

SILK

The first record of a silk weaver in Taunton was in 1677 but the major development of the industry came a century later.¹ Due to the high cost of the raw material the silk industry was company run and local managers and agents ran the mills. Most mill owners came from London where raw silk was imported and where silk weaving was established at Spitalfields but heavily regulated. The availability of cheap, young labour and water power for the new throwing machines and the import duty on worked silk after 1776 fuelled the move of silk working into areas like Somerset. The first recorded silk factory may have been that opened by Messrs Forbes and Wasdale who are said to have introduced the silk throwing industry to Taunton in 1778.² Taunton was said to be only the second town in England to make strong silk for warp thread known as organzine on powered throwing.³ Tram, threads simply twisted together by hand or on improvised spinning machines, was widely used for the weft but was too weak for warp. By the early 19th century many places in Somerset were producing silk thread but most rural silk mills closed in the 1830s.⁴

In Taunton businesses engaged in all processes and produced finished articles like scarves. An unusual item was the national flag woven in silk produced by local weaver Samuel Sholl in 1811.⁵ Another flag was made for the victory procession of 1814 in which 200 female silk workers in white with muslin turbans took part.⁶ It was said before 1822 that there were at least 500 people involved in throwing and c. 1,000 in weaving using c. 800 handlooms supported by 300 winders and quillers.⁷ The greatest demand was for organzine and marabout⁸ yarn and gradually most factories came to specialise in throwing. Of the

¹ SHC, DD/CH/74/10 (1677).

² SHC, A/AWT/1.

³ *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 233.

⁴ *VCH Som.* VI, 167; VII, 33, 35, 47, 51, 56.

⁵ A. Humphries, *Som Parishes*, 680.

⁶ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (printed insert, 1814).

⁷ Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 382.

⁸ Higher quality thread dyed between twisting and throwing and produced at the silk mill in Staplegrave.

seven mills at work in 1822 only two were specialist throwing mills but by 1830 most of the five survivors were throwing.⁹ In 1822 several silk throwsters petitioned against a change in silk duty payments, which they said would allow smuggling of foreign silk and put many of their c. 2,000 workers out of work.¹⁰ In 1832 it was said that silk weaving had ‘descended to the tomb’ with the abolition of duties on imports and the introduction of powered looms.¹¹ Despite the highly skilled nature of handloom silk weaving wages were low and most weavers were women earning only 4s. a week although men earned 8s., less than many earned throwing in the mill, sometimes as piece work with higher rates for throwing organzine than tram. Lodgers and often paying up to 2s. on rent. paid 1s. a week for space for the loom and in a good week girls earned up to 8s. but many rented their looms from mill owners and at times, such as in 1819—20, work was scarce. Some shared looms with other family members reducing earnings to 2s. 6d.¹² In 1837 the average woman’s wage was 8d. to 11d. a day and for girls from 2d. a day slightly higher than in agricultural work and for women more than in most other Somerset factories.¹³ In 1841 there were 132 silk weavers but only 59 by 1851 although total silk workers living in Taunton had increased from 288 to 481 and remained at that level until 1871.¹⁴

At first businesses were divided between silk throwing producing the various types of silk thread in powered mills and silk weaving, which employed weavers in factories or in their own homes using hand looms. By 1830 factories were classified as either silk mills or bobbin net mills also known as lace factories. Silk throwsters, silk weavers and lace makers took part in the 1832 Reform festival.¹⁵ Girls as young as seven earned 9d. a week in the

⁹ Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Robson’s Dir. Som.* (1839).

¹⁰ SHC, DD/MK/60.

¹¹ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/9/1.

¹² SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/5, 13/2/255.

¹³ TNA, HO73/53/9.

¹⁴ TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5.

¹⁵ SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/52.

mills up to 1s. 6d. as they got older. Men earned up to 12s. a week in the mill in 1821—2, more than weaving at home.¹⁶ Wages were individually negotiated and some girls started as winders in the mill before weaving at home. An 18-year old girl started at 3s. a week increasing at 6d. each year to 4s. Others signed an apprenticeship agreement at 4s a week, although no mills took apprentices by the 1830s.¹⁷ An older woman who had worked in the woollen industry at Tiverton worked for 1s. a day until she was 50 when her eyesight failed.¹⁸ Men's wages were always a higher and one young man left before 1842 because his wages had fallen to 12s. a week¹⁹ A women starved to death after her wages were reduced to 2s. 6d. a week in 1858 when the factories were on short time.²⁰

Child labour was common, silk mills being regarded as a safe and healthy environment for children and it saved mothers paying for childcare. By 1833 there had been no fatalities and only four serious accidents since the mills opened. Of the five mills employing children four who reported to the Royal Commission in the early 1830s employed up to 200 children mostly from eight upwards but younger girls were employed if their parents could not afford to send them to school and infants were taken on for nothing so their parents could work.²¹ Children were employed reeling washed silk onto swifts or reels for twisting and throwing, winding silk yarn onto quills for weaving and fine knotting any breaks for 9d. to 2s. a week.²² Some mill owners paid for the children to attend school part time or provided night classes at the factory.²³ Children usually attended Sunday school and a clergyman and a schoolmaster regarded factory children as less healthy than others

¹⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/5, 13/2/255.

¹⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/5; *Royal Com. on employment of children in factories* (1833), 72—5.

¹⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/3/5.

¹⁹ *Rep. Royal Com. on Child Employment* (1842), II, 26.

²⁰ *Taunton Courier*, 20 March 1858: BNA, accessed 12 May 2022.

²¹ *Royal Com. on employment of children in factories* (1833), 60, 72—5.

²² SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/2/255.

²³ Below, soc. hist., educ.

although a parish overseer claimed they were happy.²⁴ Parish overseers were anxious to get pauper children into the mills.²⁵ In 1861 children as young as three still worked in the industry although possibly at home but William Rawlinson employed 137 women, 34 men and 277 children under 18.²⁶

Mill hours were 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. in summer and 7.30 or 8.a.m. to 8.p.m. in winter, except on Saturdays when they finished 1 ½ hours earlier, with breaks of up to an hour each for three meals. Shorter hours were regarded a injurious to business and one manufacturer thought that it was bad for children to work only 10 hours a day and that extra leisure resulted in mischief. Two mills administered corporal punishment to child workers but the others preferred fines. One gave out tracts for good behaviour or a halfpenny on Saturday evening. Extra hours were not worked by younger children and one factory, which worked 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. changed hands for the extra hours although another mill was said to have had two young boys working 18 hours a day. At least two mills provided cooking and tea-making facilities. Most workers lived on bread with broth or tea for breakfast, bread, cheese and ale or potatoes with a bit of meat for dinner, bread and butter or treacle with weak tea in the afternoon and bread and broth for supper. The thrifty or better paid young women cooked meat for dinner or might have dried fish but women with children ate poorly.²⁷

In 1781 James Vansommer and Peter Paul, London mercers, erected a building on the site of a former brewhouse in High Street on the millstream north of Pool Wall mills with the right to use the water. It was powered by waterwheels and made thrown silk yarn.²⁸ Apart from building a 'silk wheel', for which the firm paid a £9 annuity to the millers of the

²⁴ *Royal Com. on employment of children in factories* (1833), 75—7.

²⁵ SHC, D/P.tau.m/13/9/1.

²⁶ TNA, RG9/1617—18.

²⁷ *Royal Com. on employment of children in factories* (1833), 72—7.

