

FRAMEWORK KNITTING IN THE PARISH OF ALFRETON, 1670-1870

By JOAN D'ARCY

INTRODUCTION

This study of framework knitting in the parish of Alfreton has its origins in a W.E.A. local history class. When the topic of framework knitting was raised I turned first to Reginald Johnson's *A History of Alfreton* but found that the subject was only touched upon in passing. Turning to Eric Lucas's *Alfreton in Hanoverian Times 1780-1837*, a compilation of extracts from the *Derby Mercury*, I realised that here was a rich vein of information. The advent of British Newspapers on line has made it an easier task to read the *Derby Mercury* than it was for Eric Lucas on his weekly visits to Derby Local Studies Library. I have also had the benefit of easier access to other documentary sources than Reginald Johnson had when writing his history.¹

ALFRETON TOWN AND PARISH

Alfreton is a small mid-Derbyshire market town, lying between the larger settlements of Derby, 14 miles to the south, and Chesterfield, 10 miles to the north. In 1846 Bagshaw's *Directory* described it as, '*pleasantly situated on the brow of a hill, and consists of two irregular built streets, intersecting each other in the Market place*'.² The simple town plan was, and is, little changed from its foundation, legend tracing it to King Alfred's time. A royal charter of 1252 granted a weekly market and an annual fair and the town became a locally important trading centre for corn, livestock and agricultural products.³ In 1670, 'husbandry', or agriculture, was the chief occupation, supporting ancillary industries such as brewing, leatherwork and smithying. The presence of readily accessible and extensive deposits of coal and ironstone led to the early development of mining and associated industries which rapidly expanded as the eighteenth century progressed. Framework knitting was present by the late seventeenth century as documented by the will of John Leeson Senior of Birchwood, written in 1697.⁴

The Manor of Alfreton, with its Hall and Park, lay on the western edge of the town and by the mid-seventeenth century was held by the Morewood family.⁵ The parish church of St Martin stood close by, a building of uncertain foundation but with architectural features from the thirteenth century. The parish was extensive, Revd. Anthony Carr (1768-1799) estimating it to be '*about four miles in Length and three in Breadth...*', the population outside the town living in hamlets and scattered settlements at Birchwood, Greenhill Lane, Riddings, Somercotes and Swanwick⁶ (Fig. 1).

The size of the population can be assessed from taxation and ecclesiastical records. In 1670 the Hearth Tax listed 121 households with a total of 192 hearths, over half being cottages with one fireplace. The Compton census of 1676, an ecclesiastical census of inhabitants over



Fig. 1: Framework knitting centres in South-East Derbyshire established by 1740, from the evidence of locally probated wills. The earliest will date is given. The base map is taken from John Cary's New and Correct English Atlas, a collection of county maps published in 1787. Between 1801 and 1803 a new Turnpike road was constructed from Derby to Alfreton.

sixteen, gives a population count of 461.⁷ Although not altogether reliable, taken together these figures suggest a population of about 900 persons in 1670. The parish then lay within the diocese of Lichfield and Coventry and episcopal visitations show a modest population increase during the next hundred years. A visitation by Bishop Cornwallis in 1751 asked questions on church attendance and the number of resident families to which Revd. Cornelius Horne (1733-1768) replied that there were '230 families or thereabouts'. Revd. Carr, in answer to a later visitation in 1771, estimated 240 houses.⁸

THE FRAMEWORK KNITTING MACHINE

Knitting wool by hand on two or four needles was a major domestic occupation in areas such as the East Midlands where sheep were widely farmed for the wool crop. In Tudor times, the market for knitted socks expanded as men's long robes were gradually replaced by doublet and breeches. On the continent, notably in Italy and Spain, silk hose was also knitted and this became the preferred material for those who could afford such luxury items. Increasing demand inspired invention and various attempts were made to mechanise the knitting process.

The first effective solution came in 1589 with a hand operated machine attributed to Revd. William Lee of Calverton in Nottinghamshire. Usually referred to as a 'frame', his machine produced plain knit hose and greatly speeded up manufacture though anything more complex, such as a rib stitch, had still to be hand knitted. Lee's invention eventually led to the establishment of a silk weaving industry in London. Joan Thirsk argued that the high-end silk industry was entrenched there by 1655, while an industry based on worsted yarn was making headway in the Midlands using the long wool of the Midland sheep. While woollen yarn could be spun in the home, silk thread had to be imported. But after the Lombe brothers set up a silk spinning mill in Derby in 1717, helped by the ingenuity of water engineer George Sorocold, it became locally available, stimulating local manufacture. Probate records which give the occupation of the deceased as a framework knitter, 'stockinger', or in one case 'silk stocking maker', and proved in the Lichfield Consistory Court, show that by 1740 there were at least 24 framework knitting areas in South East Derbyshire⁹ (Fig. 1).

