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THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

THE ENGLISH PILLOW LACE INDUSTRY: A STUDY
OF A RURAL INDUSTRY IN COMPETITION
DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

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by

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SUMMARY

This thesis attempts to give substance to research in an oft-neglected area of Britain's economy by studying, in depth, one of the numerous rural industries which existed in England as it passed through its industrial revolution, and beyond. The pictorial map drawn by Augustus Petermann to accompany the 1851 Census of Population gives a vivid indication of the preponderance of rural industries in the middle of the century. The pillow lace industry was one of the oldest of these, having been born late in the sixteenth century, and in the event it was one of the last to survive, for it was not until the twentieth century that it finally succumbed to the rigours of competition with machinery, and disappeared.

The machine industry had been in existence since the end of the eighteenth century and from the mid 1840s had been producing an enormous output of almost perfect imitations of hand-made lace, yet at a much lower price. How had the pillow lace industry survived for so long? The problem is compounded by the added competition of hand-made laces produced overseas, most notably in France and Belgium, where the industry was not only organized on a larger scale than its English counterpart, but was probably more skilled and more flexible in its response to machine competition. Imports of hand-made lace into England reached a peak during the 1850s and 60s, precisely at the time that the machine industry was reaching new heights of technical and organizational perfection.

An examination of the pillow lace industry's response to these pressures, the major theme of this thesis, falls readily into a number of sections. By the nineteenth century the industry had existed for

approximately 200 years and had a well-established structure and organization on which its responses, by and large, were based. The thesis therefore begins by placing the industry in its historical context, tracing the industry's history from its origins to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Before a consideration of the industry's response to its competitors can be undertaken the nature of these competitors must first be defined. What were the strengths and weaknesses of rival hand and machine producers? How were they organized and on what scale? What kinds of fabric did they produce and how and where were they marketed? And how did the growth of the machine industry affect the production of hand-made lace overseas and this, in its turn, the hand producers of England?

The pillow lace industry's structure and organization were the bases on which its competitive ability ultimately rested. The quality, variety and price of the industry's output, its ability to reach a variety of market outlets, not only at home but also overseas, were among the major determinants of its competitive capacity. Who ran the pillow lace industry and who were its workers? What, if any, were the organizational problems in bringing the various components of the industry's structure together in a putting out system? How was the lace made and how was it channelled to its market outlets, and how prompt was delivery? The answers to these questions, when viewed in the industry's competitive, and historical context, go a good way towards explaining the industry's survival into the nineteenth century. Part IV draws the various elements together and attempts such an explanation.

To discover the human aspects of how workers and employers felt

and behaved is essential if the true perspective of industrial history is to be obtained. This is the thesis' final task. Workers and employers in this kind of industry are notorious for not leaving private records. For this reason, as elsewhere, the thesis rests on parliamentary records and contemporary histories and to a lesser degree on accounts in contemporary newspapers and periodicals. Yet these provide a wealth of material, enabling the writer to draw up a picture of the workers' health and working conditions and of how the industry's workers said they felt about their existence and the effects which the industry's problems was having upon it. The thesis concludes with an examination of the industry's final thirty years, during which its organization fell substantially into the hands of philanthropic bodies. Partly as a result, the industry did not disappear until the 1930s, over 120 years after the advent of John Heathcoat's lace machine.

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Map 4 Location of the Pillow Lace Industry in Devon. c.1850.

List of Abbreviations commonly used in the text

Agric. Hist. Rev.

Agricultural History Review

Beds. C.R.O.

Bedfordshire County Record Office

Bucks. C.R.O.

Buckinghamshire County Record Office

Devon C.R.O.

Devonshire County Record Office

Ec. Hist. Rev.

Economic History Review

H. of C.J.

House of Commons Journal

H. of L.J.

House of Lords Journal

Trans. Beds. Hist.
Rec. Soc.

Transactions of the Bedfordshire Historical
Record Society.

Trans. Dev. Assn. Sc.,
Lit. & Art.

Transactions of the Devonshire Association for
the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art.

Glossary of Lacemaking Terminology used in this thesis

<u>baby lace</u>	-	round-shaped insertions for baby's caps. narrow edgings.
<u>borders/edgings</u>	-	narrow laces
<u>brides</u>	-	joining bars
<u>fond</u>	-	groundwork
<u>flounce</u>	-	continuous strip of lace
<u>gimp</u>	-	thick thread outlining areas of the pattern
<u>guipure</u>	-	laces in which the motifs of the pattern are joined up by connecting bars without a net background.
<u>insertions</u>	-	straight edged strips intended to be inserted into or to join other material.
<u>le trace</u>	-	outlining threads
<u>picots</u>	-	small loops and knots in the pattern, often in the form of rosettes.
<u>plaits</u>	-	small dots sprinkled in the pattern
<u>réseaux</u>	-	net ground
<u>toilé</u>	-	plaited lines, solid woven areas
<u>torchon</u>	-	a simple lace in which elementary geometric patterns are worked against a course net ground.

CHAPTER I*

The Industry's Origins

Since time immemorial man has concerned himself, often to the point of distraction, to improve what he evidently regards as the natural deficiencies of his appearance. He has adorned himself with trappings and trivia of various kinds, to attract those whose attention he has desired. Of such substance is the fabric lace; an essentially decorative product, its sole purpose is to adorn, its existence depends entirely upon man's vanity.

In its modern form lace was essentially a product of the Renaissance, with its emphasis on beauty and form. But its precursors reach back to a much earlier period, for looped networks, the simplest of the ornamental openwork fabrics of which lace is the hybrid form, were first used in the time of the ancient Egyptians. Robes of State trimmed around the hem in patterns of a looped network of gold and silver are depicted on the walls of the tombs of the Pharaohs and women networkers are shown in the paintings of the Egyptian sarcophagi.¹ From Egypt the practice of looping threads by needle seems to have spread into the surrounding areas of Mediterranean civilization. The craftswomen in Israel at the time of Isiaah and those in Greece and Rome were experts in the technique.² Homer refers frequently to Greek networkers, whilst examples of Roman netting were often to be seen on the gowns of wealthy Roman ladies and

* A shortened version of this chapter has been published. See G.F.R. Spenceley 'The Origins of the English Pillow Lace Industry', Agric. Hist. Review, XXI, 1973, pp. 81-93.

1 Mrs. B. Palliser, A History of Lace. Revised by M. Jourdain and A. Dryden, (1901), p. 2.

2 Mrs. E.N. Jackson, A History of Hand-Made Lace (1900), p. 4.

have been found in their tombs.¹

The expansion of the Roman Empire saw the art of networking subsequently spread north and west into the rest of Europe and not least to England. Here a piece of gold network found among the remains of a Scandinavian barrow near Whareham in Dorset gives evidence of the continuing existence of the fabric in Britain in the Dark Ages.² By the Anglo-Saxon period the technique of working threads into elaborate textures had been advanced a major step, to embroidery.³ Royal and noble ladies, and nuns, now spent their spare hours plying their needles expertly, yet leisurely, for the adornment of their own costumes and of the regalia of the church. By the end of the thirteenth century the expertise of English ladies had advanced to such a degree that their embroidery was said to be unsurpassed.⁴

In England, and on the continent, a number of precursors of modern lace alternated in popularity according to changes in fashion, until modern lace finally emerged as a fashionable fabric in the sixteenth century. A variation of traditional embroidery, called cutwork after the process of its construction, was created during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Using a needle, the worker crossed and inter-laced a network of threads around open threads which had been created by the removal of selected threads from a cloth base. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries cutwork was in vogue, trimming numerous garments,

1 W. Felkin, A History of Machine-Wrought Lace and Hosiery (Centenary ed., 1967), pp. 124-5.

2 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

3 The art of ornamenting needlework into a cloth background. For technical details see 'Embroidery', Encyclopaedia Britannica, 8 (14th ed., 1970), pp. 310-16.

4 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 6. See also 'Lace' Encyclopaedia Britannica, *op.cit.*, 13, p. 564.

especially shirts and smocks, sometimes with great extravagance.¹ Its popularity was rivalled intermittently by purl, a fabric which had been developed during the thirteenth century and was produced by the worker using her fingers as pegs so as to plait gold and silver threads into narrow, ornamental looped edgings.² As tastes changed frequently purl and cutwork had always to compete with traditional embroidery, and by the early part of the sixteenth century this had come into dominance once more. Men's shirts were now pinched and plaited with it, and handkerchiefs, sheets and pillow cases were swamped in numerous colours and designs.³ Yet fashion was a capricious mistress. In the middle of the sixteenth century embroidery was again replaced in popularity by cutwork only for this, in turn, to be superceded by the relatively new decoration which was lace.

The new fabric, an ornamental, openwork material produced by twisting and interlacing threads to form a pattern, was more complex and fine than the network and embroidery which preceded it and effectively combined features of both. It was a fine and delicate product and could be made either by needle, in which case it was called needlepoint, or by twisting threads with bobbins over a pillow, in which case it was called pillow or bobbin lace. Both types of lace seem to have originated late in the fifteenth century, though it is generally accepted that needlepoint, a sophistication of drawn thread work and cutwork, both of which had been practiced in Italy for three or four centuries, was developed first.

1 'Cut werke was greate both in courte and townes. Both in menes hoddess and also in their gownes.' Hardyng's Chronicle (c.1470), as quoted in B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 15. See also Encyclopaedia Britannica, loc.cit.

2 *ibid.*, p. 20.

3 *ibid.*, p. 16.

Over the years, increasing quantities of the fabric base in cut-work had been discarded until, eventually, it had become possible to create a complete fabric by using needle and thread alone. Some late fifteenth century Italian paintings show elaborate hemstitching and narrow lacelike insertions at the seams of linen garments and cushions and are the first pictorial evidence of developments in this direction.¹ The name for this new technique, 'punto in aria', (stitch in the air), has been found on the title page of a pattern book published in Italy in 1554,² by which time needlepoint lace was being produced commercially, and privately, in Venice and Florence.³ The new lace embodied all the artistic ideals of the Renaissance, with clear and symmetrical patterns which were sharply defined from their background and frame. The fabric was produced on a pricked parchment pattern which was stitched onto two thicknesses of strong material and was worked throughout with a needle, in a close-stitched network freely ornamented with 'picots', decorative knots or rosettes. An outlining thread stitched onto the pattern and underlying material served as a supporting framework, but at no other stage did the needle penetrate the backing. When the work was finished a knife was passed between the two pieces of material and the supporting threads and the lace was lifted clear. Moris Dreger, the art historian, called the fabric the Renaissance's 'truest child'.⁴

Pillow lacemaking emerged, meanwhile, in Italy and Flanders, also partly on a commercial basis, and it was soon to be established in such a way in England. It developed as a sophistication of purl and embroidery,

1 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 14.

2 Encyclopaedia Britannica, *op.cit.*, 13, p. 571.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 45-7.

4 Quoted in Encyclopaedia Britannica, *loc.cit.*

embodying many of the looped stitches of the latter and in the process of its construction substituting bobbins for the fingers used in producing the former. By using bobbins instead of fingers, the worker substantially increased the number of threads that could be used and thus enhanced the possibilities of making more complex and light patterns. Each of the threads was attached to a bobbin. A pattern was pricked onto a parchment and the parchment was pinned onto a hard, stuffed pillow. The fabric then emerged as the threads were moved from side to side to form twists and crosses around pins which had been placed into the holes of the pattern.¹ Pillow lace was ultimately to lend itself to considerable variation in texture and design, but the fabric nevertheless was always to be composed essentially of two basic styles, one of which was 'straight lace' which had regular sides and was made on a stationary pillow, the other, 'free lace', which was made on a movable pillow and had curved and flowing patterns.

The earliest pillow laces shown in pattern books were mostly small insertions and edgings, and contrasted sharply with the foliated artistic scrolls which, early in the sixteenth century, were being produced by needleworkers. In these early years, needlepoint developed more rapidly than pillow lacemaking, both commercially and as a domestic accomplishment, possibly because of early difficulties in handling so many bobbins on the pillow. From Venice and Florence the practice of needlepoint spread to other Italian cities and then elsewhere into western Europe, where it was practiced by ladies of the aristocracy and nuns.² But the finest needlepoint laces continued to come from Italy, particularly Venice and Florence, and it was from these centres that increasing quantities were

1 For further details of the production process see below, pp. 208-210.

2 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 47-63.

brought into England by Venetian galleys during the reign of Henry VI.¹

During the early years of the sixteenth century the quality of pillow lace was steadily improved as geometric designs were added to the more simply patterned edgings and flax threads gradually replaced metallic threads of gold and silver, giving the fabric a light, lissom appearance. Pillow lace was increasing in popularity and because it lent itself to greater variation in design, now began to show signs of stronger commercial development than needlepoint. This was particularly so in Flanders where pillow lacemaking was ultimately to reach its finest expression.² By the middle of the century pillow laces, and particularly those made in Flanders, had come to be regarded not only as fabrics of the utmost luxury, but also as important articles of international commerce. In England, where as yet there was no commercial production of lace, the demand for foreign laces of all kinds increased greatly during the mid-sixteenth century, reaching a new peak in the reign of Henry VIII.³ As yet there had been no serious attempt to limit imports; there was no local industry to protect and the revenue to be derived from taxing this relatively small section of England's import bill was not great.⁴ The demand for foreign laces continued to increase, stimulated by the increasing extravagance in clothing which was developing under the influence of Italian fashion. It

1 *ibid.*, pp. 288-9.

2 For details see below, pp. 134-149.

3 Henry was extravagant in his use of lace and frequently adorned himself with gold and silver needlepoint laces from Venice and with pillow laces from Flanders. B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 295.

4 A sumptuary law had been passed by Henry VII in 1504, limiting the import of silk laces. *ibid.*, p.296. But by this time it was ignored. It was not until the mid-century that the government began to intervene in commercial affairs with any great seriousness. See F.J. Fisher, 'Commercial trends and Policy in 16th century England', Econ. Hist. Review, X, 1939-40, pp. 102-4; L. Stone, 'Elizabethan Overseas Trade', Econ. Hist. Review, II, 1949, pp. 48-49.

was a fashion-conscious age and lace-making benefitted greatly as a result. The second half of the century saw Flanders pillow lace become a popular article with the English upper classes. Pillow lace appeared prominently in church inventories and Royal wardrobe accounts¹ and was becoming so fashionable that when Sir Digby Wyatt went to his execution in 1554, he somehow felt that the dignity of his soon-to-be severed head would be enhanced by the wearing of a 'fine hat of velvet, with broad bonework lace about it'.²

From the mid-sixteenth century onwards commercial policies took on a new restrictionist phase, as the Elizabethan government tried to turn England's now adverse balance of trade, once more in its favour. Luxury goods were particularly frowned upon by government officials as they began to prune the import list, for these had been increasing.³ In 1563 an Act proclaimed a general prohibition on foreign haberdashery, including lace.⁴ Yet the government proved unable to stem 'the irresistible demand of a recklessly wasteful society'⁵ for more and more products of this kind. Lace handkerchiefs, cuffs, collars, christening shirts, aprons and, as the century moved towards its end, the high starched muffs popularized earlier by Philip of Spain, continued to be imported on an increasing

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- 1 In 1556 Queen Mary received a 'fair smock of white work, Flanders making' as a New Year's gift. B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 297. The Royal Wardrobe Accounts are deposited in the P.R.O. and extend from 1558 to 1781 and comprise 160 volumes, written in Latin until 1730. The Accounts contain numerous references to pillow lace between 1558-1650. See B. Palliser, Ch. X, *passim*.
 - 2 At this time pillow lace was often known as 'bonework' supposedly because of the bones which were used as lace bobbins, or sometimes as pins. *ibid.*, p.59. See also A.P. Moody, Devon Pillow Lace (1907) pp. 100-101. The brass pins which were eventually used in pillow lacemaking did not come into production until the mid seventeenth century. Encyclopaedia Britannica, *op.cit.*, 13, p. 571.
 - 3 L. Stone, *loc.cit.*, pp. 43-44.
 - 4 5 Eliz. C7, quoted in F.J. Fisher, *loc.cit.*, p. 108. See also, E. Lipson, The Economic History of England, IV, 6th edition (1956) p. 14.
 - 5 L. Stone, *loc.cit.*, p. 43.

scale.¹

By the end of the century an established market for foreign pillow laces existed in England, especially in London. Lace was in vogue. 'Our English dames', said Sir Francis Bacon in 1590, 'are much given to the wearing of costly laces, and if brought from Italy, France or Flanders, are in much esteem'.² But both sexes were then fond of fancy clothing and the demand for lace by men was particularly intense in London where the growing middle class population was inflated regularly by hordes of country gentlemen settling in the metropolis for the season.³ The premium of these people was very much on finery, as Ben Jonson explained:

First, to be an accomplished gentleman - that is - a gentleman of the time - you must give over housekeeping in the country and live together in the city amongst gallants where at your just appearance twere good you turned four or five acres of your best land into two or three trunks of apparell.⁴

The fashionable mode, however, was constantly the subject of change. The established style of ruff had found new competition by the end of the century in the falling ruff, which sloped down to the shoulders from a high neckband. Yet, in their turn, both ruffs could be replaced by the standing band, a semi-circular collar, edged with lace, round at the back, high in the neck and with straight front edges tied under the chin with a string. The falling band, a wide lace-edged collar cascading down on the

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- 1 Mrs. Palliser put the import figure at £10,000 in 1563 and claimed it increased thereafter. *op.cit.*, p. 30. See also James Laver, Costume (1963) pp. 45, 55-6.
 - 2 As quoted in E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 32.
 - 3 F.J. Fisher, 'The Development of London as a Centre of Conspicuous Consumption in the sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries', Trans. Royal Historical Society. 4th Series, XXX (1948), pp. 37-51.
 - 4 C. Knight, London, I (1841), quoting Johnson. As quoted in F.J. Fisher, *loc.cit.*, p. 46.

shoulders, was also finding increasing popularity.¹ Lace was often worn at the wrists in the form of hand ruffs (later called ruffles), echoing the form and decoration of the ruff worn around the neck and might also be found edging the tops of high boots. At times it appeared in extravagant combination, as ruffs and falling collars were worn together. The fabric dominated the fashion of the age.²

It was against this background of increasing domestic demand that, towards the end of the sixteenth century, pillow lacemaking first appeared in England both as a domestic handicraft and as a commercial concern. Local records and traveller's accounts both point towards the industry's inception during the century's final twenty years, though the exact timing of an industry's establishment can seldom be defined with certainty. References to pillow lace being made privately emerge before 1600. In 1595 Philip Henslow, a London businessman, apprenticed his niece to John Grygs of London, 'to learne all manner of workes, to make bone lace and to knit'³ and this is the first recorded reference to pillow lacemaking in England. At this time pillow lacemaking was spreading among ladies of the English upper classes as an alternative pastime to the various aspects of needlework, and not only in London. In Bedford, the wife of Henry Whittaker, master of the Free School, made pillow lace prior to her death in 1601⁴ and at Ampthill, in Bedfordshire, Ann Smithson provided in her will in 1615 that her six year old daughter be brought up in the charge of Francis Cooper, victualler, for three years 'at her book and needle, and for three years thereafter to make bone lace and to

1 E.N. Jackson, op.cit., pp. 26-7.

2 *ibid.*

3 Henslow's Diary, I. ed. W.W. Greg, (1904), p. 192.

4 Beds. C.R.O. ABP/W. 1601-21.

knytt'.¹

Whilst needlepoint continued to grow as a pastime for wealthy ladies, pillow lacemaking expanded in other directions. It was now being introduced to the poorest children in a number of rural counties. In 1596, at Eaton Socon, in the north-eastern corner of Bedfordshire, the local Poor Law authorities were employing the pauper children of their parish at the lace pillow and recorded passing on their products to a merchant for sale. The Eaton Socon Overseers' Accounts show the authorities had agreed:

The payments of ijd the weeke to the woman that teacheth the pore children to worck bone lace ... And every child thus worckinge shall weekly be paid from the gaine of Mr. Beverley his stock so much as they shal earne by their worckinge; and such pore as doe not send their children being able to worck shall receive no relief from the collection.²

During the first half of the seventeenth century similar references appeared frequently in the records of several parishes in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire³ as local overseers implemented the Poor Law Act of 1576 which ordered overseers to provide raw materials of various kinds,

1 *ibid.*, ABP/W. 1615-47.

2 *Beds. C.R.O. Guide*. pl. VI., as quoted in Joyce Godber, *History of Bedfordshire* (1969), p. 209.

3 At Woburn in Bedfordshire, the Poor Law Accounts for the two years ending Easter 1618 show:

Pd. for teaching children to make lace	5s.
Pd. for teaching ye children	7s. 6d.
Pd. more for teaching ye poore children	3s.

Similar payments were made at Kempston, Podington and Pavenham in Bedfordshire and High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire. *Beds. C.R.O.* P60/12; P68/14. L.J. Ashford, *The History of the Borough of High Wycombe from its origins to 1880* (1960), pp. 150-1.

so as to make the increasing number of pauper children self-supporting.¹ In this way, rural poverty and the government's desire to maintain order and security by employing the poor helped in a minor way to encourage the parallel evolution of a pillow lace industry. For by the 1620's pillow lacemaking was being soundly established on a commercial basis in both counties, and some of these children were no doubt being employed in the industry, for child labour was characteristic of the industry from its earliest days. /

Considerable commercial development had taken place in the north-east of Buckinghamshire by 1611. In that year two pillow lace dealers from Newport Pagnell were brought before the Ecclesiastical Court for 'continually travelling with consignments of lace to London on the Sabbath day'.² Shortly afterwards, the industry had also appeared at Stony Stratford, where in 1638 William Stopp was putting out lacemaking materials to the women and children of the surrounding villages.³ In Buckingham, Peter Reynolds and John Rennals, two lace dealers, were both issuing trade tokens in the 1660's.⁴ By the end of the century there were over 200 lace dealers in this county,⁵ with Olney, where pillow lacemaking was well established by the middle of the century,⁶ rivalling

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- 1 For details of this legislation, codified with other aspects of Tudor Poor Law policy in 1601, see E. Lipson, *op.cit.*, pp. 410-434, and F.P. Ramsey, Tudor Economic Problems (1963) pp. 146-159. For further discussion of poverty among pillow lacemakers see below pp. 370-85; 409-16.
 - 2 Bishop's Visitations, 1611-12, quoted in C. Freeman, Pillow Lace in the East Midlands (1964), p. 15.
 - 3 *ibid.*
 - 4 J.O. Manton and E. Hollis, Buckinghamshire Trade Tokens Issued in the Seventeenth Century (1933), pp. 37-8.
 - 5 H. of C.J. XIII, 6 March 1699.
 - 6 T. Fuller, Worthies of England, I (1662), p. 128, James Brierley, a lace dealer, was appointed Attorney at Olney in 1650. Beds. C.R.O. G.A. 1828.

Newport Pagnell as the industry's most famous centre.

Similar, if less pronounced development had also taken place in the south of Buckinghamshire. In 1623, a year of general trade depression,¹ the industry was sufficiently entrenched in High Wycombe for the mayor to complain that:

Wee finde that by reason of the trades of clotheing and Bone Lace makeinge are much decayed and doe daylie fayle, the poore are greatlie hindered and impoverished and grown into such multitudes that wee knowe not measures to set then on worke.²

In subsequent years the industry's hold in this county gradually expanded both in the north-east, in the villages surrounding Newport Pagnell and Stony Stratford, and also in the south and west. By the century's end laces were also being put out from High Wycombe and Great Marlow to workers in Weston Turville and Holton, villages in the neighbouring Chiltern Hills, while Aylesbury had emerged as an important centre in the county's central region, serving villages on the borders between Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.³

The first half of the seventeenth century had also seen the industry take hold in the north-western areas of Bedfordshire, close to its location in Buckinghamshire. It seems to have appeared first in villages on the banks of the River Ouse where William Rose, a 'bone lacemaker', was buried at Bromham near Bedford in 1616.⁴ Richard King, of neighbouring Eversholt, was described as a bone lacemaker on a deed of conveyance dated 1621,⁵ and

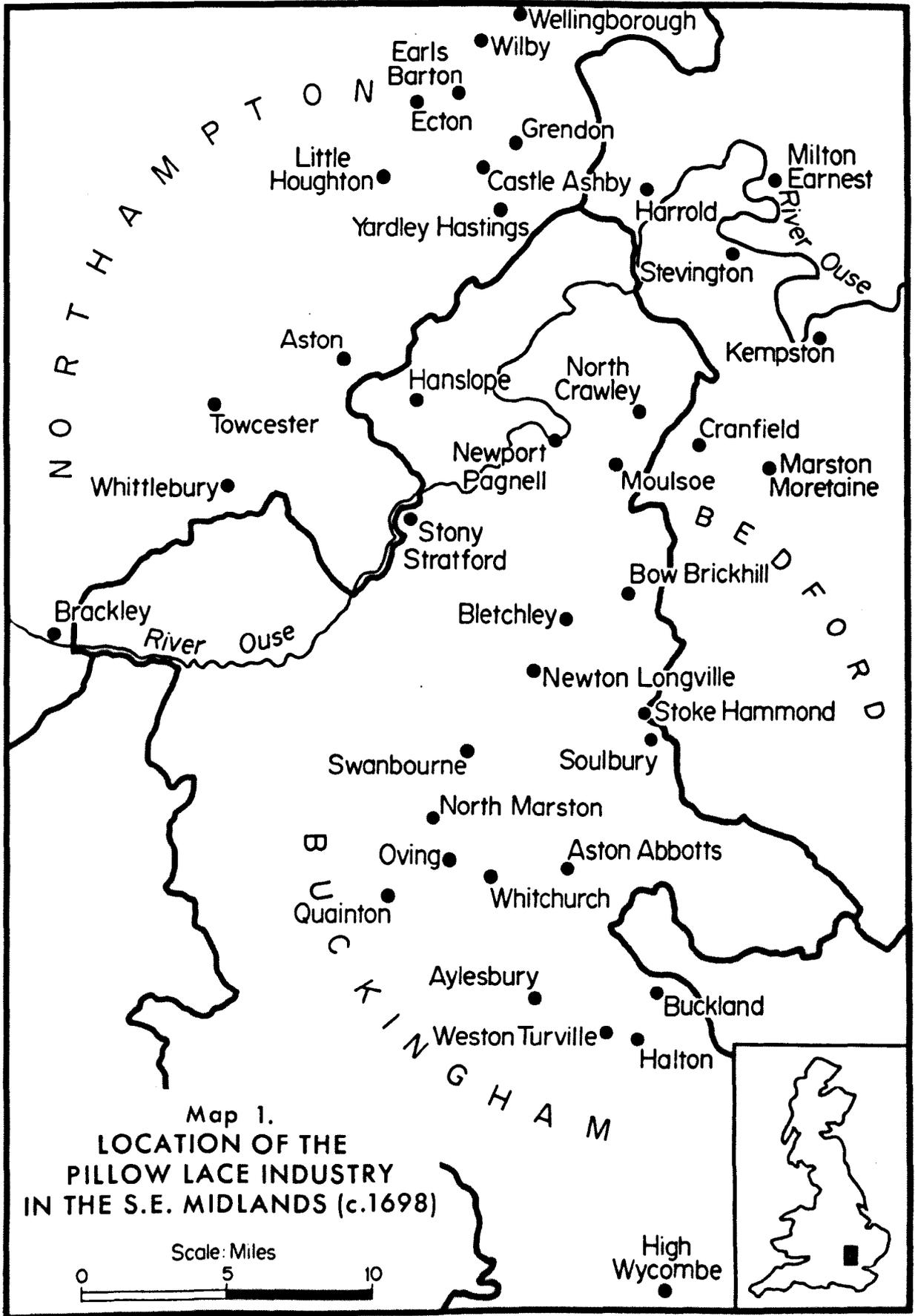
1 B.E. Supple, Commercial Crisis and Change in England, 1600-1642 (1959), p. 55.

2 P.R.O. S.P.D. Jas. I. 142, 34.

3 'Case of the Lacemakers in relation to importation of Foreign Bone Lace', 1698, Victoria and Albert Museum. 43A2H. For further details of location see below pp. 152-4 and Map I.

4 C. Freeman, *op.cit.*, p. 12.

5 Beds. C.R.O., T42/471.



at Stevington, another Ouse-side village, John Reid, is described likewise in 1668.¹ John Chapman, of Milton Earnest, just north of Bedford, a 'lacebuyer', sold over two acres of land in 1641.² By the 1680's many lace buyers³ had been recorded in this area of Bedfordshire at Cranfield, Kempston, Harrold, Stevington, Turvey⁴ and Bromham.⁵ Meanwhile, a smaller development in this county had also taken place further to the south, this time around the centre of Marston Moretaine where, in 1642, Richard Newman, a lace dealer, held stock of lace valued at £70.⁶ Yet the industry was absent from the southern extremities of the county in the villages surrounding the major township of Luton, where there was to be no rural industry until straw plaiting developed rapidly early in the eighteenth century.⁷

The industry's development in this region had also extended just over the borders of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire into Northamptonshire, primarily in the villages surrounding the two market towns of Wellingborough and Towcester. In the forest areas of Salcey and Whittlewood the industry

1 C. Freeman, op.cit., p. 12.

2 Beds. C.R.O. CH. 593/4.

3 The terms lace dealer, maker and buyer, seem to have been used interchangeably until well into the nineteenth century. A 'lacemaker', Thomas Bull of Pavenham, was made trustee of a chapel and ground in 1821, and it seems likely that he was in fact, a lace dealer. (Beds. C.R.O. X23916/1). On the other hand, some of these may truly have been lacemakers. See below, pp. 174-5.

4 Beds. C.R.O. GA/1025; GA/911; GA/986; X278/9.

5 J. Godber, op.cit., p. 274. There are no records of lacebuyers in Bedford at this time, but it seems likely that there were some as Bedford was the largest market centre in the district, with a population of around 2000 in the mid seventeenth century. *ibid.*, p. 260. Bedford was later to be the home of some of the industry's most prosperous dealers. See below, pp. 160-1.

6 Beds. C.R.O. ABP/W. 1642-1/93.

7 J.G. Dony, A History of the Straw Hat Industry (1949), Ch. I, passim.

had taken hold by 1640¹ and by the time a petition was presented by Northamptonshire lace dealers to the House of Commons in 1698 the industry had grown vigorously. Dealers claimed there were then over 3000 laceworkers in the county, of whom over 1000 were in Wellingborough. The industry had spread widely across the south-eastern corner of Northamptonshire, reaching over a dozen villages and towns, the most prominent of which, in terms of the numbers the industry employed, were Towcester, Centum, Yardley Hastings, Whittlebury and Crendon.²

By the end of the seventeenth century a distinct area of the south-east Midlands had become famous as a centre for pillow lacemaking. The industry stretched northward along the river Ouse from Marston Moretaine in Bedfordshire down into Buckinghamshire and through Olney and Newport Pagnell to its western limit in that county at Buckingham. Further south it reached out to a southern extremity at Great Marlow on the Thames, and embraced High Wycombe and its neighbouring villages

1 Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, ed. J. Thirsk (1964), p. 94.

2 'Case of the Lacemakers', op.cit. The petition listed the following 'people in a few places which get their living by making of lace':

Buckinghamshire

Weston Turville	96
Holton	74
Aylesbury	429
Buckland Beathong	59
Drayton Beauchamp	69
Aston Abbots	
Hanslope	830
Murcley	114
Newton Longville	101
Blackley	150
Stoakhamon	78
Blechly	150
Whitchurch	119

See also Map I.

Northamptonshire

North Marston	132
Solbery	155
Oving	66
Swanbourne	129
Quainton	116
Bow Brickhill	140
North Crawley	403
Fenny Shortford	192
Olney	1302
Newport Pagnell	1378
Stony Stratford	817
	654
	95
Centum	257
Little Houghton	60
Wellingborough	1146
Wilby	69
Earls Barton	127
Ecton	44
Towcester	591
Castle Ashby	64
Braxley	154
Whittlebury	206
Yardly Hastings	442
Ashton	101
Grendon	259

Bedfordshire

Cranfield	652
Molsoe	174

as it did so. The industry also covered an area above Bedfordshire which extended as far as Brackley in the west of Northamptonshire and as far north as Wellingborough and Northampton. But by far the greatest concentration of development had taken place within a 20 mile radius of the conjunction of the borders of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, and this area, to all intents and purposes, was always to be the English pillow lace industry's most important centre.

Yet the industry's development in this region had been paralleled by a smaller growth in the south-eastern corner of Devon. In the Honiton Parish Register the deaths of Elizabeth Cross, a lacemaker, and of James Minifie, a 'lace seller', were recorded in 1654.¹ But non-documentary evidence suggests that the industry was already well established by this time. An inscription on a tombstone which still stands in Honiton churchyard records the death of a lace dealer in 1617.² The industry certainly was well developed here by 1630, for Thomas Westcote then enthused at the 'abundance of bone lace, a pretty toy now greatly in request', which was being made at Honiton and Bradnidge nearby.³ Writing his Worthies of England thirty years later, Thomas Fuller championed the industry's development in Devon on the grounds that it kept out costly imports of foreign lace and provided welcome employment for many women and children who otherwise would have been a burden on the parish. In so doing he pointed to two important factors in the industry's subsequent expansion;

1 Devonshire C.R.O. 1654/7/PR5.

2 The inscription reads: 'Here lyeth ye body of James Rodge of Honiton in ye county of Devonshire (Bone lace seller hath given unto the poore of Honiton Parishe the beneyfitt of £100 for ever) who deceased ye 27th of July 1617. Remember the Poore'. I am grateful to the Rev. R.A. Babington, Rector of Honiton Parish Church, for pointing this out to me.

3 T. Westcote, A View of Devonshire in MDCXXX (Reprinted 1845), p. 62.

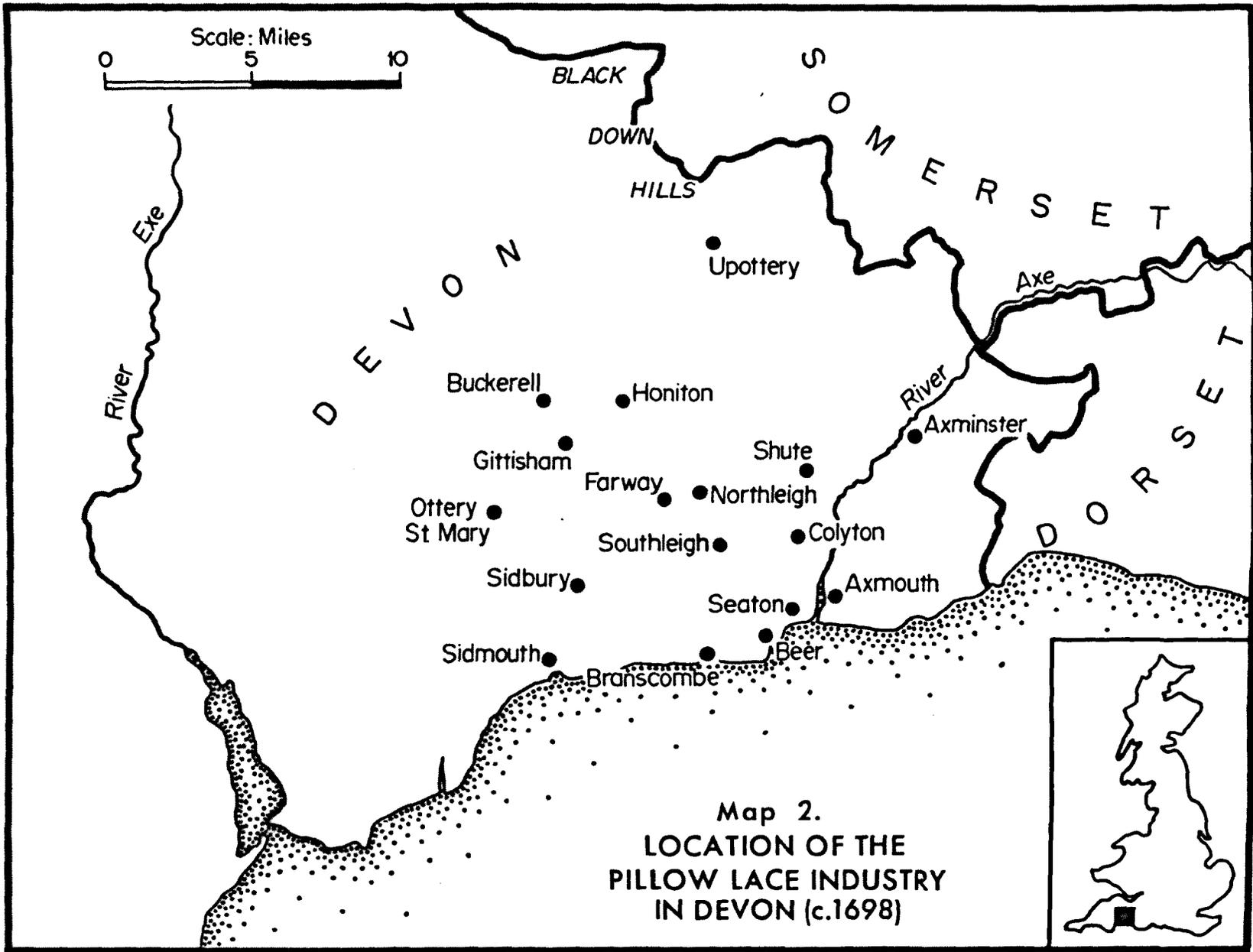
the ever-present problem of rural poverty which constantly brought forth labour supplies, and the mercantilist outlook of governments which produced a certain degree of encouragement and protection. Fuller also indicated that the Devon industry's major market centre, like that of the industry in the south-east Midlands, was London:

Much of this bone lace is made in and about Honiton and weekly returned to London... Modern the use thereof in England, not exceeding the middle of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Let it not be condemned for a superflous wearing, because it both neither hide nor heat, seeing it doth adorn. Besides, tho' private persons pay for it, it stands the state in nothing; not expensive of bullion, like other lace, costing nothing save a little thread descanted on by art and industry. Hereby many children who otherwise would be burdensome to the parish prove beneficial to their parents. Yea, many lame in their limbs, and impotent in their arms, if able in their fingers gain a livelihood thereby; not to say that it saveth some thousands of pounds yearly, formerly sent overseas to fetch lace from Flanders.¹

By the time the Devon lace dealers had come to collude with their Midland counterparts in petitioning parliament in 1698, the industry in Devon had grown substantially. There were said to be almost 4000 lace-workers in the district, of whom half were situated in the Vale of Honiton, with well over 1000 in Honiton itself. There were said to be almost another 1000 in Ottery St. Mary, a town noted by Thomas Westcote in 1630 as famous for its coloured keyseys.² The rest were scattered primarily along the coastal fringe between the rivers Ax and Ex, in the villages of Branscombe, Beer, Seaton and Sidbury and particularly in Sidmouth where there were over 300. More moderate development had also taken place along the course of the River Ax, most notably at Axmouth,

1 T. Fuller, *op.cit.*, pp. 396-7.

2 T. Westcote, *op.cit.*, p. 62.



Colyton and Axminster, where altogether another 500 women and children were said to be employed.¹

There are two traditional explanations, both of which have a certain charm and are still popular with antiquarians and lacemakers, of why the industry grew in these locations. The first fits into the category of individual accident theories of industrial development, common to many industries of this kind.² A story which was popularized during the nineteenth century but probably owes its origins to a much earlier period portrays Queen Katherine of Aragon as the industry's creator. In the years 1523/33 when sent by Henry VIII to Ampthill castle in Bedfordshire to wait quietly for the annulment of their marriage, Katherine is said to have spent her leisure hours making lace and teaching the local population her skills. The foremost nineteenth century authority on the history of pillow lace, Mrs. Palliser, opted for this explanation, suggesting that:

certain traditions handed down in the country villages of a good queen who protected their craft, lead us to infer that the art of lacemaking, as it then existed, was first imparted to the peasantry of Bedfordshire, as a means of subsistence through the charity of Queen Katherine of Aragon.³

1 The total number employed in the county, was said to be 3884:

Luppit	25	Ottery St. Mary	814	Yeovil	711
Counbraleigh	65	Northleigh	32	Branscombe, Beer	326
Sitmouth	302	Southley	45	Seaton	1341
Axmouth	73	Colyton	353	Honiton	60
Sidbury	321	Farway	70	Axminster	139
Buckerall	90	Upottery	118	Gittesham	25
				Sheat & Musbery	25

See Map II.

There were also workers at Gaucock (77), Blandford (500) Chand and Wincanton and adjacent parishes (1456) in the neighbouring counties of Dorset, Somerset and Wiltshire. 'Case of the Lacemakers', op.cit.

- 2 See, for example, C. Freeman, Luton and the Hat Industry (Luton, 1964), pp. 8-9, on the straw plait industry which is popularly said to owe its origins to Mary, Queen of Scots.
- 3 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 375.

To support this notion Mrs. Palliser pointed out that one of the lace-maker's festivals, which lingered well into the nineteenth century, was the celebration of St. Katherine's Day (Nov. 25th), a festival which was kept not only in memory of Katherine's role as the industry's creator, but also to commemorate a 'good Queen' who, 'when the trade was dull, burnt all her lace and ordered new to be made'.¹

This story has often been repeated, but has no justification. The celebration of St. Katherine's day offers no proof, not least because the festival is not peculiar to lacemaking but derives, rather, from Katherine of Alexandria, the patron saint of spinsters and though Katherine may well have 'delighted in working the needle curiously',² as another protagonist of this view has suggested, her pursuit was probably embroidery, possibly needlepoint and almost certainly not pillow lacemaking. A key to the origins of rural industries, as has rightly been pointed out by Professor Thirsk, lies with the social and economic reasons why a labour force offered itself for a particular occupation.³ The story of Katherine of Aragon as the industry's creator cannot explain this, and since Katherine cannot have acted as an entrepreneur, communicating with the market and organising production, there the story must rest, romantic, but seemingly ill-founded.

The alternative explanation is much more attractive in an analytical sense, since it could help explain three major problems; those of labour supply, of the technological basis of the industry's origins and of the industry's development in two distinct regions. The explanation rests on

1 *ibid.*, pp. 375-6.

2 T. Wright, The Romance of the Lace Pillow (1919), p. 30.

3 John Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', in Essays in the Economic and Social History of Tudor and Stuart England, ed. F.J. Fisher (1961) pp. 70-89.

the alleged movement of Flemish and French migrants to the lacemaking areas during the second half of the sixteenth century. The story goes that during the Spanish Inquisition the Duke of Alva's plundering army provoked a number of refugees, lacemakers among them, to settle in Kent and Sussex in 1568. A number of these, from Mechlin, subsequently moved down to Cranfield in Bedfordshire where they settled in that part of the village called Bourne End. Here, reinforced by workers from Lille, fleeing from the massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572, they established a pillow lace industry which then spread into the rest of Bedfordshire and neighbouring areas of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. The same process also took place in Devon, where immigrant lace workers from Mechlin moved into Honiton in 1568 and from here established the industry in the West Country.¹

This theory would certainly offer a most attractive solution to the problem of the industry's technological origins, for in both regions the product is of an essentially foreign kind; in Honiton it was made in the same way as in Brussels, in Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire in a combination of the techniques of Mechlin and Lille.² But evidence of foreign lacemakers migrating to these areas is difficult to find. An immediate problem in checking local records lies in the identification of Flemish names, for some names could be of either Flemish or English origin. Flemish names are listed, however, in the Huguenot Society's registers of the naturalization and denization of aliens³ for the years between 1503 and 1700, and this

1 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-37. See also, J.A. Fleming, Flemish Influence in Britain I (1930) pp. 237-8; A. Farquharson, The History of Honiton (1868) p. 24; T. Moore, History of Devon (1842) p. 388, for similar accounts.

2 For further details see below p. 213.

3 Letters of Denization and Acts of Naturalization of Aliens of England, 1509-1603, Ed. W. Page (1893); 1603-1700, Ed. W.A. Shaw (1911). The people listed in these registers received either a naturalization retrospective to the date of entry or from the time of the grant of the crown (denization).

offers some guide. The registers are also useful in tracing migrants into England, particularly London, but they do not always trace the migrant to his ultimate destination or give his occupation. Hence, although lacemakers do not appear in these records this does not necessarily mean that there were no lacemakers entering England or that none went to the lace areas. A further difficulty is that local parish registers, in which such migrants might also be traced, are frequently incomplete and those that have survived often do not give more than an occasional reference to occupation.

Most Devon registers were destroyed during the Second World War, though fortunately those for Honiton have survived. J.W. Coxhead, a local historian, speculated in 1952 that Brock, Gerard, Murch, Spiller, Groot and Rodge were the Flemish names of early lacemakers in Honiton.¹ But none of these names, nor any noticeably Flemish names, emerge in these registers.² The name of Rodge, moreover, does not appear to be a Huguenot name and is not listed in the Denizations.³ To this extent the theory of Flemish origins must be questioned with respect to Honiton, though numerous Flemish names appear in the Colyton register (none of them listed as lacemakers,

1 J.W. Coxhead, The Romance of the Wool, Lace and Pottery Trades in Honiton (Honiton, 1952), p. 23.

2 The Honiton registers include one for baptisms (1562-1599) and one for burials (1562-1596), though this is damaged. They are held in the Devon C.R.O. The earliest references to lacemakers in the Honiton Burial Register are as follows:

1654	Dec. 11	Amy, wife of Phillip More, Lacemaker.
1655	Apr. 8	Elizabeth, wife of William Cross, Lacemaker.
1655	Jun. 12	James Minifie, Lace-seller.
1656	Aug. 29	Amy, Daughter of Raynborne Thomas, Lace-seller.
1680	Jul. 26	Sarah Pulman, Lacemaker.
1681	May 12	Thomas Pearce, Lacemaker.
1681	Aug. 28	Emblin Stockman, Lacemaker.

Occupations were not entered in the Honiton records until 1653.

3 Denizations, op.cit., passim.

though the occupational references are incomplete)¹ and it is always possible that one or more of these may have had knowledge of the fabric and the ability to introduce it to the population in Honiton nearby. Indeed, another source suggests there were lacemakers in Colyton in 1698² and there may well have been lacemakers there throughout the period in question. Though there is no indication of the origin of the Colyton lacemakers the possibility of some connection with Flemish migrants cannot be totally discounted.

Bedfordshire parish registers have survived with much greater frequency and here a number of names do emerge in various registers which are quite likely of Flemish origin. Robert Flanders was baptised in Kempston in 1594, Thomas Rouffon and Peter Gascoigne were baptised in Bedford in 1586 and 1605 respectively, the widow Flanders was buried in Elstow in 1605 and at Kempston Judith Ventiman was baptised in 1591.³ These names appear in the heart of the lace areas, though it is not clear how long these families had been there. None of these references give any indication of occupation and it is not possible, therefore, to state that it was these people (or their relatives) who introduced lacemaking into these areas. Thomas Wright lists a number of Flemish names - Murch, Spiller, Groot, Boatch, Woram - which he claims are those of the Flemish originators of the industry at Cranfield,⁴ but none of these appear in the

1 A.F. Skinner (ed.), 'Registration of Baptisms, Marriages and Burials of Colyton 1538-1837', Devonshire and Cornwall Record Society, 1964, pp. 3, 8, 9, 27, in which the names Spiller, Stocker and Spragge are listed.

2 See, 'Case of the Lacemakers', as quoted above, p. 17.

3 F.G. Emmfson, Bedfordshire Parish Registers (1935/1949); Vol. I (Bedford St. John, St. Cuthbert and Elstow); III (Woburn); VIII (Cardington); IX (Stevington and Pavenham); XI (Milton Ernest and Odell); XXXIV (Harold and Carlton); XXXIX (Kempston). W. Burdwages, of Ampthill, had arrived in England from Anjou in 1541. Denizations, op.cit., ed. W. Page, p. 36.

4 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 36.

Cranfield registers.¹ There is also no evidence of Flemish lacemakers in the registers of Olney and Hanslope nor any noticeably Flemish names, yet Wright specifically attributes the industry's origins here to Flemings by the names of Minard, Cattell and Rubythorn, and Simons, respectively.² Hence, there is no direct proof that the origins of the pillow lace industry in any of these villages were owed to immigrant workers, though an examination of the registers of the 140 parishes in Buckinghamshire, most of which are still in the hands of the respective incumbents,³ would be necessary to be absolutely certain.

One can conjecture from the above that the Flemish immigrants who were in and around the lace areas in Bedfordshire and Devon may have had a role to play in the industry's technological origins. But such conjectures can only be made tentatively and it is equally plausible to suggest that the process of pillow lacemaking was introduced to the population of these areas not directly through Flemish migrants but through contact with an external source, most probably the market centre in London. Indeed, in this way Flemish immigrants may well have been involved, for numerous Flemish embroiderers, tailors, tapestry workers, silk weavers, linen weavers, parchment makers, mercers and haberdashers had settled in London during the second half of the sixteenth century⁴ and though none of these are recorded as lacemakers, or dealers in lace, it is

1 F.G. Emminson, *op.cit.*, Vol. XXVII, (1943).

2 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, pp. 36-7. The Bishop's transcripts of these registers are held in the Bucks. C.R.O. References to occupation are very sparse and there were no other noticeably Flemish names listed.

3 I am grateful to the County Archivist, Mr. E.J. Davis, for this information.

4 For numerous examples see Letters of Denization, *op.cit.*, *passim*. Some of these business men still had contacts with the continent. Sebastian Harvey, a hosier occupied 'a seat of merchandize in Antwerp', as also did John Fitzwillyams, a mercer. Letters of Denization, ed. W. Page, pp. 88, 120.

possible that they were familiar with the basic techniques and were ultimately responsible for their introduction. One might conjecture that these men may have been in contact with a number of dealers connected with the clothing trade who, during the sixteenth century, travelled into London from what were soon to be the lace areas. J.W. Coxhead claims that it was James Rodge who 'successfully discovered the secrets of the Flemings'¹ and it could be that Rodge was one of the Devonshire clothiers, including some from Honiton, who travelled regularly to London with consignments of cloth during this period.² The final twenty years of the sixteenth century saw the flowering of a number of new enterprises as English merchants sought new fields of interest³ and it could be that the pillow lace industry was introduced into the lace areas in this way, as English merchants may have made contact with Flemish haberdashers and so on, for many of the early lace dealers traded in London as has been shown.⁴ Certainly, pillow lacemaking would have been a most difficult task for any lace dealer to understand independently, say by unravelling an imported piece of lace.⁵ The technological problems of the would-be entrepreneur were well-illustrated by Mrs. Palliser, who quoted Lord Garden a Scottish Lord of Session who, in 1787, had thought of establishing pillow lacemaking in his 'humble parish' in Scotland. He was eventually dissuaded by the technological difficulties, of which he wrote to a friend: 'it is a complicated art which cannot be transplanted without a passion

1 J.W. Coxhead, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

2 *ibid.*, p. 25, quoting John Hooker, Synopsis and Chronological Account of Devon (1599). See also T. Westcote, *op.cit.*, p. 25; W.G. Hoskins, The Rise and Decline of the serge Industry in the South West of England, (London University M.Sc. 1929), p. 56.

3 D.C. Coleman, The British Paper Industry, 1495-1860, (1958), p. 43.

4 See above, pp. 11, 16.

5 The early machine lace manufacturers found it very difficult to do this. See below, pp. 70-2.

as strong as mine and a purse much bigger'.¹

Hence, although there is no immediate evidence that Flemish lacemakers settled in these areas, it is not entirely without credibility that Flemish migrants of some kind were in some way responsible for the industry's origins. The possibility of some connection between these refugees and the origins of the English pillow lace industry cannot be totally discounted, especially in the technological context, for it is not easy to see how a local entrepreneur could have introduced lacemaking to his labour force without some external help. It is quite clear, however, that the basis of the industry's labour force was the indigenous English population and the question must still be answered as to how this labour force was derived. For no matter what the level of technological understanding, no matter what the availability of favourable locational factors such as raw material supplies and sources of power, no individual entrepreneur, nor group of entrepreneurs, could establish an industry unless he or it could find a labour force.

In her pioneering analysis of the locational origins of the rural industries which existed between the opening of the fifteenth and the middle of the seventeenth centuries, Professor Thirsk suggested a socio-economic approach. She dismissed factors such as the availability of raw materials and sources of power, proximity to market centres and feats

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 105.

of individual entrepreneurship as largely irrelevant¹ and in the case of pillow lacemaking this would also seem to be appropriate. Market proximity clearly was unimportant, for Devonshire dealers apparently found no more difficulty in making weekly journeys to London to sell their products than did their counterparts from the south-east Midlands. The industry's implements, parchments, bobbins and pillows, could all be made almost anywhere and its basic material, linen thread, was imported through London.² Since motive power was of no consideration, the key to the location of the pillow lace industry must, as Professor Thirsk suggests, lie with the supply of labour. How, then, was this derived?

Professor Thirsk has suggested that the impetus for the development of rural industries came from within rural society itself, as local populations searched for additional sources of income to supplement meagre returns from agriculture. Yet this was no haphazard evolution. Professor Thirsk's preliminary findings suggested that the rural industries which existed in England between the middle of the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries tended to develop in distinct regions of England, in 'populous communities of small farmers pursuing a pastoral economy based either upon dairying or breeding',³ for it was here that the demands on agricultural labour were relatively slight, probably spasmodic, and where farm workers, and, in the sixteenth century, an increasingly excess rural population, could more easily turn to industrial employment.⁴

1 J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', op.cit., p. 72.

2 See below, pp. 204-5.

3 J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', op.cit., p. 86.

4 The growth of rural industries, it is argued, was probably strengthened during the sixteenth century by the pressures of population on scarce land resources. *ibid.*, p. 88. The pressures had been increasing in these areas as a result of systems of partible inheritance. *ibid.*, pp. 76-9.

There was far less likelihood of rural industries developing in arable areas, for arable agriculture exerted heavy demands on labour supplies. In Hertfordshire, for example, a small outpost of the cloth industry had died in the sixteenth century because of a switch to arable agriculture which, in the words of local magistrates, provided 'better means' of employing the poor in 'picking wheat a great part of the year and straining before the plough at seedtime and other necessary occasions of husbandry'.¹ Subsequent investigations led Professor Thirsk to conclude that:

If the industry was to flourish on a scale sufficiently large to support a specialized market of repute ... it had to be able to draw on a considerable reserve of labour. This was not so easily found in common field districts where the system of land distribution, and particularly the scattered strips of arable were extravagant in the use of labour and where mixed husbandry made heavy demands on the labour force, requiring attention to the cultivation of the fields virtually throughout the year as well as attention to stock.²

These were not the only obstacles, moreover, for lowland common field districts were highly manorialized and manorial courts had considerable effect in discouraging the immigration of outsiders and squatters on the waste, and the partitioning of land by tenants. Manorial lords were concerned to control the size and growth of population on their estates and together these were poor conditions for producing labour supplies for cottage industry.³ Professor Thirsk concluded that 'the economic and social environment was so unfavourable to the maintenance of industries in corn-growing districts that those that did survive deserve closer examination'.⁴

1 Arable agriculture gave 'full employment to all'. *ibid.*, p. 87.

2 J. Thirsk, Agrarian History, *op.cit.*, pp. 13-14.

3 *ibid.*, p. 14.

4 *ibid.*, p. 13.

Professor Thirsk was careful to point out that it was not her intention to 'propound a theory for the situation of rural handicraft industries which can be applied mechanically to them all',¹ and that any analysis of the growth of a rural industry in one district rather than another must inevitably be 'beset with pitfalls'.² But in the Agrarian History of England and Wales, further investigation has shown that, with a small number of exceptions, the development of rural industry did take place essentially in the kinds of area suggested by Professor Thirsk:

For the most part, country industries were established in areas ... now largely given over to dairying or pasture farming ... it was precisely in these districts, with their pastoral economy, that the local demand for agricultural labour was relatively slight, or at best, spasmodic.³

One of the industries with Prof. Thirsk originally suggested might be investigated was pillow lacemaking. How does the industry's development fit into this analytical pattern?

The industry's location has been traced by Professors Thirsk and Everitt in the Agrarian History to the predictable areas of non-arable agriculture. In the Midland region it appeared in the Bernwood and Stowood forests, on the borders between Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and in the Salcey and Whittlewood forests in the south-east of Northamptonshire. In the former area 'preliminary indications' suggest a population engaged in cattle-rearing, dairying and pig keeping, though 'a close study of these areas' would be necessary to establish the true nature of both farming systems.⁴ In Salcey and Whittlewood preliminary

1 J. Thirsk, 'Industries in the Countryside', op.cit., p. 86.

2 *ibid.*, p. 71.

3 A. Everitt, Agrarian History, op.cit., p. 429. For a similar view of the origins of the leather industry see L.A. Clarkson, 'The Leather Crafts in Tudor and Stuart England', Agric. Hist. Rev., XIV, Pt. I (1966), pp. 25-40.

4 J. Thirsk, Agrarian History, op.cit., p. 71.

evidence again indicates a populous community of small farmers concerned with rearing cattle, sheep and pigs and breeding horses.¹ The pattern is confirmed once more in the West Country where, despite the common association of the industry with the names of Honiton in particular, and of Devon in general, the industry's development is traced simply to Yeovil in Somerset, 'an exceptionally populous county congested with dairy farmers'.² All of this points to a confirmation of Professor Thirsk's thesis. But some of the most important areas of the industry's development in the first half of the seventeenth century in fact were not pastoral districts but districts based essentially on arable agriculture. Considerable development had taken place, as we have seen, in the adjoining northern districts of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, both of which lay on the edge of the Midland Plain. In a district in which wheat, rye and barley were grown, Newport Pagnell, probably the industry's most famous centre, still had its open fields at the end of the eighteenth century.³ Arthur Young found nearly the whole district from Aylesbury to Buckingham to be open field in 1771.⁴ Eighty years earlier,⁵ Celia Fiennes had drawn the same conclusion of Stony Stratford and district and at High Wycombe, further south, the industry had grown in an area which supplied wheat and barley to London but in which 'they breed no sheep' and 'no cheese and butter is made'.⁶

The arable pattern was repeated in Bedfordshire, a 'basically arable'

1 *ibid.*, p. 94.

2 *ibid.*, p. 72.

3 Bucks. C.R.O. ST.(BAS. 171/44).

4 A. Young, Eastern Tour, I (1771), pp. 18-19.

5 As quoted in G. Slater, The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields, (1907), p. 221.

6 L.J. Ashford, *op.cit.*, p. 40, quoting E. Langley, History and Antiquities of the Hundred of Desborough (1797), n.p.

county,¹ 'very completely under the common field system'² and famous for its wheat and barley which, it was said, was bettered by no county in England.³ This was an area in which manorial organization was still strong, the manorial courts surviving in Bedfordshire until well into the seventeenth century.⁴ But this did not prevent the development of a rural industry.

Preliminary evidence also suggests that both of the major centres of the industry's development in Devon, the areas in and around Honiton and on the south-eastern coastal fringe, may have been engaged in a sheep-corn husbandry. The evidence is by no means certain, but it was here, in the valleys and along the coast, that the few small pockets of fielden corn-growing country, in what, in the first half of the seventeenth century was essentially a pastoral county, were to be found.⁵

The agricultural organization of the areas in which the industry first developed therefore is not always clear. The pillow lace industry had emerged by the middle of the seventeenth century in a mixture of areas, both pastoral and arable. But its development in these arable areas clearly falls outside of Professor Thirsk's general pattern. How, then, is its growth in these areas to be explained?

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- 1 J. Godber, *op.cit.*, p. 237, Wheat was grown in and around Harrold, a lace village. *ibid.*, p. 363.
 - 2 E.C.K. Gonner, Common Field and Inclosure, 2nd ed. (1966), pp. 252-4.
 - 3 R. Blane, Britannia, or a Geographic Description of the Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland (1668), pp. 43-4. The barley in Bedfordshire was 'plump, white and strong'. H.C. Darby, An Economic Geography of England before 1800, (1936), p. 361, quoting W. Camden's 'Britannia', (1607)
 - 4 J. Godber, *op.cit.*, p. 277.
 - 5 Devon is said to have been 'a county mainly pastoral', but with 'pockets of fielden, corn-growing country in the valleys and along the coast', J. Thirsk, Agrarian History, *op.cit.*, p. 71. Open field organization existed in Ottery St. Mary. C. & M. Whetham, A Manor Book of Ottery St. Mary, (1913), pp. 36-41.

A complete answer would require intensive local research into the agricultural organization of each of the villages in which the industry emerged, not least because the experience of local economies could be highly varied.¹ The growth of the industry on the coast of Devon may, for example, have been attributable to non-agrarian origins. For at least two of these coastal villages, Sidmouth and Seaton, were fishing villages which, by the late sixteenth century, had known better times. Notable in 'former times' for their pilchard fishing both, by the 1630's, were 'so choked with sand brought in by the reciprocal course and strength of the tide and heaped up against them, that they have lost almost all the benefits that havens yield'.² Beer and Branscombe were also fishing villages and remained so well into the nineteenth century,³ and since fishing is by nature a seasonal, highly unpredictable occupation, the uncertainty may well have been the basis of the industry's growth for lace-making was a most useful source of supplementary income for the women and children of these villages.

The common feature among all rural industrial workers, however, no matter what the period of time or region in which they were employed, was poverty. Poverty had always created the necessity to supplement family incomes and in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries this situation did not change. Indeed, existing aggregative indices suggest that prices were rising faster than wages, and population was rising faster than employment opportunities.⁴ These developments had a particularly bad effect on the growing number of agricultural labourers.

1 See Ian Blanchard, 'Population Change, Enclosure and the Early Tudor Economy', Econ. Hist. Rev., 2nd Series, XXIII (1970), pp. 427-66.

2 T. Westcote, op.cit., p. 165.

3 R.C. on the Employment of Children in Trades and Manufacturers not already Regulated by Law, 1st Report, 1863, XVIII, p. 252.

4 P. Bowden, Agrarian History, op.cit., pp. 595-8.

Taken together, the various sources suggest that in the Tudor and early Stuart periods the labouring population probably formed about one quarter to one third of the entire population of the countryside and was a good deal higher in the corn-growing districts.¹ Indeed, in Bedfordshire the proportion was probably already close to 50 per cent by the 1590's and the size of the labouring population almost certainly continued to expand thereafter.² As the number of labourers increased, small holdings were either divided up among children and subdivided again till they shrank to small appendages to cottages, or they were bequeathed to the eldest son, so that the younger children were left propertyless.³ This process was taking place in Bedfordshire, where manorial organization was not strong enough to prevent the expansion of population or the division of land among tenants.⁴ Here, as elsewhere, the result of these developments, and of the gradual encroachment of common rights⁵ was that the labourer's existence came to depend primarily on the money wages earned by himself and his family.⁶ Yet, while prices were rising employment opportunities were not always available and early in the seventeenth century, in Bedfordshire, as elsewhere, unemployment and underemployment were major problems and many labourers were wandering around looking for work.⁷

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- 1 *ibid.*, pp. 398-9. The proportion was 35 per cent in Devon in 1524. W.G. Hoskins, Devon, (1966), p. 186.
 - 2 This figure was probably true of the Willey Hundred, in the north of Bedfordshire, by the 1520's. J. Godber, *op.cit.*, p. 214.
 - 3 *ibid.*, pp. 278-9.
 - 4 A sample of Tudor wills shows that men often shared their land among all, or some of their sons. A.F. Cirket, 'English Wills, 1498-1526', Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc., XXXVII (1957).
 - 5 J. Godber, *op.cit.*, pp. 278-9.
 - 6 The labourers' income had, of course, many possible constituent parts, among the most important of which was common rights. A. Everitt, Agrarian History, pp. 399-425.
 - 7 J. Godber, *op.cit.*, p. 214.

These problems of rural poverty, and of deficiencies in employment opportunities were particularly great in respect of women and children, and especially children, for life was short and children constituted a high proportion of the population.¹ By the end of the sixteenth century the under-employment and unemployment of women and children were particularly serious problems, and especially so in central England 'where common field farming was the rule'. Here, 'population expansion unsupported by compensating industrial development was creating an unemployment problem of formidable proportions'² and the provision of supplementary sources of family income such as might have come from pillow lacemaking 'may well have spelt the difference between existence and starvation'.³

Together, this expansion of population and the emergence of a poor class of agricultural labourers and their families in the years from the mid sixteenth century onwards created sufficient labour supplies to permit the development of the pillow lace industry in its arable locations. That unemployed and underemployed women and children were the key sources of its labour supplies was pointed to in the 1660s by Thomas Fuller, who had found many children making lace who 'otherwise would be burdensome to the parish'.⁴ His comments were later echoed by Daniel Defoe who spoke of lacemakers emanating 'from the most idle, useless and burdensome part of our people, viz. the younger women and female children. These were a real charge upon the diligent laborious poor such as the husbandmen, the farmers and the handicrafts of other trades ... and are now made able to provide for themselves'.⁵

1 D.C. Coleman, 'Labour in the English Economy of the Seventeenth Century', Econ. Hist. Rev., III, 2nd Ser. (1955-6), pp. 280-2.

2 C. Bowden, Agrarian History, op.cit., p. 610.

3 *ibid.*, p. 600.

4 Quoted above, p. 16.

5 D. Defoe, A Plan of English Commerce, 1730 (Reprinted, New York, 1967), pp. 288-9.

Women and children who could not find farm work seemingly had plenty of time on their hands. On his tour of England during the eighteenth century, the Swede, Kalm, noted that women who were not employed in rural industry in arable areas often spent their lives engaged entirely in domestic affairs. At Little Gaddesden and district in Hertfordshire, an arable area, Kalm found 'men have here to take thought for the heaviest part of the cares of husbandry. They have to do all the work in the arable fields, meadows, in the wood, the lodge and the lathe ... In short, all outdoor work belongs to the men'.¹ This situation was in part explained by the fact that 'several women were very busy in making straw hats which they afterwards sent hither and thither to be sold'.² Yet this was not true of every district he examined; in some cases the women, engaged neither in agricultural pursuits nor straw plaiting, simply spent all their time 'cooking, washing floors, plates and dishes, darning a stocking or sewing a chemise, washing and starching linen clothes'. This was 'all that they do the whole of God's long days, year out, and year in'.³

It is by no means clear, however, that these women would have chosen to engage in agricultural employment even had the opportunity arisen, particularly if there were alternatives. For the pillow lace industry almost certainly did not employ only those who could not find work in the fields. To a degree, employment at the lace pillow was a matter of choice, an element as yet overlooked in purely socio-agrarian analyses of the origins of labour supplies. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries contemporaries in the lace districts constantly complained about the inability of local farmers to find women who would work in the fields.⁴

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- 1 Kalm's Account of His Visit to England on His Way to America in 1748. Trans. by J. Lucas (1892), p. 333.
 - 2 *ibid.*, p. 327.
 - 3 *ibid.*, p. 326.
 - 4 Ivy Pinchbeck, Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, (1968), pp. 78, 235.

Employment at the lace pillow had a certain attraction of its own and did not fall only to those who could not find alternative agricultural occupations. At the end of the seventeenth century the weekly wages of pillow lacemakers in Bedfordshire could reach 7s. a week, as much as was paid to a woman reaper, who was paid 10d. a day without food and drink.¹ This was a considerable incentive in itself, but lacemaking was also probably felt to be a more congenial, less exhausting occupation than agriculture and if the returns were great enough, then opportunities of employment in the fields could readily be sacrificed as a result. Thomas Westcote may have been thinking of this when, in 1630, he spoke of 'the meanest sort of people who also will now rather place their children to some of these mechanical trades than to husbandry (esteemed more painful) whereby husbandry labourers are more scarce'.²

Lacemaking also had the incidental advantage that it could easily be turned to in the evenings. At Little Gaddesden, where there were 'a great many poor', Kalm found the women in the evenings sitting 'around the fire without attempting in the very least degree what we call household duties'. The men, alternatively, were 'killing time' after 6 p.m. at the local inn.³ Here again there was time to engage in domestic industrial work if the opportunity had arisen. Lacemaking was undertaken

1 In Devon, a woman haymaker was paid 6 pence a day in 1594, though 3 pence a day was the more general rate in the 1594 schedule. In 1699, on the other hand, a 'good lacemaker' could earn 7 shillings a week, and a child of six could earn 20 pence. Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc., XXV (1957), pp. 136-7. W.C. Hoskins, Old Devon (Newton, Abbott, 1966), p. 188; H. of C.J. XIII, 6 March 1699. T.C. Caldwell, Devonshire, (Yale University Ph.D. 1934), p. 45.

2 T. Westcote, op.cit., p. 62. Fuller also spoke of those 'lame in their limbs and impotent in their arms', T. Fuller, op.cit., p. 397.

3 Kalm, op.cit., pp. 191, 327, 333. Rush candles were produced by women in rural England from the thirteenth century onwards. Lord Ernle, English Farming Past and Present, 6th ed. (1961), p. 30.

extensively by candle light in the evening by women and children during the nineteenth century and a number of agricultural labourers were also said to have made lace, and some straw plait, on returning home from the fields.¹ Night work probably would not have been sufficient, of itself, to permit the development of a rural industry, but clearly it was an additional incentive to the first lacemakers and entrepreneurs.

Domestic industry might also have been seen as a potential refuge either for the seasonally or totally unemployed male. Some of the references above, for example, suggest men may have been among the earliest lacemakers.² In Bedfordshire, agricultural labourers, thrown out of employment by the severe winter of 1810, turned their hands to the lace pillow in an attempt to bolster family income,³ and many boys in these areas were trained as lacemakers before taking up full-time agricultural employment.⁴

For all of these reasons the pillow lace industry was able to develop in its arable locations. Until the mid sixteenth century arable agriculture may well have been able to employ most of its population. But the expansion of population during the sixteenth century, and the development of a wage earning labouring class, eventually produced more mouths than the land alone could feed. Though very few rural industries existed in arable areas in the years between the mid sixteenth and mid seventeenth centuries, it does not necessarily follow that this was because the socio-economic environment was unable to provide sufficient labour supplies. It may well

1 'Many an old worker can tell of how in order to meet the demand the whole family - men included - had to work into the night', Madame, 15 October 1898.

2 See above, pp. 12-13.

3 T. Batchelor, General View of the Agriculture of Bedfordshire (1808), p. 463. For a general account of the fluctuation of the seasons see H.S. Bennett, Life on the English Manor (1948), pp. 24-95.

4 For further details see below, pp. 174-5.

have been that an industry such as clothmaking, which required family participation, was generally incompatible with arable agriculture because of its relatively greater demands on labour. But labour supplies are far less likely to have been something of a constraint in the case of an industry such as pillow lacemaking, which was based essentially on women and children.

As Prof. Thirsk has said, there can be no finality in any explanation of the origins of rural industries. But if detailed local research reveals that from the mid sixteenth century onwards there was an increasing degree of unemployment and underemployment, particularly among women and children, in the arable areas which did not have rural industry, then the absence of rural industry may be due, not so much to inadequacies of labour supply, but to the failure of businessmen to seek out and introduce suitable industrial employments to the women and children¹ in these localities. It is doubtful if an industry such as pillow lacemaking could ever have been developed spontaneously by the labouring population in a village, for the production of pillow lace is exacting and complex, sometimes involving the manipulation of many hundreds of bobbins at once.² Indeed, as has been suggested, the impetus for this industry's development may well have come ultimately from London, for London was the chief centre of demand and lace dealers from both areas travelled there from the industry's earliest days.

Although the correlation between pastoralism and rural industry has

1 In some cases this might apply also to unemployed and underemployed males, for an increasing number of male labourers were finding part-time industrial employment from the mid sixteenth century onwards. A. Everitt, Agrarian History, op.cit., p. 426. See also W.H.B. Court, The Rise of the Midland Industries 1600/1838, (1938), pp. 65-6, for examples of poor freeholders turning to industrial employment during this period.

2 See below p. 85.

been well-established for the years roughly between the middle of the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, the experience of the pillow lace industry suggests that, at least where women and children were concerned, the notion of an incompatibility between the socio-economic environment in arable districts and rural industry does not necessarily hold once the agricultural population had begun to grow rapidly during the sixteenth century. Here, at least, was one type of industry which could grow in arable areas, subject to the willingness of entrepreneurs to exploit current trends in demand and introduce an industry to a population which, almost certainly, was anxious to find suitable means of adding to family income.

To this extent, therefore, there is a case for modifying Prof. Thirsk's thesis: rural industries could grow in arable areas and the role of the entrepreneur may well have been more important than she infers. The technological origins of the industry are extremely difficult to ascertain and one can only conjecture that, for a variety of reasons, Flemish immigrants may have had a role to play in this respect. The sheer complexity of pillow lacemaking and the fact that both areas produced laces imitative of laces produced overseas, adds some further credibility to this proposition.

CHAPTER 2

Growth to 1815

The history of lace in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is the history of the fabric at its most elaborate and beautiful. Sustained by almost ever-increasing demand, pillow lace matured throughout Europe, the fabric becoming finer and closer in texture, its patterns changing gradually towards ever more decorative floral and foliated designs. The portraits of Rubens, Van Dyck and Rembrandt, the figures and interiors by Watteau and Fragonard, the engravings of Abraham Bosse, show the rich profusion of lace worn by men and women on every occasion.

Even in England, where the fabric was generally not as fine as that produced overseas, the Puritan era caused the only serious setback to the industry's expansion during the seventeenth century, and the restoration of Charles II soon saw French fashion and extravagant clothing return with renewed vigour.¹ The fabric was still largely the province of the rich. English women then wore lace trimmings on almost every conceivable garment. Lace caps, aprons, gloves and petticoats were to be found in almost every fashionable wardrobe.² Men wore lace on a more moderate scale, but falling collars of their various kinds were nearly always popular and in 1662 Samuel Pepys could scarcely contain his enthusiasm for a new lace band which was 'so neat ... that I am resolved my chief expense shall be lace bands and it will set off anything else the more'.³

1 A passion for lace was characteristic of the seventeenth century. J. Laver, *op.cit.*, p. 56. I. Brooke, Dress and Undress (1958), p. 1.

2 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

3 Quoted in B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 337. These were known as Van Dyck collars and one is shown to advantage in Franz Hal's portrait of the Laughing Cavalier.

By the century's end the fabric had reached a new peak of popularity as fashionable women covered their bared shoulders with broad lace berthas (diaphanous scarves), trimmed their petticoats with several flounces of lace and decorated their heads with the fontage, a steeped headgear built up of wire, laces and ribbon.¹ Flounced petticoats and somewhat less extravagant examples of the fontage were still popular during the first half of the new century, when lace was in excessive demand, and now with men as much as women. This was the age of gentlemen's ruffles,² steinkirks,³ jabots, and lace-embroidered shirts, and of ladies' lappets, lace petticoats and trimmings of all kinds. Fortunes were spent on lace, its wearing could bring social recognition and was a well-versed subject among masters of etiquette.⁴

If lace was foreign its value was all the more enhanced in the eyes of the fashionable classes. Charles II and Queen Ann were extravagant in their use of Flemish lace⁵ and Royal recognition such as this always tended to encourage fashionable notoriety.⁶ The reign of George I saw ruffles and cravats, most beautifully made of Brussels or Mechlin pillow lace, or of Venetian point, increase in size and popularity.⁷ This was also the age of the mantilla and never before, nor since, has the national Spanish head dress, constructed in black lace, been so universally worn. Spanish lace was also often to be seen in deep flounces on dresses.⁸ Yet

1 I. Brooke, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

2 The dandy of the day might own as many as fifty pairs. *ibid.*, p. 3.

3 So-called following the Battle of Steinkirk, at which they were worn by French officers. J. Laver, *op.cit.*, p. 69.

4 I. Brooke, *op.cit.*, pp. 4, 66.

5 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 40.

6 For further examples, see below pp. 322-4.

7 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 349.

8 I. Brooke, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

a lady of fashion might equally wear the laces of Argentan and Alencon in winter, or the finer laces of Mechlin and Lille in summer. For State occasions and at Court, however, none could match Brussels lace. In the middle of the century fine escaloped Brussels lace lappets, hooked up with diamond buttons were the mode and the menfolk, not to be outdone, complemented their ladies' lappets with matching sleeve ruffles of double and treble rows.¹

Yet lace was now far from the sole province of the very rich. Those who could not afford the finest lace bought cheap imitations, often of English manufacture, or simply contented themselves with lace borders and edgings.² At no stage during the eighteenth century did lace fail to take a prominent position, in some shape or form, in the English peoples' dress. Even during the French Revolution, when Paris set the fashionable mode with a cry of 'Back to Nature' and attempts to revive the classical styles of Ancient Greece,³ the scanty dresses of the period, with their see-through fabrics, were still matched with lightly-patterned lace shawls and handkerchiefs designed to decorate the throat.⁴ In these days of relative simplicity, the fashionable English population did not turn completely from the lace which for so long had been its favourite.

To enjoy its share of the fruits of the fabric's great popularity during these two centuries, the English industry had always to struggle, particularly in the fashionable and expensive market, with laces produced

1 *ibid.*

2 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p.42.

3 By this time Paris set most fashion trends. It was helped by the development of the fashion plate which was printed monthly in fashion magazines, e.g. Gallery of Fashion (First published 1794), listed in J. Laver, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

4 *ibid.*, p. 79.

abroad. Indeed, to be seen in its true perspective, the course of the industry's development during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries must be viewed essentially against a background of foreign supremacy. The industry's chief rivals in the expensive market were always the pillow laces of France and Flanders, internationally renowned as the most delicate and best-designed in the world. Competition could be countered by the whims of fashion and sometimes it was. Yet, despite a considerable sophistication in the techniques of production both in the industry's south-east Midland region and in Devon, the English industry was never able to hold its own easily in the market for laces of a high quality where not only did it face the pillow lace of Flanders and France, but also the point laces of Italy, particularly those made in Venice.

Almost every European country produced its laces at this time, but those of France, Flanders and Italy dominated all sections of the European market, the scale of their industry, the ability of their designers and workers extending to levels without parallel elsewhere. The laces of France and Belgium in particular, graced the courts of Europe, inspired poetry and verse, and were copied, though seldom successfully, by lacemakers in most parts of the world. Jacob Van Eyck, a Flemish poet, lauded the artistry of the Flemish industry's workers:

Of many arts, one surpasses all; the threads woven by the
strange power of the hand, threads which the dripping spider
would in vain attempt to imitate and which Pallas would
confess she had never known.¹

1 Quoted in B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 96; M.E. Jones, *op.cit.*, p. 61. There is an abundance of literature on the history of European lace before the nineteenth century. See, B. Palliser & E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.* Also, G. Despierres, Histoire du Point d'Alencon depuis son origine jusqu'a nos jours (Paris, 1886); F. Bonlard, La Dentelle Alencon (Alencon, 1924); E. Lefebure, Broderies et Dentelles (Paris, 1887); P. Verhaegen, La Dentelle et la Broderie sur Tulle (Brussels 1902); P. Verhaegen, La Dentelle Belge (Brussels, 1912).

Against the competition of industries which brought such praise as this, the English industry's growth during these centuries rested essentially on the production of a fabric which was generally cheaper than and technically inferior to its continental counterparts. The industry found its market primarily in England, though from the early years of the seventeenth century increasing quantities of English lace were sent abroad. In the century's early years, small parcels of English lace found their way into the Courts of Europe, for English lace, while comparatively new, captured the Courts' imagination. But the premium was very much on its newness and the European market diminished considerably once the initial fascination had worn away.¹ By and large English lace was an inferior product and it was difficult for English lacemakers to compete on the foreign producers' soil. The major source of export, encouraged by an Act of 1699 which made it lawful for lace merchants to export English pillow lace, duty free, to the plantations in America, 'or to any parts beyond the sea, or into Scotland',² soon proved to be the colonies, particularly North America.³

Even on the domestic market, however, foreign competition was never to the liking of English producers, despite the general increase in the demand for lace. In 1635, at the request of lace dealers 'now brought to great want and necessity, occasioned by the excessive importation of these foreign wares', foreign pillow laces were excluded by Edict.⁴ But the Edict apparently had little effect, and Charles II,

1 There was a large importation of English lace into France during the seventeenth century. E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 36.

2 William III, C3. This was a period when export duties were still common. R. Davis, 'The Rise of Protection in England 1699-1786', *Econ. Hist. Review*, XIX, 2nd Ser. (1966), p. 311.

3 *H. of C.J.*, XIII, 6 March, 1699, p. 270.

4 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

for one, continued to indulge in foreign laces, as falling lace bands, lace cravats, and lace gloves from France and Flanders reached a peak of popularity.¹ In 1662, however, the legislature was inspired to intervene, for the government was anxious to limit unemployment and social unrest and to stimulate national self-sufficiency by the promotion of English industry.² There were, in the words of the pre-amble to the Act:

great numbers employed in the making of bone lace, who by their Industry and Labour, have attained and gained so great skill and dexterity in the making thereof: by reason whereof they have been able to relieve their poor neighbours, and maintain their families, and also enabled to set on work many poor children, and other persons who have very small means or maintenance of living other than by their Labours and endeavours in the said art.³

The industry had been serving 'most parts of this kingdom with Bone Lace', and had 'procured great quantities of thread and silk into the Kingdom from foreign parts whereby his Majesty's customs and revenues have been much advanced'. The industry's growth had not been sufficient, however, to prevent the importation of 'great quantities' of foreign bone lace 'by foreigners and Inhabitants of this Kingdom and sold to shopkeepers and others, dealers in the said commodity, as well as by wholesale and retail'. As a result, the trade was 'of late very much decayed', those employed were 'very much impoverished' ... and 'great quantities already made, were left on their hands that make it'. His Majesty had been 'defrauded and deceived in his customs', and a 'great sum of money' was being exported out of the kingdom 'to the great impoverishment of the nation'. The Act therefore prohibited the importation and sale of foreign bone laces.

1 J. Laver, op.cit., p. 59. M.E. Jones, The Romance of Lace (1902), p. 68.

2 See D.C. Coleman, loc. cit., pp. 285-94.

3 13 & 14 Charles II. C43.

Yet government support had to be re-affirmed as the seventeenth century moved to its close, for the Act of 1662 and declarations by Charles II that he would wear no foreign laces nor allow his subjects to wear them in his presence, had not been fully effective.¹ A bill for more effective prohibition reached a second reading in 1690,² and in 1697 a second Act was eventually passed, for 'rendering the laws more effectual for preventing the Importation of Foreign Bone Lace, Loom Lace, Needlepoint and Cut Work', again by prohibiting imports and with all offenders liable to a £100 fine.³

The new Act, however, had the unfortunate consequence of bringing the industry into collision with the powerful woollen cloth interest, for in retaliation against the English prohibition of Flemish laces, the Flemings had enforced a reciprocal prohibition of English cloths in Flanders. This had caused the cloth trade with Flanders to decline and the decline eventually brought a deluge of petitions from clothiers and woollen manufacturers to Parliament, pressing for the abolition of the Act. Cloth dealers from as far afield as Rochdale, Wilton, Gloucester, Coventry and Reading alleged that since the Flemish prohibition they had suffered a serious decline in their trade and that there had been a great increase in unemployment as a result. The situation had cost the country heavily in bullion and since the value of Flemish bone lace imported into England before the Act was less than £30,000 and the export of woollen manufactures to Flanders was worth over £160,000, neither the mighty woollen industry nor the national

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 335.

2 H. of C.J., X, 14 November, 1690, p. 471.

3 9 William III. C9.

revenue should suffer at the hands of this small and relatively insignificant industry. The Act clearly should be abolished.¹

The lace dealers countered with claims that since the Act their industry had prospered greatly and prices of lace had increased tremendously. Before the Act, a price of 5s. a yard was 'reckoned extraordinary', but since the Act the dealers had sold some lace at 630s. a yard and customers who had once bought lace at 5s. a yard were now asking for lace at 20s.² Some dealers said they were employing almost 300 workers, the best of whom were earning 7s. a week. Of the 200 or so dealers said to be in Buckinghamshire 150 travelled weekly to London. It was claimed that over 30,000 workers were bringing between £3/4,000 per week into the south-east Midlands, and similar growth had taken place in the West Country. In England as a whole the industry employed over 100,000 men, women and children.³

But the woollen interest eventually triumphed and in 1706 a new Act eventually repealed the old laws prohibiting the importation of Foreign laces, for they had 'obstructed wool exports'. The new Act did not apply, however, to any place 'within the dominions of the French King';⁴ English economic rivalry with France was now becoming an important issue and the government was also keen to raise revenue to pay for the wars.⁵

1 The petitions came from New Sarum, Rochdale, Reading, Wilton, Coventry, Leeds, Halifax, Taunton, Newbury and Gloucester. H. of C.J., XIII, 1699, pp. 56, 84-5, 88, 91-2, 95, 98-9, 114, 117.

2 *ibid.*, XIII, 6 March 1699, pp. 269-70.

3 *ibid.*, In fact, the number was more likely to have been around 15,000. See above, pp. 14-16.

4 6 Anne. C19.

5 R. Davis, loc.cit., pp. 309-311.

The lace industry lost this particular battle, but in the event the disasters which it had anticipated would follow the repeal of the Act did not take place. The industry adapted itself to the competitive situation and to the vagaries of changing market conditions. Though there was some attempt to compete with the more expensive Flemish laces the industry built up its subsequent expansion primarily, if never completely, on the demand for a relatively cheap product.¹ The industry's progress was such that Daniel Defoe claimed, early in the eighteenth century, that it was 'wonderfully increased and improved these few years past' and, if with customary exaggeration, that next to the woollen cloth industry it was the second largest employer in England.²

Lace dealers now showed signs of accumulated wealth. In 1694 a Stevington dealer left £80 to his eldest son and £60 each to an unspecified number of additional children.³ In 1730 Nathaniel Allibone, a lace dealer of Newport Pagnell left a house in Newport Pagnell to his eldest son, £100 to another son and £80 to his daughter.⁴ Other dealers were active in the local markets in property and land. John Allen, of Cranfield, bought one acre of the Sean Field, from Peter Edwards in 1683,⁵ while in 1714 Robert Morison sold a cottage in Ridgmont for £60.⁶ Somewhat later, in 1786, Edward Abraham, a lace dealer resident in Harrold, bought a cottage and adjacent land for £70; in 1793 he sold the

1 'Where there is one yard made above 5 shillings', said a lace dealer in 1780, 'there are 1000 made under'. H. of L.J., XXXVI, 30 June 1780, p. 165.

2 D. Defoe, A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain, I, (1724). Reprinted 1927, with an introduction by G.D.H. Cole, p. 217, II, p. 513.

3 Beds. C.R.O., W. 1694/40.

4 Bucks. C.R.O. W298, See also W303, will of James Harris, lace dealer of Olney, who left similar sums in 1705.

5 Beds. C.R.O., X278/9. For further examples of similar conveyances see Beds. C.R.O., F611 and C.H. 593/4, conveyances by Thomas Costin, lace dealer, of Great Brickhill (1694) and John Chapman of Milton Earnest (1711).

6 Beds. C.R.O., B.S. 884.

same for £450.¹ Thomas Abbot Hamilton, another Newport Pagnell lace dealer, was rich enough in 1788 to hand over £1,000 as marriage settlement for his daughter Ann.²

During the seventeenth century the industry's ability to employ large numbers of the rural poor who otherwise might have been unemployed had brought public and governmental approval. Seventeenth century writers had been in fairly general accord about the 'labouring poor' who, they felt, should be kept adequately employed, while remaining poor, and in this way would contribute vitally to the production of national wealth without disturbing the social order. In Stuart England between a quarter and a half of the population was 'chronically below' what contemporaries regarded as the poverty line and under-employment, particularly of women and children, was a national problem.³ Pillow lacemaking clearly was an ideal vehicle for helping ease this situation and hence the government's support for an industry which, as the 1662 Act put it, 'set on work many poor children and persons of very small means'.⁴ Children always constituted a vital segment of the industry's labour force and most girls in the lace areas were employed by the industry as soon as they were capable of holding a lace pillow. In Buckinghamshire, in 1698, six year olds making 'twopenny lace' for sale in London, were earning 20d. a week.⁵

The social policies of the government continued to favour the industry's expansion during the eighteenth century for poverty and its limitation was still the outstanding social problem. As the rural population

1 Beds. C.R.O., G.A. 1437/8; G.A. 1449/50.

2 Beds. C.R.O., L. 16/6, (1788).

3 D.C. Coleman, loc. cit., pp. 285-9.

4 See above, p. 43.

5 H. of C.J., XIII, 6 March 1699, p. 270.

expanded,¹ Tudor social legislation began to wane during the century's middle years, and local authorities, left by the central government increasingly to their own ends, continued to apprentice pauper children into pillow lacemaking.² Pauper children were also taught pillow lacemaking in the newly erected workhouses and their work was sold for the relief of the rates. At Eaton Socon, Jane Harris, a woman inmate, was paid for instructing the children from 1719. The expenses for materials during her nine years as teacher totalled £5 while the total income derived from selling the lace was £70.³ Public opinion and governments were well-satisfied by the progress of an industry which kept a large section of the rural poor gainfully, yet peacefully employed⁴ and it was not until well into the nineteenth century that the value of the industry as a suitable employment for the poor was first questioned seriously.⁵

The eighteenth century saw the industry move, with but one serious setback, to an all-time peak of prosperity during the Napoleonic Wars. The industry's status was never again to be so high, its dealers so successful, its workers so well-paid. The century opened encouragingly when an odious piece of legislation which had hindered the industry's progress, whilst injuring the lace dealers' pride, was removed. In

1 See, for example, L.M. Marshall, 'The Rural Population of Bedfordshire' Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc., XVI (1934), pp. 2-65. For a general account of population expansion see, M.W. Flinn, British Population Growth, 1700-1850 (1970).

2 Northamptonshire, C.R.O. Wellingborough Apprenticeship Indentures. 22 August, 1780.

3 F.G. Emminson, 'Relief of the Poor at Eaton Socon' 1706-1844, Beds. Hist. Rec. Soc., (1933), pp. 23-4.

4 For details of governmental attitudes to the poor see A.W. Coats, 'Changing Attitudes to Labour in the Mid Eighteenth Century', Econ. Hist. Review, XI, 2nd Ser. (1958-9), pp. 35-51; I. Pinchbeck, *op.cit.*, pp. 202-03.

5 See below, pp. 443-472.

1717¹ the industry was given new status and emancipation with the abolition of an Act of 1697,² by which lace dealers had been required to hold licences as chapmen, pedlars and hawkers. Henceforth, lace dealers who travelled to London without licence no longer feared abduction and fines by ever-vigilant customs officials.³ Consolidated now as an honourable institution, though still without protection from Flemish laces, the industry expanded its horizons.

From Newport Pagnell, Olney, Stony Stratford, and High Wycombe in Buckinghamshire, from Cranfield and Bedford in Bedfordshire, from Wellingborough, Towcester and Yardley Hastings in Northamptonshire and from Honiton in Devon, and elsewhere, lace dealers put out an increasing quantity of raw material to growing numbers of neighbouring women and children, to whom lacemaking was now largely an established part of village life and for whom alternative employments were scarce.⁴ Women in the eighteenth century were expected by public opinion to work and earn at least sufficient for their own maintenance.⁵ By the second

1 3 and 4 George I. C7.

2 9 and 10 William III. C3.

3 In 1699 'Thomas Pigdall, wholesale laceman, was taken up by Briggs and Lindsey (government commissioners) and they asked him for a licence. He told them he had none; and that going with them to an alehouse they first asked him for three guineas, and then thirty shillings to discharge him; whereupon he gave them twenty shillings in money and a piece of lace for the other ten shillings. H. of C.J., XIII, 6 March 1699, pp. 269-70. A similar incident had happened to Ferdinando Shrimpton, one-time mayor of Chipping Wycombe. L.J. Ashford, *op.cit.*, p. 210.

4 J. Godber, *op.cit.*, pp. 364-5; E.L. Jones, 'Agricultural Origins of Industry', Past and Present, 40 (1968), pp. 60-70, and L.M. Marshall, *loc. cit.*, pp. 12-16. It is a moot point as to how far the demand for child labour stimulated the expansion of population in these areas. The Bedfordshire population increased 61%, 1671-1801, while that of England increased by about 57%. Marshall, pp. 13-14.

5 I. Pinchbeck, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-3.

half of the eighteenth century, pillow lacemaking had become sufficiently lucrative to prevent women from working in the fields, even at haytime and harvest.¹

A large proportion of the finished laces was sold in London, the centre of fashion and by 1700 the home of over one tenth of the English population.² Each Monday the lace dealers travelled to meet London drapers and warehousemen at markets held, among other places, in the Bull and Mouth at St. Martins and the George Inn at Aldersgate.³ Here they sold their goods, received fresh orders and purchased fresh stocks of raw material. At the end of the century many London lace merchants traded from inns in the heart of the wholesale drapery trade around St. Paul's, and elsewhere. Bentley & Son, 'lacemen to His Majesty's wardrobe', were to be found at the Turks Head and Cock, Bedford Street, Covent Garden, while William Fletcher and John Davidson, 'who make and sell all sorts of gold, silver and silk laces ... with a variety of other odd pretty things for the use of gentlemen and ladies', and Robert James, 'laceman', were at the Lamb and Crown in Newgate Street. Rope and Corral, 'lacemen', were to be found at the Indian Queen in Lombard Street, Mathew Winter at the Lamb and Shuttle opposite Mercer Street and Black and Wood at the Fleece and Crown, Long Acre. There were numerous others, including Thomas Charlton, 'Gold Laceman', and Thomas and James Fisher who mixed their business as 'British Lacemanufacturers', with that of 'army clothiers, cap, accoutrement and helmet makers, hatters, sword manufacturers', in the Strand, Lombard Street, Aldgate, Cheapside

1 *ibid.*, pp. 78-9.

2 J.H. Plumb, England in the Eighteenth Century (Pelican ed. 1950), p. 11.

3 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

and Fleet Street.¹

From these centres English pillow laces were distributed by merchant drapers and warehousemen not only to metropolitan retail outlets, including Oxford Street and Regent Street, the main shopping areas, but also to many corners of the kingdom and to markets overseas. Customers arrived at the London wholesale market from all over England.² But some lace dealers either took or sent their laces directly from the lace areas to the various provincial and foreign markets. The fashionable centre of Bath proved to be an important centre of demand for the industry in Devon and dealers regularly travelled there from Honiton with consignments.³ Quantities of lace were also sent directly from Northamptonshire to 'America, Ireland, Jamaica and the West Indies',⁴ while from their country centres many lace dealers travelled to the north and west of England selling their wares directly to provincial drapers, milliners and private customers. Towards the end of the century the brothers Cartwright made regular three monthly journeys from Newport Pagnell 'into the north and by Gloster', with above £1,000 of lace,⁵ a good indication of the scale of some of the larger businesses at this time. Closer to home, laces were often sold on local market stalls and at fairs by travelling salesmen, known as tallymen,⁶ and in the lace areas the local market was always nurtured by the gentry, who frequently took private orders.⁷

1 Guildhall Library: Trade Cards. 18/6/1794; 12/11/1769; 20/4/1766; 10/6/1769; 29/5/1777; 12/4/1785. Edward Elliot traded from the Union and Star, Covent Garden. Northants. C.R.O. D1425; A. Adburgham, Shops and Shopping (1964), p. 5.

2 A. Adburgham, op.cit., pp. 5, 8.

3 V.C.H. Somerset II, (1911), pp. 426-7.

4 W. Pitt, General View of the Agriculture of Northamptonshire (1809), p. 10.

5 Bletchley Diary, ed. H. Waddell (1931), p. 242.

6 T. Wright, op.cit., pp. 42, 91. A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 2.

7 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 385-7.

Though it was almost universally recognised that continental laces were technically and artistically superior to their English counterparts, and most of the English products were cheap, this did not entirely prevent English laces from finding an occasional avenue into the expensive section of the domestic market. The industry received the constant encouragement of the Royal family and this, from time to time, helped swing the favour of the fashionable classes in the industry's direction. The patronage which was developed strongly under William and Mary¹ was re-asserted by George II who ordered that all laces worn by the congregation at the wedding of Frederick, Prince of Wales, should be of English manufacture.² In 1764 George III ordained that all laces worn at the marriage of his sister, the Princess Augusta, to the Duke of Brunswick, should again be English.³ In 1730, with an eye on the fashion-conscious population, dealers decided to show the king the high quality of their products. It was a ploy they were to use again and again during the following century, when their prosperity dwindled,⁴ for the Monarchy was good publicity and the news that English pillow lace was being worn in the Royal circle often had the desired effect. Thus:

A considerable body of dealers from Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, waited on their majesties ... with a petition on behalf of their manufacture, and carried with them a parcel of lace to show the perfection they had brought it to; and their majesties showed their Royal intentions to encourage the British manufacture by receiving them very graciously and bought a considerable quantity for the use of the Royal Family; and several ladies followed the Royal example.⁵

1 *ibid.*, pp. 342-3.

2 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 43. T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 96.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 359-60.

4 See below, pp. 322-4.

5 Notes and Queries. 8/2/1930. In 1761 Earl Temple presented George III with fine lace ruffles made at Newport Pagnell by John Millward's workers. T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

But the market stimulus derived from efforts such as these was at best temporary and far from general, for there was no hiding the English industry's general inferiority. The Society of Arts and the Anti-Gallican Society (founded in 1750) made some attempt to rectify the situation by awarding 'well judged premiums' to expert producers, some of whom, it was found, could make laces of an 'extraordinary pitch of delicacy'.¹ Indeed, England had always had a few areas which were famous for the high quality of their laces. At Blandford, in Dorset, Daniel Defoe found 'the finest bonelace in England, and where they showed me some so exquisitely fine as I think I never saw better in Flanders, France or Italy, and which they said, they rate at above £30 sterling a yard, but I suppose there was not much of this to be had, but 'tis most certain that they make exceeding rich lace in that country such as no part of England can equal'.² Newport Pagnell, a 'staple for bone lace', and probably the major centre in England, was also famous for its product, and Defoe claimed it had been brought 'to as great perfection almost as in Flanders'.³

But these domestic rivals to the finest continental producers were few and far between and the efforts of private bodies did little, in the long term, to stimulate a general improvement. English laces generally lacked the delicacy of their rivals, their workers were less skilful, less well-trained and they often lagged in developments in style.⁴ The south-east Midland industry, in particular, concentrated on trimmings, edgings and borders, generally of a modest nature. Though the pillow lace dealers in England were well aware of the discrepancy they seemed

1 One prize went to William Marriot of Newport Pagnell. T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 97.

2 D. Defoe, Tour of Great Britain, I, *op.cit.*, p. 217.

3 *ibid.*, II, p. 513.

4 See below, chapters 11-13 *passim*.

unwilling, at this time, to do much about it. Yet there was something to be said for concentrating on a cheaper kind of product. For even had the English produced as fine a lace as their continental counterparts it is doubtful if the lace would have commanded a very large section of the expensive market in England, for continental laces were foreign and as such engendered the additional respect of the fashionable world which looked to the continent for much of its inspiration. As it was, English dealers generally found the cheap domestic and colonial markets sufficient bases for organizing profitable enterprises.¹

There were occasions, however, when even the cheap domestic market became extremely difficult to command. To the industry's misfortune, protection against the laces of France proved, during the second half of the century, to be largely ineffective. The French dominated European fashion and increasing quantities of French lace, particularly cheap 'blonde' laces, made of fine silk, were brought in illicitly. Smugglers would often stop at nothing to bring lace into the country, stuffed animals and even coffins containing human corpses sometimes being found to have surprising contents.² Frequent raids by customs officers on the premises of milliners and tailors and the confiscation and public burning of foreign laces could not stem the tide.³ In 1765 the lace dealers were finally brought to the streets by the seriousness of the situation:

In May 1765 the lacemakers joined a procession of the silkworkers of Spitalfields to Westminster, bearing flags and banners, to which were attached long floating pieces of French lace, demanding of the Lord's redress and the total exclusion of foreign goods. On receiving an answer that it was too late, they must wait till next session, the assemblage declared that they would

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- 1 For details of lace dealers' profits see below, pp. 264-9.
 - 2 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 95. M.E. Jones, *op.cit.*, p. 68.
 - 3 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 44.

not be put off by promises, they broke the Duke of Bedford's pailings on the way home and threatened to burn the premises of Mr. Carr, an obnoxious draper. At the next levy they once more assembled before St. James' Court, but finding the dresses of the nobility to be all of right English stuff, retired satisfied, without further clamour.¹

But the agitation could not prevent the industry from becoming seriously distressed by the end of the 1770's. This was the great era of smuggling, as middle class incomes and demand for fancy goods increased, and the illicit importers proved to be a problem for many luxury producers besides lace makers.² In 1779 the lace dealers again vented their frustration, this time by petitioning parliament, 'seriously affected by the continual and most alarming decline in the demand for the said commodity', the decline having been produced by 'the immense quantities of foreign thread bone laces smuggled into this Kingdom'.³ A dealer estimated the total import bill, including smuggled goods, to be £150,000 per annum, of which cheap laces were the main burden. The petition appealed for the complete prohibition of all foreign thread or silk laces priced at 6s. per yard and under and for an additional duty of 8d. per yard on all laces from 6s. to 10s. and a still higher duty on those from 10s. and upwards.⁴ Parliament's response, however, was far less comprehensive than the petitioners had desired. In 1779 an Act was passed 'for the more effectual preventing of the pernicious practices of smuggling in this kingdom ... all thread lace imported to be marked and

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 360.

2 E.N. Jackson, op.cit., p. 44. R. Davis, loc. cit., p. 315. The official import figures are very low; 1770 - £1352; 1780 - £1140. P.R.O. Customs 3, Nos. 70 and 80. As might be expected, the bulk of the recorded entry was from Flanders. Mrs. Palliser placed the smuggled import from Flanders at £250,000 in 1768. B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 99.

3 H. of C.J., XXXVII, 26 Feb. 1779, p. 185.

4 *ibid.*

sealed or forfeited and lost'.¹ The House of Lords met subsequently in 1780, to consider a Bill to 'alter the duties upon Foreign thread lace imported into this Kingdom', but nothing came of it.²

For some English producers the disruption of the North American market by the Wars of Independence was now proving to be an equally serious problem. At Olney, in Buckinghamshire, exports to America had constituted a major portion of the industry's sales, but the war brought a serious depression. The poet, William Cowper, who had settled in Olney in 1767, wrote from his village home to a friend in Parliament on July 8th, 1780 describing the lacemakers' distress and its cause:

If you ever take the tip of the Chancellor's ear between your finger and thumb, you can hardly improve the opportunity to better purpose, than if you should whisper into it the voice of compassion and lenity to the lacemakers. I am an eyewitness to their poverty and do know that hundreds in this little town are upon the point of starving and that the most unremitting industry is but barely sufficient to keep them from it. We lately sent a petition to Lord Dartmouth; I signed it and am sure the contents are true. The purpose of it was to inform him that there are very near 1200 lacemakers in this beggarly town ... The prospect of a peace with America is like the streaks of dawn in their horizon.³

But the position had scarcely improved two years later, despite the newly-declared peace. In November 1782, Cowper appealed once more, this time to a 'beneficent friend' to:

Succour the distressed. We promise that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters frequently united together where the most watchful and unremitting labour will hardly procure their bread.⁴

1 18 and 19 George III. C24.

2 H. of C.J., XXXVI, 28 June 1780, p. 165.

3 The works of William Cowper: His Life, Letters and Poems. ed. T.S. Grimshawe (1860), p. 51.

4 *ibid.*, p. 121. Cowper later wrote to a Mr. Smith and distributed the £50 sent in reply. H.J. Massingham, Country Relics (1939), p. 165.

The solution to these problems was eventually found in rising domestic demand and changes in fashion. Journeying from Chester to London in 1783 Charles Pennant passed through Newport Pagnell which he found flourishing 'greatly by means of the lace manufacture'. Indeed, there was 'scarcely a door to be seen during summer, in most of the towns, but what is occupied by some industrious pale-faced lass, their sedentary trade forbidding the rose to bloom in their sickly cheeks'.¹ The industry's fortunes were everywhere on the increase. In 1791 Arthur Young wrote of Northampton that 'the trade is now very brisk and the dealers have made much money for four or five years past'.² English blonde lace, made of fine linen thread and silk, was in great demand as dress trimmings,³ and women's wages now averaged 8d. a day, some 'even ten pence and one shilling'.⁴

The English dealers were able to make their profits largely by exploiting cheap labour, for their fixed costs were small. Since the supply of lacemakers was generally in excess of demand, superfluous workers could be cast off whenever the market for lace declined, as had happened in the late 1770's when one dealer said he had discharged 500 of his 1000 employees.⁵ This labour situation also lent itself to the payment of wages in truck, so much so that in 1779 a Bill was passed specifically forbidding such abuses in the industry.⁶ But the Act failed and truck payments were still common 60 years later.⁷

1 C. Pennant, Journey from Chester to London, (1783), p. 355.

2 A. Young, Annals of Agriculture XVI (1791), p. 449.

3 E.N. Jackson, op.cit., p. 64.

4 A. Young, loc. cit.

5 H. of C.J., XXXVI, 26 February 1779, p. 237.

6 19 George III. C49.

7 See below, pp. 254-264.

The industry's expansion during the 1780's was a preliminary to its 'Golden Age', for the outbreak of the French Revolution and the wars with France were to prove highly beneficial. In 1794 the industry in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire had the good fortune of acquiring the services of a number of French refugee lacemakers¹ who introduced the finest Lille groundwork and soft outlining threads into Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire lace² and this enhanced the industry's reputation. Meanwhile, political unrest and war had done nothing to encourage the progress of lacemaking on the continent, and particularly in France. 'With Marie Antoinette', said Mrs. Jackson, 'fell the lace trade of France'. Mrs. Palliser claimed that 'the French Revolution was fatal to the lace trade. For twelve years the manufacture almost ceased to exist and more than 30 fabrics entirely disappeared'.³

In the important centre of Alençon, where one of the richest laces in Europe had been produced, the industry had already been declining as a result of more delicate types of lace becoming more fashionable. By 1809, changes in fashion, the loss of markets in Russia and England and the removal of the monarchy in France (and with it Royal patronage) had almost brought the industry to extinction and it is said to have taken Napoleon, who in 1810 ordered a set of bed-hangings and coverlet,

1 'A number of ingenious French emigrants have found employment in Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire in the manufacturing of lace and it is expected, through the means of these artificers that considerable improvements will be introduced into the method of making English lace'. B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 383, quoting Annual Register, 1794. The war years also saw a number of French prisoners make lace at Porchester Castle. 'No fewer than 3000 prisoners were engaged. The lace commanded so great a sale among the gentry of the neighbourhood that the manufacturers of Honiton and elsewhere petitioned the government for its suppression, as injuring the trade of poor people who paid taxes, and their petition was granted'. Notes and Queries, 4 October 1913.

