹. Presumably the loss of ancillary work provided by the Dutch families for spinners and winders affected local people thus employed; this is in sharp contrast to the attitudes shown by the weavers of Norwich to in-comers. A few years later the bay and say makers of Colchester were complaining of the Dutch 'strangers' engrossing their trade and practicing weaving without first serving proper apprenticeships². Again like Norwich, the settlers' community was sufficiently large and prosperous to build their own Church. The register of baptisms between 1645 and 1728 shows many Flemish families resident in the town, mostly involved in the weaving trade³.

In the mid-seventeenth century the Colchester workhouse was built from the wealth of the cloth industry and since the unfortunate residents of such establishments were expected to earn their keep they would undoubtedly have been employed in spinning and weaving of the less prestigious textiles such as hempen cloth for clothing and sacking, used in great quantity for agriculture. In Defoe's fictional work *Moll Flanders* the central character says of her youth in Colchester: 'I told my nurse ... that I believed I could get my living without going into service, for she had taught me to work with my needle and (to) spin worsted, which is the chief trade of that city'⁴. The immigrant community in Colchester suffered a good deal of animosity and abuse, possibly, like Norwich, because of their diligence and success. The town had its own Dutch Bay Hall where goods made by the immigrants were checked and marked with the maker's seal. Much

¹ Essex Review, 1895, p 262.

² Essex Review, 1887, p 123.

³ Essex Review, 1916, p 49.

⁴ Daniel Defoe, *Moll Flanders*, (London, Penguin 1991 ed.) p 10

of the Colchester and nearby Coggeshall trade was dependent on exports to Spain and Portugal as were other East Anglian towns where weaving was the main source of employment. Defoe wrote of prices rising and falling in a 'boom and bust' pattern not unlike those seen throughout the twentieth century. There were times when prices dropped below the cost of manufacture and when master weavers were reduced to pawning their finished cloth in order to survive.

Colchester was a stronghold for Cromwell's supporters during the Civil War and this created additional problems for the weavers. The town was besieged for three months by Royalists and the resultant destruction left many weavers' houses destroyed, and presumably looms and other equipment similarly rendered unusable. However seventy years later the town was still dominated by its textile trades:

The town may be said chiefly to subsist by the trade of making bays, which is known over most of the trading parts of Europe, by the name of Colchester bays, though indeed the whole county, large as it is, may be said to be employed, and in part maintained, by the spinning of wool for the bay trade of Colchester and its adjacent towns⁵.

The Dutch Bay hall was disbanded in 1728 and with it went the quality controls which had assured the Colchester wool industry of high prices. Though the industry survived for many years it was never able to regain the importance which it had previously enjoyed. Though John Kay, inventor of the flying shuttle began his career in the area, local weavers boycotted his invention and he was forced to move to Lancashire to have it accepted. Perhaps this is indicative of the East Anglian unwillingness to embrace new methods and adapt their skills, had they been less intransigent the trade might have continued successfully for more years than it did. That Kay died in poverty shows, perhaps, that the weavers of the Eastern Counties were not alone in wishing to stick to methods they knew and trusted. Nonetheless Colchester's industry survived sufficiently for wealthy manufacturers still to be building impressive houses in the town late in the century, both Hollytrees House museum and the Minories Art Gallery, were originally homes to eighteenth century woollen manufacturers. In 1784 De la Roche Foucauld noted:

Colchester's trade like Sudbury's is very flourishing for a small town. Always more work than workmen, 500 looms clattering. The cloths resemble Sudbury's but are not so fine; they are intended for Spain and America. They are first sent to London in four wagons

⁵ Daniel Defoe, *Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (Exeter, Webb & Bower, The Promotional Reprint Company, 1992 ed.) p 16.

that leave regularly three times a week, each carries two hundred and fifty pieces of cloth worth five guineas a piece ... There is a small ribbon factory, but I know no details⁶.

Ten years later Arthur Young, himself an East Anglian farmer, wrote of the woollen industry in the county and the downturn in the trade of Colchester due to the war with Spain:

At Colchester, in the manufacture of baize for Spain, are employed about a hundred and fifty or a hundred and sixty men who earn about fourteen shillings per week each: about the same number of women and children who earn from four shillings to seven shillings per week. Before the breaking out of the war with Spain, nearly five times the above number were employed and it is probable at least that number will be employed on the return of peace⁷.

During the early years of the nineteenth century a silk trade was established in the town and in 1828 it was recorded that there were one hundred and sixty looms weaving bombazine⁸, a close woven twilled fabric, often produced in silk/wool mixtures for mourning attire. Production was entirely hand-loomed and possibly home-based. There was at least one silk throwing mill, owned by Joseph Moy who later amalgamated with Stephen Brown as throwsters and weavers. Although this company continued until 1880 little information is available other than that the mill existed.

The *Victoria County History* of Essex claims that the ready-to-wear clothing industry began its existence in Colchester in the early part of the nineteenth century. Hyam's, the first established clothing manufacturers in the town were originally pawnbrokers. They were rumoured to have made a considerable quantity of wool cloth, which had been left on their hands as an unredeemed pledge, into garments. This foray into a previously unknown trade was sufficiently successful for them to continue production⁹. An entertaining story but there is no indication as to its source or validity. Whether local weavers with unsold goods decided to employ local people to cut and make up goods from redundant cloth is unclear, though this surely would be preferable to the substantial losses which would be incurred otherwise. In 1838 Hyams' advertised

⁶ Francois De La Roche Foucauld, *A Frenchman's Year in Suffolk*, (Woodbridge, The Boydell Press) p 114.

⁷ Arthur Young, *A General View of Agriculture in the County of Essex*, (London, Richard Phillips, 1807) p 390.

⁸ *Victoria County History of Essex*, 2, (London, Constable, 1907) pp 483-4.

⁹ VCH, 2, pp 484-5.

‘Constant employment for Tailors during the winter months’¹⁰. Why only for the winter months is hard to imagine, perhaps in such a rural area, many people worked on the land during the summer. During the second half of the nineteenth century at least six clothing companies opened factories in the town, Moses, Crowthers, Hyams, Hollingtons, (Figure 5) Leanings and Turners. Phillips suggests that there may have been additional small workshops employing up to twenty people and that these concentrated on bespoke work¹¹.



Figure 5: Hollington's Mill in Coggeshall. Courtesy of Colchester Museum.

The sewing machine was not invented until 1842 but the ready-to-wear trade had expanded considerably during the twenty years prior to this in response to industrial and commercial growth resulting from the industrial revolution. In any case the sewing machine was not readily available until the 1850s and thus much of Colchester's early trade was run on a cottage basis, with factories and workshops established as the machinery became available thus allowing clothing to be made up industrially. Certainly Hyams had London warehouses as early as 1840, as well as the Colchester factory, which suggests that they produced in considerable quantity. According to the *Victoria County History*, at the turn of the century there were approximately fifteen hundred operatives employed in the town's clothing trade, mainly women and girls who even this late were largely employed as outworkers with cut goods delivered to them for making up.

¹⁰Pamela Sharpe, *Cheapness and Economy, Manufacturing and Retailing Ready-Made Clothing in London and Essex*, (Textile History, 26, 1995) p 203.

¹¹ Andrew Phillips, *Life in the Colchester Clothing Factories, 1918-1950*, (Essex Journal, 1993) p 8.

Moses, large scale manufacturers in the East End of London opened in Colchester in the 1850s as did the Colchester Manufacturing Company, formerly Hammonds; Hollington brothers also established production units in the town. Booker claims that by 1864 these firms were jointly employing at least two thousand women and two hundred men¹². If this refers to in-workers, it is probable that nearly as many females would have been employed 'outside' in both the town and surrounding villages, both as machinists and hand-finishers. By the end of the century most of these firms were advertising regularly in the local papers for indoor and outdoor operatives and at intervals they sought apprentices. In a period of two or three weeks the Great Eastern Clothing Company, The Colchester Manufacturing Company, Hart and Levy, Mendes Brothers, Hollington's, Crowthers and the Military tailors at the Cavalry Barracks, all advertised in the local papers for operatives, none showed rates of pay.

Colchester had been a major garrison town for generations before the mid-nineteenth century and the arrival of several London manufacturers may well have been to use the many seamstresses previously involved in army tailoring. It is also possible that the Military Tailors at the barracks put out some of their work to local firms. As Lemire writes of Scotland a hundred years earlier, 'shirt manufacture in Edinburgh may perhaps be explained by the combined factors of the Scottish linen trade, local regiments and abundant local female labour'¹³. In comparing the British and American clothing trades, Godley claims that 'the cheap labour to perform the hand-stitching was supplied in the port towns of the south-west and the market towns of East Anglia'¹⁴. Yet a look at the number of large manufacturers in Colchester alone shows that the industry in eastern England was clearly much more important than he suggests. The decline in the weaving industries had left a pool of labour, well used to working with textiles, with transferable skills, able to adapt to manufacture clothing and whose need for work meant they would accept lower rates of pay than those demanded in the Capital. With business premises less costly the prospects for manufacturers moving out of London must have been very attractive. All these firms continued in the town until after the middle of the twentieth century. Unless more information comes to light, it is impossible to judge how many Colchester people were employed in the trade, but with so many substantial firms in the town, the figure must have run into many hundreds.

¹²John Booker, *Essex and the Industrial Revolution*, (Essex County Records Office, 1974) p 533.

¹³ Beverley Lemire, In the Hands of Work Women, *English Markets, Cheap Clothing and Female Labour*, (*Costume Society Journal*, 33, 1999) p 33.

¹⁴ Andrew Godley, *British and American Clothing Industries*, (*Textile History*, 28, 1997) p 72.

COGGESHALL

The small neighbouring town of Coggeshall was known for wool and tambour lace though lace making does not appear to have been introduced until the early nineteenth century¹⁵. Settlers arrived there from the Low Countries at the same time as in other towns in the region known for their quality wools. By the fifteenth century the Coggeshall weavers were prosperous, but like Colchester, Braintree and Bocking they suffered the results of taxes imposed on cloth imported into Spain and Portugal, and no doubt from decline in trade caused by the Spanish wars. *White's Directory* of 1848 describes the town as being 'one of the earliest seats of woollen manufacture in this country'¹⁶, the wool cloths from the town were sufficiently well known to be simply called Coggeshall whites, no other description was necessary to show their superior quality. As with Norwich and Colchester Queen Elizabeth I had issued letters patent allowing the Coggeshall weavers a monopoly on this type of cloth and the town's business conditions reflected those of nearby Colchester for most of the period of wool production. The few surviving reports show great fluctuations in trade and in conditions of the workforce, and during the seventeenth century the town's decline was in tandem with its larger neighbour. At one point the wool combers of Coggeshall formed a union which aimed to exclude immigrant weavers from entering the trade, but by the end of the century this had become a 'friendly society' supporting those suffering hardship from unemployment. In 1827 John Hall, of Hall and Sawyer, opened two silk mills at Coggeshall¹⁷ and at least as early as 1838 had installed steam power. At the same time he was reputedly selling off his weavers' cottages, though why this was done is puzzling, one would expect that business growth promoted by industrialization would make weavers' housing even more essential to attract and keep employees. Hall did not finance his own mills but borrowed development funds from a London silk broker. It must be wondered how common this sort of business mortgage was; the existence of brokers involved exclusively in the silk trade suggests it could have been widespread. There were other silk makers in the town, Joseph Lawrence, who had gone by 1832, and Westmacott, Goodson & Company¹⁸. How large or important these firms were is unclear as records have not been found but it is probable that they too were migrants from the Spitalfields area.

By 1848 the Coggeshall weavers were feeling the effects of depression, and the local directory of that year claimed that a large mill, only ten years old, had

¹⁵ Jean Dudding, *Coggeshall Lace*, (Braintree, Jean Dudding, 1976) p 10.

¹⁶ *White's Essex Trade Directory*, 1848) p 134.

¹⁷ Booker, Essex, p 55.

¹⁸ Sir Frank Warner, *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom*, London, Drane, 1921) p 301.

closed¹⁹. There were three silk velvet weavers in the town in the early mid-century providing considerable employment weaving plush but after 1850 Hall was the only survivor, and between 1855 and 1859 he opened three other mills in nearby Braintree. With the 1860 adoption of free trade between Britain and France his business collapsed. He had possibly over-extended himself with rapid expansion and unable to pay interest on his loans. It is unclear how many were still employed in the town's silk trade after 1860.

In about 1812 the manufacture of tambour lace was started in Coggeshall. This is embroidered net worked by means of a fine hook which pulls the thread through the mesh, it is particularly suitable for bridal veils and also used to apply beadwork. Classes were introduced where girls as young as seven and eight were taught the skill. Though the origin of tambour lace in Coggeshall is not explained, that which they produced was recognized as of high quality and many years later became very collectable. The work is extremely fine and time consuming and could only provide employment for a limited number of local women and girls. It had largely died out by the middle of the nineteenth century, although small quantities continued to be produced in the early 1900s.

¹⁹ White's Directory, (1848), p 135.

7.

BRAINTREE AND BOCKING

As with much of the region Braintree and Bocking were early seats of the woollen industry. Defoe limited himself to a brief description of: ‘two towns, large, rich and populous and made so originally by the bay trade ... which flourishes still among them’¹. In 1807 Young commented that ‘the woollen manufacture from time immemorial has taken the lead in this county, but from its long continued dwindling condition, it is uncertain whether it will many years remain’. His description of spinning yarn in Bocking gives a clear picture of the work:

Baize wool in the neighbourhood of Bocking, which varies as to length, pliancy and softness, according to the sort into which it is to be wove, is delivered out to the spinner, who always cards it too, to be returned in nearly an equal weight of yarn. This is reeled off into skeins ... a grown skilful and industrious person can earn up to 10d a day ... and an aged person about 5d, and 3d a child at nine years of age ... the cards are frequently supplied to the spinner and sometimes a deduction of 1d in the shilling is made from the spinning on this account². (carding is where the yarns are pulled between two brushes to straighten the fibres and ensure that they all lie in the same direction, this produces fine, soft cloth).

Little has been written about the weavers in Braintree and Bocking but it is clear that many people there depended on the trade for their living. Local records show that of the three hundred surviving apprenticeship indentures made at Bocking between 1704 and 1796 eleven out of every twelve apprentices entered the cloth trade³. Like Norwich and Colchester, Bocking and Braintree were reliant on production of high quality cloths for the better end of both the home and export markets. The Savill firm alone is reputed to have employed over one thousand workers at one time⁴, there is no indication as to how many were employed at which level or in which trade. Those involved in the industry in smaller towns and villages must have suffered a similar see-saw in fortune to that felt in the larger towns and cities all producing goods for the same markets. To a

¹ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (Exeter, Webb & Bower, Promotional Reprint Company, 1992) p 35.

² Arthur Young, *A General View of Agriculture in the County of Essex*, (Board of Agriculture, 1813) p 143.

³ Ann Hoffman, *The Bocking Deanery*, (Chichester, Phillimore, 1976) p 90.

⁴ Hoffmann, *The Bocking Deanery*, p 90.

considerable extent they relied on exports to the Iberian countries and therefore were as much damaged by European wars as they were by changes in fashion which produced great demand for imported calicoes for women's wear and a resultant drop in sales of quality woollen goods. Nonetheless the Savill family baymakers attempted to industrialize, and in 1760 John Savill bought a horse powered roughing mill for which he paid £55. Later he toured the north of England seeking information and advice on mechanization⁵. By 1787 the boom in trade had failed and the Bocking firm was unable to compete with cheaper and supposedly inferior goods from more industrialized northern counties. The mill was sold to Courtaulds in 1819.

With the start of the French revolution in 1789, France's wool manufacture came to a halt and until some stability returned the French army was forced to buy uniform cloth from this country. This was only a brief reprieve and the last decade of the eighteenth century saw trade of these Essex towns in seemingly permanent depression. 'We saw two large townships called Braintree and Bocking where the tale of distress was of late years most shocking'⁶. Such towns were ripe for the influx of silk manufacturers moving out of London after the Spitalfields act of 1774 and during the nineteenth century Braintree became home to Courtaulds and to Daniel and Stephen Walters and to Warners.

WALTERS & WARNERS IN BRAINTREE

Like other silk manufacturers in the Eastern Counties Walters business began in London with a move to Essex which was probably due to lower operating costs offered in the region. According to Hester Berry, (previously archivist to Warners) Stephen and Daniel Walters set up at Pound End Mill in Braintree which they leased from Courtaulds, in 1822. Soon afterwards the partnership broke up and it was then that Stephen Walters moved to Sudbury and set up as a weaver of umbrella silks. Daniel continued to make furnishing fabrics in Braintree, and by the 1850s was employing in excess of two hundred workers. Like Courtaulds and Gurteens Daniel Walters built or bought weavers' cottages and provided outings for the work force⁷. When the firm outgrew their premises they moved to New Mills in the town. There is some confusion as to whether this was built by Walters as claimed by Berry, or by Courtaulds, as written in their company history. Suffice to say Daniel Walter's firm grew to need all the space offered at New Mills and to expand it, this despite the swings of fortune in the silk industry. He continued to show at national and international exhibitions gaining a considerable reputation and selling successfully at home and overseas,

⁵ J Booker, *Essex and the Industrial Revolution*, (Essex County Record Office, 1974) p 51.

⁶ Hoffman, *Bocking Deanery*, p 90.

⁷ Sir Ernest Goodale, *Weaving and the Warners*, (London, F Lewis, 1971) p 16.

particularly to the colonies. In 1861 Walters employed a hundred and fifty jacquard looms and three hundred hands, it is unclear if these were all on the premises, or if he supplemented factory output with home-work; that they were jacquard looms suggests that they were factory based. By 1875 the business had twenty three power looms up and running and should have been set for continued success but the management of the firm passed into the hands of Daniel's son and was subsequently badly run. The company went into liquidation in 1894 and was bought out by Warners; William Folliott, chief designer for Walters also moved to Warners, possibly because his designs were included in the sale⁸. Perhaps like many others Daniel Walters had over expanded and invested more heavily than they could afford.

Warners moved to Essex from London, following the example of earlier silk manufacturers. The business appears to have been relatively profitable while in London, for in 1878 Frank Warner, the second generation of the family, was sent to the French silk capital of Lyon to study manufacturing methods. According to their written history it was only a few years later, in the 1880s that they forged links with Walters in Braintree.

Stephen Walters, brother of Daniel was also producing silk in the town, though whether they moved from Braintree to Sudbury or ran two parallel operations as well as their London manufactory is uncertain and records to clarify the point do not survive. There may well have been additional small manufacturers in the town whose records were lost or discarded after they ceased trading.

⁸ E H Sellick & W A Sellick, *William Folliott, Spitalfields Designer, 1835-1925*, (Braintree, The Working Silk Mill, 1993) p 13.

8. THE DEVELOPMENT OF COURTAULDS IN BRAINTREE

For most of the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century the Courtauld enterprise was the most important textile company in the country. Originally silversmiths, the family arrived in England as Huguenot refugees; subsequently George Courtauld married the daughter of a silk weaver and joined his father-in-law in business. In 1798 George made his first move into the region buying a disused flour mill at Pebmarsh which he converted for silk throwing. In tandem with the development of the factory he erected cottages for his employees and in 1809 repeated this exercise on a larger scale at Braintree. By the standards of the day Courtauld was a good employer and although he employed children, as did most other industrialists at the time, he 'always provided an intelligent and educated Matron' to care for them¹, unacceptable as this would be in the present day child labour was the norm at the time. Unusually for the period, two of Courtauld's own daughters worked in the mill supervising throwsters. Perhaps Courtauld's success encouraged the destitute weavers of the Essex cloth towns for in the very early years of the nineteenth century the weavers of Braintree, Bocking and Coggeshall petitioned the Spitalfields masters for work describing themselves as 'working for lower rates than is settled by law for silk weavers of London'².

In about 1819, George Courtauld's son Samuel, who was to be responsible for the enormous growth of the firm, agreed to buy the mill at Bocking from John Savill, (Figure 6) one of the last surviving baize (bays) mills in the county³. One report claimed that Samuel found himself short of funds to complete the purchase and Savill agreed a fourteen year lease with an option to buy later. Contrary to this Coleman states that the previous owner owed Samuel money and that in 1828 used the mill as part payment⁴. Conflicting evidence but what is certain is that during that period the mill transferred to Courtaulds. Originally designed for horse power the Bocking mill was converted to steam production in 1823; Halstead followed four years later, though by 1829 the latter mill housed only ten power looms⁵.

¹ Sophia Courtauld, *An Account of Samuel Courtauld*, (Essex Review, 1903) p 24.

² John Booker, *Essex and the Industrial Revolution*, (Essex County Record Office, 1974) p 54.

³ Ann Hoffmann, *The Bocking Deanery*, (Chichester, Phillimore, 1976) p 91.

⁴ David C Coleman, *Courtaulds, An Economic and Social History, 1*, (Oxford, University Press, 1969) p 73.

⁵ Coleman, *Courtaulds*, p 87.



Figure 6: Bocking Mill, date unknown. Courtesy of Braintree Museum Trust.

Whether this slow progress was due to lack of space, funds or lack of demand, or simply down to caution dictating a trial period before any major investment remains open to conjecture. Coleman claims that in 1832 their first purpose built factory was erected in Halstead to accommodate power machinery, this suggests that previously growth may have been hampered by lack of space. The development was phased with some additional building in 1836 and 1842, possibly to allow increased business to fund the building costs. By 1840 they had two hundred power looms on site and ten years later the number had grown to over five hundred⁶. At the time there were only 6,092 such looms in the English silk industry so even if Courtauld had not mechanized his other plants in Braintree and Bocking, the mill at Halstead gave him nearly a twelfth of the entire power production of the country's silk trade, an astonishing proportion from what had started as a small family firm only a generation earlier. The two known histories of the Courtauld enterprise, Ward-Jackson's published in 1941, and Coleman's in 1969, both comment on Courtauld's financial problems. Samuel had a number of more or less successful partners at various times, usually members of his family, particularly the Taylor brothers who were his cousins, but it was Samuel who seems to have been largely responsible for the financial planning which produced such extraordinary growth. Samuel wrote in the early years of difficulties of trade and financial hardships and at times they were very short of funds. Courtauld did not use his own money but 'contributed the ability

⁶ _____ Courtaulds, p 155.

to borrow' with interest rates as high as twelve and a half per cent⁷, a phenomenal additional cost on his production. Samuel had great stamina and worked extremely hard for long hours, and like most successful industrialists of the time demanded the same commitment from his employees. He remained an aloof and rather overbearing figure, perhaps as the head of a great enterprise, necessarily so. His brother George was a more popular man, reputedly showing concern for the welfare of the workforce. George was a personal friend of Daniel Gurteen at Haverhill and both felt a duty to provide paternalistic care for their staff, viewing their companies as a familial structure.

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century Courtaulds invested heavily in machinery and built or bought workers cottages for staff in all the towns where they had mills. In Halstead they provided a creche for working mothers, almost unheard of at that time, and employed a number of unmarried mothers. (According to Jean Grice, formerly curator of Braintree District Museum, the girls were only allowed the mistake of one illegitimate child before dismissal). Whether they applied the same rule at their other plants is unclear, though in view of their provision for workers and the towns where their factories were situated, this seems likely. This again shows that for many working class families the earnings provided by mothers taking work additional to the domestic role was as essential then as now. Despite the apparent philanthropy suggested by provision of the creche, it must have been greatly to the advantage of the company to keep trained staff to maintain output, rather than to invest time and money training newcomers. The company funded a library and evening classes to encourage staff to use their leisure time profitably. Notwithstanding such provision, they paid no more than the 'going rate' to employees; in 1870 when a foreman dyer was reputed to earn £62.10.0 p.a. and a power loom operative in Halstead earned only £15 p.a. (female of course!) Samuel Courtauld is reported to have drawn a personal income of £46,000⁸. These figures give some notion of the vast earning differentials of the time.

There is one extant study of the women in the Halstead mill in the 1860s; Judy Lown's work draws on numerous sources to give an overview of life governed by the large manufacturing industry in which most of the adult female population worked. (Figure 7) Many aspects of the employees' lives must have been common to those in similar situations elsewhere.

The centrepiece of the rituals and social life which characterized factory paternalism was the family. Familial relationships formed the central axis around which paternalistic activities were organized. In the process of differentiation and identification ... the construction of a highly segregated and vertically ranked

⁷ _____ Courtaulds, p 121.

⁸ Coleman, *Courtaulds*, p 127.

workforce, distinguished by gender and age, represented a re-creation of the hierarchical idea of family life ... the whole of the local population was working towards common ends, but all from their specified positions.⁹



Figure 7: 1859 Courtaulds female operatives with male overseer. Courtesy of Braintree Museum Trust.

It is unclear from Lown's writing if she is simply commenting on the accepted structures of the day or criticizing their existence and it is important in trying to understand the lives and work of previous generations that historians do not endeavour to judge by today's criteria. It must be remembered that during the time under discussion there was no welfare state, no compulsory free schooling and at least until the 1870 Education Act working class children were expected to earn and contribute to the family income. Indeed the act provided for part time school attendance where it was necessary for children to continue earning to prevent family hardship. Any social support came from the family, the community and from the better employers. The only alternative for the poor was to be 'on the parish' and finally in the workhouse, a fate which most would do anything to avoid, since it meant not only appalling humiliation but, except for the aged, families being separated. Local manufacturers often employed residents of the workhouse who: 'pay the price of their labour towards the economy of the

⁹ Judy Lown, *Gender and Class During Industrialisation, A Study of the Halstead Silk Industry, 1825-1900*, 2, (University of Essex, 1983) p 264.

house'¹⁰, hence it was virtually impossible for those unfortunate inmates to re-establish their independence. Thus the hierarchical system outlined by Lown was accepted as 'natural' and welcomed by many. Asa Briggs writes 'above all, the family emphasized the maintenance of those values which held society together'¹¹. If the perhaps despotic but benevolent paternalism shown within the Courtauld and Gurteen enterprises seems unacceptable today, a brief comparison with the conditions of those in neighbouring textile towns without a major employer in their midst, suggests that many of the workers employed in the mills of Bocking, Braintree, Halstead and Haverhill might have regarded themselves as fortunate. Although people were expected to work hard they had comparative security of employment and housing and enjoyed the occasional bonus in the form of company outings. In June 1846, on the 'coming of age' of the business, Samuel Courtauld declared a general holiday for the workforce and entertained two thousand of them to a banquet in the grounds of his home.



Figure 8: Courtauld employees are introduced to a client. Note the factory rules poster on the right of the picture. Courtesy of Braintree Museum Trust.

¹⁰ Francois de la Roche Foucauld, *A Frenchman's Year in Suffolk*, (Suffolk Records Society, 1988) p 208.

¹¹ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People*, (London, Pelican, 1967) p 11.

Again the familial structure of business is reflected in current literature; in Mrs. Gaskell's *North and South*, her hero, Thornton compares the mill master in the workplace to a parent in the home, but qualifies his views with: 'I do not see we have any right to impose leading strings upon them for the rest of their time', he also claims that a 'wise despotism' is the best way to govern his workforce as: 'laws and decisions work for my own good in the first instance and (work) for theirs (the employees) in the second'. (Figures 8 & 9) In the same work it is noted that some mill masters with less social concern for their workforce, had 'well cleansed and well cared for machinery and unwashed and neglected hands'¹².

¹² Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, (London, Everyman, 1993 ed.) p 118.

DRESS.

OCTOBER 9th, 1860.

IT is always a pleasure to us to see our workpeople, and especially our comely young women, dressed NEAT and TIDY; nor should we, as has been already declared in a notice that has been put up at Becking Mills, wish to interfere with the fashion of their dress, whatever it may be, so long as their dress does not interfere with their work, or with the work of those near them in our employ.

The present ugly fashion of HOOPS, or CRINOLINE, as it is called, is, however, quite unfitted for the work of our Factories. Among the Power Looms it is almost impossible, and highly dangerous; among the Winding and Drawing Engines it greatly impedes the free passage of Overseers, Wasters, &c., and is inconvenient to all. At the Mills it is equally inconvenient, and still more mischievous, by bringing the dress against the Spindles, while also it sometimes becomes shockingly indecent when the young people are standing upon the Sliders.

FOR ALL THESE REASONS

We now request all our Hands, at all our Factories, to leave HOOPS AND CRINOLINE at home when they come to the Factories to work; and to come dressed in a manner suitable for their work, and with as much BECOMING NEATNESS as they can.

And OVERSEERS at all the Floors are hereby charged to see that all the Hands coming to work are thus properly dressed for factory work—without Hoops or Crinoline of any sort; and Overseers will be held RESPONSIBLE to us for strict regard to this regulation.

Licking Bobbins.

WHEN a Bobbin is fastened off, it has been a common practice to touch the end with the tongue to smooth it down, and there is no harm in that.

But out of this practice has arisen another practice, both nasty and mischievous, of Licking the Bobbins all over to make them weigh heavier.

And to put an end at once, and altogether, to this nasty and mischievous practice of Licking the Bobbins, we now make it

A RULE

Not to touch the Bobbins with the Tongue at all; and Overseers are hereby authorised to enforce this rule by Forfeits.

SAMUEL COURTAULD & Co.

A notice, now amusing, exhibited in the mills in 1860

Figure 9: Courtaulds, Rules pertaining to safety and dress. Taken from C J Ward-Jackson's 'History of Courtaulds'.

Initially silk throwsters and then weavers, in the early years Courtaulds made a variety of silk goods. In 1841/3 they produced £23,300 worth of Crape Gauzes, £7,500 of Broad and fancy goods, £400 of 'Soft silk' (spun silk?) and £2,500 of thrown silk, the latter for sale to other companies. Over the next twenty years they gradually concentrated more on mourning crape while slowly dropping all other

lines. In 1865 they made funeral crape to the value of £90,000¹³. The method of producing the crisply finished fabric was closely guarded and those who knew how it was done were required to sign an undertaking that they would not disclose the secret. The Victorian dress code for the middle and upper classes was strict, with periods of mourning laid down as to how long one should continue to wear black, not only after the death of close family members but for all relations and close acquaintances, while anyone aspiring to superior social status wore black for court mourning. There were shops in this country, in Europe and in North America and the Colonies where nothing but mourning attire was sold. Such retailers prided themselves on being able to procure goods quickly for customers. Courtauld's massive production and warehousing for stock meant that they became the largest provider in the world for this enormous trade. To ensure its continuance, new designs for the crape surface were introduced every year, (Figure 10) thus the fashion conscious mourner was obliged to purchase new crape for every death! Wearing the fabric was not confined to the female population, men wore it as funeral drapery, presumably equivalent to widows weeds, and continued to wear it as a hat trim for months after a bereavement. The Franco-Prussian war of 1870/71 gave a two pronged boost to Courtauld's export trade first, French home production was restricted as the industry lost men to the army and then the number of deaths caused by war increased the demand for crape. Mourning attire was as necessary to the French middle and upper classes as it was on this side of the Channel. Thus the company was one of the very few in England who were favourably affected by the French trade. Clearly the working classes on either side of the Channel were not among those whose habits influenced the sale of mourning clothes; their respect for the dead was usually limited to a plain black arm or hat band made of ribbon to adorn their everyday or 'Sunday best' dress. Like all clothing worn on such occasions, these would be stored away until needed again.

¹³ Coleman, *Courtaulds*, p 80.

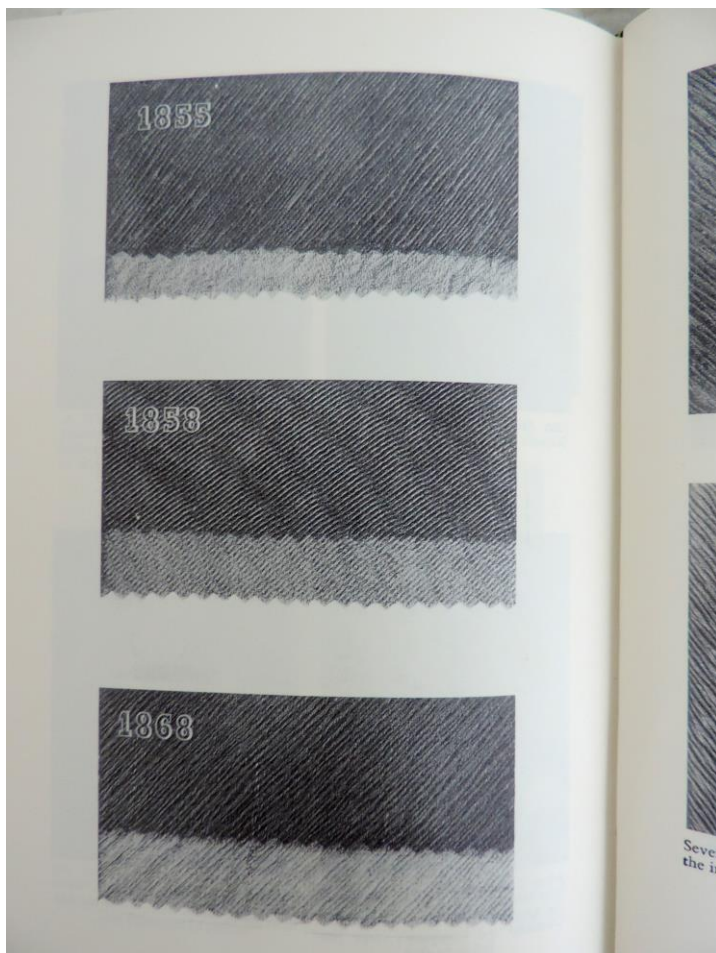


Figure 10: Courtaulds Mourning crepe surface designs, late 19th century. Taken from C J Ward-Jackson's 'History of Courtaulds'.

The Courtauld enterprise continued to grow and it seems likely that their ability to open markets and adopt faster production methods led to the demise of smaller and less efficient competitors, a pattern of business which became increasingly familiar through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Coleman describes the firm's growth during the period from 1850 to 1885 as one of 'unity and coherence with sustained though not spectacular growth'. According to Booker Courtaulds were victims of their own enterprise and when the crepe market dropped after 1885, when the Victorian fixation with mourning began to wane, having concentrated entirely on its production after discontinuing manufacture of all other goods, the company suffered their first major reverse for years. They updated their machinery by converting to gas power, but also realized

that their very exclusivity made them vulnerable and they began actively to search for new ideas.

Like a number of industrialists of the period, Courtauld was generous to the towns where his business was situated, he funded public buildings and provided space for recreation for the population, many of whom were his employees. The hospital in Braintree still bears his name, as do some of the streets in the towns where his factories were.

The 1860 commercial treaty with France with the resultant reduction of tariffs on imported silks was said to have dealt the final death blow to most of the English silk trade. Cobden, who negotiated the deal between the two countries is reported to have said: 'Let the silk trade perish and go to countries to which it properly belongs'. With such views expressed in Government and such apparent lack of concern for those thrown out of work as a result, it is hardly surprising that so few businesses survived. Nor is it surprising that those employed by companies with enough capital and business acumen to withstand the flood of imports, were grateful for comparative security. In the eastern counties it must be remembered that textile workers' earnings compared favourably with agriculture which was the only other major source of employment. Such things must be viewed in relation to work patterns in other industries and to national and regional norms and expectations to understand the acceptance of conditions. This is particularly true in the area of gender studies; in recent years much academic work has been carried out in the area of women's work. In many cases great emphasis has been laid on the oppression of women in the workplace and other factors ignored, while this cannot be omitted it should be viewed in the context of individual expectations and multiple roles of women of the period. It must also be remembered that most men in the same industries were poorly paid, few had prospects of promotion and later oral history suggests that many supplemented their income with additional seasonal work on farms in what little free time they had available.

9. SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

After the immense changes and industrial development in the second half of the nineteenth century there was comparatively little change during the first decade of the twentieth century. There were few innovations in the production methods of textiles and clothing in East Anglia and probably in other industries and other regions in the country. The major shift for both Gurteens in Haverhill and Harmers in Norwich had been from weaving to menswear manufacturing in the mid nineteen hundreds; most of the smaller silk manufacturers had gone out of production, while exceptionally, Courtaulds had developed into the largest textile manufacturer in the world.

It was not until the First World War that real change occurred. In the clothing industry the needs of the armed services for additional uniform supplies led to much increased production as companies previously making civilian clothing moved into manufacturing military wear; this in turn led to improved methods to enable firms to complete orders in time. Surprisingly real streamlining did not occur until the Second World War. As always war created more employment at home as women were required to fill the gaps left by men on active service. Vast munitions factories grew and women who might previously have worked as domestic servants took the better paid work these provided, thus women now had more independence and more disposable income than ever before.

After the war when effectively a generation of young men had been lost, many women continued to be the family breadwinners and many more remained single. In the years following the First World War there was fairly full employment, possibly partly due to a reduced population, and money was reasonably plentiful. The 1929 depression changed things dramatically and this affected all industry across the western world. East Anglia's businesses suffered as much as any. Many people were thrown out of work and there was little or no social support. The purchase of new clothing was a low priority for those with little money and the industry as a whole was hit as sales fell and factory operatives either lost their jobs or were put on short time. This did not change radically until the outbreak of the Second World War.

Production of textiles in Britain had been greatly reduced during the slump and with the advent of war in 1939 imports were restricted as merchant ships were transferred to use by the Royal Navy. Shortages of raw materials led to the introduction of the Utility Scheme in 1941, with each industry required to nominate its own team to devise workable rules for production. From the outset in the clothing industry quantities of cloth and trimmings allowable were restricted

and firms were licensed to make specific goods under the scheme, all had to conform to restrictions in design, quality and quantity. Administratively this was tedious but it forced British manufacturers into streamlining production; advice was sought from the USA to improve methods and with a much reduced workforce firms were able to meet their orders. Food and clothing were rationed severely throughout the war and restrictions retained afterwards until supplies improved. Clothing was de-rationed in 1949 and food rationing gradually relaxed over the next four years. Clothes rationing introduced in June 1941 allowed sixty-six coupons per person per year, this had to cover apparel and household textiles. A man's suit was valued at twenty-six coupons. Children were allowed an additional ten coupons to allow for their growth. In 1949 the coupons system was abandoned; the general re-action in the trade was that supplies were so scarce that lack of coupons would not impact on production.

In the years following the war as people returned to some sort of normality and men went back to their civilian jobs the clothing industry returned to previous types of production, though still, in many cases with an increased order book for uniforms. Despite this both supplies and money remained in short supply for several years; the war had nearly bankrupt Great Britain and under the terms of the Marshall plan the government had huge debts to repay to the USA. British firms with assets in the States were forced to contribute and this meant that Courtaulds had to hand over most of their American factories. They accounted for some forty nine per cent of the company's total output; it is a testament to the strength of their organization that such a loss did not completely ruin them.

By the middle 1950s the country was recovering from the war, industries began to prosper and production methods continued to improve, again probably due to the influence of the USA. Money became more plentiful and by the start of the 1960s the teenage market had developed with young people having disposable income for the first time. In the clothing industry this created new markets which in turn led to new retail outlets, an area of trade which seems to have evaded manufacturers of East Anglia. Nonetheless it was during the 1960s, 70s and early 80s that several companies in the region needed to expand, opening new factories and increasing the workforce in order to meet demands. It was during the last twenty years of the century that British Industry as a whole and textile and clothing production in particular suffered increasingly from the impact of developing industries abroad, at first in the poorer European countries such as Portugal and Spain, and then in the third world. During the last twenty years of the twentieth century British manufacturing as a whole contracted and this was particularly so in the labour intensive production of clothing. Previously large companies reduced their domestic output and began to import goods or manufacture overseas. Some firms closed altogether and by the start of the new millennium many of the industries which had created the wealth of this country and gave Britain its international trading importance had all but disappeared.

10. NORWICH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

By the beginning of the twentieth century the only surviving clothing or textile firm of any note in Norwich was Harmers, which had grown in the latter years of the nineteenth century under the direction of F W Harmer. (Figure 11) By 1900 it was run primarily by his two sons J A Harmer and T B Harmer. Unusually for younger generations of families in the textile and clothing trades at that time these young men went into higher education before entering the business, one to Germany to study music and one to Trinity College Cambridge¹. In 1909 the Trade Boards' Act was passed ensuring that training was given to those joining the various trades and shortly afterwards the Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers' Federation was formed. T B Harmer was instrumental in the development of the Clothing Board and was the first Chairman of the Federation².

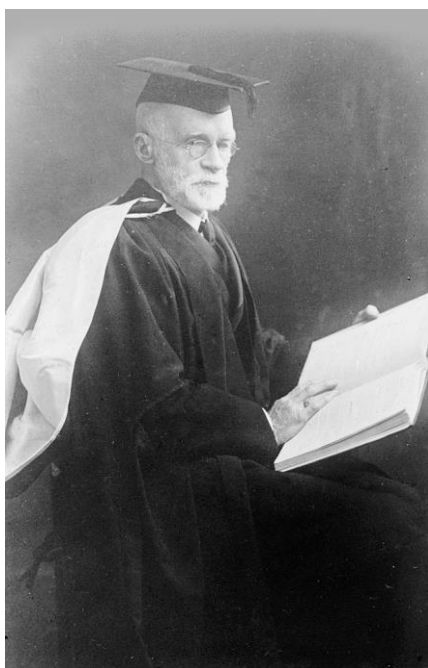


Figure 11: F W Harmer. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.

¹ F W Harmer & Co. 1825 – 1925. *A Short History of One Hundred Years*,(Undated, Private publication) p 10.

² Harmer, *Short History*, p 10.