²⁸ Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 374n.

grist mill, the water supply, sluices and other equipment remained unchanged.²⁹ Mr Paul employed poor children in 1782 but for less than they got on poor relief.³⁰ The partners went bankrupt in 1783 and William Wilmott of Sherborne and John Norman bought the silk factory with machinery but in 1787 William died and his widow sold out to Norman.³¹ By 1791 Norman employed up to 100 hands on the throwing machines and by c. 1798 worked with his son Samuel.³² A mill mistress, an experienced hand, ran the machinery according to the water level in the pond read from a gauge on the water wheel. Organzine mills required more water than the other twisting and throwing machines and machinery had to be stopped if water was low.³³ Samuel Norman worked the mill alone in 1821 and another silk factory on the site was run by Thomas Mate but by 1830 both had been acquired by George Stevenson and Company who extended the buildings northwards and installed a steam engine.³⁴ George Bloor had taken the site over by 1842 and in 1856 built a tumbling weir with triple sluices to improve the water flow to the breast shot waterwheel, which worked the mills but after a legal dispute with the Kinglake family it had to be reconstructed c. 1860.³⁵ By 1861 the factory, known as Pool Wall Mills, had turned to making silk goods for Walters and Son of London.³⁶ In the late 1870s the mill became a collar factory and in 1883 Walters built a new two-storey factory in Wood Street opposite Portland Street where they remained in business until 1899 or later. It was possibly managed by William Frost from

²⁹ SHC, DD/DP/37/2.

³⁰ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/1 (1782).

³¹ SHC, DD/SP/378 (1784); Dors. Hist. Centre/D/WIL cat.

³² SHC, A/CPT/15/5, p. 213; *The Universal British Directory* (c. 1798), IV, 588.

³³ SHC, DD/DP/37/2.

³⁴ Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Robson's Dir. Som.* (1839); SHC, D/P/tau.m/4/3/10; tithe award, St Mary.

³⁵ *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852); SHC, D/DC/tau.d/25/18 (1860).

³⁶ *PO Dir. .Som.* (1861, 1866).

Macclesfield, whose family built silk machinery.³⁷ The factory was used for furniture storage in 1909 but in the later 20th century was converted to residential use.³⁸

In 1782 Mr Vansommer bought property described as a cottage in Canon Street titling and probably built the house, workshops and warehouses on the site, now 18 Canon Street. It was run as a silk gauze factory employing 60 hands, which after he went bankrupt was sold to John James of London, who worked it in 1791. Lacking water power the throwing machine was operated by a woman using a large treadmill and the factory concentrated on weaving. There were 32 looms producing silk handkerchiefs, shawls, tiffanies and muslins. The business was given up *c.* 1800 and became a straw hat manufactory, a cabinet maker's workshop and by the 1840s a private house.³⁹ However, in 1822 a Canon Street silk factory was run by Thomas Matthews and *c.* 1830 by James Parsons from the South Street factory.⁴⁰

In 1793 Leney Smith came from London to start a crepe weaving industry.⁴¹ In 1818 he added 30 looms for silk crepe each of which employed three workers.⁴² By 1822 he was in partnership with his son in a factory in Mount Street, on the site of the later barrack gatehouse.⁴³ A Mr Every is also said to have started a factory in 1806.⁴⁴ They had probably ceased working by 1830 but Thomas Atkins had a crepe manufactory in St James Street,⁴⁵ possibly the silk factory later run by Mr Blinkhorn but crepe weaving appears to have been largely given up in the late 1830s. In 1842 the Coal Orchard silk factory was occupied by

³⁷ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/18/720; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889—99); SHC, A/ADR, box 4 (ins. bk); TNA, RG12/1877.

³⁸ SHC, A/ADR, box 4 (ins. bk).

³⁹ Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 381; SHC, DD/SP/378, 416.

⁴⁰ Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830); below this section.

⁴¹ SHC, A/AWT/1.

⁴² *Taunton Courier* 26 March 1818: BNA accessed 12 May 2022.

⁴³ Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); SHC, A/ASW/1.

⁴⁴ Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 382.

⁴⁵ *Pigot Dir.* (1830).

silk manufacturer Edward Spooner (d. 1863).⁴⁶ It was last recorded in 1868, probably no longer working, and was absorbed into adjoining foundry premises.⁴⁷

By the late 1790s William Heudebourck was manufacturing silk, possibly also in Mount Street where he lived. John Heudebourck who also lived in Mount Street started silk throwing c. 1811 in a silk factory adjoining his house.⁴⁸ The factory was small and before 1840 John moved to the South Street factory begun by James Parsons before 1822.⁴⁹ By 1842 the business had passed to John Ballance and Company⁵⁰ The original four-storey brick building was three bays by twelve with a cupola. In 1846 an Easton and Amos 50 h.p. beam engine was installed with three boilers and an 80-ft octagonal chimney, rebuilt in 1857. The mill was extended several times and in 1864 formed three sides of a square with steam-heated and gas-lit rooms for winding, cleaning, spinning, doubling and throwing silk using machines by Frost of Macclesfield and Peel and Ormerod of Manchester. There were 5,000 spindles throwing up to seven cwt of silk per week. The site also included washing house, counting house, smithy, stores and five cottages.⁵¹ In 1868 it was to be re-opened as a lace factory by Mr Amory of Tiverton but in 1873 it was converted to a collar factory.⁵²

Two London firms, Ingleby, Jones and Company in White Lion Court, off East Street and Messrs Meat and Parsons in South Street, employed silk weavers in Taunton making silk cloth such as crepe, persians and sarsanet. However, much Taunton-made yarn was sent to Spitalfields for weaving, especially after 1824 when Spitalfields' wages were no longer protected. Wages fell with the increase in imported silk goods using cheaper Asian

⁴⁶ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/2/1/19 (1863), 13/1/8; D/P/tau.m/13/2/255; DD/SAS/C212/13/1, p. 50; tithe award, St James.

⁴⁷ SHC, DD/HR/3.

⁴⁸ *The Universal British Directory* (c. 1798), IV, 588; SHC, D/N/turc/1/5/1.

⁴⁹ SHC, A/AQM/5; A/ASW/1; Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830).

⁵⁰ SHC, A/AWT/1; *Pigot Dir.* (1842).

⁵¹ SHC, A/AQM/5; *Taunton Courier*, 26 Aug. 1857, 20 Jan. 1864: BNA accessed 22 March 2019.

⁵² *Taunton Courier*, 24 Apr. 1868: BNA, accessed 12 May 2022; below.

silk rather than the high quality Italian silk traditionally used in England.⁵³ In 1824 2,000 silk workers were said to be employed in an industry worth £150,000 a year, a fifth of the town's economy⁵⁴ but in 1826 there was a depression in the trade and a committee relieved c. 400 unemployed silk weavers. In four years employment in the silk industry fell by two thirds and many did not work full-time.⁵⁵

In 1830 the silk manufactory of Ingleby, Jones and Company in White Lion Court was run by John Jones of the company who had continued weaving until c. 1826 when he changed to throwing claiming that home weaving had virtually died out. By 1833 he considered competition from Manchester and London was eroding Taunton's advantage of very cheap labour. He employed up to 150 workers, three quarters female and half under 15. They were paid on Friday afternoon.⁵⁶ In 1838 when the factory was run by George Jones production was suspended and nearly 200 workers were laid off but most were said to have found employment in the other silk mills. By 1841 the mill was rented by William Rawlinson and thereafter run with the Tancred Street mill.⁵⁷

Ingleby, Jones and Company had a throwing mill in Tancred Street, which they let before 1816 to George Rawlinson who sold the silk yarn to Messrs Pearsall and Green in London, suppliers to the Spitalfields weavers. When James Pearsall (d. 1846) retired c. 1839 the business was continued by Henry Hextall who formed a partnership with Rawlinson known as James Pearsall and Company.⁵⁸ By 1830 Rawlinson ran the mill, sited at the east

⁵³ SHC, A/AWT/1; DD/SAS/TN/54; Toulmin, *History of Taunton*, rev. J. Savage (Taunton, 1822), 382; Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830); VCH Som. II, 422—3; below, this section.