2 B. Palliser, loc. cit.

3 E.N. Jackson, op.cit., p. 45. B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 183.

ornamented by the arms of the Empire surrounded by bees (Napoleon's symbol) to celebrate his marriage to Marie-Louise, to bring about its salvation. Further commissions from Napoleon and his wife, who revived the Court etiquette of Louis XIV, enabled the industry to rekindle the interest of the ladies of Court and the nobility, sufficient to keep it alive during these difficult years.¹

In Argentan the industry virtually disappeared during the years of the Revolution and did not revive until the middle of the century. The production of Chantilly lace at Chantilly and in Caen and Bayeux in Normandy, was also severely decimated. But the Emperor issued an edict that only the laces of Alencon and Chantilly should be worn at Court and henceforth the blonde laces of Chantilly and Caen, especially, found favour with the fashionable population in France. Hardest hit of all, however, was Valenciennes lace and during the Revolution its manufacture virtually passed from France to Belgium, only the poorest kinds being produced in France at this time.²

Though perhaps not hit so severely as France, the Belgian industry still suffered a considerable recession until, according to Mrs. Palliser, Napoleon made his first public entry into the Belgian capital and ordered large quantities of rich point lace, which he intended to give to the Pope. The patronage stimulated demand for Brussels lace sufficient to keep the industry alive. Napoleon also helped stimulate the industry at Mechlin, Antwerp and Turnhout in a similar way.³

But neither the French nor the Belgian industry prospered as before,

1 M.E. Jones, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 62-3; B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 123-4.

and, most importantly, both industries were able to send but little lace to England. The effect was to leave the English industry with a unique opportunity to control the domestic market.¹ It was helped, further, by the English government, which reinforced the effects of revolution and war with two protective Acts, passed in 1803 and 1806. The Acts placed the industry in an unprecedented situation, for they operated against the importation of all laces, including the most expensive from Flanders² and there were tough penalties of £100 fine and the pillory for those who contravened them.³

English laces, for once, were at a premium, and prices rose to record levels. The lace dealers, anxious to exploit the situation to the full, responded with uncharacteristically concerted efforts to improve the standard of their products and so meet the demand for high quality goods. In Devon large dresses and veils, 'so tasteful in the design and so delicate and beautiful in the workmanship', were constructed for the expensive market by hundreds of workers at a time and were sold in London at anything between 20 and 100 guineas each.⁴ The prosperity

1 The available figures show imports to be very low: 1792 - £200; 1811 - nil; 1812 - £1420; 1813 - £3510. P.R.O. Customs 5. 'Imports by Articles', Nos. 1a, 1e, 2 and 3.

2 Flanders was occupied by the French armies in 1793 and the industry was often disrupted, thereafter, by war. A. Goodwin, The French Revolution (1953), pp. 145-50; B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 183.

3 The Acts were, 43 George III. C68 and 46 George III. C81 and had the following contents:

(1803) Silk laces charged £20 for every £100. Linen laces charged £20 for every £100, when not exceeding 20s. a yard, and 4s. the yard for every yard exceeding 20s. in value.

(1806) All laces not more than 5s. a yard charged 1s. 6d. a yard. All laces not more than 5s. to 10s. a yard charged 2s. 6d. a yard. All laces not more than 10s. to 15s. a yard charged 3s. 6d. a yard. All laces not more than 15s. to 20s. a yard charged 4s. 0d. a yard. All laces not more than 20s. to 25s. a yard charged 5s. 0d. a yard. All laces more than 25s. plus a yard charged 6s. 0d. a yard.

4 G. Dodd, The Textile Manufacturers of Great Britain, (1844), p. 208.

and improvement were emulated in the south-east Midlands. At Hanslope, in Buckinghamshire, 800 out of a total population of 1275 were said to be producing laces which sold at prices ranging from 6d. to 2 guineas a yard and the profits accruing to the village to amount to £8/10,000 per year.¹ In Wellingborough and district roughly 10,000 lacemakers were making laces which sold at anything up to 15s. a yard.² The Midland lacemakers had responded to the opportunities of the new situation with surprising alacrity. Their range of goods was extended to large items such as scarves, shawls and veils, while some designers made serious attempts to improve the standard of their patterns. James Millward, of Olney, had 'many specimens of beautiful French laces sent for imitation and after some practice in imitation, I ventured in altering, varying and redrawing some of the patterns'. The introduction of these new French patterns pleased the public so much that Millward 'dared at last to have a style of my own formed on the French mode'. Expensive laces, costing one or two guineas a yard were in general production by his workers at this time.³ In south Buckinghamshire black silk veils were turned out at Aylesbury and Great Marlow, and at Olney, black flounces, chiefly for trimming white silk evening dresses, became the local speciality'.⁴

The high prices were reflected in rising wages. At Wellingborough, in 1809, adult workers were earning 2s. 6d. a day.⁵ In 1808 single women in Buckinghamshire were earning 25s. a week and married women £1.⁶ In

1 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 212. E. Lysons, Magna Britannica (1808), p. 483.

2 W. Pitt, loc. cit.

3 S.C. on Arts and Principles of Design, IX, 1836, Minutes of Evidence, Pt. II, p. 16.

4 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 100.

5 W. Pitt, loc. cit.

6 A. Gibbs, A History of Aylesbury (1885), p. 621.

Bedfordshire wages had risen to such a degree that 'some grown up men' were said to be making lace 'full-time', others when unemployed, and by so doing it was said they 'could earn as much as the generality of day labourers'.¹ For a rough-handed labourer, unused to the concentration and precision required of lace-work, this would seemingly be a difficult, almost incredible task. Yet many boys worked in lace schools before moving off to the fields and when grown up could undoubtedly turn their hands to simple pieces such as lace edgings, whenever the need or opportunity arose.² The employment of male labourers in pillow lace-making no doubt contributed to the fact that while poor rates were said to be rising everywhere, they were said to be very little altered in lace districts. Frederick Eden noted that lacemakers were one of the few groups that could 'maintain themselves even in the present dear times'.³ 'The State of the poor in general', said Arthur Young in 1801, 'is advantageous owing very much to lacemaking. Go to the spinning counties and compare'.⁴ It was a situation which met with general approval during a period when the rural poor often were in great distress from high prices and shortage of food.⁵

The industry was now in its prime. Though the scale of its operations during these years is impossible to measure accurately, lace dealers, prone to exaggeration, claimed in 1780 that the value of thread imported through London for Buckinghamshire alone was between £30 and £40,000 per year.⁶ A hundred years earlier £5 of thread had produced £100

1 T. Batchelor, *op.cit.*, p. 597.

2 For further details, see below, pp. 174-5.

3 F. Eden, The State of the Poor, I (1793), p. 556.

4 A. Young, Annals of Agriculture, XXXVII (1801), p. 448.

5 I. Pinchbeck, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-5. J.D. Chambers & G. Mingay, The Agricultural Revolution (1965), pp. 118-120.

6 H. of C.J., XXXVIII, 2 May 1780, p. 135.

of lace¹ and if the proportions were still the same then around £700,000 of lace was being produced each year in Buckinghamshire alone. There is no accurate way of testing the reliability of these figures, but a comparison with the industry's output in the middle of the nineteenth century, by which time, in a good year, around £100,000 of lace was produced, suggests the figure may well have been more representative of the industry as a whole,² though there is no way of measuring this accurately.

The war period was one of almost continuing prosperity and the industry blossomed as never before. Prices and wages were unusually high, new dealers entered the trade attracted by easy profits,³ and children poured into lace schools, the local workshops in which, by this time, new workers were trained.⁴ The local middle classes complained that domestic servants could not be obtained,⁵ farmers were short of labour in the fields at harvest time.⁶ But even as it flourished, the seeds of what were to become serious competitive problems, and ultimately the source of the industry's destruction, were already being sewn. In Nottinghamshire, where lace nets had been produced by workers in the hosiery industry for almost half a century, attempts to reproduce hand-made meshes on the stocking frame, in the manner of a pillow lacemaker, were finally brought to fruition in 1809 when John Heathcoat, a framesmith, perfected a 'bobbin net machine'. As yet, this development had had little effect

1 H. of C.J., XIII, 6th March, 1699.

2 See below, pp. 211-12.

3 For further details, see below, p. 162.

4 See below, pp. 179-180.

5 St. John Priest, General View of the Agriculture of Buckinghamshire (1811), p. 209.

6 *ibid.*

on the hand worker. Yet the inventions of the War years were soon to become the foundation of an enormous machine lace industry and by the early 1840's only an expert would be able to tell the difference between machine-made laces and those made by hand. There was a marked difference in the price of the two goods, however, and the hand workers would eventually find it hard to compete.

When English ports were reopened to the importation of foreign laces shortly before the end of the Wars,¹ the industry was placed in a perilous situation. The fashion-conscious lady, for too long starved of the opportunity of purchasing foreign lace, desperately resumed her flirtation with expensive laces made in romantic-sounding places abroad. Meanwhile, political economists were already doubting the value of protection, for free trade, it was thought, might well see a rapidly industrializing Britain come to dominate the economy of the world. By the 1820's these four factors, the rise of the machine industry, the reopening of the ports, the movement towards free trade and changes in fashion were beginning to react adversely on the hand worker. Henceforth, there was to be no return to the prosperity of the French War period.

1 For details see below, pp. 283-4.

CHAPTER 3

The Rise of the Machine Lace Industry

The prosperity which the French Wars had brought to the pillow lace industry proved to be as transient as it had been sweet. In effect, the Wars had acted as an import barrier behind which the relatively unsophisticated English industry had been able to shelter from laces made by hand workers abroad and the industry had benefited greatly as a result; mechanical reproductions of lace had not yet emerged as a threat. Yet the first experiments with the mechanical production of lace, based on adaptations of the stocking frame, were already well-advanced. The experiments were being undertaken by craftsmen in the hosiery industry, which had developed during the seventeenth century in the area centring on Nottingham, Derby and Leicester.¹ During the first half of the eighteenth century the use of William Lee's stocking frame had grown rapidly until, by 1750, there are said to have been over 14,000 hand-powered machines in operation.² It was from around this time that inventors first began to try to adapt the stocking frame to produce a lace-like net. In Nottingham, framework knitters were trying to adapt the stocking frame so as to penetrate the market for lace during the 1760's. Once the process had begun, the impetus for invention was maintained by an expanding competitive market in which the demand for lace nets grew as their quality and appearance improved.

1 For a full account of the industry's early development see S.D. Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry 1600-1750', Textile History, IV (1972), pp. 7-50; F.A. Wells, The British Hosiery and Knitwear Industry (New Ed. 1972), pp. 15-106.

2 S.D. Chapman, *loc.cit.*, p. 7.

Two forms of adaptation of the stocking frame to the production of lace net were eventually developed.¹ One was the application of a warp to give extra threads, thereby facilitating the production of a mesh resembling lace net; the other was the use of 'ticklers', or points, for the mechanical selection of loops of thread so as to form patterns, thereby facilitating the development of the fancy net trade. The first successful patent for the production of a plain net on one of these machines was that taken out jointly in 1764 in the names of Thomas and John Morris and John and William Betts, though the invention was popularly accredited to a stocking maker named Butterworth, who lived near Mansfield.² But it was in Nottingham, the unrivalled centre of framework knitting and also an important centre of cotton spinning, that most of the early experimentation took place. In the 1760's and 70's, in an atmosphere filled with initiative, Hammond, Holmes, Lindley, Harvey, Else and Crane were all successful, after much practical tinkering and experimentation with forming meshes by hand, in producing plain net on the

1 The fullest account of the industry's progress during the nineteenth century is still that given by William Felkin (1795-1874), who was for many years a lace manufacturer and who was in close contact with many of the industry's inventors and manufacturers, both in England and overseas. His account is often pedantic and cumbersome, and occasionally suffers from personal idiosyncracies, as, for example, in his understatement of the true importance of Hooton Deverill who first successfully applied the Jacquard apparatus to lace machinery. His unstinting admiration for John Heathcoat, once his employer, led him to give an exaggerated account of Heathcoat's contribution to the development of lace machinery. Yet Felkin's book is brimful of first-hand technical and biographical information and still forms the basis of most serious accounts of the industry's evolution. For a detailed account of Felkin's life and work see, W. Felkin, History of Machine-Wrought Lace and Hosiery, 1867, ed. S.D. Chapman (1967), pp. V - XXXIII. See also R.A. Church, Economic and Social Change in a Midland Town, Victorian Nottingham 1815-1900 (1966); Z. Halls, Nottingham Lace (Nottingham, 1964); D.E. Varley, A History of the Midland Counties Lace Manufacturers Association 1915-58 (1959); N. Cuthbert, History of the Lacemakers Society (Nottingham, 1960).

2 *ibid.*, pp. 102-6.

stocking frame.¹ In 1769 Robert Frost produced the first patterned lace. By using a 'tickler' Frost was able to remove some of the stitches at selected intervals during the production of a regular, plain net, thereby turning out large interstices, like the open work patterns in real lace.²

Frame-smiths were constantly aiming at improvement and in particular were trying to produce nets which were finer, stronger and more elastic than their predecessors. For at this stage the product of the stocking frame could in no way be regarded as a technical substitute for hand-made lace. The stocking frame worked in the same way as the hand knitter with a ball of wool, producing a fabric by causing one continuous thread to make rows of loops. The pillow lace worker, in contrast, twisted numerous threads together to form regular hexagonal or square meshes. Though variations of net could be made on the stocking frame by moving the loops, causing them to mesh together in arrangements which produced holes giving the appearance of open work, the fabric was still looped rather than twisted and since it was composed basically of one thread, tended to unravel whenever the thread was broken. It was also too elastic and the measure too irregular for it to have been seriously equated with pillow lace.

In the 1780's a new product was developed which soon outstripped all other machine-made lace fabrics in popularity. This was point net, again produced on the stocking frame but now with a net which had an unprecedented regularity for a machine-made product. The first patent

1 N. Cuthbert, op.cit., p. 5. C. Dodd, op.cit., p. 209. Hammond is said here to have been inspired by a piece of pillow lace on his wife's hat. See also W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 133.

2 J. Blackner, History of Nottingham (1815), pp. 230-2. D. E. Varley, op.cit., p. 16.

for the production of point net was taken out in 1778 by Thomas Taylor, a Nottingham framesmith who had bought the invention from his neighbour, a journeyman stocking maker called Flint.¹ Point lace was later produced commercially by John Morris, a Nottingham hosier. Morris had bought the patent from Taylor who had eventually come to feel that, despite the net's unprecedented regularity and beauty, its light texture and tendency to unravel whenever a thread was broken would render it of no commercial value.² But the problem was solved in 1786 by John Rogers who produced an improved version in which the loops were pressed fast. This gave rise to a far more stable fabric than the old machine net, and was the best imitation of hand-made lace that the stocking frame was ever to produce, though it was still looped rather than twisted and had an infirm, crepe-like character which made it distinguishable from real lace.

During the War years the output of point net increased enormously. In 1786 not more than 50 point net frames had existed; by 1810 there were between 1500 and 1800, mostly in Nottingham, employing about 15,000 men, women and children, besides 'some tens of thousands' of pattern runners who embroidered the designs by hand in the neighbouring counties.³ According to William Felkin the point net frame contributed 'more than any other' to the prosperity of the industry in the years before 1815,⁴ producing edgings, borders, insertions, flounces, veils, scarves 'and every description of article suited to the varying fashions of the time'.⁵

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 137-8; Henson's History of the Framework Knitters, 1831, ed. S.D. Chapman (1970), pp. 299-300.

2 R.A. Church, op.cit., pp. 63-4. J. Blackner, op.cit., p. 231.

3 J. Blackner, op.cit., p. 232.

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 138.

5 *ibid.*, pp. 139-40; D.E. Varley, op.cit., p. 16. The four leading manufacturers then were R. & T. Frost, Wilson, Burnside & Watson, Maltby & Cwitt & W. & T. Hayne. R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 16.

Important adaptations of the stocking frame's derivative, the warp frame, also took place during this period and produced the second major sector of the new lace industry. The invention of the warp frame, which could be used to produce both hosiery and lace, has been variously attributed to a Dutchman called Vandyke, to Tarratt and Morris of Nottingham, and to Crane of Edmonton, but the testimony of Morris that Crane was the inventor has left Crane with most of the credit. Crane adapted his first warp frame for lacemaking in 1775.¹ The warp frame produced a looped lacework with separate threads for each row of loops. The lace therefore would not unravel if a thread was broken and could be cut without risk of disintegration. Warp lace was less elastic than point net and this made it more suitable for the production of scarves, collars and veils, though because its mesh, like that produced on the stocking frame, was looped rather than hexagonal, it still could not be regarded as a close substitute for hand-made lace.

In 1787 Tarratt considerably improved the technique of warp lacemaking by applying treddles to perform the requisite movements. By building the treddles as wide as 44 inches he doubled the speed at which the machine worked and trebled the width of the lace which could be made.² In 1807 rotary motion was successfully applied to the warp frame by William Dawson, a Nottingham mechanic, with an invention later known as 'Dawson's wheel', and the machine's output potential was again increased enormously.³ By 1810 there were over 430 warp lace machines in operation

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 143. J. Blackner, op.cit., p. 228.

2 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 145.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 147-8. J. Blackner, op.cit., p. 231. The wheel had irregular notches on its edge and when revolving operated on horizontal bolts or bars which then moved laterally into the fabric and thereby created the weave.

in Nottingham, producing lace net for embroidering by hand runners in the surrounding villages.¹

The machine lace industry grew up in Nottingham during the years between 1776 and 1810 on these two bases as framework knitters and framesmiths feverishly became lacemakers overnight, building and operating warp and stocking frames in their own small workshops. Few were able to maintain their patent rights, or make even small fortunes.² Indeed, in a number of ways, the industry's development did not proceed smoothly during these years. Periods of prosperity soon began to alternate with periods of deep depression. Financiers often became impatient and withdrew funds from projects. Prosperity and rising optimism often led to over-production, resulting in a collapse of prices and disaster for many of the framesmiths who had invested in a lace machine. As fashions tended to change frequently, new machines often became obsolete before they had repaid their cost.³ The industry was still feeling its way, and though its expansion was considerable, and both warp and point net were in great vogue during the first decade of the nineteenth century,⁴ it was not yet technically equipped to pose a serious threat to the hand industry. The English pillow lace industry was able to prosper, despite the developments taking place just a few miles away.

The growth of the machine industry during these early years was characterised, particularly in Nottingham, by constant efforts to produce exact copies of the fabric made on the lace pillow, for neither the warp nor the point frame could do this. The early years of the nineteenth

1 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations (1851), Reports of the Juries, 1852, p. 462. These were 500 warp net frames in 1812.

2 R.A. Church, op.cit., pp. 63-5.

3 For details, see N. Cuthbert, op.cit., pp. 9-12.

4 Z. Hall, op.cit., pp. 10, 12,

century was a period of great experimentation, in which one invention followed another as mechanics and framesmiths aimed to achieve what many contemporaries regarded as the impossible. The production of close imitations of the meshes turned out on the lace pillow called for a careful examination of the different classes of pillow lace and the reproduction of the various processes of their construction. The would-be inventor had to ascertain the number of threads used and their several courses in the formation of every kind of mesh. He not only had to define and imitate the number and order of twists, plaits, weaves and crosses which were formed by each pair of threads, but had to distinguish the various combinations of fine works, open works, thick threads, points and pearls which constituted the various fillings and patterns in the texture of each class of lace, from Mechlin, Brussels, Alencon, and Lisle, to Buckinghamshire and Honiton. This was an enormous task, a mechanical problem of staggering complexity, and no inventor, as yet, could properly meet its demands.

In just six years, from 1808-1813, however, a number of vital break-throughs were achieved. The improvement owed much to John Heathcoat, the son of a Loughborough hosier, born in 1773 and the first man to construct a machine which could effectively reproduce the twisted mesh made on the lace pillow. Heathcoat's invention, made in 1808 when he was working as a stocking maker in Hathern, Leicestershire,¹ proved to be the turning point in the history of the modern lace industry and its relationship with the hand worker. Like so many others of the Industrial Revolution, the invention was not based on entirely new premises but followed a series of attempts by inventors to produce an exact copy of

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 180. For details of Heathcoat's life see W.G. Allen, John Heathcoat and His Heritage (1958); D.E. Varley, 'John Heathcoate, 1783-1861', Textile History, VI, (1972), pp. 2-45.

pillow lace and incorporated a good many of the workings of its predecessors. Among Heathcoat's rivals were John Moore and Charles Hood who had earlier been able to produce a twisted net on horizontal lace plaiting machines. But both machines had been unable to traverse and the net meshes had gone straight down instead of diagonally across and both had been a commercial failure.¹ Lindley and Whittaker had also experimented, though again without success, at traversing bobbins across a machine and in 1802 Robert Brown had patented a machine for making fishing nets which in some ways was an important precedent for Heathcoat's, for it had incorporated bobbins and carriage on a similar basis, with the bobbins, rotating in carriages, passing round warp threads so as to form the twists from which meshes could be constructed.²

In the event, a number of inventors laid claims to be the originator of the bobbin net machine, though William Felkin had no hesitation in attributing the development to Heathcoat.³ Heathcoat, who worked alone, claimed he had scarcely heard of the improvements which were going on around him; he had not seen Brown's, Whittaker's and Lindley's machinery nor Hood's and Moore's, though he admitted to having had knowledge of the specifications of Brown's and of certain parts of Hood's and Moore's.⁴ Yet most of the parts used in Heathcoat's machine had been developed before 1808, and it seems doubtful if his claim that the contemporary ferment of ideas passed him by can

1 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 162-3.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 173-5. D.E. Varley, *op.cit.*, p. 17.

3 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 194-7.

4 *ibid.*, pp. 186-193.

really be true.¹ Heathcoat's novel contribution lay in his ability to incorporate a number of earlier discoveries - the warp beam on which threads were wound; the flat bobbins in which the 'weft' threads are carried; the carriages which hold the bobbins; the comb bars containing slits by which the carriages are held; the iron pins mounted on a bar running the length of the frame and which take up the meshes as they are twisted² - which in other hands had been practically useless, with developments he had made in his own prototypes, and so produce a successful and sound machine. Hence, the issue of whether or not Heathcoat was the inventor of the bobbin net machine is very much a matter of definition; Heathcoat did not invent the components, but his arrangement was entirely original.³

Many of the early inventors, including Heathcoat, based their machines upon observations of pillow lacemakers at work.⁴ After spending some time watching a pillow lacemaker Heathcoat realised that out of the apparently chaotic mass of threads, which seemed 'altogether like a maize',⁵ some travelled diagonally from one side of the lace to the other

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- 1 Felkin indicated the existence of trade 'gossip' without estimating its importance: 'There he could not help hearing more or less talk, acquainting him with the sanguine hopes of the local mechanics in regard to lace machinery being made to imitate real pillow productions'. W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 183. D.E. Varley concluded that 'whatever may be said about the merits of Heathcoat's own achievements, it is indisputable that he borrowed a great deal from the earlier work of Nottingham men'. D.E. Varley, loc. cit., p. 4.
 - 2 Taking these parts in turn, they might be attributed to Thomas Frost; John Lindley; Simpson & Green; Lindley, Brown & Whittaker; Robert Brown. D.E. Varley, loc. cit., pp. 9-10.
 - 3 For further details see D.E. Varley, loc. cit., pp. 8-15; J. Blackner, op.cit., pp. 446-7; W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 177-9. Felkin questioned many people before concluding that Heathcoat was the first to successfully produce a traversed net. This also is Varley's conclusion. D.E. Varley, loc. cit., pp. 10-11. See also R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 62, and N. Cuthbert, op.cit., p. 10, for similar views.
 - 4 Heathcoat watched the wife of a Hotham journeyman named Hancock. She had been trained in Northamptonshire. W.G. Allen, op.cit., p. 40.
 - 5 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 194.

and back again, while others described a more or less longitudinal course, with very little sideways movement. He conceived the idea of treating these latter threads as warp, placing them vertically in his machine, their ends rolled on top and bottom beams, while the diagonal ones corresponded to the weft of ordinary weaving. But instead of simply passing the wefts in and out of the warps Heathcoat took them round the warps on carriages so as to produce a twisted texture. Each thread was attached to a flat circular bobbin and carried round the warp threads left and right in a diagonal direction, to make the net. When taken off the machine the warp threads were allowed to slacken and the hexagonal mesh, characteristic of the pillow laces of Lille and the south-east Midlands, was formed.¹

One of Heathcoat's greatest achievements was in overcoming the problem of finding space for the great number of bobbins required to make bobbin lace, for a pillow lacemaker might use many hundreds to produce a fine piece. At one time Heathcoat expressed doubts if pillow lace could ever be made by machine, as the warp machines on which he was then engaged used twenty threads to an inch, whereas pillow lace required forty.² But Heathcoat eventually solved the problem by placing the bobbins in a double tier. A new machine, eventually known as 'Old Loughborough', was built in 1809 and, powered by the hands and feet of the operator, could make much wider breadths than the original.³ The patterns were all hand run, but this was to be the basis of tremendous expansion, for it was the first machine to make broad widths of net fine enough to be a competitor to hand-made lace. The

1 *ibid.*, pp. 195-7.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*, pp. 201-2. The machine was patented 14 July 1809.

machine not only produced a superficial likeness of pillow lace, with its hexagonal mesh, but also twisted the yarns in such a manner that in the final form they lay in exactly the same relationship to each other as did those made on the cushion. The net had the additional advantage that it was firm and did not run when a thread broke, as did point net.

Heathcoat went into partnership at Loughborough with Charles Lacy, a point-net manufacturer of Nottingham, and after a year in which the lace trade was generally depressed, saw his business expand.¹ Heathcoat's patent did not expire until 1823, but bobbin net machines attracted investment in a diverse way, both through the persistent imitations and modifications of Heathcoat's machine and through the numerous patentees who obtained licences to own or rent the machines for the purpose of manufacture.

Heathcoat's inventions had re-vitalized the old curiosity and effort which had been characteristic of the 1780's and 90's and a number of mechanics soon made efforts to improve his machine. In 1811 John Brown of New Radford, near Nottingham, took out a patent for a bobbin net machine which produced a traversed net like Heathcoat's, but which differed from his in so far as it was the warp threads, not the bobbin threads, which described the diagonal course. This 'traverse warp machine' improved upon Heathcoat's machine in one respect since it could make an unprecedented quality of 'quillings', very narrow breadths of lace trimming. Heathcoat brought an injunction for infringement of patent against Brown in 1816 and established that the traverse warp frame could not be regarded as a completely new development, but simply as an adaptation of his machine. Yet he conceded that Brown's invention was 'a great improvement' on his own, 'enabling very narrow breadths to be made, though slowly, of excellent

1 For details see, W. G. Allen, op.cit., p. 48; N. Cuthbert, op.cit., p. 11.

texture' and 'superior to any other'.¹ Brown's machine was adopted quickly during the 1820's and clearly was going to be a powerful competitor for the hand industry and proved to be so as minor modifications were incorporated during the following decade.²

Of even greater long-term importance than Brown's adaptation was the machine produced in 1813, in Nottingham, by John Leavers, a frame-setter who had recently moved from Sutton in Ashfield.³ Leavers attempted to improve Heathcoat's machine without contravening his patent, and with the financial backing of a local firm of lace manufacturers, produced a machine in which the bobbins were thin enough to be arranged on a single tier.⁴ The use of a single tier of bobbins meant that, for a given gauge of net, there could now be two bobbins side by side in a space occupied by one bobbin in Heathcoat's frame. Leaver's early machines made an excellent net with elastic properties and for a time appears to have been speedier than Heathcoat's.⁵ In later years, and with subsequent modifications by inventors other than Leavers, it came to be a machine of remarkable versatility and the basis of the fancy net trade. But at this time its patterns were hand-run and it is doubtful if John Leavers was fully aware of its potentiality. The Leavers machine at this stage simply produced plain net to be embroidered with patterns by workers in the villages surrounding Nottingham and its heyday had yet to come.

The hand embroiderers were still the key element in the efforts of the Nottingham industry to produce laces with fancy patterns. Two

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 208-9. For other infringements see D.E. Varley, loc. cit., pp. 17-18. For details of the legal battle surrounding Heathcoat's patent see Felkin, Chapters XIV - XVI.

2 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 226.

3 D.E. Varley, op.cit., p. 18.

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 271.

5 D.E. Varley, op.cit., p. 20.

different methods of embroidering the net were employed. For needlerun net a darning stitch was used, and the threads were carried in and out of the holes of the net in a regular way to form the main part of the pattern, while the holes were enlarged or ornamented with various needlepoint stitches to imitate the fancy fillings of real lace. The designs to be embroidered were printed on the net by wood blocks and the net was then stretched in a frame for the attention of the worker who used his right hand to embroider the design, holding his left under the net. The net was also 'tamboured' or embroidered in chain stitch, by means of a hooked needle, a technique introduced into Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century.¹ This was, as yet, an imitative industry and the designs of hand-made laces, especially those incorporating flowers, were copied and adapted for these purposes. The industry had yet to develop its own group of designers, and individual designs, and was heavily reliant upon traditional patterns passed on by London wholesalers.²

A second important offshoot of Heathcoat's machine was first constructed by Samuel Clark and James Mart of Nottingham in 1812. This was the 'pusher' machine and unlike Leavers' machine, all its threads travelled from one side of the lace to the other in one movement.³ It thus more clearly resembled Heathcoat's machine than Leavers', but differed from Heathcoat's insofar as each carriage, with its bobbin, was moved by a long instrument known as a pusher. In Heathcoat's machine each tier of bobbins and carriages moved in a body through the warp threads. Particular carriages could be pushed, or not pushed between the warp threads as required and could be made to turn round them as in Heathcoat's

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 95.

2 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 76.

3 In Leavers' machine one half of the carriages were placed in the front bar, the other in the back. They were then shifted sideways (shogged) one gait and were then all brought into one line (tier) again. Potentially, this gave it more flexibility than Heathcoat's machine. W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 278. For further details see below, pp. 91-4.

machine, or stopped from doing so, so that openwork or clothwork could be produced. The pusher machine produced a more clear and uniform cloth filling than Heathcoat's machine and when outlined by needle embroidery its products gave close resemblance to shawls, veils and berthas produced on the lace pillow,¹ though the full potential of this was not realized until the 1840's; at this stage pusher manufacturers were still primarily interested in the production of plain net.

The success of these machines, and their subsequent modifications, would ultimately owe much to the parallel development of associated industries and occupations. In 1805 Samuel Cartledge took an important step forward when he succeeded in developing a fine but strong cotton yarn for use on the bobbin net machine. It was more elastic than linen yarn, gave an added sheen to the fabric and its low cost, in comparison with silk and linen, was of major importance in its ever increasing use.² By the end of the century's second decade, though silk laces were still produced extensively, the new yarn, produced first in Manchester and then in Derbyshire and Nottingham mills, dominated not only this industry but was also used extensively by the pillow lace workers who had by now finally abandoned their 'deeply rooted prejudice' against cotton and thanked Mr. Cartledge for his introduction of the new 'thread'.³ Between 1812 and 1835 the price of number 200 count high quality yarn used in making lace nets fell from an average of 19s. 1d. to 12s. 0½d.⁴ Felkin estimated that in 1831 there were over 600,000 spinning spindles in the Midlands, employing over 7,000 workers and producing over 1m. lbs. of

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 292-93. Z. Halls, op.cit., p. 24.

2 *ibid.*, p. 169.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 168-9.

4 T.S. Ashton, 'Some Statistics of the Industrial Revolution in Britain' in Essays in Economic History, III, ed. E.M. Carus Wilson (1962), p. 248.

thread.¹

The traditional skills of machine-building in and around Nottingham were soon utilized for the production of lace machines and the two key crafts of bobbin and carriage making developed as distinct occupations.² The rapid development of lace production also brought corresponding developments in the processes of bleaching, dyeing and finishing. In the dyeing establishments of Keely and Windley, considerable advances, through the application of practical chemistry, were made in developing fast, bright dyes.³ Further improvements in bleaching and finishing were effected by Robert Hall who, in 1813, took out a patent for a machine which was soon also to be employed in dressing and finishing framework-knitted goods.⁴ His success eventually stimulated his son, Samuel, to patent a process by which the floss on the surface of fibres was removed, the fibres being drawn through the blue flames of carburetted hydrogen coal gas. This was a great improvement, for hitherto the rough surfaces of cloth had been removed, with some danger to the transparency of the fibres, by pressing pieces over red hot metal cylinders. Nearly all the manufacturers in the trade were soon using Hall's gassing process to finish their products and 'the superior character of lace ... after gassing was increasingly recognized'.⁵

By the early 1820's the technical bases of a new machine industry, described by Andrew Ure as 'surpassing every other branch of industry by the complex ingenuity of its machinery',⁶ had been established. During the

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 70.

2 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 61.

3 *ibid.*,

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 300-1.

5 *ibid.*, pp. 300-5.

6 A. Ure, Dictionary of Arts, Manufactures and Mines, II (4th Ed. 1867), p. 730.

years immediately following Heathcoat's invention the industry had grown steadily, if with intermittent depressions, caused primarily by over-production and changes in fashion.¹ Its main centre was Nottingham, but there had also been considerable growth in Leicester, Chesterfield, Lenton, Radford and Hyson Green. John Heathcoat had eventually moved with a number of loyal, skilled artisans, from Loughborough to Tiverton in Devon where he had located a disused woollen factory. He had planned his move in 1815, but had finally decided to move when Luddites smashed over £1000 of his machinery (55 machines) in 1816. Hence, a second pocket of machine lace production had developed in the West Country, although it was never to be as large as that in the Midlands, where investment continued despite the violence of this year.²

The adaptation of Heathcoat's machine had already caused what was now the old sector of the machine industry to contract. The production of point net had been declining even before Heathcoat's patent had been taken out owing to the ability of the new French machine industry³ to produce better articles more cheaply, and after 1815 it had virtually disappeared.⁴ In contrast, there were already 140 bobbin net machines on licence under Heathcoat's patent and another 150 which were infringements. By 1818 there were over 690 machines.⁵ But the old warp machine fared rather better and between 1810 and 1820 a number of technical improvements enabled it to hold its own. The plain cotton warp nets which had been made for ten or fifteen years were rapidly driven out of the market by Heathcoat's twist

1 For details see N. Cuthbert, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

2 R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, pp. 65-66. For details of Heathcoat's move see W.G. Allen, *op.cit.*, Ch. VI *passim*. By 1821 Heathcoat employed over 1500 workers. D.E. Varley, *loc. cit.*, p. 25.

3 For details of the machine industry in France, see below, pp. 104-109.

4 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 140. John Blackner said 'scarcely a yard' was made by 1808. J. Blackner, *op.cit.*, p. 234.

5 R.A. Church, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-6.

net which was superior both in texture and appearance. Many of the oldest of the warp frames were broken up and sold as scrap iron.¹ But this had the effect of directing warp net producers to seek new outlets, and during the 1820's warp net, made of silk, was popular as a trimming and was often made up into whole garments such as veils.² For a while this 'blonde' lace was in great repute, until eventually driven from the market by silk nets produced on Heathcoat's machines, and by imports from the French machine industry.³ It was in the warp machine sector of the industry, however, that the first successful attempts to ornament lace completely on the machine were made. Bullet hole and spotted warp nets were produced early in the 1820's by Boot, Roberts and Herbert. In 1822 warp tattings were devised by Copestake and 'suddenly machinery which before was worthless, rose to a great value; many new machines began to be built; and these warp tattings gave quite a new impulse in the warp trade'.⁴ Just as the warp tattings reached their peak of popularity the silk blonde again revived, under the patronage of the Court. In 1831 Queen Adelaide appeared at one of her balls in a dress of white silk warp lace, and it was not until 1835 that the demand for this fabric fell away again.⁵

At the beginning of the 1820's, however, the industry's immediate future lay most clearly with Heathcoat's machine and its derivatives. As yet, the full potentiality of Leavers' machines had still to be realized and compared with Heathcoat's machines they still had a number of defects in producing plain net. The carriages had to be divided to effect the traverse (which slowed the machine down considerably) and the action of

1 Reports of the Juries, 1852, op.cit., p. 462.

2 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 149.

3 Reports of the Juries, loc. cit.

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 149.

5 Reports of the Juries, loc. cit.; Nottingham Review, June 3, 1831; quoted in G. Henson, op.cit., pp. 302-3.

the points in running the formed meshes up to work the roller beam was unsatisfactory.¹ Moreover, the Leavers machine did not respond well to attempts to harness steam power to rotary action, for the vibrations induced by the steam engine caused a large number of false entries of the fine Leavers carriages into their combs, thereby seriously interrupting the work.² It was Heathcoat's machine, and its derivatives, which were adapted most strongly to steam power during this decade and which were responsible for the greater part of the industry's output.

Once Heathcoat's patent expired in 1823,³ coincident with a cyclical upswing, the industry's growth spurted, as framesmiths were once more gripped in an atmosphere of 'twist fever'. In 1824 a significant improvement in the production of twist net was developed by William Morley who devised a 'circular comb machine' which improved the smoothness and regularity of the movements of Heathcoat's machine by reducing the bolts from four short combs to two circular ones and by using pusher bars below the combs instead of above them to carry along the carriages. The machine incorporated rotary action and could be powered by steam.⁴ In the years 1823-25 capital poured into the industry, from outside as well as from within. Nottingham's population expanded rapidly as a result of migration from neighbouring counties, for machine workers were now receiving as much as 30s. a day.⁵ 'Day labourers came from the plough and strikers from the forge ... Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield engineers and tool-makers met on one common ground; but houses were too few to lodge them; bricks doubled in price

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 280.

2 D.E. Varley, op.cit., p. 20.

3 Heathcoat had already begun to grant licences more freely from 1817. W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 248-9.

4 *ibid.*, p. 313. See also, Z. Halls, op.cit., p. 22.

5 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 68.

and building land sold for £4,000 an acre'.¹ Water or steam power had already been applied for a number of years to bobbin net machinery in the larger establishments and the 'unparalleled prosperity' of these years was the means of drawing machines into factories in increasing numbers,² though it was not until after 1850 that the factory became characteristic.³

In 1831 the number of machines employed in the industry had reached 4500⁴ and by 1833 5000, of which 1100 were steam powered and located in 22 factories.⁵ Felkin said, if perhaps with some exaggeration, that there then were over 14,000 workers in the towns, feeding over 150,000 outworkers.⁶ In terms of volume of production the pillow lace industry had been left far behind, the machine industry's final product being valued in 1836 at £2.12m.⁷ Whereas a pillow lace worker could produce only five meshes per minute, Heathcoat's first machine could produce 1000, by 1820, following modifications, it could produce 10,000 and by 1836, 30,000,⁸ and this at an ever-decreasing cost. In the early 1830's, it was estimated that the machine worker could undercut the hand worker, on

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 331.

2 *ibid.*

3 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 83.

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 340; 333-4.

5 The hand-powered machines comprised: 1400 Leavers; 400 rotaries; 1350 circulars; 750 pushers. *ibid.*, p. 341.

6 *ibid.*, p. 334. Andrew Ure estimated, again with some exaggeration, that there were 10,000 twist hands, 40,000 auxiliary workers and 150,000 outworkers. A. Ure, op.cit., p. 499. The 1851 census gave 10,000 workers in Nottingham, where approximately 70 per cent of all bobbin net machinery was located. But this is almost certainly an under-estimation. For the difficulties of estimating the size of the labour force see R.A. Church, op.cit., pp. 82-3.

7 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 343. The pillow lace industry's output was probably worth no more than £100,000 in 1851. See below pp. 211-212.

8 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 60, quoting W. Felkin 'The Lace and Hosiery Trades of Nottingham', Journal of the Statistical Society, XXIX (1866), p. 540.

similar products, at a price ratio of roughly eight to one.¹

These were tremendous odds for the hand worker to compete against, particularly as the machine industry had meanwhile been improving its technique, especially in producing fancy patterns entirely on the machine. Until 1831 the great bulk of laces turned out on bobbin net machinery had been little more than plain net quillings.² The challenge to reproduce hand-made goods entirely on the machine had still to be met. Localization, competition and a market which, although expanding, was changing its nature, proved to be the mainsprings of technical progress. Most London buyers visited Nottingham to purchase from specialist merchants dealing in finished goods.³ But the industry was still characterized in the 1820's by a multiplicity of small producers hawking their nets by way of agents, up and down the country.⁴ Many of the new inventors who emerged during the 1830s were small producers such as these, seeking new ways of increasing their share of the market. The expiration of Heathcoat's patent had seen many sellers retailing similar articles and crises of over-production had continued; in 1826 prices of bobbin nets, lace machinery and wages fell drastically and caused a good deal of consternation.⁵ By the early 1830's there were signs that the demand for embroidered nets

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 419. Andrew Ure quotes the prices of finished plain net per yard as follows -

1813 - 40s;	1815 - 30s;	1818 - 20s;	1821 - 12s;
1824 - 8s;	1827 - 4s;	1830 - 2s;	1833 - 15s.4d.;
1836 - 10d;	1842 - 6d;	1850 - 4d.	

A. Ure, op.cit., p. 494. See also, R. Church, op.cit., p. 79.

2 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 460.

3 R.A. Church, op.cit., pp. 71, 73.

4 *ibid.*, p. 71. D.E. Varley, op.cit., p. 57.

5 *ibid.*, p. 69. R.A. Church, op.cit., pp. 79, 93-6; N. Cuthbert, op.cit., p. 18. Another serious slump occurred in 1834. W.G. Gordon, Midland Sketches (1898), pp. 31-2.

was declining, foreign goods were being smuggled into Britain in increasing quantities, driving British producers from the market.¹ It was clear that a change of direction, towards the production of more close imitations of hand-made lace, for which demand was increasing, was necessary if the industry's momentum was to be maintained.²

The problems which beset the machine industry during the 1820's and which continued during the early 30's,³ acted as an incentive to experimentation and improvement. Intermittent depression, the high rate of obsolescence, increasing demand for fancy goods and the sheer challenge of achieving technical perfection, led mechanics to seek a machine which could adapt more quickly to market changes and which could produce fabrics on a par with the best of those made on the lace pillow. The increased demand for fancy fabrics brought mechanics in the Nottingham industry to seek a machine which could not only produce close copies of pillow laces, but which, by its sophistication, could dictate rather than respond to changes in fashion. There was every incentive to improve, for improvements in themselves tended always to promote increases in demand.⁴

The ultimate aim of experimenters was no less than the achievement of complete control over every thread at work in the machine so as to match and imitate the degree of control achieved by the pillow lace worker. This was an enormous problem. A pillow lace worker generally used 50 bobbins to cover each square inch on her pillow, and there were 625 meshes to a square inch.⁵ Into these meshes were worked the most intricate and, at

1 Report from the S.C. to examine the present state of the Silk Trade, XIX, 1831-2, pp. 473-4; N. Cuthbert, op.cit., p. 25.

2 D.E. Varley, op.cit., pp. 20-1.

3 Numerous plain net machines were broken up as a result of over-production in 1833 and 1834. R.C. on the Employment and Conditions of Children in Mines and Manufactures, Appendix to Second Report, Part I, XIV, 1843 (431) p. f.13.

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 132.

5 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 249.

times, beautiful of patterns. It was slow, precise work, and on delicate pieces the work demanded intense concentration.¹ To imitate such precision on a machine, to gain equivalent control over every thread in the process of construction was a tremendous challenge, but it was one which eventually proved to be within the industry's grasp.

The lead in this direction had already been taken by the warp lace sector. Though it had been driven out of plain net production by Heathcoat's machine it had adapted its technology to produce fancy nets with spots and holes during the 1820s and still employed over 1000 machines as late as 1851.² From the late 1820's, however, there was a spurt of invention and innovation with respect to the production of fancy lace in most sectors, so much so that only the most important of a host of inventors who laboured at refining what were already highly complex pieces of equipment can be mentioned here.³ A contribution towards the production of fancy nets on the pusher machine was made in 1825 by John Synyer of Sneiton, Nottingham, who introduced extra wheels and pusher bars by which he could persuade the machine to make large bullet holes. A feature of these holes, which were surrounded by smaller holes, was that they gave the appearance of the 'honeycomb' net sometimes produced by the pillow lace workers in the south east Midlands.⁴

The appearance of the finished product was also altered by William Sneath and Thomas Robert Sewell. In 1831 Sneath was responsible for the invention of a machine which Felkin termed, 'of great and permanent importance'.⁵

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- 1 Some laces needed more than 400 bobbins. Northamptonshire Past and Present, I (1938), p. 39.
 - 2 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 463. Z. Halls, op.cit., p. 14.
 - 3 For a detailed account see W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 310-375; Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 460-61.
 - 4 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 293. When made by machine this net was called 'Grecian net'.
 - 5 *ibid.*, p. 312.

Sneath devised a means of producing spotted nets on Morley's circular comb machine by letting the main body of carriages remain stationary, while spotting carriages were propelled backwards and forwards by driving bars between and around the appropriate warp threads until enough spots had been made. The normal process of the machine was then resumed. The spots of wattled basket work produced by this machine were described by Felkin as 'too beautiful and useful ever to go out of fashion'¹ and closely resembled the 'plaits' which were a feature of Buckinghamshire lace. In 1831, Sewell, who for many years had worked on improving point and bobbin net machines, produced a circular machine which could produce 'three twist' or Brussels ground net from fine yarns.² Heathcoat's net, imitating the net ground of the south-east Midland pillow lace, was 'two twist', in which four of the six sides of the hexagon were made of twisted threads, the other two sides which lay at right angles to the edge of the lace being formed of two threads which were simply crossed one over the other. In 'three twist' net the bobbin threads travelled two and a half times round the warp threads, so as to show three twists on each twisted side of the finished net. In this way the machine produced a mesh which was diamond shaped, rather than hexagonal, and in which the holes were slightly larger than those produced on the lace pillow. But it gave the product a lighter and more airy appearance than the true twist net produced on Heathcoat's machine and, ironically, helped the hand industry in Devon, for the net was particularly suitable as a background for applique work, and was often referred to as 'Brussels' net, though it bore little resemblance to the original product.³

Valenciennes lace was also first successfully imitated by machine

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 462.

2 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 314-17; Z. Halls, op.cit., pp. 23-4.

3 This also helped the hand producer overseas, particularly in Belgium. See below pp. 139-140.

during the 1830's. The traditional product had a characteristic mesh background with diamond-shaped holes and each of the four sides plaited. It was durable in wear, yet delicate in appearance and by the end of the eighteenth century was typically patterned with small flowers in fine muslin-like clothwork, edged by a line of fine holes. In 1836 Thomas Alcock patented a Leavers machine which imitated the Valenciennes mesh. The fabric was not traversed but was formed of pairs of threads twisted together and caught at intervals to make the diamond mesh. Spots could be made on it and by the 1840's it was being produced with an improved mesh and clothwork patterns, giving a general, if not exact appearance of early nineteenth century Valenciennes lace.¹ The improvement, which gave a delicate and attractive effect, owed much to J.W. Bagley who had studied Valenciennes edgings in Paris and who in 1838 had produced a mesh similar to Alcock's. This was made of longitudinal lines caught together to make the diamond-shapes, but incorporated three-fold plaited lines instead of Alcock's two-fold twisted ones, the difference being effected by the use of a double warp to each bobbin thread. Shortly afterwards the patent was taken over by Fisher and Crofts who had emerged as leading lace manufacturers in Nottingham, and who soon began producing imitations which, with subsequent improvements during the 1840's, came so close to the original as to 'defy detection'.²

These improvements, and others,³ contributed to what Felkin called 'the great onward movement of the fancy trade',⁴ though the thicker outlining threads characteristic of Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire lace,

1 W. Felkin, *op. cit.*, p. 349.

2 *ibid.*, p. 318. The patent was popularly known as the 'monster patent'.

3 For details see *ibid.*, pp. 345-47.

4 *ibid.*, p. 323.

and the great bulk of patterns, were still embroidered by hand. Together, the inventions of the 1830's brought to an end the third important phase in the growth of lace production by machine. By 1836 the Nottingham industry contained 2162 machines and there were another 598 machines in Leicester and Derbyshire and 787 in the West of England.¹ Over £2.32m. of capital was said to be employed and there were 29 power factories.² The nature of the industry was changing. Almost one third of the machines made fancy goods, of which the bulk were Leavers machines and the proportion was increasing; in 1833 only 200 frames had been making fancies out of a total of around 5000.³ The total number of machines therefore had fallen between 1833 and 1836. Many narrow and slow machines producing plain net had been broken up. There had also been a most striking development towards a concentration of ownership, the number of persons owning machines declining from 1382 to 837, the product of a competitive situation in which steam operators had eliminated many of the smallest narrow machine owners.⁴ In 1836 approximately two-thirds of existing lace machinery was in the hands of slightly more than six per cent of machine owners while 70 per cent owned less than three machines.⁵ Yet the movement towards a

1 *ibid.*, p. 343. There were about 253 machines standing idle.

2 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, p. 460. Each factory contained at least 8 machines and some 60 or more. R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, Appendix to the Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. F3.

3 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 343. Of the total of 3547 machines at work:

1293 rotaries	were making plain net,	247 quillings,	47 fancies
116 circulars	" " " "	114 "	188 "
16 Leavers	" " " "	761 "	448 "

in addition to 152 traverse warp machines, and 165 pushers, also engaged primarily on fancy work. The value of plain net output in Nottingham was £503,157; the value of quillings output in Nottingham was £375,103; the value of fancies output in Nottingham was £491,678. A similar breakdown was not provided for other centres. R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, Appendix to the Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. F51.

4 *ibid.*, pp. 340-44, R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 73.

5 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. F.49.

more concentrated ownership did not mean that factory organization was typical. There were still more hand operated machines than steam-powered.¹ The typical unit of production was still the small workshop, which in Nottingham was often to be found in the upper storeys of large houses near the town centre. This remained so just as long as hand-operated machines were able to compete with power machines and the fundamental change was not to come until the 1840's.²

The sum total of the structural changes taking place during the 1830's was that the output of a wide variety of goods increased. Though the number of machines in operation had fallen, many machines had become quicker and wider and Felkin estimated that the value of the industry's output in 1836 was £2.212m., in comparison with £1.9m. in 1831, and the value of the industry's output continued to grow in the 20 years thereafter, even though the trend throughout the period 1830-60 was one of falling prices.³

No detailed statistical breakdown of the industry's output is available for the years 1836 to 1843, but the trends towards increasing output and experimentation with fancy lace production continued.⁴ Localization and personal contact continued to generate forces favourable to innovation and by the mid 1840's it had become possible to re-produce almost every known variety of hand-made lace completely on the machine.

1 *ibid.*, p. F3.

2 R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, pp. 83-5.

3 These estimates of output are only approximate and are heavily dependent on Felkin's own estimations. See R. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 82; W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 337, 394-95; W. Felkin, 'Facts and Calculations illustrative of the present state of the Bobbin Net Trade', September 1831; 'Statistics of the Bobbin Net Trade' August 1833; 'Statistics of the English Bobbin Net Trade', January 1836. These are reproduced as appendices 4-6 in First Report of the S.C. on the Laws affecting the Exportation of Machinery, 1841 (201) VII, 4, pp. 245-61; Account of the Hosiery and Lace Manufacturers, Childrens Employment Commission, First Report, 1863, (3170), XVIII, 1, pp. 234-36.

4 R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

5 See for example, First Report from the S.C. on the Laws affecting the Exportation of Machinery, op.cit., 1841, Part I, p. 179.

The key to the improvement lay in the application of the Jacquard apparatus, a thread selecting device, already well known to the textile trades, to lace machines. An early attempt was made by Samuel Draper of Whitemoor, Nottingham, in 1835. Draper developed a complex machine which had two sets of carriages, arranged in two tiers one set below the other, with the Jacquard operating on the bobbin threads, rather than the warp. The lace was traversed and the machine made several excellent patterns. But it did not work safely, was expensive to build and in the event proved to be a commercial failure.¹ In 1837 Jacquard cards were used with warp machines and in 1839, by James Wright, with pusher machines.² The most important break-through came, however, in 1841, when a new means of adapting the Jacquard to the Leavers machine was devised by Hooton Deverill. Plain nets had always been made by the to and fro movements of carriages and their threads, together with the lateral motions of various sets of threads, whether warp or bobbin. The new fancy lace was produced on Deverill's machine, a piece of bewildering technology, by similar but far more complex movements. The bobbin threads moved on carriages in a variety of ways, some passing between the warp threads, some remaining stationary, some shifting laterally to the extent of one or more meshes to the left and some to the right. In all cases the movement was determined by pushers which acted on raised parts of the carriages. A greater variety of movement, however, came with the warp threads. Instead of being separated into two divisions, as were the bobbin threads, the warp threads were separated into many, each of which could move laterally and independently of the others. It was by modifications of these lateral movements that

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 360-5.

2 Z. Halls, op.cit., p. 25.

the numerous varieties of fancy lace were produced. If the warp threads were placed in several divisions, each moving to the right or left independently of the other, and if the bobbin threads were also allowed to move independently, then it followed that an almost infinite variety of movements and patterns could be brought about.

The movements of the carriages governed the manner in which the bobbin threads twisted round the warp threads, as well as how the different systems and sizes of warp threads were made to enter into the outline and body of the pattern. The warp threads were made to move laterally by means of guide bars which were attached to springs or levers placed at the end of the machine. Each bar, made of steel and as long as the machine was wide, was pierced with holes answering exactly to the particular threads required of each pattern. The threads were passed through these holes and guided by the bars to their place in the pattern. It was the Jacquard apparatus which selected the levers or springs which pulled or pushed the bars to and from the end of the machine.

The Jacquard apparatus consisted of a four, five or six-sided roller, each side perforated with as many holes as there were moveable pins or levers placed in a frame above the rolling cylinder. A number of oblong pieces of cardboard, from 50 to 500, were connected together in an endless chain and so arranged as to size that when one of the cards was laid on one side of the cylinder and the latter was made to revolve, the whole series could be brought successively into contact with the cylinder. Every card was pierced with holes which coincided exactly with the cylinder and varied in number and position according to the pattern of the lace being produced. The cylinder had an up and down motion given to it on the presentation of the face of each fresh card and this brought it into contact with the pins. Whenever a hole occurred in the card it permitted the pin opposite to penetrate into the cylinder, but when a blank occurred

the pin could not enter the cylinder and was driven upwards. Since the pins or levers acted on the bars that moved the threads in the machine, the disposition of the holes in the card determined the order and number of shiftings of the threads. The number of cards employed depended on the number of successive movements required to form a complete piece of lace and many thousands could be used for a large piece.¹

The resultant fabric was not traversed (i.e. no threads travelled diagonally from one side of the fabric to the other and then back again) and in this respect differed from hand-made lace. It also had strongly marked longitudinal threads, while hand-made lace did not. On machine-made lace the thick threads outlining the pattern were flat on the underside, whereas on pillow lace they were equally prominent on both sides. The machine also was incapable of producing threads which move backwards through the pattern, so that whenever a part of a pattern was to be surrounded by a thick thread, two threads were used, as compared with the one outlining thread which could encircle any part of the pattern on the lace pillow. But such was the refinement of the patterns produced by the Jacquard that it would have taken a connoisseur to recognize the difference.

Neither the guide bars nor the use of the Jacquard nor the making by machine of untraversed net were new innovations. The extra guide bars had been applied to Leavers machines by Biddle and Birkin, the Jacquard had been applied in France, in 1833, by an expatriate Englishman named Ferguson, an untraversed square net had been made by Bryant and Harvey in 1832 and William Crofts had experimented with guide bars and Jacquard control in 1840.²

1 The above account is based largely on the detailed description, W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 356-75. See also, Encyclopaedia Britannica, *op.cit.*, XIII, pp. 572-4; C. Singer (ed.), A History of Technology (1958) V, pp. 601-4; G. Middleton, Imitations of Hand-Made Lace by Machinery (1938); D.E. Varley, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-9.

2 D.E. Varley, *op.cit.*, pp. 22-27.

Deverill's contribution, like Heathcoat's, lay in his particular combination of these features into a single, workable machine. Deverill's machine permitted an unprecedented selectivity and control over individual threads, enabling him to produce innumerable variations of pattern corresponding closely to hand-made fabrics, while the fixing of the comb bars made steam power, once a problem with Leavers' machines,¹ a practical possibility.² Not only did steam power make the machine faster but, more important still, it made possible a width of machine which was beyond the strength of the hand operator. The machine was subsequently improved by Joseph Wragg who adapted Deverill's machine to incorporate the one thick outlining thread which characterized much hand-made lace.³

The application of the Jacquard to lace machinery proved to be the ultimate turning point in the history of the machine industry and its relationship with the hand worker. Deverill's invention turned machines which had once been of limited usefulness into highly versatile pieces of equipment and the industry was quick to recognize its potential. Years before the introduction of Deverill's new machine Felkin had been unable to conceive of such improvement:-

The most sanguine can hardly appreciate how extensively the bobbin net machine may be adapted to the production of new fabrics or the attractive modifications of those already known.⁴

Yet only a year after Deverill's invention he was able to remark upon the

1 See above, p. 82.

2 D.E. Varley, *op.cit.*, p. 27. Varley notes that Felkin was 'strangely reluctant' to accord Deverill due merit as 'the proper claimant to the title of father of the fancy lace trade'. Felkin gives no biography of him, which is unusual.

3 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 385. Hand-made laces with a raised outlining thread include East Midland, Lisle, Mechlin, Brussels, Burano, point d'Alencon and point d'Argentan.

4 Quoted in R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 75.

'striking improvement' which had taken place.¹ Deverill's invention had placed the trade in a 'ferment of excitement'.² By 1846 over 400 machines had been equipped with the Jacquard apparatus.³

The introduction of the Jacquard soon permitted the production of imitation Lille, Mechlin, Buckinghamshire, Devon, Brussels, Burano, point d'Alencon and point d'Argentan. Of these, Mechlin had always been the most popular, for it was an elegant and very light fabric, with delicate floral patterns, worked against a mesh more close and solidly hexagonal than that produced in the south-east Midlands.⁴ By 1844 convincing imitations of Mechlin lace, known as 'Meklin lace', were being made on the Leavers machine, to such a degree that George Dodd doubted if those who were concerned with lace as a material for ornamental dress could decide if it was made by machinery or hand.⁵ And there was excellent reason why he might have expected this to be so, for every year presented a new order of processes by which a pattern which previously could only be produced by the hand worker could be made on the machine. In some cases the imitations were so exact that Dodd felt 'a close inspection' would be necessary to determine the mode of production.⁶

By the early 1850's it was said the Jacquard system was operating 'the greater part of machinery' in the fancy work sector. Much of this was due to John Woodhouse Bagley who applied 'one of the most singularly

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. f.52.

2 Nottingham Journal, 15 October 1841, quoted in D.E. Varley, op.cit., p. 22.

3 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 284.

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 363.

5 G. Dodd, The Textile Manufactures of Great Britain (1844), p. 205.

6 *ibid.*

gifted mechanical minds that has ever been applied to the improvements of the bobbin net machine' to produce imitations of pillow lace of various and most intricate kinds, 'so close and perfect as almost to defy detection and yet of chaste and elegant patterns'.¹ The lace machine was saluted by the commissioners of the International Exhibition of 1861 as a triumph of man's ingenuity. 'As a machine, the most remarkable of its kind, it presents one of the greatest conquests of machine and proves incontestably the possibility of substituting automatic for every kind of hand labour'.²

Of scarcely less importance in terms of the industry's future prosperity had been an accompanying improvement in design and in the techniques of marketing. Felkin had long stressed the importance of design and that manufacturers should acknowledge the connection between the perfection of their goods and the cultivation of the fine arts on scientific principles. In 1842, commenting on the excellence of some of the new laces embroidered completely on the machine, he stated that in his opinion the industry's future now rested on its ability to develop the full potential of the new fancy trade.³ Together with Gravenor Henson⁴ he campaigned in the local press and Town Council for a school of design, aware of the industry's need, if it was to dominate a fickle market, to lead and create fashion as well as to respond to it. Many industrialists

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 371.

2 The commissioners in the International Exhibition, as cited in W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 428.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to the Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. f.52.

4 Gravenor Henson, 1785-1852. Commercial historian, politician expert on the hosiery and lace industries. One time companion of William Felkin. For further details see, W. Felkin, op.cit., passim; 'Gravenor Henson and the Making of the English Working Class' in G.E. Mingay and E. Jones (ed.), Land, Labour and Capital. Essays presented to Professor J.D. Chambers, (1967); Henson's History of the Framework Knitters (1831), op.cit.

supported them.¹ The Nottingham School of Design was opened in 1843, financed mainly by private subscriptions, though the government granted a small annual subsidy of £150. The Nottingham industry now began to produce its own designs, abandoning its old practice of copying patterns, which had often followed the lead given by hand-made laces, brought over from London wholesalers.²

With an eye fixed firmly on the expanding market, merchants now began to gauge the potentialities of both fabric and design more clearly than ever before. The industry geared itself to interpreting, anticipating and even influencing changes in fashion. In the late 1840's pattern-designing slowly emerged as a distinct occupation, stimulated by the discovery by William Taylor of a process of recording designs and devising patterns of increasing complexity on the drawing board.³ The establishment of the Penny Post in 1840, and later the parcel post, and the opening of the Midland Railway through Nottingham in 1839-40 were important elements in quickening the pulse of the trade and in widening the national market.⁴ The improvement in communications brought London and provincial buyers in closer contact with the lace market in Nottingham, and orders became smaller and more frequent. The railway saw the end of the old road carriers who had taken consignments of lace to London by packhorse, and enabled the major firms to employ agents throughout the country (and in the capitals of Europe), giving them much closer contact with market trends.⁵ Much was owed to the influx of European Jews, who had capital, judgement and world-wide

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to the Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. f.22; George Taylor, a manufacturer, said he believed this to be the 'general opinion in the trade'.

2 R. A. Church, op.cit., p. 76.

3 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 554.

4 R. A. Church, op.cit., p. 77; D. E. Varley, op.cit., p. 95.

5 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 553.

connections.¹ In 1867 Messrs. Fisher and Copestake had 30 agents centred not only in Britain but as far afield as Paris, New York and Philadelphia.² With agents abroad they were able to hold back orders for supplies until the last moment in order to lessen risks.

The improvement in Nottingham laces was confirmed at the Great Exhibition of 1851, when Nottingham designers, many of whom had been taught at the newly-established School of Design, were judged to be capable of producing an infinite variety of articles manufactured with an 'excellence in design',³ including close imitations of the pillow laces of England, Valenciennes, Mechlin, and Brussels. Numerous manufacturers and London wholesalers⁴ received medals from the Judges for imitation pillow laces which, in general, fell into four main categories:-

1. Black silk piece net ornamented shawls, scarfs, flounces, trimming laces, blondes in white and colours, some wholly finished on the machine, others partly by machinery and embroidered afterwards.
2. Cotton edgings, laces and insertions, linen laces in imitation of white pillow lace, muslin edgings and laces, fancy piece net, spotted net, plain net in imitation of the costly Valenciennes lace.
3. Curtains in imitation of the Swiss curtains, covers and blinds.
4. Silk and cotton, plain net, Mechlin grounds, blonde, Brussels or extra twist.⁵

1 R.A. Church, op.cit., pp. 76-7.

2 W. Felkin, loc. cit.

3 'There is no doubt', said the Jurors, 'that at the present time our local artists are capable of producing designs equal to the French'. Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 461.

4 Official Descriptive Catalogue of the Great Exhibition, II, 1851, pp. 559-74. Among the Nottingham firms which exhibited the following were notable: Ball, Dunncliffe and Co.; Richard Birkin; Heymann and Alexander; Reckless and Hickling and Henry Steyman and Co.

5 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 1008. The lace curtain machine had been invented by John Livesey in the 1840's. *ibid.*

The Juries commented on the tremendous progress achieved in the previous fifty years:

There have been incredible sums of money expended, many valuable lives sacrificed by intense study, hundreds of patents taken out, and nearly as many differently-constructed machines built for the production of plain and ornamented laces of every description. It has been a matter of astonishment to see how quickly one inventor has succeeded another, and by simplifying or modifying his machine, rendered useless those of his predecessor.¹

Casting a glance back at the hand producer the Juries also noted that the machine industry could now make silk piece net, shawls, scarfs, flounces, trimming laces and blondes which were lower in price by 75 to 90 per cent of hand made goods,² an ominous sign for the hand producer.

The industry's development during these years was almost entirely favoured by trends in fashion. The rising standard of living and increasing demand for cheap luxuries by the middle class, and skilled working class, saw lace become one of the most fashionable of dress accessories, complementing the more sombre 'Gothic' basic materials of the woman's dress. In February 1849 a writer in The World of Fashion wrote, typically, that

Nothing can equal the rage for lace at the present moment, no costume being considered perfect unless it is accompanied by its lace chemisette, lace full sleeves and lace trimmings, or in full dress, the lace flounces, berthe, and lappets, giving grace, lightness and elegance to the whole costume.³

Though dress fashions changed, lace was seldom out of view (save as underwear for which it was also used lavishly), until the century's end. Its popularity extended to the Victorian drawing room, where lace curtains

1 *ibid.*, p. 1006.

2 *ibid.*, p. 461.

3 World of Fashion, February 1849, p. 22. For further details of fashions see below chapters 11-13 *passim*.

added privacy, and d'oyleys, furnishing decoration. The vogue for lace furnishings and dress accessories sustained a buoyant demand not only in the domestic market but in markets as far afield as the United States, Australia, Continental Europe and the Argentine.¹ By the increasing perfection and variety of its output the Nottingham lace industry was able not only to meet the demands of these markets but to continually stimulate their expansion.

The industry had grown and changed rapidly on these bases during the 1840's, though, characteristically, its development had not all been plain sailing. The commercial panic of 1837 had so adversely affected the industry that half the lace machinery had stopped working and a relief fund had to be established to maintain over 4000 hosiery and lace workers in Nottingham.² The depression had continued in the plain net department during the early 1840's and before 1843 only three-fifths or so of the lace frames had been regularly at work.³ In 1845 the industry was hit by a crisis of over-production in all departments, prices fell greatly, with Leavers edgings selling at 1d. a yard;⁴ and in 1846 the industry slumped again. The improvements introduced by the School of Design had seen the industry pick up again during 1847 only to fall off again with the commercial panic of 1848. According to Felkin, 'no regular sales of lace were made in the home markets from October 1847 to April 1848'.⁵ But the demand gradually revived in 1849 and continued to do so as Nottingham laces were substituted for imports of machine-made lace from

1 R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 285.

2 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 376.

3 *Ibid.*

4 N. Cuthbert, *op.cit.*, pp. 26-7.

5 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 378.

France and as the American market, which had been overstocked in 1848, expanded again.¹ The Great Exhibition proved to be a great stimulus for the production of lace curtains and imitation laces of all kinds. By 1856 Felkin estimated that the number of machines had increased from around 3200 in 1843 to around 3500 and most of an increased width. In the same period the value of the industry's output had increased from £2.74m. to £4.0m., of which the around 800 warp frames had been responsible for £350,000 & £980,000 respectively. In 1843 there had been only 100 machines operating with the Jacquard apparatus, but now roughly half of the total number were Deverill-Leavers, such had been the impetus given to the fancy trade at this time.²

In the years following 1851 the industry was not only characterized by a vast expansion of output but also by a continuous improvement in the quality and variety of its laces. Not all of the laces shown at the Exhibition of 1851 were of the highest quality, which was in part attributable to the fact that the Nottingham manufacturers were already catering for differentiated markets, including the vast export market to both North and South America where their lace found great favour with the expanding middle classes and British migrants. In 1853 over £700,000 of lace went overseas from Britain.³ Throughout the 1850's the potentialities of the various machines continued to be explored. Imitation laces already being made were perfected further. The Chantilly lace made on pusher machines was extremely popular and was refined so as to be indistinguishable from the hand-made variety. By 1860 the same could be said of almost any lace in existence.

1 *ibid.*

2 *ibid.*, pp. 396. The rest of the machines were pushers, traverse warp, a few circulars and roughly 1350 rotaries making plain net. See also R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, pp. 82, 84, 92, 284. By this time the warp machines had been adopted to produce very light silk nets.

3 R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 286.

Felkin was able to claim during the 1860s that, 'all difficulties have disappeared formerly thought insurmountable, in the way of producing imitations of real lace ... Every change of fashion and taste may be met now by mechanical arrangements'.¹

The 1850's had also seen a further movement towards the factory system until, by the early 1860's, there were over 130 'larger' factories and no more than 90 hand machines at work, all of them in private houses.² Factory organization was now characteristic of the industry, yet the small production units and independent producers, often renting steam power in factories, remained, for they had the advantage that they could respond more quickly to sudden changes in fashion.³ Together, these various producers turned out approximately £5m. of goods in 1865, of which over £900,000 went overseas.⁴ The great army of embroiders in the villages surrounding Nottingham had been so diminished by the advent of the Jacquard apparatus that only one sixth of the number employed in the 1830's were now employed in this way. Many had moved into Nottingham, there to take up employment, often in noxious conditions, in winding and threading bobbins, and in various aspects of lace finishings - pearling, hemming, mending and drawing, bleaching and dyeing.⁵

By the mid 1860's the period of almost frenzied mechanical invention

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 418-19.

2 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 82. The last hand warp machines had disappeared during the 1840's. Report of the Commissioners on the Condition of Handloom Weavers, 1840, XXIV, pp. 353-55.

3 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 77; R.C. on Childrens Employment, op.cit., Appendix to the Second Report, Pt. I., 1843, p. f. 3.

4 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 399.

5 R.A. Church, op.cit., pp. 85-7. For further details see R.C. on Childrens Employment, op.cit., 1843, Appendix to the Second Report, Pt. I, pp. f. 8, 10, 84. J.D. Chambers, Modern Nottingham in the Making (1945), pp. 10-11.

and adaptation was drawing to its close. The making of the course, heavy Maltese lace, which had no net background, was perfected on the Leavers machine, and an even courser lace, Cluny, developed from Maltese lace, was also imitated on the Leavers machine. Imitation 'blonde' laces, in fine white, cream or black silk and with the same untraversed hexagonal mesh as the original became popular in the 1860's, while the 1880's saw an imitation black Spanish lace, constructed in rose-like flowers, come into its own.¹ Mrs. Palliser's description of the Nottingham industry's display at the International Exhibition held in South Kensington in 1874 shows the enormous scope of the industry's output at this time:

Nottingham shows all she produces from the most costly to the commonest article. Nothing has been specially prepared for this exhibition, but all the goods exhibited are regular marketable articles; every description of lace in cotton and silk, such as are selling every day and exporting to all countries - Pusher shawls and mantles, tamboured shawls, veils and mantles, Shetland and Spanish shawls; Chantilly flounces and border laces; Brussels, Maltese and Cluny; Valenciennes, Italian, Swiss, Flemish, Mechlin and Duchesse lace; yak, black and coloured, bed and table covers of heavy tatting laces, suitable for the South American and West Indian markets; silk nets, Mechlin, Cambrai and Chantilly; Brussels and Paris nets; Shetland and woollen goods made on the lace frame; magnificent flouces and bridal veils, the pattern worked in by hand; and blondes which have much improved in colour, and will bear comparison with the French.²

Henceforth, the structure and organization of the lace trade was subject to little significant change. Output, in general, continued to rise, prices to fall.³ Exports also grew until, by 1900, approximately 70 per cent of total production was shipped overseas, the American market being the largest.⁴ The first Census of Production, taken in 1906, showed

1 Z. Hall, op.cit., pp. 43-4.

2 B. Palliser, Art Journal (1874), pp. 173-74.

3 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 287.

4 For a complete table of exports, 1853-1900, see *ibid.*, p. 286.

the value of the industry's output in England and Wales to be £9.578m., while the size of the entire labour force connected with machine lace manufacture was in the region of 25,000, working on over 2,500 Leavers machines, besides curtain machines and a smaller number of warps, pushers and rotaries. There were then over 400 factories.¹ By this time the hand producer in England had been almost completely overwhelmed.

Only the French machine industry had stood between Nottingham and the almost total domination of the world demand for machine-made goods. The French industry's development had more or less paralleled that of the English and not least because it owed much of its development to the adaptation of English technology. A machine lace industry had emerged during the 1770's and 80's at Lyons and Nimes, where a combination of French inventiveness and migrant English frame-smiths brought a rapid growth in the production of lace-like fabrics on point net machines. From the 1780's warp frames were introduced at Lyons. By 1800 the French industry was producing more point net than the English on over 2000 machines.² During the Napoleonic era technological progress was slow and the industry, divorced from markets in England, Germany, Russia and other parts of northern Europe, though protected from the English manufacture by prohibition, grew only moderately.³

But the end of the wars soon brought renewed activity. The English prohibition of the export of machinery was not sufficient to prevent one of John Heathcoat's employees from smuggling a bobbin-net machine to Valenciennes and then to Dovay, where in 1816 he obtained a French patent for the machine. Henceforth, the bobbin net trade was to become one of

1 *ibid.*, p. 287.

2 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 403.

3 *ibid.*, p. 404.

the most important textile industries of that country.¹ In the same year, James Clark, an English framesmith, set up a pusher machine which he had constructed himself, at Calais. Thus began the machine industry in what was to become the 'Nottingham of France'.² In the remaining years of the first quarter of the nineteenth century many English bobbin net workers migrated to Calais, Cambrai, St. Quentin and other towns in France, taking with them a variety of machines. Felkin claimed that the first truly French bobbin net machine was not constructed in France until 1822.³ John Heathcoat had himself established a factory filled with 'Old Loughboroughs' in Paris in 1818, before moving eventually to St. Quentin in 1827.⁴

The French at this stage seemed to consider the bobbin net machine suitable only for making cotton nets and it was not until 1825 that M. Dognin of Lyons began to produce silk nets known as 'Grenadine'. This improvement, together with the expiration of Heathcoat's patent brought further progress and expansion, particularly at Calais. By 1830 it was estimated there were over 3000 point net machines and over 1500 bobbin net machines in France, together with a smaller number of Leavers, warp and circular machines. The making of bobbins and carriages had become a specialist business at Calais. The bobbin net machines were producing over £400,000 of goods, and point net machines roughly the same amount.⁵

The point net machines had survived for longer than in England by

1 *ibid.*, p. 406.

2 *ibid.*, p. 407.

3 *ibid.*, p. 408. This was confirmed by M. Aubry, the jurist at the 1851 Exhibition. Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, p. 419.

4 W. Felkin, *loc. cit.*

5 *ibid.*, p. 411.

virtue of the French manufacturers adapting the machine to produce fancy articles called 'porcupine' scarfs. These were made by repeatedly placing adjoining threads upon the same needle, thereby effecting protuberances on the mesh. The silk net industry was flourishing in the early 1830's, its hand-embroidered products enjoying a great vogue in England and in the United States, for they were superior to the silk nets made in Nottingham.¹

During the 1830's, as in England, developments were made towards the production of fancy laces completely on the machine. Laces patterned with bullet holes were made from about 1834, lace nets were embellished with spots and by the end of the 1830's the Jacquard apparatus had been applied to warp and circular machines.² The early 1840's saw the French industry, and now French mechanics, move towards closer imitations of the hand-made laces of Valenciennes, Chantilly and Mechlin, with simple floral patterns of the type popular in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Jacquard was applied increasingly to Leavers machines during the 1840's and by 1850 most firms were using these or pushers only. At the Great Exhibition of 1851 the French industry gave example of its progress and skills and many manufacturers received first-class medals for their exhibits. The industry was now dominated by Calais, where more than 600 machines were in operation.³ The application of the Jacquard had everywhere increased the production of articles of 'novelty' and 'superior' style.⁴ The French were now branching out on their own and were no longer content to follow the English lead. Lyons and Cambrai were now the

1 *ibid.*, p. 409.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 409-14.

3 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, p. 465.

4 *ibid.*

established centres of the production on warp machines of silk laces, Calais of a variety of silk and cotton laces produced primarily on Leavers machines, which were often faithful copies of hand-made articles.¹ Felix Aubry, a lace manufacturer in Paris, and juror of the Exhibition, described the progress made by the French industry at this time:

Forty years ago there was only one centre of this trade, Nottingham; now there are two, Calais having taken its position. The Jacquard system now operates alike on the greater part of the machinery employed in both places. All difficulties have disappeared, though formerly thought insurmountable, in the way of producing imitations of real lace. Whether from circulars, pushers, or Leavers, admirably correct copies of pillow, Chantilly goods are obtained. Cambray produces laces, shawls, berthas, scarfs, &c. Successful imitations of Caen blondes are made on French machinery. Every change of fashion and taste may be met now by mechanical arrangements. It is true that there are 1000 machines of which they say 300 are Heathcoat's making silk blondes in England; selling the produce at lower prices than the French; and their plain cotton nets which were at one time 40f. the square yard, are in 1851 3d. (4d. was their lowest figure) And their larger articles (shawls &c.) lower than the French in price; yet except those shown by Vickers and one or two others, they are inferior in design. Their curtains require French taste ere the articles will replace the excellent embroidery of Tarrare and St. Gall, as they are probably destined to do. England is distinguished by the production of enormous masses of common goods; in these she need not fear any competition with the 3000 machines in Nottingham and its neighbourhood. Calais from its 700 machines exhibits products artistic, varied, and rich in design and fineness of tissue. Instead of servilely copying step by step the products of Nottingham as formerly, Calais is now developing its own ideas, which are more and more reproduced by English machinery. This is becoming a French industry, destined to take the first rank, if not in amount, in variety of design and facility of adaptation.²

The 1850's saw even greater expansion, particularly in Calais and Lyons. At the time of the Paris Exhibition of 1855 the industry's product was valued at £1m.³ Bobbin net production had doubled since 1835

1 *ibid.*, p. 466.

2 Quoted in W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 418-19.

3 *ibid.*, quoting the Report of the International Exhibition, Paris, 1855.

and the French claimed their designs were generally superior to the English. Even the otherwise patronizing Felkin was inclined to concede that 'the English lace manufacture owes much in regard to design, to France'.¹ In the latter half of the 1850's great improvements were made in the manufacture of silk blondes and Valenciennes, so much so that at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London, French manufacturers received more medals than the English. The Jury concluded that the 'neat and effective style of the patterns, the excellence of the colours, the well-made and superior finish of their goods, are worthy of their highest praise'.²

Progress was not quite so rapid during the 1860's, partly owing to a swing of fashion away from blonde towards heavier plaited laces of the Maltese and Cluny type then being produced by machinery in England. But by the end of the 1860's the French industry was again giving the English manufacturers serious competitive problems. French exports to England had reached around £140,000 in the 1840's; by 1850 they stood at around £289,000 and by 1871 around £600,000.³ The French had by now gained clear ascendancy in the markets for products of tasteful design, the dress and finish of their goods was often superior and it was claimed by the Nottingham industry that their prices were somewhat lower, because their labour was cheaper.⁴

Towards the end of the century to the competition of the French industry was added a new type of machine lace produced on the Schiffler embroidery machine in Germany and Switzerland, where machine production had been growing steadily since the middle of the nineteenth century.⁵

1 *ibid.*, p. 421.

2 Reports of the Jury of the London International Exhibition of 1862, (1863), p. 4.

3 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 414; R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 286.

4 N. Cuthbert, *op.cit.*, p. 41.

5 R.A. Church, *op.cit.*, p. 287.

Total imports of lace increased to £2.3m. in 1896-1900, of which £0.5m. was re-exported.¹ At the century's end continental producers still tended to dominate the markets for which design was an important consideration, but the entire market for lace was growing sufficiently to enable the Nottingham industry to continue in its expansion. Together with the continental producers of machine-made lace it had by now almost completely driven the hand-producer in England from the market. Yet this had not occurred without a struggle, particularly on the continent where, as will be seen, there were still many thousand handworkers who had survived the threat.

1 *ibid.*, p. 286. Re-exports first appeared in the tables in 1881.

CHAPTER 4

Rival Producers of Hand-made Lace

The history of hand-made lace on the Continent during the Napoleonic period had been almost the reverse of that of the English industry, for here the previous prosperity, and dominance of the European markets, had been seriously undermined. When the Wars ended the various industries had scarcely had time to re-adjust to a more peaceful situation than they were almost immediately confronted by the products of the lace machine; 'the markets of Europe were inundated with Tulle' as, from around 1818, fashion devoured the new fabric with great hunger.¹ Yet the response of the European hand producers was, with few exceptions, tenacious, the industries' organizers and workers were imaginative, adaptable and skilful enough to exploit the advantages which were to be derived from hand production. It was precisely during the 1840s, 50s and 60s when the machine industry was producing increasing quantities of close imitations of the hand-made laces of France and Belgium, that the hand producers of these countries came to their prime, working at levels of skill, and possibly of output, comparable if not greater than those achieved during the second half of the eighteenth century. William Felkin estimated, in the 1860s, that the industry in Europe as a whole employed over 535,000 workers, with over 240,000 in France and 95,000 in Belgium. Together, they were producing over £5.5m. of goods, of which £3m. came from France.²

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- 1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 187. In 1817, British net was being universally worn 'in full dress'. Ackerman's Repository of Arts, Literature, Manufactures, III, 1817, p. 177.
 - 2 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 403. Felkin claimed there were another 45,000 in Great Britain and 155,000 in Spain, Germany, Italy, and the rest of Western Europe. Mrs. Palliser also said there were 250,000 workers in France during the 1860s. B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 188. The figures are likely to be an exaggeration.

The inspired response of continental producers to mechanization enabled them to pose serious competitive problems for the English pillow lace industry. Exports from France and Belgium to England stood at roughly £56,000 in 1851, reached a peak of over £350,000 in 1871 and still stood at over £68,000, when last recorded in 1882.¹ Only from the 1870s did the machine industry cause the European hand-workers to suffer seriously, and their industry to decline. The continental experience draws interesting comparisons with that of the English industry during the same period and conclusions as to the merits, or otherwise, of the English industry's response to machine competition can be drawn from these.

The production of hand-made lace during the nineteenth century, and the competition of European producers with the English industry, was dominated by France and Belgium. Yet there were also small pockets of lacemaking in Austria, Bohemia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Madeira, Portugal, Russia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and Spain. Of these, only Spain sent significant quantities overseas, though most Spanish-style laces were made in France and Belgium.² The once flourishing lace industry of Italy had dwindled almost to nothing by the beginning of the nineteenth century and was to be found only on a moderate scale in Venice, Genoa and the Adriatic Riviera.³ Two centres of greater commercial importance, however, were Malta and Germany. Pillow lacemaking was quite new to Malta and is said to have first been introduced there by Lady Hamilton Chichester during the 1830s.⁴ Yet it was prospering greatly

1 See below, p. 320, Table 11.

2 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 45-60; 92-99. See also below, pp. 127-130, 144.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 62-3.

4 *ibid.*

during the 1850s¹ and 60s and its characteristic lace, a heavy guipure made primarily in geometric designs in black and cream-coloured silk,² was then being imitated in most European centres. Such laces were highly fashionable, were cheap and easy to make and for a time could not be imitated by lace machinery. At the International Exhibition of 1862 the industry displayed a large quantity of flouncings, shawls, veils and coiffures and there evidently had been some improvement in design for some of the smaller articles displayed were said to be 'remarkable for their beautiful quality'.³ Maltese lace was effectively reproduced by machinery from the late 1850s and its production by hand diminished thereafter, but it was still being sold, albeit on a much reduced scale, at the century's end. The London department store, Dickens and Jones, was selling real Maltese lace in 1904, though it then complained that it was difficult to obtain.⁴

The German industry was centred in and around Dresden where the production of heavy, firm and well-made laces, and copies of old laces, had become a speciality by the middle of the nineteenth century, when the industry was said by Mrs. Palliser to employ over 3,000 workers.⁵ A number of fine samples of German bobbin lace were shown at the Great Exhibition,⁶ and a number of laces of this type were imported into England during the 1850's and 60's.⁷

Outside of these two centres, and France and Belgium, only one

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- 1 Some samples of Maltese lace were shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851, though they were little admired by the expert judges. Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 467.
 - 2 For definitions of lacemaking terminology and types of lace, see Glossary of Lacemaking terminology, p. xi.
 - 3 London International Exhibition, Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1863, p. 4.
 - 4 Times, 8 December, 1904.
 - 5 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 260-61.
 - 6 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 467.
 - 7 See below p. 320, Table 11.

further industry of some note existed outside of England. This was in Ireland where there had been some lacemaking during the eighteenth century¹ but where lacemaking as a commercial proposition did not become widespread until the 1840's, when it was promoted by philanthropic ladies and religious bodies in an apparent attempt to offset the dire consequences of the famine years.

A needlepoint lace, based initially on seventeenth century Venetian designs, was introduced to County Armagh by Mrs. James Maclean, wife of the rector of Tynan, during the 1840s and pieces of contemporary design were shown at the Great Exhibition in 1851.² A piece was bought by the Archbishop of Ireland and this stimulated demand. A similar venture was inaugurated at Belfast by Miss Jane Clark, a draper of 170 Regent Street, London. A lace school was set up and imitations of seventeenth century Italian needlepoint laces were again produced and, with other pieces, exhibited in 1851.³ But both industries were over-reliant on individual effort and disappeared when their organizers died during the 1860s.⁴

Of more permanent consequence was the development inspired by the Presentation Convent in Youghal, County Cork. Here, a needlepoint lace school was opened in 1852 and was of such effect that needlepoint lacemaking spread elsewhere, into County Kerry where it was organized the Abbess O'Hagen, and to County Wexford where it came under the auspices of the Carmelite convent of New Ross. At Youghal, which became the renowned centre for the production of Irish needlepoint until the century's end, a flat point lace was produced in bold designs, often incorporating a reference to the Irish emblem, the Shamrock. Representations of the

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 435-37.

2 Official Descriptive Catalogue of the Great Exhibition, op.cit., II, 1851, p. 564.

3 Official Descriptive Catalogue, op.cit., 1851, p. 565.

4 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 443. Miss Clark does not appear in the Catalogue of the London Exhibition of 1862.

Shamrock were also produced in the other centres and these had an appeal as being typically Irish. Some of the lighter rose points of New Ross were sold in France, but most sales were made locally, or in England. The scale of these enterprises should not be exaggerated, however, for during the 1890s when the Youghal industry was still apparently thriving, only 170 workers were employed.¹

The production of pillow lace in Ireland was also on a small scale, but is worthy of note, if only because much of its output was sold in England. The practice was introduced during the 1840s as a measure of famine relief in and around Dublin, Belfast and Limerick. The Dublin Normal Lace School produced silk and cotton lace borders in the style of Buckinghamshire lace and sold them in London, though the bulk of Irish bobbin lace was of an inferior quality of a type resembling Honiton lace, produced under the guidance of Convents,² and offered no serious competition to the English industry. Indeed, Irish pillow lacemaking was of little consequence in comparison to the development of Carrickmacross and Limerick laces, though neither could be called lace in a true technical sense. Carrickmacross, a variety of cut work embroidery, was made in two ways, applique and guipure. In the former, motifs were drawn on muslin, outlined with embroidery, cut out and applied to machine-made net. To make guipure the worker simply united the various motifs with needle-point bars, though both guipure and applique techniques could sometimes be found in the same piece. This type of output had been introduced into the Carrickmacross area during the 1820s and was encouraged by philanthropists during the crisis of the 1840s. A school was established, the

1 A.S. Cole, Report upon Visits to Irish Lace-Making and Embroidery Schools in 1897, Reports of Committee of Council, Department of Science and Art, XXX, 1897, p. 5.

2 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 443-44.

interest of a Dublin draper, Messrs. Forst, was aroused, and various pieces were shown at the exhibitions held in London, Paris and Dublin during the 1850s and 60s.¹ Carrickmacross laces, mainly in floral designs, were popular in England during these years, particularly for borders and insertions. From the late 1860s, however, fashions changed and, no longer producing new designs or maintaining the quality of its workmanship, the industry declined, only to be revived again, on a more modest scale, along with other centres of Irish lacemaking, by philanthropic effort during the 1880s.²

Limerick lace, another variation of embroidered machine-made net, was unique insofar as it was the only type of lacemaking introduced to Ireland on a purely commercial basis. In this sense it had an advantage over other sectors of the Irish industry, and for a while enjoyed a greater prosperity. A Mr. Charles Walker, a native of Oxfordshire who had been employed in the wholesale lace business by a London drapery is said to have been responsible for the industry's establishment in 1829.³ The industry expanded during the 1830s and some of its goods were sold in England, particularly through Messrs. Lambert and Bury of 77 Aldermanbury, London, who exhibited a Limerick lace shawl and dress at the 1851 Exhibition.⁴ Lambert and Bury employed workers in Limerick, as also did Forrest, James and Sons of Dublin; at the Great Exhibition the former showed 'jacket flouncings, scarfs, berthes, handkerchiefs, baby's robes, lappetts, lace collars and cuffs unequalled in their class'.⁵

1 *ibid.*, p. 445.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 441-42.

3 *ibid.*, p. 442.

4 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, p. 468. Official Descriptive Catalogue, *op.cit.*, 1851, p. 560.

5 *ibid.*

Over 1500 workers were then said to be employed by the industry, and of these Lambert and Bury employed 600.¹ But by 1862 the industry had diminished considerably. Large quantities of inferior lace had been produced and the increasing demand in England for novel designs had been ignored. The London drapers, Copestake, Moore, Crampton and Co. and Haywards of Oxford Street were both selling Limerick lace at this time² but demand generally declined as the industry made the fatal mistake of meeting the competition of cheap, patterned machine lace by producing embroidered net more cheaply than before, thereby making their product virtually indistinguishable from that of their machine competitors in every way except price. Throughout the late 1860s and 70s the Limerick lace industry declined and there was no substantial recovery thereafter.³

Strenuous efforts were made to revive the industry in several areas during the 1880s, by London drapers and philanthropists alike. Alan S. Cole, of the Department of Science and Art in South Kensington, soon to be actively involved in the resuscitation of the English industry,⁴ chaired a committee in 1884 to promote the revival of Irish lace. A fund was raised, new patterns were commissioned, new schools established.⁵ In 1887 James Brennan of the Cork School of Art and Samuel Murphy, of the Waterford School of Art, visited the lace industry in France and Belgium and took home their impressions.⁶ A number of London drapers, including Haywards, Dickens and Jones, Robinson and Cleaver, Marshall and Snellgrove and two

1 Illustrated Catalogue of the Art Industry Exhibition, Dublin, 1853, pp. 334-35.

2 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1863, p. 3.

3 A.S. Cole, Report upon Visits to Irish Lacemaking, op.cit., pp. 6-7.

4 See below, p. 488.

5 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 298.

6 J. Brennan, Report... on a visit to Paris and Belgium in connection with the improvement of the Lace Industry in the South of Ireland, (1887); S.J. Murphy, Report of the Lace Industry at some of the Lacemaking Centres in France and Belgium, (1887). MS. in the Victoria and Albert Museum Library.

new selling organizations, the Irish Lace Depot. and the Irish Industries Association, sold whatever supplies were available, in London.¹ The contemporary fashion for heavier laces particularly suited Irish laces and there was some modest revival. But much of the work was still bedevilled by petty organization, was over-reliant on the ability and zeal of one person, and was 'apt to degenerate and flag when death or circumstance removes that inspiring spirit'.² The industry's fundamental situation, which had scarcely been altered throughout the century, was well described in 1884:

The lace industry of Ireland is the successor to no ancient school, nor can Erin boast of any laces of her own invention ... Poverty is the mother of the Irish lace industry; for Irish lace existed, and still exists, not to supply the commercial demand for it, but to enable a poverty-stricken population to earn a meal of porridge or potatoes.³

The Irish industry was dwarfed in comparison with the lace industries of France and Belgium. During the eighteenth century the types of lace available in the market from these two countries had usually been recognized by the names of the towns from which they originated: Valenciennes, Brussels, Chantilly, Alencon, and so on, each name signifying in the mind of the purchaser a distinctive kind of fabric. To a degree, this significance was maintained; genuine Brussels lace was always to be preferred to any imitation and the Jurors at the Great Exhibition in 1851 commented that the specialities of each district might often be 'instantly recognized'.⁴ Yet such were the exigencies of the hand producers' competitive situation, that while the names of lace still indicated the name of origin and in cases such as Brussels, the major current source of

1 Times, loc. cit.

2 M.F. Robinson, 'Irish Lace', Art Journal, 1887, p. 145.

3 ibid.

4 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 466.

production, versatility and the ability to produce many kinds of lace were two of the European industry's most important characteristics during the years from around 1830 onwards. Hence, Valenciennes lace was now produced primarily in Belgium, Chantilly lace was the chief product of Caen and Bayeux, Alencon lace was made in Brussels, and many laces were made in towns and places which did not bear their name.

A discussion of the two major centres of hand-made lace during the nineteenth century might justifiably begin with France. For the French industry not only employed the greatest number of workers but had the special importance, and advantage, of being in close contact with Paris, the centre of European fashion. It was characteristic of French fashions that they succeeded each other with great rapidity¹ and proximity with Paris was a clear advantage over rivals such as the English, who were stationed further afield and who often had no immediate contact.² Appropriately, the principal French lace designers lived and worked in Paris, following a tradition established in the eighteenth century. Most of the important French lace manufacturers had their headquarters here, making it easy for them to maintain ready contact with the designers, keep well abreast of changes in fashion and obtain a constant flow of new designs in response to them. Though Belgium was not without its own specialist designers, many Belgian manufacturers also turned to Paris for designs, thereby keeping abreast of the latest trends and, by obtaining the finest designs available in Europe, keeping one step ahead of their rivals.³

1 S.C. on the Silk Trade, XIX, 1871-2, pp. 842, 869.

2 See below pp. 214-215.

3 See below pp. 136-137.

The possession of such extraordinary skills did not prevent the Parisian lace designers from keeping a disarming anonymity, but a number emerged by way of the various international exhibitions, Mr. E.N. Toussaint and Mr. J.H. Mereaux both exhibiting designs at the Great Exhibition in 1851.¹ A high price was charged for the services of such men. In the 1880s a design for a flounce from 10 to 15 inches deep would cost 40 francs or more, depending upon the richness of the design. The designs were of such value that Brussels manufacturers cut them up so that the worker was 'unable from the portion handed to her to complete the original design, which otherwise she might do and then dispose of the lace privately'.²

The French manufacturers, placed in an advantageous position as a result of proximity to the centre of fashion and the world's most skilful designers, frequently operated on a very large scale, sometimes with workers in more than one area of France, and occasionally with workers in Belgium. These were enterprising men, anxious to build up their businesses, alive to the advantages which, in an increasingly competitive situation, the hand producer could derive. They are too numerous to enumerate,³ but a number, including Messrs. Jacques Mercier and Charles Clerambault who were responsible for much of the industry's high quality output at Alencon, Messrs. Freres and Sequin of Le Puy and Mr. Colnot of Mirecourt who were responsible for much of the industry's cheaper laces, appear prominently in various accounts of the industry's progress during these years. Large manufacturers such as these had the advantage that they could produce a wide variety of laces and risk stocking, though with

1 Official Descriptive Catalogue, op.cit., 1851, pp. 570-74.

2 J. Brennan, op.cit., p. 4.

3 There were over 60 French exhibitors at the London Exhibition of 1862. London International Exhibition, Official Descriptive Catalogue, 1863, p. 209.

their agents in Paris they were closely attuned to the immediate requirements of the European market.

The French industry seems to have taken very little for granted in respect of marketing. While close contact was maintained with Paris, French manufacturers were often at pains to study the demands of overseas customers, thereby providing themselves with a flourishing export trade in England, Germany, the United States, Spain and Latin America. Much of the prosperity of the industry at Bayeux was based on sales to Latin America of fabrics specially developed for this market. Displays at international exhibitions were used as instruments in exciting public interest and the French were very careful to produce exquisite pieces for these occasions. In Europe the French industry was also helped by the patronage of a number of leaders of fashion, particularly during the period of the Second Empire, when it received the constant favour of the Empress Eugenie; what the Empress bought today the fashionable classes of France in particular, and to a degree the rest of Europe, would often hasten to buy tomorrow.¹

The relationship between the market and producers was greatly strengthened by the appearance on the scene during the 1820s of a number of Paris fashion houses some of which were to be among the industry's most important manufacturers. Thus Videcoq and Simon, and Pigache and Mallet came to be responsible for the employment of thousands of workers at Alencon, some of them in specially organized and supervised workshops. They serviced their workers with a long series of designs, contemporary and novel in their construction and these with the good workmanship of the ladies of Alencon, were the basis of the industry's prosperity for many years. Of even greater significance, however, were M. Auguste

1 J. Laver, Costume, op.cit., pp. 97-8.

Lefebure, who employed thousands of workers at Bayeux, Alencon and Argentan and had a model workroom at Bayeux, and the Compagnie des Indes, which also employed workers in Alencon, as well as many thousands more in Belgium. These were among the most important lace manufacturers in Europe. Based at the centre of fashion, they were rich enough to employ specialist designers who worked exclusively for them. With export markets and agents in England and the United States and with well-organized and carefully trained workers who were flexible and skilful enough to meet the ever-changing requirements of a fickle public, they were able to keep the nature of their output at least one step ahead of that produced by their competitors who worked by machine.¹

There seem, in France, to have been comparatively few of the petty, unskilled dealers of the kind which dogged the English industry during these years. French manufacturers were generally as alive to the absolute necessity of good workmanship as they were to originality in design and close market contact. In many areas the industry catered for a fashionable clientele and the maintainance of a reputation for quality was an important factor in consumer allegiance. Yet even where laces were produced more cheaply for a less discriminating public, the emphasis on good workmanship was often maintained; cheap laces, edgings, borders and so on were generally well-made. In most of the lace areas special training schools were established, where skilled mistresses ensured excellence in technical training. At Alencon, Argentan and elsewhere, the manufacturers drew their workers together in workshops under the watchful eye of a supervisor, well-versed in the best techniques and strict in her application. In the country areas such direct supervision was less easy and this was often

1 M. Despierres, Histoire du Point d'Alencon depuis son origine jusqu' a nos jours (Paris, 1886), pp. 147-48; 152-58. For further details see also below pp. 123-134.

undertaken by middlemen, also engaged in collecting the finished pieces and distributing raw materials.¹ Mrs. Palliser spoke of the 'passion' with which the workers of Le Puy approached their employment² and there can be little doubt that the knowledge that they were producing a fabric which was admired throughout the continent contributed to a certain degree of pride. Though there was some variation in standards of expertise from one district and one worker to another, the general success of the lace manufacturers of France in achieving good workmanship is evidenced by the vast quantity of high quality laces which were sold in Europe, and overseas, during these years. French workers had an abundant repertoire of skills, a remarkable adaptability to new designs and a pride and energy which served the manufacturers and their customers well.

These were the most important general bases on which the French industry was able to expand during the 1830s, and enjoy two decades of remarkable prosperity, from 1850 to 1870. The experience of the various sectors of the French industry showed some variation, however. One of the oldest, and in the event, most successful centres of lace making in France was at Alençon where a rich, heavy needlepoint lace had been produced since the seventeenth century. There was no lace more rich, nor more finely made, nor more expensive than this, for its mode of production, unchanged in the nineteenth century, was highly complex and required infinite skill. As many as fourteen or sixteen workers might be required to make a quarter of a yard even in the most simple of patterns. The design on the parchment pattern was divided into several sections, each of which would be given to a different worker. But before the pattern could be used it had first to be pricked with holes by a specialist worker. Another

1 *ibid.*, pp. 147-48; 161-67.

2 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 243.

worker affixed the pattern to its cloth background and outlined the design on top of the parchment with a thick thread. The working of the pattern involved many specialists, each of whom could produce a particular stitch, variation of ground-work, motif, filling and the raised edgings, stiff and well-shaped, which were a most important feature of the lace. The fabric then passed on to a worker who cut away the finished product from the cloth, then to another who made good deficient stitches and to another who cut off stray ends of thread, and joined the various pieces together to form a completed fabric. This worker was the most highly skilled of all, for she had to be expert in all the stitches and on her depended the skilful blending of the work of so many different hands.¹

Alencon lace was expensive and during the 1820s suffered from a fashionable mania for cheap machine nets and light, blonde laces. Many manufacturers ceased production, or supplemented their businesses with embroidery and in this way managed to survive the difficult years. The long-term answer, however, came through concerted efforts to diversify and improve the industry's output, and through favourable changes in fashion. An important development was the substitution of cotton thread for linen. The cotton thread was cheaper and easier to work and was used for much of the fancy work, though the groundwork was still often made of linen.² The Alencon industry began to revive during the 1830s, the revival was confirmed at an exhibition held at Alencon in 1842 and the industry was prospering by the Great Exhibition in 1851. An important boost had come during the early 1840s when Videcoq and Simon, the Paris fashion house, had sought out Alencon lace, for light laces were going out of fashion and there was now an increasing demand for laces of a more ornate nature. The

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 467.

2 M. Despierres, op.cit., pp. 147-48.

orders from Videcoq and Simon concentrated on a richer variety of design and sufficient skilled workers had survived during the 1820s and 30s to respond to the demand.¹ The Jurors at the 1851 Exhibition lauded the industry's progress. The workers here were said to be:

extremely skilful. The open work in the lace is made in a superior style and every day new is made of great perfection. It is the richest, the finest and the strongest and consequently the prices are the highest. All the females employed in making lace carry on their work in their own houses, under the surveillance of their employers or friends, who act as their instructors.²

Videcoq and Simon submitted shawls, scarfs, dresses and flounces and 'the magnificence of the design and the surpassing quality of their exhibits' merited 'the highest praise'.³

High prices proved to be no obstacle to the increasing sale of laces which were aesthetically conceived and perfectly produced. The 1850s and 60s were boom years and Alencon lace was sold throughout Europe. The patronage of the Empress Eugenie was important in maintaining the support of the fashionable classes and in 1854 a most complex and beautiful series of dress trimmings consisting of branches of exotic trees surrounding bunches of imperiales, made at the command of the Empress, was shown at the Paris Exhibition, where they brought the industry much acclaim and increased orders.⁴ Among the Paris fashion houses now taking an active interest in the Alencon industry were M. Lefebure and the Compagnie des Indes.⁵ The premium was still on originality and high quality production

1 One of the contributors was M. Mercier. 'M. Mercier avait envoye a cette exposition quatre echantillons de point d'Alencon, remarquables par la finesse extraordinaire de la dentelle la regularite et la solidite du travail, la grace et la legerete du dessin'. *ibid.*, p. 150.

2 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, p. 467.

3 *ibid.*, p. 470.

4 M. Despierres, *op.cit.*, p. 156.

5 M. Lefebure showed a 'very beautiful production deserving the highest encomiums for fineness of quality, beauty and elaboration of design'. Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, pp. 470, 474.

and designs were constantly being altered and improved, with a tendency towards an ever-increasing richness in the fillings. An important development was that of the introduction of the effects of shading, achieved by varying the closeness of the stitches in the solid parts of the pattern. In this way, three dimensional effects, giving the notion of a luxuriant naturalism in the characteristic bunches or garlands of flowers, were introduced into much of the industry's output during these years.¹ The designs for these laces were given out from the Parisian fashion houses and their production was supervised by intermediaries, some of whom were old Alencon manufacturers, others, employed agents of the houses.²

Yet these laces were not imitated well by machinery until the late 1870s, such was their sophistication, and they continued to be sold in large quantities, helped by an increasingly romantic regard by the fashionable classes for hand-made lace, during the 1880s. In 1887 Samuel Murphy was impressed by the way in which the great skill of the Alencon workers had been maintained (it was not so by this time in many other centres of lacemaking, including England)³ and commented favourably on the high quality of their lace and the subtlety of the shading effects of the designs. Borders and flouncings were still selling at prices from £5 to £40 the metre.⁴ But by now machine competition was beginning to create more serious problems. The industry was now being 'heavily subsidized' in the form of state grants for the establishment and maintenance of lace schools and over 1300 pupils were so employed.⁵ The emphases on correct

1 M. Despierres, *op.cit.*, p. 158.

2 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 193.

3 See below, pp. 352, 355-8.

4 S. Murphy, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

5 Hosiery and Lace Trades Review, 20 July, 1889.

technique and novel designs were maintained, and with some success, but many designs were becoming more stereotyped than previously and a mechanical effect was imparted on the work, making it unsuited to competition with machinery. From around 8000 workers employed in 1862 there were only 2000 at the end of the century, employed by about five businesses.¹ Even so, Alencon lace was still being sold in London, it had survived the impact of machine competition for many years most admirably, and if by this time its heyday had passed, this did not mean that its name could no longer command the prestige of the rich and fashionable classes of Europe; it was still regarded as one of the first laces in 1904.²

While Alencon produced by far the most important and successful of the French needlepoint laces, Argentan lace, also one of the industry's oldest needlepoints, had virtually disappeared during the French Revolution and nothing more is heard of it until late in the nineteenth century when the manufacture was revived, on a moderate scale, during the 1870s.³ A variation of needlepoint lace, made in seventeenth century styles, was produced from the 1850s at Bayeux under the auspices of M. Lefebure. It was heavier in style than Point d'Alencon, had characteristic flower forms with neatly curling tendrils, and was suitable for furnishings as well as costume. This Point Colbert, as it was known, grew in popularity until the century's end and again found a market in England.⁴ James Brennan was most impressed by the pieces he was shown in 1887 and reported that M. Lefebure had found its production 'a success'.⁵

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 199-200.

2 Times, 'Real Lace and its Story', 4 December, 1904.

3 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 203.

4 Times, loc. cit.

5 J. Brennan, op.cit., p. 6.

Bayeux was more famous, however, for the production of a variety of bobbin laces, among which was the traditional black lace made of silk known as Chantilly, and which was still also produced at Chantilly itself. This was a light, airy lace, produced by a combination of grounds worked in a six-pointed star mesh or by the simple, open 'reseau' used in Lille lace, with flowers and decorative motifs worked in an open half-stitch and given clarity by being surrounded by a thick silk thread.¹ Light laces were also made at Caen, which specialized in the particularly light fabrics known as 'blondes'. Indeed, blonde laces, made of black or white linen (and later of cotton) were the basis of the industry's existence in these places during the 1820s and 30s, for they were then in the height of fashion.² Whole dresses might be made of blonde as well as borders, fichus and veils and much of a specially heavy kind was exported to Spain and Spanish America,³ as well as to England, where they were imported from Paris and were commented upon in fashion magazines from around 1820⁴ until well into the 1830s.⁵

Much of this success was owed to M. Lefebure, who had introduced a heavier blonde lace for export to Spain and Spanish America and built up a flourishing business by carefully studying fashions in these countries. His designs were made specifically for these markets and were executed by workers who had been trained in lace schools, in which young forewomen, strict and skilful, taught the latest designs and techniques.⁶

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 224-25.

2 Mrs. Palliser describes Blonde de Caen as a lace 'in which the flower is made with a different silk from that which forms the reseau and outlined with a thick, silk strand'. Ibid., p. 224.

3 *ibid.*, p. 225.

4 Lady's Magazine, February 1820.

5 World of Fashion, IV, 1827, p. 106; XI, 1834, p. 351; XII, 1835, p. 10. See also, S.C. or the Silk Trade, op.cit., 1831, p. 12.

6 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 224.