Like many of the clothing firms in the region, Harmers fulfilled uniform contracts for various organizations and prior to the First World War they were supplying the War Office with uniforms. According to the company's written history they had built up stock immediately prior to 1914 and thus were in a position to fill large Government contracts as soon as the need arose. Since they supplied the army before the war it is probable that they had stock in hand to fulfill the usual 'call-off' pattern of buying; this where the customer orders bulk but takes delivery and pays for goods on an 'as needed' basis. Thus it is the manufacturer not the retailer who bears the financial burden.

During the War the firm continued their existing connection, and sent about two tons of uniform clothes to various Government departments on a daily basis, making a million khaki garments in their clothing factories, and considerably over a million cardigan waistcoats for the Army, besides a quantity of socks³.

Although the company history does not make it clear, they must surely have taken time to build up production to provide these quantities, or to have contracted out for some of the goods.

It is not clear when the firm began its hosiery operation but in the early years of the war the department must have been quite small for they were approached by the Government, presumably the War Office, and asked if and when they could extend their knitting department. This proved problematic as none of the spinners in Leicester and Yorkshire could provide the necessary yarn. Further enquiries and negotiations were successful and the partners agreed that they would purchase machinery and could go ahead *if* they were assured of sufficient orders to keep the machinery busy. Harmer's invested £50,000 in machinery and yarn but did not take delivery for several months by which time the Government was threatening cancellation of orders⁴. (Truly nothing changes, firms are still faced with orders for bulk deliveries within an impossibly short period by customers who refuse to accept that orders placed previously might have priority) The Government must surely have realized that the goods could not be made more quickly elsewhere and grudgingly, accepted the later date. The company continued to produce 'over a mile of knitted fabric a day until the end of the war'⁵. As with other uniforms contractors, the end of the hostilities brought a change of direction.

³ _____ *Short History*, p 10.

⁴ _____ *Short History*, pp 10-11.

⁵ _____ *Short History*, p 7.

PIECE GOODS DEPARTMENT



E 54 LADIES' PRINTED MAROCAIN ART. SILK FROCK. Lengths—40 and 42 ins. In shades—Blue Grey, Navy, Beige, Almond, Cedar, Wine Price 15/11 each

E 80 LADIES' PRINTED ART. SILK FROCK. Lengths—40 and 42 ins. In shades—Powder Blue, Almond, Navy, Fawn Price 12/11 each

32

F. W. Harmer & Co.

Figure 12: Advertisement for Harmer's Ladies wear, circa 1926. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.

Post the First World War Harmer's found their knitting machinery and operators unemployed and it was then that they began to manufacture knitwear for both the men's and women's fashion market. (Figure 12) By 1925 they were producing hosiery, knitted trimmings and garments, using both power machinery

for running yardage for ‘cut and sew’, (this is where the yarn is knitted into large sections and then cut as if it were a woven fabric before stitching together for the final garment) and hand operated machines to produce better quality garments. The latter needed one operator per machine producing individual items, inevitably much more expensive than cut and sew garments. It is not clear if knitwear was the firm’s first venture into the women’s trade but certainly by the early 1920s they were making and advertising women’s wear as well as men’s and boys’ tailored suits and jackets both for stock and bespoke customers. Unlike the Colchester and Haverhill firms they used a factory system reasonably early. Their 1925 Centenary publication notes:

Special machines have been devised for performing operations which cannot be done on an ordinary machine. This has necessitated passing a garment on from one machine to another, introducing the ‘team’ system by which each operative only does a small part of the work required to make each garment⁶.

Harmer’s retained a bespoke or ‘Special Orders’ department and photographs show a much less crowded work area for this department than in the ready-to-wear factory. Like their competitors they sent out pattern bunches (fabric swatches) to their customers, supported by separate price lists and illustrated style books. It is particularly surprising that they installed their own printing department to cope with this side of the business. Records do nothing to explain what made the directors invest in this unusual offshoot of the clothing factory, perhaps they had encountered too many problems in producing printed matter outside, but in 1925 all their printing needs were filled ‘in house’. With today’s desk top publishing available it might be unexceptional but current research suggests that then it was unique.

In the early 1930s the two senior partners in Harmers died and the firm then became a limited company. There is little available information about their survival during the thirties other than the comment in their post Second World War publication, ‘Depression, the growth of the “multiples” which at that time were not part of the customer base, and changing conditions of trade made things difficult for the new Company’⁷, nonetheless they continued to develop, installing a conveyor belt production line throughout the factory. The Second World War saw the return of large quantities of uniform tailoring and presumably full employment, particularly for the female operatives in the factory. (Figure 13) As with several of our Cathedral Cities, Norwich was a target for the Luftwaffe and many buildings in the city were devastated. Harmers did not escape and in 1942 first their main factory and then the hosiery factory were destroyed. (Figure 14)

⁶ _____ Short *History*, p 24.

⁷ Harmer Company Notes, (Access allowed by David Harmer to private papers, 1947) p 1.

This meant a number of moves into rented premises for the duration of the War, but with a degree of goodwill from other firms that it would be hard to imagine in peacetime in supplying temporary accommodation, Harmers was able to continue production. After the war they built new modern premises to house all departments. (Figure 15) According to Christopher Gurteen, who trained with Harmers, their enforced redevelopment was Government funded and this enabled the company to modernize very much more quickly than competitors whose plant and premises had survived the conflict unharmed. (Figure 16) They engaged an expert in ‘time and motion’ to advise them and set up their own department to ensure that the firm ran as effectively as possible. The new factory was not in the City centre but on the outskirts of Norwich, and ‘In order to help workers and save them time, a hairdressing salon has been installed so that there is now no need to take a morning off for an hour’s hairdo’⁸. There was a subsidized canteen on the premises seating two hundred and fifty, ‘where hot and cold meals were provided for a few pence’. Such philanthropy was not entirely altruistic, such facilities must have proved useful in keeping their staff happy and in preventing their being tempted away to work for others. (Figure 17) The company employed a small number of Italian women, who, according to David Harmer, were brought over specifically as clothing workers. Presumably these people were refugees from the European mainland, and in order to speed their integration, the firm provided English lessons at the factory. It has not been possible to ascertain if this was unique to Harmers but no evidence has emerged of other firms in the region making similar provision.



Figure 13: Harmer’s female factory operatives during WWII. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.

⁸ Harmer Company Notes, 1947, p 7.



Figure 14: Bombing of Harmer's factory during WWII. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.



Figure 15: Harmer's old factory chimney is demolished, early 1950s. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.



Figure 16: Harmer's new factory site, 1950s. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.



Figure 17: Harmers, marking out a garment pattern using modern machinery, 1950s. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.

PIECE GOODS DEPARTMENT



*Nell Gwynne fascinating King Charles II.
— in one of our Radio Chine Frocks —*

SPRING is upon us and we are prepared! Glance around our fixtures—New Stock, the most attractive obtainable, at your service! Raw materials are down, so prices are everywhere lower; and values! Ah! we have them, so

SEND US YOUR ORDERS
AND
SEE FOR YOURSELVES

This Season we are running the following **PATTERN BOOKS**

DRESS BOOK. This contains a selection of Tweeds, Serges, Gabardines, Tricotines, Worsted Suitings, Repps, Marocains, etc.

COTTON BOOK. Shirtings, Prints, Flannel-ettes, Nurse Cloths, Cambrics, Gingham, etc.

WRITE FOR THE BOOK YOU WANT

26

F. W. Harmer & Co.

Figure 18: Cartoon advertisement for Harmers, late 1950s/60s. Courtesy of Norfolk County Council Library & Information Service.

Following the Second World War Harmer's, like Gurteens, found it difficult to recruit sufficient local labour. By then they were producing large quantities of mail order goods and eventually built two new factories to cope with the increased output, both in less busy areas of the county than Norwich, the first was in Watton and the second at Fakenham. According to their former Managing Director, business from Littlewoods provided enough work in the 1950s and early 60s to make such development not only viable but necessary. (Figure 18) The firm continued to fill large contracts for uniforms, supplying the three armed services, at that time under separate departments of War Office, Air Ministry and Admiralty, they also supplied the fire and ambulance services and the Metropolitan Police. David Harmer cited business in the 1960s and 70s as being at least fifty percent uniform tailoring. In the early 1970s the firm bought out Richard Emms, another family run business which had three factories, at Syleham on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, plus Diss and Stradbroke. David Harmer commented that by then the ladies' shoe trade in Norwich had grown and with higher rates of pay than the clothing factory, finding staff in the City had become difficult, if not impossible. The company now was primarily a trouser manufacturer; the acquisition of Emms gave them much greater capacity and there they produced jeans and some jackets, particularly school blazers. The production of women's wear seems to have disappeared around the end of the Second World War, though precisely when or why is uncertain.

As with most of the clothing industry the workforce at Harmer's was predominantly female, surprisingly they used women as pressers, employing ninety females at one time in this capacity. This was rare for in the majority of factories work remained gender specific and pressing was regarded as men's work, presumably a hangover from the days when the equipment was regarded as too heavy for most women to handle. Unlike many of their peers Harmer's appear to have viewed capital investment in modern machinery as a priority and as in the middle of the previous century the machine manufacturers sent training staff into the factory to teach the operatives to use new equipment. Unlike the Colchester firms, where clothing workers could move from one factory to another, Harmer's, as the only major producer in the town, employed trainers to teach their new employees. David Harmer commented that in earlier times the training was 'sitting beside Nellie', much the same as in any factory where no formal apprenticeships or training schemes had existed. Pay and conditions by this time were negotiated with the Unions, pension provision was limited to 'staff' (management) not shop floor workers; and as with other towns, pay in the clothing trades compared unfavourably with factories producing different goods where work was less skilled and less labour intensive. When easier work with better pay was available, there could be little doubt as to where the majority of factory workers preferred to be, except in the case of operatives who found real job satisfaction in what they did. Like other clothing manufacturers the highest

promotion available to women was to bench supervisor and as with others in the region, the majority expected to leave when they married or had families, perhaps returning after their children were at school.

Despite Harmers' investments in plant and machinery, and their social provision for shop-floor workers, they were still unable to retain their operatives, and like other manufacturers in East Anglia and across the country, they were hit by cheap imports from countries where labour costs were a fraction of those in the UK. In 1989, they ceased trading. In recent years, the name has been bought and once again, trousers are manufactured under the Harmer label, but not produced by this old family firm in the City of Norwich.

11.

SUDBURY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Despite its variable history, by the beginning of the twentieth century Sudbury was comparatively well placed with a few small but reputable silk businesses providing work. In his brief history of Vanners, Chapman notes that at the end of the nineteenth century there were four manufacturers in Sudbury who had invested in workshops large enough to house jacquard looms¹, these were Walters', Kipling's, Walker's and Kemp's. Inexplicably Vanner chose not to develop and sold his Sudbury unit. Both Walters and Vanners continued to operate in Haverhill, though it is not clear if they installed power looms there. William Kemp, who had been principal of his firm since 1855, was described in the *Daily Express* in 1908 as 'the Grand Old Man of the Silk Trade', claimed that there had previously been fifteen hundred silk workers in Sudbury but this was now reduced to one hundred. He complained that both Coggeshall and Halstead silk manufacturers had gone out of business, and repeated the nineteenth century complaints that imported cloth had murdered the Sudbury Silk Industry².

E W Kipling wrote of his early years in the silk trade, of moving to Sudbury just after the start of the twentieth century as a result of the bankruptcy of his former London Master and working initially as a self-employed hand-loom weaver. He recalled that a working week of fifty hours was accepted by all concerned and 'Once a week I took my efforts over to Courtaulds in Halstead for correction and cycled back again'³, such a surprising degree of co-operation between large and small manufacturers would be hard to find today. Kipling later set up his own business which at some stage went bankrupt, he subsequently merged with Vanner where eventually he was managing director. It has not been possible to clarify this further. Vanners installed power looms around 1900 when they amalgamated with Fennell Brothers⁴, originally a Haverhill firm, but again with no record of power machinery prior to the merger. The quite substantial factory in the Colne Valley Road, Haverhill, occupied by the partnership was possibly the site of their early mechanization. At the Women's exhibition at Earl's Court in 1900 electric looms were shown as being in use in Sudbury but no indication was given as to how many were in production.

¹ Stanley Chapman, *Vanners in The English Silk Industry*, (Textile History, 23, 1992) p 80.

² The Daily Express, 7th May 1908.

³ E W Kipling, *Recollections of a Sudbury Silk Weaver*, (East Anglian Life, June, 1968) pages un-numbered.

⁴ Chapman, *Vanners*, p 80.



Figure 19: Fennells in Sudbury, scraping umbrella fabric. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

Stephen Walters took over the Kipling factory in Cornard Road, Sudbury, where they have remained ever since. According to Peter Walters, Kipling had built the premises but never used them; it is hard to imagine the reasons for such profligate waste of funds and space, unless perhaps they tried to expand too rapidly prior to bankruptcy. Fennells, initially a maker of umbrella silk as were Vanners and Walters, (Figure 19) took over Walters previous site in the town and began to diversify into dress silks, as did his competitors, thus all competed with imported goods which were reputedly decimating the home trade. Chapman comments that the Suffolk silk weavers suffered intense competition from the European industry which was producing: ‘attractively cheap silks heavily weighted with mineral dyes’. (Mineral dyes were used to add weight and bulk to cheaper yarn) He claimed that Fennells became the leading silk manufacturer in Sudbury, but despite this, they initially ran the business on a shoestring, sometimes unable to pay operatives wages at the end of the week despite their employees being paid thirty per cent less than the going rate, i.e. 8s. as opposed to a national average of 11s.6d⁵. It is not clear if rates in Sudbury as a whole were low but the presence of several manufacturers of similar goods in the town suggests that this must have been so, for surely the workers would have moved to another factory if they were able to earn more. Fennells sold the old Vanners site in Glemsford in 1905 and the Haverhill factory was disposed of in 1937. Young trainees in Gurteen’s clothing factory were paid nearly as much as fully trained

⁵ _____ *Vanners*, p 79.

silk weavers in both Sudbury and Haverhill and this surely illustrates why it was easy for the Haverhill firm to recruit and retain operatives. In 1924 Vanner and Fennell bought the Sudbury Silk Weaving company which was headed by Gordon Kipling and his associate Anthony Rowland, they then moved into the production of silks for men's neckwear (ties and cravats). (Figure 20) They sold considerable quantities to Welch Margetson and Company of Savile Row; Welch's company history notes that their 1924 price list included a '46 inch pure silk scarf'⁶ possibly provided by Vanners. The firm of Vanner and Fennell continued and despite the development of 'Artificial Silk' and its effect on the market in the period immediately after the First World War; the factory was extended twice to cope with increased business which suggests that between the wars they prospered, sadly few records remain. Immediately after the Second World War the growing popularity of club, regimental and school ties in traditional stripe and crest designs provided a great boost to business and these goods became the mainstay, not only of Vanner and Fennell but of Walters and of the majority of silk weavers in Macclesfield. During the 1950s they discussed amalgamation with the silk printers, David Evans, who were situated in Crayford, Kent just south of the Thames. Initially the idea was shelved but eventually the marriage of the two firms was completed and survived successfully until the end of the twentieth century, producing printed silks in Kent and woven goods in Sudbury. It is not clear when Vanners ceased being a family firm.

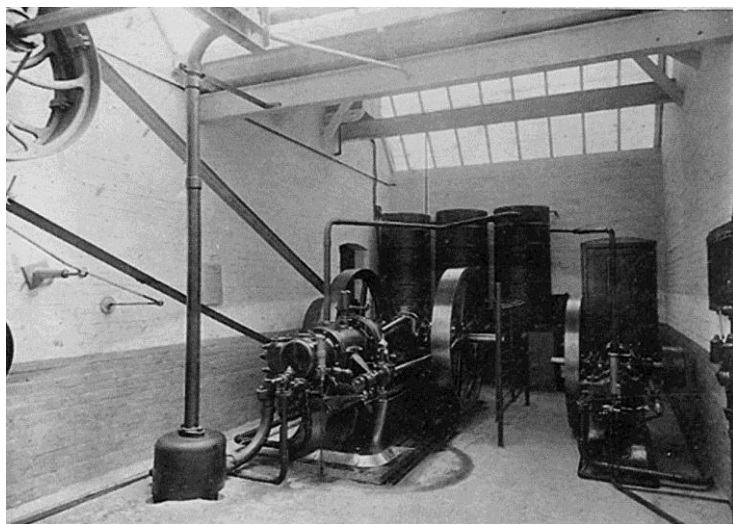


Figure 20: Warping machinery at Fennell brothers in Sudbury. Undated. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

¹⁷⁵ Welch Margetson Ltd. (Unpublished Company History) p4.

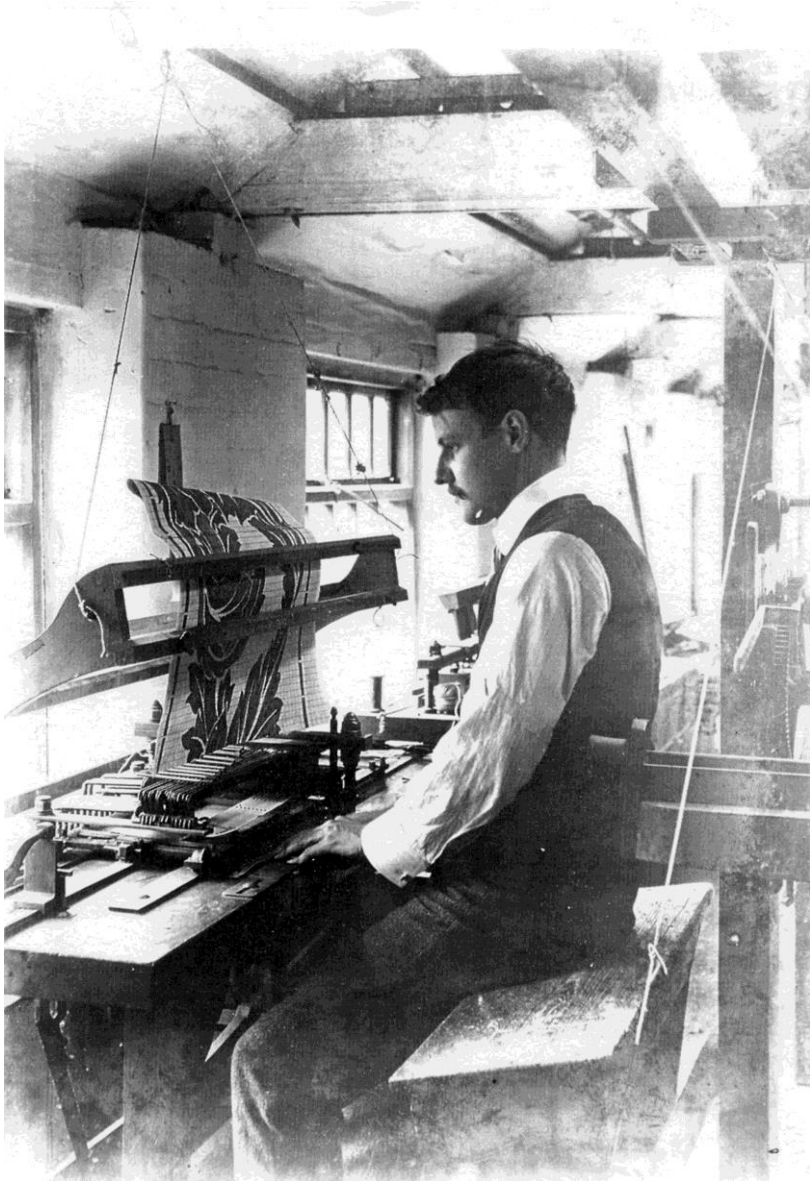


Figure 21: Reginald Warner at work in the early years of Gainsborough silks. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

One other silk manufacturer which appeared in Sudbury in the twentieth century is that of Gainsborough Silk Weaving Company. The founder of the firm was Reginald Warner, (Figure 21) son of Metford Warner who was proprietor of Jeffrey's and Company, the firm famous for having taken over the William

Morris textile weaving and printing production in south west London. Reginald had served an apprenticeship with the English Silk Weaving Company in Ipswich at the end of the previous century and subsequently set up in Priory Walk, Sudbury. This company has always concentrated on silks for the furnishing trade to the exclusion of the garment industry and as with other Sudbury firms their production was entirely dependent on hand-loom weavers in the early days. A photograph, taken around 1907/1910 of the workforce, shows seven men, including Reginald Warner, and four women at work⁷. The business established an excellent reputation fairly quickly after its birth for in 1910 they supplied Ickworth House (then the home of the Earl of Bristol) near Bury St. Edmunds with a hundred and fifty seven yards of green and silver silk, plus lining and trimmings. During the First World War Gainsborough's letter heading described them as making 'Finest Hand Made Damasks, Brocades, Brocatelles, Antique Velvets & Plain Fabrics'⁸, at this time they used the services of a London sales agent, W T Bennett, at Oxford Circus. How so small a company survived the war it is hard to imagine, like their peers Gainsborough lost men to the services, indeed in the company records there is a letter to Mr. Sayer wishing him a speedy recovery from his war wounds, and promising his job would be there when he returned⁹. Some years later Mr. Sayer became Managing Director of the firm, retiring in 1962. In 1924 Gainsborough moved to a new steam factory where photographs show similar shafting for powering the looms to that in the Haverhill sheds, like other manufacturers in the region they continued to supplement production with hand-loom¹⁰. A 1928 photograph in the firm's archive shows their eighty year old employee, Mr. T Goadey still working at his loom¹¹; he had started in the trade at the age of eight.

Gainsborough showed their goods at the British Silk Exhibition in 1912 and in 1924 at Wembley, both must have meant a considerable outlay for so small a business, but by this time the company's reputation was such that they were asked to weave fabrics for Queen Mary's Doll's house, now on show at Windsor Castle. (Figures 22 & 23)

⁷ Gainsborough Company Archive Collection.

⁸ Gainsborough Archive.

⁹ _____

¹⁰ _____

¹¹ _____



Figure 22: Gainsborough, male employees, 1926. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.



Figure 23: Gainsborough, female employees, 1926. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

Little is known about Gainsborough during the 1930s depression except that they survived. In 1946 the *Suffolk and Essex Free Press* reported that they had lost eighty per cent of their employees to war service but when staff returned the

situation was reversed¹². Wartime restrictions on production were still in place, raw materials unavailable and people desperate for employment which could not be provided until supplies were restored, a situation which was repeated in manufacturing units across the country. Nonetheless this small firm had a pension scheme in place by 1946 and, unusually, profit sharing bonuses were paid, perhaps this was more easily organized and sustained in a company of this size.

By the 1960s Gainsborough was making fabrics for major refurbishment projects, they supplied Buckingham Palace, the House of Commons and Norway's Royal Palace. (Figures 24 & 25) The company continues to quote for stately homes, both in this country and abroad. They have remained small, with only twenty four looms in operation at the time of writing. Like both Walters and Humphries in Braintree they survived by concentrating on and developing business in specialist areas.



Figure 24: Damask weaving at Gainsborough Silks, late 1950s. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

¹² Suffolk and Essex Free Press, 6th June, 1946.



Figure 25: Gainsborough's jacquard silk damask, 1950s. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

By the late nineteenth century Stephen Walters had a small unit in Haverhill and his brother Daniel had acquired Pound Mill in Braintree from Courtaulds. Stephen's business continued to operate in Sudbury and Haverhill whilst retaining their London head office. It is not clear if they continued to produce goods in the capital, or if this was used only for office and showroom space. According to Peter Walters the business has always been family run, passing from father to son from the time it was founded until the present day. Sadly many of the firm's records were lost during the Second World War when their London office was destroyed and thus it is impossible to draw a full picture of their progress in the early part of the twentieth century. However Mr. Walters thought that previous generations of the family had not been formally trained, but worked their way through the various departments of the business until considered competent to take on managerial duties. He describes his father as, of necessity, being something of a 'Jack of all trades':

It was different in those days, we were very small, not exactly a one man business, my father had a brother in the business. He (father)

travelled up and down from Sudbury to London so I suppose he spent some of the time being a salesman and some back down here and I think he did a bit of everything. I did the same as it came along. My brother went to the silk weaving school in Zurich and then spent a year in Austria, learning German and working in the dress trade, (textiles) so he was a qualified technician when he came in. I was intended to be in the financial secretarial bit so I travelled, learnt French and some German and worked in various places, shops and cloth merchants and the offices of a couple of factories in Lyon. So I got experience but didn't have any formal education for the business except for the Chartered Institute of Secretaries.

Walters' continued to make umbrella silk in Haverhill and presumably in Sudbury up to and possibly including the Second World War. Peter Walters described the 'shearing and rubbing' of umbrella silk as 'a steel rubber, half-moon shape with a handle on it. They rubbed the fabric up and down to spread the fibres and make it denser, and filling up the holes, they'd take a needle and spread it evenly'.

During the early years of the century Walters began producing spun silk for the women's dress trade and though rayon could not be used for the umbrella trade, they began making their own cotton/rayon mix for the cheaper end of the women's market. In the mid-twenties, as with many competitors, they were reliant on the neckwear market.

Throughout its history Stephen Walters has woven and finished their own fabrics, these goods being steam set as opposed to printed silks which are chemically fixed; (Figure 26) the only goods which Walters have ever sent out to finish are for wet processes such as dyeing. In 1936 the firm bought the Glemsford Silk throwing mill, (Figure 27) and although this has always remained a separate company and been run as such the acquisition gave them ability to streamline their supply to some degree. (Figure 28) In the period immediately after the Second World War they introduced silk dyeing into the Glemsford unit and the business there continued at least until the late 1990s, both throwing and dyeing silk goods. With the invention of nylon around 1936 and its availability soon after 1945, umbrella silk became largely redundant.



Figure 26: Stephen Walters, winding room in Cornard Road. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

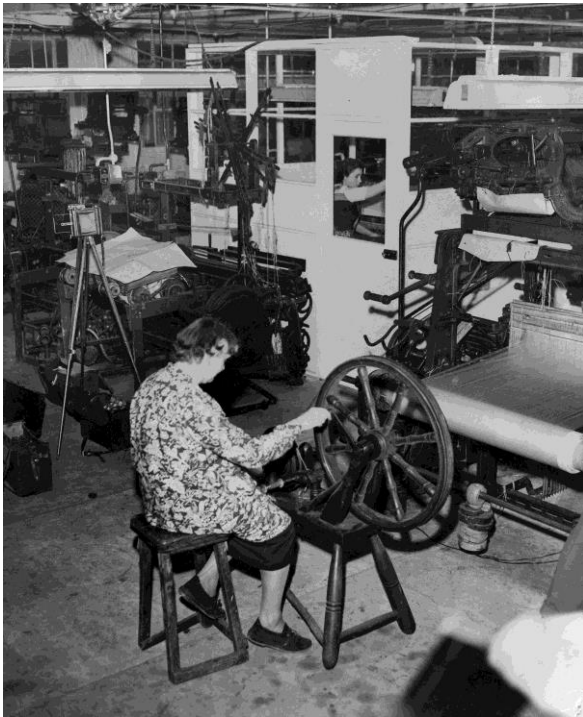


Figure 27: Silk throwing at Stephen Walters, probably early 1950s. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.



Figure 28: Bobbin winding at Stephen Walters, 1953. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

As with most textile companies in this region and elsewhere the majority of the loom operatives at Stephen Walters are and always have been women, though men were employed on various hand finishing processes.

Inevitably the two world wars meant a loss of male employees to the armed services and indeed of considerable numbers of women either to the forces or to other types of civilian war work. Like most of their colleagues and competitors they were left with the very old and very young. For the duration of the war silk output was tightly controlled as was all textile manufacture and thus the firm was able to plan their production around the staff and materials they had available. Peter Walters explained:

It was very much a hand to mouth existence but we were lucky to keep going because so many firms had to close down ... there was a silk controller. Fortunately the silk stocking business had been very active before the war and there was a lot of silk in the country, the government realized they were going to need it - for parachutes and also for silk insulation for electrical things ... so the supply of silk was frozen, the controller took possession of it all ... and he doled it out to people who were going to use it for government purposes. We were allowed, I think, five per cent for the home trade - tie fabrics - that was all and the rest was government work. We made

parachute fabric and uniform tie fabric, black barathea and printed maps - to sew into their uniforms. ... They conserved resources and used this stockpile of silk and half way through the war as it began to run out, they had invented nylon ... fortunately it could take the place of silk. [For parachutes] Vanners had two factories and the government took one of them over for clothing. Post war we did a lot of silk facing material and the regimental tie trade was quite strong. Then we began to go into the design trade which we hadn't done before.



Figure 29: 1946 Staff photograph at Stephen Walters, Peter Walters 8th from right, front row. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

Walters, like most of the silk manufacturers in this country, was a comparatively small firm. Being a family run business which was on the same site for so long meant that the directors knew most of their staff (Figure 29) and tried to ensure that they remained approachable to the workforce if there were any problems. The result was that when the silk workers Trade Union tried to recruit members from the Sudbury factory they were singularly unsuccessful.

There was one time when the Macclesfield union asked for permission to recruit, quite a nice man. We said yes by all means come and try ... They did and in the meantime we talked to them (the staff) and explained that they wouldn't be able to talk to us, they would have to talk to the union. We had always had an open door policy, if anybody wanted anything they would come and tell us ... and in the end they said 'no, we're fine'. Partly because we are smaller now than before the war we've not ever really had a train of supervision ... We have tacklers, mechanics, to look after the machinery and we had foremen or forewomen whose job was to

teach the youngsters, but they weren't really disciplinarians. It wasn't their job to make sure people were doing their job. We had a factory manager ... there wasn't a chain of command; they didn't have to go through the forewomen to talk to the manager.

Walters closed the factory for a week every year in order to service the boilers and paint the premises, as did Gurteens in Haverhill, staff were paid for that week and so were able to take a holiday then without losing money. This was in advance of any negotiated agreements within the trade to allow paid holidays for factory workers. Mr. Walters thought that they may have allowed a few days sick pay prior to the formation of the welfare state, but that there had been no specific company policy. As with many small manufacturing units at the time and in the region, the male workforce tended to stay with the firm most of their working lives. The majority of women on the shop floor left to have a family and some returned to the same employer once their children were at school. There was some traffic of workers between the silk factories in the town but generally the firms co-operated with each other, checking if another company was keen to keep someone who had applied to them. In a small town such as Sudbury surely word would have travelled quickly if there were problems with an employee, equally so if the workers found owners and managers difficult. As with most other textile firms there was no pension provision for operatives prior to the 1950s and then only a limited scheme.

During the middle years of the twentieth century Stephen Walters had no specific investment policy for up-dating or replacing machinery. This was partly due to lack of funds and maybe also wariness of over-investment since the silk trade had been so prone to fluctuations caused by changing fashion and availability of raw material. They tried to manage with what they had, only replacing when forced to do so, and sometimes buying second-hand equipment. That they remained a small specialist firm meant that they could operate in this way where a large mass-production unit would have found it necessary to up-date frequently. Mr. Walters commented that while there were no major advances in manufacturing methods they could economize but that when shuttleless looms were invented they had to invest in order to remain competitive.

[Traditional looms, both hand and power, used a shuttle to shoot the weft thread across the warp. The shuttleless loom is either (a) a rapier at both ends of the loom, (right and left) which takes the yarn across to the centre where it passes to the rapier at the other side, or (b) water pressure forces the weft thread across the warp. Both methods are very much faster than the traditional shuttle loom.]

Most of the silk fabrics produced by Walters in the first half of the twentieth century were either plain or striped. Thus like many other small units weaving fairly simple goods, they did not have any formal apprenticeships, nonetheless to comply with Training Board legislation, proper instruction was provided, and

they employed two foremen or women specifically to teach newcomers to operate their looms, but this was very much on an 'as needed' basis. After the formation of the Training Boards in 1964 [for various industries] the firm continued to use the same staff but working with groups of newcomers rather than individuals and with a more structured learning programme. Peter Walters commented that despite some obvious advantages, the training boards were costly to run and created mountains of paperwork. Towards the end of the twentieth century the NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) system of training met with similar mixed responses.

Until the 1960s Walter's continued to produce traditional fabrics for neckwear and menswear, thus they did not often have to call on the services of designers, except perhaps for translating existing stripes and crests for their own production. Latterly they moved much more into designed goods which necessitated their employing a team of designers with a studio on site, producing fashion and corporate designs alongside their stripes and crests.

Sudbury, despite the vicissitudes of fluctuating trade for nearly three hundred years has survived as a silk producing town. Other areas of the country where silk manufacture has perhaps been more industrially organized have totally ceased to produce the goods which made them famous. A hundred years ago Sudbury had four silk units in the town, by the end of the twentieth century, it retained three mills, two, Vanners and Walters, both involved in producing goods for the clothing industry and the Gainsborough Silk Company making furnishing fabrics. Possibly their willingness to remain small, specialist units led to their survival, able to cut back in leaner times, where their larger competitors with necessarily heavier wage bills and higher overheads and capital investment were less flexible.

12. GLEMSFORD AND LONG MELFORD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY¹

At the turn of the century both Kolles and Tomkins were still operating hair factories in Glemsford but in 1905 Kolles was declared bankrupt. The effect this must have had on the village where as many as two hundred had worked for the company is incalculable. In 1909 Arnold and Gould set up as dressers of horsehair taking on the Kolle's premises in Bell's Lane which had previously been the hair seating factory, (Figure 30) and probably providing work for many of those previously employed by Kolles. As with their predecessors the new firm limited themselves to dressing hair, they were not involved in weaving. Gould expanded the business and bought part of the old 'Curled Hair' factory, (possibly part of the Tomkins site) to accommodate the increase in output. The dressed horsehair continued to be used for stuffing upholstery and bedding as well as for interlinings and in the millinery trade. Throughout the First World War the firm fulfilled Government contracts, mainly for jacket and hat interlinings. The business was stable and successful enough at the end of the war to expand slightly. One haircloth manufacturer was established in the village in the early years of the century, that of Andrew Arnold, possibly a relative or partner in the firm of Arnold and Gould. Sadly no other information has come to light about this firm and it has been impossible to verify how large it was or for how long it existed. Kolles had produced mats in the village (Figure 31) as well as owning the hair factory and since much of this work was done on an outwork basis it is possible that this part of the trade continued after the firm's bankruptcy, with outworkers then employed by Gurteens in nearby Haverhill.

¹ All references in this chapter are based on the Archive of the Arnold and Gould Company which was not catalogued at the time when the author was given access to them.

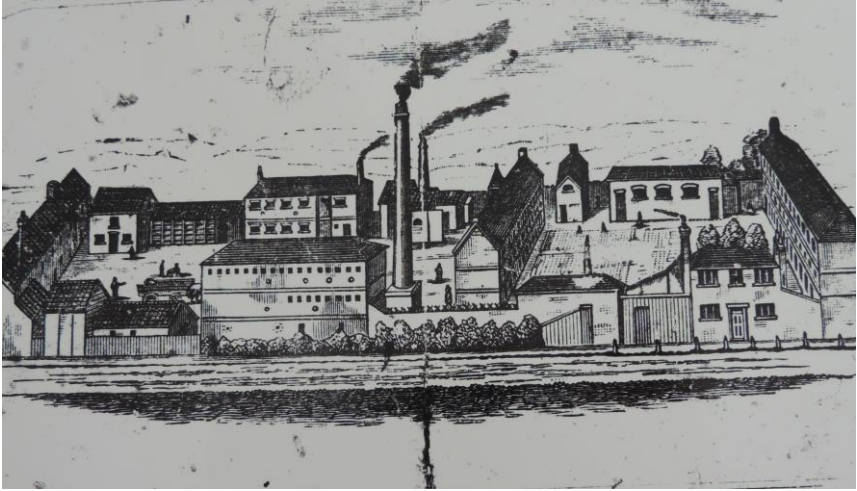


Figure 30: Arnold & Gould horsehair factory in Glemsford. Courtesy of Brian Whittaker.

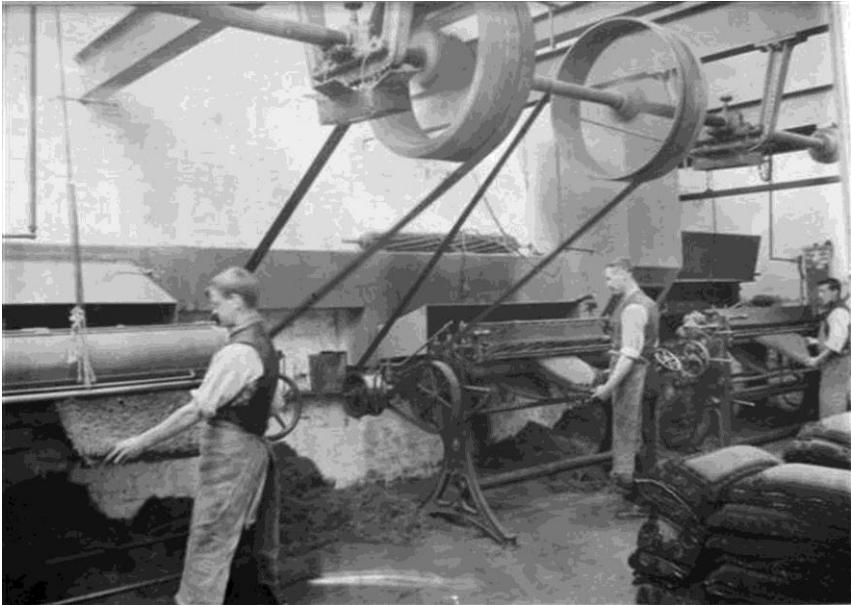


Figure 31: Mat making in Sudbury or Glemsford. Courtesy of Sudbury Museum Trust.

The Tomkins firm was at some point established in nearby Long Melford, though at one time their Glemsford unit was part owned by Arnold and Gould. Like others they supplied the services, presumably with horsehair for interlinings,

they were faced with a much reduced order book in peace time and Tomkins closed down a few years after the end of the First World War.

During the inter-war years the horsehair trade suffered as much as any and Tomkins closure had left workers unemployed. In the early years of the 1930s slump Gould wrote:

I have not made any discharges or reductions ... since Messrs. Tomkins closed down I have increased the number of workers, feeling that it is better for the workers, humanity and the country to employ eighty workers half time than forty workers full time in these days of stress and lack of employment.

The firm survived by buying raw materials at reduced costs, cutting their own prices, and giving and demanding greater discounts to customers and from suppliers. Business did not improve markedly until the outbreak of the Second World War and then with the revival of orders to fill large government contracts as in the First World War, the Glemsford factory and their peers had more demand than they could comfortably deal with. At this stage their main problems became that of obtaining untreated hair for dressing to complete orders and, once found, of shipping the raw materials into this country. Many of the Merchant Navy ships had been converted for war service and those still operating commercially faced the threat of being lost in enemy action, thus insurance for goods in transit became an additional difficulty.

Gould was anxious to keep his workers and wrote to them:

It is understood that labour will not be transferred elsewhere while we have sufficient material to keep going and our goods are required for Government contracts ... The Labour Exchange informs us that people are more likely to be called up from the Flax Factory than from here as the people here are classed as skilled workers.

There is no mention of a flax factory in the village in any local literature nor are records held at the County Record Office.

Not long after this the firm inevitably found that other factories which had lost staff to the services attempting to poach their employees and in 1941 Mr. Gould found it necessary to write a strong letter of protest to one such company:

We understand that some of our trained workers have applied to you for work and that you are taking them on ... We are a Protected Establishment and we should be glad to know if it is your practice to take trained girls from protected Establishments doing essential war work .

Clearly the firm lost some of their employees to the services and in view of the time it took for a reasonable level of competence to be achieved this caused them considerable worry. As late as 1942 Mr. Gould still considered that it took between three and five years to train workers to dress horsehair and described training within his factory as being given 'by Mother to Daughter ... Hacklers usually pass their skills from Father to Son ... we always consider that we should get bad work if we had more than about ten per cent of learners'. (Figure 32)



Figure 32: Arnold & Gould, horsehair straightening, circa 1960. Courtesy of Brian Whittaker.

Arnold and Gould did not weave hair cloth but supplied considerable quantities to Gurteens and other weavers throughout the country. Since the Haverhill firm had their own hair dressing as well weaving operation, and full records do not survive, it can only be assumed that the two firms would supply each other when either was short of a particular quality or colour needed to fill orders. Indeed this has been confirmed by the former manager of Gurteen's weaving factory. In 1939 the records at the Glemsford firm show monthly invoices from Arnold and Gould to Gurteen who were ordering ahead and calling in quantities varying in value between £250 and £350 per month. During the late 1940s and early 1950s there were invoices in both directions between the two firms which suggests that they regarded themselves as colleagues rather than competitors. It is not clear if Arnold and Gould carried out their own dyeing operation at that time or sent cleaned hair elsewhere for colour. It is known

however, that they bleached some qualities for specific use. In June 1947 Gurteens had dyed hair from the Glemsford business. A letter remains on file thanking them for doing the work, which is couched in terms that suggest that it was not a usual occurrence.

The hair was imported from various parts of the world, but particularly from South America and was sorted, cleaned and mixed within the factory. There was stringent legislation about the cleaning and disinfecting of the imported hair as there had been cases of anthrax in the past, thought to have come from factory waste. In 1909 there had been two livestock deaths from anthrax on a farm in Glemsford; the hair factory was inspected by the District Medical Officer of Health who exonerated the company from any blame.