The difficulty hand knitters faced in keeping pace with demand had encouraged Lee to experiment and his invention was undoubtedly one reason why framework knitting developed in the East Midlands. It is known to have been established in Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire by the mid-seventeenth century. How it arrived in Derbyshire is not known but a natural expansion of the industry from Nottinghamshire into the Erewash Valley and the low lying south-east of the county seems likely. It was established in Long Eaton by 1676 as evidenced by the will of John Bowley, a 'silk stocking maker' whose goods included two 'frames'. The will of Thomas Bloodworth of Derby indicates that it was established there by 1696. Framework knitters were also at work in Alfreton before 1697 as John Leeson Senior's will testifies.¹⁰

ORGANISATION

The inventory of the contents of John Leeson's house shows how his knitting business was managed. The appraisers went from room to room; *hall, parlour, chamber, chamber over the parlour, workroom, chamber over the kitchen, kitchen*. There were five frames 'In the Workroom' which was situated on the upper floor. In a smaller house a workroom might be constructed in the outside space. This would seem to be the case with John Tomlinson

of Alfreton. There, appraisers in 1721 also moved from room to room; *dwelling house, parlour, buttery; chamber over the parlour, chamber of the House, workroom* (containing three ‘stockinger’ frames), *barn and outhouses*. In contrast John Langton of Swanwick, as illustrated in the inventory of his goods in 1719, had installed frames in his living space. Here, ‘*In the parlour*’, in addition to a bed, a press, chairs and a looking glass there were ‘*2 stocking frames, a pair of scales and weights*’. The scales were an essential part of the knitter’s equipment as yarn was often provided by a middleman or ‘bagman’ who would weigh it on delivery and weigh the finished articles when collecting them for sale. Any shortfall had to be accounted for; one quarter of an ounce wastage was generally allowed on every pound of yarn.¹¹

Later inventories list goods without assigning them to rooms but the pages of the *Derby Mercury*, founded in 1737, carry advertisements which show the increasing scale of the industry, organised by ‘hosiers’. A hosier purchased frames and rented them out, charging a weekly ‘frame rent’, and either personally supplied yarn and sold finished products or employed a bagman. John Roper was an Alfreton hosier who, at his death in 1765, owned at least 27 frames, four willed to his grandson (also John Roper) and 23, in a variety of sizes, sold at auction. Eight of these frames stood in framesmith Anthony Ryley’s workshop in Alfreton, the rest could be seen where they were sited in the town or close by (Table 1). Knitters worked in a variety of materials and could manufacture a range of garments. The auction lots included a quantity of ‘*Worsted, Cotton and Thread Hose, Silk and Worsted Mitts ...*’.¹² After Roper’s death, the most prominent Alfreton hosier was William Mugliston.

In Alfreton parish	<p><u>Alfreton</u> John Burnham (2) Samuel Kirk (1) Thomas Saxton (1)</p> <p><u>Alfreton Common</u> J Simpson (1) <u>Drunken Closes near Alfreton</u> J. Falconbridge (1)</p> <p><u>Swanwick</u> Joseph Felkins (1) J. Cartlidge (1) Joseph Bryan (1)</p> <p>William Hill (1)</p> <p><u>Greenhill Lane</u> Panson England (1)</p> <p><u>Marwood Moor</u> Thomas Marsden (1) <u>Carter-Lane</u> Abraham Blazdale (1)</p>
In other parishes	<p><u>Shirland</u> Will Redfern (1) <u>South Normanton</u> Thomas Wilson (1)</p>

Table 1: A Typical Distribution of Frames: John Roper 1766.

APPRENTICESHIPS

A hosier might gather some of his frames into a workshop and employ journeymen and women, experienced knitters who had served an apprenticeship of seven years. Apprenticeships might be served within the family; as perhaps happened in the households of the Cartlidges (Table 1 and 2), Careys (Table 2) and Hills (Table 1), whose descendants, along with the Rawsons and Elliots of Swanwick (Table 2), can be found as knitters in the nineteenth century. Alternately, an apprenticeship bond might be entered into with parental consent whereby, in return for learning a skill, their child was housed, fed and clothed for a term of years.