White blondes were noted for their beautiful, lustrous colour and could not be made without difficulty. In order to preserve the purity of colour the lacemakers worked mostly during the summer, in the open air, though in winter they sometimes worked 'in lofts over their cowhouses: warmed by the heat of their animals they dispense with fire and its accompanying smoke'.¹

Blonde lace was easily and cheaply imitated by machinery, both in France and England, during the 1830s,² and the hand industry in these areas began to decline until black Chantilly lace came back into fashion towards the end of the decade.³ Although this also was imitated within a short space of time by machinery the industry's designers and manufacturers displayed great ingenuity in continually producing new designs, thereby keeping abreast of fashion, in the public eye and always one step ahead of machine producers. New designs were accompanied by a quickening of manufacturing methods. An easier type of 'reseau' of oblong meshes, known as 'fond d'Alencon', was widely adopted. Workers in Caen and Bayeux were successful in producing piece goods such as large veils, scarves, berthas and shawls by joining several narrow pieces of lace quickly by means of a stitch known as 'point de raccroc', introduced into the area by a Parisian buyer. The joining was done so cleverly that it was 'imperceptible to the eye, even with a glass'. In this way the workers were 'able to perform in less than a month, with nine or ten persons, what formerly occupied a workwoman a whole year'.⁴ Here was the closest to mass-production that the hand worker ever came. It was a clever and successful response

1 *ibid.*, p. 225.

2 See above, pp. 58, 101, 106.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 213-14. World of Fashion, XIX, 1842, pp. 22, 46.

4 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, pp. 466; 1021.

to a heavy demand for a product which had previously been slow and difficult to make, yet there was no diminution in quality as a result.

In 1851 the industry in this region was in a great state of prosperity and there were said to be 9000 workers at Chantilly alone.¹ Some manufacturers had depots in Paris and thereby were able to keep in close contact with changes in fashion and demand.² While Caen and Bayeux produced piece goods such as veils, scarfs, berthas, mantles and shawls, Chantilly was by this time noted only for the best class of lace. Here, it was said that fewer workers were 'employed than at Bayeux but the improvements of the latter have been regularly adopted. The articles manufactured are less intended for general use than to satisfy the desires of the luxurious, being laces of the very finest textures and most beautiful patterns'.³ But the Jurors of the Great Exhibition noted, ominously, the existence of 'admirable (machine-made) imitations of the beautiful black lace of Caen and Chantilly, the patterns of which are most correctly copied, while the difference in price is 75 per cent'.⁴

The hand manufacturers responded to this threat by providing a constant flow of new designs and by moving out into the country areas in an effort to find cheap labour. Chantilly lace produced on the Pusher machine tended to have a rather more flat, taut appearance than hand-made Chantilly, a difference which the fashionable lady, at least, was not slow to recognize. Many of the manufacturers of Chantilly lace who had exhibited in London in 1851 also did so in 1862⁵ and Mrs. Palliser estimated

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 215.

2 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 470. Among these were A. Lefebure, L. Randon, A. Delcambre, G. Voiland and Videcoq and Simon.

3 *ibid.*, p. 466.

4 *ibid.*, p. 465.

5 International Exhibition, Official Catalogue, op.cit., 1863, p. 209.

that there were still over 50,000 workers in the three centres in 1868 when large quantities were being exported to the United States.¹ Indeed, until this time machine competition seems to have been overcome successfully, and when the industry's output did begin to decline, during the 1870s, it was largely the result of changes in fashion. The end of the Second Empire in 1870 saw the removal of an important element in the fabric's popularity, the patronage of the Empress Eugenie and without support such as this Chantilly lace had neither the prestige nor the quality of finer laces such as point d'Alencon to enable it to succeed in a situation in which the general fashion for black lace shawls was ending. Machine-made laces were constantly improving and the romanticism which helped revive some of the finer laces toward's the century's end passed this section of the industry by. Very little Chantilly lace was being produced early in the twentieth century.²

There was somewhat less to be said of the progress during the course of the century at the two remaining traditional centres of lacemaking in France, Lille and Arras, and Valenciennes. Valenciennes lace, fine and light in texture and produced on the pillow, had been highly popular in Europe during the second half of the eighteenth century, but had virtually disappeared from France during the Revolutionary period, its manufacture having been left to Belgium where it had been introduced somewhat earlier.³ A modification of traditional Valenciennes lace, of an inferior quality, was produced in Bailleul on the Belgian frontier, for markets in India, America and England. Designs were adapted to changing tastes and in 1832

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 228.

2 Times, loc. cit.

3 The last piece is said to have been made in Valenciennes in 1840, 'furnished by Mlle. Glairo who employed the few old lace-workers then living, with the patriotic wish of exhibiting the perfection of the ancient manufacture'. B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 235.

a scalloped edge was introduced, which was instrumental in the industry's moderate progress during subsequent years. Indeed, there were roughly 8000 workers here in 1857,¹ but machine imitations of Valenciennes lace had been made from the 1840s² and by the mid 1860s the cheap hand-made variety had little to offer in competition and little is heard of the industry at Bailleul thereafter.

Lille and Arras were probably the oldest lace centres in France and although the fine mesh characteristic of their lace was one of the first to be imitated by machine the manufacturers in this district initially responded well by producing an even finer mesh, the 'fond clair'. These laces, with straight and scalloped edged borders and simple designs of spots and small flowers, were as light and transparent as any that were available and during the 1820s and 30s, when such fabrics were fashionable, brought the industry some prosperity. The market was of a limited size, however, and when richer, heavier laces came into fashion the industry began to decline. There were very few laceworkers in Lille and Arras in 1851, the workwomen deriving 'more lucrative remuneration from other industrial resources',³ and the manufacturers seemingly unable to formulate alternative types of fabric and design.

This experience contrasted sharply, however, with the development of the industry in two relatively new centres, Le Puy and Mirecourt. Of the area in and around Le Puy, in the middle of the century, it was said that:

The whole of the women are lacemakers from their cradles. As soon as the infant can use her hands, instead of a doll, a small lace pillow, with three threads fixed upon a nail, is given to her as a toy, and her tiny fingers are taught to

1 *ibid.*, p. 241.

2 See above, pp. 98-9.

3 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, p. 466.

plait the threads. As she grows older a more complicated frame is substituted, and she begins to fabricate a narrow lace: a child of six years old has been known to earn a half penny a day. Lacemaking at Le Puy is not only a trade, but a passion. It is the infant's plaything, the woman's support, and, when old and obliged to return to the simple laces of childhood, the aged workwomen will ply at her pillow so long as her eyes can distinguish, or her fingers move the bobbins. When the twirling is no longer heard in a house, it is a sure sign that the end of its occupant is at hand'.¹

The keynote of the industry's success at Le Puy was its versatility. At the Great Exhibition of 1851 the industry showed a wide repertoire of laces, from simple laces of the Lille type, to Valenciennes, to the more coarse Maltese, to worsted laces, and silk blondes. The industry infact had succeeded by turning out a wide variety of cheap laces in ever-changing designs. It had grown in the eighteenth century on the basis of cheap and simple laces similar to those produced in Lille and Valenciennes.² But during the 1820s the manufacturers had radically reorganized their industry, introduced special lace schools, diversified their output and attuned it more closely to the requirements of the centres of fashion in Paris. By 1851 there were around 50,000 workers and the industry was said to have 'lately increased to an immense extent'.³ It continued to expand during the 1850s and by 1862 had the biggest export trade of all the French centres, sending its goods to Spain, Portugal, Germany, Italy and England.⁴ The repertoire of the industry's workers was enormous, enabling them to cope with changes in fashion and cater for the demands of an international market with diverse tastes. Yet there was no resultant loss of technique; the workers of Le Puy and district were as redoubtable for their skill as

1 B. Palliser, Art Journal Catalogue of the Paris International Exhibition, (1967) p. 112, translating from J. Turgan. Les Grandes Usines, VI, (Paris 1867), pp. 237-38.

2 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 242.

3 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 466-69.

4 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1863, p. 4.

for their versatility. Manufacturers took pains to introduce new materials and new designs produced either in Paris or by themselves, and though several employed thousands of workers at a time, they were said to be meticulous in ensuring that their output was of a high standard.¹

It was an energetic industry capable of seizing market initiatives (leading Europe in the production of Maltese and Cluny laces, during the 1850s and 60s) and in the long run proving capable of succeeding by seeking out a diversity of new products, by producing them well and by keeping constantly ahead of the machine producer. There were said to be 'thousands' of young workers, still in training, in 1904.²

Mirecourt was the centre of lacemaking in the Lorraine. It had also specialized during the eighteenth century on the export of laces of the cheap Lille variety. But its success during the nineteenth century was very similar to that of the industry at Le Puy, again derived largely by way of versatility in production. It was flourishing by the 1840s when it was exporting to the U.S.A. and England. Its specialization in Lille lace had by this time been extended to the production of a 'fond clair', noted for its 'good taste and elegance' and constantly produced in new designs. The workers also produced a somewhat less elegant lace, called Mirecourt guipure, which was a bobbin lace in which the motifs were joined by bars (brides), which had no net background, and which strongly resembled a variety of Honiton lace.³ Within the four or five years preceeding the 1851 Exhibition the Mirecourt lacemakers had also begun to sew together bobbin-made flowers, with a relief effect created by surrounding the flowers with a thick 'cordonnet', which made the laces popular for

1 Among these were M. Freres, M. Faure, M. Aubry, M. Sequin, M. Julien. Reports of the Juries, 1852, loc. cit.

2 Times, 6 December, 1904.

3 See below, p. 342.

furnishing purposes.¹

During the 1850s the making of white guipure laces of a heavy Maltese type was started, leaving the workers of Le Puy to produce coloured varieties. The laces came from the Mirecourt workers 'clean and white', did not require bleaching (as did laces of a similar kind produced in Belgium) and the price was 'most moderate'.² Towards the end of the 1860s the industry was said to employ over 25,000 workers and their annual produce was valued at £120,000. Course guipure laces, and imitations of old fashioned laces of seventeenth and eighteenth century designs were now the industry's main outlets and the newly popular Cluny lace, a heavy variety of guipure, was said to have been invented here. Its success greatly enhanced the prosperity of the industry during the 1860s, and in later years, when large quantities were sent to the U.S.A. The workers and manufacturers of Mirecourt were among the most militant in response to mechanization and by hard work, quickness, adaptability and the production of new types of fabric and design, were able to maintain their prosperity until the century's end, when 'thousands', including many young children, were still employed.³

These were the major centres of lacemaking by hand in France, and on the whole manufacturers and workers had responded well, if in a diversity of ways, to the challenge of machine competition. The same was more or less true of the industry in Belgium which also was organized on a large scale and embodied an equivalent amount of skill and ingenuity. The structure and scale of the Belgian industry placed it in a favourable position to respond to the machine competition which first encountered

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 466-67.

2 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 42.

3 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 242-48; Times, loc. cit.

certain sectors almost as soon as the Napoleonic Wars were over. The mania for machine-made nets, and also the vogue for blonde laces, caused much distress during the 1820s and 30s and a long-term re-assessment by some of the industry's manufacturers of the requirements of successful organization, for the industry had traditionally produced laces of a heavier, more complex variety.

Fashions had changed favourably by 1840, however, as the mania for machine net had died, and hand-made lace of richer types came into demand, enabling the Belgian industry to expand its market outlets not only throughout Europe, but also overseas, especially in the United States. The Belgian industry was traditionally a great exporter and by the middle of the century a number of Belgian manufacturers had developed an international marketing system, incorporating agents abroad who passed on information on fashionable trends and enabled manufacturers to respond quickly to demands for new designs and textures. Some of these businesses, the bulk of which were in Brussels, were massive concerns. Messrs. Buchholtz and Co., of Brussels, were said to employ 6000 workers in Brussels, South Brabant, Antwerp and West Flanders and their selling agencies to extend to six European capitals - Brussels, Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow and Madrid. Their workers were trained to produce from a very large number of standardized patterns, so that they could turn from one style to another with relative ease.¹ Among the principal lace exporting houses and employers in Brussels were Duhayon-Brunfaut & Co. and the French fashion houses of the Compagnie des Indes and A. Lefebure. One of Lefebure's main overseas contacts was Daniel Biddle, the London draper with a large establishment in Oxford Street.² As in France, the

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 107-109.

2 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, pp. 470-71.

maintenance of traditional export markets such as England, and the development of new ones, such as Spain and the United States, were important elements in the industry's strength in the middle years of nineteenth century.

The Belgians also placed great emphasis on training and from the 1840s, as the industry responded to favourable changes in fashion, new lace schools, 'ecole des dentelliers', were established, many of them run by convents. By the 1870s there were said to be over 900¹ and it was claimed that there were still 600 to 700 as late as 1904.² Here young girls were trained rigorously from the age of five, so that they were masters of the craft within five years. Each of the schools was controlled by a highly skilled worker, 'the grand mistress' who sat in a box in the centre of the room

with a long white wand in her hand. If she observes any of them idle she reaches them a tap and if that will not do she rings a bell which, by a little cord, is attached to the box. She points out the offender and she is taken out into another room and chastised.³

Conditions were said to be more lenient in convent schools than in secular establishments, but the standard of accomplishment was almost universally high.

The design-consciousness of the French was also exhibited in Belgium and indeed the Belgian industry took many of its designs from Paris, thereby maintaining contact with the European centre of fashion and utilizing the best designers available to the continent. But there were also a number of lace designers in Belgium itself and many of these were awarded medals (a good indication of their skills) at the two London

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 113.

2 Times, 3 December 1904.

3 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 114.

Exhibitions of 1851¹ and 1862. At the latter the Jurors stated that they were;

much pleased with their graceful, elegant and easy style and their peculiar adaptability to the purpose for which they are intended. This shows at once that the Belgian artists understand both how to produce beautiful and effective designs and to adapt them to the special sort of articles for which they are intended, besides knowing how they should economically and effectively be carried out; considerations not understood or lost sight of by some designers.²

Most of the Belgian designers lived in Brussels and were employed by the largest manufacturers; in the country areas many of the smaller manufacturers produced designs on a much more impromptu, often inferior basis or copied old ones discarded by the major producers.³

The Belgian manufacturers were successful in ensuring that the designs were carefully reproduced by their workers, even though, unlike a number of their French counterparts, they seldom saw much of the workers themselves. There seem to have been fewer workshops of the kind introduced by M. Lefebure at Bayeux and Alencon, and the control of production was usually undertaken by intermediaries,⁴ usually women who had once been lacemakers, and whose technical knowledge was invaluable. These women were also responsible for distributing materials and collecting the finished pieces. Some moved round the villages, others waited at regular intervals in the towns, as was described at Bruges in 1881:

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 471.

2 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1863, p. 5. Among these were P. Bonnod; B.J. Van der Dussen d'Habbeech; A.J. Hontmans; C.C. Hontmans and J. Naltz. *ibid.*, pp. 160-1.

3 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 122.

4 An exception was in Brussels. See below, p. 140.

In the summer you may look down long and wide back streets of the town and see hundreds of women in groups of three, four and five outside their cottages plying their bobbins most industriously. It is estimated that there are over 4000 lacemakers at Bruges. The laces made are collected for the merchants, whose agents on market day sit in little boxes, like ticket offices, in the market places. To these the makers bring their laces, which are received and paid for by the agent. At the same time, the agent gives to the workers fresh orders, and serves out the pattern to be done. Every pattern, after it has been worked, has to be brought back to the agent, under the penalty of a heavy government fine, which thus is a protection for designs.¹

Government encouragement, in the form of financial aid, was also being extended to lace schools by this time,² and the massive output of laces of the finest quality and most diverse nature, as in France, gives evidence of the manufacturers' success in technical training and industrial organization. In some areas the convent tended to occupy the role of factor and it was charged by at least one British observer that it was the convents which established the cycle of wage cutting which was said to be typical of the Belgian industry.³

There can be little doubt of the success of the Belgian industry from the early 1840s onwards. As training systems were improved, new products and new threads (including cotton) were used. By the 1860s it was said that 'laces white and black, point and pillow, may at present times be met with in very province', the old regional distinctions having long since disappeared.⁴ Mrs. Palliser claimed that over one quarter of the Belgian population, mostly women and children, were producing over £800,000 of lace in 1867. New export markets had been sought out, especially in the United States, France and England, and foreign purchasers

1 A.S. Cole, 'Cantor Lectures on Lacemaking', Journal of the Royal Society of Arts', 1881, p. 802.

2 M.E. Jones, op.cit., p. 61.

3 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 82. See also below, p. 347.

4 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 138.

could select from over 180 designs.¹ The Exhibitions in London and Paris in 1851 and 1855 had stimulated demand to such a degree that early in the 1860s it was said that 'the rich are seeking more eagerly than ever the exquisite work of the Belgian workers and it was estimated that during 1862 alone the demand for Brussels lace had increased 30 to 40 per cent.'² At the London Exhibition of 1862 over 40 Belgian manufacturers, from Brussels especially, and also from Bruges, Antwerp, Grammont, Courtrai and Brabant, showed pieces of lace and gave evidence of their success in the face of lace machinery.³ It was not until the 1870s that certain sectors of the industry suffered seriously from this kind of competition.

There again was some variation as to how this success had been achieved. Undoubtedly, the greatest commercial achievement had been derived by that sector of the Brussels industry which had produced increasing quantities of 'applique' work of a high quality. Some of this work had been done on hand-made mesh during the eighteenth century, when cobwebby laces, adorned with scattered motifs, had been fashionable and it had been deemed quicker to make the mesh ground separately rather than together with the motifs, as happened in the production of the classical Brussels point. It was just as easy to apply these motifs to machine-made net, thereby reducing the price and adapting to the new competition by utilizing the very best that machinery could produce. This technique was also adapted in England, at Honiton, and with similarly favourable results.⁴

The new lace was produced in the same way as the old Brussels point, except that the bobbin net was now made by machine and not by hand. As

1 *ibid.*, p. 118.

2 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

3 Official Descriptive Catalogue, *op.cit.*, 1862, pp. 160-1.

4 See below pp. 310-311.

many as seven specialist workers were involved in the production of each piece of lace. The heading at the top of the lace was made by a worker known as the *dentelliere*. The motifs might be made by needle or bobbin and in both cases the more solid parts and fancy fillings were made by separate workers. The flowers were then applied to the net by another specialist. Motifs were made in many of the villages surrounding Brussels, but the final task of applying them was carried out in Brussels in special workrooms run by the manufacturers. The '*striqueuses*', as these workers were called, washed the work brought in from the villages in lead carbonate, which left the laces a brilliant white, though when placed in trunks and wardrobes, or in contact with flannel or woollen tissues bleached with sulphur, or scent bottles, or even the sea air, the colour would often fade dramatically.¹

Applique work was first undertaken on machine-net during the 1820s, though it did not completely replace the work of the '*drocheleuse*' who had previously made the bobbin net strips for the ground, for a few pieces were made for rich buyers in this way during the 1840s and 50s. The machine net, which came mainly from Nottingham, was made of cotton and during the 1830s matching cotton motifs were gradually introduced, replacing linen. Fashionable flounces and borders for bonnets were made at this time, with delicately drawn sprays of flowers or leaves, arranged in rows. In the 1840s these motifs gave way to bolder designs of flowers, often entwined with ribbons.

The complexity and artistry involved in the production of these laces at first tended to make Brussels Applique a relatively expensive product. Trimming laces only four inches wide varied in price during the

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

1820s and 30s from four to ten guineas per yard, veils from 25 to 100 guineas and other laces and articles were 'proportionately expensive'. But by the 1850s the advance of the machine industry, particularly at Nottingham, had brought the output of a 'very superior net' at much lower prices than before, and this had meant that the same articles were now being turned out 'at much less cost'. Yet the resemblance which these laces bore to the pure Brussels point lace, now made but rarely, was 'so striking as frequently to deceive those who possess a good knowledge of lace'. The demand for this lace had become 'very general' in England where it was worn 'by nearly all ladies of rank and fashion'. The workers were highly skilled in producing a wide variety of designs, in classical scrolls, medallions, delicate floral forms and sprays and figures from classical mythology, changing them frequently as demands changed and adapting them to a whole variety of fabrics from the narrowest borders to bed covers. The laces had a wide appeal and were sold overseas in France, Spain, the United States and Russia as well as in England.¹

The peak of popularity was reached during the 1860s, when many Brussels manufacturers exhibited fine pieces of Applique at the London and Paris Exhibitions of 1862 and 1867. Though fashions changed during the 1870s and the demand for large shawls and mantles fell, narrow borders, handkerchiefs, lappets, neckties and large veils were once more popular at the century's end and the latter could sell for as much as 30 guineas a yard.² Once again, the hand producer had survived machine competition, this time by using machine net and minimizing cost, by keeping close contact with centres of fashion, by seeking new market outlets and by producing a diversity of products, generally of a high quality and often of

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 468; M.E. Jones, op.cit., p. 65.

2 A.P. Moody, op.cit., pp. 68, 81-2. Lace edgings were being sold at Dickens and Jones in 1904 at prices from 6s.11d. to 5 guineas a yard. Times, 3 December 1904.

complex design.

Brussels Applique was described by the Jurors of the 1851 Exhibition as, with the exception of point d'Alencon, 'the most valuable lace that is known',¹ and it had been sold largely to a wealthy clientele. Point Duchesse, a lace of mixed technique, was also made in Brussels and at Bruges, but was less elegant and was developed, rather, to meet the demands of a perhaps less-discerning public. The designs were more coarse and the motifs were simply joined together by 'brides' with no mesh ground. The lace could be made by needle, or pillow, it was quick, easy and cheap to produce and was a great success, particularly during the 1850s and 60s. It resembled Honiton lace in technique and was produced in two basic qualities: Duchesse de Bruxelles, which was of fine quality and incorporated panels of needlepoint lace, and Duchesse de Bruges, which consisted of bobbin lace only and was of a much cheaper, more 'showy' variety.² In both cases the bobbin-made parts showed the usual characteristics of Brussels bobbin lace: the use of a close toilé and the emphasis of edges and details, though both were less refined than in Brussels Applique. Though it was cheap and 'showy', the Duchesse de Bruges proved to be a serious competitor for Honiton lace.³ The use of needlepoint panels was but one of a number of technical innovations which enabled this sector of the industry to stimulate interest and prosper during these years. New designs were constantly adopted and during the final quarter of the century the coarse, rococo styles then fashionable, were used with much success.⁴

Constantly searching for new ways of expanding their market the

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 468-69.

2 *ibid.*

3 See below p. 347.

4 C. Channer and M.E. Roberts, op.cit., p. 13.

manufacturers of Brussels had, by 1851, come up with yet another highly successful idea. The Jurors at the Great Exhibition noted that 'a new kind of real Brussels' had recently been developed. This was a purely needlepoint lace, produced by a number of workers in small pieces, in designs and textures which were quite different from anything which had been seen before. Its main feature was its fragility, its cobwebby mesh being composed of semi circular loops of thread, each hanging from the one above, its fillings consisting of delicate roses, centred with small spots and with double and triple layers of partly detached petals. Unlike its chief rival, point d'Alencon, its forms were not accentuated by a raised outline in buttonhole stitching but were simply outlined by a thread.¹

The fragility of the new fabric had an instant appeal and it was in no immediate danger of reproduction by machinery. Indeed, this 'point de gaze' is perhaps the finest example of the way in which the hand producer, aware of the requirements of the fashionable public, could counter the threat of the lace machine by originality and a very high level of technical expertise. Demand for the fabric boomed during the 1860s and Mrs. Palliser wrote tellingly that 'point de gaze is now brought to the highest perfection and the specimens in the Paris Exhibition of 1867 were remarkable for the precision of the work, the variety and richness of the jours and the clearness of the ground'.² The demand diminished during the 1870s, primarily as a result of changes in fashion, but its production was by no means obliterated and it was still finding market outlets overseas,

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 468.

2 Mrs. Palliser notes that 'it is made in small pieces, the joining concealed by small sprigs or leaves, after the manner of the old point, the same laceworker executing the whole strip from beginning to end.' B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 123.

including England, early in the twentieth century.¹

A similarly successful venture was also undertaken in the south and west of Brabant and in the area of eastern Flanders bounded by Ghent, Oudenarde, Grammont, Alost and Termonde. Here an imitation Venetian seventeenth century needlepoint lace was developed to a high degree of perfection. 'Venice point' was exhibited by Buchholtz and Co. and J. Strehler, both of Brussels, at the London Exhibition of 1862.² The laces were generally produced with great expertise, in a wide variety of imitations of the original, and made up into collars, cuffs, corsages and even dresses. Towards the end of the century it was said that the industry in these areas was 'in a more flourishing condition than has ever been known before, even in the most palmy days of the Netherlands'.³

But the industry at Grammont had also been enjoying a high degree of prosperity from the late 1830s onwards by exploiting, for a time, the popularity of Chantilly-style lace. The cheap, white linen laces which had once been the industry's mainstay had been dispensed with once fashion had dropped them and the new manufacture had been developed rapidly. At the 1851 Exhibition, the Grammont firm, Stocquart and Freres, showed Chantilly laces which had been produced very cheaply and were thus able to competewith French Chantilly, even though they were generally of an inferior quality, the grounds being coarser and the general effect flatter, with less concentration on shading. Yet a good quality silk was used, designs were carefully chosen and altered, and a ready market was found for this distinctive product, particularly in the United States.⁴ Eventually

1 Times, loc. cit.

2 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1863, p. 4.

3 Hosiery and Lace Trades Review, 20 February, 1891.

4 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 134-35.

the production of Belgian Chantilly shared the same fate as its French counterpart, for during the 1870s it was swamped by machine imitations. Little was produced thereafter, but the workers were then able to rely on reproducing seventeenth century laces, and in this way maintained the industry's prosperity until the century's end.

The most important sector of the Belgian industry, in terms of the quantity of output produced and the employment this generated, however, was that concerned with the production of Valenciennes lace. A certain amount had been made in Belgium, at Ypres, during the eighteenth century, but it was not until the 1830s, by which time the manufacture had almost disappeared from Valenciennes itself, that it assumed its new importance in Belgium. The industry's subsequent development on this basis, around Ypres, Menin, Courtrai, Bruges, Ghent and Alost, was such that Mrs. Palliser could claim during the 1860s that its annual output was worth over £800,000.¹

Much of the industry's progress was owed to a small number of manufacturers who, from the 1830s onwards, had made concerted efforts to revitalize these various centres, most of which, largely as the result of a mania for machine lace, had experienced but little prosperity during the 1820s. Valenciennes lace was slow and difficult to manufacture, for motifs and ground were all made in one piece (*fil continu*), the *toilé* was very closely woven and a piece only two inches wide would require as many as 300 bobbins. Indeed, on wider pieces as many as 1000 bobbins were often required and at the Paris Exhibition of 1864 a piece was shown which had been made by 8000 bobbins. Hence, the lace was always rather expensive

1 *ibid.*, p. 11. Reports of the Juries, loc. cit. The Jurors placed the development of Valenciennes lace from 1835.

especially when compared with the machine imitations which came onto the market from the late 1830s. Yet by emphasizing the contrast between its dense, white pattern and the cobwebby ground, and by boldness in design, the manufacturers were able to offset machine competition and build up an enormous trade, sending their products as far afield as England, France, Germany and the United States.¹ Bold, floral effects were developed, additional threads were introduced into the *toilé* and a new, airy, diamond-shaped mesh came into being.

The best laces with the finest mesh and closest *toilé* came from Ypres and the most expensive, wide pieces which were the town's speciality, sold for up to £50 a yard. Over 180 different patterns of various laces were being turned out here during the 1860s by around 20,000 workers, mostly for export. The workers of Bruges produced laces of what were said to be a 'good, useful quality' suitable for trimmings and which were 'much sought after by English buyers'. At Ghent, where there were over 450 lace schools, the industry employed in the region of 10/12,000 workers and laces of all qualities were produced, principally in narrow and medium widths. Though Alost possessed 'excellent workers' the Jurors at the 1851 Exhibition felt that the designs of laces made here were not equal to those of Ypres and noted that the colour of the laces was inferior; the same was true of the laces of Menin and Courtrai.² In general, the industry in this region concentrated on the production of piece goods such as shawls, scarfs and berthas and though the designs and quality of the laces were not as good as those produced by the makers of medium quality goods in France, the prices were said to be much lower and hence these products were in 'considerable demand'.³ Yet the workers of

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 130-31. C. Channer and M.E. Roberts, *loc. cit.*

2 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, p. 468.

3 *ibid.*

these areas were able to produce high quality laces if the market demanded it. A Ypres firm, Duhayon-Brunfaut, which had its headquarters in Brussels, exhibited laces in 1851 which were of 'surpassing beauty and unequalled as to quality and design' and along with a number of manufacturers of Valenciennes lace was awarded prize medals.¹

By and large, the industry's expansion had been hinged upon a shrewd assessment of market opportunities. During the 1850s and 60s the industry continued to flourish and a remarkable improvement had taken place at Courtrai which now, with Ypres, produced the finest quality Valenciennes lace. The industry had continued to innovate, and an open, net-like half stitch, characteristic of Brussels lace, was introduced into the solid parts of the design, keeping the industry's output quite distinct from that turned out on lace machines.²

From the 1830s imitation Valenciennes laces had been produced in increasing quantities by lace machinery, both in France and England,³ but the ingenuity of the hand manufacturers had until this time managed to keep them at least one step ahead of their competitors. During the 1860s, however, the task became more difficult, for by this time the hand manufacturers seemed unable to produce alternative designs and fabrics which might have brought favourable results. Valenciennes laces of all qualities were still being made at the end of the century, but in a vastly reduced quantity⁴ and from the 1870s the machine had clearly triumphed over this sector of the hand industry.

Indeed, there were some sectors of the Belgian industry which had

1 *ibid.*, p. 471. See also, B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-33.

2 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 131.

3 See above, p. 98.

4 Times, 6 December, 1904.

never been able to produce the vitality and flexibility required. Mechlin laces, made at Malines and Antwerp, and their surrounding areas, had enjoyed but little prosperity. Made all in one piece on the lace pillow, in the same manner as the laces of Valenciennes, but with a characteristic six-sided mesh similar to that of Brussels bobbin lace, and with a delicate toile and motifs outlined by a thicker thread (cordonnet) giving an appearance of a light embroidery, these laces had been in great popularity during the eighteenth century, not least in England.¹ It was a difficult lace to produce and was generally more costly than Valenciennes lace, its chief rival. Until the 1840s the industry's organizers stood doggedly by the designs which had served them well during the eighteenth century, using borders edged with a line of flowers and small flowers dotted among the mesh ground. These had been eminently suitable for trimming nightcaps, ruffles and lingerie, and as a summer decoration, but fashions had now largely changed² and by 1834 there were only eight firms left. Attempts were subsequently made, using the 'raccroc', to produce objects of great width,³ but Mechlin lace could not capture the public's imagination to any great degree and in the early 1850s the industry was said to be suffering 'very much from the caprices of fashion'.⁴ By this time imitation Mechlin laces were being produced easily and cheaply by machinery⁵ and the industry seemed unable to come up with the new developments in technique and design which might have kept it alive. There was little produced here during the 1860s and by the end of the century the industry had gone, an

1 M.E. Jones, *op.cit.*, pp. 67-68.

2 *ibid.* Caps of fine Mechlin lace, however, were fashionable in England in 1827. World of Fashion, IV, 1827, p. 176.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

4 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1852, p. 468.

5 See above, p. 95.

imitation hand-made Mechlin being produced only in France.¹

The last quarter of the century was something of a turning point for certain sectors of the Belgian industry. Laces of a heavier kind became fashionable and a number of centres, including Bruges and Thielt, adapted the mode with success. A 'guipure de Flandre', consisting of flowers and other motifs made on the lace pillow in designs of the seventeenth century was produced. It was a rich and heavy fabric though not difficult to make and its price was said to be low. But the demand for this kind of lace tended to have a short lifespan, and the workers had to change quickly from this to other varieties of heavy lace as fashions changed. During the 1880s and 90s crude fillings were worked in buttonhole stitch in thick threads onto a machine background and at Bruges, Ypres, Courtrail, Inglemunster, Aeltre, Beveren, Jamise and Turnhout, Torchon and Cluny laces, perhaps the simplest and crudest of all, were also being made. By the end of the century these types of lace were most common of all in Belgium. Yet in producing this, the workers tended to lose their old skills and many were unable to return to producing the finer laces, for which demand increased during the 1890's.

Yet there were still roughly, 87,000 workers in Belgium in 1914² and over the century as a whole, the hand producers of Europe had performed creditably in the face of competition by machinery. Workers had been trained rigorously to produce perfect pieces of lace which often had rich, complex designs, were contemporary in taste, and which were constantly being changed. The manufacturers had built up large organizations, giving them close contact with centres of fashion and access to markets overseas. They

1 B. Palliser, loc. cit.; M.E. Jones, op.cit., p. 68.

2 See below, p. 515.

had trained and supervised their workers well. Both expensive and relatively cheap products had been made to cater for different markets and changing fashions. Indeed, the general popularity of lace in nineteenth century fashions had provided skilful producers and organizers with ample opportunities to succeed. There was some variation of experience, but following its initial impact it was not until the 1870s that the lace machine had once more made serious inroads into the hand producers' domain, especially in the markets for cheap fabrics, and even here, the manufacturers of Mirecourt and Le Puy continued to show the advantages of flexible production. The English industry's experience parallels that of the industry in Europe in a number of respects, though the scale of its operations was much smaller, its organizers were generally less energetic, its workers less skilful, and its achievements were far less significant, not least because the continental hand producers themselves represented an extraordinary challenge.

CHAPTER V

Industrial Structure

The struggle of the English pillow lace industry with machine competition, compounded by competition with the hand producers of Europe, proved to be a long, drawn-out process, contrasting somewhat with the relatively sudden demise of the more famous handloom weavers who 'from being probably the most numerous single group of workers in manufacturing industry in the 1820's ... dwindled within thirty years into a picturesque anachronism, encountered only in small numbers and in odd localities'.¹ Yet Augustus Peterman's map, drawn to accompany the Census of 1851, shows most graphically the extent to which traditional industries of this kind had so far survived the rigours of the industrial revolution;² the battle for the survival of the hand producer had not yet been ended and indeed, in the case of this industry, was not to be completed until well after the 1870's.

The experience of the pillow lace industry affords a most interesting case study of industries existing in this difficult, yet intriguing situation. To be seen in its proper perspective, the industry's competitive struggle must be viewed not only in the context of the industry's previous history, and by comparison with its rivals, but also in the context of its own structure and organization, for these affected its ability to compete. In terms of the numbers it employed and of the output it produced, the English pillow lace industry was by no means as large as its rivals. Yet it was perhaps the largest

1 D. Bythell, The Handloom Weavers. A Study in the English Cotton Industry During the Industrial Revolution, (1969), p. 251.

2 The map is interleaved in J.H. Clapham, An Economic History of Modern Britain (1932), II.

those English industries which, in the middle of the nineteenth century, were still organized purely on a rural outwork basis.¹ By 1861 the industry's prosperity had waned considerably since 1815 but there were still almost 30,000 outworkers on its books and in some districts it could employ up to a third of the total female population.² If these figures pale next to those of employment in England's major industries and in lacemaking overseas, the industry was still large and important enough to have a crucial bearing on the lives of countless families in six counties and it was not until well into the 1880s that it ceased to be an important employer of female and child labour in the traditional lace areas.

At the opening of the nineteenth century the industry was established in rather strictly-defined geographical boundaries, both in the south-east Midlands and in the West Country. In the south-east Midlands it was concentrated in three counties, Buckinghamshire, Bedfordshire, and Northamptonshire, with lesser enclaves in Huntingdonshire and Oxfordshire.³ The industry embraced almost the whole of Buckinghamshire from Newport Pagnell down to Great Marlow. It spread northwards into Northamptonshire, incorporating roughly half of the county south of a line between Oundle in the north-east (the industry's northern extremity) and Daventry which lies further south; and in the far south-west of the

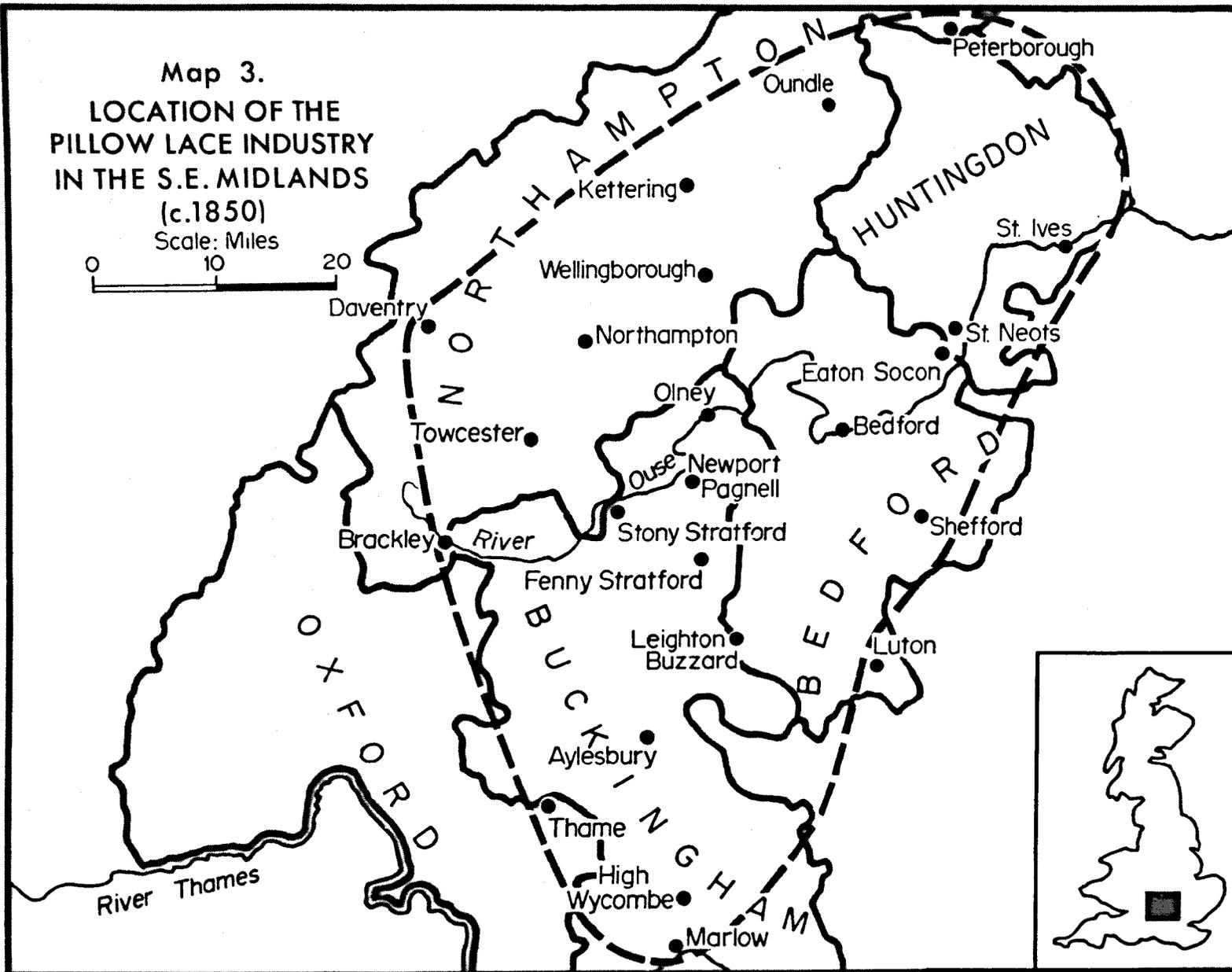
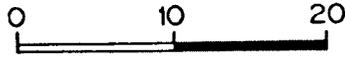
1 There has been no systematic assessment of the extent of rural outwork in the second half of the nineteenth century. The best analysis is still that by J.H. Clapham, *ibid.*, II, Chs. III and IV *passim*, and III, Ch. III *passim*. Rural industries of comparable nature were gloving and straw plaiting. But both of these were attached to factory organizations by this time. J.H. Dony, *op.cit.*, Ch. III, *passim*. F.W. Hull, The History of the Glove Trade, (1934), pp. 57-60.

2 For details see below, pp. 184-6.

3 See Map 3.

Map 3.
 LOCATION OF THE
 PILLOW LACE INDUSTRY
 IN THE S.E. MIDLANDS
 (c.1850)

Scale: Miles



county it reached out as far as Brackley. To the east of Buckinghamshire, the industry covered roughly three quarters of Bedfordshire, north of a line drawn between Leighton Buzzard in the south-west and Shefford in the east, in other words, embracing the whole of the county north of the Chiltern Hills. During the eighteenth century the industry had spilled from north-east Bedfordshire into neighbouring Huntingdonshire, and here in an area extending in a north-easterly direction for about 11 miles, it took in St. Ives, St. Neots and their surrounding villages. Further south, the industry's western most extremity in this region was to be found in Oxfordshire, at Thame, where dealers now put out materials to workers in the villages bordering on south-west Buckinghamshire. The south-east Midland region was by far the industry's largest area, and within a radius of 20 miles of the conjunction of the borders of Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire, over half of the industry's labour force was always to be found.

In the West Country pillow lacemaking was undertaken in a much smaller area. The industry's location lay within a triangle extending 30 miles at its base along the Devonshire coast from Exmouth to Axminster and with an apex 12 miles to the north at Uppottery.¹ Round and about there still were a few surviving outposts from earlier days. The old industry in Somerset had been dead for some time, but pillow lacemaking thrived just over the border from Axminster in neighbouring Wiltshire, where Malmesbury was an important centre as late as 1848, and also at Lyme Regis in Dorset where a number of workers could always be found until the century's end.²

1 There was a small outpost further north at Chulmleigh, R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 255. See Map 4.

2 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 349.

The total number of workers employed within these boundaries was to shrink considerably during the course of the century, but the industry's location, with the exception of the gradual loss of central Bedfordshire to straw plaiting,¹ remained virtually unaltered. Even at the end of the century, when the industry was on the point of extinction, a few workers could still be found at most of the traditional lace areas' extremities.²

The pillow lace industry was, by definition, a capitalist outwork industry in which raw materials were given out to village workers by a merchant and the finished goods were returned to him either directly, or through an intermediary, once the production process had been performed. During the 200 years or so before 1800 a complex series of inter-relationships between those who made lace and those who were ultimately responsible for its production, collection and sale had evolved. The production of pillow lace had been organized until this time on a four-tier structure, at the heart of which were the lace dealers, a group of merchants who sometimes preferred to call themselves 'manufacturers', particularly if they were also lace designers, as some were. Based in the market towns and villages of the lace regions, they were responsible for the production of the vast majority of pillow laces made in England, for very few were made by laceworkers on their own initiative. The dealers received orders for pillow laces from London wholesalers, from London and provincial retailers, and from private customers at home and abroad, and on this basis organised the distribution of raw materials to their outworkers, before later collecting the completed pieces and distributing them back to the various market centres.

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- 1 The straw plaiting industry gradually encroached upon the lace areas from its centres at Luton and Dunstable in south Bedfordshire. A number of areas which had once been dominated by lacemaking had gone over completely to straw plaiting by the 1850s. J.G. Dony, op.cit., pp. 19-23.
- 2 T. Fitzrandolph and M.D. Hay, The Rural Industries of England and Wales (1927), II, pp. 50-2, 260-2.

At the dealers' control, and completely dependent upon them for their income, lived and worked the thousands of women and children, and some men, who constituted the second and third tiers of the industry's structure. In the years before 1800 the pillow laceworkers seem to have dealt directly with the manufacturer by whom they were employed, for no evidence of the existence of an intermediary between employer and worker has emerged. Adult lacemakers worked at home, usually alone, though occasionally they shared a cottage room for companionship and to economise on the expenses of heating and lighting. But by 1800, and probably before, their children worked outside of the domestic economy in small cottage workshops known as lace schools, where they were taught and controlled by lace mistresses, women who emanated from the most skilled workers, though they were seldom as technically proficient, nor such competent teachers as their counterparts overseas.¹

These four groups continued to comprise the industry's basic components throughout the nineteenth century and their spatial relationships remained unchanged. In contrast to certain areas of the continent, there was no significant attempt to draw the workers together into supervisable workshops, either close to the dealers' centres or in the lace villages.² A move in this direction might well have solved some of the problems of distribution and production-control normally associated with the putting out system and indeed, it would be easy to charge the dealers with a surprising lack of initiative in this respect, for such developments

1 See below, pp. 186-191, 515-516.

2 See above, Chapter IV. There was just one notable exception. At Olney, the house of William Cowper, the poet, was used as a 'factory' under the management of a Mrs. Langley. 'The lady engaged the mistress to look after the work-rooms, while she herself attended to the orders. About forty hands were employed and the best work in town was produced here. O. Ratcliffe and H. Brown, Olney Past and Present (1893), p. 240.

frequently took place in a number of industries which were organized on a similar basis.¹ But had the dealers attempted such a move they would more than likely have come up against a dead-weight of conservatism among their labour force, for in each decade following 1851 the average age of the labour force increased.² Those who stayed at pillow lace-making tended to regard any form of industrial organization outside of the cottage as irksome and inferior to their own, and were happy to think that their employment kept them free of the accidents and discipline associated in their minds with large scale industrial organization and town life.³ For these reasons, and partly because many dealers continued to make what they presumably regarded as a satisfactory level of profit,⁴ the production of pillow lace remained the purely cottage-handicraft pursuit it had always been. In contrast to certain sectors of the continental industry, a worker generally controlled the entire process in the production of each piece of lace in her own home, and to a degree this was indicative of the technical inferiority of the English product; only in Devon was there just one simple process of division of labour, whereby specialist workers, known as 'sewers-on', applied motifs onto a net background to form large dresses, veils and so on.

But the nineteenth century did see one important development. In the south-east Midlands the industry's problems eventually caused the number of dealers to diminish substantially, while the scale of operations of the dealers remaining seems to have expanded beyond any previous level. These dealers were faced with mounting problems of tabulation, of avoiding

1 S. Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management (1965), p. 32.

2 See below, Table 4, p. 182.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D6.

4 For details see below, pp. 266-9.

embezzlement, of maintaining standards of production and of synchronising the completion of laces with marketing timetables. As they distributed raw materials and collected completed laces over an expanding area of the countryside¹ a portion of their businesses came to be transacted through the agency of an intermediary, a 'factor' or 'bag woman', who either lived close to the lacemakers in the villages or who travelled from village to village on one or more of the dealers' behalf. The century therefore saw the structure of the putting out system become more complex, as a fifth component, the lace factor, was added to the old four-tier structure; these are now examined in turn.

a) Lace Dealers

The pillow lace industry had been organized by lace dealers ever since its inception, the number increasing as the industry expanded and reaching a numerical peak during the boom years of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1814, when the industry's prosperity seemed threatened by a proposed Bill to reduce the protective tariff, over 50 lace dealers, mostly from Buckinghamshire, gathered to form a committee representative of all other dealers in the south-east Midlands.² The industry was then at its peak of prosperity, and if there were almost as many dealers in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, and perhaps half as many in Devon, then altogether there were at least 150 to 200 lace dealers operating at this time.

The prosperity of the French War period had attracted many small traders in the south-east Midlands, shopkeepers, milliners and drapers among them, to the opportunity of temporarily diversifying their business interests. Tomazin Lester, the father of Thomas Lester, who was to

1 See below, pp. 159-160.

2 See below, pp. 283-289.

become the biggest employer in the industry in Bedfordshire, was one who took up the lace business during these years, incorporating it into his general interests in drapery and millinery.¹ But the impact of machine and foreign competition subsequently caused many of the dealers who had speculated during the Wars to withdraw and concentrate again on their former practices. As the scale of the industry's business began to dwindle after 1815,² so the number of lace dealers dwindled with it. The trade directories suggest that by 1830 there were only 69, of whom 45 were to be found in Buckinghamshire. Thereafter the number of dealers in the south-east Midlands continued to decline, to 39 by 1850 and only 24 by 1877, in spite of a revival of the industry's fortune during the 1840s and 50s.³ By 1899 there were only 11.⁴

In Devon, the trend was somewhat different. Here, the number of dealers seems to have increased until the 1860s and to have declined only thereafter. This was in spite of the fact that the introduction of machine lace in the 1820s had initially caused such panic in this area⁵ that for a time the number of dealers had dwindled quite substantially. In 1823 the trade directories, which don't necessarily include all, indicated there were only 11 dealers, most of whom were to be found in Honiton and Sidmouth.⁶ Pigot's Directory of 1830 showed only seven,⁷ and such was the confusion in this sector of the industry that the decline indicated may well not be so great an overstatement, as, at first glance, it

1 Bedford Times, 2 November 1956.

2 See below, pp. 289-295.

3 See below, pp. 316-344.

4 See Table 1, p. 159.

5 See below, pp. 297-299.

6 Pigot's Directory, 1823-4.

7 Pigot's Directory, 1830.

may appear. But the industry's subsequent recovery, however modest,¹ was sufficient to bring the total back up to 49 in 1850 and there were still 39 in 1878, almost as many as there were in the three counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire combined. In 1890, however, there were only 16.² In Devon the scale of the dealers' operations clearly was much smaller than in the south-east Midlands for there were far fewer workers.³

TABLE I

Location of Pillow Lace Dealers in the Major
Lacemaking Counties (1830-1890)

	Buckinghamshire	Northamptonshire	Bedfordshire	South-East Midland Total	Devon	Grand Total
1830	45	13	11	69	12	81
1850	17	10	12	39	49	88
1878	7	5	12	24	39	83
c.1890	5	2	4	11	16	27

Sources

- 1830 Pigot's Directory, (Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Devonshire).
- 1850 Pigot's Directory, (Buckinghamshire); Slater's Directory (Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire); Post Office Directory (Devon).
- 1878 Kelly's Directory, (Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire); Bedfordshire Directory; White's Directory (Devonshire).
- c.1890 Kelly's Directory, 1894. (Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire). White's Historical Gazeteer and Directory of Devon, 1890.

Thomas Gilbert, of High Wycombe, who was probably the most powerful dealer in the trade, and in the scale of his enterprise rivalled some of

1 See below, pp. 305-330.

2 See Table 1.

3 See below, pp. 176-7 and Table 2.

the lace businesses on the continent, employed over 3000 workers in 1863, over 'the greater part of southern Buckinghamshire, and an adjoining strip of Oxfordshire'.¹ He may well have appropriated some of his workers by taking over the parishes of dealers who had left the trade. From around 1830, when the industry's fortunes began to improve, the Abrahams brothers, Samuel and John, extended their family business, based originally in Bedford, into the nearby villages of Turvey, Harrold and Kempston.² By the 1860s there were a number of businesses operating on a similarly large scale. William Ayres employed lacemakers in most of the villages around Newport Pagnell, some at a distance of more than 15 miles.³ From the same town, William Marshall, who was in the business for at least 30 years, employed workers as far away as Whittlebury and Towcester in Northamptonshire.⁴ In 1863, Mrs. Mobbs, a lace dealer centred in Broughton, who had also been in the trade for 30 years, was buying lace 'from lacemakers in all the villages around'.⁵

By this time the Bedfordshire industry was dominated by the brothers Charles and Thomas Lester who claimed they employed

lacemakers in almost every village and in some in almost every house, within a circle of ten miles from Bedford, or more in some directions and rather less towards the south-east where the straw plait trade begins.⁶

The Lesters had probably taken charge of some of those workers who had previously been employed by Huntingdonshire dealers or by the Abrahams family, for both had disappeared from the directories by the late 1850s.

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- 1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 257.
 - 2 The course of this expansion can be followed in the trade directories. Pigot's Directory, 1830, 1842, 1884.
 - 3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report 1863, p. 259.
 - 4 *ibid.*
 - 5 *ibid.*, p. 261.
 - 6 *ibid.*, p. 262.

Even then, it was possible for newcomers to build up large concerns. Encouraged by a boom in demand for Maltese lace,¹ Thomas Coombs, a trustee of the Bedford Charity, and alderman,² was no doubt able to use his reputation to enable him to start up in the trade in the 1850s. By the end of the century he claimed to employ workers in no less than 49 villages,³ some of which may have been outside Bedfordshire, for there were then less than 800 workers in the whole of the county⁴ and the Lester brothers were still operating.⁵

There were few dealers in Devon who could rival this scale of organization. Mrs. Davey, of Honiton, who at one time could boast of being 'lacemaker to the Queen', was probably the most powerful, employing workers not only in her own village, but 'in most villages for 10 or 12 miles distant'.⁶ Only Mrs. Treadwin, who dealt from the Cathedral Yard in Exeter, and was among the most successful and influential of the industry's dealers,⁷ and a dealer at Ottery St. Mary who said in the 1880s that she had once employed over 300 workers, could rival this.⁸

Thomas Coombs' experience shows that, with the encouragement of improvements in demand, it was almost always possible for prospective dealers to enter the trade. In the early part of the nineteenth century, as Mrs. Moody suggested £10 to £15 may well have been sufficient capital

1 See below, pp. 342-3.

2 Bedford Mercury, 6 February, 13 February, 1860.

3 Daily Mail Catalogue of the Exhibition of British Lace, 1908, p. 54.

4 See Table 2, p. 177.

5 Thomas Lester died in 1910. See below, p. 268.

6 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 246.

7 For further details of Mrs. Treadwin's business and interests, see below, pp. 330-1, 337-8.

8 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, LXXX, 1888, p. 5.

to open up a business.¹ A dealer's greatest outlay was probably for a horse and gig for travelling, but this was not always necessary as workers often met the dealer at his centre.² Thread was cheap³ and a prospective dealer, with business acumen and contacts in the lacemaking community, will have had little difficulty in recruiting labour, for the labour market, at least until the 1870s, was always over-stocked; there were always plenty of willing hands.⁴ The French War period had seen people move into the trade with great advantage. In his History of Buckinghamshire, John Lipscombe describes the case of John West, 'born and brought up in very humble life, who became a dealer in lace, by which he acquired a considerable fortune', great enough for him to bequest the sum of £4-5000 for a church, consecrated in Buckingham in 1807.⁵ The Buckinghamshire poet, William Cowper, wrote similarly in one of his letters, of a 'common sailor' who had returned to Buckinghamshire with only a few pounds, but had still found it simple enough to establish himself in the pillow lace trade, 'with remarkable profit'.⁶ Indeed, many of the lace dealers who had entered the trade during this prosperous period were said to have acquired 'great fortunes'.⁷

Such successes would seldom be repeated in later years, but in the middle of the century a number of dealers continued to operate on the industry's periphery, moving in and out of the trade according to its fluctuating prospects. The four dealers operating in Harrold in 1854, when

1 A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

2 See below, pp. 234-9.

3 See below, pp. 205-06.

4 See below, pp. 173-4.

5 J. Lipscombe, History of Buckinghamshire, II, 1807, p. 591.

6 As quoted in T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 210.

7 S. & D. Lysons, *op.cit.*, p. 412.

the Bedfordshire industry was experiencing something of a boom, had all been listed in a trade directory seven years earlier as shopkeepers and drapers. Yet by the 1860s, when the boom had broken, all had withdrawn from their dealings in lace to concentrate solely on their former interests.¹ A more unusual case was that of Benjamin North, a traveller for a High Wycombe chairmaker, Mr. Randell. For Mr. Randell, North journeyed on a circular route selling chairs in neighbouring counties and sometimes as far afield as Gloucester and Yorkshire. Setting out through Buckinghamshire, he collected the work of local lacemakers en route, before selling the laces in the towns and villages where he later tied up his horse and van for the night.² He was eventually able to discontinue selling lace and establish himself as a wholesaler in the chairmaking business.³

But the control of the industry in this region rested substantially in the hands of a small number of dealers whose names arise again and again in references to the industry and its organization. With the notable exception of those at High Wycombe, these dealers were largely to be found on the conjunction of the borders of Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and more often than not, in the High Streets of the market towns. In Bedfordshire, dealers were markedly concentrated in the north-west, in Bedford, Harrold, Turvey and Kempston, though a number were often to be found, further south, in Woburn and Leighton Buzzard. In Buckinghamshire they were to be found primarily in Olney, Princess Risborough, Newport Pagnell, Stony Stratford, Buckingham, High Wycombe and Aylesbury, with a

1 Bedfordshire Directory, 1847; Post Office Directory, 1854; Bedfordshire Directory, 1861.

2 L.J. Mays, The History of Chairmaking in High Wycombe (1960), p. 37.

3 *ibid.*

smaller number always to be found in the famous needlemaking village of Long Crendon and in Great Missenden in the Chiltern Hills. The pattern was more or less repeated in Northamptonshire where Wellingborough, Towcester and Northampton were always by far the most important centres, with dealers appearing now and again on the periphery of the lace areas, in Kettering and Broughton¹ and once, in Peterborough.²

Outside of these three counties there now were very few lace dealers to be found in the south-east Midlands. In Oxfordshire the only dealer to be recorded during the nineteenth century was a Mrs. E. Franklin who was operating in the 1870s from Thame³ and there once was a small number of dealers in St. Neots and St. Ives in Huntingdonshire.⁴ In contrast, the Devonshire dealers were located in almost every town and village in which pillow lace was made, though until the 1880s there were always marked concentrations in Exmouth, Beer, Honiton, Budleigh Salterton, Seaton, Sidmouth and Exeter. The Cathedral Yard in Exeter and the High Street in Honiton

1 The distribution of dealers in these three countries in 1830 fell as follows:

<u>Bedfordshire</u>		<u>Buckinghamshire</u>		<u>Northamptonshire</u>	
Ampthill	1	Aylesbury	3	Kettering	2
Bedford	7	Buckingham	3	Northampton	5
Leighton Buzzard	1	Chesham	2	Towcester	3
Woburn	2	Haddenham & Long Crendon	4	Wellingborough	3
		Great Marlow	2		
		Great Missenden	2		
		Newport Pagnell	7		
		Olney	7		
		Princess Risborough	4		
		Stony Stratford	4		
		High Wycombe	8		

Source: Pigot's Directory, 1830.

2 The dealer was Mrs. M. Bonshor, Kelly's Directory, 1871.

3 Kelly's Directory, 1871.

4 Pigot's Directory, 1830, 1850. The dealers had disappeared by 1850.

were both famous lace centres and continued to house pillow lace dealers until the century's end.¹

Dealers in both regions shared the characteristic that they seldom worked alone or relied solely on lace as their source of income. Family groups and partnerships were common and the brothers Cartwright, who were active in Newport Pagnell in the late years of the eighteenth century, the brothers Trapp of Bedford, prominent in the early decades of the nineteenth century,² the Abrahams family, the Millwards of Olney, the Farretts, Andrews, and Bird and Allen of Northampton, the Corrie brothers, who operated more extensively in Northamptonshire,³ Tuckett and Martin of Honiton⁴ and the Lester brothers of Bedford, were notable among these. Some of these businesses had been handed down over several generations. The Abrahams family controlled what was probably the longest-established business of any. Francis Abrahams, a lacebuyer, bought a cottage in Harrold in 1698.⁵ Almost a century later Edmund H. Abrahams, also of Harrold, another lacebuyer, was involved in a conveyance of land.⁶ It was from this basis that the Abrahams family subsequently expanded its lace business in north Bedfordshire. But many of the most prominent businesses

1 Pigot's Directory, 1830. Slater's Directory, 1850. Kelly's Directory, 1887. In 1850 the dealers were distributed as follows:-

Honiton	8	Budleigh		Sidbury	1
Ottery St. Mary	2	Salterston	4	Colyton	1
Seaton	2	Exeter	7	Branscombe	1
Sidmouth	12	Axminster	1	Okehampton	1
Exmouth	7	Beer	2		

2 Early in the nineteenth century they were supplying lacemaking materials to the inmates of Bedford goal. Beds. C.R.O. QSR. 1801/154; 1802/103. Bedford Gaol Bills.

3 Pigot's Directory, 1823-4, 1830; Kelly's Directory, 1854.

4 Pigot's Directory, 1830; Slater's Directory, 1850.

5 Beds. C.R.O. GA. 896.

6 Beds. C.R.O. GA. 1493/5.

in the middle of the nineteenth century were more than two generations old. The Millward business had probably passed through at least three generations before John Millward died in the 1850s, for the family are known to have been operating at Olney in the 1760s.¹ When Tomazin Lester died in 1837 he left his business to Charles, his eldest son,² who apparently took his younger brother Thomas into the business some time afterwards. Samuel Chick of Honiton said, in the 1860s, that he also had come into the trade by inheritance.³

Thomas Gilbert, Mrs. Treadwin, Mrs. Davey of Honiton, George Hurst of Bedford and William Ayres were prominent among the smaller number of pillow lace dealers who seem to have run their business individually. But the fluctuating, often uncertain nature of the trade encouraged most dealers to combine their lace interests with other projects. In some cases dealings in lace were probably regarded simply as adjuncts to more important activities. Most lace dealers, large and small, had diversified businesses which often included some combination of drapery, grocery, wool merchanting, mercery and haberdashery. Thomas Gilbert, who operated from a shop in the High Street in High Wycombe,⁴ advertised himself in the trade directories as 'grocer, tea dealer, linen and woollen draper, silk mercer, hosier, haberdasher, hatter and lacemanufacturer'. In addition, perhaps in an effort to incorporate an element of certainty into a business which was subjected to regular changes in fashion, Gilbert offered 'funerals completely furnished',⁵ though the funeral business was a common practice

1 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 115.

2 Bedford Times, 2 November 1956.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 250. Other father and son businesses, in Bedfordshire, were Ellis and Son of Ampthill and Ridgeway and Son of Leighton Buzzard. Pigot's Directory, 1830; Bedfordshire Directory, 1869.

4 This was known locally as 'Bobbin Castle'. Information supplied by Mr. E.J. Davis, County Archivist, Bucks. C.R.O.

5 Musson and Craven's Directory, 1853; Kelly's Directory, 1877, 1883.

among drapers at this time. Thomas Lester traded also as linen and woollen draper and silk mercer,¹ the Abrahams brothers as tea dealers and grocers,² the Trapps as linen and woollen drapers,³ and Mrs. Treadwin as dressmaker and milliner.⁴ John Biss, of Buckingham, told a Children's Employment Commissioner that not only did he deal in a superfluous product such as lace, but also in 'useful goods', though he did not specify what these were.⁵

A number of dealers combined their activities in lace with rather less predictable interests. At Ampthill, one kept a bedstead and bedding warehouse,⁶ John Yorke of Stony Stratford was a tanner,⁷ James Herbert of Woburn, in Bedfordshire, was an upholsterer and cabinet maker,⁸ another dealer at Girtford in Bedfordshire was an ironmonger,⁹ while C. Corrie was an agent for 'Dr. Barries' Delicious Health Restoring Arabeca Food'.¹⁰ In other cases dealings in lace proved to be a diversion from a major interest in the land and its produce. James Dawe of Woodhouse in Devon was a farmer,¹¹ William Wootton of Harrold was a maltster, who sold a malthouse and kiln to William Neale in 1783.¹² In the villages of Devon

1 Bedford Times, 2 November, 1956.

2 Slater's Directory, 1850.

3 Beds. C.R.O. QSX. 1801/154; 1802/103. Bedford Gaol Bills.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 255. Mrs. Treadwin's business may have developed out of her husband's watch and clockmaking business which is advertised in Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 13 Feb., 1847.

5 ibid., p. 259.

6 Bedfordshire Directory, 1861.

7 Pigot's Directory, 1823.

8 Slater's Directory, 1854.

9 Post Office Directory, 1854.

10 Bedford Mercury, 16 Jan., 1860.

11 Post Office Directory, 1856.

12 Beds. C.R.O. GA. 760.

the lace dealer was characteristically a grocer and general store keeper, though there was nothing exceptional in this, since village shops generally sold almost everything.

Very few dealers seem to have depended entirely for their livelihood on lace. The brothers John and Robert Talbot apparently had no other business, for in Bedfordshire trade directories and in their wills they appear purely as lace dealers.¹ But some of those dealers with divided interests evidently regarded their dealings in the lace trade as their primary source of income. Thomas Lester and Mrs. Treadwin both described themselves in their wills as 'lacemanufacturers',² despite the diverse businesses in which both were engaged.

In a century that saw the gradual exclusion of women from the shopping and retailing businesses,³ the pillow lace industry proved to be something of an exception in so far as women dealers constituted a sizeable proportion of the industry's organizers. Indeed, the majority of dealers interviewed in Devon by the Childrens' Employment Commissioners in 1863 were women. Their importance was also reflected in the trade directories; of the 48 lace dealers listed in this county in 1856, 30 were women.⁴ Mrs. Davey and Mrs. Treadwin both had the distinction that they made laces for royalty.⁵ By contrast, women played a relatively minor role in the south-east Midlands. Mrs. Allen engaged in a large business from High Wycombe,⁶ and the only dealer recorded at Thame was a woman.⁷ But there were no

1 Pigot's Directory, 1820; See also below, pp. 266-8.

2 See below, pp. 268-9.

3 I. Pinchbeck, *op.cit.*, p. 315.

4 Post Office Directory, 1856.

5 Mrs. Davey also was an agent for Globe Insurance. Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 20 March, 1847.

6 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 260.

7 Kelly's Directory, 1877.

others of comparable stature. A number of women seem to have operated on a small, local scale, utilising the business premises of husbands who were local tradesmen. One, at Buckingham, was the wife of a nailmaker, another at Northampton was married to a lamp and oil dealer¹ and when a lace dealer died his business was often taken over by his wife. Mary Gilbert ran the business for a time following Thomas Gilbert's death in the 1880s.²

The industry had traditionally incorporated a number of designer-dealers, who had made patterns not only for themselves, but for the industry at large. A number of master patterns had also come from wholesale centres. Bath, in Somerset, had been famous for its master - designers in the eighteenth century,³ and in the middle of the nineteenth century a number of London wholesalers exhibited their own designs at the Great Exhibition.⁴ The parchment designers needed and often had much skill and imagination, though Thomas Wright was perhaps unduly ecstatic over their creative ability:

The patterns elaborated by them are the most jewelled thoughts stereotyped in parchment, just as the work of an inspired author is the expression of his innermost soul imparted ... They did great things, for their thoughts were hitched to the stars. In moments of ecstasy, say the old philosophers, the soul divests itself of the body. In the finest of lace, as in a previous book, we seem to come into contact with the detached soul of a great personality.⁵

Several examples of nineteenth century master patterns produced in the south-east Midlands have survived, and bear their creator's name: George

1 Kelly's Directory, 1877.

2 Kelly's Directory, 1887.

3 V.C.H. Somerset, II (1911), pp. 426-7.

4 For details see below, p. 328.

5 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

Abrahams of Bedford, John Sargeant of Sandy, Joseph Ayres of Risely, Thomas Lester of Bedford and John Millward of Olney.¹ To this list of master-designers could be added the names of Mrs. Treadwin, Mrs. Davey, the Cardwell brothers, Elizabeth Brewer of Great Marlow, Benjamin Hill of Olney, George Hurst and Richard Viccars, all of whom designed special patterns for display at the Great Exhibition. But the number of master-designers seems to have declined during the course of the century and few of them had the skills of their continental counterparts.²

b. Factors

In the south-east Midlands, if less so in Devon, the control of the industry's labour force fell increasingly into the hands of a few dealers, some of whom employed labour forces of massive proportions. The result of this was that some lace dealers found it necessary to employ intermediaries between their workers and themselves, for the organizational problems of the putting out system were increased the more workers there were to handle and the wider the area in which they were located. The factors allocated raw materials, collected finished laces and probably helped in the recruitment of labour. Unfortunately, they do not appear as a separate entity in the trade directories and there is no way of knowing just how many there were, who they were, or precisely where they were located. But the majority seem to have been grocers, situated in the villages surrounding the lace dealers' centres. 'In a village of forty cottages', said Mrs. Allen, a lace dealer in High Wycombe, 'there would be two or three such buyers, each with a little shop and in the other villages none, in which case the lace goes to neighbouring

1 The patterns can be seen in the Thomas Lester Collection, Luton Museum.

2 For further details, see below, pp. 330, 332-5.

villages'.¹ In some cases dealers employed travelling factors, known as bag women, who moved from village to village according to their instructions.²

The dealer placed a lot of faith in his factor, for if the factor was idle or unreliable he had the potential to cause the dealer untold anxiety. Failure could mean the loss of an important section of a highly competitive market and for this reason the major lace dealers were probably very careful in their selection. The absence of any recorded complaints of the factors' inefficiency suggests that the dealers may have been judicious in this respect. The lace factors, despite being well-known in their local communities, do not seem to have been averse to falling foul of their workers' displeasure. Abundant supplies of labour and the pressures of rural poverty on the work force placed the factors in a favourable position to exploit their workers at will, and many were seemingly unabashed by their notoriety for the payment of low wages and dealings in truck.³

c/d. Lacemakers: Adults and Children

The lace dealers were ultimately responsible for the employment of the many thousands of women and children, and a small number of men and boys, who produced laces for sale not only throughout England, but also for markets as far afield as North America and Australia.⁴ The vast majority were the wives and children of agricultural labourers whose earnings generally were too low for them to be able to spurn opportunities

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 260.

2 *ibid.*, p. 256. For further details of the organization of the putting out system, see below, pp. 231-247.

3 See below, pp. 257-262.

4 For details of exports see below, pp. 227-230.

of adding to the family purse.¹ On the coastal fringes of Devon, a number of pillow lacemakers were related to fishermen,² in the Chiltern Hills a number were the wives and children of chairmakers and in Northamptonshire some were related to boot and shoemakers.³ But most had one thing in common - sheer necessity forced them to work. Children were expected by their fathers to earn at least sufficient to maintain themselves and were put out to work at the earliest opportunity. Low incomes encouraged mothers to work even at the expense of domestic organization; girls who had been employed at the lace pillow for most of their lives were notoriously poor house-keepers.⁴ It was this basic need for employment, allied to the scarcity of alternative occupations, which maintained a flow of women and children into lacemaking through most of the century. It was only from the 1870s that the flow began to wane sufficient to pose a threat to the industry's existence.⁵

If the underlying factor behind the availability of these women and children for employment at the lace pillow was poverty, and most villagers were only too pleased to take whatever employment opportunities arose, there was, for a number of women, a certain positiveness in the choice of lacemaking as an occupation. Even had alternatives been available,

1 For details see below, pp. 410-416.

2 At Seaton and Beer it was said that all lacemakers were related to seamen. R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 252.

3 ibid. Third Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, XVI, 1861, p. 178.

4 One observer felt that 'girls who have been brought up to work at lace schools, are generally found unfit for household work'. R.B. Hankin, An Account of the Public Charities of the Town of Bedford (1828), p. 23. A Royal Commissioner also spoke of their 'unfitness ... for household service and housewifery', R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., App. to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D5.

5 See below, pp. 180-6; 351-2.

many would undoubtedly have continued with the traditional employment. Sarah Tovy, of Newton Poppleford, felt that the 'freedom from accidents which are common in many other occupations,' was 'a great advantage'.¹ Craft pride probably encouraged a certain number of women to remain in the occupation even when times were bad. This was particularly so in Devon, where the industry's purchasers included many members of the Royal Family. The women of Beer were said to be the proudest of all, and 'not a little vain of their accomplishment of lacemaking and of the Queen's wedding dress, and they say all that Beer is the greatest place for lace'.² Though the money returns were small many women seem to have been loathe to see a traditional way of life break down and to have found a good deal of comfort from an established pattern of existence.

In the years following 1815 the labour market in the pillow lace industry was almost always over-stocked and unemployment was endemic throughout most of the industry's final 100 years. Here and there were fortunate groups of workers who, because of their particular skills, and because dealers saw this as a way of encouraging loyalty, were kept in employment even when the demand for English pillow lace fell away.³ Just how many of these workers there were is impossible to judge. But in an industry which was subject not only to sudden changes in fashion and to seasonal fluctuations,⁴ but also to intense competitive pressures, the labour force tended to move in and out of the employment according to fluctuations in the demand for lace. The most skilful workers would come closest to a situation of full-time employment throughout any particular year. The rest could never be sure just how long any particular spell of

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., 1843, App. to Second Report, Pt. I, p. D28.

2 *ibid.*, p. D30. The Queen's wedding dress was made here in 1837. See below, pp. 322-4.

3 See below, pp. 239-40.

4 See below, pp. 23 2-3.

employment would last, though in a boom period such as the 1850s, when there was a substantial demand for cheap as well as expensive laces,¹ something close to full-time employment may have been experienced by many of the workers who would have regarded themselves as continually available for work. Until the 1870's most dealers found no difficulty in finding new sources of labour whenever the demand for their products boomed, though there was probably some scarcity of skilled workers as is shown by the relatively high wages which were paid to them.² But Thomas Lester said, perhaps typically that 'as prices rise more hands always apply for work',³ and he was safe in the knowledge that his workers could easily be dispensed with as soon as demand fell away. Most workers moved in and out of the occupation according to fluctuations in the demand for lace, unable to find alternative employment and always willing to make the odd piece of lace whenever the opportunity arose.⁴

Little is known of the relatively small number of men who made lace, but a number of agricultural labourers certainly did, from time to time. Thomas Batchelor found several men making lace in 1808, when lace-making was perhaps as profitable as field work.⁵ Most boys attended lace school for some time and this gave them the ability to turn to lacemaking when older, perhaps at night, or when unemployed. The menfolk seem to have been particularly shy about this form of employment, but some evidence has survived which suggests that there were more male lacemakers than might be imagined, or than the menfolk might have been prepared to admit. Mrs. Treadwin knew of about 24 male workers in her home village of Woodbury,

1 See below, pp. 324-344.

2 See below, pp. 239-240.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 262.

4 See below, p. 256, 263.

5 See above, p. 61.

two of whom still survived in 1869. Among her collection of lace are several pieces labelled 'made by a man'. Captain Marryat, her brother, was once told by James Gooding, a lacemaker of Honiton, 'I have made hundreds of yards in my time both wide and narrow, but never worked regularly at my pillow after 16 years of age'.¹ The rough hands of the agricultural worker seem to have been no handicap, for the laces made by men for Mrs. Treadwin are of the same quality as those made by women. In 1861 a medical officer of the Privy Council claimed that a recent diminution of lacemaking by men and boys in Towcester had been the principal reason for the lower incidence of pulmonary tuberculosis among men than females.² One might infer from this that when the demand for lace increased, and wages too, there may have been more men employed than might be imagined.

In 1851 the first systematic attempt was made to classify occupations into classes and this was to remain the basis of Census examination, with minor modifications, until the twentieth century and therefore throughout the period under discussion. Though not entirely reliable, for reasons enumerated below, the Censuses give a useful general guide to the geographical distribution of the occupation, to the age-structure of the labour force and to the general numbers who regarded themselves as available for employment, the latter divisions also giving us a general idea of the course of the industry's progress from 1851 onwards. The censuses contain a certain amount of error of copy, illegibility, illiteracy and misunderstanding by the householder and they have the added deficiency that where two occupations are followed only the most

1 P. Inder, Honiton Lace, (Exeter 1971), pp. 25-6.

2 Third Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, loc. cit. See also below, pp. 395-6.

important is given, which may account for the insignificant number of male-lacemakers enumerated. In occasional cases children aged between 10 and 14 were ascribed the occupation of their parents, particularly boys and this makes it difficult to assess the true accuracy of the figures. Most unfortunate of all, however, is that the census instructors omitted, except in the case of army officers, doctors and surgeons, any directions for determining whether the occupation was followed full-time, part-time or not at all.¹ Hence, the figures show only those who were regarded as available for employment at the time of each Census. But the trends are unmistakable and are useful indicators of the industry's progress during the course of the century. The Census figures also correlate, broadly, with accounts in trade directories and parliamentary enquiries, and this adds further substance to the conclusions drawn from them.²

The 1851 Census suggests there were then around 33,000 women and children available for employment in this traditional cottage industry. Of these, there were roughly 10,000 both in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, almost 6,000 in Bedfordshire, roughly 1,700 in Oxfordshire and just over 1,000 in Huntingdonshire.³ Over 80 per cent of the industry's labour force therefore was to be found in the three counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. In Devon there were roughly

1 P.M. Tillot, "Sources of Inaccuracy in the 1851 and 1861 Censuses", and W.A. Armstrong, "The Use of Information About Occupation", in Nineteenth Century Society, ed. E.A. Wrigley (Cambridge, 1972), pp. 83-4, 116, 121-22, 126, 191-93. See also 'Guides to Official Sources', Census Reports of Great Britain, No. 2, 1801-1931 (1951) pp. 31-2.

2 For a discussion of the usefulness of trade directories as a guide to the reliability of Census figures, see, *ibid.*, pp.

3 See Table 2, p. 177.

3,500¹ and scattered outside of the major areas in another 14 counties were just over 1,000, of whom almost half were in Wiltshire and another 200 in Suffolk.²

TABLE 2

Total Number of Females (All Ages) Employed in the
Pillow Lace Industry (1851/1911)

	<u>1851</u>	<u>1861</u>	<u>1871</u>	<u>1881</u>	<u>1891</u>	<u>1911</u>
Bedfordshire	5734	6714	6051	4780	1524	741
Buckinghamshire	10487	8459	8077	4442	1108	373
Huntingdonshire	1018	702	678	379	120	23
Northamptonshire	10322	8187	6366	3221	729	219
Oxfordshire	1770	1337	1007	298	40	26
Devon	3488	3947	2779	1014	424	443
Total	32819	29346	24958	14134	3945	1825

Sources: Census Reports of Great Britain, (Ages, Civil Condition, Occupations and Birth Places of the People), 1851-1911.

1851 Vol. I, 1854, pp. 173, 179, 185, 191, 197, 361.

1861 Vol. II, 1863, pp. 200, 209, 213, 215, 226, 229.

1871 Vol. III, 1873, pp. 139, 145, 151, 254.

1881 Vol. III, 1883, pp. 82, 83, 98, 105, 106.

1891 Vol. III, 1893, pp. 104, 112, 200.

1911 Vol. X, 1913-14, pp. 22, 40, 100, 190, 438.

In each decade following 1851 the total number recorded in the industry tended to fall, and the figures give a good indication of the rate of the industry's decline. The fall was moderate until 1871 and rapid thereafter. In 1861 roughly 29,000 workers were recorded and in 1871 the figure was still around 25,000. But by 1881 it was down to 14,000. The industry had survived best in these terms in Bedfordshire, which had the third largest number of pillow laceworkers in 1851 but which, by 1881,

1 The figures for Devon are even more of an approximation because the Censuses do not distinguish between hand and machine workers. For the basis of these estimated figures see below, Appendix, 1, p. 523.

2 See Table 3, p. 178.

had more workers than any other county. Indeed, in 1871 Bedfordshire had more lacemakers than it had had in 1851.¹ On the other hand, the most rapid decline had come in Northamptonshire where 7,000 workers were lost during the 30 years from 1851, as compared with a decline of only 1,000 in Bedfordshire.² It is impossible to estimate the number of lacemakers in Devon precisely but the calculations suggest that it had fallen from around 6,000 in 1851 to just under 3,000 by 1871.

TABLE 3

Employment of Females in the Pillow
Lace Industry's Minor Locations

1851

Berkshire	36
Gloucestershire	88
Hampshire	44
Hertfordshire	97
Lincolnshire	97
Middlesex	31
Suffolk	196
Surrey	35
Wiltshire	391
	<hr/>
Total	1015
	<hr/>

Source: Census Reports of Great Britain (Ages, Civil Conditions, Occupation and Birth Places of the People), 1851. Vol. I, 1854, pp. 27, 36, 63, 81, 167, 279, 349, 449.

The number of pillow lacemakers employed in the industry as a whole declined rapidly after 1881; by 1891 the Census showed less than 4,000 and most of these were old women who soon would die.³ Over one third of the industry's labour force was now in Bedfordshire. In Northamptonshire there were just over 700 lace workers and in Oxfordshire there

1 For possible reasons, see below, pp. 332-344.

2 See Table 2, p. 177.

3 See Tables 2 and 4, pp. 177, 182.

were just 40. By 1901 pillow laceworkers had become so few that the enumerator eliminated them from the Census. Ten years later there had been some revival, and the Census again included pillow laceworkers, though now there were less than 2,000, of whom almost half were in Bedfordshire.¹

By this time there were very few children remaining in the industry's employment. Yet until the mid 1870s children had always constituted a high proportion of the industry's labour force. Children had been employed on a commercial basis in the industry ever since its inception,² though they were but little observed until the middle of the eighteenth century when they came under the scrutiny of a number of topographers and agriculturalists, as they looked at English agriculture passing through the 'agricultural revolution'. In 1768 Arthur Young noticed girls at Bedford earning between 6d. and 9d. a day, only a little less than the 8d. to 10d. earned by an adult.³ Young made the first known reference to lace schools, the small cottage workshops in which the children were trained, in 1800, when he described girls aged six and seven years employed in High Wycombe, Northampton and Shefford. At High Wycombe they were paying 3s. per quarter for tuition and were earning 3s. per week by their twelfth year.⁴

The first detailed account of the organisation of a lace school was made by Thomas Batchelor, in his Report to the Board of Agriculture on rural Bedfordshire in 1808:

1 See Table 2, p. 177.

2 See above, pp. 10, 16.

3 A. Young, Six Months Tour through the North of England, I, (1770), p. 45.

4 A. Young, Annals of Agriculture (1800), p. 171.

Children are taught to make lace at about six or seven years old and they occupy so much of the attention of their schoolmistresses that the expense of teaching them amounts to three shillings per week for a month or six weeks, according to their capacity. After they have learned the rudiments of the art their ordinary schooling is six pence per week. The business of the schoolmistress for lace-makers is performed by the wives of the cottagers, who are in the most comfortable circumstances. The children are frequently two years before they earn more than pays for the expense of their thread and schooling. At about ten years those of an ordinary capacity will earn about two shillings per week and at thirteen, if well attended to, they are supposed to cause little further expense to their parents.¹

The number of lace schools probably expanded during the French War period, stimulated by the industry's general prosperity, and by the War's end the villages and small towns throughout the lacemaking areas must have been brimful with them. Even in 1819, when the industry was said to be depressed, there were still nine lace schools at Marston Moretaine in Bedfordshire, where 80 to 90 girls were being taught. The number of schools probably fell during the 1820s, but there were still 15 at Newport Pagnell in 1835² and in the 1860s Thomas Lester said that there was at least one school in every village in his district in Bedfordshire and that in some villages there were probably five or six.³ As late as 1876, Assistant Factory Inspector, Mr. Whympers, estimated that there were altogether about 100 schools in Devon, in which 226 girls aged 13 and over, and 344 aged less than 13, were employed.⁴ It was not until the mid 1860s that lace schools began to show signs of disappearing.⁵

In 1851 almost 7,000 workers under the age of 15 were recorded

1 T. Batchelor, op.cit., pp. 595-6.

2 C. Freeman, op.cit., p. 18.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 262.

4 R.C. into the Working of the Factory and Workshop Acts, I, Appendix D, XXXIX, 1876, p. 172.

5 See below, pp. 359-360, 448-450, 463-465.

in the Census.¹ These constituted roughly 23 per cent of the industry's total labour force; in Northamptonshire the proportion was 28 per cent. From 1851, however, the employment of children declined, gradually until 1871, and most rapidly thereafter. In each decade from 1851 the lower age groups in the industry's occupational structure tended to become smaller,² indicative of an industry which was gradually dying. In the years 1851/71 the number of children aged less than 15 fell from 6,329 to 3,601, in other words, from almost 23 per cent of the labour force to roughly 17 per cent. Among children aged less than ten years the decline was even more pronounced, the total number falling from 1,860 in 1851, to only 519 in 1871, or from six per cent of the industry's labour force to just over two per cent.³

If the labour force is divided up into three age groups, from 5 to 20 years, from 25 to 55, and 55 and over, it can be seen that the decline in numbers was most rapid in the group aged less than 25, was less rapid in the middle group, and was scarcely noticeable in the higher age group. By 1911 almost 70 per cent of the labour force in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire was over 55 years old and there were, in contrast, less than 200 workers under the age of 25.⁴

1 See Table 4, p. 182 and Table 5, p. 183.

2 See Table 4, p. 182.

3 See Tables 5 and 6, p. 183.

4 See Table 4, p. 182.

TABLE 4

Age Structure of the Labour Force in Pillow Lacemaking
(1851-1911)

	Age Groups					Total Aged 5/25	Age Groups			Total Aged 25/55	Age Groups					Total Aged 55/95	Grand Total
	5	10	15	20	25		35	45	55		65	75	85	95			
<u>Bedfordshire</u>																	
1851	354	393	721	590	2558	988	745	554	2287	500	299	82	8	880	5784		
1861	379	958	745	655	2737	1086	983	767	2836	602	385	143	11	1145	6714		
1871	143	875	664	608	2790	973	856	807	2636	614	390	121		1125	6051		
1911		17	44	37	98	65	86	127	278	142		223		365	741		
<u>Buckinghamshire</u>																	
1851	621	1424	1349	1128	4522	1735	1320	1103	4158	902	641	235	29	2 1801	10487		
1861	351	1070	868	795	3084	1407	1119	1054	3580	866	586	236	25	2 1715	8459		
1871	178	957	889	825	2849	1241	1115	1089	3445	915	622	246		1783	8077		
1911		4	6	10	20	11	24	64	99	100	118			218	373		
<u>Northamptonshire</u>																	
1851	754	2124	1658	1275	5771	1495	1093	896	3484	599	346	109	13	1067	10322		
1861	385	1370	1025	829	3559	1252	1119	960	3361	713	437	105	12	1257	8187		
1871	157	982	706	584	2429	975	910	822	2707	664	432	134		1230	6366		
1911	(Figures not enumerated)																
<u>Oxfordshire</u>																	
1851	56	240	214	230	740	265	210	163	638	118	69	18	3	208	1770		
1861	18	169	170	144	501	244	218	164	626	113	71	23	3	210	1337		
1871	24	169	120	98	411	142	125	146	413	103	62	18		183	1007		
1911	(Figures not enumerated)																
<u>Huntingdonshire</u>																	
1851	75	288	213	128	704	118	71	65	254	39	11	9	1	60	1018		
1861	20	110	109	79	318	136	92	55	283	57	39	5		101	702		
1871	17	99	79	66	261	107	96	107	310	59	39	9		107	678		

Sources: as for Table 2.

TABLE 5

Children Aged Less than Fifteen as a Proportion of the Total
Labour Force in Pillow Lacemaking (1851/71)

	<u>1851</u>	Total Employed	Females <15	% of Total	<u>1861</u>	Total Employed	Females <15	% of Total	<u>1871</u>	Total Employed	Females <15	% of Total
Bedfordshire		5784	747	13		6714	1337	20		6051	1018	17
Buckinghamshire		10457	2045	19		8459	1421	17		8077	1135	14
Huntingdonshire		1018	363	36		702	130	19		678	116	17
Northamptonshire		10322	2878	28		8187	1705	21		6366	1139	18
Oxfordshire		1770	296	17		1337	187	14		1007	193	19
Grand Total		29331	6329	23		25399	4780	18		22185	3601	17

Source: Table 5 transcribed from Table 4.

TABLE 6

Children Aged Less than Ten as a Proportion of the Total
Labour Force in Pillow Lacemaking (1851/71)

	<u>1851</u>	Total Employed	Females <10	% of Total	<u>1861</u>	Total Employed	Females <10	% of Total	<u>1871</u>	Total Employed	Females <15	% of Total
Bedfordshire		5784	354	6.2		6714	379	5.6		6051	143	2.2
Buckinghamshire		10487	621	5.9		8459	353	4.0		8077	178	2.2
Huntingdonshire		1018	75	7.3		702	20	2.8		678	17	2.5
Northamptonshire		10322	754	7.3		8187	335	4.1		6366	157	2.6
Oxfordshire		1770	56	3.2		1337	18	1.5		1007	24	2.4
Grand Total		29331	1860	6.0		25399	1103	3.6		22185	519	2.4

Source: Table 6 transcribed from Table 4.

TABLE 7

The Proportion of Females, over 20 Years, Occupied in Pillow
Lacemaking in the Census Registration Districts
of the Pillow Lace Areas (1851)

	I	II	(II) as % of (I)
	Employment in all industries	Total in Lace	
<u>Bedfordshire</u>			
Bedford	9920	2515	25.4
Biggleswade	6082	76	1.2
Amphill	4315	764	17.5
Woburn	3361	3190	11.0
Leighton Buzzard	4395	83	-
<u>Buckinghamshire</u>			
Amersham	5191	556	10.7
High Wycombe	9098	2010	22
Aylesbury	6329	927	14.6
Winslow	2511	748	29.2
Newport Pagnell	6606	2204	33.3
Buckingham	4185	625	15.0
<u>Northamptonshire</u>			
Brackley	3846	404	10.5
Towcester	3699	991	26.8
Potterspury	2949	700	23.7
Hardingstone	2529	708	27.8
Wellingborough	5934	1202	20.2
<u>Devon</u>			
Axminster	5948	481	8.0
Honiton	7026	857	12.1
St. Thomas	15424	1027	6.6
<u>Huntingdonshire</u>			
St. Ives	5306	124	2.3
St. Neots	5068	423	8.3

Source: Census Reports of Great Britain, (Ages, Civil Condition, Occupation and Birth Place of the People), (1851), Vol. I, 1854, pp. 225-7, 395.

The location of these pillow laceworkers corresponded closely to the distribution of lace dealers, and as might be expected of an industry organized on a putting out system, most were to be found within accessible reach of the dealers' centres. Thomas Gilbert employed workers at the greatest recorded distance, 15 miles from his centre at High Wycombe,¹ but most were closer than this.² The Census figures for 1851 showed the occupation of workers aged over 20 in each registration district and principal town and give a good indication of the distribution of the labour force within the counties and also of its demands on local female labour supplies. Of the 5870 pillow lacemakers recorded in Bedfordshire in 1851, over 2,500 aged over 20 were in and around Bedford. Employment then thinned out towards the southern end of the county until, in the district of Leighton Buzzard, which was just on the industry's fringes, there were only 80 lace workers. In the major lace areas the proportion of females employed in the industry was often very high. In 1851 over 25 per cent of the women employed in and around Bedford, aged 20 and over, were recorded as lacemakers, at Ampthill the proportion was 17 per cent and at Woburn 11 per cent. In Buckinghamshire the workers were rather more widespread, though in 1851 out of a total of roughly 10,000 over 4,000, in the over 20 age group, were to be found in and around two places, High Wycombe and Newport Pagnell. There were another 900 in and around Aylesbury, over 700 in Winslow and its district, 600 in and around Buckingham, and over 500 in the district of Amersham. In the registration district of Newport Pagnell over 33 per cent of the female population over 20 were recorded as pillow lacemakers, and the figure was over 22 per cent for High Wycombe and 29 per cent for Winslow.³

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 257.

2 For details of the putting out system see below, pp. 231-247.

3 See Table 7, p. 184.

In Northamptonshire, as elsewhere in the south-east Midlands, the industry's workers were concentrated largely in and around the major distributive centres. In 1851 over 1,200 adult lacemakers were recorded in the registration district of Wellingborough, 900 in and around Towcester, over 700 in and around each of Brackley, Hardingstone and Potterspury, and over 400 in the district of Kettering. At Towcester over 27 per cent of the females aged over 20 years were recorded as laceworkers, at Hardingstone 20 per cent, at Potterspury 23 per cent and at Brackley 18 per cent.¹

Of the 3,000 or so workers employed in Devon in 1851, over 11 per cent of the females aged more than 20, and a total of 800, were recorded as pillow lacemakers in the registration district of Honiton, there were another 1,000 adult lacemakers in and around Exeter (around eight per cent of the total number of females over 20) and almost 500 in and around Axminster (eight per cent of the female population over 20).² The rest were scattered widely throughout the villages along the coastline from Exeter to Axminster and in the uplands of the Blackdown Hills, employed by the many petty dealers who had emerged and expanded in number during the 1830s and 40s.³

e. Lace Mistresses

If she did not leave her birthplace, the lacemaker's horizons were closely bounded by her village and its tradition. She could not

1 See Table 7, p. 184. The proportion of the total female population recorded as employed in pillow lacemaking was: Buckinghamshire 14 per cent; Bedfordshire 8 per cent; Northamptonshire 10 per cent.

2 See Table 7, p. 184.

3 See above, pp. 158-9.

hope to aspire to the rank of a dealership in the lace trade, and there is no evidence of her ever reaching the position of lace factor; the most that could be envisaged was to become a lacemistress. Yet a lacemistress had a responsible job for she taught village children to make lace and supervised the work of older children until, in their early teens, they were considered old enough to work, unsupervised, at home. She had to be disciplinarian, for it was she who broke down the children's impulses to run and play outside and it was she who taught the children the basis of lacemaking and subsequently ensured, often by violent means, that the children worked quickly and efficiently according to their parents' or lace dealer's instructions.¹ The lacemistress's job was vital to the industry's perpetuation. If she failed to train and supervise a disciplined labour force then the industry was most certainly doomed to die.

A mistress's life was undoubtedly a busy one. In her cottage room, adapted into a school class room, she not only taught beginners to make lace and ensured that the numerous children working at different stages of proficiency completed their daily and weekly tasks of work, but in many cases found spare minutes to attempt to further the childrens' educational and moral progress.² This latter function, though never great, increased in the century's middle decades. It was demanding work, but the occupation gave variety and impetus to what otherwise would have been a dreary life of seemingly unending hours poised over a lace pillow. The prospect of a lace mistressship was not to be spurned and not least because it generally brought with it a more steady and often higher income than could be earned simply by lacemaking.³

1 See below, pp. 406-442.

2 See below, pp. 448-451.

3 See below, pp. 189-190.

A lacemaker would need a certain amount of local respect before she could establish herself in such a position. The need for uniformity of technique and consistency in the quality of output, when added to the purely technical problems of learning, were sufficient to demand tuition by an expert. Skilful training could make a tremendous difference to the worker's prowess. In the 1860s, Thomas Lester, the Bedfordshire dealer, explained why his workers' capabilities were often so different:

There is a great variety in the skill of different lacemakers which depends mainly on the amount and kind of instruction and explanation of their work which they have received.¹

Experience in lace work, old age and widowhood seem to have been the major qualifications for the job and in the middle of the century the position seems, to a great extent, to have been the prerogative of aged widows. Widowhood was a distinct advantage, for a widow would not only have added space in her cottage to accommodate children but would also have plenty of time to apply herself to her task. Many of the mistresses operating at this time had been teaching for the greater part of their adult lives and in the 1860s there were two who had been mistresses for 45 and 30 years respectively.² The ability of each mistress varied according to her experience and training. At Beer, Mary Driver could do the finest work, and boasted that when Queen Victoria's wedding dress had been made in her village she had been responsible for a portion worth over £100. It had taken her nine years training to reach this level of accomplishment, six at 'trolley work' and three at Honiton or 'head work'.³ Mary Driver and other mistresses with similar experience in making numerous

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 262.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 249, 260.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D29.

qualities and styles of lace were able to establish schools on a wide basis of products, but others, such as Eleanor Rice, who in 1843 had kept a school at Newton Poppleford for 22 years, had only a limited range of skills to offer. Miss Rice could teach simple 'trolley lace' but the more elaborate Honiton work was quite beyond her.¹

To become a lace mistress, a lacemaker would first have to show herself to be a competent worker. A dealer could then offer the services of his child workers by recommending them to her for their training. From then on it was simply a matter of opening a cottage door, providing a number of stools and of either waiting for the children to turn up or, if they did not, of touting for them in the village. For their efforts in these directions the mistresses received an income paid by the childrens' parents, either in fees, or in donations of the childrens' lace. The dealers, ever-conscious of costs, took the mistresses' labour for free. In the south-east Midlands, where all the scholars paid the mistress a fee, the beginners paid most, for they were the most troublesome and the fee then declined until the older girls were paying a nominal sum which simply covered heating and lighting. Thus, the more beginners a mistress had in her classroom, the higher her income would be, and there was always every incentive to coerce new supplies. The system was similar in Devon, though in the initial years of what was known here as their apprenticeship, the children often paid the mistress by giving her some of the laces they had made. The mistress then presumably received a commission for the laces from a dealer, for it does not seem likely that she sold them on her own account.²

1 *ibid.*

2 There are no records of lace mistresses ever doing this.

At the opening of the nineteenth century fees were high, ranging weekly from 3s. downwards, and not surprisingly the mistresses were said to be 'in most comfortable circumstances'.¹ Their incomes did not rise to these heights again but lace mistresses were probably always slightly better off than lacemakers, particularly at times of good trade when schools were full, for the payments of 30 or 40 pupils at 3d. to 6d. per week would bring a sum well in excess of the 3s. or 4s. a good lacemaker might be earning.² Quite often older women 'sat in' with the children, for company more than anything else, and paid the mistress a sum to share the expenses of heating, and in the evenings, of candles.³ Though the mistresses' income fluctuated according to the state of the trade, those with pupils who were employed by dealers all the year round, 'taking the risk of losing by change of fashion',⁴ might always have had a few shillings. And since the lacemistresses frequently were skilled workers they could always take the chance of earning a little extra by making laces in their spare moments at night, if and when the school had closed down.

For these reasons the position of lacemistress clearly was a desirable one and not simply because of the monetary returns, for the job also was prestigious. A large portion of the childrens' lives was controlled by the mistress, for five or six days per week, from early morning frequently until very late at night. The mistress occupied an esteemed position in the lacemaking community, one worthy of the lacemaker's aspiration, and so long as she could train and organize her child

1 T. Batchelor, op.cit., p. 596.

2 For wages, see below, pp. 248-264.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 259.

4 *ibid.*, p. 262.

workers successfully, the industry could look forward to the future with a certain degree of confidence.

* * * * *

This, then, was the structure on which pillow lace was produced during most of the nineteenth century and these were some of the people who were involved. There was little change other than the gradual disappearance of lace schools from the mid 1860s and even at the end of the century lace dealers, lace factors, women and child workers (and a few lace schools) were still coming together to produce pillow laces on the traditional bases of production and organization. For what kinds of market were they catering? How were they drawn together to meet these demands? And what were their working tools and how were they obtained? These are important considerations in analysing the industry's competition with machine and continental hand producers and are examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 6

The Tools of the Trade

The lace dealers and their employees could not have functioned without the small complex of tertiary occupations which were responsible for the production of lace pillows, bobbins, bobbin winders, parchment patterns and pillow horses, the essential tools of the trade. Largely the province of village craftsmen, particularly carpenters, these occupations had grown up during the centuries alongside the five-tier structure of production to turn out these small and simple, yet highly important pieces of equipment. Bobbins, pillows and so on also embodied much of the industry's folk-lore and romance and were often regarded by lacemakers with a good deal of affection; in many families they were treasured not simply as valuable pieces of equipment but as articles with enduring emotional attachment.

No more so was this the case than with lace bobbins, which were often passed down from one generation to the next, a reminder to their new owners of older relatives and bygone days. Every lacemaking family had its store of bobbins, one of the many thousands hidden away in cottages in the lacemaking areas. The bobbins would be counted among a family's most treasured and lasting possessions. Specialist bobbin makers had probably grown up with the industry during the seventeenth century. Records of their existence are scarce, but Richard Kent, a 'bobbin maker', was buried at Olney in 1728.¹ In 1749 the Pavenham parish overseers in Bedfordshire issued their poor with lace bobbins which they had bought from local bobbin makers at a price of 1d. a

1 C. Freeman, op.cit., p. 31.

dozen.¹ The bobbin makers, always a small group, lingered until well into the nineteenth century, though their numbers had diminished considerably by this time, for bobbins were always handed down from one generation to the next. Only one bobbin maker, James Hoskins, who was listed in Pigot's Directory of Bedfordshire as 'bead and bobbin maker' in 1830,² appears in trade directories in the nineteenth century. But the absence of bobbin makers from the directories may be partly accounted for by Thomas Wright's claim that most bobbins were turned out not by specialist bobbin makers but by carpenters.³ In the middle of the century, at Sharnbrooke, Samuel Wright, a carpenter, turned bobbins on a water-driven lathe.⁴ Another carpenter, Percy Keech, turned wooden bobbins on a four foot lathe driven by a foot pedal and belt,⁵ and one Bedford carpenter, Mr. Abbott, was proud enough of his bobbins to stamp them with his name.⁶ Bobbin making might also have been a useful resource for cripples incapable of hard, physical work, for wooden ones could easily be whittled by hand. Next door to a lace school at Beer in Devon, there is said to have lived, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a 'twisted and deformed man' who eked out a scanty existence in just this way.⁷

More often than not, the lacemakers bought their bobbins directly from the local producer, though bobbins were also sold publicly on stalls

1 *ibid.*, p. 30.

2 Pigot's Directory, 1830.

3 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, pp. 131-2.

4 *ibid.*

5 *ibid.*

6 *ibid.* Other bobbin makers were George Lumbris (Reynold), David Hoskins (Leighton Buzzard), William Pridmore (Elstow), Nat Woods (Olney), Richard Adams (Stoke Goldington), Paul Neal (Hanslope), William Brown (Cranfield), Arthur Wright (Cranfield).

7 A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 74.

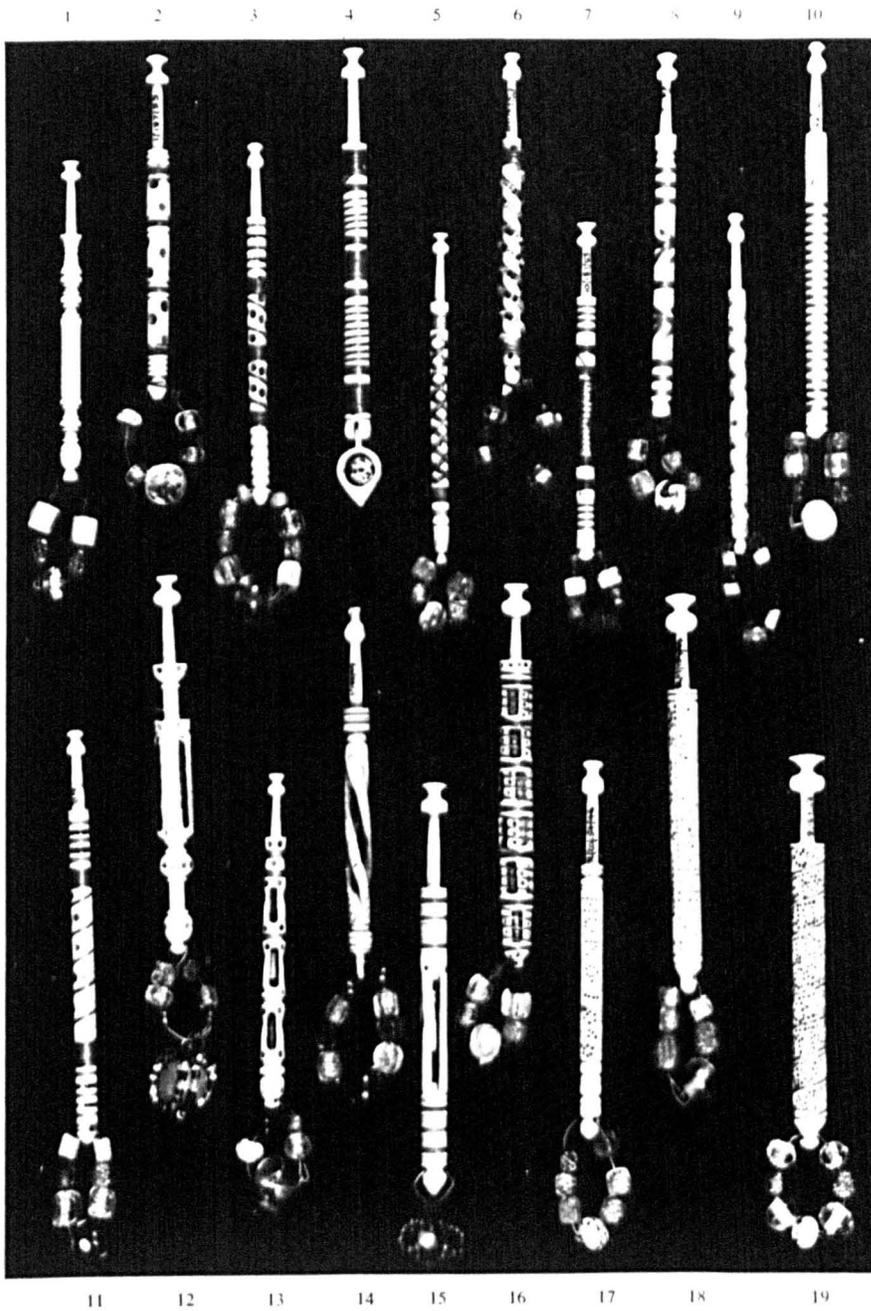


Plate 1 Examples of Lace Bobbins.

in the market at Aylesbury,¹ and probably at markets elsewhere. They also appeared at local fairs and sold in the nineteenth century at prices ranging from 1d. to 5d. a dozen.² Some bobbin makers probably hawked them from door to door. From Elstow, near Bedford, a specialist bobbin maker is said to have travelled round local villages selling his wares from a small cart drawn by a dog.³ Towards the end of the century they could be obtained from the London draper, J. Harris and Sons, at prices from 8d. to 1s.3d., which suggests that some could have been derived from similar sources earlier in the century.⁴

Bobbin making was not entirely the province of professionals, however. Occasionally, the young men in the villages whittled at wooden bobbins in the evenings. It was a way of passing spare hours while the women were working indoors at the lace pillow. The bobbins often were given as keepsakes to sweethearts and friends and a young man might be found in the twilight hours whittling at a bobbin outside a lace school, waiting for his young girlfriend to finish her task inside; it was likely that on the stem of the bobbin he would eventually have engraved an endearing message of some kind.⁵

Thousands of bobbins have survived, the earliest of which seem to have been of a Flemish type. These had a slender neck topped by a knob which acted as a spool around which the thread was wound. The stem swelled out towards the bottom to form a bulbous base which gave weight and ease of

1 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 133.

2 *ibid.*, pp. 133-4. Bobbins were sold at the Northampton Mop, Olney and Bedford fairs. Bedford Times, 14 May 1912.

3 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 133.

4 Advertisement. J. Harris & Sons Ltd., 25 Old Bond Street, London. Lester Collection; Luton Museum.

5 For numerous examples see Plate 1 and Appendix II, p. 524.

handling. By the end of the eighteenth century the bulbous base had been reduced and the shaft had been given a slimmer neck with a double knop at the top. The end of the thread was twisted in a half-hitch around the double knop so that it could be unravelled for use, by a gentle pull on the bobbin. But the weight lost by the shrinkage of the bulbous base was now compensated for by the attachment of a spangle of glass beads to the bottom of the shaft,¹ and this also added to the bobbin's attraction.

The vast majority of bobbins were made either of bone or of close-grained woods such as rosewood, ebony, blackthorn, cherry, apple, may, damson, sycamore and plum. But for special occasions, or if constructed as a gift, the bobbins might have been moulded in bronze, copper, iron, pewter or even glass. The bobbins were constructed in numerous shapes and lengths, to a degree according to the requirements set by the pattern of the particular lace for which they were to be used, and to a degree according to the fancy of their maker. As a rule, the finer was the work the lighter was the bobbin. The finest Buckinghamshire point could only be made with box-wood bobbins, for the thread would have been broken by heavier kinds. Few bobbins, however, were more than four or five inches long,² though the bobbins used for the production of course and heavy 'Yak' laces in the south-east Midlands during the 1870s were an exception. These were unusually thick, and sometimes as long as seven or eight inches.³

In the south-east Midlands the heads of the bobbins were usually ornamented with between six and nine beads, looped together with a wire.⁴

1 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 125.

