

University of Warwick institutional repository: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap>

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD at the University of Warwick

<http://go.warwick.ac.uk/wrap/36273>

This thesis is made available online and is protected by original copyright.

Please scroll down to view the document itself.

Please refer to the repository record for this item for information to help you to cite it. Our policy information is available from the repository home page.

Gender and Technology in the East Midlands
Boot and Shoe Industry: 1850-1911

Jill Greenfield

**Submitted for the degree of PhD,
Centre for the Study of Women and Gender,
University of Warwick.
March 1998.**

Acknowledgements

Firstly I wish to express my thanks to my supervisor Maxine Berg, particularly for sticking by me at times when things were not progressing smoothly. My thanks are also due to Terry Lovell, Director of the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender. Terry's sage advice and her ability to appear calm, perhaps when she did not always feel it, was much appreciated. Also I would like to express my gratitude to various students in both the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, and in the Centre for the Study of Social History at Warwick who have, over the years, provided friendship and stimulating discussion.

I am indebted to staff and archivists at *Northampton Record Office, Leicester* Record Office and various academic and local libraries. I would like to give a special thank-you to the staff at the headquarters of NUFLAT at Earls Barton in Northamptonshire, who over many weeks of research were so kind and helpful - the regular cups of tea were very much appreciated.

Chris Reid has been involved in this project from its inception right through to the finished thesis. He has read many and various drafts and always offered sound advice and criticism. I would particularly like to thank him for always believing in me, even when I had ceased to believe in myself! I owe another major debt to Mike Tadman, whose support and encouragement has lifted me on so many occasions, and who has read the whole thesis and offered much appreciated comments. Thanks for the apostrophes!

Finally I would like to acknowledge the huge debt which I owe to Sean O'Connell. Sean has worked tirelessly on my behalf, reading and re-reading

everything and making endless valuable comments on my work. More importantly, Sean has shown a commitment to both my work and to me which has constantly astonished me. His love, kindness, intelligence and occasional tetchiness have, quite literally, got me through the long process of writing this thesis. I would not have done it without him.

Contents

Title Page		i
Acknowledgements		ii
Contents		iv
List of Figures		iv
List of Tables		v
Introduction		1
Chapter One	Dating the Growth of the Boot and Shoe Industry	15
Chapter Two	Cultures of Production: Traditions and Influences in Leicester and Northampton	47
Chapter Three	Cultures of Production: Responses to Technology in Leicester and Northampton	65
Chapter Four	Reactions to Industrialisation	102
Chapter Five	New Technologies and Their Threat to 'Masculine Skill'	150
Chapter Six	Gender, Technology and Industrial Relations	182
Conclusion		213
Appendix One	Chronology of Major Events	220
Appendix Two	Glossary of Shoemaking Terms	222
Appendix Three	The Debate about the Sewing Machine's Introduction	229
Bibliography		231

List of Figures

Chapter 3

Figure 1	A Middleman Manufacturer's Upper Chamber	78
----------	--	----

Chapter Six

Figure 2	Union Banner (National Union of Operative Rivetters and Finishers)	197
Figure 3	Union Banner (National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives)	198

List of Tables

Chapter 1

Table 1	Number of Boot and Shoe Manufactures in Northampton	30
---------	---	----

Table 2	Leicester Hosiery and Footwear Firms 1846-1914	44
---------	--	----

Chapter 3

Table 3	Size of Factories in the Boot and Shoe Industry 1851	68
---------	--	----

Table 4	The Growth of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Leicester 1841-1877	91
---------	--	----

Introduction

Introduction

Gender and History

Many scholars now consider that gender is an important category in historical study, but unfortunately many do not practice what they preach. Feminists have recognised for some time the importance of some form of historical analysis to feminism, or at least what Judith Allen calls 'a historically grounded feminism'. The protagonists in the debate disagree considerably, however, over the methodology which feminist historians should adopt. The various positions taken up have led to a schism between those who believe the feminist challenge to mainstream, or what Elizabeth Fox-Genovese calls 'official' history, should be mounted from within the discipline of history or from outside it. Judith Allen claims that the work which has been done in women's history to date serves to raise considerable doubt that accepting the discipline of history as presently constituted is a viable option for feminism. She sees the phallogentric characteristics of history as an obstacle to feminists using history. Allen feels that 'no less than Marxism, feminism is opposed by professional historians as an ahistorical grid of abstraction and prescription, threatening the integrity of the historical evidence.'¹

The attitude of historians imbued with 'positivist' conceptions of history have thus tended to relegate women's history into a sub-disciplinary specialisation which

¹ J. Allen (1986) 'Evidence and Silence: feminism and the limits of history', in C. Pateman and E. Gross (Eds.), *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, Sidney: Allen and Unwin, p. 177.

can, in effect, only make an implicit challenge to the credibility of the mainstream. Allen argues that from a feminist perspective, this challenge should be made explicit and her solution to this is to place feminist history outside mainstream history, claiming 'it is only when we realise that we lose nothing in recognising and acknowledging our position outside traditional academic disciplines, that we find where our strength lies'.^[2] Fox-Genovese disputes this claim and goes so far as to argue that the wholesale rejection of 'official' history is dangerous - 'for the strategy capitulates to official history's insistence upon the universal claims of female biology.'^[3]

Feminist historians agree that the writing of so-called 'women's history' which has tried to work within the existing positivist parameters of history - that is those which see empirical data as the ultimate authority in historical analysis - has been valuable in providing much descriptive material about women in the past. It has at least forced a grudging acceptance upon 'official' history that, although women did not win wars and set up the great institutions of state, they were actually doing something - if only reproducing the next generation of 'history makers'!

However, feminists argue that this type of women's history is not enough - in the words of Fox-Genovese: 'Adding women to the received account - especially in the form of a few more neglected worthies or a lot more descriptive social history - does not necessarily change anything substantive in our manner of writing

^[2] Ibid., p. 188.

^[3] E. Fox-Genovese, 'Placing Women's History in History', *New Left Review*, No. 133 (1982), p. 14.

history'.^[4] In fact, if anything, this approach to women's history may well have led feminists into a cul-de-sac where women as 'historical subjects' are somehow removed from the broader historical process. This problem has been reinforced by the practice of social historians looking at human relationships, which has led to the legitimisation of areas of study such as the history of the family. However, Fox-Genovese argues that these accounts have been hampered by Parsonian functionalism which, while acknowledging the importance of family life in the stabilisation of social relations and political cultures, has led to viewing women as naturally fitting into female roles, and furthermore to seeing the family itself as a natural unit of study, apparently unchanging with the turmoil of the historical process. Thus women's history can be viewed as falling into the trap of treating women as 'other'.

Feminist historians argue that what is necessary is a complete challenge to the current epistemology of history. Furthermore, according to both Joan Scott and Fox-Genovese, this challenge must be launched from within the discipline - otherwise feminist history is doomed to be always a sub-set of mainstream history, easily ignored (or ghettoised) by those not practising it. As Raphael Samuel has noted: 'Historians ... though increasingly divided by the multiplication of sub-disciplines, have remained apparently immune to epistemological doubt.'^[5]

Feminist historians largely concur that the challenge to mainstream history should be waged through an insistence that historical investigation envisage gender as the central (to Joan Scott) or fundamental (to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese) analytic category. Gender is a way of referring to the social organisation of the relationship

^[4] Ibid., p. 6.

^[5] R. Samuel (1991) 'Reading the Signs', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 32, p. 91.

between the sexes - or what Scott calls 'a socially agreed upon system of distinctions rather than an objective description of inherent traits.'^[6] The conviction that gender is socially determined frees historians from the trap of biological determinism - and thus from ultimately fatalistic analyses of historically determined social relations.

The centrality of gender to historical analysis means that we should no longer work on the subjected sex, rather on the assumption that women and men are determined in terms of one another. The implication of this is that we should be interested in the history of both women and men and, as such, the problem of viewing women as 'other' will be obviated.

This thesis has been influenced particularly by the work of Fox-Genovese, who sees gender as a fundamental category for historical analysis, and emphasises that we must understand the gender system as a crucial feature of all social relations, which 'simultaneously inaugurates the essential restoration of women to historical process and moves us beyond the dead end of attempting to establish sexual difference as an agent of historical causation.'^[7] Thus we may view women as fully-fledged actors in human struggle and, as such, feminist history can challenge mainstream history from within, by questioning the way historical processes themselves are constituted. In this sense, gender is an inescapable part of class struggle and thus of the family understood, not in functional terms, but as a product of class and gender struggle. This thesis, with its concentration upon a particular industry in a specific geographical region, is an attempt to provide a micro-investigation of the importance of gender to local custom and workplace tradition. It follows the progress of the

^[6] J. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York: 1988), p. 29.

^[7] Fox-Genovese, 'Placing Women's History in History', p. 29.

factory system as it developed, uncovering the variations in the experiences of men and women in the workplace and the community. Struggle under changing conditions of production provides a useful reference point for much of the current study, as it is within this process that notions of gender become articulated most fully within the extant sources. Gender is a central concept in the thesis, and all other developments are interpreted with relation to this analytic category.

Gender and Technology

Technology, and its negative connotation with femininity has provided one of the strongest reasons for the sex-typing of jobs; technology is identified with masculinity. Technology has often been viewed as neutral, as simply a tool to do a specific job. However, technology does not operate outside of the social setting into which it is introduced. Specific technological developments can act to instigate or rigidify gendering in a particular location or industry. Technology can be society (and gender) -shaping, if a particular technology is designed and introduced with a specific section of the labour force in mind, women for example.^[8] If an employer could succeed in justifying a specific technology as female, for example, he could employ cheaper female labour. However, technology can also be shaped by society. Struggles between organised labour (or some form of popular protest) and employers can lead to technology becoming gendered. For example, a technology which effectively removed the need for a particular type of skill, may be usurped by a

^[8] See Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures Industry, innovation and work in Britain 1700-1820*, (1985), particularly Chapter Six.

section of the workforce, and have applied to it some form of new socially constructed skill.

The Social Construction of 'Skill'

Whether or not a job is described as skilled is usually a product of social negotiation and definition. All work requires some level of skill, but whether it is defined as 'skilled' depends to a large extent upon the power of collective organisations (trade unions, for example). Historically this has usually been achieved by workers succeeding in applying some form of restrictive entry to their trade. Traditionally the work which women did was invariably described as unskilled. The physical attributes which women were said to possess had less value than those of men. Consequently, women's work which demanded 'nimble fingers', dexterity and repetition, was not skilled as women naturally possessed such characteristics. On the other hand, strength and some degree of mechanical know-how which were seen as innate male characteristics inevitably connoted some form of skill.

Skill, or more specifically, the designation of a particular task as skilled, was as much a result of rhetorical devices as material reality. Thus in the boot and shoe industry, the trade union was able to win recognition of a task as skilled via a process of description. In this sense skill was socially constructed in the realm of language and ideology. Often the rhetorical definition of skill required some category of 'other' against which it could be sketched. Women, children and foreign labourers were often portrayed as these unskilled 'others' against which the 'skilled' man could be defined.

Technology and Gender in the Boot and Shoe Industry

This thesis traces the changes which occurred in the organisation of the boot and shoe industry, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, when technology and the move to the factory system threatened to usurp the autonomy which families labouring in this long-established craft had experienced. Struggles over the introduction of technology are important in showing how technologies became 'gendered'. Furthermore, with the consolidation of the factory system in the later-nineteenth century, the struggles of workers in the industry led to 'skill' becoming more rigidly constructed and inherently gendered with women being defined as least skilled and, therefore, becoming marginalised as workers. The language of gender is visible in trade union disputes and was reinforced in 'official' parlance articulated in the Parliamentary Papers and exhibited in the findings of Royal Commissions.

Prior to the sixteenth century, when the first signs of areas specialising in shoemaking became evident, the vast majority of shoemakers were engaged in bespoke work. The boot and shoe trade was traditionally one in which women were actively engaged, working alongside their husbands or fathers. Although gender division of labour was evident from the early days, it seems to have been a fluid affair, shown by the fact that many women continued to practice their husband's trade after his death. Women sutrices (shoemakers) were also members of the early guilds of cordwainers. The growth of the trade through the eighteenth century followed a form of 'proto-industry' or manufactures stage with capital becoming centred in the hands of merchants or 'putters-out' and marked by family labour which produced goods for sale to a market wider than the local one. Output was expanded not by the

introduction of technology and centralised production, but by soaking-up ever more of the under-employed agricultural labour from an ever-wider geographical area. Another vital factor in ensuring higher productivity was the sharpening of divisions of labour, with workers specialising in one operation in the process of making a shoe. Capitalist entrepreneurs organised the trade into four departments:

1. 'Clicking', or the cutting-out of the upper-leather, always considered the most skilled job.
2. 'Closing' or sewing the uppers together.
3. 'Making' or assembling the whole shoe and finally
4. Finishing.

Under division of labour within the family, women became increasingly confined to closing with children engaged in 'stabbing' (making the holes which the thread was to go through) and small tasks such as fitting eyelets. Clicking was said to be too skilled and finishing too heavy for women. However, due to the organisation of the putting-out system where supply of work could be intermittent and deadlines had to be met no matter how late supplies were received, as well as the practice of Saint Monday^[9], it seems reasonable to assume a fair amount of flexibility in the tasks assigned to each family member.

As the industry moved slowly into factory production, closing continued to be done in workers' own homes. However, the introduction of the sewing machine to the industry in 1856 led to the gradual centralisation of closing which became solely women's work. The technology of the sewing machine came to push men right out

^[9] Saint Monday was a practice in which workers would rest on Monday - and sometimes Tuesday and Wednesday - working long hours in the remainder of the week to produce enough work to earn a living.

of the closing sector (men had traditionally closed heavier work). Many young women were glad to work in the closing shop as it afforded higher wages than they had been used to earning. However all women did not agree on the benefits of the sewing machines and joined with the male Luddites who first surfaced in closing shops between 1858-60. In these two years of disputes, several women were prosecuted for intimidating machine operatives. Thus there was conflict between those women wanting to take advantage of higher earnings in the factories and those who attempted to defend traditional production and the family's income - and in fact the old family-based 'out-door' system survived alongside factory production to the end of the nineteenth century.

The reaction of trade unionists to the introduction of technology was one of resistance, and they fought to retain their autonomy over the work process. The introduction of machinery was opposed because it was perceived that cheap female and child labour would be used, thereby destroying traditional skills. By the 1890s the new National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO) displayed a more pragmatic approach to technology than did the older craft unions, choosing to direct their struggle to securing piece-work rates and prices for hand-work. The main concern of the union apropos women was to maintain strict demarcation between men's and women's jobs, thereby avoiding the problem of women doing men's jobs. Thus, it may be argued that mechanisation, along with the efforts of the trade union to wrestle some control over work organisation, led to an even stricter division of labour.

There is little evidence to suggest that women were prevented from carrying out any of the stages in the increasingly sub-divided production process by either skill

or physical strength. Men always secured for themselves the more prestigious tasks in the manufacture of adult boots and shoes, and women were more commonly employed in producing children's shoes and slippers. Although NUBSO was the second national union (after the textile unions) to begin organising women (from 1885), the attitude it portrayed towards women operatives was that of 'the problem of female labour'. Women were seen as a threat, due to the cheapness of their labour, but rather than challenging the rate of pay for women, unionists chose to challenge women's right to be in a job. This may be seen in terms of the growing acceptance of the ideology of domesticity, but should also be seen in terms of technology. The 'problem' of female labour as articulated by the unions emerged as mechanisation was introduced causing dilution of skill and threatening the tight control craft unions could exercise through apprenticeships. Thus the unions fought to redefine 'skill' with women's work always at the bottom of the hierarchy.

By offering a comparison between the neighbouring areas of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, this thesis allows a detailed examination of how pre-industrial patterns of employment in various industries led to different attitudes to both women's work and the initial introduction of machinery into the boot and shoe industry. It may be argued that the opposition of Northampton operatives to machinery, which they perceived as deleterious to their traditional work practices, acted as a fillip to the fledgling trade in Leicester, where no opposition was recorded. As the first machinery introduced into boot and shoe production was the sewing machine, gender became a crucial factor in the early development of the factory industry. In Northampton, there is evidence of men and women acting in unison over the defence of customary rights, but less so for Leicester. However, once the union leadership

had become accommodated within the capitalist factory-system, women workers became increasingly marginalised. The main policy of the union was to restrict female labour, and prevent any encroachment upon skilled male preserves. The policies were clearly economically motivated, but must also be seen in the light of an increasing permeation of bourgeois notions of separate spheres and the respective models of femininity and masculinity popularised by this ideology. The animosity of men and women within the union reached a high point in 1911, when the women in Leicester broke away to form their own female-only union, arguing that the men were simply not acting in their interests.

A Note on Sources

The boot and shoe industry still awaits its historian. Alan Fox has provided the history of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives [NUBSO].^[10] However, no monograph exists on the general history of the industry. Thus the student of the industry has to rely on a few articles which have been published, and the odd chapters in books which have occasionally appeared.^[11] There are also a number of unpublished theses on the history of the boot and shoe industry, some of which have

^[10] A. Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957*, (Oxford: 1958).

^[11] See, for example, R. Church, 'Labour Supply and Innovation 1800-1860: The Boot and Shoe Industry', *Business History*, 12 (1970). K. Brooker, 'The Northampton Shoemakers' Reaction to Industrialisation: Some Thoughts', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 6 (1980). H. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Cambridge: 1989), Chapter Nine. B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester working-class politics 1860-1906*, (Leicester: 1987), especially Chapter Two.

proved very informative.^[12] Obviously, the general paucity of literature means that there is, by definition, almost nothing on women and gender in the industry.^[13] The archives hold the answer to the under-representation of the boot and shoe industry in the historical literature. There are virtually no company records available from which a picture of the industry could be compiled. As the industry was marked by a large number of small firms, many of whom only stayed in business for a short period of time, any company records which exist tend to cover only a few years, or are very patchy in content. *This has proved a major problem for the early period covered in this thesis, particularly the 'proto-industrial' era. As virtually nothing could be ascertained in terms of capital structures in the industry it has been difficult to assess whether the industry underwent a classic period of proto-industrial activity, or whether it fitted into one of the several other models of industrial development. These problems are addressed in Chapter One. Local directories have provided an impressionistic picture of the emerging industry, as have some antiquarian sources and local journals.*^[14]

The primary sources which have provided evidence for the bulk of the thesis have been the *Monthly Reports* of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives,

[12] Particularly useful are P.R. Mounfield 'The Location of Footwear Manufacture in England and Wales', University of Nottingham PhD, 1962.
G. Thorn, 'The Politics of Trade Unionism in a Sweated Industry: Boot and Shoemakers in the Late Nineteenth Century', University of Warwick PhD, 1983.

[13] The exceptions are Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work*, Chapter Nine.
Sarah Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Union Movement*. (1980), Chapter Three.

[14] For example, Antiquarian sources such as E. Bordoli, *A Tale of Northampton and its Industry* (Northampton: n.d.) and local journals such as *Northamptonshire Past and Present*.

housed at Earls Barton in Northamptonshire, various *Royal Commissions* and *Parliamentary Papers*, particularly those conducted in the second half of the nineteenth century, the trade press for the industry and local newspapers.^[15] A critical reading of these various sources has allowed a piecing together of gender relations in an industry in flux. Particularly enlightening from this perspective have been various incidences, or flashpoints, a concentration upon which has allowed a fairly systematic investigation of the social relationships within both the workplace and the locality. Quite as important as what has appeared in the sources has been a consideration of what has been left out and why. For example the *Monthly Reports* of the union did not even mention a strike by sixty women of a firm in Northampton even though it received much local attention, a wide coverage in the local press, and resulted in court cases being brought. Mine is certainly not the first study to criticise Fox's institutional approach to the history of the union, but it is the first to do so, systematically, on the basis of gender.^[16] Women were always employed in the boot and shoe and were a numerically important group of workers nationally. This thesis has attempted to put these women squarely in the frame, and by assessing the relationship between men and women in the industry has placed gender at the centre of its analysis.

^[15] For example: *Shoe and Leather Record* and the *Boot and Shoe Trades Journal*.

^[16] Brooker, 'Northampton Shoemakers' and Thorn 'Sweated Industry' criticise Fox's institutionalist approach. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work* and Boston, *Women Workers* have assessed the women's breakaway of 1911.

Chapter One

Dating the Growth of the Boot and Shoe Industry

Chapter One

Dating the Growth of the Boot and Shoe Industry in the East Midlands

This chapter traces the origins of the boot and shoe trade in the East Midlands, with particular reference to the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire regions. The arguments of various historians about the significant dates and events appertaining to the rise of the trade in various locations are critically rehearsed. The special prominence of Northampton and surrounding villages is explained in detail.

Boot and shoe making in the East Midlands before 1700

Many commentators have exaggerated the longevity of boot and shoe-making industrial dominance in Northampton. Ernest Bordoli, one time Secretary of the Northampton Boot and Shoe Manufacturers' Association and author on the industry, argued that links began in A.D. 890 "when Alfred settled a group of Danes in the town and commanded them to make foot coverings for his men"^[1]. On the tenuous basis of three disparate pieces of evidence, proving purchase of Northampton boots by royalty, A. Adcock asserted that 'by the thirteenth century Northampton was prominent as a boot making centre.'^[2] However, there is little evidence to suggest

^[1] E. Bordoli, *Old Friends* (Northampton: 1934), p.24.

^[2] A. Adcock, *The Northampton Shoe* (Northampton: 1931), pp.13-14. The three pieces of evidence were: 1. King John purchased a pair of boots in Northampton (1213). 2. In the reign of Henry III (1216-1272) a pair of shoes for the leader of the royal greyhounds were bought at Northampton. 3. Edward I (1272-1307) purchased boots for the royal fox hunter and his two assistants in the town.

concentration of the footwear industry in any particular locations during the medieval period. The Victoria County History provides a more balanced assessment of the medieval Northampton trade:

There is no doubt, however, that in Medieval England every town was protocol self-sufficient as regards the every-day commodities of life, and that those purchases were due to the temporary residences of the Kings, either at the Royal Castle in Northampton, or at one of the hunting lodges in the vicinity.^[3]

Moreover, it maintained that there is no reference to shoemaking as the trade of the town, or to shoemakers as an important body, either numerically or influentially, in the *Liber Customarum*, or in the local muniments.^[4]

It has, however, been suggested that the intricate regulations and restrictions that governed the town's tanners during the medieval period indicate an industry providing for more than local needs.^[5] In 1460 a price limitation was placed on shoes in Northampton and on the amount of leather that strangers could buy in Northampton markets.^[6] There were similar decrees in 1452, 1552, 1562 and 1595.^[7] Much of this regulation was aimed chiefly at tanners and leather-sellers

^[3] *Victoria County History of Northampton (V.C.H.)*, Vol 2, (1906), p.317.

^[4] *Liber Customarum* dates from between 1199 and 1202, but was copied in 1450. Surviving the great Northampton fire of 1675 it is basically a book of by-laws and codes concerning local government, sanitation and highways, powers of trade guilds and the succession of property. The book did not mention the shoe industry or shoe makers.

^[5] *V.C.H. Northampton*, p. 318.

^[6] P. Dare, 'Medieval shoemakers and tanners of Leicester, Northampton and Nottingham', *Reports and Papers of the Associated Architectural Societies*, 39 (1928), p. 155.

^[7] *ibid.* p.165.

and, as such, reveals little about shoemaking.^[8] Also it should be remembered that medieval restrictions were common and it is probably fair to suggest that too much importance may have been attached to them by some authors. P.R Mounfield has pointed out that London had decrees similar to those in Northampton as early as 1320 and 1375, as did Bristol and Leicester in the fifteenth century.^[9] A Leicester by-law of 1599 instructed every country butcher coming to the market to bring not only flesh, but also the hide, fell, skin and tallow of the carcase.^[10] However, no one would argue that Leicester was a centre for the boot and shoe trade at this time.

Evidence forwarded in support of the assumption that Northampton was an important centre of footwear production by the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is also unconvincing. Several commentators have argued that it was, but their conclusions have been based on, at best, tenuous evidence. June Swann, however, does note the existence of at least two firms which might have been sizeable in the late sixteenth century. Swann wrote:

The apprentice books for Northampton, for instance, show that by the 1580s the weavers and woolcombers were taking fewer apprentices and were replaced by shoemakers and cordwainers as the dominant trade. It appears that the medieval restriction of three apprentices still survived, but there were two firms, the Gutteridges and the Pendletons, who took the maximum allowed, each apprentice being quickly replaced by another when 'out of his time'. These were

[8] It is incorrect to equate the leather industry with the footwear industry. They were separate industries from the beginning. Furthermore there was a wide variety of leather-made goods in this period; buckets, bottles, saddles and other clothing to name a few.

[9] P.R. Mounfield, 'The footwear industry of the East Midlands - (II) Northamptonshire from Medieval Times to 1700, *East Midlands Geographer*, 4 (1967), p.394.

[10] Adcock, *The Northampton Shoe*, p.13.

obviously sizable firms, which today we would call manufacturers.^[11]

Perhaps the first convincing evidence suggestive of the reputation of Northampton as a centre for boot and shoe production is found in a large-scale order for footwear dated 1642. Thomas Pendleton successfully secured this order for six hundred pairs of boots and four thousand pairs of shoes for soldiers destined for Ireland. That this was an abnormally large order for the time is demonstrated by the fact that Pendleton had to engage twelve master shoemakers in the town in order to ensure its execution with the account being over £1,400.^[12] More army contracts were secured in 1648 to furnish Cromwell's troops and in 1689 to clothe the feet of William III's army in Ireland.^[13]

For Leicester, in contrast to Northampton, historians and antiquarians have not attempted to show any sixteenth or early seventeenth boot and shoe industry. At Leicester the hosiery industry was the major industrial employer in this period and was clearly widespread in the county of Leicestershire as well. Defoe, on his tour of Britain in the years 1724 to 1726, described considerable manufactures in Leicester and in several nearby market towns concerned with the

weaving of stockings by frames; and one would scarcely think it possible so small an article of trade could employ such multitudes of people as it does; for the whole county seems to be employed in it.^[14]

^[11] J. Swann, *Shoemaking* (Haverfordwest: 1986), p.7.

^[12] Mounfield, 'The footwear industry of the East Midlands', p.396.

^[13] *V.C.H. Northampton*, p.320. 2,500 pairs respectively.

^[14] D. Defoe, *A Tour through the whole island of Great Britain*, (1992), p. 146.

The Location Debate

There has been controversy among historians about the origins of the boot and shoe industry in the East Midlands. In particular, various authors have attempted, with varying degrees of success, to provide models of location particularly with reference to Northampton and its environs.^[15] Traditional explanations for the early specialisation of Northampton as a centre of boot and shoe production concentrate upon supply-side factors and the availability of materials in particular. In shoemaking by far the most important material, at least by the medieval period, was tanned cattle hides. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that most of the early authors on the industry emphasised the importance in Northamptonshire of the availability of rich pasture and extensive oak forests.^[16]

In a 1931 M.Sc. thesis, C. P. Sargent attempted to transpose these traditional explanations into a geographical model.^[17] Sargent identified seven factors affecting the localisation of modern industry: adequate and easily accessible raw materials; machinery and the power to actuate it; sufficiently numerous and skilled

[15] V.C.H. *Northampton* pp.318-329. C. P. Sargent, 'Physical Factors Affecting localisation of the boot and shoe trade in England', *Geography*, 23, 1938 and 'A geographical study of the boot and shoe trade of England', M.Sc. thesis, University of London (1931). Mounfield, 'Footwear industry of the East Midlands', P. R. Mounfield, 'The location of footwear manufacture in England and Wales', PhD thesis, University of Nottingham (1962). For USA: E. M. Hoover, *Location theory and the shoe and leather Industries* (Cambridge: 1937).

[16] The process of tanning required vegetable tannin. By far the most common tanning agent was extracted from oak bark.

[17] Sargent, 'The boot and shoe trade'. For traditional explanation see for example: E. Bordoli, *A tale of Northampton and its Industry* (Northampton: n.d.). M. W. Brown, *Northamptonshire* (1911).

workers; good, cheap, communications; cost and rent of land or rates; nearby markets; and history. Sargent argued that 1-6 offer no satisfactory explanation for the location of the boot and shoe area (that is mainly in Leicestershire and Northamptonshire) so history must be the major factor.^[18] However, after making this bold statement, Sargent then framed his analysis almost exclusively in terms of the availability of raw material as the catalyst to the location of the industry. Sargent's arguments run thus: cow hides could not be transported over long distances due to the risk of putrefaction, so must have been locally produced. As tanning was governed by the availability of hides and access to oak bark, Sargent set about proving the suitability of Northamptonshire for this industry.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries enclosures of common arable lands for pasture were beginning to take place. Sargent provided a map showing the early enclosures with Northamptonshire and Leicestershire being the most heavily enclosed counties. On this map he then superimposed another showing his estimation of the distribution of oak forests. Via this process, Sargent claimed to show the areas where tanned hides were likely to have been most common: Northamptonshire, the area around Warwick, parts of Leicestershire, Middlesex and Oxfordshire. Thus the explanation for the location of the boot and shoe industry in the East Midlands was largely one of the availability of and accessibility to raw materials.

As has been shown above, this traditional explanation seems to have endured for many years. However, in 1966, P. R. Mounfield criticised this approach.^[19] The first criticism was that Sargent was looking at the medieval period. As has been

[18] Ibid., p.23.

[19] Mounfield, 'The footwear industry of the East Midlands'.

shown above, there is little convincing evidence to suggest specialisation in boot and shoe making in Northampton until at least the mid-seventeenth century. Another major flaw in Sargent's thesis is that it tends to treat tanning and shoemaking as one. In fact, they were always separate industries, requiring different skills and equipment.^[20] L.A. Clarkson, for example, found for the early seventeenth century, that tanners and shoemakers were clearly differentiated trades:

None of the inventories of leather craftsmen indicates that persons described as tanner, curriers, or shoemakers followed any other occupation connected with the leather industry. No tanner has been found owning currying or shoemaking equipment, no currier possessing stocks of manufactured shoes, no currier or shoemaker owning raw hides.^[21]

Clarkson demonstrated that tanners and shoemakers produced for different markets. Whereas tanners produced a standard product for a wide market, shoemakers were subject to the dictates of the local market. A point which further weakens Sargent's argument is the fact that large-scale tanning was as likely to be located in areas away from shoemaking. The availability of adequate supplies of water and bark were principal factors in tanning location and Clarkson shows that tanneries were as likely to exist alongside the iron industry (South Yorkshire, the Weald and the Forest of Dean) or the metal industries (West Midlands) as to shoemaking.^[22] On the other hand, shoemaking was distributed throughout the country.

^[20] June Swann (former keeper of the Boot and Shoe collection, Northampton Museum), personal letter in possession of author.

^[21] L. A. Clarkson, 'The organisation of the English leather industry in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century', *Economic History Review*, 13 (1960), p. 250.

^[22] Clarkson, *English Leather Industries*, p.245,

It seems that Sargent was correct to identify Northamptonshire and Leicestershire as the counties most affected by enclosure, and its concomitant depopulation, at this time.^[23] They had also become the main fattening grounds for cattle being driven to London from Wales and Scotland.^[24] However, it is not likely that many beasts would have been slaughtered at the fattening grounds. A more credible explanation being that the cattle were driven to London 'on the hoof'. Slaughtering in the Capital ensured fresh meat for its population, with the hides being processed at huge tanneries in Bermondsey and Southwark.

Sargent's analysis of oak forest distribution would also appear to be somewhat dubious. Mounfield, for instance, has argued that much forest clearance had taken place in Northampton by the seventeenth century. Furthermore there would have been difficulty transporting oak from Northampton to the major naval dockyards due to the non-navigability of the river Nene, and oak bark was only generally available when trees had been felled for another purpose.^[25]

In terms of labour, it is true that Northamptonshire could provide an abundant source of cheap labour due to the effects of enclosure, as could Leicestershire. The open field enclosure had affected the parishes of Norton, Plumpton, Guilsborough, Bozeat, Northampton, Mears Ashby, Bugbrook, Finedon, Rushden, Pytchley, Wittering and Newton, causing unemployment among the peasantry.^[26] There was

[23] For a broad survey of the effects of enclosure in the East Midlands see: J.M. Neeson, *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: 1993).

[24] Mounfield, 'Footwear Industry', pp. 401-402.

[25] *ibid.*, p.402.

[26] J. Wake (ed.), *The Montagu Musters Book 1602-1623*, (Northampton: 1935), p.xivi.

much unrest in the county, leading to a list of complaints being presented to Parliament by Sir Edward Montagu in March 1604 one of which was 'the depopulation and daily excessive conversion to tillage and pasture.'^[27] It can be argued that the availability of cheap unemployed or underemployed labour must have acted as a fillip to the fledgling boot and shoe industry in the area. However, it is difficult to suggest that available labour was the principle catalyst for industrial development.

Mounfield, therefore, rejects Sargent's supply-side induction hypotheses in favour of an interpretation centred on demand-led growth. Thus, he argued that markets were probably the most important factor in the development of the seventeenth century boot and shoe industry.^[28] In particular, growing demand for army boots and shoes was important for the development of the industry in Northampton. London was growing rapidly at this point and it is plausible that the metropolitan industry was struggling to cope with the rising demand for footwear. Moreover, London cordwainers (workers in cordovan leather) had long been involved in the high-class end of the market and were probably unable, and unwilling, to meet the growing demands of army contracts. Cobblers, who catered to the lower end of the market, were probably not in the position to fulfil large government contracts as their operations were characterised by very low capital assets and lack of organisation.^[29] As the government was notoriously slow in settling debts, a certain

^[27] Cited in Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p.405.

^[28] *ibid.*, p. 405.

^[29] *ibid.*, p. 406.

level of capital would have been vital when securing, and completing, army contracts.^[30] Thus provincial manufacturers, with lower wage costs than those in the metropolis, could offer attractive rates when army tenders were put out.

Northampton was exceptionally successful in this respect and the industry grew because of it in this early period. Prior to the advent of Cromwell's New Model Army there was no large standing army and county militia had to make their own provision for footwear. From the time of Cromwell's military reorganisation large army contracts were offered in peace as well as war time. Northampton has remained a major player in the army contract business through to the present day. To successfully secure such business, manufacturers needed to be adept at establishing relationships with the officials who tendered government contracts. Judging by the contracts he obtained from 1642 onwards, it certainly seems that Thomas Pendleton was skilled at securing the ear of such officials.^[31]

Clearly the provision of reasonable transportation facilities between Northampton and London was vital in order for army contract work to be viable. Northampton was close to Watling street which was a major route between London, the north, the midlands and Wales. Northampton enjoyed a locational advantage in its proximity to this major road over the likes of Oxford, Warwick and Gloucester.

Thus there is no one conclusive reason for Northampton's specialisation in boot and shoe production. While no definitive factor can be given, a number of pre-requisites to the development of the trade by the mid-seventeenth century have been

^[30] For example, Thomas Pendleton who had gained the army contract for 600 pairs of boots and four thousand pairs of shoes in 1642, was still owed £208 in 1651. Cited in Swann, *Shoemaking*, p.8.

^[31] *ibid.*, p. 8.

rehearsed. In summary, Mounfield provided five main factors as being influential in the specialisation of Northampton in footwear production by the mid-seventeenth century: Thomas Pendleton's initiative; contact with the London market and army clothiers; good communications with London; plentiful supplies of good local leather; and unemployment amongst artisans, following the decline of the woollen industry together with the displacement of agricultural labour by enclosure in surrounding parishes.^[32] If Mounfield's description of an industry on the verge of 'take-off' can be accepted, it is now possible to examine the more dynamic growth of the industry in the eighteenth century.

Northampton and the industry in the eighteenth century

Northampton remained the pre-eminent boot and shoe producing area, outside London, throughout the eighteenth century. Leicester did not appear to have a significant role until after 1850. By 1851, Northampton's 80.4 shoemakers (including the category of shoemakers' wives) per thousand of the population contrasted with London's 21.4 and Leicester's 18.7. The national average was 20.5 per thousand.^[33] Northampton's boot and shoe trade benefitted in the eighteenth century from the relatively low wages it demanded compared to the other major

^[32] Mounfield, 'Location of Footwear Manufacture', p. 278.

^[33] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 434.

centre, London. There were combinations among journeymen shoemakers in the capital in 1761, 1763 and 1777 which threatened strikes.^[34]

Ready-made shoes had been readily available in Northampton from around 1725.^[35] In that year, Daniel Defoe commented that the shoes of most Englishmen from 'the poorest countrymen' to his 'master' were 'from Northampton'.^[36] Whether the fact that he did not mention women's shoes is indicative of Northampton's specialisation in men's shoes, or a reflection of contemporary exposition must remain unresolved. However, we do know that today Northamptonshire largely specialises in the production of men's footwear. As Northampton owed much of its early success to the production of army boots, it is fair to assume that the skills of entrepreneurs and workers would have favoured the continued production of footwear for men.

The growth of the industry in the eighteenth century is also shown by the increasing numbers of articles and advertisements on the trade appearing in the *Northampton Mercury*. From 1779 advertisements appeared from London master shoemakers seeking shoe supplies from provincial sources.^[37] As in earlier periods, the trade in Northampton in the eighteenth century also benefitted from growing demand for its products due to wars. The American wars of Independence (1774-81) and the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815) led to a major growth in demand for footwear.

^[34] V. Hatley and J. Rajczonek, 'Shoemakers in Northamptonshire 1762-1911: A Statistical Survey', *Northamptonshire Historical Series*, 6 (1971), p. 3.

^[35] Swann, *Shoemaking*, p. 9.

^[36] Cited June Swann, *Shoemaking*, p. 9.

^[37] Hatley and Rajczonek, 'Shoemakers in Northamptonshire', p. 3.

A further boost to Northampton's staple industry emanated from the price inflation which led London workers to strike for higher pay. As a result, master shoemakers looked to the country for alternative sources of supply. An advertisement appearing in a Northampton newspaper in 1783 bears testimony to this:

A person wants to have a few Men's wax flats made in Northampton where wages are reasonable. Apply Mr. Nicholls, Bishopsgate Without, London.^[38]

A further indicator of the importance of Northampton boots and shoes in the London market was the opening of a warehouse in Smithfield by Northampton manufacturers for the distribution of their products.^[39] Rising population figures also testify to the growth of Northampton as a centre of boot and shoe production. Between 1746 and 1800 Northampton's population grew by 37% and the number of dwellings by 27%. In 1746 there were 5,136 inhabitants living in 1,083 dwellings rising by 1801 to 7,020 and 1,322 respectively.^[40]

Thus Northampton was established as a major boot and shoe producing town during the eighteenth century. The trade was organised largely on a putting out basis. Therefore it is reasonable to assume that villages surrounding Northampton were also becoming involved in the trade. The boot and shoe industry began to appear in towns and villages in Northamptonshire in the last third of the eighteenth century. Notably the firm of Sharman and Ellis, founded in 1767 in Wellingborough, and Thomas

^[38] *V.C.H. Northampton*, p. 321.

^[39] Swann, *Shoemaking*, p. 11.

^[40] William Griffen, 'The Northampton Boot and Shoe Industry and its Significance for Social Change in the Borough from 1800-1914', University of Cardiff MA (1968), p. 7.

Gotch in Kettering in the year 1777, provided employment to many workers, mainly outworkers. Also the period between 1774 and 1783 saw the trade established at Raunds, Long Buckby, Thornby, and Daventry.^[41] However, throughout the eighteenth century, the town of Northampton continued to dominate over the surrounding county. It is to the nineteenth century that we have to turn however, to witness the largest proliferation and growth of the industry in both Northamptonshire and Leicestershire.

Growth of the boot and shoe industry in nineteenth century Northamptonshire

The nineteenth century, despite short-run depressions, continued to be one of growth for the industry in Northamptonshire. The end of the Napoleonic wars heralded a depression in the industry and, in 1829, shoemakers petitioned the House of Commons describing distress 'owing to the want of regular employment and the low price of wages'.^[42] The growth of the empire, especially the West Indian trade, brought a measure of prosperity to the town, although it did not lead to a rise in wages which fell in money terms by 20-25% between 1812 and 1850.^[43] This was most likely the result of a large pool of underemployed labour. Women workers were a major factor in this instance, especially following the decline of lacemaking,

[41] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 434.

[42] Swann, *Shoemaking*, p. 15.

[43] R. Church 'Labour supply and innovation 1800-1860: The boot and shoe industry', *Business History*, 12 (1970), p. 29.

and because of the seasonality of the boot and shoe trade. Roy Church has suggested that 'the permanent and growing labour force' was expanded in periods of strong trade by 'the seasonal availability of rural labour and the regular seasonal circuit of tramping labour'.^[44] Dare has argued that, in order to survive, the whole family had to be employed as it was impossible for a man to make a living on his own: 'he must have a whole family at work because a single-handed man is so badly paid that he can scarce provide the necessaries of life'.^[45] This had probably always been the case however, and not simply the result of recession. The boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire was based largely on domestic labour, and due to the erratic nature of work under this system, it is certain that all members of the family would have been pressed into service to meet deadlines, at least occasionally. The growth of various centres in Northamptonshire in the nineteenth century was due to the increasing demand for shoes in home and colonial markets. However, it was also a reflection of the desire by manufacturers to exploit the cheaper labour found in these areas. Kelly's Post Office Directory for 1848 described some of these areas thus:

Northampton - one of the chief centres of the trade.

Daventry - the manufacture of shoes is carried on to a great extent and is now in a very flourishing condition.

Desborough - the inhabitants are chiefly employed in agriculture and boot and shoe making.

^[44] *ibid.*, p.29. An author in the *Morning Chronicle* in 1851, argued that the 'best kind of workmen' tramped to Oxford and Cambridge in term time, to Northampton around Christmas, and to London for the social season.

^[45] P. Dare, 'Medieval shoemakers and tanners of Leicester, Northampton and Nottingham', *Reports and Papers of the Associated Architectural Societies*, 39 (1928). Cited Mounfield, 'Location', p. 287.

Rushden - the inhabitants are chiefly employed in boot and shoe making for the manufacturers in Higham Ferrers and Wellingborough.