Figure 33: Arnold & Gould, horsehair bunching, circa 1960. Courtesy of Brian Whittaker.



Figure 34: Checking length of horsehair and trimming, circa 1960. Courtesy of Brian Whittaker.

All the work within the hair dressing trade continued to be by hand, (Figures 32 & 33) as indeed it remained, clearly infinitely more labour intensive than almost any other area of textile related business. Inevitably, as new fabrics were invented which could be produced quickly and cheaply, particularly non-woven and adhesive interlinings; the woven hair fabric trade was decimated. Nonetheless Arnold and Gould survived, supplying fewer and fewer weavers with raw materials but continuing to dress quantities of hair for other uses. An article about the firm appeared in *The Field* in the spring of 1973 describing them as supplying the brush trade, upholstery firms, wig makers and rocking horse makers. (Figure 34) At that time the company employed seventy people, it shrank further over the next thirty years to employ only a handful of people, but continued to dress hair by the traditional methods. Until the year 2000 they were still supplying John Boyd's in Castle Cary, the only weaver of horsehair fabrics left in this country. (Boyd's also supply the brush and upholstery trades). Arnold and Gould remained in family ownership until 1979, when the last Mr. Gould retired and the company was taken over with Brian Whittaker as Managing Director. Sadly this last bastion of the hair dressing trade in East Anglia closed at the end of 2001.

In Long Melford both the wool and mat trades continued on a shrinking scale into the twentieth century but as far as is presently known died out in the 1950s. Without further evidence it can only be assumed that the decline was due to changing needs and cheap imports. No other information has come to light on twentieth century textile production in the village.²

² All references in this Chapter are taken from the Arnold & Gould (uncatalogued) archive.

13.

COLCHESTER AND COGGESHALL IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

According to Andrew Phillips, one of the prime movers in the founding of the 'Colchester Recalled' oral history project, from 1890 onwards Colchester's clothing trades grew enormously. Prior to 1914 about a dozen clothing companies were established in the town. Jointly they employed up to fifteen hundred factory hands, mainly women, most of whom wanted to work near to home and were prepared to accept the local rate of pay without demur. (Figure 35)

But a far larger number of women outworkers could be found in the surrounding villages. This is one of the keys to Colchester's clothing industry; an abundant supply of cheap and docile female labour ... During the First World War government contracts for uniforms served to keep order books full, while the use of predominantly female labour meant that the industry did not lose its skilled workforce to the armed services¹.



¹ Andrew Phillips, *Life in the Colchester Clothing Factories*, (Essex Journal, Spring 1993) p 8.

Figure 35: Crowthers of Colchester, branch workshop in Rowhedge Village, dated 1915 but probably a little earlier. Courtesy of Andrew Phillips.



Figure 36: The 'specials' room at Crowthers in Colchester, 1916. Probably their bespoke tailoring unit. Courtesy of Andrew Phillips.

Many firms lost considerable numbers of their female employees to munitions factories and to work on the land and in the transport services, is it possible that those working to make uniforms for the services were prevented by wartime restrictions from moving to better paid work? It would be surprising if the Colchester clothing firms were unaffected by such migration since these jobs were considerably better paid than the clothing industry. What happened in most cases was that production of long runs of uniforms instead of the variety of goods previously made, meant that time spent on each garment was reduced to the minimum. (Figure 36) In addition to this the War made British clothing manufacturers adopt more streamlined methods, modelled on those in the USA; productivity improved substantially as a result.

In the inter-war years existing companies did not expand, nor were there new clothing businesses established in the town. Women who had worked in the clothing firms in the town and whose oral histories were recorded for the 'Recalled' project, spoke of similar working conditions to those experienced elsewhere in the region, though none mentioned having applied for work prior to leaving school. (Figure 37)



Figure 37: Turners (The Colchester Manufacturing Company), machinists at work, 1930s. Courtesy of Andrew Phillips.

Mrs. H who joined Hollingtons in Coggeshall around 1930 described being taught ‘one step at a time’ perfecting skill on one operation before progressing to the next, beginning with machining sleeve seams and eventually making whole garments. She found the noise of the machines very difficult at first but presumably became accustomed to it; trainees were not disciplined for their mistakes. Hollingtons paid a set price for each dozen garments but Mrs. H could not recall what the figure was, she commented that once fully trained the money was ‘quite good’. At one time she was appointed as trainer, teaching the newcomers machining skills and construction methods, but this reduced her earnings and consequently she returned to the benches. This may seem strange, but an efficient machinist, whose pay was based on output could often earn more than those on a fixed wage.

There were twelve machinists to a bench and seven benches in Mrs H’s room. (Figure 38) The company had a canteen and a common room, and operatives were allowed one and a half hours for lunch; each room in the factory had its own toilet facilities. Table tennis was sometimes played in the common room and the company had their own football and cricket teams. Hollington’s London factory was bombed during the Second World War and many operatives moved to the Coggeshall factory. Mrs. H could not recall any strikes nor could she remember any Union membership, nonetheless union records show that there was a branch of the Amalgamated Union of Clothiers Operatives in the town as early as 1914

but it has not been possible to verify which group(s) of workers this involved². Staff clocked on as in other factories and the firm was strict about hours of employment, late arrivals were not tolerated. Machinists at Hollingtons supplied their own scissors, needles and thread, by the twentieth century this was unusual for in-workers but was still accepted practice for those working from home. Mrs. H commented that there were no real prospects for advancement, other than to forewoman but the girls did not expect to move up the promotion ladder, most only worked until they had a family.



Figure 38: Crowthers, machinists workroom, circa 1943. Courtesy of Andrew Phillips.

Mrs. D's memories were similar though she had begun work several years earlier. She had learned to sew at school and wanted to work in a garment factory as she enjoyed it. She remembered there being a hundred women in each production unit. 'Number 2 room was for uniform trousers, mostly railway, number 3 room for better class trousers, number 4 for vests; (waistcoats) and number 5 was for coats', presumably jackets. In her early working days they had no canteen or recreational facilities and no lifts to get to the upper floors. Mrs. D thought the machines were electric when she was there, but was uncertain if there were not still some treadles. Again she described the trainees being taught by experienced machinists, first doing only straight seams, then inserting pockets and then finally applying waistbands. They had a one month training period when they earned 6s 8d. per week, after which they went onto their 'own machine' and

² Amalgamated Union of Clothiers' Operatives Report, (December 1914) p 7.

were paid piece rates. The mother of the present author, working for a Liverpool waistcoat manufacturer from 1924, recalled her wage when training was 6s. per week, which suggests that pay rates were fairly standard across the industry. The machinists pressed the seams themselves while the garment was being constructed but the final press was done by a presser; like their Haverhill competitors they were not alone in using such outdated and unproductive methods at a fairly late date. The shop floor workers checked in at ten minutes to eight in the morning, if they were late they had to wait until the office staff arrived at nine o'clock and thereby lost an hour's pay. Mrs. D described being given bundles of a dozen cut garments and making the whole item, making pockets first, then flies, then seams to maximize individual efficiency. She thought that after a month she went onto 'time' and could do about a dozen items a day recalling that the maximum she was able to earn was about £2 per week. After the finishing processes and final press the whole garment was checked by the forewoman, if the work was not right then the machinist had to do it again and this meant loss of income so it was in their best interests to get it 'right first time'. Again the staff had to supply their own needles, scissors and thread but after the factory moved to another site they joined a Union and from then on the company supplied such things. Mrs. D recalled being paid 5s. for making a dozen railway uniform dungarees, using the largest stitches possible to attain the maximum speed so that they could earn more money. (Pay was usually priced for a dozen items) As with other factories in the region there was neither sick pay nor pension provision. Pregnant women worked until the birth of their baby, many returned as soon afterwards as possible. As with the history of women in the industry during the previous century, this undermines the conviction held by many that women did not work after marriage. The latter may have been true for middle class families, but for the less well off the extra income was as essential then as now. At Hollingtons there were no sackings due to lack of orders, but if work was short the employees were laid off until more work came in. Strangely Mrs. D commented that if one floor was busy and another slack the machinists could not transfer. One might expect that it would make financial sense to distribute the work more widely than to have one department on short time and pay overtime to others. Later when Mrs. D was at home with her family and her husband was out of work she took outwork for Hyams. She described an 'old fella on a trade push bike' bringing bundles of work to be made up and paying her on collection of the completed garments. Mrs. D clearly enjoyed her work. (Her parents had bought a Singer sewing machine for her twenty-first birthday, paying £17 for it, at 3s. per week over a period of three years and on this she made all the family clothes, in total £23-8s; if this ladies memory is accurate this is an extortionate interest of £6-8s. or forty per cent over the basic price.)

Mrs. S worked in the worsted garment department at Hyams in Colchester from the time she left school. She did not actively search for work there, but lived

near the factory and was told by a neighbour who was employed by the firm as a cutter that they needed learners. Her recollections are very similar to those of the women who worked at Hollingtons. Hyam's did some bespoke tailoring, these were made by senior machinists, making the whole garment. Like the other factories in the region they were kept busy during the war years, manufacturing uniforms, in this case specializing in battledress jackets.

The training period at Hyams was longer, about three months, with a trainer working full-time to teach newcomers use of power machines. Employment of a full-time trainer might suggest a fairly high turnover of staff; equally it may be simply that Hyams organized their training differently from other factories. Mrs. S remembered that trainees were paid 6s.6d. whilst in training, and 7s. if they worked on a Saturday morning, presumably only when they were considered competent to work without supervision. They normally worked from eight in the morning until six in the evening with one hour for lunch. Those who could not get home at midday took a packed lunch and ate at their work bench. The risk of soiling the work in hand must have been considerable, nonetheless this reflects how meals were taken in other factories. Clearly the advantages gained by allowing operatives a proper break at midday were not appreciated.

Mrs. S thought the firm had produced on a CMT (Cut, Make and Trim) basis for Austin Reed, sewing in the retailer's own labels by hand. She talked of the factory having both buttonhole and serging (overlocking) machines and these operations were done before work was handed out for garment construction. As with Hollington's the maximum earning for machinists was around £2 a week and apart from a brief period prior to the Second World War there was no short time. The employees were allowed to take unpaid holidays and their jobs were held for them. During the war there was no call up from her department but the informant thought that this was because most were over age for active service. Again much of the factory was engaged in uniform making and this was described as being 'very thick stuff to work on'. Anything which took a long time was referred to as 'working on a dead horse' as it meant their money would be short and they would try to make it up by taking on an extra bundle. Like other machinists interviewed Mrs. S felt that all enjoyed their work, everyone was friendly and they did not look for the amenities that staff would expect today, they were just glad to be working near home and earning when others were not.

The factory employed mechanics and cleaners so the girls were not expected to do anything except make up garments. Mrs. S thought there were about two hundred people employed on site while she was there, with cutters and pressers all male and the machinists all women. The 'passers' were women, usually senior machinists and the final check was made by the foreman; any problems were taken to the foreman not to the manager. Operatives were paid in cash but Mrs. S had no idea what the earnings were of any staff other than the machinists. She

commented that any faulty work was unpicked and done again but the machinist all took pride in doing things properly.

Mr. and Mrs. B were both in Colchester's clothing trade and commented that pay was poor until 1975 when legislation brought in equal pay. They thought people were glad of any work, particularly women, for whom the only alternative was to go into domestic service. Mrs. B worked initially on a trouser bench at Leanings, like others, making the whole garment. She recalled earning 1³/₄d an hour (7s. per week) when training and then being paid 1s. (one shilling) for a pair of trousers when first considered competent to work alone. The machinists worked a forty-eight hour week as did those at other factories. In busy periods she worked overtime and was paid an extra 7s. 2d, until legislation limited the hours. Mr. and Mrs. B commented that the factories were glad to get staff during the war when the volume of work increased and so many who had previously worked in the town's clothing industry were in the services.

Andrew Phillips comments on how little the industry changed during the inter-war years. In some ways that is not surprising, machinery did not develop greatly during that time and as the informants pointed out, alternative employment was hard to find and pay elsewhere probably lower than at the clothing factories. All Colchester clothing work was gender specific and the women expected to leave when they married, therefore earnings were more important than job satisfaction³. In addition there was much less social mobility than in the post war era and the majority of the workforce preferred to stay near their families even if it meant accepting poor pay and conditions; availability of public transport, costs and travel time must also have come into the equation⁴.

Mr. B remembered that he joined Rogers, a bespoke tailoring workshop, to learn the trade when he was sixteen, starting by felling (tacking or basting) waistcoat linings into garments. He was paid 7s. 6d per week, more than a girl of the same age, he commented that boys going into an engineering factory earned 10s. He served what was described as a four year unofficial apprenticeship and was taught each stage of making the garments. Mr. B left for the war but returned to Rogers briefly and was then paid at £1.19s. His wife worked at Roger's for a time but described it as very unpleasant, 'dusty, you couldn't breathe', and commented that the staff were not allowed to talk to each other whilst working. It was not clear from their recollections if the men and women were treated differently, but if Mr. B's memory of the rate of pay immediately post war is accurate then Rogers were not generous employers. He commented that the male apprentices had a week of paid holiday but the girls did not, this was despite legislation in 1938. In 1946 he joined Turner's (Figure 37) for an additional £1 per week to work as a 'fitter-up', supplying machinists with bundles of work

³ Phillips, *Life in the Colchester Clothing...*, p 8.

⁴ Phillips, *Life in...*, p 8.

having first checked they were complete. After his departure two girls were taken on to do the work previously handled by Mr. B, but they could not work fast enough to keep the operatives going. Mr. B moved on to Hollingtons in Colchester 'passing out' the goods and thence to their Coggeshall factory as manager, where he stayed for thirty years. Both husband and wife felt that most factories were reasonably ventilated and with good natural light from windows along one side of the building. Heating was provided by coke boilers.

Like her husband Mrs. B moved from one factory to another within the town. She said that one could always get a job at Peaks as the foreman was unpopular and explained that Leanings was a family firm and that they were extremely well liked, describing Mr. Stanley Leaning as being 'too nice really'. The manager there had been promoted from within and this was apparently the norm with lower management or supervisory staff generally moving up from the factory floor. Mrs. B said there was no chance of promotion for the female operatives but that there was certainly no harassment of any sort.

Despite the machinists all commenting that they were badly paid, and several saying that the men earned better money, few joined the union when the opportunity arose. Perhaps this more than anything else underlines how different are the attitudes of their generation of working women from those of later years. It is unlikely today that any workforce, male or female, would not use the unions to fight for decent pay and conditions. There was clearly a considerable movement of factory staff between the various manufacturers in the town and advertisements frequently appeared in all the local papers, mostly for machinists. It was not unusual for staff to be poached. Clearly with so much traffic between the various firms the foremen and women would get to know who was likely to prove a reliable employee or a reasonable charge-hand. With such competition it is surprising that the workers remained badly paid for so long, unless of course, the firms had formed a cartel to control wages. It is surprising also that the trade unions were not more active.

By 1952 Hollingtons staff worked from eight in the morning until five-thirty at night, still paid hourly or on piecework but now with two weeks paid holiday a year, consistent with other industries in the post war period. Several of the interviewees spoke of works outings to Yarmouth and other East Coast resorts and of company floats in the town's Carnival.

According to Mr. & Mrs. B three of the town's clothing firms closed down within a short period: Turners, officially known as the Colchester Manufacturing Company, Leanings and Crowthers. Hollingtons survived longer but changed hands a number of times making it difficult to trace their progress; eventually there was a management buy-out which lasted for a few years but finally all manufacturing ceased. Phillips sums up the attitudes of the female workers in the Colchester clothing industry:

While our interviewees needed a paid job, they valued more the community spirit achieved within their departments ... at a time when gender stereotyping was so strong it was probably central to this sense of community that they were all women ... In this context the absence of strong trade unionism appears more a calculated decision on the machinists' part and less a sign of industrial weakness. So long as the firm had work you had job security. If you fell out with management your skills would gain you a job elsewhere⁵.

This is true of the attitudes of the women in most of the clothing trade towns. Ambition did not come into it, just to do a job well enough to earn as much as possible and be able to take a pride in the end result. Nearness to home, support and friendship with one's peers were much more important than climbing the ladder to greater success.

In 1990 Hollingtons ceased manufacturing after their largest customer went into liquidation. Their Coggeshall site remained as a factory shop at least until 2000, selling goods bought in from other firms; this was run by Don Hockley who was on the board of the firm during their manufacturing years. Mr. Hockley talked of whole families having worked for the company, much as in Haverhill and Norwich. With their closure in Colchester the last of the clothing workers of the town had to look elsewhere for employment.

In 1928 S P Dobbs commented that the importance of East Anglia as a clothing manufacturing region had declined since the turn of the century. He claimed that Norwich was the leading centre for production of tropical wear⁶, and that approximately two thousand people were employed in the city's industry, Colchester had seventeen hundred and Ipswich sixteen hundred⁷. He does not mention Haverhill, though a greater proportion of this small town's employable population were involved in the trade than in the larger towns. Surprisingly Dobbs claimed that at Hyams in Colchester men were employed as machinists⁸; other literature on the subject makes no mention of this, and apart from Mr B's recollection does not appear in the oral history work of the Colchester group.

An enquiry held at the turn of the century had found that 'In certain country districts, especially round Colchester and round Bristol, extremely low earnings were revealed⁹'; Phillips work shows that by the early years of the twentieth century, pay in the town was comparable to other manufacturers in the region. At the time when Dobbs' book was written, many clothing firms in the region were

⁵ Phillips, *Life in...*, p 8.

⁶ S P Dobbs, *The Clothing Workers of Great Britain*, (Routledge, 1928) p 36.

⁷ Dobbs, *Clothing Workers*, p 67.

⁸ _____ p 68.

⁹ Dobbs, *Clothing Workers*, p 174.

making quantities of uniforms for the armed services and tropical gear for the colonial trade. Clearly in later years as former colonies developed their own industries British manufacturers lost business. Dobbs suggested that the rapid industrialization of the region might lead to labour shortages in future years¹⁰ and this inevitably happened, though not to any great extent until after 1945. After the 1909 establishment of the Trade Boards, machinery for managing conditions of employment and pay were gradually introduced, though pay was not regulated until after 1914. The intention of such legislation was to overcome the appalling system of sweated labour which prevailed in many areas, particularly major centres such as London and Leeds. Despite their best efforts the Trade Boards could not overcome the problem of workers being laid off for slack periods which meant that the overall picture did not improve greatly. There were areas where unions were successfully established and then local negotiations could be more effective than national agreements, but in rural areas there was still little alternative work other than agriculture. Undoubtedly in these places many were still in a position of accepting what they did not have the power to change on the basis that any work, however badly paid, was better than unemployment.

¹⁰ _____ Clothing Workers, p 83.

14.

BRAINTREE AND BOCKING IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

WARNERS

In 1901 'The Queen' magazine reported that 'the late lamented Duchess of Teck' had admired the goods produced by the silk weavers of Braintree and Spitalfields. As a direct result Warners were contracted to weave cloth for the Coronation robes of Edward VII in 1902, plus silks and silk velvets for other regalia for this important state function. Again in 1911 they wove silk for the coronation of George V. What better publicity could the new owners of the firm which was previously owned by Daniel Walters want than to produce goods for the two most important public occasions the country had seen for many years. Thus by the end of the first decade of the century Warners was well established in the town which housed one of the Courtaulds mills. William Folliot had remained chief designer and manager when the firm changed hands and the company built on his reputation and skill. Warner was clearly an astute businessman and now had the designer, goods and marketing skills needed to build the business successfully both at home and abroad. International trade fairs were still an important tool for publicity as well as for overseas sales and the firm exhibited at the Franco-British exhibition in 1908. They were award winners at the 1910 and 1911 Brussels and Turin Fairs and in 1913 and 1914 respectively they gained Diplomas in Ghent and Paris. Although Folliot and presumably other designers were used for the exclusive damask market, Warners contracted out both designs and weaving for their less expensive goods, ensuring that they had exclusivity for the designs they bought. Little has been said of their progress during the First World War but immediately after the conflict there were swings in fortune reminiscent of those over a hundred years earlier.

In 1921 Frank Warner's son Cloudesley became a partner and at his instigation the firm invested in modern machinery and subsequently built their own dye house, employing a colour chemist. Cloudesley was instrumental in opening a Paris showroom but after a comparatively short time it became apparent that fluctuations in currency exchange rates made it impractical to maintain. In 1926 the company acquired their silk printing works at Dartford in Kent and though there is no evidence of how successful it was, this ran until the outbreak of the Second World War. It may seem strange that they should combine with a print works on the other side of the Thames, but there do not appear to have been others that could have been geographically more convenient. This presumably is

the business subsequently occupied by the David Evans and Vanners amalgamated firm at Crayford, just south of Dartford.

Cloudesley Warner died in 1928, still a young man and Ernest Goodale, his brother-in-law took over his role. A solicitor with no textile training, Goodale clearly possessed a considerable business brain and guided the firm through the years to come. During the 1930s Warners widened their role into production of furnishing textiles, continuing to buy in designs and employ young designers for the less costly fabrics with a wider appeal, thus ensuring the survival of the firm through the years of recession. In 1936 they advertised a range of over fifteen thousand fabrics¹. During that time there was an explosion of house building evident now in the large estates of middle priced 1930s developments that can be seen in every town in the country; this must have fed demand for moderately priced furnishing fabrics.

The company was affected by the outbreak of war in 1939 as were all other manufacturers, Goodale refers to their having acquired government contracts which took half of their production. Like Stephen Walters in Sudbury they wove quantities of parachute silk and hat bands for uniforms, and were also contracted to weave Utility furnishing fabrics. Thus they were able to survive the war, possibly or probably with a reduced work force due to employees joining the services, but at least continuing with their own production as well as fulfilling wartime contracts.

After 1945 Warners enlarged their household textile output. Again they were wise to realize the importance of good design (Figure 39) and retained the services of Marianne Straub, an Austrian designer who had worked in this country during the inter-war years and established an outstanding reputation. Straub continued to produce work for Warner's for many years and undoubtedly helped them not only to retain their position in the industry but to build on it. The production of hand and power loomed fabrics continued at Braintree in the post war years with the firm employing about a hundred and twenty people on power looms and a dozen or so on hand looms. (Figure 40)

¹ Hester Berry, *A Choice of Design*, (Ilford, Warner Bros., 1981) p 62.

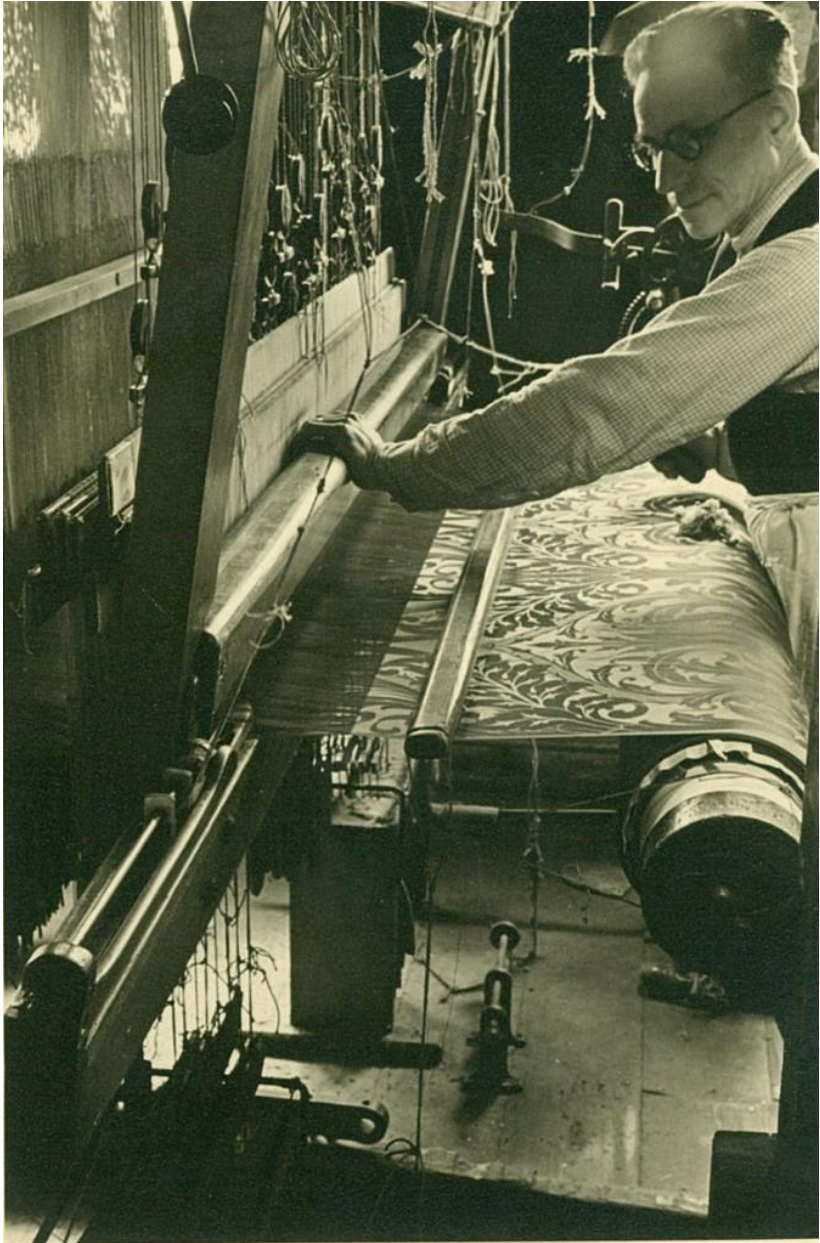


Figure 39: Mr G Watson at Warners in Braintree, weaving for Buckingham Palace, 1948. Courtesy of Braintree Museum Trust.

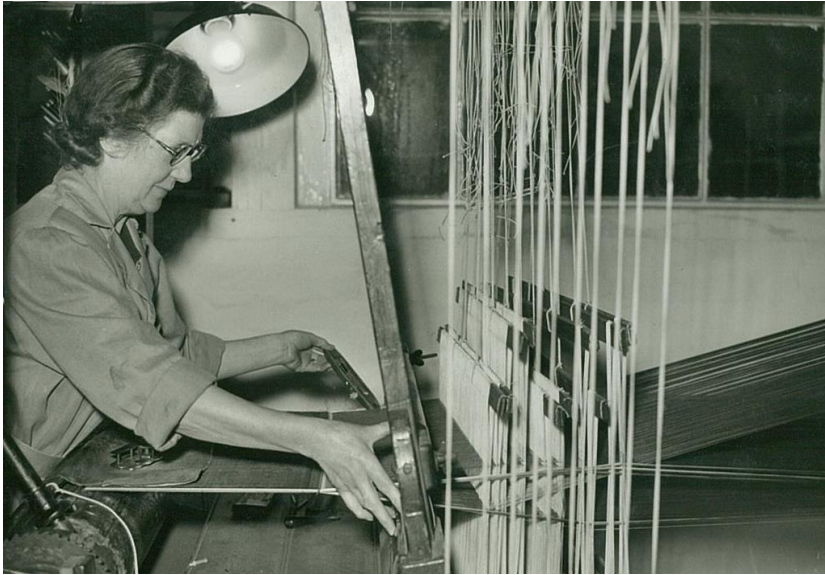


Figure 40: Warners, Mrs Calver weaving purple velvet for Coronation Robes, 1953. Courtesy of Braintree Museum Trust.

During the 1950s and 60s three directors of Warners died within a short space of time, including Alec Hunter, by then their leading designer. Goodale wrote that ‘in March 1966 Warner’s Board of Directors decided to form a wholly-owned subsidiary company to take over the factory at Braintree. ‘One reason for this was the growing volume of work being carried out at the factory for other wholesalers’². One might expect that this meant the unit was busy and successful, but fashions in household textiles change as much as for apparel and the 1960s saw a decline in the market for woven designs as the market for printed goods increased. The Braintree site was used exclusively for woven designs and in 1971 Warners closed their operation in the town. Richard Humphries who was a young apprentice designer in Braintree at the time, commented that all the equipment was extremely old, the newest they had was over twenty years old and had been bought second hand. The firm needed major investment and young and innovative leaders to energize it, they were employing only about sixty people in the town by this time and eleven of those were designers. In 1971 when they moved their entire operation to Milton Keynes the Braintree factory closed. The local authority in the new town made it attractive for businesses to relocate there and if Warners were to grow again successfully as manufacturers they needed a modern site and access to a young workforce. Some of the hand-looms and jacquard cards from Braintree were acquired by Richard Humphries who

² Sir Ernest William Goodale, *Weaving and the Warners, 1870/1970*, (Leigh-on-Sea, F Lewis, 1971) p 52.

subsequently established his supremacy in the niche market for high quality hand woven textiles for stately homes in need of refurbishment. This continued until the end of the twentieth century when the Working Silk Mill finally closed down. Since then the site has been acquired as a permanent home for Warners' design archive.

15.

COURTAULDS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY - CONTINUED GROWTH & DEPARTURE

By the end of the nineteenth century the mourning crape business showed signs of decline. If the twentieth century was to be as successful as during their best years then Courtaulds must find alternatives. The silk market had always been volatile and manufacturers were repeatedly held to ransom by the Chinese who, as the main producers of the raw material, could dictate prices. In addition imports had been affected at various times by the international political situation. These combined problems made it difficult and at times impossible for silk manufacturers to keep business stable, regardless of astute deals and customer demand. Courtaulds may well have been aware also that with increased industrialization and more women working and earning, there would be a growing market for less expensive fabrics both in made up garments and in running yardage. There had been various attempts to produce an 'artificial' fibre in the last years of the nineteenth century and Courtaulds had reportedly been negotiating with Count Chardonnet in France, the first person to produce a man-made fibre in the 1880s, but this came to nothing and the Frenchman's business failed without ever making its mark.

At the turn of the century Cross and Bevan, a small partnership of two chemists, based at Kew in Surrey, were experimenting to make filaments for light bulbs for the new electricity market. Working with cotton waste and wood pulp they found that they could produce a viscous mixture which could be extruded through a spinneret, (a fine sieve like construction) to make a continuous fibre which could then be woven¹. They took the precaution of patenting their process. Concurrently Topham and Stearn had been working to produce 'artificial' fibres and there was some joint work by the two teams. Sadly for the chemists but fortunately for Courtaulds, the researchers ran out of money and in order to carry on with their work sold the patent to Courtaulds in 1904, and a year later the laboratory was relocated to Coventry from Kew². This was to provide better premises and brought the chemists under close supervision from the company. There must have been many teething problems with the new yarn and successful development would not have been possible if the company had not been prepared to pour money into the project. However, it is clear that Courtaulds were reactive rather than proactive in these early stages, only buying in when they knew that it was possible to produce a weavable fibre which might substitute for the

¹ Edwin Beer, *The Beginning of Rayon*, (Phoebe Beer, Paington, Devon, 1962) pp 37-60.

² C H Ward-Jackson, *A History of Courtaulds*, Private Publication, 1941) p 75.

expensive naturals if properly developed. It must be wondered if it was coincidence that it was also in 1904 Courtaulds was registered as a public company.

By 1908 viscose mixtures were in production for lining fabrics and a year later the company established their American subsidiary. By 1914 textiles of a hundred per cent viscose yarns were being made on both sides of the Atlantic and were in use for a variety of purposes including woven linings and knits. Doubtless the outbreak of war in 1914 slowed progress and it was not until the early 1920s that Viscose Rayon became an important fabric for both the clothing and household textiles markets. The results of war led to great changes in the role of women both in the family and in society, the loss of so many men meant that many more women remained single and had to be totally self-sufficient. Unlike previous generations whose earnings went into the family purse incomes were their own to use as they wished. This led to increased buying power, hence the market for textiles sold to the dress trade and running yardage for home dressmaking retailers grew rapidly. Women's work became vital to the survival of industry during the war, not only in filling the munitions factories, but replacing men in areas where previously women would have been unacceptable. With the end of the war in 1918, it became obvious that women's role had changed for good with working women creating an increased demand for comparatively inexpensive clothing. Dress manufacturers and retailers supplying fabric by the yard sought to fill the need for a real substitute for expensive silk at an affordable price. Thus the development and growth of man-made textiles came at just the right time.

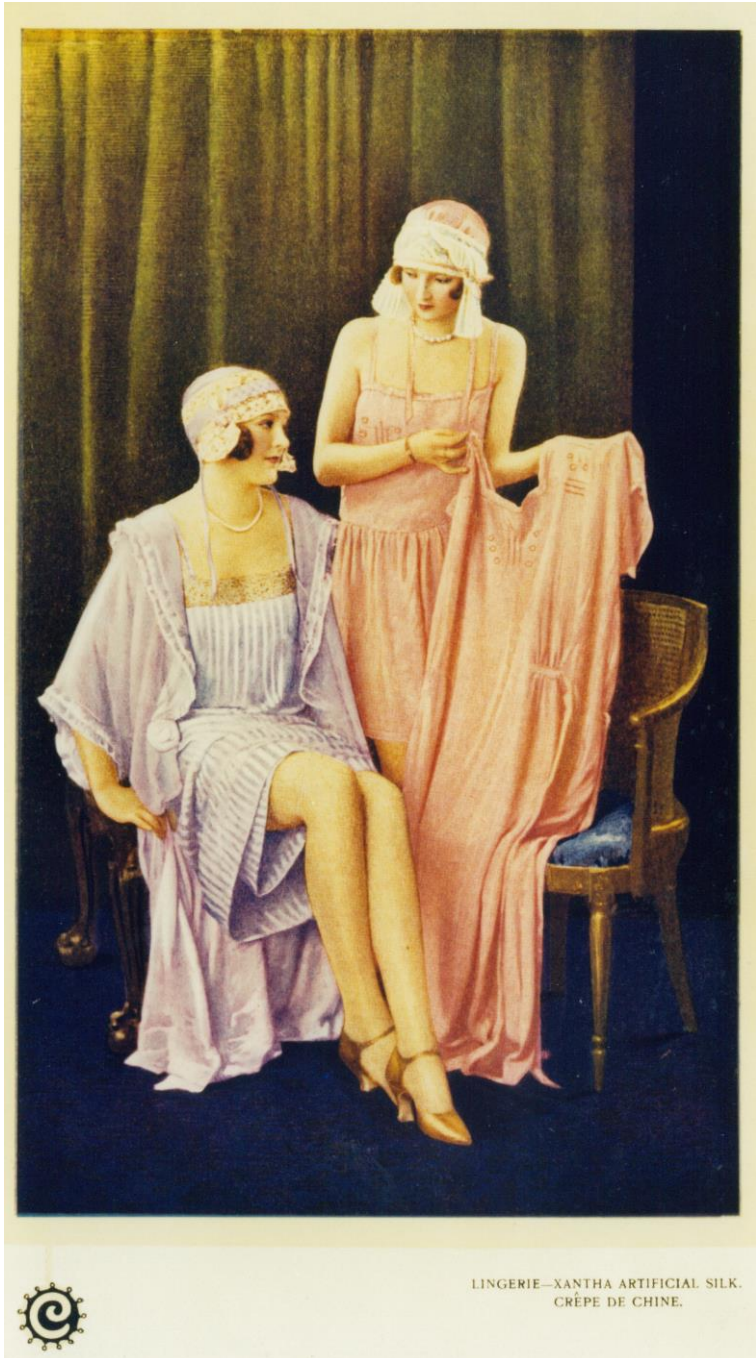


Figure 41: Courtaulds advertising their fabrics in the early 1920s. Courtesy of Braintree Museum Trust.

The initial marketing of viscose yarn and fabric was under the name of 'Artificial Silk', the word rayon first appeared in the USA in about 1925, though where or how it originated is unknown. Rayon became a generic term covering all the early man-made cellulose fibres. Despite the new designation it was the label 'Artificial Silk' which continued to appeal to the mass market and the advertisers exploited it to the full. (Figure 41) The new fibre was versatile: it could be used as continuous filament or cut into staple lengths such as found in all natural fibres except silk: it could be woven and knitted, produced in various weights and surface textures: it dyed well and since it was cellulose, was comfortable to wear. Despite all this it could never achieve the luxurious feel of pure silk and for the garment trade the tendency to both crease and fray created production problems. Nonetheless it was the first break through into non-natural textiles and as such formed a bridge between the natural fibres of wool, cotton, linen and silk and the invention in the 1930s of true synthetics such as nylon (polyamide) and polyesters. 'Artificial Silk' sold in quantities previously thought impossible: H.P. Curtis, wrote:

It has been said that women use much less material than they did twenty years ago. This is by no means true - they use much more today than they ever did. A frock today may be made of less material, but the average woman wears many more dresses than formerly. Artificial Silk mixtures have made this possible - they are cheaper than silk, and two dresses can be purchased with less money than one all silk. Women do not require any one dress to last more than a few weeks or months because fashion changes so quickly ... In April 1927 twenty two million yards of cotton/artificial silk mixed piece goods were shipped abroad³.

By 1928 Courtauld employed over 20,000 people in the United Kingdom, many in their Essex factories making viscose, and more in their American subsidiaries. A local paper in 1950 claimed that by 1921 the firm had twenty factories in operation⁴. Their American Viscose Corporation, (AVC) was responsible for an average forty per cent of Courtauld's gross profit for the years 1929 and 1930⁵, and approximately half their factory units were on that side of the Atlantic. Throughout the 1920s and 30s clothing manufacturers advertised a growing variety of garments made from 'Rayon' - underwear, dresses, blouses and running yardage were shown in fashion and trade magazines. The yarn was

³ *Artificial Silk and its Effects on Fabric Demand*, (The Textile Educator, ed. E J Mills, 1929) p 969.

⁴ Essex Weekly News 6th October, 1950.

⁵ D C Coleman, *Courtaulds, An Economic and Social History*, (Oxford University Press, 3, 1980) p 39.

used extensively in furnishing fabrics, cutting costs there as much as for the garment industry and just as importantly to the trade for, as with clothing, families of limited means were showing increasing interest in decorating their homes prettily and inexpensively. Women's magazines of the period show nearly as many articles on use of soft furnishing as they do on clothing. Mowat wrote:

What was not lost was the new freedom conferred by a relaxing of older conventions and a use of new materials, above all rayon. ... Rayon stockings, lighter in shade and weight than the older wool or cotton stockings were an important innovation of the early twenties. The new styles and materials assisted another change. The war had blurred class distinctions; and now dress tended to minimize rather than emphasize such distinctions⁶.

The impact of the new fibre on all aspects of business connected with textiles was truly immeasurable and there is little doubt that without its discovery the development of real synthetics would have been much delayed.

Like most of the other firms in East Anglia the Second World War saw Courtaulds heavily involved in production for war use, presumably parachute silk and nylon as well as uniform fabrics. By 1944 over sixty per cent of production from Halstead and Braintree, Leigh in Lancashire and Halifax in Yorkshire was for war purposes and thirty per cent for the Utility market.

In the inter-war years Courtaulds were aware of the need to modernize the textile factories in this country and in 1944 they wrote to Hugh Dalton, then President of the Board of Trade, pointing out that prior to the war, Britain had the lowest percentage of automatic looms of all the textile producing countries. Whether this referred only to the developed world or included India and others of the (then) colonies which produced cloth is unclear. Post-war the firm was still complaining that production was restricted by inability to import sufficient modern looms and that such equipment was not made to a sufficiently high standard in Britain. In 1954 they were still requesting that the Board of Trade allow them to completely re-equip the Halstead factory.

A major blow to Courtauld's international ambitions and one which would have destroyed many firms, was the system negotiated by the British Government with the USA to repay funds borrowed from America to finance the war in Europe during the years before America joined the conflict. Some British companies with factories in the States were obliged to hand them over to help meet the debt thus accrued, and most of Courtauld's American assets were lost in this deal. This must have made modernization of the Essex plants a matter of even greater urgency. Despite such a vicious blow to the company, in decimating

⁶ Charles Lock Mowat, *Britain Between the Wars*, (Chicago, University Press, 1955) p 212.

their capital, profits and the amount of goods they were able to produce, a local newspaper in 1947 was extolling their success:

It was in North Essex that Courtauld's business was founded. In 1816 at Panfield Lane, Bocking, Samuel Courtauld set up his premises midway between the great silk centres of Norwich and London. ... From 1906 Courtauld's earliest Viscose Rayon yarn was woven, dyed and finished into dress and furnishing fabrics, linings and shirtings. Local men and women, whose ancestors had made the ancient Bays (Baize) cloth ... applied their traditional weaving skills to creating new techniques for using a revolutionary textile fibre ... Today at Braintree rayon is processed, woven and knitted. At Bocking fabrics are dyed and finished and furnishings and other fabrics are woven at Halstead. ... Out of a total of over 20,000 employed by Courtaulds in the United Kingdom the company's Essex mills employ 1600 people in regular work and approximately half as many more women than men. ... There is an urgent need for many more employees than this if these three mills in North Essex are to fulfill their share of the world's demands for British rayon⁷.

In October 1950 an article noted that the Braintree Mill, built in 1910 was to be demolished and new premises built on the site to 'assist the development of the firm's already world-wide industrial ramifications ... 'Thousands of Braintree weavers and other work people, men, women and children have learned their trade and prospered as they have passed to pensionable age through the Old Mill'⁸. During the depression of the early 1930s Braintree had over two thousand of its working population out of work, but soon after the Second World War the Courtauld textile mills were unable to find enough locals to fulfill the growing demand for goods from their Essex factories and had to import staff from other parts of the country. (Figure 42) How quickly the situation changes, it was a similar time scale to the closure of all three Essex mills and the loss of employment for many who had worked in Halstead, Braintree and Bocking for the whole of their working lives. In the latter part of the twentieth century the only reminders of the firm's long history is in street names and the social facilities such as hospitals which Samuel funded during their early Essex years. (For a full account of the Courtauld factories in Essex the reader should refer to D C Coleman's volumes 'Courtauld, An Economic and Social History).