2 *ibid.*, p. 127.

3 *ibid.* For details of Yak lace see below, pp. 358-9.

4 *ibid.*, p. 133.

There were two top beads, which were ornamental, followed by three on each side called square cuts and a large round bottom bead called the 'Venetian', 'Paisley' or 'China' bead. The square cuts, of clear or coloured glass, were melted from a glass rod by a lapidary, twisted on a copper wire to form a hole, and then squared on the sides with a file. They were usually coloured red, though amber, pale and dark blue and different shades of green were also used. The bottom beads, some of which were opaque, others transparent and decorated with a coloured design, were also twisted onto a wire but were always left uncut.¹

The spangles were partly decorative, but their major purpose was to weight the bobbins over the pillow when they were not in use, and their weight also helped keep the threads taught and therefore prevented tangling. In Devon bobbins without spangles were sometimes used for delicate laces with fine threads. Devonshire bobbins, known locally as lace sticks, also tended to have sharper ends, though for the cheaper laces which were produced extensively in the second half of the century, spangles were used and the sticks had blunted ends, similar to those used in the south-east Midlands.²

In all districts the bobbins, more often than not, were lavishly ornamented in numerous colours and patterns. Carpenters engraved them with coloured bands by dropping them into a dye, usually red, black or blue, occasionally green or yellow, before removing the unwanted colour on a lathe.³ In Northamptonshire a different method was used. Here the bobbins were often painted in ultramarine, vermilion and chrome yellow, the

1 *ibid.*, p. 132.

2 *ibid.*, p. 176. Devon bobbins, being lighter, were generally passed from hand to hand, whereas Buckinghamshire bobbins were thrown. See also, A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

3 T. Wright, *loc.cit.*

paint having been bought by the carpenter in powder form and mixed to the necessary consistency with gum arabic. The mixture was then applied with a crow quill and worked with a quick twirling motion into small indentations made previously with a drill. The completed bobbins were then left to dry in a vertical position in racks before being taken out later to be sold.¹

There was no end to the possibilities of decoration. Mr. Abbott, the Bedford carpenter, coloured his bobbins red by boiling them in a solution of log wood chip.² At Beer, where the husbands of lacemakers were fishermen, bobbins were decorated with designs of anchors, fishes, seaweed and ships and young men took their sweetheart's bobbins with them to sea as keepsakes.³ Perhaps the most ornamental were 'birdcage' bobbins, intricately inset with small compartments containing coloured beads. They were rivalled by Bedfordshire 'tigers' which were inset with pewter spots, and 'tallies' which had series of wooden bands running round them. On the other hand, plain, undecorated bobbins carried the mundane title of 'old maids'.⁴

In all districts the bobbins were inscribed with mottoes in commemoration of births, deaths, historical events, fairs and feasts, or with scriptural texts. The inscriptions often told something of the lacemaker's life or related important events in local history such as hangings, elections, transportations, even suicides.⁵ Every lacemaker would have her store of bobbins. With her other pieces of equipment she kept them in a 'lace chest' and, if conscientious, would wash them clean with soap and water before attaching them to a fresh pattern. She generally placed the

1 *ibid.*

2 C. Freeman, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

3 A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

4 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 126.

5 For details, see below, Appendix II, p. 524.

bobbins in a home-made bobbin bag, attached to the side of her lace pillow, until they were required for use on the pattern. When washing the bobbins she would have been careful not to rub off the inscriptions, for these served as a constant reminder both of local and family history and of personal events and relationships, and many of these bobbins, which were handed down over the generations, have survived as family heirlooms until the present day.¹

There was far less romance attached to the production of lace pillows. Made of hessian or canvas bags, stuffed tightly with wisps of straw, the pillows could be square or 'round' and came in numerous sizes. The round pillow was usually bolster-shaped, with open ends. The pillow's shape and size was devised in accordance with the requirements of different patterns. As a rule, Devonshire pillows, which resembled those used in Belgium, were smaller and flatter than those used in the south-east Midlands. Their smallness made it easy for the lacemaker to turn them round during the course of her work, and so produce small and elaborate sprigs which subsequently could be sewn together into large items such as dresses and veils. For narrow laces the pillow was reduced sometimes to a small bolster-shaped roller five or six inches wide so that the worker could grip one end of it between her knees, resting the other on a chair back and then work down the full length of the pattern.²

The pillows, like lace bobbins, were produced partly on a commercial basis, partly by the workers themselves. In Bedfordshire they were being

1 The bobbins were romanticised early in the twentieth century: 'The bobbins form a homely record of their owner's quiet life. Friendships and courtships, events that stirred the great world, and events of domestic interest are there chronicled and so the bobbins are a daily reminder to the girl of her lover, to the mother of her children, to the old woman of the days of her youth'. Empire Review, January 1903.

2 Oxfordshire pillows were generally more round and less flat and wide than Bedfordshire pillows. T. Wright, op.cit., p. 116.

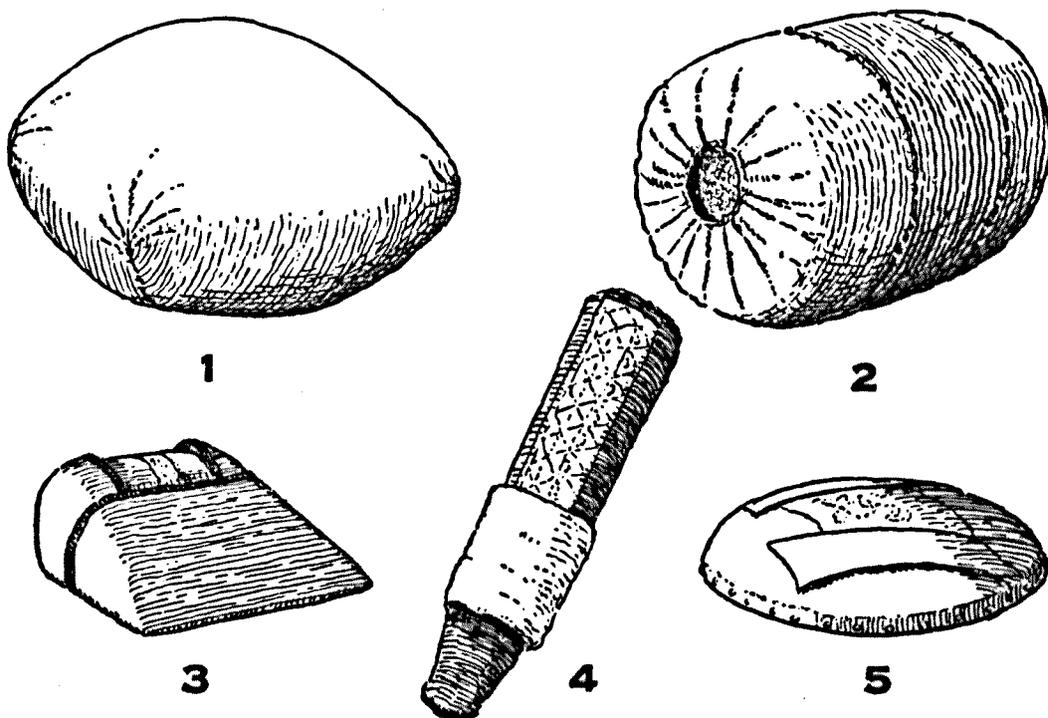


Plate 2 Examples of Lace Pillows: 1. square 2. round 3. French.
4. Maltese. 5. Belgian.

produced on a commercial basis by the eighteenth century. The Turvey overseers paid pillow makers 1s. 3d. per pillow in 1743.¹ The job was generally undertaken by local carpenters. At Aylesbury the Smith family held the monopoly of pillow making throughout the nineteenth century.² George Keech was still making lace pillows, which he stuffed with wheat straw with a mallett and dummy spike, after the fashion of a harness maker, at Oakley in Bedfordshire in the 1890s.³ The pillows, once bought, were looked after carefully and sometimes the lacemakers felt it cheaper to have them repaired rather than buy a new one. From Cranfield, in Bedfordshire, Arthur Wright travelled round local villages in the middle of the nineteenth century repairing or 'new middling' old pillows, by re-filling them with fresh straw and hammering them hard again. To boost his income he also sold other pieces of lacemakers' equipment, especially pillow horses and bobbin winders.⁴ Pillows were also sold, late in the century, by J. Harris & Sons, at varying prices according to the size and shape

1 C. Freeman, *op.cit.*, p. 25. For examples of pillows see Plate 2.

2 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

3 C. Freeman, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

4 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 119. For these see below, pp. 200-201, 204.

of the pillow and the quality of its covering.¹ But it was not difficult for the lacemakers or their husbands to repair, even make pillows themselves and though there is no record of them doing this it seems most likely that they did. The pillows, like bobbins, were handed down from one generation to another and many of them were prized family possessions. They were kept clean, together with laces in the process of construction, with 'pillow cloths' which reputedly were always coloured butcher blue.²

The local carpenters' contribution to the provision of these tools of the trade was extended during the course of the nineteenth century to the production of pillow horses, wooden stands on which the worker rested her pillow at a height which made it unnecessary for her to bend. These came as a welcome relief to workers who for many years had

1 Advertisement. Lester Collection. Luton Museum:-

Bruges Mushroom Pillow:

Covered Grey Calico	10/6	each
Covered with Sateen, with Pincushion, &c	18/6	"
Mounted with Bobbins, Pattern of Lace, &c	from 30/-	"

Bruges Half Mushroom Pillow:

Covered with Grey Calico	6/6	"
Covered with Sateen, with Pincushion, &c	10/6	"
Mounted with Bobbins, Patterns, &c	from 16/6	"

Smaller Bolster Pillow:

Covered Grey Calico	1/6	"
Covered with Sateen, with Pincushion, &c	5/6	"
Mounted	from 10/6	"
Wooden Stand for same, 7in. x 7½in.	2/9	"

Honiton Pillow:

Covered, Grey Calico	6/6	"
Covered Sateen, with Pincushion, &c	10/6	"
Mounted with Bobbins, Pattern, &c.	from 21/0	"

Square Maltese Pillow:

This Pillow is much used for making Beds, Maltese Handkerchief Borders, Collars, &c., which cannot be made on a bolster or roller pillow.

Covered, Grey Calico	3/-	"
Covered Sateen, with Pincushion, &c.	9/6	"
Mounted with Spangled Bobbins	from 20/-	"
With Plain Bobbins	21/0	"

2 In some areas the cloth was known as the 'hindcloth'. T. Wright, loc.cit.



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Plate 3 Examples of Pillow Horses: 1,2,3,5. Bowed; 4 Bowed with adjustable bow, 6 rough trestle; 7,8,9, folding; 10,11 single.

deformed their figures and impaired their constitutions by bending forward as they worked, for until this time they had always rested the pillows on their knees.¹ The horses came into general use during the middle of the nineteenth century, though they had been known for a long time before then. The St. Paul's Parish overseers in Bedford had paid from 3d. to 6d. for them in 1781.² The earliest types, known as single horses, were essentially a three legged stand with a straight or slightly curved bar across the top. The pillow rested on the worker's knees, and was propped against the bar, which helped to support it. But this was still rather uncomfortable for the worker and a later, but more sophisticated type, the 'bowed horse', though of similar construction, had a half-hoop 'bow' fixed to the bar so that the worker could rest her pillow on it without further support. The wide pieces supporting the bow were frequently slotted and held by pegs so that the bow could be adjusted to a convenient height and so prevent the bending which had caused so much discomfort. The lacemaker usually rested her feet on a stretcher bar joining the two front legs of the horse.³ J. Harris & Sons. were selling pillow horses during the 1890s at a price of 6s. 6d.⁴

Pillows, bobbins and pillow horses were all simple, and in a technical sense, easily replaceable pieces of equipment. Parchment patterns, which were difficult to construct and even more difficult to replace, were in an altogether different category. If the workers were skilled, a good or badly-made pattern determined the difference between an elegant or mundane piece of lace, perhaps the difference between

1 For details see below, pp. 397-400.

2 C. Freeman, *op.cit.*, p. 34.

3 See Plate 3 for examples.

4 Advertisement. Lester Collection. Luton Museum.

success and failure in the competition to acquire a section of the market.¹ For these reasons, many lace dealers designed the parchment patterns themselves. In both regions a small number of dealers created master patterns, known as 'drafts', from which the workers, or other less-skilled dealers, transcribed the working patterns, known in some areas by the name 'down'.²

The dealers in the south-east Midlands carefully pricked the holes of the master draft pattern on cardboard or vellum, and outlined the pattern's shape with ink. The pattern was then usually placed over a piece of transparent sheep or calfskin parchment and the same process was repeated until the final piece was formed. It is not clear from where the parchment came, though a parchment maker, Mr. Cowley, was living in Newport Pagnell during the nineteenth century and the Grace family were said to have been responsible for the production of all parchments used at Olney.³ In Devon, some of the best patterns were pricked directly onto the skins, which were often the remnants of old wills.⁴ The pricking was generally done with a 'needlepin', a number eight sewing needle which had been forced into a short wooden or bone handle or which had been given a screw cap or collar, though awls and steel pins were also used.⁵

The completed master patterns were transferred by the workers onto working patterns which were also made of vellum, normally in strips about

1 For details, see below, Chapters 12 and 13 *passim*.

2 C. Freeman, *op.cit.*, p. 24.

3 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 180.

4 It was, of course, more dangerous to prick the skins directly. A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 39.

5 *ibid.*, p. 100.

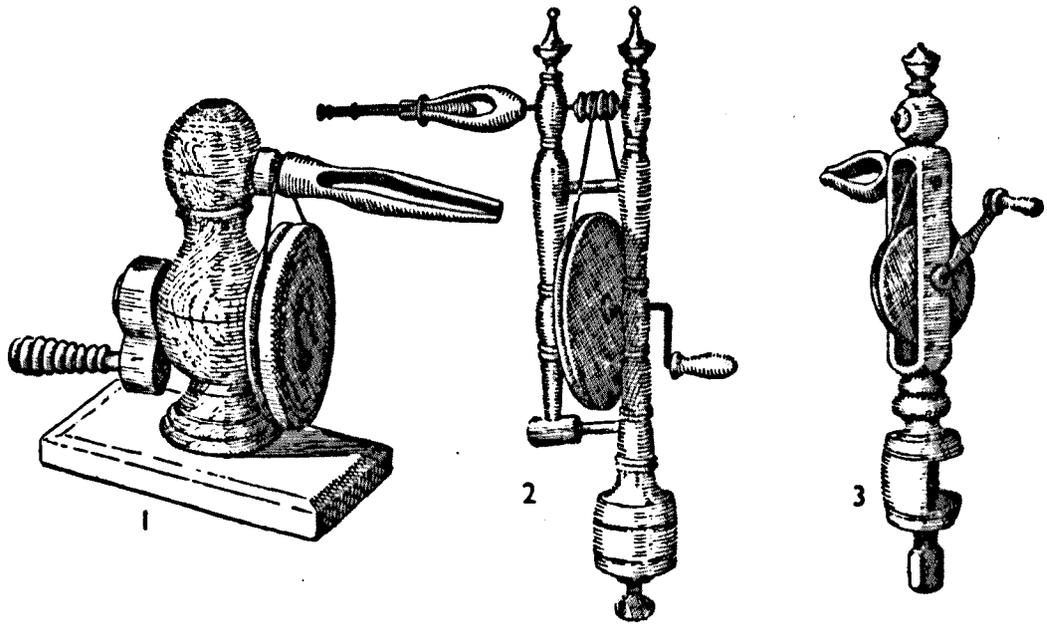
14 inches long and as wide as the pattern required. The design was transferred from 'draft' to 'down', by placing the 'draft' over a transparent parchment, which rested on a lead sheet or felt-covered board, and then pricking through the holes of the 'draft' onto the parchment below. Short cotton or linen tabs known as 'eches' were sewn onto the ends of the parchment so that the 'down' could be stretched and keep its shape until required for use.

A number of patterns were also provided by London wholesalers. The only documentary record surviving of these is of the sale of such patterns by J. Harris & Sons. The patterns were inexpensive and probably not typical of some of the high quality patterns which had been provided earlier in the century by Daniel Biddle and others.¹ The prices ranged from 10s. 6d. for Bruges berthas, to 4d. for Honiton sprays.²

1 See below, p. 328.

2 Advertisement. Lester Collection, Luton Museum: The full list was as follows:

Torchon Edgings and Insertions	6d., 8d. to 1/- 2/- and 2/6 each
Cluny Edgings and Insertions	from 6d. to 2/6 and 3/6 "
Cluny Squares and Motifs for inserging in Bedspread, T. Cloths, &c.	6d., 9d., 1/- to 5/6 "
	also at 6/6 and 8/6 "
Bedfordshire Maltese Edgings and Insertions	6d., 9d., 1/- to 8/6 "
	also at 5/6 "
Maltese Handkerchief Borders	2d., 3/6 and 4/6 "
Maltese Stock Collar	1/6 and 2/6 "
Honiton Sprays	4d., 6d., 8d., 1/- to 2/6 "
	also 4/6 and 6/6 "
Honiton Handkerchief Borders	2/6, 3/6, 4/6 "
Honiton Stock Collars	1/6, 2/6 "
Bruges Edgings and Insertions	2/-, 3/-, 4/6 "
Bruges Stock Collars	2/-, 2/6 "
Bruges berthas	6/6, 8/6, 10/6 "
Bruges Tie Ends and Handkerchief Borders	1/6, 2/6 and 3/6 "
Bucks Edgings and Insertions	10d., 1/0, 1/6 to 6/6 "



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Plate 4 Examples of Bobbin Winders

Once a worker had received a pattern she would proceed to wind threads round each bobbin, before commencing work. She would do this with a bobbin winder which consisted, basically, of a fly-wheel set on a wooden base, the fly wheel having a grooved rim and a handle for turning the threads onto the neck of the bobbins. The fly wheel revolved a spool-holder by means of a belt or cord. The base supported an X-shaped skein¹ holder, the blades of which were pierced with a row of holes to take a peg, often made from a discarded bobbin. The worker opened the skein of thread and placed it around the pegs of the blades leading one end of the thread to the bobbin, which had been placed in the spool-holder. She then turned the fly-wheel with her right hand while steadying the head of the bobbin lightly with her left and guiding the thread through her fingers. When fully wound the thread was broken and the loose end was attached to the neck of the bobbin with a half hitch, which prevented the thread unwinding freely. With the bobbin now fully wound the worker turned to her lace pillow, tied the threads to the pins and began her work. She will have bought the winder in the local community, probably from the local carpenter, who had made it with cutting tools and a lathe.²

As has already been indicated, the industry was by no means entirely self sufficient for its tools and equipment. Until the 1830's when threads known as gassed cotton threads, so-called because they had their loose fibres removed in a gas flame, were introduced,³ pillow laces had always been made of fine linen threads, imported from Antwerp. An importer estimated in 1780 that the value of the thread imported for the

1 C. Freeman, op.cit., pp. 39-40. See Plate 4.

2 Some lace dealers made them. T. Wright, op.cit., p. 119.

3 See above, p. 79.

Buckinghamshire industry alone was £30/40,000, all of which came through London. The finest thread was called 'Nun's Thread' and £5 of thread would make £100 of lace.¹ In 1822 the market price for this thread was said to be £70 a lb.,² and it was said that the threads were so fine that a ball would stretch for 150 miles.³ The thread was sold by wholesalers in skeins, numbered according to the degree of the thread's fineness, the coarsest being 6 to 8 skein, the finest 16 to 20.⁴ The threads were retailed and sold by dealers to their workers in hanks, each weighing one ounce, the hanks themselves being subdivided into half-ounce hunches.⁵

During the nineteenth century linen threads were still the basis of all the finest laces, but from the 1820s cheap cotton threads were used increasingly.⁶ Mrs. Treadwin bought hers from Peat, Son & Co., Nottingham,⁷ Mrs. Reid, a Bedford dealer, bought hers in the 1830s from Greenhalgh and Sons, of Nottingham, 'agents for lace threads', at prices ranging from 5s. per pound for 6 skein, to 12s. 6d. for 12 skein.⁸ The threads came in large packets containing several parcels, each parcel consisting of a number of hanks, and the threads graded according to their

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- 1 One dealer said the thread was smuggled out of Flanders, into Austria, and thence to England. H. of C.J., 2 May 1780.
 - 2 S. & D. Lysons, op.cit., p. 420. B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 420. Mrs. Palliser said the finest thread cost £95/lb. in the 1860s. *ibid.*, p. 407.
 - 3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 250.
 - 4 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 4.
 - 5 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 104.
 - 6 W. Felkin, op.cit., pp. 168-9.
 - 7 E. Treadwin, Antique Point and Honiton Lace (1874).
 - 8 Beds. C.R.O., X259/4. A Devon dealer said, in 1888, that all his threads came from Nottingham. A.S. Cole, loc. cit.

fineness. Of those used by Rachel Reid, 14 skein was the finest, three skein the coarsest.¹ Though linen² and cotton threads were by far the most common, woollen threads, silks, metallic threads and even the hair of a yak were also used.³ Silk threads were sold by J. Harris, at prices ranging from 9d. to 2s. 2d. a reel.⁴

The precise source of origin of lace pins is obscure. Before the nineteenth century a number of fine brass pins are said to have been specially imported from France, presumably by the London wholesalers who also dealt in lace.⁵ The earliest pins had globular heads of fine twisted wire, secured to the shaft by compression from a falling block and die. By the 1820s, however, solid-headed pins had been developed and quickly came into general use. The Lever family, living at Milton in Northamptonshire in the 1850s, were responsible for the production of a great number of these, in their factories at Hardingstone, Milton and Stony Stratford. They were made out of 18 inch coils and brass wire and were produced in these factories until late in the nineteenth century.⁶ In the 1840s I.F. Rawson and Co., drapers, of St. Paul's Churchyard, London, sold lace pins wholesale, as also did J. Harris,⁷ and it was from sources such as these that the lace dealers presumably took additional supplies.

The pins also embodied a certain amount of romance. The lacemakers

1 *ibid.*

2 Fine threads were still imported into Honiton at the end of the nineteenth century. A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, pp. 104-5.

3 See below, pp. 358-9.

4 Advertisement, Lester Collection, Luton Museum.

5 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 122.

6 V.C.H. Northamptonshire. II, 1906, p. 339.

7 Guildhall Library, Trade Cards, 10 March 1840; Advertisement, Lester Collection, Luton Museum.

gave them the general name of 'Long Toms' or 'Yellow Pins', but distinguished the function of the various kinds by decorating them in different ways. Some they threaded with detachable heads taken from other pins, or with tiny coloured glass beads. Pins for the top of the lace, called 'head-side', often had red-waxed heads; pins for the bottom section, 'foot-side', were often mounted with gold wax or green beads. In Bedfordshire these two important classes of pin were known together as 'king pins', in North Buckinghamshire as 'limmicks', in South Buckinghamshire as 'bugles'. The lacemakers also used a large ornamental pin, a 'striver', to mark sections of lace so that they could calculate the time it took to produce them.¹ By practicing, they hoped they would gradually improve their time.² Larger brass pins, called 'corking pins', were two or three inches long and were used to affix the bobbin bag, (in which the worker placed unused bobbins), pincushion and parchment to the pillow. Devon workers also used a 'needlepin', a small needle set in a wooden shaft and sometimes fine crotchet needles or wigmaker's needles for joining separate parts of the pattern into a single piece.³

Pins, parchment, pillows, bobbins, bobbin winders, pillow horses and threads were the basic and peculiar tools of the trade. But no lacemaker's equipment was complete without a number of additional pieces of equipment which were not peculiar to lacemaking, and could be bought at any local drapers', grocers' or general store. Various domestic types of 'goffering machines', or irons, were used when the lace required crimping. A flour bag was occasionally used for drying the hands or even to disguise soiled lace. But cleaning laces was better achieved by

1 Some pins were ornamented with goose grass. T. Wright, op.cit., pp. 122-3.

2 For details, see below, pp. 433-6.

3 C. Freeman, op.cit., p. 30.

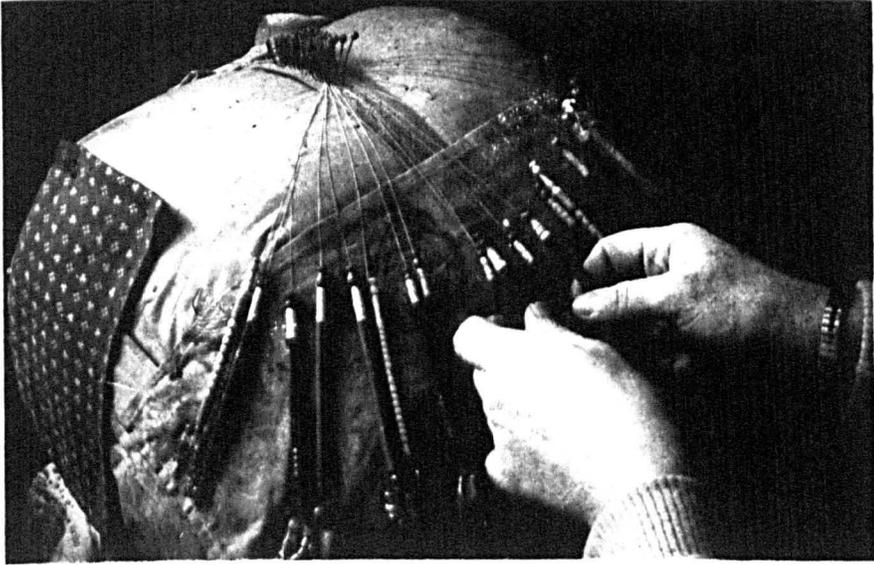


Plate 4 Detail of Lacemaking

the use of a 'lace drying bottle'. A bottle was covered in flannel, the lace was wrapped round it, and the whole was then immersed in soapy water. The lace was then gently smoothed over with the hands, rinsed and, while still on the bottle, placed outside on a stick to be dried.¹ Every lacemaker also had a pair of scissors, usually small, which she hung either from the pillow or from her wrist belt. She also had a 'yard-stick', a slat of wood calibrated with notches or brass nail heads, which she used on 'cutting-off days' to measure the lengths of her lace. Her lace chest and its contents, kept in the corner of the room, was a constant reminder of her dependence on the craft and of its tradition. With all these pieces of equipment and material at her disposal the lacemaker was as fully prepared as any continental worker to face her allotted task, though her training had in all probability been less careful and the patterns at her disposal were often less fine.

Yet it was no simple matter to make pillow lace. It required long training and hard concentration. A worker began by 'setting in' the pattern. A pin was inserted into the top end of the pricked parchment and the free end of the thread was attached to it by a clove hitch. Additional threads were then attached to the same pin and additional pins were inserted as the number of bobbins required for the pattern were attached. The worker watched the threads as she proceeded down the pattern and carefully worked out the design so that no part became too thick or too thin, too wide or too narrow. On reaching the bottom of the pattern she took the pins out and 'set up' the next section to start working down again.²

1 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 120.

2 See Plate 5.

The basic movements of all pillow lacework were twisting and crossing. The worker began by selecting four bobbins, taking a pair in each hand. She twisted by laying the right hand thread of each pair over the left, and crossed by placing the left-hand inner thread over the right hand inner. A whole stitch was completed by repeating the movements until the requisite number of meshes or loops had been created.¹ These movements are the basis of all bobbin work and from these were built up all the varieties of texture associated with bobbin lace: plaited lines, solid woven areas (toile), joining bars (brides), net grounds (reseaux) and fancy fillings. The movements were made around the pins, those at the back being removed and used again in front as the pattern proceeded. For a triangular mesh three pins would be used, for a quadrangular, four. The worker kept the threads at a uniform length, with the bobbins spread in order fanwise on the pillow. She manipulated the bobbins with her hands palm downwards, inserting the pattern by an astute selection of the bobbins and by crossing them around the pins at the appropriate points. She had always to be careful to pull the bobbins tight enough so that the work would not be too loose of texture and lose its shape, yet she also had to ensure that the bobbins were not pulled so tight that the thread would snap.

There were numerous variations in the manner in which the basic crosses and twists could be made. When John Heathcoat first saw a lace-maker at work, he was astonished by the fabric's complexity. 'A pretty heap of chaotic materials I found it. Like peas in a frying pan dancing about'.² It was unfortunate that a day at the lace pillow often left

1 W. Felkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 127-9, 189.

2 *ibid.*, p. 191.

the worker in a state of exhaustion, a far cry from the sense of artistic fulfilment which, in different circumstances, she might well have derived.

CHAPTER 7

The Market for Lace

The English pillow lace industry produced for a market which not only embraced much of England, but also several countries overseas. Just how large was the value of this output at any one time is difficult to gauge. The only surviving estimate for the nineteenth century is that given by F.W. Bull, a Buckinghamshire historian. Bull estimated the value of laces produced in the south-east Midlands in the middle of the century to be in the region of £100/120,000 per annum.¹ This may, in fact, be a fairly accurate assessment for the industry as a whole, for in 1840 £23,868 of pillow lace was exported and there are reasons for thinking that this may have constituted around one quarter to one fifth of the industry's output. A number of dealers were certainly heavily dependant on exports. Thomas Lester said that prior to the American Civil War almost a third of his produce had gone to the United States,² the chief source of export for the industry as a whole, and another dealer in Newport Pagnell said the loss of the United States market caused by the Civil War had hit his business severely.³ On the other hand, other dealers in Buckingham, and elsewhere, seem to have been concerned primarily with the domestic market⁴ and a sizeable proportion of the Devonshire industry's output was produced for the fashionable classes in England. If a quarter or one fifth is close to the correct proportion, then laces to the value of roughly £100,000 were being produced in the century's middle

1 F.W. Bull, *op.cit.*, p. 195.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 262.

3 *ibid.*, p. 258.

4 *ibid.*, pp. 258-263.

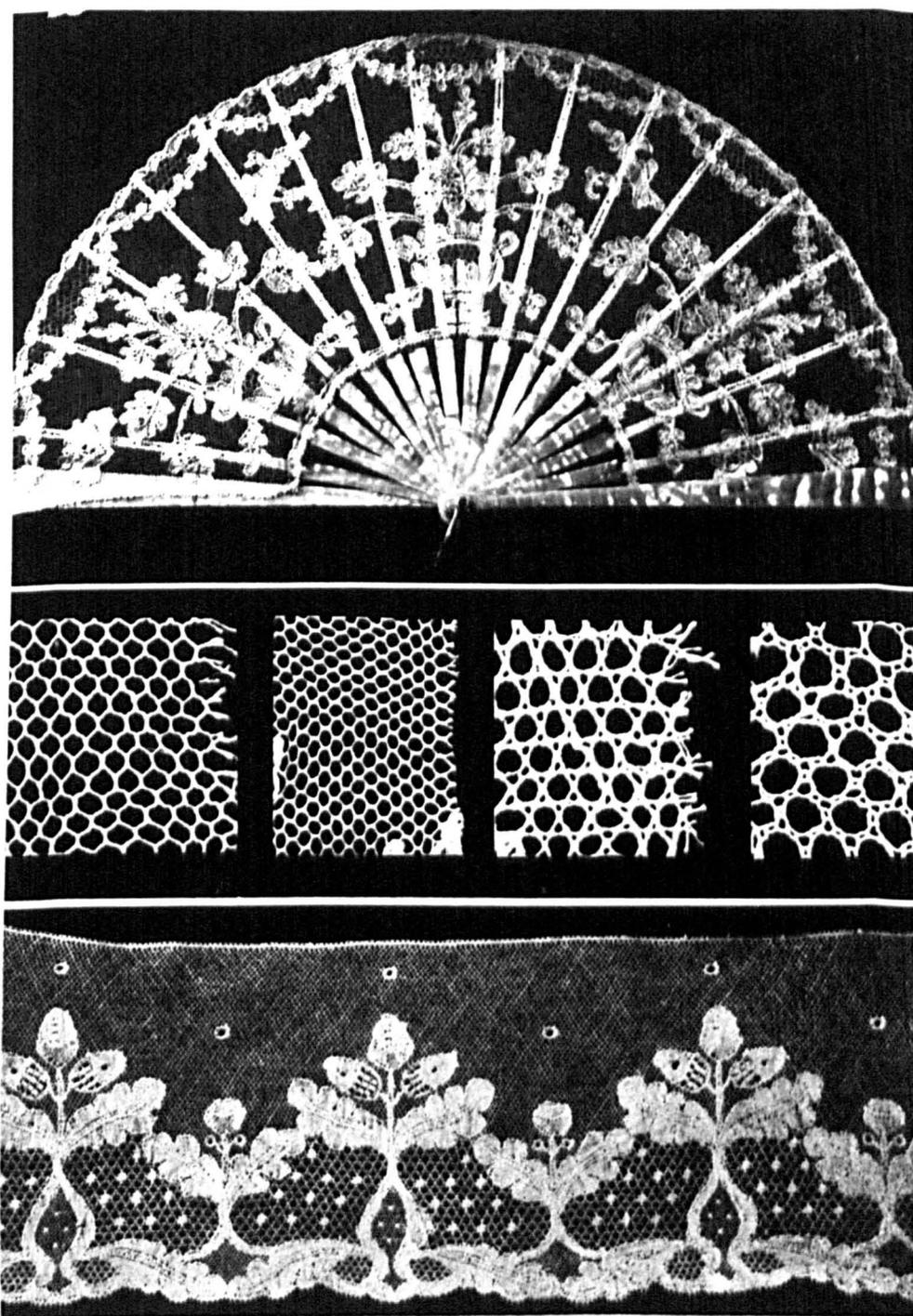


Plate 6 Above, Fan, Buckinghamshire Point.
Centre, enlarged details of grounds, 1. Lille & Bucks. Point.
2. Mechlin. 3. Wire. 4. Honeycomb.
Below, Bucks. Point Border, acorn pattern.

decades, though this clearly varied a good deal from year to year.¹

The industry's output peaked during the twenty years between 1840 and the early 1860s.² It had been smaller before then, and in subsequent years undoubtedly fell markedly, along with the numbers the industry employed. Indeed, by the 1870s exports had fallen to such a degree that they were no longer recorded and though it is impossible to estimate the degree to which the lost exports were re-absorbed in the domestic market, the shift cannot have been large, if it took place at all, for by this time cheap machine-made laces, and imported pillow and needlepoint laces, were swamping the domestic market at the expense of English hand-made goods.³ By the end of the 1880s the industry's labour force was less than a quarter of the size it had been in 1851.⁴ The industry's output will have fallen accordingly and then probably stood at no more than £20,000.

A perhaps better assessment of the scale of the industry's output, however, might be made not in terms of value, but of volume, for laces which were small and cheap still constituted a large proportion of total output. In 1840 over 300,000 yards of lace were exported, in 1853, over 570,000,⁵ and if we multiply these figures by four the result suggests that in the middle years of the nineteenth century the industry might have been producing between one and two million yards of pillow lace each year, according to its fluctuating prosperity. When viewed in this context,

1 Bull gave no indication as to whether or not his estimate was made in a good year. Unfortunately, only one sales ledger has survived, for the 1880s, and this belonged to a relatively small dealer and is of no use in this respect. See below, pp. 223-7; 236-7.

2 See below, pp. 223-6.

3 See below, pp. 316-344.

4 See above, p. 177, Table 2.

5 See Table 8, p. 228.

the scale of the industry's output and the resultant organizational problems gain better perspective, though it is still relatively small when compared with the output of the hand lace industries of France and Belgium, and the machine industries of Calais and Nottingham.¹

This gross estimate of the industry's output masks the diversity of products which were turned out both in Devon and in the south-east Midlands throughout the century. Both areas traditionally produced fabrics which were technically distinguishable from each other. Honiton laces could be separated from all other English laces by their being produced in two pieces, groundwork and motifs, the net being worked in separately as required and in this respect resembled the laces of Brussels. In the south-east Midlands, groundwork and pattern were made together in the same manner as the laces of Lille and Mechlin, in which the motifs of the design were defined by being outlined with a thick thread or gimp and were set off against a light, airy six-sided mesh.

By the end of the eighteenth century many towns and villages in these areas had become famous for their specialities, though in general the south-east Midlands was rather more famous for its edgings, insertions and trimmings than Devon, where a greater number of larger pieces such as veils had been produced. But Great Marlow could produce expensive veils and Aylesbury and Hanslope produced a reputedly excellent, fine lace. Northamptonshire was generally famous for its spotted lace edgings and handkerchiefs, Amersham for its black laces, Olney for its black flouncings which were used from time to time to trim white evening dresses, and Fenny Stratford could produce fine, white laces. But most famous of all were certain parts of the industry in the West Country. The large rose sprays

¹ See above, pp. 90, 101-102, 108, 110-111.

produced in Honiton and Branscombe in Devon were unrivalled in England and from Blandford in Dorset came what, reputedly, was the finest stock of laces in England.¹

As the new century progressed, the evolution of machine competition provoked many English lacemakers into producing a new and more wide variety of laces, some of which bore few of the traditional characteristics, though Honiton and Buckinghamshire laces were always made in a fundamentally different way. Indeed, few dealers, and areas, now clung to a particular form of lace, for flexibility in output and design became a cornerstone of success. An exception was during the 1850s when the heavy Maltese lace became very popular and was widely produced in both districts.² Much depended on fashion.³ On the whole it was an industry of contrast. At their best, as would be shown at the Great Exhibition of 1851, English pillow laces could compare with the finest in the world, at their worst they were almost unrivalled in their vulgarity and crudity and in general standards were somewhat lower than those on the continent.

The greatest proportion of the industry's output was sold in England and much of this passed through London, the great centre of English fashion. There seems to have been only a limited direct contact with the centres of fashion in France. English fashion houses received a number of patterns from French designers during the 1850s, but in general the industry had no direct access to or contact with the Paris fashion market and in this sense the English industry was at a certain disadvantage since Paris fashions still had a pronounced influence on the more expensive English tastes.

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 380; A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 69; T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 100.

2 See below, pp. 342-3.

3 For details see below, pp. 316-343.

But the greater proportion of the English industry's output was of a less highly fashionable nature than this and the disadvantage was only a limited one.

To the various London inns used as meeting places between pillow lace dealers and London wholesalers in the eighteenth century¹ had now been added a number of lace warehouses, the permanent establishments of general wholesale drapers and specialist lace merchants. Of these, Haywards' Lace Warehouse, and Urlings British and Foreign Lace Warehouse, were perhaps the most famous. By the 1850's Haywards had moved to Oxford Street, changing its name as it moved to 'Daniel Biddle, Laceman to the Royal Family'.² Biddle was one of the most important of the pillow lace dealers' wholesale contacts and displayed pieces of Honiton lace at the Great Exhibition in 1851.³

In 1817 there were no less than 60 lace warehouses in London, some of which, including Evans and Co. of High Holborn, W.D. Booke of Lillyput Lane, Noble Street, H. Hopkins of Maiden Lane, Cheapside, Lambe and Stubbin of Park Street, Grosvenor Square, and Pullen and Co., of Brigge Street, advertised themselves as dealing only in British goods.⁴ Most of the warehouses were to be found in or around the West End and dealt in laces of all kinds, though it was not until the 1820's that a number began to advertise themselves as dealing only in 'bobbinet', the product of the lace machine.⁵ From then on it becomes difficult to distinguish between the warehouses which specialised in English pillow lace and the scores which were more generally engaged in the lace trade, for the vast majority did

1 See above, pp. 50-1.

2 A. Adburgham, *op.cit.*, p. 37.

3 Official Descriptive Catalogue, *op.cit.*, II, 1852, p. 559.

4 Johnston's Commercial Guide and Street Directory, 1817.

5 Pigot's Directory, 1823/4.

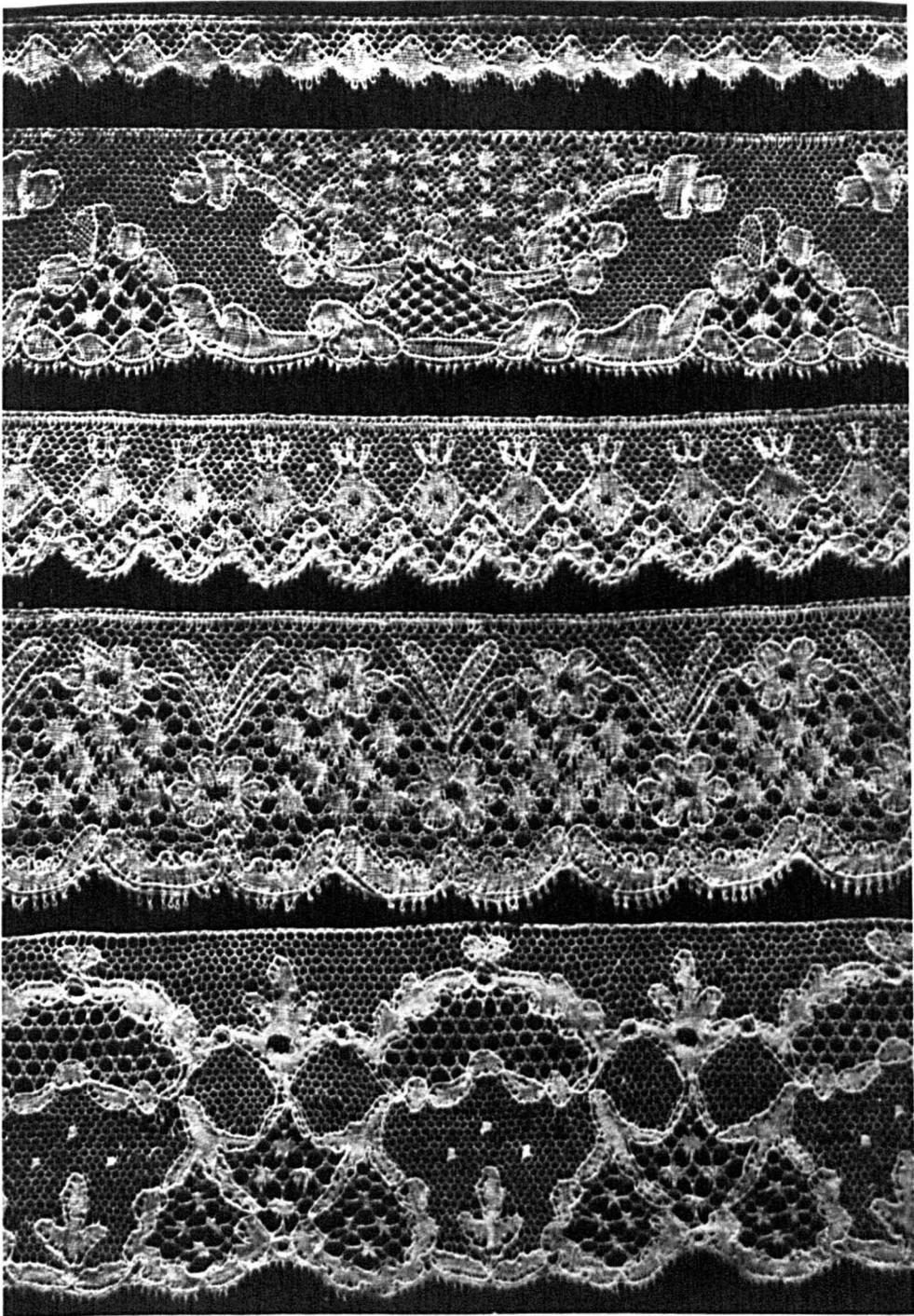


Plate 7 Bucks. Point Borders: 1. Baby Lace. 2. Centre fillings with Torchon Stitch. 3. Diamond & chain pattern. 4. Mayflower filling. 5. Honeycomb, Mayflower, Point ground and other fillings.

not specify in the trade directories. In the 1830's, Urlings Warehouse, typically, was dealing in a mixture of 'curious imitations of Brussels, Mechlin and Valenciennes, real and imitation Blondes, real Brussels, Point and Chantilly veils, Valenciennes and British pillow laces'.¹

From warehouses such as these the pillow lace dealers took orders and materials before allocating them to workers in the villages. Before the advent of the railways the dealers took the completed laces by pack-horse,² to the warehousemen who distributed them to London retail outlets, which had grown rapidly from the 1780s,³ and to retailers in the provinces. In 1823 there were over 50 retailers specializing in lace in London, as well as hundreds of haberdashers, hosiers, drapers and mercers who traded in lace as part of their general business.⁴ By the 1860s there were over 80 lace specialists, one of whom, Mrs. Holman of 186 Sloane Street, London, sold laces made by Mrs. Treadwin's workers in Devon.⁵

In London, the early years of the nineteenth century saw the development of several large draperies, some of which, if not yet classifiable as department stores, retailed in more than one department, including one for lace.⁶ Among these, the most famous were Swan & Edgar (established in 1812), Dickens & Jones (1803), Debenham & Freebody (1803), Marshall & Snellgrove (1837) and Maples (1842).⁷ Dickens & Jones and Debenham & Freebody were still selling English pillow laces in the 1890's,

1 J. Tallis, Tallis's London Street Views, (1839).

2 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 553.

3 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 10.

4 Messrs. Haywards & Urlings had their own retail outlets. Pigot's Directory, 1823/4.

5 London Business Directory 1864; E. Treadwin, Antique Point and Honiton Lace (1874), p. 71.

6 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 37.

7 J.B. Jefferys, Retail Trading in Britain (1959), pp. 325-6.

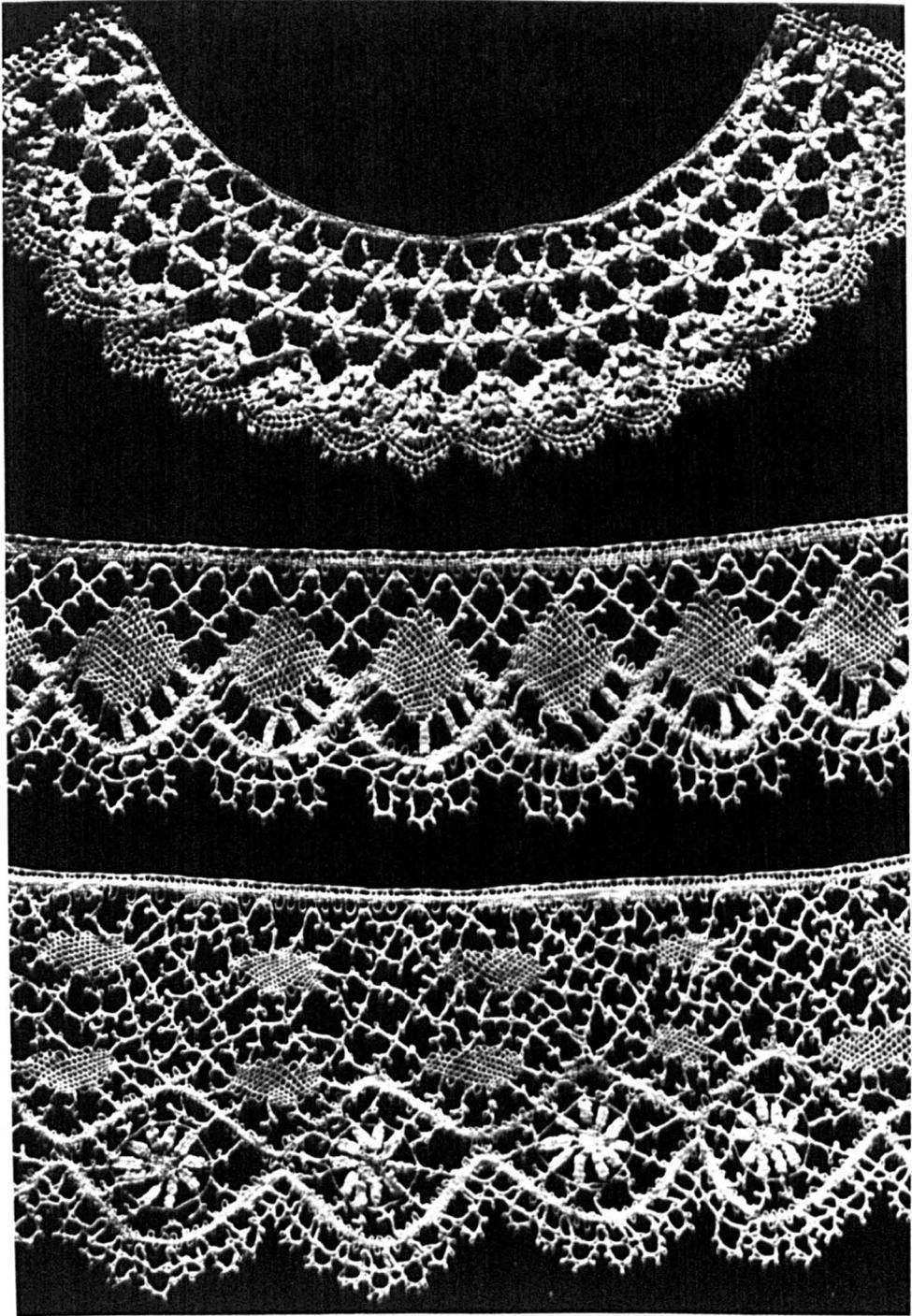


Plate 8 Bedfordshire Maltese Lace.

and Honiton lace was one of their six most popular laces.¹ The large draperies and big department stores such as these took a large quantity of the industry's expensive laces, while the poorer ones were sent through the wholesalers primarily to retail outlets in London and the provinces, though trade customers also came to London from all over England.² Buckinghamshire laces were sent around the country in this way, and even into the lacemaking areas of Devon, J. Broad, a retailer of 14 High Street, Exeter, announcing in 1837, his return 'from London, with Blonde Valenciennes, Lille and Buckinghamshire laces'.³ There were a number of warehouses which continued to advertise themselves as dealing purely in English pillow laces, particularly those made in Devon, as late as the 1860s, by which time the machine industry was capable of producing almost perfect imitations. Hannah Hill of 63 George Street in the West End dealt solely in Honiton lace, as did James Penny, of Elderbury Street, Pimlico, Edward Puckin of Dorset Street, and Emanuel Stokes of Park Street, Camden town.⁴ But well before this time most warehousemen had broad-based interests and dealt in all kinds of lace, from quilling nets made on the machine at one half penny per yard, to Brussels Point veils at 100 guineas.⁵

A few warehouses displayed and won prizes for English pillow laces at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Two wholesalers, Esther Clark and William Guarde, of Cavendish Square and Regent Street, were described as 'designers and manufacturers', the one of Honiton lace, the other of 'British' lace.⁶ Along with Daniel Biddle, Howell James & Co. of Regent

1 Times, 1 December, 1904; 4 November, 1895.

2 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 8.

3 Woolmers' Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, 27 May, 1837.

4 London Business Directory, 1864.

5 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 37.

6 Official Descriptive Catalogue, op.cit., II, 1852, pp. 559-60.

Street, Groucock, Copestake Moore & Co. of Bow, Laughher & Cosens, and James & Co. of Oxford Street, all of whom also displayed specimens of English pillow lace at the Exhibition, they were important suppliers of master patterns to the country dealers.¹ In this way they transmitted the requirements of their markets to the workers in the outlying villages, though they undertook no direct supervision of their workers, and there were no workshops such as existed under the auspices of Paris fashion houses in parts of France.²

It follows that the contact between the industry and these London market centres was in general more loosely organized than that between the continental industry and its market centres, or between the Nottingham industry and London, following its improved organization during the 1840's. Indeed, Esther Clarke and Miss Jane Bidney, 'Honiton Lace Manufacturer by appointment to Her Majesty', both of Honiton and John Fucher and Co., of Branscombe were the only pillow lace producers with headquarters in London.³ A number of wholesalers' agents were resident in Stony Stratford in the 1840's,⁴ but on the whole the south-east Midlands sector of the industry seems to have relied on London wholesalers sending urgent market information into the lacemaking areas whenever it was required and on dealers travelling at regular intervals to London themselves.⁵ Yet the influence of some of these wholesalers was sufficient to ensure that many lace dealers worked only for them, sometimes even for only one of them, and some of the whole-

1 *ibid.*

2 See above, pp. 121-2.

3 Miss Bidney's London address was James Street, John Fucher's, Bedford Square. Official Descriptive Catalogue, op.cit., 1852, p. 564. Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 469. International Exhibition: Official Catalogue, op.cit., 1862, pp. 69-70. Tallis's London Street Views, loc. cit.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, Appendix to Second Report, op.cit., Part I, 1843, p. A.12.

5 *ibid.*

salers had sufficient influence to enable them to effect a considerable improvement in design in these areas in the 1840s.¹

The development of the parcel post in the middle of the century permitted some lace dealers to post regular quantities of lace to London warehousemen, the warehousemen sending fresh orders and payment for the goods by return. Friday was 'sending in' day in Devon, and if the goods were not received in London on time the warehousemen covered themselves by refusing to pay.² This caused a good deal of frenzied activity among the laceworkers, particularly in lace schools, where the children made desperate efforts to ensure that the goods were delivered on time.³

Though London dominated the wholesale trade, Bath, in Somerset, had for long served as a second major retail and wholesale centre for the Devonshire industry. The demand here was for laces of all kinds, but the fashionable market in Bath was expanding, and this, bolstered by demands from the wealthier sector of Bristol, absorbed a large quantity of laces of a generally more expensive kind. There were seven wholesale lace merchants in Bath in the 1860s, all specializing in Honiton lace, and it was not until the 1890s that they had gone.⁴

The provinces, and particularly the north of England, always absorbed a large portion of the industry's output. Lace dealers often travelled regularly north and west, selling their wares on the spot to local retailers and advertising their supplies, in specially prepared books, to local customers. Some had permanent agents in certain towns. Mrs. Woodruffe,

1 See below, pp. 328-9.

2 One dealer explained: 'Today is sending in day by post to London and the money returned. If not sent now it cannot be sent till next week and no money sent'. R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 247.

3 See below, pp. 431-2.

4 Kelly's Directory of Somerset, 1865, 1894.

a 'Honiton lace manufacturer' was permanently situated at 9 Lower Parade, Royal Lemington Spa during the 1860's.¹ On the other hand, Abigail Chick, a Branscombe dealer, seems to have visited the fashionable resort of Brighton, where she was obviously well known. In 1833 the Brighton Herald reported that:

Mrs. Chick, Honiton lace manufacturer returns her thanks to the public for the kind and liberal support which she has experienced since her residence in Brighton & begs to inform them that she has received a large and elegant assortment of bordering and sprigs of every description, ready trimmed laces of all widths, habit shirts, black and white veils, dresses, pellerines, falls for bonnets and other caps.²

Such excursions into and contacts with the provinces were continued until well into the nineteenth century. From Colyton, in Devon, a dealer who wished to remain anonymous said he had travelled 'all over England' with his lace specimens until, in the 1870s, old age finally stopped him.³ Another dealer at Otterton said in 1888 that a sizeable proportion of his trade had always been conducted in the north of England, though he did not say if he had travelled there himself.⁴ Some dealers seem to have preferred to make market contacts personally, perhaps so that they could induce the sympathy of purchasers away from goods produced by rival sellers.

Travelling dealers sold directly from boxes of lace or took orders from sample books, two of which, both belonging to Thomas Lester, have survived. The books contain samples of lace, each with a number and name pinned neatly onto the pages. In one of the books the quality and availability of each lace is commented upon in marginal notes. Of one lace

1 E. Treadwin, Antique Point and Honiton Lace (1874). loc. cit.

2 Brighton Herald, 14 March, 1833.

3 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit. p. 3.

4 *ibid.*

it was said, 'the quality is good'; of another that there were 'a few only'. In the second book the names of the laces are translated into French, with prices marked up in francs, from 12.50, down to 58 centimes a yard. Both books were prefaced with instructions for payment, both in French and English. 'All the laces marked in this book', the prefaces read, 'are to be paid for after ninety days, with a discount of twenty per cent upon the market prices'.¹ Lester may well have had limited dealings on the French market, for small quantities of exports to France were recorded in the 1850s.² But the likelihood is greater that he was dealing with the Channel Islands, or Canada, for both had a fair-sized demand for English laces during the century's middle years, almost, £3,000 of pillow lace going to the Channel Islands in 1849.³

A number of dealers, particularly in Devon, depended, on the other hand, almost entirely on local, private custom. G. Seward, an Exeter draper, employed lacemakers either directly or through a local dealer, to produce for the Exeter market and regularly announced the availability of his goods in the press to the local fashionable classes:

G. Seward announces to the nobility and gentry of the West of England that he has just completed some superb specimens of white lace veils quite equal both in elegance of pattern and durability of texture to foreign veils usually charged 50 to 60 guineas each.

Ladies purchasing black lace veils will find the largest assortment in the West of England, both of Real Chantilly from 5 to 20 guineas each and likewise of G. Seward's own make from 5s. upwards.⁴

'I', the principal dealer at Sidmouth in the 1880s, who was proud of the

1 The books are lodged in the Lester Collection, Luton Museum.

2 See Table 8, p. 228 and Table 9, p. 229.

3 See Table 8, p. 228.

4 Woolmers' Exeter & Plymouth Gazette, 25 April, 1837.

finely-made laces for which she had won several prizes at the Bath and West of England Society Exhibitions and which, on one occasion, had fetched over 50 guineas per yard, said she preferred to supply private customers 'as much as possible'.¹ The local demand for lace came from all social levels, from businessmen and the aristocracy down to the lacemakers and their own families. In 1909, at Yeovil, the daughter of C.W. Pittard, a well-known glove manufacturer, was married in a specially produced Honiton veil.² The advantage of private orders for the discriminating local purchaser such as this was that the production process could be supervised directly:

A woman now living at Spratton remembers the time when her mother, then living at Crendon, made the lace worn by Lady Sarah Spencer at the wedding of the Princess of Wales. She was but a child, but remembers distinctly the Lady coming on her horse now and again to see how the lace was getting on.³

In these areas English pillow laces were often able to command a sympathetic following, even when the national trend of fashion had turned against them. At Sidmouth, by the mid-century a fashionable resort, and at Honiton and Branscombe, there were several specialist lace shops.⁴ Much was also sold at local fairs, at drapers' shops and on market stalls. In 1830 it was said that the industry in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, was 'well-sustained' by the 'respectable local inhabitants who with numerous residents in the vicintage of the town could be relied upon to purchase local supplies'.⁵ The trade at Stony Stratford also was 'well-

1 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 4.

2 Western Gazette, 13 August, 1909.

3 C. Channer & M.E. Roberts, op.cit., p. 69.

4 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 71; A.S. Cole, loc.cit.

5 Pigot's Directory of Buckinghamshire, 1830.

sustained' by travellers passing through on the road to London.¹ Many towns in the lace areas held at least one market during the week, and lace dealers were well represented on the stalls, transacting their business with country drapers, travelling merchants and private customers. At Newport Pagnell market lace dealers met local retailers every Wednesday.² Stocks of lace were sold each Saturday at Leighton Buzzard markets and on Tuesdays at the market at Honiton, while lace stalls were common at Newport Pagnell fair.³

A more detailed indication of a lace dealer's transactions can be derived from the only lace dealer's sales ledger to have survived, though this business was small, existed late in the century and no doubt differs a good deal from the transactions of a larger dealer such as Thomas Lester. During the 1880s, Rachel Read, a lace dealer at Cranfield, near Bedford, ignored the wholesale trade and dealt with private customers, largely through the post, both at home and abroad. She advertised her laces on printed cards, which showed photographs of herself and her workers, and listed prices and styles: 'Ladies requiring any description of pillow lace', including 'up to date designs', 'should write to the above address where supplies are always in stock'.⁴ Sending parcels of samples 'on approval', Mrs. Read dealt with customers as far afield as San Francisco, Michigan and Independence (Iowa) in the U.S.A., and her customers in England were to be found as far apart as Hyde Park, Ipswich, Leeds, Chippenham, Manchester, Gravesend, Luton, Northampton, Mansfield, and Sutton Coldfield. She dealt also with a number of retailers in the

1 Pigot's Directory of Buckinghamshire, 1839.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report 1863, pp. 258-59.

3 Pigot's Directory of Devon, 1830; Pigot's Directory of Buckinghamshire, 1830.

4 Beds. C.R.O. X259/4. Advertising Card of Rachel Read, 'Pillow Lace Manufacturer, Cranfield. Interleaved in Mrs. Read's Sales Ledger, 1886-1902.

provinces, again by sample books sent through the post. From Mrs. McDonald, a private customer residing in Hyde Park Road, Southsea, she received a request for 'a sailey collar like this one, in the leaf pattern, the same work as the hanky and I will send the money on, if you let me know the price',¹ and from Mrs. Layne of Maynelle, Michigan, U.S.A., the request was, 'Be shore and send me some more of this'.²

Much of Mrs. Read's business with private customers was conducted on credit. The customer posted a request for lace, the lace was made and the customer sent payment on receipt. A customer at Sandy, in Bedfordshire, owed Mrs. Read £6.11s.2d. on January 5th 1886, and repaid her by irregular instalments of 10s. 6d.³ Credit was also extended to customers abroad; on July 18th 1901, Mrs. Read, having posted a parcel of lace to Mrs. Layne, recorded the receipt of 'a letter with two silver dollars from Mrs. Layne'.⁴

Mrs. Read's private orders were generally small. For Mrs. Turtill of Ipswich her workers produced, between February and June 1897, laces to the value of just over £4. The articles were small and the prices low as the following extract from her notebook indicates:⁵

-
- 1 Letter from Mrs. W. Lane Maynelle, Tuscole County, Michigan, U.S.A. Interleaved in Mrs. Read's Sales Ledger.
 - 2 Letter from MacDonald, 119 Hyde Park Road, Southsea, Portsmouth (n.d.), Interleaved in Mrs. Read's Sales Ledger.
 - 3 Letter from W. White, St. Neots Road, Sandy, 5 January, 1886, Interleaved in Mrs. Read's Sales Ledger.
 - 4 Note of receipt from Miss Lorton, 18 July 1901. Interleaved in Mrs. Read's Sales Ledger.
 - 5 Extract from Mrs. Read's Sales Ledger.

Ordered Mrs. Turtill February 16th

Handkerchiefs		2 at 5s.	10s.
		1 at 4s.	8s.
		1 at 3s. 6d.	3s. 6d.
Insertions	6yds.	at 1s.	6s.
	6yds.	at 8½d.	4s. 3d.
	1yd.	at 1s. 6d.	1s. 6d.
	4yds.	at 1s. 2d.	4s. 8d.
	4yds.	at 1s. 4d.	5s. 4d.
	6yds.	at 1s. 2d.	7s.
Remnant		3s. 2d.	3s. 2d.
			<hr/>
			£2. 13s. 5d.

Ordered June 21st

Insertions	4½yds.	at 1s. 6d.	6s. 9d.
	3yds.	at 1s. 6d.	4s. 6d.
	3yds.	at 1s. 2d.	3s. 6d.
	6yds.	at 9d.	4s. 6d.
	3yds.	at 1s. 4d.	4s.
	6yds.	at 9d.	4s. 6d.
			<hr/>
			£1. 7s. 9d.

Mrs. Read's annual sales of lace seldom reached much more than £100, and the highest total recorded in her sales ledger for any one year during the years 1886 to 1902 was £171. Cheap laces, especially insertions, squares, handkerchiefs, collars, borders, caps and edgings were in keenest demand. Her largest and most expensive items were capes, which sold at prices ranging between £1 and £2. Sales for July 1886, totalling £6/1/1, are typical of the entries in the ledger and give a good indication of the types of lace being sold:

July

5 round collars (3s. 2d.)	15s.
1 black silk cape	£1. 0s. 0d.
6 squares	8s.
6 Mrs. George's pieces (3s. 6d.)	£1. 1. 0d.
3 pointed boys collars	7s. 8d.
2 squares	4s. 9d.
cap	5s. 6d.
6 yards	1s. 7d.
4 collars	1s. 4d.
6 yards	5d.
1 collar	1s.
18 yards insertion	£1. 4s. 0d.
	<hr/>
	£6. 1s. 0d.

A peak was reached during the years 1887 to 1896; thereafter sales declined, until by 1902 Rachel Read sold only £19 of lace and the sales book was permanently closed.¹

Thus, the market for English pillow lace was quite diverse. The London wholesalers absorbed a large quantity of the industry's produce before sending it out again to retailers in London and the provinces. In London a quantity was also absorbed by the growing number of department stores. An alternative for the lace dealers was to trade directly with regional retailers and private customers, either by travelling round

¹ Extracts from Mrs. Read's Sales Ledger. Mrs. Read's sales of pillow lace during this period were as follows:

	£.	s.	d.		£.	s.	d.
1887	64	4	0	1895	132	14	3
1888	91	18	8	1896	171	15	6
1889	86	19	4	1897	52	3	6
1890	78	13	5	1898	88	15	4
1891	186	17	0	1899	77	10	5
1892	62	15	1	1900	71	1	0
1893	141	2	7	1901	55	9	7
1894	95	15	1	1902	18	19	2

the country or, from the 1840s, by using the post. Locally, laces appeared in drapers' and milliners' shops and on the stalls at markets and fairs. Occasionally, dealers left boxes of lace at local inns, to be handed round by the waiters at the end of dinner and just a few girls made up pieces for private sale. 'Many travellers', said Mrs. Palliser, 'will call to mind the girls who, awaiting the arrival of each travelling carriage or post chaise, climbed up to the windows of the vehicle, rarely allowing the occupants to go their way until they had purchased some article of the wares so pertinaciously offered for their inspection.'¹

But the industry had never confined itself solely to the English market, and continued to export abroad, as Mrs. Read's ledgers show, until its dying days. Until the 1840s the value of exported pillow lace seldom exceeded £5,000, of which the largest quantities were sent to the United States, the West Indies, East India, Canada and Belgium. Smaller quantities, sometimes valued at less than £10, were sent from time to time to Italy, Spain, Australia, Holland, South Africa, Malta, Gibraltar, France, Russia, Ireland and even to Mauritius, Brazil and Peru. Together, these outlets, with the occasional addition of Germany, Turkey and the Philippines, absorbed the industry's exports until the 1850s. The years 1840/44 were boom years. In 1841, exports totalled £23,299, (over 200,000 yards), of which £20,833 went to the United States and £1,067 to Canada. By 1844 the total figure had fallen to £8,259 of which the United States took only £5,000, most now going to Canada and the East Indies. By 1848 there had been a further fall, down to £2,057, with roughly a third going to Belgium. But there was some revival in 1849 and in 1850 exports again reached over £14,000, with the bulk going to the U.S.A. and Belgium.²

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 236.

2 See Table 8, p. 228. For a general discussion of the use of trade figures see B.R. Mitchell & P. Deane, Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 274-8.

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TABLE 8 - EXPORTS OF ENGLISH PILLON LACE (1812-1853) (Declared Value, £)

Year	Foreign														Total (£)	yards											
	Mauritius	Peru	Russia	Belgium	Ireland	France	Germany	Portugal	Ch. Islands	Italy	Gibraltar	Malta	S. Africa	E. India			Spain	Australia	Colonies	Canada	Brazil	W. Indies	Holland	U.S.A.			
1812			30															18	209					227			
1814																		548	359					907			
1815					103			400				130	399					1133	1456			286	3907	23549			
1816													220				300	590	597			140	1847				
1817				43									598					498	415			448	2062	13954			
1818				35				184	215				2478					477	196			953	5099				
1819				470	40		350					80	225	311				266	88	1034		305	3049	14283			
1820				35			76		200				1060	812				300					2749	13627			
1821							88						320	100	155								1074	10983			
1822																											
1823				174			6					157						302	458	25			1122	13309			
1824	20	50		30								1	30	10				1639	626	140		279	2825	29902			
1825	45					24				120	67	591	103		121			385	400	1796		484	3137	36714			
1826				184			26			70		15	1040		256			357		463		1660	4071	33983			
1827				75								48			430			250	12	70		1608	2493	37580			
1828				2313										100							206	550	3169	11619			
1829				2178					76									50		90		35	2429	6270			
1830				1130								10						20		4		250	1413	6390			
1831				1025																		593	1618	8676			
1832				2803			50					350						978			1	298	250	4730	32503		
1833	88			61							10				300	200		437					1271	32554			
1834						430		5		6		40	24	14	90			257				75	941	17453			
1835	354					25					95				58			75	80	22		881	1589	57049			
1836	154			5					40			50	336		370			35		89		606	1695	97764			
1837				3					2						292			170	110	40			616	11983			
1838				70		21		136		4	26		6		322					50		5240	5875	58744			
1839	58						295				29		100		360	255	674				14	1294	3079	145958			
1840						431		20					154	30	1135	763	2807				152	18376	23868	238677			
1841	24											63	118		462	337	1067			346		20883	23299	232987			
1842						799							1000		2901	369	5104			346	2540	140	940	13803	138031		
1843	1200					484			50			6	966		586	474	3476			4209	589	64	12074	120735			
1844									290				3306		290	1315	2283			207	68	500	8259	32586			
1845				6					70			6	54		5					911			1119	58245			
1846		5							50		10		130	36	394					1005			148	1	88	1863	
1847				75	15	136							249	1	458					273			52	5		1044	44583
1848				341				13	55			2	64		272					260			20		42	1057	30651
1849		30		1642				1	2840						363			12	80	352			36		2069	6827	193213
1850				4346			51		510											542			285	2	5813	14320	416929
1851				690			193		655											426			300		2813	5432	158213
1852				183			182	220	500											311			272	103	1897	4160	177216
1853				563			255	628	150											60			55	77	4732	8109	574685

Source: P.R.O. Customs 9, 'Exports by Articles', Nos. 1-46.

TABLE 9

Exports of Pillow Lace (1854/78) G.B.(Value £ at Current Prices)

	West Indies	Germany	France	Holland	Belgium	U.S.A.	British E.Indies	Ch. Islands	Australia	Argentina	Others	Total (£)	Yards
1854		272	310		581	5043		500	320	274	496	7296	292563
1855					487	2915		500	309		240	4651	218508
1856					329	1557			254	388	651	3179	151457
1857						971		450			871	2292	72897
1858						840		613	633		876	2962	105283
1859						2311		300	519		538	3668	278029
1860						9759	540	450			890	11639	279689
1861				631		1087					426	2744	67726
1862	1114					693					358	2165	147929
1863		725				812					153	1690	27876
1864						290					36	326	12534
1865						175					147	322	3339
1866		600				1505					95	2200	48122
1867					All countries							588	11412
1868												1154	15134
1869												472	2211
1870												1044	41400
1871					Figures not given								
1872													
1873													
1874													
1875													
1876													
1877													
1878													

Source: Annual Statement of the Trade and Navigation of the U.K. 1854/78.

The 1850's saw the United States maintain the position of chief importer.¹ In the United States English laces assumed some of the exclusiveness and desirability which foreign laces could command in England. The lace was sent directly by lace dealers to meet private orders, or was sent in bulk by the export departments of London wholesalers.² The Bedford drapers, E. Braggins and Sons, advertised themselves as 'wholesalers and exporters': 'we are in the centre of this industry and take the lace direct from the workers' pillows'.³ 1853 was another boom year, total exports reaching £8,109 of which £4,732 went to the United States. Thereafter, this total was exceeded only once, in 1860, when it reached £11,639. Of this £9,759 went to the United States, the rest to the Channel Islands, which had emerged as a regular purchaser from 1855, the East Indies and a number of countries whose names were not specified. From 1859, Australia, which for six years had regularly imported over £250 of pillow lace, disappeared from the records, and following the onset of the American Civil War, and adverse changes in fashion which together dislocated the American market, exports played a relatively insignificant role.⁴ The United States' demand did not recover after the war and such sales as there now were, went primarily in small, private consignments such as those sent by Mrs. Read. From the mid 1860's the great majority of English pillow laces were absorbed at home, in the provinces, locally, through the London wholesale trade and, from the early 1890's, through the agency of philanthropic agencies which grew up to prevent the industry's extinction.⁵

1 See Table 8, p. 228 and Table 9, p. 229.

2 A. Adburgham, op.cit., pp. 208-10.

3 Advertising Card. Lester Collection, Luton Museum.

4 See Table 9, p. 229.

5 See below, pp. 473-509.

CHAPTER 8

Industrial Organization: the putting out system

The organization of the putting out system which catered for this diverse demand for English pillow lace was as complex as it was varied. From the massive businesses belonging to those dealers who employed around 3,000 workers, the industry's organization ranged down to the small, speculative operations of the local village grocer in Devon. Yet, almost predictably, the business records which might have given a detailed account of the scale and nature of the dealers' operations and of their annual profits and output have not survived. The only surviving record which gives any indication of this kind is that of the brothers John and Robert Talbot of Newport Pagnell, who sold their stock of lace, thread, horse and gig, which were worth £3,000, to Thomas Collier and John Claydon in 1820.¹ There can be no doubt that the major businesses in the mid nineteenth century were at least as large, if not larger than this, if only because there was a marked concentration of the dealers' control in this region as the century moved on.² Thomas Gilbert, Thomas Lester and other lace dealers who employed around 3,000 workers might well have been responsible, at times of heavy demand, for a weekly output in the region of 4,000 yards of lace, for it was estimated that a good lacemaker could produce over a yard of edging or insertion per week.³ In terms of the numbers they employed these businesses could compare with some of the largest in the woollen cloth industry in the eighteenth century.⁴

1 Beds. C.R.O. DDX/1985. Deed of Dissolution of Partnership, May 1822.

2 See above, pp. 158-161.

3 A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

4 S. Pollard, The Genesis of Modern Management, (1965), pp. 31-2.

It is these businesses which had the most complex and interesting organizational problems, fundamental among which were the control of production and the synchronising of output to meet either real or anticipated demands. Supplies of threads and patterns had to be given out to numerous workers over wide areas of the countryside and if embezzlement and short measure were to be avoided and the expected quantity and quality of finished laces were to be received on time, then scrupulous checks had to be made on all outgoings and returns. The speed, regularity and quality of the workers' output, the payment of the workers' wages and the allocation of fresh orders had all to be watched closely if the dealers were to avoid the traditional pitfalls of domestic industrial organization and succeed in meeting their markets' requirements. In the industry's competitive context this was often doubly crucial.

In Devon, the dealers were faced by an additional organizational problem, for here the lace was made by workers in two separate parts, the groundwork and sprigs, and dealers had to collect supplies of both before handing them out once again to women in the villages who sewed the various pieces together. As a result, the dealers not only had to ensure that the quality of each sprig reached the standard required so that it could be blended but also that each of the sprigs was completed in time so that they could be sewn together onto the groundwork and the completed laces be sent off to the various market centres.

Within the general fluctuations set by fashion and personal tastes the output of English pillow lace tended in some areas, to be seasonal. This was especially so in Devon where the trade always reached a peak in the late spring and early summer when, it was said by one dealer, 'more is wanted than can be made'.¹ The trade was rather less seasonal in the

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 249.

south-east Midlands, partly because its products were concentrated more on the cheap wholesale trade, and partly because a sizeable portion of the region's produce was sent abroad, seemingly throughout most of the year. Even here, however, the local press carried more advertisements for lace in the spring than in any other season, as also did the London fashion journals. In Devon seasonal fluctuations were modified by a great number of private orders. There were always weddings for which dresses were wanted 'in a hurry',¹ and a large private order, such as that for Queen Victoria's wedding dress, could keep scores of workers in employment for weeks, even months on end. There was also something of a boom at Christmas time when orders for seasonal gifts increased, and in the later decades of the century the Devon industry enjoyed an increasing amount of holiday trade.²

All told, the industry's organizers were faced with massive organizational problems. Indeed, it has been said that such problems were 'well nigh impossible to control within the structure of the putting out system'.³ The employer of domestic weavers in the textile industries, for example, could never tell within a fortnight or three weeks if every web sent out to the neighbouring villages would be returned.⁴ Since the organization of putting out systems had so many chains and depended to a degree upon mutual trust between employer and employee, there was an inevitable amount of uncertainty. In this, as in every domestic industry, a large number of workers were children, many of whom were employed on a part-time basis and their employment made organization all the more

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 247.

2 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 3.

3 S. Pollard, op.cit., p. 32.

4 *ibid.*, p. 33.

difficult, for children are less predictable than adults and often more difficult to control.

Such was the diversity of ways in which the distribution of raw materials and the collection of finished goods could take place that generalisation on method, and its effectiveness, would give an unrepresentative picture. Each dealer tended to operate in his own way; there were no hard and fast rules. In some respects the old eighteenth century pattern was maintained. Workers in north Buckinghamshire had often taken their laces to the Swan Inn at Newport Pagnell, where they met dealers at monthly intervals to take out fresh orders¹ and in the 1860s William Marshall still worked in this way, journeying from his base at Newport Pagnell to meet his employees at regular intervals at the inns in the surrounding villages, sometimes as far away as Whittlebury and Towcester.² In Oxfordshire some workers took their laces once a month to a dealer who met them at an inn in Thame. The dealer was from High Wycombe, and may well have been Thomas Gilbert who controlled most of the workers in this district. The dealer bought the women's laces before providing them, without charge, with fresh supplies of thread and patterns.³

For some lacemakers such transactions involved an exhausting return journey on foot of 10 or more miles, but such distances were a normal and traditional part of their lives. A dealer in Devon who met workers at her own depot said that in some cases her employees had walked from over five miles away⁴ and a local vicar once complained that 'some of the girls get much exhausted and faint on the road'.⁵ Yet some women undoubtedly

1 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 91.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 258.

3 *ibid.*, p. 257.

4 *ibid.*

5 *ibid.*, p. 251.

preferred to walk all this way rather than deal with a local, small dealer, or factor, who was more likely to pay them in truck.¹ A lady at Elstow, in Bedfordshire, recently remembered her mother trekking to Bedford and back every Saturday morning to meet Thomas Lester at his shop. Here she would queue with 'scores' of other lacemakers until the time came for her to meet him. Her mother was paid by the yard, and always preferred to deal with Thomas rather than his brother Charles, since Thomas generally paid more.²

In the middle of the century most dealers collected and put out weekly, the most common days for meeting their workers being Friday and Saturday. Mrs. Godolphin, a dealer in Devon, always paid her workers on Friday 'in ready money', and claimed this was done so that they could 'buy their goods and food in the market on Saturday'.³ Mrs. Allen, a Buckinghamshire dealer, travelled weekly from her centre at High Wycombe to Princess Risborough, the village in which she had been brought up and where, as a result, she probably was well-known to her employees. Here she waited for her workers to bring in their laces from villages six or seven miles around, giving them pattern cards and threads, both of which she provided free, in return.⁴ At Branscombe, in Devon, collection day was Saturday and, said Mrs. Moody,

the quantity of work brought in was such that, with the valuing, followed by a choice of grocery and haberdashery, it was often past eleven at night before the shop closed. It took a considerable amount of courage, coupled with real want, to bring the women and girls back at night through the rough lanes.⁵

1 See below, p. 263.

2 Information provided by Mrs. Cirket, Elstow, Bedfordshire. October 1969.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 246.

4 *ibid.*, p. 246.

5 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 44. Thomas Wright said 'cutting off' day was Friday. T. Wright, op.cit., p. 203.

A number of dealers worked on a monthly basis. During the 1880s and 90s Rachel Read called on her workers on a monthly circuit and recorded her calls in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire in a ledger under the general heading 'Times called last'. Thus her schedules, including a visit to a workhouse, for September and October 1888:-

Times Called Last

Husband Crawley	Sept. 24th	Astwood	Oct. 28th
Salford	27th	Stagsden	29th
North Crawley	28th	Wavendon	Nov. 3rd
Lidlington	27th/28th	Broughton Workhouse	12th
Wavendon Brighton	30th	Salford	12th
Husband Crawley	Oct. 25th	Lidlington	13th
Richmount	26th	Molsoe	16th
Chickley	27th		

Mrs. Read spent roughly one day in each centre before moving on, seemingly staying the weekend at whichever place she happened to be when Friday arrived.¹ Another dealer, operating in Northamptonshire in the 1820s, listed 'taken in days':

Moulton	April 29th	Weedon	20th
Pitsford	May 6th	Broughton	June 2nd
Hartwell	11th	Welford	13th
Barton	12th	Moulton	23rd
Stoke Bruen	13th		

The dealer had 98 samples of lace in his sample book.²

The most important dealers generally met their workers in one of a number of ways. They might meet them in the villages or at their shops, or at the shops belonging to their factors or perhaps at an appointed place such as an inn. Thomas Gilbert conducted his business

1 Beds. C.R.O. X2591/4. Mrs. Read's Travel Ledger.

2 Luton Museum. Unnamed Ledger, Ref. 48/32.

in three ways. Some of his workers he met at his centre in High Wycombe, others he met in the villages, at an appointed time and place and on other occasions he dealt through a factor. Though there was no legal contract between Gilbert and his workers he nevertheless expected them to work for no one else and to ensure loyalty and reliability accepted his workers' lace all the year round, no matter what the current market situation. Only a dealer as rich as he, and with such broad-based interests, could take the risk of stocking. In return, Gilbert expected his workers to adhere to his standards of workmanship, to use only the patterns and threads provided by him, and to return their work to him alone:

They are not absolutely engaged by me as workpeople, but I sell them the materials, i.e. patterns and silk or thread, and there is a mutual understanding, though no legal obligation, that I should take all the lace for which I have sold the patterns, whether there be a demand for it or not, and that the lacemakers should bring it in to me and not to any other dealer.¹

The scale of Thomas Gilbert's business made it necessary for him to use village factors, but his control was still preserved in the same way as when he dealt with his workers directly. In Gilbert's own words:

In some places I do not deal directly with the lacemakers themselves but through the agency of a small buyer, to whom I supply the materials and patterns and who in turn deals with the lacemakers in the same way as myself.²

Mrs. Wright, who kept a general store at Prestwood, six miles from High Wycombe, worked as a lace factor and may well have been employed by Thomas Gilbert. She received threads and patterns 'from the manufacturer', and supplied them to the lacemakers, whose work she superintended, 'not allowing any of the patterns to be seen by any but those who work for

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 257.

2 *ibid.*

him'.¹ The workers took their completed laces in to Mrs. Wright who paid them in cash and supplied them with fresh quantities of materials and instructions as to how the new laces were to be made. Patterns were guarded jealously by all those dealers who wished to maintain the exclusiveness of their products.

Since Gilbert agreed to take all the laces made by the workers on his books the risks were all his, and the factors acted purely as collecting agents, presumably working for a fee, or a commission. But from the dealer's point of view a possible advantage of employing a factor was that the factor could share the risk of purchasing laces on his own account, before re-selling them to the dealer. Some factors bought materials from the dealer, sold them to the workers and paid the workers out of their own income, often with grocery and drapery which they had bought from a dealer. They then transported the finished laces to the dealer in the expectation that he would buy them. 'The shopkeepers or boxwomen as they are called', said Mrs. Allen, 'bring in boxes to the wholesale buyers from whom they generally get their grocery, drapery and so on'.² For this they sometimes received a commission of around 10 per cent on what they had paid out, though one factor who was also a travelling grocer, was paid only 5 per cent.³ It was always in the factor's interest to see that the dealer's demands were met, for dealers are not likely to have accepted work which did not come up to the requisite standards, and few if any will have paid the factor's fee in advance.

Quality of workmanship and originality in design were often of as

1 *ibid.*, p. 258.

2 *ibid.*, p. 256.

3 K.S. Woods, The Rural Industries Round Oxford (Oxford, 1921), p. 9.

much importance as punctuality in production and successful collection and to this end dealers such as Thomas Gilbert often designed their own patterns and ensured that only these were used. By the mid nineteenth century it was conventional among many dealers that their workers used only the patterns provided by them. Benjamin Lacey of Princess Risborough said he sold 'patterns and materials to lacemakers and they sell their lace as their own, but it is expected that they sell the lace where they buy the patterns'.¹ In the 1860s, William Marshall of Newport Pagnell, was careful to supply patterns and parchments to his workers, though he permitted them to purchase threads for cheaper patterns where they pleased. For expensive laces made of the then fashionable black silk threads, Marshall insisted that the lacemakers take their materials and patterns from him, 'a particular kind', as he put it, 'being wanted to suit the work'.² Such was the value of the patterns to the dealers that many supplied them free. This was true, for example, of William Ayres of Newport Pagnell and of Mrs. Hayman of Sidmouth, though both sold their workers all additional materials, as was the practice with many dealers.³

Workers could be made reliable if they could be made loyal.

Perhaps for this reason Mrs. Davey, of Honiton, employed her lacemakers all the year round, 'taking the risk of losing by changes in taste and fashion'.⁴ The Incumbent of Honiton parish told enquirers that it was common practice for regular employment to be given to 'those who turn out the best work'.⁵ Thomas Lester also found this to be a good way of ensuring the quality and regularity of workmanship. 'We purchase the lace weekly

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 258.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*, pp. 254, 258.

4 *ibid.*, p. 247.

5 *ibid.*, p. 248.

all the year round', he said, 'and pay in money which we find the most advantageous and to command the best workers'.¹ Lester worked more or less in the same way as Thomas Gilbert, dealing with his workers at his shop, and by travelling round the villages. But despite the scale of his business, he does not seem to have used a lace factor, presumably because his brother Charles helped out with the organization.

Some dealers fixed the price they would pay to workers in advance of the lace being made and this again encouraged loyalty. A guaranteed return for an accepted standard of workmanship was an arrangement which many lacemakers would have liked but often could not find, for wages, particularly when paid by smaller dealers and factors, were often the subject of haggling on the payer's side.² John Bigg, a dealer in Buckingham, said in 1863 that his plan was to:-

supply the pattern and material to the lacemakers, fixing beforehand the amount he will give for their labour, the lace then belonging to him as a manufacturer and the pattern remaining his also.

The pattern and materials seemingly were free.³

The dealers often expected high standards of workmanship in return for their favours. Thomas Lester, the 'terrible autocrat',⁴ was notorious for his high standards, and it was 'not without trepidation' that women and children went to his shop in Bedford High Street, and then in the Arcade, to take in their finished laces and obtain fresh orders.⁵ He would not take work which was shoddy, or discoloured, and reputedly trapped

1 *ibid.*, p. 262.

2 See below, pp. 261-2.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 259. There were no 'customary' prices as, for example, existed in the hosiery trade. See, F.A. Wells, *op.cit.*, pp. 81-4.

4 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 207.

5 *ibid.* Lester moved into the Arcade in the 1890s.

the fingers of inefficient workers in the drawer in which he kept his materials, a sharp reminder of what he expected next time.¹

Thomas Lester was one among a number of dealers who saw their problems in a long perspective. By controlling lace schools they aimed to train children up to their desired standards, so that by the time the children became adults they would be well-versed in the various patterns and stitches and in the habits of punctuality and reliability which the dealers demanded of them. Mrs. Treadwin, the Exeter dealer, said she had established lace schools 'in order to train up a set of lacemakers suited to this business'.² The pupils in her schools were taught by a skilled mistress who received a wage of as much as 12s. a week, which was two or three times greater, and more certain, than the wages gained by most workers in the trade at this time.³ In this way Mrs. Treadwin said she 'ensured the regularity'⁴ of training which presumably she could not have got if the children had been trained more casually in schools not directly under her control. Thomas Lester also dictated the kinds of laces to be made in many schools in his district, and supplied all the patterns.⁵ He left it to the mistresses to recruit his child workers, and they also had the responsibility of allocating the work which he had prescribed. Lester simply collected the laces from the schools and payed the children for what they had done,⁶ but he could be sure they had been closely supervised, for the mistresses' livelihood depended

1 Bedford Times, 2 November 1956.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 255.

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*

5 *ibid.*, p. 262.

6 *ibid.*

upon school fees.¹

The mode of collection of laces from the schools varied from one dealer and one school to another. In some schools the childrens' parents sold the laces to the mistress who paid them by the piece and the mistress then received payment from one dealer for the value of the money she had given out. In this way the mistress acted as factor for the lace dealer and sometimes travelled with the finished laces to the dealer's centre. Mrs. Goodman, a mistress at Elstow, took her childrens' laces into Bedford before bringing back their wages, fresh materials and orders, though she received no commission for this.² In other cases the childrens' parents took the laces into the dealers' centres, together with the laces they had made themselves.³

An increasing number of schools functioned not for any particular dealer, but on a speculative basis, opening and closing according to the state of the trade. The children worked on materials they had bought freely and sold their laces wherever they could.⁴ Standards of workmanship and reliability were not as high here as in the schools organized for particular dealers.

The temptation always existed for a factor to sell laces on his own account and a few did purchase lace threads privately and sell them to lace workers wherever they could. The finished laces they sold either in their own shops or to any dealer who may have wished to buy them. William Ayres, a dealer in Newport Pagnell, said that he bought laces both from his workers and from 'a small shop' in one of the villages'.⁵

1 See above, pp. 189-190.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 263.

3 *ibid.*, p. 259.

4 *ibid.*, p. 258.

5 *ibid.*, p. 259.

In this way, some lace factors could scarcely be distinguished from lace dealers. But their scope as part-time dealers was limited. They could not produce difficult patterns, nor probably even judge a well-designed piece of lace, and in this sense the expensive market was beyond their reach. Standards of workmanship were at their lowest and payments in truck and low wages were at their most predominant where small dealers and factors were in operation.¹

The associated problems of organization were those of tabulating the outgoings of materials and the receipt of finished laces, and of avoiding embezzlement. The situation required some kind of accounting system by which the dealers could record each worker's allocation of materials, the date at which they were given out and the date at which the completed laces were expected to be and in fact were returned. Each dealer tended to work out his own method, according to his own experience and the demands of his business organization. Thomas Gilbert explained to investigators how he kept a check on all aspects of his dealings with workers, both at his centre in High Wycombe, and in the villages:-

The value of the lace brought in by each maker is entered in one column in a book; in another column is the amount of fresh orders, material and patterns taken out; in another the amount of goods as grocery and drapery, if the lace-maker likes to take away instead of money; and the balance is paid in cash. From some I buy in the villages, travelling round for the purpose, an account of the lace sold and the fresh materials being taken in the same way.²

Rachel Read listed her workers in a note book, giving each one a number. Against each number she listed, in a number of columns, the worker's name, the type and quantity of lace each worker was to make and the wages she paid for their efforts. When the lacemaker had completed her task, a

1 See below, pp. 254-263; 350, 355-6.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 257.

final column marked the laces 'returned'.¹ When Mrs. Read received orders from private customers she seems to have subdivided the order in pieces among a selected group of workers. On June 23rd, 1896, she received an order from Mr. J. Critchley of Manchester for various pieces of lace worth £4.5s.9d. and allocated the task among a number of workers as follows:-

1	set of collar and cuffs	(Mrs. Ping) ²
1	"	(Mrs. Wilson)
1	"	(Mrs. Pulley)
1	old point border	(Mrs. Maynard)
3	handkerchiefs @ 3s. 4d. each	(Mrs. Maynard)
1	"	(Mrs. Warley)
3	round collard @ 13s.	(Mrs. Foster)
2	bags	"
1	smaller	"
1	border	"

Presumably the allocation was checked out to these workers in her note book in the usual way.

The activities of Thomas Gilbert and Mrs. Read are the only ones of which any note has survived. To what extent their accounting system enabled them to avoid embezzlement is difficult to surmise. Embezzlement had undoubtedly existed well before the nineteenth century. In 1761, Richard How, a Bedfordshire Quaker, had proposed to marry Silena Ramsey and had decided to establish her as a lace dealer in Aspley Guise. Having taken advice on the matter of establishing such an enterprise from established pillow lace dealers, he decided there was one major problem to be guarded against, and advised Silena how to counter it:

One ought to have some knowledge of the lacemakers before one engages with them, as 'tis common practice amongst them to get patterns, thread, money and goods from one, and then sell their lace to another, and if prosecuted in Ampthill court etc., to make over their effects to a relation so that there is nothing left to seize and the creditor is only laughed at.³

1 Beds. C.R.O. 2391/4. Miscellaneous Note Book.

2 ibid.

3 Beds. C.R.O. HW86/47. Letter from Richard How to Silena Ramsey. 17 November, 1761.

This kind of problem was also apparent during the nineteenth century, particularly in respect of patterns, for during the 1830s there were 'a number of persons of both sexes going about the country, from house to house, collecting anything they can buy, and they are searching for every pattern they can lay their hands on, which they will buy if they can'.¹ John Millward had personal experience of the problem:

The other day, at Easton Mandit, in Northamptonshire, a woman brought me a bit of lace - I did not know but that she had been all the time working for me - I took it. She wanted a new pattern. Some person reminded me that she had not been there for a twelvemonth before, and that when she wanted a new pattern, she came to me again, to get one to hawk about and sell where she pleased.

The problem was made more serious by the fact that only one pattern in ten was successful and hence the producer of the pattern could derive a good deal of benefit if he could maintain its exclusiveness. Millward sought, apparently without success, the protection of Somerset House where, he felt, every pattern should be drawn on a stamp and any other person found working that pattern within a certain time should be fined and any manufacturer who had given it out should be fined more heavily still.² Such goings on still existed in the 1850s, and had a deleterious effect on standards of design, for many of the skilled designers left the industry as a result.³

Generalizations on this industry are difficult, but the pillow lace dealers were probably able to manage their workers as well as had any dealers in the history of the putting out system.

There were no prosecuting committees

1 S.C. on Arts and Design, 1836, op.cit., p. 18.

2 *ibid.*

3 See below, pp. 298-300; 331-2.

such as were established in the woollen cloth industry,¹ and even in the small outwork net-making industry in Dorset,² and no account of prosecutions appear in the Bedfordshire assize records.³ An old worker recently remembered one dealer's response to such trafficking by his workers. Recalcitrant workers were simply sacked: 'if any worker sold to another buyer she got no fresh orders'.⁴ Yet very few workers could probably afford to refuse the dealers' demands, and the lacemakers were notoriously poor and timid.⁵ Workers engaged by dealers on a regular, or cash-wage basis were probably grateful for such small mercies as these and as a result may well have had little inclination to cheat. In lace schools, which for long had provided a good basis on which to train technically-efficient and responsive workers, the childrens' training was rigorous enough to instil into them a realisation of the values of prompt delivery, accurate workmanship and honesty.

It would be extravagant to claim that the dealers were successful in every case, for quite clearly they were not. That orders were sometimes delivered late is shown by the late or even non-payment by London wholesalers for goods arriving behind schedule from Devon, and it has been seen that patterns were sometimes hawked fraudulently. The fact that the dealers left few recorded complaints does not necessarily mean all was well. But a wide variety of consignments of lace of the required quality do often seem to have been delivered to the market on time, few workers seem to

1 See, S. Pollard, *op.cit.*, p. 31.

2 'Notice to flax combers, spinners and purchasers of net and others whom it may concern'. December 1858. Lodged at the Bridport Museum. Dorset.

3 Bedfordshire Assize Records (1800/1900): Beds. C.R.O.

4 Bedford Times, *loc. cit.*

5 See below, pp. 253-4.

have sold laces privately, and though the theft of good patterns was a problem, most dealers dealt in relatively cheap ones and there seems to have been no general problem in this respect. And since most dealers made cheap laces the technical problems were in any case somewhat more moderate than those faced by the smaller number of skilled dealers; workers making relatively poor laces were probably less difficult to control in a technical sense.

The very fact of the industry's survival suggests a certain degree of success. But the poverty and fear which helped the dealers control their workers during the first half of the century eventually came to work against them for it began to repel workers from the industry. Thereafter, the characteristic problems associated with the putting out system intensified to such a degree that dealers, finding delivery dates increasingly uncertain, the quality of work increasingly less predictable¹, were unable to arrest the industry's path to extinction. Many of the old generation of laceworkers began to age and die, and their replacement rate was falling.² Yet these problems were partly the dealers' own doing, for even the more generous among them had scarcely paid the workers more than a pittance. Low wages were one of the factors which eventually pushed young girls to look other than to the pillow lace industry for their employment. The second half of the nineteenth century saw the dealers come up increasingly against the conservatism of the ageing women who remained. The old workers were neither fit, nor flexible, nor forward-looking enough to cope with the constantly changing and often complex artistic patterns which were often the requirements of survival and this, as will be shown, was an important factor in the industry's eventual demise.

1 See below, pp. 361-2.

2 See above, pp. 180-184.

CHAPTER 9

Wages and Profits

Faced with the problems of a highly competitive market situation, in which the long-term prospects often seemed to be bleak, both workers and employers in the pillow lace industry strove to preserve their traditional way of life and standards of living. But it proved difficult for the two groups to work in great harmony, for their interests, though ultimately united in the industry's progress, often came to be opposed in the day to day process of worker-employer relations. Not least of the reasons for this was that labour was the dealers' major cost of production. Yet in respect of wage-bargaining dealers generally had the whip hand, for the supply of pillow lace workers was almost always in excess of their demands for it and the lacemakers were a notoriously timid and unorganized group. Relationships between dealers and lacemakers tended to worsen as the century moved on and as dealers exploited their workers through wage deductions and payments in truck this proved to be an important factor in the eventual erosion of the industry's labour supplies. Those workers who proved unable or unwilling to leave the employment often found the industry's decline an unhappy, painful experience. Memories of former days, clouded with nostalgia and delusion, tended only to enlarge the bleak contrast with the reality of their contemporary situation. Many lace dealers also found it difficult to maintain their former living standards and were forced to drift from the trade.¹ Yet those who were successful were able to make substantial profits until the century's end and the contrast between dealers and workers points surely to the conclusion that

1 See above, pp. 157-161 and below, pp. 298-300.

the dealers' prosperity rested, to a great degree, on their ability to exploit their labour force.

It is impossible to estimate the lacemakers' earnings with any precision at any one time, and for this reason it is not possible to draw up a meaningful wage series. Much depended on the worker's varying skill, on her physical strength, on how often she was unemployed, on whether she was paid in money or in truck, or by a lace dealer or his factor. A varying proportion of the lacemaker's wage would be taken back by her employer in payment for materials and it is seldom clear if the wages quoted at any particular time are for all kinds of work, or only for the best work, or if they were being paid to the worker all year round or for only part of the year. For these reasons, and in the absence of any wages books, it is impossible to transcribe quotations of wages at any particular time into any kind of wage index. Wages varied considerably from one worker to another, from one era to another, from one dealer to another and from one year or season to another; a meaningful average figure cannot be formed.

A number of general statements on wages were given by contemporaries, however, and these give a rough indication of the course of wages during the century. It is clear, for example, that after 1815 the laceworker never again earned as much as her father or husband, or as much as she had during the War years. By the mid 1820's adult laceworkers in the south-east Midlands were said to be earning 3s. a week, children of nine or ten 1s.6d. and a woman had to work 'very hard to earn even sixpence a day'.¹ In the West Country, 'the best hands' who formerly earned 8s. to 10s. a week, 'could now earn not more than 2s.6d. or 3s.'² Even allowing for the

1 Times, 9 March 1829. The figures related to 1826-9.

2 Devon and Wiltshire Gazette, 6 April 1826.

problems of generalization noted above, this clearly compared badly with the Napoleonic years. Wages were equally as low, if not even lower, during the early 1830's. In the 1834 Poor Law Report most women were said to be earning between 1s. 6d. and 2s. a week, and their children (aged less than 12), between 1s. and 1s. 6d.¹ When compared with what had been earned not so long before these wages were poor indeed, though a family's earnings at the lace pillow could still be an important contribution to family income,² for in the 1830's most agricultural labourers earned less than 10s. a week and indeed their real wages rose only moderately in the next four decades.³

The late 1830's saw the industry re-adjust to the post-war situation on a more effective basis and prices began to rise as English lace won back some of its old popularity.⁴ The improvement in the industry's fortune seems to have been reflected in a slight improvement in wages, though with a good deal of variation, and not sufficient to dispel the workers' memories of what had been earned not so long before. Elizabeth Chalice remembered in 1843, with some remorse, that 'I used formerly to get my living easily at it, but it is now very difficult'.⁵ To attain what was regarded as a satisfactory minimum, a laceworker now had to work for longer hours, and at a generally harder rate than ever before. A young woman had to 'work very hard for 14 or 15 hours a day', said a Royal Commissioner, 'to earn 3s.6d. a week, who formerly could easily have made 8s. or 9s.'⁶

1 Report of the Assistant Commissioners into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws. Appendix B, Answers to Rural Questions, Pt. I, XXX, (1934), pp. 2a-48a.

2 See below, pp. 410-416.

3 J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, The Agricultural Revolution, 1750/1880, (1966), p. 190.

4 See below, pp. 307-316.

5 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D.31.

6 *ibid.*, p. A.12.

There seems to have been no improvement by the 1860's when the Royal Commissioners' investigations of childrens employment once again provide some detailed information. One old worker felt it was now necessary to work from 'daylight until nine or ten at night to make it worth her while at all'.¹ Sarah Jane Perry, who was a 'quick worker', said she had never earned more than 3s.6d., and complained she could not earn 'enough to put anything in the post office bank'.² Yet 3s.6d. was considered to be 'very good', and a more usual level quoted was anything between 2s.6d., and 2s.6d. a week. An 'indifferent' girl would hardly get a farthing an hour,³ while at Beer a woman was said to be capable of earning 4s.6d. only by working from 8 a.m. until 11 p.m. every day, and on Fridays right through until 2 a.m. on Saturday morning.⁴

By the final quarter of the nineteenth century the payment of wages in money, as distinct from truck, had become even more spasmodic and the increasing age of most of the workers did nothing to help them in their wage bargaining. Yet at boom times the workers could, as happened at Honiton in 1871, still earn from 2s.6d. to 6s. a week, though most were earning less.⁵ When the industry was examined in the 1880's wages had become so low in most parts of the south-east Midlands that very few new workers were being attracted by the craft, and many of the old workers were laying their pillows aside. In the south-east Midlands the majority

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 259.

2 *ibid.*, p. 251.

3 *ibid.*, p. 263.

4 *ibid.*, p. 252. The Reverend Gidley, of Branscombe, said: 'The girls can earn out 1s.6d. a week but out of this have to pay 4d. for schooling and pay for thread and pins, pricking patterns etc., besides, and get hardly anything clear'. *ibid.*, p. 250.

5 R.C. on Truck System, op.cit., II, 1871, p. 875. For details of truck see below, pp. 254-263.

of workers were now receiving only a penny an hour though 'there were not a few workers who, without home or family connection, support themselves on this'.¹ In Devon, on the other hand, it was still possible for some workers to earn 3s. a week even in 'bad times' and, in good days, from 10d. to 1s. for a day of 10 to 12 hours.² Some of Mrs. Treadwin's workers were earning 2s. to 2s.6d. a day and her youngest hands were able to earn 5s. or 6s. a week.³ Yet at Colyton, a few old ladies were earning only 1s. or 2s. a week and were receiving outdoor relief.⁴ There was still much variation, though by this time skilful workers were very much in a minority.

In sum, the trend in wage levels following 1815 seems roughly to have been downward in the 1820's and 1830's, up slightly in the 40's and 50's and then down again from the 1860's until, by the 1880's, there was no consistent pattern. Statements on children's wages are particularly difficult to evaluate. Elizabeth Ring, a lacemaker at Sidbury, gave the depressing estimate in the 1840's that a girl could 'not clear more than 5s. in her first year, paying for school, thread and pattern'.⁵ On the other hand, Mary Driver (aged nine) said that she had earned 3d. per day for eight to nine hours per day.⁶ Yet another girl said she had earned nothing for the first six months.⁷ Much clearly depended on the ability of each child and whether or not deductions were taken for raw materials. Major Burns estimated in 1843 that girls of 10 to 13 might earn 1s. to 2s. a

1 A.S. Cole, Report on Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire Lace Industry, 1891, pp. 1-2.

2 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 3.

3 ibid., p. 4.

4 ibid., p. 3.

5 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 249.

6 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., App. to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D.29.

7 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 249.

week, after paying school fees and this is the only general estimate available.¹

There seems to have been no appreciable difference between the wages paid in the different counties, though in Northamptonshire, where laces were relatively cheap and crude, the average level was probably slightly lower than elsewhere, and there were probably more payments in truck in Devon, as will be seen. Much depended not only on the worker's skill, but on the kind of pattern being used. Makers of the finest laces generally earned most and the sewers-on in Devon were a good example of the value sometimes placed on skill. Their peculiar attributes were in short supply and as a result they generally received at least double the wages paid to anyone else. In the 1870's they could earn as much as £2 per week, when other women were earning a maximum of 6s.²

Wages were paid for the more expensive laces such as veils and flounces by the piece, and for the cheaper lace edgings, which were known as 'yard lace', by the yard. Devonshire workers were often paid at so much per dozen for the small sections of lace, known as sprigs, which were subsequently sewn together by the 'sewers-on' into complete designs. When employed by wealthy dealers the lacemakers might find their wages fixed in advance, but many laces were taken in on collection days and paid for according to their immediate, observable merit and as such were subject to a degree of bargaining.³

Hard bargaining was perhaps only to be expected of dealers who found, in the words of the Jurors at the Great Exhibition in 1851, that

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., App. to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. A.12.

2 R.C. on Truck System, op.cit., II, 1871, p. 875.

3 See above, pp. 235-240.

'the worth of the actual material bears such a small proportion of the value of the article itself, as to make the amount paid for the labour expended in its production to be almost the sole cost'.¹ It was unfortunate for the pillow lace workers that they were in no position to counter the dealers' strength. Scattered widely in small villages, they had little chance of combining together to form a trade union. None of the women had had more than a fragmentary taste of elementary education. Cowed and physically exhausted by their work and of an increasingly high average age, the laceworkers were not likely to be a breeding ground for active trade union leadership. The majority of workers, living close to subsistence, evidently preferred half a loaf to no bread at all, and while falling wages and payments in truck were often complained about, economic necessity generally dictated that these had to be accepted. A commissioner investigating the extent of truck payments in the industry in 1871 likened the lacemakers to the glovemakers of Ringwood in Hampshire, and found their response to dealers' practices to be more or less the same:

They are usually all exceedingly timid, and ... did not seem aware that it (truck) is illegal. None of them seemed to know that; and I should mention that anything like combination among them would be utterly impossible. They are too poor a class, too few and too dependant; they could not combine to oppose it.²

For these reasons the dealers were able to transfer a large proportion of their losses onto their workers, particularly by dealings in truck, a system defined by Alfred Marshall as one of 'getting back by underhand ways part of wages which they [employers] had nominally paid away'.³ One of the

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 463.

2 R.C. on Truck System, op.cit., II, 1871, p. 874.

3 As quoted in G.W. Hilton. The Truck System (1960), p. 40. The author shared Marshall's conclusion.

dealers admitted to a commissioner in 1862 that this was how he had cushioned himself against falling prices:

The nominal value of hand lace has fallen at least sixty or seventy per cent, but from the price of the cotton used in the making it being reduced and also that of the goods being given in exchange being reduced in a still larger proportion, the real reduction in the value of the lace is much less than the apparent, but still the falling off is very great.¹

Payments in truck had existed in the lace areas for at least a century before various government Reports in the middle of the nineteenth century revealed just how widespread they still were. In 1799 an Act had been passed specifically to prevent trucking in this industry, but this, and the general Act of 1831, had been almost totally ignored.² The Commissioner on Children's Employment pointed out in 1843 that 'the custom of exchanging lace for goods instead of money prevails through the pillow lace districts'³ and the system continued to blight the lives of pillow lace workers until the industry's final days.