Apprenticeships might also be a means of saving the parish the cost of a child's upbringing. A single volume recording parish pauper apprenticeships in Alfreton has survived for the years 1805-1824. It does not appear, as sometimes stated, that the Overseers of the Poor were overloading the industry with pauper apprentices, as out of 37 apprenticeships entered into during these years only eight were with knitters. Aged from seven to fourteen, the children were bound until the age of 21 or, in the case of girls, on marriage. The two youngest, aged seven and eight, were apprenticed within the family, their widowed mother Sarah Whitehead having remarried to Robert Bird, a knitter from Oxton in Nottinghamshire. The rest were apprenticed within the parish, as shown here.¹³

<i>Date</i>	<i>Apprentice</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Master</i>
4 March 1805	George Turton	14 illegitimate	John Amas of Alfreton
24 June 1808	Francis Radford	8	George Elliott of Swanwick
10 March 1818	John Brelsford	13	John Carey of Alfreton
10 March 1808	Ann Boot	11 illegitimate	John Cartlidge of Swanwick
10 March 1818	Mary Allen	13 of Joseph dec	George Bullock of Swanwick
8 April 1822	William Boot	11 illegitimate	John Elliott of Alfreton

Table 2: Parish Apprenticeships in Framework Knitting.

Other arrangements were sometimes entered into, as in 1756 when William and Isaac Kirk agreed to bear the cost of an illegitimate child born to Elizabeth Kirk through the sale of a stocking frame. In 1759 the Overseers at Newbold reached an agreement with William Wood, a hosier at Swanwick, who took on William Swift, an orphan and underage owner of two small rented properties at Stonegravels in Newbold. After the parish had been reimbursed for his upkeep, the rents were transferred to Wood to finance the apprenticeship.¹⁴

Typically, knitters worked for long hours. In South Normanton they were known as 'shiners' from the sheen on their leather trousers caused by sitting at a frame for perhaps 14 hours a day.¹⁵ This may help to explain the advertisements for runaways found in the pages of the *Derby Mercury*. In 1794, one such advertisement was placed for the apprehension of seventeen-year-old Anthony Dale, '5 ft 5 ins or 5 ft 6 ins in height'. His master, George Stocks of Swanwick, stated that if Dale returned he would be 'received with kindness'. As this apprentice was wearing an almost new waistcoat, leather breeches and new shoes hobbled with nails, neglect or harsh treatment would not appear to be the motive for his flight.¹⁶

This may not have been the case with boys who absconded from the Elliots of Swanwick who were unfortunate enough to lose several youngsters in their care. In 1783 George Elliott advertised for runaway apprentice Joseph Walters, described as wearing a dark brown coat and white linen waistcoat. In 1796 William Elliott 'lost' two apprentices within a month, John Timmis, aged about sixteen, absconding first, shortly followed by Thomas Redgate, aged thirteen. A handsome reward was offered for their return. Three more absconded in the following year. Israel Daws, a thirteen-year-old, 4ft. 10 ins. tall with a scar on his forehead and wearing 'drab' clothes, ran away in March: 'if he will return to his master he will be kindly received'. In November two more absconded:

*John England aged 13, about 5ft. 2 ins. high, fresh complexion, short dark hair; had on a blue coat and waistcoat, velveten breeches, dark hose and his shoes tied with leather strings. Benjamin Amos, aged 15, 5 ft. 3 ins. high, pale complexion, light grey eyes, broad nose, brown slank hair, had on a blue coat, an old brown waistcoat, old thick-set breeches, grey hose and very bad shoes.*¹⁷

On these occasions no reward was offered, only a dire warning against anyone who sheltered them, ‘*both civil and military*’, acknowledging that runaway boys might attempt to enlist in the army or navy.

The strenuous nature of the work may help to explain why framework knitting was a predominantly male occupation but many female knitters are recorded. Ann Gilborne was one and her runaway in 1791 was a female apprentice:

*ABSCONDED MARY GREGORY, an apprentice to Ann Gilborne of the Riddings in the Parish of Alfreton, Framework Knitter; Had on when she went away a striped Wolsey Petticoat and a grey Wolsey Apron. This is therefore to discharge all Persons whatsoever from harbouring or secreting the said Mary Gregory after this notice, as they will be prosecuted for the same.*¹⁸

However, adverts can be found for absconding apprentices in other occupations, such as mining and tailoring, so perhaps too much should not be made of the hardships endured by a framework knitter’s apprentice.