⁷ The Observer, 25th May 1947.

⁸ Essex Weekly News, 6th October 1950.



Figure 42: 1960s advertisement for Lister Courtelle (Courtaulds). Courtesy of Braintree Museum Trust.

PART TWO

16. EARLY HAVERHILL

The Gurteen family firm family has been present in Haverhill for over two hundred years; originally weavers of fustians and checks, in the second half of the nineteenth century, while continuing textile weaving they became major manufacturers of ready-made men's clothing. It was the presence of this entrepreneurial family and the employment they provided which led to the growth of the population and the town.

Haverhill is in Suffolk but perched on the borders of both Essex and Cambridgeshire. Previously little bigger than a modern day village, from the mid-nineteenth century and for nearly a hundred years, the town was home to one of the most important textile and clothing manufacturers in the country. Looking at the geographic location one must wonder how and why such a business developed in so rural an area. Sitting astride the old Roman road from Cambridge to Colchester the town's location was a perfect position for sending goods outwards to the ports of the Eastern Counties for export and west to Cambridge for onward road transport to London. Perhaps this encouraged growth from a small cottage based industry to a large factory employing most of the town's population. Even in the late eighteenth century there were daily coach services through Haverhill to London, Cambridge and Colchester, a lot of public transport which might suggest that, though small, Haverhill's business life attracted visitors; it was probably also a necessary staging post for changing horses.

Like its neighbouring towns to the east, Haverhill was dependent on the textile industry and agriculture for its livelihood for most of the last four centuries. Although methods of production and types of goods made evolved with the years, this situation did not change radically until after 1945 when the town became an overspill development for people from the East End of London, many of whom had been displaced by wartime bombing. At that time it was government policy to prevent over expansion in London and the south east and to encourage businesses to move to other regions. East Anglia, with its lack of industry was perhaps an obvious area for development.

Local directories tell us that in the early eighteenth century the population was 1,600; a hundred years later this had increased only to 2000. Wool and hemp were both produced locally and as the Gurteen family were farmers in the area it is possible that they were able to supply some of their own raw materials. Although Haverhill has grown in recent years it is still surrounded by farmland.

Gurteen company records show that in the early nineteenth century they used a number of local carriers to transport packages to customers. The eastern end of Haverhill's High Street is in Essex and A F J Brown's work shows that

improvements to roads and ports assisted in the shifting of goods to and from businesses within the region as well as moving agricultural items:

The County's transport system developed almost step by step with its changing economy ... The turnpike trust network (of roads) was designed mainly to improve access to London markets and the turnpiked cross-country roads from Braintree and Chelmsford to Maldon were also designed to facilitate the transport of agricultural produce to that port for carriage by sea to the Thames ... Major and minor improvements were also made at ports and wharves along the whole Essex coastline¹.

Brown emphasizes the increase in the number of private stage coaches and wagons brought into operation in response to the development of better road systems² and the importance of Colchester as a vital point in local economy prior to the advent of rail transport, commenting that 'in one week in 1844 five vessels brought to Colchester general goods from London, ... two sailed with grain and flour to London and two to Goole'³. The evidence shown in Brown's work, taken in conjunction with that of Gordon Jackson's research on the port of Hull shows that in the eighteenth century, the Yorkshire port received regular coasters from ports all along the East Anglian coast, all of which carried mixed cargoes, including quantities of woollen and other textile goods which were then shipped to northern Europe⁴.

Research into the origins of the Gurteen family shows that they moved from nearby Clare around the end of the seventeenth century, (at that time the name was usually spelt Gurton). The Suffolk County Record office houses an apprenticeship indenture dated 1664, showing that Daniel, son of John Gurton of Clare, was apprenticed to a basket maker in the town⁵. The family was thought to be of Huguenot origin and to have settled in the area when so many Protestants fled from Northern France and the Low Countries after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1684. The presence of the Gurteens in Clare, only a few miles from Haverhill, some twenty years earlier must discount this, though it does not exclude the possibility of their having Huguenot ancestry. Most early records of Haverhill were lost in 1665 when a fire destroyed much of the town centre, including the Parish Church where the parish registers were housed, making it impossible to trace the family before that time.

¹ A F J Brown, *Rural Essex*, (Essex Record Office, 1996) p 37.

² Brown, *Rural Essex*, pp 48-49.

³ A F J Brown, *Colchester 1815-1914*, (Essex Record Office, 1980) p 15.

⁴ Gordon Jackson, *Hull in the Eighteenth Century*, (University of Hull, 1972) pp 346-7.

⁵ Suffolk County Records Office, H501/7/728.

A nineteenth century writer supports the tradition that the weaving trade was first established in the town by Flemings escaping religious persecution after 1684, and by the Quaker community at about the same time. Certainly the Duddery, used as the trading centre was there during the eighteenth century; goods produced were described:

The early manufacture was linsey-wool, a coarse article of home-spun linen and woollen cloth ... The name 'Duddery' indicates the site of a woollen store or factory. It is elsewhere applied to certain parts of ancient fairs devoted to the sale of woollens and the term 'Dud' in some northern counties means a woollen rag to this day. It is further known that a colony of Quaker weavers surrounded that part now known as the Duddery, and hence it may be inferred that it was the seat or centre of early manufacture⁶.

Defoe refers to a 'Duddery' in his description of Stourbridge fair, just outside Cambridge, as the centre for wool trading at this major annual event where traders from all over Europe met to do business⁷. The Haverhill Duddery was in the town centre and directly on the main road where the coaches and carriers travelling to and from the coast, Cambridge and London all passed; this was where the master weavers of the town sold their goods and possibly bought raw materials. In the nineteenth century Daniel Gurteen IV made his home, still called the Duddery, in the original wool hall. Local historian, Patrick Crouch notes a Thomas Baskerville passed through Haverhill in 1662 and commented that the population was busy with: 'the making of fustian and dimity is here a great trade'⁸. (The reference here to dimity is surprising since this sheer, lightweight fabric is only known to have been made from cotton since the beginning of the eighteenth century, one must wonder if there was a forerunner in fine linen or wool).

Many Quakers dwelt in this part of East Anglia and most were involved in the textile trades. The bouts of persecution suffered by members of religious minorities possibly led to a preference for occupations which, if they were forced to move, could be practiced anywhere regardless of language and geographic position, not dissimilar to the work chosen by the itinerant Jewish communities in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The presence of a Quaker (Society of Friends) settlement in Haverhill is supported by the name of Quaker's

⁶ Gurteen Company Archive, 19/45, Crampton's Haverhill Almanac, (1894) p 22.

⁷ Daniel Defoe, *A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (Exeter, Webb & Bower, The Promotional Reprint Company, 1992) pp 33-4.

⁸ Patrick Crouch, *How Important Was Haverhill*, (Haverhill History Society Journal, 1997) p 13.

Lane which runs along the side of the Gurteen factory site and is confirmed in the history of the Society of Friends in the town during the 1660s and 70s:

Robert Dawkins (also spelt Darkin) Parish Officer, and Elias Dowty, an informer, came to meetings regularly on first and fourth days of the week and took names of those present ... They informed Gervas Elways JP who issued distress warrants so often that whole estates were taken ... from another for a fine of 10s they took yarn worth 18L (£) ... and when they made spoil of a poor weavers goods, they brake his loom in pieces with the work in it, the only means he had to get bread for himself, his sick wife and a young child. The distresses taken in a few months time were of the following values. From Robert Sharpley, Anthony Appleby and Daniel Grindley, John Salmon, Giles Barnardiston and William Reynolds, Thomas Hall, John Edwards and John Bird, Thomas Evans, George Evans and Richard Power total of £261.19.0 ... (and in 1675) Taken by Distress for religious meetings, George Evans, working tools and other goods - £4; Daniel Catlin, wool weavers tools and utensils - £2; ... Daniel Grindley - Fustian worth £27; ... George Evans, Robert Sharp, Daniel Catlin and Daniel Grindley, all of Haverhill were committed to Bury (St. Edmunds) gaol for refusing to pay 2s.6d towards the Steeple House rate⁹. (Parish Church)

Darkin was a weaver, documents in the Gurteen archive show that he bought, sold and let business property in the town regularly and was heavily involved in local affairs, all of which suggest he was a fairly successful businessman. That his affluence was the result of trade alone it is not possible to verify but his persecution of the Quakers may well have been due as much to business rivalry as it was to religious beliefs. The "Official Guide to the Borough of St. Edmundsbury" quotes an unnamed author, writing of Haverhill: 'By the middle of the 1700s a traveller had noted that every cottage brought forth a clatter as the workers applied themselves to their looms'¹⁰.

A 1958 article in a local paper claimed that a 1625 inventory of the town listed a Guildhall, a 'Prentice Hall, Chantry House, Daybell House and Alms Houses'¹¹. (It has been impossible thus far to establish the meaning of a Daybell house). Property conveyances in the Gurteen archive show something of the town's weaving trade. The earliest of these, dated 1667, refers to a property transfer

⁹ J Besse, *The Suffering of a People Called Quakers, I*, (un-named publisher, 1670) pp 674-678.

¹⁰ Borough of St. Edmundsbury, *Official Guide*, p 75.

¹¹ South West Suffolk Echo, (27th December, 1958) p 6.

between Robert Darkin and William Argent, both woollen drapers¹². Of the hundred and thirty surviving documents covering the period from 1667 to 1890 sixteen give the occupations of those named, eleven are described as fustian weavers, two are referred to as woollen drapers, and one a silk weaver. (Fustian was originally made in single yarns or in mixes of wool, linen and hemp, later it was of cotton or wool with a linen warp, customarily used to make workmen's smock-frocks.)

The first conveyance referring to Daniel Gurteen, whose family was to be instrumental in the town's development, is an 1808 indenture referring to a property transaction with John Webb; both men were weavers; Webb's daughter Grace married Daniel Gurteen II. They were the parents of Daniel III who began the expansion of the firm. During the nineteenth century many of the properties in the conveyances were bought by the Gurteen family, either for their business premises or for renting as dwellings to their employees.

This then is some of the background to the textile trade of the town, but how did it develop so successfully in Haverhill during the nineteenth century when so much of the production of textiles and clothing for which East Anglia was known disappeared or went to other parts of England?

¹² GCA, Conveyance, 1/30.

17.

NINETEENTH CENTURY HAVERHILL

Those were the days of the smock frock, a worn and shabby one for every day, a better one of a softish greenish hue for Sundays. This in its time descended to weekday wear and very likely to another and a third generation. The smock was a comprehensive garment that reached below the knees, the farm labourers lower extremities being encased on Sundays in short brown leather buskins which met the hem of the smock. To work he wore cord or fustian breeches, hitched up in the legs to the point of comfort by a leather strap worn garter wise, just below the knee¹. (Figure 43)



Figure 43: Gurteens, early 19th century linen smock-frock. Photograph by Norman Brand

¹ Essex Review, (1900) p 245.

The firm's archive shows that in 1784 Daniel Gurteen II opened a bank account with a deposit of £1,000, a substantial amount of money when working men earned a few shillings a week. Within a very short period the initial investment was followed with a number of smaller sums amounting to several hundred pounds. Written records do not say from where the money came, but it is known that Daniel was both a master weaver and a successful farmer. The earliest concrete evidence of weaving in the town in the nineteenth century is in sales records of his business, fustian and checks were being dispatched by carrier to London and Leeds as well as to retailers in towns and villages closer to home very early in the century².

The sales records for these early years are fragmentary with notes of outgoing goods in 1801 and 1803 on the same page with nothing entered for the intervening year. Whether this shows that Gurteen was a poor record keeper or that other order books have been lost is impossible to tell.

On February 18th in 1801 Gurteen sold to 'old' Edward Boavis.	
Feb 18th 1 ps (piece) of cloth 20 yd.	£1. 6.0.
May 28th 1 ps Blow (blue?) check	£1. 9.0.
ditto, light blow	£1. 6.0.
June 10th 1ps ½ elle Fustian	£1. 14.0
(An ell or elle was a measurement of cloth of approximately 45 inches wide though at times it seems to have been used to describe width or running length).	
In 1803 he sold to Mr. Cartor(?) 1 ps check for	£1. 7.0 ³

(The spelling in these early records varies from one entry to the next).

As early as 1806 Gurteen was supplying both Benyons and Marshalls in Leeds, these sales are listed only as 'goods'. Both were major linen yarn manufacturers so possibly there was a reciprocal trade with Gurteen buying from Leeds and then supplying them with woven cloth to supplement their own production.

Even at this stage and with all goods woven on hand-loom, Gurteen was producing and selling textiles of varying widths. In 1819 he sold to Janet Webb of Haverhill, (possibly his mother in law):

Feb 23 rd . 1 ps ½ Ell Fustian.	£1. 6.0.
Ditto, ½ yd Fustian,	£1. 2.6.
1 ps check	£1. 6.0. ⁴
(A piece length would be about twenty five yards).	

² Gurteen Company Archive, 18/1.

³ GCA, 18/1.

⁴ Ditto.

The first recorded sale of a ready-made garment is in 1819, when a smock frock was sent to Mr. Robert Fox of Great Bardfield in Essex. (This family business survived in Bardfield until shortly before the end of the twentieth century). By 1823 smocks were going out in varying ‘nails’ (2 ½ inches) lengths. Gurteen sent to Mr. Joal Myers of Saffron Walden:

Dec 18 th 2 slops @ 8/-	16s 0d (simply cut untailed clothing)
1 ditto,	7s 6d
1 pr trows,	4s 6d (abbreviation for trousers)
1 Frock 22 nails	8s 3d
1 Frock 21 nails	8s 0d
4 Frocks 20 nails	7s 9d
Dec 25 th 1 White Frock 22 nails -	8s 6d ⁵
Wide gathers.	

It is clear from evidence of literature and paintings of the period that fustian clothing was worn by most workmen in the early and middle years of the century, made up into smocks in rural areas and into slops for those in urban occupations. Thomas Hardy’s anti-hero in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is described wearing fustian clothing ‘before the nineteenth century had reached one third of its span’⁶. (Hardy also refers specifically to rural menfolk wearing smock frocks in both *The Dorsetshire Labourer* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*). Mrs. Gaskell in her novels *North and South* and *Mary Barton*⁷ makes a number of references both to the weaving and wearing of fustian, while Flora Thompson in *Lark Rise to Candleford* refers to ‘an unbleached drill jacket known as a sloppy’⁸.

Successive issues of regional trade directories covering the town list businesses and describe their output. It is not clear if such publications charged a fee for inclusion as do so many now, or if they were a local service. If the former then it is likely that only the more affluent businessmen would afford an entry. In Pigot’s 1830 Directory Haverhill is described:

The principal street is wide, but the houses are indifferently built; and the principal trade and manufacture of the town is in the weaving a coarse description of twilled cotton cloth called drabbett,

⁵ Ditto.

⁶ Thomas Hardy, *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, (London, Penguin, 1974 ed.) p 7.

⁷ Elisabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, (London, Penguin, 1974 ed.) p 166 & p 172, and, *North and South*, (London, Penguin, 1974 ed.) p 132.

⁸ Flora Thompson, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, (London, Penguin Classics, 1979ed.) p 7.

used principally for waggoners' frocks; there is also a silk manufactory upon a small scale⁹.

At that time seven drabbett manufacturers were operating in the town, only one of whom was listed as a (smock) frock-maker. Gurteen is not shown as making smocks, though company records show that by then he had been making and wholesaling these rural workmen's garments for at least twelve years. The next description of the town is in White's Suffolk Directory of 1844 and it would seem that Haverhill was considerably more prosperous than fourteen years earlier:

The town consists chiefly of one broad street, about a mile in length: and many of its old thatched houses have given place to neat slated buildings during the last twenty years. It was formerly noted for checks, cotton and fustians and has now a silk mill employing about 70 hands and several manufacturers of drabbetts¹⁰.

Checks were used for shirts, jacket linings and for women's gowns and aprons as well as curtaining and other domestic purposes. Traditionally fustian was an even weave fabric while drabbett was a close twill weave; possibly the acquisition of different looms had precipitated the change though without further evidence this cannot be confirmed. It is not clear when or why the Gurteens introduced drabbett; they continued manufacturing fustian for some time, though by the 1850s only drabbett appears in their records. Although the latter is referred to here as cotton, the company books show that in the 1880s they were still ordering linen warp yarn from Yorkshire for its production.

White's 1874 Directory confirms the type of goods previously produced and adds that the town:

... now has three mills for weaving silk into umbrella and parasol fabrics and employing about 200 persons; and a large manufactory of drabbetts, in which about 400 weavers are employed. About 2,000 females in the town and surrounding villages are engaged in making up the latter article into smock-frocks. The linen and cotton yarns of which drabbetts are woven are mostly brought from Leeds and Stockport. There is also a hair seating and cocoa-nut (matting) manufactory where employment is given to about 100 persons¹¹.

The hair factory to which this quotation refers was for horsehair cleaning, and possibly weaving, at that time it was owned by Kollé & Son who also operated at

⁹ GCA, Picot's Suffolk Trade Directory, (1830) p 760.

¹⁰ White's Suffolk Trade Directory, (1844) p 292.

¹¹ _____ (1874) p 292.

Clare and Glemsford, both just a few miles away. The silk manufacturers listed are detailed in the chapters on Sudbury and Glemsford. Daniel Gurteen III is shown as ‘manufacturer, farmer and landowner; the company is described as drabbett and linen manufacturers and wholesale clothiers. William Hawes is listed as a shirt and frock-maker, later in the century his name has disappeared from the listings.

Until recently it has been assumed that until the advent of the sewing machine in the mid-nineteenth century most clothing was made either in the home or by jobbing tailors and dressmakers (previously called milliners). But this was not so; Beverley Lemire writes that the need to provide clothing for the armed forces led to an enormous growth in manufacture¹². Most of the work was ‘put out’ to women working at home, and it was reliant on the low pay of seamstresses. These industries grew up around naval ports and military establishments. A look at the *Song of the Shirt* by the poet Thomas Hood¹³, illustrates that, even then, there was concern for the state of the women employed to stitch. From this began the system which still prevails in many instances. The manufacturer, who in reality simply bought the cloth and sent it to out-workers, on collecting the finished items sold them on to dealers who supplied the retailer. All had to make money out of the goods and there is little doubt that the needlewomen earned the least. Since Haverhill was not a military town there seems to be no direct correlation between the Gurteens business and the needs of the army, but assuredly, the business which started with supplying clothing for the agricultural labourer and others in menial work developed on similar lines to those in Colchester and other towns dominated by military or naval bases.

CENSUS RETURNS

The census records for 1871 shows 133 people employed in Haverhill as clothing workers, though others are listed as weavers. If the figure previously quoted from the trade directory of 2000 outworkers is accurate then surely most must have lived outside the town, perhaps this gives some indication of how much local employment, particularly of women, depended on textile and clothing production for work and of the need of manufacturers for out-workers in the vicinity. Census enumeration then was such that one cannot rely solely on it, though analysis in conjunction with other records suggests that by then the Gurteen family employed a substantial and growing workforce. The census from 1841 onwards gives a picture of demographic change, population growth and family size, and of areas dominated by one trade or industry. After 1851, as other drabbett weavers went

¹² Beverley Lemire, In the Hands of Work Women, English Markets, Cheap Clothing and Female Labour, (Costume Society Journal 44, 1999) pp 24/5.

¹³ Thomas Hood, *The Song of the Shirt*, (Hoods Poetical Works, undated) p 520.

out of business and the Gurteen concern grew and diversified, the census illustrates how many were employed in the different strands of this one company. In 1851 one other drabbett manufacturer is still listed in the town census; Joseph Nott is shown as employing 30 hands, Daniel Gurteen as manufacturer and farmer. By 1861 Nott's name had disappeared and Daniel Gurteen III is shown as dress (smock-frock) manufacturer employing 130 workers, and farmer employing a total of 14 hands. John Lester is shown as a silk manufacturer employing 90 males, 56 females and 84 boys and girls. By 1881 Gurteen is listed as a 'wholesale clothier with two thousand hands and farmer with forty-five hands; in manufacturing terms a sixteen fold increase of staff within ten years. By this time he is the only textile producer in Haverhill.

WORKADAY HAVERHILL

The 1830 Directory noted that there were two schools in Haverhill¹⁴. Commonly at that time, one was a Church of England foundation and the other a non-conformist establishment. Forty years before the 1870 education act and half a century before the advent of compulsory education in the 1880 act, parents in 1830 were required to pay for all schooling. With a population of only 1,649, that the town could maintain two schools which required payment suggests that Haverhill's population was not suffering the degree of hardship felt by their neighbours in Sudbury, Glemsford and Braintree prior to Courtaulds moving production there, where all were entirely dependent on the silk trade. The 1838 Royal Commission on the State of the Weaving Industry took evidence from three drabbett weavers:

These weavers employed in making drabbett which is a fabric of which warp is hemp and the shute of cotton ... used for smock frocks for farmer's men and as undress for grooms and other gentlemen's servants ... As lately as about forty years ago weavers said there were looms engaged in weaving woollens for neighbouring farmers. At that time they said farmer's wives and daughters after their days work amused themselves spinning ... the woollen manufacture has all but forsaken this part of England¹⁵.

White's 1844 Directory comments on the improvements in the town over a period of twenty years claiming that the several drabbett manufacturers employed a total of three hundred and thirty weavers and 'many women are here employed in making up the latter article into smock-frocks ... and a silk manufacturer

¹⁴ Pigot's Suffolk Trade Directory, (1830) p 760.

¹⁵ Royal Commission on the State of the Weaving Industry, (1838) p 355.

employing about 70 hands'¹⁶, presumably this is Stephen Walters (see chapter on Sudbury). There is nothing to indicate the presence of any form of power machinery and the local almanacs of the 1880s confirm that all textile production had been hand-loomed until Gurteen's major investment in factory buildings, steam engines and looms in 1856. *The Victoria County History of Suffolk* describes the trade in Haverhill in the first half of the nineteenth century:

About the year 1815 these fabrics (checks and fustians) were ... replaced by drabbett, of which the warp was composed at first of hemp and subsequently of linen, and the woof (weft) of cotton. Drabbett was so called from its colour, but it was also dyed olive or slate. At Haverhill which was the principal seat of the industry, there were in 1840 some 330 weavers of drabbett employed by half a dozen masters who travelled about the neighbouring country to obtain orders. ... A full length of drabbett, called a 'chain' (40 yards) was a week's work for a man, but at least half the weavers were women and children, who could not on average produce more than half a chain apiece. The price paid for weaving a chain varied from six shillings to eight shillings according to the fineness, but out of this the weaver had to find his own loom and harness and also defray the cost of winding and of candles and find dressing for the warp, so that the net earnings were not more than six shillings. A loom and harness were worth £4.4s.0. A loom would last a lifetime, but the cords of the harness required constant mending and renewing, which involved an expense of about eight shillings a year ... They complained that their wages had fallen twenty five per cent. A dyer could make half a crown a day and some beer, but he was often wet and the cost of his shoes and clothes was more. The drabbett weavers had not, however, to suffer like the silk weavers from chronic unemployment¹⁷.

Textile dyes at that time were made entirely from vegetable sources and there is no indication as to whether the dyers were employed by the master weavers or operated independently. The Gurteens employed their own indigo dyers during the second half of the nineteenth century and continued to do so well into the twentieth century, at no time did they dye other colours all of which were sent out.

According to evidence given to the Royal Commission, the price for weaving a chain had fallen from 11s to 6s, though it is not clear over what period this decline took place. However it was said that workers could not afford to strike for

¹⁶ White's, (1844) p 492.

¹⁷ Victoria County History of Suffolk, 2, (London, Constable, 1907) pp 274/5.

better pay and that despite hardship many boys were still brought up in the trade¹⁸. The situation was reflected nearly a hundred years later amongst Lancashire cotton workers; Woodruff, writing of his early childhood in Blackburn commented on the outcome of the 1926 general strike ‘henceforth you toed the employers’ line or you were for it’¹⁹.

One of the results of the method of employment was the prevalence of the truck system. This was where, instead of being paid in cash, the employee was paid with promissory notes or token coins, both of which were exchangeable for goods only in specified outlets. Such retail shops were frequently owned by the masters and were reputedly considerably more expensive than elsewhere. The shop at Styal in Cheshire, adjacent to the Greys Quarry Bank Mill was run this way with the cost of goods bought by the workers automatically deducted from their wages²⁰. One of those in Haverhill named as having his own token coin is Darkin, who, as already shown, was a prime mover in the persecution of the local Quaker community. The two surviving Haverhill tokens are both dated 1794. (Figure 44) The name Fincham appears on the face side of one coin with a weaver at his loom on the obverse. No extant record shows a weaver of this name in the town though there was a Fincham weaving in Norwich. (The same illustration of the loom appears on the obverse side of the token issued by Herveys of Norwich). The Fincham token bears around the rim, the words ‘exchangeable in John Fincham’s shop’. Some of the early Gurteen goods were despatched via a carrier called Fincham. At some stage, probably in the mid-nineteenth century, the company adopted the hind’s head logo shown on the token as their own. Does this mean that the weaving business owned by Fincham operated in both Haverhill and Norwich or did Gurteen buy the Fincham carrier out at a time when he was shipping large quantities of their goods, or did he adopt the image as indicative of the speed with which his goods were delivered? (There were no laws of copyright at the time). No clear evidence has been found to explain but the hind’s head is still used as the firm’s logo. The second token shows a shuttle and a plough on the obverse side with ‘success to the plough and shuttle’, around the rim is engraved with ‘payable in London and Hull’, clear evidence of the spread of local manufacturers customer base in the late eighteenth century.

¹⁸ Royal Commission, (1838) p 355.

¹⁹ William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End, An Extraordinary Childhood*, (Halifax, Ryburn, 1993) p 251.

²⁰ N Nixon and J Hill, *Mill Life at Styal*, (Altringham, Willow Publishing, 1986) p 19.



Figure 44: Haverhill Token Coins, late 18th century. Photograph by Norman Brand,

Evidence in the works of both Brown and Jackson, quoted in the previous chapter confirms this; Jackson lists all the ports easily accessible for exporting Haverhill goods, Southwold, Woodbridge, Ipswich, Harwich, Maningtree, Colchester and Malden all had regular shipments to and from Hull²¹, and he affirms 'Universal distribution of goods throughout Hull's export markets was, if anything, accentuated in the later part of the eighteenth century'²².

Apart from the Darkin token no proof of the truck system in Haverhill has been found, legislation to prevent its use, like most preventive measures, must have been difficult, if not impossible to enforce.

THE GURTEEN FAMILY

Little is known about the first two generations of Daniel Gurteen other than that they were probably master weavers. The town's early records were lost when fire destroyed the church, thus it is impossible to trace their origins further. Daniel

²¹ G Jackson, *Hull in the Eighteenth Century*, (University of Hull, 1972) pp 346/7.

²² Jackson, *Hull in the...*, p 57.

Gurteen III, the grandson of the first 'Gurton' known to have been a textile producer in the town, was born in Haverhill in 1809. (It is unclear if the spelling was changed or simply evolved. The 1801 order book shows Gurton, everything thereafter refers to Gurteen). Daniel was educated locally and in 1823 was apprenticed to Overton Hebblewhite, drapers in Market Hill, Cambridge, to learn the trade. This was not unusual, in North and South Mrs Gaskell refers to Manchester manufacturers sending their sons in to 'sucking situations' working for colleagues or competitors of their fathers and going into the family firm only when they had a thorough knowledge of various aspects of the trade²³. There is no clear evidence that young Daniel was taught weaving skills, but the priority given to his ability to sell clearly shows that his father was aware of the need to create markets to sustain and build the business. Successive generations of the family received their training in similar ways.

After his apprenticeship Daniel Gurteen III joined his father in the Haverhill business, working initially as a traveller, family legend suggests this was when he was about twenty. In 1884 a local paper eulogizing the town's debt to Daniel's business acumen and social awareness, described his early days with the firm:

Whether it was at home in the factory, superintending the manufacture of their then only staple, (fustian) or "on the road" travelling, in those old days, his power was acknowledged. He was known to be unwearied in industry and his honour, act and word were beyond question. Travelling in those days - before the "poetry of the railways" was sung, meant hard and persistent labour. We do not wish by one word to detract from the energy tact and push of "men on the road" in the present day and in these cutting times: but we do say that the means of locomotion now and that which existed then makes all the difference. Therefore we say that travelling for commercial men was not the easy thing it is in the present. No, travelling in those days meant being in the saddle or on the box of a coach *early*; it meant hard riding, exposure to all weathers, a bruised body and sore bones from jolting occasioned by the bad roads traversed. Thus did Mr. Gurteen labour, ... so we believe, did the present head of the firm of Gurteen and Sons lay the foundation up which, in these later years, father and sons have erected so noble - so vast - a superstructure²⁴. (Figure 45)

²³ Elisabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, (London, Everyman, 1993 ed.) p 66.

²⁴ GCA, Cheven's Haverhill Almanac, *Biographical Sketch*, (1884) p 2.

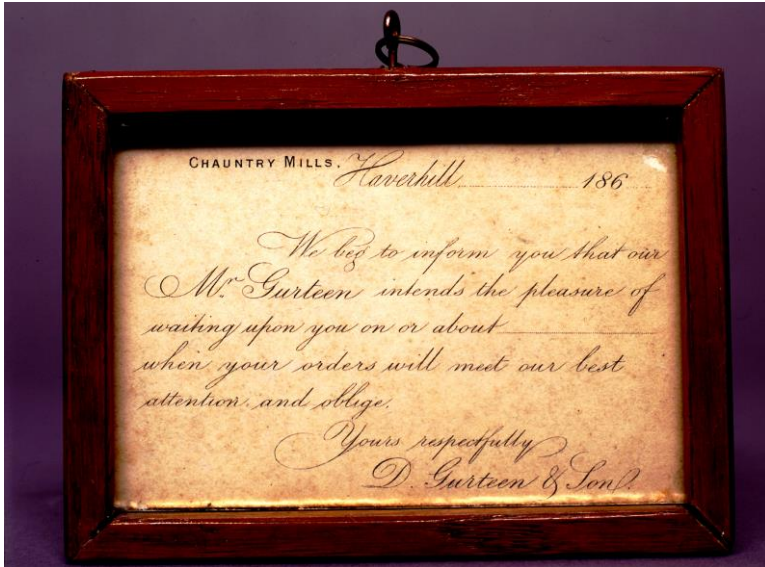


Figure 45: Daniel Gurteen's business card, 1860s. Photograph by Norman Brand,

Despite this piece of sycophantic journalism there is no evidence that Daniel spent time on the factory floor. There is little doubt that the description of the life of a travelling salesman in the early nineteenth century is near the truth and when considering the strict rules, hours and conditions of work imposed on his workforce, he clearly expected nothing of his employees that he did not give himself. Daniel III married in 1833 and that same year was taken into partnership in the business, the deeds survive in the firm's archive:

MEMORANDUM OF AN AGREEMENT OF PARTNERSHIP

Made this 31st day of January 1833 between DANIEL GURTEEN SENr. of Haverhill on the one part and DANIEL GURTEEN JUNr. on the other part, the said Daniel Gurteen Senr. and Daniel Gurteen Junr. both hereby jointly to carry on the business of Drabbetts Manufactory.

The said Daniel Gurteen Senr. to have a two third and the said Daniel Gurteen Junr. one third profits of the said business and be it further remembered that the said Daniel Gurteen Senr. have brought into the said business the sum of TWO THOUSAND POUNDS and the said Daniel Gurteen Junr. the sum of ONE THOUSAND POUNDS, the said sums to bear interest respectively

at the rate of five per cent per annum and any addition made to the capital of either to bear interest at the same rate²⁵.

Apart from isolated notes of goods sold there are few records of the next seventeen years. Aside from the shawl trade which had effectively if temporarily salvaged the failing woollen industry in Norwich, and the growing Courtauld's concerns in Braintree and Bocking of which Coleman has written extensively, most of East Anglia's textile production was in terminal decline. The few reports available suggest the situation was no different in the Haverhill area. Local directories and census returns show that the number of master weavers in the town had dwindled to two drabbett manufacturers and one silk maker.



Figure 46: 1862, drawing of Gurteen new factory. Photograph by Norman Brand,

Daniel IV joined his father and grandfather in the business in 1854 at the age of twenty, and two years later in 1856 three major events took place. Firstly, Daniel Gurteen II died and his son and grandson took over. Secondly, Daniels III and IV set into motion plans to mechanize by building a factory to house a steam engine and power looms. (Figure 46) This was to be the first in Haverhill and probably the first in Suffolk. The third equally important factor was the opening of the Colne Valley and Halstead Railway, which in 1863 was extended into the town with a station at Haverhill South. When the Great Eastern line from Shelford to Sudbury passed through the town in 1865, linking with the Colne

²⁵ GCA, Agreement of Partnership, 1833.

Valley line at Haverhill North station, it gave ongoing connections to every part of the country and to the east coast ports used for exporting goods to the colonies and to Europe. It is impossible to judge if business expansion and mechanization were planned prior to the death of Daniel II, or if the more conservative parent had perhaps restrained his entrepreneurial son. The opening of the rail link and the development of the factory occurring in the same year can be no accident. Daniel III was a major shareholder in the Colne Valley Railway Company and may also have held shares in the Great Eastern. It is possible that siting the two stations in the town, one near the factory and one near the Duddery, was due to his influence. The quick and efficient shifting of raw materials and completed goods in and out of the factory was as important as the industrialization process within the mill. Perhaps Daniel's early experiences travelling for the firm had hardened his determination to grasp modern means of transport as soon as it became available. Coleman claims that Samuel Courtauld invested in railway stock in order to use some of his money²⁶. Surely a businessman as astute as Courtauld viewed the advent of a national rail network as a tool to be used to aid and develop his business. The *Victoria County History of Essex* commenting on the completion of the region's rail network in the 1850s notes that the Great Eastern, formed in 1862 (from smaller independent lines) had taken over the harbour at Lowestoft, and:

It would be a mistake to suppose that the modern development of Suffolk industry was solely or even primarily due to these new facilities of communication. But the establishment of direct connexions (sic) with the resources of a world-wide commerce together with the almost simultaneous removal of tariff restrictions on imports were the indispensable conditions of the great progress subsequently achieved²⁷.

By the time factory and rail links were running effectively in the mid-1860s the Gurteen family was the only major employer in Haverhill. Both Daniel III and his son Daniel IV lived in the town, and like the Gregs of Quarry Bank Mill in Cheshire and some other industrialists, they were heavily involved in the administration of the area, serving on the town council and later county councils and as magistrates. The firm provided employment for the majority of men and women in and around the town, (Figure 47) as well as many of the houses in which the population lived. Father and his sons were heavily involved in the non-conformist church, Daniel IV was vocal in support of compulsory education and the women in the family were instrumental in setting up and running local

²⁶ David C Coleman, *Courtauld, An Economic and Social History, 1*, (Oxford, University Press, 1969) p 27.

²⁷ VCH of Suffolk, 2, (1907) p 252.

charities. Surely with so much input into local affairs, their influence on the council(s) would be considerable. Daniel Gurteen IV, describing the town in mid-century spoke of great poverty. ‘Often 500 men stood idle on the Market Hill, waiting for work and food. So great was the distress that the Vestry met twice a fortnight for the purpose of sending families to Australia and elsewhere²⁸. (The Vestry consisted of local ratepayers who, under the terms of the early poor laws, had responsibility for care of the poor in their community). Daniel commented that ‘what men want is work, not charity’. According to the local almanac, he and his father set about providing that work²⁹.



Figure 47: Gurteens machinists at work, 1881. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

Coleman highlights the poverty of East Anglia and writes of London silk manufacturers moving to the region in consequence³⁰. The 1838 Royal Commission comments that ‘trade suffered much more severely than in Spitalfields ... In other branches (fustians) earnings are higher but time out in unemployment makes the pecuniary condition of weavers below agriculture’³¹.

When Daniel III took over the business after his father’s death in 1856 he was 46 years old and had worked in the business all his adult life, during that time he had seen most other textile manufacturers in Haverhill and in the surrounding towns go out of business. The bulk of textiles made for the working class market were now produced in the North, the Midlands, Scotland and Ireland. The much greater development of the textile industry in those areas was due to a number of

²⁸ GCA, Crampton’s Haverhill Almanac, *Memoir*, (1895) piii.

²⁹ _____ piii.

³⁰ Coleman, *Courtauld, I*, p 61.

³¹ Royal Commission, p285 & 297.

factors. The huge growth in cotton imports from North America as well as the old providers from the Indian subcontinent meant that enormous quantities of the raw material could be imported at advantageous prices. Thus wool and linen were displaced as the basics for working clothes. Much cotton was imported through the ports of the North, particularly Liverpool. For the cotton industry the availability of fast flowing rivers and coal to provide water and steam power combined with the damper climate of the North West around Manchester was more conducive to working with cotton than the dryer climate of the East of England and the existence in the North and the Midlands of more densely populated areas were better able to provide the manpower necessary for the factory system. [Cotton fibre is more easily handled in a fairly damp climate as in a dry atmosphere it can become brittle.] It seems clear that the survival of Gurteens was due to their preparedness to invest and diversify.

It is evident that the survivors in East Anglia were those who invested heavily in factory premises and power machinery. The Gurteens must have been well aware that unless drastic action was taken their own business would slide into the oblivion suffered by so many of their peers. To the south east in the Essex silk centres of Braintree, Bocking and Halstead they saw Courtauld's enterprises grow to be the major employer in all three towns. Courtauld had begun to industrialize before the turn of the century and despite the manifold problems which beset him from time to time, was a major force for change and growth both in the towns where his mills were situated and in the industry itself. That the two families, Gurteen and Courtauld, in different branches of the same industry and producing goods for opposite ends of the market, were acquainted is clear. George Courtauld, Samuel's brother was a guest of honour at the opening of the Haverhill Town Hall (donated by Gurteen to the town) and in the *Journal of the Huguenot Society*, there is a report of an address by Samuel A Courtauld:

That textile work of Suffolk has been adapted to constantly changing economic conditions by enterprising 'captains of industry' can be best illustrated by reference to the history of the largest textile firm in the county, Messrs. Gurteen Sons of Haverhill. It is at the outset worth remarking that not only the heads of this firm but also the manager of its textile departments claim descent from the Protestant refugees of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The grandfather of the present members of the firm set up business as a manufacturer about the beginning of the last century. At that time checks and fustians were being replaced by drabbett ... Since the middle of the last century Messrs. Gurteen & Sons have built up a considerable industry in other linen fabrics such as straining-cloth for dairy purposes, which is shipped all over the world, huckaback towelling etc. About the year 1875

they also began to make jute and canvas fabrics, including a cloth known as ‘scryms’, which is used by gardeners and paper-hangers. During the eighties two other branches of textile manufacture, the weaving of horsehair and of coconut mats were undertaken by Messrs. Gurteen, who have since become the largest manufacturers of both in the country³².

Perhaps Gurteen took advice and courage from the example and growth of Courtaulds which was to become the most important textile company in the country during the rest of the century. One report claims that at the end of 1819 Samuel Courtauld had been ‘just keeping the business alive’³³. It is also known that Courtauld himself borrowed extensively to finance his expansion³⁴. Documentation does not survive to indicate where Gurteen obtained the money for his massive expansion but family members are not aware of any business debts at the time. Daniel and his father were not only weavers but manufacturers of smock-frocks at least as early as 1819, considerably earlier than most men’s clothing had been ready-made, apart from military dress. Daniel was a farmer of some substance and it is possible that his parallel businesses subsidized each other when the need arose. However during the intervening years not only had the textile industry in East Anglia suffered from the years of war and from overseas competition but there had been periods of major agricultural depression. With no evidence to the contrary it must be assumed that the Gurteen coffers were sufficiently full for Daniel III to finance his business plans. May writes of the successful businessman of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

He was capitalist, financier, works manager, merchant, salesman and in many cases, community builder ... Factories grew on isolated sites - the entrepreneur had to provide houses, shops and other services³⁵.

This perfectly describes the impression given of Daniel Gurteen III in reading what was written of him during his lifetime. In addition to their several farms the members of the family all lived within the community. Daniel III’s two younger sons, William and Jabez both joined the business, but the driving force(s) in the whole enterprise were the Daniels, III and IV, father and son.

³² S A Courtauld, *East Anglia and the Huguenot Textile Industry*, (Huguenot Society Journal, 1925) p 9.

³³ Coleman, *Courtaulds*, p 65.

³⁴ _____ p 75.

³⁵ Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760-1990*, (London, Longman, 1987) p 25.

18.

DEVELOPMENT OF GURTEENS

In autumn 1856 the Cambridge engineering firm of Headley and Manning submitted to Gurteens a specification for installing a twelve horse-power non-condensing beam engine. Headley and Manning were experts in their field and it may have been their proximity to Haverhill which persuaded Gurteens to employ them as they were close enough to return should problems arise. Sadly the accounts for building the entire factory do not survive but during 1856 correspondence concerning various plans for building weaving sheds went back and forth between Gurteens and the Sun Ironworks of Heywood, Lancashire. They allowed scope for expanding the sheds if necessary and for installing the steam engine; they subsequently designed and built the sheds as well as supplying and installing the looms. The initial account for equipping the loom sheds was £763.11s.11½d. Furthermore one of the Lancashire firm's employees was sent to Suffolk to set up the looms and to train weavers in their use. The first drawings for the factory show accommodation for one hundred looms with spacing which, at the time was extremely generous. The first surviving letter from The Sun Ironworks in the archive is dated 17th December 1856:

Gentlemen,

We have much pleasure in handing you the enclosed sketches on which the following remarks may perhaps be necessary.