⁵⁴ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/9/7.

⁵⁵ *Bath Chronicle*, 1 June 1826, *Dorset County Chronicle*, 6 May 1830 (report on Taunton): BNA accessed 3 June 2021.

⁵⁶ Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Royal Com. on employment of children in factories* (1833), 72.

⁵⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.ja/13/1/8; D/B/ta/13/1/1; *Taunton Courier* 28 Nov 1838: BNA accessed 12 May 2022; below, this section.

⁵⁸ SHC, A/AWT/1; *Globe*, 26 June 1839; *Nonconformist*, 26 Aug. 1846: BNA accessed 12 May 2022.

end of Concord Place, off Tancred Street, as a bobbin net or lace factory.⁵⁹ After John Ingelby's death the Tancred Street silk mills were sold in 1839 under a Chancery court order and bought by George Rawlinson. The three-storey mill was 100 ft by 24 ft with a parallel building to the east, large winding room with loft above, carpenter's shop, engine house, offices, foreman's house and stables. The eight h.p. engine had two boilers and an 80 ft chimney.⁶⁰

After George Rawlinson's death the company was split between the Taunton mills run by his son William and the London business managed by his brother⁶¹ William expanded the business taking over the mill in White Lion Court before 1841 and he owned many houses in Tancred Street.⁶² He employed 448 people by 1861 and 565 by 1871.⁶³ He supplied silk for embroidery, fringes, knitting, netting and scarves to the London shop and wholesale business. The firm was noted until the mid 20th century for its unfading dyed embroidery silks produced and exhibited since at least 1851.⁶⁴ In 1874 Rawlinson took on William Summerfield to manage the business for a salary, a share of the profits and the opportunity to buy the business after seven years.⁶⁵ He also expanded the Tancred Street factory by purchasing a large two-storey timber workshop from the Saracen's Head yard in 1877.⁶⁶ In 1881 he retired and the business was taken over under the 1874 agreement by William Summerfield as part of the partnership of Messrs Stanway and Summerfield who insured a stock of silk and lace and the premises in White Lion Court.⁶⁷ By 1890 they were

⁵⁹ *Pigot Dir.* (1830); SHC, DD/SAS/C/2550/12.

⁶⁰ *Som. Co. Gaz.* 1 June 1839; BNA accessed 22 Mar. 2018; SHC, D/B/ta/13/1/1.

⁶¹ SHC, A/AWT/1.

⁶² SHC, D/P/tau.ja/4/3/1; D/B/ta/13/1/1.

⁶³ SHC, A/AWT/1; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—2, 2074—5.

⁶⁴ SHC, A/AWT/1; *Taunton Courier* 1 July 1908; BNA accessed 12 May 2022.

⁶⁵ SHC, DD/KIT/7/13.

⁶⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/11/383.

⁶⁷ *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 233; SHC, A/ADR, box 4 (insurance book); *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883, 1889).

the only silk throwsters left in Taunton.⁶⁸ In 1903 the business was taken over by two employees Messrs Calway and Drillien who extended the three-storey silk thread factory into court 1 in East Street with three floors of gas-powered reeling rooms. Their two factories were valued at £8,000 in 1910.⁶⁹ In 1926 the firm was re-united with the London business as James Pearsall and Company Ltd, which bought the buildings, plant, debts and contracts for £41,000.⁷⁰ In 1910 the three-storey White Lion Court factory consisted of winding and silk throwing rooms on the ground floor, winding, stock, drying and staff rooms on the first floor and winding, tramming, drawing, doubling and weighing rooms on the top floor.⁷¹ The Tancred Street throwing mill had a four-storey building with engine house and a mill room extension with shed for hand twisting. The first and second floors comprised winding and weighing rooms and the top floor was used for storage. There was a reservoir behind the mill.⁷² The factory was updated and in 1928 the company sold its 1810 beam engine to Henry Ford's museum in the USA and built a second block on its East Street site for finishing and washing silk adding new machine rooms in 1929. It was still called the new mill in the 1960s.⁷³

In the 1950s the company had a 125-machine yarn spinning factory called Eastgate House, built c. 1938 on the site of Sibley's drapery store at 4—6 Eastgate and 1—3 Harmony Row, Tancred Street, employing c. 120 people on piecework mostly women living locally. It closed in 1966—7 and the site was redeveloped for retail use.⁷⁴ In 1953 Pearsall's supplied silk for the Coronation and cordage for the British Antarctic Expedition. By 1959 the company was part of the Bridport, from 1964 Bridport Gundry, group of net

⁶⁸ *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 233.

⁶⁹ SHC, DD/KIT/12/165; DD/IR/T/26/1, pp. 1—2, 10.

⁷⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/28/1811; TNA, IR 58/82593 (1); DD/KIT/12/16; A/AWT/1; A/ADR, box 4 (ins. bk).

⁷¹ TNA, IR 58/82593 (1).

⁷² TNA, IR 58/82594 (186).

⁷³ SHC, D/RA/9/21; D/B/ta/24/1/69/1361, 24/1/71/1420, 24/1/178/10567.

⁷⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/47/728; D/P/wilt/23/41; A/AWT/1; A/DIF/116/217; D/B/ta/24/1/178/10657.

manufacturers. The factory produced specialist yarns for upholstery, embroidery, knitting and crochet and fishing. They took over the collar factory in Augustine Street for the manufacture of surgical sutures, originally made of silk, and by 1967 it was the largest supplier of sutures outside America producing 50 million yards that year.⁷⁵ In 1964 the company designed a large new building originally intended to be added east of their Tancred Street mill but in 1965 they bought adjoining land on Duke Street and in 1967 built a new braiding factory capable of processing 1,500,000 lb. of yarn a year. All production was thereafter on a single site.⁷⁶ The factory concentrated on surgical sutures but also industrial sewing thread, high-strength braiding for parachute lines and nets for fishing and lifting pallets. Rayon was the main yarn but silk was still thrown, some on traditional machines. However, only 200 people were needed to wind silk compared with up to 600 in the 1920s and very few people were needed to operate the modern fibre and netting machinery.⁷⁷ Pearsall's had a turnover of £0.75 million and a wage bill of £120,000 in 1967.⁷⁸ In c. 1973 they described themselves as throwsters, dyers and braiders of pure silk, rayon, nylon, polyester and polypropylene and had vacancies for machine operatives.⁷⁹ In 1983 they still employed up to 200 people but specialised in sutures, medical textiles and industrial braids, which remained the core of their business in 2021.⁸⁰

The silk industry in Taunton declined in the face of overseas competition and the loss of the American market in the civil war resulting in several factories lying idle in 1864.⁸¹ Most silk mills were converted in the later 19th century to shirt and collar factories. That was made easier by the fact that by 1866 only one mill was still throwing the rest had

⁷⁵ SHC, A/AWT/1.

⁷⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/157/9616.1, 24/1/159/9716; D/DC/tau.d/25/7 (1601); A/AWT/1.