THE FRAME AND THE FRAMESMITH

A highly competent framesmith, or manufacturer of frames, was essential (Plate 1). The frame was stoutly made of timber, a straightforward carpentry job, but it took a skilled mechanic to make, or cause to be made, and assemble at least 2,000 metal parts, the most important of which were the rows of fine bearded (or barbed) hooks, referred to as needles, which were set up horizontally across the frame and operated by foot treadles. Frames varied in size and complexity and one of the more complex sort might have up to 3,500 different components, take 50 days to make and twelve days to assemble.¹⁹ A frame was too expensive an item for most self-employed knitters to afford and the greater the number of needles, or gauge, the more costly it was to maintain. In 1779 Anthony Ryley, a framesmith who had served his apprenticeship under hosier William Mugliston, was witness at a House of Commons Committee set up to inquire into the state of the industry and stated that a

*‘...new coarse frame is worth 13 gns, a fine new one is worth 15 gns. A new coarse frame will go 10 or 12 years without a recruit [refit]. I can undertake to keep those frames in repair for 8s a year’.*²⁰

A coarse frame would be used to make worsted or woollen hose, while a fine one would be needed for silk. Cotton, which had been introduced into the industry in Nottingham in 1730, came somewhere in between. Initially imported from India, in the 1770s cotton thread became locally available with the setting up of cotton spinning mills in the Derwent Valley by Richard



Plate 1: A framework knitting machine. This example from Calverton is in the City of Nottingham Castle Museum. On this machine two leather straps are fixed to the bench for greater comfort and ease of movement. The glass globe, top left, when hung by a window, reflected sunlight onto the frame. Similar machines can be seen in museum collections at Belper North Mill, Wollaton Hall and Ruddington.

Arkwright and cotton largely replaced wool. The greater the gauge, the finer the fabric. Those owned by John Roper were a mix of 16 - 30 gauge and set to a variety of widths: 15, 15¼, 15½ and 16½ inches.²¹

Even second-hand machines had considerable value. Leeson's five frames were assessed at £40, Tomlinson's three at £26, roughly a third the value of his goods, and Langton of Swanwick's two frames and pair of scales were valued at £26 5s 0d, roughly half the value. In some families, frames were passed down through generations. On his death in January 1806, aged 67, unmarried Francis Carey, draper and 'stockinger', left three frames to his nephews, John and Richard Carey, while in 1812 William Dawes of Birchwood bequeathed a 30 gauge frame to his wife and a 20 gauge one to his son William.²²

A framesmith could generally command a good standard of living. At Ryley's death in 1808 the furnishings of his house included:

*Oak Bedsteads, Feather and Chaff Beds, Blankets, Coverlids etc. Dining, Screen and other Tables, Chairs etc. Capital 50-hour Clock in neat Oak case, Brewing Copper, Mash Tub and other Brewing vessels, several 18-gallon Casks, and a general assortment of household and Kitchen requisities.*²³

However, Ryley gave evidence in 1779 that framesmiths combined this trade with other employment. His brother William, who employed three journeymen and three apprentices, was also a blacksmith, while an unnamed Alfreton framesmith '*did a great many Jobs for the Neighbors*'. Part of Ryley's own income came from brewing, as the brewing vessels show and the sale included a '*Capital Milk Cow*'.²⁴

When framesmith Robert Scotthorne was forced to assign over his effects to his creditors in 1806 an advertisement of sale described a less affluent lifestyle. There were no luxury items and the furniture '*In the House*' was mostly 'old': *an oval table and an old square table, a cupboard and an old dresser with shelves, 5 old chairs* along with beds and bedding and '*In the parlour*' an old chair, bed, bedding and an '*old boy*'.²⁵ There was no mention of a forge or tools of the trade, such as are found in the sale of Ryley's goods. These included two pair of bellows, anvils, vices, a set of drawing tackle, drills, screws, taps, hammers, tongs, wrenches, cramps, swages, punches, braces and bits, bores, trial rules and a quantity of old iron and steel. Ryley would have needed a workshop such as one which once stood on Alfreton High Street and went for sale in 1832:

All those 8 Freehold Messuages or Tenements adjoining, with Gardens and other conveniences to the same... and a Framesmith's Shop (at present unoccupied) with Chamber over. The above premises are situated in the town of Alfreton, fronting principally on the approach from Mansfield and Nottingham; one of the Houses commanding two fronts, eligible for the Retail Trade.