1. In our sketch No 1, you will perceive we have kept as near as possible to your plan No 1, but as in your arrangement the pillars are in the way, we have removed them so as to leave 3 bays of 11 ft. and a narrow one of 7 ft. & the length is now nearly 64 feet, the wood beams being exactly 8 ft. from centre to centre. This leaves sufficient room between the looms & more than there is in some sheds in this neighbourhood. [It would appear from these comments that the Gurteens had supplied some of their own drawings]

2. We have drawn the Engine House to suit the plan of Engine laid down in your sketch which is either a 'Beam' Engine or a 'Horizontal' & we drive the main shaft direct from the Fly shaft to obviate the necessity for so much bevil gearing. It would be better if the engine were a vertical one, the crank over the cylinder, it would not then require so much raising by stone work. Another advantage would be obtained by making the engine house narrower to throw the Fly wheel into the roof of the shed which might then be contained in the end of the building.

3. At the west end a beam & pillars are put up like the rest in the shed to support the roof, a brick length wall is then run up to close the end which can easily be removed in case of extension.

4. Between the north wall & the boundary line there is a piece of waste ground which ought by all means to be made available, this might be done by building that wall upon the boundary itself in a slanting direction, lengthening the beams a little & planting a few more pillars where they might be too far unsupported. The enclosed ground would then hold a small turning lathe, joiners bench etc. or even a few more looms & if not light enough might have a common skylight in the roof...

Hoping to see you soon, we remain gentlemen yours respectfully,
N Smith & Bros, T L Scott¹.

The Gurteen family had no experience of factory planning but friendship with the Courtaulds may have given the opportunity to study the layout of their loom-sheds in nearby Bocking and Halstead. By this time beam engines was far from modern and it is not clear if this is an example of the two Daniel's playing safe by installing tried and tested equipment or if they were constrained by costs from buying more innovative machinery. Throughout 1857 Sun Ironworks supplied the factory with looms and with sundry other machinery and supplementary equipment to complete the enterprise.

To facilitate the transmission of power from an engine to provide energy to run machinery created a need for multi storey buildings to incorporate space for engine shafting. This had to be of strong enough construction to accommodate weighty equipment and to withstand the vibration caused by the looms. In the early days of industrialization in the textile industry, where existing buildings had been inadequately converted there were a number of cases where appalling accidents had resulted from collapsed floors and from fire caused by the highly flammable mixture of yarn waste, oil and candlelight. Ron Fitzgerald, an industrial archaeologist comments that such events led to considerable research for better materials and methods for use in factory buildings². He suggests that textile and railway companies were interdependent, largely because they each learned from the others mistakes³. His theory is that initially railway pioneers relied on the textile mills experiences in the use of cast iron for machinery and in buildings; later, as the railway companies made modifications, the textile entrepreneurs used their knowledge to ensure safety in their own premises⁴. When

¹ Gurteen Company Archive, 19/4B.

² Ron Fitzgerald, *The Development of the Cast Iron Frame in Textile Mills*, (Industrial Archaeology Review, 10, September 1988) pp 127/146.

³ Fitzgerald, *Development*, pp 127/146.

⁴ _____ *Development*, pp 127/146.

Strutts mill in the Derbyshire town of Belper was destroyed by fire in 1803⁵ the premises were re-built using cast iron beams and brick with as little timber as possible to reduce fire risk. This was thirty years before the advent of rail transport thus it is possible that Fitzgerald's views on the development of the two industries have some currency though over such a long period other businesses must surely have demonstrated the value of cast iron in reducing flammability of building materials. In comparison with the development of the Lancashire and Yorkshire textile mills and with the Courtauld plants in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Haverhill firm was late in mechanizing. In the long term this may have been to their advantage as early correspondence shows considerable care being taken to design a structurally sound building with good light and room for further growth whilst giving sufficient space between the looms for the weavers to operate reasonably comfortably. All of this suggests that the suppliers were aware of safety needs.

Both Courtaulds and Gurteens invested heavily in their buildings, though some of Courtauld's premises were on the sites of previous mills which they adapted. Pebmarsh, which was their first throwing mill had been converted from a corn mill. In Halstead they operated on business premises with hand looms for some year before mechanization in the 1820s; the outlay for such developments must have been considerable. There are no reports of any major disasters in either concern during their expansion. Both firms bought cottages and built houses for occupation by their employees, not uncommon in the days when paternalism from employers was regarded as acceptable and even desirable. Cynically this may be regarded not as altruistic but merely an exercise in controlling the workforce and to some degree this may be but historians should consider the prevailing views affecting the lives of those they research and not endeavour to impose the standards of a different age upon them. George Ewart Evans writes of paternalism as: 'I'm Father, I'll look after you ... Father knows best! And at its best it did indeed hold the old feudal overtones of *noblesse oblige* - rank involves obligation, and privilege carries with it the duty of service to the community'⁶. Leaders of both companies were well regarded in their respective towns during their lives and were reported to show genuine concern for the well-being of their employees. It must have been clear that staff able to live near their work-place in comfortable, affordable homes would be more reliable than those less well provided for. Surely such concern shows a mixture of respect for the needs of employees, common sense and business acumen. In developing towns which had previously been exclusively rural areas, new housing was a necessary adjunct to the factory if the owners were to attract workers into the area and keep them

⁵ E G Power, *A Textile Community in the Industrial Revolution*, (London, Longman, 1969) p 23.

⁶ George Ewart Evans, *Where Beards Wag All*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1970) p 122.

there. It is clear that the presence of a mill in a community provided employment not only for spinners, weavers, winders and other ancillary textile trades but for builders, mechanics, smiths, and labourers. A large enterprise in the town would lead to the growth of other businesses to supply the factory with necessary goods, and to house, feed and clothe the ever growing work force employed in textile production.

Like the Courtauld family and other industrialists of the period Gurteen financed various services to the community which were later provided by local authorities. Again the emphasis was on the familial structure which developed from the presence of a large manufacturer in the town. Lown's work implies that a paternalistic structure was deliberately used as a tool to keep women in lesser work⁷, contrary to this Briggs comments that in the climate of the period such a system was viewed as commendable⁸. Certainly the oral histories given by former Haverhill workers show that the social hierarchy which existed for them and previously for their parents was accepted without any apparent rancour. The responsibility of an employer at that time was more multifaceted than today; Delderfield's fictional hero's view perhaps sums it up: 'His personality flowered under the triple pulse of power, responsibility and risk ... Paternalism not only grew on him but suited him. Little by little they (the employees) began to trust him and his judgments'⁹. In August 1883 Daniel's largest gift to the community, the Haverhill Town Hall was opened. A large and imposing red brick Victorian building at the end of the High Street, refurbished in the 1990s this is still in constant use as a concert hall, cinema and local history centre. The speech made by Gurteen on this occasion reflects his sense of responsibility to his workforce:

Our old town has long needed a suitable public place, where the inhabitants could meet for friendly intercourse, amusement and instruction, irrespective of party or creed. The opportunity will now be afforded ... A great deal is said in these days on our platforms and written in our leading reviews about the social chasm which exists between employers and employed, and also between rich and poor ... In our large towns the wealthier classes are moving out to the pleasant suburbs and tend more and more every year to form a distinct community. The poorer classes are left behind in ever increasing masses to form a separate community. This I hold a serious injury to both. The mutual relations of employer and employed, richer and poorer, educated and uneducated, lie at the root of the well-being and progress of the commonwealth - social

⁷ Judy Lown, *Gender and Class During Industrialisation, A Study of the Halstead Silk Industry in Essex 1825-1900*, 2, (Colchester, University of Essex) p 264.

⁸ Asa Briggs, *Victorian People*, (London, Pelican, 1967) p 11.

⁹ R F Delderfield, *God is an Englishman*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1970) p 177.

principles and relations are the secret springs of the improvement and advancement of the community. That state is the healthiest where all classes of town and village mingle together ... When we toil, and we are all toilers, or ought to be, for the common good - we may occupy several departments according to our different stations and pursuits ... some may have more social advantages than others, but when we meet in a public building ... we blend together, feel the touch of social sympathy and more vividly realize our common humanity¹⁰.

Woodruff comments on this growing social divide saying of the period of greatest growth in the cotton industry: 'While madness reigned, some manufacturers sold out at inflated prices and became wealthy country gentlemen'¹¹. May claims that 'suburbanization isolated the poor'¹². Daniel's comments show that he disapproved strongly of such isolation and his life reflected these views, he and his sons lived in the town all their lives. All gave of their time and money to services for the community. Daniel III retired from the business in 1887 but continued to live near the mill and remained fairly heavily involved in local affairs. The town hall which he had donated to Haverhill, as well as its use for concerts and meetings, housed a reading room where newspapers were available for public use, though who bore the cost of them is unknown. In 1887 on the occasion of Queen Victoria's jubilee celebrations William Gurteen, Daniel's bachelor son donated a tract of land for use as a recreation ground for local children; it remains in use over a hundred years later and is just a short walk from the mill.

For a family who had such influence in so small a town as Haverhill the population must have feared for their future when the two Daniels, III and IV, father and son, died within a year of each other in 1893 and 1894. On his death Daniel III was sufficiently important to warrant obituaries in the national press. The *London Echo* referred to him as one of the finest captains of industry in East Anglia with the *Daily News* describing him as the King of Haverhill¹³. The younger sons of Daniel III, and Jabez, in company with their cousin Arthur Smart and Daniel Maynard, son of Daniel IV kept the business intact into the twentieth century.

¹⁰ Gurteen Company Archive, Cheven's, Haverhill and District Almanac, 1884, p 10.

¹¹ William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End, An Extraordinary Childhood*, (Halifax, Ryburn, 1993) p 43.

¹² Trevor May, *An Economic and Social History of Britain, 1760-1990*, (London, Longman, 1987) p 332.

¹³ Patrick Crouch, *Journal of the Haverhill History Society*, IV, (1993) p 8.

19. GROWTH & DIVERSIFICATION

In 1888 a journalist with the *Bury Free Press* was given a tour of the Gurteen mill by Daniel IV, he wrote in glowing terms of the organisation:

The time came when the Gurteens saw that they must do or die. It came to a decision between risking all available capital in the erection of the newest and best machinery or ... seeing the trade drift away ... a great ground floor building, lighted by skylights, facing north, where about 200 looms are at work¹.

The writer compares the decay both of Lavenham's wool trade and Sudbury's silk mills with the thriving industry in Haverhill. During the thirty years following their first factory development the Gurteen family continued the mechanization of their cloth production and in 1861 installed treadle sewing machines to manufacture men's and boys' clothing. Over fifteen years this developed into a large factory with departments making cotton, wool and cord ready-to-wear garments. They created a department which produced workmen's leather gloves and gaiters, (Figure 48) and a dye house making indigo blue to dye some of the drabbett from their weaving sheds: in 1898 factory prices show that dyeing added eight shillings per piece (approximately 25 yards) to the selling price. They wove huckaback towelling (a soft cotton or linen fabric with a textured surface to make it more absorbent) for commercial use, often with lettered borders. (Figure 49) In 1884 they established a horse-hair dressing (cleaning) and weaving factory, this was used in woven interlinings which Gurteens produced for use in their own ready-made garments as well as supplying other clothing manufacturers. The horsehair dressing operation was a few minutes away from the main factory, by Haverhill North Station. Finally in 1886 they opened a mat factory, initially producing woven rag rugs of the type used extensively as floor covering in working class homes, but adding coir mats and matting to this before the end of the century. Woodruff mentions these in writing of his childhood in Blackburn², though he suggests that in Lancashire they were made domestically. During all of this time the company was owned and run by Daniels III and IV assisted by the younger sons, Jabez and William.

¹ The Bury Free Press, 25th February, 1888.

² William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End, An Extraordinary Childhood*, (Halifax, Ryburn, 1993) pp 12-13.



Figure 48: Early sewing machine in the Gurteen museum, possibly for glove-making. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.



Figure 49: Huckaback towelling with patterned border. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

By the time the Gurteens expansion began all other master weavers in the Haverhill area who had produced textiles for the working class market had disappeared. Why this one business survived when others disappeared remains in question, perhaps Daniel had more capital available and was more prepared to take risks and respond to the growing market for such clothing. Certainly the views of Daniels father and son, suggest that they were aware of the need to create employment in their home town.

WEAVING

The Gurteens are known to have been weaving on a domestic basis for at least seventy years prior to building their factory and installing steam power. Mechanization was clearly intended to facilitate mass production of various cloths, where previously they had woven only drabbetts and fustians. In 1862 they bought from Schofields of Cornbrook Mills, Manchester, coning machines which wound the yarn onto cones preparatory to attaching it to the loom, and a shearing machine which shaved off surface nap or pile from the woven cloth. Three years later in 1865 they replaced the steam engine installed in 1856/7 with a larger one, also from Schofield, who supplied a 'fourteen horsepower High

Pressure Vertical Engine at £230, with Steam Boilers for another £230, a Condenser Pump with shaft, crank and pulleys and sundry fixings', a total outlay for the engine of £1,009.14s.4d³. They paid £73.12s.6d for Schofields to send staff to Haverhill to install the equipment. During the following two years they spent an additional £2,731 with Schofields, all for small items of repair or replacement for the various machines⁴. Including the engine they spent a total in excess of £4,700, a heavy outlay for a company which might have been considered too remote from the main areas of trade to be regarded as serious manufacturers.

HAIR CLOTHS

There were a number of weavers of hair cloth in the Eastern Counties, the 1844 White's Suffolk Directory shows two 'hair-dressers' in Haverhill, Kolles and Heckford and Kiddle⁵, neither of whom appear in later issues. Records in Glemsford suggest that Kolles had financial problems⁶ and if so, possibly Gurteen bought their Haverhill unit or set up after they had failed. It is not clear when Gurteen began dressing and weaving hair though records show that in 1888 they were renting a hair factory from the executors of Edward Boreham who was related by marriage to the Gurteen family. (Figure 50)



Figure 50: Haircloth for interlinings. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

³ Gurteen Company Archive, 19/4B.

⁴ GCA, 19/4B.

⁵ White's Trade Directory of Suffolk, (1844) pp 732-4.

⁶Arnold & Gould Company Archive.

Why the manufacture of hair cloths developed particularly in East Anglia is a mystery but possibly the presence of workers well used to hand-loom weaving of hard wearing textiles was an invitation to manufacturers to take production to the workers rather than waste time training a new and untried workforce. Horse tail hair was imported from South America in an untreated state. It was cleaned, dressed and graded for length and quality before being woven with a cotton, wool or linen warp to produce the finished fabric. The standard width of the cloth, dictated by the length of the hair, was usually around 25 to 27 inches. It was not until the 1930s that one of the Gurteens directors, working with one of the factory foremen, invented a method of wrapping the hair so that it could be woven as a continuous weft yarn thus enabling them to use the shorter mane hair of the animal to produce a wider cloth. Nowadays this type of yarn is known as corespun.

Although little has been written about haircloth, the *Victoria County History of Suffolk* claims that it was all woven on hand looms⁷. So why did Gurteens become involved in a business which at first appears to be at odds with the rest of their production? The ever growing industrial and commercial society created continual and rapid growth in demand for menswear at every level of the market, all of which needed haircloth interlinings. Although it is possible that Gurteens' hair production was partly a response to their growing clothing factory that was not its only use; the corsetry trade used considerable quantities of hair fabrics to support and reinforce boning in corsets, and the various styles of crinoline petticoats were made with hair fabrics, women's skirts and jackets were also frequently interlined with hair cloth. It was used extensively by milliners to create the basic shape on which hats were made, for women of every class wore hats in all weather and on all occasions: 'The vogue for dress improvers (stiffening used to create bustles and to support the skirt which flowed from the bustle) in the early 1890s led to a great demand for horsehair cloth, and it affords one of the many bases upon which the milliner raises her wonderful constructions'⁸. Loose hair was used as filling for mattresses and chair seats and if the article quoted at the end of this chapter is right then Gurteens were also weaving patterned hair cloths, almost certainly for the upholstery trade. This combined with their weaving patterned edges to their huckaback towelling suggests that they must have had some jacquard looms though to date it has been impossible to verify this. As Gurteens were already weaving on simple looms, maybe the production of hair cloths was a natural extension for by this time they were manufacturing clothing and could utilise much of the output themselves, and profitably, supply the needs of other clothiers in an expanding market.

⁷ *Victoria County History of Suffolk*, 2, (London, Constable, 1907) p 275.

⁸ *VCH of Suffolk*, 2, p 275.

The *Victoria County History of Suffolk* describes Gurteens as being the largest producer of hair cloths in the country⁹. Hair fabrics of various weights remained essential to the tailoring trade until well into the second half of the twentieth century, when the growing use of non-woven and adhesive interlinings such as Vilene (made from waste fibres by a felting process) became the accepted method of structuring ready-to-wear clothing. Hair cloths were woven on a simple even weave loom, (even weave or tabby being when the weft or horizontal threads pass alternately under and over the warp threads to produce a flat even texture) comparatively inexpensive to buy and set up and for which the operator needs very little training.

What remains a mystery is the departure into the weaving of towelling and dressing of horse-hair adopted by the Gurteen family in the latter years of the century. In view of the feelings expressed by Daniel IV about work and charity, it may also have been a conscious attempt to provide local employment.

CLOTH DYEING

By 1862 Gurteens were dealing with Joshua Schofield of Manchester, negotiating for the purchase of dyeing machinery¹⁰. They were sending drabbett out for piece dyeing of green and terracotta needed for smocks, respectively for the Essex farming community and the fisherman of the Eastern coasts. It is strange under these circumstances that the only colour they dyed on the premises was indigo blue. Again the growing need for blue work-wear overalls and dungarees for various trades stimulated production and although few records survive within the archive, the press report and subsequent oral history shows a picture of a small workforce employed on three shifts to maintain both quality control and output round the clock. The firm continued to dye its own blues for use in the cotton work-wear department until at least the middle of the twentieth century. As far as it is possible to ascertain other colours were always ‘sent out’; sadly there is no information available as to who or where the external dyers were.

GLOVE MAKING

Records do not show when or why the Gurteen family began to make gloves. However, Caroline Gurteen, wife of Daniel III, who with his sons built the business, was the daughter of William Basham, a local glove maker who died in 1841. Conveyances in the firm’s archive show that a few years after the death of his father-in-law Daniel bought various properties from William’s son. In view of

⁹ VCH, 2, p 275.

¹⁰ GCA, 19/7B.

Gurteen's apparent determination to expand his business, taking on a possibly ailing family concern might seem logical. William Basham's other daughter, Elisabeth, had married Joel Smart of the Cambridge retail clothiers firm and in 1848 Daniel, in partnership with his two brothers-in-law, bought and sold several properties in the region¹¹. The gloves made in these early years were heavy duty working gloves needed by agricultural labourers. They were all hand made by outworkers though the cutting was done in the factory. During the twentieth century production shifted to sheepskin gloves for country wear and although cutting methods became slightly more sophisticated in that patterns were stamped out with a press rather than hand cut, the making up continued to be hand-worked on a domestic basis.

CLOTHING PRODUCTION

The rapid development of the factory site in the late 1850s and early 60s make it clear that it was then that the clothing factory was established and company legend suggests that the first sewing machines were bought in 1861. Changes in work and social patterns were clearly the major factors in encouraging Gurteens and other manufacturers to establish factory based production. It is also possible, or indeed likely, that the cotton famine caused by the American Civil War further stimulated growth of the industry. For the duration of the conflict supplies of raw cotton from America dropped to almost zero, vast numbers of weavers in the cotton mills of the North West were thrown out of work, masters went to the wall and many families dependent on the weaving industry literally starved. By then Gurteen's weavers were working with cotton, thus the firm already employed people well used to handling textiles and able to retrain as machinists. A 1935 local almanac claims that between 1868 and 1881 part of the warehouse was used as a sewing or clothing factory and 'in 1881 the present sewing factory (which has since been considerably enlarged) was built and power machines were installed'¹². By 1866 they were buying repair supplies regularly for Singer machines¹³, though there is no evidence as to how many machines they had on site. It is clear from other research¹⁴ and from Singer's own advertising both in trade and domestic publications that the machine manufacturers offered generous terms to those who wanted to invest via 'deferred payments' in their equipment. The early machines in the factory were treadle operated and several of these survive in the firm's museum. Early records suggest that they installed their first

¹¹ GCA, 19/17, (Property Conveyance File, 1848).

¹² *150 Years of Haverhill's Chief Industry*, (Haverhill & District Almanac, 1935) pages un-numbered.

¹³ GCA, 19/7C.

¹⁴ Andrew Godley, *Singer in Britain*, (Textile History, 27, 1996) pp 59/76.

power machines in 1876¹⁵ with the factory extended in 1881 to accommodate the growing clothing department. In 1880 the firm installed their last and most powerful steam engine¹⁶. Bought from Hargreaves in Bolton ‘Caroline’ was named after Mrs Gurteen senior and had sufficient capacity to provide all the energy needed for both the clothing factory and looms and presumably for the various other units on site, and it provided some heating. This engine still survives in the factory and is run once a year when it is open to the public. Lack of records make it impossible to assess the financial outlay for the sewing factory but a local paper described four hundred machines in use making up trousers, jackets and waistcoats¹⁷ for the ready-to-wear market. If one adds to this the output of the cotton and work-wear departments the number of machines in use is staggering. The firm employed large numbers of local women as out-workers both in the town and in surrounding villages, this was mainly for finishing garments but some outworkers also made up clothing. Sewing machines were supplied for use in their own homes and goods collected and delivered by hand-cart on a weekly basis.

MAT MAKING

There had been a mat weaving industry in various parts of the Eastern Counties for some years and particularly around Sudbury and Long Melford, White’s Directory for 1874 shows eighteen ‘cocoa-nut mat’ makers, sixteen of whom were in Suffolk¹⁸ and two in Norfolk. In 1885 a group of out of work mat-makers are reputed to have walked to Haverhill from Long Melford. Led by one Henry Byham, they asked if they could set up their looms to use the off-cuts from the clothing factory to make these simple domestic items. Gurteen’s response was positive, he found them room on site and within a very short space of time the company had added a mat factory to their other departments. In the company museum there is a photograph of these first weavers, (Figure 51) whose initial visit laid the foundation for a department that grew to produce coir matting and lettered and patterned mats which were sent all over the world. The mats were entirely hand-loomed and, in view of the physical strength required to operate the looms the workforce was entirely male¹⁹. In 1896 electricity was installed in the mat factory, run from a dynamo it provided light for each operative²⁰. There is no evidence of electric power in the rest of the factory at that time though it is not

¹⁵ GCA, 19/24, Cuttings Folder – Essex Chronicle (1888).

¹⁶ Letter from Bolton Museum, (Bolton Museum accession number E779).

¹⁷ Bury Free Press, 25th February, 1888.

¹⁸ White’s, (1874) p 189.

¹⁹ VCH, 2, p 275.

²⁰ GCA, 19/56. Factory Diaries, 1896.

impossible that some lighting was provided from the engine which gave power for the sewing machines and drabbett looms. By the turn of the century the company had built additional factory space to accommodate the mat weavers and employed about two hundred and fifty men in the department.



Figure 51: The first group of mat-makers at Gurteens. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

Perhaps this story of the founding of such a successful extension of the business shows more than anything else that part of the Gurteen success was due to opportunism and preparedness to speculate in areas where others had failed rather than to a planned business expansion. Daniel III and his sons must have learnt from their earlier success in not only salvaging but expanding his weaving business, that factory methods were only effective if one was prepared to invest in proper buildings and equipment.

Records of the building plans for housing the sewing factory no longer exist but the outlay shown in developing premises and installing power suggests that the two Daniels, father and son, were well aware of the increase in business that such investment could engender. Documentation of clothing production is fragmented but from 1878 turnover is recorded. The entries show the warehouse and mill figures weekly, monthly and annually, separately and in total. The turnover for 1878 to 81, are grouped together, at a figure of £103,111.17s.1d., for 1882 the figure was £137,852.6s.3d, a very considerable increase, by 1901 the

combined warehouse and mill figure for the year was £180,819.8s.10d, approximately an eighty per cent increase over twenty years²¹.

Fashions in men's clothing at the lower end of the market did not change substantially in the late nineteenth century, jackets remained slim fitting with the rever breaking from the centre front at a fairly high level and trousers remained slim, mostly with a fall front (such as one sees still on matelot pants) rather than a fly fastening. Advertising material shows that they continued to produce the same lines for a number of years. The firm's considerable growth was largely due to work patterns created by development of large commercial enterprises which in turn created a need for inexpensive but formal clothing, and for the growing colonial trade where men's wear reflected that worn in Britain. The Gurteens were always aware of new opportunities and their clothing operation was mirrored in the establishment of men's ready to wear factories in Colchester, Norwich and Ipswich.

The decline in use of the smock-frock worn for so long by rural workers reflects changes in employment, for men using machinery the fullness of the smock would create a safety risk and thus manual workers began to wear overalls and dungarees. In comparing British and US clothing trades during this period, Godley claims that the increase in the 'off the peg' market was driven by retailers and that the introduction of standard sizing made mass production easier²². A valid argument but surely it was changing occupations which were the main force for change. Barran of Leeds, like Gurteen, were originally smock-makers and like the Suffolk firm it was during the 1850s when sewing machinery became readily available that they set up a factory to enable them to mass produce. The difference between the two firms is that Gurteens diversified while Barrans remained committed to menswear in the heart of the city which became the capital of the men's clothing industry.

Despite many of their attitudes being apparently well ahead of their time, the Gurteens did not appreciate suggestions of legislation for a maximum of an eight hour working day. Daniel IV was vociferous in his opposition, claiming that those who had been unable to work because of bad weather would not be able to make up lost time and would therefore suffer great financial hardship²³; his views were probably not entirely altruistic since a shorter working week would undoubtedly have meant reduced output from the factory or employing additional operatives.

²¹ GCA, 19/15.

²² Andrew Godley, *British & American Clothing Industries*, (Textile History, 28, 1997) p 72.

²³ GCA,19/24, Cuttings Folder, Un-named newsprint cutting.

ADDITIONAL INVESTMENTS

Daniel Gurteen III and his father invested considerably in residential property in and around Haverhill from at least as early as 1832. They bought existing cottages when they were available, others were bought or built at intervals over the next hundred and fifty years. During the first half of the twentieth century the firm owned much of the tenanted property in the town, traditionally employees were always given the first option if a property became vacant. Records of rental costs show prices of between 3s.6d and 6s.6d per week for a two or three bedroomed house. The company bore the cost of maintenance and decorating, employing tradesmen to fill these specific roles; an example of the additional work created by a successful factory in the midst of a small community. The Gurteens were astute businessmen and would be unlikely to invest in property which did not bring them a healthy return, in addition, by providing homes for the workforce they would be able perhaps to exercise some influence over the behaviour of the tenants. The factory diaries show that in October 1890, after several warnings, Mrs Alex Webb was evicted for causing disturbances²⁴.

As well as investment in residential property Gurteens provided mortgage facilities for some management staff, and more unusually, for some of their customers to buy their business premises. The first written records of mortgage provision is of £550 which they granted for William Ashplant, their factory manager, to buy his house on the outskirts of the town, with interest charged at four per cent. Similar arrangements were agreed for business properties as far away as Leicester and Southampton, all at varying and slightly higher rates of interest than those given for domestic mortgages to staff²⁵. It is difficult to be sure that all loans on business premises were to their own customers, but it seems probable since they would clearly have very regular contact with those they supplied, thus creating the conditions under which the mortgage might be offered whilst ensuring that the various businesses remained financially viable in order to fund repayments. It is a measure of the Gurteens astuteness that in providing such a valuable service to those who bought from them they assured both customer loyalty and their own priority as suppliers. There seems to be no parallel for this type of investment among other industrialists in the region, nor is there any indication if profits from such transactions were ploughed back into the company. The only comparison to this is in Derek Brumhead's writing on New Mills in Bowden Middleleale, Derbyshire, commenting on a local weaver and farmer a

²⁴ GCA, 19/56, Factory Diaries, 15th October, 1890.

²⁵ GCA, 19/25, Mortgage Book.

hundred years earlier, he maintains that: ‘Any further spare cash was either invested in stock in trade or put out on loan’²⁶.

After 1923 when the Colne Valley & Halstead Railway became part of the LNER (London and North Eastern Railway) Haverhill South station which was yards from the factory, was used only for freight, indicative perhaps that the business provided by Gurteens was sufficient to keep the station open. Various members of the family continued to farm in the nearby villages, though whether this was a profitable investment with the many slumps which affected farming more than almost any other industry, is questionable. Perhaps the agricultural depression made it easier for Gurteens to find and keep staff at the mill for there was little other work available in the area for either men or women. Lack of competition might indicate that wages at the factory could be kept down, but reports in the press on local pay suggest that Haverhill operatives were as well off as those in the Colchester area cited in Clementina Black’s research, as having a reasonable standard of living²⁷. One of the evils of the clothing industry was the sweating system whereby manufacturers without sufficient capacity to produce all they needed, contracted out to middlemen who employed their own operatives, all female, they worked in appalling conditions and for very low pay. There is no evidence of this sort of abuse in Haverhill.

MARKETING

We know that like Harmers in Norwich Gurteens employed their own sales team; a letter circulated to customers in 1898 advised of the appointment of Mr Thirtle to cover East Anglia, otherwise there is little evidence of marketing strategy. They employed seven or eight salesmen covering the whole country, split into regions much as one would find today, East Anglia, Midlands and Yorkshire, London and the Home Counties, North West, South West. Oral testimonies mention the salesmen packing up huge wicker skips (sometimes called skeps) of goods and travelling with them by coach, train and sometimes by pony and trap to visit their customers, supplying stock goods and taking orders for future delivery. The Gurteens family of all generations spent time ‘on the road’, learning their business.

In 1897 they notified their customers:

We beg to inform you we have purchased the Business of Messrs. Spencer & Co., of Barnsley, Manchester and London. Having manufactured a portion of their Goods for a considerable time, and

²⁶ Derek Brumhead, *New Mills in Bowden Middlecale*, (Textile History, 33, 2002) pp 195-218.

²⁷ Clementina Black, *Married Women’s Work*, (London, Virago Press, 1983 ed.) pp 260-1.

made arrangements to continue the same Dyeing and Finishing Process in Barnsley, we feel we are in a position to do the Business to your entire satisfaction....

Yours truly, D.GURTEEN AND SONS²⁸.

By the second half of the nineteenth century industrial exhibitions and trade fairs had become a major marketing tool and such events were held regularly across Europe. It is clear that Gurteens showed goods at these for in 1880 the factory was closed for the day and trains were hired to take the entire workforce to the Alexandra Palace exhibition. It is unlikely that the directors would have invested a considerable sum in such an outing had they not been exhibiting there. As an exercise in relationships between employer and employees it was presumably considered worth showing the staff something of the extent of the business for which they worked. If one considers that holidays for the working classes were virtually unheard of at this period and many of the employees would never have travelled further than the surrounding villages or the next town, the excitement and staff loyalty such a visit might engender must have paid a handsome dividend.

²⁸ GCA Factory Letters, 1897.

20.

TWENTIETH CENTURY HAVERHILL

After the death of the two Daniels, Jabez Gurteen was the more influential of the surviving brothers; he and his brother William had charge of separate departments. Daniel Maynard Gurteen, their nephew, son of Daniel IV, was responsible for the weaving operation.

By 1900 the record keeping of the various departments was more detailed than a few years earlier, materials used in garments were listed by quantity and price with the various processes costed separately. By 1908 only selling price set against total manufacturing costs were shown, i.e. a Boy's 'Ventnor Suit' cost 3s.9d to make, and sold to retailers at 8s.9d', with rise or fall (shorter or longer) making a difference of 6d either way. A boy's 'Cambridge suit' cost 4s.2d to produce but sold at 10s.6d, (Figure 52) nine years later production costs on this had risen to 7s.11d and it was sold to retailers at 24s¹; the department's manager produced costings from which these figures were derived. Such profits seem high by late twentieth and early twenty-first century standards; traditionally costings are worked out per dozen garments on production and overheads, including materials, with profit added. Retailers would add another hundred to hundred and fifty per cent dependent on their geographic location and relevant costs. From 1908 it is difficult to be sure how accurately Gurteen staff worked out production costs for each item. Reading the late twentieth century evidence of Alan Tiffany, their factory manager, when he joined the firm their costing methods were described as hit and miss, if this was always so then profits shown in the early part of the century were deceptive.

By the first decade of the century Gurteens were sending lists of goods in stock to customers as sales reminders and it is clear from records that they had developed a reputation for an excellent stock service. Their 1910 list of available overcoats show thirteen different styles, with written descriptions of design details and price². (Figure 53) Representatives carried large pattern books showing cloth swatches and drawings of garment designs and stock goods.

¹ Gurteen Company Archive, 20/1, Costings Book.

² GCA, 20/87, Overcoat Styles.



Figure 52: Boys corduroy suit, circa 1910. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

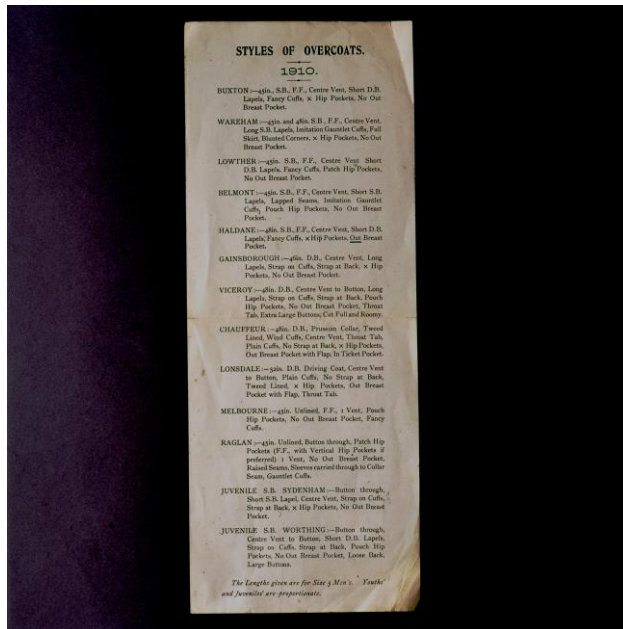


Figure 53: 1910 Overcoat price list. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.



Figure 54: Gurteens stand at the Brussels International Exhibition, 1910. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.



Figure 55: 1911, Turin International Exhibition, Gold medal citation. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.



Figure 56: Trade Show Display, circa 1912. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

In 1910 Gurteens exhibited at the Brussels International Trade Fair and were awarded gold medals for three of their exhibits. (Figure 54) Unfortunately documentation no longer exists to show which items won them such prestige though the medals themselves are on show in the firm's museum. In 1911 they exhibited at the Turin International Exhibition showing their whole range of goods, men's wear, smocks, towels, mats, haircloth and bales of fabric; a tremendous variety for one company in rural Suffolk. (Figure 55 & Figure 56) By then the firm was selling sufficient quantities to the colonies to deal through London buying offices and forwarding agents. This is not unusual even now, there are still buying offices in central London which act on behalf of overseas retailers, sometimes buying goods on their instructions but more often arranging meetings with suppliers when buyers visit this country and then handling documentation, progress chasing and payments. Gurteens sent large quantities of cotton clothing to various parts of the world, with frequent shipments to South Africa; also in 1910 they supplied the British Antarctic expedition with dungarees, jackets and trousers. In 1913 they fulfilled a single order for two shantung suits to Northern Manchuria³; such individual attention from a mass market manufacturer cannot have been viable in business terms or cost effective. Whether these sales were continued as a matter of maintaining customer relations or simply following company tradition remains in doubt. By this time there were seven members of the family working for the company and they appear to have continued as they had for thirty years with no idea of adapting to changing markets. None were innovators and, according to present members of the family, none had any planned training or worked in any other business to gain experience.

THE GREAT WAR

The earliest extant balance sheet from 1916 shows the capital holdings of the various partners, with the two senior members of the family as the major investors, William Gurteen had a £26,000 share and his brother Jabez £36,484. The younger generation each had £21,000 invested, a total of £167,484; their balance sheet showed capital that year as £186,402, a substantial figure for the period; the following year the firm's balance stood at £209,122. Horace, who served with the Red Cross in Italy throughout the war, continued to draw his salary while away. (Employees were not paid whilst on active service). It is not clear if Horace was medically unfit for battle, too old, or objected on moral grounds; he would have been 34 years old in 1914. The early twentieth century balance sheets show that their accountant was Arthur Ivy-White of the firm of

³ _____ 20/102, Export Orders.

Rimington and Co. of Grantham, Lincolnshire. Ivy-White was a personal friend of Conrad Gurteen who dealt with the firm's finances, and was clearly regarded with great trust by the partners. After the firm's incorporation as a limited liability company in 1929, Ivy-White became the first, and for many years, the only director who was not a member of the family.

The rate of growth during the war necessitated a capital injection to fund business. There was still no borrowing from banks or other sources but during 1918 Jabez invested a further £15,000 of his own money in the firm at a rate of five and a half per cent, this to be repaid to him before any profit exceeding £3,000 was drawn by the partners⁴. This additional sum was described in the minute book as 'for increasing turnover, meaning larger outlay on materials and payments of Excess Profit Duty'. According to Pugh seventy per cent of the costs of the war were met by loans with the remainder funded by taxes⁵. That Jabez's personal fortune allowed him to invest such a sum is indicative of the wealth that individual members of the family had accumulated. If one takes the average working man's wage then as between £1 and £2 per week and the average now as £300 to £400 per week, then an equivalent investment at the end of the twentieth century would be in the region of two million. Pugh wrote of huge profits made by employers during the Great War and of government pressure on manufacturers to increase pay substantially thereby avoiding interruption in production⁶. That such growth occurred during the war years is not surprising, like many other clothiers, Gurteen's made quantities of army uniforms, (Figure 57) which constantly needed replacement. They also tendered for uniforms for the railway companies and fire services, though there is no surviving evidence to tell us if they obtained these contracts. At the same time they produced substantial quantities of work-wear for export to the colonies. Looking back to previous centuries it is clear that war has always created expansion in the industry; Lemire notes that in the late seventeenth century 'Military requirements represented a unique catalyst to the clothing trade ... it established and enlarged the trade in basic apparel'⁷. Historically this pattern has continued despite many of the men previously employed in the trade leaving to serve in the armed forces.

⁴ GCA, 20/106, Minute Book, September 1918.

⁵ Martin Pugh, *State and Society, British Political History*, (London, Edward Arnold, 1966) p 150.

⁶ Pugh, *State and*, p 149.

⁷ Beverley Lemire, In the Hands of Work Women, English Markets, Cheap Clothing and Female Labour, (*Costume Society Journal*, 44, 1999) p 23.



Figure 57: WWI, Army uniform in Gurteen Museum. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

By 1918 Gurteens were supplying retailers in more than five hundred towns and villages across this country, and maintaining their established export business. It is perhaps indicative of their attempts to move up-market that at this time they began to produce ‘motor clothes’ and issued price lists for customers which showed available stock of ‘Garage coats, Chauffeur coats, Gentlemen’s coats, Gentlemen’s reefers, leggings, spat overall trousers and cap covers’⁸. Their turnover at the end of 1920 was double that of four years earlier with a final figure of £420,585.14s.2d.

Gurteen’s wage records for the first decades of the century are not sufficiently detailed to give clear information on family income, they record weekly earnings of individual employees, but there is no indication of the number of hours worked. However, Clementina Black’s campaign for better working conditions for women involved a survey conducted soon after the start of the century which

⁸ GCA, 20/101.

showed earnings of weavers averaging 20s. per week⁹. Former employees recalled their parents' time with the company, working for long hours (though no more than elsewhere) and earnings throughout the factory were comparable with Black's findings. Furthermore some of the recorded memories from people living in the villages of north west Essex around the time of the First World War shows that agricultural wages were less than those in the factory¹⁰. Factory diaries reveal that the early twentieth century women of Haverhill were not exploited as easily as much feminist history might suggest. They disputed the payment offered for making clothing to fulfill a government contract and went on strike for one week, returning after accepting an increase of 6d per dozen garments. In 1914 a number of them joined a Trade Union. Records of the Amalgamated Union of Clothier's Operatives for that year shows total income from the Haverhill branch of £41.12s.10d and £45.14s.3d, this is listed as three quarters trade contributions and entrance fees - presumably either to meetings or initial membership enrollment. It also shows the travel expenses of various union officials visiting the town¹¹. This leads one to think that the union was actively attempting to recruit new members from the company's workforce.