⁷⁷ SHC, A/AWT/1—2.

⁷⁸ SHC, A/AWT/1.

⁷⁹ SHC, PAM 1535, *Taunton official guide* [1973].

⁸⁰ *Som. Business Dir.* (1983), 92.

⁸¹ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 4.

turned to manufacturing silk goods.⁸² By 1883 there were only two silk businesses and four making collars and cuffs. The number of Taunton silk workers fell to 346 in 1881 and averaged *c.* 300 from 1891—1911.⁸³

LACE AND NET

In 1831 54 men were making silk lace in St Mary's parish but no figure was given for women.⁸⁴ William Charles Cox had established a bobbin net factory adjoining his foundry in Foundry Square off Tancred Street *c.* 1825 in partnership with a Mr Winter employing *c.* 100 hands. It was powered by an 18 h.p. engine, which ran continuously and in 1833 hands in shifts worked 18 hours a day.⁸⁵ He may have let the factory to James Dollin by 1843 and then to Thomas Sutton for a while before the latter returned to Macclesfield but the factory seems to have been given up *c.* 1844 when Cox sold the premises. It formed part of the foundry by 1875.⁸⁶ George Rawlinson also ran a bobbin net factory at Tancred Street until 1842 and it was presumably absorbed into the site of his thread business.⁸⁷ In 1841 there were 11 lace workers in Taunton, mainly men so presumably working on machines and 14 lace and two net workers in 1851.⁸⁸ A court off Tancred Street was called Lace Factory Court in the later 19th century.⁸⁹

Honiton lace was produced by Elizabeth Sansome in Bridge Street, North Town in 1859. By 1864 she had been succeeded by Jane Coombes who employed up to nine lace

⁸² *PO Dir. Som.* (1861, 1866).

⁸³ TNA, RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7; RG13/2276—8; RG14/14234—40, 14242—5, 14247, 14249.

⁸⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/16.

⁸⁵ *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Royal Com. on employment of children in factories* (1833), 72—5.

⁸⁶ SHC, Q/SR/529/60; D/N/tau.n/3/2/1; DD/CH/22; DD/SAS/2016/48.

⁸⁷ *Pigot Dir.* (1830); *Robson's Dir. Som.* (1839); *Pigot Dir.* (1842).

⁸⁸ SHC, Q/SR/529/60; TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3.

⁸⁹ TNA, RG9/1617; RG12/1877; SHC, D/P/tau.ja/23/17.

makers until 1883 or later.⁹⁰ It was presumably the lace factory employing several people in 1891.⁹¹ The art college taught Honiton style lace making from 1902 until the 1920s.⁹²

OTHER TEXTILES

Most linen was imported but some was woven locally and in 1620 a man sued for payment for making up and supplying many dozens of plain and laced shirt bands and whitework.⁹³

A girl was apprenticed to spin linen thread in the late 17th century.⁹⁴ There are references to flax dressing in 1841 and a flax factory in 1861.⁹⁵ Between 1871 and 1891 there was a small horsehair business probably in William Street in Rowbarton and two horsehair dealers.⁹⁶ In 1894 a horsehair manufacturer was based in East Reach.⁹⁷ Presumably they were supplying the furniture manufacturers.

COLLAR AND SHIRT

As the silk industry declined, mills turned to starched collar and cuff making, usually of linen but later of cotton, employing large numbers of female machinists and others in an area of low wages and familiarity with textile work. Although local craftsmen continued to make bespoke shirts and collars there was an increasing demand for more affordable clothing especially as fashions changed and working men as well as professional and clerical workers wanted stiff collars and cuffs that were difficult to make at home. The industry grew quickly from c. 20 employees in 1871 to 291 in 1881 and 715 in 1891.⁹⁸ By

⁹⁰ Harrison, Harrad and Co., *Dir. Som.* (1859); *PO Dir. Som.* (1861); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1864), 23; TNA, RG10/2370—2, 2374—5; RG12/1875—7; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883).

⁹¹ TNA, RG 12/1875—7.

⁹² SHC, PAM 2443; TNA, ED 114/804; below, soc. hist., educ.

⁹³ SHC, DD/SP/63 (1620).

⁹⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m/13/6/1.

⁹⁵ TNA, HO107/972; RG9/1618.

⁹⁶ TNA, RG10/2370—2, 2374—5; RG12/1875.

⁹⁷ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1894).

⁹⁸ TNA, RG10/2370—2, 2374—5; RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7.

1883 there were four factories and at least six by 1887.⁹⁹ In 1901 over 1,200 shirt, collar and blouse workers were resident in Taunton, mostly women and over 1,750 by 1911.¹⁰⁰ In the early 20th century production switched to unstarched, semi-stiff collars and later to shirts with attached collars and some factories also produced women's blouses, nightwear and underwear. By 1939 the textile and clothing industries employed c. 2,000 insured workers in Taunton although numbers fell during the war years. Four factories employed c. 975 workers in the 1950s and in 1961 six factories employed c. 1,700 mainly women making it Taunton's largest manufacturing industry.¹⁰¹ The industry also used outworkers and in 1952 411 clothing outworkers were subject to inspection under the Public Health Acts falling to 100 by 1972.¹⁰²

In the late 1870s Pool Wall Mill was converted to a shirt and collar factory and by 1882 was run by McIntyre, Hogg and Company also known as the Cheddar Valley and later Taunton Manufacturing Company and also made shirts and ladies underwear.¹⁰³ Before 1883 Wheeler and Wilson established a collar factory in High Street presumably adjoining Pool Wall mill. It was taken over by McIntyre, Hogg and Company and presumably used to expand their premises.¹⁰⁴ A five-storey, seven-bay wing was built north-east of the original north-south range. A detailed inventory of the machinery in 1885 shows that virtually all processes were mechanised with power provided by a beam engine and Cornish boiler and to the laundries by a horizontal steam engine. The old and new factories were linked by a stair tower topped by a cistern and containing goods lifts, firefighting equipment and clocking-in apparatus. The washhouses, equipped with washing, wringing, starching and blueing machines, occupied the ground level with offices and packing rooms, the laundries

⁹⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883); *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1887).

¹⁰⁰ TNA, RG13/2276—8; TNA, RG14/14234—40, 14242—5, 14247, 14249.

¹⁰¹ SHC, D/DC/tau.d: T. Sharp, *A Plan for Taunton*, 16; D/P/wilt/23/41; A/AWT /1.

¹⁰² SHC, D/B/ta/4/22/1 (1952, 1972).

¹⁰³ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883); SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/18/729.

¹⁰⁴ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883).

for ironing, polishing and curling collars, occupied the first floors, sewing rooms were on the second floors and the top floors housed cutting and mechanics rooms, the print works and a box-making room. The factory was supplied with a refectory, hot water, and drinking water and sanitary facilities throughout the buildings, which were lit by gas and had speaking tubes and electric bells for communications.¹⁰⁵

By 1890 the factory employed nearly 800 people making shirts, collars, cuffs and blouses for men and women.¹⁰⁶ Further additions in the 1890s including a new engine and boiler house took the buildings up to the Temple Methodist school which caused friction with that congregation.¹⁰⁷ In 1899 c. 500 employees were photographed on the front and balcony of the two-storey extension.¹⁰⁸ In 1904 additional land was bought and in 1910 the brick-built factory comprised engine room, refectory, laundry and packing room and offices on the ground floor, shirt making on the first floor, collar making and buttonholing on the second floor, box, collar and shirt cutting on the third floor and stockroom and box making on the top floor.¹⁰⁹ It was later extended to Upper High Street. The company, then known as Radiac, employed c. 350 workers in the 1950s, mostly women on piecework.¹¹⁰ By 1958 there were difficulties obtaining workers and the factory closed and was demolished to make way for government offices.¹¹¹

From 1873 the South Street silk mill was a cotton and linen collar factory run by W. B. Newland of Ilminster and renamed Alma Street Works employing 330 hands. In 1875 part was sublet to collar manufacturer Richard Moody, who later moved to Viney Street and

¹⁰⁵ SHC, DD/LK/3/1.