Irchester - the working classes are chiefly employed in boot and shoe making.

Irthlingborough - the employment of the inhabitants is principally in boot and shoe making.

Kettering - the principal manufactures peculiar to the town are boots, shoes and silk shag for hat, velvets, ribbons and brushes.

Wellingborough - the manufacture of boots and shoes to supply the London market is the principal trade ... the Eukeminda, a patent leather gaiter, is in much demand and the patentees employ 300 hands.

Raunds - William Nichols listed as proprietor of a shoe factory as well as being a currier, leather merchant, grocer and linen draper.^[46]

Table One
Number of Boot and Shoe Manufacturers in Northampton

Year	Number of Manufacturers
1818	12
1820	21
1830	31
1837	37 (includes 24 'factors')
1852	103 (includes 15 'factors')

Source: William Griffen, 'The Northampton Boot and Shoe Industry and its Significance for Social Change in the Borough from 1800-1914', MA Cardiff, 1968, p.50.^[47]

Despite this, by the mid-nineteenth century, Northampton still dominated the region in terms of boot and shoe employment. Between 1801 and 1851

^[46] Cited in Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 435.

^[47] Griffen compiled his figures from a combination of census reports and local directories. A 'factor' was not necessarily (although could be) a manufacturer in his or her own right, most often a factor was a middleman who purchased raw materials which were put-out to other small firms or sweaters to be made up and returned to the factor who would then sell the product.

Northampton's population more than trebled. In-migration was not simply from the surrounding areas, with 23% of the population arriving from outside of Northamptonshire.^[48] The 1831 census provides an explanation for this influx 'the Borough of Northampton had increased in population, chiefly attributable to the extension of the manufacture of boots and shoes, upward of 1,300 men being engaged in the trade'.^[49] This is born out by the figures for the growth of manufacturers in the town (see Table 1).

Although this period was one of growing population generally in Britain, it can be shown that the growth of Northampton was due largely to the boot and shoe industry. For example, between 1831 and 1841 Britain's population grew by 14% but Northampton's adult male shoemakers increased by 38%^[50]

A contemporary observer confirmed that the growth continued during the next twenty years in the town:

Northampton in 1869 had just under 40,000 inhabitants. The 1871 census revealed that 41,168 persons were living in the town at that date, an increase of 8,355 on the figure for 1861. Out of 10,909 male inhabitants aged 20 years or over, 4,641 (43 per cent) were described as being employed in making shoes. There were 7,804 houses occupied or empty in the borough, an increase of 1,188 in the previous ten years. In 1811 the population of Northampton had been only 8,427, and the number of houses 1,600. It is impossible to calculate the number of shoemakers living in Northampton in 1811, but in 1818 it is likely that there were about 500-600. The rapid growth of Northampton had begun in the second decade of the 19th Century and was ascribed by contemporaries chiefly to the opening in 1815 of a

[48] *ibid.*, p. 437.

[49] *Census of England and Wales 1831: Enumeration Abstract* (1834), p. 441.

[50] *ibid.*, p.52.

branch waterway, four miles long, between the town and the Grand Junction Canal at Blisworth.^[51]

Although satisfactory figures are not available, it has been estimated that the putting-out masters would have employed an equal number of women and children to the numbers of males employed, albeit on a more casual basis.^[52]

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the growth of the surrounding areas exceed that of Northampton itself in many cases. Kettering grew from a population of 5,198 in 1851 to 28,653 in 1901 and Wellingborough from 5,297 to 18,412 in the same period. The smaller towns and villages along the Nene and Ise valleys also experienced large population increases: Rushden, 752%; Burton Latimer, 175%; Irthlingborough, 173%; Desborough, 165%; Irchester, 140%; Earls Barton, 128%; Higham Ferrers, 123%; and Raunds, 103%.^[53]

Explaining the Growth of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe Trade

Some attempt to explain the growth of Northamptonshire's boot and shoe industry during the nineteenth century is necessary at this point. As early as 1797, William Pitt asserted that 51.5% of Northamptonshire's 150,000 inhabitants were engaged in commercial and manufacturing employments.^[54] The four major trades in the

^[51] "Snobopolis": Northampton in 1869', reprint of an article which appeared in the magazine *Good Words* (1869), *Northampton Historical Series No.1*, p.3.

^[52] Church, 'Labour supply and innovation', p. 26.

^[53] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 437.

^[54] W. Pitt, *General View of the Agriculture of Northampton* (1809), pp. 247-8.

county were the woollen, silk, lace and boot and shoe industries. The fortunes of these industries and their spatial locations 'play an integral part in the explanation of the evolution of the pattern of footwear production'.^[55]

According to the *Victoria County History* of Northamptonshire weaving was carried on extensively throughout the late seventeenth, the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. There was extensive weaving in Kettering, Rothwell, Desborough, Braybrooke, Little Bowden and neighbouring villages, the products being mainly tammies (thin, open texture material) and shalloons (coarse woollen stuff).^[56] Pitt estimated that there were between 5,000 and 6,000 employed in the county making cloth in the 1790s, but this had fallen to half that number when his book was published in 1809.^[57] Spinning and reeling was chiefly done by women and boys aged ten to fourteen years of age, earning around 6d per day. Weavers earned about 18d per day. As the industry contracted, it became concentrated on Kettering and its immediate environs, having disappeared from Wellingborough by the end of the Napoleonic wars. It limped on until 1840 in Desborough and 1860 in Kettering, but in a very depressed state. The 1821 census reported 1,805 people in Kettering listed as paupers from a total population of 3,668.^[58] Thus we find, by the mid-nineteenth century, areas where the staple trade had more or less died out. Workers in these areas were accustomed to domestic industrial employment in which a division of labour along gender and age lines had been developed. In their reduced

^[55] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 438.

^[56] *V.C.H Northampton*, p. 333.

^[57] *ibid.*

^[58] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 438.

economic circumstances they were forced to eke out a sparse living from seasonal agricultural employments. Furthermore, larger centres such as Kettering had been important distribution centres for the yarn spun from a wide area between 1650 and 1800, the river Ise providing the water power needed for fulling. Thus the economic infrastructure of a large scale putting-out trade was already in place before the expansion of boot and shoe manufacture in the area.

The silk industry can be traced back to the seventeenth century in Rothwell. At this point, the trade relied heavily on homeworking and handlooms, the major products being black plushes for silk hats, plain and coloured silks, black and coloured velvets, figured velvets, terries and plain and figured satins.^[59] However, when the silk industry became significant in Northamptonshire's economy, in 1820 when it arrived in Desborough from Coventry, it was primarily factory-based. Silk factories were established by Kettering firms in Wellingborough, Finedon and Brigstock. The industry flourished briefly, but was effectively finished by the 1860s.

Mounfield has summarised its principle features succinctly:

The industry was in factories almost from the outset. Warping, winding and weaving of silk were the basic processes undertaken in the production of velvets, terries and plushes for silk hats. Kettering concentrated on ribbon weaving, Rothwell and Desborough on the embroidery of silk and cotton net and, later, silk waistcoats. Daventry produced silk stockings. But the silk industry was short-lived. It collapsed very suddenly between 1830 and 1862, mainly due to the removal of tariffs on imported French goods.^[60]

^[59] *V.C.H. Northampton*, p. 334.

^[60] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 439.

As noted above, the decline of this industry left an underemployed industrial workforce and infrastructure. In fact in Kettering, Rothwell and Desborough, the old silk factories were later used as shoe factories.^[61]

The other major industry of Northamptonshire (apart from boot and shoe manufacturing) was lacemaking. In the eighteenth century it had been a major employer of female and child labour, predominantly in the Nene valley region, but by 1851 it was widespread in the county. Villages especially famous for lacework were Kettering, Middleton Cheney, Spratton, Paulerspury and the South West of the county. By mid-nineteenth century in Wellingborough, Higham Ferrers and Earls Barton, the lace industry continued alongside other clothing. However, Northampton lace had a simple design which was easily copied by Nottingham lace machines, leading to the decline of the local industry.^[62] At its height, the lace industry employed 9-10,000 women, boys and girls, earning from 1s 6d to 2s per day. In fact, in lace manufacturing areas '[m]any a wife earned the greater part of the income which kept the home together'.^[63] The women worked at home but children were sent to lace school from ages as young as four to complete a long and arduous apprenticeship.

It is fair to assume that, during the first half of the nineteenth century, the growth in boot and shoe production was confined mainly to the town of Northampton due to its early start and the concomitant concentration of capital and skilled labour

^[61] *V.C.H. Northampton*, p. 334.

^[62] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 439.

^[63] *V.C.H. Northampton*, p. 337.

there.^[64] However, with the decline of Northamptonshire's other staple industries of silk, woollen textiles and lacemaking, a new, cheap source of industrially experienced labour became open for exploitation by the boot and shoe trade in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is underlined by the fact that the major centres of the boot and shoe industry coincided with the centres where other staple trades had flourished, especially Kettering, Rushden and Wellingborough.^[65] As the boot and shoe industry prospered in Northamptonshire, the growth in demand was met by putting out work further and further into the countryside. The decline of other industries meant that footwear manufacturers enjoyed a near monopsonistic position in relation to the labour force. *Church argues that the growth of villages in Northampton, especially from the 1850s was due to a process of 'rural colonisation in the lower wage areas' which enabled manufacturers to secure orders from those public contractors wedded to a policy of seeking the lowest possible tender for certain types of footwear.*^[66]

A further spur to the process of 'rural colonisation' were provided by Northampton workers combining to fight wage cuts in the 1830s and 1840s. Rural labour was cheaper and, with the workforce dispersed geographically, more acquiescent. This spread of rural outwork, with very little capital outlay needed, was eased as boot and shoe production remained largely one of hand methods, no power

^[64] Mounfield has shown that, by 1847, Wellingborough had only nine wholesale boot and shoe establishments. Earls Barton had seven, Higham Ferrers four, and Kettering, Wollaston and Irthlingborough one each. This is compared with 60 in Northampton itself: 'Footwear Industry', p. 439.

^[65] *ibid.*, p. 439.

^[66] Church, 'Labour supply and innovation', p. 28.

or machinery was required. In fact, Mounfield has argued that this, and the fact that Northamptonshire was not located on a coalfield, were positive boons to the nascent industry. He argues that:

During the nineteenth century Northamptonshire was neglected by industries requiring large amounts of steam power and the footwear industry was thereby allowed a virtual monopoly of local labour, capital, entrepreneurial skill and factory sites. This was no slight advantage because many industries, for example cotton, woollens and metal manufacture had called for large amounts of steam power, and if they had arrived before rail transport, the footwear industry in Northamptonshire might have been in difficulties. As it happened, true mechanization came much later than in most other industries and when it did arrive there was no great demand for steam power.^[67]

As suggested above, increasing combinations amongst Northampton workers in the second quarter of the nineteenth century was probably a strong contributing factor in the extension of rural industry. In February and March 1825, shoemakers struck for five weeks to obtain wage increases, and appear to have been successful.^[68] There were other disputes over wages in 1830, 1839 and 1852.^[69] Although the boot and shoe workers of Northampton were not at this point in a strong position in disputes with employers, industrial unrest may well have led to the search for rural workers whose wages, being lower than those in the town provided a sufficient attraction in itself. Labour unrest, particularly in the mid-1850s over the introduction of the sewing machine in Northampton, may also have had some bearing on the growth of Leicester boot and shoe trade.

^[67] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 450.

^[68] M.J. Haynes 'Class and class conflict in the early nineteenth century: Northampton shoemakers and the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union', *Literature and History*, 5, (1977), p. 80.

^[69] Church, 'Labour supply and innovation', p. 29.

The Growth of the Leicester Footwear Trade

The traditional explanation for the emergence of Leicester and its surrounding countryside as a major centre of boot and shoe production is similar to that of the growth of Northamptonshire compared to Northampton in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many commentators almost wholly attribute the post-1850 growth of the trade in Leicester to industrial unrest over the introduction of the first machines in Northampton in 1857. In the assessment of the *Victoria County History* '[i]t is not too much to say that Kendal and Leicester owed to it their start as shoemaking centres at the expense of Northampton and Stafford.'^[70] Protracted strikes over the introduction of the sewing machine, which lasted over a two year period in Northampton, must certainly have had some effect on both the state of the industry in Northampton and the development of Leicester. However, caution should be taken in placing too much emphasis upon this explanation. Male opposition to the introduction of upper closing machines operated by women, and later sole sewers operated by men, in established centres of the industry must have presented a boost to the Leicestershire industry. Leicester's footwear industry provided no opposition to machines; in fact the industry was based on machine production from its inception. Furthermore, in this period of strife in Northamptonshire, some workers would have moved to Leicester to obtain employment. The superintendent registrar noted in 1871 that:

About the year 1861 the strike at Northampton caused the removal of a large portion of its shoe trade to Leicester, and the depression at

^[70] V.C.H. *Northamptonshire*, p. 327.

Coventry a year or two later brought a large number of ribbon weavers from that city and neighbourhood who were absorbed by the elastic web trade.^[71]

Although the influx of skilled labour was an obvious factor in the establishment of the industry in Leicester, care should be taken not to overestimate its importance. The number of migrants may not have been all that large. Employees in the industry in Leicester in 1861 were double that of 1851, but included only an additional 500 male and nearly as many females under 20 years of age. Clearly these numbers were not huge, but must have had some effect on the new industry: As P. Head argued,

It seems that the role of these immigrants was that of aiding an expansion and a move to capitalist production which had already begun, rather than grafting of these features to an entirely stagnant, handicraft industry. Having been engaged in a capitalist industry, they would hardly have moved to Leicester had not opportunities existed for similar wage employment.^[72]

A.T. Patterson suggests that an influx of village shoemakers in 1851, who provided boots for navvies and who, after the completion of the Syston to Peterborough railway, were employed by a Northampton firm on government contracts, marked the beginning of the trade.^[73] Others stress the importance of the entrepreneur Thomas Crick and his pioneering factory as the most important factor in the growth of the industry in Leicester. In 1835 there were only two wholesale shoe makers in

^[71] *Census Report 1871* (note by superintendent general).

^[72] P. Head, 'Industrial Organisation in Leicester 1844-1914: a study in changing technology, innovations and conditions of employment', University of Leicester PhD (1961), p. 134.

^[73] Cited B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester working class politics 1860-1906* (Leicester: 1987), pp. 24-25.

Leicester according to the local directories, Crick and J. Dilkes. Crick was described thus:

Thomas Crick ... known locally as the father of the industry, who in addition to running a warehouse, was also engaged in boot making and in leather carrying and straining. He abandoned the latter activity when he became a large scale manufacturer of shoes.^[74]

It is true that Crick was probably the first manufacturer in Leicester to produce shoes for sale in shops and for more than a strictly local market. Crick began experimenting in 1830 with a method of attaching sole, upper and insole with rivets. This was not strictly a new method, having been invented during the Napoleonic wars by D.M. Randolph. Randolph's process was modified and used by Marc Isambard Brunel in mass producing army boots. However, Brunel's warehouse had been destroyed by fire, and the process had been discontinued.^[75] The introduction of rivetting at Crick's warehouse effectively obviated the need for skilled labour in producing shoes, as the traditional hand-sewing skill of the artisan was rendered unnecessary. However, Crick did not become a 'true' manufacturer until 1851 and his rivetting process was not patented until 1853. In the 1851 census schedules Crick is revealed as a master manufacturer employing 22 men and 12 women.^[76] The importance of Crick in Leicester's take off as a boot-manufacturing centre should not be underestimated. Mounfield writes:

Thus in Leicestershire, as in Northamptonshire, the first seed of growth was sown in the county town itself, but with a time lag of two

^[74] *Wright's Directory of Leicester*, 1846, p. 12.

^[75] J. H. Clapham, *Economic History of Modern Britain: Free Trade and Steel* (1932), p. 94.

^[76] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 10.

centuries. The Crick family undoubtedly laid the foundations for the subsequent amazingly rapid growth of machine made footwear in Leicester. They increased their own turnover from £3,500 in 1853 to £100,000 in 1868. Encouraged and stimulated by this example other entrepreneurs began to manufacture shoes within the town and during the eighteen-sixties the local footwear industry grew rapidly. The speed and scale of development that occurred was remarkable. Between 1853 and 1867 the number of boot and shoe factories rose from four to seventy and by the latter date Crick's firm was employing 1,000 hands.^[77]

The number of people engaged in shoemaking in Britain between 1851 and 1861 fell from 274,000 to 250,000, while in Leicester the number rose from 1,393 to 2,741, and by 1861 40 per 1,000 of the population was engaged in boot and shoe production.^[78] This provides further indication of the specialisation of Leicester in boot and shoe production.

However, although Crick might have provided a major impetus to the development of the industry in the town, other factors were also important. This is especially true when attempting to explain the development of the industry within Leicestershire. It is to these factors that we now turn our attention. Just as in Northamptonshire, the pattern of earlier industrial development within Leicestershire was of prime importance to the subsequent success of the boot and shoe industry.

^[77] *ibid.*, p.11. This was the first firm in the entire industry to achieve this size.

^[78] R.L. Jones, 'The sociological context of trade union activity in the East Midlands boot and shoe industry in the late Victorian era', University of Loughborough (1969), p. 13.

The Hosiery Industry and the context of Leicester's role in the boot and shoe industry

The hosiery industry in Leicestershire was highly organised and well established by the mid-seventeenth century, mainly in Leicester itself and the surrounding villages. The first stocking frame was introduced into Leicester by Nicholas Alsop between 1670 and 1680.^[79] The first recorded mention of a hosier in the town was in 1677, and between 1677 and 1700, seventeen freemen and one woman were listed as hosiers in the town register.^[80]

The first half of the eighteenth century saw the rapid growth of stocking-frame knitting in Leicester with the proportion of hosiers as a percentage of population rising from 13.7 (1670-9) to 41.3% (1740-9).^[81] The stocking frame was a relatively expensive technology and from at least 1700 there grew a class of merchant employers who owned and rented out frames and marketed the finished product, supplying distant markets such as London. By 1753, there were estimated to be about twelve manufacturers owning 100 frames for hiring out, along with a number of smaller merchants. White stated that around half of Leicester's population was dependent on hosiery manufacture in 1801, and that the industry had largely caused the population growth from 6,000 in 1700 to more than 17,000 in that year.^[82]

^[79] *Victoria County History: Leicestershire*, 4 (1958), p. 168.

^[80] *ibid.*

^[81] *ibid.*, p. 169.

^[82] *White's Directory of Leicestershire*, 1846, p. 65.

Until the mid-eighteenth century the trade prospered and there was little unemployment. However, by the 1770s wages had fallen and intensive work could still only yield a net wage of 7s 3d in summer and 6s 6d in winter.^[83] After a brief period of prosperity during the Napoleonic wars, the industry was once again in distress and petitioned the House of Commons, in 1812 and 1819, for an investigation of their plight. The resulting enquiry revealed that wages had fallen from 14s in 1817 to 7s in 1819 for a fifteen hour working day.^[84]

There was much unemployment and underemployment by the 1840s, many frames only being worked part time.^[85] The condition of the hand-framework knitters was further threatened by the introduction of large frame shops and powered machinery between 1840 and 1855. However, the putting-out system continued alongside the growth of factory production. As many branches of the industry were affected by seasonal demand, it made good sense for the employers to use out-workers who paid high frame rents, to whom the hosiers could simply cease to give out work when times were slack. The introduction of wide frames meant the growth of seaming outwork, which was done by women; articles made on wide frames had to be cut with scissors and pulled to shape before sewing. Nancy Grey Osterud has shown that by the mid-nineteenth century women had almost entirely moved out of knitting and were concentrated in seaming.^[86]

[83] *ibid.*, p. 170.

[84] *ibid.*, p. 176.

[85] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 15.

[86] N. Grey Osterud, 'Gender divisions and the organisation of work in the Leicester hosiery industry' in A. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (Oxford: 1986), p. 51.

The decline of hosiery handworking in this period is an important factor in the growth of the boot and shoe industry. As was the case in Northampton, shoemaking grew to replace the declining staple industries in Leicestershire. Boot and shoe entrepreneurs were able to utilise the large pool of unemployed labour at low wages rates. In this respect, Bill Lancaster has rehearsed the importance of hosier capital in the early expansion of the industry in Leicester.^[87] Table 2 shows that hosiery manufacture fluctuated in the second half of the nineteenth century while boot and shoe manufacture showed a rapid upward trend:

Table Two

Leicester Hosiery and Footwear Firms, 1846-1914

Year	Hosiery Firms	Footwear Firms
1846	119	2
1861	101	80
1870	138	117
1882	144	200
1900	150	225
1914	140	220

Source: P. Head 'Industrial organisation in Leicester', University of Leicester PhD.

^[87] Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism*, p. 25.

The growth of the villages around Leicester as centres of boot and shoe production followed the pre-existing pattern fostered by the outwork system of the hosiery industry. The enclosures of the eighteenth century in western Leicestershire had provided the hosiery industry with a large class of landless labourers and the main centres for domestic hosiery production grew in Leicester, Hinckley, Shepshed and Loughborough. Thus the hosiery industry was concentrated to the South of Leicester and in the Soar valley area. There remains a very close coincidence between these early centres of hand frame-knitting and the later ones of boot and shoe industry. It is clear that the boot and shoe industry moved out into the rural hinterland, soaking up the impoverished and underemployed labour which the decline and mechanisation of the hosiery industry had left in its wake.

Clearly, as has been shown, labour was a very important factor in the location of the boot and shoe industry in both Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, albeit in different historical periods. Equally important, in the development of the boot and shoe industry in these two areas were the social relations and work practices associated with the workers who found themselves employed in this sector. In this respect, there were important differences between the two regions. Significantly, the fact that it began on the basis of a technical advance in productive processes, the Leicester footwear industry preserved a receptive attitude to new machine techniques. For example, sole-sewing machines were introduced early. One of the first sole-sewing machines in England was installed in Crick's factory in 1862 and the American Blake sewer was adopted by Stead and Simpson in 1865. Conversely, in Northampton an era of labour unrest culminated in a long period of strikes and lock-outs between 1857 and 1859. The town was the most important stronghold of hand-

sewn work and the strikes crystallized around opposition to the introduction of sewing machines for upper closing and sole sewing. It was during this period of unrest that many of Northampton's best workers sought employment in the shoe industry of nearby Leicester, where their skill was much in demand.^[88]

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a picture of the background of a region into which the boot and shoe industry developed. Due to the lack of any company records of quality, the debates rehearsed are necessarily impressionistic. However, critical consideration of the work of antiquarians and other historians has allowed the outlining of interesting features of the industries of the two areas under consideration in this thesis. A major link between the two areas is the stagnation or decline of older staple industries and their replacement with the boot and shoe industry, or the expansion of the industry in the case of Northamptonshire. As has been shown, the boot and shoe industry in Leicester benefitted to some extent from events in Northampton. The next chapter investigates the importance of the older industries and their organisation of production for the way in which the boot and shoe industry subsequently developed. The importance of social relations of production for reactions to technology and gender will be the focus of Chapter Two.

^[88] Mounfield, 'Footwear industry', p. 17.

Chapter Two

Cultures of Production:

Traditions and Influences in Leicester and Northampton

Chapter Two
Cultures of Production:
Traditions and influences in Leicester and Northampton

Introduction

This chapter and Chapter Three fall into the sub-section entitled 'cultures of production'. Together they provide a geographical comparison between the two neighbouring counties of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire. No previous study has attempted an assessment of gender relations in the boot and shoe industry in these geographical areas. This approach allows us to trace the importance of other staple industries in the two areas and show the importance of gender relations in these trades to the later developments in working practices in boot and shoe manufacturing. Harriet Bradley has detailed the operation of gender and technology in both the hosiery and the boot and shoe businesses. However, she did not attempt a systematic comparison of the two industries.^[1] Similarly, Nancy Grey Osterud has provided fascinating insights into the relationship between gender, technology, capital and ideology in the Leicestershire hosiery industry in the nineteenth century. However, her failure to fully investigate the concomitant development of the boot and shoe industry in Leicester has resulted in her making some misleading assumptions. For example, Grey Osterud concluded that the 'gender division of labour in the boot and shoe industry meant that hosiery could become a women's industry and the men work

^[1] H. Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment* (Cambridge: 1989).

in boot and shoe.'^[2] Although in sheer numbers this assumption could be accepted (in 1900 two thirds of hosiery workers were women and two thirds of boot and shoe workers men), it is very misleading and ignores the important role gender relations played in the development of the boot and shoe industry.

This chapter assesses the major industries in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire which either pre-dated or co-existed alongside the burgeoning boot and shoe industry. By exploring how work was organised in the family and between women and men within households in the domestic-based system of production, it is possible to obtain important insights into how gender came to shape attitudes to mechanisation in the two areas. It is argued that in Leicester previous experience of working with machinery, a gender division of labour, under capitalist organisation, together with the declining staple industry of hosiery, smoothed the way for the introduction of the boot and shoe industry into the town. Conversely, in Northampton previous independent and home-based production of boots and shoes, with its concomitant handicraft pride in skill and independence, spawned violent opposition to the factory system. Accordingly gender relations were very different in the two areas. This chapter concentrates upon the importance of traditional work practices in Northampton and Leicester and the relevance of gender within these conventions. Chapter three focuses upon how work traditions and gender relations in the two areas shaped reactions to technology and the early factory system in the boot and shoe industry. This approach is enhanced by the insights which a geographically comparative study can provide. It also enables an assessment of the

^[2] N. Grey Osterud, 'Gender Division and Organisation of Work in the Leicester Hosiery Industry', in A. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918* (Oxford: 1986), p. 64.

importance of tradition and the experience of working in different industries in shaping gender relations to be offered. Equally importantly, it allows us to examine the importance of gender relations in shaping the development of the boot and shoe industry in the two areas. We will begin by tracing the development of lacemaking and hosiery in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire.

Lacemaking in Leicestershire

Lacemaking in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire employed large numbers in the years before 1850. However, the organisation of the industry in the two areas was very different. Leicestershire (like Nottinghamshire) was a centre of machine-made lace, whereas Northamptonshire produced hand-made or pillow lace. The Children's Employment Commission of 1843-5 reported 2,760 lace machines in operation in the counties of Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire, and noted that the town of Leicester had 'a considerable population engaged in this trade'.^[3] With the factory machines, driven by steam power, it was generally acknowledged that a threader (usually a young boy) was required for an average of three machines and that young people of both sexes were engaged in winding or filling bobbins. Hand-driven machines were also important in Leicester's lace industry, and child labour was used to assist older workers who used these machines. Most of these children went on to tend the machines themselves in their adulthood.^[4] However, the majority of

^[3] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5*, 2nd Report of the Commissioners, Vol 9, p. 4.

^[4] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5*, p. 4.

juveniles who worked in the machine-lace trade were employed in embroidering or finishing processes such as mending, pearling, drawing and hemming, or in dressing and finishing fabrics produced by the machines. These latter were hand processes and, as such, would have been largely undertaken in the homes of labouring families, usually under the direct supervision of the mother. These children were put to work at a very early age and worked long hours.

One sub-Commissioner obtained evidence in which an infant under two was regularly employed by its mother.^[5] Caution is necessary, however, as this seems an extreme case. Perhaps it was likely that a child of two present in the household may have been mistaken as a worker with the cramped and often haphazard way in which work was undertaken. Notwithstanding this note of caution, the evidence given by one Leicestershire family is worth quoting at length as it is very revealing of the family organisation of finishing machine-made lace:

Mary Houghton, four years old: 'Has drawn lace two years; her mother gives her a penny a-week.' Anne Houghton, six years old: 'Has been a drawer three years.' - Mrs. Houghton, the mother of these children: 'Is a lace-drawer and has four children; Harriet eight, Anne six, Mary four, and Eliza two years old; of these the three elder are employed as lace-drawers. Harriet was not quite three when she began to work, Anne was about the same, and Mary was not quite two years old. Eliza "has tried and drawn a few threads out".' [Sub-Commissioner - 'All this was interrupted with "Mind your work," "Take care," "Make haste," "Now Anne, get on," "Mind your work."'']^[6]

The tender age at which these children were put to work suggests that the family was poor. It also indicates how, in putting-out networks, parents were responsible for

^[5] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5*, p. 10.

^[6] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5*, p. 10.

driving the pace of work and number of hours worked each day in order for the family to subsist. This aspect of machine-lace manufacture will be shown to have been similar in organisation to the pillow-lace making of Northamptonshire. However, unlike in pillow-lace making, there existed in the machine-lace trade opportunity for children to gain experience and skills relating to factory production. As discussed earlier, threaders worked in the factories. Significantly, although there was division of labour on gender lines, these were often blurred and sometimes crossed completely. A *Children's Employment Commission* found that

In almost all the hand processes connected with the manufacture of lace, girls are employed in common with boys, and in some the work is done almost entirely by girls, as in threading, embroidering, drawing, pearling, hemming, dressing &c. Even in threading, although the great majority are boys, still there are many girls engaged in this occupation.^[7]

The machine-lace industry in Leicestershire also provided experience of different methods in the recruitment and overseeing of labour. As shown above, many of the young people were employed and policed by their own parents and in their own homes. However, when children were old enough to go out to work they were sometimes hired by factory principals or other workers. A Commissioner reported:

In all the large establishments whether machines are propelled by power or hand, the threaders are engaged and paid by the principals; but where machines are let out to workmen, then they are engaged by mechanics whom they assist. The agreement is usually made by the parents, with whom the children live.^[8]

^[7] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5*, (Grainger, Report: App. Pt.1.,pp.F13 et seq., 110,111,134.

^[8] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5* (Report: App. Pt.1., p. F8, 65).

The high capital costs of lace machinery, together with the rapid capital depreciation that was endemic in the industry, meant that long hours were worked. The machinery was often kept running day and night. This had a peculiar effect on the nature of children's employment, especially the threaders. Whenever a run of lacemaking came off the machines, threading was required and children were called out, whatever the hour of day or night. These irregular work patterns were further exacerbated by the common practice of threaders being employed by several masters, a system which often necessitated young boys and girls walking long distances, day or night, between factories. One lace operative, Sarah Pymm described this process to the sub-Commissioner:

At this time of the year the Children go to work as soon as it is light, and stay till eight or nine at night; in summer they go at six or seven A.M., and stay as long as they can see. Many drawers go by her door as late as eleven o'clock at night. Her Children have been obliged to get up at all hours of the night, winter and summer She always sat up for her children coming home; many and many a score time she has gone into the street to look for them; wonders how she has lived through it. The girls who are winders have to get up in the night, as well as the threaders; at all hours there must be many girls going about the town to and from work.^[9]

The majority of adult married women employed in the lace industry in Leicestershire worked in their own homes, often supervising children's labour, or working for small mistresses, largely on the finishing processes. However, as has been shown above, the working population in Leicester was experienced in factory-based lace production, the use of machinery and in working directly for a capitalist. This was true of both boys and girls, who continued in the trade when reaching adulthood.

^[9] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5*, (Grainger Report, Evidence: App. Pt. 1., p. 33,11,4,14).

Lacemaking in Northamptonshire

In the 1830s and 1840s, the pillow, or hand-made lace trade was severely depressed, largely due to competition from machine-made lace. However, it was still an important industry for many women in Northamptonshire: 'The manufacture of pillow lace still finds occupation for many thousands of women and children in the dispersed population of Northamptonshire'.^[10] Northamptonshire was particularly well-known for its baby lace which was used to trim babies' caps.^[11] Women worked at home, and the employment of children was predominantly in so-called lace schools run by mistresses. Children usually began to learn the trade at about five or six years old. Most villages in lacemaking areas had a school, although very little academic instruction was given; they were, in reality, little more than workshops. The conditions tended to be poor with as many as twenty girls being crammed into a tiny cottage room. The job called upon the young girls to stoop, pressing their chests over the pillow, which caused pain and sometimes deformity.^[12] It was considered a matter of course for agricultural labourers in lace-making areas to send their daughters to lace school as soon as they were old enough to prepare them for their life's trade. After leaving the school, the girl would work in the home under the superintendence of her mother. Pamela Horn has noted that it was the wife's business to ensure that the daughter worked as many hours 'at the pillow' as the

^[10] *Children's Employment Commission 1843-5*, Second Report, p. 4.

^[11] P. Horn, 'Child workers in the Victorian Countryside: The Case of Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 7, 1985-6, p. 181.

^[12] *Children's Employment Commission*, First Report, 1863, Evidence, p. 450-1.

father of the family worked in the field. This practice continued until the daughter left the family home.^[13]

Wages were very low and the girls had to pay a fee to attend the school. One respondent to the sub-Commissioner in 1843 stated that she earned a shilling a week, 4d. of which was deducted as a charge for her schooling. However, the ready supply of girls entering the trade indicates the importance of their wage to the family economy. It should also be noted that girls put into the lace trade were not drawn solely from the families of agricultural labourers, in boot and shoe-making villages the daughters of shoemakers were also put to the pillow.

Unlike lacemaking in Leicestershire, there was no mechanisation in the Northamptonshire industry. The pillow-lace trade of Northamptonshire was solely the province of female labour - both married and single women and young girls. The father of the family was occupied in some other trade, most usually agricultural labour. Thus, there was a strict gender division of labour in the lacemaking areas of Northamptonshire; women made lace, men worked in a completely separate industry. The only men involved in the industry were lace-buyers, or their agents, who usually met workers at the local inn.^[14]

The Leicestershire Hosiery Industry

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Leicester was the centre of the woollen and worsted-hosiery industry. Leicester was the largest market town in the county and

^[13] P. Horn, 'Child workers', p. 182.

^[14] *ibid.* p. 182.

was the organizational centre for a widespread rural industry. However, there was also much direct employment in the town itself. The hosiery industry was organized on a capitalist basis from the beginning in the Midlands, with merchant-manufacturers employing wage labourers from the late-seventeenth century onwards. Workers were paid on a piece-work basis and used relatively sophisticated hand-operated machines, called knitting frames. The frames were rented from the capitalist, who also owned the yarn, and the household was the basic work unit. All the family participated in production, jobs being allocated on the basis of age and sex. Typically the husband worked the knitting frame whilst the children wound bobbins and the wife seamed the stockings.^[15]

However, the industry was not wholly concentrated in the home. In 1843, according to the Children's Employment sub-Commissioner, 28,000 people were employed in the hosiery trade in Leicester, with approximately 46 per cent. of this number being under eighteen years old. Although there were no large factories, there were a number of workshops, especially in Leicester itself:

In each family there may be from three to six or eight frames; but frequently a person who undertakes work from the warehouses employs from ten to fifty hands of various ages, who either work in one shop, or partly in a shop and partly at home. These small employers are master stocking-makers or 'bag hosiers'.^[16]

Bag hosiers (or middlemen) rented several frames from the large manufacturers and either re-let them to individual knitters, or used them in workshops that typically

^[15] Osterud, 'Gender Division and the Organization of Work'.

^[16] *Children's Employment Commission*, 1843-5, p.48. The term 'bag hosier' came from the practice of carrying the work to the warehouse on Saturday, often from neighbouring villages, in a large bag.

employed between six and twenty workers, but occasionally as many as fifty.^[17] It was also customary, in all branches of the trade, for girls to work alongside boys.^[18] However, there was some gender division of labour with embroidering, chevening and seaming being exclusively the preserve of girls and women. This work was either done within the family-based system of production, as described below, or in the homes or workshops of small mistresses employing between four and twenty children. In the early part of the nineteenth century, women and men worked the narrow frames in their homes. The process was described by the Children's Employment commissioner:

The common custom is for each married man to hire two or more frames, according to the size of the family. One of these frames is worked by the husband, another by the wife, and the others by any of the children who are sufficiently old. The younger children are almost invariably employed in winding the cotton, worsted or silk for the frames, or in seaming the articles which have been made. Thus all members of the family, except the very youngest, find employment.

Within this family-based system the common practice of observing 'St. Monday' in which Monday and perhaps Tuesday were spent in rest, or in the local hostelry, was widespread. The resting in the early part of the week frequently necessitated very long hours of work on Fridays for the whole family, who often worked all night, in order that the work could be returned on Saturday.

The second quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the introduction of wide frames which made a number of stockings at once. This work was inferior, the stocking being made straight up and down as opposed to the more demanding fully-

^[17] *ibid*, Evidence, p.F13.

^[18] *ibid.*, p. 18.

fashioned variety. Work on these frames offered lower piece rates, and was a factor which contributed to the Midland Luddite riots against the introduction of this technology. Although the hosiery industry was not completely transformed to the factory system until the end of the nineteenth century, the introduction of wide frames had a profound consequence for the gender division of labour in the industry. Employers began to gather knitters together in workshops, which facilitated greater control over the worker and eased the giving out and collection of work. The employers continued to collect rent for the frames and to charge for lighting, heating and standing room. However, as Nancy Grey Osterud has demonstrated, the transformation of the production process affected women and men very differently - knitting moved into the workshops whilst seaming remained a domestic occupation. In fact, women's work in seaming actually increased as the wide frames were more productive than the old ones. Thus, the transition from the outwork system to factory production did not displace women (even married women) from wage labour. As Grey Osterud has stated '[h]ousehold and workplace remained synonymous for women, while they diverged for men'.^[19]

Grey Osterud also revealed that, under capitalist production, members of the family worked as individuals rather than as a family unit: 'women no longer seamed the stockings that their husbands had knitted'.^[20] Men and women were paid separately for the labour they performed and were often employed by different manufacturers, thereby sharpening the gender division of labour. Thus Grey Osterud has argued that whilst the division of labour was based upon the customary practices

^[19] Grey Osterud, "Gender divisions", p. 50.

^[20] Ibid.

of working-class families, a profound change was wrought when the scale and location of hosiery work changed in the nineteenth century. She maintains that once jobs became assigned by employers, the gender division of labour became more rigid. Thus the flexibility of tasks allocated to household members under the domestic system of production changed and became rigidified with the incorporation of the family into the social division of labour.^[21] Grey Osterud asserts that 'women gradually moved out of knitting and became almost entirely concentrated in seaming by mid-century.'^[22] The twin reasons cited for women not going into the workshops by Grey Osterud are, firstly, the heaviness of physical labour of knitting (which she sees as a ideological definition) and, secondly, the importance of women's continued performance of domestic labour.

Whilst not disputing the overall conclusion of Grey Osterud's description, my assertion is that caution must be exercised when addressing the move from domestic to workshop or factory production. The final outcome may be as described by Grey Osterud in the Leicestershire hosiery industry; but, in practice, it might be too simplistic to credit women's domestic labour as the major or only determinant of the rigidification of gender divisions under capitalism. As shown above, women had long worked outside the home in both the Leicester lacemaking and hosiery trades. Furthermore, as an investigation of the development of the boot and shoe trade in Leicester will show, women were the first factory operatives in this industry. A detailed analysis of the various actors within the development of capitalism or factory-based production will show a far more complex picture of gender relations. It is not

^[21] Grey Osterud, "Gender Divisions", p. 50.

^[22] Ibid.

my intention to deny the importance of women's domestic labour, but to indicate that women themselves shaped working patterns and practices and thus gender was an important factor in establishing new work practices.

The transition to the factory system in hosiery was not complete until the end of the nineteenth century. Putting-out held continued attraction for hosiers due to seasonal demand and because it allowed them to pass on the impact of economic fluctuations to their workforce. For example, in periods of good trade, knitters paid high rents for their frames, whereas in poorer spells the hosier simply stopped giving out work, whilst still charging high frame rent.^[23] Another common practice was for the middleman to own and rent out far more frames than could practically be fully-used. This facilitated so-called 'spreading' of the work which caused widespread under-employment of the operatives. One bag-hosier, questioned by the Commissioner in 1871, admitted that the rent received from the frames was itself a profitable part of his business. Bill Lancaster points out 'that even those manufacturers employing steam were still charging factory operatives machine rent which was often as high as 13 shillings per week.'^[24] This practice had profound gender implications allowing women to make inroads into every sector of the industry, as demonstrated by Harriet Bradley.^[25] Women's wages tended to average between half to two-thirds those of men. Although a piece-work system was operated, women's wages were lower than men's and they were given cheaper types

[23] Grey Osterud, "Gender Divisions", p. 48.

[24] Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester working-class politics 1860-1906*, (Leicester: 1987), p. 6.

[25] Bradley, *Men's Work, Women's Work*, p. 134.

of work. In an industry characterised by seasonal fluctuations and underemployment, frame rent was an important part of the hosier's profit. The profit from frame rent favoured the employment of young people and women as they paid the same frame rent despite their lower output. Bradley has illustrated the advantages of employing women in this way 'the employment of women was one of a variety of tactics by which, quite literally, hosiers made capital out of frame rents.'^[26]

However, there was no simple and direct substitution of cheap female and child labour. There were further sexual divisions in hosiery production with women being largely confined to the coarser and less-skilled processes that used the old fashioned 'narrow' frames. In the cottage industry, men tended to make the legs, while women knitted the tops and feet.^[27] Women also came to be viewed as less skilled with the application of new technologies because they were never instructed in the actual mechanics of the frame. Men however, could set up a frame and carry out basic maintenance, and knew how to adjust it for various stitches or fabrics. As Bradley states: '[I]t was claimed that frames worked by boys, women and old men suffered much more from wear, tear and deterioration, and a woman knitter would need a man in attendance to maintain and adapt the frame.'^[28] This male monopoly of technical knowledge continued into the factory system, and became increasingly important as new technology was introduced. Male workers had more to fight for than the simple exclusion of women from certain tasks. The widespread abuses of middlemen, the problem of frame rents and new de-skilling technologies such as wide

^[26] Ibid.

^[27] Ibid., p. 135.

^[28] Ibid. p. 135.

frames (which supplanted fully-wrought work with the less-skilled straight work) are well-documented in the numerous Royal Commissions into the condition of the framework knitters. The move to the factory system in the late 1850s was resisted by male operatives, who were fighting to maintain the independence of their work practices. Thus the substitution of women in these factories was attractive to capitalists. This was particularly the case when steam power was used, when the operator became, in effect, a mere overseer of the machine's operation.^[29]

The first factory workers in the hosiery trade tended to be young women and men (as was the case in the boot and shoe industry, as will be demonstrated in chapter three). However, by the 1870s, a gender division of labour similar to that which had been practised in the home industry had been re-constituted in the factories.^[30] Men in the factories operated the large and less-automated frames, and the Cotton's Patent which was invented in 1864, thereby cementing the position of males as the most skilled workers in the trade.^[31] Women were excluded from operating the Cotton's Patent for a number of reasons apart from the already noted lack of mechanical skills. The technology was expensive, with each frame costing upwards of £200. This high investment price, coupled with the cost of investment in steam plant, led hosiers to institute the practice of the night-shift in order to reap

[29] Ibid., p. 137.