In a subsequent advertisement the framesmith's shop was occupied by Mr. Gibson, with the '*yard, garden, ground, stable and appurtenances thereto belonging*'.²⁶

THE DERBY 'RIB'

There was a problem within the industry which held back production. The frame could fashion only a plain knit stocking but a rib stitch produced a fabric that was more elastic. All attempts to knit rib stitch on a frame failed until Jedidiah Strutt introduced a modification known as the 'Derby Rib'. Strutt was born in South Normanton, a village two miles east of Alfreton where knitting was an established occupation.²⁷ Growing up in this community, he was aware of the problem and of experiments to overcome it and in 1758 he succeeded in building a frame with an added vertical attachment of needles that could create a rib stitch.

Strutt, a wheelwright, looked to find an opening in the established knitting industry and with this aim he visited Alfreton. After a fruitless visit to a 'Mr Horn', he chanced to meet Mr Holmes of Alfreton House. The house, built c. 1650, still stands at the eastern end of the town. Johnson calls the Holmes family '*pioneers of framework knitting of hose in Alfreton*' but no supportive evidence of this has been found. Strutt later wrote an account of his meeting with Holmes in a letter to his wife Elizabeth, née Woollat:

He took occasion to ask me about our scheme & said Alfreton was the only place for doing business of that sort to advantage for many reasons. Ist that Mr Rope[r] was always drunk and neglected his business (tho' he is his Tennant) & the workmen cd not get their money, the great [expense] a week for Carrying goods and Letters, the prodigious increase of stocking makers thereabouts, that they wd be glad to work there and receive their money & so lay it out at the Market without more loss of time and that we might have room enough, that one Mr Brown a large Hosier in Nottm...

Holmes subsequently gave Strutt a letter of introduction to a 'Mr Brown' whom he then visited:

But as I was not of the business cd not answer to Questions he wd have asked. He sd he shd like to employ about 10 Frames but wd come to Alfreton on fryday and will speak to Mr Holmes.

Some stockings were manufactured on Strutt's frames and he took a small stock with him to London at the end of 1758. While there he reached agreement with hosiers John Bloodworth and Thomas Stamford of Derby, together with William Woollat, his brother-in-law, as a result of which frames were set up there. The 'Derby rib' was so nearly the 'Alfreton Rib' but for lack of backers it was not to be.²⁸

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: A LIVING WAGE?

Knitters were paid by the piece and when the market was buoyant, and the overseas markets strong, they could make a decent living but, as the century progressed, war increasingly disrupted overseas trade. The American War of Independence (1756-1763) and a simultaneous colonial war with France led to a down turn in sales which depressed wages. In 1761 an 'Address to hosiers of the counties of Nottingham, Derby and Leicester' set out their case for a wage increase to restore the living standards they had enjoyed in 1740. In the early part of the

century bread prices had remained stable for decades but thereafter they rose steadily while wages remained static. The years before 1740 would become halcyon days.²⁹

An additional source of income was a cushion against the lean years. Knitting was not John Leeson's only employment; he had a small herd of cattle valued at £40, together with sows and horses, the value of his livestock almost twice that of his frames. He also had arable land: *Wheat on the ground £8 0s 0d; 20 quarter of oats sown and unsown £8 0s 0d; Wheat in the barn to thresh £8 2s 6d*. His two-storey house of six rooms was well, if not richly furnished: the tableware was pewter with only one silver piece. On a lesser scale, the Langtons kept a cow and ran a dairy. In 1763 knitter Joseph Dawes, who willed two frames to his son Joseph, left three cows, four sheep, two small pigs, hay and corn to his wife. Gardening, agricultural labouring or coal mining were other ways of obtaining additional income. Framework knitter John Rawson, who made a will in 1760, had a house and garden to pass on to his grandson. His possessions, valued at only £4 17s 3d, included tools suited to gardening but with also a variety of other uses; two mouldrells, a hammer, saws, shovels, a hatchet, three whibrells [possibly drills], two grindstones and some coals.³⁰