¹⁰⁶ *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 234; E. Jeboult, *A Popular History of West Somerset* (1893), appendix 1885.

¹⁰⁷ SHC, D/N/tmc/4/2/27, p. 181—3, 228—9, 237; D/B/ta/4/3/2 (1896).

¹⁰⁸ N. Chipchase, *Taunton Revisited* (Stroud, 1998), 30.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, IR 58/82637 (619—20).

¹¹⁰ SHC, D/R/ta/34/9/3; D/P/wilt/23/41.

¹¹¹ *Taunton Courier*, 31 May 1958; BNA accessed 22 March 2019; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/132/7560, 7589, 24/1/133/7570.

his share, the upper floors of the north wing, were let to Charles Potter. Both tenants shared the chimney but having died by 1880 their executors assigned both leases to Macintyre and Hogg.¹¹² They sublet the factory and between 1880 and 1889 it was run by Edwards and Cony one of whose partners was Edward Josephs, a partner in the collar works at Tangier in Bishops Hull.¹¹³ By 1889 it was run by Samuel White and Henry Van Trump as the Somerset Manufacturing Company employing 500—600 workers, mainly female, making shirts, collars and cuffs for the wholesale market.¹¹⁴ They doubled the size of the cutting room in 1906.¹¹⁵ In 1941 part of factory was rented by Frederick Theak who made bow ties and waistcoats.¹¹⁶ In the 1950s Somerset Manufacturing employed c. 150 women and 50 men making collars, shirts and nurses' uniforms.¹¹⁷ From 1966 they became one business but still known in the 1970s as Frederick Theak and Company Ltd and Somerset Manufacturing Company Ltd making ties, cummerbunds and waistcoats using machinists, handworkers and outworkers.¹¹⁸ In 1998 the business moved to Ilminster and closed shortly afterwards. The South Street factory was demolished for housing development in 1998—9.¹¹⁹

A collar factory was built in Viney Street by Charles Samson for London merchant and manufacturer Richard Mullins Moody c. 1881 and later extended to Princes Street. He died in 1893 but his company, also known until 1894 or later as the West of England Collar Manufactory, continued.¹²⁰ The company enlarged the factory with a block to the north and installed a glass roof over the former courtyard. In 1910 Moody's Viney Street two-storey

¹¹² SHC, A/AQM/5; DD/BR/lw/1; J Cook, *Report of Several Cases* (Taunton, 1895), 57.

¹¹³ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883); SHC, DD/KIT/8/9; D/P/tau.ja/23/17; Bishops Hull, econ. hist.

¹¹⁴ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889); *Industrial Great Britain* (c. 1890), 233; SHC, A/AQM/5.

¹¹⁵ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/36/387.

¹¹⁶ SHC, A/AQM/5.

¹¹⁷ SHC, D/P/wilt/23/41.

¹¹⁸ SHC, PAM 1535, *Taunton official guide* {1973}.

¹¹⁹ SHC, A/AQM/5.

¹²⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/14/508; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883—94); *PO Dir. London* (1885, 1890). Moody was born in Evercreech but lived all his adult life near London: TNA, RG11/712/10; *Nat. Prob. Dir.*

factory comprised turning, stamping, pacing and ironing rooms and laundry on the ground floor and sewing and button holing machines on the first floor.¹²¹ In 1922 part of the factory passed to John Manning Van Heusen, an American whose company specialised in semi-stiff white and coloured collars until 1971 and shirts from the late 1920s.¹²² He came to Taunton with the financial backing of Harding and Tilton of Boston and remained until 1927 but in 1923 Harold Hartley was appointed as general manager. In 1928 the company purchased the entire Viney Street factory and its equipment and became known as Harding, Tilton and Hartley but used Van Heusen as its brand name.¹²³ In 1936 most of the factory was still single storey and the ground floor was occupied by the large collar machine room and laundry surrounded by tape-weaving, packing and store rooms. The two storey east block was devoted to shirt cutting, machining and packing.¹²⁴ In 1938 new workers were paid 15s. for 43 ¾ hours a week.¹²⁵

After the war branch factories were built throughout west Somerset and in St Austell, Cornwall. In 1952 the company became the British Van Heusen Company and in 1956 opened a corporate office in Saville Row, London.¹²⁶ By then the Taunton factory employed 400 workers of whom 85 per cent were young women and produced over six million collars a year, many for export to Europe, Africa and the Far East. They were made from cloth woven with a curve and then singed to provide a smooth, polished surface, which took on a gloss when ironed. The collars were stamped with the brand name, trimmed and taped, buttonholed and trimmed, all by machine, before being laundered, folded and boxed. In 1971 collar making was replaced by the production of shirts with integral collars.¹²⁷

¹²¹ TNA, 58/82646 (1539).

¹²² *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914); SHC, D/R/ta/34/9/3; A/BMG/5/1; A/EQW/1/3, p. 5.

¹²³ SHC, A/EQW/1/3, pp. 8, 12, 30.

¹²⁴ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/99/2291A.

¹²⁵ *Taunton Courier* 19 March 1938; BNA accessed 12 May 2022.

¹²⁶ SHC, A/EQW/1/3, pp. 16, 18.

¹²⁷ SHC, D/P/wilt/23/41; W. Hordle, 'The Manufacture of the Van Heusen Collar', *Journal SIAS* (1977) 40—2. Mr Hordle worked at the factory from 1918 to 1968 by which time he was production manager.

The factory and offices were extended in the late 1920s and 1930s replacing adjoining houses. A new block built east of Princes Street was linked to the main factory by a bridge over the road, since removed.¹²⁸ A new factory was built covering the entire block between Viney, Victoria, Lower Queen and Princes Street in 1961 and the original factory was demolished to create a large courtyard.¹²⁹ By the 1960s 740 people were employed in the Taunton factory, mostly local women but although shirts were exported the company licensed factories around the world to make their shirts and established premises in Northern Ireland.¹³⁰ The Taunton factory employed fewer than 200 people in 1983 and only 130 when it closed in 1990 with the company's other Somerset factories. The building survived and became home to several businesses.¹³¹

The Excelsior Shirt and Collar Works was begun before 1885 by Alfred Kirk Cook (d. 1926) who had worked for McIntyre and Hogg and piano dealer Clement Smith who employed 75 machinists making collars.¹³² The factory occupied the site of a house called The Mount abutting the back of the Original Infant School. New drying and ironing rooms were provided that year and a new cutting room in 1887.¹³³ The factory was run by Alfred Cook and Company but using the Excelsior brand name.¹³⁴ They suffered a fire in 1890 when c. £1,500 of stock was destroyed but by 1893 were patenting shirt starching and upright washing machines.¹³⁵ They also had premises in Canon Street in 1894, probably for

¹²⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/71/1440, 1448, 1460; 24/1/79/1654—5; 24/1/85/1831; 24/1/98/2204.

¹²⁹ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/140/8367.

