

What it was like to work in the mills ?

Working in the mills was often long and hard and often dangerous. For this reason many handloom weavers refused to work in the mills preferring to work from home.

Workers would have started work at 6am and finished at 6 pm with an hour for breakfast in the morning and an hour for lunch.

There were many different jobs in the mills and factories and the work was rated according to how skilled and clean the job was.

The spinners, for example, had the dirtiest work and were considered not to be very skilled whereas the weavers were at the opposite end of the scale. Wages were usually paid weekly or fortnightly.

Hacklers

This part of the process was very important as it was a very skilled job. The hacklers drew the flax fibres through rows of pointed pins to clean and split the fibres.

This would start the whole process in the factory and needed to be done properly or the cloth would not turn out well.

Hacklers wore long-tailed coats, high hats and linen waistcoats to show how important they were.

Spinners

In the spinning room there was a process known as wet spinning which meant that there was always water and heat.

The workers stood in their bare feet in the water all day and consequently they frequently suffered from conditions such as foot rot. The spinners wore black shawls known as 'black clouds'.

Doffers

"Doffing" was the first job most women did in the spinning room. When the spinners had filled their "bobbins" full of yarn the doffers had to replace them with empty ones.

Doffing mistress

The "Doffing Mistress" had to make sure that the doffers were doing their jobs and that all the full bobbins were replaced.

Spinning master

He was the manager and was responsible for running the spinning room. It was his job to keep everyone working and report to the mill owner.

Half-timers

In 1901 the school leaving age was raised to 13. Many people had started work before that. The 'half-timers' were children that spent half their day in the mills and half in school.

Weavers

The weavers worked in the 'weaving sheds' in the factories. Learning to weave took about eight weeks and after that the weavers had to share a loom before they were given one of their own.

The looms were placed in rows of three and the rows were facing each other. The weaving sheds were so noisy that the weavers talked to each other by signing. The walls were whitewashed because the weavers needed plenty of light and this helped boost the natural light.

The weavers would have worn a stiff white apron which again showed the importance of their work.

Tenters

They lit the gas jets and serviced and tended to the looms. Tenters were at the beck and call of the weavers and had to keep the looms running or production would go down.