It was in this way, even more than by wage cutting, that most dealers kept their costs down to a minimum. Mrs. Mobbs, a Northampton dealer, admitted in the 1840's that while she had once paid all her workers in cash she now could not afford to do so, and was 'obliged' to pay them in truck if she was to maintain her business interests.⁴ Certain dealers claimed that it was:

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- 1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 250.
 - 2 The two Acts were 19 Geo III, C49 and I and 2 Geo IV, C37. A few dealers had been fined under the latter. R.C. on Employment of Children, First Report, 1863, loc. cit.
 - 3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D6.
 - 4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, pp. 260-1.

an accommodation to them [the workers]. They often get advances while doing the work and sometimes advances ahead of the work which they say is a great advantage to them.¹

The shopkeepers gave the workers credit in groceries and, according to one, 'let them work out their debts at leisure'.² Mrs. Hayman, a dealer at Otterton, said:

I have a grocery and provision shop and pay them in my own shop goods ... I feel obliged to let them have something but they are so poor that I can scarcely ever get them out of my debt.³

The extent of debts such as these was never made clear, however. There is no evidence of long term net debts such as arose in the coal industry and in common with most industries in which truck appeared the debt probably was no more than a week's advance. In most industries net debts were seldom very large and most employers tried to avoid them whenever possible, since they had the disadvantage of reducing the employer's ability to discharge his employees, since the debt had often to be taken on by the new employer.⁴ It is a moot point as to whether debt was encouraged as a device to limit labour mobility, not least by extending the arrangement to the workers' families. There is no evidence of this and dealers who sought to maintain supplies of skilled labour tended, rather, to encourage them by favours such as cash payments. Debt was most prevalent among petty dealers who generally had more than ample supplies of the relatively poor quality labour they required and it is not likely that there was sufficient competition among them to encourage policies of a kind which,

1 R.C. on Truck System, op.cit., II, 1871, p. 875.

2 *ibid.*

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 254.

4 G.W. Hilton, op.cit., p. 5.

in any case, may have been ineffective; repressive systems such as this could, for example, have repelled workers rather than maintain them.¹

The major reason for the existence of the truck system in most industries seems to have been the circumvention of general trade union wage rates.² Yet there were no such rates in this industry and the dealers' protestations that the truck system was used for the workers' benefit clearly belies the fact that it was used primarily to take money back from a weak labour force. In particular, it enabled shopkeepers to force on their workers those articles at their own price and weight which they could not sell to their money customers. Since many of the lace dealers and factors were also dealers in groceries and drapery, sometimes with a local monopoly, they had no difficulty in obtaining exchangeable goods. Indeed, the situation provided an easy opportunity for disposing of goods which were not selling well. The workers were often unaware of the true market value of the goods they received and frequently were forced to take them at prices well above the true market level. One lacemaker, Harriet Wheeler, complained that:

I know of boots bought at a shop for five shillings a pair, being sold to the lace girls for ten and six, and of other cases of a similar kind. Every article is charged to the lacemakers something over the price paid by other people. Calico which I get for seven pence would be nine pence or ten pence to a lace girl; lump sugar instead of sixpence half-penny the half pound would be eight pence; candles ditto; bacon is always one penny or two pence a pound dearer to them, and other things in the like manner and all the year round. I wish the government could do something to stop this it is so cruel. Any shop that would pay ready money and sell on fair terms would make a fortune.³

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- 1 For details of the difficulties of analysing the motives behind the truck system, see *ibid.*, pp. 45-55.
 - 2 *ibid.*, p. 45. This was the view first developed by S. & B. Webb, Industrial Democracy, (1902), pp. 317-18.
 - 3 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 248.

Another worker was so exasperated by a dealer's 'so exacting' prices that she vowed she would never work for him again.¹ But it is doubtful if she could afford or would have the temerity to live up to her intent.

By dictating the types of good which were handed out, and by controlling the days on which the distribution took place, the lace dealers were able to reduce their workers to an almost complete dependence upon them:

They will give out these goods on certain days as once or twice a week, the days here being, I believe, Wednesday or Saturday and then not what the lacemakers wish but what the manufacturers like to allow and think needed for actual use. Thus, two loaves of bread and half a pound of butter form part of a common weekly allowance. The object of this is to prevent the people from selling the goods and so getting anything which they might wish for at other shops where they could get it better. Sometimes a manufacturer actually refuses something that is asked for, on the grounds that it cannot be wanted for use but for sale. The other day a girl who had been working long hours to earn more came to me and asked me if I would buy from her a pound of white sugar for six pence halfpenny, if she could get it; six pence halfpenny being the proper market price, though the price of this sugar would be put down to the girl herself at eight pence. Still, for the sake of ready money she wished to do this. But she was unable to get the sugar, the manufacturer saying she did not want it for her own use. The lacemakers feel this very much and I have seen them crying because they are not allowed to get any money.²

Such transactions were most commonly the province of the smaller dealers and lace factors who often had grocers shops. In the south-east Midlands some of the larger dealers almost always paid in cash, though some charged a discount, usually of 2d. in the shilling, for so doing. There again was a good deal of variation. Thomas Gilbert offered payments in goods as an option,³ Jane Betts, a laceworker at Nash in Buckinghamshire, sold her

1 *ibid.*, p. 267.

2 *ibid.*, p. 248.

3 *ibid.*, p. 257.

lace to a travelling buyer, 'a principal dealer', who paid most in cash 'but expects you to take a little tea, which he brings round in small packets'.¹

Truck payments were at their greatest in Devon, where the control of the industry was less concentrated. Nearly all of the trade here was 'in the hands of the people with shops of some kind'.² There were seven such shops in Otterton, and at Branscombe there were four, all of which dealt with their workers in groceries and drapery.³ At Beer none of the dealers paid cash.⁴ Elsewhere, one or two dealers mixed their payments, half in clothing, a quarter in groceries, and a quarter in money.⁵ At Sidmouth, Mrs. Hayman paid half in money and sold 'plain goods such as calico and fustians' for the rest.⁶ It was said by some workers in Devon that in general it was impossible to get more than 2s.6d. in cash out of every 12s. of their earnings.⁷ In this respect it was the least efficient workers who suffered most, for workers of a high calibre could work for a dealer who wished to ensure the quality of his labour supply and so paid in cash. It was always advantageous to live close to a large dealer in a town. The workers who could 'not get the work taken in the town' had 'to take it for sale into the villages', where the truck system was 'very general'.⁸

It is hardly surprising that when the Commissioners investigating

1 *ibid.*, p. 260.

2 *ibid.*, p. 246.

3 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, *op.cit.*, pp. 3-4.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 252.

5 *ibid.*, p. 250.

6 *ibid.*, p. 249.

7 *ibid.*, p. 251.

8 *ibid.*, p. 247.

the Truck System arrived in Devon in 1871, some of the lacemakers were 'very anxious that it should be done away with, and they seemed quite delighted with the enquiry', though there was little they could do about it themselves.¹ Yet the lace dealers took an ambivalent attitude. Many said they were 'not ashamed of it', while others, presumably those who did not pay in truck, 'tried to create an impression that there was a certain amount of oppression about it'.² Those who did pay in truck could scarcely deny their obvious sins, and probably sought their refuge in the industry's sad condition, for by this time the smaller dealers were generally struggling hard to make ends meet, and probably protested that there was little they could do to alleviate or change the situation. One dealer excused the position thus:

The shops have to pay so dear for their own goods that they cannot afford to make money payments and only do so when trade is very good, to a small extent giving perhaps a shilling or so at a time.

But she admitted that:

the lacemakers like best to have money and so to be able to buy their own goods when they please and will all go to the shop at which they can get any money so that when one shop in a place begins paying money as they do sometimes in a good time of trade others must do the same or be left without lace.³

The dealers who did not pay their workers in truck were equally quick to point out its evils. 'The practice of trucking', said Mrs. Godolphin, 'is the greatest evil in the trade and ought to be stopped'.⁴ The local clergy expressed similar misgivings, and one clergyman had gone so far as to implore some of the London wholesalers to deal with the workers

1 R.C. on Truck System, op.cit., II, 1871, p. 875.

2 *ibid.*

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 257.

4 *ibid.*, p. 246.

directly, though they had not taken kindly to his suggestion.¹

Lace dealers and their representatives also limited the real value of their workers' earnings by discounting money payments at a rate of so many pence in the shilling. This varied from 1d. to 2d. or 3d. and the practice was something at which the lacemakers grumbled very much. There was often a certain amount of haggling and workers can still remember that Charles Lester never payed as much as his brother Thomas, and was avoided whenever possible.² But lacemakers often had little or no idea of the value of the laces they were making and this, apart from their lack of confidence and physical strength, made it difficult for them to bargain. Elizabeth Perry complained that 'they are beat down very much', and she received only 4½d. for every 6d. worth of lace she produced.³

Since very few workers could afford to buy their threads with cash the cost was usually taken out of their wages and there was very little the workers could do to stop the dealers charging arbitrary prices and so recovering more of their costs in yet another way. A dealer explained:

If these (threads) are bought either from the wholesale buyer or from the shops with money actually brought in the hand, they are sold at the market price, which would be about four skeins of cotton or one skein of silk for the penny; but if, as must usually be done, they are paid for out of the value of the lace brought in, something is taken off in discount so that about three skeins of cotton are actually given for two pence or less than half the proper amount; at any rate unless all the value be taken out in goods of some kind. The lacemakers call out at this more than anything else, and say that it seems so hard to have their money taken off in this way as soon as they take their work in without getting the benefit of it.⁴

1 *ibid.*, p. 251.

2 *ibid.*, p. 246. Interview with Mrs. Cirket, Dec. 1969.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D30.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 257.

What made the situation worse was the prices of the threads charged by the dealers took no account of fluctuations in the price of lace or of the decline in thread prices which had come about from the 1820's as a result of cheaper imports of linen threads and the advance of cotton thread production. By insisting that the laceworkers took their threads only from them, the dealers were able to charge whatever exorbitant price they chose:

Though the lace does not by a third at least fetch what it did formerly, they are forced to take their thread at the same enhanced price as before and if they did not buy their thread off them they would not take their lace.¹

One lacemaker complained that the dealer 'finds fault with the lace if not made with his own thread and says, you got that at the shop'.² The result, in her experience, was that she was not paid for her exertions and had to take the lace home in the hope that she could sell it elsewhere. She estimated that for every shilling she received from a dealer she would have to pay 4d. for silks, or 1d. for cotton, depending on the lace she was making. From the draper she could buy 10 skeins of cotton thread for three farthings yet the lacebuyer gave her only one skein for 2d.³ When patterns were changed with great frequency the situation was at its worst. 'If the pattern is changed regularly', said one lacemaker, 'there is a good deal to pay out of the four shillings I earn'.⁴

For all of these reasons it is difficult to estimate the workers'

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- 1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. 1, 1843, p. A12.
 - 2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 259. Ann Freeman was also troubled by this and complained that 'A young woman must work very hard to earn sixpence a day; you see, we pay as much for thread now as we did when trade was better, and better prices given'. R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1943, p. A5.
 - 3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 259.
 - 4 *ibid.*, p. 257.

wages during the course of the century with any precision. There clearly was much variation and not all dealers were as tough in their dealings as those described above. Some, such as Mrs. Treadwin, and some of the major dealers in the south-east Midlands, were prepared to pay high wages for work of a high quality and others were willing to pay money wages, sometimes in advance, to ensure the quality of their labour supply.¹ But the general impression is that most dealers, and their factors and bagwomen, took the opportunities to cut wages in these various ways, whenever the opportunities presented themselves. The situation was symptomatic of the industry's troubled times.

There was little the laceworkers could do other than grumble, however. Poverty and their need for an income, however small, forced most into a grudging acceptance of their position. Many of the workers were so poor that they took small pieces of lace to local dealers as soon as they had made them. 'They bring in a piece of lace as soon as they have done it, every day and sometimes twice a day - it may be as little as a couple of penny worth - and beg you to take it, that they might get something to eat'.² If the alternative was nothing at all then truck payments were readily accepted. Some dealers excused themselves by claiming that they could only keep workers in employment all the year round by paying them in truck:

The people seem to like the system in some places because, they say, the principal people supply them with work when Honiton lace is not in fashion and when there is no great demand for it and in good times.³

1 See above, pp. 239-240.

2 R.C. on Truck System, op.cit., II, 1871, p. 875.

3 *ibid.*

The workers were 'very poor', said a commissioner, Mr. Beadon, 'and one hardly knows how they would live if it were not so'.¹ Hence, the practice of trucking continued throughout the industry's history. At the end of the nineteenth century local grocers' shop windows were often filled with laces which had been exchanged for goods. The laces stood side by side with bottles of brandy balls and dips,² a sad reflection of the rural poverty which had been instrumental not only in the survival of such practices of trucking, but of the industry itself.

To the negative, pathetic response of most laceworkers there were, here and there, just a few bold exceptions. At Beer, a small fishing village on the coast of Devon, where one might least expect to find a radical spirit, the lacemakers were keeping two shops themselves during the 1880's, 'selling to customers the laces they had made on patterns pricked on old parchments'.³ And at Sidbury, another coastal village in Devon, groups of girls occasionally worked together to make 'a collar or something, and get a few shillings in money by selling it privately'. But they did so only at the risk of 'being caught by a dealer and never being given work again'.⁴ These exceptions were few and far between.

* * * * *

The lace dealers' situation often contrasted sharply with that of their workers. Even during the industry's most difficult days, many were able to make sufficient profits not only to keep active in the trade but also to furnish their families with a highly comfortable living. Pillow

1 *ibid.*

2 Factory and Workshop Commissioners' Report, op.cit., I, App. D., 1876, p. 173.

3 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 3.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 248.

lace had always been profitable business, if never exceptionally so, despite its many fluctuations. At the end of the seventeenth century some dealers were already leaving considerable legacies.¹ A Newport Pagnell dealer left two cottages and £180, both of which had come 'from the sale of my bone lace'.² Throughout the century lace dealers had been active on the local markets in property and land, indicative of men with an accumulated wealth. In 1686 John Mathewes, a lace buyer from Newport Pagnell, had sufficient surplus capital to loan £100 to Richard Gale of Clifton Regis, on the surety of his grounds and spring well.³ The expansion of the eighteenth century brought greater prosperity. Robert Ramsey of Woburn, another lace buyer, received in the seven years from 13th May 1767 to 5th July 1774 over £1093 from the rent of properties he had purchased with his profits in London.⁴

Lace dealers were often men of some social position. This could either have helped them in their business, or have been the product of it. In 1651 William Wootton, of Carlton, was given the responsibility of being guardian to the orphaned Francis Gregory, aged seventeen, and was made trustee of his property until he came of age.⁵ Dealings in lace might

1 See above, p. 46.

2 Bucks. C.R.O. W298.

3 Beds. C.R.O. St.594.

4 Beds. C.R.O. N.C. 1386. See also above, p. 46.

5 Beds. C.R.O. AD 1604/1766.

also lead to socially prestigious marriages, such as that which took place in 1788 between the daughter of Thomas Hamilton, lace merchant, and the Reverend Samuel Greathead of Newport Pagnell. Hamilton paid over £1000, a considerable sum, in marriage settlements.¹ Status might sometimes come in a religious way. In October 1821 Thomas Bull, a lace dealer, was made trustee of the chapel and grounds belonging to the Calvinistic Baptists at Stevington, with the power to mortgage the premises and dispose of them should the congregation ever disperse.² Thomas Coombs and Benjamin Trapp were trustees of the Bedford Charity and aldermen,³ George Hurst held the same positions, and was also a member of the Bedford Burial Board.⁴ John Millward was at one time secretary of the Bedford Reform Club.⁵ Perhaps the most respected of all lace dealers was Thomas Gilbert, who for many years was a local councillor and borough magistrate, a director of the Building Society and of the Waterworks Company. In 1873 he became mayor of High Wycombe.⁶

During the French Wars the wealthiest dealers were said to have made 'considerable fortunes'.⁷ Margaret Pettit died in 1818, at Leighton Buzzard on the fringe of the lace area and left £3000 plus her lace business and good will to her son.⁸ Other dealers thought nothing of mortgaging considerable loans, or of transferring large sums in settlement of marriage. When Mary Talbot, the sister of John and Robert Talbot, married Thomas

1 Beds. C.R.O., L16/6.

2 Beds. C.R.O. X239/9/6/1.

3 Bedford Mercury, 6, 13 Feb. 1860, 4 Sept. 1847.

4 *ibid.*, 5 March, 1860.

5 *ibid.*, 23 January, 1841.

6 Bucks. Herald, 15 July 1885. I am also indebted to Mr. Davies, County Archivist, Bucks. C.R.O.

7 S. & D. Lysons, Magna Britannia, I (1822), p. 482.

8 Beds. C.R.O. RY/113.

Collier a wool stapler from Kettering, the brothers arranged for £1020 in three per cent consols, part of their property, to be transferred to her husband.¹ Three years later Robert Talbot still apparently found no difficulty in mortgaging £8500 to Thomas Gell, a wealthy landowner, on the surety of his lands at Sharnbrook.²

The Talbots had sold their business in 1820 for £3000 and the money had been invested shrewdly. When Robert Talbot died in 1834, he left behind him a large fortune to be shared among his family. The bulk of his estate (of an unspecified value) he left to his brother John, to his numerous sisters, nephews and nieces he left £1800, to his sister Mary an annuity of £150 per year, to his housekeeper £20 per year, and to his manservant £12.³ Seven years later his brother John followed him to the grave, and his will reveals in greater detail the means by which the family's profits from the lace trade had been effectively utilised.

John Talbot had speculated widely in the property market, leaving numerous cottages and lands at Olney, Sharnbrook, Carlton and Turvey. He also had invested heavily in government stock. To his sister Mary he left £12,000 in three and a half per cent real annuities 'part of my stock in that', and £50 per year in consolidated lay annuities. To two nieces and a nephew, Talbot left another £12,500 in three and half per cent consolidated bank annuities, plus £3,500 in trust to the youngest. To his sister-in-law he left £100, to three friends £100 each in three and a half per cent annuities. Two labourers who had been in his employment inherited £10 each and his manservant six shillings per week. To the

1 Beds. C.R.O. X106/76. Marriage Settlement. Thomas Collier and John and Robert Talbot. 12 Oct. 1821.

2 Beds. C.R.O. X106/81. Mortgage. R. Talbot to T. Gell. 27 Aug. 1824.

3 Probate Registry (Somerset House). Will No. 246/26 (1834).

poor of Sharnbrook, at whose hands so much of his wealth had been accumulated, Talbot left £19. The residual of his goods and estate he left to his sister Mary.¹

Even in the middle of the nineteenth century, some dealers were able to leave sizeable legacies. Thomas Gilbert left over £20,000 when he died in 1885,² though his business was diverse and it is not possible to assess the profitability of his interest in lace. Thomas Lester died in 1910,³ by which time his business must have shrunk considerably from the 1860's. Yet in his will he still described himself as 'lace manufacturer', and left an estate to his daughters valued at over £25,000. Mrs. Treadwin left over £17,000 when she died late in 1890.⁴ Both Thomas Lester and Mrs. Treadwin had diverse business interests and like the Talbots had probably invested their profits wisely. The profitability of their lace businesses is therefore difficult to assess, though both probably felt the lace business was their main interest.

Records of dealers' profits other than these are scarce and it is not possible to give any overall assessment of the course and extent of profits during the course of the century or to identify any regional differences, though there no doubt were relatively more rich dealers in the south-east Midlands than in Devon, since businesses here were often larger. In general, there clearly was much variation between one dealer and another. Thomas Lester was among the most successful, but the many

1 Probate Registry, Will No. 1041/50 (1841); Bedford Mercury, May 15, 1841.

2 Bucks. Herald, 15 July 1885.

3 Probate Registry (Somerset House) Will No. 53 (Jan. 1910).

4 Probate Registry Will No. 149 (1891). Hosiery and Lace Trades Review, 5 Jan. 1891. Mr. Davis, a Honiton dealer, is said to have left over £70,000, but his will has not survived. A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 4.

petty dealers made much smaller profits than his and at various times during the century many had had to abandon the business altogether. But the substantial profits which accrued to some of those who remained had in all cases been sufficient to encourage them to continue in the business for many years after the threats of machine competition and imported hand made laces had first emerged at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. No doubt their success could, in part, be attributed to business acumen, for many dealers, as will be seen, had responded well to the problem of these times.¹ Yet an important element in the success of dealers such as Thomas Lester had clearly been their ability to exploit their workers. Lacemakers had always been among the poorest section of the lacemaking communities and perhaps by the nineteenth century this seemed to some dealers to be the natural order of things. But there is no doubt that some dealers could have paid their workers larger sums than they did and the poverty and unhappiness of their labour force, though clearly the product of diverse factors, was partly their responsibility. To a large degree, the industry's losses and problems were pressed heavily upon its workers, though no doubt there were many dealers who would have withdrawn from the business had they not been able to deal with their workers in an extortionist way.

1 See below, Chapters 12, and 13, *passim*.

CHAPTER 10

The Industry in Competition: Problems & Sources

English pillow laces were being sold during the nineteenth century in a highly complex competitive situation which was always changing as the nature and prices of the various fabrics available on the market and as fashions and public tastes were constantly being altered. The industry was confronted by two gigantic opponents, the machine producers of Nottingham (and to a lesser degree of Calais) and the great army of hand producers on the continent. In terms of the scale of output and the size of its organization it was dwarfed by both and it took all the ingenuity of the industry's organizers to survive against them. For there was scarcely a corner of the market for lace in which, almost as soon as the Napoleonic Wars had ended, the industry was not confronted by a competitor. The machine industry was very quickly into the cheap market, and especially that for plain net and edgings, where much of the English industry had traditionally made its home and as the century progressed it was joined here by certain sectors of the continental hand industry, as they sought to diversify their products so as to survive in a highly competitive situation. In the more expensive market, the competitive threat evolved almost in the reverse order, for here it was the industry's traditional rivals which at first were the greatest threat, only to be joined, by the mid century, by the equally ominous threat of cheap, yet fine imitation laces made by machine. All told, this added up to an extraordinary challenge which, in the long run, the English pillow lace industry was unable to contain.

Within what might broadly be called the markets for cheap and

expensive laces, an enormous variety of laces were available, all of which the potential consumer had to assess on a wide range of criteria, before purchase was finally made. Among the various determinants relative price levels loomed large, for this was a luxury industry in which the cross elasticities of demand are normally high. Price competition was particularly strong in the market for cheap laces where, by and large, the machine industry very quickly had the upper hand. Yet this was a highly fashionable fabric, and even in respect of cheap laces, fashion trends, and originality in fabric textures and design, could be important considerations to the consumer, in some cases sufficient to outweigh price differentials. This was as true of competition between the English and continental hand producers as it was of competition between hand and machine.

That the market was by no means governed entirely by economic rationality, or by technical differences between the various products, was particularly evident in the choice by some relatively rich consumers between machine and hand-made lace. For the very success of the machine industry in turning out cheap, yet indistinguishable imitations of almost every known hand-made lace caused many fashionable ladies to view good pieces of hand-made lace in such a nostalgic, often romantic way that they would buy them at almost any cost; indeed, by the 1860s, the higher the price, the more likely they were to buy them. Yet even at the end of the century a very large section of this fashionable class was also buying large quantities of cheap machine lace, partly because it was cheap, yet more particularly because it once again was highly fashionable.

Throughout the century the English pillow lace industry found itself competing with the machine industry, with continental handworkers and sometimes with both. Generalizations

about the industry as a whole are somewhat precarious and not least because a whole host of laces of different kinds were being produced and were competing with different laces, at various times, and in numerous market situations. Indeed, the geographical location of the various market outlets was very important, for the laces of Nottingham, Honiton, Brussels and so on were not always competing on the same ground and there was a certain degree of loyalty to English pillow laces, in certain areas, even at the century's end.

It follows from what has been said that considerations on the one hand of the relative quality of goods available on the market, of their prices, of changes in these prices and the technological and organizational processes which created them, and on the other, of changing consumer tastes and fashions, must be among the key aspects of an analysis of the progress of the English pillow lace industry during the nineteenth century. Yet the analytical framework must necessarily be limited by the availability of suitable data. In certain respects there is no shortage; there is an abundance of material on the market for lace, on technology, on the nature of the various fabrics and, by way of the 'ladies' magazines which abounded during this century, contemporary newspapers and a host of books written during the twentieth century, on fashion.¹ Contemporary assessments of some reliability also exist of the scale and nature of the machine industry's output, and of the prices of the goods it turned out.² But comparative statistics of the hand industries are much more difficult to find and in many cases are subject to a degree

1 See for example, J. Laver, Taste and Fashion (1937); D.C. Calthrop, English Dress from Victoria to George V (1934); A. Buck, Victorian Costume and Accessories (1961).

2 See above, pp. 78, 80, 83, 84, 86, 89, 90, 101, 102, 104, 108.

of romanticism or bigotry which makes them either wholly unacceptable, or available for use only with extreme caution. By and large there is very little to compare with the relatively detailed estimates given of the machine industry by William Felkin and guesses as to the scale of the hand industries' output can only be derived from estimates in secondary sources and by calculations, which are not always entirely reliable,¹ based on official import and export figures. Price data is also relatively difficult to obtain and is difficult to compare with that available for the machine industry for, in contrast, very few price lists of hand-made lace have survived, particularly for the years before 1880, from which date such information is of relatively small consequence since the industry was then moving rapidly and irredeemably towards its extinction. Private letters and bills of purchase and sale, referring specifically to the prices of pillow lace, are scarce, while the accounts books belonging to dealers in this kind of industry have a notorious habit of disappearing and none of any substantial usefulness have survived.²

The position is made even more difficult, as was recently explained by an investigator into retailing in Great Britain, by the fact that 'very few shops have preserved comprehensive records of their history',³ and those that have survived seldom date before 1880.⁴ Newspaper advertisements

1 See, for example, above, pp. 211-212.

2 See above, pp. 223-7.

3 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. viii.

4 The following department stores were contacted: Peter Robinson Ltd.; Swan & Edgar, John Lewis Partnership; Army & Navy Stores and Debenhams. All claimed to have no records dating before the 1880s and in some cases later; Debenhams did not respond. Much of the John Lewis archive was destroyed in the war.

are more readily available, but these more often take the form of general advertisements, such as 'Edward Green announces his return from London with a superb collection of Chantilly veils and falls, French blondes, Mechlin, Valenciennes laces and edgings, Buckinghamshire thread lace, Brussels and Chantilly nets',¹ rather than of detailed and comparable lists of the prices of the various goods being sold. It is not always clear, moreover, whether the goods being advertised are of machine or hand production, and advertisements for 'laces 2d.; good laces 6d.; large 10d.; black and white veils (large) 12s.',² such as appeared now and again, are not particularly helpful. Only an occasional list of prices of similar articles produced by the various competing industries can be drawn up and comparisons must therefore be made on a less rigorous basis than might ideally be desired.

Some supplementary reliance must be placed on more general statements by observers of the industry's progress, in parliamentary enquiries, newspapers, histories of the English pillow lace industry and so on, though there are sufficient of these to give a fair degree of consistency in generalization, especially from the 1830's onwards. Particularly useful guides to the industry's progress during the years from 1851 onwards were the catalogues and reports by the Jurors of the International Exhibitions in 1851 and 1861, to which the products of the industry and its competitors were submitted. These provide useful indication on fashion trends, on the variety, quality and occasionally prices of the fabrics under consideration, as well as general statements on the industry's recent progress and its

1 Trewman's Exeter Flying Post, 8 May, 1837.

2 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 2 May, 1829. Advertisement of 'Spring Fashions' by Martin and Lewellin, 233 High St., Exeter. Further examples are included in the narrative below.

future prospects.

Of the numerous histories of the industry written during or after the 1860's, by far the most important, and fruitful in this context is that by Mrs. Palliser first published in 1865, when the industry still employed roughly 25,000 workers.¹ Mrs. Palliser (1805-78) was a sister of the novelist Captain Marryat and lived in Sidmouth for many years. Here she took an active interest in the local lace industry, once procuring various patterns of a high quality for the workers, and submitting the results at the Bath and West of England Society's show. Her understanding of the industry was unique, her account of its history unusually detailed. Mrs. Palliser was a regular contributor to Academy and the Arts Journal, produced a Descriptive Catalogue of Lace and Embroidery in South Kensington Museum in 1871 and was one of the leading organizers of the International Lace Exhibition there in 1874. Her own collection of lace, comprising 657 items from Italy, Spain, France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, England, Sweden, Jamaica, Russia, Brazil, Maderia, India and Ceylon, was presented to the Royal Albert Museum in 1874. Her book, though tinged with an element of romanticism, is nevertheless a mine of information, both on the history's evolution and on its organization in the nineteenth century; it provides the most detailed contemporary account of the industry during the period in question outside of parliamentary papers, and, if used with caution, is indispensable,² for it gives a good general view, almost decade by decade, of how the industry was progressing.

In the absence of reliable figures on the industry's gross output, figures of employment taken from the not entirely reliable censuses of

1 See above, pp. 176-9.

2 The book was brought up to date in 1902 by the Misses C. Channer and M.E. Roberts, two devotees of lacemaking.

population,¹ are the best statistical indicator available of the progress of an industry which had but little fixed capital. These accord fairly well with more general statements on the industry's circumstances, in histories, fashion journals, parliamentary investigations, newspapers, and so on. Movements in the level of prices are also a useful indicator, though there was a good deal of variation in the fluctuations of the prices of the different fabrics being produced. In general, falling prices were taken by contemporaries as indicative of falling demand and output, with upward movements generally denoting the reverse. During the 1820's, for example, while most general accounts speak of the industry in 'depression', the indications are that prices generally were falling, while during the 1840s as demand was increasing and the industry's output was increasing beyond the level of the 1830's, prices were rising.² The same was also generally true of wages and of the regularity of employment, though here there was also a good deal of variation from one person to another and general statements made by contemporaries to these effects must therefore be treated with a certain degree of caution.

The pillow lace industry had no trade journal of its own and the Nottingham industry did not publish one until the 1880's.³ In its absence, one of the most fruitful sources of information might be expected to be local newspapers, since in many areas lacemaking was the dominant non-agrarian employment. Yet the information in local newspapers is piecemeal, and there was very little interest shown in the more general aspects of the industry's progress. While the papers abounded with often trivial

1 See above, pp. 175-6.

2 See below, pp. 297, 299, 323, 327.

3 The Hosiery and Lace Trades Review commenced publication in 1889.

reports of 'sensational' or 'horrible' murders, ran regular columns of 'maxims to live by' and contained full reports of national and international economic and political events, very seldom was a report given on the industry's current situation, or prospects, and only occasionally does a reader's letter express alarm or delight at this, and its associated social consequences. Here and there a reference appears to the business and political activities of one who is known, by other sources, to have been involved in the lace business, and advertisements generally increased in the spring, but the lack of local interest in this industry was indeed extraordinary. Though it is almost always a slow and difficult process to follow the activity of any industry in the local press, one was far more likely to find a report of the Lancashire cotton industry, of the straw plait industry, of the boot and shoe industry, or the progress of the national railways, than of pillow lace; references to this industry are unusually scarce even by a historian's modest standards of expectation.

One can only conjecture as to why this was so. Though pillow lacemaking was a great employer of labour in many areas it was, nevertheless, only a secondary employment to agriculture. It was also based largely on the employment of women and children, and the income derived from their employment, though of significance in the family budgets,¹ was essentially secondary to that derived by the male. As such their employment was probably somewhat less newsworthy since the effects of its diminution were less catastrophic. In certain areas too, alternative sources of industrial employment were of greater significance in terms of the derivation of income for

1 See below, pp. 409-416.

that area; boot and shoe making in south Northamptonshire, chair making in and around High Wycombe, straw plaiting and hatting in central and southern Bedfordshire and adjacent fringes of Buckinghamshire. Each of these industries received more consistent news coverage than pillow lacemaking, and whereas the experience of the pillow lace industry, throughout the century, was seldom remarkable in any particular way (its successes were moderate, its 'decline' a long, drawn out affair), these industries, until the 1880's at least, were relatively expansionary and successful. This may well be the most important explanation. The Bedford Mercury, printed at Bedford in the heart of the pillow lace areas, almost always gave more news of straw plaiting, even though the industry was based further south at Luton and Dunstable. In 1845 an editorial announced, perhaps significantly in this context, that

the number of hands wanted (by the straw hat industry) is about equal to the population of Dunstable and barely half that of Luton; yet we believe the influx of trade to straw hat manufacturers warrants such demand. The south of Bedfordshire has become the leading manufacturing district of this county from no great natural advantage but from a spirit of enterprise and activity of mind which the north of the county is not accustomed to.

It went on to suggest that the capital of the county might even be removed to the south, such was the relatively moribund state of industry and lack of enterprise in the north.¹ The Bedford Times was even more enthusiastic, claiming in the middle of the century that Luton's

fame has been trumpeted abroad and the inhabitants of distant towns have envied its growing greatness; multitudes have flocked from all quarters to share with the Lutonians their renown and success. Houses forming streets and little towns in its suburbs have sprung up like magic. It has been designated the beehive of England and represented as the mart where industry was best rewarded.²

1 Bedford Mercury, 25 Jan. 1845.

2 Bedford Times, 18 Sept. 1847.

An example of the relative lack of interest in lacemaking, when compared with straw plaiting, occurred in the 1840's, when the tariffs on imported laces and straw plaits were both reduced. Typically, the Bedford Mercury contained in 1842 editorials and several readers' letters on the 'uncalled for reduction' in the tariff on straw plait,¹ but a reduction in the tariff on lace in 1842 and 1847 brought no response here, or in the West Country, where even the reduced tariff on straw plait had been reported.² Such was the weight of the straw hat industry's lobby against the proposed tariff that the old tariff was eventually increased, rather than reduced.³ The pillow lace dealers made no such endeavours, though the reduced tariff undoubtedly represented something of a threat to the lace trade.⁴

An industry which was expanding and succeeding was clearly of greater interest and worthy of greater support than one which was not. This was an era in which the pervading idea was progress, yet the pillow lace industry belonged essentially to the past, and one senses a certain indifference to it as a result. Whenever the industry enjoyed a success, such as the production of Queen Victoria's wedding dress in Devon,⁵ or occasional royal patronage 'such as is consistent with the duty she owes to rival products',⁶ or the award of prize-winning medals at the 1851 Exhibition, the papers tended to report the event and to allocate their

1 Bedford Mercury, 26 March, 2 April, 9 April, 16 April, 1842.

2 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 16 April, 1842. There was little straw plaiting done in Devon.

3 Bedford Mercury, 14 May, 1842. The tariff was increased from 5s. to 7s.6d. a cwt.

4 See below, pp. 318-319.

5 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 14 Feb. 1840.

6 *ibid.*, 18 Feb. 1860.

support. But successes of this degree (and particularly those with social prestige) were limited and the rest of the industry's history was dull by comparison; perhaps a sharper demise such as afflicted the handloom weavers would, ironically, have brought greater coverage. It was not until the 1870's and 80's and the development of a romantic, ostensibly philanthropic interest in the industry's preservation (too late, in any case, to be of real usefulness), that letters and articles abound. Until that time the papers were more inclined to include information on the industry only if it coincided with news of some greater social, even snobbish interest. The death of an important-dealer, or the occasional periods of progress, such as took place during the 1850's, were of little consequence; the Queen's presentation of a £5 note for a sturgeon fish which had been given to her from the husbands of the 'simple and warmhearted' lacemakers, was.¹

It is hardly surprising that the industry's situation proved on the whole to be equally unattractive to the professional economist, politician or journalist; only Frederick Egels showed more than a cursory interest.² A far greater interest in the industry was taken, however, by government reformers who eventually discovered that the industry harboured a good deal of sickness, noxious working conditions and harsh industrial discipline, though it was not until 1888 that a special report by a government department on the industry first emerged.³ On the whole, the parliamentary reports,

1 'It is a pleasing fact that our beloved Queen has not lost all recollections and sympathy with this part of the coast of Devon. It was in this neighbourhood that she spent a portion of her infant days ... It was from this parish that she received one of the first manifestations of attachment on the part of her devoted subjects, in a present of lace, from its simple and warmhearted workers. And in the last few days she has sent to the brothers and sons of these workers a present of £5 in return for a fine sturgeon'. *ibid.*,
The Queen sent another £5 for a second sturgeon a little later. *ibid.*, 23 June 1860.

2 See below, pp. 447-8.

3 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, loc. cit.

particularly those on the Employment of Children in 1843 and 1863, are most fruitful sources of information on many aspects of the industry's history, including its competitive problems, and they have the advantage that they suffer far less from the problems of bias in the selection of witnesses and of pressure group politics, as for example, did those organized to enquire specifically into the situation of the handloom weavers.¹

The eventual reform of employment conditions in the industry was almost totally dependant upon parliamentary reforms and owed little or nothing to local interest. Here and there a few members of the local clergy, poor law officers and schoolboards advocated piecemeal reform, and lacemakers are mentioned in reports by these,² but by and large the local population and papers seem to have preferred, perhaps from shame, to look the other way. Perhaps the industry's situation would have aroused more concern had the lacemakers been better organized and more vociferous in their complaints. As it was, they had no trade union, they indulged in no political actions, they were often infirm and unwell and, according to commissioners on the Truck System, had little heart for making their industry, and its deficiencies, public.³ No lacemakers of the era before the 1880's now survive and the few old lacemakers still living have little recollection of industrial organization and only muddled and often romantic tales to tell.

The material available on the industry in this context is therefore of a quite varied quality and there inevitably must be some uncertainty and qualification in any conclusions which are drawn. George Dodd described

1 D. Bythell, *op.cit.*, pp. 16-17.

2 See below, pp. 445, 448-9, 461.

3 See above, pp. 254-5.

the pillow lace industry in 1844 as, 'gradually dwindling into insignificance'.¹ Infact, the industry's history during the nineteenth century can safely be seen to fall into four major phases: 1815-30, a period of depression; 1830-40, a period of moderate recovery; 1840-62, a period of modest success, and 1862 onwards, a period of rapid deterioration. These are analysed, in turn, in the chapters below.

1 G. Dodd, *op.cit.*, p. 208.

CHAPTER 11

Competitive Difficulties 1815-30

A discussion of the industry's competitive problems best begins in 1814, for then the somewhat uncharacteristic prosperity of the Napoleonic years already seemed to be in imminent danger of disappearing and the industry's dealers already seemed to be aware of the imminence of their future problems. Hostilities had been brought to a halt by the Treaty of Paris and a movement for the reduction of tariffs to the old levels was mounting. In this temporary lull from war French feminine modes resumed their supremacy throughout Europe, and as the French workers increased their output of lace the English flocked in great numbers to Paris to replenish run down stocks.¹ When the House of Commons proposed, on November 14th 1814, to resolve itself into a committee to discuss the protective Act of 1806 with a view to removing the existing set of tariffs on foreign imports and to replacing them by a 20 per cent ad valorem duty, the lace dealers were quick to recognise a threat to their livelihood, and gathered to oppose the move.

The strength of the dealers' reaction indicates the extent of their feelings of insecurity and of the unreality of their position during the War years. A meeting was held at the Swann Inn, Newport Pagnell on December 21st 1814, 'for the purpose of taking into consideration the resolutions of the House of Commons of 17th November last on the Act of Parliament passed in the 46th year of His Present Majesty for better encouraging the Manufacture of Thread Lace in Great Britain'.² The

1 J. Laver, Costume, op.cit., p. 87.

2 'Minutes of the Lace Manufacturers Committee' (21 December 1814 - 14 June 1816), William Cowper Museum. Olney.

minutes of the meeting, now housed in the former home of the Buckinghamshire poet, William Cowper, give a full account of this and subsequent gatherings which took place regularly until the 14th June, 1816. Mr. Isaac Hanley Handscombe, a lace dealer, chaired the first meeting at which a committee of 55 members representative of other dealers in the trade was formed, 'for carrying the resolutions of this meeting into effect'.¹ The meeting resolved immediately that any single group of five members of the committee could, if called upon by the Chairman, be empowered to act as a lobbying group on behalf of the others, adding to their numbers whenever they saw the need. The committee decided to call itself the Lace Manufacturing Committee and was unanimous in its resolution that 'any duty imposed by the Legislature on Foreign Thread Lace except by the System of Law, now existing agreeably by the provisions of the said Act of the 46th year of His Present Majesty Cap 81,² would entirely ruin the manufactory and materially affect the General Trade and Landed interests of the counties of Buckingham, Northampton and Bedford and the adjoining counties where the Lace Manufactory is carried on'. Indeed, during this lull from war, the Committee suggested a surcharge of 20 per cent might well be invoked by the government for additional protection.

The Committee decided to appeal directly to parliament, agreeing that the members of parliament for the lace districts should be entreated to oppose any Bills which might be introduced into the House of Commons by the committee which was currently investigating the 1806 Act. For the expenses which might arise, a subscription fund was opened, to which the dealers present contributed £411/10/-. Messrs Olive and Co., bankers, of Stony Stratford, were appointed treasurers, and William Lucas, of an

1 *ibid.*, 21 December 1814.

2 See above, p. 60.

unstated address, solicitor. To bolster funds a further call was made on members on January 11th, this time for £25 per head.

The Committee was very quickly into action, sending a letter to the Marquis of Buckingham who promptly agreed to a personal consultation with their representatives at Aylesbury. He eventually met a deputation consisting of 13 dealers: Isaac Handscombe, the brothers Trapp and Smith, John Talbot, Temple Hillyard, William King, Adam Corrie, Henry Lovegrove, William Gurden, John Casts and Michael Smith, together with Mr. Lowards, the member for the county of Buckingham. The results of the meeting were not communicated to members but the Committee recorded thanks for the Duke's advice and shortly afterwards expressed a similar gratitude to six M.P.s: Lord Althorpe, Lord Compton, Mr. Cartwright, Mr. Lowndes, Mr. Pym and Mr. Hanbury, who presumably had been enlisted into the cause.

Meanwhile, Charles Smith, John Talbot and William Lucas composed a collection of 'Observations' on the effects a reduction of the tariff would have upon the industry and those who depended upon it. The 'Observations', 'respectfully addressed to the Landowners, Farmers, Tradesmen and the other inhabitants of Buckingham, Northampton, Bedford, and the adjoining counties', were designed to 'show the necessity of petitioning parliament to prevent the proposed Bill from passing into a law'. The case was stated emotively, appealing to the hearts of those who might feel compassion at the distress which would follow the industry's decline and to the pockets of those who might suffer from the resultant increase in poor rates and decline in local economic activity.

The authors were imbued with the traditional sense of the right of every self-respecting citizen to appeal to parliament for redress¹ and in

1 See E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (Pelican ed., 1968), Ch. II, passim.

so doing revealed both a considerable skill as pamphleteers and a good deal about their fear of competitors abroad:

It is one of the glories of the British Constitution that those who live under it have free permission at all times to petition parliament on any subjects that they may deem proper and expedient. In the present age and period this privilege has been frequently resorted to, and to the Honor of both Houses of Parliament the Prayer of petitioners has generally been attended to and answered when it has been responsible and important.

There had seldom been an issue as important or of such public responsibility as this:

Few occasions, where temporal interest has been concerned, have more loudly called for the adoption of this Constitutional and Successful Measure than the present occasion calls on the Landowners, Farmers, Tradesmen and other inhabitants of the counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire and adjoining places to use the same expedient in order to prevent the proposed Bill for repealing the Duties on Foreign Laces from being passed into a law.

For the effects of the proposed Bill would be disastrous not only for the lace dealers but for the lace community as a whole. The dealers claimed a selflessness in their demands:

Should this Bill receive the sanction of parliament the effects will tend to the ruin of many thousands of the industrious poor of the counties above mentioned who will be reduced to the utmost distress and obliged to throw themselves upon their parishes for relief. Some persons have imagined that the Lace Manufacturers only are interested in the result of the pending Bill and that their interest alone will suffer by the introduction of French lace. That the Lace Manufacturers will be great sufferers is also too plain a truism, they will lose much by their present stock of lace in hand, and probably the trade will become so depressed that many of them will be obliged to quit their present line of business, and is it no evil for a large body of men to be thrown out of their accustomed habits of trade? But that the Lace Manufacturers alone will suffer is a position too absurd to require any formal confrontation. Common sense will immediately discover its fallacy.

Indeed, the dealers admitted they had a number of avenues open to them by which they might safely mitigate their own position:

It may be proved that the manufacturers will not ultimately be the principal sufferers, and that they will be affected to less degree than many others, for let it be considered, they have no expensive machinery fitted up for carrying on their manufacture, they are under no obligatory tie to purchase English lace any longer than they can derive a fair profit from their trade - they are at perfect liberty at once to divert their property and their attention to other objects of a more profitable nature.

The prime sufferers from a decline in the industry, the dealers argued, would not be themselves, but the women and children whose livelihood depended greatly upon their earnings from lacemaking. If these people were to prosper then their industry must have protection. The English industry could not possibly compete with foreign laces which were often cheaper yet of better quality, and which the Englishwoman, to her shame, often preferred:

When the difference of the price and quality of the article produced by the foreign manufacturer is considered in connection with the prevailing or universal preference which many of our countrywomen give to lace of foreign manufacture, it may with safety be affirmed that no competition on the part of Britain can be supported against the Foreign goods and therefore it appears to be impossible that the poor English lace-makers should obtain by their labour anything more than a miserable pittance quite inadequate to procure for them the bare necessaries of life.

The 'Observation' claimed that at the present time the smaller parishes in the lace districts were earning an income of between £2,000 and £3,000 per annum. Yet even then many of the poor were 'obliged to apply for relief to their parishes'; any decline in the lace industry's fortune would clearly affect the poor most adversely.

This was to say nothing of local tradesmen, whose business activity depended greatly upon the level of income being drawn into their community, or of the farmers who helped maintain the Poor Rates:

What will be the consequence if British lace, through the introduction of foreign should be depreciated in value £25/30/40 or even 50 per cent?, which last computation is not so improbable a case as many may suppose. Many of the lacemakers would be unable to maintain themselves ... the Poor Rates would be alarmingly augmented and this augmentation must be principally supplied by the farmers, and ultimately the landowners would be affected, for in proportion as the Poor Rates increase the rent of farmers must necessarily be diminished. In relation to tradesmen whose business and profits depend so much on the public in general the effects are too obvious to require any elucidation.

Here was good cause indeed for landlords, traders, farmers, lacemakers and dealers to convene and petition parliament to reject 'the Bill to facilitate an ad valorem duty'.

The Committee had high hopes that, with the 'blessing of the Almighty', its propaganda would succeed and that the counties of Buckingham, Bedford and Northampton, and the adjoining counties, would continue to flourish as a result. The campaign mounted during the following months. The resumption of hostilities with France momentarily limited the demand for continental laces, but when the Wars were finally ended the threat was regarded with great seriousness not least because parliament had not yet made up its mind on the proposed reduction of the tariff. A series of letters exchanged between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Committee revealed that French laces, rather than Flemish ones, were then regarded as the industry's greatest competitive threat. The 'prevailing or universal preference' of English women, starved of French fabrics during the Wars, was for these, and the effect of a reduction in their price would most certainly be disastrous.¹

In January 1816 the Committee felt the time had come to lay what

1 Minutes of the Lace Manufacturers' Committee, op.cit., 15 Feb. 1815.

it saw as its trump card and with the support of London lace merchants proposed that the laces of Valenciennes, Mechlin, Brussels and Ghent be admitted at 20 per cent of the value and that all other laces should be charged at 30 per cent.¹

The Committee had for a long time hoped for a direct confrontation with the Chancellor and this was finally arranged for the 12th May 1816. Members of the Committee, together with six members of parliament, Mr. Cartwright, Mr. Lowndes, Mr. Pym, Mr. Hanbury and the Lords Althorpe and Compton, put the case. But the meeting seems, in the event, to have been unnecessary, for on the 14th June the Committee held its final meeting, at which it was reported that it appeared 'to be the opinion of the Chancellor of the Exchequer that no proceeding can be taken on the subject'.² In the long run parliament would do little to help the industry in its struggle, but it had not yet convinced itself of the need to reduce the tariff and the first reduction would not come for another ten years.³ Indeed, in 1819 the tariffs on foreign thread laces were increased, though for the last time, to 2s.6d. a yard for all lace under 5s., 40 per cent for lace over 25s. a yard, and 40 per cent on all silk laces.⁴ The protection, therefore, was heaviest on laces of the cheap variety.

The increased tariff did little to dispel the gloom which had overcome the industry by the early 1820's. By then the buoyant industry

1 *ibid.*, 17 January 1816.

2 *ibid.*, 14 June 1816.

3 See below, p. 301.

4 59 Geo. III, C52. The Act had the following content:

All laces valued less than	5s. a yard,	charged	2s. 6d. a yard.
" " "	between	5s. and 10s.	" 4s. "
" " "	"	10s. and 15s.	" 4s. 9d. "
" " "	"	15s. and 20s.	" 6s. 9d. "
" " "	"	20s. and 25s.	" 8s. 4d. "
" " "	valued at more than	25s.	" £40.

described by observers during the Wars had slumped considerably. Aggregative quantitative evidence on prices and employment is scarce but at Honiton, where in 1795 over 2,000 workers had been employed, there were now only 300.¹ The industry had 'much declined' and Honiton veils, which during the War years had fetched between 20 and 100 guineas, were now fetching only 8 to 15 guineas. The price of hand labour had become so low that 'a pittance sufficient to sustain life could not be obtained by it'.² In 1817 the lace trade in Buckinghamshire was 'considerably less profitable' than in 1815 and a good lacemaker could earn only 8d. a day,³ only a fifth of what her earnings had been during the War years.⁴ As a result of falling wages many lacemakers in Bedfordshire had begun to look to straw plaiting as an alternative occupation.⁵ It had not taken long, following the end of the French Wars, for the English industry's fortunes to have changed remarkably.

An immediate cause of the industry's distress had clearly been the increased importation of foreign hand-made lace. Recorded imports jumped from £3520 in 1814 to £8286 in 1817 and to almost £18,000 in 1825, with the bulk of this coming from France.⁶ Yet the true figure was probably a good deal larger, for smuggling was increasing, and was to continue to do so alarmingly as the decade moved on.⁷ Mrs. Palliser blamed the industry's troubles in the years immediately following the Wars on 'the expertise of

1 S. & D. Lysons, Magna Britannia, op.cit., III, Pt. II (1822), p. 420.

2 Mrs. Treadwin, 'Devonshire Lace', Transactions of the Devon Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art, XV (1883), p. 233.

3 S.C. of the H. of L. on the Poor Laws, V, (1818), pp. 72, 98.

4 See above, pp. 61-2.

5 J.G. Dony, op.cit., p. 32.

6 See Table 10, p. 291. The figures include both pillow and needle-made lace.

7 See below, pp. 301-302. The figures are 'official' values and in any case not strictly accurate since they are valued at prices which held around 1696. See B.R. Mitchell & P. Deane, op.cit., p. 275.

Table 10

Imports of Hand Made Lace Retained for
Home Consumption* in G.B.
Official Values (£)

	<u>Flanders</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Holland</u>	<u>Total £</u>
1814	1973	1435		112	3,520
1816	2673	1771			4,444
1817	3673	4613			8,286
1818	2334	6947			9,281
1819	2786	8873	154		11,813
1820	2569	10489			13,058
1821					
1822	6187	27			6,214
1823	1937	8773			10,710
1824	2710	15218			17,928
1825	3198	14172			17,390
1826	3849	190	170		4,209
1827	2246	21	1073		3,340
1828	2419	113	50		2,582
1829	1940	232	259		2,431
1830	1887	262	138		2,087
1831	818	113	50		971
1832	1097	344	63		1,504
1833	525	1062	1512	42	3,141
1834	1042	566	1300	42	2,950
1835	888	267	929		2,034
1836	700	201	420		1,321
1837	2465	1323	191		3,979
1838	3186	1166	558		4,910
1839	5776	1312	469	49	8,606
1840	4345	1004	582	36	5,967
1841	1854	2115	200	44	4,213

Source P.R.O. Customs 5. Nos. 3-30. 'Ledgers of Imports under articles'.

* Re-exports were very small and have been adjusted for.

the smuggler and the cessation of war'.¹ Certainly, continental laces were now in the height of fashion and the fashion-conscious ladies of the aristocracy and growing middle class now grasped energetically at the renewed opportunity of purchasing their favourite decoration. 'At Almanack's, the Assembly Rooms at Bath and Tunbridge Wells', said Mrs. Jackson, 'the chaperons would gossip of their lappets of Alencon and Brussels'.² The Paris fashion houses were filled with English buyers. The London draper, Messrs. Urling and Co., established in 1817, was just one which was quick to make arrangements in Paris for supplies of the newest articles in French blondes, Chantilly, Valenciennes and Mechlin.³ French laces were popular above all others, for Paris was the centre of fashion and laces gained 'an immense aura of elegance if they came through this source'.⁴

The general drift of fashion towards a light, delicate kind of lace was well-suited to certain sectors of the continental industry, particularly those of Lille, Caen and Mechlin,⁵ where advantage was taken of the change in fashion and output increased rapidly. The demand was particularly strong in England for blonde laces, lightly patterned with borders of leaves and flowers and with slight, fancy fillings. They were used to trim low necks and hems of dresses, or to form gathered ruffs, and from around 1815 were used in alternate strips with muslin, on bodices, sleeves and caps and as a trimming on bonnets and hats.⁶ During the Wars

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 80.

2 E.N. Jackson, op.cit., p. 48.

3 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 36.

4 *ibid.*, p. 37.

5 See above, pp. 127, 131, 148.

6 *Lady's Magazine*, II, 1821; XV, 1824; XVI, 1825. Lace caps of fine blonde were 'generally discarded the moment the fair wearer has taken her breakfast'. *ibid.*, XLIX, 1827, p. 509.

the English lacemakers had produced imitations of many foreign laces, some expensive, some cheap, and imitations of French laces, particularly Valenciennes, Hainault and Dentelle Torchons, known as Greek lace, had been extremely popular. In Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire a cheap 'revolution' lace based on Mechlin styles had been made in great quantity and in Northamptonshire very narrow edgings designed in Lille and Mechlin patterns had been made to trim babies' caps. When the Wars ended these imitations were largely abandoned for the genuine article.

The industry's output and the prices of some of its goods undoubtedly fell as a result of the resumption of imports during these years. Yet to a degree this change merely represented a return to the old pre-war situation, for imports, particularly of expensive fashion goods, had always been a problem. Indeed, once the post-war fashion mania had subsided, the industry might eventually have been able to settle into its former position, had it not been for the emergence of a new competitive element, the marketing of goods made by the lace machine.

A writer of a history of Newport Pagnell said that the competition of the machine industry was not felt with any severity here until 1835,¹ by which time reasonably close imitations of hand-made laces could be produced. But the machine industry was undoubtedly having a greater competitive effect before then. Indeed, the one Buckinghamshire dealer whose comments survive suggests that after 1815 the threat of machinery had been more serious than that of imports.²

In 1809 machine lace had not yet become a common article, but its use was increasing more or less immediately following Heathcoat's invention

1 F.W. Bull, History of Newport Pagnell (1900), pp. 195-97.

2 S.C. on Art and Design, op.cit., 1836, p. 36. Evidence of John Millward.

and it was than that the effects on the hand worker were first felt severely. Until this time, the rival fabrics do not seem to have been widely regarded as substitutes. John Millward, a prominent dealer, said he had 'never heard of machine lace until that of Heathcoat's',¹ and even when the two fabrics had been offered on the market, the product of the stocking frame had often proved difficult to sell. Around 1809/10 a framework knitter had tried to sell single press yarn and later complained that the persons to whom he had offered it had frequently declined, for the machine lace which they had bought previously had often unravelled and become ragged, and despite the relative cheapness of machine lace they had said they 'would sooner give 7 shillings a yard for Buckingham lace rather than 6d. a yard for his'.² Heathcoat's fabric, with its double press twist net was clearly a great technical improvement and demand moved strongly in its direction from around 1809.

Embroidered nets, copied from hand designs, were soon in vogue in the shape of scarves, veils, collars, mantles and pelerines. Urlings lace, as machine net was often known, became part and parcel of the fashionable lady's wardrobe and was worn at early morning, during the day and in the evening, on the appropriate kinds of dress and hat,³ and as much by the middle classes as by the aristocracy, for 'so fast' did those belonging to the middle station of life follow the example of their superiors that 'there are few females of any respectability but what must be looked up

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 210.

2 V.C.H. Nottinghamshire, II, 1901, p. 359, quoting Report on the Framework Knitters, 1812, p. 12. Some of this machine lace was selling at 4d. a yard. For the technical inadequacies of nets produced on the stocking frame, see above, pp. 67-8.

3 Lady's Magazine, II, 1820, pp. 52, 274; XVI, 1824, p. 228. Embroidered nets were also known as 'British Point Lace and British Mecklin'.

to for the taste and elegance of their costume'.¹ At this time British Net was 'universally worn' on full dress,² though it was not until the 1820's that demand was further enhanced by the support of the Royal Family, an act which brought typical approval in fashionable magazines:

Every day brings with it some fresh proof of the interest which our beloved Monarch takes in the welfare of his subjects. His Majesty has been graciously pleased to give His Royal Order for some pieces of the British Mecklin ... This mark of His Majesty's benevolence, if our nobility generally follow the illustrious example, will, we trust, be of essential service to the manufacturing interests of Nottingham.³

By the middle of the 1820s, and probably much earlier, the sale of embroidered Nottingham lace, and plain net, extended well beyond London, into the provinces, and even into the heart of the old pillow lace districts. T. Dawson, a linen draper situated next to the Crown Inn at Aylesbury, sold Nottingham lace alongside Buckinghamshire pillow lace in 1825⁴ and Urling's dresses were highly fashionable at Exeter at roughly the same time.⁵ Plain machine-made nets were available in 1827 from Colson and Spark, the Exeter drapers, at 3 yards for 1d.,⁶ and G. Seward's lace warehouse, of Fore Street Exeter, had 'immense stocks of net', as well as 'every article of lace'.⁷ During the 1820's the prices of hand-embroidered machine-made net tumbled remarkably as its

1 *ibid.*, XXV, 1825, p. 636.

2 *Ackerman's Repository*, *op.cit.*, III, p. 1707.

3 *World of Fashion* IV, 1827-8, p. 203. Orders were also received from the Duchesses of Gloucester and Clarence, and from the Queen of Wurtemberg.

4 *Bucks. Beds. and Herts. Chronicle*, 19 Nov. 1825.

5 *Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, 6 Jan. 1827.

6 *ibid.*, 10 March.

7 *ibid.*, June 2, 1827. Martin and Lewellin, also of Exeter, were selling plain net in 1829 at ½d. a yard, figures nets at 16d. *ibid.*, 2 May, 1829.

output increased. In 1813 finished plain net had been wholesaled at 40s. a square yard, by 1824 the price had fallen to 8s.¹ By then Heathcoat's machines were producing over 10,000 meshes per minute, in comparison with the handworker's five, and the value of the machine industry's output was well above that produced by hand.²

The effects of these developments were first felt by the hand industry shortly after the adaptation of Heathcoat's machine, and at both ends of the market spectrum. While fashionable ladies bought large quantities of net, plain and embroidered, the poorer purchaser bought smaller pieces and particularly cheap edgings and borders, the production of which increased as John Brown's improvement of Heathcoat's machine was gradually adopted following its invention in 1811.³ Fashion clearly was an important factor in this demand, for at this time machine lace was new and exciting. But price competition was also important in both markets and particularly in the cheaper market where the pillow lace industry had traditionally made its home. According to John Millward the challenge had first been felt during the Wars, but the end of the Wars had seen 'a most singular change; Nottingham gained on us then seriously'. The 'outcry for cheap articles' had soon made the Nottingham industry 'a more dangerous rival' than the industry's old foe, the hand workers of France.

1 Felkin listed the prices per square yard of plain finished net as follows:

1813	40s.	1824	8s.	1836	10d.
1815	30s.	1827	4s.	1842	6d.
1818	20s.	1830	2s.	1850	4d.
1821	12s.	1833	1s.4d.	1856	6d.

W. Felkin, 'The History and Present State of the Machine-Wrought Lace Trade', Journal of the Society of Arts, IV (1855/6), p. 483.

2 See above, pp. 83, 211.
 3 See above, pp. 75-6.

And while the 'Nottingham manufacture goes on steadily improving', the pillow lace industry was 'constantly deteriorating' and 'excluded by the price'.¹ Indeed, William Felkin claimed that by the early 1830's the hand workers were already being undercut on equivalent pieces by a ratio of eight to one.²

The early advance of the Nottingham industry affected the pillow lace industry somewhat differently in its two sectors. Heathcoat's plain net had quickly made its impact on the industry in Devon, where the groundwork and motifs of leaves, flowers and scrolls were made separately and were subsequently stitched together into collars, dresses and so on by specialist workers known as 'sewers on'. Heathcoat's net proved to be a serious competitor, for it was a cheap substitute for hand-made net and the result, according to Mrs. Palliser, was disastrous:

The invention of Heathcoat's dealt a fatal blow to the Honiton net makers. A hopeless struggle ensued between manual labour and the results of science: human industry yielded under the pressure. For twenty five years the lace trade suffered the greatest depression.³

There was no possibility of the hand workers competing, either in terms of output or price, prices tumbled⁴ and hundreds of networkers were thrown out of employment, so much so that during the twenty years following Heathcoat's invention the art of producing hand-made net was almost lost.⁵

To an extent, however, Mrs. Palliser's Devonshire depression had

1 S.C. on Arts and Design, op.cit., 1836, p. 36.

2 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 419.

3 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 408.

4 'A piece of hand-made net which once had sold for pounds was sold for as many shillings and soon for as many pence as the price of net made on the machine tumbled'. E. Treadwin, loc. cit., pp. 233-34.

5 *ibid.*

been self-induced for it was not only the networkers who had suffered. In the comfortable days of the French Wars the Devonshire pillow lace dealers had seemingly been so unaware of the developments taking place only a few miles to the north of them, that when the machine industry's existence had finally dawned upon them they had made the fateful decision, out of sheer panic, to compete with the machine industry on its own terms. Rather than consolidate on the originality and beauty which traditional designs had to offer, or attempt to improve the quality of their laces, the Devonshire dealers had decided to foresake the best of the foliated and floral designs of their forefathers and to produce instead, a cheap and hideous set of patterns of a lower quality than they had ever turned out before. 'Out of their own heads', said Mrs. Palliser, 'many dealers concocted turkey tails, frying pans, bullocks hearts. The most senseless sprigs and borderings took the place of the graceful compositions of the old school; not a leaf nor a flower was copied from nature'.¹ Many of the trained expert designers who had once created patterns for a large number of dealers began to flee from the trade, only to be replaced by inexperienced dealers with little or no notion of taste or design.²

The panic had a spiralling, adverse effect on the industry's situation. As prices fell, even less care was taken and bad designs further damaged the industry's reputation. In the absence of good designers, many of the old patterns which had been retained by lacemakers and dealers were pricked from and altered until their artistic value was lost. Such new patterns as were now created tended to come from dealers

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 409.

2 A.P. Moody, op.cit., pp. 39-40.

lacking sadly in expertise. In this way the industry in Devon not only failed to adjust in these early years to the requirements of competition with the machine but, by seriously reducing the quality of its workmanship, further diminished its ability to compete with the pillow laces produced by its rivals on the continent. In the 1820s, the London trade announced 'regular arrivals of continental laces of all kinds'¹ and particularly of Chantilly, Caen, Mechlin and Lille blondes which were in great popularity until well into the 1830's, as fichus, ruffs, sleeves, dresses and trimmings of all kinds.²

The impact of mechanisation was also felt in the south-east Midlands at more or less the same time, though perhaps with less immediate severity. Here, the groundwork and motifs were made up in a single whole and there at least was no distinct group of hand net-makers to be threatened. Charles Pinnock observed in 1819, however, that the lace trade in Buckinghamshire, and especially at Newport Pagnell, High Wycombe and Amersham, had recently been 'much injured by the employment of the machine', and no doubt particularly by the production of cheap quillings,³ though Thomas Wright suggested that the threat extended to more fashionable goods also:

The low prices at which machine lace could be sold caused great consternation among the Buckingham workers. 'Nottingham Net' was followed by 'Urlings Imitations'. It was in Urlings Patent Lace that Mrs. Stephens sang 'And they're a Noddin' and that Mademoiselle Noblet danced. Belgravia and Mayfair wore it on their Cleopatra backs and fashioned it as a mob cap under their sea green bonnets.⁴

1 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 37.

2 J. Laver, op.cit., pp. 84-88. Lady's Magazine, XVI, 1824, pp. 227-28. Lady's Cabinet of Fashion, Music and Romance, VII, 1835, pp. 65, 132, 198, 436.

3 C. Pinnock, History and Topography of Buckinghamshire (1819), p. 14.

4 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 213.

In this district, a large number of lace dealers also fled the industry and by the mid 1830's the industry's organizers were said to be 'quite another class from what they were 20 years since'. The business had been largely 'taken up by shopkeepers and travellers and other persons, who know very little about it'.¹ The complaint was made by John Millward, if perhaps with some over-statement, for a number of the old dealers had, infact, survived. Yet there is no doubt that the general quality of lace dealers and especially of lace designers had been weakened. Millward was acutely aware of the necessity of good design, but complained that now there were very few of the old designers left. He was envious of the Nottingham manufacturers who had 'the singular advantage' that

if a person should succeed in an attempt at improvement, he takes out a patent and is remunerated; but in our case the patent laws are totally unavailable... our improvements are principally confined to elegance and originality of design, and in addition to the difficulty of defining a pattern the cost alone of the remedy would make the law inapplicable.²

In Millward's view the resultant 'piracy of patterns' had been one of the main causes of the 'sufferings of the lace trade', for many of the old dealers and designers had left the industry 'in disgust'. Millward described the current state of pattern drawing as 'despicable - contemptible. The drawing is vulgar and scarcely worthy the name of drawing, in ninety nine cases out of a hundred'.³

1 S.C. on Arts and Design, op.cit., 1836, p. 16.

2 *ibid.*, p. 17.

3 *ibid.*, p. 18. See also above, p. 158.

The industry in the south-east Midlands seems to have reached a low ebb during the 1820's. Yet to a degree the situation was beyond anybody's control. The incontrollable element was fashion. Since French laces had an old popularity and superior reputation, and France was the unrivalled leader of fashion, and since the products of the machine were new, cheap and for a time exciting, both were heavily favoured by demand.

In 1825 Huskisson replaced the old tariffs on imports with an ad valorem duty of 30 per cent. Ostensibly, the tariff reduction would have been problem enough, for it effectively reduced the tariff on imported laces by between 10 and 30 per cent.¹ Yet the recorded imports are surprisingly low,² for it was the incidence of smuggling, which had been increasing since 1815 and was now growing alarmingly, which caused greater problems. A Select Committee on the Silk Trade said in the early 1830's that most of the imported French blonde laces which were then in vogue, were being brought in illicitly and that this had been going on for some time. Yet the government had itself been instrumental in encouraging smuggling, for its treatment of smugglers had been highly illogical. The charge on captured laces had not been altered following the 1825 Act and was considerably less than the newly-lowered import duties. In 1825 it stood between 10 and 15 per cent,³ and this had been a remarkable incentive for the would-be smugglers who,

1 6. Geo. IV, c.111. For the old tariff see above, p. 60.

2 See Table 10, p. 291.

3 Report from the S.C. to examine the Silk Trade, op.cit., 1831-2, pp. 473-4. The duty was 'practically not obtained upon any very considerable quantity of lace: and the compact manner in which this article can be put up in considerable quantities allows of smuggling, at a rate very much under the 30% regular duty'. S.C. on Laws Affecting the Export of Machinery, op.cit., 1841, p. 160.

it seems, had taken full advantage of it.

At the end of the 1820's a rare and sympathetic letter from a writer in Buckinghamshire appeared in The Times appealing to 'every respectable female in the kingdom to use a small quantity of English lace' and thereby provide employment to 'a numerous, industrious and peaceable class of our fellow subjects' who 'must speedily be transferred from their humble homes to the parish workhouses, unless a remedy is found'.¹ The letter complained about imports and trends in fashion:

This trade has frequently sustained changes of depression and prosperity, and although now so reduced many entertain the hope that it may revive again and flourish. It is conceived that there is sufficient scope for the consumption of lace manufactured by the hand labour without sacrificing any material injury arising from the Nottingham frame lace, as the great source of the evil complained of originates in the preference inconsiderately given to the foreign lace not, it is confidently asserted, from the circumstances of the latter being really cheaper and more elegant, but from the caprices of fashion - the mere circumstances of its being foreign, which however ought not to weigh a feather in the scale of well-informed and patriotic minds.

During the preceding twelve years a 'succession of reductions' had 'sunk the price of labour to an almost incredible degree'. The writer appealed to the ladies of Great Britain:

May it not be rationally hoped that the ladies of Great Britain, so justly distinguished for their benevolence and patriotism, good sense and correct taste, may be induced to patronize the industry and its talents and promote the welfare and comfort of their own country-women, in preference to those of foreigners.²

At the end of the 1820's the industry was indeed in poor circumstances.

1 Times, 26 April, 1829.

2 *ibid.* Another letter had appeared earlier: 'Let every respectable female in this kingdom use a small quantity of this lace and ample employment will be afforded to a numerous industrious and peaceable class of our fellow subjects'. Times, 13 March 1829.

Similarly depressing reports to those conveyed to The Times had also been given by governmental enquirers and such reports were still generally bleak early in the 1830's. In some places, as at Eversholt in Bedfordshire, the industry had ceased to exist,¹ or was considered by investigators as 'not worth notice'.² In Bedfordshire a number of lacemakers had taken to straw plaiting where the wages of between 5s. and 10s. a week compared very favourably with lacemaking. A woman lacemaker had to 'work very hard' to get ½d. an hour, 6d. a day and employment was generally very intermittent. This was a great loss to women who had once earned between 10s. and 20s. a week. In Buckinghamshire women had begun to seek employment in the fields,³ a mode of work which they generally disliked and to which they were unaccustomed. Coinciding with a long period of agrarian depression, the difficulties of the lace trade were seen as important components of the general distress described in these areas. Towards the end of the 1820's Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette spoke of the 'still increasing number of paupers' in the lace areas, and ascribed this to 'the distressed state of the manufacture, lower prices now being derived than in any former period'.⁴ In Bedford, the workers were said by a contemporary to have been 'reduced to such a state as to render the most toilsome application insufficient to obtain a bare subsistence'.⁵ The industry was disappearing from Thame in Oxfordshire,⁶ and at Aylesbury processions of lacemakers, headed by a

1 S.C. on Labourers' Wages, VI, 1824, p. 54.

2 Reports from Commissioners on the Administration and Practical Operations of the Poor Laws, XXVII, 1934, pp. 229A-230A.

3 S.C. on the H. of L. on the Poor Laws, VIII, 1831, pp. 10, 12; Report on the Poor Laws, op.cit., Pt. I, 1834, returns for various lacemaking villages.

4 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 10 February 1827; 23 Jan. 1830.

5 J.H. Mathiason, Bedford and its Environs (1931), p. 172.

6 V.C.H. Oxfordshire, II (1907), p. 253.

band of music and featuring a lace queen, seated on a carriage 'plying her vocation', are said to have protested against the lace machine with banners trimmed with pillow lace and inscribed 'support pillow lace' and 'down with the machine stuff'.¹ Almost everywhere, the industry's position contrasted sharply with that which it had held only a few years before. Yet all was not lost, and in some areas the industry would soon begin to show signs of recovery, albeit on a modest scale.

1 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 214.

CHAPTER 12

Adaptation and Improvement 1830-621. 1830-1840

The great majority of lacemakers stayed loyal to the traditional occupation in spite of its problems; and during the 1830's there were signs that the lacemakers' hopes for improvement would be fulfilled, despite the continuing expansion of the machine industry, the almost regular fall in the prices of the machine-made nets and increasing adaptation of lace machinery to produce patterned laces, and the maintenance of demand for continental pillow lace.

The machine industry was constantly growing, its machine technology improving as, for example, William Morley's circular comb machine was brought into use from 1824. More and more machines were being moved into factories and being motivated by steam power. By 1830 the total value of the industry's output had reached roughly £2m., and the variety of goods available on the market was constantly widening. Up to the mid 1820's the main emphasis had been on producing good quality plain net for embroidering. In 1831 there were roughly 150,000 workers engaged in this aspect of the trade, copying all types of hand-made lace and these enjoyed a tremendous vogue in the years between 1810 and 1830, vying in popularity with the hand-made blondes, whose designs they often emulated. But the elements of patterned machine lace were by now also being developed as, for example, William Hardy adapted Heathcoat's machines to produce spots in 1824. By 1830 a light net with diamond-shaped meshes,

resembling the Lille mesh, also used in the south-east Midlands, had made its appearance. Imitation blonde laces were now being made on the warp machine, imitation Valenciennes by Thomas Alcock, and the spots or 'plaits' which were a feature of Buckinghamshire lace, by William Morley on his circular comb machine.¹ The whole added up to an enormous and increasing challenge which was succinctly described by John Millward in 1836:

As the Nottingham manufacture is nothing but an imitation of our lace, the closer the imitation, the greater the chance of selling their productions, which was a cheap substitute for our more costly laces.²

Machine lace was popular by the middle of the 1830s as a trimming for shirts, and flounces of British net were worn on opera dresses. In general, fancy laces, made completely by machine, began to take over a part of the market once dominated by the hand-embroiderers.³ English machine lace now found favour in Paris. In 1830 it was reported that 'British lace is now brought to exquisite perfection and in Paris preferred to all other kinds for trimming mantillas, collars and morning caps.'⁴

The improvements in the English machine industry were paralleled in France, and French embroidered silk nets and spotted nets made completely by machinery enjoyed a great vogue in England during the 1830's.⁵ Continental hand-made laces were also still highly popular. Brussels applique and Valenciennes lace now found favour and black Chantilly-style laces⁶ began to move towards the position of fashionable ascendancy which they

1 See above, pp. 82-3, 87.

2 S.C. on Arts and Design, op.cit., 1836, p. 16.

3 See, for example, Ladies Cabinet of Fashion, Music and Romance, VII, 1835, pp. 189, 436.

4 World of Fashion, XII, 1835, pp. 84, 249.

5 Tallis's London Street Views, op.cit., I, 1839. World of Fashion, XI, 1834, pp. 10, 35; XII, 1835, pp. 10, 36.

6 *ibid.*

were to enjoy during the 1840's.

Yet these developments did not prevent the English pillow lace industry from taking on a more stable and, in parts, more prosperous appearance than during the 1820's. The recovery, such as it was, was in part the product of a more sensible assessment of the competitive situation (which still contained a number of advantages), in part the result of favourable changes in demand. In spite of its continued advances, the machine industry's competitive ability was still limited, to a degree, by technical problems, for there were, as yet, defects in machine lace which made it readily distinguishable from most hand-made laces and this was important in the minds of some purchasers, particularly in respect of fancy lace. Though the machine industry could now produce spotted lace of various kinds, and a variety of fancy nets, the finest laces and close imitations of pillow lace still had to be made by lace runners whose work could easily be detected. The threads could quite clearly be seen to have been stitched through the holes of the groundwork so that although solid areas of pattern could be produced by embroidery on plain machine net, the basic net was always visible as the framework around which the patterns had been built. In contrast, the thicker 'gimp' threads which outlined the pattern in pillow lace passed between the twisted threads which formed the sides of the hexagonal holes, having been slipped between the threads during the making. As yet, close reproductions of the finest pillow laces could not be produced by the machine industry and to the discriminating purchaser this was often sufficient reason to purchase the hand-made product, provided it was of the quality or variety required.

Some dealers now began to realize that in competing with machine products, though there was little to be done about price, particularly with

respect to nets, edgings and quillings,¹ there was a lot to be said for producing laces of a style which the machine could not yet emulate. Much depended upon fashion and the ability of dealers to exploit the favourable changes which were now taking place. English hand-made laces suddenly found new favour with a wide spectrum of the population. In 1829 the lacemakers of Devon petitioned Queen Adelaide that she take steps to mitigate their plight. The Queen's response of ordering 'a handsome suit of Honiton lace for a court dress', led to a 'sudden and great revival'.² The dress, which was 'got up in a very superior style under the direction of the Queen's dressmaker, Miss Amy Lathy, was made in heavy silk tulle ornamented with flowers 'copied from nature', the initial of each flower forming the name of the Queen, its effect was 'brilliant and dazzled the eye'.³ Some of the Devonshire dealers, including Mrs. Davey of Honiton, whose workers made this dress, had now regained some of their rationality and found sufficient skilled workers to meet the resultant rise in demand for good pieces of lace; this suggests that the decline in standards in Devon may not have been quite as catastrophic as Mrs. Palliser suggested. At a 'juvenile ball' given by the King and Queen on May 24th 1831, in honour of the Princess Victoria, the Queen took the opportunity of exhibiting her new dress to the Court, with the result that many ladies of the aristocracy followed her example. In the same year, the Duchess of Kent and the Princess Victoria both ordered laces from Sidmouth, and other orders soon followed, including one each from the Duchess of Gloucester and Lady Bessington.⁴

1 Fine, machine-made quillings were being sold in Regent Street by Dixon's Lace Warehouse in 1839 at $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a yard and by G. Spearer at $\frac{1}{4}$ d. a yard. Tallis's London Street Views, op.cit., I, 1839.

2 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 26.

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*, p. 27; Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 15 March, 1831.

The Queen's support came as part of her campaign to counteract a general slump in the British textile and fashion trades which had occurred in the years 1828-30.¹ Queen Adelaide had announced her intention of banning French fashions from the Court immediately after William IV took the throne in 1830, and her campaign met with a good deal of success, not least because it was supported by the influential World of Fashion. Messrs. Urling & Co., by now the foremost London drapers, also gave some support and came out in the spring of 1831 with a headline which must have stunned the innocent young man about town. 'French Blondes,' read the headline, were 'on the decline'.

G.T. Urling & Co., 224 Regent Street, London have had the honour to supply Her Majesty with Dresses, Veils, etc., the work of BRITISH FEMALES in imitation of 'French Blonde and Brussels', that challenge the criticism of the most fastidious. Urling & Co., not being interested in upholding the prejudice for foreign produce, can afford to offer their extensive stock of Chantilly Veils etc., selected by themselves in Paris, much under the usual prices.²

The improvement in the industry's fortune was soon reflected in rising prices. In 1830 large quantities of Honiton lace were being sold in the metropolis at prices ranging from 1s. to 5 guineas a yard.³ In Exeter G. Seward's Lace Warehouse began employing workers on imitations of Chantilly laces, and white veils.⁴ Seward claimed that his laces were made in the 'most beautiful patterns... and which from their close resemblance to real Chantilly, both in pattern and lightness, have excited

1 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 35.

2 Quoted, *ibid.*, pp. 36-7. They were making similar claims in 1839: 'The retailers of fancy wares and French milliners encourage foreign manufacture and excite public prejudice against British industry, whilst Urlings & Co. have perservered in their efforts to render British lace worthy of the highest patronage and therefore feel that they have some claim to the continued support of the fashion world'. Tallis's London Street Views, op.cit., I, 1839.

3 Pigot's Directory of Devon, 1830.

4 See above, p. 221.

the admiration of everybody who has seen them', as also had his imitation French blondes, which were 'much superior both in the elegance of their appearance and in durability'.¹

The industry in Devon had recently been favoured by Sewell's invention in 1831, which had permitted the application of pillow lace motifs onto a machine net background.² The Queen's dress had been made in this way and so also were the imitation Chantilly veils which were the most successful of the new Honiton appliques, now being produced in increasing quantities. These were reported by Mrs. Treadwin as having sold at £5 while the real ones cost £50. Yet the English floss silk flowers and patterns bore a close resemblance to the more costly original³ and here, at least, was one sector of the continental industry which was not going to have the British market all its own way.

G. Seward provided some of the net for the Devonshire workers and advertised its arrival in the local press:

G. Seward respectfully informs the Lace Makers of Honiton, Sidmouth and Exmouth & Co. that he has just received a fresh supply of Black and White net of excellent quality and with which he can supply them at the manufacturers prices.⁴

In this way the Devonshire sector of the industry cleverly answered the requirements of its competitive situation, producing fabrics which were popular, yet not imitated by machine, and which were cheaper than similar fabrics imported from overseas. The applique laces of Brussels, though artistically superior and made in a more complex manner, were more expensive,

1 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 10 Oct. 1830.

2 See above, p. 87.

3 E. Treadwin, loc. cit., p. 234.

4 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 6 Nov. 1830.

at least until the 1850's, and few imitations of real Chantilly lace were made here. The machine industry seemed to have no objections to its net being used in this way.

The industry in the south-east Midlands had not been favoured by the ability to make applique laces, since motifs and groundwork were all made together. Yet here also there was some adaptation and improvement, in spite of the general weakening of the quality of the dealers. John Millward and the small number of expert designers remaining continued to fashion exclusive and difficult patterns for the fashionable classes and found lacemakers who could do the work for them. In the early 1830s a demand for Regency Point, a 'durable and handsome lace', based on the traditional Buckinghamshire point, with a clothwork scroll headwide and plaits dotted along the fillings helped nourish the industry for a time.¹ But many dealers now responded to the growing demand for blonde laces, made from white silk and used for trimming ladies' dresses and bonnets and as an edging for the newly fashionable long drawers.

The general demand for blonde laces was so high, and so diverse, that the English industry was able to command a share of the market, even though the machine could now produce blonde laces of sorts more cheaply than the hand worker, and though the French pillow lacemakers were technically and artistically superior. Fashion, and the efforts of the English producers to answer it, enabled English blonde laces to be sold side by side with French blondes and imitations made by machine. G. Seward announced on November 28th, 1831, that he was 'constantly receiving fresh supplies of black lace veils and squares, black and white French and English blonde, Nottingham lace and edgings in very great variety'.² Indeed,

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 388.

2 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 28 Nov., 1831.

Buckinghamshire blondes were selling widely in Exeter at this time. In May 1837 Edward Green of 229 High Street, proclaimed his 'return from London with a superb collection of Chantilly veils and falls, French blondes, Mechlin, Valenciennes laces and edgings, Buckinghamshire blonde lace, Brussels and Chantilly nets'.¹ In 1832 the Queen and Princess Victoria were 'gratified to find that there is a prospect of making blonde lace by the peasantry of Buckinghamshire' and pledged to do 'all in their power to encourage this manufacture'.²

Though there was a good deal of insincerity in the vow to 'Buy British', and even Queen Adelaide constantly bought foreign laces,³ Royal approval of English laces was maintained during the 1830's. In 1837 the Princess Victoria wore a dress of Buckinghamshire blonde at a celebratory ball for her eighteenth birthday.⁴ This kind of demand no doubt encouraged John Millward in his attempts to produce artistic designs. Yet Millward also noted that there was a large demand for laces of a cheaper kind⁵ and parts of the Buckinghamshire industry responded in the middle of the decade to a growing demand for cheap edgings, known as 'baby laces', which were used to trim babies' bonnets. Some of these may well have been sold to the working classes, for they were cheap and the working classes had an eye for fashion in their own way. Fashion and novelty were again the keys to success and even John Millward is said to have produced a number of patterns of this kind.⁶

1 *ibid.*, 8 May, 1837. J. Broad also returned from London on 27 May with 'Blonde Valenciennes, Lille and Buckinghamshire laces'. *ibid.*, 27 May, 1837.

2 Buckinghamshire Herald, 24 March, 1832.

3 A. Adburgham, *loc. cit.*

4 Trewman's Exeter Flying Post, 1 June, 1837.

5 S.C. on Arts and Design, *op.cit.*, 1836, p. 16.

6 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 291.

The industry also seems to have derived certain advantages from market imperfections. Until the middle of the 1830's the mode of supplying the retail demand for Nottingham lace in the Metropolis, and the larger cities and towns in the provinces, was based largely upon the practice which had been used by Buckinghamshire dealers for centuries. For years they had packaged the lace, slung it over a porter's shoulders and seen that it was taken to the appointed area. The increasing quantity and weight of laces sent from Nottingham had eventually led to the use of horses and carriages, on journeys to London and various parts of the provinces. Messrs. Fisher and Co. and Messrs. Copestake and Co. each had 30 or 40 such vehicles.¹ London buyers also travelled to Nottingham each Saturday to purchase from the numerous houses which dealt in finished goods.² Yet Nottingham laces sold in this way may not always have crossed the path of English pillow lace. A sizeable proportion of the pillow lace industry's output at this time went to the provinces, and particularly to the north of England,³ where tastes were slower to change and continental pillow laces, (which arrived largely via the London wholesale market),⁴ as well as machine products, may not have been either available or readily acceptable to local populations. Abigail Chick who regularly visited the fashionable resort of Brighton, and Mrs. Woodruffe, who also had a retail shop at Royal Lemington Spa, were but two dealers who had been able to build up a sizeable local demand.⁵ There was a good deal of localized demand⁶ at this time and consumer loyalty and traditional demand patterns

1 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 552. About half of the industry's goods were sold through London. R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. F.81.

2 D.C. Varley, op.cit., pp. 52-6.

3 For details see above, pp. 219-220.

4 A. Adburgham, op.cit., p. 32.

5 See above, pp. 219-220.

6 See above, pp. 222-3.

helped the handworkers survive, particularly before the advent of the railways which permitted the speedy consignment of goods in bulk, and which went a long way towards the formation of a more perfect national market, and before improvements were later made by the Nottingham industry in its marketing system.¹ Local fairs, drapers' shops, market stalls and the lace box in the pub were all important outlets which helped nourish the industry during these years.

By the late 1830's, therefore, the domestic market had by no means been lost. True, the Devon netmakers had gone, the industry as a whole could not compete with the price of cheap machine-made edgings and in spite of the 'Buy British' campaign the very best quality hand-made laces still tended to be sought from producers overseas. The industry's fibre had been weakened in this respect by the disappearance of many of the old expert designer-dealers. Yet parts of the Devon industry had now begun to produce laces of unique design and good quality, often using a basis of cheap machine net and here and there dealers were finding the ability to produce fabrics of various kinds for which there was a peculiar demand and which, whether as a result of favourable fashions, market availability or of texture or price, held certain advantages over the laces turned out by rival producers. There remained the export market, particularly the West Indies and the United States. Exports were not large, seldom exceeding £5,000 per annum² but they were encouraging and this was doubly important to an industry which had quite clearly experienced something of a psychological blow during the years immediately following the advent of Heathcoat's machine and the end of the French Wars.

1 See above, pp. 96-8.

2 See above, Tables 8 and 9, pp. 228-9.

The improvement, however, should not be exaggerated. Reports of Poor Law investigators still spoke of poverty and low wages and of the industry's 'failure' in certain areas.¹ One Devonshire dealer claimed in 1843 that his prices had fallen between 60 and 70 per cent since the 1820's² and in the same year the Report of the Childrens' Employment Commission stated that the pillow laceworkers were reduced to a state of 'miserable depression'.³ In certain parts of Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire, central Bedfordshire and Wiltshire, the industry would never function as before, though there would always be a few lacemakers to be found in most of the industry's traditional locations. But there clearly was a good deal of variation from worker to worker, dealer to dealer and place to place and the Report also noted that 'the manufacture of pillow lace still finds occupation for many thousands of women and children in the dispersed population of Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and likewise in Devon.'⁴ New dealers, in fact, were entering the trade⁵ and for many of their workers employment was probably more regular than it had been during the 1820's, though so far as can be judged weekly wages had scarcely improved.⁶ English pillow laces would seldom again sell at the inflated prices of the War years, but the future appeared at least to offer the dealers and workers a prospect of moderate prosperity, sufficient to keep them in the trade and for many there was but little alternative; there were still roughly 30,000 people who regarded

1 As, for example, at Leckhampstead and Scotsgrove in Buckinghamshire. S.C. of the H. of L. on the State of Agriculture; XIII, 1836; First Report, pp. 42-3; Third Report, pp. 256-7.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D.3.

3 *ibid.*, p. A.52.

4 *ibid.*

5 See above, p. 159.

6 See above, pp. 249-50.

themselves as pillow lacemakers in 1851.¹

2. 1840-1862

Of the ultimate arbiters of the industry's fate one of the most important was fashion. In the 1820's it had turned against the industry, in the 1830's there had been a favourable change. In the early 1840's William Felkin was able to announce that the demand for all kinds of lace, both machine and hand-made, was substantially on the increase. During the twenty years or so from the early 1840's the English pillow lace industry came to enjoy its greatest prosperity since 1815, sharing, if to a more moderate degree, the good fortune of the European pillow lace industry as a whole. Felkin claimed that there were then 'more persons employed' in making hand-made lace in Europe 'than at any former period of its history'.²

The enormity of the demand for lace in the century's middle decades must be fully emphasized if the survival, and indeed, success of the English pillow lace industry in its competition with the low-priced and increasingly perfect goods produced by machinery and the technically superior hand-producers overseas, is to be understood. For during these years the industry was highly favoured by fashion, as the demand for lace fabrics of all kinds increased remarkably. Lace was almost universally in vogue. In February 1849 a fashion-writer noted that:

Nothing can equal the rage for lace at the moment, no costume being considered perfect unless it is accompanied by its lace chemisette, lace full sleeves and lace trimmings; or in full dress, the lace flounces, bertha, lappets giving grace, lightness and elegance to the whole costume.³

1 See above, pp. 175-8 and Tables 2 and 3.

2 W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 132.

3 World of Fashion, February 1849.

The Gothic style of dress, with its heavy sombre materials, was decorated with bright and exuberant trimmings, of which lace was one of the most popular. Lace frills, collars, ruffles, cuffs, chemisettes, caps and veils became essential parts of the fashionable woman's wardrobe and cheaper varieties satisfied people on lower incomes. The high level of demand was maintained during the 1850's, as the bustle was covered with cascading falls of lace outside the skirt and up to 80 yards of trimming might be so employed.¹ Elaborate caps, upon which yards of hand-made lace and embroidery were lavished, also became popular,² and large shawls of black and white lace or cashmere were worn for evening attire.³ Something of a sentimentality for hand-made lace emerged. The broad, horizontal drapings of the bust, known as the 'bertha', which became popular after 1845, were often decorated with flounces of hand-made lace.⁴ Large handkerchiefs, edged with pillow lace, were bought following Queen Victoria's example,⁵ and in the 1850's upper class womens' crinolins were often trimmed with 'beautiful real lace'. 'The taste for good lace again became general in England',⁶ to such a degree that where dealers and workers were skilful enough, the hand industry was able to hold its own against the machine. It was felt to be a:

happy circumstance that far from damaging the business of making cushion laces, the progressive development of the machine wrought lace appears rather to have excited in regard to the former, which is essentially a luxury, a double activity beyond that of any former epoch, so that

1 R.A. Church, op.cit., p. 285.

2 Doris Langley Moore, The Woman in Fashion (1949), p. 60.

3 J. Laver, English Costume of the 19th Century (1929), p. 46.

4 D.L. Moore, op.cit., p. 65.

5 E. Jackson, op.cit., p. 49.

6 *ibid.*, p. 48.

hand-wrought lace was never before so much sought for by the richer classes, and the returns to it never being so great as they are today. Although the price of machine lace is not more than one eighth of that of cushion lace, there never need be any fear of lessened use of cushion lace, however close imitations by machinery may become.¹

The machine industry was indeed taking pronounced strides towards producing almost exact imitations of hand-made laces of all kinds. As the Jacquard apparatus was adopted during the 1840's, and with greater rapidity during the 1850's, increasing quantities of Valenciennes, Chantilly, Honiton, Buckinghamshire laces and so on were being produced. There now was a much more rapid turnover in designs, the quality and originality of which were constantly improving. The expansion of the railways and advent of the postal system helped the industry re-organize its marketing system so that contact with London fashion houses was improved, and machine laces could probe more quickly and widely into various corners of the English market.² The price competition offered by the machine industry was indeed serious. A square yard of bobbinet, sold for 30s. in 1815 sold in 1851 for 3d. and a yard of silk blonde, made on the warp machine, was sold for 6d., as against 2s. in 1830. Silk piece nets, shawls, scarfs, flounces, trimming laces and blondes made by machine were said to be between 75 and 90 per cent cheaper than equivalent pieces made by hand.³

The hand industry on the continent was also moving to a new phase of prosperity with all kinds of lace being produced expertly in increasing quantities. In July 1842 the old tariffs in England were replaced by an

1 The Juries at the Paris Exhibition, 1855, quoted in W. Felkin, op.cit., p. 419.

2 See above, pp. 96-8.

3 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 461, 463, 466.

ad valorem duty of 12.5 per cent,¹ roughly a third of the protection offered by the Act of 1825. The result, and the general popularity of continental lace, was shown immediately in the import figures, the recorded figure² jumping from roughly £4,000 in 1841 to over £24,000 in 1842, and £67,000 in 1843, of which over £47,000 came from France and over £10,000 from Belgium. The high level of imports was maintained during the 1840's, though a further tariff reduction in June 1847 to an ad valorem duty of ten per cent,³ seems to have been of less effect.⁴

During most of the 1840's French laces were particularly popular, the demand arising largely 'from the very beautiful patterns which are placed on the goods, and the desire which prevails here to obtain French goods'.⁵ Alençon needlepoint now satisfied the most wealthy, while Chantilly, Mechlin and piece goods from Caen and Bayeux were in vogue among those with less extravagant tastes. Imports reached a peak value of £136,877 in 1846. The 1850's saw the general level of demand subside a little, but Brussels applique and Duchesse, Valenciennes (mostly from Ypres), Alençon point and Chantilly were still highly popular. Indeed, Chantilly laces were perhaps the most beloved of all and continued to be so well into the 1860's, taking the form of square or triangular shawls, flouncings, berthas and border laces, adorning crinolines and lavishly trimming dresses, largely in floral designs, for naturalism was the favourite form.⁶

1 5 & 6 Vict. Cap. 47.

2 The figures before 1854 are official values and therefore give an indication of trend rather than true value. Smuggling seems by this time to have been less important. It is impossible to assess the impact of the tariff reduction on retail prices, though some decline might be expected.

3 9 & 10 Vict. Cap. 23.

4 See Table 11, p. 320.

5 S.C. on Exportation of Machinery, op.cit., 1841, p. 158.

6 For details, see above, pp. 127-9.

Table 11

Imports of Hand-Made Lace (£) (1842-81) (G.B.)

	<u>Germany</u>	<u>Spain</u>	<u>Belgium</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>Sardinia</u>	<u>Others</u>	<u>Total</u> (£)
1842	1,685	1,196	4,761	18,253	166		24,865
1843	8,924		10,637	47,370		172	67,597
1844	15,924		17,967	69,025	362		102,597
1845	19,896		41,253	66,619		229	127,997
1846	31,135		37,414	67,250		618	136,877
1847	8,780		37,813	51,096			97,689
1848	6,084		42,224	41,368			89,676
1849	2,439		36,674	40,207			79,320
1850	3,536		28,823	37,755			70,114
1851	2,973		22,105	40,616			65,694
1852	2,090		27,473	35,599			65,162
1853			20,983	22,702			43,685
1854			19,275	31,103	208	499	51,165
1855	1,885		20,078	24,118	2,366	917	49,364
1856	3,023		18,209	27,318	2,973	621	52,144
1857			13,893	20,609	2,245	1,207	37,954
1858			19,742	18,240		1,513	39,495
1859		1,196	17,422	28,220		2,458	49,296
1860	1,266		26,161	18,734	126	2,349	48,636
1861			27,423	20,016		1,891	49,568
1862			35,825	23,987		2,724	62,536
1863			41,216	21,751		2,756	65,723
1864			58,857	21,131		2,972	82,960
1865			84,193	10,572		2,851	97,616
1866	3,249		76,654	4,615		1,886	86,404
1867	1,164		63,524	32,300		2,880	99,868
1868			72,756	25,049		4,366	102,171
1869			92,395	23,870		2,747	119,012
1870			185,097	58,399		3,112	246,608
1871			353,873	26,562		3,182	383,617
1872			263,620	9,937		949	274,506
1873			189,079	21,191		1,283	211,553
1874			178,179	35,132		802	214,113
1875			101,324	33,034		1,697	136,055
1876			63,538	21,755		415	85,708
1877			74,628	20,936		296	95,860
1878			72,548	17,492		508	90,548
1879			62,156	7,587		135	69,878
1880			62,599	524		93	63,216
1881			67,989	970		210	69,169
1882							

(not distinguished from all other laces)

Sources: P.R.O. Customs. Class V, Nos. 31-42. 'Ledger of Imports under articles'. Annual Statement of Trade and Navigation of the U.K. (1854-82)

* With the exception of 1845 when over £2000 of lace went overseas, re-exports were never more than £2000, and have been included in the totals.

Official Values to 1853.

Values at Current Prices 1854+.

Yet these developments did not prevent the English pillow lace industry from enjoying a greater level of prosperity than it had experienced since the end of the French Wars; even in the 1870's, it still had around 25,000 workers on its books.¹ The factors behind the industry's tenacity were the sheer scale of the general demand for lace and the effective response of some of the industry's organizers, and workers, to it. Concerted attempts were made by some dealers to improve the quality and originality of their product, thereby trading on the growing cachet for good lace. Others turned to producing cheaper goods, often of a kind or design which was not emulated by rival producers, and for which there was an ever-changing, yet sustained demand and market outlets not only at home but overseas. The industry was characterized by a certain degree of technical improvement, both in production and design, and by the increasing contact by some dealers with London fashion houses. There are also signs that where the dealers' contact with the labour force was closest, in lace schools, work discipline was increasing.²

William Felkin's statement that rising demand was a 'happy circumstance' for all was true for the English pillow lace industry so long as it could respond adequately to it. To a degree, however, it was a two-way relationship, for once the industry showed itself capable of satisfying certain consumer demands those demands were liable to increase further. This was particularly true of the expensive laces demanded by the fashionable public and in this respect the reputation of the English

1 See above, p. 177, Table 2.

2 See below, pp. 416-442, passim.

industry was enhanced considerably when, in 1839 the laceworkers of Beer, in Devon, were privileged with an order for various parts of Queen Victoria's wedding dress. In January 1840 the Morning Post reported:

The lace for her Majesty's Bridal Dress, though properly called Honiton lace, was really worked at the village of Beer, which is situated near the sea coast, about ten miles from Honiton. It was executed under the direction of Miss Bidney, a native of the village, who went from London, at the command of Her Majesty, for the express purpose of superintending the work. More than 200 persons were employed upon it from March to November, during the past year. These poor women derive a scanty subsistence from making lace, but the trade had lately so declined that had it not been for the kind consideration of Her Majesty in ordering this dress they would have been destitute during the winter. No-one can form an idea of the gratitude they express, who has not heard of it from their own lips. The lace which is to form the flounce of the dress measures four yards, and is three quarters of a yard in depth. The pattern is a rich and exquisitely tasteful design, drawn expressly for the purpose and surpasses anything that has ever been executed either in England or in Brussels. So anxious has the manufacturer been that Her Majesty should have a dress perfectly unique, that she has, since the completion of the lace, destroyed all the designs. The veil, which is of the same material and is made to correspond, has afforded employment to the poor laceworkers for more than six weeks. It is a yard and a half square.¹

The order was worth £1000 and was made in Honiton applique.²

English pillow laces, some from the south-east Midlands, were also to be seen in abundance among the wedding congregation and their presence was reported, along with the Queen's dress, in the fashionable journals which so influenced the taste of the elegant lady. The Queen Dowager wore a dress of white satin, covered by a rich deep flounce of Buckinghamshire lace, the Duchess of Kent a similar dress trimmed with three flounces of English blonde lace and blonde ruffles of Buckinghamshire point. A

1 Morning Post, Jan. 1840, as reported in Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 1 Feb. 1840.

2 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 409.

number of Buckinghamshire lace flounces were worn by Lady Cottingham¹ and among the many dresses of the Queen's trousseau was one of very beautiful design, made entirely of Honiton lace under the direction of Mrs. Clark, a local dealer who also had an agency in London.² The wedding caused the demand for Honiton lace in particular to show great improvement and after a time created a production problem which the lace dealers, now unused to such extravagant demand, found difficult to answer. But many workers responded well and the prices of Honiton laces were pushed up almost to the heights of the 1790's as lace edgings sold in London in the mid 1840's at prices of up to 10 guineas a yard;³ by 1851 Honiton flouncings, shawls, scarfs, veils, handkerchiefs and berthas were selling at between 10 and 200 guineas.⁴

The lace workers and inhabitants of Beer seem to have been particularly grateful for the Queen's order and celebrated the wedding accordingly:

In the afternoon about 150 of the lacemakers who had the honour of working on Her Majesty's Bridal Dress drank tea at the New Inn, Her Majesty being so well pleased with the dress that Miss Jane Bidney, who superintended its execution, sent down Ten Pounds for the purpose. A loyal Address was also got up at a public meeting of the inhabitants, to be presented to Her Majesty, congratulating her on her Marriage, and also thanking her for the patronage and support she has conferred on the inhabitants.

Honiton shared in the celebrations:

The appearance of the town was very animated; there being a great display of flags, banners and evergreens, and in the evening Her Majesty's Honiton Lace Manufacturer by Appointment, Mrs. Clark, illuminated a splendid transparency

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- 1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 409; see also World of Fashion XVII, 1840, p. 67.
 - 2 *ibid.* See above, p. 217.
 - 3 Post Office Directory of Devon, 1856.
 - 4 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 461, 463, 466.

of Industry (represented by a figure) receiving from the Queen encouragement and support.¹

And there was good cause for celebration, for Society ladies often followed the Queen's leadership in fashion, a fact which was not lost to a number of lace dealers who seem to have recognized her advertising potential and to have been willing to exploit it to their advantage. As the immediate effects of the wedding dissipated, one lace dealer chose, on more than one occasion, to take a sample along for the Queen's approval. Thus, in 1853, Mr. R. Vicars of Padbury, Buckinghamshire, waited upon Her Majesty at Windsor Castle with a 'beautiful pillow lace scarf of Buckinghamshire manufacture'. The Queen was pleased to signify her approval, and her purchase of the scarf brought 'an impetus' to the trade which promised to bring Buckinghamshire lace once again into 'fashionable notoriety'.² In this way the lace dealers had not only shown initiative in following fashion, but also in creating it for their own ends. Market opportunities were being seized more eagerly now that demand had become more encouraging.

The expensive markets were potentially fruitful outlets for the hand industry, and not least because the advance of the Jacquard loom and the increasing popularity of machine-made imitation pillow laces were now pressing certain ladies of fashion to turn their eyes increasingly towards laces made by hand. For these ladies were, almost by definition, connoisseurs of all things of tasteful design, and by careful selection of more expensive fabrics could make envious all those whom they wished to

1 Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette, 14 Feb. 1840. The Lord of Honiton manor thanked the Queen for patronizing Honiton lace again in 1847. ibid., 23 May, 1847.

2 Buckinghamshire Herald, 29 February 1853. In 1845 Mr. Vicars had earlier submitted specimens and Her Majesty had been 'graciously pleased to select several pieces'. Times, 6 Feb. 1845.

impress. Hand-made laces could be a hall-mark of distinction, a recognisable indication of gentility and elevation above the philistine values of the age. Though the qualities of hand-made lace were scarcely recognisable at a glance, there was a whole world of difference between a fabric produced artistically in an 'ivy clad' cottage, with devotion to beauty and form, and a fabric mass-produced by anonymous industrial workers in a bleak and grimy factory. In 1874 John Ruskin summed up the value of hand-made laces in a letter to the Duke of St. Albans, which was read by the Duke at a distribution of prizes at a Night Arts class:

There is still some distinction between machine-made and hand-made lace. I will suppose that distinction so far done away with that, a pattern once invented, you can spin lace as fast as they now do thread. Everybody then might wear not only lace collars, but lace gowns. Do you think that, when everybody could wear them, everybody would be proud of wearing them? A spider may perhaps be rationally proud of his own cobweb, even tho' all the fields in the morning are covered with the like, for he made it himself; but suppose a machine spun it for him? Suppose all the gossamer were Nottingham made? If you think of it, you will find the whole value of lace as a possession depends on the fact of its having a beauty which has been the reward of industry and attention. That the thing is itself a price - a thing everybody cannot have. That it proves, by the rarity of it, by the dignity of its wearer - either that she has been so industrious as to save money, which can buy, say, a piece of jewellery or gold tissue, or of fine lace - or else that she is a noble person, to whom her neighbours concede as an honour the privilege of wearing finer dress than they. If they all choose to have lace too - if it ceases to be a piece, it becomes, does it not, only a cobweb? The real good of a piece of lace, then, you will find, is that it should show first, that the designer of it had a pretty fancy, next, that the maker of it had fine fingers; lastly, that the wearer of it has worthiness or dignity enough to obtain what is difficult to obtain, and common sense enough not to wear it on all occasions.¹

1 Queen Lace Book, (1874), p. 17. See also D.L. Moore, op.cit., p. 66, speaking of the 1850's: 'it was a sign of true gentility, as the mechanical products became available to all, to wear only hand-worked trimmings'.

Though it had sold goods to royalty much earlier,¹ the machine industry was still struggling in the fashionable market when, in 1848, it announced gleefully in the Times that the Queen had ordered a lace dress from one of its manufacturers:

We have been favoured by Messrs. Reckless and Hickling, lace manufacturers of this town, with a sight of the splendid lace dress which they have been engaged in preparing for Her Majesty, and which we briefly alluded to a fortnight ago. This dress is unquestionably the most splendid and tasteful specimen of Nottingham lace which has ever been got up in this town, and must go far, in spite of every prejudice, to bring our staple manufacture into repute with the ladies in the highest walks of society. The extraordinary skill and taste displayed by Messrs. Reckless and Hickling in getting up their goods reflects the highest credit among themselves as manufacturers and cannot fail, ultimately, of being in the highest degree beneficial to the trade and by the impulse of their success must communicate to all other men of talent and enterprise engaged in the same business. The dress for the Queen, and which was worn by Her Majesty at the state drawing room held yesterday comprises what may be termed a whole suit, consisting of bertha, lappets, train and dress (proper), double skirted. The pattern wrought is on a Brussels ground, as it is technically called, having all the purity of appearance of the most perfect specimen of 'cushion net' from a design by Her Majesty's own wish, consisting of most graceful combinations of the rose, the shamrock and the thistle. We have further pleasure to say that the dress has been received by Her Majesty and after a close examination by herself and the ladies of the Court, has been pronounced most beautiful.²

It was incumbent upon the pillow lace dealers and their workers to answer the demand for laces of high quality and for originality in design (for exclusiveness was an important facet of fashionable snobbery), and at the Great Exhibition of 1851 there were many indications that a distinct improvement in the standard of English pillow laces had indeed been made during the preceding 10 years. English pillow lace dealers gathered at the Exhibition with machine producers and the best of the

1 See above, p. 81.

2 Times, 26 June, 1848.

continental designers to receive prizes for good design. Their laces were said to be of 'good useful quality', 'of excellence in design and manufacture' and in some cases of 'very excellent quality'.¹ Mrs. Treadwin, of Exeter, by now a producer of laces of the highest quality, was 'particularly commended' for a Honiton flounce which resembled 'ancient lace'. Many of the pieces exhibited were of staggering complexity.²

The most notable improvement had taken place in Devon and particularly in the Honiton district where 'considerable progress' was said to have been made. Honiton fabrics were found by the Jurors to display 'not only extreme delicacy of execution, but also beauty and taste in design.'³ The flouncings, veils, scarves, shawls, handkerchiefs and berthas which were on display, and the prices at which they sold, were ample proof of the improvement. Some Honiton straight lace now sold regularly in London at 20 guineas a yard.⁴

This improvement, and the industry's success at the Exhibition, had been no chance affair. The most astute of the dealers had well-learned the stark experience of the 1820's and early 30's and having found their feet with the production of applique laces, had now decided to advance their position further, not only by answering the demand for better quality fabrics but also by deliberately exploiting the market

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 468.