THE INTER-WAR YEARS

In 1918 Horace Gurteen returned from the war and took up management of the corduroy department. In November that year, despite there being no legislation for retirement provision and the company having no pension scheme for directors, staff or operatives, they set up a 'Special Fund for pensions' with an annual in-payment of £200¹². The partners decided to pay Mrs. Guille, widow of one of their salesmen, £50 per annum in recognition of her husband's service. At the same time Stephen Brown was allowed only £30 a year and in January 1919, Mrs. Yeadon, widow of another representative was granted 30s. a week for the rest of the year, plus one further and final payment of £15. The following year Mr. Teasdale was asked to retire and was given an ex gratia payment of £250 but no pension. Philip Wash retired in 1919 with an ex gratia payment of £360 plus a pension of £120 per annum for life; both were company salesmen. (The pension paid to Wash was as much as many operatives earned on the shop floor.) There is no evidence as to the age of these men, but as Guille had worked for the firm for forty-five years and Wash for fifty-six years, both must have then been elderly men.

⁹ Clementina Black, *Married Women's Work*, (London, Virago, 1983 ed.) pp 260/265.

¹⁰ Oral History Recordings taken for Saffron Walden Museum, 1996. Recordings held by Essex County Sound Archive.

¹¹ GCA, Amalgamated Union of Clothiers Operatives, Balance Sheet, 1914.

¹² GCA, 20/106, Minute Book.

These pension payments appear to have been made entirely at the discretion of the directors, there is no evidence that employees contributed. In 1921, despite a period of recession the partners decided to continue the pension paid previously to Mr. Bullock for his widow until the end of the year, with a final payment of one hundred guineas in recognition of her husband's faithful service. In 1925 they authorized a pension of 5s. a week to Francis Skelton who had joined them at the age of ten and worked as a drabbett weaver for fifty eight years. This is the only instance of recognition for a shop floor worker prior to formal pension arrangements. Paying occupational pensions to former employees was very rare indeed and suggests that in this area at least, the Gurteen family were ahead of their time, if only in some instances. In 1924 the partners agreed that in the case of staff sickness, that is management and salesmen but not factory operatives, the firm would pay salaries in full, less national insurance, for a period of three months. The former managing directors of both Harmer's in Norwich and Stephen Walters in Sudbury commented that it was not until after 1945 that their firms paid pensions or sick pay to employees at any level. This was confirmed by department managers from Gurteens, two of whom said that shop floor workers were expected to save, making their own provision and that many contributed small weekly sums to insurance schemes.

After the boom of the war years, from the end of 1920 there was a depression in trade. The partners agreed that there would be no salary increases, though it is unclear if this referred to staff or partners or both, they agreed that Sunday bonuses for shop floor staff (presumably for working on Sunday) and Christmas (gift) cheques would continue. That same year it was decided that the company would bear the cost of employees' contribution for unemployment benefits. This is the only year that such action was taken and possibly the partners thought that the gesture might mollify those whose hopes for increased pay were disappointed. During 1919 the Excess profits bill for the firm was £37,134; as a result the partners agreed not to draw their share of profits for that year. In 1921 the minutes note that: 'under the terms of the new finance act, a refund is due from the Excess Profits Duty previously paid'¹³. Unfortunately there is no note of the sum involved, but as it enabled them to repay the special capital of £15,000 to Jabez and all partners to draw £1,000 from their capital investment, the rebate must have been substantial. This wartime taxation scheme was introduced in 1915 to fund the mounting cost of war, it was based on pre-war profits and the amount which businesses had to find varied from year to year. Later that same year the Gurteens drew out the capital inherited from William, Jabez' older brother who had died in 1913.

In 1919 the question arose of taking the next generation of the family into the business and the partners agreed to fix terms of admission for such a move.

¹³ GCA, 20/106, Minute Book.

Between 1919 and 1921 both Arthur Smart and Daniel Maynard Gurteen decided to bring their sons, Oswald Smart and Daniel Robert Gurteen into the company. A supplementary deed of partnership was drawn up which enabled them to do this with the agreement of their colleagues, and also provided for them to send this new generation away for training before entering the business. Oswald spent time with Whiting and Partners in Bury St. Edmunds. There is no record of where Daniel Robert received training and tragically he died in a motor cycle accident at the age of twenty-nine. He was the only son of Daniel Maynard Gurteen and thus the firm passed to the descendants of Jabez and their cousins in the Smart family.



Figure 58: Travellers' pattern book with garment illustrations, circa 1910. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

The firm still employed regional representatives and this was clearly the main method of supplying retailers in this country. (Figure 58) They tried to open up the market in India in conjunction with other manufacturers in the region, though whether this was via a free-lance agent or through the auspices of the Eastern Counties Wholesale Clothing Manufacturers Association is unclear and their

efforts appear to have been fruitless. This organization seems to have been formed partly as a lobby group to press for legislation or guidance where necessary and as a forum for discussion and agreement between members on employment conditions. (The closure of so many of the region's clothing firms from 1980 onwards means that the association is now little more than a social group). By 1921, they had closed the Manchester showrooms and arranged with their new agent in the North West to contribute £40 p.a. towards the upkeep of his office. They appointed Mr. Jeffreys as representative for the Welsh ground in 1921; subsequently Jeffreys became a self-employed agent carrying goods for other firms as well as for Gurteen and earning commission only on all sales.

In 1921 the Gurteen partners installed additional heating in the clothing factory and a service lift in the warehouse. By 1924 they were evidently enjoying a short revival of their fortunes for they again took the entire workforce and some of the families and friends of employees to the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley. They chartered two trains which left Haverhill shortly after 4.30 a.m. and arrived at Wembley before 8 a.m., returning to Haverhill at 10.30 that night. The local paper tells us that, 'over one thousand people were included in the visit and as on the previous occasion, many had never visited London before'¹⁴. Accepting that rail fares at that time were comparatively inexpensive, the cost to the company of £415.18s.11d for such an outing for so many was considerable. Surely the partners felt the expense of such a public relations exercise among their staff worthwhile to keep them involved and to ensure that they understood something of their customer base and the importance within the industry of the firm for which they worked. The paper went on, 'During the day a large number of the employees paid a visit to the firm's stand in the 'Miscellaneous Textile Section' of the Palace of Industry, where is being displayed a splendid selection of the Chantry Mills productions, including drabbetts, haircloths, towels, mats, men's gloves etc.'¹⁵. They do not say if the clothing factory was showing goods in another area, but since all the staff from every department were included in the visit then one must assume that all production lines were exhibited. The partners' philanthropy did not extend to guests of the employees who wished to join the party; they were charged 10s.6d each for the day, to include the journey, entry to the exhibition and meals, (a substantial part of weekly earnings for many). The following year it was decided that the firm could not afford to repeat the exercise.

The company turnover dropped substantially during the post war years, and continued to decline from 1921 until 1932 when it reached a low of £156,910.12s.8d. During the first quarter of the century Gurteens exhibited in London and Glasgow, as well as in Turin and Brussels and may well have shown at other fairs for which records are now lost. Certainly by then trade fairs and

¹⁴ GCA, 19/24, Cuttings Folder.

¹⁵ _____ 19/24, Cuttings Folder.

exhibitions both at home and abroad were accepted as an important showcase for goods and frequently produced successful sales for the following season. The expense incurred by showing at such events could be discounted against sales and was possibly more economic than using overseas agents or sending representatives abroad. In addition it gave manufacturers an opportunity to meet their overseas buyers without necessitating too much time away from base and it was at national and international fairs such as these that many initial contacts were made. The exception was government contracts for colonial supplies, these were put out to tender with contracts awarded to the company which offered the best combined price, quality and consistent delivery.

By 1925 the firm was selling through agents across Europe, Scandinavia, North Africa, India, South America and throughout the colonies. These men worked on commission only, usually acting for several overseas firms in similar fields. In 1938 Gurteens exchanged contracts with Mr. Mooney to represent them in Amsterdam, M. Laruelle in Paris, and others in the United Kingdom, commission to be paid at three per cent overseas and two and a half per cent in the United Kingdom¹⁶. In addition to goods sold at trade fairs and the business brought in by agents and their own salesmen, the firm still tendered regularly for uniform contracts through the Crown Agents who handled orders for those areas of Africa, the West Indies and Arab countries which were either colonial outposts of Britain or much influenced by British contact.

Immediately after 1918 the company had been under pressure from the Eastern Counties Clothing Manufacturers Association to agree fixed customer discount terms with them, presumably forming a cartel so that members of the association did not undercut each other. Gurteens preferred to 'go it alone', agreeing their own terms with individual customers, probably based on the history of how quickly they paid. Nineteenth century records show considerable disparity in discounts that were deducted for prompt payment, suggesting that they had no hard and fast rule. The minute book shows that applications from several customers for additional discounts were left to the discretion of the counting house, (Figure 59) a system which could lead to abuse. Former employees spoke of the trust that directors put in the managers they employed, and other than an unfortunate experience with the accountant in the 1930s, there is no evidence that such trust was misplaced. By 1925 the clothing factory was more efficient, regular discount of three per cent was allowed for payment within a month, with two and a half per cent for two months¹⁷. These were standard discounts with many firms until at least the latter part of the twentieth century. References were taken from other suppliers for new customers before credit was allowed and in some cases no account was permitted, goods then were supplied with payment on

¹⁶ GCA, 20/185, Agents' File.

¹⁷ GCA, 20/137, Invoice Books.

a pro-forma invoice, and there are some cases where accounts existed but spending limited to sums which the company considered the customer could pay without too much delay. Many manufacturers today describe their customers as ‘prompt payers, slow payers and non-payers’ and profits are inevitably eroded by the time and cost spent in chasing unpaid accounts thus creating cash flow problems for the suppliers.



Figure 59: Outside the Counting house, early 20th century. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

During these years the firm continued to expand their ready-made clothing department whilst still taking orders for bespoke goods. The time taken to produce individual items when the factory was geared to mass production meant a profligate waste of time. Perhaps they continued to provide such service as a customer relations exercise, with profits dropping throughout the 1920s maybe the directors felt it worth the outlay to ensure continuity with their more reliable customers. Many former employees of the company have stressed the inter-departmental competition, saying that members of the family seemed to regard outselling those units run by their relatives as more important than overall success. If this is true it seems more likely that with each department run as a separate entity none had thought to query the viability of making bespoke garments. Such poor business methods, particularly as they had a very

considerable stock service for ready-made goods are hard to understand. At least once a year the firm continued to send out illustrated booklets of their fashions for men and boys, each item with a style number¹⁸. Supplied to customers for reference, they show a wide range of designs covering classic suits, golf and other sports-wear, (Figure 60) frock coats, breeches, vests (waistcoats) and boys' suits, jackets and coats. Prices were not appended but listed separately, thus allowing for changes without the necessity to reprint the whole book. Customers held fabric swatches and thus were able to select both style and material for a garment, mailing or telephoning orders if they did not see a representative.



Figure 60: Early 20th century riding breeches in Bedford cord. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

It seems strange for a company with such a large range of products and wide-spread customer base that other than these small booklets that there is no evidence of them advertising to publicize their goods. Neither trade publications

¹⁸ GCA, 20/125, Illustrated Sales Booklets.

or national press show any reference to Gurteen clothing. It is only in local papers where retailers advertise their stock that illustrations of garments appear that are from Gurteen ranges. Such publications are retained in the firm's archive with illustrations marked, one wonders if this indicates that they contributed to the cost of customers' advertising. In recent years the firm have produced and paid for all their advertising material which is supplied to retailers at a cost of one per cent of the turnover on Gurteen goods.

Local retailers who bought from the firm during the inter-war years recall representatives showing samples from which they ordered. The bespoke trade shows that Gurteens prided themselves on delivering within forty-eight hours of receiving measurements. Two local retailers, Gray Palmer, a menswear shop in Saffron Walden, a town about twenty miles from Haverhill, and a village shop in nearby Great Chesterford, about five miles from Saffron Walden, bought from the firm. Members of the families which owned both businesses spoke of ordering clothing for agricultural workers from Gurteens and going elsewhere for their more 'up-market' goods. They bought heavy Derby tweed or Bedford cord breeches and trousers, (Figure 61) sometimes with a jacket but more often as a single item, and occasional suits, still mainly for the agricultural community. Holman's of Great Chesterford, a village in rural Essex, bought overalls, bibbed or sleeved, made from Gurteens' own woven cotton twill (drabbett) in brown or blue. Wholesale prices for these were between 8s.6d and 12s.6d each. As with many other retailers in rural areas, these businesses sent their own salesmen out to the surrounding villages to sell, taking orders from local families. In the early 1930s Palmers bought trousers for rural workers from the Gurteen stock lines for as little as 8s.6d and some at 10s.6d. Even by the standards of the day this was inexpensive. Goods were dispatched by train and delivered from the station by a local carter. The company accounts for 1927 show regular orders going out to retailers across the country. A Bishop's Stortford outfitter bought regularly and frequently, orders of varying values from £4 up to £15¹⁹. A local farmer recalls his father shopping there once a year for 'Sunday' suits and 'everyday' trousers for both his sons, always in heavy tweed or cord such as was made up by Gurteen²⁰. The salesmen's returns for 1927 show single orders as little as 8s. being dispatched and the most valuable order in one month as £10.9s.d²¹. The ability to order small quantities or individual pieces from stock was a great advantage to small retailers and this continued until the 1950s. When the firm re-organized such flexibility ceased and businesses which had relied on such a service must have found it impossible to locate another manufacturer prepared to fill the gap. The visits of representatives were supplemented with written

¹⁹ GCA, 20/141, Accounts Files.

²⁰ Oral History Recordings, Saffron Walden Museum, 1996.

²¹ GCA, 20/141, Accounts files.

reminders of stock and prices for ready-made clothing and for cotton work-wear. (Figure 62) The 1932 listing describes their Bedford cord as of 'Government quality'. The firm's own price list for 1931 show cotton tweed trousers 'grey plain' at between 4s. and 7s. dependent on style with pants (breeches) with lined knees and a buttoned or laced fastening at 8s., matching jackets were similarly priced. Bedford cord or whipcord jackets were selling at 11s.6d each²². A late 1930s catalogue for cotton work-wear shows engineers overalls, described as short slops in white duck - medium quality, at 23s., best quality at 25s.6d and the same design in linen drab, Barnsley finish, at 30s., those with 'heavy make Haverhill finish' at 33s. The latter may mean fabric of a denser weave or a garment with reinforced patches at elbows and other areas of heavy wear. This leaflet lists five types of slops at varying prices, length is still quoted as 12 to 17 nails (1 nail = 2 ½ inches) long and the firm is still offering 'long worked (embroidered) smock-frocks to order in olive and drab drab, olive linens and white ducks'²³, these are not priced. At the same time they were offering a CMT (cut make and trim) service on customers own fabrics, this was for lounge suits, jackets, vests (waistcoats), unlined trousers, breeches and Chesterfield overcoats.



Figure 61: Fly fronted, high backed trouser in mid-20th century. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

²² GCA, 20/157, Company Price Lists for 1932.

²³ _____ 20/159, Price Lists for Slops, late 1930s.



Figure 62: 1950s advertisement for workwear. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

As the demand for ready-made clothing accelerated so too did the output of woven haircloth for interlinings and the only clear evidence of further capital investment at the time is the purchasing of new hair looms. In 1921 Mr. Unwin, the weaving shed manager, was given permission to dismantle some twenty-four drabbett looms and erect new hair looms. The firm had already taken delivery of fifteen of these and was awaiting delivery of another twenty-five. The local Almanac of 1935 in commenting on the lack of power looms for mat weaving says:

For many years it seemed probable that this would also be the case with the haircloth loom, but during the forepart of the present century various types for power appeared. The most successful of these was the Henderson Patent Loom and Messrs. Gurteen and another firm in the haircloth trade obtained the sole rights for their

use. In 1909 the first consignment of these was installed, since which time many others have been added²⁴.

In 1923 Gurteen's agreement with Henderson Brothers and the Ripley Manufacturing Company was revised to meet changing needs, in August 1924 this was extended for a further five years²⁵. In the same year the partners decided to improve the electric lighting in the warehouse at a total cost of £344. Clearly new equipment must have been bought for all departments as they modernized and as equipment wore out or became obsolete. It was during this period that additional ducting from 'Caroline' the steam engine was installed to heat the sewing factory.

It is interesting to note that unlike the Colchester firms, where so many clustered together in one town, and where frequent advertisements for operatives appeared in local papers, the factory in Haverhill did not advertise either in local or national press, or trade journals for staff at any level. Former workers speaking of their time with Gurteens said that with employment opportunities in the town scarce and little public transport to enable them to look elsewhere there was always a queue of youngsters waiting to join them. Parents put their children's names down with the factory manager before they left school to be sure of a place and promotion was always offered from within.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, listings of employees show that in the clothing factory at any one time, Gurteen's employed as many as five hundred indoor and sixty outdoor machinists, a hundred and sixty to a hundred and seventy outdoor finishers and up to one hundred indoor finishers. There were sixty-seven cutters, all men; in addition they employed forty-nine warehouse staff, thirty-seven pressers and forty-seven over-lookers (examiners). They had the services of a hundred and four errand boys and girls, most of whom went into the various manufacturing departments as vacancies arose. Over a thousand people worked in the ready-made clothing department. By the 1920s they employed seven sales representatives across this country. Whether these men sold only clothing or called on users of other goods made by the company is not clear. Perhaps if they were selling to small general shops which sold running yardage, towels and mats as well as clothes, the early salesmen would handle orders for all the firm could supply, in later years, they covered the clothing trade only.

The numbers the firm employed in the weaving sheds, the leather and glove department, towelling and mat departments are not available but records show dates of staff joining, leaving, and in many cases re-joining the firm. Most are female operatives though some men are listed, showing their absence was clearly due to war service. For the women the dates indicate that they took time out to

²⁴ _____ Haverhill and District Almanac, 1935, p 22.

²⁵ GCA, 20/178, Haverhill and District Almanac, 1935, p 23.

have children, returning to the factory when the family went to school. Pugh's writing on social change in the inter-war years suggest that in many industries women lost their jobs to men returning from the services²⁶, and that it was not until the 1950s that women opted to combine work with their domestic role²⁷. In Haverhill and other towns dominated by the clothing industry married women traditionally returned to work as soon as they were able, either in the factory or as outworkers. The clothing industry had always been gender specific and it is clear that this remained so at Gurteens as in the rest of the industry.

After the First World War the firm continued to produce the goods they had made since the 1880s. The clothing factory ran as three separate units producing respectively, cords, cotton work-wear and woollens. The hair weaving factory maintained output as did the mat and glove factories. (Figure 63) The latter two were all male operated while the sewing machinists and weavers were all female, cutters and pressers continued to be men. It was not until the slump of the 1930s that there were any lay-offs. Even then, rather than leave people entirely unemployed the Gurteens operated a three day week. Operatives worked for three days and claimed unemployment pay for three days. (Figure 64)



Figure 63: Metal templates for glove cutting, 1920s. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

²⁶ Pugh, *State and Society*, p 158.

²⁷ Pugh, *State and Society*, p 266.



Figure 64: 1930s, machinists at work. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

At some point during the early years of the century Gurteens acquired the major share-holding in a group of menswear retailers trading under the name of Davies Ltd., and they bought the business of J D Haines. The latter was purchased after the death of Mr. Haines but it is not absolutely clear why they bought into Davies's; Gurteens held a mortgage for at least one of this retailer's premises so perhaps this was negotiated in return for shares. Possibly it was suggested by their accountant Ivy-White who was also responsible for the audit of the Davies group. The shops were in Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Cambridgeshire. In looking at a broader field of business this may be unusual but the former managing director of Harmers of Norwich commented that his firm had acquired one or two retail shops as a result of unpaid debts, so perhaps for clothing manufacturers acquisition of retail outlets was not uncommon. The Davies group was incorporated in 1918 with £10,000 worth of shares, even at this early stage the Gurteens had the majority share-holding and Ivy-White, the accountant who looked after the accounts of all the shops and of Gurteens own business, held one hundred and ten shares from the outset.

In November 1937 Ivy-White appeared in court facing a number of charges for embezzling money from various branches of Davies Ltd. The retail outlets all had separate bank accounts and there was one general account, possibly this made the shifting of monies easier for one bent on defrauding the firm(s). Fifty five charges related to the Davies' shops, six charges of embezzlement from J D Haines and

seven for fraud against the Braintree laundry. It is not clear how much he took from Gurteens or for how long he had been siphoning funds. Oswald Smart had noted discrepancies in accounting and after investigations showed evidence of falsification White was brought to court. The total amount which this trusted and long serving accountant and director had misappropriated was reported in the Nottingham Evening News as ‘in the region of £16,000’²⁸, a substantial sum at the time when the country was only emerging from the terrible depression of the early thirties. The company was secure enough to withstand the loss but it is hardly surprising after this experience that it was many years before they appointed another non-family director. Despite such losses it was during the years immediately prior to 1939 that the firm began to regain some of their former prosperity, by 1940 their turnover was £257,626.0s.7d. and in the first full year after the end of the war turnover had broken the £300,000 mark.



Figure 65: Bill Gurteens's notebook, compiled whilst training, 1920s/1930s. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

²⁸ GCA, 19/24, Nottingham Evening News, 15th November, 1937.

Jabez Gurteen died in 1924, the last member of the family to have worked directly with his father and brother who together had built the firm from weavers of textiles for working men's apparel to manufacturers of a diverse range of textiles and ready to wear clothing for sale at home and abroad. From then until the 1950s the business was to be run by his three sons, their descendants, and their cousins the Smarts. Bill, the son of FW Gurteen, had entered the company in his youth and like his forbears had spent time in other factories, learning his trade and acquiring the leadership skills necessary to take his place in the firm. Bill went to a textile mill in Lancashire where he studied production methods and compiled his own study collection showing cuttings of different fabrics and miniature point paper diagrams of their various weaving patterns. (Figure 65) The only other members of his generation to enter the business were Oswald Smart and Stephen Gurteen. Oswald Smart read mechanical engineering at Trinity College, Cambridge but followed his father into the business after 1918. With Geoffrey Boardman, he was responsible for inventing the machinery for spinning wrapped hair for weaving. (The machinery was made for them by the local firm of Atterton and Ellis; surprisingly there is no record of their producing other hardware for the mill). Stephen Gurteen, son of Conrad, was accountancy trained.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In 1941 with the introduction of the Utility scheme each industry nominated its own specialist team to devise workable rules for production. The clothing trade group was led by Thomas Barlow, a Manchester manufacturer and as a director of Gurteens, Oswald Smart served on the committee. From the outset in 1941 the amount of cloth and trimmings used in each garment was restricted; firms were licensed to produce specific goods under the Utility label, (Figure 66) each with its own product number. Though no doubt many found it extremely tedious to administer, British manufacturers had little choice but to streamline production as design, quality and quantity were limited to conform to regulations. Staff shortages and increased trade led to British firms looking to the USA for advice on improving methods. Although there is no positive proof that Gurteens sought outside help, a look at their very reduced staff levels compared with the size of orders being dispatched shows that they found means of increasing productivity to meet demand; conversely, less than twenty years after the war the company's decline was largely due to outdated methods and poor management.



Figure 66: Utility mark on huckaback towelling, WWII. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

Gurteens had made large quantities of Army uniforms during the First World War and in 1941 were again producing battledress blouses and trousers for the Ministry of Supply. The profit margin was very small, 4d (pre-decimal currency of less than 2p) a unit on trousers, but as the goods were being called in * by the customer at the rate of one thousand pairs per week, perhaps the directors thought the quantity made such profits viable. A little over a year later orders for the same items show a profit of 7¾d. a unit, this time called in at three hundred pairs a week. Their 'Making accounts' book for 1939-40 shows costings for men's and youths' drabbert jumpers, operating gowns, men's jackets, gas mask bags, ladies double breasted motor coats, ladies AGR (agricultural) coats and breeches for the women's land army, ladies blouses and caps, ladies overalls (white room, twin needle), presumably uniform wear, - ladies navy cord shorts, and football 'knickers' for men and boys. The Crown Agents ordered women's Khaki tunics for NAAFI workers, these were supplied at 62s.4d (approx. £3.23p), (probably per dozen garments) via Hobsons and Sons of London. This is the only time in the company's history that there is any record of them making women's clothing,

all appear to be for work or uniform wear. In 1941 they were supplying Sainsbury's with boiler suits and warehouse coats at a cost of 11s.3d. and 9s.6d. respectively, probably made under the Utility Scheme; even then the profit margin included in such prices must have been very small. Orders for single items were frequently dispatched to smaller customers and records suggest that they continued producing the same type of goods as they had prior to the war; some of which may have been unregistered stock made in addition to their utility contracts.

The advent of rationing in June 1941 meant an allowance of sixty-six clothing coupons per person, per year, this included apparel and household textiles; a man's suit was valued at twenty six coupons. The magazine *Men's Wear* remarked that one person had spent five coupons on a 2s.11d sports shirt and would rapidly exhaust his quota unless he learnt to shop more carefully²⁹; uniforms were exempt. Most reports suggest that the system worked well. When clothing coupons were dropped in 1949 the reaction from manufacturers and retailers to its abolition was that it would free staff for more useful tasks but otherwise shortage of supplies meant that it would have no great impact. The Utility scheme continued for a few years after clothes rationing ceased. It is interesting to note that there were suggestions that purchase tax should be abolished in favour of a 'sales tax', *Men's Wear* commented that such a move would be 'no less pernicious than Purchase Tax. What is needed is complete abolition of an imposition which was introduced as a war-time expedient'³⁰. Pipe dreams only, for taxes on manufactured and retailed goods have been with us ever since.

As with the 1914-18 conflict Gurteens lost most of their younger male employees to the services and probably many of its young single women, certainly the staff lists show a much reduced workforce. Throughout the war the firm continued to fulfill overseas contracts, sending goods to the various African colonies and to the West Indies, largely for tropical gear, and uniforms for local police forces and the GPO, plus work-wear for armaments factories. The sales returns show that goods were still going to countries outside the British Empire, presumably serviced by the firm's overseas agents; small quantities were also sent to Denmark, Sweden and Switzerland. After hostilities ceased the company continued processing orders from the Crown Agents with goods going to Jordan and Aden, and to Cyprus, Malta and Gibraltar, all still under British rule and where there were British service bases. The last Crown Agents records are dated 1954, it is not clear if the firm ceased to supply through them or if perhaps the individual organizations for which the goods were destined began to handle their own orders. One particularly sad note is of the agent who served the company in

²⁹ *Rationing, How it Began*, *Men's Wear*, 19th March, 1949, p 27.

³⁰ *Men's Wear*, 19th March, 1949, p 16.

Thessalonika. In 1943 David Recanati was transported with other Jews during the German occupation. At the end of the war the Gurteen directors tried desperately to ascertain what had happened to him, making contact with others in the area and with his family, but he was never heard of again and it was thought that he had perished in the gas chambers of a concentration camp.

In 1944 the recorded warehouse sales for the representatives was between £22,000 for Mr. Halfpenny in the Midlands and £5,960 for Mr. Heap in the North. In the year that these figures were recorded Mr. Halfpenny earned £633 commission on his sales, the other salesmen made between £82 and £130 above their salaries. At this time the directors themselves were drawing modest salaries of £41.13s.4d per month, plus a monthly fee of £12.10s.0d. Wage records for the factory operatives in the early years of the war show rates of between £1.12s.0d. and £2.6s.0d. per week and these did not rise substantially until 1947 when the lower rates were around £3, rising to between £4 and £7 a week a year later, quite a sharp rise in a short period. There is no written indication of how many hours were worked by those earning these sums, though oral history suggests it was based on a forty-eight hour week, and take home pay was comparable with that earned by those employed by clothing retailers in the area.

*The term 'calling in' within the clothing industry refers to a situation where a customer places a large order with only part for immediate delivery, the rest of the order is dispatched or 'called in' as and when required. It effectively means that the manufacturer takes the risk as the retailer is only invoiced as goods are sent out.

21.

FACTORY LIFE RECALLED

Archival material combined with primary and secondary sources shows how the Gurteen business operated within the factory. To gain insight into what it was like working for the firm during the twentieth century a number of former employees were asked about their work. Their memories cover the period from shortly after Jabez' death in 1924 until the 1980s and show something of relationships between employer and employed and between those who worked together on the shop floor. Informants had worked in all departments and at as many levels as possible. The questions were phrased to try and gain a truly unbiased picture of life for the employees. Good, bad and indifferent views have been included and combined with other information it is hoped that a clear picture emerges of life within the factory and town.

WEAVING

Joan joined Gurteens as soon as she left school at the age of 14 in 1933. Her mother had worked for the firm as a weaver, leaving during the First World War to work in a munitions factory. Her grandmother had been a machinist working at home when Joan was a child, but had worked 'indoors' for the company when she was younger. Joan started as a 'trimmer' in the weaving department which she described as 'cutting out the bad pieces' (quality checking). Subsequently she trained as a hair weaver and continued there until 1972 when the weaving sheds closed down for a while, but returned to the company when the firm began weaving other fabrics and stayed until retirement. Asked if she enjoyed the work, Joan replied:

Well I enjoyed the work and enjoyed the company; we were more like a family affair you know. It wasn't a very clean job, but the atmosphere was nice.

Joan went on to talk of the changes that occurred during her time with Gurteens, first drabbett weaving was dropped and the firm began to weave Courlene for deck chair manufacture. She remembered Mr Unwin, who had managed the weaving sheds from the late nineteenth century, and his successor, Mr Funnell. When asked about discipline within the department Joan said:

I don't think anybody got told off, not really. I suppose if there were too many faults you did, it was left to your judgment more or less. Sometimes the boss would come round with a little eyeglass to

check it ... We used to sing while we worked, if one started one or two more would chime in, singing above the noise of the looms. Sometimes word would come through from Mr. Dan, 'would the girls not sing so much'. (This last comment was clarified as being only when he had visitors in his office which adjoined the weaving shed.)

She remembered that they often worked overtime. Her husband, who also worked for the firm, thought this was paid at time and a quarter for the first two hours and then time and a half. Hours in the department were from 8 a.m. till 6 p.m. Promotion was always from inside the company and was offered to the most able. Managers were 'well aware of the capabilities of the staff'. They commented that the majority stayed at the factory for most of their working lives.

Asked about the attitude of the workforce to the Gurteen family, Joan felt that many of the older people in the town were in awe of them. She talked of hand loom weaving of hair cloths continuing in the town after power looms were installed in the factory. She described the work as incredibly heavy and only carried out by men, many of them working at home or in large garden sheds erected on their allotments and that this went on until well into the 1930s. In this day and age it is unlikely that such equipment could survive without being vandalized but then, with few visitors in the town and a small, close knit community, it was regarded as completely safe to leave looms unattended and doors unlocked.

Another lifelong employee had vivid recollections of the outworkers and their looms:

The looms were fairly big, ... about - what six to eight feet ... that was in the length, about four foot wide and at least six foot high. There was a lot of it, all cottage weaving. They used to come in and get their warps and that wheeled on, because they had the machinery here in the factory, they couldn't do it at home, and then they had to take the thing home and fit it up themselves, tie all the threads in and then start weaving. It all used to take a long while; I think some of the rolls used to be forty and fifty yards long. And they gradually kept winding round and you know ... drawing it down.

John Simpkin who joined the firm in 1950 as an office junior and rose to be a director in about 1980, described the weaving sheds when he joined Gurteens:

When I first started, there were a hundred and forty looms in the weaving shed. Weaving horse-hair was on a loom that wove a piece of tail hair, and we used to buy that in lengths of roughly seventeen

or nineteen inches and the maximum we ever got was twenty-seven inch length of hair. In those days there were lots of hair dressers working in the factory. They used to dress the hair and put it into bunches of various lengths. Gradually horsehair became too expensive for the clothing market and Gurteen, in conjunction with Atterton and Ellis produced a machine that would spin mane hair from the horse, it was shorter and softer but it was spun with a cotton thread through and wrapped, called Gurteen's wrapped hair ... this gradually moved into the clothing market ... you could weave in much wider widths as it wasn't dependent on the length of the horsehair. So the mane horsehair really finished its days in Savile Row in London at the very top clothing manufacture in the UK.

Wage records for the department in 1948 show earnings of between £2.10s. and £5.10s. per week. Indoor weavers were all women so possibly the different pay rates reflect either to varying hours worked or the individuals length of service.

LEATHER GOODS

Charlie joined the firm in 1928, aged fourteen, as did most of his contemporaries; he was employed as a cutter in the leather department for over fifty years and continued working part-time after retirement age.

I was with them fifty-one years and ten months. I started off in the leather department, cutting all the leggings and gloves. I had thirty years in there as a cutter. We cut them out and the gloves were made by people round the villages, they used to come in and collect them in great sheets and take them home and stitch them up. It worked out about 2d or 3d a pair, that's all. I started off at 9s. a week [45 pence in today's money] when I was fourteen that was forty-eight hours a week at that time. The older men, the cutters up in the clothing section, they were the best off, but I don't know what their wage would be, 25s. [£1.25p] or it might be something like 30s. [£1.50p]

That was real hard work, making some of these gloves, it was all done by hand. Sheepskin, horse hides, some of the horse hides were ever so thick and you could cut them out with a pattern, like a template. They used to be cut by hand with a knife, an ordinary blade, not a band knife. The older employees, they was always comparing things when they were young, up to the present day and

we all looked upon Golden Heckford as a real old man, but he wasn't all that old because he was in the first World War and he used to talk about his times in the Army. He was in the glove shop; his father was foreman before him in the same shop. The Gurteens used to come in that way ... so we were seeing them every day, you could talk to all of them. There was another man, he was a kind of secretary for the Gurteens, Mr. Harry Scott, he was our governor; any complaint or anything we wanted, we went and saw him and he took it to the Gurteens. Training? Well you just did the odd jobs and then as time went on - they used to be hand shears, you used to have a little job cutting different things out, then you started marking things out until you got so used to it you gradually got into the swing, that wasn't an apprenticeship, you just used to learn as you went.

My mother worked there during her young life. She was a machinist in the clothing department, they used to start at six o'clock in the morning and finish about six or seven at night. Five and a half days a week; they used to work Saturday morning. My father worked on the land up till 1929, then he went to Gurteens as a maintenance man and builder, helping with repairs and then he was a carter, he used to cart the coal for the old boilers ... up Mill Road, the old 'stoke hole' where the mat factory was, the boilers would run the machinery. All the children as they come along, all worked at Gurteens. My sister worked for Gurteens, she was a machinist and I've got another sister worked there, she was a machinist and another sister worked with the wife in the textile department, weaving. Where the offices are now and the warehouse that was all the weaving shop, all looms in there, rows and rows of looms. And there'd be one woman would have perhaps six looms to look after and keep them on the go. The din in there was deafening; later on, at the latter part the weavers wore ear protection, but before they didn't, they used to more or less lip read because you couldn't hardly (sic) hear.

If you were sick, you had to lose the money, there was no compensation for anything. It was only after the war when anything like that came in. When I came out of the Army we went down to Yarmouth for a fortnight but I had to lose that fortnight's pay. Golden, he used to go on holiday, but he was the only one in the shop, nobody else did, they couldn't afford it. In our department, the glove shop, we used to be paid for all statutory holidays. That was through Mr. Scott, but the other cutters, they weren't, we could never understand that.

Asked how Gurteens compared with other places of work, Charlie said that he felt it was easier than other work in the town, he responded ‘The money wasn’t great but more than you’d get in this region because there was only [on] the land at the time’. Before 1929, when his father was a farm labourer and with seven children to support, he earned 25s. a week. Charlie was not sure how much more he had when he went to Gurteens but knew he was better off or he would not have moved.

The Gurteen family owned nearly all the houses in the town, I lived in one and all the rents were the same, where I lived there was different people working on the land and things like that but they all paid the same rent. Every year, if you were going to do any decorating inside Gurteen would give you the paint. They were good landlords because when they sold the houses they sold them very cheap to the ones who was in it, they were dirt cheap. I lived in one, but we’d moved when they was selling them and they went for about £100, it was after the War. (post 1945)

Charlie recalled that after 1945 factory managers were brought in from Leeds and staff could no longer assume promotion would be from the shop floor. Operatives stayed with the firm because there was little opportunity for other work.

They sold that factory which is Addis now. It belonged to Gurteen’s and they sold that to them on condition that they didn’t take anybody from Gurteens when it was taken over first. I should reckon in the 1920s. It was a silk factory and it was empty for years and years. [This had been the silk factory which was operated by Vanner and Fennell] Addis came and took it just after the war.

As with the mat department it appears that though the leather workers did not regard their training as a formal apprenticeship, nonetheless, they were given time to build their knowledge as in any structured learning process. Again Charlie enjoyed his work and liked the people he worked with. Unlike the women employees he was clearly not in awe of the Gurteen family and felt that they could have been approached with a problem if the need had arisen.

Although there is no evidence as to why the firm began their leather department, by the middle years of the twentieth century they were making sheepskin gloves and coats for winter fashion wear and were exporting these in some quantity to Norway at least as late as the 1970s. The department closed as part of the firm’s general restructuring, perhaps the popularity of leather clothing in the 1970s and the considerable growth of specialist leatherwear manufacturers

precipitated this decision. Christopher Gurteen commented that they could not compete with specialists.

THE CLOTHING FACTORY

Bea' joined the firm in 1924, straight from school at the age of 14. Her mother had worked in the ready-made clothing department all her working life, as had her grandmother.

We were in a place where all the youngsters met and you used to fold the garments and look for this and that [faults] and then when you was there for six months you went to a job. I went down to the pressing shop and I used to pull all the bastings out of the work that was already made, for the pressing off. Then when I'd been there a year I went on the machines and I made coats and waistcoats. We was taught how to use the machines first, and then we was put on the cheap garments. They were heavy waistcoats what farm people used to wear. We used to make them right through and when we was on them for a certain amount of time then we went on to the wool jackets. After you'd been on there so long, you learnt the blazers, we made them right through [one machinist making the entire garment] and then you came onto the suit side of it.

I loved the work I really did! It's very interesting and if you've got the talent you can learn quite a lot about it. Our foreman, Stanley Smith, very nice, very learned man in the tailoring trade. He used to do a lot of work at home, sometimes he used to come in the morning and he'd say, 'would you make the lining up of this jacket for me' and I used to bring it home and Mother would let me do it on her machine.

We worked from eight in the morning till six at night, later they left off at five. But we used to work Saturday morning till half past twelve, that was a forty-eight hour week. I had 6s.6d a week when I started, and then it went up to about 10s. I should say. Then after you'd been there so long and learnt the work you had to go on piece work; a wage up until you were about eighteen I think and then you had to go on your own and earn your own money [on piecework rates] - which wasn't much then.

At the beginning Mr. Fish was in the position of governing the whole lot, then he died and Mr. Noble came and he altered a lot. He was a very efficient man, he taught us to do all the different parts. I done all the inside linings and he was quite good really, 'cos he'd sit aside you, even though he was the manager and say 'Now I

know a better way, or a quicker way you can do that', and he learned (sic) me quite a lot really. Then he retired and we had two or three others come, but they weren't efficient, so they didn't stop long. Then at the finish Mr Tiffany came from Yorkshire.

Bea recalled that the only promotions for women were to bench supervisor and trainer.

We used to take our own lunch, we had to sit at the machine and work and eat it. They were fairly strict, they used to like you to keep to your machine, if you didn't they wanted to know where you were and all that, but there wasn't a lot of playing about that I can remember.

There was Mr. Smart and then there was Mr. Will, and Mr. Horace and Mr. Oswald Smart, Mr. Smart's son. They were the directors. Mr. Smart, he was very friendly ... he came round every morning at about eleven. You didn't think he was taking any notice of anything, but if you was away a week, when you came back, he'd come and ask if you'd been ill and if you was all right and say it was nice to see you back, the others weren't very approachable. You might ask permission, a gang of you, if things weren't right in the factory, he'd see you. If you had difficulties you had to sort them out with the foreman. They could be a bit odd at times, but they weren't too bad, I didn't used to argue with them. I can remember once, when Mr. Noble our manager was there, he sent for me, outside with Mr. Carr our foreman, and he said 'Bea, I got a dress jacket and I want you to do it'. He said 'I'll show you what you got to do', and he shew (sic) me how to, 'cos it's a lot of pieces and silk fronts. Well I stood and pondered it over and he was still there with Mr. Carr. I jumbled it all up again and I went back, I said 'I just can't fathom out where the pieces have got to go'. So he looked at me and he said 'Bea, I didn't think you were such a bloody fool'. And [then] I knew where every piece got to go. But I didn't mind him at all, he was very strict but you could talk to him.

Asked what happened if machinists made a mistake or misbehaved.

I'd say they were given a second chance, but that didn't happen a lot on my bench. We made it happy, that was a very hard working place, you had to work for what you got. And if you didn't earn your money when you was supposed to, well you was had up and told off about it; it wasn't always possible. In the time that we weren't at work, we made life pretty good really. There was nothing

else, not unless you went into service and my Mother didn't want me to go in service. But we enjoyed it I must admit, all my friends - we all worked till we was nearly 60 anyway, a lot went over sixty.

Bea said that the only men in her department, apart from one tailor who used to do hand work on the bespoke jackets, were pressers. She did not know what the men had earned in comparison with the women, but said that in her time few employees left. From 1943 onwards she rented her home from the Gurteens for 3s.6d per week and when the firm sold the properties in the 1950s she and her husband were able to buy the house they lived in for £200 which included legal fees. The house is part of an Edwardian terrace, all with extremely large gardens and related to incomes and expenditure at the time £200 was more in keeping with prices of property between the wars.