¹³⁰ SHC, A/EQW/1/3, pp. 26—30; DD/CWC.bw/31; *Taunton Courier*, 29 Feb. 1964: BNA, accessed 8 June 2022.

¹³¹ SHC, PAM 1535; D/B/ta/4/3/4 (1936); *Som. Business Dir.* (1983), 94; *Bridgwater Journal*, 24 Mar. 1990: BNA, accessed 8 June 2022.

¹³² *Taunton Courier*, 29 Feb. 1964: BNA, accessed 8 June 2022; TNA, RG10/2370—2, 2374—5; RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7.

¹³³ SHC, tithe award St Mary; D/B/ta/24/1/20/804; D/B/ta/24/1/21/882; DD/CWC/bw/31; *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1887).

¹³⁴ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889—99); TNA, RG12/1875.

¹³⁵ *Taunton Courier*, 17 Sep. 1890; *Chard and Ilminster News*, 19 Aug. 1893: BNA, accessed 20 June 2022.

collar dressing and works in Ilminster.¹³⁶ In 1910 the Mount Street factory had a vertical boiler and 12 h.p. engine, machine shop, offices and box cutting room downstairs and a room with 40 shirt machines, box store and stockrooms upstairs but was in poor repair. Its laundry and drying rooms were in an iron building with a collar machine room above, and another iron building housed the cutting room and cloth store.¹³⁷ The company had a large export business, which was damaged by the war and the company went bankrupt in 1922 and in 1929 its assets were liquidated and the factory was sold.¹³⁸ By 1931 it was used as a furniture store and showroom and as a saleroom.¹³⁹ In the 1960s part of the site was occupied by Deane Manufacturing.¹⁴⁰ The main building was a second hand furniture warehouse in the late 20th century but was destroyed in a fire and replaced by Phoenix Court apartment block.

The St James Street collar works in the former vicarage opposite the church was run by a Mr Goldsmith in 1887 as The Priory Manufacturing Company. It was demolished after a major fire in 1889 to make way for the electricity generating works.¹⁴¹ McIntyre, Hogg and Company continued the business on the other side of the street, probably in the former Priory Gate foundry near the cricket ground until 1929 or later.¹⁴²

In the late 1890s a new shirt and collar factory was built in St Augustine Street, probably designed by A. B. Cottam in late Victorian Renaissance style, for the Tone Vale Clothing, later Manufacturing, Company, whose proprietor was Henry Van Trump (d. 1925) who had started in South Street. He ran a furniture business in Taunton and a factory in

¹³⁶ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1887); *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1894); *Taunton Courier*, 27 Jan. 1926: BNA, accessed 20 June 2022.

¹³⁷ TNA, IR 58/82634 (368).

¹³⁸ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914); *Taunton Courier*, 31 May 1922, 27 Jan. 1926: BNA, accessed 20 June 2022; SHC, D/R/ta/34/9/3; D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 385; DD/CWC/bw/31.

¹³⁹ SHC, DD/CWC/bw/31; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 92.

¹⁴⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/150/9176.

¹⁴¹ *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1887); *Taunton Courier*, 6 March 1889: BNA, accessed 7 July 2021.

¹⁴² *Goodman's Dir. Taunton* (1902--3), 202; SHC, A/ATZ/1 (1905); D/B/ta/13/3/1, p. 385; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 73.

Bridgwater as well as serving four times as Mayor of Taunton and was one of the few freemen of the borough.¹⁴³ The washing, starching room and engine rooms were on the ground floor, the machining and turning room occupied the first floor and the second floor was for ironing and polishing.¹⁴⁴ In 1931 the company changed its name to Kolar Makers Ltd. Although most employees were women supervisory and senior positions were held by men as they were in similar factories.¹⁴⁵ After 1961 the factory closed and was taken over by Pearsalls and later by Barnicotts.¹⁴⁶ The main red brick and slate, three-storey 12 bay range with an eastern extension building survived in a derelict state but was restored in 2022.

Thomas Besaut, manager of the St Augustine Street factory, started the West of England Clothing Company and by 1901 produced coats and other items in a factory at Victoria Gate. During the First World War it produced clothing for soldiers but in 1920 went into voluntary liquidation and sold its 26 sewing machines and other machinery.¹⁴⁷ It became an electric motor workshop and later a second hand furniture store but was disused in 2020. The General Textile Manufacturing Co built a two-storey factory in Peter Street in 1920 and extended it in 1922 and 1924 for laundry and ironing rooms¹⁴⁸ but it closed after 1927 and was converted into flats and a bungalow in 1932.¹⁴⁹

In 1919 the Taunton Manufacturing Company of Pool Wall Mills acquired the former Rowbarton woollen factory, recently used as a cake factory, and warehouse but gave

¹⁴³ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* 1914; TNA, IR 58/82603 (1071); obituary in *Taunton Courier* 11 Nov. 1925: BNA accessed 4 May 2022.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, IR 58/82603 (1071).

¹⁴⁵ SHC, A/BKN/6/1.

¹⁴⁶ SHC, A/APN/2/6; SWHT, Som. HER 16754.

¹⁴⁷ TNA, 58/82646 (1539); *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914); *Taunton Courier*, 3 Feb. 1915, 29 Dec. 1920, 31 Jul. 1943: BNA accessed 25 May 2021.

¹⁴⁸ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/50/798, 24/1/53/893, 24/1/57/008; D/R/ta/34/9/3.

¹⁴⁹ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1927); SHC, D/B/ta/4/3/4 (1932); D/B/ta/78/1633—4.

it up soon after and it became a carrier's depot.¹⁵⁰ From 1940 it was taken by Steel and Glover, manufacturers of shirts, collars and pyjamas. The old factory was destroyed by fire in 1956 and rebuilt in 1956—7 with two extra floors. They also had an annexe across the street, formerly a cloth then furniture warehouse damaged by fire in 1945.¹⁵¹ After rebuilding the factory the company employed 45—50 young women making shirts on piecework using Manchester cotton fabric.¹⁵² By 1960 they had 160 employees and opened a new warehouse at Priorswood to extend production but sold it in 1964.¹⁵³ As Steel and Glover (Taunton) they had a subsidiary factory in Belfast but in 1968 they were taken over by.¹⁵⁴ Mr Harry Menswear Ltd and by 1978 by Luvisca.¹⁵⁵ It became a co-operative known as the Taunton Shirt Co-operative in 1983 but employed fewer than 50 people and closed shortly after.¹⁵⁶ The building now called Hi Point survives.

OTHER CLOTHING

A tailor was in the borough court in 1289—90 and another was a taxpayer in 1327¹⁵⁷ and tailors had stalls in the market paying 13s. 1d. in tolls from the 14th to 18th centuries.¹⁵⁸ A vestment maker was recorded in 1472.¹⁵⁹ In 1589 a tailor could pay £8 to be discharged from militia service.¹⁶⁰ A Taunton tailor was said in 1607 to have invented the ruff.¹⁶¹ A

¹⁵⁰ SHC, DD/AY 328/1—14; D/R/ta/34/9/3, pp. 51, 386; D/B/ta/24/1/122/5396; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1923—31).

¹⁵¹ SHC, A/DIE/116/225; D/B/ta/24/1/122/5396; D/DC/tau.d unlisted box 17, 1943—5 (June 1945); *Taunton Courier*, 25 Feb. 1956; BNA accessed 16 July 2021; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1957), 135.

¹⁵² SHC, D/P/wilt/23/41.