2 Daniel Biddle, the Oxford Street wholesaler, exhibited a piece of Honiton lace which represented the arms of the Queen and Prince Albert, encircled with wreaths of palm olives and olive branches, around which the rose, thistle and shamrock were entwined and the whole being enclosed in a border of oak. Designed by T. Shay and manufactured by John Tucker of Branscombe, this is now in the Buckland Abbey Museum, Yelveston, near Plymouth.

3 *ibid.*, p. 463. Other successful dealers were W.L. Gill of Colyton and Esther Clark of Honiton.

4 Post Office Directory of Devon, 1856.

potentiality of the Exhibition. This had been decided upon well before the Exhibition had been opened:

At the public meeting convened by the mayor of Honiton... a resolution was carried unanimously, 'that it is desirable that an effective representation of the Honiton lace manufacture should be secured in the Exhibition of 1851, as tending to revive the trade of that town by exciting attention to the surpassing beauty and excellence of the fabric, and a committee be formed for carrying out the design and cooperating with the Honiton manufacturers.'¹

During the 1840's contacts had been built up with a number of London fashion houses and these showed a wide range of mantles, flounces, shawls, berthas, collars, handkerchiefs, coiffures and babies' caps, all of good quality, at the Exhibition.² These fashion houses had been most important elements in improving the quality of the industry's output, for 'to meet the taste required by their customers' they had 'employed every means at their disposal to raise the character of this description of lace'.³ The Jurors commended the London houses for promoting continental standards of design, for the houses had been:

fully alive to the conviction that the more the British manufacture becomes assimilated to the characteristics of the foreign (which are chiefly suitable, beautiful, and clearly-defined patterns, with refinement of execution), the more the demand for this lace will extend, and, proportionately with such increased demand, they will be induced to expend still larger sums, in order to produce a higher class of designs. They are further encouraged in their exertions by the fact that, although the British lace cannot boast of design so exquisite and execution so delicate, as Brussels lace, it yet possesses remarkable and valuable qualities in as much as it is produced perfectly white, does not change colour, and the price is very moderate.⁴

1 Journal of Design and Manufacture, II, 1849-50, p. 212.

2 These were Daniel Biddle and Co., Groucock, Copestake, Moore & Co., Howell, James & Co. and Laughner & Cosens. Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 469.

3 *ibid.*, p. 463.

4 *ibid.*

In these respects, at least, the Devon industry appeared to hold some advantages, not only over machine producers but also over continental pillow laces, and the very fact that the lace was English could, if the lace was well designed and made, give it some distinction, since such high quality laces still formed a relatively small proportion of the Devon industry's output and were relatively scarce in comparison to those made in centres such as Brussels. The industry's historian, Mrs. Palliser, avidly in favour of the industry's perpetuation, supported the Jury in its general conclusions, but while commending the Honiton workers for their efforts at imitating foreign laces was more regretful that they did not adhere rather more to the old Honiton sprigs, for in her perhaps exaggerated view, they had been 'scarcely surpassed, even by the lacemakers of Brabant'.¹

Mrs. Treadwin, who by this time had emerged as the most skilful designer in Devon, had high hopes of the newly-created government School of Design in London. She had been introduced to the School by Sir Stafford Northcote, and along with another Devonshire dealer, Mr. Gill of Colyton, received a number of new patterns, most notably made by C.P. Solcombe and T. Rawlings.² But the School betrayed her hopes. According to Mrs. Treadwin it turned out to be so lacking in understanding the practical problems of lacemaking that its contribution to the improvement in design which was taking place during this period was minimal. This was perhaps an exaggeration,³ but the student designers of Somerset House

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 415-16.

2 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, Supplementary Report on Design by R. Redgrave, p. 748.

3 E. Treadwin, loc. cit., p. 233. Richard Redgrave put the deficiencies of the School rather more mildly: 'The designs are novel but a little too architectural in their general arrangement, resulting in a slight degree of stiffness, and a want of that flowing ease which should characterise the ornament of the lace'. *ibid.*, p. 748.

seem to have been generally unable to comprehend and make use of suggestions given to them by dealers with regard to the technical requirement that the designs must eventually be used by workers. When a dealer from Sidmouth called at the School some years following the Exhibition, prepared to spend a £10 note on new designs, he found the students unable to understand the practical side of lacemaking. Their delicately painted white patterns, if of undoubted artistic merit, were incomprehensible to the laceworker. The situation called for designers who could unite a practical experience of lacemaking with an artistic capability so as to design patterns suited to the peculiarities of the manufacture. Unfortunately, the School seems to have been unable to provide such men and the credit for the improvements in design rested solely with the pillow lace dealers and a few London wholesalers.

Not that all of the Devonshire industry's output had been improved in this way. The majority of its workers had been producing laces of a far more moderate and often poor quality and by the time of the Exhibition the Devonshire industry had become established on a pattern which, by and large, it was to maintain until the end of the century. On the one hand were a relatively small number of very skilled workers and dealers, capable of producing the finest types of lace, often expressly designed for London fashion houses and royal orders; on the other were the majority of workers, employed by dealers to turn out laces of a poorer quality, but for which there was a steady market at least until the 1860's. Mrs. Treadwin later felt that the high level of demand for poorer quality pillow laces had been detrimental to the more general improvement in standards of workmanship and design which she would have liked to have seen:

The demand for lace had so much increased that in 1850 the quality of the work was much deteriorated, for the workpeople, finding that whatever was made met with a

ready sale, were not desirous of improving their patterns. They preferred common work that could easily be executed to better but more difficult designs, requiring more taste and care.¹

Mrs. Treadwin's standards were perhaps higher than anybody's, and she was clearly understating some of the progress which had taken place during the 1840's. She was also speaking in a long-term perspective and perhaps with the advantage of hindsight, for the ability of her workers to produce laces of a high quality eventually enabled her to continue successfully in the industry when others, who had concentrated on producing cheap laces, failed. For fashion was always liable to change dramatically and by the mid 1860's the demand for cheap English pillow laces had subsided. Yet during the 1840s and 50s these poorer designs, mostly in applique work, had found a 'ready sale' and had helped the industry reach its greatest level of prosperity since 1815. These years witnessed an extraordinary level of demand for pillow laces of all kinds at all prices and most lace dealers found their markets according to their varying interests and abilities in technique and design, according to the expertise of the labour force available to them and to their assessment of favourable sources of short run profit.

A similarly mixed experience had been characteristic of the industry in the south-east Midlands. The shortage of expert designers of which John Millward had complained during the 1830's was still apparent. In 1853 Octavias Hudson reported to the Department of Practical Art that he 'had great difficulty in finding a designer for pillow lace - I only succeeded indeed, in obtaining the names of two', and these concerned themselves only with the better types of lace.² There were, infact, more

1 E. Treadwin, loc. cit.

2 Octavias Hudson, 'Report on Lacemaking', App. VII, First Report of the Dept. of Practical Art, 1853, p. 368.

skilled designers than this, but while John Millward and a few others continued to produce expensive fabrics the industry won back some of its former prosperity by catering largely for current cheap fashions, in essence following its eighteenth century tradition. During the 1830's and 40's a small number of dealers had taken over a large proportion of the industry's labour force in this area, operating on an unprecedented scale¹ and though there were few, if any, expert designers among them, they were not lacking in business acumen and much of the industry's progress during the 1840's and 50's was their responsibility. For they answered current market demands and sought out new markets² and new fabrics with an energy which their predecessors had often lacked.

At the 1851 Exhibition the Jurors were able to take account of the industry's recent progress in this region and showed that as the demand for blonde laces had declined the industry had been able to exploit a demand for a variety of black laces instead:

Not many years since, a very considerable number of women and children were employed in (this) manufacture throughout the counties of Bedford, Buckingham, Northampton and Oxford; but the demand having fallen off (being subject to fluctuation like all articles dependent on fashion), had caused this branch of the trade to suffer severely. Contemporary, however, with the diminution in the making of white thread lace, an increased requirement for the black lace occurred, the manufacture of which was introduced into the districts enumerated and has been attended with marked success.³

1 See above, pp. 159-163.

2 These efforts were not always popular locally. In 1845 a Bedford writer questioned 'the propriety of the lace dealers of this county making the approaching Bazaar to be holden at Covent Garden Theatre in May next under the direction of the Anti Corn Law League a means of promoting the prosperity of that deserving class in this country, the laceworkers, by having a stall upon which to exhibit this manufacture of Bedfordshire'. Bedford Mercury, 25 Jan. 1845.

3 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 463-64.

Yet this general statement and the inability of Octavius Hudson to find more than a handful of expert designers do not give a true indication of the undoubted technical progress which had been made during this decade. Laces of good quality and original design were not only shown at the Exhibition by London fashion houses, but also by a number of local dealers: Elizabeth Rose of Paulerspury, Richard Vicars of Padbury, Thomas Lester of Bedford, who had developed 'an improved lace fall piece to avoid joining at the corners ... and an improved arrangement of an infant's lace dress', Elizabeth Frewen of Great Marlow, who showed 'lace made of cotton mixed with silk to improve its appearance', George Hurst of High Street, Bedford, who was clearly striving for novelty for he exhibited a lace of his own design 'with glass introduced into the figure',¹ and John Millward. One of Millward's workers, with the help of Graucok, Copestake, Moore and Co., was seated at the Exhibition working a pattern with over 7000 bobbins and this 'novel and interesting spectacle' attracted the attention of the Queen, Prince Albert and the Royal Family, 'whereupon they stopped and enquired minutely into the simple yet beautiful illustrations of the industry of thousands of poor women and children'.²

The best designers were still being dogged by the plaguairism of which John Millward had complained during the 1830's, however, and this no doubt continued to inhibit more extensive improvements in design. A lace manufacturer complained that a lace lappett shown by another dealer at the Exhibition was from a pattern made by him; 'we have made scores of articles from it ... and we have suffered before from some unprincipalled lace manufacturers who, themselves deficient in taste, have had the kindness to

1 Official Descriptive Catalogue, op.cit., 1853, pp. 559-74.

2 Bucks. Chronicle, 14 June, 1951.

borrow our designs without acknowledgement'.¹

This problem was perhaps less responsible, however, than the high level of demand for cheap pillow laces for the fact that, inspite of the undoubted technical progress which had been made, the bulk of the industry's output was still the trimmings and insertions which had almost always been its staple products. George Hurst exhibited edgings suitable for collars, cuffs and sleeves, insertions for caps, sleeves and stomackers and infants' and babies' caps, Thomas Lester and Richard Vicars also showed baby laces, while G.T. Cardwell of Northampton, J.T. Knightley of Northampton, Benjamin Hill of Olney, Rebecca Philips of Swanborne (Bucks.), C.T. Sim of High Street Bedford, Samuel Vincent of Turvey (Beds.) and William Ayres of Newport Pagnell all showed a mixed collection of trimmings and insertions, similar to that exhibited by Hurst.²

Indeed, the extent of the improvement in technique and design, in both districts, certainly should not be over-emphasized, despite what the Jurors generally assessed as 'an energetic application of resources, in order to excel in their various productions'.³ In a supplementary report on design, Richard Redgrave conceded that in general the English industry had not acquired the standards of beauty and perfection attained by most of its competitors overseas. The French and Belgians had a 'truer appreciation of beauty' than most of their English counterparts, an appreciation which showed itself not only in design, but also in execution. The patterns of English laces were often too heavy and overcrowded, the whole

1 Bucks. Chronicle, 7 June, 1851.

2 Official Descriptive Catalogue, op.cit., 1853, pp. 559-74. Hurst's exhibit, and Lester's was reported in the Bedford Times, 10 May 1851; Rebecca Phillips' in the Banbury Guardian, 22 May 1851.

3 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, p. 464.

effect a little too solid and equal to be perfectly comparable with the best continental products. The ornamentation of foreign laces had a grace and flow which the English, with their rather fussy patterns, often lacked. 'The English lace', Redgrave concluded, 'seems rather to call attention to the labour bestowed upon it as a part of the excellence; the foreign lace, even when greater labour has been employed, strikes us as rather elegant and beautiful than as laborious and costly, from the more easy and playful forms of its decoration'. Even Honiton lace, which had received the greatest allocade, sometimes contained a fundamental fault in design which no truly elegant and flowing lace could ever incorporate. This was a tendency to a too natural imitation of flowers. An elegant lace might well contain floral forms, filled in with a variety of stitches so as to give a lightness, variety and richness at the same time, but the heavy fillings of petals and leaves, worked into some pieces of Honiton lace in a symmetrical arrangement, made the total effect heavy and cumbrous, and markedly inferior to foreign designs.¹

There was no denying the general improvement in the industry's fortunes, however, and the Jurors of the Exhibition were strong in their protestation of the social and economic value of this advance, not only to the laceworkers, but to the nation as a whole. Seemingly ignoring the rather disturbing findings of the recently published Report of the Royal Commission on Childrens' Employment,² the Jurors concluded their examination of the industry with unqualified favour:

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 757-58.

2 For details of this Report, see below, pp. 372-3, 387-390, 418-439.

It is deserving of consideration, that the worth of the actual material bears such a small proportion to the value of the article itself, as to make the amount paid for the labour expended in its production to be almost the sole cost. This industrial product, therefore, cannot fail to enlist sympathy on its behalf, as its furnishes, in comparison with its price, a surprising extent of employment and maintenance, and these benefits, moreover, are afforded to a class of persons who otherwise would have a difficulty earning a livelihood... It is a gratifying reflection that the growing appreciation of the wealthy and refined class of the increasing merit of these really useful and ornamental articles of British manufacture gives suitable employment to a large number of females at their own houses, thereby increasing their comforts, encouraging habits of industry and adding to the general prosperity of the nation.¹

The Great Exhibition proved to be an important turning point in the industry's history for during the 1850's the industry experienced its final upsurge on a notable scale. In the 10 years from 1851, the number of workers available for employment in pillow lacemaking fell only slightly, from around 32,000 to 29,000 and in Bedfordshire the numbers probably increased.² The improvement was very much on the mixed basis as before, as parts of the industry answered the general demand for cheap hand-made laces of various kinds and as others continued in their attempts to improve not only the quality but also the novelty of their designs.

By carefully studying continental designs Mrs. Treadwin, a woman described by a contemporary journal of fashion as of 'culture and taste',³ continued to train her workers to produce the most excellent copies of the finest Valenciennes and Flemish laces, which were highly in fashion, as well as pieces of high quality Honiton work. The Queen magazine was delighted during later years to record her success:

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1852, pp. 463-64.

2 See above, p. 177, Table 2.

3 Queen, 31 May, 1879. For further details of Mrs. Treadwin, see below, pp. 337-9, 353-4, 360.

Mrs. Treadwin of Exeter has submitted to us her latest achievements in the production of ancient Valenciennes, and other Flemish pillow lace. We freely admit that we never before saw anything that can compare with these beautiful copies of ancient lace. One must be an experienced connoisseur indeed to detect any difference between the ancient models and the modern reproductions; for to an unpracticed eye both are equally perfect. No minute detail is neglected and even the long felt difficulty of matching the old lace thread in colour and texture has been most satisfactorily overcome. We understand Mrs. Treadwin personally instructs her lace-workers in their delicate work and cunning hands she must have found among the Devonshire girls to turn out such admirable reproductions. Such an industry well deserves the patronage of birth and wealth, who can appreciate lace and pay the necessarily somewhat high price.¹

In the market for high quality laces Mrs. Treadwin was perhaps the most successful of all dealers. She produced a wide variety of standardized patterns on which her workers learned and which they used according to changes in demand. Much of the work was undertaken for royalty and these purchases were often reported in fashion journals, tending to bring her laces into fashionable notoriety. When Mrs. Treadwin's workers made a flounce of Venetian Point for Lady Lymington's wedding dress, The Queen magazine claimed it was 'so good that no appreciable difference between the original and the copy can be detected'.²

Not all dealers were as careful, or as successful as this, and some certainly fell foul of some of the traditional difficulties of the putting out system.³ Much depended on the organizing ability and interest of particular dealers, though producers of high quality laces such as Mrs. Treadwin could scarcely have met their customers' requirements without careful supervision. Mrs. Treadwin eventually wrote a small book Antique

1 ibid.

2 Queen, Feb. 21, 1885.

3 See above, pp. 244-7, and below, pp. 361-2.

Point and Honiton Lace (1874) to further not only her own interests but those of the Devon industry in general. It was mainly concerned with the artistic merits of making good lace and showed how this was done, but it also contained a full price list of the items made by her workers:

Bridal Veils	5 - 50gns.
Flounces, partially applied on net 10-15in. wide	15s. - 3 gns./yd.
Garniture Lace, 4 in. wide, entirely of point lace.	1 - 4gns.
Pocket handkerchiefs.	1 - 10gns.
Lappets	1gn. +
Fan Leaves	2 - 12gns.
Parasol Covers	4 - 20gns.

These prices were said to be roughly the same as for equivalent pieces of Brussels lace,¹ the Devon industry's chief rival in the fashionable market. But Mrs. Treadwin was probably able to command prices higher than almost anybody in the English industry and the constituents of her output, and their prices, are probably not typical. The catalogue entry for Haywards (Daniel Biddle) of 81 Oxford Street at the International Exhibition of 1862 in London, affords a more useful and unusual opportunity to make a comparative assessment of the relative prices of the various laces, both machine and hand-made, then available in the London stores:

Brussels lace squares from	10gns.	Brussels lace, sets of collars
Imitation lace squares	" 1gn.	sleeves from 24s. to 2gns.
Brussels lace tunics	" 11gns.	Honiton lace, do. from 10s. 6d.
Brussels lace double		Full trimmed sets of collars and
flouncings	" 16gns.	sleeves in lace and embroidery
Imitation flouncings	" 45s.	from 12s. 6d. to 5 gns.
Honiton lace squares	" 3gns.	Muslin and cambric embroidered
Honiton lace flouncings	" 7gns.	sets from 5s. 6d. to 30s.
Swiss lace squares	" 3½gns.	Lace and muslin double-skirt
Black real point lace		dresses from 15s. 9d.
flouncings	" 18gns.	Embroidered cambric handkerchiefs
Imitation do.	" 2gns.	from 3s. 6d.
		Trimmed lace do. from 10s. 6d. to
		25 gns.
		Black lace mantillas and shawls
		from 25s. ²

1 E. Treadwin, Antique Point and Honiton Lace (1874), p. 71.

2 Official Illustrated Catalogue of the London International Exhibition, 1862, p. 69.

It can be seen that Honiton laces generally undercut the price of equivalent pieces of Brussels lace by around 60 per cent, and that machine laces undercut both by around 30 per cent and 90 per cent respectively. Though Honiton laces were not, as a rule, of the same quality as Brussels lace, they do at this time seem to have enjoyed a marked price advantage, at least on the goods described here. But differences in design, and the very fact that they were Honiton laces were probably just as important in the minds of many purchasers. Both hand-made laces were seriously undercut by machine laces, but with respect to fashionable piece goods such as these, quality, originality in design and hence an ability to exploit a pronounced fashionable taste for real lace worked, with some purchasers, to their advantage. A typical piece of advice to fashionable ladies was that given in The Young Englishwoman in 1870:

Laces of excellent quality may be had at far lower prices than is usually supposed; and I strongly advise young girls, instead of buying every mode in collars, ruffles and sleeves in common lace, to purchase a few lengths of real lace, which they can alter and arrange as the fashions change. If a girl who has a limited sum to spend will examine her account book for the last year, she will find that neckties, collars, chemisettes and sleeves of 'patent lace' of imitation 'Point Duchesse' and other novelties, have cost as many pounds as would have purchased some real lace that would have been always elegant, distingue, and of value.¹

Mrs. Treadwin's workers were not the only ones to exploit this situation by reaching high standards of accomplishment. Many elaborate pieces from both regions were on display at the International Exhibition of 1862.² Application laces had by now been largely replaced in Devon by guipures, most of which featured the flowers and roses for which Honiton was

1 Young Englishwoman, July 1870, p. 374.

2 Art Journal Catalogue of the London International Exhibition (1862) pp. 46-7; International Exhibition, Official Catalogue, op.cit., 1862, pp. 69-70.

famous, though a number bore witness of attempts to produce more sophisticated designs based on those of contemporary continental laces and particularly of attempts to introduce strapwork to give the designs form; Debenham and Freebody and Howell and James both showed designs of this type.¹ Others had made attempts to improve the more traditional, naturalistic designs. Mrs. Palliser commended the efforts of her brother, Captain Marryat, in procuring for the lacemakers of Sidmouth new patterns of 'flowers, insects and other natural objects', and of the Bath and West of England Society in providing a competition and prize for lace 'worked either in flowers, fruits, leaves or insects, strictly designed from nature'.² The Jurors of the Exhibition said that much of the improvement was due to the 'perseverance and intelligent exertion of Mr. John Tucker of Branscombe who is the manufacturer of the best articles exposed'.³

There had also been some further improvement in technique and design in the south-east Midlands, though the bulk of laces produced here were still of the cheaper kind. The Jurors noted that the progress made in Buckinghamshire since 1851 could be 'readily perceived by an examination of the fine specimens of piece goods, including shawls, tunics, flouncings, veils and cuffs which are exhibited this year'.⁴

It is only within the last three or four years that large articles in fine lace have been made in Buckinghamshire; the workers there have not only improved their fabric... their designs are of a higher standard than they used to be.⁵

The best patterns, such as those shown by Debenham and Freebody, were

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 410.

2 *ibid.*, p. 412.

3 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1862, p. 3.

4 Reports of the Juries, *loc. cit.*

5 Art Journal Catalogue, *op.cit.*, p. 81.

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4 Reports of the Juries, loc. cit.

5 Art Journal Catalogue, op.cit., p. 81.

being taken from designs prepared in France and Belgium and 'altered to answer the requirements of our English style of lace'.¹

The ability of dealers to change designs of piece goods with some frequency, no doubt owed something to Mr. Edward Godfroy, a native of France, who had settled in Buckinghamshire during the 1840's and had instructed a number of workers in the art of the 'point de raccroc', the method of stitching small pieces of lace together so as to form large specimens with imperceptible joins.² In so doing he brought the standard of some Buckinghamshire workers closer to the French, who had for long used the 'raccroc' to advantage in producing large items quickly.³

Yet the continued improvements in standards of production had still not brought the industry, in both areas, to anything like that general state of technical perfection which existed in large sections of the industry overseas. The designs of many Honiton laces were still far from perfect. 'Crowded and spiritless', and composed principally of heavy medallions and clumsy arabesques encircled with bouquets of flowers, these laces were 'poor imitations of nature'.⁴ The Jurors felt with their predecessors that the English workers might still pay heed to the finer and more graceful style embodied in Brussels lace.⁵ In Northamptonshire the skill of lace designing had deteriorated to a considerable degree.⁶ Yet Thomas Lester felt that French and Belgian designs had only a limited usefulness:

1 Reports of the Juries, loc. cit.

2 *ibid.*

3 See above, pp. 128-9.

4 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1863, p. 3.

5 *ibid.*

6 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 262.

the great want in the trade is a school of design which would enable manufacturers to obtain patterns suitable for ordinary work. There are many French and Belgian designers but their patterns are too elaborate and too difficult for people here, and scarcely any of the manufacturers can design their own ...

Many dealers had tried to take the easy way out by copying old patterns, but this had simply 'discouraged invention', with the result that fresh, original designs were now becoming scarce.¹

The industry in the south-east Midlands had nevertheless enjoyed a degree of prosperity during the 1850's which was quite beyond anything it had experienced since 1815. There had been some technical improvement and greater attempts had been made to counter competition, particularly with machinery, by producing a constant flow of new designs. Yet much of the industry's progress was the product of the ability of lace dealers to produce a fabric which was cheap, was very simple to execute, which did not resemble any of the classical pillow laces and which, for almost the whole of the decade was in great demand, yet was not imitated on the lace machine.² Almost all of the south-east Midland laces exhibited in London in 1851 had been either lace edgings and insertions, classical Buckinghamshire point, or imitations of fine foreign laces. Thereafter, the traditional fabrics of these areas had given way somewhat, though far from completely, to Maltese lace.

There had also been developments in this direction in Devon where the women and children made 'coarse and geometric laces' as well as cheap guipures, with great facility and precision.³ In 1855 the fabric was improved in this district by the introduction of a raised plait, incorpor-

1 *ibid.*

2 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 385.

3 *ibid.*

ating designs of butterflies and birds which, in a crude way, resembled the fillings of classical Honiton work and this further increased interest in the new product.¹

It was in the south-east Midlands, however, that this fabric found its greatest success and coiffures, black silk veils, parasol covers, lappets, shawls and flounces, all in Maltese lace, were for many years produced in great quantity. At the International Exhibition the Jurors reported that the introduction of black and white Maltese lace had been 'of great service to this branch of trade, and has added considerably to the numbers of workers, as well as to their wages'.² The workers of Buckinghamshire produced an offshoot of Maltese lace, 'Buckinghamshire Cluny', copied from old Italian laces housed at Cluny Museum in Paris and made in a white linen material. This proved to be popular as an edging for curtains and table cloths and as a furniture lace.³ Indeed, in spite of the various technical improvements which had occurred, the bulk of the industry's output, in both areas, was still composed of cheap laces of this kind though perhaps rather more in the south-east Midlands than in Devon. Baby laces also proved to be popular, not only in England, but also overseas, and particularly in the United States, where sales were substantial, though never again quite as high as the peak of £18,000 in 1840.⁴

In these various ways, the pillow lace industry came to stand, at the end of the 1850's, at its final peak. During the preceeding 20 years it had responded well to the exigencies of competition and to the

1 *ibid.*

2 Reports of the Juries, *op.cit.*, 1862, p. 3.

3 T. Wright, *op.cit.*, p. 127.

4 See Tables 8 and 9, pp. 228-9.

rising level of demand which had provided it with the opportunity of survival. There had been some notable improvements in design and execution, market contacts with the London fashion houses had been tightened, the market potential of a highly popular, yet simply-made lace had been well exploited and efforts had been made to produce a more rapid turnover of types of lace and designs. The industry had been able to offset the price competition of the machine industry and the general technical superiority of its continental rivals, its labour force continued, by and large, to see it as its first choice of occupation and additional hands generally turned up for work whenever dealers required them.¹ Yet the improvement had been based on somewhat precarious foundations and was not destined to last. During the 1860's the industry's fortunes took a distinct turn for the worse and it was never to recover again.

1 See above, p. 174.

CHAPTER 13

The Industry in Decline (1860-90)

During the 1860's a number of the factors which had been instrumental in the industry's improvement were suddenly dissipated. In the short run the production of cheap, coarse Maltese laces had brought a good deal of prosperity to the industry. Yet there had clearly been no long-term future in this, for Maltese lace was a cheap product without any advantage of style, and soon it would almost inevitably be produced even more cheaply on the machine. Laces with solid areas and no net background were made on the Leavers machine from the 1840's, though of very different patterns from the true Maltese lace or its imitation. Around 1850, however, the earliest specimens of fancy Maltese laces were made on the machine. The resemblance was still vague and rested mainly on the boldness of the geometric patterns, but by the early 1860's, almost inevitably, close imitations were being made on the Leavers machine and from then onwards the production of Malteses laces by hand declined severely.¹

This was a particularly harsh setback for the south-east Midlands and it was doubly unfortunate that it coincided with a second catastrophe, for the demand for baby lace was suddenly 'unmercifully overthrown' by 'the caprices of fashion' and not only in England, but also the United States. Thomas Lester was one of a number of dealers who had sent a good deal of his output to this centre.² Indeed, Mrs. Jackson claimed, albeit exaggeratedly, that had it not been for the American market the industry

1 Reports of the Juries, op.cit., 1863, p. 3.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 255.

would have fallen into the 'deepest depression during the 1850's'.¹ But the falling demand for baby lace, and then the Civil War, almost obliterated this source of export during the 1860's. In 1865 the United States took only £175 of English pillow lace and with the exception of one year when over £1000 of lace went to the West Indies, there was no sign of a recovery in the general level of exports.² A large segment of the industry's market had been permanently lost, leaving the onus on the dealers to replace it on the domestic market.

It was unfortunate in this respect that the 1860's saw the importation of hand-made laces into England increase enormously. There had been some decline in imports during the second half of the 1850's.³ Tariffs had been lowered in 1855 to a charge by weight instead of value, which effectively reduced the tariff, slightly, to 10 per cent.⁴ Technical and organizational improvements in the English industry, together with fashion had played their part in limiting its impact. But when Gladstone finally abolished the tariff on imported laces in July in 1860,⁵ this, together with the increasing demand for continental lace, had the immediate effect of stimulating imports of foreign pillow laces by leaps and bounds. From a level of £48,636 in 1860 imports of pillow laces jumped to £65,723 in 1863 and by 1871 reached the record level of £383,617. Belgium and France were still the chief suppliers, Alencon and Brussels continuing to

1 E.N. Jackson, op.cit., p. 67.

2 See Table 9, p. 229.

3 See Table 11, p. 320.

4 18 & 19 Vict. Cap. 97.

Mohair lace, 1s. the lb. (average price 10s./lb.)
Cotton pillow lace, not more than 1" wide, £1 the lb. (average price £10/lb.)

Cotton pillow lace, more than 1" wide, £2 the lb. (average price £20/lb.)
Brussels Point, £10 per £100 value: Silk pillow lace, £1.5 the lb.
(average price £15/lb.)

5 23 & 24 Vic. Cap 22. The Act drew no comment on its effect on lace in the local press. Woolmers' Exeter and Plymouth Gazette and Bedford. Mercury, July 1860.

satisfy those with expensive tastes, Le Puy, Mirecourt and Grammont much of the demand for laces of a more varied and cheap variety, often now of heavy design. Of the £48,636 of lace imported in 1860 £26,161 came from Belgium and £18,734 from France and this pattern was maintained during the 1860's and 70's, Belgium sending £41,216 of lace in 1863 and the enormous quantity of over £383,000 in 1871. The value of imported hand-made lace did not fall below £136,000 until 1876 and in 1880 still stood at £69,878, of which £62,156 came from Belgium.¹

The cheaper varieties of lace suffered particularly, as they were faced with 'a hard fight to keep their footing against the cheaper and more showy guipure' which was now being produced in increasing quantities in Belgium. The Belgian industry was not only larger and better organized, but also in the view of contemporaries, more ready to sweat its labour and sell high quality laces at lower prices than its rivals. Much of the blame for the low prices of Belgian laces was attributed by supporters of the English industry to sweating, rather than to the Belgians' superior efficiency or tariff cuts. It was claimed by one that Belgian nuns set off the vicious circle of wage and price cutting so characteristic of the infamous sweated trades by selling their laces at less than what was regarded as the normal market price.² But the Belgians' superior competitive ability clearly rested on a broader basis than this, and though their workers were poorly paid, they were also more skilled, and their products were generally marketed in an altogether more ambitious way. The English industry harboured too many workers of poor skill and had improved its techniques and organization in too piece-meal a way for it to counter the

1 See Table 11, p. 320.

2 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 82.

increasing competition of an industry which, in terms of technique and organization had, by and large, been constantly improving.¹

From the mid 1860's it took all of the dealers' ingenuity to survive. The market available to them had suddenly diminished as exports were almost curtailed and competition on the domestic market had increased. For the first time for 20 years fashions had moved substantially against the industry's interests as the demand for Maltese and cheap baby laces had waned. Machine-made laces had long since reached the highest degree of imitative perfection and could satisfy the demands of all those who wanted all manner of laces at a relatively low price. The pillow and needlepoint lacemakers in Europe responded to increasing competition by producing an ever wider variety of goods and by selling large quantities of laces overseas.² But during the next 20 years the challenge proved, on the whole, to be beyond most English dealers' capacity. The industry's decline was reflected in falling figures in the Censuses. In 1851 the industry had roughly 33,000 women and children available to it. In 1871 there were still roughly 25,000. By 1881 the number had slumped to just over 14,000 and the numbers continued to tumble thereafter.³ Worse, the industry was now attracting few of the young workers on whom its future would ultimately depend.⁴

This unhappy situation was inspite of the fact that the demand for lace was generally still very high. Lace appeared on dresses in the form of sleeves, collars, cuffs, flounces and sprays, on all manner of

1 See above, pp. 134-149.

2 See above, chapter 4, passim.

3 See above, p. 177, Table 2.

4 See above, p. 184, Table 4.

underwear, as trimmings on bonnets and in the form of veils, scarves and blouses. It was an important decoration on housemaid's caps and aprons and took an important place in the home, decorating chairs, table tops, mantle pieces, dressing tables and windows in endless variations.¹ Yet the industry was unable to fill the void which had been left by the losses of the overseas market and the demand for Maltese, baby laces and cheap guipures. In the long run, the production of cheap laces such as these had done nothing either for craftsmanship or design and this now seriously inhibited the industry's competitive capacity both in the cheap and expensive markets.

Thomas Gilbert was feeling the competition of machinery during the early 1860s:

Machine lace is constantly pressing upon pillow lace and the only means of keeping the latter manufacture alive is by constantly introducing new designs and kinds of lace as fast as the old are made on the machine which is often within a very short time after a new pattern is out.²

From the early 1870s even the continental producers of cheap hand-made laces, with the notable exception of those at Mirecourt and Le Puy, were finding machine competition difficult,³ and the English industry lacked both the finesse and ingenuity of its French rivals. The demand for good quality lace was still high and high prices could still be derived. But much of the industry's reputation, and ability, had been seriously undermined. Mrs. Treadwin's criticism that there had been too much emphasis on poor quality production proved substantially correct and it now proved impossible for the industry to succeed greatly in either market.

The industry's difficulties were most apparent in Northamptonshire,

1 J. Laver, Costume, op.cit., pp. 98-106.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 257.

3 See above, pp. 130-135, 145-8.

where large quantities of baby lace had been produced and where the industry was declining rapidly by the mid 60's, the decline being reflected clearly in the Census figures for 1871.¹ The same process was now taking place, if to a lesser degree, in Devon, where cheap guipures had brought easy profits and the belief by many dealers that the answer to the industry's problems lay in this direction. Yet in this way many dealers had simply repeated the mistakes of the 1820's, for by reducing the quality of their laces they had ultimately led their businesses, and the Honiton industry as a whole, down a spiral of self-destruction. Bad Honiton laces had mingled on the market with good, and the industry had eventually lost face as a result, making it difficult even for skilled workers and dealers to exploit the market for quality lace, which now probably offered most potential:

The dealers vied with each other in selling laces at reduced rates, and to effect their object, introduced work of an inferior quality, mingling the good with the bad. Honiton lace lost its prestige in the eyes of the public and that which at the first afforded a gain, in the end injured the trade, which has never entirely recovered.²

The industry's difficulties proved everywhere to be self-reinforcing, and particularly in discouraging future labour supplies. Many petty lace dealers had for long reacted to their difficulties by paying their workers low wages, or worse, in truck,³ and this had done nothing to encourage loyalty. Just as the industry's prospects were diminishing visibly, elementary schools began to attract children away from the industry, and not least because the loss of income in attending elementary instead of lace school was increasingly negligible, though children

1 See above, p. 177, Table 2.

2 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 410.

3 See above, pp. 254-264.

often switched temporarily to lacemaking when demand for their local produce increased.¹ As employment opportunities became more intermittent and the childrens' education was improved, however modestly, the young workers who once would have followed the occupation of their forefathers began to look more carefully at alternative opportunities. Village life also was changing. A traditional way of life was being broken down as villagers in many places began to look further afield to the brighter lights and the bustle of city life, where they expected to find new and exciting opportunities.² The lace trade was increasingly regarded by most young villagegirls as something belonging to a bye-gone age, with little monetary or vocational attraction. In Devon, domestic service took the place of the lace trade as first choice of employment and many lacemakers moved to Axminster where they placed the bristles in brushes. In the south-east Midlands many drifted into the hat-making industry at Luton and boot and shoe making in Northamptonshire.³

From the mid 1870's the industry's labour supplies were even more seriously threatened at grass roots level by government legislation. The industry had been examined closely by the Children's Employment Commissioners and by the Medical Officer of the Privy Council during the 1850's and had been found to be in serious need of control.⁴ Though the Factory and Workshops Act of 1867 proved to be a dead letter, the Elementary Education Act of 1876, the new Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 and the Education Acts of 1880 and 1886 eventually made the control almost water-

1 See below, pp. 461-2.

2 For a general discussion see J. Saville, Rural Depopulation in England and Wales (1957), pp. 19-21.

3 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 3; J.G. Dony, op.cit., p. 93; V.C.H. Northamptonshire, II, (1906), p. 338.

4 See below, Chapter 14, passim.

tight.¹ The supply of child labour was already on the decline but these Acts had a strong re-inforcing effect on the trend. By the end of the 1880's very few children were being recruited into the industry.²

As the century progressed through its second half the industry's labour force continued to grow older. The dealers' efforts to maintain standards and flexibility of production came increasingly against the apathy and intransigence of their workers. Old workers proved to be less flexible, less likely to accept the notion of change than younger women. They were not always willing, or able, to undertake difficult or new patterns. When Mrs. Palliser attempted to introduce new patterns to the industry at Sidmouth a number of dealers were very quick to seize the opportunity. But the reaction from their workers was notably inconsistent. While the youngest workers accepted the new patterns 'with gratitude', the older ones tended to be more sceptical. 'They had had their patterns for 40 years and more, and they were as good as anybody's, and they would not change'.³ Shortsighted and feeble, many of the old workers found new and difficult patterns almost incomprehensible and constant changes in design only confused them. The industry contained a built-in obsolescence which would destine it to extinction. Mrs. Palliser was driven to lament of Devon: 'the air is soft and the inhabitants an apathetic generation, alone to be roused by famine or some like calamity, from the natural somnolence of their existence'.⁴ Yet for these aged women there was no alternative but to continue to work at their traditional occupation. There was nothing else they could do and the few extra

1 See below, pp. 464-472.

2 See above, pp. 180-3, and Table 4.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 410.

4 *ibid.*

shillings and pence were preferable to poor relief and charity.¹ The industry's future rested very heavily upon their ability to respond to a most difficult and perplexing situation.

Here and there, there were still some signs of hope. High quality laces were still in evidence in Devon and the use of Honiton laces for wedding dresses was still highly fashionable, both in England and Europe. A French bride, in the 1870's, would still ideally wear 'a tunic of Chantilly lace and three flounces of the same, three flounces of point d'Alencon and three of Honiton lace; a Marie Antoinette fichus of Chantilly lace and another of point lace'.² And there was still some chance that she would find the lace she desired. Peter Orlando Hutchinson, a historian of Sidmouth, wrote:

In 1865 I had in my hand and examined some lace flowers made for Princess Christian's wedding. These were eleven yards of half a yard wide and nanover lace for the dress trimming. The cost was £300. This was supplied by Mrs. Hayman of Prospect Place.

In March, 1871, I saw in the same place a beautiful handkerchief made for Princess Louise who married the Marqui of Lorn on the 21st of that month. It was 18in. square, having a plain centre 6in. square, with a wide border of lace all round the centre. Each of the corners was adorned with a royal crown; midway between two were lovers' knots, the rest of the border being made up of flowers like orange blossom, birds like doves, and other pretty devices. The price £65.³

In 1878 Honiton laces were being sold in London at prices ranging from 2s. to 10 guineas a yard,⁴ and Exeter lace had been brought to such a height of perfection by Mrs. Treadwin's workers that it was forecast

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- 1 Mrs. Palliser commended the women of Beer who frequently kept their menfolk through bad winters when the fishing boats could not leave harbour. *ibid.*, p. 364.
 - 2 Young Englishwoman, Feb. 1872, p. 94.
 - 3 Quoted in H. Barnard, The Origin and History of Honiton Lace (Honiton, 1961).
 - 4 White's Directory of Devon, 1878-9.

there was now a fair chance that it would rank amongst the places 'famous for the production of specially beautiful lace'.¹ Mrs. Treadwin made 'two magnificent flounces' for the Queen, from whom she received regular orders. Indeed, her clientelle extended far and wide, from Lands End to John O'Groats, from China to Peru.²

Some skilled dealers derived stimulus by submitting products at a variety of national and international exhibitions. The gentlemen of the Bath and West of England Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce continued to offer prizes of £100 at their annual agricultural show, held at Clifton. Three prizes for designs 'strictly after nature' were won by Honiton dealers in 1887.³ Exhibits of lace also became a regular feature at the Northamptonshire Home Arts and Industries Association's exhibitions held annually at Northampton, Daventry, Towcester, Kettering and Wellingborough until 1910.⁴ In 1887 Buckinghamshire lace was shown at the Royal Yorkshire Jubilee Exhibition and 'the mill people took very great interest in watching the manipulation of the bobbins and can by no means understand how they manage so many without throwing them into inextricable confusion'.⁵ Some fine specimens of Buckinghamshire Point were shown at the London Health Exhibition in 1884,⁶ and at the Chicago Fair of 1881, where prizes were won by Mrs. Fowler of Honiton and Miss Radford of Sidmouth, for sprays and 'exquisite models' of flowers and birds.⁷ Thomas Lester was among dealers who submitted

1 *ibid.*

2 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 241, Hosiery and Lace Trades Review, 20 Feb. 1891.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 387.

4 Northamptonshire Past and Present, I (1948), p. 39.

5 Buckinghamshire Herald, 28 May, 1887.

6 E.N. Jackson, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

7 *ibid.*

specimens at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, and at the Vienna Exhibition of 1873, and won medals for so doing.¹ Each success of this kind was prestigious and promoted temporary improvements in demand. Following an exhibition at the Bath and West of England Society, Queen Victoria ordered all the exhibits to be sent to Windsor and from these she selected a flounce designed after the fashion of a honeysuckle. Typically, the demand for Honiton lace was momentarily increased.² In the same year a dealer at Sidmouth made a flounce which she sold to Royalty for 150 guineas³ and shortly afterwards a lace dress was made for Princess Beatrice.⁴ A number of Devonshire dealers also adopted a technically good style of lace which had previously existed only in Belgium, which they called 'Devonia'. It was made up of raised petals and butterfly wings which were worked separately and stood out in relief from the rest of the pattern. But its popularity, like that of most innovations, proved to be but momentary,⁵ and the dealers had to search again for the new designs and fabrics which seemed to be their major hope.

In both major lacemaking districts, however, standards of workmanship were everywhere on the wane. Even dealers who had once been careful to produce high quality laces now seized almost any opportunity for quick profits, often with little consideration of the nature of their product. Some Devonshire dealers saw their salvation in a fabric which had little to do with classical lacemaking. A length of tape or braid was first woven, then tacked onto a paper background. The braid was gathered into

1 Bedford Times, 2 November, 1956.

2 Western Gazette, 24 July, 1885.

3 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 2.

4 *ibid.*, p. 4.

5 *ibid.*

the required shape with a running thread, edged in button holing and the special spaces left for embroidering were then filled with fancy needle stitches. In many cases the fillings were extremely ornamental, sometimes identical with the classical needle point lace, 'point de Venice'. Braid lace was made with much greater rapidity than pure lace and for a time provided a welcome relief for the industry's sagging fortunes.¹

There was less to be said, however, for most of the cheap expedients which were now being adopted, not least because their appeal was even more short-lived. As the old master designers died or disappeared from the Devonshire industry,² the small dealers took to copying patterns from table cloths, wall papers, even frosted glass. 'Sometimes we sees a new wall paper and prick a pattern off it, change a bit here and there and leave or add a little'.³ Standards fell acutely as 'snails, slugs, frying pans, cats' paws, turkey tails, bullock hearts, shells, ferns, feathers, even peacocks found themselves immortalised in lace'.⁴

For a quick return some Devonshire dealers took to making 'rag lace', which was made with as few bobbins as were needed to hold a lace fabric together. The bars joining the sprays were loosely plaited and worked without pins or purls. The work was generally left half finished. The fastening off of each couple of bobbins was dispensed with, and the whole bunch was simply given a sharp twist and tied round with thread before being cut off. These laces were cheap, poorly worked and ill-conceived, and in no sense lasting. The thin leaves of their patterns

1 A.P. Moody, op.cit., pp. 35-6.

2 Mrs. Treadwin, died in 1891, Hosiery and Lace Trades Review, 20 Feb. 1891. See above also, p. 268.

3 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 3.

4 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 40.

soon showed open spaces where the foundation threads began to slip apart, and the least strain pulled the threads out of place.¹ The lace was a far cry from classical Honiton lace, and was no basis for sustaining demand, for it added to the industry's dwindling reputation.

There was little more to be said of the new-found habit of restoring and remaking old lace for the London market, even though there was momentarily a keen demand for it. Much of this was seventeenth century needlepoint:²

The splendid mantles, tunics, and flounces which enrich the shop windows of the great lace dealers of London are mostly concocted from old fragments by the Devonshire lacemakers. It is curious to see the ingenuity they display in re-arranging the 'old rags' - and such they are - sent from London for restoration. Carefully cutting out the designs of the old work, they sew them upon a paper pattern of the shape required. The 'modes' or fancy stitches are dexterously restored, any deficient flower supplied and the whole joined together on a pillow.³

But restoring old laces did not improve the Devonshire workers' ability to meet the still substantial demand for well-constructed and elegant pillow laces or even, it seems, for braid work, the authors of the Queen Lace Book complaining that:

The laceworkers of the present day revel in torturing their braid by doubling and crossing it into meaningless and angular patterns connecting the lines of the design with rigid and stiff bars, and filling every nook and cranny with a distressing variety of point stitches; they forget that simplicity and taste are the first requirements for artistic work.⁴

The image of the Devonshire industry was well and truly tarnished and it

1 *ibid.*, p. 41.

2 Queen Victoria bought two such flounces in 1875 and pieces were used for Princess Beatrice's wedding in 1885. Queen, 21 Feb., 1885.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, pp. 411-12.

4 Queen Lace Book, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

now proved largely impossible for the few skilled dealers to rectify the situation.

A tendency towards cheapening the industry's output was also in evidence in the south-east Midlands where attempts were made to cater for changing markets, and the popularity of heavy laces, after the fashion of the industry at Le Puy. The attempts, however, were far less successful. 'Name lace', in which patterns were formed by Christian names, and long bookmarks $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, with mottoes and a turnpin edging of red silk, were made for a time in Buckinghamshire.¹ 'Monogram lace', in the form of medallions, was made in Olney, and sent to the Continent largely for ecclesiastical purposes.² Bedfordshire workers found a good market for a while for cheap plaited laces, ornamented with leaf work.³ A slight revival of Maltese laces took place in the 1870's in Buckinghamshire. The laces were produced by the yard in black and white, for collars, cuffs, coiffures, lappets, parasol covers, shawls and flounces, in unusual patterns based on floral designs recently taken from Paris.⁴

From 1870 Yak lace was introduced into Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Initially it was made, according to Thomas Wright, for a limited clientele, literally from the hairs of a Yak, but as its popularity spread, it was produced for a wider market almost entirely in Yorkshire wool, though some was made of goats' hair. For a time, 'enormous' quantities of this lace, with its geometric designs copied from Italian Reticella and Maltese Guipure, were sold in narrow widths for dresses and in wider pieces for furnishings. At High Wycombe one dealer was said

1 T. Wright, op.cit., pp. 228-9.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*

to use over 300 lbs. of wool per month. It was soon produced in colours to match any shade of dress.¹

For a time, this proved to be a 'large and important' branch of the trade but the boom was short-lived. A little later, a worsted 'Norman lace' was produced in and around Newport Pagnell² and a gold thread lace was made in the villages of north Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire in the 'early 1880's'.³ Small medallions, to decorate blouses in rounds and oblongs, and cheap Torchon lace made of Irish linen also became popular. A brown lace with blue plaits, two, three and four inches wide, was produced in the 1880's as a decoration for dresses, and furnishings. In some villages heavy black Chantilly lace for dress trimmings was momentarily in great demand.⁴ About 1888 a Maltese type of lace, made of gold metallic thread, was made extensively in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.⁵ But the demand for these products in all cases proved to be only temporary and the general effect once again was to add to the cheapness of the product and to diminish the industry's reputation.

By the early 1890's as a correspondent to The Times announced, the industry was 'fast dying out'.⁶ The lifeblood of the industry was rapidly being drained away. Between 1881 and 1891 the total number of workers employed fell dramatically from roughly 14,000 to just over 4,000.⁷ When A.S. Gle reported to the Home Office on the Present Condition and Prospects of the Honiton Lace Industry in 1888, he found it to be in a state of

1 *ibid.*

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*, p. 230.

4 *ibid.*, p. 229.

5 A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-6.

6 Times, 12 June, 1888.

7 See above, p. 177, Table 2.

abject depression. There was an element of despair among lace dealers, a despair based on the realisation that the situation could not really be expected to improve. The industry, Cole felt, was dying. The last good season had been 10 years ago when 'nearly all the workers in the place had been employed'.¹ Occasionally, it had seemed that just such another season would return, but improvements had always proved to be only temporary. The public taste for Honiton lace was withering away, business 'had never been so bad,' the 'cheap hybrid lace made at Nottingham' having 'vulgarized the commonest genuine hand work, reduced its value and affected its quality'. Comparative pieces of cheap lace produced in France and Belgium were cheaper than those produced here. The workers had 'taken to the streets begging the dealers and anyone to take their lace'. At Beer, where in the 1860's there had been 400 workers there now were only 60 and at Seaton there were only 20. 'F', a dealer at Honiton who had once employed over 200 workers, now provided only intermittent employment for 70. Another dealer who had regularly sold over £40 of lace every week said that she was lucky if she sold £1 or £2 of lace a week, and 'sometimes not a shilling; not a sixpence worth even'.²

Shortly before her death, Mrs. Treadwin, lamenting the general diminution of standards, ascribed some of the blame to the London wholesale trade which, for a while, had 'encouraged hastily produced laces of a poor quality'.³ The result had been the cheapening of all Honiton laces in the eyes of the public, so that it had become difficult to persuade potential buyers that even the best Honiton laces were in fact the genuine article. A.S. Cole had been told that the production of cheap Honiton

1 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., p. 5.

2 *ibid.*

3 E. Treadwin, *loc. cit.*, p. 233.

laces and of cheap imitations in Nottingham had vulgarised the genuine high class hand work to such a degree that even if new patterned laces were produced with the finest thread the very name of Honiton would tend to bar it from the market:

A chief cause of the failure of the lace trade is connected with the unwillingness of people to believe that Honiton lace cannot be of patterns and quality different from and superior to those of a certain character which do not fairly represent the capabilities of the industry... But if new patterned lace made with the finest thread is produced the name Honiton seems to bar it from the market; though if it be called a foreign name it takes.¹

The great need, Cole concluded, was for standardised specimens, such as those produced by Mrs. Treadwin in Exeter, for only they could serve to uplift the industry's general standard of production.²

There now seemed to be little the dealers could do to arrest what appeared to be the industry's irresistible path to extinction. Cole suggested that travelling teachers might be employed to teach lacemaking of the highest quality, and that prizes be given for samples of good work, under the auspices of county councils. But his hopes would not be fulfilled. There were now so few skilled workers left that it had become impossible to satisfy all the demands of those who wished to place an order for expensive lace. The absence of regular practice detracted from the maintainance of standards and when demands came the workers often lacked the skill to meet them. The constant failure of the industry to produce goods of the required quality contributed to a further diminution of demand, and at a time when generally there was a lace mania.³ In 1898

1 A.S. Cole, loc. cit.

2 *ibid.*

3 Times, 1 Dec. 1904. Dickens and Jones were then selling £10,000 of lace a day.

the fashionable magazine Madame idealized the old days: 'Many an old writer can tell of the high prices that used to be paid and how, in order to meet the demand the whole family, men included, - had to work late into the night'.¹ But the days of frantic efforts at weekends, of 'force put',² as periods of intense activity were called, were now gone. Early in the twentieth century Mrs. Moody could only lament the fact that:

the greatest difficulty in working a large order is the hopeless unpunctuality of the older women. Words seem to have no power to impress upon them the loss a broken promise may mean to the business. There seems to be no feeling of personal responsibility. 'If the Lord is willing you shall have your work next week' said one old lady, 'but I don't think you will'.³

CONCLUSIONS

By the early 1890's the industry had clearly lost its struggle against laces made by machine and hand-workers overseas. The industry's general plight with respect to machinery was well-summarized in 1893: 'it can never compete with machine-made lace, the resemblance being so close in all points except price'.⁴ Certainly, from the 1850's it had been very difficult for all but those with a romantic attachment to hand-made lace to distinguish between the two. The Times claimed in 1904 that 'it is no exaggeration to assert that in London alone every year many yards of machine-made lace are sold as real',⁵ and this had probably been so for many years. The price gap had been widening from the 75 to 90 per cent suggested for the 1850's.⁶ In 1904 a good lace flounce of the

1 Madame, 18 April, 1898.

2 See below, pp. 431-3.

3 A.P. Moody, op.cit., p. 87.

4 'The Chicago Exhibition: Lace and Other Personal Decorations', Art Journal, 1893, p. XXVI.

5 Times, 1 Dec. 1904. Dickens and Jones were then selling £10,000 of lace a day. See also Appendix V, for comparative prices of laces sold at the Army and Navy Stores in 1907.

6 See above, pp. 318, 339.

style then fashionable in imitation Brussels point or Applique cost £2, in real lace it cost ten or twelve times more; the gap had widened 25 per cent during the previous 10 years.¹ It was unfortunate that there were few dealers or workers left who could exploit the demand for expensive laces of this kind. Even the machine industry now showed its sympathy, its trade journal regretting that Honiton workers had been left 'without guide as to good taste or fashions of the day'² and suggesting, as a possible avenue to improvement, that:

there is at the present time in England, lace stored up of immense value and of wonderful beauty, which if used would require replacing and would find work for our English laceworkers... The declining industry, which in the past has produced many splendid specimens, requires new life, which should be infused into it in the manner indicated.³

With the advantage of hindsight it can be seen that amidst the changing complexity of factors behind the industry's perpetuation well into the second half of the nineteenth century good taste and workmanship, and a flexible response to changing fashions had been the most important. The industry had suffered badly during the 1820's. The Devonshire netmakers had been swamped by cheap machine products, and cheap machine laces and foreign pillow and needlepoint laces of all kinds had been highly fashionable. The reaction had at first been poor, many of the old-designer dealers had left the industry, in part from despair, in part in disgust at the increasing plaguairism of their patterns by rival, perhaps desperate dealers. But rising demand during the 1830's, and a fashionable mania for lace from the 1840's had eventually provided the basis for recovery,

1 Times, loc. cit.

2 Hosiery and Lace Trades Review, 20 Sept., 1890.

3 ibid., 20 June, 1891.

provided that the demand could be met.

With respect to machine competition, the industry had tried, erroneously, to counter the machine industry during the 1820's on its own terms, by reducing the quality of its output to a similar level. It emerged during the 1830's, and more particularly during the 1840's, that the best means of countering competition with the machine producer, particularly in the cheap market, was to avoid direct confrontation. Aided by regional market loyalties and increasing exports, the pillow lace industry had been able to sell goods such as applique and Maltese laces, which were quite cheap and yet the machine did not reproduce. Survival had also involved a certain amount of ingenuity and flexibility in production. Whenever direct price competition between strictly comparable goods emerged, the hand industry generally lost heavily. And fancy piece goods such as veils, berthas, handkerchiefs and so on were under increasing competition as, during the 1840's, the machine industry reached new heights of technical perfection. Yet differences in design and the ability to produce new ideas ahead of the machine industry had sometimes enabled the hand producers to counter this. The problem had been to keep up the flow of ideas and innovations.

The alternative was to produce hand-made goods of an exceptional quality and so reap the benefits of the increasing attachment of the fashionable classes for this kind of fabric. Here, however, the industry came up against its traditional rivals, the hand producers of Europe. Not only had the English industry to fight cheap machine products and ever-improving machine imitations of its finest laces, but also the acclaimed, artistic laces of Brussels, Alencon and so on. Worse, continental producers had reacted against machine competition, in part, by diversifying their output and increasing the flexibility of their output in a similar manner to that which had occurred in England. In general, continental

technical expertise was almost always superior to its English equivalent and the prices of continental laces were often competitive and sometimes lower.

Yet once the English industry had recovered from the shock of the 1820's, it had not been until the 1860's that imported laces had again begun to bite into its market and so contribute seriously to its eventual demise. The answer to this situation had lain mainly with the fashions of the century's middle decades and the extraordinarily high level of demand for hand-made laces of all kinds. This had finally encouraged some of the industry's producers to strive for new heights of technical perfection and flexibility in design and in some cases there had been notable success. Successful sales tended to breed further demand, such that so long as an acceptable standard of production had been achieved there had effectively been room in the market for all.

To most dealers, however, the production of popular cheap laces of various kinds had seemed to be the most attractive and, in the short run at least, most remunerative proposition. During the 1840's and 50's there had been room in this market for both continental and English hand producers. Yet Mrs. Palliser saw in this development the industry's ultimate undoing:

Ever since the Great Exhibition of 1851 drew attraction to the industry different persons have been trying to encourage both better designs and better manufacture, but the majority of people have sought a livelihood by meeting the extensive demand for cheap laces. Good patterns, good thread and good work have all been thrown aside, the workers and small dealers reckoning little of the fact that they themselves were undermining the trade as much as the competition of machinery and machine-made lace, and tarnishing the fair name of Honiton throughout the world, among those able to love and appreciate a beautiful art.¹

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., pp. 415-16.

And in the longer perspective she was probably correct. For the pillow lace industry had gradually run out of the ingenuity not only to beat the machine but also the producers of Mirecourt and Le Puy. The number of skilled workers able to cater for the still large market for expensive lace had been reduced to a dangerous degree. Many dealers might have done the industry a greater service had they adopted a longer perspective and made greater attempts to improve the quality of workmanship and design. But here there clearly had been a number of inhibiting factors. The industry had suffered from the loss of many of its master designers during the panic of the 1820's and these, by and large, had not been replaced. It also had a weaker tradition of skill and craft pride than its continental counterparts and no doubt the sheer weight of traditional competition with these workers and the recognition of their superior expertise, had not been encouraging. There seems to have been but little effort to analyse the organisation and technical training of the industry overseas, where training was more rigorous and where the industry was much closer to fashion centres and more tightly and skilfully organised. Unlike the Belgian industry, the English pillow lace industry was unable to attract government aid and attention and in the long run it seemed unable to sustain sufficient enterprise to help itself.

The ultimate, long-term determinant of the industry's survival, given the continuing demand for hand-made laces of various kinds, however, was the availability of labour supplies and here again, the industry's organizers had probably done themselves a disservice. For by paying their workers badly, and often in truck, and by employing children strictly and in unwholesome conditions,¹ many dealers had effectively begun

1 See below,

Chapters 14 and 15 passim.

to push workers out of the industry, thereby adding to the pull factor of the attraction of the towns, even before the Factory and Education Acts had begun to cut away supplies of child labour. One might pose that had the majority of dealers been more dependant upon lace, and had less diverse business interests, their general efforts to keep the industry alive might have had greater intensity; for too many, lace was probably merely a speculative adjunct to more substantial interests.

In the early 1890's, the pillow lace industry gave every indication that it would soon be gone. It would take a new lease of life, a new sense of purpose and direction if an improvement were to be effected. Yet the industry, which had survived for a longer time than many contemporaries would have predicted in the 1820's, was not completely finished. Laces continued to be made on a commercial basis until the early 1920's, partly at the instigation of a small number of lace dealers who lingered in the trade, and partly also as the result of the activities of a group of so called philanthropists who, from the 1880's, took it upon themselves to furnish the industry's preservation, and the very fact that they felt it necessary to do so, and in the event, enjoyed a degree of success, is indicative of the lace dealers' failure to master the exigencies of their competitive situation. For the demand for expensive and original pieces of hand-made lace was high until the century's end.

CHAPTER 14

The Workers' Health

In 1785 an anonymous gentleman journeying through the south-east Midlands came, seemingly by chance, upon the lacemakers of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. He was alarmed by their stunted and sickly appearance and upon closer examination found them to be suffering from a number of physical handicaps which could be identified closely with the nature of their work and the conditions in which it was undertaken. Soon afterwards, clearly distressed by what he had seen, he drew the lacemakers' condition to the attention of the readers of the Gentleman's Magazine,¹ and where possible indicated the causes of their deprivation:

In the course of a late journey into Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, the frequent sight of deformed and diseased women in these counties drew my attention, and on enquiry I apprehended that these evils arise in great measure from causes which might by care be easily prevented. Many of the workers are deformed, occasioned by their uneasy posture, many are diseased seemingly owing in great measure to their inclined posture while working, which prevents their lungs having a free play. From the stomach being so compressed it cannot fail to bring on difficulty of breathing, pains in the region of the stomach, bad digestion, jaundice and many other complaints.

The gentleman was moved to call for the 'preservation of the health' of these unfortunate women, for not only were they in dire physical condition, but their situation was preventing them from 'bringing to perfection' what for him was their essential concern: 'the noblest manufacture (if I may be allowed the expression) of peopling the earth with a healthy and useful offspring'. How was it possible, he asked:

1 Gentleman's Magazine, 1785, p. 938.

that a diseased and deformed woman can bring forth healthy children or that a mind enfeebled by bodily distempers can be duly qualified to instil into the minds of infants with judgement and proper temper, such principles as infant minds should be tempered with?

Here, in the mind of the gentleman observer, was a clear case for some kind of intervention on the lacemakers' behalf, and he proceeded to offer two simple, yet for him decisive cures for their ills. He argued that by boring a small opening into the ceiling of the small, low and close rooms in which these women worked, and by connecting the hole to a flue, the noxious vapours which threatened the womens' health could safely be carried away. He had no doubt that with the flow of 'good' air which would follow, and with the implementation of his second proposition, 'a change of posture', (he did not suggest how this might be effected) the workers' health would be radically improved.

For almost two centuries before 1785 the employment of women and children in the pillow lace industry had received universal approval. Seventeenth century contemporaries had been convinced that the industry was totally beneficial to society,¹ and the physical condition of the workers had been completely overlooked amidst the approbation. By the eighteenth century the employment of women and children in domestic industries such as pillow lacemaking was an established and applauded facet of rural society. Daniel Defoe was one who delighted at the activity the pillow lace industry created and made rapturous and exaggerated claims as to the numbers it could so vigorously employ.² The account in the Gentleman's Magazine was still only a minor blemish on a contemporary outlook which was almost totally in favour of employment

1 See above, p. 47.

2 D. Defoe, Plan of English Commerce (1720), p. 241.

in the industry; it came well in advance of its time.

Humanitarian concern for the pillow lace workers was not resumed for another forty years. The industry's prosperity in the Napoleonic period encouraged further protestations of its value, and humanitarian accounts did not emerge again until the 1820s, by which time the industry's prosperity had waned following the resumption of French and Belgian competition and the advent of the lace machine. For a time the industry seemed to be in a dire situation and it was doubly unfortunate that this decline in its fortunes coincided with a period of depression in agriculture.¹ Together they produced misery and poverty in the lace areas and it was probably for these reasons that the physical condition of the pillow lace workers once more came to light during the 1820s and 30s.

In 1821 G.A. Cooke, a topographer, toured Devon, and finding the lacemakers there to be in a wretched physical condition, was drawn to doubt if the final product, however fine, was worthy of the human sacrifice involved:

Both at Sidbury and Sidford and indeed in all the neighbourhood for many miles about, great quantities of thread lace are made and some of which is extremely fine and beautiful. But after all has been remarked, it is a melancholy consideration that so much health and comfort are sacrificed in producing these trifling articles of decoration. The sedentary nature of this employment and the early age of the poor children confined to it make terrible havoc of life and body. The sallow complexions, the rickety frames and the general appearance of languor and debility are decisive proofs of the pernicious nature of this employment. The small unwholesome rooms in which numbers of these females are, especially during their apprenticeship, crowded together, are great aggravations of this evil. It is no wonder that the offspring of such mothers, in a majority of cases are puny, feeble and frequently a short-lived race.²

His comments were echoed shortly afterwards by a correspondent to The Times who wrote sympathetically of a group of females and children

1 I. Pinchbeck, op.cit., pp. 78-9. See also above, pp. 303-304.

2 G.A. Cooke, op.cit., p. 29.

who exhibited 'all the painful appearance of squalid poverty, wasting disease and despondency'.¹ This growing appreciation of the lacemakers' condition now brought the first positive, if minor step towards amelioration. In 1828 the trustees of the Harpur Trust, a Bedford charity, announced 'with pleasure that they are enjoined not to apprentice girls to lacemaking whereby health is frequently impaired'.²

But it was many years before the legislature finally intervened. First, a searching and lengthy process of examination and inquiry was necessary to persuade the government to accept responsibility for the conditions not only of outworkers employed in pillow lacemaking but also in rural industries as a whole. The general criticisms of early observers such as G.A. Cooke had first to be given empirical foundation in the two Royal Commissions on Childrens' Employment in the 1840's and 60's and then in the various Reports of the Medical Officers of the Privy Council in the 1860's. Even in the late 1860's, when there was plenty of evidence to the contrary, there were still those to whom rural industry presented a picture of the ivy clad cottage and of rustic bliss and charm. Mrs. Palliser, who was passionately in favour of the industry's preservation, spoke romantically in her History of Lace, of healthy, happy lacemakers, their cheeks as 'ruddy as the apples of their native orchards'.³ But the Reports of the mid-nineteenth century made it plain that the lacemakers' health and their working conditions left much to be desired, and that the one was seriously impaired by the other. Major Burns, the chief inspector for the Midlands area in the first Childrens Employment Commission, was quite convinced by the evidence of his inspectors that

1 Times, 16 June, 1828.

2 R.B. Hankin, op.cit., p. 23.

3 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 413.

the lacemakers' health was seriously impaired by their occupation and concluded from the reports that:

All accounts agree in stating that lacemaking is injurious to children and adults from their commencing so young and assembling in number in small rooms.¹

Indeed, his inquirers had found the health of the lacemakers generally to be so poor that one woman, 'remarkably stout, well-grown and hale looking' was marked out as something of a curiosity.²

To a degree, it was difficult for the first investigators to distinguish precisely between the general influence of environment and the specific influence of employment on the lacemakers' obviously poor condition. The lacemakers were afflicted by a number of illnesses and physical handicaps which were essentially the product of both situations and the one tended to aggravate the other. The lacemakers' lives were spent at the margin of subsistence, diet was often poor, and their resistance to disease, which was always nearby, was generally low. Rheumatism, bronchitis and neuralgia, common in the lacemaking communities of Buckinghamshire in the 1860's, came from living and working in damp rooms, and from constant changes in temperature.³ Conditions varied from one place to another, but village water supplies were often polluted by refuse and flies, sewers tended to be open and insanitary, while open privies were a common adjunct to cottage doors. The village environment contributed to occasional outbreaks of small pox, typhoid and diarrhoeal disease during the century's middle decades and typhus, which came from the lice which bred in domestic filth, broke out frequently in the south-

1 R.C. on Childrens' Employment, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, 1843, p. A.12.

2 *ibid.*, p. A.23.

3 Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, pp. 176-9.

east Midlands until the 1870's.¹

The most detailed investigation of diet in the century's middle decades was that undertaken by Dr. Edward Smith for the Privy Council in 1863.² In addition to agricultural workers in various counties Dr. Smith drew up diets of people occupied in sedentary work in various domestic industries - silkwomen, needlewomen, kid glovers, shoemakers and stocking weavers. Though his diets were not specifically those of lacemakers, and Dr. Smith pointed out that his enquiries were 'too few to give a fair average 'of the whole in each county',³ many of the agricultural workers examined came from Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire and the indoor occupations were comparable to pillow lacemaking.

Dr. Smith found white bread to be the staple food of most of the workers he examined. Oatmeal was the only other significant meal and this was confined largely to the north west. The consumption of potatoes probably varied considerably from season to season and few families grew sufficient to consume them all the year round, without either a period of shortage in the spring and early summer, or else supplementing them by purchases. Other vegetables such as cabbage were used mainly when meat was cooked and therefore less frequently than potatoes, though onions, when being cooked with meat, were 'used very extensively and give a savoury relish when bread is the chief article of which the meal is

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- 1 ibid.; 'The Sanitary State of Beds., Bucks. and Oxfordshire', Bedford Mercury, 13 Feb., 1860; Buckinghamshire Herald, 10 December, 1842; Bedford Mercury, 30 Jan., 1841; R.C. on Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, 1867/8, XVII, First Report, App. Pt. II, Evidence of Assistant Commissioners, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, pp. 466/540; Report from the Poor Law Commissioners into the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain, 1843, XII, pp. 12, 66, 88, 122, 126/7, 262, 268.
 - 2 Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Committee of Council on Health, XXVIII, 1864.
 - 3 ibid., p. 236.

composed'.¹ Milk was consumed on average at just under a quarter of a pint a day and indoor workers had only half that amount.²

Meat was a luxury and under seven per cent of calories were obtained from an average of between two and three ounces daily. Indoor workers' purchases of meat depended upon the state of employment and Dr. Smith admitted that he had found it necessary to average out purchases to obtain a weekly figure. Among outdoor workers around 30 per cent ate no butcher's meat, or only at very infrequent intervals. Other protein rich foods formed but a small part of the diet. On average, under a half ounce of cheese was eaten per day. In rural areas, except for the south-western counties, fish was almost entirely absent from the diet. One egg was eaten every two or three days, sugar consumption was about an ounce a day, fat consumption was low (about three quarters of an ounce a day) and was not eaten every day. Tea and beer constituted the major drinks.³

Among regional variations in diet, agricultural workers in Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire ate a flour and water pudding several times per week, known in Bedfordshire as the 'clanger'. Pork was almost the sole meat eaten in these counties, rarely cooked fresh and often pickled and kept for a year. On Sundays pieces of pork might be included with the pudding. Some of the workers in Bedfordshire had never eaten potatoes. In general, Smith estimated that 40 per cent, 43 per cent and 33 per cent of those questioned in Northamptonshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire respectively ate less than the minimum nitrogenous content

1 *ibid.*, p. 243.

2 This may be an exaggeration, however. Many poor people in the country experienced great difficulty in obtaining milk, particularly for feeding young children. See T.C. Barker, D.J. Oddy and J. Yudkin, 'The Dietary Surveys of Dr. Edward Smith, 1862-3: a New Assessment: Department of Nutrition', Elizabeth College, Occasional Papers, No. 1. (1970), pp. 29-30.

3 Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, *op.cit.*, 1864, pp. 245-53.

and in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire 33 per cent and 20 per cent respectively ate less than the minimum requirement of carbon.¹ Almost everywhere, Sunday saw the main meal of the week:

Universally, the dinner on Sunday is better than that on the other days, because, in many instances, in addition to other reasons, it is the only dinner at which all the members of the family can assemble. The meat or the bacon, when the whole quantity is small as 2lb to 4lb is commonly cooked for this dinner, and all partake of it.²

There are numerous difficulties in analysing and interpreting Dr. Smith's general conclusion that 'taken as a whole the examined classes of indoor operatives are so ill fed that assuredly among them there must be many instances of severe and injurious deprivation'.³ Diet fluctuated during the year according to changes in income (in part determined by the availability of occupations to the various members of the family)⁴ and to the seasonal availability of foods. The distribution of food within the family unit is also important, yet it is not possible to measure this on the basis of Dr. Smith's evidence. But Dr. Smith pointed out that the father generally received a larger share of the food than other members of the family and indeed that:

This is not only acquiesced in by the wife but felt by her to be right and even necessary for the maintainance of the family... The important practical fact is, however, well-established, that the labourer eats meat and bacon almost daily whilst his wife and children may eat it but once a week.⁵

1 *ibid.*, pp. 238-243. Smith suggested that 28,600 grains of carbonaceous foods and 1330 grains of nitrogenous foods, per week, were the necessary minimum subsistence level of diet. *ibid.*, p. 232. This is equivalent to 2650 Kilocalories and 77 grams of protein.

2 *ibid.*, p. 249.

3 *ibid.*, p. 13.

4 Family income in Bedfordshire was the highest of any in the Midland, Western, Eastern and Southern Counties, though straw plaiting was probably the main reason, for the Buckinghamshire figures were much lower than Bedfordshire and labourers' wages were roughly the same. See T.C. Barker, D.J. Oddy and J. Yudkin, *op.cit.*, pp. 28-9.

5 Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, *op.cit.*, 1864, p. 249.

It is also difficult to measure the calorific requirements of individuals since these vary according to age, body size and physical activity and this information, necessary for an accurate assessment of diet requirements, was not given.

A recent scientific analysis of Dr. Smith's report by an economic historian, sociologist and nutritionalist/dietitian, however, has suggested that Dr. Smith's figures for calorific intake 'were low enough both to affect growth and to restrict physical output' and that 'quite apart from long hours and poor working conditions the small intake of food must have contributed to a state of chronic exhaustion of the workers'.¹ With respect to protein the conclusions are difficult to assess, without a more precise knowledge of body size and food distribution within the family. Foods such as meat, cheese and eggs tended to be given to the breadwinner. Children were usually given cheaper foods such as bread, smeared with dripping or treacle and such foods are low in protein. The examiners conclude, however, that 'the few facts make it likely that the protein intake was adequate for adult men and for adult women that were neither pregnant nor lactating. It was probably inadequate for optimal nutrition for women during pregnancy or lactation, and for growing children'.² There is also evidence that faults in the absorption and/or metabolism of iron (though not of its inadequacy in diet) were a cause of a form of anaemia, chlorosis, ('the green sickness') which was common among women and severe amongst adolescent girls; this condition was also very common among young pillow lacemakers.³ In contrast to iron, the dietary supplies of calcium seem very low. Yet there is no evidence of widespread calcium deficiency

1 T.C. Barker, D.J. Oddy and J. Yudkin, op.cit., p. 46. For methods of calculation see, *ibid.*, pp. 35-38.

2 *ibid.*, p. 46.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 46-7. See also below, p. 397.

and in all probability the intakes of calcium in the groups studied by Smith, though much lower than those of today, were probably sufficient for physiological need.¹

Dr. Smith's evidence of poor diet had already been pointed to, in a general way, in 1843, by investigators of the conditions of childrens' employment in various industries not already regulated by law, including pillow lacemaking. Major Burns, investigating Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire, concluded that the 'children in lacemaking are poorly fed',² and most of the lacemakers interviewed gave substance to this view. Elizabeth West, of Wellingborough, aged 13, said she hadn't 'much food; meat about twice a week; other days potatoes or bread and butter; and for breakfast have bread'.³ Most of the few girls who spoke of their diet said they ate meat once a week and that bread and butter was their staple, though one girl, Catherine Curtis, aged 11, of Stony Stratford, claimed 'I have plenty to eat, meat twice a day at dinner and supper'.⁴ Mr. Stewart, examining the pillow laceworkers in Devon concluded that 'in general the want of a good supply of food of a nourishing and palatable kind and such as it would be desirable to provide for a person tired and exhausted with work, was a striking subject of remark on every side'.⁵ Here, bacon was the usual relish for potatoes and bread, though this was 'not too abundant'.⁶

1 *ibid.*, p. 47.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, 1843, App. to Second Report, Pt. I, p. A.13.

3 *ibid.*, p. A.54.

4 *ibid.*, p. A.51.

5 *ibid.*, p. D.3.

6 *ibid.*, For similar evidence see also, R.C. on Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, *op.cit.*, First Report, App. Pt. II, 1867/8, pp. 524-26, 538.

Dietetic inadequacies were but one aspect of the poor health which investigators of various kinds found to be characteristic of many pillow lacemakers. Dr. Smith made the important point that privation of food might be viewed in a broader context, for it was

very reluctantly borne and... as a rule great poorness of diet will only come when other privations have preceded it. Long before inefficiency of diet is a matter of hygienic concern... the household will have become utterly destitute of material comfort... even cleanliness will have been found costly or difficult and if there be self respected endeavours to maintain it, every such endeavour will represent additional pangs of hunger. The home too will be where shelter can be cheapest bought; in quarters where commonly there is least fruit of sanitary supervision, - least drainage - least scavenging - least suppression of public nuisances - least or worst water supply - and if in town, least light or air. Such are the sanitary dangers to which poverty is almost certainly exposed, when it is poverty enough to imply scantiness of food.¹

Though there was some variation from household to household, reports of the structural deficiencies, delapidation and unhygienic conditions of cottage dwellings in the pillow lace areas were common throughout the century's middle decades. The dwellings of the labouring classes in Towcester and Newport Pagnell, for example, were found almost universally to be 'very small, over-crowded and ill-ventilated', with the largest room not exceeding 11, 12 or 13 feet square by from 6½ feet to 7 feet high. Many of these rooms were without backdoors or windows and did not possess the means of through ventilation; in many instances there was no chimney in either of the bedrooms. These faults, the investigator found to be 'the rule rather than the exception' and as such it was 'not surprising that females, who are occupied at home, should

1 Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1864, pp. 14-15.

suffer more than males who are occupied abroad'.¹ Though there was some variation from place to place similar conditions were to be found in many of the lacemaking villages.² The lacemakers were notoriously poor housekeepers, as has been shown,³ and lack of domestic hygiene was no doubt a serious contributory factor to the pillow lacemakers' poor condition.

Overcrowded cottages, workrooms and bedrooms heightened the dangers of infection and contagion. Overcrowding was a national problem throughout the nineteenth century. In the 1860s the Medical Officer of the Privy Council reported on the housing of the rural labourers in England and his conclusion was that the overcrowding problem in rural England had worsened over the century, to such a degree that then it was probably worse than it had ever been before:-

Gradually and for many years past the state of the labourer in these respects has been deteriorating - houseroom being greatly more difficult to find and when found greatly less suitable to his needs, than perhaps for centuries has been the case. Especially within the last twenty or thirty years the evil has been in very rapid increase and the household circumstances of the labourer are now in the highest degree deplorable.⁴

Following investigations in 821 parishes in England, Dr. Hunter estimated that during the years 1851-61, house room in rural areas had diminished by four and a half per cent while the population had increased by five per cent, and there were 'innumerable parishes where the dearth of houses was going on more rapidly than any lessening of the population

1 Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, pp. 178-9.

2 See, for numerous examples, Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, pp. 177-79; R.C. on Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, op.cit., First Report, App. Pt. II, 1867/8, pp. 496-540; and Seventh Report of the Medical Officer, XXVI, 1865, pp. 148-59; 238-57.

3 See above, p. 172.

4 Seventh Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., p. 9.

could explain.¹ Dr. Hunter's conclusions are tabulated below, and show that in all the lacemaking counties this process was marked:

Decrease of Houses Accompanied by Increase of Population
in 821 Parishes or Townships in England

	<u>Houses</u>		<u>Persons</u>	
	1851	1861	1851	1861
Bedfordshire	741	730	3637	3748
Buckinghamshire	618	579	2608	2764
Devon	3485	3348	15554	16119
Huntingdonshire	1144	1110	4855	5087
Northamptonshire	719	697	2983	3125
Oxford	937	906	4208	4460
England	69225	66109	305567	322064

Source: Seventh Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council,
op.cit., (1865), p. 129.

The deterioration was attributed primarily to the reaction of landlords to the Poor Law of 1834. Since there was no levelling out of ratepaying liability among the constituent parishes of the post 1834 Poor Law unions, the landlords were cutting the supply of cottages in their parishes so that the labourers and their families would be induced to move elsewhere, where they could be out of their charge. Even during the 'Golden Age' agricultural labourers lived precariously on the brink of destitution, and illness and unemployment brought them frequently to seek parish aid. Where the ownership of property in a parish was concentrated in few hands the burden of the Poor Rates was felt 'very definitely and considerably' by the landlords, who consequently had resolved: 'that there shall be no labourers' dwellings on their estates and their estates will therefore be virtually free from their responsibility for the poor'.²

1 *ibid.*, p. 10.

2 *ibid.*

By the 1860's some landlords had gone a long way towards reaching their goals. Cottages had been allowed to deteriorate and had even been pulled down so that the poor would move on. Many labourers had now moved from 'closed' parishes to 'open' ones where they concentrated in 'wretched habitations',¹ thrown up by small cottage speculators who had bought small plots of land which they thronged 'as densely as they can with the cheapest of all possible hovels'.² Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire were among the most notorious of counties in this respect, and lace dealers were among the most notorious of the speculators. When John Talbot died in Bedfordshire in 1841 he left cottages in Shanbrook, Carlton, Turvey, Olney and Stevington,³ and was probably one of those lace dealers ill-famed for charging exorbitant rents for cottages of this nature.

The overcrowding problem was concentrated in 'open' villages. Once the 'evil' process of depopulation of the closed villages had been completed, they were left as showpieces

where the cottages have been reduced to few and where none but persons who are needed, as shepherds, gardeners, game-keepers are allowed to live.⁴

But the landlords in the closed villages could not cultivate their land without the labourers they had expelled, just as these labourers could not live without the employment the landlords had to offer. Each day therefore, many labourers walked from open to closed villages to work, sometimes walking as much as forty or fifty miles in a week.⁵ When the labourer returned home, he cannot have felt much relief at the squalid

1 *ibid.*, p. 11.

2 *ibid.*

3 See above, pp. 267-8.

4 Seventh Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1865, p. 135.

5 *ibid.*, p. 11.

situation which greeted him, and family life, which was already strained by domestic work and the struggle to survive, must have been made even more uncomfortable by the labourer's irritability¹ which followed inevitably, upon his fatigue.

Though very few labourers now lived in one roomed huts, a great many lived in one bedroomed cottages with one room downstairs and perhaps a small lean-to at the back which may have served as a scullery or privy. Dr. Hunter made a comprehensive survey of the size of rooms in the cottages of Bedfordshire. Of 150 cottages examined, 94 had only one bedroom. In these were accommodated 264 adults and 210 children, or five persons per room.² The doctor also took random samples of the incidence of overcrowding in a number of villages in Bedfordshire, stressing that the examples were 'not extravagant'.³ At Wrestlingworth, there were six per bedroom; at Eywroth six; Dunton ten; Biggleswade six; Houghton Regis ten; Tilsforth eleven and Leighton Busaard eight. An arbitrary selection and examination of 14 cottages in the village of Sutton revealed the following disturbingly similar results:⁴

<u>Houses</u>	<u>Bedrooms</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Total per room</u>
1	1	2	3	5
2	2	2	1	1½
3	1	3	1	4
4	1	2	6	8
5	1	2	0	2
6	1	2	8	10
7	1	2	0	2
8	1	5	0	5
9	1	5	3	8
10	1	7	6	13
11	1	6	5	11
12	1	2	7	9
13	1	7	4	11
14	1	2	6	8
				<u>Average 6.9 per bedroom</u>

1 For Dr. Smith's comments on this see Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1864, pp. 15-16.

2 *ibid.*, p. 146.

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*

The standard bedroom size was given as about 12 feet by 10, although many were much smaller. The position regarding bedrooms seems to have worsened since the early part of the century for in 1808 Thomas Batchelor had said that most cottages in Bedfordshire had two, three or four rooms, and that 'it is probable that about three rooms are inhabited by each family'.¹ In general, the lacemaking counties compared badly with the rest of rural England, as the following tables show:

	<u>Houses Examined</u>	<u>Bed-rooms</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Persons per House</u>	<u>Persons per Bedroom</u>
Bedfordshire	150	206	435	202	4.9	3.6
Buckinghamshire	94	127	233	189	4.5	3.8
Devon	211	368	546	421	4.6	2.6
Huntingdonshire	104	139	252	193	4.3	3.2
Oxford	333	555	778	858	4.9	2.9
Northamptonshire	303	441	750	664	4.6	3.2
England	5375	8805	12432	11338	4.6	2.8

Source: Seventh Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, op.cit., 1865, p. 128.

	<u>Single Bedroomed Houses, only</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Persons per House</u>
Bedfordshire	94	264	201	4.9
Buckinghamshire	62	138	113	4.0
Devon	53	123	66	3.6
Huntingdonshire	70	153	131	4.0
Oxford	124	268	272	4.4
Northamptonshire	182	391	354	4.0
England	2195	4918	3906	4.0

Source: Seventh Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, op.cit., 1865, p. 128.

Dr. Hunter had no doubt that in many instances the 'evil' was being 'aggravated by the influence of local industries - straw plaiting, glove

1 T. Batchelor, op.cit., p. 598.

making, braiding, shoemaking and lace'. These 'household occupations' were being followed by young women who otherwise might have been 'in service or away from hom'.¹

Dr. Hunter had high hopes that the Union Chargeability Act, which was before Parliament at the time of his report, and which was passed soon afterwards, would distribute the charge of maintaining the poor uniformly among the constituent parishes of the Poor Law Unions, and so remove the inducement for the 'dislodgement of agricultural labourers from their homes'.² He was careful to point out that it 'would be unjust to suppose that the relationships between the large landowners and the labouring population are universally as I have described'.³ The Duke of Bedford was one who provided and maintained cottages, at low rents, which had gardens, kitchens and three bedrooms.⁴ But Dr. Hunter stressed that 'by instances like those, judgement must not be blinded to the fact that they, in proportion to the mass of observed cases, are altogether exceptional and rare'.⁵

By the 1890s, however, his hopes of improvement were being fulfilled. Buckinghamshire cottages were still gravely overcrowded in 1884,⁶ but by 1892 some labourers were saying there were now 'plenty' of cottages to live in.⁷ By the 1890s the practice of pulling down houses to avoid the poor rate had ceased.⁸ In the Woburn Union of Bedfordshire the supply of

1 Seventh Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1865, p. 14.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*, p. 11.

4 *ibid.*, p. 12.

5 *ibid.*

6 R.C. on the Housing of the Working Classes, XXX, First Report, 1884, p. 596.

7 R.C. on Labour, XXV, Reports from the Assistant Commissioner: The Agricultural Labourer, Vol. I, Pt. I, 1893, p. 25.

8 *ibid.*, p. 31.

cottages was sufficient in nearly all villages to meet the demands of the population.¹ In the Duke of Bedford's villages, many cottages now had two or three bedrooms, of varied size.² But by this time the pillow lace industry had almost gone. The migration of women, previously employed in lacemaking and straw plaiting was marked by the 1880s and 90s, and was said to have contributed to the alleviation of the problem in many parishes.³

For reasons of poor diet, often overcrowded and insanitary homes, and poor village sanitation and water supplies, the lacemakers in the south-east Midlands and Devon would have exhibited some signs of poor health even had they not been employed at the lace pillow. But lacemaking undoubtedly worsened their health and many of the lacemaker's complaints, it was eventually found, could be related either directly, or in part, to the nature of their work and to the conditions in which it was undertaken.

In many cases the employment affected childrens' health even before they first took hold of a lace pillow. For the employment monopolised a mother's time during the childrens' earliest years, just when her attention was needed most. From birth many children were given opiates, especially 'Godfrey's Cordial', a mixture of laudanum (with its opium base) and syrup, as economic necessity compelled mothers to drug their children into silence so that they could work in peace. 'Godfreys', as it was almost affectionately called, was administered to the children by the spoonful, 'as carelessly as if the most harmless drink in the world'.⁴ Not surprisingly, many children did not survive their experience and were

1 *ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

4 Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, *op.cit.*, 1864, p. 459.

taken dead to the village doctor, 'shrunken up like old men', and 'wizzened like monkeys'.¹ A high rate of infant mortality was the inevitable result of the combination of maternal neglect, rural poverty and an appalling ignorance of medicine. At Towcester the mortality rate of children aged less than five years was twice the national average for the years 1848/55 and this the medical officer attributed directly to maternal neglect, the result of mothers diverting their attention from their children to the lace pillow.²

Those children who survived these early years were soon put out to lace schools, and here from the age of four or five, they worked for the next 10 to 15 years, in noxious conditions. The first year at the pillow was reputedly the worst. It brought to the children an element of discipline and restraint which they found utterly alien. Following a short, graduated introduction to the employment, a girl might, within six months, be working a 'full day' of anything from 12 to 18 hours. The work was often undertaken under 'fearful pressure' as they strove under various incentives of the 'stick' and 'carrot' variety, to twist the bobbins at their fastest speed so that production targets were reached on time.³ These early years of employment clearly had an adverse effect on the childrens' health. In their first days at the pillow many girls slumped over their pillows from exhaustion.⁴ Ann Freeman, a mistress at a school in Brackley, Northamptonshire, was convinced that when young children were brought to sit by the pillow for so long it 'hurts them, stints their growth and weakens their back'.⁵

1 *ibid.*

2 Third Report of the Medical Officer, *op.cit.*, 1861, p. 179.

3 See below, pp. 430-9.

4 See for example, R.C. on Childrens' Employment, *op.cit.*, Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. A.50.

5 *ibid.*, p. A.53.

The pressures on the children clearly were not simply physical, for the emotional strains of adjusting to this tempo of existence were emphasised by the pressures which came from the childrens' families. Fathers often made their children only too conscious of the importance of the contribution they were expected to make to family income, and of the dire consequences which might result should they fail.¹ The childrens' work contributed directly to their own maintenance and the quantity of food they ate often depended greatly upon their income. The very high incidence of nervous disease which the surgeon of Towcester found among lacemakers was probably attributable as much to familial pressures as to the rigid discipline, beatings and punishments which many lace mistresses handed out in lace schools.²

In their first year many girls soon began to show the effects of their work. If they did not collapse from exhaustion, they often complained of pains in the side, of headaches, of feeling faint and dizzy, of irritability and tiredness. Though there were exceptions who testified to the opposite the majority of girls told investigators that the work had always made them feel unwell. Elizabeth Smithson had always felt 'very low', May Wells complained that 'since I came to lacemaking I never felt well, hardly ever', Mary Platt told an investigator that lacemakers were 'more delicate than those who work outside in the open air', while her sister Sarah, who had moved from lacemaking to work at the Swan Inn in Newport Pagnell, said, 'lacemaking never agreed with me, I never was well', and she was adamant she would never go back to the lace pillow again.³

1 See below, pp. 409-416; 418.

2 See below, pp. 430-9.

3 R.C. on Childrens' Employment, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, pp. A.50, A.52.

The girls' general complaints were often symptomatic of far more tangible and terrible afflictions than fatigue. The Childrens' Employment Commissioner concluded in 1843 that the health of the majority of lace workers was 'impaired and the constitution much deteriorated by the practice of crowding together to work in small and crowded apartments'¹ and further and closer investigation showed just how great the deterioration was.

Consumption was the greatest threat of all and the greatest killer. The product both of the lacemakers' general environment and conditions of employment, it was the lacemakers' 'most mortal disease'. Most people in the lace areas were aware of it, though few lace dealers would admit it. Only one, Mrs. Allen, a dealer at High Wycombe, conceded that many of her young workers soon 'went off into decline' because of 'pains in the side', though typically she showed no sign of concern and offered no suggestions for improvement.² The girls and lace mistresses often complained of these pains to the investigators: 'At first', said Mary Sumpter, a lacemistress, who in her childhood had been a pupil in a lace school for many years, 'the girls complain of a pain in the side, after that in their stomach and when it gets there they soon suffer in their heads too'. There was 'many a time' when her pupils had been forced to 'give up over a pain in their side'.³

The lacemakers' vulnerability to tubercular disease was related closely to their serious lack of exercise and fresh air and to the small, overcrowded rooms in which they worked. Here, infection was almost inevitable, as Dr. Baley, the medical officer reporting on the lacemakers'

1 *ibid.*, p. A.13.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 256.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 260-1.

condition to the Privy Council in 1861, pointed out. Dr. Baley outlined the sources of the lacemakers' susceptibility to tubercular disease:

Taking for instance the case of girls and women who from childhood onwards sit ten hours a day or more, often in constrained postures, stitching gloves, or lacemaking - this life, at its best has to a great extent the evils of monotony, of deficient bodily exercise, of physical seclusion from sun and air and of mental provocation from what is beautiful and animating in external nature. And thus probably even at its best, it tends to produce somewhat of vital depression, somewhat of mental privation and bodily etiolation during which there is a heightened liability to tubercular disease. Where the industrial system is bad, bad either in excessive length or in the overcrowdedness and non-ventilation of workplaces these evils may be vastly developed.

The lacemakers' life, he said, was 'comparable' to the life of the prisoners with whom he had been working earlier in Millbank Prison, London. Here, during the years 1825 to 1842, tubercular deaths were three to four times greater per thousand than in the city of London.¹

The conditions in lace schools were largely responsible for this situation. Better described as industrial workshops, these small cottage rooms converted for the purpose of industrial training and organisation displayed many of the worst characteristics of the workshops of the sweated trades. Dimly lit, ill-ventilated, insanitary, hot in summer, freezing cold in winter and invariably overcrowded, they fell far short of the minimum building and sanitary conditions necessary for the maintenance of the childrens' health. The children were always likely to contract disease, both at home and in school, but in lace schools the possibility was greatly increased by the higher incidence of overcrowding.

Most of the schools were small, only three or four yards in dimension, and about two yards high. The smallest included a few purpose-

¹ Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, pp. 31-32.

built extensions to cottages, such as the rooms occupied by Mrs. Woodley, a mistress at Newton Poppleford, in Devon. This was seven feet square, eight feet ten inches high and though the day on which it was examined was cool, the room, dirty and overcrowded, was said by an investigator to be 'almost unbearable'.¹

The schools were invariably far too small for the great number of pupils who crowded into them, as one observer remarked, like 'so many bees in a swarm'.² In all schools there was a premium on space, but the distribution of children into the number of schools in each village was by no means uniform and overcrowding in some cases was extreme. The number of pupils attending each school varied according to the state of the trade and the disciplinary prowess of each mistress. As parents sought to maximise their children's income, the toughest mistresses found themselves with the most pupils and it was in their schools that the worst cases of overcrowding occurred. During peak periods most of the schools were packed with pupils, and those of the strictest mistresses were sometimes filled 'till they will hold no more'.³ A commissioner found girls in a lace school in Moulton (Beds.) 'sitting so close together as scarcely able to move'. Not surprisingly, the girls complained of sitting 'close together' and of feeling 'faint' and 'dizzy' as a result of this and the heat of the room. At the end of a day during which they had scarcely moved from their stools, they felt a great desire to 'stir about' and run around outside.⁴

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 254.

2 Report of the Inspectors of Factories for the half year ending 31st October 1868, XIV, (1868), p. 307.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 249.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1943, pp. A.80, A.55.

In the 1850's most schools contained 20 to 30 pupils but when the industry boomed the numbers might be increased to 70, though there was probably not enough room to accommodate half that number in comfort. The first systematic check on the size of lace schools was made in 1860 when the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, reporting on 'districts with excessive mortality from lung diseases', measured the size of lace-school rooms and counted the number of pupils in each of them. At the time of enquiry the lace trade was in a 'very depressed state', the attendance at lace schools was said to be 'small' and many schools to hold twice the stated number in better times. Even so, the calculations revealed a startling incidence of overcrowding, even by contemporary standards of sanitation. The figures drawn up by the officer are reproduced below:

<u>Village</u>	<u>Cubic feet of air/room</u>	<u>Pupils/School</u>	<u>Cubic feet/ head</u>
Towcester	1666	9	185
"	1980	17	116
"	1470	8	183
Greens Norton	1274	12	106
Silverstone	520	9	57
"	1092	11	99
Newport Pagnell	1260	9	140
"	1200	18	66
"	882	12	73
"	1512	20	75
Olney	1404	40	35

Source: 3rd Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, op.cit., 1861, p. 181.

At this time the Common Lodgings Act (1855) demanded 240 cubic feet per person, the Boards of Health and Prison Inspectorate 800 cubic feet, and even the army authorities, who might be expected to accept minimal standards, advocated 500 feet per head in barrack rooms.¹ Without exception, the

¹ Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1864, p. 143. The Childrens' Employment Commissioner recommended a minimum air space per head of 300 feet. R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Second Report, 1864, XXII, p. XXIX.

cubic air space available for each child in a lace school came well below these criteria. If to the Medical Officer's table are added a collection of measures taken from evidence in the Royal Commission on Children's Employment (1863) the incidence of overcrowding looks even worse. There is no indication that 1863 was a particularly prosperous year but the figures were nevertheless alarming:-

<u>Village</u>	<u>Cubic feet of air/Room</u>	<u>Pupils</u>	<u>Cubic Ft/head</u>
Sidbury	583	18	32
Beer	650	10	65
Newton Poppleford	440	24	18
Seaton	330	12	28
Wilhampstead	682	22	31
"	1092	20	55
Houghton Conquest	968	24	36
Newton Poppleford	441	18	24½
Seaton	319	10	32

Source: R.C. on the Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, pp. 260, 262, 267, 264.

Such overcrowding inevitably had a deleterious effect on the childrens' health, particularly in summer when the schools became 'unbearably hot' and smelled 'offensively close' in the heat of the day.¹

The lace schools were seed-beds of infection, not only because air-space was short, but also because fresh air was often carefully and deliberately excluded. Many schools did not have windows, and such windows as there were would not always open. Even in the summer, when the schools were most crowded, cracks in the doors and walls were often carefully covered up, windows were closed and fireplaces stopped; the schools reeked with the stale breaths and body smells of their pupils. The air was excluded in an effort to make sure that flying particles of

1 *ibid.*, First Report, 1863, p. 252.

dust did not ruin the lace. White lace was particularly vulnerable, and though flour might be used to clean up a spoiled piece, it would never look the same again, for in cleaning the lace would have lost much of its essential delicacy. Warm air was also considered necessary to keep the girls' fingers supple so that they could manipulate the bobbins. But the plan of excluding air for this purpose often backfired. The children were frequently overcome by the heat, and their hands became so warm and sticky that they had to discontinue.¹ In the summer, mistresses sometimes took the girls outside into the fresh air, particularly if they were working on poor quality laces or on black ones which would not show the dirt. At times such as these the girls sat together in a garden, perhaps under a tree or even in the shade of a hedgerow, but the dangers of flying dust and of the sunlight causing the threads to become brittle made these excursions few and far between.²

These conditions contributed to make the lacemakers extremely liable to pulmonary tuberculosis, more commonly known as phthisis, a highly infectious disease. It has been calculated that a person suffering from a lung cavity may spit up four billion bacilli in the course of 24 hours. Each of these when dried or blown about is a seed of infection. The number of bacilli which might be contained in a lace school whenever a number of pupils were sitting close together, with all windows closed, is beyond imagination.³

In 1860 the Medical Officer of the Privy Council drew up a comparative list of figures showing the incidence of pulmonary disease in the industrial areas in which it was 'most prevalent'.⁴ He indicated

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- 1 R.C. on Childrens' Employment, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D.32.
 - 2 Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, p. 179.
 - 3 The figures are taken from Black's Medical Dictionary (1959), p. 25.
 - 4 Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, p. 35.

the difference between males and females in each district, and compared his findings with the incidence of the disease in three selected standard agricultural districts. The table, reproduced below, indicates the damaging effect of lacework, and shows it to be one of the worst employments in respect of the liability of its workers to contract tubercular disease:-

<u>District</u>	<u>Prevalent Occupation</u>	<u>Death Rate by Pulmonary Disease including Phthisis in proportion to 100,000 (1848-54)</u>	
		<u>Males</u>	<u>Females</u>
Newport Pagnell	Lace	490	545
Towcester	Lace	475	573
Berkhamstead	Straw Plaiting	401	566
Yeovil	Gloves	528	591
Stoke on Trent	Pottery	721	665
Wolstanton	Pottery	726	727
Bromsgrove	Iron	583	559
Alcester	Iron	539	577
Sheffield	Iron	939	670
Penzance	Tin	560	456
Redruth	Tin	670	450
Rieth	Lead	724	528
Patel Bridge	Flax	508	391
Macclesfield	Silk	691	804
Leek	Silk	588	705
Leeds	Wool	817	718
Bradford	Wool	611	603
Stroud	Wool	511	511
Melksham	Wool	626	559
Leicester	Hosiery	740	659
Hinkley	Hosiery	652	603
Preston	Cotton	726	768
Standard Agricultural Districts:			
North		297	304
South		411	454
South West		446	395

Source: Third Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, op. cit., 1861, p. 35.

The figures are calculated by the district and not specifically by employment. If they had been applied specifically to the operatives in each occupation the results would undoubtedly have pointed even more unfavourably against employment in each of the industries under investigation.

Lacemaking ranked, merely by its inclusion, as one of the industries in which the incidence of pulmonary disease was at its greatest. The disease was worse among lacemakers than among purely agricultural workers and the laceworkers proved an exception to the general rule that consumption was an urban-industrial phenomenon. Although it was by no means the worst occupation in this respect, it ranked with some of the most notorious industrial occupations: with the manufacture of hosiery, woollen cloth, pottery and iron implements, with tin and lead mining and with flax and silk spinning.

The adverse effects of the occupation were exemplified by the fact that in the lacemaking areas females were far more likely to contract the disease than were males; this was particularly so in the years of adolescence, when the girls were confined in lace schools. The figures shown below, are for the years 1848/54:

<u>Death Rate by Pulmonary Disease/100,000</u> <u>in the decenniad of adolescence</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Newport Pagnell	301	617
Towcester	239	577
Standard Northern Agricultural Districts	331	333

Source: Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, op.cit., 1864, p. 23.

In most purely agricultural areas there was little or no difference in the liability of the two sexes in this group to contract pulmonary disease, but in the lace areas females were twice as liable to contract it as were males. The medical officer felt that 'not anyone who knows the circumstances under which the girls work can wonder at the fact'.¹ Indeed, the industry's influence was such that the 'recent diminution of lace-

1 Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1864, p. 23.

making by men and boys' in Towcester was said to be the principal reason for the 'lower incidence of the disease' there among males than females.¹

The relatively high death rate with regard to pulmonary disease during the years of adolescence was not so apparent among glovemakers, a similar cottage occupation, and was not quite so bad among straw plaiters:-

<u>Death Rate by Pulmonary Disease/100,000</u> <u>(1848/54) in the decenniad of adolescence</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Yeovil (gloves)	280	409
Leighton Buzzard (plait)	309	554
Berkhampstead (plait)	219	538
Newport Pagnell and Towcester (lace)	270	597 +

Source: Sixth Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, 1864, p. 23.
+ (Average figure) extracted from previous table.

The difference was largely the responsibility of lace schools. In the glove industry there were very few schools, and most girls worked in less crowded conditions at home. The slightly lower death rate among straw plaiters can probably be accounted for by the fact that girls attended plaiting schools only during the winter. In the summer months they were able to walk in the country lanes and enjoy the open air, for they had that

great advantage over the lacemakers in change of position and locomotion, the heavy pillows of the latter confining them to the one spot where the plaiters can roam and work at the same time.²

In lace schools children were confined in conditions which inevitably affected their health adversely. Tuberculosis was the most serious problem,

1 Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, p. 178.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Second Report, 1864, p. 175.

but disturbances of the menstrual function, leucorrhoea, chlorosis, annemia and constipation,¹ all of which resulted from lack of exercise and fresh air, were equally common problems. The onset of winter brought with it additional dangers. The schools became extremely cold and since fuel, particularly coal, was expensive, fires were seldom lit. Instead, the children tended to huddle together for warmth and placed beneath their feet earthen pots and pans, known popularly as 'fire' or 'dicky' pots, which they filled each morning with embers, and re-vitalized from time to time with bellows. Most pots were of plain brown ware, but some were decorated with holes punctured round the rim and others were painted with coloured designs. The best and most treasured were made of brass. The pots were used throughout the lacemaking community and according to Thomas Wright also helped many a lacemaker through a long, winter's church sermon.² But they were more attractive than they were functional and their effect on the workers' health could be quite serious. By placing the pots close to their feet the girls developed chilblains and swollen ankles and the odour of the schools was not improved by the girls' habit of placing the pots beneath their clothes.³ The girls constantly complained about the cold, and the pots seem scarcely to have fulfilled their practical purpose. At times they were 'so freezed with cold' that they could not continue their work. The girls' fingers had stiffened and it had become too difficult for them to manipulate the bobbins.⁴

The lacemakers' stunted and sickly appearance, which had long been

1 Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, p. 179.

2 T. Wright, op.cit., pp. 107-9.

3 It was 'a practice which, of course, tends to vitiate the atmosphere of the small, ill-ventilated cottages', Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, p. 247.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 247. For this reason, there may have been some diminution of productivity in winter.

noted by casual observers,¹ was examined carefully in the 1840s and 60s by the Childrens' Employment Commissioners and the Medical Officers of the Privy Council. The results showed the lacemakers to be round-shouldered, with distinct spinal curvature, and chests which were almost always flat and ill-developed. Bending forward at work was the most obvious cause. Normally, the worker rested the pillow on her knees and bent well-forward, arms cocked, elbows outwards, while she twisted and turned the bobbins to follow the pattern's demands. It was an uncomfortable posture and seriously impaired respiration, since it prevented the lungs having 'free play'. The girls complained that at the end of the day their shoulders ached terribly as a result of bending. Ann Freeman (aged 12) said that when she went home at night she not only felt 'very tired' but her 'neck and shoulders ached from stooping over the pillow'.² A lacemistress at Sidmouth, Mrs. Stephen, came unconsciously very close to the truth when she told a commissioner 'the little creatures are quite crippled and their growth quite hindered by their being so cramped'.³

The girls' habit of wearing 'busks', wooden boards which they pushed into the front of their stays, ostensibly to keep their backs straight and hold their bodies erect, seriously aggravated the predicament. For far from holding them erect, the busks simply pressed into the girls' chests as they leaned forward. The result was a serious contraction of the sternum. The medical officer of the Privy Council made precise calculations in 1861, measuring the anterior and posterior of the girls' chests and comparing the results, shown below, with similar measures taken among cotton factory workers in the Lancashire town of Preston:-

1 See above, pp. 368-370.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. A.52.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 250.

Lacemakers' Chest Measurements

<u>Age</u>	<u>Total</u> (in)	<u>Anterior</u> (in)	<u>Posterior</u> (in)	<u>Difference</u> <u>Posterior/Anterior</u> (in)
9	25½	11	14	3
11	26	12	14	2
15	29½	13½	16	2½
17	31	14	17	3
11	17	12	15	3
8	24	10½	13½	3
9	26	12	14	2
18	30½	14½	16	1½
12	26½	12	14½	2½
15	30	14	16	3
12	30	13	17	4

Source: Third Report of the Medical Officer of the Privy Council, op.cit., 1861, p. 181.