[30] Ibid. p. 137. See also Osterud, 'Gender divisions'.

[31] B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism*, p. 6. This technology was a 'flat frame driven by a rotary mechanism which finally solved the problem of "fashioning" by power. It followed the same principles as Lee's original frame but carried them out with different motions, introducing a needle bar which moved vertically. Moreover, its adaptability enabled all kinds of fashioned work to be produced, and soon improved models were making a dozen or more hose at once.'

the maximum return their outlay. The fact that women were forbidden by law to work at night in factories, presented a legal impediment to their employment on this technology.

Lancaster identifies three main occurrences which hastened the move to factory production in hosiery in the 1870s. First the abolition of frame rents in 1874, following the 1871 Truck Acts Commission. Second, increased foreign competition, and third the passing of the Education Act in 1870.^[32] The abolition of frame rents changed the attitude of hosiers towards technology as the profitability of the putting-out system was reduced. Lancaster also argues that the arrival of the Board School in Leicester, with compulsory attendance ensured via a local by-law in 1876, weakened the putting-out system, which was highly dependent on child labour because 'children were removed from the workshops into the classrooms where new horizons and attitudes were instilled, and this vital area of recruitment to the putting-out system was closed.'^[33]

The growth of steam-powered factories, also led to the reorganisation of the secondary processes, those of seaming, mending and cutting which were by this time female occupations. However, it was not until an overlock machine was perfected in 1887 that the problem of seaming cut-out garments was overcome within the factory. The overlock machine led to the rapid concentration of female stitchers in the factories. Concomitantly the concentration within factories of 'menders' and 'cutters'

^[32] Ibid., p. 7.

^[33] Ibid., p.7.

occurred. Mending and cutting was hand work but was so closely linked with the other processes of manufacture that it was undertaken in the same building.^[34]

As has been shown, technology and the factory system of production in Leicester's hosiery industry led to the sharpening of the gender division of labour. However, subsequent technological innovations led to the feminisation of the hosiery industry. As has been shown, the initial demand for skilled factory knitters was for male labour operating the Cotton's Patent. However, as machines became ever-more automated, the substitution of female labour became possible. The seamless automatic frame cheapened production in two ways. First it made possible the turning out of hose in one operation. Second its operation only required semi-skilled labour.^[35] Female labour in the hosiery industry in Leicester rose from 1,886 in 1871 to 9,107 in 1901, with male labour remaining static at around the 3,000 to 4,000 level. However, as will be demonstrated in Chapter Three, Nancy Grey Osterud's suggestion that hosiery became a female industry whilst boot and shoe a male one in Leicester is too simplistic. Women were involved in boot and shoe production from its inception in the town and were, in fact, the first factory operatives.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the variety of work organisation which existed in the areas of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire in the production of lace and hosiery. In

^[34] Ibid. p. 8.

^[35] Ibid. p. 9.

Northamptonshire, lace production was small-scale, unmechanised and strictly divided on gender lines; men simply did not make pillow lace. In Leicestershire a more complex gender division of labour was evident in both lacemaking and hosiery. Workers in the Leicestershire industry had some experience of factory and workshop labour and were therefore industrially experienced. The introduction of technology into both trades in Leicestershire profoundly affected gender divisions of labour, with men maintaining more control over technology by their association with the mechanics of it. As has been shown, workers in Leicestershire had long experience of working in trades based on capitalist production whereas it appears that female labour in Northamptonshire was more shielded from this relationship by working in small lace schools where their everyday point of contact with the outside world was the lace mistress. It will be argued in Chapter Three that the prior experience of labour in the two areas in the period before the introduction of workshop production in the boot and shoe industry affected the reactions of workers to this process. In Leicester, the introduction of the new trade of boot and shoe production, caused less opposition than in Northampton. This must be seen in terms of the declining hosiery industry and the opportunity of employment offered to an industrially experienced female work force. In Northampton, with a long history of independently organised boot and shoe trade, which relied heavily on family labour, the reaction of male and female workers to workshop production was far more hostile. Chapter Three traces in detail the various reactions of workers in both places, and considers the implication of this for the subsequent development of the boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. Central to this analysis is the importance which shoemakers' reactions to industrialisation and technology had for gender relations.

Chapter Three

Cultures of Production:

Responses to Technology in Leicester and Northampton

Chapter Three
Cultures of Production:
Responses to Technology in Leicester and Northampton

Introduction

The first machine to be introduced into boot and shoe production was the sewing machine. This early sewing machine was suitable only for the closing of shoe uppers, and women were the first employees in the new closing rooms. Prior to this innovation, the only shoemaking process which had undergone central supervision was the cutting out (or clicking) stage. Before the 1850s, the only classes of workers employed in warehouses were the clickers and the rough-stuff cutters (those who cut out soles). The centralisation of clicking posed no threat to the customary practises of the domestic system of production. Clickers had long been the elite of the trade, and their skill and standing often placed them in a position akin to that of the manufacturer. In fact, a large number of clickers proceeded to become manufacturers in their own right.

The importance of the sewing machine must not be underestimated. Workers in the boot and shoe industry experienced the effects of mechanisation much later than those in many other industries, with no mechanisation occurring until the mid-1850s. Therefore, in this chapter, we shall delineate the tenacious struggles undertaken in order to maintain independence and traditional working cultures in a period that has not usually been recognised as an historically turbulent one. In fact it has more commonly been identified as the age of ‘mid-victorian stability’.

A second important theme running through this chapter involves stressing the value which a geographically comparative approach can provide. Many studies of the effects of mechanisation and of changing work practices in the boot and shoe industry have emphasised either one town, or a particular firm. Bill Lancaster, for example, provides a wide-ranging social and political history of Leicester in the period 1860-1906.^[1] Lancaster's description of the hosiery and boot and shoe industry in both the town and county of Leicestershire, and the important links between the two trades is extremely illuminating. This chapter extends the analysis to include the Northamptonshire boot and shoe trade, which had antecedents stretching further back than that in Leicester. The comparative analysis allows a greater understanding of the importance of gender in the development of the trade in these centres.

This chapter demonstrates that the two areas of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire experienced very different paths in the development of the boot and shoe industry. The main differences in this experience were due to previous experiences of work and the social relations of production in various staple industries. Clearly implicit within these traditions was the importance of family labour. The introduction of new technology and factory production was received very differently by workers in the two areas. Its implications for the division of labour (particularly gender divisions of labour) were paramount to the reactions of labour in the Leicester and Northampton. These variations will be indicated through a detailed exploration of reactions to the development of the early boot and shoe factory industry in the areas of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire.

^[1] B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester working-class politics 1860-1906* (Leicester: 1987).

Boot and Shoemaking in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire

As noted in Chapter One, Northampton had specialised in boot and shoemaking since the seventeenth century. This specialism continued, albeit with fluctuations in trade, through to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. By 1851, Northampton was the major shoemaking town in the country. That year's census showed that there were 80.4 shoemakers (including wives) per 1,000 population in the county compared to the national average of 20.5 per 1,000, or approximately four times the national average. The town's population grew from 8,427 in 1811, to 10,793 in 1821, 15,351 in 1831 and 21,242 in 1841. The number of shoemakers grew even faster with 550 adult male shoemakers in 1818 burgeoning to 1,800 in 1841. Clearly by the mid-nineteenth century Northampton was virtually a single-industry town.^[2]

As has been noted, at the beginning of the nineteenth century London was no longer the sole centre for the wholesale manufacture of boots and shoes. Aided by war-time demand for army footwear, and the increased tendency amongst London wholesalers to put work out to the provinces, the production of ready-made footwear had developed first in Northampton, and then in Stafford, Kettering, Wellingborough, and Daventry. In each case, one or two enterprises were involved.^[3] The growth of wholesale manufacturing was manifested by a proliferation of small firms and a growth in outworking and rural production rather than in the rise of large enterprises. Before 1815, exports had been an important influence on the scale of organisation in

^[2] V.A. Hatley and J. Rajczonek, 'Shoemakers in Northamptonshire, 1762-1911: A Statistical Survey', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 1971, p. 22.

^[3] R. Church, 'Labour supply and innovation 1800-1860: The boot and shoe industry', *Business History*, 12 (1970), p. 25.

the industry. However, in the first half of the nineteenth century population growth became the probable major determinant of demand. British population grew from around 9 million in 1801 to 18 million in 1851.^[4] Church argues that before 1850, when the important export boom began, home demand was the decisive factor acting upon the trade:

If we may assume a low price and income elasticity for boots and shoes during a period when fashion changes tended to be uncharacteristic of the market for items of basic apparel, the rise in population may be regarded as the most important single determinant of the demand for leather footwear.^[5]

The increasing demand for boots and shoes led to the emergence of a small number of firms employing a few hundred people, mainly outworkers, alongside a simultaneous proliferation of small masters.

Table Three: Size of Factories in the Boot and Shoe Industry 1851

Number of Adult Male Workers	Number of Factories
0	7,311
1-2	6,016
3-9	3,644
10-19	444
20-49	181
50-99	38
100+	31

Source: Census (1851)

As Table Three demonstrates small factories were still the most predominant form of organisation in the industry. Only thirty-one factories had more than one hundred

^[4] *Census of Great Britain: 1851* (1854), p. lxviii.

^[5] Church, 'Labour supply', p. 26.

workers. Alongside the figures shown in Table Three, it should also be noted that the figure given for 'masters' was 17,665; so the emerging factory system was accompanied by a burgeoning in the number of small masters, who may have employed just family or a couple of hands.

The expanding market also influenced regional specialisation. Northampton and its surrounding villages were early beneficiaries of the demand created by the French wars, helped by the militancy of organised labour in London. London shoemakers had formed trade combinations before 1806 and struck in 1809 and 1812-13. As a result, London merchants sent uppers to Northampton to be closed and returned as 'basket work' to meet export orders.^[6] The apparent success of this practice is borne out by the subsequent custom for London wholesalers to place orders directly with Northampton manufacturers to take advantage of their cheaper labour costs. In turn, Northampton manufacturers put work out to increasingly distant Northamptonshire villages.^[7] There were no labour shortage problems in meeting the demands of London manufacturers because Northampton's capitalists exploited under-employed labour in the declining rural craft industries such as silk, woollens and lace. Furthermore, the migration of many London shoemakers to Northamptonshire alleviated any potential skill shortages. Church argues that this process of 'rural colonisation', that is the Northampton manufacturers' putting-out of work over widespread areas in order to take advantage of lower wage areas, was possible because boot and shoe production until the 1850s remained entirely reliant

^[6] J. Swann, *Shoemaking*, p. 23; Church, 'Labour Supply', p. 27.

^[7] Hatley and Rajczonek, 'Shoemakers in Northamptonshire', pp. 5-6.

on hand methods.^[8] The only process which had undergone central supervision at this time was the cutting out (or clicking) stage. Clickers and the 'rough-stuff' cutters were the only classes of worker employed in warehouse premises. There was great competition amongst the rural populations for the closing and finishing work and this was heightened by 'the seasonal availability of rural labour and the regular seasonal circuit of tramping labour'^[9] which swelled an already crowded labour market.

Thus in the first half of the nineteenth century a *regional division of labour* arose, Northampton and Stafford became the centres of wholesale boot and shoe production whilst London retained its prominence as the bespoke shoe producer. In addition, within the provincial industry, a further division of labour occurred between centralised operations and the putting-out departments (the putting-out spreading increasingly into the rural hinterlands which utilised the labour of women and children). Closing, or the sewing together of upper leather, increasingly became the domain of female labour, with children being employed on various finishing and general auxiliary operations. Clicking and lasting were male-only occupations. With such a widespread and largely unorganised workforce it is understandable that attempts by workers' associations to prevent the reduction of piecework rates, as in 1830 and 1839, were unsuccessful. The 1852 strike was slightly more successful and achieved a minor victory in forcing those employers paying less than average rates to conform to the average.^[10] Earnings quoted by the Operative Society of

[8] R. Church, *The Dynamics of Victorian Business - Problems and Perspectives to the 1870s* (1980), p. 35.

[9] Church, 'Labour Supply', p. 29.

[10] *ibid.*

Cordwainers showed a fall in wages of between 20 and 50 per cent. between 1812 and 1850.^[11] Thus with a low-waged and abundant workforce there was little impetus for employers to innovate or to centralise production, at least before the 1850s.

Historians' Interpretations of Mechanisation in Boot and Shoe Production

The slow adoption of the closing machine by manufacturers in Northampton and Stafford has received various interpretations. John Clapham, for example, argued that technical difficulties experienced in adapting the sewing machine for waxed thread - a necessity for the production of Northampton's staple product of heavy boots and shoes - were responsible. However, Americans were using waxed thread machines for boot closing in 1857, so this seems an insufficient explanation.^[12] Certainly, it is true, as H.P. Adams argues, that those firms and villages which specialised in supplying military contracts (Raunds for example) were constrained in their methods of production by military specifications. Until 1913, all boots and shoes produced had to be welted and hand sewn. Thus manufacturers who were contractors for the army and navy had little impetus to innovate.^[13] This caveat, however, is not a sufficient explanation for the slow introduction of closing machinery

^[11] *ibid.*, p. 29.

^[12] *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, IX, Manufactures, part III*, Cited in Church, 'Labour supply', p. 42.

^[13] H. P. Adam, *British Leather, Record of Achievement*, (1946), p. 122.

as only a small number of county villages would have been affected to any extent by these strict regulations.

Church argues that labour supply not only retarded mechanisation, but also after the mid-1850s was instrumental in the introduction of technology to the boot and shoe industry.

In the middle fifties there are signs that some classes of workers were becoming scarce, and this fact, taken together with a strike for higher piece rates and the subsequent introduction of closing machinery, fiercely resisted by shoemakers in Northampton and Stafford, might suggest that the character and chronology of the first phase of mechanization in the footwear industry can be explained by labour shortage, a situation which was beginning to affect other sectors of the economy in the 1850s.^[14]

Church's claim that scarcity of labour was a catalyst for mechanisation also seems unlikely, as he himself admits later in the same article. Whilst the demand for labour did rise sharply from the 1850s, population was also increasing rapidly. As noted above, there appears to have been little shortage of female closers, and this was the first technology introduced into the industry in 1857.

In some circumstances machines were employed, but in Britain local factors influenced this process. The closing machine patented by the American Elias Howe in 1846 had been adapted to stitching upper leather in the United States in 1852, and machine-sewn uppers were the norm in the American wholesale footwear industry by 1855.^[15] In 1855, the Singer company of New York offered British manufacturers

^[14] Church, 'Labour supply', p. 29.

^[15] B. Hazard, (1921), *The Organisation of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts before 1875*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 94-95.

a machine for sewing upper leather,^[16] and the machine's low capital outlay - £30 or less - must have provided an attractive option for manufacturers. However, a shoemaker's union, formed in the 'traditional' areas of Stafford and Northampton thwarted its early introduction by the firm of Edwin Bostock in these locations.^[17] The successful introduction of the machine into Norwich and Street is an interesting corollary of the resistance to this early technology in the industry. C. and J. Clark at Street was a paternalistic employer and the firm dominated the small village. The banning of unions in Clarks was successful throughout the nineteenth century, largely because of the monopsonistic position that the firm enjoyed in a rural community with little alternative employment.^[18]

The most plausible explanation for late adoption of machinery in Northampton must be based upon that suggested by Church in his conclusion, where he argued that 'the major factors which account for the technical lag in the fifties are labour militancy and the entrepreneurial trepidation which it seemed to induce'.^[19] However, Church did not investigate this important assumption in detail, more specifically, he ignored any reference to gender within this militancy. The next section investigates this line of thought more thoroughly and will emphasise the importance of custom and traditional notions of work organisation in the so-called

[16] J. H. Clapham, *An Economic History of Modern Britain: Vol 2* (Cambridge: 1932), p. 94.

[17] Church, 'Labour supply', pp. 31-32.

[18] W. H. Barker (ed.), *One Hundred Years' History of Shoes at Street, Somerset* (Street: 1942), p. 171.

[19] Church, 'Labour supply' p. 43.

anti-machine disputes. The threat that machines posed to established patterns of gender relations will also be revealed.

Custom, Gender and Workplace Culture in the Northampton Boot and Shoe Trade

The operatives employed on the early closing machines were young, single women and this was a reflection of prevailing notions about the impropriety of married women working outside the home. The men and women who worked the traditional methods were opposed to the factory system. *I shall argue the defence of custom and traditional work practices was perhaps more important than the fear of job losses or lower wages.* In the mid-1850s, when closing machinery was first introduced into the industry, hand closers' pay rates were three times those of machine closers. However, due to their greater productivity, the latter's overall wages were larger under the prevailing piece-work system.^[20]

Gender conflicts at this time were complicated by class issues: Operatives employed in the traditional areas of boot and shoe making considered the defence of the traditional form of domestic production more important than issues of women's or men's work. Thus the most important divisions were between supporters of the domestic system and proponents of the factory system. Gender divisions were

^[20] *Children's Employment Commission, Second Report, 1864, XXII, p. 164.* The average weekly wage of hand closers of less than seven shillings, could be doubled, or even trebled, by working on machine closing.

complex and multi-faceted: Men were opposed to the employment of young women in workshops, but so too were women. The wives and children of boot and shoe workers utilised the ideology of the male breadwinner in defence of their traditional ways of life and work, even though the 'male breadwinner' norm had never, in fact, existed in the trade. Clearly, the young women who went to work upon the machines were threatening the hierarchy of family labour. In working outside of the patriarchal or matriarchal gaze, and receiving wages in their own right, they were perceived as a threat to the men, women and children working under the traditional system of production. In the mid-1850s, the major defenders of custom united to fight the perceived tyranny of factory owners and the treachery of the young women willing to work for such tyrants. That gender divisions of labour pre-dated factory production has already been noted. However, there is clear evidence that the move to factory working produced a stricter gender demarcation. Under domestic production, closing - or sewing together of the upper parts of a shoe - was routinely undertaken by women. Nevertheless, the outworking practice of the whole family being employed in the production of boots and shoes almost certainly provided women and children with a knowledge of processes other than closing. This skill assimilation was also important under a system of production which often necessitated all-night working in the later part of the week. Irregular hours often had to be worked on Fridays and Saturdays in order to complete orders to be 'shopped' and wages collected for Sunday and for the all-important 'Saint Monday'. Numerous examples exist of women engaging in what have traditionally been considered male areas of boot and shoe making under the domestic system. Oral evidence provided

by Northampton Borough Council's community programme *Northampton Remembers*

gives many examples of women working in 'men's' areas:

Grandmother, I've seen her sewing welts in and seen her making the thread and sew welt in the shoes and Uncle George's wife, the one who did the samples for Manfield's, I've also seen his wife sewing the welts in by hand and that was the way of life at that time.^[21]

However, interchanges of male and female work under the pressure of the domestic system may have been somewhat less important in the fight against factory working than the fact that female labour was complementary to men's work and was indispensable in the successful functioning of the domestic system. More evidence from *Northampton Remembers* clearly demonstrates the vital role of women in the maintenance of men's livelihoods:

My father worked at home and as I say but unluckily for us my mother died just before the war finished ... he couldn't work without my mother to do that stitching for him you see. Other than that he'd got to get another woman in the neighbourhood that did it to do it for him, but that wasn't always convenient, if they were working with their own husbands you see.

After his wife's death Mr. Ellis was eventually forced to take a job, which he hated, at the Top Boot factory.^[22] That this evidence was from a Northampton man talking about the period of the First World War shows the remarkable endurance of the domestic system in the area. More, importantly, though, it demonstrates that it was only the labour of his wife which kept him from the 'hated' factory.

^[21] *Northampton Remembers Boot and Shoe* (Northampton Borough Council Community Programme, Northampton: 1988). Respondent Mr. Joe Ellis born 1898.

^[22] *ibid.*

The strict gender division of labour which operated once machinery was employed is well illustrated in the description of a middleman's factory in Northampton (a commentary published in the magazine *Good Words* in 1869):

The middleman's factory is a three-floored brick building, window lighted of [sic] both sides. On the ground-floor the paste-boys work, earning from 3s to 4s a week. The two upper floors are given up to the girls. In each room there is a row of about a dozen 'machinists' - young women from seventeen to twenty odd, some of them with chignons like small pumpkins - working 'uppers' on Howe and Singer sewing-machines, and earning from 9s to 18s a week. The little girls who sit on the floor in the middle of the room, with baskets beside, are 'knot-tiers'. They earn from 1s 6d to 3s by picking out and knotting the ends of the machinists' threads. At a long dresser-like counter on the other side of the room stand a row of 'fitters', girls of an age indeterminate between the machinists and the knot-tiers, and earning intermediate wages of from 7s to 12s a week. The ceaseless ticking of the sewing-machines, the pummelling the fitters give the uppers they are fitting to the lasts (in preparation for the machinists) and what I must be ungallant enough to call the 'clatter' which is an almost necessary consequence of feminine foregathering, combine to make those upper rooms remind one of the parrot house in Regent's Park. The working hours are from 7 to 12am; and from one to six pm. Such of the children as come under the Factory Act are sent to school in batches. Here, as well as I believe at the large factories, work ceases at two on Saturday afternoons - a boon which the Northampton operatives highly and jealously prize, and the holidays given amount to about four clear days in the year^[23]

As the above quote demonstrates, by 1869 the factory system was becoming established, at least for the closing of shoes. Women were concentrated inside factories and workshops and were initially employed on the first machines used in boot and shoe making. All-female workshops where division of labour and machinery were routinely utilised became commonplace (see Figure One for a graphic illustration of such a workshop).

^[23] Re-printed in *"Snobopolis" Northampton in 1869* (Museums and Art Gallery of Northampton: 1976), p. 6.



Figure One

A Middleman Manufacturer's Upper Chamber (or closing room)

Source: *Good Words* 1869

However, there was no easy transition to the factories, and much opposition by workers led to protracted confrontations with employers wishing to move to the factory system. The threat presented by the closing machine to traditional ways of working in Northampton during the 1850s, was strongly opposed by all groups of workers in the industry. Labour unrest following the attempted introduction of the first closing machines in Northampton will now be analysed, with evidence being drawn from various magistrates' court cases emphasising the strength of feeling aroused by this technology.

The 'anti-machine' strike in Northampton 1857-9

The two long years ranging from 1857 to 1859 have rightly been seen by historians as a period of crisis in the Northampton boot and shoe trade.^[24] There is some dispute as to whom was the first person to introduce the closing machine in Northampton,^[25] but, in November 1857, operatives in Northampton discovered that two firms were using closing machinery in the town. The firm of J. Green & Co., one of the two pioneering firms, was a recently-established branch of a large London and Norwich firm. The company's Northampton foreman had visited America in 1852 and had witnessed closing machines in use at the Singer factory.^[26] Significantly the other firm using closing machines in the town,

^[24] V. Hatley 'Monsters in Campbell Square! The Early History of Two Industrial Premises in Northampton', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 6 (1966), p. 51.

^[25] For a synopsis of this dispute, see Appendix Two.

^[26] *Northampton Mercury*, 13 and 20 February, 1858.

Marshall and Padmore, had a partner who had been registered as a manufacturer in the 1840s, following which he too travelled in America and had become familiarised with the Howe closing machine. Thus, also in the winter of 1857, the firm of Marshall and Padmore began using a machine for closing.^[27]

Shoemakers' leaders immediately called upon workers to strike against these two firms, and both were subsequently 'blacked'. This led to a long period of disruption in the town with 'scabs' being publicly ridiculed and the premises of 'guilty' manufacturers being picketed. The first magistrate's hearing against the so-called 'anti-machine committee' and against others on charges of intimidation was heard on February 20, 1858. Two men, John Holton and John Coleman were charged with unlawfully assembling outside the shop of Messrs. J. Green and Co. It was alleged that they had distributed handbills and molested workmen attending the shop, and had attempted to prevent them from taking work out. The defendants were reminded by the Magistrates that, in 1825, an Act had been passed to prevent such restrictive actions: 'if any person shall endeavour to prevent any persons from accepting work, he shall be liable to three months' imprisonment with hard labour'.^[28] The *Northampton Mercury* described the actions of the defendants as follows:

They stand at Messrs. Green's shop door and endeavour by abuse, and jeers, and pushing, and various other modes of intimidation, to prevent people from working, and to hold up those who do - as the handbills they were distributing said - to public execrations. In this bill persons who were disposed to work were designated as 'scabs', 'traitors to

^[27] *Northampton Mercury*, 23 January 1858.

^[28] *Northampton Mercury*, 20 February 1858.

their country', and deserving of being 'execrated by everybody'.^[29]

The difficulties of those opposed to machinery were exacerbated by the putting-out system, as the testimony of one witness in this case revealed. Thomas Payne lived in Harpole (a country village) and was a carrier who took work out from Green's for the people in Harpole. He claimed the defendants called him a 'Harpole scab' and that there were at least 30 or 40 gathered to intimidate him. Payne also claimed that the group

stopped my wife's sister, and last Saturday they cut the rope that secured the goods on the cratch behind my cart. Three weeks ago Holton asked me whether Harpole people worked for the shop - Catherine Hall, Mrs. Payne's sister said she had seen Coleman at the gate. Several persons were with him. They tried to prevent her from passing.^[30]

The firm of Green's, who had brought the case, asserted they had no desire to exact long punishment on the defendants but had taken legal action in order to establish their right to use machinery. The employers supported their claim that this was a matter of principle by maintaining that, in fact, they only had two machines, and both had proved unsatisfactory. One had been returned to the suppliers and the other was on the premises but not in use. Judgement was postponed for 21 days and Coleman and Holton (the protesters) were informed that, if they did not resume their picketing the case against them would be dismissed. Clearly, the magistrate hoped that no more trouble would ensue following the hearing. This hope was a vain one and the following morning the defendants returned to the factory to resume their picket.

^[29] ibid.

^[30] ibid.

Green's argued, at a further hearing, on the 13 March, that protection was now more necessary as the machines were now operational. The court sentenced Coleman and Holton to twenty one days' imprisonment.^[31]

This first case of the 'period of crisis' in Northampton initiated a pattern which was to become familiar. A clear demarcation was set, on the one side, between the right of the manufacturer to introduce machinery and the related need to defend the freedom of workers who chose to work on machine-made shoes, and, on the other side, the aim of operatives to retain their traditional forms of production.

As the months passed attempts to disrupt the work on machinery at these two firms continued apace. The gatherings and intimidation became the subject of debate in both the *Northampton Mercury* and through proceedings at the Magistrates Court. It is to these debates that we now turn, as they reveal much about notions of custom, defence of independent work practices and gender. Equally importantly, they reveal the dichotomy between, on the one hand, the workers and their oral defence of traditional practises, and, on the other, the written words of the middle-classes and their emphasis on notions of the rationality of science, the neutrality of technology and the inevitability of 'progress'. A good example of this latter position is provided by a letter, published tellingly by the *Northampton Mercury* on the date of the first court hearing of the troubles. The author of the letter to the editor was apparently a visitor to Northampton who had noticed the anti-machine atmosphere of the place:

The manufacture of boots and shoes appears to be the staple trade of Northampton and its vicinity. Do you wish to retain it? If so, you are driven to the alternative of having recourse to machinery. It is a notorious fact that the French and Americans are sending into this

^[31] *Northampton Mercury* March 13 1858.

country tens of thousands of boots and shoes made by machines. They are underselling you in price, beating you in the quality. You are not now competing with them on equal terms. Bestir yourselves. Let machines do the work of machines; let brains and souls steer towards that higher position to which they were destined. Depend upon it there never was a time at which skilled labour stood at so high a premium as at present. Competition with the foreign manufacturer under present circumstances will lead to reduced wages and the ultimate loss of your trade. Adopt every possible improvement, whether it be in hand or machine labour, and you will keep your trade and extend it. It may be a few will have to seek other employ, or give their minds more to their work and less to pleasure and dissipation. Good or better wages, with good machinery, will be the potion of the skilled and industrious; their wives may then stay at home to superintend and be the Polar Star of the family circle, and freed from many of the contaminating influences around them here; their daughters may obtain situations conferring greater comfort and more certain improvement

Your sincere friend, Onward^[32]

The first point to note in this letter is the uncomplicated use of bourgeois notions of gender ideology. The use of machinery, it was claimed would ultimately produce a more moral society, with the home being untainted by production, therefore allowing women to concentrate upon their natural duties as home-makers and mothers. These notions, as will be shown below, were linked to descriptions of the unmanly men and unwomanly women who hampered those wishing to go to work on machines. The clear implication of these discourses reported in the press was that men and women who worked upon machinery - and by extension in the factory system - could avoid the 'tainting' influences of homeworking and could thus fulfil their gender roles fully.

Another point worthy of consideration is the use of the press as a tool for the dissemination of propaganda in favour of the factory system. The author of the above letter was allegedly a mere visitor to the town who was struck so forcibly by the 'foolhardiness' of many of its inhabitants that he or she was moved to write to the

^[32] *Northampton Mercury* February 13 1858.

local press. For someone described as a visitor to Northampton, 'Onward' revealed a rather detailed knowledge of the boot and shoe trade in both its national and international perspective. Lack of evidence on 'Onward's' identity allows for little more than speculation upon the wider agenda of the writer. However, the language used clearly reflected middle-class sensibilities surrounding this issue.

A similar note of caution is necessary when ascribing the motivation behind individuals bringing cases before the magistrates, individuals such as Jane Tye. However, it is interesting to note how, despite repeated intimidation, this young, demure, female showed such tenacity in bringing cases in front of the Magistrate. Whether Miss Tye had the backing of a factory owner, or other person of influence again must remain a matter of speculation. The cost of obtaining a summons from a Magistrates court was as low as two shillings but,^[33] as a young machinist, Tye could not have been earning more than 12 shillings a week, so the regularity with which she brought cases before the courts would have represented a large drain upon her resources. The cases involving Tye illustrate how gender ideology was being used and contested at this period. They also show how complex gender relations were at this time in Northampton as women were as likely (if not more so) to back their men - husbands, brothers etc. - against other women who went to work on machines. There was no simple masculine\feminine divide in gender relations in this period. The divide was one between the domestic and factory systems.

On 3 April 1858 Tye charged two boys named Clarke and Roddis with intimidation and with obstructing her from pursuing her occupation. She worked at

^[33] J. Davis, 'Prosecutions and Their Context: The Use of Criminal Law in Later Nineteenth-Century London', in D. Hay and F. Snyder (eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850* (Oxford: 1989), p. 400.

Messrs. Marshall and Padmore, one of the two firms who first introduced machinery.

The report, in the *Northampton Mercury*, described Tye as 'A very pretty, modest looking girl' who had been beset on her way to work by mobs of anti-machinists:

men, boys, and women - who cluster about her, call out 'scab', rattle tin kettles, and practice various similar annoyances, till the poor girl is afraid either to leave her home or to return to it. The two boys now charged were active agents in this *mob-tyranny* on Tuesday last, when P.C. 26 happened to be a witness to some of the petty persecutions to which she was subjected. Roddis told her to put her head in a bag; Clarke called out 'scab', a girl shook a handkerchief in her face, and a mob of *unmanly fellows and unwomanly women* hounded on the smaller fry and made up the chorus. The case was strengthened by a man who came forward with the intention of vindicating the boys by showing that the word 'scab' was not used in connexion with the name of the complainant and who evidently thought he had hit upon a point of law which would upset the whole case. The magistrates said they were sorry to send these boys to prison, but people must and should be protected in the pursuit of their lawful avocations. The complainant, had as much right to go to her work as the mob who beset her had to be idle at home if they preferred it. They should sentence the boys to 14 days' imprisonment, and, if the complainant was again subject to annoyance the offenders would be dealt with very severely. Grown up persons would certainly be visited with the severest punishment the law would permit.^[34]

This passage is quoted at length as it reveals many facets of both gender ideology and bourgeois notions of propriety held by both the press and the Magistrates. That Tye was described as very pretty and modest looking underlined the belief that the factory system would produce a more moral society. Equally this allowed the others - 'the mob' - to be sketched as less moral; in fact as a disgrace to their gender. The pretty, modest girl was beset by a howling mob of unmanly men and unwomanly women. The so-called anti-machinists (by this time the accepted title for anyone protesting for the continuance of their livelihood) were, without exception, described as a mob.

^[34] *Northampton Mercury*, 3 April 1858 [Emphasis added].

Thus middle-class notions of the freedom of the individual to pursue their own way in life could be defended more rigorously in the face of such an unlawful throng. In this case, no-one had actually physically assaulted Tye. They had barracked her publicly and practised forms of protest that had a long precedent, devices such as tin-kettling (a form of 'rough music') and public embarrassment. Thus they could be said to be protecting a traditional way of work with traditional forms of protest. However, they were met with a law which defended individual rights and not customs. The point at issue here was the right of Tye to follow her vocation. The assumption by the Magistrate, that the 'mob' had as much right to idle away their time, was also revealing of the attitude of the magistracy. Contrary to the magistrate's assumption, these people, far from intimidating Tye because they were idling away their lives, were doing so precisely to defend their livelihoods.

April 10 1858 witnessed another case brought by Tye. This time Joseph Ball, an elderly man, was charged with intimidating and obstructing Tye in a sequel to the last court case she had brought. Tye claimed that, on leaving court she was followed by a mob. Ball had removed his hat, hammered it before Tye and called her a scab. Tye was cross-examined by Ball's counsel about ill-feeling between herself or her family and the accused which pre-dated the alleged incidents. The *Northampton Mercury* reported:

But, although something of the kind was admitted, it was evident that the particular annoyance had reference to the anti-machine movement and the charge of intimidation. She stated that a week last Saturday he put his head out at window as she was going to work and called her a scab, and all the children took up the cry. Her story was corroborated by Elizabeth Tye, her brother's wife, and Mary Tye her sister - Mr Shoosmith, who appeared for the defendant, said he was instructed that what had occurred arose out of a private quarrel, and was not at all referable to the machine movement. He submitted that the simple fact of calling her 'scab' did not necessarily prove

intimidation, but was a term of opprobrium applied commonly. The learned gentleman called a girl named Clarke, who stated that Jane Tye slapped her face, and Mr. Ball said if she was his child he would make Jane suffer for it. They were not calling of her, no calling 'scab' no hammering, and no crushing - Hones, a gardener in Bull orchard said he saw Tye slap the girl's face without any provocation. He admitted there was some rattling with a tea-board. He didn't hear Ball say nothing, but there was a great noise at the time. Mr Higgins said the magistrates considered the case proved, and sentenced the defendant to 21 days imprisonment.^[35]

This case was built upon shaky foundations. The only witnesses for Tye were members of her own family. It was admitted that there had been previous quarrels between the Balls and the Tyes, but was claimed that this case was different as it was an anti-machine case. However no direct evidence was supplied for the latter assertion. Two witnesses saw the pretty, modest looking Tye slap a young girl's face without provocation. However, the magistrates considered the case proved. It is tempting to conclude that this case was one in which the magistrates wished to make an example of Mr. Ball as a warning to other 'anti-machinists'.

The tenacious Jane Tye was again applying for a warrant on 17 April. This time she alleged that Julia Johnson had grossly assaulted her that morning and had torn her bonnet. The *Northampton Mercury* rallied to Tye's support, describing her as 'a poor girl' who 'has been compelled by the dastardly persecution to which she has been subjected, to abandon her work'.^[36] The report continued saying that, once more, Tye had been hunted by a mob who had 'spat upon her and called her opprobrious names.' Among them was the accused, Johnson, who hit her in the face, and tore her bonnet saying 'the magistrates could do nothing and didn't mean to take

^[35] *Northampton Mercury* 10 April 1858.

^[36] *Northampton Mercury* 17 April 1858.

any further notice of these cases.'^[37] Johnson was a married woman and Tye single, and thus this case typified the distinction between married women defending the family-work system and single young women who went to work in the factories. The magistrate described Tye as an industrious hard-working girl who had been forced to give up her employment due to harassment. The warrant was granted.

On the same day a number of cases appeared in court which demonstrated how men, women and children joined the intimidation of women going to work for employers who used machinery. An example of this was the charge against one Stephen Hillman for assault and for molesting Sarah Sweatman who worked for Marshall and Padmore. This case was reported in the *Northampton Mercury* which described the scene as follows:

On Thursday a mob of around 2,000 assembled in Woolmonger street. Jeered at her, pushed her, threw her down and struck her. In this cowardly sport women, boys girls and great hulking men joined. Prisoner pushed her over and slapped her face. Six weeks imprisonment with hard labour.^[38]

The case of Joseph Kemshead was also brought on 17 April. It demonstrates the depth of feeling sustained by various sections of the community against those working for manufacturers who employed machines. Kemshead was charged with intimidating Alfred Faulkner and with calling him a 'damned scab'.

He [Kemshead] said there was tin kettling among the children the previous evening, and his wife was talking with a person named Snedgar about it, when Faulkner's wife called her a damned ugly cat. He, [Kemshead], went out to see what was the matter, when Mrs. Faulkner told him to go back to work, and pay his debts. He answered, "I beg your pardon, maam, I shan't do it by being a scab".

^[37] ibid.

^[38] ibid.

That was the cause of the crowd which was assembled when Faulkner came home.^[39]

This piece shows how neighbour was set against neighbour, men against women, women against women, men against men and women against men over the vexed issue of machinery, and its perceived corollary the factory system.

This section of the chapter has demonstrated how long-established patterns of working in Northamptonshire - inherited from the early organisation of the lace industry and adapted in the boot and shoe industry until the mid-nineteenth century - determined reactions to the perceived threat of the factory system. Paramount amongst this opposition were the treasured notions of skill and independence fostered and supported by all members of the family under the domestic system of production. The factory system was seen as a threat to the social relations of production so cherished by those who worked in domestic industry. The final section of this chapter concentrates upon the development of boot and shoemaking in Leicester, where a very different pattern emerges.

Leicester's Boot and Shoe Industry

The most striking aspect of the development of the boot and shoe industry in Leicester in the second half of the nineteenth century was the rapidity of its take off and growth. Prior to 1850 the industry in Leicester was entirely domestic, and provided only sufficient output for the local area. Thus, there was no appreciable boot and shoe industry in Leicester before 1850. In 1835 there were only two

^[39] ibid.

wholesale shoe makers in Leicester, one of whom was Thomas Crick, who is the accepted pioneer of the boot and shoe industry in the town. The other, J. Dilkes, was also a hosiery manufacturer. His involvement was an early example of what we shall see was a very common association between the two industries in Leicester.^[40] It is, however, necessary to make one qualification to our genealogy and to acknowledge the work of local historians Jack Simmons and V.W. Hogg, who have both emphasised the importance of a small but important local wholesale trade.^[41] During the 1830s in Leicester, some product specialisation was evident with a number of shoemakers. The product manufactured, known locally as 'cacks', were cheap, brightly coloured strap-on sandals and boots for children which were popular in the country villages.^[42]

The structure of the industry underwent dramatic change from a domestic-based trade supplying only local needs to the largest centre of boot and shoe production in Britain. Between 1841 and 1877 the number of manufacturers grew by over 200 per cent. (see table 4). The number employed in the boot and shoe trade nationally actually fell between 1851 and 1861 from 274,000 to 250,000, whilst in Leicester between these years the number employed rose from 1,393 to 2,741, or 40 per 1,000 of the population.^[43] Furthermore, the 1861 Census for Leicester may well have underestimated the number of women and children employed in the

^[40] *Wright's Directory of Leicester* (1846) p. 12.

^[41] J. Simmons, *Leicester Past and Present*, (1974), pp. 2-5 and V.W. Hogg, 'Footwear production' in *Victoria County History of Leicester*, 4, (1958) pp. 314-319.

^[42] Hogg, 'Footwear Production', p. 314.

^[43] *Victoria County History of Leicester*, 4 (1958), p. 315.

industry.^[44] Giving evidence to the Royal Commission on the employment of children in 1863, one Leicester manufacturer stated:

the wholesale boot and shoe trade in Leicester may be said to have come into existence within the last five years up to that date there were only two or three wholesale manufacturers in the town.

Table 4
The Growth of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Leicester 1841 - 1877

Year	Independent Shoe Makers	Manufacturers
1841	204	1
1861	137	18
1877	750	203

Source: R. L. Jones, 'The sociological context of trade union activity in the east midlands boot and shoe industry in the late Victorian era' University of Loughborough M.Sc. (1969)

The same manufacturer also estimated that between two and three thousand women were employed, mainly in the factories. His estimate, which is entirely plausible, given the mode of manufacture prevalent at this time, was based as follows. 'I arrived at that number by reckoning the number of sewing machines, which is tolerably known, at over 800 and taking a proportion of two fitters to each machinist with a margin for those who are otherwise employed.'^[45] This evidence, along with that shown in Table 4, clearly shows a rapid development - within the space of some thirty years - of the new industry in Leicester. It also demonstrates that the industry was based, from the outset, upon the new technology of the sewing machine

^[44] *ibid.*, p. 316.