¹⁵³ SHC, R.P. Elliott, 'Taunton: an urban study', TS Durham BA geog. dissertation c. 1966, 19.

¹⁵⁴ *Taunton Courier*, 18 Apr. 1959, 10 Dec. 1960; *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 Feb. 1968; BNA accessed 16 July 2021; SHC, A/AWT/1.

¹⁵⁵ *Taunton Courier*, 18 Apr. 1959, 10 Dec. 1960; *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 Feb. 1968; BNA accessed 16 July 2021; SHC, A/AWT/1; A/APN/2/6; D/PC/stapg/7/3; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).

¹⁵⁶ *Som. Business Dir.* (1983), 94.

¹⁵⁷ SHC, T/PH/win 1289—90; F. Dickinson, *Kirbys Quest etc* (SRS 3), 274.

¹⁵⁸ SHC, T/PH/win 1334—5, 1454—5, 1505—6, 1544—5; DD/MT/1/39, 17/36..

¹⁵⁹ TNA, CP40/841/777: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

¹⁶⁰ *Acts PC* 1588—9, p. 387.

¹⁶¹ Gough, ed. *Camden Britannia*, I, 96.

tailor and his journeyman had a stall and shop by the high cross in 1608 and in 1628 a family tailoring workshop was recorded employing a resident journeyman.¹⁶² A wealthy tailor in 1644 had invested a great deal of money in leaseholds and lending but still worked with serge in his shop.¹⁶³ Pauper children were commonly apprenticed to tailors in the 17th and 18th centuries.¹⁶⁴ However, unqualified tailors were threatening trade by the late 17th century and in 1700 some tailors wanted a charter of incorporation but do not seem to have obtained one, probably because they were told it would cost at least £100.¹⁶⁵ There was an alehouse called the Tailors Arms by the early 18th century.¹⁶⁶ Twelve tailors were on the list of electors in 1774.¹⁶⁷ Some specialised in military and livery uniforms, possibly the reason for the survival of some serge making, or riding habits and others did alterations, cleaning and mending.¹⁶⁸ In the 1814 victory procession 77 tailors followed the cloth workers, in the 1820 poll 51 tailors were eligible to vote and in 1831 there were 74 tailors just in St Mary's parish.¹⁶⁹ From 1841 to 1891 there were usually between 150 and 190 including up to 30 women.¹⁷⁰ In 1901 134 men and 52 women were employed in tailoring but many of the women were probably machinists at the coat factory in Victoria Gate and many of the men specialised in cutting.¹⁷¹ One company invested in new cutting and fitting rooms in 1928¹⁷² but by mid century bespoke tailoring was a luxury service and only three local businesses survived in 1972. In 1970 John Collier, one of Taunton's last '50s. tailors', retired after 35 years.¹⁷³

¹⁶² SHC, D/D/Cd/40, 65.

¹⁶³ SHC, DD/SP/1644/56.

¹⁶⁴ SHC, D/P/tau.m 13/6/1.

¹⁶⁵ SHC, DD/SF/13/2/51.

¹⁶⁶ SHC, DD/SP/61/9.

¹⁶⁷ SHC, DD/HC/6/1/1.

¹⁶⁸ SHC, D/P/tau.m/23/3; TNA, IR1/66, p. 184.

¹⁶⁹ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (printed insert, 1814); D/P/tau.m/23/16.

¹⁷⁰ TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7.

¹⁷¹ TNA, RG13/2276—8.

¹⁷² SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/69/1363.

¹⁷³ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3, 424; SHC, D/P/tau.a/2/9/7 (1970).

There is very little record of dressmaking before the 19th century but in 1685 a tucker's wife working as a needlewoman was doing better than her husband and her boxes of lace were the most valuable items the couple possessed.¹⁷⁴ A widow in High Street sold tapestry in the 17th century and possibly made it.¹⁷⁵ During the 18th century several mantua makers and milliners took paying apprentices.¹⁷⁶ By the mid 19th century dressmaking and needlework employed an average of 350 women a year. Like tailors they varied from the very poor doing plain work to specialists making mantles or waistcoats or doing embroidery and prosperous employers with workers living in their home.¹⁷⁷ Needlewomen were also employed to line carriages and make curtains for cabinet makers and both dressmakers and milliners were employed by large drapery stores to make alterations and add extra trimmings for customers.¹⁷⁸ They probably helped to provide work for the four scissor grinders recorded in 1887 including three members of the Dawe family.¹⁷⁹ In 1900 there were dressmaking workshops in Mary Street and in 1904 a clothing business with workshop and fitting rooms in Station Road.¹⁸⁰ As late as 1911 373 dressmakers and needlewomen were living in Taunton.¹⁸¹

A capmaker was recorded in 1476.¹⁸² William Culverwell a shearman's son was a capper in 1540 and inherited his father's teasels, presumably used to raise the nap on his hats as they gave a fine soft finish.¹⁸³ A hatmaker owned property on North Street in 1564. However, a capper or haberdasher in debt to a London capper and a haberdasher in the

¹⁷⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1685/44.

¹⁷⁵ SHC, DD/SP/438, no. 66.

¹⁷⁶ TNA, IR1/41, p. 24; IR1/46, p. 137; IR1/48, pp. 2, 125, 142; IR1/49, p. 142; IR1/50, p. 271; IR1/61, p. 5; IR1/70, p. 91.

¹⁷⁷ TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7.

¹⁷⁸ TNA, RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7; RG13/2276—8..

¹⁷⁹ *Goodman's Taunton Dir* (1887).

¹⁸⁰ SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/26/1710, 24/1/31/202.

¹⁸¹ TNA, RG14/14234—40, 14242—5, 14247, 14249.

¹⁸² TNA, E 326/6453.

¹⁸³ Siraut, *Som. Wills* (Som. Rec. Soc. 89), 81.

1570s were probably selling ready-made hats,¹⁸⁴ whereas a man described as a hatter or feltmaker in 1578 was presumably making his own.¹⁸⁵ Two hatters were recorded in 1774 and five in 1820 and several hat manufacturers were recorded until 1830.¹⁸⁶ In 1824 the men's hat trade was worth £6,000 a year and straw bonnets a further £1,000.¹⁸⁷ The latter were made in a former silk factory in Canon Street.¹⁸⁸ Very small numbers of hatters and cap makers, both male and female, were recorded especially after 1841. Changes in fashion are probably reflected in the decline in the numbers of bonnet makers, including straw bonnets, from 32 in 1851 to none in 1891.¹⁸⁹ In the 19th century there were a mix of retail and craft hatters and milliners, although before the mid 19th century milliners were not exclusively making headwear, but their numbers gradually declined from 121 in 1851 to 65 in 1891 and 70 in 1911.¹⁹⁰

Another by-product of the cloth industry was the making of hose and later of knitted stockings. Hosiers were recorded from 1280 and a man named Hosyer was a draper in 1425.¹⁹¹ A dispute in 1641 involved stockings and wooden legs presumably for shaping hose.¹⁹² Hosiers were recorded in the 17th and 18th centuries and in the 1740s they had standings in the market.¹⁹³ Jemima Bright was a hosiery manufacturer in East Street from the mid 1880s. By 1889 Florence Yandell was producing knitted stockings at Bridge Street and Mrs Hartnoll produced wool and silk knitted items on machines at her shop. They

¹⁸⁴ TNA, CP40/1295/1563; 1316/463d; 1354/228d: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021

¹⁸⁵ TNA, CP40/1354/2263: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021

¹⁸⁶ SHC, DD/HC/6/1/1; D/P/tau.m/23/29, Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); *Pigot Dir.* (1830);

¹⁸⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C795/BA/9/7 (1824).