Mrs. N worked for the firm for 39 years, joining at the age of 14 in 1926. Her mother had worked for the company as a machinist and supervisor. She described starting with the firm:

I went there from school, there used to be a lot of us go. Mother put my name down like the other mothers did, because they used to take your name six months before you left school. My mother worked there, she was a trouser hand. I hadn't been there about three weeks and Mr. Fish sent for me, he was the manager and he said 'I want you to go over [to] the warehouse. That was where the post office is now. That was the front office and then right down the yard there was a three storey building and Horace Gurteen worked on the top floor. I had to clean his office out every morning and if he wanted an errand, run downstairs; Frank Backler used to work there. The orders used to come there and they took them down and they used to have yellow cards for stock I think, and white cards for special orders. When they wrote them out, I had to take them over to Harry Scott in the office in the yard.

Well eventually ... I come over on the machines, I reckon that was about two years, I was taught with about six others all at a time. Nell Webbers taught us, we had bits of rag to machine; and then I was on the cloth bench, jackets. We used to make it right through, it used to come from the cutting board. If it was stock work it was in a bundle and if it was an order it was one, and then we done the lining and the sleeves, put them together and everything. I think when Mr. Fish retired and Mr. Noble come, he altered the course. Eventually when you went on you own I think it was about 32s. [per week]. When you went on your own someone would bring you a bundle and they'd put it down in your book. That was paid so

much a garment, so much a dozen. We all made woollen jackets and waistcoats and we made blazers and school blazers. We used to do dozens and dozens of them, binding with blue ribbon and they used to be clapped together, so you could turn 'em out, raw edges, [overlocked or a run and fell self-finishing seam?] I used to get paid time for them, it made up my money. Not all uniform blazers, some just like you could buy in the shops you know. They were all local girls when we went there first, but over the years they run a bus, they run one over to Hadleigh and then they used to run one out this way. [towards the Cambridgeshire villages].

We did 48 hours a week for 6s.6d and then when you'd been there six months I think it was 8s. I reckon when I went on the machine it was about 12s. Then I got on over the years I suppose and went up to 28s.. I was about twenty or something like that then. In the department there was our bench and the cloth bench, the white bench, the trouser bench, the woollen trouser bench and the cotton trouser bench and then there was cord jackets. I should think there was five or six different lots. There were six machinists in a row. Then there was another bench and then there was the finishers, then a gangway, then into the pressers' shop, then the white bench where they used to make white garments. [work-wear] Saturday they used to shut the engines off at twelve and you had a quarter of an hour to clean your machine and sweep the floor. I don't think they worked Saturdays when I finished, but then they left off at five on Fridays and then they left off at dinner time on Fridays. I think we had an hour and a quarter for dinner and finished at six o'clock at night.

When I went on the machine, we was under Mr. Smart, he was a director ... and he had his son come in, Jack Smart. We had several different foremen, we had Stanley Smith first and then Mr. Carr, then he retired and then Mr. Tennant. Mr. Noble, Mr. Carr and Mr. Tennant, they were very good you know, they helped you. I never met anybody really nasty, they used to have a few words you know, but I think everybody got on. When Mr. Noble came round first thing in the morning, if you was talking to someone else on their machine, you'd sit down but I've never been told off. If people cut the wrong vents or something, I've done that myself, you never got into trouble, just that Mr. Smith or Mr. Carr took it over to the cutting bench and got a new lining. Nobody ever grumbled at you. It was noisy, that's why I talk loud.

When we were first there we used to have a week off in August. August Bank holiday and we used to sign on that week, we never

got paid. [This was when the steam engine was cooled and serviced]. But over the years we got paid, I know we had a week's holiday paid for several years before I left. If you were away sick for over three days, you had to go to the secretary to be reinstated, you always had to do that; always went back to the same work, it never changed. Sometimes if the other bench was over-run, they used to put things together like I put the jackets, they've asked me to help out and I've done my best, and if I couldn't earn my money they made it up. They always made stock because it used to come over there in big drayfuls. When you made a garment you machined a ticket under the pocket, when it got over to the warehouse they used to write it out properly.

Mr. Smart never missed a morning, he used to come round, if you happened to catch his eye, sometimes he'd say 'good morning' and sometimes he'd say 'what are you doing?' Old Mr. William [grandfather of Christopher Gurteen the present joint managing director] used to come round sometimes. When Mr. Russell come and had these minutes, our bench had a right big meeting in the office with them, with Oswald Smart and it was soon after that he, Mr. Russell, left. Oswald Smart said 'I'm sick and tired of minutes'.

Mr. Russell worked as factory manager for a short time, he tried to introduce his own time and motion methods which caused considerable anger amongst the operatives. This was the only industrial problem Mrs. N could remember in the thirty-nine years she worked for the company.

My Mother, - Lilly Page, she was like a charge-hand, she left when I married. My Father didn't work there before the First World War, but when he come home from the war he went there in the mat department and he worked there till he retired. He was a mat finisher, not a mat maker. I can remember him going to Smart's circus, a long way away. They made the mats and put up at a hotel and put the mat together. My Grandmother Page, Dad's mother, she was a finisher, and I had an Aunt Lil worked there; she was a finisher on the jackets. My brother Jimmy worked there; he was a cutter. I've got a sister, Tessie Rose; she was a forewoman on the trouser bench. Iris Coe worked there, that was my Auntie Frances's daughter, her father worked with my Dad. I reckon there wasn't much else to do in the town. Some who left went in shops. Percy Sizer used to bring them [cut garments] on a trolley. Percy Sizer, Stan, his brother was our presser, then he'd got a sister Rosie, she worked on the cotton benches I think. It was all families, it must

have been. Kate Barber, that was my mother's aunt, she was a finisher on trousers. Being at school (together), you knew everybody. If anyone was home a month they never got any money. Then when we got our money on a Friday night, two of us used to stand there, whose bench they were on, and we'd all put a penny in and give them that.

This more than any other recorded interview emphasizes how many local families were entirely dependent on Gurteens for employment. When Mrs N was first with the firm, the machines were run from the steam engine: 'Then in years to come they went on all electric lights, all modern, and they had electric machines, they done away with the steam. I can't remember when they done away with it'.

Like so many of the employees Mrs. N lived for many years in a house owned by the firm.

Vi' worked for Gurteens from 1934, joining them at the age of fourteen, leaving when she was fifty to work elsewhere after a dispute with her supervisor. She was a trouser hand. Her mother had been an outworker for the firm, making hand stitched leather gloves but to the best of Vi's knowledge she had not worked in the factory as a youngster.

I was a machinist, made trousers and I loved the work, I really did. Money was very small, I think it was £3 or something like that and then as you'd been there so long it gradually went up. That was the only place I wanted to go. There was Pyes and there was the brush factory that made toothbrushes and there was the laundry, I didn't want any of them. All my family used to work at Gurteens in the weaving side you see, that was one of the reasons I thought I'd go to Gurteens. They trained me, because it was a heavy machine, I picked it up quite quickly because I did machine at home before I went there. All the better material, I used to have all that work, I was fast, I could get twelve pairs of trousers done before the other girls. Worked eight till five, five days a week; if they wanted me to I used to stay at night, if there was overtime, but you didn't get much unless they wanted an order done or something like that. There were about forty on the trousers. They used to go in droves at Gurteen's, there was the machine room, then there was the cutting room; upstairs they'd got rooms as well with machines and all the twin (needle) machines.

My foreman was Stan Hammond; the one in charge was Mr. Noble and he was strict, but I got on well with my foreman. Mr. Noble wouldn't have nothing go wrong; he'd get the people up and tell

them straight. We'd chat and sing and all things like that. Eventually they did have the music on, the radio, but it wasn't on all the while - so I thoroughly enjoyed it. Then like I said, my foreman died and this girl from the cord bench took over and she started being bossy and smacking us like children. Well, all hell let loose! Well as soon as we heard HMP [Haverhill Meat Products] was wanting girls, all the girls went down to get a job. They came back and told me there was a machine job going there. I put in for it, went for an interview with all the others and I was the one that got it. I used to do all the overalls there.

I think there was a walk-out once, but when I say walk-out, they'd walk to the end of the yard, they wouldn't leave the firm, and then they'd sort it all out ... One thing I will say, if there was trouble they sorted it out ... if anyone was always making trouble they'd get rid of them. The trouser room was smaller than the other places; you weren't allowed to go into the other shops.

Vi said there was no sick pay and no pension provision. Asked about work when the orders were poor she could not remember ever being on short time. According to her colleagues this was when they worked for three days and 'signed on' for three days, but Vi commented that they were normally kept busy and that she could have worked overtime more often, but with two children, chose not to do so. Her memories of the Gurteen family were that Oswald Smart and Bill Gurteen were friendly and would speak to the operatives, not just to the managers and supervisors. Nonetheless if the shop floor workers had a problem they must go to their departmental manager and not to one of the family. Asked about pay in the factory after the town began its industrial development, in comparison with other businesses:

I should say that Gurteens was poor. I knew the difference when I went down HMP. (Haverhill Meat Products) But the people who worked on the looms, they said that the pay was bad, 'cos they were standing all day. With us we were able to sit down and that. I don't know what they were weaving, there was that big place on its own. [The weaving shed] I never did go in, but you could hear them going backwards and forwards.

This last comment underlines how separate the various branches of the business were.

Summary. The operatives all spoke of enjoying their work and taking pride in the skill they needed to achieve satisfactory results. All found their department managers approachable and respected their ability, not only to manage but to

understand methods needed to improve efficiency. They did not expect to approach the directors with any problems and some were in awe of the Gurteen family, though they spoke with genuine affection of Oswald Smart, Frank William Gurteen and Bill Gurteen. All expected and wanted to work near to home and amongst people they had known all their lives. Pay was not over-generous but opportunities locally were limited and pay and conditions were as good as might have been found elsewhere. The mother of the author trained as a machinist and finisher in a central Liverpool workroom from 1924, she recalled her pay whilst training as 6s.6d a week, virtually the same rate as in this very rural area. Accepting that competition for labour must have been much greater in a major city with a variety of opportunity, suggests that the Gurteen factory workers were not badly off in comparison with those similarly employed in other regions. All interviewees said there was no holiday provision, but the factory closed for a week every year so that 'Caroline' the steam engine could be stripped down and serviced. This gave employees an enforced week away from work; it remained unpaid until shortly before the Second World War and since it occurred in the summer, many of the staff used the week to earn extra money during harvesting at local farms. A builder, whose family moved into the area to work on the properties owned by Gurteens, commented that in his youth most of those working in the factory earned more than they could elsewhere in the district. It is indicative of the changing expectations and attitudes of both sexes, particularly women, that until well into the second half of the twentieth century it was more important to work near to home for regular pay and in an organization which allowed its female employees to take a break to have their children and return once they were at school. Most appeared contented with their lot and voiced neither ambition to seek promotion nor resentment that it was not available beyond that of bench supervisor. Many took outwork from the firm during the time when their children were under school age and did so again after retirement. For the men employed in the company the situation was not greatly different. Although there were some promotion prospects, senior jobs were clearly limited to the few departmental managers, assistant managers and foremen, and that meant waiting for a retirement or death to provide a vacancy, consequently most would not progress greatly. In addition, as production methods became more sophisticated so senior staff needed better training and it was then that the firm began to search for management staff from the more up to date factories in the north of England. Even then they rarely advertised, and seem usually to have been able to acquire the people they needed by 'spreading the word' through the trade. That some of the women left rather than do battle with a difficult supervisor is perhaps evidence of changing views of working women.

22.

PROMOTIONS

'Nibby' joined the firm in 1936, going straight from school at the age of fourteen. Apart from the war years he was with the company all his working life, serving Gurteens for a total of forty-four years. He started as a runner or errand boy before going into the textile warehouse as a packer, later he was promoted to foreman and for the last twenty years managed the weaving department.

I was paid four guineas a week when I come back after the war. When I was fourteen it was 7/-, with 2d stopped for stamps, 6s.10d a week. I wasn't a trained weaver, first I went into the warehouse, I was under a chap called Mr. Radford, he was the foreman, but he was killed in the war. After the war they put me in his position in the textile warehouse. Getting stuff packed and sending it out, I learnt as I went along. I spent the last six or seven years fitting the looms as well as being production manager. We worked forty-eight hours a week, started at eight o'clock. When I took over as production manager in the weaving department there was about a hundred or a hundred and ten [people] in the whole section; winders and all people like that, fitters, hair and drabbett weavers, they were all women. I used to see them all once a fortnight in the office, have a chat and check their account books, see if they were improving or not - they were on piece work. [Presumably if their productivity improved this would be reflected in their pay]. I was on salary. There were ninety-one women and the rest were men. [The winders and spinners] We used to spin the short horsehair on a special machine that was invented by Mr. Smart, quite a number of men worked in that section, because that was twenty four hours a day, wrapped horsehair, corespun. The men worked shifts.

Nibby talked about relationships between the women weavers in the department. He could remember no trouble of any sort and said that everyone got on well. He went on to explain the system of pay for loom operatives:

It was a set price for different cloths, some take twice as long to weave as others. All depends how many picks to the inch they put in, the better quality cloth had more picks, they were paid more for that. I used to keep checking, keep an eye on them, in case I had to get rid of somebody you know, if they weren't good enough. You had to pay a standard wage, and some of them don't earn it, well, I wasn't rude or anything like that, made some sort of excuse, slack

work or something like that. It's all very well, but you can't subsidize someone every week. [A pick denotes a shuttle movement taking the weft yarn across the warp, thus twenty picks means twenty strands of yarn, the more picks there are the denser the cloth; the warp yarns are called the ends, presumably because the end of the warp is tied onto the frame].

'Nibby' was asked if, having lived in the town all his life, and having worked with the people on a more equal footing before promotion, made any difficulties for him:

Mr. Conrad Gurteen, when he had me up in his office to say they were making me manager, he didn't want me to associate with the workers, you know, mix with them in the pubs, anything like that. I'd been just foreman before. I never applied for it, it was out of the blue. I was pleased. The whole tale was, the previous manager, - we used to do thousands of yards of cloth that went to Canada, and one or two years on the trot, he lost a terrific amount of money. When I took over I had the raw material weighed out, the weaving done and what was left was all weighed. The first thing I learnt was you'd got to get your costings right. They were just carrying on issuing the raw material, and I don't know where they got the price from, just pulled it out of the air I suppose.

When I first went there, the hair all came in bales from South America, with all the dirt and that, it used to go into a department and was washed and then to the drawing department and it come out all one length. [The hair was graded according to length] We bought from Glemsford [as well as using hair from their own dressing department] eleven or twelve miles away, Arnold and Gould. We used to keep on weaving for stock, but we used a lot of it ourselves, up in the clothing department, interlinings and boilersuits.

They used to have cleaners come in every weekend, all the looms were cleaned. The old looms that made the drabbett and the ones that made the hair interlining, we gradually got rid of them, so we had automatics you see, that was a very big improvement. On the hair the girls looked after eight looms and on the drabbett looms, four. I've got an idea the drabbett was 48" wide.

I suppose we were one of the first to weave deck-chair stuff. We used to send the rolls out and they were cut out in lengths and sent off. That was when the ordinary weaving started to drop we started on that.

Nibby was asked if the directors of the firm were approachable:

You couldn't wish for better people. Mr Dan, he was in charge when I was first there. His office was next to mine, because he was responsible for the textiles. Later Christopher [Gurteen] and John Simpkin were in charge. They were the only place you could get any work.

We had a canteen, and so many would go - say at quarter to ten, and they came back and another lot went and so on. They had a quarter of an hour break and then an hour for lunch.

I left twenty years ago. [In 1980] What happened was, the stuff we were weaving then, Courlene, deck chair fabric, they imported it far cheaper. So in the finish they called me in and said they would have to close the weaving department. They offered me the job of boss of the shipping department. I thought about my age and what they offered me, there wasn't much work about, and I said I'll finish here.

The weaving department was finally closed in 1980 when shrinking orders and profits meant it was no longer viable. Nibby said that he was happy with the company and even after the development of the town he didn't want to move. He felt that the pension scheme could have been better organized. Nonetheless it seems as though he had a 'golden handshake' in addition to his pension when the department closed. He recalled that after the war holiday pay came in and that was for all the employees but sick pay was not introduced.

Jack joined in 1927 at the age of fourteen and was with the firm for fifty years, finishing as warehouse manager:

I had to go to the rag shop first, where everyone goes, that's the place where all the clippings of the materials are put, sorted out and sold to dealers. Sometimes there was(sic) twelve boys in there, sometimes three, and when a department wanted someone, they used to pick the best and take them. I was there for a fortnight. We sorted all the clippings you see, we learned about the fabrics because you had to put them in the proper skips, kerseys and Derby tweeds. Kersey is a thick white material, and there's mole'. [moleskin] Mole was a thick texture - plumbers used it for wiping the joints when they put solder on, that was a kind of a cord but no ridges on it.

Unusually Jack was the first member of his family to work at the factory. At the time, just after the general strike of 1926, the situation in Haverhill and the surrounding towns was bad.

When I left the rag shop, I went to the warehouse, the booking [orders] department. I used to take the grass out of the cobbles, [in the factory yard] clean the ink-wells, move the day books from one office to the other, take orders from some of the warehouses and bring them to be booked. I was there about five weeks, I should say, then I done parcel packing, garments or anything. We used to have horses and wagons used to take all the stuff from the station all day long. Two wagons, and in their spare time they used to cart the coal, they'd change the wagon and collect coal from the station for the boilers, they were working all day; we used to have stables to keep the horses. We done(sic) eight o'clock till about eight at night. The break for lunch, or dinner was an hour and a half, twelve-thirty till two, I used to go home. We just had water (to drink) during the day, there was a pump in the yard.



Figure 67: Hand held seam flattener for corduroys. Photograph by Norman Brand, Courtesy of Gurteens.

There was a cobblestone roadway with a cottage, a caretaker lived there with his wife, she used to clean the offices and he used to do the corduroy trousers. They didn't iron the cords, they used to beat them with a big bit of wood, (Figure 67) level them out and fold

them up, so they didn't flatten the cord, there was no pressing of that, there was a whole department. It was a three storey building, not there now, it's pulled down, cords on the top floor, woollens in the middle and cottons at the bottom, for overalls, from mess jackets to trades. All the trades used to wear the same kind of overall, carpenters wore brown, engineers were navy and cooks and painters white. They didn't weave the fabric for them while I was there, they did some drabbett and also dyed it blue for dungarees. They used to take this drabbett to some shows they had in Brussels, to sell it. Mostly dyed either khaki or blue but they only dyed the blue at Gurteen's. They had about four vats and about eight dyers, they used to leave it in the vats all night, in the morning they used to open it up to see that it took everywhere and that was a real fast dye they used, indigo, it set well.

The girls did piecework but not the men, the mats were piecework, but the men in clothing had a weekly wage. There wasn't a great lot, there was cutters and warehousemen and a few tailors, but the majority were women on the machines.

Before the First World War there was Vanner and Fennel's silk mill. They packed in just after the First World War, but Gurteen's was the only one weaving in Haverhill, they had outworkers weaving in cottages. Some of the cottages are called Weaver's Row, three storeys, with big windows in the middle; they used to have a loom in each. [These cottages still survive a short distance from Chantry Mill in Burton End, all now in private ownership] There was weaving in the cottages and sheds, ordinary allotment sheds and they'd have a loom. That was when I first started about 1929. These looms were only wooden affairs. They never had heat or anything, there was nothing stolen in that time of day, [vernacular for 'during that period']. People could leave their doors open all night and no one would walk in.

There was first aid at the factory and a doctor used to come round, we were examined by a doctor before we started; just one first aid post for the whole factory. They were careful really to prevent accidents, the managers were responsible [for that] you see. After the factory inspector's visits there were no changes, all I remember is all doors used to be made to open and shut properly. The only thing I remember is anthrax from the hair, one case only and he recovered. If an employee was away sick, you had three day's pay, if I remember, but most people belonged to a private insurance, one was called the Shepherds, those sort of people, there were lots

about. You claimed - it wasn't a lot though. I was never ill ...There was no pensions until 1950 something.

About a third of Haverhill was allotment land, it belonged to the Gurteens mostly, they rented it out at so much a rod, generally ten rods each, some had twenty. They charged 6d a rod. [About 5s. a year] Everyone grew their own vegetables, they kept pigs and chickens; they used to say if you'd got four chickens you didn't want for anything else. If you went on a Saturday afternoon or something, there'd be crowds up [on] the allotments, all busy, that was their leisure really, and part of their income. Some who'd got twenty pigs for instance, they were really well-off. They used to let them go off from work down to market to sell their produce. They were quite easy - if you done your job ... There was a fair on May 1st, then there was the Haverhill Gala on August 1st. The factory closed then and generally we had a float in the Gala. For years and years we had these wagons and they'd take the cover off and just leave a flat platform, ideal really, I've been in them four times, the horse pulled them. People used to go gleaning too, for corn, just before the Second World War, mostly on Gurteen's fields, to feed their chickens. I've seen dozens of people on the street corners, no work, in the twenties. And the soup kitchens, used to boil up bones in big boilers, a chunk of bread and a bowl of soup for a penny, out of local charities. There was no dole then if you were out of work.

The warehouse manager in Jack's youth was a Mr. Darkin, possibly descended from the weaver of the same name mentioned in early Quaker records.

He was a Methodist preacher, well you didn't get on with him at all. He used to wear a buttonhole the whole time. Very rigid, but he was fair, he never interfered with you if you were doing the job. But working for Gurteen's was a good job, just the money, but an agricultural labourer never got so much as us, but we were always in a clean job and clothing was cheap. Less than cost price, say 1/6d to 3/6d for trousers, they were 18s. or 20s. (£1) in the shops, that was a big saving, but you had to wait till they came up, they were seconds.

Jack's comments on agricultural pay are supported in Evans oral history work in the region: 'During the 1914-18 war their [agricultural] wages had reached 46s a week. But after the war the wages were eroded down to 19s. a week¹.

¹ George Ewart Evans, *Where Beards Was All, An Extraordinary Childhood*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1970) p 109.

In 1933 the firm moved its offices from the site opposite the factory gates where the town post office now stands and where there was a well in the yard:

All the old day books we dumped in the well, hundreds of them, they came from the loft a lot of them. Some were 1900, perhaps 1800s, they all went down the well, destroyed, and ledgers, and the other stuff was taken over to the new offices. There was a load of water in there, they'll have gone now. The pump was over the well that was the only water they had at one time ... The old offices was like a Dickens room, with green baize doors, not a sound.

This illustrates the difficulty of business research; frequently when a firm moves to different premises any non-essential records are jettisoned.

Jack remembered the representatives travelling with a pony and trap or by train. He commented that Mr Thirtle, who covered East Anglia, worked until he was in his seventies. At the time the firm had eight salesmen, all of whom sold most of the firm's products. He thought most of the business was for hard-wearing, country clothing.

The most stuff sold in industrial areas was up in Durham, the shipyards in the North East, it wasn't deprived then. We used to have a special train from Haverhill station used to go to Bishop Auckland with about four or five tons of clothing on it, that was in 1946. It had always gone on, all the time, they used to put them in bales. There was two characters there, the Basham brothers, they'd been there since the First World War, all they done was stitch bales with hessian and put a hundred overalls in, or two hundred sometimes. They were laid out flat, lay a cover down, put paper inside and stitch it up; they used to wear straps on their hands with a grip to push the needle in. They used red and white coiled string so no one can cut them out and stitch them up again, and all new canvas they cut off the roll, hessian really. These used to go up to Bishop Auckland and Sunderland, also hair cloth to Canada, Montreal and Toronto; it was sold at trade fairs.

The skips were made of willow, like big baskets with a lid on, hinged and locked with straps. They used those in the packing shop too, to send clothing in, woollen clothing, so it didn't get creased up so much as in a bale. They came back empty, the railway used to charge a lot less for empty skips. We used to have a skip mender in Haverhill who used to mend them if they got broken a bit. (Figure 68) They were made locally, it was known as Skip yard. They used to grow the osiers [willow] at Sturmer. [A village about a mile or so from the town].



Figure 68: The Skip makers shop in Haverhill Square. Photograph by Norman Brand. Courtesy of Gurteens.

Jack's recollections of work in the Haverhill factory and his description of the baling of work-wear to send to the North East of England and to the Colonies gives a vivid picture of the operation at that time. In view of his comments about the poverty in the town around the time of the General Strike (in 1926) it is hardly surprising that those safely employed were happy to remain so. With work, housing and allotment sites all coming from one source they must have felt themselves fortunate to be part of such a concern, only one informant voiced any resentment.

Harold joined the firm in 1930 at the age of fourteen and apart from the war years and a period overseas, worked in the mat department all his life, eventually he became foreman:

We used to do a lot of reversible mats, with the red, green and brown border, that used to be dyed on - very thin, they were in coir yarn, we used to have to lace them in. I think the price used to vary from about 7d up to about a shilling a dozen. [Paid to the operative] They ranged from twenty-four inches by fourteen inches right up to No. 5, that's thirty-six inches by twenty-two inches, ordinary sort of doormats. We had to work hard, it's very hard on your hands.

They used to go to different parts of the country. Timothy Whites and Taylors and all those lot, all the big stores in Manchester, Belfast and everywhere, some of the mats were sold abroad, we made a lot for the mining company in South Africa, gold mines, all with the letters, the names in the mats. Also we made a great big circus mat for the Antwerp show in Belgium, I think that was about

thirty-six foot diameter and it was shaped the same as a saucer. It was three inches thick on the outside and tapered down to about one and a half inches in the centre. We had to take it down into the school playground in the Haverhill County School to join it up, it was too big to join in the factory, and then they took it to the railway station and shipped it to Antwerp.

When I first joined we used to start at eight o'clock until six at night. We had to work on Saturday morning. It was all piecework, except perhaps you might sometimes get a job on day work. [daily pay rate] It was only $2\frac{1}{4}$ d. an hour, after you had been there a year you got a farthing an hour rise [$\frac{1}{4}$ of an old penny, about 10s. per week]. We learnt as we went, they just showed you, gave you a little information about what to do and you learnt as you went along, but as you got on learning the trade so you went onto different types of work. Gradually developing on, from one thing to another right on to wool border mats and letter mats, finishing, shearing and shaving, shaped all your mats up and everything. It is a skilled job, it has to be drawn out onto graph paper, all the letter mats, the names of hotels and all these big places and big houses, they all have to be drawn out, you had to do it yourself. I finished up as foreman of the mat department. I gradually kept going up and as the older ones kept dying off and retiring, they used to promote ... you had the experience to show other people who were coming into the trade. [This last comment illustrates the general acceptance of the workers that promotion was dependent on older men retiring].

My father worked here all his life, he did fifty-eight years, he was fourteen when he joined ... born in 1878, so it was around about 1892 when he joined. He finished when he was seventy-two and he lived on until he was nearly ninety-seven. He was a wool border maker, he used to go to work at six o'clock in the morning and when he'd finished work at six o'clock at night he'd go on the farm to help with the harvest until nine o'clock. We was abed when he came in, we never saw father all the week till Sunday morning, that was how hard times was. They'd be in at six fifteen in the morning, he'd work till quarter past eight, he'd come home and have a bit of breakfast and walk back again. He'd walk back, home to dinner, back after dinner, then he'd come, finished at six then he'd go straight on the farm. There was eight of us in the family and his wages used to vary from 28s. to 30s.[£1.50] a week. That was in the latter part of the twenties, from the general strike up to about 1930. That was the only job there was about here at the time, only

apart from harvest work. There was nothing much else in the town, there was no industry actually in the town. If they was unemployed and they hadn't got no work, they'd go to the labour exchange and sign on and they'd tell you up straight at the labour exchange 'There's a job going at so and so'. They had to hire a bicycle for about 2d. a day, to cycle out, and they had to go, otherwise they didn't get any dole money.

He [Harold's father] said they was all a good lot of fellers to work with, and there was no trouble or anything like that. If you was two minutes late coming in the gate used to be closed and you had to stop out there a quarter of an hour and lose the time ... or you had to pay a penny towards a sick fund that they had running. If someone was sick they got a little help at that time of day, just for so long they got it, but then perhaps in the factory they'd have a collection for them, from the men. Because when I started here there must have been nearly a hundred worked here in the mat factory, finishers and weavers as well. There used to be a fund for Addenbrookes hospital ... There was just a slight provision you know, you had to pay for a doctor and everything.

That was all very dusty sort of work. But the old boys, they used to take snuff ... to clear their heads. I never knew anybody had any serious illnesses, not that I can recall. There was one chap came round once, somewhere about the Industrial Tribunal [probably a factory inspector] something about dust, but they never took no notice of it because nobody was ill. They all used to smoke and the old boys chewed tobacco at that time of day. I had an accident, I got my finger caught in a machine, I wasn't very old, got it caught in a cotton machine. But I got half my wages, about 3s.9d or 4s. a week and I had about four or five weeks off with that. There was a medical box on every floor and there was somebody there to do the job. Somebody in the St. John's Ambulance or something like that.

We was (sic) sort of associated with the Company because Miss Grace Gurteen, Daniel IV's daughter, was very good to my Mum, because she'd got eight children. Every little while she'd come up and bring half a dozen eggs you know, fruit or anything; she had a bicycle at the time and she used to cycle up. And she was very good to my wife ... she'd lost her first husband and a son, all within six weeks during the war. Her first husband was in the London Fire Brigade and the young boy he had appendicitis and he died with peritonitis just a fortnight before his sixth birthday. She was very down and Miss Grace used to look after her.

There was no pension, the only thing you just paid your stamp and that. When you were sixteen you started to pay a stamp ... The pension scheme wasn't brought in until a few years ago, that was usual. You see the long hours they had to work, they had to do sixty and a half hours before they took any overtime. That was when my father was alive ... I can remember Father made a mat for a Fishguard Bay Hotel and he made it a bit too long ... he had to buy that mat ... they couldn't sell it because it was too long, and he had to pay so much each week off it from his wages, everything had got to be exact. It's not like that today you know, if it had been today they'd have just sold it off as a 'job' mat.

Harold left Gurteens and England in 1957 to emigrate to New Zealand, but returned a few years later due to family problems. Wage books for the period show that at that time pay in the mat department varied between £2.15s. and £11 per week, presumably the lowest rate is for part time work or possibly for youngsters still in training. He re-joined the firm and continued to work as mat foreman until he was seventy-six years of age. It is clear from this interview that, as in other departments, although the employees in the mat department did not regard their training as a formal apprenticeship, it was a highly skilled job. They were eventually required to be able to produce their own point paper work, this is what Harold refers to when he talks of drawing the design out on a graph; it looks similar to an embroidery chart and is very highly skilled work. The youngsters were expected to perfect one skill before progressing to the next stage and although they were not indentured as apprentices they followed a structured training programme. Harold's family did not live in a company owned house but the rent they paid was equivalent to those who did.

Vic joined the firm just after 1945, going straight into the mat department as a finisher. He was subsequently made foreman of the spinning section in the weaving department. Of the men interviewed he is the only one who left the firm before retirement to go elsewhere, perhaps indicative of the competition for staff which developed post-war when new firms moved into the town:

It took me about a month to get used to it you know; your hands and that used to get sore, pushing the needle through and the mats had got to be finished just so and measured right ... you'd got to do so many, you got so much for a dozen, you might have a dozen No. 1s or a dozen No. 3s or whatever size they were. So you'd got to work hard to earn £5 then, it was all piecework, I think the average wages up there was nothing much, they used to talk about giving you a farthing an hour rise, got plenty of work if you do it for a farthing an hour extra. [And of his father-in-law] He worked at

Sudbury first before he come here and he come here as foreman and was in charge of the whole mat department, I think he was mat weaving in Sudbury.

After that I went on to the spinning machines when they came in, I was in charge of them, that was the hair spinning machines, those ones ... they invented them. Well, Mr. Oswald Smart and the Boardman Brothers, they and Lawrence Miller, his father invented all the pickers for them machines, that was a long while before I was there ... he'd never show anybody how to sharpen them and get the pickings out. I think they went up to Yorkshire, some hair people up in there bought the machines.

It's ever so hard, because of the heat and that, when it was the damp days, November time ... they used to pick twice as easy, they never got so many breakdowns then. But we had thirty machines to look after and they kept you on the go, you had to change the hair bunches about every hour you see. You'd got to scrap to get it done, because the longer they stop the less money you had. We got so much for the bobbins you turned out, you'd got to turn out so much weight on these machines, and then they used to go to the looms and make it into the cloth. They had this special room with the blokes in there called the hair drawers, I think there was about five or six worked in there, all local men, they'd been there thirty years. After they stopped making the mats, and then they'd have a lot of what you call the 'creel' from India ... you just cut the sizes you want off. (ready-made matting) I think it was cheaper to have it that way. They had a machine in there, you put the mats through, just to tidy them up and trim them all off to the sizes you wanted, so if they wanted them short, an inch or inch and a half or something ... they adjusted the cut of it. There were fitters there to keep the machines in working order and they used to sharpen them up as well. They wasn't (sic) strict as long as you done your work and everything.

Vic's views on the employment situation in the town underlines the fact that the company had no competition for staff until the overspill development just after the middle of the century. He commented that to the employees it was 'just a job' and the only means of earning a living locally other than agriculture, a view not shared by many, most of whom took great pride in their work.

Eric joined the firm straight from school in 1925 at the age of fourteen. He had no choice of department but was sent straight to the woollen clothing section where he finished his working life as manager:

I went straight in the woollen department which the Smarts always ran ... into the piece room warehouse, that's where we stored all the cloths, linings and everything. We sorted cloth out and made all of the pattern swatches for the travellers. We unloaded, because most of the goods those days came by rail, there was no lorries, they'd got their own horses and wagons that bring them to the station. I stayed in that department all the time I was there, because I finished up as the buying manager. When I went there first there was four youngsters in the department, we was responsible for getting all the cloth upstairs, they had to feed the cutters. [Ensure the men cutting the garments had a constant supply of cloth to work on] Later they had more of these band knives, there was a few accidents there, you know, they'd only want to take their mind off for a second and it was too late, in those first days there was a lot of hand cutters - with shears. The suiting for trousers and jackets mostly came from the Huddersfield district.

When I started I think it was about 8s. a week, I was paid by the hour, compared with farming and all that, it was a short working week, we were a lot better off. You had your cutters, your machinists, your pressers and all those. I think about the only people on piecework were the pressers. [This is only amongst the men] When I went there, there was about four different departments run by four directors, either Smarts or the Gurteens, the woollens was always run by the Smart family and it still is, Jack Smart; I worked under his grandfather and his father. Then there was what they called the cotton department, that was run by Christopher Gurteen's grandfather and father, they used to call him Mr. William, the cotton section which made overalls and they had contracts with the GPO and the Colonial Office. And there was another department with the looms, and then the mat factory, they all came under Daniel Gurteen, [Daniel Maynard Gurteen, son of Daniel IV] and then there was a corduroy department that was run by Mr. Horace Gurteen.

My father was a mat maker and my mother worked on the sewing machines. Mum packed up fairly early because she had a big family, there was ten of us. It must have been a nightmare sometimes, six till six.

I had a six year break in the RAF. A lot of us stayed with the firm over fifty years. You see when you come out of the Services ... I think the first factory to open was Wisdom toothbrush and they brought a lot of people with them so they didn't need many at the start. A lot stayed, there was more moved after they come out of the

services, [after] mixing with other people you know ... There weren't many had the sack, unless anything was stolen or anything, which happens in most factories. They were pretty good in that way.

There was first aid, they were mostly St. John's Ambulance people who had been trained ... There was a factory doctor, if anything went wrong they sent for him, he lived in the High Street. [And asked of industrial health problems?] There were none, because the place was kept pretty clean, it was swept up. The looms were cleaned up every day and the machine shop where the women on the machines worked, they had to keep it clean. No sick pay but we used to pay into a Friendly Society, so much a month, the Shepherds and the Oddfellows. We didn't get paid for holiday, you could take time off but you had to lose your money.

They used to have about six or eight travellers toured the whole country looking for orders, with skips, that's what they used to have packed with samples in. They travelled by train all the time, because there wasn't a lot of motor cars about early on. They managed to do it, because the orders used to come in every day, from anyone who'd buy the stuff in those days, they hadn't got the big accounts like they have now.

When they did a government contract the inspector came and inspected every garment and put a stamp on and they were packed in these big wicker hampers, about four feet by three feet and three feet high. Used to get a lot of garments in them, and they went by rail. The GPO had their overalls and jackets, and then they used to send abroad with the Colonial ... these big shorts and jackets, there was always a bit of competition in between the departments to see who did the best at the end of the year, a bit of rivalry.

The hours you worked depended on what orders came in. Perhaps leave off at four o'clock if they were short, but you lost those two hours pay. When I was young I didn't mind, we went on the Rec. [recreation ground] and played football.

Eric was asked about outside training for workers:

No one did it in that time. One or two went to London to learn more about cutting and all things like that, but there wasn't many. Most of them were trained in the factory from boys and just carried on. No pension, not until later, all that started sometime after the war. Now the younger generation of directors, they were more forward looking, they were the people who started the pension

scheme. In those days you was expected to save and look after yourself.

There's always a little bit of jealousy, you take the cutters who I was in contact with, where some would get a better job than the others and they could show more on their sheet at the end of the week. [This is where piece work could cause problems] The foreman, he settled it ... but you could always go and see Mr. Smart, when you wanted. You got one or two directors different to the others, some were a bit stricter than the others, Mr. Horace Gurteen, he was strict, he ran the cord department and the farms. The Smart family were fairly easy going, I always got on all right with them, because I was always in contact with them, buying and all such jobs as that. [We] Used to have a meeting every week to see what you'd sold and what we'd got to get in, they used to take what you say and run an eye over it, and if they thought it was right they'd do it. It was just a matter of sense, not ordering too much, then you'd got to sell that the next year, you'd got to be careful what you bought.

I finished in 1983, but I was part time for the last seven or eight years, I just went in mornings, I had the offer, he said 'You can carry on, or take your pension and work part time' I said 'I think I'll take my pension and work part time'. I'd had the experience and was training one or two youngsters.

A machinist is skilful, and you'd got to work hard to earn your money ... the machinists were all on piecework. I think people in those days were very conscientious, because if you lost that job you couldn't find another. They learned quickly because they had a good charge-hand, people who were fully experienced and they were very strict, to get them to do it properly, because it was better for them in the long run, the quicker they were the more money they could earn. They had training places for the machines, otherwise you'd run a needle in your finger. The wife did that once to hers and that left the cotton in, a piece of the needle in you know and it worked out, the manager said, 'That was damned good cotton, it didn't break!' I think they did fairly well. There was a little lift there to feed each floor with cut cloth.

They had a lot of changes while I was there. Most of them left and then went back again when the families grew up. They were mostly local, later on they used to bring them on from the villages but they were mostly local, they had to walk in. At half past twelve they used to stream out of there. There wasn't many part timers in the early days ... they couldn't really afford to run part timers because

that machine was standing idle unless they could get one for the morning and one for the afternoon. There was some outwork, mostly the finishing of the garments, buttonholes and all that; they used to be taken out on a van.

There was quite a lot of work done outside because they had the hair weaving. They'd build a house and have the loom in the house, and then they built big sheds. There used to be some sheds with looms on the old Downs, I reckon they must have been on piecework. It was a very slow job, so were the mats. It would either be short time or overtime. Because when my father worked down there, when I was a boy, I had to take his tea when they were busy and I thought - 'I don't want to work in here!' Used to go up and take it up to the factory and he'd have tea at his loom. Perhaps he'd be there till nine o'clock, because they'd got orders to finish for a certain time. The harder they worked the more they got. If they'd got a special mat he had to bring his graph home and fill out all the different colours in his own time, fill it how he wanted it, how he was going to do it ... told him what they wanted and what colours and he filled that in before he started on the mat. He'd just been taught by somebody else I think. Some were better than others. They must have had to be very fair because they wouldn't have stuck it, because they was always all familiar with their foreman.

Eric was promoted to 'staff' in 1964 at a monthly salary of £71.5s.

Despite the views of so many of the staff that training was informal, legislation had been in place via the trade boards since 1909, whereby employers had to provide proper training for all skilled workers within their various specialisms. The tailoring trade board issued certificates of competence for various levels of ability; in 1918 Alfred Thake was awarded his learner's certificate which survives in the firm's museum. It is clear from the responses of those employed in all departments that structured training was given with each operation understood and perfected before the trainee was allowed to go on to the next stage. Perhaps the rather informal atmosphere in a factory in this small town, where the majority of the employees knew each other, gave youngsters the impression that training was by accident rather than design, this was clearly not so.

The managers salaries are shown together and these appear to have been charged in general overheads rather than departmental costs. In 1948, Mr Funnell, who managed the department, earned £83.6s.8d. per month, £1,000 a year; a figure often used as a benchmark of great success at that time. Mr Noble who managed the clothing factory and Harry Scott who managed the Gurteen estates were next in line with £750 per year. A police sergeant in the Metropolitan force

at that time was earning about £500 a year, thus the middle management of this rural company were clearly valued enough to be paid a competitive salary.

Many attitudes expressed by the shop floor workers show affection for their place of work, for their peers and for some members of the Gurteen family. This is so in the clothing factory and in the mat and weaving departments. Perhaps it is indicative of the different attitudes of men and women workers that the female members of the workforce were more in awe of their employers than were their male colleagues. Most enjoyed the work they did and agreed that pay and conditions were better than in agriculture or domestic service, which were the only real alternatives in the area until after the middle of the century. Most of the older workers stayed with the firm at least until retirement age, even though by that time there were other factories in the town, many of whom probably offered better money. The managers and foreman interviewed had been promoted from within the existing workforce; none had applied for the job but were singled out by the directors. Harold's comments illustrate that promotion was only available on the retirement of the previous post holder.