Hosiers were generally affluent. George Bland from Nether Birchwood, described in his will in 1757 as a hosier though in the accompanying inventory as a framework knitter (with however no mention of knitting frames), had goods totalling £95 10s 0d of which livestock accounted for half. The household furnishings included a clock and a looking glass.³¹ The leading hosier in Alfreton in the 1770s and 1780s was William Mugliston (c. 1752-1788), the second son of John, a wealthy Alfreton dyer. His father died when he was ten years old and at the age of fourteen he was apprenticed to a 'stockinger'. Having completed his apprenticeship and with an inheritance of £1,400 from his elder, unmarried brother, he set up as a hosier in 1772. He was also a woolcomber, his estate at death including '*a large quantity of wool fit for combing*', the first stage in the spinning process. He lived as a gentleman, writing articles, pamphlets and letters such as 'A letter: on the subject of wool, interspersed with Remarks on cotton, addressed to the public at large; but more particularly to The Committee of merchants and manufacturers at Leeds ...' (1782). He wrote poetry and, although unable to find a publisher for a book of his poems, in 1782 '*A Contemplative Walk with the Author's Wife and Children, in the Parks of George Morewood Esq. at Alfreton*' was printed and sold for 6d.³²

As a hosier, Mugliston owned 54 frames in a variety of gauges, worked in worsted, thread or cotton. These he had purchased for an average of £10 each and distributed around the town. He rented other frames at 20s - 26s yearly and employed independent knitters who owned their own frames, though such individuals found it harder to find work. In July 1771, shortly before he set up his business, knitters were agitating for an increase in wage. There were meetings and assemblies in Derby but the majority of hosiers were not amenable: in a letter to the *Derby Mercury* they told the suppliants that while other groups of workers had seasonal, laborious and dangerous employment, '*your Wages is the same the Year round, without Danger, or being exposed to all sorts of Weather, and gave constant employment*'.³³

In 1776 knitters came together to form the Stocking Makers' Association for Mutual Protection, a putative Union, and in 1777-78 Daniel Parker Coke, M.P. for Derby, presented the Derbyshire hosiers' petition to Parliament with the aim of regulating wages. A bill was drawn up but met strong opposition and failed at the second reading. This caused rioting in Nottingham and Leicester but Derby appears to have remained calm.³⁴ A Commission of Inquiry was set up and in 'The Hosiers and Framework Knitters' Examinations before a Committee of the House of Commons, 1779', Alfreton was represented by Mugliston and

framesmith Anthony Roper. Mugliston explained that there were four levels of work - altered, sham, fine and super - and for each a proper stuff (material) and proper gauge. A 30 gauge frame should produce super stuff (the highest quality) but the work was often put onto a 28 gauge machine and paid at 28 gauge rates. He produced his cash book for the weeks 22 March - 24 May as evidence of the wages he paid. He stated that a knitter could earn 8s a week but:

*A common Workman must work very hard to gain 6s. a week, working 6 Days, 10 or 12 Hours each Day clear of all Deductions.' He added, 'The prices are not the same now as they were when I was an Apprentice; there has been a Reduction. - Provisions are dearer since I can remember. A Journeyman Manufacturer, working common Work, with Diligence, cannot maintain himself decently.'*³⁵

The 'Deductions' included frame rent of 9d for a coarse frame and 12d. for a fine one. Mugliston could afford to reduce the rent but thought his competitors would not follow his lead. Other costs were the weekly replacement of needles (3d - 4d) and candles for night work, the price of which had risen.

Mugliston died in 1788 at which time knitting had weathered this depression.³⁶ In 1789, James Pilkington wrote: *'The inhabitants [of Alfreton] are chiefly employed and supported by the manufacture of stockings, and the collieries in the neighbourhood.'*³⁷ Wars with France and North America, beginning in 1792, would again plunge the industry into deep depression.