In all cases the posterior measure of the lacemakers' chests exceeded the anterior, in only two did the chest exceed 30 inches, and in all but one case the difference between the anterior and posterior measures was two or more inches. The results were much better in Preston. Here, among an equal number of children aged 8 to 12 years (a noticeably younger age grouping), the anterior and posterior measures were equal in four cases, the posterior was greater by a quarter of an inch in one case, by half an inch in another, by half an inch in three cases, by one inch in one and in two cases by one and a half inches. The comparison bore 'adversely', the medical officer concluded, on the lacemakers.¹

Many girls were permanently deformed. When some of the enquirers induced them to throw away their busks and to stand erect the girls' chests expanded momentarily and they straightened. But the girls had been weakened by years of stooping and could not sustain the development. Their back muscles were flabby and weak and they soon returned to their

¹ Third Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1861, p. 181.

'former practice'. Standing erect caused them too much 'discomfort and fatigue'.¹

A minor improvement occurred in the late 1860s when 'pillow horses' or 'maids', semi-circular hoops which stood upon wooden legs and carried the lace pillow, were brought into general use. They could be constructed by the local carpenter or wheelwright according to the height of each laceworker, so that she could sit erect as she worked.² This was the first practical attempt to improve the lacemakers' working conditions and a decade later it was shown to have been of some effect. In 1876 the Factory and Workshops commissioner reported he could find 'no stoopers'.³

There were many other complaints which might also have been mitigated by greater consideration and understanding. The lacemakers often complained of inflamed and sore eyes, of headaches and dizziness, symptomatic of eyestrain. Lacework demanded intense concentration and it hurt 'the eyes very much keeping them steadfast on the pillow';⁴ it 'tried anyone's head'.⁵ The degree of strain varied with the complexity of different patterns and styles and with the degree of fineness of the threads being used. Buckinghamshire Point was particularly difficult to work, for its patterns were complex and refined, and it was therefore less restful to the eyes than many others. Maltese lace, with its course thread and simpler, heavier patterns was the least hurtful. The threads from which the different laces were made varied in thickness from the

1 *ibid.*

2 See above, pp. 200-201.

3 Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Working of the Factory and Workshops Acts, 1876, XXX, I, pp. 172-3.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 251.

5 *ibid.*, p. 250.

hair of a Yak at one extreme to linen, which was the finest of all; if coloured white the latter could be seen only against a background of black parchment. Working on such threads as these was 'killing to the eyes'.¹ If white lace was difficult to work by day, black lace, especially when of fine linen thread, was said to be the most difficult of all, for it was not worked easily by daylight, and by night the strain was intense.²

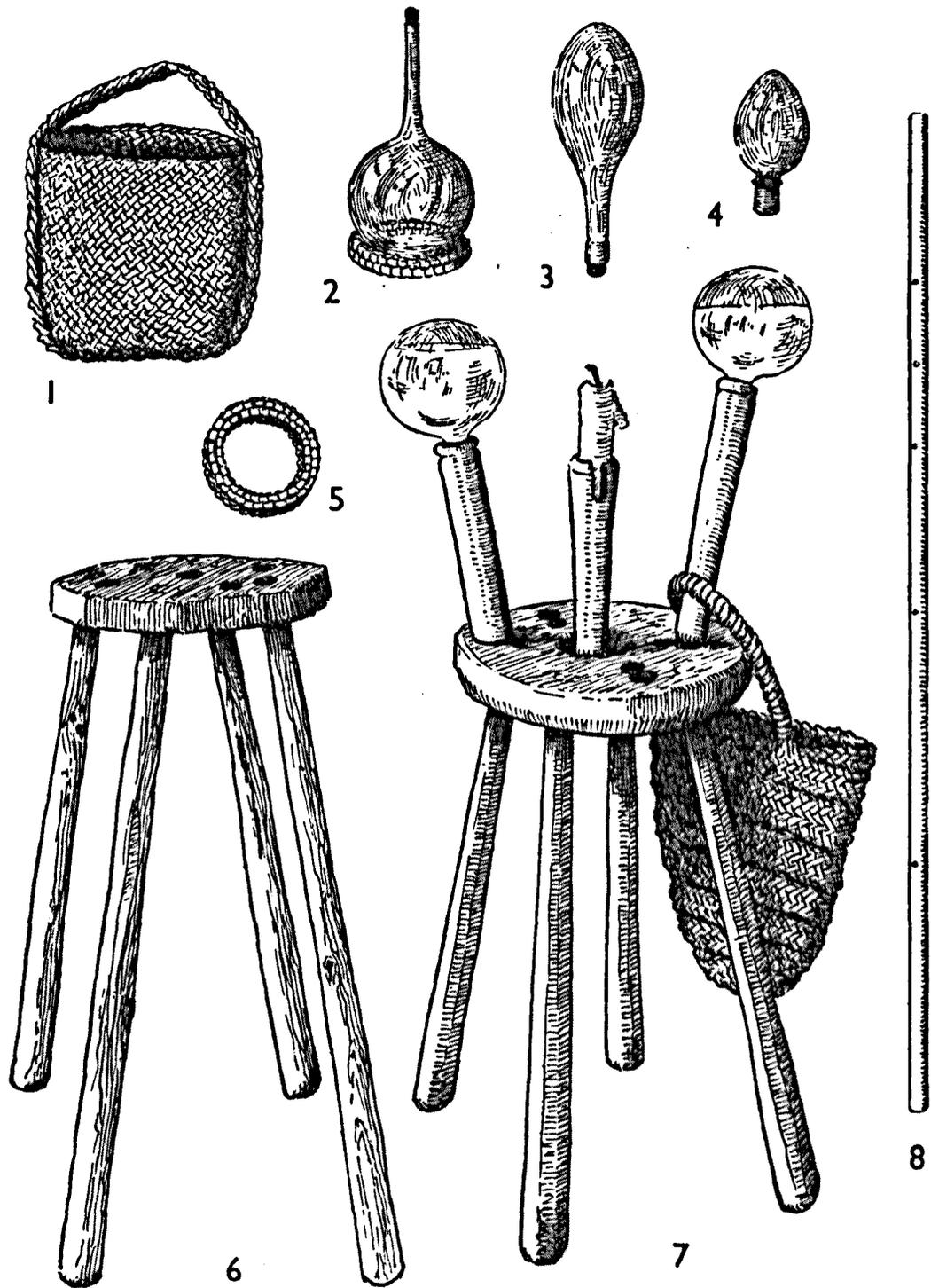
Good lighting arrangements might well have helped ease these problems. Mothers working at home were able to sit by the window during the day, but in lace schools, where many workers were involved, this was clearly impossible and the girls invariably sat in half-light. The problem was at its greatest at dusk, particularly at the moment just before candles were brought out for the evening's work. Candles were expensive commodities, costing 2d. to 4d. each in the 1860s, and were used so sparingly that the lacemakers often worked without them until total darkness made their use imperative. When a commissioner entered a lace school one evening the girls were working on without a candle, even though 'it was so dark I could hardly see to write'.³

Working by candlelight was itself far from satisfactory, but girls began to work in this way within two years of their starting at lace school and some began even earlier. It was commonplace for girls aged eight or nine years to work in lace schools throughout the night and into the next morning if the work so demanded it. Each day, at dusk, the very youngest girls went home, while the eldest prepared to 'turn night into day'. In the centre of the room they gathered round a 'candle stool' a long pole on which rested the candles which would light them through

1 *ibid.*

2 *ibid.*, p. 260.

3 *ibid.*, p. 259.



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Plate 9 Examples of Lighting Equipment.

the night. The typical evening scene in a lace school was portrayed vividly by Mrs. Palliser:

In the evenings eighteen girls worked by one tallow candle, value one penny: the candle stool stood about as high as an ordinary table with four legs. In the middle of this was what was known as the pole board, with six holes in a circle and one in the centre. In the centre hole was a long stick with a socket for the candle at one end and peg hole through the sides so that it could be raised or lowered at will. In the other six holes were placed a bottle made of very thin glass and filled with water. These bottles acted as strong condensers or lenses, and the eighteen girls sat round the table, three to each bottle their stools upon different levels, the highest nearest to the bottle, which threw light down on to the work like a burning glass. The makers of the best laces would sit nearest to the bottle, and so on in order of merit.¹

A mistress said, however, that the 'proper number' of girls to sit round a candle stool was eight not 18. The eight sat in pairs and according to their nearness to the candle were graded 'first light', 'second light' and so on; 'Them as sit first light can see; them as sit second light can't very well, but 12 can sit round one candle and do so at times'.²

The candles were ignited by the mistress with a tinder box and sulphur-tipped piece of wood. Most of the bottles, or 'flasks', were specially made for candle stools, but engravers' or silversmiths' refracting glasses, oil flasks, and even Italian-style oil lamps could be used equally well. 'Flaskcushions', small open circles of plaited rush were sometimes used as rests for the flasks in their holders, and 'hutches', baskets of plaited rush (made in Bedfordshire in the Ouse-side villages) held the flasks when they were not in use. The candles were lit traditionally on Nutting Day (September 3rd) and were then used throughout

1 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 390. See Plate 9.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 259.

the winter until Shrove Tide (February 25th), when the children gathered together in their schools to chant the traditional verse:

Be the Shrove Tide high or low,
out the candle we will blow,

following which the mistress ceremoniously extinguished the candle.¹ The traditional dates were not followed strictly, however, and the candles were used whenever the children worked in darkness. The stools were also used by older girls and women when they worked at home. At night they might gather together in one cottage for company, and to minimise the costs of lighting.²

Unfortunately, the stools were conducive neither to practicality nor to the maintenance of the workers' eyesight. The workers at the back plainly could not see and underwent a good deal of strain in their efforts to do so. The result was that the laceworkers often became weak-sighted. When Mrs. Woodroffe of Monks Risborough died in 1853, aged 90, the Buckinghamshire Herald found it interesting and remarkable news that she had made lace without spectacles till her death.³ The laceworkers, naturally, were conscious of the value of their sight, for their livelihood depended greatly upon its preservation. A contemporary observer, Mrs. Moody, said the laceworkers were always careful to regulate the amount of work they would do each week so that their eyes were not damaged. They generally knew, said Mrs. Moody 'what work they may safely undertake without injury to the eyes or bringing on the acute headache that results from overstrain'.⁴ But Mrs. Moody, like Mrs. Palliser, was passionately in favour of the industry's preservation, and though the lacemakers

1 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 414. Mrs. Palliser may have romanticized the event.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 260.

3 Buckinghamshire Herald, 14 October, 1853.

4 A.P. Moody, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

undoubtedly realised the value of their sight, only the very best and highest paid can have afforded to spurn opportunities of employment. In any case, the prerogative of refusing work rested only with grown women and by this stage serious damage had probably already been done.

In the 1870s the group of middle and old-aged women who then formed the core of the industry's labour force were in a sorry physical condition, for they embodied the consequences of years of work at the lace pillow. Yet they would not easily succumb to their ills and strove, sometimes painfully, to continue with their employment. To the obvious physical strain of working lengthy hours was often added the effort of a weekly walk to the dealer's centre, sometimes five or six miles away from home. The aged worker was often in an anxious situation, for it was not always clear if she would be able to complete her orders. The old workers made pathetic attempts to maintain themselves and frequently took on work they clearly could not hope to do. Yet by this time the dealers had no choice but to offer them work, for there were few others who might do it. As if to refute those like Mrs. Moody who said they calculated the amounts of work they could safely undertake most workers clearly carried on to the limit of their endurance.¹

At the end of the century the aged laceworkers stood as a pathetic symbol of the evil effects the employment had had on its labour force over the years. Noted early in the nineteenth century for their pallid, stunted and languid appearance the lacemakers had been found during the following years to be suffering from a variety of diseases and disfigurements. The lacemakers had many of the characteristics of workers in some of the most notorious industrial occupations, including the sweated trades.

1 See below, pp. 505-506.

They were clearly in great need of protection. Yet, though their ailments were known to the government from the time of the publication of the Childrens' Employment Commission in 1843, there was no legislative intervention on their behalf until the late 1860s, and even when it came this legislation had little immediate effect. It was only in the 1870s, by which time many of the industry's ills were being cured naturally by the decline in its labour force, that child laceworkers were brought under effective control. And the group of ageing workers, who constituted an ever-increasing proportion of the industry's workers, remained without effective protection until the industry's final days.

CHAPTER 15

Work Discipline: Child Labour

The pillow lace industry was just one of a number of industries which, during the first half of the nineteenth century, came face to face with new and frightening competition. Britain was industrializing and old industries were everywhere giving way to new ones in which the product was not made by hand, at home, or in a workshop, but by a machine worker in a factory. The changing industrial face of the nation brought with it a new series of values. Everywhere, workers were having to adapt themselves to a different mode of life. In the factory areas there were new disciplinary pressures,¹ the key element behind which was the machine, the chief dictator of the tempo of work, an anonymous piece of metal to which the worker was tied and was compelled to respond. In the new situation there could no longer be any question of the worker organising his working day in accordance with his own whims, as had been the case in the days of domestic employment and the workshop. With the machine the tempo of work became more even, the traditional irregularity of life, in each week and throughout the year, no longer existed; the celebration of St. Monday, characteristic of most workshop and domestic industries, disappeared. The machine worked at a regular speed and the worker either had to meet its demands or face dismissal by an employer with whom he had no personal relations, and who often saw him simply as yet another factor of production. To encourage the worker to adapt to the new requirements of wage labour

1 For a detailed account, see, E.P. Thompson, op.cit., Pt. II, passim; E.P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', Past and Present (1967), No. 38, pp. 56-98; S. Pollard, 'Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution', Economic History Review, Second Series, XVI, (1963-64), pp. 254-271; N. McKendrich, 'Josiah Wedgwood and Factory Discipline', Historical Journal, IV, (1961), pp. 30-56.

and to the realisation that time now meant money, not only to himself, but more particularly to his employer, various incentives, intermingled with deterrants, were introduced. This proved to be a painful experience for a labour force which had once known relatively greater freedom and a life, hard though it was, which had at least been interspersed with the pleasures of the small community, of family kinship, of occasional fairs and holidays and celebratory feasts. The workers' impulses, centuries old, were now gradually broken down and this caused serious disturbance among the members of the labouring classes, adults and children alike, who found themselves in the new environment.¹

Child labour, the primary concern of this chapter, had been an intrinsic part of the agricultural economy before the industrial age, and it continued to be so until rescued by the advent of the elementary school. Young children had always worked for long hours in the family economy, under conditions which by modern standards were arduous and even brutal, but when compared with the new factory employment, important differences are generally identified. In domestic employment there was more variety of work. In normal circumstances work would be intermittent, it would follow a cycle of tasks and most jobs did not require the children all day, or for six days a week:

In short we may suppose a graduated introduction to work, with some relation to the children's capacities, interspersed with running messages, blackberrying, fuel gathering or play. Above all the work was within the family economy and under parental control. It is true that parental attitudes to children were exceptionally severe in the eighteenth century, but no case has been made out for a general sadism or lack of love.²

1 See, for example, N. Smelser, Social Change and the Industrial Revolution (1960), pp. 225-65 and E.P. Thompson, loc. cit.

2 E.P. Thompson, op.cit., p. 368.

E.P. Thompson suggests, further, that the period from 1780 saw an increase in the tempo of work even in communities in which the traditional industries remained. Economic differentiation and specialisation led to workers in domestic and workshop industries working harder and for longer hours than they had ever done before. Children were given tasks which demanded monotonous application for ten or more hours per day, often for six days a week. The vices of the eighteenth century were now operating in a more intensive form.¹

Yet the rigours of workshop and domestic employment still could not match those associated with employment on the machine:

The crime of the factory system was to inherit the worst features of the domestic system in a context which had none of the domestic compensations; it systematised child labour, pauper and free with persistent brutality. In the home the childrens' conditions will have varied according to the temper of parents or of masters and to some degree his work will have been scaled down according to his ability. In the mill the machinery dictated environment, speed and regularity of work and working hours for the strong and the delicate alike.²

Though the parents of children in factories not only needed the children's income but expected them to work hard, most of the brutality associated with factory employment came from the discipline of the machinery itself, lavishly supplemented by the driving force of alien overlookers. The childrens' parents still expected certain standards of humanity to be observed, standards they no doubt had brought with them from their traditional modes of familial and industrial organisation.³

It is in this general context that the effects of industrialization with respect to the employment of children in the pillow lace industry,

1 *ibid.*, p. 370.

2 *ibid.*

3 *ibid.*

are examined below. To what extent was work discipline increased in this sector of the economy? And what kinds of disciplinary action were used?

An immediate problem in examining rural industries such as the pillow lace industry is the paucity of evidence for the years before the nineteenth century. Local records and newspaper accounts are scarce, and for this reason it is difficult to draw strict comparisons between the eighteenth century situation and that in the nineteenth century, by which time the evidence is more plentiful. Yet even when plentiful evidence does emerge, as in the Reports on Childrens' Employment in the 1840s and 60s, there is enough variation in the answers given by interviewees to make generalization precarious. When an industry is organised on a putting out basis in the villages of six counties there can be no hard and fast rules, and a certain variation of experience is only to be expected. For these reasons an assessment of work organization in the pillow lace industry can only be undertaken with caution and conclusions must inevitably be hedged with a certain degree of uncertainty.

There can be little doubt, however, that by and large the industry's child workers were under constant pressures from parents and dealers to maximise their income and output. One of the bases of the industry's development had been the rural poverty which constantly pushed forward new supplies of labour and the necessity that children should contribute to the family purse had not changed at any stage in the industry's history. Indeed, poverty and pillow lace-making seem to have been inextricably interwoven since the industry's earliest days, and the continuation of the one accounts to a great degree for the survival of the other.

By the end of the eighteenth century children had come to play an established and vital role in the derivation of family income in the pillow

lace areas. The lives of these families had by this time developed on a well-established pattern. Father and sons worked in the fields, mothers at home, turning now to their lace pillow, now to their domestic chores, perhaps occasionally tending animals or helping with the labourer's small allotment or garden, and the girls went out to lace school. It was an accepted part of life that the girls should work and earn at least sufficient to maintain themselves, for agricultural workers had come to depend upon the wages of their wives and children to supplement their own meagre earnings. Economic expediency meant that this position did not change during subsequent years. Lowly standards of living dictated that all members of the labourer's family contribute to the family purse. At no time, from the final decades of the eighteenth century until the industry's demise, could the agricultural labouring family exist, even in modest comfort, unless all of its members turned their hands to employment whenever the opportunity arose.

A labourer would never be more poor than when he was newly married, with young children who were too young to earn. Well before Rowntree's thorough investigation of rural life early in the twentieth century,¹ Dr. Edward Smith had pointed out to the Privy Council in the 1860s that the rural families 'in the most constrained circumstances' were those:-

First, who have several children under the age of ten years and therefore too young to earn anything.
 Second, who reside in localities where labour for the wife and female members of the family is deficient or unremunerative.²

The greatest prosperity, however slight, was to be found among the families which could employ their children in rural industries such as

1 R.S. Rowntree, How the Labourer Lives (1911).

2 Sixth Report of the Medical Officer, op.cit., 1864, p. 232.

lacemaking, glove making and straw plaiting. Domestic employment added 'to that amount of income to the family which relieves from the pressures of want and provides shoes and clothing and pays the rent, and thus enables the whole family to be better fed'.¹ When H.H. Mann examined the lacemaking village of Ridgemount in Bedfordshire early in the twentieth century he concluded similarly, that an agricultural labourer's family, incorporating two young children or more, would fall beneath the poverty line until such time as the children could earn at least sufficient to maintain themselves. And even then,

even after full allowances are made for all income - allotments, poultry and pigs, charity, poor relief, pensions, odd jobs, home industries and money sent by absent children, it appears that 31.5% of families were in primary poverty.²

It was markedly in a labourer's interests to put his children out to work as soon as they were physically able. In the pillow lace areas the children employed at the lace pillow tended to come from the poorest sections of rural society, a factory and workshops commissioner noting in the 1870s that 'a large number of the children employed are the children of people who are constantly receiving poor relief'.³

The period during which children were earning wages was one of the few when an agricultural labourer might be able to save and as a result, it was said that children were often relegated to the unfortunate position of being 'subordinate instruments of their parents' plans' which, in the words of one observer, were 'blind and low in the extreme'.⁴ The 'desire on the part of heads of families to turn their children to account' was

1 *ibid.*, p. 218.

2 R. Lennard, English Agricultural Wages (1914), p. 87.

3 Factory and Workshops Acts Commission, *op.cit.*, I, 1876, p. 16.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D.8.

said to be common:-

A farm labourer took it as a matter of course that his daughters would be sent out to lace school at four or five years and that from the time of their leaving school to the time when they leave his house for good it is his wife's duty to see that they stick to their lace pillow and work at least as many hours as he does himself.¹

Yet this was hardly surprising. The Childrens' Employment Commissioner for Devon spoke for the whole industry when he pointed out the vital importance of the childrens' earnings to the lacemaking family:-

The average pay of the peasantry being from nine or ten shillings a week, no adequate means of properly nourishing a family is supplied without some additional resources. In many of the cottages of the country labourers something is gained by the wife and one or two of the children working at lacemaking; but even with all these ancillary occupations and even where the head of the family is gaining wages above the average rate of agricultural labour, the condition of the working classes is certainly poor. Poor they are in spirit as well as circumstance.²

To the labourer, pillow lacemaking had a number of obvious advantages; it had the convenience of being a local industry, the returns tended to come quickly, and in a number of cases it was genuinely believed that lacemaking was a worthwhile and pleasant occupation, in which children would find a certain degree of fulfilment.³

The diversity of means, monetary or otherwise, by which a family's living could be obtained, and the way in which this could fluctuate considerably from season to season and throughout a labourer's lifetime, make it difficult to speak of an average family. Movements in prices, the availability of a pig, an allotment or garden, the nature of a labourer's

1 R.C. on the Employment of Children, Young Persons and Women in Agriculture, op.cit., First Report, App. I, 1867-8, p. 126.

2 R.C. on the Employment of Children, op.cit., Second Report, Appendix to Part I, 1843, p. D.3.

3 See above, pp. 172-3.

contract, the rent of a cottage, the sickness and strength of members of the family, the provision of tied cottages and of food and drink for the labourer at work, could all cause considerable variation. But poverty and the constant fear of a fall in living standards seemed to have contributed in almost all families to a pronounced state of anxiety with respect to the derivation of income. The childrens' earnings not only proved to be an important component of the family purse but served as a reserve to which the labourer might look during hard times such as unemployment or sickness for a certain degree of salvation.

Yet the labourer and his family were often locked in a vicious circle of poverty, for an agricultural labourer's income was frequently reduced on the expectation that his family would contribute to its own maintenance. Lacemaking, it was said, 'diminishes the wages of men, the farmers giving less in proportion as the wives and daughters earn something on which the family may be supported'.¹ On the other hand, because of their supplementary nature, the lacemakers' wages also tended to be held deliberately low by lace dealers. Thomas Gilbert, and no doubt others, knew that

the earnings of the children are a great inducement to put them to lace as soon as they can contribute anything to the support of the family ... till the elder children reach this age a family is nothing but expense, but a mother with some of her children may make as much as the father.²

Those dealers who wished, could easily exploit this situation to their advantage by underpaying their workers, and in this way, the vicious circle was closed, for neither the father nor his family were in a position to

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 251.

2 *ibid.*, p. 257.

withdraw their labour in the hope that their wages might be improved.¹

There can be no doubt of the continuing usefulness of the childrens' contribution to family income throughout the nineteenth century. During the golden years which were those of the French Wars, children of 11 and 12 years old had frequently been able to earn as much as their fathers.² In the next decade their wages fell markedly and by 1834 average wages, so far as they can be ascertained, had fallen to around 1s.³ But the First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, in 1835, showed that the childrens' contribution to family income was still quite substantial. Philip Peddor, aged 39, a farm labourer in Cranfield (Bedfordshire), lived on a total money income of 15s. 4d., of which roughly one third came from his family's efforts at the lace pillow:

Philip, farm labourer	7s. 0d.
Wife, laceworker	1s. 0d.
Mary, 19, "	1s. 6d.
Sarah, 16, "	2s. 6d.
Thomas, 14, plough	2s. 6d.
Betsy, 9, laceworker	10d.
Philip, 4, nil	0d.
	<hr/>
	15s. 4d. ⁴
	<hr/>

1 See above, pp. 254-5.

2 See above, pp. 61-2.

3 Report on the Poor Laws, op.cit., App. B, Pt. I, 1884, pp. 2a-9a.
For the problems of assessing an 'average' wage see above, pp. 412-413.

4 First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissions for England and Wales, XXV, 1835, p. 324.

Another family whose earnings totalled 16s., found 7s. by lacemaking.¹

In 1838 the Poor Law Commissioners noted that the wages of every family in the villages of Bedfordshire varied very much according to the earning proficiency of wives and children at lacemaking and straw plaiting. It was the earnings of the poorest labourers' families that kept them out of the workhouse² and though the real wages of agricultural labourers began to rise in the century's middle decades,³ this scarcely altered the continuing importance of the childrens' contributions to family income. Family budgets for these years are scarce, but one general example shows that a decline in the industry's fortunes could still bring a good deal of distress. In 1847 the Board of Guardians of the Woburn Union in Bedfordshire distributed relief to the poor 'during this period of severe distress, in consequence of the extraordinary high prices of provisions and the depressed state of the lace trade'.⁴ Rural living

1 The family came from Princess Risborough and their earnings were composed as follows:

William Bagley (aged 43) on roads	5s. 6d. from parish
Wife, ill	1s. 6d. "
Betsey, 25 at the lace pillow	1s. 6d.
Sarah, 24 "	1s. 6d.
Kitty, 20 "	1s. 6d.
Ann, 19 "	1s. 6d.
Thos, 14, plough	3s.
James, no work or allowance	
John, "	
Sophy, "	

Total earnings 16s. 0d.

ibid., p. 320.

2 Nineteenth Report from the Select Committee on the Poor Law Amendment Act, XVIII, Pt. II., 1838, p. 22.

3 J.D. Chambers and G.E. Mingay, op.cit., pp. 190-1.

4 Bedford Times, 29 May, 1847. In 1860 the Vicar of Odell, in Bedfordshire described the effects of a decline in the lace trade: 'There is real distress among us and several families by reason of the dullness of lace and the unfavourable harvest are almost completely destitute of clothing and food... I have heard them confess with tears in their eyes they have only tasted food once in twenty four hours'. Beds. C.R.O. B.S./600.

standards were generally so low that opportunities for additional earnings could not be spurned whenever and wherever they looked promising. The point need hardly be pursued further. At no time during the century could parents afford not to encourage their children to add to family income whenever a suitable outlet emerged.¹

Children had always been an important element in the industry's labour supply, and as such had been employed not only in accordance with family needs, but also with the requirements of the industry's organizers. In a number of ways, however, the industry's situation, before and after the Napoleonic Wars, was sufficiently different to suggest that, subject to some variation, children now took on a greater importance in the industry's organization than they had ever done before. The effects of the machine industry were first felt seriously in the years immediately following the Napoleonic Wars. Though there was eventually some recovery, lace dealers henceforth were not slow to pass their competitive problems onto their workers, and not least to the children, for children were both extremely vulnerable and useful to them. Of their usefulness there can be little doubt. Children who were introduced to pillow lacemaking at an early age and were adaptable to the craft were able to execute the most intricate of designs by their eleventh or twelfth year, the equal of anything their parents could produce. Indeed, a girl of eight could often be a 'nice little lacemaker', and a girl of twelve could frequently do 'as well as a woman'.² Girls of this age could work at least as quickly, and sometimes more so, than their mothers, and responded more easily to the changes in production techniques and patterns, which many dealers saw as the answer

1 From the 1860s a number of labourers chose to send their children to elementary school instead of lace school, largely because the expenses of fees and materials were greater than the income the children were able to earn. For details, see below, pp. 449-451.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 256.

to the industry's problems.¹ To older women in particular, such efforts could be a traumatic experience.² Childrens' fingers were often more nimble than a woman's, and on difficult patterns, incorporating dark or thin threads, their youth was an undoubted asset, since the sight and physical vigour of pillow laceworkers tended to diminish with age.³

For these reasons the training and disciplining of children in the new, critical competitive context was likely to become more intense, for success in competition with the machine could best be derived if goods of the appropriate quality and variety were produced strictly on time. In lace schools the dealers had an outstanding opportunity to supervise their workers in just the way they would have desired and many sought to exploit their potential to the full. In this respect the pillow lace industry differed from many rural industries, most notably the woollen cloth industry, in so far as, in this way, its child workers were employed in groups, outside of immediate familial control. Though some of the lace mistresses were undoubtedly friends or relatives, living in the village community, many were not and the mistress's relationship with her pupils tended to be primarily an economic one. All mistresses were poor, many were widows, and organizing a lace school was their primary means of keeping out of the workhouse. The more strictly a mistress organized her pupils the greater her income was likely to be and there was every incentive for her to press the children in her charge to their greatest possible effort.⁴

1 See above, pp. 327-344.

2 See above, p. 362, and below, pp. 505-507.

3 See above, pp. 398-404.

4 See above, pp. 187-191.

Yet the shadow of the childrens' parents also was never far away. The children often knew that if they did not succeed at school they would endure chastisement at home, for their families' living standards were determined partly by their success. It was an experience 'actually recorded by old people', in 1919, to have been taken to the market as five year olds by their parents, to sell their first piece of lace, 'with the promise of a good whipping if it were not good enough'.¹ A Childrens' Employment Commissioner concluded in 1866 that 'it is unhappily to a painful degree apparent through the whole of the evidence that against no persons do the children as much need protection as against their parents'.² The children were caught between two forces, parents and dealers, with the mistresses carrying out their commands; the pressures on them were enormous.

The internal organization of lace schools is not described in any detail until the 1840s, but some of the pillow laceworkers then stated that children were working harder, and for less pay than had been the case before the advent of the new competition. Mrs. Innes, a lace schoolmistress, said that 'the people that are poor are forced to make their children work harder than when I began',³ and Sarah Watts agreed that 'the children work more than formerly and more confined'.⁴

In 1843 the chief Commissioners on Childrens' Employment in the south-east Midlands found the children in this industry working under a harsh discipline. Pillow lacemaking was said to demand:-

1 Bedford Times, 18 May, 1919.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Fifth Report, 1866, p. XXIV.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. A.53.

4 *ibid.*

the complete absorption of the time and attention of very young children beginning at a very early age and continuing day after day for twelve hours or less, all of which is a monotonous and uninteresting employment of the faculties.

The effect of this occupation seemed to one commissioner to:

necessarily keep them stolid and stupid if it do not positively stultify them and prevent their due intellectual development. There is consequently, indeed there can hardly be, but little time for recreation and generally no thought of education and improvement.¹

His sentiments were echoed in subsequent years by a Medical Officer of the Privy Council who said children in lace schools were suffering from the 'evils of monotony, of deficient bodily health and mental privation from what is beautiful and animating in internal nature'.² Of course, there was some variation, but the great majority of interviewees spoke of an unhappy and difficult work experience, and while a number of lacemakers said, in the middle of the century, that conditions had positively worsened during the preceding years, there were none who could point to an improvement. Even Mrs. Palliser, a romantic, and keen apologist for the industry, could not deny the

stories of the cruel severities practised on the children in the schools, of the length of time they sat without daring to move from their pillow - of prolonged punishments imposed on the idle apprentices, and other barbarities.³

Though there is no detailed evidence on the organization of lace schools before the mid nineteenth century, the available evidence does point towards a general increase in the disciplinary control of children employed in pillow lacemaking in the years roughly between 1820 and

1 *ibid.*, p. D.2.

2 Third Report of the Medical Officer, *op.cit.*, 1864, pp. 31-2.

3 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 414.

1860 and the evidence of this disciplinary control in practice is abundant.

In common with a number of domestic industries, child workers in the pillow lace industry were introduced to their employment by a graduated process, the extent of their work in the initial phase being determined according to their age and assessed capabilities. Very few children worked a full day until they had spent an arbitrarily prescribed time as a 'learner'. But children were introduced to the employment at a very early age and the graduation period was generally a very short one. Neither dealers nor parents could afford the children more than the shortest possible time to learn, and within a year or two most children were working what was considered to be the 'full day'.

In Devonshire, children were sent to lace school, it was said, to 'serve their time' in an 'apprenticeship', so as to learn the various stitches and patterns. This period could seemingly last anything from six months to seven years. But it is not likely that even the finest stitches involved in the production of a Honiton veil would take anything like seven years to learn and the term 'apprenticeship' signified the nature of the business relationship between child and lace mistress rather than the duration of the child's introduction to the craft. The 'apprenticeships' were not of a formal kind (i.e. there were no indentures), and the term was generally used to describe that arrangement by which a mistress kept all the laces made by the children and sold them for herself in lieu of fees. In the south-east Midlands, where the term apprenticeship was not used, the mistresses took a direct fee of two or three pence per week. There is only one recorded exception in this area, in Northamptonshire, where one mistress explained that she 'employed children for a time, not paying but giving their work for teaching; those who were not apprentices

paying threepence per week'.¹ But at Broughton another lacemistress emphasised that 'apprenticeship was not customary in those parts',² and Thomas Lester pointed to its absence from Bedfordshire.³ A distinction was clear in the minds of the lacemaking community; if the mistress took the childrens' laces instead of fees, it was 'apprenticeship', if she took fees it was not.

Children would generally be actively engaged at the lace pillow, whether under an apprenticeship or otherwise, not later than their sixth year. They were to be found in lace schools in the 1840's at only three or four years old, though it was more common for them to begin at five or six.⁴ The age at which children were introduced to the craft had changed little during the years between Thomas Batchelor's description of lace schools in 1808,⁵ and the Report of the Royal Commission on the Employment of Children in 1843. In 1808 most children had begun at six years, by 1843 it was more or less the same, though there were some who began later and some who began earlier than this. The age at which a child began her employment depended partly on parental circumstances, partly on the current state of the trade, partly on local custom, and increasingly on the availability of sources of alternative employment. The decision would always be tempered to a degree by the realisation that there was a limit to what children aged less than five or six could usefully achieve. Though many mothers, themselves lacemakers, may well have been glad to get the children out of the way, even at the expense

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 260.

2 *ibid.*, p. 260.

3 *ibid.*, p. 262.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. A.53.

5 See above, pp. 179-180.

of school fees, the mistresses may not have felt the same way about taking them, for very young children were often fidgety and little more than a nuisance. On balance, the pressures of subsistence were such that children would usually be sent to lace school as soon as it was felt that they could reasonably be expected to be useful. As Mrs. Amelia Clark, a dealer in Devon, put it; 'their mothers put them to it a deal too early, but they are driven to do so'.¹

An important influence behind the employment of children at this early age was the opinion voiced frequently among laceworkers that the technical proficiency of the child depended as much on the age at which she had been introduced to the craft as on her natural ability and interest. The earlier a child was introduced to lacemaking, it was said, the easier and quicker might she learn, and the more skilled might she become. If a child was brought into the craft later than her seventh or eighth birthday, then it was unlikely she would ever be able to learn properly, for as one lacemaker explained; 'If not put early, you never get quick; it's not like anything else'.² This argument had obviously impressed Factory Inspector Whimper on his tour of Devon in 1876, for then he confirmed:

There is great force in the argument that certain manufactures (i.e. lacemaking and straw plaiting), requiring nimbleness of fingers, if not mastered at a tender age cannot be mastered at all.³

In the 1880s, when the Elementary Education and Factory and Workshop Acts were taking away prospective laceworkers, a mistress at one of the surviving lace schools complained that children coming from elementary school, with

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 249.

2 R.C. on Employment in Agriculture, op.cit., First Report, 1867/8, p. 524.

3 Factory and Workshops Commission, op.cit., Appendix D, 1876, p. 86.

no previous experience of lace work, could not be trained. In her view there was much to be said for introducing a child to the lace pillow at a 'tender age', for children who came late to school had learned 'all sorts of wickedness' outside, and had 'grown proudlike and above work';¹ they had no interest in lacemaking, for their minds had been diverted in more worldly directions. In other words, it was felt that children were best introduced to lacemaking before their awareness of the outside world and alternative opportunities had been developed, and before they had experienced the delights of freedom and the open air.

If a child was employed by one of the larger and more prosperous dealers, such as Thomas Lester, then it is likely she would be expected to learn a diverse number of stitches and patterns which would enable her to meet all manner of market contingencies. On the other hand, if she was working on the basis of selling to any of the numerous small dealers who took almost any kind of lace, then it is more likely that she would have been learning only the simplest patterns. The aim of every beginner, however, was to learn as quickly as possible. Some parents began to familiarize their children with the principles of lacemaking even before they attended lace school, teaching them to handle bobbins and to acquire a general sense of the purpose of the pins, parchment and cushion. Thomas Wright said some children were given a play pillow on which they could pretend to work, while familiarising themselves with the general idea of the craft,² and since pillows, bobbins and pins were cheap, and often inherited,³ there is no apparent reason why this should not have been so.

Once in school, the children often mastered the fundamentals in a

1 A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op.cit., 1888, p. 4.

2 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 120.

3 See above, pp. 192-9.

matter of weeks. In Devon, children were generally introduced first to making simple lace edgings of various kinds, known as 'Trolly' or 'Yard work', since the finished strips were measured and sold by the yard. This was simpler than Honiton or 'head' work, the regional speciality, in which all kinds of sprigs and flowers were made for stitching onto a net background. Generally, a girl went on to learn Honiton work, a process which could take up to two additional years.

If there were alternative schools available some girls 'served their time' at one before moving to another. Sarah Hart, for example, learned 'trawly' at one school for 12 months, and then, for the following year and a half, learned Honiton work at another school in the same village.² The pinnacle of achievement for a child worker in Devon was the completion of her training with a mastering of the art of 'sewing on'. This was an important and relatively well-paid job, calling for considerable skill and artistic sense, and was undertaken only by those who had shown the most skill during their training. Such specialist work was restricted to an exclusive number, whose status was enhanced in the lace villages as a result.

In the south-east Midlands beginners were first taught to make narrow lace edgings and the simpler stitches involved in their production: the 'pea, ninepin, towntrot, and spider web', before passing on to 'kidney bean, double ring, spectacles, old trot, running river' and some of the more complex stitches involved in the production of the local speciality -

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D.27.

'Bucks Point'.¹ Mrs. Wagstaffe, interviewed in the 1950s in her home at Little Staughton, remembered how, in the 1880s, she had first made handkerchief borders, table covers, edgings and collars. She received lessons every day at Mrs. Harriet Miles' lace school for a month and was then considered ready to begin producing for a dealer.² At Elstow, Mrs. Cirket could remember in the late 1960s how children had first made 'straight lace', then progressed to handkerchief and traycloth borders, before moving over to the finest patterns of Buckinghamshire point.³

There was no common or prescribed limit to the hours a child might work during her introductory period. Much depended upon her natural aptitude, and her ability to attain her daily target, for a piece of work was generally divided into daily portions. The child knew well that the faster she learned and the quicker she worked, the greater would be her reward and the mistresses generally saw to it that the maximum effort was achieved. During these early stages of employment there does seem to have been some consideration of each child's capabilities. A child's work was often graded according to what either the mistress or her parents felt, in some arbitrary way, she could do within her assessed physical limitations. Some mistresses and parents were obviously more considerate than others. At a school in Looseley Rouse, Bedfordshire, four year old beginners sat 'only a quarter of an hour at a time, learning the stitch',⁴ and at Mary Driver's school in Beer, in Devon, the children sat for two periods of two hours, one in the morning and one in the afternoon.⁵ After

1 Bedford Times, 25 May, 1956.

2 *ibid.*

3 Information provided, Dec. 1968.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 257.

5 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D.29.

about a year they passed on to a seven or eight hour day. More typical of the graduation process, however, was that at another school in Beer in which for the first three months the children worked for four hours, then for the following three months for seven to eight hours 'and then the full day'.¹ The introduction had thus lasted only six months. At Elizabeth Ping's school in Devon the children also worked 'a full day within six months of starting'.² Mrs. Allen, a lace dealer who spoke favourably about many aspects of the industry's organisation, including the ability it gave children to count, said the beginners in her area of Buckinghamshire (High Wycombe and district) went from nine a.m. until twelve and then from one until four, but that they could not 'sit for long the whole of this time, indeed not for more than half an hour together'.³ But children at another school began at the age of six and immediately worked between the hours of eight and four p.m., and after one year 'from six a.m. till dark, or longer'.⁴

Once this graduating process had been completed, usually within a year of starting, there was no limit to what the children might do. The Childrens' Employment Commissioner estimated in 1843 that the hours even of the youngest children 'out of their time' were 'twelve or a little less'.⁵ In the 1860s Elizabeth Hart, typically, had to begin work at seven or eight o'clock and continued working till ten p.m. in order to earn 6d. a day.⁶

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 253.

2 *ibid.*, p. 249.

3 *ibid.*, p. 256.

4 *ibid.*, p. 247.

5 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D.2.

6 *ibid.*, p. D.28. At Mrs. Clark's school at Sidbury, nine year olds worked from seven a.m. to eight p.m. in summer and from eight a.m. to eight p.m. in winter. R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 249.

These were long days and frequently began on an empty stomach. There were those who had a little breakfast at school, at such time as they could 'snatch a few bites',¹ but others complained that by ten o'clock they felt 'faint and dizzy from being so long without food'.² A working day normally allowed a period for some sort of lunch, most commonly bread, and if the children were kept for evening work, for tea too.³ Sometimes tea would be taken in school, especially if the child came from a neighbouring village or if her work was behind schedule. Local girls were more fortunate and sometimes were able to take a small break at home. But whenever orders were urgent, or demand was great, a meal-break would be forgone, and the children would always eat by their lace pillows.

Working days generally began at six or seven in the morning in summer and, because of the light, an hour later in the winter. The day's work was not finished until the girl had accomplished her daily task. 'A clever girl would get away about seven',⁴ but for many children the advent of the evening simply marked the beginning of additional activity. The daily target of work, which was called 'set work', was defined not so much in terms of hours but in terms of a measurable proportion of a week's or months' work which a girl could be expected to accomplish each day. Unfortunately, this was often an ambitious quota, with the result that many girls had to stay behind at night to finish. The children could always aim to finish on or even before time, but there can have been few who left school early. Indeed there is no record of this happening.

There clearly was no question of the children deliberately working

1 *ibid.*

2 *ibid.*, p. 261.

3 *ibid.*, pp. 248, 254-5.

4 *ibid.*, p. 249.

slowly in the early part of the week and reaching a peak of activity towards the week's end. Their task was a daily one, there was no St. Monday in the lace schools. In this sense the child pillow lace workers differed from those employed in the woollen cloth industry during the preceeding century, where work had generally been graduated in this way¹ and they were perhaps even more unfortunate than those who worked by machine, for while the machine workers, coming increasingly under legislative control,² could often guarantee when their hours would be completed, here the onus was very much on the child herself. There were very few children who could be certain to finish at any particular time, and the majority seem to have worked frequently beyond what was regarded as their normal quota of hours per day. In terms of the number of hours worked per week the young pillow lace workers, without any legislative protection until the 1870's,³ were as badly off as most child workers in Britain.

With regard to work discipline, a certain degree of parental concern, determined largely by economic factors, was again shown from time to time. Mrs. Allen said that 'some mothers who do not wish their children to sit too long and can afford to do without their earnings, give directions how long their children are to sit at a time'.⁴ But there were very few lacemaking families which could afford not to push their children as hard as they could go. Ann Maria Channon began, more typically, at the age of six and from that time onwards was 'kept constantly at it'.⁵

Pillow lacemaking was as exacting, and in terms of technique, as

1 See above, pp. 407-408.

2 See, B.L. Hutchins & A. Harrison, A History of Factory Legislation (3rd Edn., 1966).

3 See below, pp. 443-472.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 256.

5 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D.33.

complicated as any handicraft could be. It demanded intense concentration if it was to be undertaken quickly and effectively. Many of the patterns were so closely pricked that it was impossible for older workers, whose eyesight was at all weakened, to see them. Selecting the appropriate bobbin and turning it about the pins could not be taken lightly for a hopeless tangle could ensue if concentration was broken. On a piece of Buckinghamshire point a pillow lace worker generally used 50 bobbins to cover each square inch on her pillow, there were 625 meshes to a square inch and into these meshes were sometimes worked the most intricate of patterns. There can have been very few handicrafts as complex as this, though some fabrics, as has been seen, were more simple. Commentators on the development of the lace machine, which by the 1840's effectively imitated the work of the hand worker, thought it the most extraordinary technical achievement of the age.¹

Few young children would sit voluntarily for long hours at a task which required their utmost attention, for monotony and restriction are particularly cruel to the child. The first duty of a lace mistress, therefore, was to break down the children's impulses to be free and run around outside. The achievement of this required a severity of method which in many ways closely resembled the means by which early factory employers introduced workers to the demands of factory organization. The tone of each day was set, according to Mrs. Palliser, as soon as it began:

When school started they stood up in a circle to read the verses. If any of them read jokingly they were given a penalty, and likewise for idleness.... so much work.²

The children sat in rows facing their 'argus eyed mistress' who, with her 'all powerful sceptre',³ the hazle cane, to hand, soon began to move

1 See above, pp. 94-6.

2 B. Palliser, op.cit., p. 414.

3 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 103.

among them. Her duty, said the Children's Employment Commissioner in 1843, was 'to act the part of an overseer in a factory and see that the proper amount of work is done'.¹ Since her income depended very much upon her success, her attention to the children was often rigid and demanding.

The simplest way to inculcate children with an acceptance of a new and disciplined way of life was, of course, to beat them, and this most mistresses were not slow to do. The hazel-stick cane, seen in most lace schools, was administered freely whenever the mistresses thought necessary. A mistress at Princess Risborough explained the advantage of taking children young and of teaching them an early and sharp lesson:

Six is the best age, you can beat it into them better then. If they come later, after they have been in the streets, they have the streets in their minds all the while.²

The childrens' more spontaneous impulses had to be broken down, and beatings and similar punishments were the easiest response to the problems and frustrations of controlling groups of recalcitrant children whose interests obviously tended frequently to gravitate from their task.

Beatings were the most common form of punishment inflicted in lace schools. 'If we don't mind our work', said one lacemaker, 'we always get a cut or two'.³ Thomas Wright said that the girls were bent over their pillows with their shoulders bared and went so far as to suggest that they were sent to school by parents with bare necks and arms so as to make canings and slappings so much the easier.⁴ But many mistresses had their own forms of punishment which were just as effective,

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D.30.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 258.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D.29.

4 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 104.

and probably even more sinister. A former lacemaker at Risely in Bedfordshire remembered recently how pupils in the school which she had attended were tied to a beam on the ceiling by a cord and suspended there until their recalcitrance had faded away.¹ Another old lady related the experience of her first day at school to Thomas Wright:

When I was five, mother took me to lace school and gave the mistress a shilling. She learned me for half an hour, smacked my head six times, and rubbed my nose against the pins.²

Beatings such as these were not least among the many respects in which the organization of children in lace schools bore some resemblance to that normally associated with the development of large scale factory organization and the adaptation of a labour force to the values of time-thrift and obedience to the cash stimulus. The children certainly could not come and go as they pleased, and if clocking in and the factory bell were absent, most seem to have started work on time; there were no complaints of lateness. The children were taught to work competitively against each other and to better their companions so that each could produce her quota of lace on time. There were incentives for effort and beatings, stoppages of food, periods of enforced silence and ultimately a loss of income in the form of deductions for those who failed. If orders were to be fulfilled there could be little wastage of effort, little allowance for meals or conversation.

These pressures tended to increase towards the week's end, though this had nothing to do with the worker's choice and did not mean that the children worked less than the 'normal' day during the first days of the week. Additional work, at the week's end, was usually necessary

1 Bedford Times, 14 May, 1912.

2 T. Wright, loc. cit.

to meet delivery dates, and while the children worked 10 or 12 hours a day early in the week, a long day by any standards, they often still had to work extra hours on Friday if their quota was to be met. It was typical for children to work late into Friday night and sometimes right through into Saturday morning in order to finish laces in time for collection by a dealer, or for delivery to his centre. If the laces were wanted in a hurry, for special occasions such as weddings, the pressures could be especially worrying.¹ Before the laces were considered ready for the market they were checked by the mistress, and girls who had done shoddy work would have to stay behind until the poorer pieces were re-done. One lace mistress explained:

When the girls are making up a quantity to send off and take in on Saturday they will sit up all night to finish it, as it cannot be taken unless it is an even length, or on any other day.²

The ability to meet special, and often expensive private orders at short notice was one of the advantages which small scale producers had over the lace machine and in this respect the maintenance of goodwill was very important. 'If you promise the work you must do it', said Mrs. Croydon, a lacemistress at Honiton,³ otherwise the goodwill might be lost.

Most girls would first sit through the night when they were 11 or 12 years old. Mrs. Stevens, a Honiton dealer, said she had 'many a time got up at four o'clock and sat until I couldn't use a pin', both 'when

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- 1 'When orders are given in a great hurry, as for weddings, both women and girls are obliged to work early and late, from breakfast or earlier to twelve at night', R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 246.
 - 2 *ibid.*, p. 247. Mary Griffen found that 'if it was not done in time' she 'had to stay behind to finish it'. *ibid.*
 - 3 *ibid.*

she was little, and since she was big'.¹ At such times as these dinner and tea were forgone; the girls simply worked as many hours as were required to finish the job. An experience of Sarah Jane Perry of Branscombe was typical. She:

once went in the morning before six, and once at three having been at work till ten the night before and up till eleven. She 'worked on all through this day till eight or nine at night stopping for ten or twelve minutes breakfast, about twenty for dinner and taking her tea at her pillow.

She had sat through the night 'many a time'.² These long Friday nights often came in spite of the girls' exertions during the earlier part of the week.

A good, but by no means exceptional standard of speedy work was said to be the insertion of 10 pins per minute, 600 per hour, and so quick was the movement of the childrens' fingers at this speed that a Factory and Workshops Inspector found it 'quite impossible for the unpracticed eye to follow them'.³ The children acquired such aptitude by racing against each other, sometimes in teams, sometimes against an hour glass. There was a competitive element to see who was the fastest worker. Mrs. Palliser described the usual course of events:

Among the plans to incite the children to industry was one to arrange them in two rows in order to see which company could place five pins in the shortest time. The five score breakings as it was called created great emulation. All hollered out what pins they had stuck in. Two girls acted as counters and the side that was victorious called out triumphantly, 'fewest'. Usually, however, they counted to themselves every pin they stuck, and at every fiftieth pin they would call out the time, each endeavouring to outdo the other. But sometimes, instead of competing with one another they raced against the hour glass which usually stood on the middle of the mantle shelf.⁴

1 *ibid.*

2 *ibid.*, p. 251.

3 Factory and Workshops Commission, *op.cit.*, Appendix D, 1876, p. 173.

4 B. Palliser, *op.cit.*, p. 414.



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By permission of Mr T. W. Bagshawe

Plate 1D Mistress and Pupils.

The girls counted the number of pins in each 'head' of lace which formed the pattern, and then repeated the performance in a fresh head. Each girl was set at the rate of so many pins an hour, and each hour the mistress called round to see if she was behind and by how much. Mrs. Allen claimed that by constantly counting the inserted pins, and how much their daily output was worth, 'counting the yards and the odd quarters and the odd pence and half pence', the lacemakers generally 'became good reckoners'. She also added that she thought the lacemakers were 'more hard working than any other class'.¹

A lacemaker tended to work more quickly and with more precision if she could establish a rhythm as she twisted the bobbins and threads around the pins and for this reason the children chanted lace 'tells', which had the dual function of helping them establish a rhythm and count the stitches as they proceeded down each piece of lace. Most of the 'tells' were in doggerel verse and involved calling out numbers, usually in a declining sequence from 19, this being the greatest number of stitches a worker could complete in a single burst before she 'looked off' for a moment's relief. Thus:

Nineteen miles to the Isle of Wight,
Shall I be there by candle light,
Yes, if my fingers go lissom and light,
I'll be there by candle light.

and

Nineteenth little round holes gaping for a wire,
Every pin that I stick in,
Gets me one the nigher.²

At the completion of each verse a stitch would have been formed, and the verse would then be resumed, this time at 18, until a complete sequence

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, loc. cit.

2 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 181. For further examples of lace tells see below, Appendix IV, p. 532.

had been run through. During these bursts of 19 stitches the children were not allowed to look off their work, and if they were caught doing so they were beaten. An old lacemakers' ditty describes the situation:

Needle pin, needle pin, stitch upon stitch,
Work the old lady out of the ditch,
If she is not out as soon as I,
A rap on the knuckles shall come by and by,
A horse to carry my lady about,
I must not look off till twenty are out.¹

The child who could not keep up, or lost her rhythm incurred penalties. She might be beaten, but she might also find her food had been stopped, or that she had to undergo a 'glum',² a period of silence during which the child was neither to speak nor to join in the chanting of the 'tells'. If the child had not completed her task at the end of the prescribed session of ten or so hours, then she was kept behind until the job was done:

Children had a task to be done by five o'clock, and if it was not done by five it must be ten, and if it was not finished by a fixed time more was set.³

The unfortunate children were kept without supper if it was still not done,⁴ and if, after all this, they had to return home with the work unfinished, they faced the chastisement of their parents. In the words of another lacemakers' ditty:

1 *ibid.*, pp. 182-3.

2 According to Thomas Wright, the 'glum' generally constituted the time it took to stitch eight pins, i.e. about one minute. When the 'glum' was completed the girl is said to have chanted:

'Tip stitch and turn over,
Let it be hay or clover,
My glum's done'.

Anyone who looked off during a 'glum' incurred an additional penalty of 30 pins. *ibid.*, p. 181.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, *op.cit.*, First Report, 1863, p. 249.

4 *ibid.*

There's three pins I done today,
 What do you think my mother will say?
 When she knows I done no more,
 She'll take and turn me out of door,
 Never let me come in any more.¹

At the Hertfordshire Assizes, Elisabeth Oldham told the magistrate that she had 'often heard the blows' which Ruth Goodson had given her 12 year old daughter Elisabeth, a lacemaker, as a lesson against incompetence:

The blows were with a stick and too hard to be given her. She has used the child most cruelly by not allowing proper subsistence and almost starving her, and the task set her to perform making lace in the day was more than in her powers to do.²

Not all mothers were as cruel as Mrs. Oldham but the pressures of work and the knowledge that failure could lead to chastisement and punishment both in school and at home, often brought children to a state of nervous anxiety. Not surprisingly, nervous dyspepsia, which afflicts people subject to constant exhaustion and anxiety, was the lacemakers' 'most common' affliction.³

For those who succeeded, however, there were some rewards. Successful children in Devon received a new apron at the end of their first year, a new pair of shoes at the end of the second, and a new frock at the end of the third.⁴ These awards seem to have been long term gifts rather than direct awards for any particular effort, but it does not seem likely that they would have been given to recalcitrant or unsuccessful workers. Thomas Wright tells of children in Bedfordshire receiving pairs of pattens mounted on iron rings,⁵ on the successful completion of a year

1 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 183.

2 Hertfordshire County Records, II, (1801), p. 193.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. A.13.

4 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 247.

5 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 104. The iron rings were to raise the wooden shoe above the mud.

at the pillow. Here and there, there seems also to have been some system of reward based directly on the childrens' performance in school, for Harriet Channon claimed she had regularly received 'bags of comforts',¹ and others received gifts from dealers on the completion of a particular piece of work. A bobbin survives in Luton museum inscribed, 'A gift from Lester'.²

These long and arduous days left the girls in a state of anxiety which was often noticeable to the industry's investigators. The girls were said to keep 'an anxious eye upon their chances, few and far between, of escaping from monotonous and uninteresting toil',³ and at the end of the day were glad to leave and 'stir about' in the fresh air outside. Old lacemakers have recollected that at times the children would go to great lengths of daring to escape:

Many stories they have to tell of how they moved their pins, or even cut pieces from their parchment in order to escape from bondage, although it was certain to be discovered at the end of the week.⁴

Each day at lace school could be a fatiguing and worrying one. Each hour could be a trial, as the lacemistress went round the room to check if anyone was behind. The anxiety probably built up towards the week's end, when the worries of completing the days' tasks were transformed into the worry of producing the requisite quota of goods on time. With the exception of the children's earliest weeks in school, the lacemistress, whose

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 250.

2 Lester Collection. Luton Museum.

3 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D.5.

4 One worker remembered her brother throwing his pillow into the local well, hoping that it would be a long time before it was dry enough for him to use again. E. Greenshields, A Survey of Lacemaking in Bedfordshire (Bedford, 1955), p. 3.

livelihood depended on ensuring that the children accomplished their daily and weekly tasks, often gave little consideration of individual needs; the pressures of poverty tended to limit humane considerations.

The recollections of Mary Ann Sumpter well sum up the anxiety and unhappiness which a childhood at the lace pillow could bring:

My own health suffered very much from being at a lace school to which I went a distance from here at six years old and I feel it still. I used to have the sick headaches which I never had before and could not work then, but my mistress said it was all idleness and used to flog me so severely and knock me about so all the same, whether I could work or not, that I got more behind still. Other girls had the common headache. When we got behind we had more work set for us to do by a certain time and if it was not done by then it was doubled. In this way I have been kept till ten or eleven at night in summer and one night in winter I had a bad accident from hurrying home in the dark about nine and was picked up streaming with blood.

Sometimes, even when I was kept as late as this I have had to go without finishing what was set me because I really could not do it and then could not work the next day. This was partly from being kept from food so long that sometimes I felt as if I should die. It was a common punishment if girls had not finished what they had to do to keep them all day long without food from morning till night, making them sit all dinner time instead of going home, and if their mothers brought them food afterwards, not letting them have it.

A mistress made nothing of that and I have known mothers as severe as mistresses in keeping their children without food when they will not work. I feel even now a kick in my back which my mistress, who was very cruel, gave me once as I was sitting at my work and leaning forward, which I think made the blow worse. I have often thought that my mistress could not know what I suffered, or she could not have treated me as she did.¹

Yet it must be pointed out again that there was always some variation of experience. A number of girls, if perhaps under their mistress's duress, told investigators that their mistress did not beat them, or that if she did, they 'did not mind'² and that it did not hurt them. A few

1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 261.

2 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, pp. A.50, A.52, A.54.

girls stated that the 'mistress treats us kindly,' and some said they had 'no complaints'. Mary Sumpter, who had eventually become a lace mistress, had decided from her childhood experience that she would send children home whenever they grew tired.¹ In the close-knit village community there was always a good chance that the mistresses would be well known to their pupils, and that there would be some who could overcome purely economic considerations and treat their pupils humanely.

Rural life, too, might still have its compensations. Easter, Christmas and Whitsuntide were still celebrated with the deference due to a Holy occasion. Elisabeth Hart, perhaps exceptionally, was given a week off from lace school for Christmas, and when questioned was 'looking out' for her next celebration, Christening Day.² Local fairs still provided moments of festivity, and on occasion were the source of two or three days respite from toil. The lacemakers also enjoyed two festivities, St. Katherine's Day (November 25th) and St. Andrews Day (November 30th), which they regarded as peculiarly their own. Though St. Katherine is the patron saint of spinsters, the lacemakers celebrated the day primarily from the association with Katherine of Aragon, to whom in local folk lore, the industry owed its origin.³ Known locally as 'Kattern', the day was heralded in each village by the bell ringer, with the cry of:

Rise maids arise,
 Bake your Kattern pies,
 Bake enough and bake no more, Have no waste,
 And let the bell man have a taste.⁴

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- 1 R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., First Report, 1863, p. 261.
 - 2 She also had Saturday off, provided she had 'done her task'. R.C. on Employment of Children, op.cit., Appendix to Second Report, Part I, 1843, p. D.28.
 - 3 See above, p. 17.
 - 4 T. Wright, op.cit., p. 194.

Kattern cakes of dough and caraway seeds were baked, and were followed, on occasion, by dining and feasting. A favourite meal was said to have been stuffed rabbit with onion sauce. In some villages the inn keepers took it upon themselves to provide free ale and cake to customers. At Bromwich in Buckinghamshire, the villagers each took a plate to the largest inn where they were served with cuttings of beef from a large joint.¹ The occasion was celebrated somewhat less ambitiously, though no less enthusiastically, at Poddington in Bedfordshire, with Kattern cakes and apple pie, and at Wendover with ginger cake. The day often ended on a high note, with the firing of Catherine wheels.²

The celebration of St. Katherine's day was most popular in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. In Buckinghamshire, St. Andrew's day enjoyed greater celebration. At Olney people went from door to door, drinking a mixture of honey and mead,³ though the day was also celebrated at Turvey, in Bedfordshire, with nuts and figs, and at Stock Goldington with specially cooked sweets, known as 'black buttons' and 'Tandras', which consisted of sugar and a small quantity of butter boiled together; at Stevington it was cake and elderberry wine.⁴

Numerous villages had their peculiar celebrations. In Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire some celebrated St. Thomas's day.⁵ At Eton, cakes and tea were the order of the day, and were eaten at a ceremony known as 'washing the candle block'.⁶ At Cranfield, February 2nd and 14th were

1 *ibid.*

2 *ibid.*, pp. 195-7.

3 *ibid.*, p. 197.

4 *ibid.* In some places St. Katherine's day was also known as 'candle day', the first day of candlelight. The girls are said to have jumped over a candlestick shouting:

Jack be nimble, Jack be quick,

Jack jump over the candle stick. *ibid.*, p. 196.

5 In some villages the children traditionally locked the mistress out of the room. *ibid.*, p. 201.

6 *ibid.*

marked out as special lacemakers' holidays. For many villagers these holidays and celebrations were the fruition of a year's subscription which had been taken regularly every week or fortnight.¹

CONCLUSIONS

Such activities were no doubt a welcome relief from an employment which, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was probably as demanding as any employment of this kind had ever been. For pillow lacemaking was among the most complicated of the hand processes and demanded an intense concentration which could only come from rigorous training and discipline. In lace schools there could seldom be any looking off the lace pillow, hours were long and the hour glass, the counting and chanting and competitive races tended to reduce the work to a monotonous regularity and to a very high degree of routinization which was often carried out irrespective of consideration of a particular child's physical condition, or ability. The graduation period was short and the work was frequently undertaken under the supervision of people outside of the family organization.

Generalizations on an industry of this nature are always somewhat precarious, but the employment of children in lace schools in the middle years of the nineteenth century does suggest a sad case of exploitation. Though there was some variation of experience, the weight of evidence points towards the conclusion that the disciplinary aspects of industrialization percolated through to this sector of the economy with a greater severity than has previously been imagined and that they were intensified by the industry's competition with the lace machine.² It was the children who bore the brunt of the industry's problems, for their mothers worked independently at home, and although economic expediency undoubtedly pressed them to work

1 *ibid.*

2 Since lace schools had existed well before the advent of the machine industry, some of these disciplinary methods may well have been implemented before 1815, if perhaps, for the reasons enumerated above, with less severity.

hard they could always cease working whenever they pleased; the organization of their time, to a large degree, was their own responsibility.

Comparisons with the severity of conditions of employment in the new factory areas are difficult, but conditions in this industry clearly approximate more closely to conditions in factory organization that E.P. Thompson, for example, has suggested.¹ To a degree, the hour glass, competitive races and so on were as effective dictators of the tempo of work as the constant turning of a machine. To this were added the anxieties which came from a life which was precariously close to the poverty line. Whether or not one group of workers felt any worse, or was treated with greater severity than was the other indeed can only be a matter of degree, for both types of industrial organization produced adverse working conditions which left workers in a distressed physical and emotional condition.

The health and working conditions of child pillow laceworkers ranked with that of workers in some of the most notorious industrial occupations.² Yet while factory workers were already coming under legislative control by the 1820's there was no sign of amelioration here until the late 1860's. Hidden away in villages, far from the centre of Britain's industrial advance, these child workers were all too easily ignored by reformers; they must be counted among the most unfortunate victims of Britain's industrial advance in the nineteenth century.

1 See above, pp. 406-408.

2 See above, pp. 368-405.

CHAPTER 16

State Intervention

The legislature was not moved to intervene on the pillow lace workers' behalf until the 1860s. It had first to be convinced of the need for control and of the possibility of making it effective. The eventual control of the industry had two basic components; the extension of the Factory legislation in the 1860s and 70s, and the passage of the Elementary Education Acts of 1870, 1876 and 1880. Yet the process of legislative intervention was by no means satisfactory, for it came almost too late and was too limited to control many of the aspects of the employment which had needed attention. Though it finally brought children under control in the 1870s, it overlooked the aged women on whom the industry had come, increasingly, to depend. The lateness and inadequacy of the legislation covering the pillow lace industry meant that it failed to mitigate a good deal of the suffering which had been brought by the industry's decline. Indeed, if intervention into the conditions of childrens' employment had come earlier it might, by curtailing the supplies of child labour, have caused the industry to decline more rapidly than it did. As it was, the lateness and inadequacy of legislative intervention contributed to the industry's preservation and to the trials of the workers who remained in its employment. By the 1890s there were still enough unprotected workers remaining to leave the way open for the final attempts of philanthropic ladies to encourage the industry's preservation.¹ This probably contributed to a slight improvement in the lacemakers' earnings but it did nothing to improve working conditions. The old ladies who continued to make lace in the twentieth century were a pathetic and pitiful

1. See below, pp. 473-509.

sector of industrial society whose need for protection parliament continued, at great social cost, to ignore.

The development of protective legislation for workers in workshop and domestic industry at large ultimately hinged very much on the ability of reformers to break down deep-seated prejudices that conditions were neither bad enough, nor places of work amenable enough to warrant or make practicable parliamentary control. Where work was undertaken at home the barriers to reform were particularly great, for the legislature was reticent to intrude into the sanctity of what was widely regarded as a citadel of virtue and all that was best in Victorian life. It took a long time, and the provision of a good deal of information by would-be reformers, to overcome the many obstacles and eventually bring a sceptical parliament to accept the need for intervention. In this way the legislative control of conditions in the pillow lace industry was bound up closely with the general movement for reform of domestic and workshop industry and came as part of changes which were first won during the 1860s and subsequently improved upon in the 1870s. The intervention into the industry owed almost nothing to the campaigns of disinterested individuals or to outside interests. Here and there, a few local persons had long voiced their opposition to the unhappiness or immorality which they felt the industry had caused,¹ but in no sense had there been a campaign. The industry's reform owed almost everything to the hard work of the factory inspectorate and government enquirers.

An accurate description of the conditions prevailing in any industry was one of the fundamental prerequisites of its being brought under legislative control. The Childrens' Employment Commission of 1843 eventually demonstrated that conditions in several workshop and domestic industries,

1. See above, pp. 247-251.

pillow lacemaking among them, were in many respects as bad as those in factories and mines. The 1843 Report contained plentiful evidence on the pillow lace industry. Women and children were working long hours, sometimes right through the night, for wages which, when all deductions had been taken for materials, and when truck and cash payments had been made, were sometimes so negligible as to make the effort involved scarcely worthwhile. The employment was demonstrably injurious to the workers' health and the moral condition of the lacemakers had emerged as a matter of serious concern; it was 'nearly as low as that of the plaiters',¹ a notoriously promiscuous group, and 'prostitution was rife among them from the same cause - scanty earnings, love of finery and the almost total absence of moral culture'.² The girls' education had also been found wanting, since lacemaking had divorced them from opportunities of elementary education, and left them 'stolid and stupid' and 'utterly unfit for domestic service'.³ Mr. Stewart, the commissioner for Devon and district, and Major Burns, the commissioner for the south-east Midlands, portrayed a group of depressed and underpaid workers whose working conditions were clearly in need of regulation.

Yet the commissioners were investigators above all else, and showed little inclination to draw practical implications from their findings. No concrete proposals as to how reform might be carried out were made, and the evidence of the Commission was not of itself powerful enough to persuade a sceptical and busy parliament of the need for intervention. 'Scarcely anything in the history of the Factory Acts', said Hutchins and Harrison, 'is more disappointing than the coldness and apathy with which the Report on the Employment of Children in Manufactures was received. The commissioners did admirable work but with one or two exceptions, these industries received

1. R.C. on Employment of Children, op. cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. A12,

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*, p. D1.

little attention until two decades had expired, and the work of enquiry had then to be done over again'.¹

Factory reform, as Hutchins and Harrison pointed out, was essentially a pragmatic affair, resting on a painstaking process of discovery, of proposals for control and then of argument, before practical steps to make the resultant proposals effective could be undertaken. All of this took time, and in the general context of the evolution of parliamentary control, industries such as pillow lacemaking were obviously not going to lend themselves to regulation as readily as those which were organised on a larger scale. To a great degree, the reform of this industry was ultimately dependant on the success of intervention in industries of greater importance, most notably cotton. The cotton industry was the first to be brought under control precisely because it was geographically concentrated and its workers were located in large buildings where they were relatively easy to check.² It was only when it had been shown that this major industry had been able to prosper under regulation that the conviction gradually emerged that other industries might advantageously be brought under control.

The 1840s were marked by the efforts of factory reformers to show economists and industrialists alike that state intervention in employment was not only justifiable and necessary on moral grounds but also on the grounds that the state would actually prosper from it, since such legislation might well lead to an increase in industrial efficiency. By the mid 1840s it could be shown that legislative intervention had not diminished productivity in the cotton industry. Yet there were lingering doubts and governments and pragmatic reformers were still committed largely to the problems of controlling the major textile industries. Parliament, despite the findings of the 1843 Report, needed additional conviction of the need for

1. B.L. Hutchins & A. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

2. *ibid.*, p. 121.

intervention elsewhere. Such legislation as there was in the 1840s and 50s simply extended the control over factories in the textile industries.¹

During the 1850s, in an atmosphere of prosperity and optimism, the impetus of Benthamism which had carried forward the reforms of the previous decades began to wane. The influence of the more doctrinaire wing of laissez faire, following the victory of the extreme free traders in the Corn Law dispute, was now in the ascendant. Yet it was during these years that the conversion of public opinion in favour of widespread reform took place. The source of the change is to be found in the reports of the factory inspectorate, which destroyed the fears of the Manchester School that a reduction in hours would bring a corresponding reduction of output, and showed that the long hours customary in other trades, far from being productive, positively tended to encourage irregularity of trade and a restriction of output. The eventual result was an extension of legislation covering a number of industries, including the pillow lace industry, during the 1860s.

Yet, with respect to pillow lacemaking, the 1843 Report had had little immediate effect on general public opinion. One lone voice had been stirred into protestation. Frederick Engels, to whom the public's apathy had come as no surprise, had been utterly convinced of the industry's evils by the Report. In his account of The Condition of the Working Class in England, Engels made the most vitriolic condemnation of the industry ever written, extending the responsibility for the workers' ills to bourgeois society as a whole, for in his mind those who chose to purchase and wear the industry's product were as guilty of gross moral negligence as those who employed the workers directly. A graphic description of the lacemakers'

1. *ibid.*, pp. 120-1.

physical condition was followed by his general argument:

This is the price at which society purchases for the fine ladies of the bourgeoisie the pleasure of wearing lace, a reasonable price truly. Only a few thousand blind working women, some consumptive labourers' daughters, a sickly generation of the vile multitude bequeathing its debility to its equally vile children and childrens' children. But what does that come to? Nothing, nothing whatsoever! Our English bourgeois will lay the Report of the government aside indifferently, and wives and daughters will deck themselves with lace as before. It is a beautiful thing, the complacency of the English bourgeois.¹

Engels was not far short of the mark in predicting that the English bourgeois would ignore the implications of the Report, but he might have passed some of his condemnation of the bourgeoisie onto the aristocracy, for it was they, above all, who were to show the greatest interest in the industry's products.²

There were signs during the 1850s, however, that local opinion was becoming more unfavourable. It was perhaps as a result of this, and perhaps also as a result of the findings of the 1843 Report, that conditions in lace schools were now being altered. The 1843 Report had been critical of the adverse effects which pillow lacemaking had on education. As local possibilities of elementary education began to appear during the 1850s, particularly in the form of National and British Church Schools, the dealers and mistresses responded by invoking minor changes in the nature of lace schools. When the second Childrens' Employment Commission investigated the pillow lace industry in the early 1860s the schools had taken on a slightly different appearance

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1. F.W. Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England. Translated by W.D. Henderson and W.H. Chaloner, (1958), p. 219.
 2. See below, pp. 473-509.

from the 1840s for with their exertions at the lace pillow the child workers now also combined a modicum of elementary education.

There had been little or no mention of such facilities in the 1843 Report. It was said then that the employment left the children 'little time for recreation and generally no thought of education and improvement', and the only source of instruction the girls enjoyed after commencing lacemaking was in Sunday School.¹ Yet by the 1860s there were very few lace schools in which a portion of the day was not devoted to some general teaching, particularly reading and counting. The development of National and British Church schools in the rural districts was attracting a number of pupils who at one time might have attended lace school. Though the state of the lace trade was still the major determinant of whether or not children attended lace school, and whenever the trade boomed the elementary schools were soon emptied,² low wages at lacemaking and an apparent awakening of interest in elementary education among the agricultural labouring class were causing a number of parents to keep their children away from lace school for a longer period of their early years than had previously been the case. The majority still began at five or six, but the threat was a serious one, for two vital years of disciplining and training at lacemaking could be lost as a result, and children who had experienced something of the outside world were so much more difficult to control.³ In some elementary schools lacemaking had now been introduced to the curriculum as an additional inducement for the children to attend. The fees were a penny a week, which was less

1. R.C. on Employment of Children, op. cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. D2.

2. See below, pp. 460-2.

3. See above, pp. 422-3.

than in most lace schools, and since the lace was sold for the childrens' parents,¹ little pecuniary advantage was lost by the children having missed lace school, particularly as wages in lacemaking were so low.²

To the lace dealers, signs of local opinion turning against the industry were a potential cause for alarm. Many clergymen now had 'that amount of influence that they were able to persuade many children to attend their own schools'.³ The low state of the childrens' morals and 'the baneful effects of language and conversation arising from among those of an age reaching puberty in the presence of the younger', were said to be causing particular concern.⁴ In 1867 the Reverend Rigg, of Bozeat, told enquirers that

Girls in these parts labour under a great disadvantage; they are put to the lace trade at an early age of six or seven years. The lacemaking is the prolific source of bad health and bad morals and produces no pecuniary result worthy of the sacrifice.⁵

The dealers were threatened on two fronts. Local opinion was beginning to move against them, and the development of elementary schools was threatening to undermine their future labour supplies.⁶ For the first time they were finding it necessary to induce children to attend lace school.

The provision of a daily quota of time in lace schools for reading and counting, and for moral training and an understanding of the Bible

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1. R.C. on Employment of Children, op. cit., First Report, 1863, pp. 258, 259, 262.
 2. See above, pp. 251-264.
 3. R.C. on Employment of Children, op. cit., First Report, 1863, p. 259.
 4. R.C. on Employment of Children, op. cit., Appendix to Second Report, Pt. I, 1843, p. A13.
 5. R.C. on Employment in Agriculture, op. cit., First Report, Appendix, Pt. II, 1867-8, p. 446.
 6. Thomas Lester, however, did find some advantage. In 1863, he said that 'There has been great improvement of later years in the intellectual condition and manners of the people in these districts. I attribute this chiefly to an increased amount of Sunday-school teaching.' R.C. on Employment of Children, op. cit., First Report, 1863, p. 262.

was proclaimed loudly in evidence to the Commissioners in 1863, as the dark cloud of intervention now loomed threateningly near. Mrs. Treadwin said she had recently employed a schoolmistress to teach reading, writing and arithmetic for two hours per day,¹ and exaggerated claims such as one made by Mrs. Allen, a dealer at High Wycombe, were abundant:

Lacemakers can generally read well though they have not much time to learn writing. In all the lace schools the girls read twice a day, generally from the Testament, or some Scripture lesson book, the little ones sometimes learning a hymn besides; and these readings are seldom missed and attention is paid to them by the mistresses. From what they learn in this way and in Sunday school and also on Saturdays, when many of them go to schools for half and sometimes the whole day I should say there is not one lacemaker in twenty, whether a grown up or a child that cannot read, and they are taught little else; that is the foundation of all other learning.²

But the accuracy of such claims must be seriously doubted. The pressures of work in lace schools were intense, and it is not easy to see how reading could be taught on such a basis. Most mistresses had had little if any formal education and were scarcely qualified to teach others. A mistress at Wihampstead displayed surprising ignorance when she admitted in 1863 that she had not heard of the Queen.³ When young lacemakers went to the Harrold National (Mixed) School in Bedfordshire in February 1866, the headmaster noted they were 'scarcely able to write or do an addition sum'.⁴ At best, most mistresses must have been like Sarah Mitchell who told commissioners, 'I can't learn 'em much, but I do the best I can'.⁵

The new Commission on Childrens' Employment, which unearthed these

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1. *ibid.*, p. 255.
 2. *ibid.*, p. 256. Benjamin Lacey, a dealer at Princes Risborough, said that 'in lace schools children are really taught to read and more attention is paid now than formerly, and William Ayres claimed he 'frequently had letters written to him by lacemakers'. *ibid.*, p. 258.
 3. *ibid.*, p. 263.
 4. Harrold National (Mixed) School Log Book, Beds. C.R.O.
 5. R.C. on Employment in Agriculture, op. cit., First Report, 1867-8, Pt. II, p. 576.

developments, had been appointed to investigate conditions of childrens' employment in industries, including pillow lace, 'not already regulated by the law.'¹ By the sheer weight of its evidence it finally broke down the illusion that conditions in domestic industry were neither sufficiently bad nor accessible enough to make regulation necessary, or even possible. The Commission showed, in much greater detail and in a more systematic way than its predecessor, that long hours, insanitation, low wages, sickness and strain, common to all forms of industrial organisation, were to be found most particularly in workshop and cottage industries in which labour was cheap and competition unregulated. The problems might be less visible because the workers were scattered in small institutions, but it was precisely for this reason that these industries were especially in need of control. Pillow lacemaking was just such a case and the commissioners rebuffed those who still doubted the need for intervention in its organization:

This assumption appears to have rested partly on the tacit assumption that no evil accompanies it of a nature sufficiently grave to involve the general interest of the public and partly that even if such evil existed the law could not reach it. The assumption that no evil exists sufficiently grave to involve the public interest is negatived by the ample proof furnished by the evidence of the injury to health inflicted on the large body of young females engaged in the employment, as carried on under its present unfavourable sanitary conditions, to encourage the growth and spread of consumption.²

The commissioners were convinced that lace schools should be brought immediately under control:-

Considering the large numbers of the female population which devotes the early years of its life to the work of pillow lace in the numerous towns and villages which are the seats of this manufacture, it would seem that the interests of society as regards the health and stamina of the population

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1. B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, op. cit., p. 280.
 2. R.C. on Employment of Children, op. cit., Second Report, 1864, p. XXXI.

even more require in their case, that the conditions of health in lace schools be a matter of public concern.¹

To those who might suggest that such institutions were outside the reach of the law, the commissioners pointed out that the Public Health and Local Government Acts had already placed administrative officers under the direction of local authorities, and these only needed to be given specific powers for them to be able to deal effectively with just this kind of case.²

Yet it was not only lace schools which were in need of regulation. The commissioners proceeded to the radical proposition that family organisation could no longer be regarded as inviolable, and that the need for intervention was just as great here as in workshops of this kind, for the childrens' greatest enemies were, in fact, their parents:

It would seem to be greatly to the benefit of the health, comfort and means of improvement of a very large body of the children, young persons and women if the protection of the law could be so far extended to them as to ensure for them moderate and regular hours of work and an improved sanitary condition of their place of work. But more especially would such legislation be a protection and benefit to the great numbers of very young children who in many branches of industry are kept at protracted and injurious labour in small, overcrowded, dirty, ill-ventilated places of work by their parents. It is unhappily to a painful degree apparent through the whole of the evidence that against no persons do the children need so much protection as against their parents.³

The commissioners therefore recommended the extension of the Factory Acts, with modifications, both to private schools and to small places of work generally. In the case of the pillow lace industry this meant regulation should be extended to lace schools and to workers at home.

These recommendations were ambitious, and in the case of controlling

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*, Fifth Report, 1866, p. XXV.

work at home, novel and startling. Lace schools were to be placed under the same regulations as were the lace warehouses in the lace finishing trade in Nottingham,¹ that is, under the regulations of the existing Factory Act. For purposes of registration and the inspection of ventilation, sanitation and overcrowding, the schools were to be placed under the auspices of local authorities, in accordance with the Public Health Act of 1848, the Common Lodging Houses Act of 1857, the Nuisances Removal Act of 1855, the Metropolitan Local Management Act of 1851 and the Local Government Act of 1858. There appeared to be 'no valid reason' why the said officers should not have the same powers with regard to lace warehouses and lace schools as they had for local housing. The local authorities were to notify school owners of the Act and by such notice require them to register the school informing the authorities of the condition of each school and the number of workers to be authorised under the Act. Each school would be examined by the Medical Officers and whenever the regulations were found to be contravened, the Factory Inspectorate would have the power of enforcement.²

It was hoped that the new Act would have one incidental advantage. By directing the attention of the labouring and middle classes to the subjects of overcrowding and ventilation, both of which were now recognised as prime causes of 'typhus and other fevers, and of that lowering of the system which predisposes to other disease',³ it was hoped that the new regulations would bring an improvement in the conditions of the cottages

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1. 'The lace schools are clearly in the same category as the mistresses' houses in the lace finishing trade. They are equally places of manufacture, equally frequented by large numbers of children and young people, and equally injurious to health, from overcrowding and lack of proper ventilation. The recommendations which we have made in regard to mistresses' houses and the limitation by local authority of the numbers to be allowed to work in each room according to cubic contents are equally applicable to lace schools'. *ibid.*, Second Report, p. XXXI.
 2. *ibid.*, pp. XXVI-XXIX.
 3. *ibid.*, p. XXI.

in which most of the lacemakers were employed.¹

It was agreed that although children making pillow lace at home were not working directly for their parents, their 'tender and immature age' meant that they must to all intents and purposes be considered as virtually so employed.² That being the case, it was suggested that these children should come under the recommendations designated for private houses in the lace finishing trade.³ No child under the age of eight was to be employed, and no child under the age of 13 should work more than six hours per day, or between the hours of 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. No young person above the age of 13 and under the age of 18, nor any woman should work more than 10½ hours in any one day, or between the hours of 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. And every child, young person or woman should be entitled to the same meal times as specified under the Factory Acts.⁴

These were ambitious propositions, but by 1867 Parliament had been convinced. To the evidence of the Commission had been added the weight of the findings of the Reports of the Medical Officers of the Privy Council, in which well-documented and statistical proof of the consequences of life in workshop and domestic industries, including pillow lacemaking, had been given.⁵ The moral case for reform now had all the evidence it required and parliament was now convinced that the economic effects of such intervention would not be adverse. Industrial organisations other than factories had been brought under control for the first time in the early 1860s when, following the first report of the Childrens' Employment Commission, an Act was passed in 1864 to control conditions in the pottery

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

4. *ibid.*

5. See above, Chapter 14 *passim*.

trade, lucifer match making, percussion cap and cartridge making, paper staining and fustian cutting. The Act placed the enumerated industries under the Factory Acts already in force, the definition of a factory being widened so as to include 'any place in which persons work for hire'. In the same year the Factory Acts were extended to occupations in which children, young persons and women were employed in 'any building or premises whatever, in the processes of finishing, hooking, lapping, or of making up and packing any yarn or cloth of wool, cotton, silk, or flax, or any mixture of them, or any yarn or materials or any such processes'.¹

The more comprehensive Workshops Regulation Act followed these precedents and was passed in 1867.² The Bill was introduced into Parliament by the Home Secretary, Spencer Walpole, who stressed that the evils incident to the employment of women and children were, in general, 'aggravated to a tenfold degree in the small workshops in which children were found at work'. Such conditions warranted the State's intervention, not only in workshops, but also in the home and therefore in the sphere of family relations. For the state, 'the parent of the country', was morally obliged to take the place of the child's parents whenever parental duties were neglected.³

Parliament had been easily convinced both on moral and economic grounds, and a leading article which appeared in The Times following the passage of the new Act indicated just how much public opinion had changed since the early 1840s. The paper supported the Bill primarily on economic grounds, for unrestricted employment in a number of industries had resulted in men working casually for the early part of the week and relying on their

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1. B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, op. cit., pp. 154-5. The two Acts were 27 and 28 V.C. 48 and 27 and 28 V.C. 98.
 2. 30 and 31 V.C. 146.
 3. As quoted in Hutchins and Harrison, op. cit., p. 166.

energies, and those of their wives and children, to replenish the family purse towards the week's end. Yet to employ women and children 'unduly' in this way was simply to 'run in debt with nature'. Regulation would prove that constant, moderate labour was more productive than alternate bouts of idleness and fatiguing activity.¹

The Workshops Regulation Act applied to all establishments with less than 50 employees, and since in the same year the Factory Extension Act² related to establishments in which 50 or more persons were employed, the number of workers in each establishment now became the determining factor of the means of control. Under the Factory Extension Act the larger establishments were subjected to the requirements of the factory inspectorate; under the Workshops Act, the smaller establishments were to be placed under a modified system of regulation and local supervision.³

The Workshops Regulation Act paid heed to the suggestion by the second Childrens' Employment Commission, that work at home was as much in need of control as work outside. It was designed to be comprehensive, covering home and workshop equally; those employed 'in any workshop and in any handicraft'⁴ were to come under its jurisdiction. In the event, the definitions of 'employment, workshop and handicraft' were to be important. A person was 'employed' when working, whether for wages or not, and whether under a master or parent. A workshop was defined as 'any room or place whatever... in which any handicraft is carried on by any child, young person or woman, and to which and over which the person by whom such child, young person or woman is employed has the right of access or control,⁵ and a handicraft as, 'any manual labour exercised by way of trade or for

1. *ibid.*, pp. 166-7.

2. 30 and 31 V.C. 103.

3. B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

4. *ibid.*, p. 170.

5. *ibid.*

purposes of gain in or incidental to the altering, repairing, ornamenting, finishing or otherwise adapting for sale any article'.¹

By its definition of 'employed' the Act therefore included all home industry. But by its definition of a workshop as a place to which and over which the employer had right of access or control it excluded a large number of outworkers. Whereas those persons employed at home by a parent, husband or master who owned their place of work were controlled, those outworkers who were employed on premises not owned by the employer were not. This had serious implications for the pillow lace industry.

The provisions of the Workshops Act were close to those of the existing Factory Acts. Maximum hours were the same; no child under 8 years was to be employed in any handicraft; children from 8 to 13 might only be employed for six and a half hours per day, as in factories; young persons and women might only be employed for 12 hours, less one and a half for meals, and no child, young person or woman might be employed after two p.m. on Saturday, except in establishments employing five, or less than five persons.² Though working hours were thus restricted to the same number as those under the existing Factory Act, the limits within which these might be undertaken were much wider. The working hours of children might fall between 6 a.m. and 8 p.m., those of young people and women between 5 a.m. and 9 p.m. In this respect the Act was weak, for the experience of earlier factory legislation had shown that if 'spurious relay systems' were to be avoided, a normal day was needed, with the number of hours permitted fixed so as to equal the boundary limits of hours within which work could take place.³

The Act also contained educational provisions, akin to those existing

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*, p. 171.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 171-2.

under the earlier factory legislation. Children were to attend school for a maximum of 10 hours per week, on a half-time system, though again the provisions were defective, for there were no set standards of education, there was no daily provision, and the distribution of the attendance during the week was left entirely to the parent, which past experience had shown led to very irregular attendance.¹ In its final clauses the Act empowered the sanitary inspectors of local authorities to implement the provision of a fan or other mechanical means to carry off noxious dust from the 'workshops'. But the Act ignored many of the suggestions of the Childrens' Employment Commissioners in other respects, most notably those of making provision for notice of occupation and for the exhibition of an abstract of the Act in the workshop and of surgeons' certificates and measures for cleanliness.

There clearly were many loopholes in the Act and in most cases, including that of the pillow lace industry, it eventually proved to be a dismal failure. The provisions of the Act were complicated, the clauses on education and the regulation of hours were deficient, and not all workers were covered. Worst of all, the enforcement of the Act was left in the hands of local authorities whose administrative controls failed, almost inevitably, from lack of interest and lack of effective means of control. The Childrens' Employment Commissioners had anticipated that the 'duty of exposing defects' would be an invidious one when undertaken by local persons,² and their fears were ultimately proven to be correct. To enter a workshop an officer had first to obtain an order from a Justice of the Peace, and orders were given only when the Justice was satisfied that the Act had been contravened. This in itself was frustrating, but the number of inspectors was in any case so small that the work was invariably neglected

1. *ibid.*, p. 172.

2. R.C. on Employment of Children, *op. cit.*, Second Report, 1864, pp. XXXVIII-XXXIX.

or at best carried out inefficiently. Many lace schools and women working at home simply were not discovered. The Act was almost totally ineffective with regard to the pillow lace industry, as the factory inspectorate who did all they could to help, soon discovered. The regional inspector for the south-east Midlands soon realised that the Act did not cover most lace schools, since they could not be classed as places over which the employer had right of access or control. The 'great fault' of the Workshop Act was that it assumed that the occupier of the workshop (in this case, the lace mistress) hired the children and payed their wages. Yet this was seldom the case¹ and hence the lace schools could seldom be classed as a workshop.

There were a few successes, despite these problems, whenever any 'earnest endeavour' was made to put the Act into effect, particularly with regard to controlling children under eight years old.² But the successes were far outweighed by the failures. The headmaster of Harrold National School (Bedfordshire) recorded in his log book on February 24th, 1868, that 'the lace defys much progress in the girls' education'.³ Children attended his school only in so far as the demands of the lace trade permitted it. On April 28th the headmaster noted that 'several girls have left, all between six and seven years of age, for the lace'.⁴ But later, on January 18th in the following year, the girls were 'attending under the Factory Act'. In March and April, however, the girls were once more leaving for the lace pillow.⁵ In the middle of the year the chief factory inspector reported very little success with children between 8 and

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1. Report of the Inspector of Factories for the ½ year ending 30 April 1868, XIV, (1868-9), p. 305.
 2. *ibid.*, p. 306.
 3. Beds. C.R.O. Harrold National (Mixed) School Log Book, Feb. 12, 1868.
 4. *ibid.*
 5. *ibid.*

12 years old and that no attempt had yet been made to intervene with children working at home.¹

Within a year of its inception it had been shown that the Act was already well on the way to becoming a failure. The district factory inspector for the south-east Midlands reported that he was 'utterly disregarded in many of the towns and manufacturing villages, and that one of 'the worst forms of infant associated labour' had escaped his supervision.'² Mr. Redgrave, the chief factory inspector, eventually reported in 1870 that the administration of the Workshops Act had been 'the cause of great anxiety' to him and his staff,³ and in 1871 it was finally accepted that the attempt to make use of local sanitary authorities as inspectors had failed miserably. Under the Factory Act of 1871⁴ it was decided to hand over the administration of the Act completely to the factory inspectorate.

The change brought some improvement. In March 1872, the headmaster of Harrold National School was pleased to record the visit of the inspector of factories, 'giving notice that girls under the age of 13 must make 10 hours per week in school', and in May that a certain amount of success had been achieved, since more 'half timers' had 'been admitted in consequence of a visit by the Inspector of Factories'.⁵ But there clearly was a limit to the work the inspectorate could undertake, as was soon to become apparent. The inspectorate found it impossible simply to discover all the workshops which were scattered throughout the countryside, and even when workshops were found they could be visited only once in a number of years. Typically,

1. Report of the Inspector of Factories, op. cit., 1868-9, p. 305.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*, 1870, p. 126.

4. 34 and 35 V.C. 104.

5. Beds. C.R.O. Harrold National (Mixed) School Log Book, 12 March 1872; 21 May 1872.

were often fully alive to the directives of the Act, and simply let their children attend school at irregular intervals without regard to the quality of education. The half-time system under the Act was useless. Mr. Whympers, the sub-inspector for Devon, estimated that probably no more than 50 out of the whole number of children in his area attended a day school with any regularity:

Of the others a few may receive some very slight instruction from the mistress (possibly herself no great scholar) in the intervals of lacework, and a good many attended night schools; but the amount of learning which they derive from these two sources is not likely to be very great and the majority have not even these advantages. Ignorant they have entered the lace schools and ignorant they have at present remained.¹

In several places in Devon there had been insufficient school accommodation and in others none at all.² In many ways the 1867 Act, even with the modification of 1871, was proving to be a failure.

As the factory inspectorate debated the merits or otherwise of the 1867 Act, the inadequacies of the legislation were compensated for, to a degree, and particularly with regard to the control of child labour, by the effects of the industry's competitive problems. Poor wages³ and what by now were the industry's dismal prospects of improvement encouraged many young girls to drift from their rural home to take up more lucrative, often less exacting employment in towns. In Bedfordshire some went also into straw plaiting until, in 1888, a sudden and massive influx of cheap Chinese and Italian plait, caused a drastic decline in this industry's fortunes.⁴ During the late 1860s and 70s, as the number of children attending lace schools diminished, an increasing number were closed down,

1. Report of the Factory and Workshop Commissioner, op. cit., I, Appendix D, 1876, p. 173.

2. *ibid.*

3. See above, pp. 251-264.

4. J.G. Dony, op. cit., pp. 85-6. In Devon, the major alternative was domestic service. See above, p. 351.

unable to attract new pupils for training. By 1871 the number of children employed in the industry aged less than 15 years was only half that of a decade earlier. In 1851 children aged less than 10 years had comprised around seven per cent of the labour force; by 1871 the figure was down to just over two per cent.¹

But the fact that the industry's demise was repelling potential supplies of child and adult labour, did nothing for those workers who remained in its employment. In 1876 the Factory and Workshops Commissioners decided that something further must be done. The 1867 Act had been defective in its structure, its administration had been weak and it had frequently been evaded. It had been utterly impossible to control home workers. The Assistant Inspector for the pillow lace districts of the south-east Midlands, Sir Charles Patrick, felt he could not say that the old abuses were disappearing:

They are ameliorating, I think, but so far as my experience goes if you prosecute a case in a village the effect of it lasts a short time, and when the sub-inspector revisits the place he will find the old system in force.²

Since the industry was spread over a great number of small villages it was difficult, almost impossible, for a sub-inspector to detect its abuses. Patrick therefore recommended the abolition of the existing Act and the extension of the Factory Acts to all establishments, however small. But he made the provision that all places in which none but the family were employed should be excluded. In so doing he recognised the complete failure of the inspectorate to intervene in employment at home. To improve the mode of inspection generally, he suggested that the new legislation might well be placed in the hands, not of the factory inspectorate, but of local men under the supervision of magistrates, or

1. See above, p. 183, Table 6.

2. Report of the Factory and Workshop Commissioners, op. cit., II, Minutes of Evidence, 1876, p. 987.

the petty sessions. For there were 'a great many men in most of the villages who have been old soldiers or old policemen' and who, with experience of policing the working class at home and the native populations abroad, Patrick felt should find the task of controlling small workshops a relatively simple one.¹

The Chief Inspector concluded from the various reports in 1876 that the law needed to be simplified, and agreed broadly with all of Patrick's conclusions, with the exception of his final one. In the Chief Inspector's view, the Workshops Regulation Act should be repealed and workshops should be brought under the Factory Acts, for regulation had been shown to be more lax in workshops than in factories.² Hence, the distinction between factory and workshop on the basis of whether or not 50 hands were employed should be abolished. There was no reason why provisions regarding education, safety and hours should be 'deliberately made less efficient in smaller places of work where they are most needed'.³ The word factory should now be re-defined so as to include the factories presently under the Factory Act of 1874 (i.e. premises in which any mechanical power was used) and the word workshop should be used to cover all other places of work within the new Act. The limitation of hours in workshops could also be more strictly applied, for experience had finally shown that 'the only way to enforce the law against overwork is to provide not merely a maximum period of labour in the day, but maximum limits within which such periods may be taken'.⁴ It was realised, however, that in the case of domestic labour it would be impossible to enforce a more rigid law than the one already in force. In general, there was to be no change in the law in this respect⁵ and the Report thus went back on its

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*, p. XXX.

3. *ibid.*, p. XVI.

4. *ibid.*, p. XXV.

5. *ibid.*

avowed policy to abolish the 1867 Act completely. Domestic employment, defined as 'employment by the occupier carrying on business in a room also used for the purpose of a dwelling house and employing none but inmates', was to have special exemption from the general recommendations and be left 'under the system at present in force in workshops'. Hence, the clock was effectively turned back to the 1840s, as it was once more felt 'desirable that the legislature interferes as little as possible with the habits and arrangements of families'.¹ Indeed, the commissioners advocated further retrogressive steps from the Act of 1867 by deeming it unnecessary to interfere with the employment of women, up to two in number, who were employed in a dwelling house by the occupier, and by advocating a number of relaxations with regard to the labour of women in workshops, where no young persons or children were employed.²

There were obvious inadequacies in the Report, but its chief recommendations were subsequently embodied in the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 and this, together with the Elementary Education Acts of 1876 and 1880, proved to be instrumental in bringing workshop industries under control for the first time. The 1878 Act³ ended the distinction between factories and workshops on a numerical basis, by defining a factory as the premises in which any articles 'are made, altered, repaired, ornamented, finished or adapted for sale by means of manual labour exercised for gain, if mechanical power is used on the premises'. Workshops were re-defined as all unpowered establishments of whatever size. The Act classified workplaces in six divisions: textile factories; non-textile factories; workshops employing children, young persons and women; and womens' workshops and domestic workshops in which only the members of a family

1. *ibid.*, p. XL.

2. B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

3. 41 and 42 V.C. 16.

were employed. In general, workshops other than womens' workshops and domestic workshops, were to have the same hours and conditions as those in textile factories. This ruling therefore applied to lace schools and represented a tightening up of the regulations.¹ The minimum age of employment was to be 10, and working hours were to take place during a fixed maximum period. Children should only be employed either in morning and afternoon sets, or on the system of alternate days. The period of employment for a child in a morning set should begin at six or seven a.m. and end at one p.m.; in an afternoon set the period should begin at one o'clock and end at six or seven. A child employed on the alternate day system should work between six a.m. and six p.m., or seven a.m. and seven p.m. In both cases Saturday employment should terminate at two p.m. and not less than two hours should be allowed for meals. The Act also prescribed periods of education, in accordance with the demands of the Elementary Education Act of 1876. The child working mornings or afternoons should attend in the alternate period; if engaged on alternate days, then a day's education must precede each work day. Attendance at school should be between eight a.m. and six p.m., though Saturdays were excepted. In addition, the Act catered for the few women in the pillow lace industry who worked together in a cottage, or on occasion in the corner of a lace school, bringing them under the regulations governing womens' workshops which were less strict than those governing lace schools. Employment might be taken at any time between six a.m. and nine p.m., and the workshops were exempt from the regulations relating to sanitation, meals, holidays, the fixing of notices and abstracts and the notification of accidents.

While the new Act generally left control of domestic employment under the provisions of the 1867 Act, straw plaiting, glove making and lacemaking were singled out for special consideration. Under the fifth schedule,

1. See above, p. 458.

there was to be no attempt whatsoever at control over private houses in which 'the labour is exercised at irregular intervals and does not furnish the whole or principal means of living to the family'.

Hence, the Act contained obvious retrogressions from the policies advocated by the second Children's Employment Commission and which had been attempted, however unsuccessfully, under the Act of 1867. Under the new Act women's work could not be effectively controlled in workshops, there was no effective control over their work at home and the Act had not achieved the simplification of the law which the 1876 Report had desired, for there clearly was much variation of treatment.

If the abandonment of serious attempts to interfere with domestic work was unfortunate it did have an element of realism about it. The enforcement of legal provisions had clearly been impossible, and would, even with an enormous inspectorate, have proven extremely difficult to carry through. On the other hand, the decision also reflected the growing reaction among women of the middle classes to restrictions on female employment. In their urge for emancipation and freedom of employment they mistakenly associated their own plight with the very different problems of the working class woman and it was largely due to the pressure of a movement led by Mrs. Emma Paterson, which expressed itself through the Women's Union Journal and The Englishwoman's Review, that the relaxations regarding women in domestic workshops and in womens' workshops were carried through. The influence of these women was a strong factor in the virtual abandonment of control over workers at home.¹

But there had been some improvement with regard to children, though it was indeed ironic that by the time this legislation had been passed,

1. B.L. Hutchins and A. Harrison, op. cit., p. 188.

some of the old abuses in lace schools were already disappearing. But the two Education Acts of 1876 and 1880 eventually combined with the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 to end the old abuses completely. The Elementary Education Act of 1876 complemented the earlier Act of 1870 which had required the establishment of local school boards in areas where voluntary effort was insufficient to provide adequate facilities of elementary education.¹ Though the 1870 Act had been slow to take practical effect in terms of the development of schools, it had, by generally advertising the cause, contributed in a minor way to reducing parental opposition to elementary education. But the Elementary Education Act of 1876, which introduced an element of indirect compulsion, was of much more practical significance. It was now deemed a parental duty to see that children attended for elementary education each morning or afternoon of the week, or on alternate days, and failure to do so could lead to a fine or to the commitment of children to an industrial school. No child aged less than 10 years could work during school hours, nor could a child aged 10 to 14, unless he had already passed the prescribed minimum, which was standard four.² True, the Act was by no means comprehensive. Children living more than two miles from school could still work, the employment of children outside school hours was unrestricted

1. As cited in Pauline Gregg, A Social and Economic History of Britain 1760-1965 (1965), pp. 511-12.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 513-14.

and children aged eight or nine who had been employed before August 1876 were exempt.¹ But it was a great improvement on its predecessor.

The development of school boards proved to be a gradual process, the one at Bedford not being established until 1897.² The Factory Inspector for Devon, on the other hand, was able to report late in 1878 that 'new schools are now in the course of erection and the area of others being enlarged'.³ In 1880, the Elementary Education Act was tightened by a new Act which introduced direct compulsion. It was now the responsibility of School Boards to enforce the attendance of every child in its area which was of school age.⁴

By the end of the 1880s the number of children employed in the industry aged less than 10 years had dwindled to insignificance. At Exmouth where once there had been 20 lace schools there now were none.⁵ Many lace schools had closed down because 'the demand for lace fell off so much',⁶ but the factory regulations and the Exmouth School Board had also 'greatly helped to get rid of them'. The Acts, were said to have been 'the final blow'.⁷ In 1888 the Factory and Workshops Inspector reported that the trade in the south-east Midlands was 'in a miserable state', and while 'some years ago there was not a child of four years old that could not make pillow lace', children now were 'not taught it'.⁸ From the end of the 1880s there were no more references to absenteeism on account of the lace trade in the log book of Harrold National School

1. *ibid.*

2. J. Godber, *op. cit.*, p. 543.

3. Report of the Factory and Workshop Inspector for the year ending 31st October 1878, XVI, 1878-9, p. 173.

4. 43 and 44 V.C. 23.

5. A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

6. *ibid.*, p. 4.

7. *ibid.*, p. 5.

8. Report of the Factory and Workshop Inspector for 1887/88, XVIII (1889), I, p. 6.

and the visits of the factory inspector and school attendance officer in 1880 had undoubtedly been of some effect.¹

The Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 had left the loophole, by exempting domestic dwellings from its duress, that children could still be employed at home after school hours. Yet the effects of elementary education soon began to undermine even this possibility. The children who had attended elementary school were said by lace dealers to have grown 'proudlie and above work'.² A.S. Cole, reporting on the condition of the pillow lace industry in the south-east Midlands in 1891, noted that 'the literary tendency of the elementary school has apparently cultivated a distate in children for the industry'.³ Many of the dealers were now filled with a sense of imminent disaster. 'I think', prophesied a dealer at Branscombe (Devon), 'our country will come to feel it some day if they don't now, what with our children being put to so much schooling and not brought up as they used to be to a trade and occupation'. In his view, the children were leaving elementary school only to 'beg in the streets', for they had learned 'all sorts of wickedness' and now didn't 'know what else to do'.⁴ The Elementary Education Acts of 1876 and 80 and the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 signalled the end of childrens' employment in the pillow lace industry. Faced by falling demand, and the new legislation, the industry was in serious trouble, and in the words of Mrs. Treadwin, was 'doomed to extinction' unless more

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1. Beds. C.R.O. Harrold National (Mixed) School Log Book: 5 Aug., 28 Sept. 1880.
 2. A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op. cit., p. 3.
 3. A.S. Cole, Report on the Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire Lace Industry, op. cit., p. 2.
 4. A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op. cit., p. 3. Such comments as these were typical of employers in all industries which employed children at this time, and also were very common among farmers. See Report of the Departmental Committee on the Employment of School Children, (1901), passim.

children could be trained.¹

The industry still employed over 10,000 workers in 1881, however, and most of these were middle aged and old women who worked, unregulated, at home. Yet the new Factory Act of 1891 confirmed the abandonment of attempts to control domestic work. The Act raised the minimum age of employment in a factory to eleven and brought women's workshops into line with ordinary workshops, as defined under the 1878 Act. It also provided inspectors with the right to enter domestic workshops in which children were employed, with special warrants; but there was to be no further regulation of women at home.² By the 1890s the legislature had been only partially successful in controlling conditions in the industry. There was still a sizeable number of workers, without protection.

If the age distribution of the occupied population had been taken in the censuses between 1881 and 1911 the figures would undoubtedly have shown a labour force ageing decade by decade. It was a labour force belonging to the underworld of sweated labour, abandoned by the state and degraded, yet clinging always to the hope that the situation would improve. The ageing laceworkers on whom the industry now depended formed part of what a contemporary described as the 'no man's land of the industrial world in which dreary phantoms come and go, and whence and whither no man can tell.'³ They were left exposed to exploitation by any lace dealer who chose to employ them. It was to this group of ageing, and often decrepit women that the open arms of the philanthropic classes eventually came to offer hope and salvation.

1. A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op. cit., p. 1.

2. 54 and 55 V.C. 75.

3. Dangerous Trades, ed. T. Oliver (1902), p. 98.

CHAPTER 17

The Lace Associations*

The disappearance of pillow lacemaking as a commercial enterprise would undoubtedly have come more quickly had it not been for philanthropic intervention. In the 1870's and 80's groups of middle and upper class women came, in highly formalized organizations, to take over a large section of the industry's control, and succeeded where many of the lace dealers had previously failed, in producing large quantities of lace and selling them on a wide market. As a result, the industry's demise did not eventuate as quickly as it might have done and in 1914, at the outbreak of the First World War, there were still around 2,000 pillow laceworkers actively engaged in the trade.¹

The Lace Associations, as these organizations were generally known, owed a large part of their origin to the social and intellectual ferment of the 1880s. On the one hand, it was then that the flow of population from the English countryside reached a peak in absolute terms and first became an important national issue.² The identifiable link between rural depopulation and the overcrowded, spiritless life of urban England, revealed in Mearn's Bitter Cry of Outcast London, was the subject of increasing investigation and public concern and a prime cause of the upsurge of interest among politicians, businessmen, economists, social reformers and romantics alike, in the means by which society might be revived.