23.

SALES & MARKETING

All generations of the Gurteen family appreciated that effective marketing was the mainspring of their business. Pay for sales staff was good and at least in recent years, the representatives earned more than those employed by their competitors. The salesmen who worked for the company through the Second World War had all been with them for many years and were well regarded by the firm's directors. Those representatives who covered very rural areas with only small retailers dotted about clearly had to spend more time on the road than those covering urban areas with major customers, thus their basic pay reflected this. In the late forties the Directors were drawing £1000 a year. Pay and commission rates for the salesmen was changed shortly after this and in 1959 their salaries were £1000 per year with commission only above a certain sales figure. Junior directors by then were drawing salaries of £1750 p.a.

Retired salesmen talked of their customer base, how the merchandise changed during their time with the company, and how the move to modernize led to the expansion and the opening up of additional clothing factories in Hadleigh, Ely and Ireland.

John Arnison joined the firm in 1954 to cover the South and South West ground, replacing Mr Sherrill who had been there for forty years. He knew his predecessor slightly having called on many of the same customers and it was Sherrill who suggested that Mr. Arnison should apply to take over when he retired. All the representatives found their jobs with Gurteens by recommendation.

Mr. Arnison described the degree of trust that the directors showed to their travellers:

They were so straight and honest. Old Mr. Con, he said to me 'You'll need money for your hotels, send in an indent for how much you want'. I had to say 'I think I shall require so many pounds for the month' and it was paid to me. Mr. Con said 'We trust you, if we can't trust you we don't want to employ you'; I couldn't wish for a better firm to work for ... I had a pretty good knowledge of what they did. With Anderson's... it was just salary, with Gurteen's they offered me salary *and* commission, I was much better off.

Christopher (Gurteen) wanted to come round with me as he'd just joined the firm and I was due to go to Cornwall that week, so he came and stayed. When I went to Cornwall I used to leave about

three in the morning, I had good customers in Penzance, Simpsons, and in those days the roads were dreadful, so we had to start out early. I opened several new accounts, on the south coast, one or two towns were very good, but the West Country was very poor, there were no startling businesses, it was hard work to get an order.

Gurteen's kept a very good stock so they were pretty good on delivery. If there was a complaint I would try to pacify them and sort something out, but on the whole there weren't many. There wasn't much work-wear sold in my ground, it was mainly on the better end. Exeter was a good town, but you see in those days, you left Exeter to go to Barnstaple, you'd drive across the moors, and of course some of the orders were very small. You go to a small outfitter, if he ordered three pairs of trousers you were a lucky man.

When John joined the firm there was no pension provision. Gurteens began their scheme shortly before he retired so his pension was very small, nonetheless he was happy with the company.

Harry Bates covered the north east of the country. He replaced Mr. Heap who had died 'in harness' having been with the company for well over thirty years. Harry joined the firm in 1957 and described his experience thus:

I was recommended to Gurteens ... they phoned several of their customers and said 'look we want a replacement for Jimmy Heap, do you know anybody you could recommend. Anyway I went down and I was interviewed in the boardroom by all of the directors, all elderly men. They asked me 'what knowledge have you got of the clothing trade, who do you know in the trade?' I told them and they said 'Well you seem to know a lot of our customers ... You've got to see Mr Conrad Gurteen and he's going to discuss the terms of the job with you. Subject to your references being in order we're going to give you the job ... Well, when he made the offer I nearly fell off the chair, it was three times what I was earning.

I started on January 2nd. I went down by train on the Sunday and trotted along the road to Gurteens on the Monday morning. Oswald Smart said 'Look I'm going to ring somebody; I want you to be with one of the travellers today. I spent five days in Haverhill; I went there on a Monday and came away on a Friday with all the samples. I got the job because they liked me, they must have done. I knew a high percentage of their customers, that was the important thing. They gave me a list of accounts, I said 'Oh, I know these people very well, I've called on them for six years'

My predecessor had died. He did very well in Nottingham where he lived; the accounts there were very good, Boots was one, he opened that; of course in those days Gurteens made overalls you see. There was no business in Sheffield, nothing in the North East, apart from Newcastle. He did well in Bishop Auckland, but in Middlesbrough and Stockton ... in Hull there wasn't a single account. He did well with a few people but he didn't cover the ground properly so I'd got to find new accounts. What they had in those days was Derby tweeds, they had breeches, trousers, ever such old fashioned stuff you know, I did well with it in Yorkshire but they laughed at me in Nottingham. They [Gurteens] didn't make fashion clothing in those days, they made trousers, they were good at that, sports jackets, overalls, summer jackets of course. That was big business - in Alpaca originally and then they went into terylene and cotton, they had a good name in summer jackets. W V [Gurteen] said to me one day, 'I don't know what we're doing Derby tweeds for, the Derby tweed age is over'.

I didn't do Lancashire in the early days, it wasn't covered by the firm. Then they decided to pull me down from the North East, from Newcastle. They left me with Bishop Auckland because it was an extremely good account for trousers and I was very friendly with the buyer. There were no accounts in Lancashire at all, and I built that up and did quite well there. They did overalls for Boots, only for the factories, the buyer was called Tomlinson, such a nice chap; it was already an open account. I didn't take orders at Boots, they went direct to the company. My job was to be a friend of the buyer, I took him to lunch about three times a year and once a year he went down to the factory. He used to send the orders through. Sketchleys was another one, in Nottingham, an overall replacement firm, white coats, grey coats, that was big business as well. When Christopher came into the business, after a bit, [in 1959] he said 'We are going to drop these overalls, there's not enough profit in it'.

The Gurteens trusted you, they were a very good firm. Their reputation with customers was very good. When I was offered the job I went to Nottingham where they'd done a lot of business ... One of them was Donald Horseborough, a customer who became a very good friend. He said 'You realize you're a very lucky chap to get that job'. I stayed with them thirty years. From being a very old fashioned company it was transformed. I went to people I couldn't have gone to with the old stuff and I opened big accounts. J G Graves of Sheffield - Mail Order, well I did a lot of business with

them, I worked very hard and developed the clothing side; Leeds wasn't good for me because it was the home of [men's] clothing in those days. They'd never heard of Haverhill or Gurteen's, but they knew them all right when I'd finished.

If the turnover had dropped they would have wanted to know what I was doing, but I worked hard, you've got to drill yourself to work. There was no supervision, they didn't have a sales manager, you were entirely your own driving force. The only thing they wanted to know was what the turnover was like. Christopher started a sales sheet, saying where you'd called, but when I started with them in the early days they didn't want any of that. I don't think any one of them [salesmen] abused that trust, to be completely trusted is very flattering you know, they only want results, it's a very nice feeling.

Nothing in the firm's archive explains why the North Midlands and North East area had been so poorly covered, clearly there were a number of towns which had sufficient retail outlets to warrant regular visits and to produce substantial business but this did not happen. There was no sales manager at the time and each department dealt with their own outgoing goods. There was no cross-referencing between the directors to ensure that the ground was covered effectively. Maybe Harry's predecessor, Mr Heap had relaxed knowing that his regular calls provided enough orders to satisfy his employers. Perhaps the fact that the directors and salesmen were all elderly men, set in their ways and no longer motivated to increase trade made them complacent; also the proximity to the men's wear manufacturers of Leeds may have been a disincentive for buyers to look as far afield as Suffolk for goods; whatever the reason, Harry had to work extremely hard to open up new accounts in his area. He worked for the firm until he was sixty-eight. 'When I retired Christopher gave me the car, he said 'here's the log book, it's yours'.

Roy Robinson joined the company as a traveller in 1960. He had met Mr Jordan, Gurteen's current salesman when both were visiting the same customer; they discussed the coming closure of the firm for which Mr Robinson worked and he was subsequently approached by Gurteens. When Jordan retired Roy took over the East Anglia area but until then he covered London and northwards up to Peterborough in the East Midlands.

Asked if it was usual for the firm to approach possible employees rather than advertise:

They had such a small turnover of travellers. This man I'm talking about was with the company for thirty-nine years, so they very rarely needed to employ a new man. [Mr Jordan had taken over from Mr Thirtle who had joined Gurteens in 1898]. It was often

word of mouth, I don't remember them ever advertising for a traveller, they had such a fine reputation that anyone joining them knew what to expect.

The customers I was given were very poor, people that had spent as little as five pounds with the firm in a year. The irony of it all was, that most of these companies said - 'Gurteens, marvellous company, if ever we want a high back flannel trouser, we always come to Gurteens'. Well, I suppose it came out of the ark, you know, the chance of selling a high back flannel trouser was very remote, but they always came to Gurteen for them, they'd dealt with them for fifty years. Fortunately for the company Mr Christopher was coming into the company and Mr Jack, and they were introducing new lines, so for a new traveller these were ideal times to open up new accounts. Instead of going to the existing accounts who would automatically reject them, we were able now to go to a new customer and open the account with them. And it just mushroomed from there. The company was not particularly well known in the ground I took over, they'd never been strong in North London, but it didn't take us long to get established, about two years and we were beginning to get some quite useful accounts out of it. At that point the man who I'd met originally that put my name forward to the company, was then retiring, Mr. Jordan, and I said, 'well I know East Anglia', because I'd covered it for about ten years before, 'could I take it over'? They said, 'you can take it over on one condition, that you introduce to the company a man that could take over your ground'.

Our targets went up with inflation, and we got commission over that target figure. So if inflation was five per cent and you got £100,000, £105,000 then you were virtually at a standstill there, but if you got £110,000 you get commission on the £5000. When I joined the company in 1960 it was at a very low ebb, I don't think we had a target figure. I think the turnover [of his sales ground] was about £50,000 and something like one per cent commission I think, on everything. Probably about ten years later, when this new system came in and it seemed to work all right. We had salesmen's meetings, now this personally I appreciated very much, because if you have a meeting it's surprising how many times there's a matter which you don't mention to the company because you think it of no importance. But when two of your colleagues round the table mention it at the same time you realized it was important. When they started doing this I think it fed in a lot more information to them, which they needed. One must remember that this company,

thirty years ago was very much behind the times. Everything had left it behind, it took a long time to catch up, but it caught up, by listening, not only to us but the governors were obviously talking to the big retailers and getting their views.

I suppose, one is always aiming for the biggest customers, but in the rag trade there is a limit, because a lot of the really big buyers, this didn't apply thirty years ago, but about twenty years ago shops were grouping up, forming the independent department stores, groups of shops like Palmers of Yarmouth and Bury and Joshua Taylors of Cambridge. You see then they were starting to dictate terms, what they wanted and prices they would pay. Now fortunately the company left us to sort these things out ourselves, they didn't take them off our hands and make them house accounts. [A house account is where the customer usually deals direct with the office and no commission is paid to the representative though on occasions he is expected to visit] We were allowed to battle away with them and get what we could out of them, and I think it worked. But like in most trades, the smaller retailer was gradually taking a back seat because he hadn't got the facilities or the room. The sort of shop we would deal with, Dick Palmer in Saffron Walden. It was our job to be first in if we got an inkling that somebody was starting a shop, we wanted to get in there. (Asked did the directors realize that it was regarded as old fashioned and 'a bit in the doldrums') They did, I was asked to take the sales manager, John Simpkin with me, to look around a few shops in London, and we stayed in Woodford Green for two or three days and we looked around. John made copious notes about what was missing and why we weren't in there and prices and so forth. And as I say, the younger directors, which was Mr Christopher and Jack Smart were coming into the business and taking an interest in it. In those days we used to make a lot of overalls, but they got a research business to look into it and they were told that the overall business was going to decline and the Far East would be producing that sort of stuff, so it would be very much to the company's advantage to move into more clothing. The sales force then had been sort of regenerated, we were in our twenties or early thirties, we had different ideas. Somebody in the factory made a corduroy trouser, I know it's a job to realize this but corduroy trousers were great baggy things, halfway up your back and they used to look awful. Somebody made a corduroy trouser which instead of being about nineteen inches wide was about fifteen inches wide and it had no turn-ups, and it had belt loops at the top ... it was called Slimmex

and retailers would look at it and they said 'Well we'll try half a dozen, we'll try ten', One of the first big orders where I'd been used to getting ten pairs of trousers, twelve pairs of trousers, I showed this company the sample and they asked me to have a wander round and come back. When I came back, there was an order there; you must remember I'd only been with the company a few months then and I'd only had the crumbs off other people's tables, and there was an order and I could see the numbers twos and threes, and I put it in my pocket and got out before they changed their mind. And when I got out to my car the first thing I did was counted them, four hundred pairs of trousers, I couldn't believe it, four hundred pairs! They'd got about three branches, but it was a London company and they had never dealt with us before. I sent it in and the company put a few more colours in and out we went again. And this one trouser had more impact on the company progress than anything else they'd ever done, it changed the image. So now we moved into something a little better, plain bottoms, still slim, because the slimness got the things going and people were beginning to expect us to bring different lines. They were saying - 'What have you got for us this time'; but at the same time we could not afford to drop the old fashioned stuff, in those days we were still doing the overalls. Remember the company had expanded quite fast, we had four factories, Ireland, Ely, Hadleigh and Haverhill, we were producing that stuff, all made by the company in those days, but as it went on, this modern stuff got a bigger share of the company you see. We took the new stuff in because this was the stuff we would wear and that we enjoyed selling and it worked.

We were very proud of the stock service, but we didn't back that up completely because when you go out with a range you can never be sure what's going to sell. If they thought a particular cloth or a particular colour perhaps would go, they'd put more cloth in, to back it up. The warehouse has never been empty, we used to get a stock list every month, and when you saw it, you'd get a sample and go all out to sell that. If a retailer was getting a bit low on grey trousers and you'd got stock, it was yours that you wanted to get in his shop, and we did run a stock brochure, and most of these lines were backed a hundred per cent. If you sold a retailer a hundred pairs of trousers and they sold well there was a good chance you'd get another sixty while the season was on.

They used to do two exhibitions a year. I used to do the one in London; I never did the one in Birmingham. I think we'd got certain firms round the world, I think we had one in Canada and I

know I dealt with one in Sweden, years and years ago, but, I don't know where the others were, but I would imagine we'd probably got about twenty, but we never went all out for it because we didn't have an export department.

Like his colleagues, Roy commented on the level of trust the directors showed their representatives and said that this encouraged loyal service from those who worked for them, such trust could also have been abused. They were paid salary plus commission. 'The company believed that if you got a salary, at least you'd always be fairly respectably dressed, trouser bottoms wouldn't be frayed etc'. Roy was with Gurteens for thirty-two years and felt that he was well looked after and his efforts were appreciated.

The views of these salesmen who joined Gurteen's just after the middle year of the twentieth century show the changes needed if the firm were to survive. All spoke of the number of small customers buying minimum quantities, a hangover from the days when overheads were low and wages a smaller percentage of total costs. Those covering rural areas had to drive many miles to obtain orders for two or three items and this made nonsense of any efforts at efficient costing. All commented on the age of most of the Gurteen directors. It is not surprising that after thirty or forty years continuing a business built by their forebears in a region which was a backwater in terms of industry and transport, they had failed to move with the times. Had the firm not had an infusion of younger members of the family and young men 'on the road', all with outside experience, at best they might simply have marked time. The reputation they had achieved a generation earlier, combined with their business methods, particularly the maintenance of an excellent stock service, probably sustained them to some degree but clearly the need to modernize both goods and production methods was imperative. Nonetheless the firm's turnover during the 1950s increased substantially year on year and this was before management consultants were called in to update and streamline their operations. That they saw the need for advice shows that the directors were at least partly aware of the problems. The salesmen were selected with care and all enjoyed excellent relationships with the firm's directors; they were paid a very competitive salary for the work. This reflects the attitudes of Daniels III and IV a hundred years earlier, in understanding that without effective marketing efficient production methods were immaterial. It is truly astonishing that for a company with such a large and varied output that they employed only two generations of salesmen in nearly seventy years. The realization that good salaries were essential for them to attract and retain the staff they needed shows again in that they appointed a female personnel manager in 1964 at a salary of £1000 p.a., at this time young female graduates in London, where salaries are traditionally higher than elsewhere, were being offered £800 and £1000 p.a. Three years later Mr. Leadbetter was appointed as a pattern cutter at £1,750 p.a.

again a very high salary for this type of work in a rural area, reflecting the directors' acknowledgement of the need to employ highly trained technically expert professionals rather than just promote someone with very limited experience from the shop floor.

As soon as possible after 1945 the company began selling again through international trade shows. In 1963 the International Men's and Boys' Wear Exhibition (IMBEX) was founded. This was a major annual show mounted by the British Clothing Industry Association, primarily a showcase for the industry to promote contact between manufacturers and their customers. The management committee was chaired by members of the business community who gave an enormous amount of time and effort to ensure success. IMBEX always took place at a major exhibition venue such as Olympia or Earl's Court and retail buyers from all over the world converged there, many doing their main annual buying during the show. Bill Gurteen served as chairman for sixteen years from 1962 and was awarded an OBE for services to the industry. Subsequently his son Christopher acted in the same capacity for a number of years. Imbex had its final year in 1992 and the event was taken over by a professional exhibition company. That such a major function could be run for nearly thirty years by businessmen prepared to take it on in addition to the work involved in managing their own firms, is a measure of the commitment shown by the Gurteens and their colleagues. The company continues to exhibit regularly at the major shows in this country.

24.

TIME FOR CHANGE

Some ten years after the end of the austerity measures of clothes rationing and the Utility scheme, the development of Haverhill as an overspill town for those moving out of London, and the building of industrial units to provide work for the growing population began. At the same time there was expansion of the clothing industries in the Third World. It became clear that the Gurteens needed to re-plan their whole organization. They were faced with greatly increased competition in the trade and with the industrial development of the town: for the first time in its history the firm had difficulty in both recruiting and retaining factory operatives. New industries paid more than Gurteens, the hours were much the same but at factory level the work required less skill and was much less labour intensive. In clothing production the machinists required considerable training before reaching maximum earning potential and sloppy work had to be re-done. For many of the new industries such as Haverhill Meat Products and the Addis brush manufacturer, training was minimal.

Despite the problems the company continued to increase their turnover very steadily during the twenty years after the Second World War and between 1950 and 1964 they more than doubled their figures from £500,182, to a little over £1m. Nonetheless rising turnover was being outstripped by overheads and profits were decreasing fast. Drastic action was needed and in 1955 the first of several work study consultant firms was called in. In January of that year Peacocks accepted the following brief:

To make such enquiries as necessary to determine the general efficiency of clothing manufacturing activities ... and where weaknesses exist to make suggestions for improvements. To make a review of salient factors of each department ... followed by conclusions and constructive suggestions¹

Their findings were:

Woollen department: Administration adequate, specialization and anticipation of the market so that most orders can be met ex-stock. Useful cost analysis on material consumption and records kept of productive wages of technical groups including all garment manufacture. Stock well kept and department finances ... nothing to warrant radical change. *Cotton Department,* Delivery periods sometimes difficult to define ... overlapping of work and lack of

¹ Gurteen Company Archive, 20/479, Peacocks Work Study Report, (1955).

information on progress of orders. [The report fails to clarify where the overlapping of work occurred and makes no suggestions as to remedies] *Cord Department*, Small in comparison, some analysis done on material costs against anticipated cost including in selling price. Might merge with woollen department. *Design and Pattern making*, Special items mean designers time and preparation of item not covered by profit. [not cost effective]. Odd singles made for directors, makes nonsense of attempts to include productivity and cut costs and staff show a negative attitude to suggestions. *Cutting Room*, Suggest that Mr. Vaux should have a deputy as his knowledge is unique and if anything happens to him chaos would result. Lighting poor, glare from exposed filament lamps, varied intensity of light for benches. *Woollen making*, Impossible to define costs of making particular styles, time wasted in passing garments during manufacture. Disruption from part timers coming and going. Suggest mobile units work in sequence. Again too much time spent on 'specials'. Absence of reliable records in woollen trouser making. Unproductive (time) carrying work about; output could be raised by fifteen to twenty per cent. The workforce largely oldish. *Cord trouser making*: same comments as woollen making. *Machining cotton coats, trousers, tropicals*, the foreman did not know the names of jobs of many of his operatives and there was no interest outside technical issues, labelling, and giving out of haberdashery. No records of output of labour groups. Tropicals of a high standard 'As long as you can get labour prepared to undergo a long apprenticeship and then stay for what are comparatively modest wages, should be able to expand this class of garment profitability'. (On the management of the company their comments are even more damning. Conditions within the factory are described as) well-nigh unmanageable, very few men would take over the job at any price. It is unfair to use a modern clothing factory as a basis for comparison².

The variety of goods produced makes it impossible to mass produce in the usually accepted sense of the term. Mr Noble [the factory manager] is purely a technician. His grasp of management techniques is very limited and responsibilities not clearly defined. Higher management makes free contact with his subordinates in a manner which undermines him. He has antagonized labour in the past and [is believed] to have acquired his manner from his

² GCA 20/479, Peacock's Work Study Report.

immediate chief who is reputed to possess only a limited amount of tact and diplomacy³.

It is a damning report which underlines the need to appoint a highly skilled factory manager who has technical knowledge combined with an ability to foster labour relations and discipline whilst instituting good pay structures. There were no weekly costing analyses or checks on fraud and the writer commented that there was 'gross exposure of people to temptation'⁴. The consultants clearly felt that the trust spoken of by many of the staff was misplaced.

Nothing was done in response to these findings and astonishingly the company continued to limp on for the next three years, run by aging members of the family and department managers promoted from within, none with any outside experience; even the comments of the potential for growth in the cotton department were ignored. The evidence in the report underlines the fact that various family members were more concerned with interdepartmental competition than with the overall health of the firm. They were still applying methods of production and staffing that they had used seventy years earlier. They were a perfect example of comments made during a Royal Society of Arts Inquiry into economic factors in East Anglian industries 'Complacency remains a strong inhibitor of change and improved performance'⁵.

W G Rimmer, writing of Marshalls of Leeds in the mid nineteenth century, commented:

The partners developed attitudes incompatible with the energetic conduct of business ... they could safely neglect the mills and instead of searching methodically for profit and improvement ... they collected whatever the mills happened to offer⁶.

The same could be said of the Gurteen family in the company during the early mid-twentieth century, yet they surely must have been aware of studies made by British industrialists and earlier by the Board of Trade of the American industry which showed UK manufacture to be appallingly outdated⁷. It was not until 1958 that two more specialist Work Study firms were called in. The first, L A Ferney and Associates put forward a report on the Gurteen factory and proposals as to how efficiency and profitability might be restored. Some of their comments are particularly relevant:

³ _____ Peacock's Work Study Report.

⁴ GCA, Peacock's Work Study Report.

⁵ Royal Society of Arts Inquiry, University of East Anglia, Pamphlet HH8010.

⁶ W G Rimmer, *Marshall of Leeds, Flax Spinners, 1788-1886*, (Cambridge University Press, 1960) p 67.

⁷ Andrew Godley, *British and American Clothing Industries*, (Textile History, 28, 1997) p 67.

In most concerns there is one group of executives who believe and act on the basis that so long as the wheels turn, however slowly and noisily, don't do anything, be content with the miracle that the machine runs at all. Another ...who are dissatisfied with the existing order who wish to see the maximum of reforms carried out in the minimum of time. It is believed that a sound organization is built up by balancing these two contradictory forces⁸.

Gurteen directors again ignored the report, possibly because many of their findings resulted in personal criticism of members of the board. The second consultants that year were Norcross and Partners. Their preliminary report shows a more direct approach and fewer attacks on individuals than Ferneys; as a result they were appointed to restructure the company. In August 1958 they wrote to the directors of Gurteen pointing out that over a four year period their profits had dropped from a little under eight per cent to two and a half per cent and that if this were to continue the firm could not survive. The first major decision taken was to advertise for a:

Works Manager for an old established Manufacturing company in the Men's Clothing Industry ... knowledge of the following - work study, piecework, incentive schemes, factory layout, costing and estimating, general works administration and stock control. Applicants must know the latest management techniques⁹.

Norcross and the Gurteen directors interviewed applicants and at the beginning of 1959 the firm appointed Alan Tiffany as works manager at a salary of £1750 p.a. Mr. Tiffany had worked for John Barran of Leeds whose development a hundred years earlier closely mirrored the Haverhill business. Barran's situation in the heart of the men's wear manufacturing city meant that they were constantly aware of improved methods of production and machinery and were undoubtedly considerably more up to date than their Suffolk competitors. Alan had been assistant production manager; he was appalled at the methods still in use in Haverhill and commented:

Frankly I'd never seen machines like these, there can't be spare parts for things like this, line benching with two horse motors and girls sitting opposite each other with a little ditch with all the stuff in. They actually stopped machining and went to a giving out room for the work. It's a challenge, but it'll take me ten years to sort it out ... I put a costing system in, they had no system at all ...

⁸ GCA, 20/273, Ferney's Management Report, 1958.

⁹ _____ 20/442, Norcross Work Study Files, (1959).

everything was an overhead, trimmings, zips and buttons were all stuck in works overheads, I said you can't do this, that's materials.

This last comment illustrates very clearly how out of touch the directors were. They had little understanding of how a modern clothing factory, or indeed any business, should be run and no real desire to learn, hence perhaps their ignoring the advice of the previous work studies. Without proper costing no price structure can be effective since it can only be based on guesswork. In the light of Alan Tiffany's remarks it is surprising that the firm had lasted so long.

In June 1959 Alan submitted to the board his survey of suggested improvements for factory layout, manufacturing methods and quality control. He pointed out that in the home trade there was a 'growing awareness' of need to adopt engineering principles to machinery, plant, garment making and laying up, and talked of increasing productivity and sales and decreasing manufacturing costs. The need to build up a well-trained labour force was stressed, with wages reflecting the increased competition for staff that the development of the town's new industrial areas would necessitate. New training schemes within the factory were planned as well as sending some staff out for specialist training, and a full-time designer/pattern cutter was employed¹⁰. Substantial savings needed to be made if they were to continue producing the goods they had made previously. Norcross commented in their report that the work study application needed to be 'technically, economically and socially successful, i.e. it must be acceptable to the people in the business. A former employee of your company made some very crude attempts to apply Time Study which have left behind, in the minds of most of your employees, a feeling of suspicion'. The consultants stressed the importance of 'carrying your employees with us'¹¹. As far as it is possible to tell, most of the suggestions put forward by the study team and Alan Tiffany were adopted without too much demur. Is this an indication that by this time, the board, despite being rather overweight with older members of the family, had realized they should act on the advice of those they felt had greater expertise and objectivity than they had themselves or were they forced to acknowledge that unless they did so the company would fail? Whichever is true, they were clearly not ungrateful for Mr Tiffany's achievements and were subsequently concerned that he would not remain with them without some inducement. After discussion with Oswald Smart and the improvements in productivity that resulted from his work Alan was rewarded when in 1963 he was appointed to the board, the first non-family director since the disaster of Ivy-White in the 1930s.

It must be said that Gurteens were not alone in neglecting areas of business management which were vital to the health of a company. S Pigot, writing of Hollins, manufacturers of Clydella and Vyella fabrics wrote of infighting

¹⁰ GCA,20/482, Alan Tiffany's Report, (1959).

¹¹ GCA, Norcross Files,

amongst family members of the board and of the appointment of the appointment of E D A Herbert as Deputy Chairman, he comments: Under his direction the organization and policy of the company was substantially recast...the transfusion of much new blood soon began to make itself felt¹².

The staffing problems in Haverhill increased in the 1960s as more industries relocated to the town, many offering easier and better paid work. Alan commented 'It was a question of how quickly I could stem the flow of experienced machinists going out and youngsters coming in who didn't know one end of a sewing machine from the other'. The situation was only going to get worse as the town developed and it was decided to look for additional production space elsewhere. After considerable research, the company opened three new units, Hadleigh in 1961, Ely in 1964 and Ireland in 1968. The latter in Arva, County Cavan, was partially due to grants offered by the Irish Development Board to encourage renewal of industry and relieve unemployment, but the problems of staffing and religious strife made it difficult. Entrenched attitudes of various factions and the refusal of some to work with others made it difficult to appoint and keep the operatives on the shop floor, management staff from Britain were not keen to relocate to work in such an atmosphere and after seven years the company pulled out. The Hadleigh factory made overalls and inexpensive trousers and it was here that they employed their first and only female factory manager. In Ely they took over a factory from the Spirella corsetry company which they extended; they took on most of the existing staff and here they made the garments for the better end of the trade. Ely and Hadleigh were kept busy for twenty years.

Christopher Gurteen and his cousin Jack Smart joined the firm in 1959 and 1962 respectively. Like their forbears they had worked elsewhere first. Christopher had worked for Harmers in Norwich for a while and for a further period in France, three months at a weaving factory, three months at a clothing factory and eighteen months at University in Lausanne. On entering the family firm he worked with Alan Tiffany for several months and in 1961 he and John Simpkin were given the task of setting up a sales office. Jack spent a year with Rothmans of Pall Mall, and then a short time with Atterton and Ellis, a local engineering firm before going to the Leeds College of Technology for three years. This was followed by a stint at the British Institute of Management followed by a further year with an industrial clothing company. On joining the family firm he worked on the road with John Arnison, selling and researching the market for Gurteen's goods in London.

Young blood brought new ideas and the company image changed drastically with work-wear, leather goods and weaving gradually dropped as competition from specialist firms and overseas made them unviable. Finally in 1990 the mat

¹² Stanley Pigot, *Hollins, A Study of Industry*, (Nottingham, William Hollins, 1949) p 135.

department closed and Gurteen's then were able to concentrate their energies on production of good quality middle price range clothing. Even this was not without problems; the ever increasing competition from emergent economies in the Third World meant that painful decisions had to be taken. In the 1990s it became clear that, if they continued to manufacture at home they could not compete with inexpensive imports and after much soul searching in 1995 the directors closed their production in Haverhill and began manufacturing abroad. It cannot have been an easy decision, many old Haverhill families had worked for the firm for generations, for those still employed there the passing of such a vital part of the town's industrial history might be greeted with a mixture of sadness and resignation. For the family directors who had known most of their older employees since childhood having to take such drastic action must have been painful. The factory premises were modernized and adapted and now serve as offices, showrooms and warehousing. Thus for the third time in the firm's history members of the Gurteen family, faced with the need to survive, accepted the challenges of the global market and instituted the radical changes necessary to face the future.

Within the last decade of the twentieth century another generation of the family joined the business. Training for family members continues to be a priority; Christopher's two sons, Damian and Charles joined the firm during the 1990s. Damian had spent time in the Army and then working in the City gaining financial experience and Charles studied pattern cutting at the London College of Fashion. Jack's son Duncan took a degree in Business Studies followed by a BCIA (British Clothing Industry Association) scholarship in Manchester and then a spell with William Baird the knitwear firm before joining the family firm. Alan Tiffany retired in 1980 and two long serving company men were appointed directors, John Simpkin and Chris Lushey. Robert Norbury, who joined the firm in 1979 to take over from Alan Tiffany, also became a director.

With the town's accelerating development, competition for staff had a real impact on Gurteens; though some of this was due to better pay and conditions offered elsewhere and to the degree of skill training needed to become proficient in the clothing factory, much may also have been due to changing attitudes in the work place. Previous generations had regarded 'jobs for life' as of prime importance and neither sex viewed the lack of promotion prospects as a problem. Industrial growth and social mobility combined with changing political thinking - 'You've never had it so good', of the 1960s Macmillan administration, all encouraged fresh attitudes and new priorities in the younger generation. Christopher Gurteen commented that it was the industrial development of the area which presented them with the need to advertise for staff for the first time in their history. Previously they had been able to take the best of the youngsters leaving school and place them in whichever department had a vacancy.

Clothing manufacturers in the region were not alone in facing such problems. In their work on *Industrial Location* Keith Chapman and David Walker discuss the difficulties facing the textile and clothing industries of this country in the second half of the twentieth century:

These products are fundamental necessities but as levels of disposable income rise the proportion spent on clothing tends to fall. Thus, although it is one of the first industries to establish in any country, it is difficult to sustain rates of growth commensurate with general levels of economic expansion. Even stability has proved a forlorn objective as output, employment and capacity have all declined steadily in most advanced economies ... there has been a flight of corporate capital from the core industrial economies to the global periphery, especially important in an essentially labour intensive industry. This shift has precipitated the relative decline of the industry in the core economies¹³.

Certainly the proportion of disposable income spent on clothing has fallen steadily, this is due partly to improved technology in manufacture and to the availability of synthetic and mixed fibre textiles, now mostly made in less expensive parts of the world than Western Europe, this results in decreasing costs (in real terms) per garment. In England as elsewhere, the clothing trades have traditionally been reliant on a static female workforce. As education has improved and women's expectations have changed, combined with legislation on equal pay and sex discrimination, much of that workforce is no longer available. Partly as a result of this, large firms relocate and/or begin to diversify into other areas of business and other parts of the world.

W G Rimmer comments 'Recent business histories, particularly those relating to textile firms, have dealt with large concerns which outlived the nineteenth century and adapt to the twentieth. Anyone who has sampled directions knows such firms are rare¹⁴. Proof of this last statement is given in that of so many textile and clothing firms in East Anglia, only Gurteens survive to the present day.

¹³ Keith Chapman and David F Walker, *Industrial Location, IV*, (London, Blackwell, 1991 ed.) pp 159-160.

¹⁴ W G Rimmer, *Marshalls*, p XI.

CONCLUSIONS

Of the weaving firms whose businesses have been included in this study only Stephen Walters remains in East Anglia, in business and in the same family. Little work has been undertaken on the history of this firm, due at least in part to their archive having been destroyed during the war years. Stephen Walters originally started as a breakaway operation when the partnership with his brother Daniel ended; this firm has survived another century still in family ownership and having consolidated its production in Sudbury after closing the Haverhill unit. Never the only silk manufacturer in Sudbury, they are alone in having remained a family business and indeed it is only in recent years that they have had any directors who are not family members. Successive generations have worked in the company which has remained small throughout its history. Records no longer exist which can shed light on their early years but the transition from makers of umbrella silks to weaving dress and shirting fabrics and then to include regimental and school uniform goods are within living memory and in recent years they have added furnishings to their range. The firm has evolved as the markets they supplied changed. Now with men's neckwear more fashion orientated than it has been for the last century and a half, they employ a fully trained design team working with modern and traditional methods. They supply the ever changing trade with quality silks as well as designing and weaving corporate fabrics. The stability of the firm may be due to their ability to listen to the needs of customers and the views of the workforce, many of whom have been with them for a number of years. It may also be in part due to caution not allowing them to expand beyond their means or even to trust that times of increased business would last forever. The Walters brothers were not East Anglians but moved into the region in the early nineteenth century as did other silk weavers.

Daniel Walters, despite considerable early success was badly run by the second generation and sold out to Warners who were extremely successful for many years. Whilst in East Anglia Warners' directors were aware of the need to adapt to new markets, while maintaining their production of classic and expensive silks for luxury goods they developed in answer to the wider needs of the furnishing trade and began making good modern designs using leading designers of the period. Warner's moved from the region in the early 1970s, and at that time the board still largely consisted of family members. Though the production in Braintree was relatively small, their closure must still have affected the remaining workers. Courtaulds which played such a huge part in the textile trades of East Anglia and of the country, first increased and then gradually decreased their production in Braintree, Bocking and Halstead during the years following 1945 and finally ceased operating in Essex in the 1980s; they had been a major

international public company for many years prior to that. Coming less than ten years after the closure of Warners this must have seemed like the final blow to the textile industry of the town where for so many years, it had been the major source of work. It is thanks to Richard Humphries courage and foresight that, when Warners relocated, he rescued what he could of the looms and design archive and subsequently established himself in a unique position to supply short runs of high quality hand loomed silk goods. By doing so he ensured that at least some of the town's heritage was not lost and it may be in part due to his efforts that the town eventually secured agreement to return the Warner archive to Braintree and financial support to do so.

The development of the clothing industry in East Anglia was due to a number of factors. The growth of industrial centres in this country and abroad, fuelled by technical progress in both textile and clothing production, led to an explosion in the demand for inexpensive ready to wear garments. Many clothing companies were either relocated from London or offshoots of existing factories in the capital, this was certainly so in the case of the several firms which became major employers in Colchester. It is clear that the availability of a large pool of workers, well used to handling textiles and made redundant by the decline in weaving, made Colchester attractive to manufacturers and factory sites and wages were considerably cheaper than in London.

The Gurteen family were not migrants from the capital and had been in Haverhill for the whole of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and at least for part of the seventeenth century. Daniel Gurteen III and his sons responded to political and industrial change in the gradual move from woven textiles to clothing for the mass market; it is probable that Harmers of Norwich did likewise. Both families had originally been weavers and it would seem that their founding fathers had the foresight to realize where the future lay. Both Norwich and Haverhill had previously been centres for the weaving trades, though for opposite ends of the market, the one supplying expensive woollens at home and abroad and the other weaving for a strictly working class customer base. The major difference is that Norwich as a sizable and previously vitally important city must have offered alternative occupations, the people of Haverhill were largely dependent for employment on the Gurteen factory and to a lesser degree on the few silk masters operating in the town. Gurteens' very considerable diversification in the nineteenth century gave more employment opportunities and increased their domination of the town. It was that diversity which built the business and the town where it is based, that in the middle years of the twentieth century created problems as they sought to keep a variety of production lines operating which were less and less viable. Both Harmers and Gurteens must have had either capital or access to funds which enabled them to take calculated risks and invest substantially in factory buildings and plant in order to take advantage of the new markets for clothing.

Most clothing manufacturers in the region produced a wide range of garments for the men's wear trade. During the period immediately after the Second World War they lost staff to incoming industries. This was in part due to relatively low wages paid for the very labour intensive work needed in garment making, which required a considerable degree of skill and is time consuming and often tiring to perform. The growth of better paid and less strenuous work in the towns took their toll on Gurteens and Harmers. Both were forced to open units in other areas to find the operatives needed to fulfill the growing demands of the retailers they supplied. This does not seem to have been the case in Colchester, though there was some traffic of employees between the various clothing firms there.

Industrial growth in the third world meant the development of clothing industries, particularly in the former colonies and this led to massive decline in clothing production in the Eastern Counties and elsewhere in the country during the latter half of the twentieth century. A living wage in most of those countries was, and still is a fraction of that needed to provide an acceptable standard of living in Great Britain and conditions of employment which would not be tolerated here are acceptable in the Third World. Combined with free trade policies which allowed massive importation and a retail market more concerned with price than with political factors or with working conditions in countries of origin, the East Anglian clothing factories suffered the same fate as many other areas dependent on the ready-to-wear industry. Over the last thirty years there has been a gradual decline in numbers employed and by the end of the twentieth century all the Colchester firms and Harmers in Norwich have ceased trading, the only survivor is the Gurteen factory.

The growth and survival of this firm in the nineteenth century was due entirely to the business acumen of Daniel Gurteen III and his oldest son and their preparedness to react to the developing and diversifying markets at home and abroad. During the early and middle twentieth century the firm was governed by aging member of the family and did little other than mark time. The arrival in the 1950s and 60s of younger men in the business, who were open to innovative ideas and willing to follow advice from professionals restored the company. By modernizing and limiting production to a few lines, they not only survived but prospered. Gurteens must now be not only the oldest clothing company in the country but alone in remaining in family ownership and in the same town throughout its history. They still produce men's wear under their own label but have not been unscathed by the effects of imported goods. In April 1995 they moved their manufacturing out of this country, thus ending a two hundred year tradition in the town. Christopher Gurteen commented that they had watched the rest of the industry in the region decline and had tried valiantly to maintain the Haverhill factory. However eventually it became clear that in order to survive, they must move production to an area where costs were less, otherwise they would sink like so many of their peers. Many old Haverhill families had worked

for the firm for three or four generations and must have felt some regret for the passing of the factory unit that was responsible for the development of the town. That the company has survived where so many have failed is due to the preparedness of successive generations of the family to adapt to market forces and industrial change outside their control.

Godley claims that the clothing industry in this country was dominated by Leeds. A brief look however, at the number of manufacturers in the predominantly rural Eastern Counties shows that proportionate to population this view is inaccurate. Over the last two or three hundred years the textile and clothing firms of East Anglia have enjoyed times of enormous prosperity and great poverty. Various attempts were made during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to explain the vagaries of the region's trade. Some blamed the natural caution of native manufacturers both in the region and in the country for the slumps suffered by those involved in the trade, but there could be no sole reason for the decline of many and survival of so few. In the industry's early years the availability of raw materials, plentiful workforce and proximity to trade routes helped establish the region as a centre for textiles and later for clothing. External competition, war and other political pressures, the growth of the mass market, industrial development here and then in the emergent economies of the Third World, have all played their part. Mergers of companies forming ever larger conglomerates on an international scale created intense pressures on their smaller competitors. When all these points are considered it is astonishing that those East Anglian firms to survive all these 'swings and roundabouts' should remain family firms where the directors and workforce are linked through more than two centuries of personal and local history. It is hoped they continue to flout the law of probability and to face the future with the same adaptability which kept them in business throughout the twentieth century.

The author makes no claim to have covered the entire textile and clothing industry history in the Eastern Counties. Many firms and some towns may have been omitted and they are for other historians to research and write. Nonetheless the importance of the region's rich history of what was for so many years, the main industry and trade not only of East Anglia but of the whole nation, has been greatly neglected in the past and it is hoped that these pages will redress this and lead others to continue the work.

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