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY: A QUESTION OF SURVIVAL

The nineteenth century began badly for Alfreton knitters. War with Revolutionary France had lasted for a decade and severely impacted on overseas trade. Richard Beresford of Alfreton and Thomas Hickson of Four Lane Ends were hosiers and partners but in April 1800 the partnership was dissolved and soon afterwards both were declared bankrupt. Thirteen of Beresford's frames were immediately sent to auction; nine were 'in the shop' and the rest out to rent at Matlock, Heage and Swanwick (2). The frames included gauges from 24 - 34, producing both plain and ribbed stockings in varying widths from 14 - 17 inches. A second auction of ten frames took place on his former premises, described as *'a newly-erected building now used as 'Workshops and Ware Rooms'*, which was likewise sold. Thomas Hickson's eighteen frames, in 18 - 40 gauges, *'most of which are nearly new and in work'* were auctioned soon after. All these were also rented out, five in Swanwick and two at Four Lane Ends but the rest further afield; in Brackenfield (2), Linday-lane (1), Oakerthorpe (1), Pentrich (1) Wingfield (2) and in Selston (1) with Bagthorp (3) in Nottinghamshire, such was the scattered nature of his business.³⁸

Before their bankruptcies, Beresford and Hickson had been comfortably placed in life. An advertisement for the sale of Beresford's household effects describes:

All the neat and useful Household Furniture and effects belonging to Mr. Beresford, consisting of Four-post and other bedsteads with hangings, Feather beds, Blankets, Quilts and Counterpanes, Bed and Table Linen, Plate, China etc. handsome Mahogany Dining, Pembroke, Card and Screen Tables, Mahogany Chairs with armed ones to match, Elm and painted ditto, Mahogany and Oak Chests of Drawers, Oak Desk, Large Floor Carpet,

*Sofa, Pier and Swing Glasses, 8 day Clock, Barometer, Japan and Mahogany Tea Trays and Waiters with a variety of other useful Chamber, Parlour and Kitchen Requisites.*³⁹

They were by no means the only hosiers to fail around this time. In 1803 for example 230 frames were put into auction in Nottingham, 84 of which were employed in Heanor, which after Derby was the leading hosiery centre in the county. In the following year 87 frames were for sale in Chesterfield.⁴⁰ As war continued some hosiers tried to avoid bankruptcy by manufacturing a cheaper 'cut out'; cloth woven on a wide frame, cut to a stocking shape and stitched up. This practice incensed knitters in Nottingham, where greater numbers were employed, and in 1811 groups known as 'Luddites' began to raid properties under cover of dark to destroy the wide frames. Unrest spread into Leicestershire and then into Derbyshire. In December, the *Derby Mercury* reported '*with extreme regret*' that Luddite activity had spread into the towns and villages of Ilkeston, Makeney, Pentrich, Heage and Crich, '*where many frames had been broken in the night*'. On a later foray, Luddites destroyed several more at Pentrich before moving to Swanwick, where three were broken, and two in Riddings. This was the limit of their activity. It has been said that the gangs which carried out these raids were based at Sutton in Ashfield, Nottingham, Arnold and Swanwick but there is no other evidence that Swanwick was a Luddite centre of operations.⁴¹

The following year the 'United Committees of the Framework Knitters of Derby and Nottingham' came together to petition for regulation of the industry, complaining of '*lowering standards*' but nothing came of this and the end of war in 1815 brought no improvement.⁴² In 1816 petitions were again fruitlessly presented and general unrest across the North and Midlands led to conspiracies. In the villages of Pentrich and Wingfield an ill-formed plan was made to march on Nottingham and set up a provisional government. Several Alfreton knitters, miners and labourers were drawn into this in the belief that they were part of a larger rising. On the night of June 9th marchers from Pentrich and Wingfield set off, going via Butterley Ironworks, where a plan to obtain guns was foiled, through Ripley to Codnor. Here contingents from Swanwick, Alfreton, Heanor and Ilkeston joined in but their way was blocked at Kimberley by a party of Hussars and they were quickly routed. Amongst the Alfreton contingent were seven Elliotts and six Rawsons, of whom all but Joseph Rawson, aged 33, were released without trial. Joseph was tried, convicted and along with two Alfreton miners sentenced to transportation. He served just four years of a fourteen-year sentence, dying at Liverpool in Australia in 1821. Also arrested was Edward Haslam (36) of Alfreton who was released without trial. The participation of these knitting dynasties may owe something to the setting up of local Hampden Clubs, where radicals met and agitated for parliamentary reform.