^[45] *2nd Report Royal Commission on the Employment of Children* (1864), p. 165.

and upon factory production from the 1850s. The majority of early factory operatives were women employed upon sewing machines. This picture is in stark contrast to that in Northampton where the operatives in the industry robustly opposed the use of machinery, factories and the female operatives who worked therein. There is no extant evidence of any opposition by the workers of Leicester to the development of factory production and to the utilisation of machinery in its burgeoning boot and shoe industry. Indeed, the reminiscences of a young Leicester boy describing Crick's factory (or perhaps more accurately his workshop) in fond terms is a far cry from the outright hostility found in Northampton at the time. This boy, later a manufacturer and well known in the industry, recalled:

as a young boy, about 1853, passing Crick's factory, and hearing the girls singing. There was probably no other factory in Leicester, and very few in the country, where a number of girls would be working sewing machines. At that time it was quite a novelty and much talked of.^[46]

Origins of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Leicester - the Debates

Historians have identified a number of factors considered to be crucial to the development of the boot and shoe industry in Leicester from the 1850s. The traditional explanation refers to the opposition of machinery in the older areas of boot and shoe production such as Northampton and Stafford. Writing in the *Journal of the British Boot and Shoe Institute* in 1965, A. Granger supported this explanation:

The traditional home of shoe making was Northampton, but the attempts by some manufacturers to introduce machines there met with considerable opposition which continued for about ten years. There is

^[46] Reminiscences of James Green, *The Footwear Organiser*, Jan 1926.

little doubt that not a few Northampton journeymen came to Leicester as a result of the strikes and intimidation prevailing in that town, and so Northampton's loss became Leicester's gain.^[47]

This version of events also received contemporary backing, which may have led later commentators to accept its veracity. The *Leicester Chronicle* in 1901 granted the strike in Northampton with even greater importance to the development of the trade in Leicester than Granger:

The first innovation [in the shoe industry] was the introduction of the sewing machine, and the opposition to this by the hand closer was much more determined than what has manifested itself since against other appliances, although far larger interests have been from time to time affected. Leicester in the mid 19th century was practically unknown as a shoe making centre, and might never have become famous for it, but for the great strike in Northampton against the sewing machine.^[48]

This explanation seems plausible on the surface, and certainly some shoemakers from the older areas did migrate to Leicester to find work in the trade. The firm of Stead and Simpson for example relocated from Leeds to Leicester in 1853 in order to avoid the labour difficulties they had faced in Yorkshire. This firm played an important part in innovation in the Leicester industry becoming, in 1858, the first to introduce the American 'Blake' sewer, which stitched the insole to the outer sole. This innovation proved to be even more important than Crick's riveting device which it displaced.^[49] However, this does not explain the movement of both workers and manufacturers to Leicester if it is true that in the mid-nineteenth century the town was virtually unknown as a shoemaking centre.

[47] A. Granger, 'History of the shoe industry in Leicester 1750-1950' *Journal of the British Boot and Shoe Institute*, March 1965, p. 2.

[48] *Leicester Chronicle*, 5 January 1901.

[49] Lancaster, *Radicalism*, p. 27.

As shown above, some commentators point to the importance of a small, specialised, but crucial, wholesale trade in Leicester prior to the period of take-off in the industry in the town.^[50] As Lancaster notes, in 1843, 36 shoemakers in the town owned their own 'show shops' for the sale of ready-made boots and shoes 'but the main recruits to the ranks of the wholesalers, that is, firms producing goods for retail outlets other than their own, came from the hosiery trade.'^[51] The involvement of hosier capital in the boot and shoe industry in Leicester was a vital component in its development, but its importance has frequently been underestimated for a number of perfectly understandable reasons. Firstly, concentration upon the activities of the boot and shoe entrepreneur Thomas Crick have tended to overshadow other aspects of the early development of the boot and shoe industry in Leicester. Secondly, the paucity of business records has allowed at best an impressionistic interpretation of the industry's genesis. Crick's remarkable achievements do tend to grab the historian's attention, and it is necessary to trace his story here.

Thomas Crick - 'Father' of the Leicester Boot and Shoe Industry

The name of T. Crick first appeared in Leicester's town directories in 1835, and his business remained at the same premises for the next twenty years. Crick was actually a 'translator' rather than a boot and shoe maker, which meant that his business was

^[50] Hogg, 'Footwear production'. Simmons, *Leicester*.

^[51] Lancaster, *Radicalism*, p. 25. From White's *Directory of Leicester*, (1846), p. 172-4.

concerned with attaching new soles to old uppers, a service clearly in demand by the working classes for whom a new pair of boots represented a major purchase.

In 1853 Crick 'rediscovered' the method of attaching uppers to soles by rivets inserted by a mechanical press. As Clapham notes, this method had been used during the Napoleonic wars, but had fallen from use.^[52] However, it should be noted that it was more than a mere rediscovery, but an improvement upon the earlier riveting method as was shown by Crick's Patent of 1853:

3rd March, 1853

using tacks, rivets, or sprigs, instead of stitches, for fastening the tops or uppers to the bottom or sole of boots, shoes, clogs, over-shoes, or slippers. The method pursued is to last the boot, shoe, clog, over-shoe or slipper in the usual manner, and to fasten the top or upper part to the sole or lower part with tacks, rivets, or sprigs, instead of stitches, the heads being on the interior. The advantage of the Invention consists in the increased economy of production.

To make, use and vend the 'Improvements...' in UK and Ireland, Channel Isles and Isle of Man.

Having thus described the nature of my Invention, I will proceed to describe the manner in which the same is performed; and I would first remark, that boots and shoes have before been made by fixing the 'uppers' to the soles by means of rivits,[sic] or pegs by driving them from the outside of the sole into the interior of the boot or shoe, and so that the points of the rivits or pegs or tacks have been inwards; but the present improvements the heads or enlarged part of the rivits, tacks or sprigs are inwards, and the points outward, which will be found much more useful mode of fastening the 'uppers' of boots and shoe to the sole.^[53]

Rivetting disappeared after the Napoleonic Wars because the points of the rivets had been reported to cut the feet of soldiers. The importance of Crick's

^[52] J.H. Clapham, *Economic History of Great Britain Volume 2: Free Trade and Steel* (1963), p. 94.

^[53] Letters Patent, A.D. 1853 No. 542, "Specification of Thomas Crick", London: Eyre and Spottiwoode, 1853. Leicester Record Office DE 1463\1.

invention was that it allowed the utilisation of relatively unskilled labour in the making process of a boot and shoe. The sewing, by hand, of the sole on to the upper had long been a skilled aspect of boot and shoe making. The riveting machine allowed a sub-division of labour in the making process along with much higher productivity rates.

As Lancaster shows there was some initial resistance by consumers to the new product, and for a time Crick had to rely upon a chimney sweep, who ran a stall in the weekly market, to dispose of his goods.^[54] However, the cheapness of his products finally won over the doubting public and, by 1855, he had moved to a new larger premises, which was steam-powered, as shown by his articles of partnership in 1863:

Articles of Partnership of Thomas Crick, 1853

20th June 1863

Mr. Thomas Crick 'has for many years carried on the business of a boot and shoe manufacturer at Leicester.' and Mr. John Throne Crick (his son). Premises situate at Redcross St. and Highcross St, Leicester - steam-powered. Part-freehold, part-leasehold - £400 pa rent (including steam-engine). Capital for premises £22,000 - Thomas and £2,920 - John.^[55]

The relocation to new premises marked the beginning of a period of massive growth for Crick's enterprise. By 1863 he employed, inside the factory, 420 females between the ages of 15 and 23 and 300 men and boys. A year later the factory became the first in the boot and shoe industry to employ one thousand workers.^[56]

^[54] Lancaster, *Radicalism*, p. 26.

^[55] Articles of Partnership of Thomas Crick, 1853. 20th June, 1863. Leicester Record Office DE 3225/32/1-14.

^[56] *Royal Commission on Children's Employment*, 2nd Report, (1864), p. 125.

Women were employed upon steam-powered sewing machines in the closing process, and the factory also utilised steam to power pricking and cutting machines.^[57] An important point to note is that in the 1830s and 1840s Crick's associate in the wholesale boot and shoe trade was the hosier J. Dilkes who provided capital and perhaps personnel from the hosiery industry. We shall now return to the importance of hosiery capital to the nascent boot and shoe industry in Leicester.

The Significance of Hosiery Capital in Leicester's Boot and Shoe Industry

The lack of any significant company records makes it impossible to trace the growth of individual firms. This is a problem for the historian of the boot and shoe industry in general, and arises from the large numbers of bankruptcies and the plethora of small Leicester boot and shoe firms who only traded for relatively short periods. The major sources for tracing a general picture of the industry are therefore local directories and the various Royal Commissions. Lancaster argues that, during the 1850s and 1860s, '[T]he largest source of capital and personnel undoubtedly came from local hosiery interests.'^[58] As little capital was required to set up business in the shoe trade, *White's Directories* of the 1840s and 1850s list a plethora of shoe manufacturers who were also engaged in the hosiery trades. By 1861 the list included: J. Biggs and Sons, J. Lanham and Sons, Pool and Lorrimer and Corah's.

^[57] Lancaster, *Radicalism*, p. 26.

^[58] Lancaster, *Radicalism*, p. 26.

Furthermore, J. Preston and Son and Walker and Kempson went so far as to cease hosiery production and to follow footwear production exclusively.^[59]

Once Crick's invention had allowed the sub-division of labour and displaced the necessity of the skilled shoemaker in sewing the sole to the upper, unskilled workers could be employed in the industry. Moreover, the adoption of the sewing machine provided work for women and called for little more than the most rudimentary of sewing skills. Thus the large and well-developed hosiery putting-out networks could be easily adapted to suit boot and shoe production. The hosiery industry in Leicester was stagnating and underemployment along with static wages led to deteriorating standards of living amongst hosiery hands. *The Report on the Conditions of Framework Knitters* in 1845 acknowledged this:

For a series of years past the supply of framework knitters has almost invariably exceeded the demand for them; and hence the value of their labour has been progressively if not constantly, diminishing, except in a very few of the fancy branches of the trade where considerable skill is required, and in which, consequently, the number of competitors has been proportionately lessened.^[60]

Thus the economic depression in hosiery in mid-nineteenth century Leicester produced a surplus labour force with experience of machine working. This, coupled with the intricate putting-out systems and long-established divisions of labour in hosiery, including gender divisions as highlighted above, ensured that there was little resistance to the new technologies upon which the Leicester shoe trade was built. The industrial environment in Leicester contrasted sharply to that in Northampton. Shoemakers in Northampton viewed machinery as a threat not only to their

^[59] *ibid.*

^[60] *Report on the Condition of Framework Knitters*, 1845, p. 26.

livelihoods, but also as leading to the demise of much prized independent cultures of production. The new workers in the trade in Leicester were offered the chance to escape from an overcrowded and stagnating hosiery industry. Gender division of labour and the use of machinery was nothing new to the Leicester operatives, and the shoe industry brought a new prosperity to the town. The Director of a Leicester shoe firm, Preston and Sons, commented on the state of the town's trade in 1863:

[i]ts trade was never in a more prosperous state than at the present time. The hosiery trade had benefited by the introduction of other - notably shoes - forming an opening for the surplus labour in the town, while the large factories and warehouses springing up around them, bore witness to the prosperity and extension of the shoe trades.^[61]

The first machines to be used in the production of boots and shoes were sewing machines which were used in the closing of uppers. This part of the shoemaking process in the older areas had already become associated with women's work. The opposition in Northampton to the machines was not, as has been shown, the opposition to women working within the industry. Rather it was an opposition to the perceived disruption of customary forms of production, particularly the notion of domestic production for women. This domestic work allowed the male shoemaker to practise much-cherished independence within his own and his family's work. It also permitted a notion of the male-breadwinner to be utilised in struggles with employers as the women's contribution to production could be obscured somewhat.

In Leicester, the early capitalization of the hosiery industry coupled with gender divisions of labour already established around technology by the mid-nineteenth century meant less opposition to women working in factories and on

^[61] *Leicester Chronicle*, 31 October 1863.

machinery. As R.L. Jones has demonstrated, rather than being oppositional to shoe machinery in the new industry, Leicester workers welcomed the developments:

The industrial environment of Leicester in the mid- 19th (sic) century was one of flux, and ideally suited to the development of an industry which required cheap relatively unskilled labour that could operate machinery, and where the capital cost of establishing a shoe firm was low. The hosiery, elastic web and kid glove industries had provided the labour force, which the new entrepreneurs readily utilised. It was these internal forces operating in Leicester, rather than external events at Northampton which were the impetus to the industry's growth.^[62]

Conclusion

This section, containing chapters Two and Three has developed its analysis by two sets of comparisons. Firstly, it has undertaken a comparison between the two neighbouring, but distinct, geographical areas of Northampton and Leicester. Secondly, it has addressed the similarities and differences between industries in those areas. Specifically an examination of the industries which pre-dated, or co-existed alongside the boot and shoe industry has enlightened our appreciation of the labour conditions in each area. This has allowed a more complex and fuller tracing of the early development of mechanisation in the boot and shoe industry in each area.

As a result, it brings new layers of interpretation to a complex set of debates about industrialisation, technological innovation, work relations, and gender relations. This is important as it allows an assessment of how these vital factors have varied over time and within distinct areas under different workplace and social relations. A major criticism of some feminist and 'socialist' histories of work has arisen over

^[62] R.L. Jones 'The sociological context of trade union activity in the east midlands boot and shoe industry in the late victorian era', (Unpublished M.Sc. Loughborough, 1969), p. 17.

their tendency towards the grand narrative which subsumes the variety of experience to which historical actors have been subjected. My approach has allowed an examination of the different ways in which work experience can influence gender relations, and how subsequent strategies adopted arise around those involved. It also brings new and important evidence and interpretation to the history of the boot and shoe industry.

The following chapter will examine subsequent developments in the boot and shoe industry in the two areas. The increasing pace of technological development within the industry will be charted with reference to the social relations already highlighted in this chapter. It will also show how the path to industrialisation was patchy and slow, and this will be investigated in relation to gender relations, workers' opposition or acceptance of new practices, and employers' desires to change the production process.

Chapter Four
Reactions to Industrialisation

Chapter Four
Reactions to Industrialisation

Introduction

In Chapter Three we saw how fiercely the boot and shoe-makers of Northampton fought the introduction of the sewing machine between 1857 and 1859. The sewing machine's use in boot and shoe production had much wider implications for the organisation of the industry in general. It was rightly perceived, by the operatives, as the first step towards a stricter division of labour and the move to the factory system. As demonstrated in Chapter Three, gender divisions were sharpened when sewing machines were introduced into warehouses with women being almost solely employed on this technology and thereby becoming removed from the domestic system of production.

The first section of this chapter will trace the early history of the first two large manufactories built in Northampton's Campbell Square. The second section considers the value placed upon control of their working environment by shoemakers. It identifies this as the central issue in continuing opposition to the factory system. The third section concentrates on a strike, by women, of a Northampton firm in 1890. It demonstrates that when fighting to maintain traditional workplace culture, gender divisions were less important to the operatives than customary rights. In addition, by examining the action of women workers and the reactions of men to them, the chapter allows an extension of the rank-and-file approach to the defence of workplace culture, that of the importance of gender.

Monsters in Campbell Square

Two large warehouses were built in the latter part of the 1850s, in Northampton's Campbell Square, and were handsome and ornate structures unlike any industrial buildings that had preceded them in the town. The so-called Manfield building whose proprietor, Moses P. Manfield, was a shoe manufacturer was a three storey building whose tower dominated the Northampton skyline. It was constructed of brick and stucco and built in the Italianate style.^[1] The other building was that of Isaac, Campbell and Company and was designed by local architect, William Hull. The Isaac building was also three storeys and had a highly ornamental facade. Isaac, Campbell and Company were large-scale army contractors and dealt not only in footwear but also in clothes and equipment. Their headquarters were in London and they only became established in Northampton in 1857.^[2] Their original premises were in Inkerman Terrace, but they quickly set about planning the new warehouse. Tenders for constructing the premises in Campbell Square were invited in February 1857, and the premises were ready for occupation by May 1859.^[3]

As has already been indicated, the two-year period between 1857 and 1859 was one of crisis in the Northampton boot and shoe industry. Shoemakers feared the

^[1] Victor A. Hatley, "Monsters in Campbell Square! The early history of two industrial premises in Northampton", *Northamptonshire Past and Present* Vol IV No.1, 1966-7, p. 51.

^[2] Ibid., p. 55.

^[3] Ibid., pp. 54-55.

introduction of closing machines and perceived their introduction as a threat to their independence and customs such as St. Monday. Gender was central to these fears and to the ensuing disputes, as it was women who worked on the closing machines in the earliest warehouse/factories. It was in November 1857, at a meeting held in the market square to consider the issue of the introduction of machinery, that Manfield's warehouse was christened the 'monster'. The chair of the meeting, an operative shoemaker called Mr. Wilsher, spoke of a 'monster warehouse' rearing its head in the town which would ruin them all. Moses Manfield was present and denied that there were any grounds for the fears of the workers that his warehouse was to be used as a factory. However, the meeting resolved to 'resist by all legitimate means the introduction of machinery into the manufacture of boots and shoes.'^[4]

In April 1858 shoemakers in the town and county of Northampton formed the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe-Makers' Mutual Protection Society to fight the manufacturers.^[5] The Mutual Society set up a strike fund and worked in close liaison with operatives at Stafford who were also resisting the introduction of machinery. The machinery dispute came to a head on 12 February 1859 when the principal manufacturers in Northampton announced, in the *Northampton Mercury*, their intention to immediately introduce machine-closed uppers. The manufacturers

^[4] Quoted in Hatley "Monsters", p. 54.

^[5] *Rules of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe-Makers' Mutual Protection Society embracing all Towns and Villages whose Shopmates and working for Shops in the Town or County of Northampton, 1859*, Northampton Central Library. The two existing societies representing operatives in men's and women's footwear were represented on the executive, as was the third main body known as the 'flints'.

at Stafford supported the stance taken by these Northampton employers, pledging not to give any work to striking Northampton operatives who might go on the tramp.^[6]

One week later, a meeting of the Mutual resolved to strike against those manufacturers using machine-closed uppers. A letter from Stafford operatives was read out: 'Respected Friends, - We have had a very enthusiastic meeting of three bodies, and were very glad to hear of your unanimously protesting against the cursed machines. We have resolved to hold a public meeting to try to rouse their sympathy and support on your behalf to defeat their selfish ends.'^[7] Mr. Pell of the Mutual reported that all the shops concerned had been visited and that the majority wished to maintain their position and to strike the shops in question. Pell roused the crowd with the words 'let the shops be struck; if the scabs beat us we will die manfully on the field.'^[8] Furthermore, after fifteen months of dispute, the meeting resolved to tramp in order to find work in other areas, Pell once again affirming that the operatives were 'driven to put the kit on our backs (loud cheers) to leave Northampton with all its misery. We have tried arbitration. Our employers say they are determined; and so are we.'^[9]

At Stafford an assembly of four thousand met and resolved to continue to strike machine-closed firms and those who used their products. A deputation from Northampton was present at this meeting, and three of these, Pell, Coleman and Wyn, who represented the three sections of the Mutual, started out for Stone,

^[6] *Northampton Mercury*, 12 February 1859.

^[7] *Northampton Mercury*, 19 February 1859.

^[8] Ibid.

^[9] Ibid.

Nantwich and Sandbach to attend similar meetings. Furthermore, on 26 February, Hodson of Stafford, secretary of No. 3 society, informed a meeting that there was 'in Stafford an Association of females who had held a meeting together on this question [of a levy to support Northampton], and were going to put a levy on themselves to support the Northampton cause. (Cheers).'^[10] Thus the scene was set for what was to be the last major dispute over the closing machine in the traditional boot and shoe-making areas of Northampton and Stafford. In other areas such as Leicester the machines were already being used without resistance. On one side were the manufacturers who stood firm and supported each other in their determination to use machinery and the products thereof. On the other side were the boot and shoe operatives, male and female, who opposed machine-sewed uppers and were keen to defend their traditional ways of work.

The strike also involved the county districts, as Daventry, Wellingborough, Kettering, Long Buckby, Doddington, Irchester, Wollaston, Piddington, Burton Latimer, Rothwell, Finedon, Rushden, Isham, Pitsford, Little Harrowden, Towcester, Brayfield, Grendon, Wilby, Earls Barton, Moulton, Ecton, Weedon, Pattishall, Denton and Harpole are mentioned as having contributed to the strike fund, mostly in levies. On the expenses of the Mutual there is a reference to '[T]ramping 93 men off strike at 9s each £41 17s'.^[11] The Webbs estimated that around one thousand five hundred workers left the town to find work elsewhere.^[12] In February 1859 the *Northampton Mercury* underlined its support for the progress of machinery and

^[10] *Northampton Mercury*, 26 February 1859.

^[11] Cited in *Northampton Daily Echo*, 30 October 1929.

^[12] Webb Trade Union Collection, L.S.E. Coll. E, Section A. Vol XXV.

its antipathy towards the strikers, reporting that the strike was continuing. It also claimed that a large number of operatives had left the town to 'wander about on as idle a pilgrimage as ever thoughtless folly set out upon - the quest after some happy valley into which the light of innovation never penetrates.'^[13]

The strike was a failure. The shoemakers did not experience the sympathy they had expected from workers in other industries and other areas. When it was discovered that in some places Northampton shoemakers were handling machine-closed uppers at their new places of work, the strikers lost much of their support.^[14] By the middle of May 1859 the strike was over, and those who had gone on the tramp were drifting back into the town. Northampton had suffered much hardship in the strikes over closing machinery, and the workers now had to return and accept work on the 'cursed machines'. The *Northampton Herald*, referring to the strike in December 1859, commented that '[N]umbers of families, until then respectable, have not yet recovered from the injurious effects of that mischievous movement'.^[15]

This movement, however, should not be viewed simply in terms of defeat for the striking workers. The strength of feeling in the county against the encroaching factory system led to concessions by the factory owners. The announcement made by Isaac, Campbell and Company in May 1859 about the imminent opening of its warehouse demonstrates how the mood of the workers had influenced this particular employer. Described by Victor Hatley as 'one of the most interesting documents in

^[13] *Northampton Mercury*, 26 February 1859.

^[14] *Webb Collection*, Vol XXV.

^[15] *Northampton Herald*, 31 December 1859.

the history of the boot and shoe industry', the announcement is reproduced in its entirety below.^[16] The announcement appeared in the *Northampton Mercury*:

TO THE BOOT AND SHOEMAKERS OF NORTHAMPTON

We address you on a matter of the greatest concern to you and to us. You live by work. We want work done on fair terms and for fair wages. That being so, our object is to establish those proper and just relations which should exist between employers and employed.

We have built, at a great cost, extensive premises in which to carry on the manufacture of boots and shoes. They are arranged upon the best plan. The rooms are large, lofty, and well ventilated, and kept warmed at uniform, moderate, and healthy heat by nearly two miles of hot water piping.

They will be opened in a few days for the reception of workpeople; and we hope to see them filled by hundreds of busy hands.

The engagements will be permanent for all those who are willing to do, each day, a good day's work, *under the superintendence of a foreman*. The work will be all piece work. *The attendance must, for your sakes as well as for ours, be regular*. The hours fixed are -- in summer from 6 to 8, from 8½ to 12, and from 1 to 6 o'clock; and, in winter, from 8 to 12, from 1 to 4 and from 4½ to 8.

The wages will be the same as those paid by other houses, and may be received daily or weekly, as you please. Those who desire to do so may take two half-holidays in each week, namely, from the dinner hours of Wednesday and Saturday.

We intend to employ machinery. We state that plainly, because we know that many of you have striven against the introduction of machines; but we submit to you, and we are glad to know that many of you are aware of this fact, that machinery must and will be employed, and that to struggle against it is to fight with science, and to attempt to put a stop to the progress of the human mind.

We intend to employ women and children on the premises. Some of you have objected to that being done; but it is obvious that those women who work at machinery must be employed upon the premises. For them, separate work-rooms, entrances, staircases and personal accommodation have been provided; and they will be superintended entirely by females.

^[16] Hatley, "Monsters in Campbell Square", p. 55.

But we do not stipulate that married women and mothers of families shall work upon the premises, for we know that the house requires the presence of the wife; and the wives of men working for us may take out work. No objection will be made to parents bringing their own children as apprentices to themselves.

Four men will work at each table. The men at each three of the tables may elect from among themselves an overseer, who will see that the work is properly done, and will be paid by us for such extra service. There will be upon the premises a grindery store. The articles will be purchased wholesale for ready money, and sold to our workmen at cost price.

We have heard of your objections to what is called 'the factory system'. We submit to you that the system we propose is not the 'factory system'. It is a carefully considered system of constant, orderly, regulated work, without any of the bad features which have made the factory system distasteful to you; for example:-

Married women may have work at home;
 Parents may bring their children as apprentices;
 Men and women will be kept separate;
 Workmen will be allowed to choose their own overseers;
 Subdivision of labour will not be attempted.

The advantages which will accrue to the work-people can, we think, hardly be overlooked by you.

Instead of your being obliged to work in the close, confined rooms of your cottages, you will labour in healthy, commodious and well-ventilated apartments.

Your houses, instead of being ill-regulated workshops in which domestic duties interfere with labour, will become homes in which comfort will be possible.

You will be enabled to eat, sleep, and sit at your firesides free from the smell of the materials of manufacture, which, in small and crowded dwellings, is unpleasant, and may be unwholesome.

In regular hours of orderly labour, free from domestic hindrances, you will be able to do more work and earn more money in less time than you can now.

Your children employed under a well-regulated system will acquire habits of industry and order, and become more valuable to you.

Regular half holidays will afford you opportunities for amusement and recreation.

We submit these important changes to you in all frankness, and in the hope and belief that you will see their reasonableness and advantage. You must be aware that we cannot suffer our premises to remain empty, and that if we cannot get work-people belonging to the town, we must obtain them from other places; but we had much rather employ those among whom we live, with whom we wish to be on the best terms, and to whom we have addressed these explanations, in the firm conviction that the acceptance of our proposals will be mutually beneficial, and that we shall have been privileged to conduce in no slight degree, towards the social, moral, physical and economical advancement of the honest and industrious artizans of the borough of Northampton.^[17]

The first point to note is how gender actually *directly* influenced the *physical* structure of the premises. Clearly the employer had faced the dilemma of the need for female labour in the factory whilst being well aware of the *moral outrage* that could ensue. In effect, the design of the building created separate spheres within its walls. Women-only workshops were provided with separate toilet and bathroom facilities. The very architecture of the building was gender-driven with separate entrances for men and women. The allocation of women overseers for the female workshops was another means to maintain strict division between male and female workers. Some factories even operated different starting and finishing times for male and female employees, to ensure absolutely no meetings of the sexes. The stricter gender division of labour which was brought about by the advent of the sewing machine was thus reflected in the spatial and physical structure of the buildings of boot and shoe manufacturers.

^[17] *Northampton Mercury*, 28 May 1859.

Clearly it was not just the gendered nature of the work process which influenced the design of the factory. Isaac Campbell's announcement demonstrates the related issue of morality within the factory system which had long exercised the minds of legislators, politicians, employers and workers alike. For the most part, Campbell's address was conciliatory towards the menfolk, making it clear that the morals of the boot and shoemaker's daughter would be protected in his premises. Equally, married women were not expected to work in the factory. Thus the male worker could feel that his patriarchal power remained intact.

However, there was also a pragmatic consideration by the employer in this concession. As had been shown during the two years of disputes in and around Northampton over the introduction of machinery, all sections of the working population were keen to fight for their independence and customary working practices. Thus allowing married women to remain in the home and take out work from Campbell's premises was a conciliatory gesture. The practice of shoemaker's wives contributing to the family income could be continued without incurring the moral opprobrium of their going out to work. The census returns for 1851 and 1861 recorded 1,760 and 2,010 women recorded respectively as 'shoemakers wives'.^[18] That this category was included in the enumeration at all indicates that it was accepted practice for shoemakers to receive assistance from their wives.

Likewise, allowing parents to bring their own children into the factory enabled the common practice of family labour within the trade to continue. The importance of children's earnings to the family was also acknowledged implicitly in this acceptance of child labour within the factory. Prior to the introduction of the sewing

^[18] *Census Reports* 1851, 1861.

machine much of the closing work had been carried out by the children, as well as the wife, in many shoemaking families. With the advent of the sewing machine, children were unable to compete in closing, and subsequently lost their jobs. This eventuality had been anticipated by shoemakers in 1857, and caused much resentment over the loss to the family of supplementary child wages. Shoemakers also feared competition from older children if they were not supervised and controlled by their parents. Thus the contingency of allowing parents to bring their children as apprentices was an act of appeasement on the part of *Isaac Campbell and Company*.

Gender segregation, the exemption of married women from indoor working whilst being still gainfully employed by the firm, and the proviso of accepting children of employed workers as apprentices were not the only accommodations made by the firm to the traditions of the putting-out system. The wages of the majority of Northampton shoemakers were based on the piece-work system, and the company announced no plans to change this practice. The two most important accommodations, however, were the undertaking that no sub-division of labour would be attempted and that the workmen would be allowed to choose their own overseers. The pride which shoemakers held in their independence in production and their skill was a huge factor in their loathing for the factory system. Clearly any sub-division of the shoemaking process was a threat to notions of skill and independence. The importance of offering regular half-day holidays to allow for amusement and recreation must also be seen in this light, as social gatherings such as the public house and the races were an integral part of shoemaking culture in the town. Allowing twelve men to work together as a team was a further attempt to replicate the traditional working patterns of the shoemaking trade. In the outworking system

shoeworkers traditionally liked to work together in groups, either in small workshops adjoining their homes or in other premises. Apprentices were sent out to buy ale and newspapers and would sit and read to the men as they laboured at their benches. Thus the grouping together of the men, in the factory, allowed an approximation to the outdoor workshop. A vital aspect of appeasement to the men was the acceptance that they chose their own overseer. Their much-prized independence could thus be maintained to a large degree, as a man chosen by the workers themselves would have little incentive or ability to impose changes to work practices. As will be seen below, the introduction of new technology to the boot and shoe industry in the ensuing fifty years, and the inexorable move towards the factory system, was most often opposed because of the threat to custom, skill and independence of production it entailed rather than because of any lowering of wages it might induce.

The statement issued by Isaac Campbell and Company, showed a great understanding of the mood of boot and shoe workers in Northampton at this time, and must have gone some way to reassure them that their traditional way of life would not be threatened by their factory. However, it also allows glimpses of the conviction held by manufacturers on the inevitability of the factory system. The warnings of the futility of fighting with science and attempting to stop the progress of the human mind were very much in vogue in the language of industrialists and legislators alike. Thus, despite the many accommodations offered by Isaac, Campbell and Company, the address terminated with a stark warning that they would go ahead with their plans regardless of the opinions of Northampton workers; if necessary by employing workers from other places.

The *Northampton Mercury* was a vocal supporter of what it saw as the progress which technology and the separation of home and work would provide. Echoing the fashion of the day, which was prevalent amongst factory inspectors and Royal Commissioners, the *Mercury* associated outwork with moral degradation:

The home of the shoemaker, in fact, where in a very large number of cases, the dwelling place and the working place are the same, is not a home. It cannot be kept strictly clean and orderly, and the inability discourages the habit of cleanliness and orderliness, and a train of evils follows too obvious and too often before our eyes to require to be detailed.^[19]

The *Mercury* strongly supported the announcement of Isaac, Campbell and Company, urging the operatives of Northampton to consider it carefully before taking any action. The newspaper was certain that the workers' 'social, moral, physical and economical advancement is materially dependant upon the conclusion at which they shall arrive'.^[20]

The Mutual Protection Society were clearly not persuaded by either the exhortations of the *Northampton Mercury* or the conciliatory address of Isaac, Campbell and Company. The Manifesto of the Mutual Protection Society in response to the address is reproduced in full below:

We beseech you, then, shopmates, not to abandon your principles of unity, nor your efforts thereby to emancipate yourselves from slavery and your coming degradation. For we think that you cannot read over that plausible and honeyed placard issued by Isaac & Co. on their darling system of factory-working, without seeing the deep and deadly cunning of "Will you walk into my parlour says the spider to the fly" forcibly illustrated.

Shopmates! Once within the infernal walls, once the damnable system is established, and your social degradation is secured for another

^[19] *Northampton Mercury*, 28 May 1859.

^[20] *Ibid.*

generation, and you will leave your poor offspring a legacy for which they will curse your memory; and you will place them (your children) so firmly in the grip of the employers that it will require almost superhuman effort to extricate them from their degrading thralldom, and raise them in the social scale.

What body of men we ask is in a better position now (under the present system) to benefit themselves and permanently, too, by unity and co-operation? What can possibly prevent you by these means from raising yourselves to an humble independence and to respectability? But once under their thumb, and your prospects, socially and politically, are blasted for years to come.

By all that is sacred, then, we entreat you to arouse yourselves from indifference at this, the most critical period of your history; don't allow yourselves to be dispirited by your recent apparent defeat, for your employers have not defeated you; you must repeat it, and truthfully too, you have defeated yourselves. Your employers cannot defeat you; it is not in their power; their favourite maxim is "Money will do everything".

We deny it. Money without labour will do nothing, and they cannot keep open their establishments without your labour and consumption; but you can do without their establishments and are much better outside of them, though you may work for them. Don't let the sweet tones of the wily Israelite beguile you. "There is death in the pot". Money! Money! Money! is his Molech, and he will sacrifice you and yours to his darling idol and his contemporaries will do likewise.

The small tradesman must suffer fearfully from his grovelling scheme. His "Grindery shop is on the premises"; he had better get a cook shop and lodging house, too, and then the great premises on which he has laid out so much gold may be profitable indeed, for if you will not tread his sanctuary "he will get it filled with workpeople from elsewhere". Where from, we ask?

SHOPMATES! The signs of the times are ominous; you are in danger; look to your union; look to your societies; look forward to and prepare for your forthcoming delegate meeting, and let this partial defeat prove a stimulus to prompt you to energetic action; let the important lessons you have learned guide your future steps; and above all, Shopmates, remember this -- your employers did not defeat you.^[21]

^[21] Cited in *Northampton Daily Echo*, 30 October 1929.

Both the address by Isaac, Campbell and Co. and the response of the Mutual portray the importance which workers attached to the independence of their craft. The reference to the social degradation which the factory system would hasten was not seen in terms of wages. The tenor of the whole manifesto was the loss of independence and respectability which the factory would engender. The reference to prospects both socially and politically being blasted for years to come is interesting and requires explication. Northampton shoemakers were widely enfranchised (at least until the 1832 reforms) and local elections were marred by intimidation of workers by their employers.^[22] It was widely known that those shoemakers not voting in accordance with their employers' wishes risked losing their jobs.^[23] Most shoe manufacturers were Liberals, and references were made to 'the screw' (whereby a shoemaker voting against his employer's wishes lost his employment). As Hatley points out, 'The Liberal defence of this practice seems to have been that the shoemakers were free to vote according to their consciences, but that accepting a Conservative bribe justified dismissal'.^[24] Clearly, the Mutual believed that once inside the 'infernal walls' the political influence which the employer could exercise upon his workers would be even more powerful and direct. Thus, not only was the worker's independence over work practices threatened by the factory, but also their political independence.

^[22] From the election of 1768, all male householders not in receipt of poor relief were entitled to vote. The Reform Act of 1832 which imposed a uniform franchise on borough electorates -- householders rated at £10 or over -- reduced the number of persons entitled to vote.

^[23] Victor A. Hatley, "Some Aspects of Northampton's History, 1815-51" *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol III No.6, 1965/66, pp. 243-253.

^[24] *Ibid.*, p. 248.

The description of the employer as the wily Israelite is presumably a reference to Samuel Isaac. Although clearly anti-semitic in tone -- an unedifying sentiment echoed later in National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives [NUBSO] tracts -- the reference to Money! Money! Money! also contains a point of vital importance to the anti-factory stance of the shoemakers. Wages were in this period not the major source of worker agitation and opposition to employers. Of much greater importance was the ability to retain independence over the work process. This independence was viewed as vital to the social respectability of the shoemaker, his masculinity, and his family. An interesting point to note is that, despite their appeal in May 1859, Isaac, Campbell and Co. did not stay long in Northampton. The commodious premises in Campbell Square were taken over in early 1861 by Turner Brothers, Hyde and Co. Although there may have been a business connection between Isaac, Campbell and Co. and Turner Brothers, Hyde and Co. in the 1860s, the reason for the former's removal after only two years remains unclear. Hatley speculates that 'perhaps they were unable to recruit a labour force amenable to their system of indoor production.'^[25]

Rank-and-File Opposition to the Factory System

Historians concentrating upon tracing enduring and institutionalised movements of labour risk overlooking important aspects of working-class activity.^[26] For

^[25] Hatley, "Monsters in Campbell Square", p. 59.

^[26] For example A. Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958 -- this is discussed in detail in Chapter (continued...)

example, John Foster argues that Northampton portrayed little class consciousness under early industrial capitalism compared to Oldham and even South Shields. Foster describes Northampton, in the 1850s, as 'still under direct bourgeois influence ... a significant portion of the labour force still remained under the fairly direct cultural control of their employers'^[27] However, as we have seen above, shoemakers were keenly aware that the move to the factory system, which they saw as inevitable in Isaac, Campbell and Co.'s new warehouse, posed a direct threat to their political independence. M. J. Haynes suggests that institutional approaches to the study of the development of class-consciousness have led to the compartmentalisation of working-class experience. Thus, by concentrating on the 'advanced sections' of the working class, the broad picture of working-class formation and culture becomes lost.^[28] Haynes argues that Foster was not immune from this, when the latter concluded that in Northampton 'class formation was slight, and what there was had a tame, sheet lightning quality about it'.^[29] Foster's work concentrated on the first half of the nineteenth century and therefore it is perhaps not surprising that he found a more developed working-class consciousness in Oldham than Northampton.

^[26](...continued)

Six. J. H. Porter "The Northampton Boot and Shoe Arbitration Board Before 1914", *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol VI, No.2, 1979.

^[27] J. Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns*, London: Methuen, 1974, p. 131. Foster argues that, during the crisis of 1832 manufacturers continued to employ shoemakers even though their warehouses were fully stocked.

^[28] M.J. Haynes, 'Class and Class Conflict in the Early Nineteenth Century: Northampton Shoemakers and the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union', *Literature and History*, No. 5 Spring 1977, pp. 73-94.

^[29] J. Foster, "Nineteenth Century Towns: A Class Dimension' in H.J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History* (1968), p. 291.

Oldham had experienced an earlier transition to factory production than Northampton, which we have seen was experiencing its first factories in the mid-1850s. In this section it will be argued that cultures of workers can be as enlightening to an investigation of working-class attitudes as membership of socialist societies or other forms of institutional action. The work of Keith Brooker on shoemakers' reactions to industrialisation is particularly important in this respect.^[30] Brooker shows that solidarity was found in the workplace over the defence of custom and the tradition of freedom at work. He argues:

Despite the adoption of machinery in the trade from the late 1850s and the beginnings of a sub-division of labour, many workers retained the ability to exercise extensive freedoms at work, whether he worked in his own home, [sic] rented a sitting in a workshop, or, more significantly, laboured on an employer's premises, as increasing numbers of piece-workers did. It was not until the years after 1885 that, under the impetus of recurrent trade depression aggravated by increasing home and later foreign competition together with a tightening costs structure, there occurred a change in organisation structure -- the eclipse of domestic outwork by a centralised factory system.^[31]

Documentary evidence clearly demonstrates the extent to which shoemakers were able effectively to control their working environments right through to the 1890s. An examination of rank- and-file dissent is particularly enlightening to an investigation of how shoemakers in Northampton considered their position with respect to their employers and the encroaching factory system. Consideration of the importance of work-place cultures and solidarities also allows a fascinating glimpse into how gender operated within the factory and the town. Brooker does not consider

[30] Keith Brooker, "The Northampton Shoemakers' Reaction to Industrialisation: Some Thoughts", *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. VI. No. 3, 1980, pp. 151-159.

[31] Brooker, "The Northampton Shoemakers Reaction", p. 151.

gender in his important article, concentrating instead solely upon the 'attitudes of men'.^[32] By examining the actions of women workers (and the reactions of men) the present analysis adds another dimension to the study of the 'rank-and-file' approach to the defence of workplace culture.

The importance of quality of life at work to the Northampton shoemakers should not be underestimated. It was prized above monetary rewards. Foster has shown that in terms of the hours worked by shoemakers, they were far poorer than other artisan groups.^[33] But output levels by piece-workers were controlled, and workers resisted manufacturers' efforts to raise them. Brooker believes that these levels were set 'by a mix of personal inclination and group custom, the ultimate limits being determined by the prevailing methods of hand working'.^[34] As a result of this custom-restricted output, employers made use of firms who were 'sewers to the trade' during busy periods. Alternatively, older and less skilled workers were taken on to meet the shortfall in production. The *Boot and Shoe Trades Journal* identified this practice of lasters and finishers in 1885:

...the short period before Whitsuntide is one of great rush.... Of course, this being the case, the difficulty is to get the work done. The work people know they can have it [as much work as they can do] when wanted, yet do just what they like, and no more. There seems to be no control over rivetters and finishers, either indoor or outdoor workers, as to how much they shall do, or how long they shall work. They appear to have every license to do as they like, while on the other hand, the clickers and other indoor hands must expect summary

[32] Ibid. p. 151.

[33] Foster, *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 96.

[34] Brooker, "Northampton shoemakers' reaction to industrialisation", p. 153.

dismissal if they are not at their work regularly and turn out so much per week.^[35]

Clickers were not generally paid by the piece, and had long been employed upon the premises of the owner. Thus they did not have the ability to restrict output based on producing just enough to meet their immediate financial needs. However, clickers were the elite of the trade, their work being the most skilled, and their resulting wages were higher than in the other branches of shoemaking.

Unfettered sociability was another important customary expectation amongst the workforce. Employers continually complained about the difficulty of keeping operatives in the factory and at their work. The operatives retained the right to wander freely in and out of the factory during the hours that it was open for business. The practice of operatives leaving the factory at any time, to 'take the air' (as it was euphemistically known) provided an area of common complaint for the employers. This could involve simply popping out for a chat with a friend in another factory, spending a number of hours in the pub, or attending a political meeting, amongst many other diversions. This custom provided a useful conduit for sharing information about disputes at various premises, fellow workers or the state of trade. Brooker argues that the control over work and social association was complimentary and was often used to decide who was to work in the shop and 'when, within limits, work would be executed'.^[36]

The tradition of St. Monday, and its association with drink and improvidence, has already been discussed. It is the most heavily discussed aspect of tradition in the

^[35] *Boot and Shoe Trades Journal*, 23 May 1885.