The debate eventually reached a final peak shortly before the First

* The essence of this chapter has recently been published. See Geoff Spenceley, 'The Lace Associations: Philanthropic Movements to Preserve the Production of Hand-Made Lace in Late Victorian and Edwardian England', Victorian Studies, XVI, 4, June 1973, pp. 433-452.

1. See above, p. 177 and Table 2.

2. For a detailed discussion see J. Saville, op.cit., Chapters I-IV, passim.

World War, and the ideas of G.F. Millin and J.L. Green, who were prominent among the numerous advocates of the preservation of the rural economy at this time, encompass much of the thinking which prevailed during the thirty years before the outbreak of the war. For Millin, a radical journalist, rural depopulation was 'a change of the utmost gravity, deeply to be deplored'.¹ The concentration of workers in towns had brought 'great moral and physical dangers' to the population, as well as endangering the economy at large. For not only were British cities overcrowded and squalid, but Britain was over-dependent upon foreign trade and if it was ever to be in a sound condition it must first 'make fullest use of its own land and must aim at the most efficient organization of its own people in the manufacture of what the land produces'.² Millin saw the agricultural labourer as the backbone of England, 'the germ, the origin, the starting point of the whole system' and made radical plans, though without effect, to eliminate the profit motive from agriculture and create a free peasantry which would work on a co-operative basis in self-sufficient villages containing workshops and social amenities.³

F.E. Green, an office worker who left the city to take up a small holding and eventually became a socialist,⁴ saw similar dangers, and in 1912 forecast that 'if this depopulation of our rural districts continues, national disaster is sure to overtake us; for it is only those nations which have become firmly rooted in the soil, producing for themselves the necessaries of life which can endure'.⁵ Green had long been anxious about urban conditions, but the dangers of war with Germany and a curtailment of food supplies now made the 'reconquest' of England's acres a patriotic goal.⁶ His solution

1. G.F. Millin, The Village Problem (1903), p. 15.

2. *ibid.*, p. 12.

3. *ibid.*, Chapter III, *passim*.

4. I am grateful to my colleague John Fisher for this information.

5. F.E. Green, The Awakening of England (1912), p. v.

6. *ibid.*, p. VI.

was the creation of industrial villages, in which workshops and village institutions would permit the labourer a full and enriched life. The preservation of rural industry would stimulate rural society, strengthen the nation and save the import bill.¹

These were among the most outspoken and radical of a large number of individuals and interested groups who came, for a variety of reasons, from the 1880s onwards, to create a widespread impression that, somehow, the English countryside must be preserved. The notion carried with it a powerful humanitarian and patriotic appeal. The consolidation of the rural economy was seen by many people, if with varying emphasis, as the ideal vehicle by which urban squalor and rural depopulation might be controlled and national vigour might be maintained.²

During these years, the examination of the prevailing nature of Victorian society also brought many men to look with nostalgia to a more perfect bygone age, in which families had once worked together in co-operative harmony, and craftsmanship had been an important and integral part of family life. An aesthetic revulsion, both among intellectuals and segments of the upper and middle classes, against the philistine values of the mechanical age saw the anti philistinism, characteristic of the romantic movement of the mid nineteenth century, perpetuated now in a variety of forms, from the late pre-Raphaelites, influenced by Swinburne, Morris, Rossetti and

1 J.L. Green, Village Industries: A National Obligation (1915), pp. 10-21.

2 For further details see J. Saville, *op.cit.*, pp. 158-9, and W. Ashworth, The Genesis of Modern Town Planning (1954), p. 8.

Ruskin, to the newer, sophisticated minority of Aesthetes, influenced by Pater.¹ The solid, Victorian age was coming to an end and together various writers and thinkers helped create a second impression upon an increasing number of the educated and well-to-do, that Victorian economic expansion had been achieved only at great aesthetic cost and that something must be done to reverse the trend. In terms of practical effect, the predominant influence was that of John Ruskin. His supporters looked for inspiration to the medieval world in which men had once fulfilled their humanity in craftsmanship and art. Victorian industrial society, inimical to beauty, had dehumanized both art and labour. Yet Ruskin believed that every man had within him certain creative powers, the realization of which would not only enhance the happiness of the individual, but of society as a whole.² By the 1880s notions of reviving handicrafts, which at times developed into a 'cult of the beautiful',³ and more general ideas of reviving the countryside,⁴ were being expressed in a number of institutional forms, of which the Lace Associations were one.

Best known of the movements designed to revive the countryside is the Society for Promoting Industrial Villages, established in 1883 by a group of social reformers and businessmen, with the object of re-establishing village industries in localities which would give the worker 'healthier and happier conditions of industrial life than at present

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1. A.E. Rodway, 'The Last Phase' in From Dickens to Hardy, ed. B. Ford (Penguin, London 1958); E.P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (London 1955), pp. 22-24; 62-66; P. Jullian, Oscar Wilde (London 1969), pp. 150-159.
 2. E.P. Thompson, William Morris, op. cit., pp. 62-6; 82-3.
 3. P. Jullian, op. cit., p. 159.
 4. The legislation of the 1890s and early twentieth century promoted the supply of smallholdings and allotments, but was less-successful than protagonists had hoped. For a general summary see J.H. Clapham, op. cit., II, pp. 287-9, and III, pp. 105-9.

are found in this country'. Each village would have excellent social amenities, public institutions, well-built cottages, gardens and allotments. Wasteful disputes between capital and labour would be eliminated by profit-sharing and co-operation so that the worker, freed of many of the injurious influences of overcrowded cities, could enjoy an enriched life, in which sedentary occupations could be varied by the cultivation of a garden, and farm labour by simple handicrafts in the winter. The enlightenment was to be shared by the worker's family, for Home Arts and 'female enjoyments' would enable wives and daughters to 'enjoy the blessings of home life'. The Society received considerable support in its early days, including that of Alfred Marshall, but the grandiose scheme had a very short history, interest declined with the recovery of trade at the end of the 1880s, and by 1890 the Society had ceased to exist.¹

Less well-known, yet probably more successful, was the Home Arts and Industries Association, founded in 1884 and also interested in reviving handicrafts, including those in the countryside. Its inspiration was drawn in part from Ruskin, in part from the American advocate of workshop industry, C.J. Leland.² The enemy was the degradation of work which had been brought about by mechanical production, and in this respect it had the support, among others, of Oscar Wilde. The Association's aim was to bring back the pleasure and simplicity of work, so as to 'counteract the complicated vulgarities of modern luxury'. Its initiator was Walter Besant,³

1. J. Saville, op. cit., p. 159.

2. C.J. Leland (1824-1903), b. Philadelphia: Journalist, author, poet and humourist. Travelled to Europe 1869; lived in London, where he befriended Walter Besant. Became interested in the industrial arts, advocated their incorporation into public education. Author of 'Industrial Work in Schools'.

3. Walter Besant (1836-1901). Journalist, poet, author. Made a personal inquiry into the problems of poverty in East London. Opened the 'People's Palace', for working class education, in London, in 1887. President of the Antiquarian Historical Society.

but it was Lady Wentworth, a woman described by one of her associates as a person 'gifted with a heartfelt sympathy', who received most of the acclaim. In the fashionable magazine, Woman's World,¹ edited by Wilde, her supporters portrayed her romantically as one of an exclusive group of people 'able to see where good can be done' and 'throw themselves realisingly into the position of those who are to be benefitted'.² It was this ability which, in 1884, enabled her to attempt the 'seemingly unpromising task' of teaching woodcarving to a small group of boys in her local village.³

From these small beginnings a committee was eventually formed with the aim of 'elevating and brightening mens' lives'. It claimed its inspiration was Ruskin. The medieval hand worker was its ideal:-

How easy was the lesson set before the old medieval hand worker. In the workshops of his native town, or by his father in the old family kitchen he was taught - 'Thus and thus do you make a chest, or a dish or a hinge or a door and thus and thus do you ornament it. There is no other possible way. His education was very simple and very limited, but perfect in that it had no disturbing elements.'⁴

But like Ruskin, the committee accepted that it would be impossible to recreate the conditions of medieval life in the nineteenth century. Instead, its 'noble ambition' was to try to 'raise up a school of beauty and simplicity' and to give to the 'lowlier and less fortunate among us a source of pure pleasure, such as princes might envy'.⁵ Under the presidency of Lord Brownlow, and with Walter Besant as treasurer, a business office and studios were opened at Langham Place, London and instruction in minor arts was provided to persons interested in the

1 The Woman's World was a luxury magazine, interested to enlighten the public on fashion and offer the opinion of well-known ladies on many subjects. P. Jullian, op.cit., p. 150.

2 Woman's World, ed. Oscar Wilde (1887/8), p. 418.

3 *ibid.*

4 *ibid.*, p. 422.

5 *ibid.*

Association's objects for a fee of 2s. 6d. per session.¹

By 1887 it was claimed, if perhaps with some exaggeration, that pupils were to be had by the thousand. The tone of one village had 'distinctly improved' since some of the young men had 'devoted themselves to woodcarving', and the Association applauded 'the benefit confirmed upon the ignorant by calling out of them that delightful creative instinct which is in us all'.²

The activities of the Home Arts and Industries Association in the following years remain something of a mystery, but it continued its work well into the twentieth century, helping both isolated workers and affiliated societies and industries, which it classified either as 'developed industries', which were self-supporting and had full-time workers and paid management, or as 'partially developed industries', which were only partially self-supporting and had to appeal for donations to the Association's funds. Most of the Association's sales were made locally and privately on a commission of 10 per cent.³ A few orders were received from the wholesale trade and in the 1920's a permanent depot was opened in London, where work went on sale throughout the year. Sales were good, and many tourists, particularly Americans, were attracted to the showroom by advertisements in hotels and clubs. In 1924 Fitzrandolph and Hay praised the Association's activities as a 'valuable influence' on standards of craftsmanship.⁴ But from that time we hear no more of its activities.

The Peasant Arts Fellowship, established in 1912, had similar ambitions and for a time was more influential. It met under the chairmanship of Greville Macdonald and was governed by an executive committee which

1. *ibid.*, p. 419.

2. *ibid.*, p. 421.

3. T.W. Fitzrandolph and M.D. Hay, II, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

4. *ibid.*, p. 73.

included Ernest Rhys, editor of Everyman's Library, the Reverend G.S. Davis, Master of Peterhouse, and the Reverend J.B. Booth, formerly secretary of the Ruskin Union.¹ Using words couched heavily in romanticism, and with something of a religious fervour, the Fellowship 'crusaded' for the revival of rural life and handicraftsmanship. It produced its own journal, The Vineyard,² a monthly magazine 'devoted to the literature of peasant life'.³ The Fellowship believed that 'fundamental in the upholding of England's greatness lies the restoration of the land to its fruitful uses, and of the essential crafts to the hand, as original rights and needs'. It desired to 'bring about a moral regeneration and to uphold the truth against those mechanical devils who lead all modern states by the nose'. Neither politicians, democracy, nor any 'ideal system of socialism or autocracy' could ever remedy social bitterness, apathy and cruelty. Salvation from 'all ill-conditions' could only be had by seeking the 'ancient simplicities of humanity - love, forgiveness, vision beyond eyesight, worship':

1. Vineyard, October 1911, p. 67.

2. The following extract is typical:

The movement stood,

To defend beautiful things and customs from the attacks of mechanicalism and commercialism. It will also carry the war into the enemy's country, into the schools and workshops and wheresoever the hand and imagination are in captivity because there is the holy land and we are the crusaders to recapture it. It will strive for the better use of the land by showing those who hold the Earth for pleasure, like a sterile mistress, how adorable she is as the mother of so many sons, nurse of their hardy virtues, teller of fairy tales, and teacher of songs: until they fall so deep in love with her that they redeem her shame and lift her to rightful honour.

Vineyard, November 1911, p. 70.

3. *ibid.*, Preface.

When the mind learns to give, when the body learns to obey, when the environment makes freedom possible, then priest, physician and politician will cease to be needed. Meantime, rituals, drugs and acts of parliament may and must serve as 'modus vivendi', as supports even, until the sufferer learns how death lurks in his own bitterness; in his own vomit, in the hoard he has won in exchange for his simple soul. Nothing is impossible, so long as we have not lost touch with the ancient simplicities of humanity - love, forgiveness, vision beyond eyesight, worship. To go back to these is not to begin life again, it is to live truly the life that has never left us, to let it rise supreme - not by destruction but by creation.

In 1911 the leaders of the Fellowship's members felt they were on the road to success:

The vines are strong. The soil has opened to the eager roots
her many doors. The keen air has brought strength
from the mountains. The sun has penetrated the mists
and the rains have given us daily bread.¹

It would not be long before men would realize 'the beginning of life and finding of God',² and would be liberated from the decadence of a philistine age.

In the minds of the Fellowship leaders the practical means to success lay literally in men's hands. Here, the influence of Ruskin, probably through the Reverend Booth, was strong. Work could be the 'great creator of social good' when it called forth the worker's powers, when it was full of variety and when its end was 'the making and heightening of life'. The work of the peasant contrasted so much with the work of the machine-hand whose life was dull and routinized. There must be few who would not endorse the teaching of Ruskin when he said that 'every youth, from the King's son downward, should learn to do things finely and thoroughly with his hands'.³ The making of simple and useful things by

1. *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

2. *ibid.*, p. 6.

3. *ibid.*, p. 6.

hand would help everyone find the true meaning of life.

On this basis the Fellowship organized classes to teach handicrafts in the villages of Somerset, Surrey, Sussex, Dorset, Hampshire, Worcestershire, and Lancashire. Basket making, carving in ivory and wood, and spinning and weaving were the major projects. Though the classes were always small, seldom with more than 20 pupils, they produced sufficient goods to be sold regularly at the Fellowship's depot in Duke Street, London, and at the 'Weaving House' at Haslemere in Sussex.¹ The Fellowship's centre was at Haslemere where, under the surveillance of Mr. Godfrey Blount, the Haslemere Weaving Industry employed a number of working class girls who prayed together each morning for deliverance 'from the Egyptian bondage of profitless work'.² A few men were also trained in pottery and ironwork. The Fellowship lent its support to the revival of lacemaking, 'probably the most elaborate work which has ever engaged the facile fingers of a woman',³ but made no effort to teach lacemaking itself; this it left safely in the hands of the Lace Associations. By 1914 the Fellowship had gone, but it had constituted an important part of the general atmosphere in which the movement for the revival of the pillow lacemaking industry was able to flourish.

A number of less influential groups also engaged in similar activities. A Miss Fry organized leather classes for 30 or 40 pupils at Failard, near Bristol. At Ascott, in Buckinghamshire, woodcarving classes were at one time organized by a Mr. and Mrs. Macdonald. Spinning and weaving classes were for a time held at Winterston, while at Stonehenge, a 'Woolen Industry' was flourishing in 1912 under the surveillance of a Miss Lovebond.⁴ At Chipping Camden F.E. Green found in 1912, 'the most

1. *ibid.*, also, Peasant Arts Fellowship. 3rd Annual Report. (1913/14).

2. F.E. Green, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

3. The Vineyard, October 1911, p. 6.

4. J.L. Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-3.

striking example of the workshop plus land movement'. Here, amidst the Cotswolds, a group of 40 craftsmen had come to work in an old silk mill at various skilled crafts, and to labour on 77 acres of land when trade was slack. Technical schools, art classes, social clubs, and swimming clubs had been formed. The benefits had been widespread. 'Even Hodge, who had almost lost hope on his 12s. a week, began to take heart of grace', for the craftsmen, unable to cultivate the 77 acres themselves, had 'invited Hodge to take a hand'. At Wing in Buckinghamshire, Mr. and Mrs. Leopold de Rothschild organized evening classes in woodcarving, a Miss K. Grace did the same thing at Friskney in Lincolnshire, and the success of her workers at various exhibitions 'bore witness to the results'.¹

The development of the Lace Associations was strongly influenced by this general movement for the revival of handicrafts and rural society, and must be seen in this context. One of the Associations claimed that one of its major objectives was the preservation of the countryside² and the influence of John Ruskin, which was to be found in many of the movements of these years, also pervaded the Lace Associations, if less obviously than in some. In the Queen Lace Book, published in 1874, a letter from Ruskin to students of the Night Art Class, in which Ruskin spoke at length for the revival of lacemaking, was re-iterated fully, as justification for the book's general plea for the industry's preservation.³ Much later, in 1921, Lady Inglefield, who had been an important member of a Lace Association, said she had learned her principles from Ruskin who had said that 'the devil had invented machinery, but the Almighty had invented

1. F.E. Green, op. cit., pp. 193-4.

2. See below, p. 494.

3. Queen Lace Book, p. 17, quoted above, p. 325.

our handicrafts'.¹ Ruskin's ideas were always lurking in the background, and the industry's supporters generally shared his revulsion from the degradation of artistic sense and craftsmanship which had come with the industrial revolution and urbanization.²

The Lace Associations were perhaps the largest and most successful of all the bodies which worked to revive rural industries during this period. In many ways the pillow lace industry was the ideal vehicle to carry the energies of those who wished to stimulate rural society and handicraftsmanship, for in the 1880s it was the largest of any surviving, purely rural industry, and its products had the reputation of being among the finest ever turned out by the handworker. Yet the Lace Associations might be viewed in an additional context. For this was an era in which philanthropic work had become something of a national obsession, particularly among women. To the thousands of would-be female philanthropists, ever-eager to channel their latent energies into respectable enterprises which gave them, at once, the opportunity to extend their limited horizons, exercise their compassion and acquire the public acclaim they so often desired,³ the preservation of this industry provided an ideal outlet, with the acceptable ingredients of aestheticism, humanitarianism and patriotism.⁴ Moreover, these women were often very fond of hand-made lace and by the 1870s the industry's decline looked as though it might soon be turned into total obliteration. Old workers and old designers were

1. Bedfordshire Standard, 12 May 1955.

2. The Edinburgh Review was another supporter of the industry and favoured the revival of pillow lace on the grounds that it was the ideal means by which 'taste, intellect and originality are able to express themselves', and 'its very presence indicates leisure, refinement and a cultivation of the artistic sense'. Edinburgh Review, January/April (1872), p. 37.

3. For a discussion of the motives of philanthropists at this time see B. Harrison, 'Philanthropy and the Victorians', Victorian Studies, IX (June 1966), pp. 353-74, and below, pp. 506-507.

4. The development of the Home Arts and Industries Association and the Peasant Arts Fellowship might also be viewed in this context.

disappearing from the scene and were not being replaced. The lace villages were filled with despondency¹ and it was clear, as Mrs. Palliser had pointed out, that unless something drastic was done the industry soon would disappear.² Lady Inglefield once said that during the 1870s and 1880s the question on the minds of 'all lace lovers' had been 'how are we to prevent this beautiful craft from dying out?'³ It was from this time onwards in the words of the Bedford Times, that 'ladies of influence and fashion took the matter in hand',⁴ by organizing a large portion of the industry's labour force.

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Yet the movement to revive the pillow lace industry began in a very modest way, in 1874, with the establishment by a Miss Rose Hubbard of Winslow (Bucks.), of a small local organization employing workers in the parishes between Bletchley and Buckingham. Her organization, which operated for at least 30 years under the name of the Winslow (Bucks.) Lace Industry, and soon employed between 70 and 80 women from 12 years old to 80 on a self-supporting basis, was the first case of direct intervention in the industry.⁵ It was soon to be followed by others. In 1880, Mrs. Harrison, the wife of the Vicar of Paulerspury (Northants.) took similar steps in organizing the 'Paulerspury Lace Industry', through which she sold laces made by local workers to the 'Ladies Work Society' in Sloane Street, London.⁶ Her efforts roused far more interest than she

1. See above, pp. 359-360.

2. B. Palliser, op. cit., p. 417.

3. As quoted in Bedfordshire Standard, 12 May 1922.

4. Bedford Times, 14 May 1912.

5. Aylesbury Museum: pillow lace collection. Circular Letter of the Winslow (Bucks.) Lace Association.

6. Northampton Herald, 16 January 1897.

could possibly have anticipated. Orders were received from Princess Louise, the Duchess of Edinburgh and Princess Christian, and these brought fresh orders and an enhanced reputation.¹

Local movements of this nature were soon spreading in many areas. In 1879 a Mrs. Chettle began collecting and selling work in Northamptonshire and by 1888 had sold laces to the value of £200.² At Spratton in Bedfordshire, a Miss Roberts began to operate in a similarly modest way, opening up a small subscription fund so that she could buy lace from local villagers and sell it, mostly to friends,³ on the workers' behalf.

From local efforts such as these, the movement gradually expanded. 'In almost every village', said the Misses Channer and Roberts, 'something was done. There was want of method perhaps, and waste of force, but it was an enthusiasm'.⁴ The enthusiasm generated outwards in many directions as the industry's decline and the plight of its workers became topics of interest in the press and fashionable magazines. Pillow lace appeared on stalls at bazaars and exhibitions⁵ and from Honiton, where previously there had been little local interest of this kind, a letter appeared in The Times in 1888, lamenting the industry's decline and challenging 'the ladies of England to revive and support such an exquisite and native industry as Honiton lace'.⁶

1. C. Channer and R. Roberts, op. cit., pp. 56-7.

2. *ibid.*, p. 57.

3. *ibid.*, p. 59.

4. C. Channer and R. Roberts, op. cit., p. 54.

5. Among the magazines in which articles on pillow lace appeared were: Empire Review, January 1903; The Lady; The Ladies Home, 1898; Atlanta, November 1896; Health and Home; Ladies Pictorial, November 1898; Church Weekly Times; The Connoisseur, March 1906; Madame, October 1898. (The references, not dated, are in a collection of cuttings at Luton Museum). Exhibits of pillow lace appeared at the Northampton Home Arts and Industries Associations Bazaars until 1910; at the Bazaars of the Bath and West of England Society from 1873; at the Somerset Home Arts and Crafts Exhibitions; at the West Coker Arts and Crafts Exhibitions, as well as at numerous international venues. Western Gazette, 8 May 1903; 20 August 1909. Northamptonshire Past and Present, I, 1949.

6. Times, 17 September, 1888.

The growing interest in this rural industry did not escape the government's notice. In 1888 the Board of Trade instructed A.S. Cole to make a special report on the Honiton Lace Industry. His findings were gloomy. Unless government and private intervention came to its rescue Cole predicted that the industry would almost certainly disappear.¹ At the instigation of the Countess Spencer, who by this time had taken an interest in the industry in Northamptonshire, Cole made a second report three years later, this time on the condition of the industry in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire.² His findings and the conclusions drawn from them were more or less a repetition of what had been said about Devon. The industry was sick, and its survival would require a good deal of initiative and enterprise by government and private bodies alike.³ In the event, the government was not moved, but the first Lace Associations were founded during the early 1890s, shortly after the publication of Cole's reports and at a time when the general debate on rural migration was reaching a peak.

The Midland Lace Association was formed late in 1891, following an exhibition of needlework and pillow lace which had been held with great success at Northampton earlier in the year. Over 500 exhibits of pillow lace had been displayed, and in the words of one of the organizers, 'so great had been the interest displayed and so large the quantity of lace sold, that it seemed a pity to let the industry die out for want of encouragement'.⁴ The result was an exploratory meeting held subsequently at St. Giles' Vicarage, Northampton, at which a general scheme for a

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1. A.S. Cole, Report on the Honiton Lace Industry, op. cit., p. 4.
 2. A.S. Cole, Report on Pillow Lacemaking in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, op. cit., p. 2.
 3. Times, 12 November 1891.
 4. Northampton Daily Chronicle, 12 January 1897.

Lace Association was drawn up. The objects of the Association were summed up as follows: 'To improve the local manufacture of lace, to provide workers with greater facilities for the sale of their work at more remunerative prices, and to provide instruction in lacemaking.'¹ Responsibility for organization was to be taken by a working committee of five under the general surveillance of a President, Countess Spencer, and twelve vice presidents.² From its inception, therefore, the Association carried the distinction of aristocratic approval, a virtual guarantor of success.³

It was hoped that the Association would soon become self-sufficient. To set it on its feet the working committee first drew up a general list of subscribers, whose funds were to be used to buy up stocks of lace and defray the expense of postage, printing and advertising. It took roughly a year before the Association's supporters ceased to 'dip generously into their own pockets' and the Association could truly be said to be 'holding its own'.⁴

Meanwhile, a number of small schools had been established, in which girls were taught lacemaking after school hours. A correspondent to The Times described 'the silent industry of the class, with the stir and flutter of the bobbins' which 'attracted even the amateur visitor'.⁵ At home, women were already making 3s. per week without in any way interfering with their domestic routine. The committee encouraged its workers to divide their days, so as to perform household duties in the morning and supplement the mens' small wages by two or three hours work at the pillow

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1. Northampton Herald, 16 January 1897.
 2. *ibid.* The working committee comprised: Mrs. Roberts of Spratton; Mrs. Chettle, Mrs. Bostock of Northampton, Mrs. Forest of Princes Risborough and Mrs. Harrison of Paulerspury.
 3. D. Owen, English Philanthropy 1660-1960 (1967), pp. 167-69.
 4. Times, 26 December 1894.
 5. *ibid.*, 4 January 1895.

every afternoon.¹

There was a price to be paid for these benefits, however. The committee accepted only such work that was of the highest quality. All 'spurious and modern' patterns were 'vigorously excluded'; only the pure traditional Buckinghamshire designs, noted for their 'precision and straightness' were required.² On this basis the Association produced laces that found ready acceptance among the fashion-conscious population. In 1894 laces were exhibited successfully at the Chicago Exhibition, and the Duchess of York had ordered 330 yards of the finest Buckinghamshire point.³ On the more popular market, laces were now being sold at prices from 3d. to a guinea a yard. There seemed to be every reason why the Association might look forward optimistically, for it claimed its highest quality laces were finding an expanding market with the upper classes, who could 'scarcely believe the laces are made in England', while its cheaper laces, just as inexpensive as laces made by machine, could not be approached by machine lace either in purity of design or in durability.⁴

The Association's success encouraged emulation and in 1893 it was joined by another Association, the 'Buckinghamshire Lace Industry'. Centred at Maids Moreton, under the chairmanship of a Miss M. Burrowes, the Association counted among its numerous patrons, five duchesses, four countesses, and a baroness.⁵ Again, it was hoped that the industry would become self-supporting, and by insisting on high standards of workmanship this was soon achieved. In its first year the industry employed around 50 workers full-time, on wages generally higher than those paid by private

1. *ibid.*, 26 December 1894.

2. Northampton Herald, 16 January 1894.

3. *ibid.*

4. Times, 26 December 1894.

5. Circular Pamphlet of the Buckinghamshire Lace Industry, Aylesbury Museum: Pillow lace collection. These included The Duchess of Buckingham, Sutherland, Buccleuch and Devonshire.

dealers.¹ The price paid for these benefits was a strict adherence to the 'Industry's' standards, which were made clear in circulars produced for its workers. As an incentive to effort prizes were distributed to those who were successful:

All workers sending their lace to the above, read a circular instruction sheet 'must always attach a slip of paper to the lace sent, on which is clearly written the name and address of the worker, also the length and price of the lace sent. Good measure must always be sent, and if a small extra piece is added that can be cut off for a pattern it helps to increase the orders.

Parchments are provided for the worker on application and prizes for the different width laces, kerchiefs, borders etc. will be given annually.

The best threads, gimp and pins for the making of Buckinghamshire Point or half stitch laces, also linen threads for Torchons, are now obtainable from Miss M. Burrows, Moretaine, Manor House, and it is preferred that all threads etc. should be obtained from the same, for all orders given by the above are too often inferior and mixed threads have been used which spoil the lace. The best and finest pins only must be used, at 23/4 pence per sheet, the commoner ones ruining the parchment.²

These were rigorous standards, but the 'Industry' offered the benefits of paying for laces before they were completed, and thereby bore the entire risk of whether or not they would be sold. By 1895 the number of workers in the Industry's books had grown to over 200 and Queen Victoria could be counted among the many upper class purchasers of its products.³ The industry turned out laces which were often of an expensive quality, sometimes in Continental designs, and ranged from wedding and court flounces, to evening dress laces, to fichus, collars, handkerchiefs, toilet covers and fans; but cheaper trimmings for all manner of household goods and clothing were produced. Most sales were made privately, the customers selecting the laces from sample boxes, which were sent to them

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.*

by request. A number of laces were made for private customers abroad, particularly in the United States, and once an order was received from a Russian nobleman.¹ By the mid 90s the movement to preserve the pillow lace industry was booming. The Midland Lace Association found that more lace was being demanded than could be made. Its organizers predicted that if the demand could be maintained, 'we shall be able to raise our prices (they will still be most reasonable) and so place the industry on a really satisfactory footing'.² In addition to private sales, laces were now to be sold through the Association's new depot at Northampton.³ Success demanded the reorganization of the Association on a more professional basis. A full-time organizer, Mrs. Roberts, was appointed to direct the activities of the working committee. The Association gave her overall responsibility for buying and selling laces, thread and parchments, for experimenting with different threads and patterns and for collecting samples from all over Europe. Her days were 'filled with arduous labour', but she asked for no reward save that of seeing the Association's continuing prosperity.⁴

In 1896 the Association achieved a giddy success. On 12th December the Northampton Herald announced 'Good News for the Midland Lace Workers'. An order had been received from the Queen, so large that it would 'keep many willing hands happily employed, not only through these trying winter months, but long after'. The writer, Miss Effice Clark, the Vice President of the Association's working committee, prophesied continuing prosperity:

It is a significant fact that although many Royal Wedding Robes have recently been decked with south country produce (i.e. Honiton Lace), Her Majesty is mindful of

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1. C. Channer and R. Roberts, op. cit., p. 57.
 2. Northampton Herald, 16 January 1894.
 3. *ibid.*
 4. C. Channer and R. Roberts, op. cit., p. 58.

her Midland lacemakers, the ancestors of many of whom made much for her own wedding garments. That I was able to send the Queen work which was not only 'fit to be seen', as the children say, but that was really beautiful is due to the revival in which we are so much interested and ought to stimulate us to fresh efforts. Today the cry is not 'who will fight for, but who will work for the Queen'.¹

Such had been Miss Clark's success that she had been able to offer work, not only to her established workers, but to any who cared to send in specimens of work for her approval. On the face of it this was an admirable piece of initiative, but it precipitated an indignant response from other members of the Association who saw in her efforts an affront to their united cause. The members of the Association lapsed into a bout of public infighting. In what appears to have been little more than an outburst of petty jealousy the leaders of the Association rebuked Miss Clark for her efforts. On 16th January the Northampton Herald published a letter written for the Working Committee by John White of Pitsford Rectory expressing both surprise and affront at Miss Clark's announcement. She was acting independently of the Association and the committee had no choice but to erase her name from the list of Vice Presidents, for her action had threatened the sound business record which the Association had built up over the past four years.² For her part, Miss Clark replied with surprise and criticised this 'useless expenditure of force':

I would submit sir, that to everyday mortals the object of such an Association is to enlarge its borders both as to workers and helpers in every possible way, finding all grist that comes to their mill, instead of trying to repulse efforts made for the good of the lacemaking counties.³

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1. Northampton Herald, 12 December, 1896.
 2. Northampton Herald, 16 January, 1897.
 3. *ibid.*, 18 January, 1897.

But Miss Clark's name did not appear on the Association's notices again and the Association continued to flourish despite its dissensions. 1897 was the year of the Diamond Jubilee and it provided an ideal opportunity to advertise the Association's cause. The Queen was presented with two cases of lace. In one was a lace constructed into a special Jubilee inscription; in the other were specimens of old English work specially woven by the workers of Blakesley and district for the occasion. The Jubilee piece, designed by Messrs. C. Bartholemew and Leo Stanton of Towcester, was an elaborate affair, showing to full advantage the heights of technical and artistic perfection which the Association's workers were capable of attaining. At its head was the Royal insignia 'VR.', worked over a crown, beneath which was a star representing the order of St. John of Jerusalem. The centre piece was composed of the Grand Cross of the Order and the whole was completed, at the base, with a Maltese Cross, fringed on either side by the Jubilee dates, 1837-1897. The Queen, who was delighted with its 'artistic design and execution', expressed her pleasure with a cheque, the proceeds of which were to be distributed in unspecified proportions, between workers and designers.¹

This was a remarkable achievement and as had happened so often in the past, Royal approval stimulated demand, this time to such a degree that later in the year the Midland Association had to branch out, forming a subsidiary group to take care of the affairs of its workers in Buckinghamshire. The North Bucks. Lace Association was established in April 1897 under the presidency of Mrs. Walter Carlyle, wife of the M.P. for North Buckinghamshire, and later of Lady Inglefield, 'for the purpose of reviving this most ancient and interesting industry'. Its declared aims reflected the influence both of Ruskin and of the broader

1. *ibid.*, 19 June, 1897.

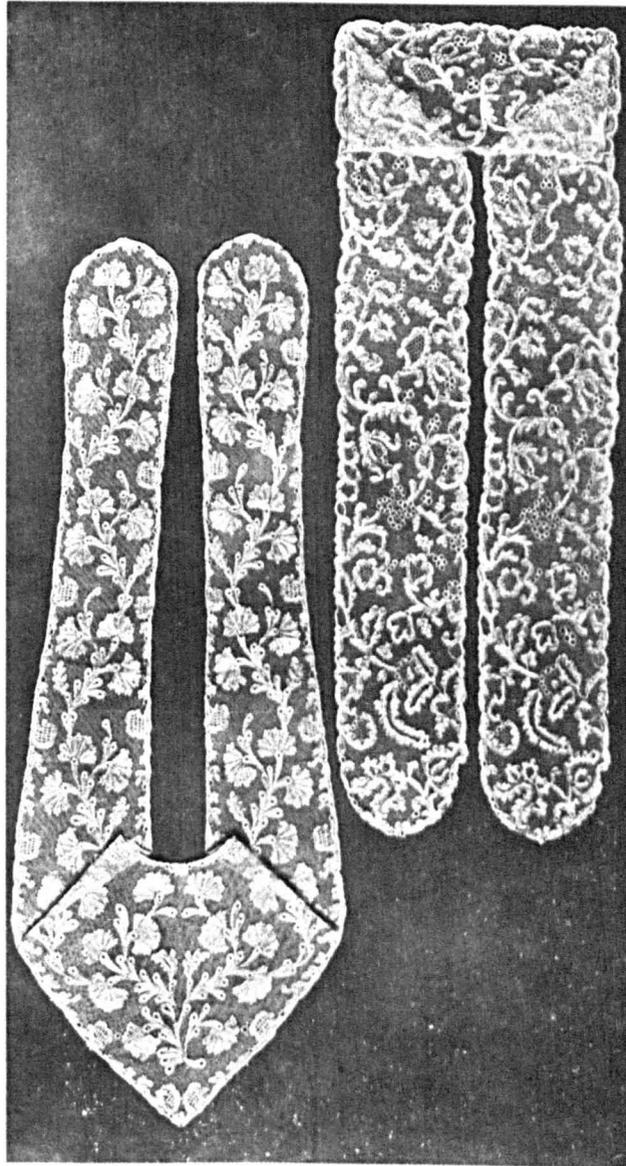


Plate 11 Scarfs, made by workers of the North. Bucks. Lace Association.

movement to revive rural society. The Association was established to 'preserve and renew the best old designs, to discourage and stamp out as far as possible vulgar and degenerate forms of lace, to ensure the use of proper materials, and to facilitate the sale of lace direct from the worker to the purchaser, thus securing to the worker an adequate return for skilled labour and saving the large profits made in all trades by the middleman'. But its final aim, it claimed, was to 'provide employment in the country and prevent migration to large centres'.¹

By 1907, the Association could include Queen Alexandra, the Duchess of York, the Princess of Wales and the Princess of Battenburg among its patrons. The list of thirty two Vice Presidents glittered with the names of five countesses (of Howe, Jersey, Egmont, Temple and Carrington), of the Baroness Kinloss, the Earl of Howe, the Duchess of Buckingham and Chandos, and Lady Rothschild. Secretary to the Association was a Miss Kenley of Newport Pagnell, and treasurer was the Hon. Cecil Freemantle, of Winslow.²

The new Association was run initially by an auspicious Committee of eighteen, including Lady Pauncefort Duncombe, Lady Lawrence, Lady Addington, and Mr. and Mrs. W. Carlisle. They worked to a familiar pattern. Each committee member supervised the work in a number of villages, whenever possible promoting good quality workmanship in classical designs. For a year the Association's laces were sold privately but by 1898 sales had risen to such a degree that it became necessary to open a store in London with a permanent sales staff. The laces produced ranged from cheap edgings at 3d. a yard, to Berthas at £6/6/-, and to Fichus and scarves at £10/10/-.³ Success had come out of an insistence on high standards, and

1. Beds. C.R.O. Pamphlet of the North Bucks. Lace Association.

2. *ibid.*

3. *ibid.* See Plate 11.

the training of pillow laceworkers in the finer aspects of the craft at the Association's classes held at Fingford, Preston Bissett, Fingwich, Lillingstone, Lovell and Hartwll, villages in the lace regions.

The Association advertised its cause and requested funds in circulars:

As you may be aware, there is at the present time a Lace Association comprising Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire which is doing good work, but unfortunately this Association is not able to give to North Buckinghamshire that attention and assistance which the large area and the number of laceworkers there require. We are endeavouring by forming a branch of this Association to revive the industry of beautiful old Buckinghamshire Point Lace, which owing to the competition of foreign laces is rapidly dying out. To do this we find it necessary to ask for your assistance by a small annual subscription, or otherwise, to cover the expense of a clerk, postage and more especially the procuring, pricking and reviving of old parchments and to provide a balance in hand by which the Association can be in a position to pay ready money to the workers, as they cannot afford long lengths of lace, taking months to make without money payments.¹

It was a price, judging by the Association's success in its first year, which the Lady of Fashion had been prepared to pay.

During the twenty years before the outbreak of the First World War the Midland Lace Association and its important offshoot developed into sizeable and reasonably-successful organizations. Contemporary opinion tended to support the principle of their efforts, which seem on the whole to have been well-organized to achieve the avowed aims of improving general standards of workmanship and paying employees regular wages. It was claimed in 1903 that the village of Paulerspury in Northamptonshire was receiving over £700 per year in wages.² Both Associations employed skilled teachers, and stimulated interest in their products by showing them at

1. *ibid.*

2. Northampton Herald, 8 August, 1903.

numerous exhibitions. In pamphlets they advertised their cause with romanticised accounts of the industry's history and current plight, setting them next to idealised photographs of pillow lacemakers seated blissfully with their pillows at the doors of ivy-clad cottages.

A copy of the minutes of the North Bucks. Lace Association has survived for the years 1897/1902 and a sample of the sales and wages figures gives a good indication of the scale of the Association's operations at its peak and of the non-profit making nature of its organization. In the year ended 31st March 1898 total sales amounted to £224, of which £217 was paid out in wages. In the following year sales reached a new peak, of £469, with wages this time absorbing £408. The twelve months from January 1st to December 31st 1901 brought a record total sales of £665, of which wages accounted for £525. The Secretary of the Association recorded her pleasure that 'the lace continues to improve both in texture and workmanship'. The centres producing most lace were Long Crendon, Newport Pagnell, and Buckingham.¹ In 1908 it was claimed that the Association had disposed of over £7,000 of laces during the previous ten years,² and good workers had been paid as much as 20s. to 30s. per week.³

The Midland Lace Association operated on a similar scale, employing over 400 workers in 60 villages located throughout the southern parts of Northamptonshire and north-east Buckinghamshire. In a record book, now held in the Northamptonshire Archives,⁴ each worker was classified according to her particular attributes and skills at the lace pillow. Some worked 'a beautiful point', others were noted for 'river edgings', 'very good torchon wide', 'buttercup and diamond borders', 'good point

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1. Aylesbury Museum: Minutes of the North Bucks. Lace Association.
 2. Catalogue of the National Exhibition of British Lace (March, 1908), p. 54.
 3. Northampton Herald, 2 August, 1902.
 4. Northamptonshire C.R.O.



Plate 12 An Old Worker.

ground and insertion', 'Catherine of Aragon and Como Lace', 'Maltese', 'collar and good linen lace' and so on.¹ Some were capable of four or five specialities. In 1899 the Northampton Herald estimated the Association's sales at £475 per year.²

Though the activities of these Associations dominated the scene, this did not prevent smaller groups such as the Winslow Agency, established in 1874, from developing a scarcely less notable degree of success. In 1904 it was claimed in an advertising circular that the average annual output of the 70 to 80 women in its employment, aged from 12 to 80, was 3,000 yards of lace, besides dozens of special, larger pieces such as collars, motifs, squares, and handkerchiefs. Prices ranged from 8d. to over £18 per yard. During the five years from 1899 to 1904 the Agency's workers had received £1,383 15s. 11d. in wages. In 1900 alone total sales had amounted to over £302. Most sales were made privately, either through personal contact or by sample, but the Agency also organized two annual fairs which brought a good deal of success.³

One or two women continued to work for the industry's revival independently. Mrs. de Bless of Great Billing and Mrs. Phyllis Wake of Courtenhall kept the craft alive at Hackleton, Hoveton and Riddington in Northamptonshire, with a certain amount of success, until 1914.⁴ A relatively small Lace Association also sprang up in Huntingdonshire during 1907. Prompted by the success of the larger Associations a group of Huntingdon ladies set out to collect subscriptions of 5s. each from selected residents in the county. The aim was to purchase old parchments, bobbins, pillows and winders for use in the classes which members of the group

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1. Record Book lodged at the Northamptonshire C.R.O.
 2. Northampton Herald, 4 March, 1899.
 3. Aylesbury Museum: Agency Circular.
 4. Northamptonshire Past and Present, I (1948), p. 39.

proposed to hold in the lace villages. They succeeded sufficiently to establish a few lace classes and organize the collection and sale of laces made by a small number of workers. But the scale of the Association's work was insignificant in comparison with its rivals, and though it managed to keep itself solvent by selling every piece of lace which was brought to it, the number of workers and the general interest in the county had fallen to such a degree by this time that supplies were always uncertain, and few of the workers trained in the Association's schools kept up their work regularly.¹

In 1910, by which time Thomas Gilbert and Thomas Lester, the two principal dealers in the south-east Midlands had both died,² Channer and Roberts reported that the 'bulk of the trade' was in the Association's hands.³ It is difficult to estimate the truth of this statement, for there were still a number of private dealers operating, but it seems quite likely that this would be the case, for the Associations generally paid better wages than private dealers, and for this reason were able to compete successfully for labour supplies. The middlemen had always taken too large a share of the profits to make the workers' remuneration of any value and had done little to encourage workers to stay with them if given a better offer elsewhere. In 1911 the Associations probably employed over 1,000 workers, for over 1,800 workers were then registered with the Censor of Population.⁴

From 1907 the Associations enjoyed the support of local councils. The Bedford County Council Education Committee began to pay small grants to a newly-created body, the Bedford Lace Education Committee, which

1. T.W. Fitzrandolph and M.D. Hay, *op. cit.*, II, p. 60.

2. See above, p. 268.

3. C. Channer and R. Roberts, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

4. See above, p. 177, Table 2.

financed lace teachers at evening classes and sold most of the laces made under its auspices at the London depot of the North Bucks. Lace Association. A number of classes were also held under the control of the Huntingdon and Northampton Education Committees.¹ These developments were a further contributory factor, in a general way, to the Associations' success.

Yet it had taken a long time for the success of the Lace Association in the south-east Midlands to stimulate any imitation in Devon. Here, there had been many notable individual promoters of the industry, among whom the Misses Tebbs, Fowler, Herbert, Bernard and Trevellyan, and the Mrs. Fowlers, Collier, Herbert and Treadwin were outstanding.² The Countess of Suffolk was also active in this area, reviving the old industry at Malmesbury in Wiltshire.³ The Devonshire industry's promoters received a mark of success in the 1890s when they were awarded gold medals for exhibits at the Chicago and Paris Exhibitions, the grand prize at St. Louis, and the Medallion d'Honneur at Milan.⁴ Queen Alexandra's wedding dress was made at Branscombe.⁵ It was perhaps primarily because of the industry's small size, and the success enjoyed by individual philanthropists and dealers such as Mrs. Treadwin, that no Lace Associations had emerged.

In 1901, however, the industry in Devon was at a low ebb, for when Mrs. Moody, author of yet another romanticised account of the industry, enquired about the industry's prospects, she found it was 'pathetic to see how eager all were in asking the same question: Would the old times really come back; and would another Queen help?'⁶ For a time there was

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1. T.W. Fitzrandolph and M.D. Hay, op. cit., II, p. 61.
 2. E. Jackson, op. cit., p. 53.
 3. Catalogue of the Daily Mail Exhibition of British Lace (1908), p. 38.
 4. Western Gazette, 28 May, 1909.
 5. H. Barnard, The Origin and History of Honiton Lace (n.d.)
 6. A.P. Moody, op. cit., p. 30.

talk of forming an Association, but the coronation of Edward VII brought something of a revival; the industry's problems were momentarily forgotten and the talk came to nothing.¹ Queen Alexandra's request that all ladies wear goods of British manufacture at the Coronation had brought many valuable orders to Devon, and so filled with gratitude was one worker that she worked the Queen's portrait in lace before framing it in her cottage window.² But the revival was short-lived and it was probably for this reason that the many local organizers eventually joined together to form the East Devon Cottage Lace Industry; in 1908 the Industry employed 200 workers.³ But there was little sign of prosperity, or of the Industry's activity, thereafter, and by 1914 pillow lacemaking had almost disappeared from what had once been one of its most famous homes in England.

This was in marked contrast to the south-east Midlands. Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War the Lace Associations could truthfully say they had staved off the industry's elimination. In the regional press they boasted of their achievement and of the recognition they had received, not only from English Royalty, but from Royal families in many parts of the world. In 1913 the North Bucks. Lace Association received a 'wonderful royal recognition' such, it was said, as no other industry had received. Mr. A.A. Barnes, a member of the working committee was granted permission to name a series of lace designs after various members of the English and foreign Royal families. Shortly afterwards, Queen Alexandra of Russia and the Queen of Norway were gracious enough to accept photographs of a number of Bedfordshire lacemakers, all of whom were over 80 years old. Queen Alexandra wished 'these de-ver,

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1. The idea was put forward by Mrs. Gidley of Collumpton, Western Gazette, 28 May, 1909.
 2. *ibid.*
 3. *ibid.*

industrious old ladies every success and happiness during their declining years'. The Associations could not have wished for greater social acclaim than this.¹ The pinnacle of achievement, both in social and economic terms, had been reached.

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At the International Exhibition of 1910 the revival of pillow lacemaking was said to be the 'most remarkable' among the recent attempts to revive many old handicrafts. Just 30 years earlier English hand-made lace had almost been lost, but now, thanks to the 'revival of interest in this beautiful craft kindled by a few enthusiastic people', the industry had been placed on a 'commercial' basis and the excellence of its products, recognized everywhere, had been preserved.² No doubt there was much to be applauded. The industry had been given the kiss of life and a beautiful old handicraft remained as part of the national heritage. There had been a commendable improvement in standards of workmanship and many of the old abuses of trucking and low wages which had been perpetuated by lace dealers had been abolished. Much of the uncertainty had been taken out of the workers' lives by regular employment and by the knowledge that their wages, which were often paid in advance, would be paid in cash rather than truck. The industry and some of its workers certainly had an altogether more healthy appearance than in the dark days of the early 1890s, and this had been the avowed aim of the Associations.

There had undoubtedly been a large element of altruism in the efforts of many of the Associations' organizers. The Associations existed

1. Bedford Times, 16 October, 1913. See Plates 13 and 14.

2. Report of H.M. Commissioners for the International Exhibition of Brussels, Rome and Turin. (1910 and 1911), XXVI, 1913, p. 307.



Handwritten names and ages:
 Ann ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 80
 Mabel Dennis age 81
 Elizabeth Smith age 82
 Caroline Smith age 82
 Sarah ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Elizabeth ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Mary ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Elizabeth ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Sarah ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Elizabeth ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Sarah ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Elizabeth ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81
 Sarah ^{McKean} ~~McKean~~ age 81

Plate 13 Twelve Bedfordshire Lacemakers. All over 80 years. Combined
 Ages 1007 years. (c.1900).



Plate 14 Buckinghamshire Lacemakers. c.1900.

purely on voluntary effort and, to a degree, on charitable funds, and to this extent they were truly philanthropic. A number of the organizers were churchmen and their wives and their sympathy, guided presumably by Christian principles, was probably genuine. Local experiences seem to have given many organizers a heartfelt desire to help poor pillow lacemakers out of their plight, and particularly widows who were liable at any time to fall backwards into the arms of the workhouse. In 1921 an organizer of a Lace Association explained that her driving force had been sympathy for the distraught workers in her village:-

When I came to live here nearly thirty years ago I found the village workers in a sad state. They earned three halfpence an hour in yarded lace and a penny an hour in borders and collars. All work had to be taken to a town seven miles away, the distance often walked. Sometimes the work was bought, sometimes not. When bought, half or the whole of the value was taken out in drapery goods. I put myself in communication with a London buyer, learned to make the lace and began collecting, paying full value in cash.¹

It was in the Lace Associations, too, that there had at last emerged a public recognition that the lace merchant had not always treated his workers as well as he might have done.

Mixed with a benevolent philanthropism, however, had been a strong desire in the Associations to see the lacemakers placed in a position whereby they could help themselves. The Buckinghamshire Lace Industry was proud of the fact that its workers had been 'able to maintain their own small homes and pay rents by their earnings'.² Local newspapers feted the lacemakers' self-reliant efforts to keep out of the workhouse. In 1911 a Mrs. Darker of Weekly, near Kettering, and Mrs. King of Far Cotton, aged 92 and 89 respectively, were still in regular employment

1. K.S. Woods, op. cit., p. 157.

2. Northampton Independent, 18 February, 1911.

for the Associations and the Northampton Independent announced gleefully that 'lacemaking and longevity seem to go together'.¹ When Mrs. Darker died three years later, the same newspaper commended her as

a wonderful example of the industrious countrywoman who by her amazing dexterity in the beautiful art of lacemaking kept herself for many years. Always industrious full of sturdy independence and scrupulously clean, it was a pity that the old lady in the last few years of her life when no longer able to work her beloved bobbins had to seek the shelter of the workhouse in which she passed away.²

The Misses Channer and Roberts, who were ardent supporters of the Associations, commended the hundreds of women aged between 60 and 80 who had kept themselves independent by making lace. They praised those who had maintained husbands too old, crippled, blind or bedridden to work, and the widowed women who had been able to pay their way when boarding with sons and daughters.³

This was an effective answer to those who commonly charged that charity organizations injured the pride and self respect of the poor, and tended to encourage indolence.⁴ Indeed, in the minds of the Associations' supporters there could be no more ideal or beautiful way

1. *ibid.*

2. *ibid.*, 28 March 1914.

3. 'There is undoubtedly a considerable class of persons to whom it is an immense boom, to whom its disappearance would be an insuperable loss... There are hundreds of women between sixty and ninety years of age quite unfit for any other kind of work who keep themselves by it in independence; any lace buyer can count up a large number of women who keep their husbands as well - husbands past work, crippled or blind, or bedridden... But it is not only the aged who are glad of the work, the mother of the family finds it a great help... There is no other industry so convenient for the home'. C. Channer and R. Roberts, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3.

4. See D. Owen, *loc. cit.*



Plate 15 An idealized view.

in which the female peasant could assert an independency. At times the vision of the laceworker at her pillow degenerated into a vapid sentimentality. Ideals of rustic bliss and an appreciation of the finery which was pillow lace clouded the philanthropists' appreciation of the true difficulties faced by their employees. The prospect of reviving the industry carried a powerful romantic appeal. Imaginations conjured up pictures of the lacemaker, seated at the door of her ivy-clad cottage, engaging in her aesthetic pursuits, oblivious to the trials and tribulations of the modern world, yet continuing to pay her way.

Thus, Madame, October 15th 1898:-

There are many pretty villages in Bedfordshire and their charm is often enhanced by the quaint pictures the laceworkers present to the passers-by, as, seated outside their cottage doors they ply their favourite industry. Here an old dame of eighty three has taken her pillow on its three-legged stand to the gate of her ivy-clad house, and works away busily in the sunshine; whilst opposite her, the winder on her knee, the daughter fills the bobbins for her mother's use. There, on the threshold of her tiny house, where she spends her life with a cat as her only companion is an elderly woman; her husband is dead, the children are out in the world, and yet she is happy; her thoughts, her hopes, her fears seem to work themselves into the lace as it grows beneath her fingers. What a boon for the women who have few interests in the world to be able to work until the last.¹

Romanticism such as this no doubt sustained the interest of the philanthropist and did much to promote public acclaim. Channer and Roberts spoke of the 'spell that lace seldom fails to throw over its devotees'.² Yet this picture of rustic bliss could be far from the truth. To the old lady whose livelihood depended upon the lace pillow, the exacting standards set by the Associations could prove problematical, even painful. Tired eyes did not take easily to difficult patterns, no more than did

1. Madame, 15 October 1898. See Plate 15.

2. C. Channer and R. Roberts, op. cit., p. 73.

ageing minds and bodies, fatigued by years of toil, take readily to meeting production targets for goods of a closely defined quality. To be employed by a Lace Association could be just as worrying as it was fulfilling. A number of letters from pillow laceworkers to the organizers of the Midland Lace Association have survived and their pathetic tones indicate the great strain and anxiety which employment by the Associations could bring. The Associations clearly pressed a number of old women into employment who had neither the energy nor the ability to fulfil their demands. Early in the twentieth century an old laceworker wrote to the manageress of the Association apologizing for her ineptitude:

Please I set a wide lace, I done one down. But I could not see to set up, it is so close. I new I should not be asked to do it. I am sorry I could not do what you wanted, but you see I am over eighty years old, I can't help it.

Another asked from Grendon, in Northamptonshire,

What am I to do next, I carnt do much now as I am such a poor thing,

and another apologized from Hungerford in Bedfordshire that she was

Sorry to say that I can't do any more this week as I can't see to do it and it upsets me so,

while another felt she could no longer carry on:

I received your letter safe but was just goin to see my sister as laid. Just at last we berid her yesterday. I will try and do the borders but I cannot do the lace for it is a long job to take as I am not fit to sit much¹ now and my eyes are very midling. I cannot see to do it.

These letters do not speak of rustic bliss and artistic pleasure, but of the difficulties which many of these aged women encountered in

1. Another wrote: 'You must not be in a hurry as I cannot sit much'.
Northamptonshire C.R.O. Miscellaneous Lace Collection.

meeting the Associations' demands. They had been drawn by their poverty and old age to a pathetic dependence on their benefactors who in their desire to help had inevitably pressed their workers to the point at which self help had almost become physically intolerable. Yet the alternative was the workhouse, socially degrading and the last place in which the mass of the population would wish to spend its final days. Caught in this dilemma, the Lace Associations had chosen to give their beneficiaries the opportunity of maintaining their self respect by helping themselves. No doubt they were aware of the inherent difficulties this type of help would bring, but in an immediate sense this had probably seemed the best solution, for there will have been many workers who preferred this to the workhouse.

In this way, the Lace Associations still looked, in common with many philanthropic bodies, towards individual treatment as the answer to social ills.¹ There is no evidence that the Associations ever spoke out for the old age pensions which many contemporaries saw as the comprehensive answer to these problems. The Associations' organizers chose to keep the lacemakers in their place, as grateful recipients of what was publicly acclaimed as benevolent philanthropy. Philanthropic organizations were generally structured as a microcosm of English society and in this respect the Lace Association's were no exception. The lacemakers were never asked to participate in organization or give their say on policy and the suspicion cannot be avoided that these dependent old ladies were largely viewed by many of the Associations' organizers as the vehicle by which public acclaim and social position could be achieved.

For the Lace Associations were very much a product of their time and philanthropy was a fashionable and socially acceptable pastime for

1. D. Owen, op.cit., p. 509.

ladies of leisure. The motives of the countless philanthropists who were active during the late Victorian and Edwardian eras have seldom been fully explored. Yet altruism was clearly not the sole basis of their activity. Religious promptings, sentimentality, fear of popular discontent and a variety of biographical factors could all play their part, and for many public display and self-aggrandizement were often as important as the alleviation of social ills.¹ At its most vulgar, philanthropy was a form of social snobbism and Charles Dickens' Mrs. Jarndyce, who was 'desirous to aid any work that is considered good work',² was probably typical of the many for whom public acclaim was sufficient justification for involvement. The sponsorship of the Queen, or representatives of the higher peerage brought an organization and its members to the pinnacle of social recognition.³

The Lace Associations and their organizers shared many of these latter characteristics. They were stamped with aristocratic and royal approval. Their organizers were not slow to indulge in public displays of self congratulation over their 'good' and 'unremitting' works and the 'arduous labour' they had exerted on behalf of those whom they once romanticised as 'our own English invalids'.⁴ In 1895 one organizer could not resist writing to The Times, to ensure that the good work should 'obtain the publicity it deserves'.⁵ At the International Exhibition of 1910 the Jurors applauded the efforts of the Lace Associations in just the way their members would have desired. The movement was dependent 'on the voluntary artistic enterprise of its patrons... creating the beautiful for the love of beauty'. It provided 'the women folk of many a poor

1. See B. Harrison, op. cit., pp. 163-4.

2. C. Dickens, Bleak House (Collins ed. London, 1953), p. 44.

3. D. Owen, op. cit., p. 165.

4. North Bucks. Lace Association Pamphlet: Aylesbury Museum.

5. Times, 4 January 1905.

household with the opportunity of supplementing in their spare hours, the breakwinners' low earnings'. Yet the Jurors could not help adding, perhaps more tellingly than they intended, that the movement to revive pillow lacemaking 'affords an outlet for the energies of refined and artistic people'.¹ The Lace Associations had, among other things, provided a most acceptable opportunity to the fashionable lady to play the philanthropic game.²

Yet there was more to the Lace Associations than this. Shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, Lady Inglefield asked the head buyer of Marshall and Snelgrove if he thought it worthwhile for the Lace Associations to continue and he replied, pointedly, 'the ladies will have lace for their babies, war or no war'.³ The impression cannot be escaped that the desire to guarantee a supply of English hand-made lace was central to the activity of many of the Associations' organizers. This was a 'lace epoch', no woman's garment was complete without this 'charming effect'. The Associations and their sympathisers were always more than ready to buy the goods their workers produced, for in their minds hand-made lace was 'the most elaborate work which has ever engaged the facile fingers of a woman'.⁴ Hand-made lace had a peculiar mystique for the fashionable lady and by participating in the

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1. Report on the International Exhibition, op. cit., 1913, p. 307.
 2. In 1912 F.E. Green entered the Haslemere branch of the Peasant Arts Society which was established to promote the resurgence of rural handicrafts and supported the Lace Associations. Green could not help feeling that, in spite of the sincerity of the pioneers of the handicraft movement at Haslemere, precosity is in the air... The work peasant, too, has become rather a cult, and when one sees the word hammered out on metal over a West End shop which is the London depot of the Society, somehow the word uncomfortably suggests a pose. I remember that it was a Haslemere lady who once introduced me at a garden party with great enthusiasm as one who had become 'quite a peasant'. F.E. Green, op.cit., p. 203.
 3. Bedfordshire Standard, 12 May 1922.
 4. North Bucks. Lace Association Pamphlet: Aylesbury Museum,

Lace Associations she had been able, in her small way, to help maintain the output of the fabric of which she was so particularly fond.

The Lace Associations were but a small corner of the philanthropic colossus. Yet their members not only reflected contemporary aestheticism and interest in reviving the countryside,¹ but also the wide variety of the forces which regularly pressed women into philanthropic activity. Biographical details of the Associations' members are scarce, but it was largely out of a strange mixture of romanticism, aestheticism, social snobbism, a selfish obsession with a beautiful and fashionable product and a genuine desire to revive a rural industry and enhance the welfare of those who engaged in it, that most had been drawn into the Associations' activities. In the event their efforts merely highlighted the weaknesses of the philosophy of those who continued to see self-help and individual treatment as the answer to social ills and particularly to the problems of old age. Those workers who were strong and skilful enough to meet the Associations' demands were no doubt grateful recipients of their interest; those who were weak and infirm were the victims of a philosophy which merely perpetuated their adversity. The major achievement of the Lace Associations was to contribute substantially towards the perpetuation of the industry until well into the twentieth century. Yet their success was short-lived. A World War and the changing values which came with it would soon bring the industry to its end.

1. Since the Associations only employed old women, they had little real contribution to make in this respect, 'tho the North Bucks. Lace Association had claimed this to be one of its ambitions. See above, p. 495.

CHAPTER 18

Final Days

The pillow lace industry's survival well into the twentieth century did not rest entirely in the Lace Associations' hands, for shortly before the First World War a new organization which eventually was to take over a large share of the trade, began to operate. This was the Bucks. Cottage Workers Agency founded in 1907 by a Mr. H.H. Armstrong; it was the last of the large private businesses in the trade.¹ The name of Armstrong's Agency gives a hint of philanthropic spirit, but this was scarcely the case, for Armstrong's interests were purely commercial. Before establishing the Agency Armstrong had first studied the condition of the lace trade 'carefully and extensively', and it was only when he had ascertained he was living in something of a 'lace epoch' that he had decided to go ahead with his new venture, convinced that no woman's garment, and few aspects of the home, were complete without 'this charming effect'.² His decision had probably been influenced by the earlier success of the Lace Associations and his timing was superb, for lace was then keenly in demand.

To his surprise, Armstrong found little difficulty in recruiting workers. In the Buckinghamshire villages, his persuasiveness and the promise of immediate sale and remuneration encouraged many women who had

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1. Thomas Lester's business survived in Bedford until 1910, under the name "Lester and Driver". Kelly's Directory for Bedfordshire, 1910. Armstrong's family are now unknown in Bedfordshire. Recollections of Armstrong extend only to what is given in this account. His history is unknown.
 2. Pamphlet of the Association, Beds. C.R.O., A.D. 996. 'Dame fashion demands lace in practically every garment you wear, from your gowns to your lingerie, in short, lace nowadays is the completion'.

previously given up pillow lacemaking to start again. At Stoke Goldington Armstrong rented a cottage which was to be used as an office and distributing centre, and from here he soon began to put out parchment designs and materials, employing as many local buyers as he could to help with the organization. The lessons of the industry's past had been well-absorbed. Armstrong made it clear to his new employees that only the highest standards of workmanship would be accepted. Every piece of lace brought in to the depot was scrupulously checked, so that whenever possible the worker's technique could be advised upon and improved.

Yet, for a while, Armstrong found it difficult to break into the market on anything other than a modest scale. His professional approach to marketing, which included a mail order system, press advertising, samples sent by despatch to the leading fashion houses and the use of two West End shop windows was, of itself, too formal to succeed. A personalised and emotional approach had brought the Lace Associations much success, and he saw that this might also be used to his advantage. Hence, he was not slow to modify his plans. By concentrating more on advertising, particularly in fashionable magazines, and by taking personal mail orders and giving careful and individual attention to every inquiry, Armstrong subsequently saw his business expand. The establishment of connections with 'good country families' proved particularly useful as a vehicle for increasing the Agency's reputation.¹

Within a year the office at Stoke Goldington had become too small to meet the demands of the business. The Agency was moved to a large building in the High Street of the famous old lace centre, Olney, a village which was advantageously placed close to the railways and which could

1. *ibid.*

also provide Armstrong with the clerical workers he now required. In its new premises the Agency continued to expand, in Armstrong's words, 'by leaps and bounds'. By 1911, something of a boom year, it was sending orders not only to several London fashion houses, but also to markets throughout the United Kingdom, indeed to 'all parts of the civilized world'. His laces, he claimed, were 'famed throughout the world for their exquisite designs and unsurpassed quality';¹ and there was probably some truth in this, for at the Festival of the Empire and Imperial Exhibition held that year at the Crystal Palace the Agency was awarded a gold medal and diploma for its exhibits.²

Armstrong's success owed much to his advertising campaign. In pamphlets containing photographs of lace and old laceworkers, and in articles in ladies' magazines, Armstrong portrayed himself in the role of the industry's saviour. An old industry had been dying out and he wished to save it from oblivion. His aim was to 'produce better laces in Buckinghamshire than are made in any part of the universe', so that the industry's finest traditions could be maintained. If successful, his Agency would be of tremendous aesthetic and economic value to his employees. His motives were selfless and were akin to those propounded by the Associations. 'The Agency is maintained,' Armstrong claimed, 'in the belief that the production of materials by hand for use in the home and for the clothing of the inmates is a great source of happiness to the worker, and has besides, an educational value hardly to be measured'. Armstrong assured his prospective purchasers that all workers would be paid fairly and immediately for their efforts so that they could 'add to their husband's scanty income' and thus be relieved 'from any feeling of injured self respect' or encroachment of their independence. In all,

1. Agency Pamphlet. Beds. C.R.O. A.D. 996.

2. *ibid.* Though in view of the industry's recent problems there can have been few workers capable of reaching such very high standards.

the Agency could be relied upon to work conscientiously and honourably towards an admirable goal:

The name Bucks. lace is typical of John Bull. It stands for the integrity of purpose, the conscientious endeavour to produce the best, the honest making of honest goods and the policy of square dealing which is at the back of the Bucks. Lacemaking Industry.¹

Though, as always, fashion was the ultimate arbiter of success, Armstrong's claims were certain to appeal to the numerous groups which at this time were concerned to revive rural life and rural handicrafts.

By 1914 the pillow lace industry had apparently been given a new lease of life. Many old workers who had given up the trade had been persuaded to return and both the Lace Associations and Armstrong's Agency were enjoying a degree of success which, in the early 1880s, had seemed impossible. But the outbreak of the First World War seriously damaged any hope of a lasting revival. For a while it had seemed that all might be well. In 1915 a 'very large number' of Belgian refugee laceworkers settled in Bedfordshire, bringing with them all their traditional skills, and the North Bucks. Lace Association was only too glad to incorporate them into its organization. By the end of the year Flemish, Brussels and Valenciennes laces had become a regular and significant part of the Association's trade. The philanthropic classes poured their sympathy onto these escapees from the German military machine, to such a degree that a new branch of the Association, the Anglo-Belgian Lace Industry, was eventually established to handle their output. From its depot at 9 Beauchamp Place, London SW3, the 'Industry' enjoyed roughly a year's success; its patrons included no less than Queen Mary, Queen Alexandria, Queen Eugenie of Spain, Princess Beatrice, Princess Alice, Princess Louise

1. *ibid.*

and the Marchioness of Milford Haven.¹

But the initial boom was short-lived, for the War eventually brought more problems than advantages. As the demand for luxuries of this nature declined, the war effort, and the munitions factories in particular, took most of the young workers away from the Association's books. The consolidation of a dying industry seemed irrelevant at a time of national emergency and the movement lost support. In 1915 the Association was already announcing that it was having 'great difficulty' in maintaining its former volume of orders. It appealed, plaintively, to the hearts of its prospective customers:

An order for a few yards of lace for undergarments means that the Association can help to keep an old cottager from brooding over the great sacrifice she has made in parting with, perhaps, her bread winner and favourite son, and from feeling the pinch of poverty caused by the increased cost of living.²

The Association claimed a patriotic purpose, for the purchase of pillow laces could be regarded as an investment in the nation's future. It was 'our most urgent duty', the Association said, 'to build up the home industries' which were 'bound' to become of national importance once the War had ended. What better way was there of furthering this cause than by employing 'our own English invalids' and Belgian refugees, in their homes, at pillow lacemaking?³

But the Association's appeal came to little. By the end of the War the Lace Associations had suffered a terrible blow from which they would never recover. A temporary boom in 1919, when over £750 of lace

1. Pamphlet of the Association, lodged in the pillow lace collection, Aylesbury Museum. Among those in its employment were now included 'Sicilian Refugees, homeless from the earthquakes, who are now working in other parts of the Island', and 'our own English invalids' (whose hostels and workrooms are at Denmark Hill, S.E.).
2. Association Pamphlet. Beds. C.R.O. A.D. 996.
3. *ibid.*

was sold,¹ was sufficient to salvage the North Bucks. Lace Association and the Midland Association. But the War had broken the movement's momentum. Many of the old organizers and patrons had now died, and it proved difficult to lure young workers, emancipated by the War effort, back to the traditional ways. Just as had happened a hundred years earlier, and with such devastating effect, the end of the War had brought an increased demand for continental products. Belgian, French and now Chinese pillow laces grew in popularity, and were said to be an important cause of the Associations' problems.²

In March 1920 Lady Inglefield, an active promoter of the North Bucks. Lace Association, took it upon herself to travel to Bruges in Belgium to investigate the basis of the Belgian industry and to see if there were any lessons to be learned.³ Her finding that the Belgians were much more highly-organized than the British probably came as no surprise, for this had always been the case.⁴ The Belgian industry had declined considerably since 1914, but lace teachers were still being trained here in a very skilful and well-planned way, and business now was expanding.⁵ Student teachers learned their craft in classrooms equipped with blackboards and charts. Each supervisor had a large demonstration cushion on which were attached bobbins of heavy woollen threads so that the students could follow the threads' movements around the cushion and record them in notebooks. It was considered vital that the students learned the basic principles thoroughly before going on to produce the various patterns. In this way, practically all known

1. Northampton Independent, 17 May, 1914.

2. T.W. Fitzrandolph and M.D. Hay, III, op. cit., p. 69.

3. Bedfordshire Standard, 12 May, 1922.

4. See above, pp. 134-149.

5. Lady Inglefield estimated that in 1914 the Belgians had had over 87,000 workers at the lace pillow. The estimate included children.

patterns were taught on the basis of 20 to 30 fundamental operations. By using different colours for each thread as she worked on the demonstration cushion, the teacher could easily point out the basic techniques of each operation. It was only when the students had completed a course in designing and pricking patterns that they were permitted to put their techniques to the test with pupils in practice schools.¹

This situation was in marked contrast with the more casual training undertaken in England. True, there were some excellent teachers in the Associations, but these were becoming more and more of a rare breed. More commonly, teaching was undertaken by old lacemakers who used teaching techniques which had been handed down over the centuries; the pupils generally followed the mistress's example as best they could. Lady Inglefield had high hopes of changing the situation and to inspire activity recalled the ideas of John Ruskin.² But her appeal had little effect, for the industry's organization was not altered as a result.

Yet K.S. Woods, examining the industry for the Institute for Research in Agricultural Economics at Oxford in 1921, was still able to find some cause for optimism about the industry's future, provided it could be organized on a sound commercial basis. Ten collectors continued to operate on a small scale in Oxfordshire and sold laces both at home and overseas. Woods conceded that most of the work done was of cheap quality, and was undertaken almost exclusively by old women, but there was still something of a Christmas rush and at 3d. or 4d. an hour a skilled worker might still make 10s. 6d. a week through most of the year. Prices had improved since the end of the War and what had been 3d. a yard

1. Bedfordshire Standard, 12 May, 1922.

2. *ibid.* For details see above, p. 325.

now cost 11d., and borders which in 1914 had cost 6½d. now cost 1s. 10d. There was a demand for fine Buckinghamshire point laces and in the West End dainty white laces were still popular.¹

But Woods and Lady Inglefield were both unduly optimistic. For a time the Womens' Institute showed an interest in the industry and Belgian teaching methods were introduced into lace schools in Bedford, under the auspices of the Bedford Lace Education Committee.² But the Midland Lace Association, ostensibly as the result of 'some desperate friction' among the organizers,³ disappeared during the late 1920s.⁴ Philanthropists and dealers alike now found it impossible to attract more than a handful of young girls to a trade that offered only a dim future and small immediate returns.

During the 1920s women and children in Devon continued to attend pillow lace classes at 2d. per week under the auspices of the Devonshire County Council, using patterns constructed in the Exeter School of Art. A small tourist trade in cheap laces⁵ sustained a lace shop in Honiton. The proprietress, herself a lacemaker, encouraged fine work, and employed collectors in a number of villages.⁶ A few elaborate orders were made up for church linen and wedding veils, but the activity was very small scale, and in contrast with the Midlands, there now was little demand for expensive laces.⁷ Nothing is heard of any further

1. K.S. Woods, op. cit., pp. 159-60.

2. The pupils used text books and pattern cards and followed the patterns on blackboard diagrams. T.W. Fitzrandolph & M.D. Hay, op.cit., III, pp. 61, 69.

3. Northamptonshire Past and Present, Vol. I (1948), p. 39. What happened to the Anglo-Belgian industry is unknown.

4. It had gone when Fitzrandolph and Hay investigated in 1926.

5. T.W. Fitzrandolph and M.D. Hay, III, op. cit., p. 64. Children were encouraged to make their own floral designs, to infuse 'an element of freshness combined with simplicity into the designs'.

6. *ibid.*, p. 66.

7. K.S. Woods, op. cit., p. 59.

development in Devon after this time. Shortage of teachers was a key problem, for even when teachers could be found they were not always willing to work weekends, the time when most of the few children who now took an interest were able to work.¹

Only the Bucks. Cottage Workers Agency was able to operate on any significant scale in the 1920s. In 1921 Woods spoke of a pillow lace business 'worth thousands', which employed buyers on a 10% commission, and it seems quite likely that it was Armstrong's.² A few residents of Olney can still remember Armstrong in the 1920s when the Agency was still advertising in the national and local papers.³ Private orders took most of the trade, but some consignments went to West End shops,⁴ and a few parcels of lace were still being shipped off to America. At one time Armstrong sent his sister to Canada in the hope that she might expand the market there, but no one can remember if she succeeded or not.⁵

1929 was something of a boom year, the last in the industry's history. The Northampton Independent announced, on February 16th, a 'great revival' of the local lace industry. Pillow workers were taking out their bobbins once more, and were 'joyfully returning to the beautiful art of their youth'.⁶ For a short time Armstrong was able to collect laces from hundreds of cottages in Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire. Hand-made laces were in vogue. Childrens' garments, lingerie and handkerchiefs, in particular, were turned out in all kinds

1. *ibid.*, p. 159.

2. *ibid.*, p. 160.

3. Information provided by Mr. Morgan, curator of the Cowper Museum, Olney, December, 1968.

4. K.S. Woods, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

5. Information provided by Mr. Morgan, and Mrs. Whittell of High Street, Olney, December 1968.

6. Northampton Independent, 16 February, 1929.

of pattern, from Bucks. point, to Northamptonshire point, to Torchon, Maltese and Aragon.¹

But the boom broke almost as quickly as it had begun and its collapse seems to have killed the Agency, for there is no record of its existence after 1929. There are vague recollections of Armstrong in Olney around 1930, but what became of him is unknown. Olney villagers can also remember one or two other small dealers operating at this time. George Smith, who lived at number 60 in the long Olney High Street which had seen lacemakers come and go for roughly 300 years, regularly attended the Baptist Chapel and paid cash for laces taken to his Olney depot. He sold most of them either in London, or to private customers, though a few pieces were sent to America. A Mr. Rafferty also visited the village regularly, paying the workers with groceries and transporting the laces to London.²

Fitzrandolph and Hay, who examined the industry shortly after Woods, were much less impressed by its prospects and were doubtful of its value to society. They found lace was still being made here and there throughout most of Bedfordshire, as well as at Yardley Hastings, Denton, and Paulerspury in Northamptonshire and at High Wycombe, Princess Risborough, and Aylesbury in Buckinghamshire, though it was 'less firmly established' here than elsewhere. A number of draperies and art needlework shops in Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire made a specialty of stocking the laces of their district and a few sent buyers to the villages.³ Fitzrandolph and Hay felt that, ideally, the industry might still prove beneficial by providing employment to women who were physically unfit for other work, and by acting as a prop for the unemployed. Working expenses

1. *ibid.*

2. I am grateful to Mr. Morgan for this information. Lace dealers disappear from the directories after 1928. The last to be recorded is a Miss M. Ives, of Bletchley. Kelly's Directory, 1928.

3. T.W. Fitzrandolph and M.D. Hay, *op. cit.*, III, p. 51.

were low, the lace pillow and bobbins took up little space in the home and could easily be stored. At times such as these, when farm wages were low,¹ the 3s. or 4s. a week earned by a labourer's wife at the lace pillow might be invaluable.

But they encountered no enthusiasm among the younger people to learn the craft, not even as a hobby. It took too long to learn and the returns for the effort were too small. Realistically, they eventually concluded that if the industry was to be preserved it could only be as a hobby. At best village girls might be taught pillow lacemaking at their leisure, and learn to work in simple stitches so that they might decorate their own clothing. This was the most satisfying outcome possible.² The investigators judged from their knowledge of the craft's past that pillow lacemaking could only be one of two things; 'either a sweated industry, practiced only by the most needy, or a delightful hobby for leisured people whose time is not yet reckoned in terms of the necessities of life'.³ If the craft was to be preserved, as they felt it should be, then the latter was clearly the most honourable and ethical alternative of the two.

Pillow lacemaking has subsequently survived in just this way. By the 1930s the old generation of the industry's supporters had gone, and there was nobody to replace them. The demand for hand-made lace declined, lace dealers disappeared from the trade directories,⁴ and in the context of the pressing social problems of these years there seemed little justification for trying to revive this inconsequential corner of the economy; the era of pillow lacemaking in England as a commercial concern

1. *ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

2. *ibid.*, p. 71.

3. *ibid.*

4. See above, p. 521.

had all but passed. There was a minor revival in the south-east Midlands during the Second World War, as a result of souvenir hunting by American Servicemen¹ and in 1952 a Devon worker executed a pair of ruffles for the Duke of Wellington which he wore at Queen Elizabeth's coronation.²

Today there are no commercial dealings in pillow lace. Its production is undertaken by a small number of women purely as a hobby. The craft still cannot attract the young girls on whom its existence on a commercial basis would ultimately depend, and unless the values of a world of mini skirts and transistor radios change it does not seem likely that it will ever do so again. But the craft has not been lost. Middle-aged and older women maintain the industry's traditions at home, with a good deal of pride. Many of them hold the romantic conception of the industry which was built up at the close of the nineteenth century. Most were taught by their mothers and can boast of being the last of many generations of lacemakers. A few have newly taken up the craft in their middle years, as the pleasing hobby it can be. Others attend evening classes, under the auspices of the county education committees, in and around Bedford, and in Devon.³

It seems likely that this ancient craft will linger in this way. There can now, at the end of the 1960s, be no more than a couple of hundred lacemakers left, but among these are many enthusiasts, who are anxious to hear of the industry's past, and conscious and proud of their local tradition. Many are surprised to learn that the industry's tradition and folk-lore are often far from the truth, but it does not

1. C. Freeman, op. cit., p. 21.

2. H. Barnard, op. cit.

3. Information provided by Mrs. F. Hamer, of Goldington Road, Bedford, December, 1968.

deter them from their determination to maintain the craft, and in this small way there is every hope that the handicraft will somehow survive in this age of mass production.

Appendix: IEstimation of the number of Pillow Lace
Workers employed in Devon (1851-1911)

Since the Censuses do not distinguish between hand and machine producers, the number of hand producers was estimated on the following basis:

- 1 The 1851 Census includes an enumeration of pillow lacemakers, aged over 20, in the major registration districts. To this total was added a proportion of 38%, this being the proportion of females aged less than 20 employed in the hand industry in the south east Midlands in this year. (Proportion extracted from Table VI). The resultant total shows handworkers to represent roughly 64% of all laceworkers in Devon in 1851.
- 2 This estimate was repeated for 1861 and 1871.
- 3 For 1881, 1891 and 1911 a smaller proportion of 20% was added to the total number of females enumerated in the registration areas, arbitrarily allowing for the decline in childrens' employment as a result of the Factory and Workshops Act of 1878 and the Elementary Education Acts of 1870 and 1880 and also for the industry's now rapid failure.

Appendix: IITypes of Plain and Decorated Bobbins held in
the Lester Collection, Luton Museum

- 1 'Dumps' or 'Bobtailed'. Wood only, small usually single-necked, plain, without spangles.
- 2 'Cow-in-Calf' or 'Jack-in-the-Box'. Made in sections with a hollow space inside concealing a miniature bobbin either loose or attached to the foot. Some with single necks.
- 3 'Trolley' or 'Bedfordshire Trailers'. Stout, sometimes single necked, sometimes with spangles, fitted with loose pewter or wooden rings called 'gingles', mostly in wood but sometimes in bone with bone gingles.
- 4 'Quills'. Wood, with long neck on which the whole skein of gimp is wound. Used to refill trolley bobbins, not on the pillow.
- 5 Yak. Large heavy wooden bobbins used in making worsted lace.
- 6 Gold Thread. Large wooden bobbins, single-neck section forming a reel to hold the metal thread used in making gold thread lace.
- 7 Plain Shank. Plain turned shanks. Exceptionally thin ones were called 'Old Maid' bobbins. These occur also in metal.
- 8 Turned Shank. In a great variety of baluster, ball-and-reel, bobbin and other turnings. These occur also in metal.
- 9 Incised Decoration. Coloured dots, dashes or other incised ornamentation.
- 10 Banded. Decorated with coloured bands.
- 11 Coloured. Dyed green, red, purple or other colours.
- 12 Mottled. Mottled staining by dye or aqua fortis.

- 13 'Bedfordshire Tigers'. Plain shaft inlaid with lead or pewter bands.
- 14 'Bedfordshire Leopards'. A similar type with pewter spots.
- 15 'Butterflies'. A similar type with splayed or winged pewter bands.
- 16 Pewter Inlay. Similar but with other decoration in pewter inlay.
- 17 'Tallies'. Similar but with broad pewter or tin band around the shank.
Used for working the plaits or leadworks on point ground net.
- 18 'Bitted'. Wood, rarely bone, inlaid with wood of contrasting colour in various designs, or occasionally with bone.
- 19 Spliced. Two colour woods, or wood and bone, sometimes metal, spliced and riveted. Some were repairs to broken bobbins.
- 20 Sectioned. Made in sections in contrasting woods or wood and bone.
- 21 Wired. Shank covered completely or intermittently with tightly-wound brass or copper wire.
- 22 Wire-beaded. Decorated with small coloured beads threaded on wires coiled round the shank and arranged to form a pattern, or set into spiral or other grooves in the shank.
- 23 Tinsel. Decorated with tinsel set in spiral or interlacing grooves.
- 24 'Mother-in-Babe', (later 'Church Window'). Shank hollowed and cut into open-work compartments in one or more sections, sometimes spirally, the spaces often containing miniature bobbins, coils of wire, lead shot, wooden balls or glass beads. The collection includes an iron example.
- 25 'Bird-cage'. Similarly cut, but with more compartments each containing a miniature bobbin or beads kept in position by wire coiled around the shank to form the bars of the 'cage'. A variation appears in metal, where wire uprights threaded with metal or glass beads unite the two halves of the shank to form an open bird-cage for the miniature bobbin.

- 26 Adapted types. Bobbins from other English or foreign lacemaking districts were sometimes provided with spangles and used by East Midlands workers.
- 27 Native types. Missionaries and others sometimes taught East Midlands lace-making to native workers in the colonies and other parts of the world, the bobbins being copied by the natives, often with characteristic variations. An Indian example in ivory, in which a carved open-work bird and flower ornament takes the place of the spangle and the shank is engraved with a design of grotesque animals.

Source: C. Freeman, op. cit., pp. 33-5.

Appendix: IIIExamples of Inscribed Bobbins held in
the Lester Collection, Luton Museum,Type

- i Initials or pairs of initials: BS. CS CB 1828. CY 1861 LU.
- ii Christian name(s), sometimes prefixed 'Dear' or 'Sweet':
JAMES, WILLIAM, MERCY LOVE, DEAR SOPHIA, GEORGE SARAH.
- iii Relationships, sometimes prefixed 'Dear': DEAR FATHER. MY DEAR
SISTER 1870. MY SON HABRAM PRENTIS. DEAR UNCLE. ANN HULL MY
DEAR AUNT 1865.
- iv Names: MATILDA GOODMAN 1832. NAMIO BUGBY. ANN PENEY 1812. MR
JOHN BUTCHER TC 1831. WILLIAM BECKETT 1863.
- v Names and places: These and class iv sometimes occur in sets, each
bobbin bearing the name of a member of a family. WILLIAM PETETT
AMPTILL. JOHN MALLET MY DEAR RIDGMOUNT. HENRY ASH LITTLE HORWOOD
1840. REBECCA BATES BRATON 1843. A set of four: WILLIAM, JOSHUA,
ELIZABETH and MARY WAITE, HARDLEY HASTINGS.
- vi Names and occupations: Rare. A wooden Mother-in-Babe bobbin in the
Museum collection inscribed: WILLIAM CLARK SHEPORD GOOD GAL MAKE
CAST AND WORK (William Clark, Shepherd, good girl, make haste and
work) is probably unique. THOMAS BARKER BRAFIELD GREEN SWEEP
(Wright).
- vii Famous people: JOHN BUNYAN. LORD NELSON. WAKES OAK; made from the
oak in Whittlebury Forest traditionally connected with Hereward
the Wake (Wright).
- viii Royalty: QUEEN CAROLINE FOREVER. MAY THE PRINCE OF WALES BE WITH

GLORY WED. A pair: VICTORIA MARED FEB 10/ALBERT MARED FEB 10.

- ix Politicians and Elections: VOTE FOR OSBORNE; probably John Osborn, MP for Beds. 1806-7, 1818-20 (Wright). GUNNING AND REFORM; a Northants. MP (Wright). CRAWLEY FOR EVER; probably S. Crawley, Beds. 1832 (Wright).
- x Murderers: JOSEPH CASTLE HUNG 1860. Castle murdered his wife at Luton and was tracked down with the help of a bloodhound kept at Luton police station. On the night of his execution at Bedford Gaol, the friends of his wife held a party at which every guest was given an inscribed bobbin as a memento. WILLIAM WORSLEY HUNG 1868; Worsley murdered William Bradbury at Luton; his was the last public hanging at Bedford Gaol. WILLIAM BULL HANGED 1871; Bull murdered an old woman named Sarah Marshall and was executed at Bedford. FRANZ MULLER HUNG 1864; Muller was the first person to commit murder in a railway train.
- xi Transportation: RANNSON DILLINGUM BOTANY BAY (Wright).
- xii Suicide: JOSEPH WEST; West hanged himself during a night in the lock-up at Cranfield (Wright).
- xiii Memorials: SARAH HOBBS DIED FEB 10 1836 AGED 18 YEARS. JOHN WESTON MY HUSBAN AGED 28. WILLIAM LOVEDAY DEAD AND GON. ROSE ANN JUDD DIED JANY 27 1862 AGED 6 WEEK. HERYWIN HILL HELMDON AGED 22 1844 (Northants). ELIZA HALL MY DAUGHTER DI FEB 15 1866. ALICE CURTIS BORN AUGUST 24 1840 DIED SEPTEMBER 16 1841.
- xiv Birthdays: FAITH WESLEY BORN MARCH 12 1836. EMILY GWYNN BORN DECEMBER 1 1839. A set of triplets: FAITH SETCHILL BORN JUNE 10 1831; HOPE SETCHILL BORN JUNE 10 1831; CHARITY SETCHILL BORN JUNE 10 1831 (Wright).

- xv Historical events: WATERLOO 1815 (Wright). ALMA 1854 (Wright).
- xvi Presentations: A GIFT FROM LESTER (a reward for good lace given by Thomas Lester, the Bedford lace dealer). ACCEPT THIS TRIFEL FROM A FREIND WHOSE LOVE TO THEE WILL NEVER END. FOR BETSY. A KEEPSAKE. A NEW YEARS GIFT 1861. A GIFT FROM ELIZABETH HURST 1859. CHRISTMAS BOX. WILLIAM LEACH A GIFT TO BB. A PRESENT FROM MY AUNT 1842.
- xvii Curses: IF YOU TOUCH IT WILL TAKE.
- xviii Blessings: BLESS JACOB. BLESS MY DAN. MAY THE PLESOURS OF REST IN OUR HARTS. PLENTY AND PLENTY.
- xix Admonitions: DO GOOD TO ALL. BE NOT FORGETFUL.
- xx Biblical texts: THOSE THAT SEKE ME EARLY SHALL FIND ME. THOU SHALT NOT STEEL. JESUS WEEPT. TIME IS SHORT. Wright records a set of 12 each inscribed with a clause from the Lord's Prayer.
- xxi Pious phrases: I LOVE JESUS. JESUS IS ALTGETHER LOVLY.
- xxii Apophthegms: TIME FLIES 1714. BETTER TO DO WELL LATE THAN NEVER.
- xxiii Popular songs and poems: WITH ALL THEY FAULTS I LOVE THE STILL; William Cowper. O THAT WILL BE JOYFUL WHEN WE MEET TO PART NO MORE; T. Bibly (Wright). WAIT FOR THE WAGGON (Wright). POP GOES THE WESEL (Wright).
- xxiv Verses: These usually occur in sets, one line to each bobbin.
TAKE ME FOR BETT/ER OR FOR WORSE/YOU PRAISE MY EYE/BUT EYE MY PURSE.
- xxv Alphabets: ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ.
- xxvi Cryptograms: + UR + UB AN ++ UR TO ME (Cross you are, cross you be, and too cross you are to me). YM RDAE I LEOV OUY SAS SRIDB OLVE SHEREIE (My dear I love you as the birds love cherries) (Bedford Modern School Museum).

xxvii Catches: PEEP FOOLE PEEP DINT YOU NEVER SEE A ROBIN AFOR (Wright).

(b) Aspects of Love and Courtship

xxviii Aspiration: TO LOVE AND LIVE HAPPY IT IS MY DESIER WITH MY LOVE.

I WANTS A HUSBAND. I LONG TO WED THE LAD I LOVE. I LONG TO BE
A LOVING MANS WIFE.

xxix Invitation: KISS ME QUICK AND DONT LOOK SHY. LOVE COME AGAIN.

LOVE GIVE ME A KIS. KISS ME QUICK MY LOVELY DEAR. KIS ME COURT
ME HUG ME TITE DONT CRUMP MY COLR TONIGHT (Wright).

xxx Warning: DONT KISS AND TELL. LADS NEVER COURT TO LASCES AT ONCE.

xxxi Flirtation: I LOVE THE BOYS. DONT TELL MY MOTHER. KISS ME QUICK
FOR MY MOTHER IS COMING. IF I LOVE THE BOYS THATS NOTHING TOO
NO BODEY.

xxxii Despair: IF YOU DENY MY LOVE I DY. DA HER I LOVE HER BUT ILL
NEVER GO NIGH HER NO (Bedford Modern School Museum).

xxxiii Protest: LET GO. LOVE ME OR LEVE ME ALONE.

xxxiv Question: DO YOU LOVE ME YES. WHO IS YOUR LOVER MY DARLING (Wright).

xxxv Proposal: NAME THE DAY. LOVE WILL U MARREY. COME LOVE AND LIVE
WITH ME MY DEAR. SWEET ONE BE MINE AND MAKE ME THINE. MARRY ME
QUICK AND LOVE ME FOR EVER. WILL YOU WED.

xxxvi Refusal: JOSEPH IT NOT FOR HE KNOW IT. ITS ALL VERY FINE BUT NO
LODGE HERE FOR YOU MY LAD (Wright).

xxxvii Acceptance: BUY THE RINGE. LOVE BUY THE RING.

xxxviii Injunction: LOVE ME MY LOVER. B TRUE. LOVE ME AS I LOVE YOU.
LOVE ME TRULEY. LOVE ME AND FORSAKE ALL OTHERS. PROVE TRUE.

xxxix Declaration: MY DEAR. MY LOVE. LOVEY. I LOVE YOU MY DEAR THAT IS
TRUE.

- x1 Plighted love: DANIEL GOODWIN MY LOVE 21. DB I LOVE YOU MY
 DEAR IT IS TRUE JHHS. SWEET WILLIAM IS THE LAD I LOVE SO TRUE
 MAY 24 1846. JAMES HARPER MY SWEET HEART IS CY. GEORGE BOYCE
 MARY DEVRICKS SWEET HART 1859. JOHN WEBB SUSANNAH READ 1840.
 I LOVE YOU. MY LOVE FOR THE NON ONE CAN TELL.
- xli Blighted love: IT IS HARD TO BE SLITED BY ONE A I LOVE. LOVE IS
 A SHARP THORN. LET NO FALSE LOVER GAIN MY HEART. RICHARD
 COBB SLITED BY ONE AS (Wright).
- xlii Quarrel: + UR + UB AN ++ UR TO ME. KEEP YOUR TEMPER.
- xliii Reconciliation: LOVE DONT BE CROSS.
- xliv Happiness: MY LOVE IS LIKE THE BLOOMING ROSE. SITING ON A STILE
 MARY HAPPY AS THE DAY. LOVE AND LIVE HAPY. LOVE IS LOVE. MY
 JOY.
- xlv Constancy: MY BOYS IF I AM RAGGED MY HART IS TRUE. MY MIND IS
 FIXT I CANNOT RAING I LOVE MY CHOICE TOO WELL TO CHANGE. I
 WILL FOR EVER LOVE THE GIVER.
- xlvi Absence: MY LOVE ABSENT. FORGET ME NOT WHEN I AR AWAY. LOVE
 DONT TARRY. MY LOVE I LONG TO SE. REMEMBER ME MY LOVELY DEAR.
- xlvii Sailor's Return: JACK A LIVE.
- xlviii The Recruit: LOVE DONT YOU LIST. DONT LIST LOVE.
- xlix Husband and wife: EDWARD AND MATHER WALDEN.

Source: C. Freeman, op. cit., pp. 35-9.

Appendix: IVExamples of Lace Tells and Lacemakers' Ditties

- 1 Knock, knock at your door. Who's there? It's me,
Come In.
Does Your little dog bite?
Yes. How many teeth has it got?
Six, and seven next time; eight when I call again.
- 2 Dingle, dangle, farthing candle,
Put you in the stinking dog's hole,
For 31 speak or look off for 62.
- 3 There's three pins I done today
What do you think my mother will say?
When she knows I done no more
She'll take and turn me out of door,
Never let me in any more.
- 4 Tip, stitch and turn over,
Let it be hay or clover,
My glum's done.
- 5 Jack be nimble, Jack be quick,
Jack jump over the candle stick.
- 6 19 miles to the Isle of White,
Shall I be there by candle light?
Yes if your fingers go lissom and light,
You'll be there by candle light.

Appendix: IVExamples of Lace Tells and Lacemakers' Ditties

- 1 Knock, knock at your door. Who's there? It's me,
Come In.
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Yes. How many teeth has it got?
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- 3 There's three pins I done today
What do you think my mother will say?
When she knows I done no more
She'll take and turn me out of door,
Never let me in any more.
- 4 Tip, stitch and turn over,
Let it be hay or clover,
My glum's done.
- 5 Jack be nimble, Jack be quick,
Jack jump over the candle stick.
- 6 19 miles to the Isle of White,
Shall I be there by candle light?
Yes if your fingers go lissom and light,
You'll be there by candle light.

7 19 long lines hang over my door,
 The harder I work, the shorter my score,
 The more I do play, it sticks at a stay
 So come little fingers, let's twink away
 There's twinkum and twankum and five to your four;
 Them as are done first, they may give o'er.
 My shoes are to borrow, my true love's to seek,
 I cannot yet married till after next week.

8 19 little round holes gaping for a wire,
 Every pin that I stick in gets me the higher.

9 19 miles to the river and ring,
 I do my stitch and set it in.

10 The Flashy Lace Makers

Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, Buchenham too,
 Are most of them lacemakers we know it is true,
 Most of them lacemakers in every town,
 None of these fine lasses shall e'er be run down.
 As for these lacemakers it is their delight,
 To twingle their fingers from morning till night,
 They work in their pillow, bobbins and pins,
 And when your lace is done girls, you may take it in.
 Round go the lacebuyers in every town,
 To see if there's any good lace to be found,
 There's plenty of lace so you need not to fear,
 It's so much a yard and you'll find it not dear.
 So now to conclude and finish these lines,
 These flashy lacemakers they are very kind,

They are very kind I'll make it to appear,
Thro' Bedfordshire, Northamptonshire, and Buckinghamshire.

11

THE FOX

19 miles as I sat high
Looking for one, and two passed by,
I saw them that never saw me -
I saw the lantern tied to a tree.

The boughs did bend and the leaves did shake
I saw the hole the Fox did make.

12

Get to the field by one
Gather the rod by two
Tie it up at three
Send it home by four
Make her work hard at five
Give her her supper at six
Send her to bed at seven
Cover her up at eight
Throw her down stairs at nine
Break her neck at ten
Get to the well-lid by eleven
Stamp her in at twelve.

How can I make the clock strike one,
Unless you tell me how many you've done?

13

THE JEWESS MAIDEN

There was a Jewess maiden, or so my story states,
Who beckoned to a little boy who peeped between her gates.

An apple so red, a plum so sweet, she gave him from her
tree;

She dazzled his eyes with a garry gold ring that was so
fair to see.

And when she got him in the gates she laughed, he knew
not why,

And uttered many wicked words and told him he must die.

She laid him on the dresser board, no mercy then she
showed

But stabbed him with a knife and stabbed until the life-
blood flowed.

- 14 A lad down at Olney looked over a wall,
And saw nineteenth little golden girls playing at ball.
Golden girls, golden girls, will you be mine?
You shall neither wash dishes nor wait on the swine.
But sit on a cushion and sew a fine seam,
Eat white bread and butter and strawberries and cream.

- 15 Up the street and down the street
With windows made of glass;
Call at Mary Muskett's door -
There's a pretty lass!
With a posy in her bosom,
And a dimple in her chin;
Come, all you lads and lasses,
And let this fair maid in.

16

THE BEDFORDSHIRE FARMER

In Bedfordshire lived a rich farmer, we hear;
 A Bedfordshire maiden had lived there a year.
 She started for home on a short holiday,
 When a highwayman stopped her upon the highway.
 She screamed out with fright, she screamed out with fear,
 But help ('twas the Bedfordshire farmer) was near.
 The highwayman, hit by a blunderbuss, died;
 And there soon was a wedding, and she was the bride.

17

THE OLD COUPLE

There was an old couple and they were poor,
 They lived in a house with only one door,
 And poor old folks were they.

And the poor old man said he wouldn't stay at home,
 And the poor old woman said she wouldn't sleep alone,
 And poor old folks were they.

And she said, "If you've got any love for me,
 You'd fetch me an apple from yonder tree".

And poor old folks were they.

He fetched her an apple and laid in on the shelf,
 And said, "If you want any more, you can fetch them
 yourself!"

And poor old folks were they.

18

Nineteen miles to Charing Cross,
 To see a Black Man ride on a white horse.
 The rogue was so saucy he wouldn't come down,
 To show me the road to the nearest town.

19 Behind in this meadow you'll find a dry land,
Two beauties of Bedford, and there do they stand;
He on the white horse and she on the gray,
And so these two beauties go riding away.

20 Twenty pins have I to do,
Let ways be ever so dirty.
Never a penny in my purse,
But farthings five and thirty.

Betsy Bays and Polly Mays,
They are two bonny lasses;
They built a bower upon the tower,
And covered it with rushes.

Sources: T. Wright, *op.cit.*, pp. 180-192. John Holloway, 'The
Flashy Lacemakers', The Listener, 21 May, 1970, p. 682.

Appendix: VList of Prices of Lace sold at the
Army and Navy Stores c. 1907REAL LACELace

Brussels, Point Gaze	yard	11/6	to	92/0
" Applique	"	7/9	"	53/9
Duchesse	"	5/6	"	51/0
Irish Point	"	43/6	"	97/0
Bruges	"	3/11	"	13/0
Limerick	"	2/0	"	17/0
Carrickmacross	"	9/6	"	53/6
" Applique	"	5/6	"	35/0
Honiton	"	12/3	"	74/6
Bretonne, Cream	"	2/6	"	5/11
Valenciennes Edging	"	0/7½	"	21/0
" Insertion	"	0/7½	"	12/9
Chantilly, Black edging, about 5½ in. wide	yard			15/0
Chantilly, Black edging, about 6 "				22/0
" " " " 9½ "				29/6
" " " " 14 "				41/3

Bridal or Court Flounces

Brussels, Point Gaze, about 7 in.	yard	55/0	to	122/0
" " " 8 "			yard	96/0
" " " 9 "			"	151/0
Duchesse, about 7 in.			"	25/6
" " 8 in.	yard	29/6	to	48/0
" and Brussels, mixed, about 10 in.			yard	64/6
" " to match, about 5 in.			"	51/0
Bruges, about 9 in.	yard	12/0	to	15/6

Veils

Black Chantilly, spotted (with border)	each	15/0	to	83/0
Bretonne, Cream	"	1/1	to	9/6
Black	"	2/11	to	9/6
Brussels Applique	"	4/3	to	30/0

Bridal Veils

Brussels Applique			each	225/0
Bretonne			"	40/0
Limerick	each	70/0	to	127/0

Lappets

Duchesse	each	7/6	to	69/6
Brussels	"	38/6	"	92/0

Sets

Brussels, Point Gaze	set	52/0	to	150/0
Duchesse	"	12/9	"	110/0
Irish Crochet	"	7/6	"	20/0

Handkerchiefs

Brussels, Point Gaze	each	7/9	to	200/0
Honiton	"	4/6	"	124/0
Duchesse	"	2/6	"	110/0
Valenciennes	"	3/6	"	55/0
Limerick	"	2/6	"	17/0
Carrickmacross	"	6/6	"	32/6
Irish Point	"	42/0	"	137/6

Scarfs

Real Spanish Scarfs, black	each	26/0	to	145/0
Maltese Scarfs, black	"	9/0	"	66/0
" cream	"	9/11	"	160/0
Brussels Applique	"	7/6	"	430/0
Duchesse	"	28/0	"	165/0
Carrickmacross	"	16/0	"	169/0
Brussels Point Gaze	"	133/6	"	455/0

Berthas

Bruges	15/0	to	42/0
Duchesse	20/0	to	190/0
Point Gaze	75/0	to	420/0
Brussels Applique	15/6	to	60/0
Irish Point	-		280/0
Honiton	73/0	to	107/0

Collars

Irish Crochet	each	4/6	to	94/0
Irish Point	"	81/6	"	162/6
Brussels Point Gaze	"	60/0	"	160/0
Bruges	"	12/6	"	25/0
Duchesse	"	15/0	"	175/0
Venetian	"	133/0	"	175/0
Honiton	"	20/0	"	70/0

Fichus

Duchesse	each	15/6	to	120/0
Brussels Point Gaze	"	65/6	"	530/0
Spanish, Black	"	40/0	"	107/0

Eretonne Ties

Cream each 1/0 to 42/0

Infants' Christening Veils

Bretonne each 17/0

Lace Trimmings

Everlasting doz 0/8 to 1/9
Featherstitching 3 doz 0/10½ " 1/3

IMITATION LACEWidows' Collars and Cuffs

French Lawn Collars, round, size 12½, 13 in. each 1/8
" " " " 13½, 14 and 14½ in. " 1/9½
" " " " 15 in., 15½ in. " 1/11
" " " straight, size 12½, 14 in. " 1/6
" " " " 14½ to 16 in. " 1/8
" " Cuffs, 8 in., 8½ in. pair 2/11
" " " 9 in., 9½ in. " 3/0
Muslin Collars, round, 12½ to 15½ in. each 0/10
" " straight " " 0/7
" Cuffs, 8 in., 8½ in. pair 0/11
" " 9 in., 9½ in. " 1/0
Linen Collars, round, 12½ to 15½ in. each 0/8
" " straight " 0/7½
" Cuffs, 8 in. to 9½ pair 1/2
Foundation Cuffs, in black silk, 7½ in. to 9 in. " 1/9

Chiffon, Crepe-de-Chine, and Brilliante

White, cream, black or coloured Chiffon, 46 in. yd 1/4½
White, cream, black, sky, pink, helio, maize and cardinal
Crepe-de-Chine, 42 in. wide yd 2/11
Black, white, cream, sky, pink, heliotrope, maize Silk
Brilliante, 47 in. wide yd 2/2

Mourning Veils

Net trimmed, crape 1/9 to 2/6
Crape, embroidered edge 2/3 " 3/9
Net " " 1/9 " 3/6

Gossamers

Black, white, grey, navy, or dark brown, single, 16 in. yd 0/9½
Do., double, 16 in. " 1/3½
Navy, brown, grey, black, double, 27 in. " 2/2

Grenadine (Veiling)

Black, 31 in.	yd	2/9
" 31 in.	"	3/6

Lisse

Black, 26 in. wide	yd	1/11
White, 36 in. "	"	1/11

Silk Nets

Black or white, 45 in. wide	yd	1/6
" uncrushable, 72 in. wide	"	2/11
" Chantilly, 36 in. wide	"	2/6

Cotton Nets

Black or white, 45 in. wide	yd	0/10½
" " 72 in. "	"	2/4
" " (stiff), 36 in. wide	"	0/4½
White or cream (soft, washing), 36 in. wide	yd	1/0 1/1½
" " (spotted)	yd	1/0
White, cream, or ecru, for lace mounting, 60 in. wide	"	2/6

Piece Laces

Chantilly black, 44 in. wide	yd	2/11 to 8/11
Guipure, black, 18 in.	"	11/6 to 14/9
Do, ecru, cream, or white, 18 in. wide	"	4/6 to 11/6

Tulle

White, cream, or black, 36 in. wide	yd	0/10
White or black, 36 in. wide	"	1/5½
White (bridal), 2 yards wide	"	1/11½
Cream, 2 yards wide	"	1/11½
White, 4 "	"	3/1

Imitation Lace, & c.

Chantilly, black	yd	0/1½ to 4/6
Silk Guipure, black	"	0/11 " 11/6
Cotton " Ecru	"	0/7½ " 5/9
White or creme	"	0/7½ " 6/9
Valenciennes, antique, white, or cream	"	0/1½ " 1/2½
Mauresque, white, cream, or Ecru	"	0/6 " 3/6
Torchon (Imitation), white	doz	1/0½ " 2/11
Valenciennes (Imitation) Edgings	"	0/5½ " 7/9
Do. Insertion	"	0/8½ " 4/6
Valenciennes (wireground) Edging	"	1/0½ " 3/9
Do. Insertion	"	1/1½ " 3/6
Filled Muslin for trimming curtains, white	doz	3/9

Madreia and Swiss Works

Real Madeira Edgings	yd.	0/9	to	3/0
" Insertion	"	0/6½	"	2/4
Swiss Edgings	"	0/3½	"	1/1½
Insertion	"	0/4½	"	1/1½
Flouncings	"	1/11	"	5/6
Piece Embroidery, about 22 in. wide	"	2/6	"	6/6

Lisse Lace and Fancy Frillings

Plain white Lisse	yd.	0/5½	to	0/10½
Fancy white or cream lace edge	"	0/4	"	0/7
Widows' roll frilling, tarletan	"	0/4½	"	0/8
" Lisse	"	-		1/2½

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