¹⁸⁸ SHC, DD/SP/416.

¹⁸⁹ TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7.

¹⁹⁰ SHC, DD/SAS/C2402/63; DD/HLM/8; TNA, HO107/1922—3; RG12/1875—7; RG14/14234—40, 14242—5, 14247, 14249.

¹⁹¹ L. Landon, *Som. Pleas 1280* (SRS 44), pp. 214—5; TNA, CP40/618/2095d, 636/1433, 641/381, 656/1123: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

¹⁹² SHC, DD/SP/53 (Jan. 1641).

¹⁹³ E. H. Bates Harbin, *Quarter Sessions Records, 1607—1625* (Som. Rec. Soc. 23), p 42; TNA, PROB 11/209/260; PROB 11/242/538; SHC, D/P/tau.ja 13/5/2; D/B/ta/31/5/3.

probably employed the female hosiers and knitters recorded between 1891 and 1911.¹⁹⁴

Florence's sister Ada Billet carried on the Bridge Street business assisted by Edith Yandell (d. 1922), presumably a relation, who took over the hosiery manufactory followed by Bessie Yandell until 1939 or later. The premises were still known as Yandell's wool shop in 1954.¹⁹⁵ Fleming, Reid and Company were manufacturing hosiers in North Street from 1914 to 1957 and a firm was producing machine knitted womenswear in Bridge Street c. 1983.¹⁹⁶

Staymakers were recorded in the 18th and 19th centuries at first mostly male.¹⁹⁷

However, by the 1720s they were taking mainly female apprentices and by the 19th century it had become a female occupation. Changing fashion and the availability of mass produced corsets probably accounted for the fall in numbers from 24 in 1851 to four in 1891.¹⁹⁸ A crinoline manufacturer was recorded in 1866.¹⁹⁹ Three corset makers were in business in 1972.²⁰⁰

From the 1950s to 1990s there was a small garment and toy factory at the former brewery site in Middle Street.²⁰¹ In the 1940s the Deane Manufacturing Company occupied a factory behind the Clements and Brown store with adjoining former almshouses, the Squirrel inn and 10 Church Square in Magdalene Lane.²⁰² They remained until 1963 when they took over the collar works at The Mount.²⁰³ Wessex or Tone Textiles produced overalls at 9 Magdalene Lane by 1957 before moving to Tangier c. 1967. The site of both

¹⁹⁴ *Where to Buy: Taunton* (1890), 39, 43; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1889—1906); TNA, RG12/1875, 1877; RG13/2276—8; RG14/14234—40, 14242—5, 14247, 14249.

¹⁹⁵ TNA, RG14/14237/310; *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914—39); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 9; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 376.

¹⁹⁶ *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1914, 1927); *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1929), 63; *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 376; *Som. Business Dir.* (1983), 62.

¹⁹⁷ SHC, Q/SR/306/24; DD/HC/6/1/1; D/P/tau.m/13/3/5, 23/29; *The Universal British Directory* (c. 1798), IV, 587—9.

¹⁹⁸ TNA, IR 1/48, p. 88; IR 1/467, pp. 113, 162; Pigot, *London and Provincial Dir.* (1822—3); TNA, HO107/972, 1922—3; RG9/1617—18; RG10/2370—5; RG11/2366—8; RG12/1875—7.

¹⁹⁹ *PO Dir. Som.* (1866).

²⁰⁰ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1972—3).

²⁰¹ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 89; SHC, D/B/ta/unlisted (factory inspection cards); A/BUG/5/3/1.

²⁰² SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/112/4003

²⁰³ *Kelly's Dir. Taunton* (1957), 26, 84; SHC, A/APN/2/6; D/B/ta/24/1/150/9176, 24/1/153/9337.

Magdalene Lane factories was cleared to provide loading bays for the large Fore Street stores.²⁰⁴

Another industry related to clothing was starch production, restricted in times of dearth and often the subject of monopolies. A Taunton man was accused of resisting a search for unlawful starch in the 1590s.²⁰⁵ The White family were starch manufacturers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and still had starch houses off East Reach in 1855 but by then had turned to malting by 1840 and later brewing.²⁰⁶ William French had a starch factory in Tancred Street in the mid 19th century but despite the production of starched collars by the late 19th century starch had ceased to be made locally and French's factory became part of his tannery.²⁰⁷ A furrier was recorded in 1578²⁰⁸ and a few furriers or fur manufacturers between 1841 and 1872.²⁰⁹ A retail and manufacturing furrier was in business in 1972.²¹⁰

Rope and Twine

In c. 1420 Henry Roper supplied cable for a crane at Dunster castle and in the 1440s a 30-lb. hemp sling and two others for the Bridgwater crane.²¹¹ Other ropers were recorded in the 15th and early 16th centuries²¹² and one took an employee from Bruton for 11 years.²¹³ A barber was a netmaker in 1731 working with cord and twine in his barber's shop presumably between customers.²¹⁴ A rope market was part of the market place by 1769 and

²⁰⁴ Kelly's *Dir. Taunton* (1957), 26, 84; Bishops Hull, econ. hist.; SHC, D/B/ta/24/1/191/10936.

²⁰⁵ *Acts PC*, 1595—6, p. 197; *Cal. S.P. Dom.* 1598—1601, 521.

²⁰⁶ SHC, DD/SP/416.

²⁰⁷ SHC, DD/SAS/C212/13/1, p. 79; *Slater's Dir. Som.* (1852); TNA, HO 107/1923; RG 9/1617.

²⁰⁸ TNA, CP40/1354/258: www.waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021

²⁰⁹ TNA, HO107/972, *Pigot Dir.* (1842); Morris and Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872).

²¹⁰ Kelly's *Dir. Taunton* (1972—3), 392.

²¹¹ SHC, DD/L/P4/26/4 (1419—21); T.B. Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Records* (Som. Rec. Soc. 58), 188; T.B. Dilks, *Bridgwater Borough Records* (Som. Rec. Soc. 60), 62.

²¹² TNA, CP40/692/561; CP40/1005, image 1037d: at waalt.uh.edu/index.php/CP40 accessed May 2021.

²¹³ TNA, C/478/9.

²¹⁴ SHC, DD/SP/1731/26.

a ropemaker's wife in Shuttern identified cord used in a robbery as sold by her.²¹⁵ In the early 19th century ropers had stalls in the eastern arcade by the Market House with the butchers.²¹⁶ A ropemaker and twine spinner had a warehouse and a market stall in 1816 and a female roper also sold her produce on the market where there were five ropers' stalls in 1843.²¹⁷ Ropers worked in the town in the 1850s and 1860s possibly in East Reach where a rope and twine manufactory was still at work until 1914 or later.²¹⁸ In 1888 there was a ropewalk at the South Street brickworks.²¹⁹

²¹⁵ SHC, DD/DP/44/7; DD/HC/96/8.

²¹⁶ SHC, D/B/ta/31/1/2, pp. 307, 326.

²¹⁷ SHC, D/P/tau.m/9/1/5, 13/3/10; D/B/ta/31/1/4, p. 317.

²¹⁸ TNA, HO 107/1922—3; RG9/1617—18; Morris and Co. *Dir. Som.* (1872); *Kelly's Dir. Som.* (1883, 1914).

²¹⁹ OS Map 1:500, SOM. LXX. 12.18 (1888).