^[36] Brooker, *Northampton shoemakers' reaction to industrialisation*, p. 154.

historiography, and must have been an endless annoyance to those factory owners who wanted to inculcate regular working habits. Attempts by factory owners to lock-in piece workers were common. These attempts inevitably led to unauthorised strikes against the factories concerned. Brooker identifies strikes over the locking-in system at Arthur Stanton's workshop in July 1887, and at H. J. Bateman's in 1892 and concludes that in both disputes - as was the case in any attempt by manufacturers substantially to curb privileges before 1895 - the workers won.^[37]

The importance of custom in the boot and shoe trade throughout the second half of the nineteenth century has been clearly shown by Brooker. The enduring power of tradition was remarkable. Even after the great lock-out of 1895, which has rightly been seen by most commentators as a watershed in the industry's labour relations, there is evidence of worker resistance to factory regulation of work. Indeed, oral evidence indicates that the locking-in system still persisted, in some places, into the inter-war period.^[38]

However, Brooker's analysis does not consider the role of gender. It is to this that we now turn our attention. The so-called 'shoe girls' dispute' which took place in 1890-91 at the firm of Simon Collier demonstrated that custom and workplace culture cut through gender divisions. The striking women received stout support from male workers and throughout the town. It will be shown that in this dispute, men and trade unionists supported a female strike which was largely concerned with maintaining workplace traditions. This can be fruitfully contrasted with the later incident at Leicester, in 1911, when men set themselves in opposition to women. The

^[37] Ibid.

^[38] Ibid.

variations in behaviour during the two disputes should be seen in terms of the incorporation of the Union and the men into the system of arbitration by 1911, with wages becoming more important than culture.

The Shoe Girls' Dispute of 1890-91 and the maintaining of work place culture

At around 10.30 a.m. on Tuesday 21 October 1890 all the women working in the closing room of Simon Collier's factory walked out, initially over the dismissal of an improver (or trainee) for poor work. Collier's version of events was produced that evening in the *Northampton Daily Reporter*, under the headline Sixty Shoe Girls Locked out. It was reported that 'considerable excitement' was caused by the news that the females employed at Collier's factory had all been dismissed. Collier claimed that he had received complaints from customers over the quality of the machining on shoe tops.^[39]

Collier stated, that the girls had been 'remonstrated with by their superiors time after time.' The leniency of the foreman was blamed for the girls having 'too much of their own way lately'. Collier, upon entering the work-room that morning to ascertain the cause of the various complaints, found that 'the most boisterous behaviour carried.' He examined the work and at once dismissed the girl who had performed it. The women then all rose and signified their intention to strike, whereupon Collier immediately paid them and dismissed them all. The *Daily Record*

^[39] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 21 October 1890.

noted that the girls were fond of their foreman, who had been sacked before this disturbance arose, and testified to this by singing 'for he's a jolly good fellow' loudly outside the factory.^[40]

Collier's explanation for the women's dismissal appeared, on face value, to be a simple one. The foreman was not doing his job properly and the women were producing shoddy work. The fact that they all stood up and threatened to walk out over the sacking of a trainee seemed to suggest that they were out of control and acting on a whim. However, an incident which Collier no doubt thought would receive very little publicity and which would simply fade away, did not. As the strike progressed, and the local press gave it detailed coverage, it became apparent that the strike was about a great deal more than Collier's initial assertion. In fact, the fundamental cause was the independence over work which the women were able to exercise.

The next day, the *Daily Reporter* printed a letter from sacked foreman Albert Bentley. That Bentley had received his notice the day before the strike took place had greater resonance than might be supposed. Bentley defended himself in asserting that he had no idea that the women intended to strike the day after his dismissal, and said that he was 'as much surprised as Mr. Collier when the girls rose in a body and refused to work any longer'.^[41] Bentley countered Collier's accusation that he was lenient with the girls, arguing that as much work was turned out each week as under any other overseer. He argued that Collier's charge of leniency came simply from

[40] Ibid.

[41] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 22 October 1890.

the fact that he 'treated each girl alike and had no favourites'.^[42] Bentley stated that he had attended a meeting of the women and heard from them that they could not stand the treatment they had received from Collier and his sons. Furthermore, the women had heard that a very unpopular forewoman, who had worked previously for Collier, was to be employed in Bentley's place, and the women had stated that they would refuse to work under her. However, the spark for the walk-out was Collier entering the shop and dismissing, on the spot, an improver who had run a little wide on her stitching. Her wages were only 5s 6d a week, and the women believed sacking a trainee on such low wages for one mistake was unacceptable.

Bentley's defence of his position suggests that Collier may have had a wider agenda than the incidences related above. It appears that the employer intended to assert a tighter control over the women's workshop, and believed he needed to break-up the solidarity of the women and had to remove the popular foreman to do this. Bentley argued that, for some time previous to his dismissal, his position had been made increasingly untenable:

I have been employed by Mr. Collier some six months and suited up till a few weeks ago, when there were a few pairs that were closed by a fresh hand (whom I parted with for doing her work badly) and were not done as they should have been. This caused a bother, and since, they [the Colliers] have made it very unpleasant for me. On Saturday I went to see Mr. Collier to ask him what the cause of it was, and it ended in his giving notice last Monday morning. I don't think any just man would be unreasonable to expect out of close on 3,000 pairs per week that every pair would be without a fault.^[43]

The same issue of the *Daily Reporter* featured an article putting forward the women's position. Covering a meeting held at the Green Man Inn the previous

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

evening, attended by nearly all the sixty women, the article stated that four women were appointed to put their grievance to Collier. When the deputation arrived at the factory they were informed that Collier was out of town. This clearly shows that, at this point, Collier was confident that little would come of the strike, and that he would find labour elsewhere. The grievances stated by the women were as follows:

Chief of these is that they have too many masters. First there is the foreman, next there is Mr. Collier, and next there are his sons. Each of these takes his turn of finding fault. Another grievance is that the foreman is to be replaced by a forewoman, a person who was previously there, and whom the girls dislike. A third grievance is the dismissal of an improver ... the girls complain they are not allowed their kit. Their workshop is shut up, and though some of them can have work elsewhere, they cannot start because they cannot get their tools.^[44]

There are a number of points in these complaints which are relevant to the defence of custom debate outlined above. First is the issue of the sacking of a popular foreman and the threat of his replacement by an unpopular forewoman. The declaration issued by Isaac, Campbell and Co. clearly showed the importance which shoe-hands attached to their right to appoint their own overseers. That this was still a point of contention in a dispute occurring some thirty years later is testimony to the importance of custom and independence in the industry. Strikes in the industry sometimes appear to have had no clearly articulated grievance other than a mood of general dissatisfaction, whilst at other times the point at issue is clearly apparent. Common grievances in this context included opposition to a foreperson either because she or he was personally overbearing or rude, or because this supervisory worker was

[44] Ibid.

responsible for making a new work system function. Stoppages regarding quality of work and the employment of cheap labour also occurred.^[45]

A number of these grievances were clearly at the heart of the dispute at Collier's. First there was the removal of a popular foreman and his replacement by an unpopular forewoman. This was viewed as a threat, in a shop where the women enjoyed solidarity and independence, in what Collier disparaged as a 'boisterous' and 'raucous' atmosphere. A second, and related point, was that there were too many masters. This was clearly resented, and the women felt that there existed an atmosphere where fault was being found consistently from a number of different quarters.

The women also complained that they were not allowed their kit, a vital blow to their prized independence and self-sufficiency. The loss of the shoemaker's ownership of the tools of the trade following the 1895 lock-out would be an important feature of the loss of independence and of the consolidation by employers of control at work. Brooker rejects Porter's conclusion that the imposition of strict control on the shop floor was not a mere case of opportunism. Instead Brooker argued that it was 'the logical culmination of a long effort by manufacturers to increase control over production and discipline.'^[46] The dispute at Colliers can be seen in the light of the long effort by employers to wrest control over production. The reaction of the women clearly shows that notions of work-place custom were equally important to men and women. Although Brooker only highlights the loss of men's ownership of

^[45] Brooker, "Northampton Shoemaker's Reaction to Industrialisation", p. 159.

^[46] Ibid., p. 157.
J. H. Porter, 'The Northampton Boot and Shoe Arbitration Board Before 1914', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 6, pp. 93-99.

their tools, the following quotation could easily have been applied to the striking 'shoe girls':

the shoemaker lost his control of the tools of the trade, the ownership of which had contributed to his independence. In part this was an inevitable erosion linked to the introduction of expensive, powered machinery. But hand-processes remained in the factory, and until 1899 Northampton's hand-workers retained personal ownership of their kit on employers' premises. In that year the Arbitration Board resolved that in future tools, parts and grindery would all be found by the employer.^[47]

Collier must have hoped that the dispute would be of little significance, but only two days into the strike the *Daily Reporter* noted that 'circumstances point to the strike of Mr. Simon Collier's shoe girls as marking an important epoch in the history of local trades unionism'. This referred to the fact that the women now began to organise in the same trade union as the men: by Wednesday 22 October, the majority of the striking women had joined the local branch of the Boot and Shoe Operatives Union. Although the strike had as its catalyst the sacking of an improver, it became clear that this had provided an opportunity to draw attention to many other grievances held by the women. These objections had previously been discussed among the women 'with a view to obtaining support and in ventilating and getting them fully dealt with'.^[48] On 22 October the women held a meeting in their headquarters -- the upstairs room at the Green Man Inn -- which was addressed by Fred Inwood, the President of the men's union, urging the women to combine. The women also appointed a deputation of six to act as a strike committee and, as we have seen, to meet Mr. Collier. They also issued an appeal to 'Fitters, Machinists and Friends in

^[47] Brooker, "Northampton Shoemaker's Reaction to Industrialisation", p. 157.

^[48] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 23 October 1890.

Northampton', calling for subscriptions to be forwarded to their strike headquarters.^[49] The women received a great deal of support from the operatives of the town, and by 27 October the total amount of subscriptions received stood at over £15, from which the women were paid strike pay.

On the morning of Wednesday 23 October, the women's deputation met Simon Collier to discuss their grievances. At Mr. Collier's invitation, seconded by the women, a representative of the *Daily Reporter* attended the interview. The proceedings were thus reported in full in that evening's paper. The correspondent stated that outside the cafe in St. James's End there were about thirty of the women 'in boisterous spirits and apparently enjoying their novel experiences'.^[50] The women's deputation was waiting in the entrance lobby of Collier's premises and indicated to the journalist that they were keen to discuss the situation at length. Representing the firm was Simon Collier, his eldest son Charles and a younger son. They were seated, although the women were all forced to stand throughout the proceedings which lasted around three-quarters of an hour. Collier asked the women to state their names. They were Florence Lovell (who was later prosecuted for intimidation of a female working at Collier's), Sarah Farmer, and Mrs. Underwood, who wore a Salvation Army ribbon and was the most vocal member of the deputation. At the request of Simon Collier, another woman (Lizzie Tilley) was called from outside, making the deputation two machinists and two fitters.

Collier asked what the women wanted and they replied that they wished to know if the forewoman was coming back to Collier's. They asserted '[W]e are quite

[49] Ibid.

[50] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 23 October 1890.

ready to do our duty -- to have one of your sons over us if needs be -- but we don't want her and we don't want so many masters.'^[51] Collier retorted that he would not be dictated to in deciding who he should employ. The women argued that it was not just them, but all the women who felt this way. Collier stated that the forewoman was not coming back, although he would employ her if she were available. He stated that a man was coming from London on Monday to begin work.

When asked of their other grievances, the women stated that it was unfair to sack an employee at a minute's notice. They further argued that the rising of the sixty women was spontaneous. The women also stated that they had heard that a Mrs. H----, a machinist was coming back to work in the shop, and that a woman was to be sacked to make room for her. 'We thought it wasn't right to give a girl the sack -- an improver -- because she was not a good machinist' asserted Mrs. Underwood.^[52]

Charles Collier accused the women of general neglect of their work and a number of samples were produced and submitted to the women as 'botchery'. However, Miss Lovell argued that some of the bad work was the result of the 'girls having to race over it so'.^[53] The meeting ended with Collier informing the women that they could now have their kit back and had better find other situations for themselves. The meeting ended with Simon Collier in defiant mood, stating 'each case ... will be treated on its merits: some of the girls, however, will not be

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

employed by me again. I shall not treat with you as a body at all'.^[54] As the deputation was about to leave, Collier informed Lovell and Underwood that it would be unnecessary for them to apply for reinstatement as he would not consider having them back. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Collier was attempting intimidation and attempting to assert his control over the closing shop. It is interesting in this context that Lovell and Underwood were the two machinists in the deputation, and that the two fitters were not included in his list of unwelcome ex-employees. His main dispute was with the behaviour and quality of work of the machinists. The rate at which the machinists worked was most important in the closing shop. *Fitters were not only paid far less than machinists, but were also employed at a rate of two to three fitters for each machinist.* Thus if speeding up was required, more fitters could be employed per machinist, but the overall rate of output would be determined by the speed of the machinist in closing the boot or shoe.

A number of points raised in this meeting are worthy of further discussion in the context of workplace culture. The issue of sacking a woman to be replaced with an evidently unpopular machinist was one with a long precedent. Brooker has shown that the workshop was not merely a place of toil, but one in which 'diversions between work and social association were intertwined and complimentary'.^[55] A passage from the *Boot and Shoemaker* of 1878, describing this idyllic state of affairs, supports this argument:

There is a social content[ment] in the old order of shoemaking which is lacking in the new, in the manner in which shopmates worked together ... by 2s., 3s., and 4s. -- rarely more -- and as they worked,

^[54] Ibid.

^[55] Brooker, "Northampton Shoemaker's Reactions to Industrialisation", p. 154.

conversed freely together or sang at their toil, and were to all intents and purposes their [own] masters^[56]

There was a more pragmatic reality however -- the control maintained by the workers in the shop meant that workers could decide who should be allowed to work in the shop and could to some extent determine when the work would be executed.^[57] The women's objection to the rumoured imminent employment of 'Mrs. H----' was evidence of their belief that they had at least some right to decide who should be employed. It also indicated that there was a sophisticated network of communication which the women were party to. Although Collier denied that he intended to employ the unpopular forewoman, the women's information proved to be correct, for she did indeed work at Collier's during the strike.

Another point raised by the women when accused of poor work was the mitigation that they were driven too hard. As demonstrated above, the control over the amount of work done via the piece-work system had long been the major determinant of the shoemaker's independence in the workshop. Clearly the women at Collier's were imbued with this same work ethic.

By 24 October, just three days into the dispute, it was clear that support for the 'shoe girls' was growing in the town. The *Daily Reporter* described the scenes thus:

Yesterday at leaving off times, both in the dinner hour and in the evening, crowds of people assembled outside Mr. Collier's factory hooting and hissing the work-girls as they came out. A few of the

^[56] *Boot and Shoemaker*, 1 June 1878, p. 141.

^[57] *Ibid.*

County Constabulary were about. No offer to molest anybody was made.^[58]

The men employed at Collier's became involved in the women's dispute on 25 October, when they held a meeting in the 'Girl's room' to consider the situation. John Faulkner opened the proceedings by stating that he and a couple of 'mates' had talked the matter over and felt something should be done to bring the 'girl's' dispute to an end. He pointed out that none of the women had belonged to the union before the dispute, but now the union was backing them. Faulkner suggested that a deputation of the men be appointed to meet with the striking women and to ask their intention because, if the matter wasn't settled quickly, the shop would soon be closed until after Christmas. Mr. R. L. Lewis then spoke 'because no-one else seemed inclined'.^[59] Lewis said he could see no point of trade union principle on which the women had reason to leave work as 'the Trade Union did not recognise any dispute between workmen and foremen'.^[60] The discussion which followed debated whether the union was supporting the girls, as they had accepted the women's new membership and had given advice. Lewis averred that 'the girls would not have a cent from the Union funds'. Mr. Jas. Bullock pointed out that Mr. Inwood (the local union president) had a right to advise the women if asked to do so. The deputation adopted consisted of Messrs. Lewis, T. Douglas, G. Golding, Jas. Bullock, W. Page and E. Boddington.^[61]

[58] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 25 October 1890.

[59] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 25 October 1890.

[60] *Ibid.*

[61] *Ibid.*

The men's deputation met Collier who stated that his decision remained unchanged; any of the striking women could make application to him for work on an individual basis. However, there were a number of machinists who he would not take back under any circumstances. He announced (to laughter from the men) that some of the women were in the habit of taking beer in teapots into the shop, and that others used very bad language. He argued strongly that the men's union officials had no right to take up the women's quarrel and that it was for the men to judge whether they would allow their officers to 'misbehave' themselves. All cases of dispute he urged should be referred to arbitration between the union and the Employers Association who had been informed of the women's dispute. Collier then said that he left the men to decide whether the union officials had done 'their duty in pampering those girls and getting them to picket the shop without first resorting to arbitration.'^[62] Collier urged the men to protect the girls still at work, as he would, by legal proceedings if necessary.

A meeting of the women striking Collier's shop was held on 25 October at the Green Man and was very well attended. The chair was occupied by the ex-foreman Bentley and the meeting was addressed by Inwood. The deputation appointed by the men employed at Collier's also attended. This deputation asked the women to explain why they were on strike, and the *Daily Reporter* columnist showed how easily the women were able to win the men over to their side:

members of the deputation, after hearing the girls' side, said that the girls' had very good cause for their action. Some of the deputation,

[62] Ibid.

who looked as though they had come to curse, so far blessed the strike by subscribing to the fund.^[63]

Clearly Collier had appealed to his male workers on points of trade union principle, and it appeared initially that the men themselves had doubts about the women's strike on these same principles. The fact that the men were so easily won over to the women's side shows that, although trades unionists, they had not been completely incorporated into the principles of arbitration, and still maintained some sympathy with custom and tradition. The reference made by Collier to the beer in teapots was met with laughter rather than support for Collier. Clearly the distaste which Collier felt at the women drinking beer in the workshop was not shared by the men. Brooker has shown that the consumption of alcohol on employer's premises was tolerated and accepted as an integral part of shoemaker's workplace culture for shoemakers.^[64] The fact that the women held their meetings in a public house was also following the tradition of working men in trade disputes, and shows a clear sense of independence and confidence on the part of the women.

An interesting letter was published in the *Daily Reporter* on 28 October. It showed a keen understanding of the principles of trade unionism and also warned of the dangers of supporting the women against the powerful Employers' Association. It warned of another probable lock-out of the town in general. The letter is reproduced in full, as not only are its contents of interest, but also its anonymous author, who was unmasked later.

Sir, Again these terrible words are flying about the good old town [ie. the probability of a lock-out] and for what reasons? As far as I can

^[63] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 27 October 1890.

^[64] Brooker, "Northampton Shoemakers' Reaction to Industrialisation", p. 154.

gather they are the following: The fitters and machinists employed by Mr. Simon Collier, a prominent member of the Manufacturers' Association, have thought good to leave their work, to support a female who had been discharged for doing work which the deputation sent by the "girls" themselves described as "botchery" and to the surprise of most people we find that Mr. Inwood, president of the Shoe Trade Union and aspirant also to "municipal honours", is supporting them in their, what I consider from a trades union standpoint, illegal demands. When asked at a meeting of the girls last night for an explanation of this singular conduct, he stated that he was not taking action on behalf on the Union, but in his private capacity. Now sir, this explanation seems to me to be most ridiculous. I am glad, he said, the Trades Union did not support him, as what Trades Union could support a man, no matter who, sowing the seed of discontent with all its attendant miseries in his private capacity. Were I inclined to doubt his integrity, I should be prone to surmise that at present things political more that social were troubling him. But now, Mr. Editor, let us look at what may be the probable result of the present crisis. Mr. Collier being a member of the Employers' Association -- which has already called a meeting of its members -- will I doubt not, be sure to receive the full support of his association in the fight he has undertaken to uphold the right of employers to discharge incompetent work people be they male or female. And from what I hear they will probably be prepared, if forced to resort to another lock out. As a working man whom this question deeply affects, I trust that ere that terrible crisis be upon us, wiser counsels may prevail than are at present advocated by Mr. Inwood.

A Working Man Who Will Have to Suffer.^[65]

Notwithstanding the obvious inaccuracy that the 'botchery' was not the work of the sacked girl, this working man was very well-informed on the action that the employers might decide upon and seemed to have a personal axe to grind with Inwood. However, the contents of the letter took on a different perspective during the meeting of 28 October at the Green Man. The meeting was attended by several of Collier's lasters, fifteen of whom had struck to help the women. The meeting discussed a letter and an article that had appeared in the *Daily Reporter* offering a 'true account' of the meeting of the men's deputation and the strikers. This 'true

[65] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 27 October, 1890.

account' stated that the deputation had not been satisfied with the girls' statements, and did not support the women as the *Daily Reporter* had claimed. The 'true account' stated that the press were excluded from the meeting and that the men present had agreed that the strike would throw them out of employment. It was revealed that Mr. Lewis, the author of both the 'true account' and the letter reproduced above, was related to Simon Collier by marriage, and 'might possibly be biased in his favour.'^[66] It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Collier was using Lewis and the men's deputation to undermine the credibility of the women's strike and to reduce the massive support which the women were enjoying. Equally, the thinly veiled threats apparent in Lewis's letter about a total lock-out and the strength of support of all employers seem likely to have, if not been penned by Collier's hand, at least heavily influenced by his closeness to the author.

The veracity of Collier's own public statements was also called into question when the women learned that, despite his denials, the unpopular forewoman, Mrs. Knighton, had resumed work in the shop. Although she was only there for a few days, apparently until another foreman was engaged, this appointment did actually occur. Reference to the new foreman from London, who Collier claimed had been engaged and was starting work on the Monday, was also found to be misleading. The women had found out where the new foreman was staying and asked him to attend their meeting on 28 October. The man, named Bags, stated that he was formerly in the employ of Messrs. Lilley and Skinner in London. He told the meeting that he had seen Mr. Collier on Friday and was asked if he knew where tops could be closed in London. As a result of this meeting, he was given five pairs of shoes by Collier

^[66] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 29 October, 1890.

to get made as samples. He returned to Northampton on Monday, with the samples and under the impression that he was to start his employment. He was met by Simon and Charles Collier at the factory, and was told that, although the tops were satisfactorily done, he would not be required, and was given 11s -- his railway fare to and from London. Collier told the newspaper that he had good reasons for discharging the man, though he failed to articulate those reasons.^[67] From this account, it appears that Collier had little intention of employing the foreman, but had simply used his knowledge of the London trade to identify a firm where he could get his shoes closed while the women were on strike and picketing his shop.

The determination of Collier to assert his employer's rights in the face of the women's dispute, and his resolve to use every possible means to achieve these ends, is demonstrated clearly in the court case brought against three women for a breach of the Labour Laws. The case, brought before Magistrates on 1 November 1890, accused Florence Lovell, Mary Ann Wilmer and Nellie Saloman, shoe hands of St. James's End, of intimidating Kate Perkins on 24 November, while she was working at Collier's. Mr. Symonds was the prosecutor and Mr. Phillips defended all three women.

In his opening address, Symonds said that the girl Perkins was 'fragile and delicate' whilst the defendants were 'apparently strong girls'. He alleged that in order to prevent Perkins from working at Collier's shop, the accused followed her home and abused her. The defendants had elected to have their case dealt with summarily, and Perkins was the first witness called. Perkins was a new hand, having only been in Collier's employ for three weeks. She alleged that at dinner time the

^[67] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 29 October, 1890.

women went into the back garden of her lodgings, and Florrie Lovell said to her that she ought to be ashamed of herself to take bread out of other people's mouths. One of the others allegedly called her a '----- scab' and the other said she would pull the complainant's '----- head off'. When returning to work at about 1.30 p.m., Perkins claimed to have seen the defendants again, one of whom said 'I'll give the - ----- it'.^[68] Perkins claimed that she had to be escorted to and from work because she was frightened to be alone.

The prosecutor, Symonds, then asked that 'his client' should be allowed in court. Phillips, for the defence, claimed that if neither Perkins nor the Crown was instructing Symonds, the latter had no *locus standi* in the Court.^[69] After some discussion in the court, it was finally explained that Simon Collier was the client referred to. As Collier was a witness to the case, the Chairman ordered that he should stay outside. Phillips questioned Perkins as to whether Collier had told her to take out the summons and she said (amid laughter) that she did not know. Under questioning, Perkins grew increasingly vague about which of the women had said what to her. She stated that she had gone out on strike with the others, and told the defendants that she had to return to work to feed herself and her child. The strikers, however, told Perkins at this time that she would have been looked after with rest of the women if she had stayed out on strike. She admitted that she had not been anxious to issue a summons, but Mr. Collier had advised her and paid the fees. He also consulted the lawyer, and she did not. She stated that initially she had come out

^[68] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 1 November, 1890.

^[69] *Locus standi* - place for standing, or right to interfere.

with the rest of the girls, and had promised pickets that she would stay out, but had broken her promise.

George Richardson said he had heard one of the defendants say she would pull Perkin's head off. However, Phillips pointed out that Richardson was employed by Collier. Simon Collier stated that when the women went to work, and when they left, they had been heckled and groaned at by the women pickets. He stated 'if it had not been for the police and other protection offered by himself, his sons, and Mr. Gottschald, the tram company's manager, the girls would have been assaulted.'^[70] He argued that he had brought the prosecution because he believed it was his duty to protect his employees who had faced 'the horrible cruelty of the mob'. None of the other witnesses called, including Charles Collier and Sergeant Scotney, could indicate anything specific that the defendants had said or done to Perkins. In fact, Scotney stated that on the Friday dinnertime a large crowd was around Collier's factory, and he saw the defendants there 'doing nothing in particular'.^[71] This weak testimony concluded the prosecution's case.

Phillips, for the defence, again asked the bench to take notice of an objection on a point of law to the *locus standi* of Mr. Symonds, who represented neither the Crown, the complainant nor the person laying the information. Furthermore, if the defendants were to be convicted, it must be shown that Perkins was in fear, and that the defendants were the ones who caused that reasonable fear. He then stated:

the defendants had, on the Friday noon, been home with a girl named Emma West, and they stopped to talk to a man named Clayson with whom Perkins lodged. Any altercation was sought by Perkins. There

^[70] Ibid.

^[71] Ibid.

was no evidence of a feared injury, or that it was contingent on Perkins returning to Mr. Collier's to work. No intimidation or following was proved, and this was a prosecution by Mr. Collier, not because of any offence, but because of the dispute between Mr. Collier and the defendants, and other of his employees.^[72]

Charles Clayson was the first witness for the defence, and he claimed that none of the girls who had been summoned called Perkins any of the names alleged, or used foul language. Clayson had been employed by Collier until the day before the court case, when he had left suddenly, but he denied that his leaving was a consequence of his giving evidence. Emma West also stated that no bad language was used to Perkins so far as she knew, and she added that she had heard Perkins being told that she would have had financial support if she had stood out with the other strikers. After only a few minutes' deliberation, the magistrates returned, and the Chairman stated that the defendants were found guilty. They were fined £1 each and 7s 6d costs or, one month's imprisonment each. The Chairman also stated that any future case would be dealt with more severely.^[73]

On the same day, a case brought by the sacked foreman, Albert Bentley, against Simon Collier, was heard. The claim was for £1 16s, for a week's wages. Mr. Symonds, for Mr. Collier, submitted that the Court had no jurisdiction in the case of a foreman, who was not engaged in manual labour, and that this was a case for the county court. The bench upheld Symonds's contention and dismissed the summons.^[74]

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Ibid.

The description of Perkins as delicate and the defendants as ‘apparently strong girls’ has a resonance with the cases brought by Jane Tye (and described in Chapter Three). Although there was no direct evidence in the Tye cases of her summonses being funded by an employer, in the case discussed in the present chapter it was openly stated that Collier had brought Perkins’s prosecution of the three women who were on strike and who picketed his shop. Perkins was clearly a stooge, even admitting at the witness stand that she was not keen even to issue the summons. George Richardson, who gave evidence against the defendants, was also an employee of Collier. This indicates an extension of paternalism from the factory into the court, with certain of Collier’s employees clearly speaking at his behest.

The case also highlights the apparent complicity between the Magistracy and employers of the town. Phillips, for the defence, called attention on three separate occasions to the point of law of *locus standi* with reference to the prosecutor, who represented neither the Crown nor the complainant, but instead represented Collier, a witness in the case. However, despite the repeated questioning of the legitimacy of the case, and its clearly political sub-text, the Magistrates ignored the issue completely. In the case brought by Albert Bentley, however, the point of law raised saw the case rapidly dismissed. But with the Perkins case, the Magistrates took only a few minutes to find the three defendants guilty and to impose hefty fines, even though there was considerable evidence in their favour from a number of sources, including a police sergeant. It is hard to imagine that the coverage of this case in the press would not have acted as a timely warning to the striking workers of the danger of crossing legal swords with employers.

The women's strike continued throughout November, December and into January 1891, but coverage in the press became thinner. Collier stuck to his original refusal to deal with the women as a group, offering to take all of them back on an individual basis, except the six he had always refused to employ on any terms. For their part, the women also adhered to their resolve that they went out in a body and would not desert six of their number. The shop continued to be picketed, and the women continued to receive financial support from the trade and the town, and to hold regular meetings at the Green Man Inn. Simon Collier who had been keen in the early stages of the dispute to court publicity, *inviting the press to attend meetings* between himself and the women, later reversed tactics and refused meetings with both the women and the press.

Having adopted a tactic of limiting publicity, it appears that Collier developed an increasingly condescending and belligerent attitude towards the women. Letters from striking women were printed in the *Daily Recorder*, and indicated the nature of Collier's attitude. The last interview between Collier and the women took place on 4 November. The women had requested an interview with him and Collier unexpectedly fixed an early hour that morning. As it was impossible at such short notice to get the women's deputation together, two women who were on picket duty braved the ordeal. The women reiterated their concerns over having too many masters, and Charles Collier claimed that their work was so shoddy that they needed sixty masters. The women also brought up the matter that their old forewoman had returned to work at Collier's despite his claims to the contrary. Simon Collier adhered to his original position that he would consider re-employing each woman on her individual merits, but that he would not consider six of the women under any

circumstances. The two women reaffirmed that they would not desert six of their number. He informed the women's deputation that he regretted that the girls should be on picket 'in all sorts of weather such as we have been having lately.'^[75] One of the women picketing Collier's factory had a letter published in the *Daily Recorder* on 5 November, which indicated the way in which Collier was now addressing the strikers:

Mr. Collier says that the pickets would be better employed in working and not "wearing out the flagstones". This is very clever of him; but as the flagstones are not all his and belong to us quite as much as to him, we are not going to stop wearing them out to please him. Of course, he wants us to leave off picketing, so that he can get girls to work for him, but we do not intend to.^[76]

The picket clearly understood the influence which Collier enjoyed in Northampton, but also was quick to point out the rights of the women to walk freely on the streets of their own town. Another letter from one of the women striking Collier's shop was printed in the same edition. It showed that the women still had a lot of resolve in the dispute, despite its duration, and Collier's increasing intransigence. This letter also demonstrates that the women's action had a maturity and clear understanding of Collier's tactics in sacking them all, and that their rights at work were being threatened.

Mr. Collier says that we want sixty masters to look after us. That would be as bad as being in the quicksilver mines of Siberia. I should like to inform Mr. Collier that the ringleaders, who were the first to come out, are the same he has in his shop now. I wonder whether Mr. Collier thinks he has a lot of children to deal with. And as regards his sympathy for the pickets in such weather as we have had lately, it is not worth much. I daresay he thought if he could only get

^[75] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 4 November, 1890.

^[76] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 5 November 1890.

them in his office two at a time they would go in like lambs on any conditions.^[77]

The meetings of the women continued to be well attended throughout November, and on Saturday 24th, the women on strike met at the Club House, Overstone Road, at 2 p.m. The Riveters' and Finishers' Trade Union Band volunteered their services for a parade through the town to raise funds for their support. The band was headed by a person carrying a poster signifying the purpose of the parade, and each woman carried a cigar box in which to collect donations. The *Daily Reporter* noted 'The sight was a novel one, never before witnessed in Northampton, and naturally caused numbers of people to follow them to their headquarters.'^[78] The women collected £4 19s 6d on the march which, with their weekly subscriptions, allowed them to receive their strike pay and put a sizeable amount in the coffers for the following week. The newspaper reported an amusing incident which occurred in one of the pubs visited by the women on their march. The landlord mistook the women for the Salvation Army and ordered them out of the premises. However, upon realising his mistake, he called the women back and placed a silver coin in each of their collecting boxes before passing the boxes around his customers.^[79]

Reports were published in the press in December stating that the strike was in the same situation and that the women were still picketing Collier's. A meeting at the Green Man on 1 January 1891 was reported as 'fairly well attended'. On 3

^[77] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 5 November, 1890.

^[78] *Northampton Daily Reporter*, 24 November, 1890.

^[79] Ibid.

January, Collier refused to see any deputation and reiterated that individuals could come and see him. This was the last press coverage on the dispute, and the only conclusion possible is that the strike simply petered out. The union's *Monthly Reports* made no reference to the women's dispute in Northampton, which underlines the incompleteness afforded to the historian by concentration on 'institutional' sources. In addition, the sudden cessation of coverage in the local press indicates the difficulty in researching women and gender, particularly in reference to women at work.

Conclusion

The main focus of this chapter has been upon the importance of custom and workplace culture for the shoemakers of Northampton. It has been demonstrated that workplace culture cut across gender boundaries with men supporting women in trade disputes where issues of custom and control over work were involved. Historians concentrating upon institutional records, such as those of trade unions or employers' federations, have failed to acknowledge the independence and solidarity of women workers in the boot and shoe industry. Equally neglected has been the support which the women were easily able to elicit from male workers. Our examination of the 'shoe girls' dispute' has shown that the women involved held regular public meetings which were widely attended by operatives in the town. They picketed Collier's shop, and ran the gauntlet of court cases and intimidation by their ex-employer. Another remarkable factor was the endurance of notions of custom and tradition, in the face of forty years of technological developments in the industry and the move to the

factory system. There were strong correlations between the attitudes to rights at work that were demonstrated in the first 'anti-machine' disputes in the 1850s and those shown in the events of the 1890s. Also when comparing the court cases described in Chapter Three with the one brought by Collier, a striking similarity is found in the terminology used when describing female complainants and the accused. In the 1850s, Jane Tye was described as 'modest' and 'delicate', while her alleged assailants were invariably described as a 'mob' of 'unmanly men' and 'unwomanly women'. In the case brought by Collier in 1890 similar terminology was used by the prosecuting attorney. Perkins, the complainant, was described as 'fragile and delicate' while the accused were somewhat curiously characterised as 'apparently strong'. That the courts favoured the employers' side has been shown clearly in the Collier case. This provides much support for the hypothesis ventured in Chapter Three that the courts were used by employers as a tool to force their will upon the shoemakers. The fact that Collier attempted to place a wedge between women striking his shop and men employed there is also interesting. Collier appealed to the men on principles of trade unionism, and the men's deputation arrived to meet the women armed with these points of principle. These were that the women had not been members of the union before the strike, and therefore should not receive strike pay from the union or advice from its officials. Also the point was raised that the union did not recognise disputes over foremen or over the sacking of a worker for poor work. However, when the men's deputation met with the women in a formal meeting, and the women could put their case, the men quickly moved to support them. It could be argued that, although the men were trade union members, they had

not yet been completely incorporated into the accommodation between employers, unions, and the factory system which was to be achieved after the 1895 lock-out.

This chapter adds a new perspective on the historiography of protest and custom in the boot and shoe industry by examining the role of gender. Historians have traditionally seen Northampton as describing limited signs of class consciousness, but this chapter shows that solidarity and customary organisation was very strong and cut across any gender divisions. Institutionally speaking, Northampton was backward compared to Leicester, with much lower unionisation. However, in Northampton, the women had the confidence to meet in public houses and to parade through the streets with the support of men of the trade and of the town in general. As we shall see in Chapter Six, the more heavily unionised town of Leicester, with high numbers of women in the union, actually witnessed the marginalisation of these women. Once the union had accepted the factory system and fought for indoor working and for the social construction of skill under mechanised production, women and children were viewed as a threat to male hierarchies of skill. The policies of the union thus marginalised its female members and led to the women of Leicester breaking away to form their own union in 1911. Hatley points out that it was ironic that after the Campbell Square episode it was the unions who pushed for the indoor system. However, this statement is somewhat simplistic. The important issue is much wider: once it had become incorporated into the system of industrial capital the union followed a pragmatic path. Issues of custom effectively were replaced by realism when the factory system came to be viewed as inevitable. The gender division of labour, which had been rigidified by technology, became inveigled in the realms of ideology. The principle of the Union to redefine male skill in the

face of technology led to the Union utilising bourgeois concepts of gender to defend the men's position against the threatened encroachment of female and child labour. The next chapter considers the involvement of the state in the factory system that emerged in the boot and shoe industry. In particular it examines how notions of gender came to be structured via legislation, middle-class views on morality and notions concerning women's work in factories and with specific technologies.

Chapter Five

New Technologies and Their Threat to ‘Masculine Skill’

*Chapter Five**New Technologies and Their Threat to 'Masculine Skill'**Introduction*

This chapter examines the introduction of new technology into boot and shoe making during the second half of the nineteenth century, focusing on its impact on the skilled male worker. It will be seen that bourgeois notions of gender were increasingly adopted and re-formulated in the boot and shoe trade union's policy and rhetoric. In particular, beliefs about the family wage and the male breadwinner became central to union thinking. The regular introduction of new technology within the boot and shoe trade undermined, and frequently removed, aspects of the work process that had long been associated with skilled male workers. New machinery and methods of production meant that women, children, rural and unskilled immigrant workers became a growing threat to the skilled, male boot and shoe worker. It was in this context that bourgeois ideals of working-class femininity and masculinity became increasingly attractive to union leaders in the boot and shoe industry. Previous historians have acknowledged the incorporation of NUBSO's liberal leadership within the capitalist system, here it will be maintained that the union was similarly incorporated within a bourgeois ideology of masculinity. By deploying this ideology, alongside a range of other strategies, the leadership of NUBSO sought to reconstruct notions of 'skill' around masculinity. This masculinity was not based simply upon a sexed body, but upon a set of cultural, economic and even racial attributes that the

union's male membership was deemed to possess. These included respectability, sobriety, independence, skill and the ability to provide for a wife and children.

However, the successful redefining of skill, in the face of technological change which effectively de-skilled boot and shoe production, depended crucially upon the existence of 'others' who did not possess the requisite attributes of the skilled worker. We shall see that this often meant rank-and-file members who were considered less skilled - these were country labourers and often immigrant labourers (especially in London). Perhaps the most obvious 'other' (and the least mentioned in the existing historiography) was the female or child worker.

The opening section of this chapter considers the implications for existing work practices of the piece-meal introduction of various technologies into the shoe-making process. New technologies effectively led to de-skilling in a technical sense, along the classic line described by Harry Braverman, providing clear opportunities for employers to replace male employees with women's labour.^[1] However, there was no simple direct substitution of female for male labour in the boot and shoe industry in the period 1850-1900, even in the face of this technical de-skilling. Thus the importance of the social construction of skill in the maintenance of men's work is considered as central in this chapter. Many writers on women's work have viewed 'skill' as problematic, involving a large amount of social construction.^[2] This is not

^[1] H. Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (1974).

^[2] H. Bradley, 'Technological Change, Management Strategies and the Development of Gender-Based Job Segregation in the Workplace', in D. Knights and H. Willmott (eds.), *Gender and the Labour Process* (1986). C. Cockburn, *Brothers. Male Dominance and Technological Change* (1983). J. Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology* (1991).

to deny a material base to skill, but to acknowledge, as Bradley suggests, that 'this material base is overlain, and in some cases quite disguised, by the processes of social negotiation that surround the definition of jobs and skills.'^[3] The second section of this chapter is largely concerned with the redefinition of jobs and skills in a period of turmoil and technological innovation in the boot and shoe industry. An important consideration here is the process of social construction which became 'the dominant part in terms of collective organization, economic rewards and social status'.^[4] In this context, the actions of the trade union are vital as the 'collective organization' *most energetic in the social reconstruction of skill. In this period* gender segregation was a vital component in reconstructing notions of skill, but as well as female workers as a broad group there were also 'others' such as country labourers, the 'less-skilled' and immigrant labour. These 'others' formed a core who, by their very exclusion from discussion of 'skill', facilitated the construction of an 'ideal' skilled worker in union rhetoric.

The third and fourth sections of this chapter investigate how the marginalisation of the 'others' described above led to fissures within the union. Under-represented and marginalised workers grew dissatisfied with the increasing coalescence of union leaders and employers. This led to a militancy from some sections of workers, and produced an opposition to machineries of arbitration which were identified with the liberal union leadership's accommodation with capital. The chapter then focuses on the culmination of these disputes, with the watershed of the

^[3] H. Bradley, 'Frames of Reference: Skill, Gender and New Technology in the Hosiery Industry', in G. de Groot and M. Schrover (eds.), *Women Workers and Technological Change in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (1995), p. 19.

^[4] *ibid.*

'great lock-out' of 1895. The final section considers the greater role which the State and middle-class opinion formers began to take as the factory system developed. In particular bourgeois notions of femininity are considered. The chapter then considers the union leadership' increasing use of middle-class ideologies of masculinity and femininity in its efforts to reconstruct skill and to develop the notion of the male breadwinner. Chapter Six will explore further the significance that these union attitudes had for women workers and gender relations in general.

Technological Development and the Increasing Division of Labour

The total mechanisation of the boot and shoe industry was a long drawn-out process. The first machine to be introduced was the sewing machine in 1857. In its wake, the various processes in the boot and shoe production were mechanised, the spread of technology more or less following the manufacturing procedure of a hand-made boot, with each of the hand processes being mechanised one by one. The way in which the technological developments were experienced is of enormous importance for the story being related here. As each new piece of machinery tended to affect only one part of the production process at any given time, this allowed for a good deal of flexibility in the way workers responded to the technology.

As we saw in Chapters Three and Four, the introduction of the sewing machine led initially to the collection of fairly large numbers of female operatives on the manufacturers' premises. It also led to a sub-division of labour in the closing process. The new category of 'fitter' became necessary to paste or fix together parts of the upper and to hold them in place for the machinist to sew. Usually two to three

fitters were needed to keep one machinist fully employed. Also young girls and boys were employed simply to knot the ends of the thread after the machinist had sewn the uppers. In some cases this engendered increased centralisation of production and even to the use of steam-power, as was the case at Crick's factory in Leicester. In 1863, Crick employed 420 women, mostly between the ages of fifteen and twenty-three, and 300 men and boys.^[5] However, the sewing machine, particularly during the 1860s, was equally 'put-out' to women working in their own homes, or in small workshops. Much of the evidence provided by employers from both Northampton and Leicester to the Children's Employment Commissioners acknowledged this latter practice. Mr. Stanyon of Leicester explained this procedure:

I have had as many as 120 machines on my premises, but I now much prefer to give my work out I let out my machines at a fixed rent of 1s. a week; some have two and a few three of them. The cost of a machine is £11 or £12, and reckoning that they get knocked to pieces in two or three years, still it answers my purpose I would not go back to the old system, for I get by this means a better class of girls, whose parents would not like them to work in a factory.^[6]

Many employers gave their reasons for leasing machinery as allowing for a 'better class of girl'. Many also alluded to the difficulties of supervising large groups of women. This clearly does not sit comfortably with the often quoted description of female labour as docile. One employer even admitted that he was slightly fearful of entering the women's shop in his factory! 'He stated that the women were very

^[5] *Children's Employment Commission*, 2nd Report, 1864, p. 165.

^[6] *ibid.*, p. 247.

difficult to manage, and that he did not like even to go into the place where they worked', preferring to leave this supervision to his forewoman.^[7]

However, it must also be acknowledged that there were sound economic reasons for putting out work. As Stanyon stated, he could easily cover the capital costs of his machinery by charging the operatives rent. This practice clearly reduced overheads, a considerable advantage in an industry open to the vagaries of seasonal demand, and probably meant lower wages for the women. Enabling women to work in their own homes would also have allowed them the flexibility necessary to combine paid work with the other domestic duties of cooking, cleaning and child-care. This practice would also have concurred with the prevailing notions of the impropriety of women working outside the home. One of the respondents to the Children's Employment Commissioner provided a further reason for preferring homework, one which few historians have considered. Miss Plumstead who, with her sister, worked at home on sewing machines, argued that although they were constantly forced to work into the small hours and were often very tired, they preferred to work at home, because of the money they saved on clothing:

Those who work in factories work less hours than those who work at home, but I think the noise and heat make them worse than home work. I was for three weeks in a factory, but didn't like it altogether; the machine wears out our dress so; at home we can wear what we like, but we must be decently dressed to go through the streets. I had an offer last month to go into a factory, but I refused to go for anything under 10s. a week, day work.^[8]

^[7] *Children's Employment Commission*, (1864), p. 174. Evidence of Mr. Hodges boot and shoe manufacturer, Stafford.

^[8] *Children's Employment Commission*, evidence, (1864), p. 172.

Some employers insisted that in the name of propriety women attended work in shawls, bonnets, hats and shoes as well as in decent dresses. The love of finery in the dress of working women in the boot and shoe industry was widely documented in various Royal Commissions, and was usually alluded to in a derogatory way by those opposed to women working in factories. The above example demonstrates the dilemma which some women found themselves in when they could not afford the reasonable clothing demanded by employers and society. In these circumstances they were forced to work long hours at home even to the detriment of their health. Plumstead stated that the long hours which she was forced to work made her very tired and 'sometimes I am quite dizzy, when I first get up in the morning, and have to lay my head down for a time, but the dizziness usually goes off'.^[9]

The next major innovation to be introduced into the industry was the *Blake* sole sewer, invented in 1858, and first used in Leicester by Stead and Simpson in that year.^[10] The Blake which sewed the upper and sole together (the 'making' as it was called), was suitable for the outwork system. Although a large machine, standing 5 feet 6 inches high, the treadle-operated Blake was highly productive and could thus be used in small workshops without power. The steam-powered Blake was more productive, but, as Bill Lancaster has shown, three treadle machines in an outdoor workshop could produce as much work as two steam-powered machines. With high

^[9] Ibid.

^[10] *Victoria County History - Leicester*, IV (1958), p. 315.

capital outlay for steam plant, it is understandable that many employers favoured outdoor production.^[11]

The Blake reduced the need for highly skilled male hand-sewers in the production of cheap footwear, as did the introduction, in the 1860s, of a variety of riveting and pegging machines. These latter machines fixed the upper to the sole via a series of brass or metal rivets which were driven into holes already made by a machine, they were then hammered over (often by boy labour) to join together upper and sole. It was, however, not until 1872 - when the Goodyear Welt machine was introduced into the industry - that hand-sewing was displaced by machines for the better classes of work. The Goodyear Welt machine, along with a chain stitcher, allowed the production of boot similar in quality to a hand-sewn product.

The large-scale advent of riveting into the industry (particularly in Leicester, as Northampton was still a centre of good quality men's boots which continued to be hand-sewn) brought about a new division of labour. Effectively, from the 1860s, riveting replaced hand lasting and welt-sewing in large areas of boot and shoe production. This innovation meant that the laster became a riveter. As will be seen in Chapter Six, the birth of a new union in 1874 - the National Union of Boot and Shoe Riveters and Finishers, which became NUBSO in 1890 - was as a direct result of the change in the division of labour brought about by riveting.^[12] The enormous changes wrought by this technology were felt initially by the riveters who were the first to be affected by large-scale mechanisation, but also by the finishers,

^[11] B. Lancaster, *Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism: Leicester Working-Class Politics 1860-1906*, (1987), p. 29.

^[12] Thorn, 'The politics of trade unionism', p. 5.

who were determined to resist the mechanisation of their jobs. Indeed finishing was the last process to be fully mechanised.^[13]

The sub-division of labour which had been brought about by machinery was prevalent enough by 1865 for the *Children's Employment* Commission to describe it in some detail, as the norm in the wholesale trade. Best quality and heavy boots, and also bespoke work were still produced under the hand-sewn method in which the shoemaker practised the skills of lasting and of sewing together the boot, but these skills were rapidly becoming obsolete for the majority of shoes produced. The commissioners of 1865 described four distinct departments which were common in the general wholesale trade. The first department was where the leather was cut to shape. The clicker, who cut out the upper leather, was described thus: 'stands up at a table, using a round knife, with which he cuts uppers or linings from the piece of leather or "stuff" which is "laid on the board," a wooden slab, before him.'^[14] As can be seen from this description, the clicker's job had been unaffected by mechanisation, and clicking still retained its position as the most skilled and highly remunerated. Rough-stuff cutters, who cut out the sole leather, although working in the same department as the clickers, had always been afforded the lowest status, apart from women and children and received the lowest male wage rates. In most wholesale houses by the 1860s, soles were cut by a machine press, frequently worked by steam. Thus 'rough-stuff' cutters became increasingly known as simply 'pressmen'.

^[13] J. Swann, *Shoemaking*, (1986), p. 19.

^[14] *Children's Employment Commission*, (1865), H.W.Lord's report, p. 124.

Those workers who made up the leather into the boot or shoe consisted of three distinct classes -- closers, makers and finishers. Closing meant the sewing together of all the upper parts of the leather, including linings, tongues, and springs (in the case of elastic sided boots). The commissioners reported that, with the exception of the highest quality bespoke and very heavy boots, closing was 'done by the sewing machine, and therefore is in the hands of females. Boys however, as well as girls, are employed at small places to paste for fitters, and to tie the ends of threads after machining.'^[15]

The 'making' had been a skilled part of shoemaking and this involved the exacting task of lasting the upper and insole *at exactly the right tension before sewing* together the sole and upper with heavy waxed thread (holding the last across the knee with a stirrup held under the operative's foot). However, *in the wholesale trade*, the awl and waxed thread of the 'maker' (and the skill entailed in the process) had been largely supplanted by riveting. H.W. Lord's report described the riveting process:

The sole is now pricked with holes by means of light machine worked in a very few cases by steam, but usually by the hand or foot of a lad or child. Into each hole a rivet or nail is hammered by the boy who helps the rivetter.[sic] When several rivetters work together, the room is fitted with long narrow tables like shop counters, which are divided into compartments called benches, each bench being long enough to admit of a man and a boy to stand side by side at work. In each bench are fixed two iron rods, upon which moveable iron lasts are placed. The man lasts up, or fits the material over one of these lasts, lightly tacking the sole to the upper leather, and he passes it on to the boy, who with an old file drives the nails into the holes made by the pricking machine, until they pierce the part of the upper leather placed in contact with the sole, and their points meeting the iron surface of the last turn so as to form a rivet. The boy's work is, in fact, in the

^[15] *ibid.*, p. 125.

words of a witness of the old sewn-work school, "more like carpentering than boot-making."^[16]

The finishing processes involved using a burnishing iron to flatten edges and soles. This was known as 'staking' and, although heavy and requiring the strength of both arms, was often done by boys of fourteen years old. Younger boys were employed to rasp off the heads of nails and to sandpaper, ink and scrape the bottoms of the soles. Finishers were extremely loathe to work inside factories, even though the work was lighter. One employer stated to the commissioner 'finishing is heavy work; it would be much less so if they would use the upright moveable lasts we have here, and stand up to the table, but the men who work at home do not care to change.'^[17] In warehouses boys were also employed to clean the shoes, punch holes and put in eyelets and laces and for other similar jobs.

Throughout the 1870s and 1880s, more hand processes became displaced by machinery. In the rough-stuff department, leather-cutting, splitting and rolling machines, lining-cutting and sole-cutting presses, upper-skiving, channel cutting, and sole-moulding machines had appeared. These were not only devices for labour-saving, but also utilised less costly labour. As J.B.Leno noted: 'from the fact of little skill being required upon the part of the attendants, less costly labour is usually requisitioned.'^[18] However, the union was not greatly concerned with these developments in the rough-stuff department, as these workers had very low status in the trade and were not strongly unionised. Of greater concern to the union

^[16] ibid. p. 125.

^[17] ibid.

^[18] J.B.Leno, *The Art of Boot and Shoe Making*, (1885), p. 168.

leadership was the new sole attachment machinery and the time-saving devices which were being introduced into the lasting department. One such device was the 'magnetic tacker'. The insole having been attached to the last, the upper was drawn over by hand and tacked at the toe. The last was then fitted to a jack and the tacker operated. The machine had a hammer with a magnetised face which, upon the operation of a treadle, picked up a tack from the reservoir and drove it into the upper.^[19] Even in finishing machines were appearing in the 1880s. Thus edge-paring, edge-levelling, sole-levelling and buffing operations could all be performed by machine.

The Defence and Redefinition of 'Skill'

The previous section showed how the processes of boot and shoe manufacture became mechanised during the second half of the nineteenth century. This section will discuss how the workers fought to socially reconstruct categories of skill in the face of the technical de-skilling of their work. This de-skilling had obvious ramifications for the loss of independence over work. New technology, requiring skills which could be learned quickly, precipitated a decline in the apprenticeship system. This decline posed a threat to a major rite of passage into masculinity for young men in the trade. As Keith McClelland has argued, what a boy learned when he entered a trade was a 'vital source of identity for him' and taught him the duties and obligations

^[19] A. Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957*, (1958), p. 89.

which the trade involved 'in terms of gender'.^[20] He shows the importance of the apprenticeship or trainee experience to the attainment of 'manhood':

And in receiving training from the men he [the boy] underwent a phase of 'unfreedom' or servitude which it was necessary to pass through if he were to emerge as a competent workman and which marked his passage from being one of the 'lads' to being a free and independent man.^[21]

The decline of the apprenticeship system in the boot and shoe industry represented a loss of control for the workers over recruitment, but also threatened the informal system whereby a lad was schooled in the traditions of the 'craft'. The obvious corollary of this loss of control was the threat of dilution to male labourers. There was a very real possibility that employers would substitute female and child labour into previously skilled men's jobs. Another threat to male skill in the mechanised industry was posed by the increasing use of country labour. As has been shown above, shoemaking technology was easily applicable to outdoor workshops, and employers made increasing use of rural labour. Country labour was cheap, and less strongly unionised than in the urban areas. Rural labour could thus be used by employers to usurp the restrictive practises of urban unionism.

A major difficulty which faced the men and the union was the way in which machinery was introduced to the industry. Technological development was very uneven in the various branches of the trade as machines were only available, or economic, for certain processes. The remaining processes were thus left to hand-labour, so that machines 'invaded the province of hand-labour without, however,

^[20] K. McClelland, 'Masculinity and the 'Representative Artisan' in Britain, 1850-1880', *Gender and History*, 1 (1989), p. 170.

^[21] Ibid.

supplanting it.^[122] Consequently, new classes of machine operators appeared who were often boys or youths, whilst hand-lasters, hand-riveters and hand-finishers remained, albeit with their function reduced. The obvious effect of this was to disrupt statement piece-work rates without allowing a complete new wage structure to be put in place.

Disputes constantly arose over the deductions that manufacturers introduced to piece-work rates for those parts of the work being done by machine. Throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s, the most frequent complaint made by the union leadership was over machinery, de-skilling and the reduction in wages which this entailed. In 1888, the General Secretary of the union, stated that

They [the union] were going to oppose the introduction of machinery that not only tended towards the employment of unskilled labour, but also had the effects of reducing the men's wages, and did not do the work properly. For instance, the paring machine did not do the work efficiently. When a machine only did a pennyworth of work it was a shame that twopence should be deducted from the wages of the men for it.^[123]

Clearly the union faced a dilemma as they were aware of the necessity of organising the less-skilled labour which was becoming an increasing feature of the industry, but they were still imbued with the notion of skilled wage rates and their maintenance. The leadership's clinging to the traditional notion of male workers (as defined by their ability to produce to the skilled work necessary to earn the statement piece rates) led to the alienation of the less-skilled workers. In union parlance, the reference to 'others' helped to define new constructions of skill. The 'others' in this sense included female and child labour but also the less-skilled workers, country workers

^[122] *ibid.*, p. 90.

^[123] *Report of the Proceedings of the 1888 Union Conference*, p. 39.

and foreign immigrants. Thus the union followed policies designed to restrict the number of boys employed in the industry. It also enforced strict gender divisions of labour.

However, another important group that was increasingly viewed as a threat to skilled male unionists was rural labour. In the early 1880s the union received reports that manufacturers in Leicester and Northampton were sending work out to surrounding villages. The employment of unorganised labour that was prepared to work for lower pay than those in the towns was another way of employers reducing their production costs. This practice was known as 'basket work' because the materials were transported to and from the villages in baskets. There are many examples of the union attempting to place restrictions on where work could be sent, but this resistance appears not to have been wholly successful.

Manufacturers who did not use machinery on a large scale could also seek to reduce their costs by implementing the 'team system' of hand-production. This was a favoured system by many employers when machine development was still at a fairly rudimentary stage, but it continued to the end of the century. The team system was equally applicable to both the lasting and finishing departments (including heeling). It basically involved an elaborate sub-division of labour, contrived to make use of cheaper labour - either boys or youths, or in the larger urban conurbations, adult immigrants. Under the team system day wages were paid, and the union was much opposed to this since they saw the use of lower-skilled workers as leading to the breakdown of standard prices. Charles Booth described the complexity of the team system, which depended upon a skilled worker, but which effectively undermined general skill levels:

The keynote of the team system is that a series of operations, formerly entrusted collectively to a single artisan, is split up in such a manner that one part of the work -- that which requires the greatest degree of skill -- is performed by a workman who, possessing a relatively high degree of ability, is fairly able to insist upon an adequate remuneration, while the remainder of the work is placed in the hands of men whose greatly inferior competence ... forces them to accept a much lower rate of wages.^[24]

There were further complications as the team system was being applied both in connection with machinery, where sub-division of labour was inevitable, and with hand methods where machinery was not being used. Alan Fox has argued that the distinction between the team system using machinery and the exploitation of cheap labour on hand methods 'was not yet being clearly drawn, and Union policy was correspondingly equivocal.'^[25] Thus the union was struggling to reach a firm policy on the issue of the team system. This was also the case with the debate over day-work and piece-work.

From its first appearance, day-work was opposed by the union, which made such work an offence against its rules. In some districts day-work had long been practised, but not in those areas where the union was strongest, such as Leicester and Northampton. However, during the 1880s day-work was beginning to appear in union strongholds. The frequency with which disputes took place over day-work caused concern amongst the union leadership. A council report in 1881 described the deleterious effects of day-work upon wages:

This system [day labour], which is one of the latest devices of the employer to obtain a reduction in the wages of their workmen, obtains in several of our Branches The system ... is to give a certain sum per week to commence with, and the work done has to be a stipulated

^[24] C. Booth (ed.), *Life and Labour of the People in London*, Vol 4, (1893), p. 97-8.

^[25] Fox, *National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives*, p. 95.

quantity, and also the commoner kinds. Gradually, however, the first scale of wages becomes reduced, and at the same time the quantity of work to be done increases in amount, and also better in class; the result of which is that in a short time the work-man finds himself doing an amount of work, which if paid for at the statement prices, would mean from 5s. to 12s. per week more added to his so-called weekly wages. The extras now paid are gradually merged into the ground-work, thus the aggregate price of the work undergoes a methodical system of pruning, until all traces of the original piece-work prices are lost.^[26]

As is clearly shown by the above statement, day-rates were used to de-skill labour and also to reduce wages, rendering previously agreed statement piece-rates obsolete. Many in the union were totally opposed to the day-wage system and argued for drastic action to oppose it by expelling any member accepting day rates. However, despite initial support for the Leicester delegation's motion of 1881, the union leadership accepted a compromise. At a special delegate meeting called in 1883 to debate day-work, a modified rule was adopted:

No Rivetter [sic] or Finisher shall work day-work upon any shop where piece-work only exists, with the exception of shops' foremen or overlookers of apprentices. In all cases where Rivetters and Finishers are employed both as day- and piece-worker, it shall be permissible for Branches (with the consent of the Council) to admit all such workers as members of the Union, with the object of ultimately placing them upon the same system of working.^[27]

The ambiguous position which the union had adopted to machinery questions was thus repeated with its policy on day-wages. Clearly the union leadership had a pragmatic approach to the turbulence in the industry that saw employers, under increasing international competition, forced to change working practices and to introduce technology. However, the policy options adopted by the Council left many union

^[26] Monthly Report, May, 1881.

^[27] Monthly Report, March, 1883.

members uneasy and alienated from the leadership. The position of the union leaders is best exemplified in a discussion of arbitration, a process which had been introduced in the 1870s.

Arbitration in the Boot and Shoe Industry

Local boards of arbitration began appearing in the 1870s in many centres of boot and shoe production. The attitude of the union leadership towards the employers was generally conciliatory. In turn, as Fox noted 'in each of these centres there was a group of employers who considered that regular joint discussions could play a constructive part in the smooth running of the industry'.^[28] However, the 1870s were not quite as harmonious as Fox would lead us to believe. Lancaster has stressed the ambiguity that surrounded 'the rhetorical expressions frequently voiced by the union officials'.^[29] Because of the existence of local boards of arbitration, which effectively acted as courts of appeal to decide upon the many and varied disputes which constantly arose, the union leaders viewed the union's role as 'to act as mediator between employers and workmen in trade disputes'.^[30] Union leaders in Leicester, which was the seat of government for NUBSO from 1873, were liberal in their attitude towards capitalism in general, and were, to a man, Liberal in their politics. Successive union leaders, therefore, saw the role of the union as one of accommodation with industrial capital, fighting only to get the best for their members

^[28] Fox, *National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives*, p. 70-71.

^[29] Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism* p. 42.

^[30] Monthly Report, April, 1878.

within the evolving factory system. Lancaster emphasises the closeness of the union leaders and the employers on local boards of arbitration. The conciliatory approach towards manufacturers, according to Lancaster, brought rewards to union leaders. Chief amongst these rewards being the achievement of political office. Smith and Sedgwick, and their successor as general secretary, Inskip, all sat on the Liberal benches of Leicester council, along with the ten or more Liberal councillors who were also shoe manufacturers.^[31] That union officials were at ease moving in bourgeois circles in Leicester perhaps helped to define their attitudes towards the less skilled, immigrant labour, and those who did not fit their notions of the skilled, breadwinning, manly man. *In the following discussion of the rise of militancy in Leicester and the 'Great Lock-out' of 1895, the narrowness of Inskip's liberalism and of his notions of how trade unionists should conduct themselves will be seen to be increasingly at odds with the views of many in the rank-and-file of the union. The final section of this chapter will then delineate the attitudes of the state towards women workers. It will be argued that the union leadership accommodated itself to bourgeois opinion on gender which led, finally, to the alienation of women trade unionists in the industry.*

The 'Great Lock-out' of 1895

In 1891, the National Federation of Employers was formed, and from this point manufacturers in each centre of boot and shoe production acted in accordance with

^[31] Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism*, p. 46.

nationally agreed policies. By 1892 arbitration machinery at both local and national levels was in place. The union's national leaders believed that the best interests of its members would be served by negotiation with employers. They were committed to ruling out nothing from the bargaining table, believing that this would strengthen union organisation and enhance central control over the membership.^[32] The militants who became increasingly active in Leicester in the late 1880s and 1890s rejected not only the machinery of arbitration, but also questioned the role of the union in respect to the capitalist system. R.L. Jones argued that arbitration institutionalised the national union within the context of industrial capital and argued that the arbitration process 'assumed by definition that the capitalist employers and shoe operatives had some common interest, which they could discuss to their mutual benefit.'^[33] The leader of the Leicester militants, T.F. Richards, was a committed socialist, a supporter of producer cooperatives and a laster by trade. The main thrust of the militants' attacks upon the union leadership, was in anti-arbitration activism. Lancaster shows how the militants exploited anti-arbitration sentiments in Leicester, organising unofficial strikes and attacking the leadership's liberalism with socialist rhetoric. He writes that 'A series of major unofficial strikes in 1889, led by Richards, proved successful for the workers and provided Richards with a firm platform to mount his challenge against the union leadership'.^[34]

^[32] R.L.Jones, 'The sociological context of trade union activity in the east midlands boot and shoe industry in the late Victorian era', (M.Sc. Loughborough, 1969), p. 99.

^[33] Ibid., p. 99.

^[34] Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism*, p. 98.

The militancy in Leicester extended beyond trade disputes, and in 1891 the Leicester Working Men's Political Council was set up with the purpose of advocating independent Labour representation in Parliament. This was clearly in opposition to the Liberal sentiments of the union leadership. Militancy had often been associated with lasters, but in Leicester the fact the Number 2 Branch of the union, composed of the traditionally quiescent clickers, joined in support of Richards on Labour representation showed the strength of feeling in the town.^[35] In February 1893, Inskip (the general secretary) was adopted a prospective union Parliamentary candidate for Northampton, on an orthodox Liberal ticket. However, he came under increasing pressure from militants within the union and was forced to make concessions to them. In February 1894, at a *meeting of Northampton No.1 and No.2* branches, he announced some additions to his Parliamentary programme, these being the nationalisation of land, mines, quarries, telephones and the abolition of taxes on the necessities of life, provision of a pension by the State for old age and infirmities, free and non-sectarian education, and direct employment by the state and municipal authorities whenever practicable.^[36] However the militants also wished a more broadly socialist manifesto in favour of collective ownership of the means of production. At the 1894 union conference, Richards gained unanimous support for his resolution that the union's Parliamentary candidate should call for the 'nationalisation of the land, and the implements of production and distribution'. Inskip felt that he could not stand as Parliamentary agent under such a resolution.

^[35] For and investigation of similar militancy in London at this time see Thorn, 'The Politics of Trade Unionism'.

^[36] Monthly Report, February 1894.

He announced his resignation in the May *Monthly Report*, with the words 'I feel I should be able to use more influence and do more real good to the Union and its members by remaining outside the House, than by placing myself at the mercy of any hare-brained Members who choose to bring in a Bill of Confiscation'.^[37]

The ambiguous attitude displayed by the union leadership towards machinery was not shared by the militants. Fox noted that in Leicester the local socialist branch leaders became particularly identified with 'a hostility towards machinery which was markedly more single-minded and unequivocal than that displayed by Inskip and the General Council'.^[38] In many centres of the trade, under the guidance of local branch leaders, a policy of output restriction was practised, with fines being imposed on those members exceeding quotas. This practice was noted by John Day, the editor of the *Shoe and Leather Record*, as early as 1892:

There exists among workmen a tacit understanding that only so much work shall be done within a certain time, and no matter what machines are introduced, the men conspire to prevent any saving being effected by their aid.... The Unions are engaged by a gigantic conspiracy to hinder and retard the development of labour-saving appliances in this country.^[39]

Inskip, under increasing pressure from the Leicester socialists, began to be less accommodating towards the employers, sometimes even lending support to local strikes which were in flagrant defiance of union rules. At the 1894 union conference,

^[37] Monthly Report, May 1894.

^[38] Fox, *History of the National Union*, p. 207.

^[39] *Shoe and Leather Record*, 19 February 1892.

Inskip proposed the setting up of a fighting fund of £15,000 to be raised in case of possible conflict with employers.

When the Leicester branch leadership adopted a policy of piece-work statements designed to obviate the economic advantage of machinery for employers, it became clear that union moderates had lost control of the organisation. The policy, motivated from 'Owenite' socialist principles, that the worker should receive the whole advantage of any improved techniques, would have led to the industry itself becoming undermined. The stage was inevitably set for some sort of showdown between capital and labour, as Fox stated:

Militant union leadership in Leicester, the most important centre of the industry, was forcing the issue on a principle of the utmost importance for the manufacturers, and the one which most closely affected all the influential members of the Federation Executive. Collision seemed inevitable; the only point in doubt appeared to be just how and when it would occur.^[40]

The clash came in the 'great lock-out' of 1895. In November 1894 the Employers' Federation submitted a proposal to the national union as a condition for the continuance of local boards of arbitration. The proposal became known as the 'Seven Commandments' and is reproduced below:

1. That there shall be no advance or reduction of the present minimum rate of Wages or Piece work statement, or alterations of the hours of labour applying to a town or district within two years of the 31st December, 1894, or within two years of the date of any subsequent award.
2. That the present is not an opportune time for the introduction of piece work in connection with lasting and finishing machinery.
3. That every employer is entitled (a) to the fullest control over the management of his factory and to make such regulations as

^[40] Fox, *National Union*, p. 214.

he deems necessary for time-keeping and good order; (b) to pay either the recognised price or day rates of wages; (c) to introduce machinery at any time without notice.

4. That there shall be no interference with the output either from Machine or Hand-labour by the Union or its officials, and instructions shall not be given by them to restrict the amount of work to be performed by workmen in connection therewith.
5. That every Employer is entitled to have his work, or any part of it, made in any town or place, provided he pays (a) the recognised rate of wages in such town or place, or, if no rate of wages has been fixed, then (b) such wages as may be fixed by mutual arrangement with his work people.
6. That each Employer has the sole right to determine what workmen he shall employ.
7. That the statement of the Secretary of an Association, or of a Branch of the Union shall be accepted on either side as proof of Membership for Federation purposes.^[41]

Clearly the above statement shows that the employers were determined to break all the practices which the workers and the union followed in order to try to maintain control over work. This was an aggressive act on behalf of the employers, and it left no room for negotiation. The inevitable strike came, with notices being served on six firms in Leicester and three in Northampton. On 6 March 1895, the Federation countered the strike by imposing a general lock-out in all areas which were federated to the union, with the result that 46,000 men, women and children were forced out of work. The details of the lock-out have been well documented elsewhere.^[42] It is sufficient to note here that the result was a major defeat for the union. Two

^[41] Monthly Report, November, 1894.

^[42] See for example, Fox, *National Union*, Thorn, 'Politics of Trade Unionism', Jones, 'The Sociological Context', Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism*, Webb and Webb, *Industrial Democracy*. Thorn argues that the boot and shoe lock-out of 1895 has been overlooked by historians, noting that Pelling argued that the engineering lock-out of 1897-8 was the first major national lock-out.

outcomes of the lock-out are important in the context of this dissertation. First, the lock-out took the sting from the militant workers's initiatives: from that time the rank and file were more interested in gaining financial security than in engaging their employers in more ideologically-based battles. Second, the so-called 'Terms of Settlement' that were reached at the lock-out's conclusion firmly institutionalised the Union within the context of the existing economic system. The settlement defined strict limits of Trade Union activity within the industry. It increased the rigidity of Arbitration Boards and set out explicit procedures to be followed in the event of a dispute. The Settlement even empowered the Union (and the Federation) to deposit a sum of £1,000 in a trust fund, which was to be forfeited if the dispute procedure was broken.^[43]

After the lock-out, a pattern of industrial relations was forged which continued into the twentieth century. It was a fatal blow for the militants or 'new unionists', as employers had succeeded in wresting control over the new means of production which had come to typify the boot and shoe industry. The accommodation of the union to the system of industrial capitalism also had resounding impact upon notions of gender. As highlighted below, the involvement of the state in the factory system led to the dissemination of middle-class sensibilities regarding the fitness of factory work for women. Chapter Six discusses in detail the embracing by the union of bourgeois concepts of masculinity and femininity. The next section considers the role of the state and other influential middle-class opinion in the defining of femininity.

^[43] Jones, 'The Sociological Context of Trade Union Activity', p. 120.

The Impact of Bourgeois Ideologies of Femininity in the Boot and Shoe Industry

Very soon after the sewing machine came to define women's work in the boot and shoe industry, and the gathering together of large numbers of females within factories occurred, this work became the focus of various Royal Commissions. At the heart of debates amongst middle-class commentators, was the moral issue of women working outside of the home. The Royal Commissions tended to treat women and children in the same way, with the ultimate conclusion that the state needed to protect the morals of these workers. This attention led to various factory acts, such as the *Ten Hours Act*, which restricted the number of hours which women and children were allowed to work in the factories. An examination of the parliamentary papers which discussed women's work provides revealing insights into middle-class attitudes towards femininity and towards the propriety of women working outside the home. Commentators imbued with the Victorian notion of 'separate spheres' directed their investigations in terms of the morality (or lack of it) shown by working women. The pages of Royal Commissions are filled with descriptions of the raucous behaviour of these 'independent' women. Ironically, the notion of independence which, as we have seen, was so central to respectable working-class masculinity was seen as dangerous when associated with women. The independence shown by 'factory girls' was often seen as a corrupting influence on the morality not only of women, but of the town in general, even extending to those employing or overseeing women:

several persons, both employers and professional men, spoke in strong terms of the deterioration in morals since the high rate of wages and system of factory work had become general. One spoke of the town

as being quite changed; especially in respect of the dress and noisy behaviour of the girls on Sundays. One case was mentioned of a foreman, who had seduced several girls who worked under his control^[44].

Feminine independence, which had been a direct result of working on sewing machines in factories, was always inextricably linked to questions of morality, as this quote from the *Children's Employment Commission* of 1864 illustrates: 'The hours of work are regular, but the high rate of wages has increased the love of dress, and in other respects not led to an improvement in morals'.^[45] Alongside frequent references to the women's morality and the difficulty of supervising female labour were those of lack of education and 'questionable' leisure pursuits. A Norwich employer summed up his general opinion of the women who worked for him in the following way:

I cannot say much for their education or moral character; there are four or five at least out of the 20 young women in that room [the closing room] who cannot read. They would never think of going to a night school; the theatre or dancing saloon is much more to their taste. They do not suffer from want of holidays. In last Whit week they took three half days, and in the next week they had another, the Queen's birthday.^[46]

The fact that low literacy rates among the women were probably the result of their working as child labourers, in the family home or small workshops, instead of attending school was not mentioned. Clearly this admission would not have sat

^[44] *Children's Employment Commission* (1864), Evidence from Stafford, p. 174.

^[45] *Children's Employment Commission* (1864). Evidence of Mr. Starmer, (Manufacturer, Newlands) - Northampton, p. 170.

^[46] *Children's Employment Commission* (1864), evidence from Mr. Boyce, foreman E.W.Lulham and Co. Norwich, p. 171.

comfortably within the ideology of separate spheres, according to which men earned a wage sufficient to provide for the whole family, while women were full-time homemakers. Thus women working in the publicly-accessible factory system were blamed for dubious morality and wanton independence on the one hand, and for lack of housewifely qualities on the other hand.

Women workers were also faced with another dichotomy, over the technology which had brought them in large numbers into the public domain. Thus the technology of the sewing machine itself became an area of contention. The effect on women's physical health of using the sewing machine was only one strand of this gendered debate about technology. The physical effects of operating the machine were inextricably linked with the moral effects, and were clearly contentious largely because of the ideological stance of those taking part in the debate. Mr Starmer, giving evidence to the *Children's Employment Commission*, stated that he did not think the sewing machine good for women as 'they begin at a time of life, when the female constitution is likely to suffer from such work'. He made another distinction between those women who could cope with the machine and those who suffered; 'rough girls can do it, but not delicate ones'.^[47] Clearly these commentators were operating with some idealised form of femininity which they associated with some - but by no means all - working-class women.

Women operatives themselves did not always share the opinion that machine work was deleterious to the female constitution. Many of the women who were

^[47] *Children's Employment Commission* (1864). Evidence of Mr. Starmer, (Manufacturer, Newlands) - Northampton, p. 170.

actually asked their own opinion averred that machine work was preferable to the hand-work in which they had previously been employed:

Miss Smith, a machinist stated that she used to stab when she was a child; she was then thought to be in a decline, but had now worked on a machine for five years, and was much better in health. She found that regular hours did her no harm, but when she worked an hour overtime as was sometimes the case, she was very tired.^[48]

However, the conclusions drawn by the Commissioners gave less weight to the opinions of the women themselves than to the collective 'expertise' of employers, health professionals, factory inspectors and others.

We have seen that the technology of the sewing machine and women's morality was an issue of much debate. The medical profession took an early interest in the connections between sewing machines and women's sexuality. The interest began in France in the 1860s, but spread through Europe, reaching the *British Medical Journal* in 1867 and the *American Medical Times* in 1860.^[49] French doctors, initially, identified problems of occupational health resulting from the industrial application of the sewing machine. It was found that some women engaged in working on the machines complained of fatigue and ill health. The debate quickly became focused on the sensational claims that the bi-pedal used to operate the machine had a masturbatory effect. The rubbing together of the thighs which occurred when operating the bi-pedal machine was said to cause 'extensive vaginal discharges, sometimes haemorrhages, and extreme genital excitement'.^[50] These

[48] *Children's Employment Commission* (1864), p. 170.

[49] K. Offen, "'Powered by a Woman's Foot:' A Documentary Introduction to the Sexual Politics of the Sewing Machine in Nineteenth-Century France', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 2, (1988).

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

claims, first made by a Paris hospital physician, Eugene Guibout, rapidly resounded beyond the medical profession and 'spread quickly into public discussion on the woman question throughout Europe'.^[51] Guibout's claims were 'confirmed' in England in the following year (1867) by Dr. Down, and were introduced into a debate at the 1866 congress of the First International Workingmen's Association.^[52] Karen Offen has maintained that 'for opponents of women's employment, the sewing machine incarnated an immediate threat to women's "health and morality"'.^[53]

Clearly the debate over women's work, a debate which had emanated from influential middle-class professionals, had filtered through society and working men were now engaged upon the debate over women's morality and sexuality in connection with the sewing machine. However, this must be seen in terms of a wider debate over the acceptability of women working outside of the home. NUBSO rhetoric contained many of the 'ethical' notions outlined above, and led to the definition of female labour as a 'problem'. Also the union leadership used the ideal of the male breadwinner in its definition of masculinity, and this influenced its policies towards male and female workers. Women became increasingly marginalised in trade union policies and proclamations, which was to lead eventually to the major gender confrontation that will be delineated in Chapter Six.

^[51] Ibid.

^[52] Ibid.

^[53] Ibid.,

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the major technological upheavals experienced by workers in the boot and shoe industry in the period 1850 to 1900. Workers and their collective representatives in NUBSO fought to retain some control over working practices, and were also active in the process of socially reconstructing notions of skill. Whilst many of the union's policies can be seen in terms of pragmatism in the face of huge technological upheavals, there were clearly ideological underpinnings to NUBSO's manoeuvres. The social reconstruction of skill involved the marginalisation of some groups of workers, and dissatisfaction amongst these excluded members led, as we have seen, to confrontation with both the union's leadership and employers. After the defeat of 1895, the union became increasingly engaged in a process of maximising wages under a system of production which had effectively been imposed upon them. Once wage maximisation became the major goal, in place of the defence of workplace custom and culture, gender relations became much more divisive. In part, this was due to the fact that the tactics and rhetorical devices employed by the union in order to define the skilled male worker and his wages involved a negation of the female worker. A large and growing body of material emanating from various sources, most of which contained descriptions of bourgeois notions of femininity, came to influence the thinking of NUBSO. Women became caught in a double ideological bind where their work (which had always been necessary in the boot and shoe industry) was degraded and their morality was increasingly questioned. Thus, at the same time as being defined as second-class workers, they were also seen as a corrupting influence within the context of the alarmist moral and sexual politics of the late-nineteenth

century. In this respect, the 'othering' of the woman boot and shoe worker may have been assisted by the increasing physical separation of women and men in the workplace. This, along with the stricter sexual division of labour, certainly led to an antipathy between the sexes. The support which men and women had given to each other, described in earlier chapters, declined.

The next chapter extends the analysis begun here, investigating union policy and rhetoric in more detail. Definitions of masculinity are explored as is the growing use of the ideology of the male breadwinner in union negotiations. A major split which occurred in the union in 1911 along gender lines is explored in detail. In the process of describing the women's breakaway of 1911, Chapter Six provides a new component in the historiography of NUBSO. Other writers have criticised the NUBSO's historian, Alan Fox, for presenting a picture of the union from an institutional perspective. But these critics have themselves failed to explore the role of gender in the history of the boot and shoe industry. Chapter Six develops the criticisms of Fox's perspective, and presents a further dimension to this debate, by illustrating how gender was a fundamental category in the operation of the union.

Chapter Six

Gender, Technology and Industrial Relations

Chapter Six

Gender, Technology and Industrial Relations

Introduction

This chapter will demonstrate that gender was at the heart of conflicts between employers and organised labour. Moreover, I will argue that gender, in fact, formulated and shaped the form of disputes in the boot and shoe industry in this period, principally over the introduction of technology and the concomitant changes in work which this dictated. Much of this chapter will utilise the discourse of trade unionists and employers to examine the gendered nature of their interactions.

That notions of 'manliness' were of paramount importance for the bourgeoisie in the second half of the nineteenth century has been well documented by historians.^[1] However, historians have only relatively recently begun to extend a similar discussion of the importance of notions of masculinity and femininity to working-class formation.^[2] Much British feminist historical scholarship in the last twenty-five years has closely followed that of Marxist scholarship. This has led to much debate, especially over the dichotomy between patriarchy and capital.^[3]

^[1] See for example L. Davidoff and C. Hall *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class* (1987) M. Roper and J. Tosh (eds.), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (1991). J.A. Mangan, *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School* (Cambridge: 1981).

^[2] J. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: 1989). J. Lawrence, 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914' *English Historical Review*, 108 (1993).

^[3] H. Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union', *Capital and Class*, Summer, 1979. S. Alexander, 'Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London' in *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, (eds). J. (continued...)

Ultimately, this problem can be reduced to the dichotomy between materialist and idealist explanations of history. Scholars imbued with an Althusserian insistence upon the primacy of the economic base over superstructure have tended to reduce social and cultural factors as epiphenomenal to material conditions. However, the same tendency is also prevalent in neo-classical economic theories, which inevitably view the economic base as the determinant of subsequent social or cultural activity. A similar criticism can also be levelled at feminist 'dual systems' theorists.^[4] In this interpretation capital accumulation is achieved through the exploitation of workers and patriarchy is a system whereby men gain from the exploitation of women. As Sonya Rose argues, the various interpretations which emphasise either the system of patriarchal capitalism or capitalist patriarchy tend to:

either relegate gender to the realm of ideology while leaving economic relations grounded in the material world, or claim that patriarchy is ultimately subsumed by capitalism and see the causes of women's subordination to be their biological role in reproduction (that is their material bodies), which becomes either part of the dynamic of capitalist exploitation or a focus of class conflict.^[5]

It is the contention of this chapter that critiques of Marxian political economy are predicated to a large extent upon the 'economistic' approach of its practitioners.

The use of various forms of symbolic analysis is usually associated with post-structuralism and post-modernism, and consequently is often eschewed by historians

^[3](...continued)

Mitchell and A. Oakley (Harmonsworth: 1976). M. Barratt, *Women's Oppression Today*, 1982. J. Humphries, 'Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1 (1977).

^[4] Hartmann, 'Unhappy marriage'.

^[5] S. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England* (Berkeley, Calif: 1992), p. 12.

who feel their craft lies in uncovering 'truths' based in an examination of the 'real world'. For this reason the stress of historian Joan Scott upon the importance of language and symbolic meaning, especially for the study of gender, has been the cause of much debate.^[6] I accept some of the criticisms levelled at textual and discourse analysis which accuse it of relativism and lacking a base in material reality. However, for the historian of gender the concept of cultural production can prove fruitful. Gender divisions of labour were an integral part of industrial capitalism which had a profound effect on what it meant to be a man and what it meant to be a woman. These gendered meanings, although largely dependent upon divisions of labour, were also influenced by the ways in which they were articulated by various groups. In turn, this affected the forms in which men and women experienced these ideologies of gender.

This thesis concentrates largely upon the workplace and thus is largely concerned with the day-to-day material experiences of people working to survive. Gender divisions were embodied in both the workplace and the home, but there were also powerful influences affecting the representations of gender from those in positions of power; here I include politicians, capitalists, religious and trade union leaders.

Cultural analysis provides a fuller picture of the operations of a gendered workforce than any simple economic analysis, and sheds new light on the gender division of labour. It will be argued that the economic practices of both capitalists and workers were influenced by cultural factors, particularly in terms of the sexual

^[6] Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*.

division of labour. The actions of employers cannot be explained solely in terms of strict economic rationality. In the boot and shoe industry during the second half of the nineteenth century, mechanisation of every process in shoemaking would have enabled the substitution of cheaper female labour in every area. This did not happen, however, as both trade unionists and employers implicitly or explicitly accepted the dominant cultural constructions of gender. This is not meant to imply a simple acceptance of an ideology handed down from on high: rather it is suggestive of an assimilation of widely disseminated discourses which were used and re-defined by the protagonists in labour disputes. Integral to this for the working men in the boot and shoe industry were notions of masculinity, that is, what it was to be a man.

Masculinity

Victorian masculinity has been well documented by historians, but usually with reference to the middle class.^[7] 'Manliness' was important to middle-class men as it conferred respectability and its codes allowed the display of the 'inner character' of the man to the world at large.^[8] Proof of femininity or 'womanliness' was not as important, as gender was predicated on essential biological difference, women were 'the sex'.^[9] In this sense, the achievement of manhood was a more complex

^[7] M. Roper and J. Tosh (eds), *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (1991).

^[8] J. Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity: Reflections on Nineteenth Century Britain', *History Workshop*, 38 (1994), p. 183.

^[9] Rose, *Limited Livelihoods*, p. 14.

process for boys than was the achievement of womanhood by girls. Michelle Rosaldo describes the process thus:

A woman becomes a woman by following in her mother's footsteps, whereas there must be a break in a man's experience. For a boy to become an adult, he must prove himself - his masculinity - among his peers. And although all boys may succeed in reaching manhood, cultures treat this development as something that each individual has achieved.^[10]

John Tosh identifies three main areas in nineteenth century Britain where masculinity was contested and publicly demonstrated: home, work and all-male associations.^[11] Tosh argues that marriage and the setting up of a home were essential pre-requisites for the achievement of manhood.^[12] Once the household had been set up, it then had to be maintained by constant participation in the world of work. The ideology of the male breadwinner was widespread in the nineteenth century, even if the reality was somewhat different. Most married women were expected to remain at home and devote themselves to domestic duties. However, for the working class this luxury was rarely achieved: most married women undertook paid employment at some points in their life. This was certainly true in the boot and shoe industry as is demonstrated by the growth of putting-out networks, even after the introduction of the sewing machine in 1856.^[13] However, when investigating the final sphere outlined by Tosh

^[10] M. Rosaldo, 'Women, Culture and Society; a Theoretical Overview', in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (eds), *Women, Culture and Society* (Stamford: 1974), p. 28.

^[11] Tosh, 'What should historians do with masculinity?' p. 184.

^[12] *ibid.*, p. 185.

^[13] The sewing machine was from the first a women's machine as its first use was for closing (sewing uppers together) which had traditionally been women's work.

- that of all-male associations - the notion of the male breadwinner is paramount. This was integral to the masculinity of workers in the boot and shoe industry and circumscribed the policy of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO). Writing about working-class masculinity in general Tosh writes:

...the idea that a working man's property lay in his skill, acquired by apprenticeship or training under his father's eye, carried ... moral worth, and it was the basis on which craft unions demanded the continuation of traditional labour relations based on respect for the masculine skills of the men.^[14]

In this section I will use the records of NUBSO to demonstrate the importance of 'manliness' to male workers in its industry. The boot and shoe industry was in transition in the second half of the nineteenth century, as shown in Chapter Five, and this had profound effects on the notions of 'masculinity' employed by union members. The transition from a largely domestic industry to a workshop and later factory based one fractured, to a large extent, pre-existing gender relations and threatened accepted notions of masculinity. As Maxine Berg has shown, in domestic industries men directed the labour of their families and dependents within the household.^[15] From 1856, the introduction of new technology into the boot and shoe industry, with its concomitant changes in work organisation, gradually reduced the household-production system thus eroding the head of the household's position to that of wage labourer, alongside his wife and children. As will be shown, the union, which had always had a membership comprising skilled shoemakers, supported the notion of the male breadwinner. Although this may appear on face value as merely an ideological

^[14] J. Tosh, 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity?', p. 186.

^[15] M. Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700-1820* (1985)

and rhetorical apparatus, its foundations lay in the social relations of production. It was used in an attempt to maintain the skilled status of the men in the face of technological upheaval and hence to attempt to maintain, as far as possible, their wage rates. However, as both Keith Brooker and Gary Thorn have shown, the maintenance of control over work was at least as important as wages.^[16] The notion of 'manliness' was central to the definition of the male breadwinner and also to the independence of the worker. The associational aspects of the workplace were important to this independence, as Brooker notes:

As in other small trades, control was not necessarily exercised by the shoemaker maliciously, but rather in accordance with the spirit of a traditional set of values in which the workshop was not merely a place of toil, but a place where diversions between work and social association were intertwined and complementary.^[17]

The manly man was sober, industrious, moral and skilled; women and children were his dependents. The concept of 'manliness' could also be used to differentiate between male workers, for example the unskilled, foreign workers and non-unionists were commonly seen as having unmanly characteristics. In the union records of June 1878, for example, a report from the Northampton Branch stated that trade was bad and they had experienced a large decline in membership, stating: 'We are sorry to say that the majority of our men here would rather spend their money at the public house than pay towards the improvement of their social position'.^[18] Employment

^[16] K. Brooker, 'The Northampton Shoemakers' Reaction to Industrialisation: Some Thoughts', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 6 (1980). G. Thorn, 'The Politics of Trade Unionism in a Sweated Industry: Boot and Shoemakers in the Late Nineteenth Century', Unpublished PhD, University of Warwick (1983).

^[17] Brooker, 'Some Thoughts', p.154.

^[18] Monthly Reports of the Rivetters and Finishers' Union, No.12, June 1878, p.8.

of the notion of manliness was thus used not only to defend the position of the working man against the encroachment into the industry of women, but also of 'unmanly' male workers whom the union did not represent. Working men maintained their sense of manliness not simply through their work, but also by their conduct in social life. This was despite some of the more bacchanalian aspects of St. Monday often being associated with shoe makers. One anecdotal article published in the *Shoe and Leather Record* in 1895 claimed that in the recent past, many shoe-makers' earnings 'were spent on Saturday, Sunday and Monday with lavish carelessness, and the chief gainer was the publican or the bookmaker'.^[19] However, much evidence suggests the presence of respectable artisans in shoemaking areas. Northampton, for example had very high levels of owner occupation amongst its shoeworkers. The town also had a successful adult school, men's bible classes and working-class political organisations.^[20]

NUBSO's monthly reports were peppered with rousing songs and poems which presumably were designed to keep morale boosted in difficult times. However, they also had another function; to underscore the importance of manliness. The following poem was published in March 1910, under a call for the restriction of women encroaching upon male areas in the workplace:

MANLINESS

Who is a brave man, who?
Who is a brave man, who?

^[19] C.J. Battle, 'Workshops - The Old and The New', *Shoe and Leather Record*, 25th January, 1895, p. 177.

^[20] After the Household Suffrage Act of 1868, raised the number of the electorate from 6829 in 1874 to 8189 in 1880. Cited in Brooker, 'Reactions to industrialisation', *ibid*, p. 155.

He who dares to defend the right,
 When right is miscalled wrong;
 He who shrinks not from the fight,
 When weak contend with strong;
 Who fearing god, fears none beside,
 And dares to do right whate'er betide.
 This man has courage true
 This man has courage true

Who us a noble man?
 Who is a noble man?
 He who scorns all words or deeds
 That are not just and true;
 He whose heart for suffering bleeds,
Is quick to feel and do.
 Whose noble soul will ne'er descend
 To treach'rous act towards foe or friend;
 This is a noble man
 This is a noble man.^[21]

The acceptance of bourgeois concepts of masculinity allowed the skilled artisan to distance himself from both working women and the unskilled who were viewed as lacking the moral fibre demanded of the manly man. It also determined a definite position towards employers, leading to:

The just recognition of the rights of the employers, together with due consideration for the responsibilities which form such an important factor in our commercial system, is in no sense incompatible or inconsistent with the highest form of independence of thought and action on the part of the workmen.^[22]

The male breadwinner ideology of the union leadership also allowed the depiction of working women (at least those who threatened men's jobs) as somehow immoral and potentially treacherous. This led the men to support the policies of bourgeois philanthropic figures. For example, in June 1882, a deputation of sixty trade

^[21] NUBSO, Monthly Reports, March 1910, p. 244.

^[22] Monthly Reports, September, 1882, p. 4.

unionists met Sir William Harcourt, the Home Secretary, to discuss an increase in the number of factory inspectors. The union reports stated that Harcourt had been informed that 'it was not uncommon to find males and females working indiscriminately in one workshop' and that this was a 'standing disgrace to a civilised community' in which 'the health and social and moral tone was tainted'.^[23]

So, on the one hand, women were a danger to morals and decency - at least women who went out to work. On the other hand, they were *devoted wives and mothers*, gentle and at the mercy of their husbands for economic well being. This latter description was used to justify a living wage for the trade unionist and his family:

Is not trade bad, and work difficult to obtain; and will there not be hungry little ones with pale, care-worn faces, crying to the breadwinner for subsistence; and a wife, struggling to maintain her husband's good name on the one hand, and the strong maternal instinct on the other, silently but wistfully appealing for bread?^[24]

These representations belied the reality that very few boot and shoemakers were ever in reality male breadwinners. However, the reality in which the working class laboured was articulated in an ideology of the family which viewed men as responsible for filling the family coffers. It was the very nature of these articulations which had a profound effect on the shaping of union policy. These gender constructions and the way in which they were articulated in turn affected class dynamics. Thus we can detect, in the boot and shoe industry, women and men being thrown into competition with each other and workers fighting with each other. It is

^[23] Monthly Reports, June, 1882, p. 9.

^[24] Monthly Reports, November, 1884, p.4.

with these issues in mind that I now wish to turn to a critique of the historiography of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

A Critique of the Historiography of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period in the industry's history when, for the first time, new technology was being introduced at a rapid pace and the move to the factory system was gaining ground. These events threatened the old forms of work discipline and control over work practices. In a concomitant process the old hierarchies of skill were challenged, thus allowing easy recruitment of labour into the industry. Perhaps most alarming for the union was the growing ease with which unskilled male, female and child labour could be substituted for skilled male labour. It is maybe a little surprising, given this backdrop, that historians of the industry have perceived gender as relatively unimportant through this period of disruption and constant battles between employers and workers over control of the work process. For example, Alan Fox's 684 page work on industrial relations in the industry, devotes only 4 pages to the major breakaway from the union by Leicester women workers in 1911. It is the contention here that gender was a major factor in struggles over technology and the work process in this period. Trade unionists reinscribed their status time and again in terms of skill and masculinity and in turn were ambivalent to the problems, needs and perceptions of both women and unskilled workers. I will argue that tensions in gender relations affected trade union policy and

the reactions of various workers and employers. Thus gender relations are crucial to an understanding of this period in this particular industry.

The historiography of the British boot and shoe industry is woefully scant and thus also, by definition, is that of industrial relations within the trade. The major work on the history of NUBSO was provided in 1958 by Alan Fox.^[25] Brooker in a 1980 article, and Thorn, in a 1983 unpublished PhD thesis, both criticise Fox for providing an 'institutional' history of the union especially in respect to the unskilled workers who did not all support the move for indoor working and uniform statements in the 1890s. Thorn argues that 'Fox's history views developments very much from the standpoint of the Leicester Council in a traditionally institutional fashion.'^[26] Thorn's study remains concerned with the way in which national collective bargaining combined with the local social history of London bootmakers to determine their behaviour as trade unionists.^[27]

Thorn argues that the conditions of labour, especially of sweated labour and Jewish immigrants, led to a socialist awareness and support for 'new unionism'. The policies of an aristocratic national union were rejected as unrepresentative of unskilled workers' interests. Brooker echoes similar sentiments, identifying dissent against the official union line by Northampton workers over the control which workers were able to exercise over their operative and social life in the workshop.^[28]

^[25] A. Fox, *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957* (Oxford: 1958).

^[26] Thorn, 'The Politics of Trade Unionism', p. 28.

^[27] *ibid.*

^[28] Brooker, 'Reaction to Industrialisation', p. 151.

My contention is that whilst Thorn and Brooker have been largely successful in resurrecting the under-represented, unskilled and politically radical workers, they have been less so - indeed less interested - with respect to women workers. This oversight is a grave omission in an industry which traditionally employed large numbers of women. Also missing from both of the above accounts is any investigation of gender relations in reference to struggles over technology, skill and power which circumscribed the policies and activities of the union. In Thorn's words new unionism:

was more than a revolt against employers grabbing the benefits of technical innovation. As its name implies, it was also a revolt against old unionism which had neglected the semi and unskilled worker in the past and, *throughout the 1880s, showed little inclination to change its ways.*^[29]

New unionism attracted Jews and others who were excluded from the old union on grounds of skill. But notions of skill, constantly contested and redefined with the introduction of new technology, were bound up inextricably with notions of masculinity. The skilled worker was respectable, sober, industrious and manly. These concepts of manliness, regularly referred to in union reports and negotiations conferred legitimacy upon the negotiations and policies undertaken by the union men. As has been shown, masculinity in this sense could also be called upon to exclude groups of workers, most notably women and children, but also the unskilled and foreign. Charles Freak, secretary of the London Metro branch and NUBSO General President from 1899 to 1910, rallying in support of the anti-immigration movement in 1894, spoke of the 'vagabonds of the earth' who had been turned out of Russia and

[29] Thorn, 'Politics of Trade Unionism', p. 40.

other countries ‘not so much on account of their religion as because they had shown they had no manhood and no principle’^[30] He added that he had failed in teaching Jews ‘the principles of manhood and therefore exclusion was the only alternative’.^[31]

As Wally Seccombe has pointed out, in the nineteenth century, only the men in privileged sections of the skilled working class could achieve high enough wages to support their families.^[32] Moreover, Seccombe contends that the triumph of the male breadwinner norm in the working class was:

not a foreordained consequence of capitalist growth, but rather was the outcome of struggle in which an increasingly conservative labour movement, in the aftermath of the defeat of Chartism and Owenite Socialism, reacted in a narrow exclusionist fashion to the very real threat which the mass employment of women as cheap labour represented to the job security and wage levels of skilled tradesmen.^[33]

Seccombe situates the victory of the male breadwinner norm, within working-class culture, in the mid-nineteenth century. This ‘watershed’ occurred at the point when ‘the *prevailing* wage form shifted decisively.’^[34]

Whilst not denying the overall validity of this point, it is my contention that a more detailed investigation of gender ideology, as espoused by the union leadership throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, reveals a more complex picture

[30] *ibid.*, p. 388.

[31] *ibid.*, p. 389.

[32] W. Seccombe, ‘Patriarchy Stabilised: the construction of the male breadwinner wage norm in nineteenth-century Britain’, *Social History*, 2 (1986), p. 54.

[33] *ibid.*, p. 55.

[34] *ibid.*, p. 56.

than delineated by Seccombe. Gender was not immutable, but changed over time under the impact of technology and the social conditions which prevailed. At various points, gender ideology was used to exclude various groups of workers in the industry, and was used to support a range of policy options. In order to emphasise this point I will now trace a brief history of the union and its responses to the changing work process within the industry before moving on to a case study of the breakaway of women in the Leicester union, which it is hoped will highlight the cursory treatment afforded to women and gender in the existing historiography.

The Cordwainers union was formed in 1863 and had 4,300 members in 84 societies with a membership of skilled shoemakers. The secession of the Riveters and Finishers in 1874 can be said to be the product of a division of labour in the making process which had divided it into lasting and finishing in home workshops since before the 1870s. In the 1860s, iron riveting had largely replaced hand lasting and welts, effectively reducing the role of laster to that of riveter. As early as July 1869 the Cordwainers Association welcomed riveters and finishers into its ranks due to the perceived inevitability of the growth of machine work in the industry:

Machine work is growing into use fast, and at present with hardly any protection for the journeymen employed in its manufacture. This is used by the unprincipled employer to compete in the market, whereby compelling the respectable employer to reduce to keep their position. We therefore hope those shopmates desirous of joining our Union or forming Sections, will correspond with the General Secretary, who will be happy to give any explanation that might be required.^[35]

It is clear that the union was well aware of the inevitability of the coming of machinery and new divisions of labour and was mindful that its future lay in maintaining wage rates and privileges in the face of this fact.

^[35] Quarterly Report of the Amalgamated Cordwainers Association July 7th 1869.



Figure Two

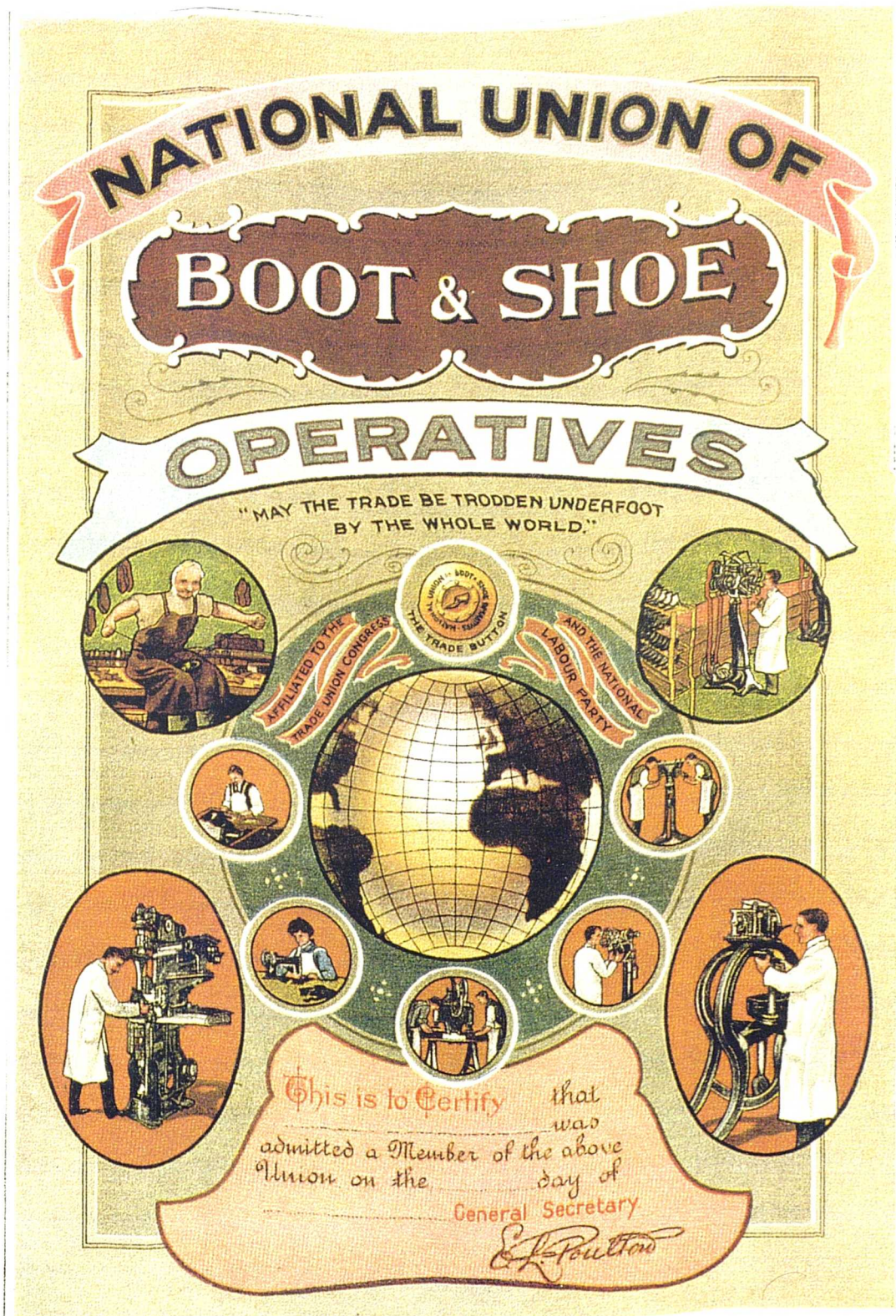


Figure Three

The two union banners [Figures Two and Three] are illustrative of the changing face of the industry. Figure Two shows the original banner of the National Union of Operative Rivetters and Finishers [NUORF] in 1874, the year of its formation. Although, as shown above, this union came into existence due to the incursion into the industry of technology which introduced a division of labour, the banner portrays many of the 'craft' pretensions of this new union. The prominence given to St. Crispin, the ancient patron on the boot and shoemaking art indicates that NUORF was proud of the tradition of a trade in the face of technology. The depiction of the union's commitment to travelling assistance and help in sickness is also redolent of the older craft societies. Tramping had a long tradition in an industry which had long held associations with seasonal trade, but also the ability to go on the tramp held connotations of a skilled male community. Thus in times of bad trade in one area, all the shoemaker required was his union card and his skill to obtain work in any part of the country through the fraternity of his trade. So the choice to feature travelling assistance on the banner was important in the union's definition of its culture. Similarly featuring aid in sickness was indicative of the craft aspirations of the union, as this implied the charging of hefty entrance fees and high subscription rates which would have been necessary to offer such benefits. As will be seen the 'new' unions (those representing the unskilled) were defined in part by low subscription rates and by offering strike pay as the only financial benefit.^[36] Clearly, NUORF was keen to show that it was an organisation for the skilled and relatively better paid sections of the trade. The corollary of this clearly implied the exclusion of the less skilled and obviously women who were traditionally the lowest paid sector of the industry. It is

^[36] S. Boston, *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, (1980), p. 47.

interesting to note that the female form shown in the banner is couched in terms of nurturance. The two females, dressed in fine robes and in passive poses, are used to emphasise 'security' and 'compensation'. Although as we have seen women workers were a significant and vital part of the industry, women are not depicted in the banner as involved in the work process in any way. The final feature in this banner worthy of consideration is the depiction of the workshop. One worker is shown operating a Blake, which is treadle operated, not steam-powered. However, the majority of the men are depicted in various processes of hand-work such as in lasting. The picture could hardly be seen as one showing intensive industry; the majority of the men are sitting posing for the portrait as opposed to labouring away at their tasks. This may be an attempt to portray the much prized independence of the worker in deciding his own pace of work; an independence which was inextricably linked with connotations of skill.

The story of the union's battles throughout the second half of the nineteenth century is almost exclusively one of redefining skill to maintain status and thus male wages. This had clear ramifications for the gender division of labour which became strictly demarcated with the introduction of the sewing machine in the 1850s. The union was seemingly content to have women working on sewing machines, so long as they did not encroach upon 'men's' work which became increasingly possible with the advent of new machines requiring little skill to operate. Sub-division of labour and the increasing mechanisation of the industry meant, by the 1880s, that 'ofttimes a man, whose knowledge of the trade does not extend beyond being able to tell which is the bottom and which the top of a Boot, is put to work a machine'.^[37]

^[37] Monthly Reports, April 1881.

In the effort to maintain the status of male workers the union pushed for indoor working (i.e. the factory system) from around 1880. Reference to Figure Three indicates the changing position of the union to the development of the factory system. The banner of the new National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives [NUBSO], which grew out of and replaced NUORF in September 1890, in recognition that the union by this time contained clickers, women and all other workers, not just riveters and finishers, gave prominence to machinery. A woman was included as a machine operator, and all the various machine operations were depicted. With the exception of one hand-sewer, pictured in the traditional workshop setting, at his bench with the tools of his trade all around, all the workers appeared to be in a factory setting. Unlike in the NUORF banner, all the workers pictured were fixed in concentration upon their various machine tasks. These factory workers, apart from appearing industrious and absorbed by their work are also shown as efficient technicians, smart, clean cut and attired in impeccably white coats. The only person looking up from his work is the hand-sewn man. One of the union's major arguments for a move to the factory system, apart from the inability to regulate workshops, was the notion that if work was separated from home greater cleanliness and morality could prevail. This ideological argument had clearly influenced the banner as, even though the workers depicted were employed on what were often quite dirty machine processes, they were portrayed in an almost sterile environment. However, the ideological underpinnings of the policy for indoor working had more pragmatic basis. This indoor policy arose largely because outdoor working was used to undercut wages and also had less rigidly divided labour in terms of gender. The seriousness with which this was viewed is illustrated by this observation printed in the

union's Monthly Reports; 'On Thursday morning last, a woman named Mary Ann Gray, went to Mr. Hall for some work, and she obtained some boots for *her* and her husband to finish'.^[38] [emphasis original]. It was clearly a concern that outdoor workers were practising a more fluid sexual division of labour than was acceptable to the union. The other obvious concern was the relative lack of power the union could exert over the use of child labour in the home. In 1881, for example, George Sedgwick (Union General Secretary) used his influence to hasten indoor working through his position on the Leicester School Board. The Leicester Daily Mercury reported Sedgwick publicising the fact that the children of finishers were not at school, but were being kept at home to assist parents in their work. He drew this to the attention of employers and hoped:

This matter would receive attention from employers, so that both rivetters and finishers could work on the premises, the result would be that the children would be better educated, better kept, and more cleanly, and the work of the School Board would be very much lightened.^[39]

Thus, the labour of women and children was seen as deleterious to male wage rates, especially that of the large pool of underemployed rural labour which employers tapped with regularity.

However, as has been demonstrated above, gender ideology could also be utilised in an effort to restrict unskilled and immigrant labour; In fact, in union discourse these two were quite often seen as one and the same. In 1881, at the Trades Union Congress, Sedgwick argued for an increase in Assistant Factory

^[38] Monthly Reports, April 1882.

^[39] Cited in Fox, *The National Union*, p. 96.

Inspectors, to achieve further inspection of factories and workshops. It was shown that only 60,155 workshops were inspected in 1881 nationwide. Sedgwick claimed that 'in the shoe trade upwards of 20,000 houses are being used as workshops' and cited Leicester, Northampton and London as examples of areas where this practice existed.^[40] Also in 1883, there was a dispute in Leicester over an employer putting out work to a Jewish sweater who had set up near Leicester and was using labour from Whitechapel and Birmingham. The Monthly Report for October 1883 stated: '[the] Union concerned are likely to remain out until we have scotched this new {to Leicester) phase of the Jewish Sweating System'.^[41] The reason given for this stance was that sweating led to the 'annihilation of all manly independence'.^[42]

There is some evidence of female labour being substituted in previously male dominated areas of employment with the introduction of machinery as early as the 1880s. For example, in a dispute at Stewarton (Scotland), the Monthly Report for February 1887 stated that 'employers have accepted the statement but they still need to abolish Day Labour, [and] Female Labour in the Rivetting and Finishing Departments'.^[43] However, it was not until around the turn of the century that the issue of women in male departments became of major significance, being discussed at length month after month in the union reports:

^[40] Monthly Reports, June 1882, p. 9.

^[41] Monthly Reports, October, 1883, p. 5.

^[42] *ibid.*

^[43] Monthly Reports, February 1887.

We have again to call attention to this matter; not because of opposition to the employment of women, but to the constant attempts that are made to CUT down wages by trying to introduce women's labour in the departments that are rightly looked upon as for male operatives.^[44]

There was evidence of women and girls being employed in the pressroom, clicking room, lasting and finishing departments.^[45]

The Organisation of Women and the 1911 Breakaway

It may be argued that it was due to the perceived threat of female labour, increasingly evident with new technologies that required little or none of the traditional skills for operation, which led the union to concentrate upon the organisation of women. In this they were very successful with total female membership of the Union reaching around 9,000 by 1912.^[46] However, the ambivalence of the union leadership towards female labour is demonstrated by the following quote, which appeared in the Report of the Conference Proceedings in May 1894. The President stated:

I still feel that we have not been altogether so successful as could be wished, there still being a large number outside the pale of our union. This applies largely to the female worker, and I trust the Branches will persevere in their effort to induce them to become members, as they would undoubtedly form a strong body *to assist us should the necessity arise*.^[47] [emphasis added]

^[44] Monthly Reports, March 1910.

^[45] *ibid.*

^[46] Fox, *National Union*, p. 313.

^[47] Monthly Reports, May 1894, p. 8.

However, as more women came within the 'pale' of trade unionism, so discontent with the attitudes of both the male leadership and the male rank and file amongst women operatives grew. To a very large degree, the breakaway of the Leicester Women's Branch of NUBSO to form the Independent National Union of Women Boot and Shoe Operatives, in 1911, was due to the ambivalence of male trade unionists to women's grievances. Gender relations were strained and operating in a similar way with respect to women as towards the unskilled workers in the 1890s. The clarion call to organise more and more women under the auspices of NUBSO was not matched by a zeal to fight for women's pay and conditions. Male trade unionists were at least as likely to encourage women to join the union in order to maintain the strict gender division of labour in the face of technological innovation. In 1903 NUBSO announced: 'This the Executive Council, hereby protests against the introduction of females into the Clicking, Rough stuff, Lasting and Finishing department, and any Branch or Branches of the Union knowing of such being in operation in any district, must immediately acquaint the Central Office'.^[48]

Furthermore, by 1904 the union had negotiated fixed minimum pay rates for men, but not women. In the same year the Leicester Women's Branch sent the first ever female delegates to the Annual Conference. The two female representatives heard the union President argue that wages paid to women in the industry were a 'scandal' and that the union 'ought to try to establish a minimum wage of 20s a week for adult females'.^[49] However, his rhetoric was not followed by any positive action in this direction. The employers were also an obstruction to achieving a

^[48] Monthly Reports, June 1903.

^[49] Fox, *National Union*, p. 308.

minimum wage for women. They refused to recognise the union's claim to represent women workers. The question of women's rates was raised once more at the 1906 and 1908 conferences, but no practical resolutions were reached. Finally, on 22 December 1908, a meeting was held between the Umpire of the Arbitration machine, Lord James, union executives and members of the Employers' Federation. Lord James' ruling was that, under the Terms of Settlement negotiated in 1895, the union did have the right to represent female workers at Boards of Arbitration.^[50]

From this juncture Lizzie Willson, Secretary of the Leicester Women's Branch, was a representative on the Leicester Board of Arbitration. Despite women in Leeds managing to achieve a minimum wage agreement in 1909, nothing was achieved in Leicester. The union also raised its subscription by 1d, which angered the women who felt they did not get adequate help from the union. In April 1910, the arbitrators ruled on a claim for a general piecework settlement for fitting, machining and all operations performed by women and girls. They issued the following statement:

we agree that a uniform statement of piecework prices for fitting and machining would be an advantage to the trade, and we are desirous of facilitating any practical means whereby friction with regard to prices and quantities of work in the Closing Departments may be removed; but we find on investigation that there are great practical difficulties which at present prevent the accomplishment of this object by means of a uniform Piecework Statement.

We trust that these difficulties, which at present appear to be insuperable, may be ultimately overcome; but *we decide* that in the meantime any questions and disputes as to prices or quantities that may arise in the Closing Department shall be dealt with, and settled for the

^[50] *Monthly Report*, April 1910.

shops directly concerned by means of shop statements.^[51] [emphasis original]

It is important to note that the men had rejected a similar ruling during the lock-out of 1895, and that amongst the arbitrators was Charles Freak (General President). At this juncture, Lizzie Willson called in Margaret Bondfield (Women's Trade Union League) to act as arbitrator claiming the union leaders were out of touch, especially with women members, and that 'a man is not fit to arbitrate on a women's cause'.^[52] Whilst this question was still being contested a dispute occurred at Wigston in Leicestershire. A firm changed their system of work in the closing room which, in effect, *lowered the women's earnings*. Willson directed the women to restrict output at the Wigston factory; a practice with a long historical precedence in the union. This, in effect, put the men on short time. Instead of supporting their fellow union members, the male operatives applied for dispute pay to compensate for their short time. It seems that 'the brave men' on this particular occasion did not live up to the lofty manliness of the poem quoted above. The firm then made a claim on the union funds arguing that the women had violated the Terms of Settlement and the Umpire fined the union £200. The women considered their treatment by the union very unfair and saw no way out but to secede from NUBSO. Thus the Independent National Union of Women Boot and Shoe Operatives was born.

Fox depicts the Leicester women's breakaway as essentially a result of militancy on the part of Lizzie Wilson. In doing this, he effectively reduces the gender relations in operation at this time to an assessment of a single personality.

^[51] *Monthly Report*, April 1910.

^[52] *Leicester Daily Post*, 15 September 1911.

Thorn's criticism of Fox's institutional (ie Leicester biased) history has already been noted. Another interpretation of the events leading to the breakaway could emphasise that it was this very institutionalism that the women were taking on. Leicester dominated, to a large extent, union policy, therefore the Leicester women could be seen as offering a direct challenge to that policy and leadership. Leicester had been the headquarters of the union since its inception in 1874 and although the union rules allowed for changing the seat of government every two years, it had always remained there. As at least half of the General Council of the union had to be provided from the seat of government branch, Leicester had disproportionate power in deciding union policy. Thorn points this out with reference to the unskilled and foreign workers in London and I wish to emphasise this with regard to women.

As Fox notes:

Relations between the Leicester Women's Section and the Leicester and national leadership had never been wholly happy. For the first two years the section had been officered by men, and when in 1906 it was allowed its own women officers the assumption seems to have been that any restlessness would thereby be allayed. The hope was not to materialize. Several incidents created ill feeling in 1908 and 1909, and the women's leaders gained the impression not only that the men's leaders were dictatorial but also that they were indifferent to the cause of trade unionism among women except where their own interests were concerned.^[53]

Fox admits that the male unionists were not taking women seriously and likens the treatment afforded them as similar to that extended to the semi-skilled 'new' unionists in the 1890s; a manner that was compounded by 'faint contempt and lofty condescension'.^[54] He then proceeds to focus upon the personality of Lizzie

^[53] Fox, *National Union*, p. 309.

^[54] *ibid.*, p. 309.

Wilson and suggests her actions were affected by the militant suffrage movement, although he provides no evidence of her having had any involvement with this movement. However tenuous, this assumption provides the vehicle through which Fox's account undermines the actions of women as trade unionists, by implying that the motivation for their actions came from outside the industry. Fox argues that the suffrage movement, a 'modest and respectable' movement by middle-class women for suffrage rights, had by 1910 become one which had developed characteristics of hysteria which could perhaps justify its description as 'largely psychopathic'. Above all, it had developed the symptoms of a sex war 'eager to seize any opportunity to humiliate men and misrepresent their motives.'^[55]

Fox chooses to use his remarkable description of the women's suffrage movement, circa 1910, to describe the actions of the trade unionist Lizzie Willson:

Many of Lizzie Willson's actions and utterances suggest that she was emotionally involved in this movement, and that this caused her to react to real and imagined slights with a bitter passion which soon turned indifference and condescension into anger and hostility. It is highly probable that the wider sex war aroused by the suffragette movement affected also the responses of the men, though it would probably not have done so but for the personality of Lizzie Willson herself.^[56]

An analysis of the events leading up to the Leicester women's breakaway, and events in the national union afterwards, suggests that the women were indeed justified in engendering anger and hostility if this was necessary in order to force the men in the union to act in the women's interests. Perhaps the time had come for the women to

^[55] Fox, *National Union* pp. 309-310.

^[56] *ibid.*, p. 310.

Conclusion

The National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives was second only to the cotton unions in organising women. But, as has been seen, twenty years and more after welcoming female workers into the union, little had been achieved in terms of bettering their wages and conditions. It is quite probable that if the union had fought for equal conditions for women workers, rather than following a policy of limiting women's participation in the industry, a stronger union would have resulted.

The boot and shoe industry throughout the second half of the nineteenth century was one in transition. Firstly the transition from home to factory or workshop organisation, then into a mechanised industry by the end of the century resulted in struggles between workers and employers to maintain control over work. I have argued that gender was central to this struggle as articulated by both the union leadership and the employers. Thorn and Brooker have warned of the dangers of interpreting the history of the union 'institutionally' but have themselves ignored gender in their work on the unskilled and marginalised foreign workers. I have argued that gender operated at all times during the struggles which NUBSO undertook during this period, taking different forms under varying social conditions of production. To ignore the concept of gender when analysing the actions of men and women workers is perilous. The whole incident of the women's breakaway only merits scant attention in Fox's voluminous work. The Independent National Union of Women Boot and Shoe Workers survived until the mid-1930s, despite the opposition of some employers and efforts of NUBSO to woo back the women, and thus their existence should not be treated in the cavalier fashion adopted by Fox.

As noted earlier, gender divisions of labour were accepted by, and their retention fought for, by the unions. The employers also tacitly accepted and promoted these divisions. The official policy of the Leicester Manufacturers' Association was to refuse the Women's union recognition for bargaining purposes. The employers also followed a policy of replacing any workers who left their employment and were members of the Women's union with NUBSO members.^[58]

It may be argued that had the union leadership not clung so tenaciously to the ideology of the male breadwinner, wages and conditions in the industry could have been better for all. Instead the upper strata of 'skilled' workers suffered due to the fact that employers could undercut their wages by using outdoor labour over which the union had little control. Unskilled, immigrant, child and female labour were employed in large numbers in their homes or small workshops for very low pay. The later efforts to draw these groups into the union fold foundered to a large extent on the edifice of an ideology which never really reflected reality. However, as has been shown, it was a powerful ideology, around which the union leadership built its most important policies for half a century or more.

[58] Fox, *National Union*, p. 312.

Conclusion

Conclusion

This thesis has traced the history of an industry much under-represented in British historiography. The boot and shoe industry was a large and important one throughout the period of the Industrial Revolution and after. However, there is no major text on the industry. This lacuna does not exist in the historiography of the industry in the United States. To the author's knowledge, there are at least fifty books on the boot and shoe industry available to the scholar of the American industry. In large part this is due to the lack of any company records of quality in Britain. The British boot and shoe industry was characterised by many small firms. Little capital outlay was necessary to set up in business in the industry, particularly in the early period covered by this thesis. Consequently many firms came into existence, and disappeared almost as quickly as they had arrived. Thus the archives of Northampton and Leicester are patchy and fragmented. Although in the course of researching this dissertation, I consulted every company record for the boot and shoe industry extant in the local record offices of Northampton and Leicester, as well as the local history collections in the central libraries of both towns, nothing more than an impressionistic picture of the details of the industry was forthcoming. I believe that this is the single most important factor in the lack of attention paid by historians to the boot and shoe industry. As historians of women and gender well know, any attempt to unearth the under-represented from official historical accounts is akin to finding the proverbial 'needle in a haystack'. When attempting an historical analysis, with gender as its central analytical category, in an industry with such scant archival material that haystack sometimes assumes daunting proportions. Fortunately it has not proved

impossible. A critical reading of those sources available whether they are written by antiquarians, historians, local newspaper journalists, trade unionists etc. has allowed an investigation of gender relations in an industry which was undergoing fundamental changes.

The reason for choosing this particular industry as the subject of the thesis was partly due to the fact that it was so under researched, but was also influenced by developments in approaches to the Industrial Revolution in Britain. Recent interpretations of the impact of the Industrial Revolution have tended towards stressing the gradual and intermittent increases in output and, highlighting continuity as much as change. Also some historians have questioned the wisdom of concentrating on the high-performance sections of the economy in Industrial Revolution histories. For example, Nick Crafts argues that cotton possibly accounted for half of all productivity gains in manufacturing, but that it was an atypical sector in the industrialising economy.^[1] Focus on industries less dynamic than cotton or iron has enriched our understanding of the Industrial Revolution, and this study has emanated from the desire to know more about the industries less affected by the ravages of change, and to uncover the many and varied forms which industrial production took. This seems particularly relevant in our own age where mass production is being superseded in many areas with production processes based on principles of 'flexible specialisation'. Flexible specialisation has been described, by Maxine Berg, as 'production based on short-runs, entailing constant changes in design, set up and product, and thus not amenable to flow line processes of mass

^[1] N. Crafts, *British Economic Growth During the Industrial Revolution*, (Oxford: 1985), p. 87.

production',^[2] It is apparent that the boot and shoe industry right through to the mid-nineteenth century (and after) was one marked by small scale, flexible production techniques. Boot and shoe production was affected not only by the vagaries of seasonality of demand for its products, but also by the vicissitudes of fashion which meant products were constantly having to be updated. These factors, alongside the availability of cheap under-employed and female labour in Northamptonshire and Leicestershire, affected to a large degree the organisation of production. Thus the boot and shoe industry was not one in which centralisation in large factories was the only alternative. At the same time as centralised production began to appear, there was a simultaneous proliferation of putting-out networks and various other forms of workshop production.

This thesis has argued that it was not just purely economic factors which affected the developmental paths which the boot and shoe industry followed. Also of great importance was custom and tradition in workplace culture. It has also been shown how these cultures varied between Leicestershire and Northamptonshire and how they affected the developmental course in each place. Gender was of central importance in these workplace cultures and traditions as shown in Chapters Two and Three. Chapter Two demonstrated the variety of work organisation which existed in the areas of Northamptonshire and Leicestershire in the production of lace and hosiery. In Northamptonshire, lace production was unmechanised and strictly divided on gender lines. A more complex gender division of labour was evident in Leicestershire's lacemaking and hosiery industry. Leicestershire women had

^[2] M. Berg, 'Factories, Workshops and Industrial Organisation' in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (Eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700*, Vol 1. 1700-1860, (Cambridge: 1994), 2nd Edition, p. 136.

experience of factory and workshop labour, and of using technology. In Leicester, the new boot and shoe trade, and the use of the sewing machine found less opposition than in Northampton. The introduction of the trade in Leicester was welcomed in the face of the declining hosiery industry and the opportunity of employment it offered to an industrially experienced female work force. In Northampton, with a long history of an independently organised boot and shoe trade, which relied heavily on family labour, the reaction of male and female workers to workshop production was hostile.

Chapters Two and Three, which dealt with cultures of production, developed their analysis via two sets of comparisons. Firstly a comparison was drawn between the two neighbouring, but distinct, geographical areas of Northampton and Leicester. Secondly, the similarities and differences between industries in those areas were addressed. An examination of the industries which pre-dated, or co-existed alongside the boot and shoe industry has informed our appreciation of the labour conditions in each area. This dual approach has brought new layers of interpretation to a complex set of debates about industrialisation, technological innovation, work relations, and gender relations. It also brings new and important evidence and interpretation to the history of the boot and shoe industry.

The final three chapters of the thesis examined reactions to industrialisation, after 1850, in the boot and shoe industry in the two areas. Chapter Four highlighted how custom and tradition were more important in the early phase of industrialisation in the boot and shoe industry than gender divisions of labour or wages. Workplace culture cut across gender boundaries with men supporting women in trade disputes where issues of custom and control over work were involved. Historians

concentrating upon institutional records, such as those of trade unions or employers' federations, have failed to acknowledge the independence and solidarity of women workers in the boot and shoe industry. In highlighting the support shown by male workers for women workers, this thesis has added a new perspective on the historiography of protest and custom in the boot and shoe industry by examining the role of gender in notions of tradition held dear by men and women.

Another major analytic category in this dissertation has been that of technology and skill. It has been demonstrated that technology was not neutral, but was shaped by the social relations of production into which it was introduced. Technology became gendered by these social relations, and in turn affected the development of the industry and shaped the attitudes of workers and trade unions. Karl Marx noted the impact of the sewing machine upon the gender division of labour within the trade. He noted that the new machine operators were 'exclusively girls and young women' who by working on machines 'destroy the monopoly that male labour had of the heavier work'.^[3] As more and more processes in boot and shoe production became mechanised, the unions fought to redefine notions of skill in order to maintain the position and income of skilled male workers. The social construction of skill necessitated, in union discourse, the existence of 'others', a grouping which included not only unskilled labour but also immigrants, women and children. Thus women and children were viewed as a threat to male hierarchies of skill. The policies followed by the union marginalised its female members and also those who did not fit the ideal skilled worker. The gender division of labour, which had been rigidified by technology, became inveigled in the realms of ideology. The principle of the

^[3] K. Marx, *Capital A Critique of Political Economy*, (Harmondsworth: 1976), p. 601.

union to redefine male skill in the face of technology led to it utilising bourgeois concepts of gender to defend the men's position against the threatened encroachment of female and child labour. The union, once it had been forced to accept the inevitability of the coming factory system, redefined its goals in terms of the social construction of skills within the factory system in order to maximise wage rates in the face of technical de-skilling.

Once wage maximisation became the major goal, in place of the defence of workplace custom and culture, gender relations became much more divisive. In part, this was due to the fact the rhetorical devices employed by the union in order to define the skilled male worker involved a negation of the female worker. Paramount in the discourses utilised by the union in the social reconstruction of skill was the notion of masculinity. Masculinity in this context involved a shared experience which only the skilled male worker could achieve. Notions of masculinity espoused by the union increasingly involved the utilisation of middle-class concepts of manliness. Thus the concept of the male breadwinner came to augment the demands of the union in defining the correct skilled-wage rate for the job. Other bourgeois discourses also came to define the 'problem' of female labour. Debates about the propriety of women working outside the home, and the subsequent furore over female morality came to feature in union rhetoric, which led to the marginalisation of the female membership.

Several commentators have alleged the incorporation of late-nineteenth century trade unionists within bourgeois notions of political consensus. This was certainly true of the leaders of NUBSO who, as a result, were at one point subjected to severe criticism by some of their more socialist members. This thesis has argued that male

workers in the boot and shoe industry were also incorporated into middle-class forms of masculinity. These were related to the notions about political or industrial consensus and negotiation. They necessitated the recognition of union leaders, by employers, as political entities, qualified to be so through certain qualities of manliness. In this increasingly masculinized political/industrial discourse female workers were marginalised. The antagonistic actions of employers and male union members against the Leicester women's break-away union in 1911 was a telling historical moment. Employers and unionists came together to snuff out the women's 'unmanly' initiative. Some of those reacting against the women's move no doubt saw them as non-rational or even, like the historian Fox, 'hysterical'. The biggest question left unexplored by this thesis is the history of the women's break-away union. Its history remains unwritten because, once again, the union's records are no longer, it would appear, in existence. Meanwhile the records of NUBSO, employers and the boot and shoe trade press remained silent about these workers who had chosen to move outside of what was clearly a very ritualised masculine discourse.

Appendix One
Chronology of Important Events

Appendix One

Chronology of Important Events

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1642 | First convincing evidence of Northampton specialising in boot and shoe manufacture when an order was secured by Thomas Pendleton for 600 pairs of boots and 4,000 pairs of shoes for soldiers. |
| 1825 | Five week strike of shoemakers in Northampton to obtain wage increases. It was successful. |
| 1830
1839
1852 | Disputes over wages |
| 1851 | Thomas Crick of Leicester becomes a boot and shoe manufacturer. |
| 1853 | Crick patents riveting method of making shoes. |
| 1857 | First introduction of the sewing machine for closing shoes in Northampton and Stafford. |
| 1857-9 | The 'anti-machine' strike in Northampton (against the use of the sewing machine). |
| 1858 | Formation of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoemakers' Mutual Protection Society - to resist the introduction of machinery. |
| 1858 | First use of the Blake sole sewing machine. |
| 1859 | The opening of Isaac, Campbell and Company's new warehouse in Northampton where the sewing machine was to be used. |
| 1863 | Formation of the Cordwainer's Union. |

- 1872 Introduction of the Goodyear Welt machine.

- 1874 Formation of the National Union of Operative Rivetters and Finishers.

- 1890 NUORF becomes the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives [NUBSO].

- 1890-1 'The Shoe Girls' dispute'.

- 1890s NUBSO push to organise women.

- 1891 National Federation of Employers' formed.

- 1892 Arbitration machinery at national and local level in place.

- 1895 The 'Great Lock-out.

- 1911 Leicester women break away from NUBSO to form their own union - the Independent National Union of Women Boot and Shoe Operatives.

Appendix Two
Glossary of Shoemaking Terms

Appendix Two**Glossary of Shoemaking Terms**

BEAD -- strip of material inserted in upper seams for reinforcement. Also known as welt, though the latter term should be restricted to the sole seam insert.

BINDING -- narrow strip of material covering the edges of section. In 17th - early-19th centuries, used to join the parts of the upper. The term is then equivalent to closing.

BOOT -- footwear, the leg of which extends above the ankle joint.

BOTTOM -- the underpart of a shoe comprising one or more of the following sections: sole, insole, middle, welt, heel and other minor sections.

BOTTOM UNIT -- a unit of sole and heel, sometimes with a mock welt (20th Century). May also be used for the single piece of material of moccasins and opankes which forms the sole and the upturned sides.

BRACING -- when an upper is lasted on to an insole, the lasting margins have to be held in position until welt or sole is attached. This can be done by nails or by bracing thread criss-crossing and pulling the margins inwards.

BREAST -- the front surface of the heel, usually termed the heel breast.

BURNISHING -- running a hot iron over surfaces after they have been treated.

CAP -- a separate component of the upper over the toes.

CLOSED (OR CLOSE) SEAM -- two upper section are together face to face along an edge and then opened out.

CLOSING -- stitching upper sections together.

CLUMP (OR CLUMP SOLE) -- a half-sole added to the shoe, usually as a repair.

CLUMPING -- Hammering the edge of the sole to the edge of the shoe (using a 'clump' hammer).

CONSTRUCTION -- term for the method by which upper and bottom are joined together (Nailed, Turnshoe, Welted).

CONTINUOUS SOLE -- on early heeled shoes the sole may be continuous under the forepart, waist, down the breast and under the heel.

COUNTER -- alternative name for a stiffener, but should be restricted to outside counter, a separate component over the back part of the quarters.

CUT OUTS -- used to describe sections cut out of uppers, usually for decoration.

EDGE/FLESH SEAM -- the stitching holes are pierced from the edge of the section (usually the sole) to the flesh side; commonly used in the majority of medieval turnshoes.

EYELET -- While strictly speaking the holes for lacing, a convention has developed for using this term only for those with metal or plastic binding. Where this is only visible on the inside, the term blind eyelet is used. Other holes should be termed lace holes, or stitched lace holes.

FACING -- the front part of the quarters carrying the eyelets/lace holes.

FACING STAY -- a reinforcement of the facing.

FILING -- using a fine file to on the sole and heel to obtain an even edge.

FINISHING -- collective term for all the processes which put shoe in finished state after it has been made. Includes: knifing, paring, clumping, rasping, filing, staining, heel balling, burnishing and scouring.

FLESH -- the inner surface of a piece of leather originally next to the animal's body; the loose fibre are usually prominent.

FOOTWEAR -- originally the American term for wearing apparel for the foot excluding hosiery.

FOREPART -- the front of the shoe (or sole or insole).

GRAIN -- the outer surface of piece of leather originally bearing the hair, fur, wool, etc. Each animal has a characteristic grain pattern and the surface is normally smooth. Soles usually have the grain side downwards resting on the ground; insoles usually have the grain side upwards so that the foot rests on it. Uppers normally have the grain side outwards except for suedes.

GOLOSH (OR GALOSH) -- (1) an overshoe, originally of leather and/or fabric and now usually of rubber: (2) the extension of the vamp wings either side of the shoe round to the back.

HALF SOLE -- a short sole under the forepart, not reaching to the heel. Usually a repair, either replacing the worn forepart sole cut away, or added as a clump.

HEEL -- a component added to the rear (or seat) end of the sole, originally for utility but then as fashion. May consist of separate 'lifts' ('built heel') or be a block

of wood covered with leather or other material. In either case the bottom section which rests on the ground is called the 'top-piece'.

HEEL COVER -- the material, leather, cloth etc., covering usually a wooden heel.

HIDE -- the pelt of the larger animals (cattle, horse etc.).

HOBNAIL -- a nail with enlarged head, usually domed, for sole protection.

IMPRINT LINE -- the estimated edge of the sole on a moccasin/opanke.

INSOLE -- the inside bottom part of a shoe on which the foot rests, sometimes referred to as the 'foundation of the shoe'. In a turnshoe there is no separate insole, the foot resting on the inner flesh surface of the sole which also acts as an insole.

IRON -- the unit of measurement of thickness of bottoming leathers, one forty-eighth of an inch.

JUMP -- the small pieces used in building stacked heels, which are not the full size of the lifts.

LACE -- lengths of leather, silk ribbon, braided cotton etc., used through holes to fasten footwear.

LACE SHOE -- a shoe fastening with laces.

LAPPED SEAM -- two upper sections are overlapped and stitched together right through the full substance of both sections.

LAST -- a wooden block on which the shoe is made roughly corresponding to the shape of the foot but with certain differences due to fashion and shoe-making requirements. The Romans also used iron lasts but these were anvils for turning over nail points and not apparently moulds for shaping.

LASTING -- the operation of shaping the upper to the last.

LASTING MARGIN -- the lower edge of the shoe upper which is turned under and fixed to the insole (or sole) during lasting.

LINING -- the interior part of an upper, usually divided into the same sections as the outer, ie. vamp lining, quarter lining, leg lining etc.

MIDDLE (OR MIDDLE SOLE) -- an additional section placed between sole and insole.

NAILED CONSTRUCTION -- a method of shoemaking in which the upper is nailed to the bottom, the lasting margin being sandwiched between the sole and insole.

UPPER PIECE (UPPER) -- an upper cut in one piece, usually seamed at the inside waist. A small insertion usually triangular may be necessary to complete the upper.

PARING -- using a knife to remove waste portion of the sole and heel.

PATTERN -- the card, paper etc. shapes used to cut upper sections.

PEG -- strip of wood used for crude repairs. Used in the 19th century for sole attachment.

PINKING -- used for both zig-zag edges and cut-out patterns - eg gimping on brogues.

PROTECTOR SOLE -- lies between welt and undersole; acts as a protection from dampness and forms a solid base for securing undersole.

QUARTERS -- the sides of shoe upper joining on to the vamp at the front and meeting each other at the back of the heel. If there is a seam here it is called the backseam. The name quarters derives from the fact that if there is a join at the back, then a pair of shoes has four of them.

QUARTER TIP -- a segment let into the top piece at the outside back where the most wear occurs.

RAND -- a long narrow strip of leather of roughly triangular cross-section included in an upper/bottom seam to make it more waterproof or decorative.

RASPING -- filing sole and heel to obtain an even edge; rasp = coarse file.

RIVET -- a metal nail knocked through the sole against an iron, or iron-plated last, to turn the tip over and prevent it coming out.

SCOURING -- slight roughing of the underside of the sole and heel to prevent the wearer from slipping.

SEAT -- the rear end of insole or sole on which the heel rests.

SHANK -- a reinforcement placed centrally between the lasting margins of the waist of a shoe and between sole and insole. Its purpose is to prevent the shoe from bending in the waist, particularly when a heel is used.

SIDE SEAM -- the seam at the side of the shoe joining one piece shoes or vamp to quarter.

SKIN -- the pelt from smaller animals (goat, sheep, deer etc.).

SKIVING -- cutting a this strip from the surface of the leather to provide a flat joint.

SOCK -- a piece of material stuck inside a shoe to cover the insole; a heel sock just cover the back part (heel seat). Its purpose in to cover nail points or stitches, but it may also carry the maker's name or trademark.

SOLE -- the part of the shoe which is in contact with the ground. If the shoe has a separate heel the bottom section of the next to the ground is called the top piece.

SOLE SEAM -- seam joining sole or bottom to upper.

SPRING HEEL -- one lift inserted between sole and upper.

STACKED HEEL -- a heel consisting of a number of lifts and sometimes also jumps.

STAINING -- coating surface leather with (a) heel ball, (b) stain, (c) shoe polish.

STIFFENER -- a reinforcement placed inside the back of the quarter.

STITCH LENGTH -- the distance between the centres of stitches or stitch holes in a row.

STRAIGHTS -- the term applied to symmetrical shoes which are not made left and right, but can be worn on either foot.

TAG -- the binding, usually metal (now plastic) at the end of a lace for leading through the holes. It may be made from spiral wire.

TANNING -- the conversion of rawhide into leather by soaking in tannin.

THROAT -- the central portion of the rear end of the vamp resting on the instep of the foot.

THROUGH SOLE -- a sole extending the whole length of the shoe from toe to heel. Mid sole should be used if it is between sole and insole.

TOP EDGE -- the top of uppers.

TOE PUFF -- a reinforcement under the toe-end of the vamp.

TOE SPRING -- the elevation of the toe-end of a shoe sole above a horizontal surface on which a shoe is standing.

TONGUE -- a backwards extension from the vamp throat resting on the instep of the foot.

TOP BAND -- a narrow strip of leather or other material stitched to the top edge of the quarters.

TOP PIECE -- the bottom section of the heel which actually rests on the ground.

TREAD -- the widest part of sole forepart in closest contact with the ground.

TUNNEL STITCHING -- uses a curved awl to make a hole which enters the surface, passes a short distance between grain and flesh of leather and then reappears on the same surface. Sometimes called a 'caterpillar' stitch.

TURNSHOE CONSTRUCTION -- the shoe is made inside-out (normally with the flesh side outwards) by sewing the lasting margin of the upper to the edge of a single sole which also acts as an insole. The shoe is then turned the right way round, so that the grain side of the leather is on the outside of the shoe and the upper/sole seam is now inside.

TURN WELT -- a turnshoe which has an extra wide rand included in the seam so that this becomes a welt to which a first sole, and later, a repair one, can be stitched. It is the intermediate stage between a turnshoe and a welted shoe, appearing c.1500.

UPPER -- the portion of the shoe or boot which covers the top of the foot. It normally consists of an outside and a lining with interlinings and reinforcements. Typical sub-divisions of an upper in, for example, an ordinary Oxford shoe are: outside - cap, vamp, tongue, quarters, back-strap; lining - vamp lining, quarter lining, tongue lining; there may also be side linings.

VAMP -- the front section of a shoe upper covering the toes and part of the instep.

VAMP WINGS -- the sides of the vamp extending backwards with side of the throat to join the quarters.

VELDTSCHOEN -- a shoe in which the upper is turned outwards round its bottom edge to form a flange which is then stitched to a sole of middle-sole. In a 'welted veldtschoen', the lining is welted to the insole and then the outside is flanged outwards and stitched to the welts and sole. Although the method is traditionally South African it was used for repairs on early shoes where upper patches were required.

WAIST -- part of the sole between forepart and heel.

WELT -- strip of leather stitched to the boot or shoe between the upper and the sole to fasten the two together. The strip is sewn round the lasting margin of the upper, joining it either to the insole edge or to a rib raised on the flesh side of the insole near the edge. The sole is then attached to this welt by a second seam. It appears to have been developed from the 'rand'.

WELTED CONSTRUCTION -- a method of shoe construction introduced to this country c.1500 and still used (although mechanised). It takes place in three stages. (1) the upper is lasted and held in position by nails or bracing thread. (2) the laster upper is sewn together with a welt to the edge of the insole. (3) the sole is then stitched to this welt.

Appendix Three

The Debate about the Sewing Machine's Introduction

Appendix Three**The Debate about the Sewing Machine's Introduction**

Northampton Mercury 8 April 1865

Dear sir, Having read in your journal of Saturday last an article extracted from the Builder on the above subject, i wish to make one or two corrections in it. In the first place I beg to say I was the first introducer of the sewing machine into this town in 1857. At that time I was foreman to the London and Norwich shoe company. Being in the United States in 1851 and '52, I saw the machine in the factory of Messrs. J.M. Singer and Co. It struck me with a little alteration as being peculiarly adapted for boot and shoe closing. On returning to England and settling in Northampton, the idea still haunted me, and in 1857 I sent for a machine (the invoice of which I still have by me) being determined to test it. I did so, and the result convinced me that my first impression was right. On its becoming known a deputation waited on me, and requested me to get rid of the machine, which I refused to do. From that time commenced a strike of from 15 to 18 months duration, the whole of which time I was followed to and from my home by several hundreds of people daily, which swore they would drive me and my machine out of town together. The fallacy of which threat is proved by the fact of there being upwards of 1500 in the town at the present time. We all know you to be a lover of fair play, and that you endeavour to give

honour where honour is due, therefore you insertion of the above will oblige W.
Young Edward

Northampton Mercury 8 April 1865

Another version of the introduction of sewing machines. Henry Marshall argues he was before Edward in introducing a machine made by Thomas Bros, of London in 1855. Never used in factory - for his own private use (only his brother knew about it). First to introduce publicly Marshall and Padmore 1857 - 2 year strike.

Bibliography

Manuscript SourcesLeicestershire Record Office

Apprentice indenture of clicker at Samuel Lennards 1893

Pigot's Directory 1850

Thomas Crick of Leicester: Specification for the invention of Improvements in the Manufacture of Boots, Shoes, Cloggs and Slippers, (Letter patent: DE 1463/1)

J.F. Timpson Ltd, Leicester: Various documents 1893-1918

Leicester 'Self-Help' Boot & Shoe Manufacturing Society: Wages book 1896-1964

Portland Shoes Ltd., Leicester: Various documents 1872-1946

Stead & Simpson Ltd, Leicester: Various documents 1861-1911

W & E Turner Ltd, Leicester: Directors' minute books 1901-1978

J. Wake (ed.), *The Montagu Musters Book 1602-1623* (Northampton: Northamptonshire Record Society Publications, 1935)

National Union of Footwear, Leatherwear and Allied Trades (Earls Barton, Northamptonshire)

Amalgamated Cordwainers Association, *Quarterly Reports*

National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, *Monthly Reports*

London School of Economics and Political Science

Webb Trade Union Collection, L.S.E. Coll. E, Section A. Vol XXV.

Northampton Central Library

Rules of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe-Makers' Mutual Protection Society embracing all Towns and Villages whose Shopmates and working for Shops in the Town or County of Northampton, 1859

Northampton Museum

Hanby & West Ltd., Northampton: Various documents

Northamptonshire Record Office

Allinson & Co., Northampton: Minutes, ledgers, accounts and correspondence 1873-1981

John Cave & Sons, Rushden: Papers 1898-1915

Charter & Underwood, Northampton: 1884-5

John C Gotch & Sons, Kettering: Various documents 1799-1885

William Green & Son (Grenson), Rushden: Letter book 1900-1922; history of firm (1966).

Harvey Lee Ltd., Kettering: Various documents

Parliamentary Papers and Official Publications

- 1843 xiii Children's Employment Commission
- 1843 xiv Children's Employment Commission
- 1845 xv Royal Commission on the Condition of the Framework Knitters
- 1845 xiv Report on the Select Committee on the Stoppage of Wages (hosiery)
- 1860 xxii Select Committee on Masters and Operatives
- 1863 xviii Children's Employment Commission: First Report
- 1864 xxii Children's Employment Commission: Second Report
- 1865 xx Children's Employment Commission: Fourth Report
- 1967-8 xxxix Royal Commission on Trade Unions: Tenth Report
- 1875 xvi Report on Inspectors of Factories
- 1876 xxx Factory and Workshops Act (Minutes of Evidence)
- 1888 xx Sweating Commission: First Report
- 1888 xxi Sweating Commission: Second Report
- 1892 xxxvi Part II: Royal Commission on Labour
- 1893-4 xxxviii Royal Commission on Labour: Report on the Employment of Women

1893-4 lxxxi Part II: Report on Statistics on the Employment of Women

Census of Great Britain, 1851 - 1901 (Eyre and Spottiswoode)

Newspapers and periodicals

Boot and Shoe Maker

Boot and Shoe Reporter

Boot and Shoe Retailer and Leather Trades Gazette

Boot and Shoe Trades Chronicle

Boot and Shoe Trades Journal

Boot and Shoemaker

Boot Trades Association Gazette

Bootmaker's Gazette

Footwear Organiser

Leicester Chronicle

Leicester Daily Post

Northampton Daily Echo

Northampton Daily Reporter

Northampton Herald

Northampton Mercury

Shoe and Leather Record

Shoe and Leather and Allied Trades News

Shoe and Leather News

Shoe and Leather Reporter

Shoe and Leather Trader

Shoe and Leather Trades Chronicle

Shoe Manufacturer's Monthly

Primary printed sources: books and articles

A. Adcock, (1931) *The Northampton Shoe*, Northampton: Archer and Goodman.

J. Ball, (1860) 'An account of the strike of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoemakers in 1857-8-9', in *Trade Societies and Strikes*, London: National Association for Social Science.

C. Booth, (1893) *Life and Labour of the People in London*, London: Macmillan.

E. Bordoli, (1934) *Old Friends*, Northampton: W. Mark and Co.

E. Bordoli, (n.d.) *A Tale of Northampton and its Industry*, Northampton: W. Mark and Co.

Bowley and Hurst, (1913) *Livelihood and Poverty*, London: G. Bell and Sons.

M. W. Brown, (1911) *Northamptonshire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Daniel Defoe, (1971 orig. 1726) *A Tour through the whole island of Great Britain*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

T. Dekker, (1963) 'The Shoemaker's Holiday', in Bald, R.C., (ed.), *Six Elizabethan Plays*, Cambridge: C.U.P.

London Tradesmen, being a historical account of all trades now practised in the cities of London and Westminster (1747), no publisher.

J.B. Leno, (1887) *The Art of Boot and Shoemaking A Practical Handbook*, London: Crosby and Lockwood.

W. Pitt, (1809) *General View of the agriculture of Northampton*, London: T. Wright.

R. Rowe, (1869) ' "Snobopolis": Northampton in 1869', Northampton: Northampton Borough Council's Leisure Activities Department, reprinted 1976.

W. White, *History, gazetteer and directory of Leicestershire*, (Annual).

Women's Industrial Council, (1897) *Home Industries of Women in London: Report of an Inquiry into Thirty-Five Trades*, London: Women's Industrial Council.

Secondary printed sources: books and articles

- D. Aldcroft (Ed.), (1968) *The Development of British Industry and Foreign Competition, 1875-1914*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
- J. Allen, (1986) 'Evidence and Silence: feminism and the limits of history', in C. Pateman and E. Gross (Eds.), *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- S. Alexander, (1983) *Women's Work in Nineteenth-Century London: A Study of the Years 1820-50*, London: Journeyman Press.
- S. Alexander, (1976) 'Women's Work in Nineteenth Century London' in J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (eds.) *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- L. Althusser, (1970) *Reading Capital*, London: NLB.
- E.F. Baker, (1966) *Technology and Woman's Work*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- W.H. Barker (Ed.), (1942) *One Hundred Years' History of Shoes at Street, Somerset, Street: Clark's*.
- M. Barratt, (1982) *Women's Oppression Today*, London: Verso.
- K. Baynes and K. Baynes (eds.), (1979) *The Shoe Show, British Shoes Since 1790*, London: Crafts Council.
- V. Beechey, (1989) 'The sexual division of labour and the labour process: a critical assessment of Braverman', in S. Wood (ed.), *The Degredation of Work. Skill, Deskilling and the Labour Process*, London: Hutchinson.
- V. Beechey, (1977) 'Some Notes on Female Wage Labour in Capitalist Production', *Capital and Class*, 3, pp. 45-66.
- J. Benson, (1983) *The Penny Capitalists: A Study of Nineteenth Century Working Class Entrepreneurs*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan.
- M. Berg, (1985) *The Age of Manufactures Industry, Innovation and Work in Britain 1700-1820*, London: Fontana.
- M. Berg, (1980) *The Machinery Question and the Making of Political Economy 1815-1848*, Cambridge: C.U.P.

- M. Berg, (1987) 'Women's work, mechanisation and the early phase of industrialisation in England', in Patrick Joyce, *The Historical Meanings of Work*, Cambridge: C.U.P.
- M. Berg, (1994) 'Factories, Workshops and Industrial Organisation' in R. Floud and D. McCloskey (Eds.), *The Economic History of Britain since 1700*, Vol 1. 1700-1860, Cambridge: C.U.P.
- M. Berg, (1993) 'Small Producer Capitalism in Eighteenth-Century England', *Business History*, vol.35, No.1, pp. 17-39.
- M. Berg, (1993) 'What difference did women's work make to the Industrial Revolution?', *History Workshop Journal*, No.35, pp. 22-45.
- J.R. Betts, (1905) *The Raunds Strike and March to London*, Raunds: Raunds and District History Society.
- M.H. Blewett, (1988) *Men, Women, and Work - Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- S. Boston, (1987) *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*, London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- H. Bradley, (1989) *Men's Work, Women's Work - A Sociological History of the Sexual Division of Labour in Employment*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- H. Bradley, (1995) 'Frames of Reference: Skill, Gender and New Technology in the Hosiery Industry', Gertjan de Groot and Marlou Schrover (eds.), *Women Workers and Technological Change in Europe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, London: Taylor and Francis.
- H. Bradley, (1986) 'Technological Change, Management Strategies and the Development of Gender-Based Job Segregation in the Workplace', in D. Knights and H. Willmot (eds.), *Gender and the Labour Process*, Aldershot: Gower.
- H. Braverman, (1974) *Labour and Monopoly Capital: the Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- I. Brooke, (1972) *Footwear, a Short History of European and American Shoes*, London: Pitman.
- K. Brooker, (1980) 'The Northampton Shoemakers' Reaction to Industrialisation: Some Thoughts', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. VI No. 3, pp. 151-159.

- K. Brooker, (1981/2) 'James Gribble and the Raunds Strike of 1905', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. 6, No. 5, pp. 275-290.
- E. Brunner, (1949) 'The Origins of Industrial Peace: The Case of the British Boot and Shoe Industry', *Oxford Economic Papers*, 1, pp. 247-259.
- W. Bush, (1957) 'A Family of Shoemakers and Musicians: The Billingshams of Kislingbury', *Northamptonshire Past and Present* 2, pp. 23-29.
- C. Calver, (1912) 'The Boot and Shoe Trade', S. Webb and A. Freeman (eds.), *Seasonal Trades*, London: Constable and Co.
- L. Charles and L. Duffin (Eds.), (1985) *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, London: Croom Helm.
- R. Church (Ed.), (1980) *The Dynamics of Victorian Business: Problems and Perspectives to the 1870s*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
- R. Church, (1970) 'Labour Supply and Innovation 1800-1860: The Boot and Shoe Industry', *Business History*, No. 12, pp. 25-45.
- R. Church, (1966) 'Messrs Gotch and Sons and the Rise of the Kettering Footwear Industry', *Business History*, Vol VIII, pp. 140-149.
- C. Goldin, 'The Historical Evolution of Female Earnings Functions and Occupations', *Explorations in Economic History*, 21, 1984, pp. 1-27.
- J.H. Clapham, (1963) *An Economic History of Modern Britain: Free Trade and Steel 1850-1886*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- A. Clark, (1969) *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, London: Frank Cass and Co.
- G. Clark, 'Factory Discipline', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol.54, No.1, March 1994, pp. 128-163.
- L. Clarkson, (1960) 'The organisation of the English leather industry in the late sixteenth and seventeenth century', *Economic History Review*, 13, pp. 245-255.
- L. Clarkson, (1966) 'the Leather Crafts in Tudor and Stuart England', *The Agricultural History Review*, No. 14, pp. 25-39.
- C. Cockburn, (1983) *Brothers - Male Dominance and Technological Change*, London: Pluto.

- C. Cockburn, (1985) *Machinery of Dominance. Women, Men and Technical Know-how*, London: Pluto.
- C. Cockburn and S. Ormrod, (1993) *Gender and Technology in the Making*, London: Sage Publications.
- N. Crafts, (1985) *British Economic Growth During the Industrial Revolution*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- P. Dare, (1928) 'Medieval shoemakers and tanners of Leicester, Northampton and Nottingham', *Reports and Papers of the Associated Architectural Societies*, 39,1, pp. 37-46.
- L. Davidoff and C. Hall, (1987) *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class*, London: Hutchinson Education.
- H.B. Davis, (1940) *Shoes, The Workers and The Industry*, New York: International Publishers.
- J. Davis, (1989) 'Prosecutions and their Context: The Use of Criminal Law in Later Nineteenth-Century London', in D. Hay and F. Snyder (Eds.), *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850*, Oxford:
- J.T. Day, (1979) 'The Boot and Shoe Trade', in M. Berg, (Ed.), *Technology and Toil in Nineteenth Century Britain*, London: C.S.E. Books.
- M. Dickie, (1993-4) 'Northampton's Working-class Home Owners', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, 8, 65-72.
- B. Dobbs, (1972) *The Last Shall be First: The Colourful Story of John Lobb and the St James's Bookmakers*, London: Elm Tree Books.
- P.S. Doughty, (1973) 'Boots and Shoes', *Transactions of the Museum Assistants' Group*, 12, pp. 5-9.
- M. Drewery, (1978) *William Carey: Shoemaker and Missionary*, London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- W. Faulkner and E. Arnold, (Eds.), (1985) *Smothered by Invention: Technology in Women's Lives*, London: Pluto.
- J. Foster, (1968) 'Nineteenth Century Towns: A Class Dimension' in H.J. Dyos (ed.), *The Study of Urban History*, London: Arnold.
- J. Foster, (1974) *Class Struggle and the Industrial Revolution: Early Industrial Capitalism in Three English Towns*, London: Methuen.

- E. Fox-Genovese (1982) 'Placing Women's History in History', *New Left Review*, No. 133, pp. 5-29.
- E. Fowler, (1962) *J. Buckingham & Sons (Norwich) Ltd.: A Hundred Years in the Shoe Trade, 1862-1962*, Norwich: Buckingham and Sons.
- A. Fox, (1958) *A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives 1874-1957*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- A. Game and R. Pringle, (1983) *Gender at Work*, Sydney: George Allen and Unwin.
- J.F.B. Goodman et al, (1977) *Rule-making and Industrial Peace: Industrial Relations in the Footwear Industry*, London: Croom Helm.
- A. Granger, 'History of the shoe industry in Leicester 1750-1950', *Journal of the British Boot and Shoe Institute*, March, pp. 19-27.
- R.L. Greenall, (1977) 'The History of Boot and Shoemaking at Long Buckby', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. 5, No. 5, pp. 437-455.
- D. Haraway, (1985) 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s', *Socialist Review*, 80, pp. 65-107.
- H. Hartmann, (1979) 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union' *Capital and Class*, pp. 1-33.
- V. Hatley, (1966/7) '"Monsters in Campbell Square!" The Early History of Two Industrial Premises in Northampton', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol.4, No.1, pp. 51-59.
- V.A. Hatley, (1965-6) 'Some Aspects of Northampton's History, 1815-51' *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. 3, No. 6, pp. 243-253.
- V. Hatley and J. Rajczonek, (1971) 'Shoemakers in Northamptonshire 1762-1911: A Statistical Survey', *Northampton Historical Series*, No.6, Northampton: Northampton Historical Series.
- M.J. Haynes (1977) 'Class and Class Conflict in the Early Nineteenth Century: Northampton Shoemakers and the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union', *Literature and History*, No. 5, pp. 73-94.
- B. Hazard, (1921), *The Organisation of the Boot and Shoe Industry in Massachusetts before 1875*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- P. Head, (1968) 'Boots and Shoes', in D.H. Aldcroft (ed.), *The Development of British Industry and Foreign competition 1875-1914*, London: George Allen and Unwin.

- E. Hobsbawm and J. Scott, (1980) 'Political Shoemakers', *Past and Present*, No. 89, pp. 86-114.
- V.W. Hogg, (1958) 'Footwear Production', *Victoria County History of Leicestershire*, IV, Oxford: O.U.P.
- K. Holmes, (1992) *Two Centuries of Shoemaking: Start-rite 1792-1992*, Norwich: Start-rite.
- P. Horn (1985/6) 'Child Workers in the Victorian Countryside: The Case of Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. 7, No. 3, pp. 173-185.
- W.G. Hoskins, (1956) 'Provincial Towns in the Sixteenth Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6, pp. 1-20.
- K. Hudson, (1968) *Towards Precision Shoemaking: C & J Clark Limited and the Development of the British Shoe Industry*, Newton Abbot: David and Charles.
- J. Humphries, (1977) 'Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working Class Family', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 1, pp. 241-258.
- A. John, (1986) *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- B. Lancaster, (1987) *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester Working-class Politics 1860-1906*, Leicester: L.U.P.
- J. Lawrence, (1993) 'Class and Gender in the Making of Urban Toryism, 1880-1914' *English Historical Review*, 108, pp. 629-653.
- J.A. Mangan, (1981) *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- S. Marglin, (1974) 'What Do Bosses Do? The Origins of Hierarchy in Capitalist Production', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, No. 6, pp. 60-112.
- A. Marshall, (1970 edn.) *Industry and Trade*, New York: Kelley.
- K. Marx, (1988) *Capital* Vol. 1, London: Penguin.
- K. McClelland, (1989) 'Some Thoughts on Masculinity and the "Representative Artisan" in Britain 1850-1880', *Gender and History*, 1 (2) pp. 164-177.
- J. Mitchell and A. Oakley (Eds.), (1976), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

- J. Mokyr, (1993) *The British Industrial Revolution An Economic Perspective*, Oxford: Westview Press.
- P.R. Mounfield, D.J. Unwin and K. Guy, (1982) *Processes of Change in the Footwear Industry of the East Midlands*, Leicester: L.U.P.
- P.R. Mounfield, (1967) 'The footwear industry of the East Midlands - (II) Northamptonshire from Medieval Times to 1700, *East Midlands Geographer*, 4, pp. 394-413.
- P. R. Mounfield, (1967) 'The footwear industry of the East Midlands (II) and (III) - Northamptonshire', *East Midlands Geographer*, pp. 434-453.
- R. Mudie-Smith, (1980) *Sweated Industries: A Handbook of the "Daily News" Exhibition*, London: Garland.
- L. Mumford, (1966) 'Technics and the Nature of Man', *Technology and Culture*, 7, pp. 303-17.
- J.M. Neeson, (1993) *Commoners: Common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820*, Cambridge: C.U.P.
- L.J. Nicholson, (1986) *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Northampton Borough Council, (1988) *Northampton Remembers Boot and Shoe*, Northampton: Northampton Borough Council.
- K. Offen, (1988) '"Powered by a Woman's Foot:" A Documentary Introduction to the Sexual Politics of the Sewing Machine in Nineteenth-Century France', *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. II No. 2. pp. 93-101.
- N.G. Osterud, (1986) 'Gender Divisions in the Leicester Hosiery Industry' in A.V. John (ed.), *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England 1800-1918*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- C. Pateman, and E. Gross (eds.), (1986) *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- A. Phillips and B. Taylor, (1980) 'Sex and Skill: notes towards a feminist economics', *Feminist Review*, 6, pp. 79-88.
- J.H. Porter, (1968/9) 'The Northampton Arbitration Board and the Shoe Industry Dispute of 1887', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 149-154.

- J.H. Porter, (1979) 'The Northampton Boot and Shoe Arbitration Board Before 1914', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, Vol. 6, No.2, pp. 93-99.
- E.L. Poulton, (1924) *Fifty Years: The History of NUBSO 1874-1924*, London: NUBSO.
- E.R. Richards, (1953) *Shoemakers: A Study of Goodwill in Industry*, London: Allen and Unwin.
- W. Rimmer, (1957-61) 'Leeds Leather Industry in the Nineteenth Century', *Thoresby Society*, 46, Miscellany, 13.
- S.G. Roberts and L.A. Ritchie, (1990) 'Records of British Business and Industry, 1760-1914: Textiles and Leather' *Textile History*, 21, pp. 245-249.
- M. Roper and J. Tosh (eds)., (1991) *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, London: Routledge.
- M. Rosaldo, (1974) 'Women, Culture and Society; a Theoretical Overview', in M. Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere (Eds), *Women, Culture and Society*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- S. Rose, (1992) *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England*, Berkeley: California University Press.
- S.O. Rose, (1988) 'Proto-Industry, Women's Work and the Household Economy in the Transition to Industrial Capitalism', *Journal of Family History*, 13 (2), pp. 181-193.
- S. Rowbotham, (1980) *Beyond the Fragments - Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, London: Merlin Press.
- C.E. Russett, (1989) *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- R. Samuel, (1991) 'Reading the Signs', *History Workshop Journal* (32) pp. 88-109.
- C. P. Sargent, (1938) 'Physical Factors Affecting Localisation of the Boot and Shoe Trade in England', *Geography*, 23, pp. 250-258.
- L. Sargent (Ed.), (1981) *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: A Debate on Class and Patriarchy*, London: Pluto.
- P. Sargent Florence, (1961 2nd ed.) *The Logic of British and American Industry*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

- J. Schmielechen, (1984) *Sweated Industries and Sweated Labour: The Clothing Trades 1860-1914*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- J.W. Scott, (1988) *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- W. Seccombe, (1986) 'Patriarchy Stabilised: The Construction of the Male Breadwinner Wage Norm in Nineteenth-century Britain', *Social History*, 2, pp. 53-76.
- R. Silverstone and E. Hirsch (Eds.), (1992) *Consuming Technologies*, London: Routledge.
- J. Simmons, (1974) *Leicester Past and Present*, London: Methuen.
- W. Smith, (1968) *An Historical Introduction to the Economic Geography of Great Britain*, London: G. Bell and Sons.
- K. Sokoloff, (1984) 'Was the Transition from the Artisanal Shop to the Non-mechanised Factory Associated with Gains in Efficiency? Evidence for the US Manufacturing Censuses of 1820 and 1850', *Explorations in Economic History* 21, pp. 351-382.
- G.B. Sutton, (1979) *A History of Shoemaking in Street, Somerset: C. and J. Clark 1833-1903*, York: William Sessions.
- J. Swann, (1986) *Shoemaking*, Haverford West: Shire Publications.
- J. Swann, and J.H. Thornton, (1986) *A Glossary of Shoe Terms*, Northampton: Central Museum.
- J.M Swann, (1969-70) 'A Sequel to the Shoe Industry Dispute of 1887', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, (4), 4. pp. 247-8.
- K. Thompson, (1989), 'Apprenticeship and the Poor Law: A Leicester Example', *Local Historian*, 19, pp. 51-55.
- G. Thorn, (1988) 'London Bootmakers and the New Unionism', *London Journal*, 13, pp. 17-28.
- R. Tong, (1989) *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, London: Unwin Hyman.
- J. Tosh, (1994) 'What Should Historians do with Masculinity: Reflections on Nineteenth Century Britain', *History Workshop*, 38, pp. 179-202.

A.P. Usher, (1921) *Introduction to the Industrial History of England*, London: G. Harrap and Co. Ltd.

Victoria County History of Northampton: Volume Two (1906), Oxford: O.U.P.

J. de Vries, (1994) 'The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol.54, No.2, pp. 249-270.

R.G. Waddington, (1931) *Leicester: The Making of a Modern City*, Leicester: Joshua, Wykes & Paine.

J. Wajcman, (1991) *Feminism Confronts Technology*, Oxford: Polity Press.

S. Walby, (1990) *Theorising Patriarchy*, Oxford: Blackwell.

E. Willis, (ed.), (1988) *Technology and the Labour Process: Australasian Case Studies*, Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

E. Wilson, (1966) *A History of Shoe Fashions*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Unpublished theses

H. Bradley, 'Degradation and Resegmentation: Social and Technological Change in the East Midlands Hosiery Industry', University of Durham PhD, 1987

P. Cronkshaw, 'A History of the Boot, Shoe and Slipper Industries in Rossendale', University of Manchester MA, 1945

G.R. Desborough, 'UK Footwear Industry: A Study of Decline 1965-1980': Unpublished 1982. Unpublished University of Portsmouth Economics Project.

William Griffen, 'The Northampton Boot and Shoe Industry and its Significance for Social Change in the Borough from 1800-1914', University of Cardiff MA, 1968

P. Head, 'Industrial Organisation in Leicester 1844-1914: a study in Changing Technology, Innovations and Conditions of Employment', University of Leicester PhD, 1961

R.L. Jones, 'The Sociological Context of Trade Union Activity in the East Midlands Boot and Shoe Industry in the Late Victorian Era', University of Loughborough M.Sc, 1969

- A.D. Little, 'Mid-Victorian Working-class Politics in Leicestershire', University of Manchester PhD
- J. Morris, 'The "Sweated Traders": Women Workers and the Trade Boards Act of 1909, an Exercise in Social Control' University of London PhD, 1982
- P. R. Mounfield, 'The Location of Footwear Manufacture in England and Wales', University of Nottingham PhD, 1962
- C. P. Sargent, 'A Geographical Study of the Boot and Shoe Trade of England', University of London M.Sc, 1931
- G. Thorn, 'The Politics of Trade Unionism in a Sweated Industry: Boot and Shoemakers in the Late Nineteenth Century', University of Warwick PhD, 1983.
- L.E. Warner, 'Devolution in Industry: An Enquiry into the Scale of Production in the Boot and Shoe Industry', University of Birmingham B. Comm, 1925