Open air meetings, marches and disturbances continued and on 16 August 1819, at a crowded meeting in Manchester, eighteen people were mown down by the local yeomanry. The news of the 'Peterloo Massacre' travelled quickly and evoked a rapid response in Alfreton from Revd. John Wood, vicar at St. Martin's, who called a Vestry meeting. The parish workhouse, built in 1802-4 on Sleetmoor Common, was totally inadequate to deal with the number of indigent knitters and subscription lists were immediately opened to raise funds for outdoor relief. At the same time knitters were encouraged to change to husbandry. Distress continued into 1821, and as rates of pay fell, a general meeting was held in Alfreton and a strike was called throughout the East Midlands. The strike took hold and it was said that '*scarcely a dozen of hose was made in the three counties for two months*'. Subscription lists helped the strikers to hold out while hosiers sold off surplus stock before coming to terms, but

only to maintain the low rates of 1819. In 1824 there was another withdrawal of labour which lasted for several weeks, and a fierce pamphlet war erupted, both attacking and defending the strikers who were praised for the peaceable and orderly manner in which they had conducted themselves. Once trade picked up again the protests subsided.⁴⁴

In Alfreton, the parish population had been steadily growing. The 1801 census recorded 2,801 inhabitants in Alfreton parish which doubled by 1831 to 5,691. As a result, in 1835 the parish was divided into two ecclesiastical districts with a new Anglican church at Riddings. Census returns from 1841 show that the majority of knitters were congregated in Alfreton and Swanwick, but with a significant number in Somercotes (Table 3). There were only seven in Greenhill and none in Riddings where agriculture, coal mining and ironworking were the main forms of employment. In Table 3 all entries marked framework knitter (fwk) are presumed to be knitters. The number of knitters is not equivalent to the number of frames as some knitters might hold two or more.

<i>No. of Houses</i>	<i>size of population</i>	<i>male fwk</i>	<i>female fwk</i>	<i>age range</i>	<i>under 15</i>	<i>cotton</i>	<i>silk</i>
Alfreton Town 366	1774 (m 888. f886)	102	42	11-75	5	123	2
Swanwick 242	1319 (m 678. f 641)	120	13	9-81	5	105	29
Somercotes 338	1744 (m 899. f 845)	21	27	13-75	7	48	nil

Table 3: 1841 census: framework knitters. ⁴⁵

During the 1830s the Chartist Movement, with a Six Point Charter for parliamentary reform, had gained many recruits from working men and women, including many knitters. Speakers regularly visited Alfreton and Swanwick and there were weekly recruiting meetings. In April 1841 the *Northern Star*, a Chartist newspaper with an obvious bias, reported that 1,460 people there had signed a petition for parliamentary reform but when the petition was presented in the following year it was rejected out of hand. The Chartists persisted and fostered the idea of peaceful combination. In 1844 the *Northern Star* reported that in January delegations of knitters marched from Alfreton to Nottingham to join with knitters from Derby, Belper, Heanor and Ilkeston where they resolved to form a General Union with a 1d weekly subscription. William Meakin of Belper was appointed Lecturer for the Derbyshire area and said of Alfreton: '*the very best spirit prevails on the side of consolidation*'. A General Union was formed but it flourished for only a short time.⁴⁶ Although its existence was brief it helped to persuade government to re-examine the state of the framework knitting industry. A Royal Commission of Inquiry was set up and witnesses primed.

THE 1845 INQUIRY AND THE RISE OF WARD AND BRETTLER, BELPER

The Inquiry sat from February to August 1845.⁴⁷ By this time, two large manufactories, Messrs. Ward and Brettler, had been established in Belper and many knitters now rented frames and knitted for them. John Ward Senior had set himself up as a hosier in the mid-

eighteenth century and Belper had become his centre of operations. In 1800 an advertisement was placed for a framesmith: 'A steady man and good workman one whose character will bear the strictest inquiry. May have constant work and good wages.'⁴⁸ However, the firm was close to bankruptcy. This was avoided when, in 1803, John Ward Jnr. and his brother William joined with George Brettle to form Ward, Brettle & Ward. They were both hosiers and manufacturers, renting frames, supplying yarn (largely from a cotton spinning mill set up by Jedidiah Strutt in Belper) and purchasing finished goods, but also with workshops and a warehouse in Belper. A second warehouse was soon established in London and later a third in Alfreton. With the promise of steady work, knitters were attracted to the firm. The year 1812 was one of deep trade depression and 'a very considerable number of good workmen', were added to the workforce. As the firm expanded it extended its range of products and in 1829 Glover wrote that Ward, Brettle & Ward were:

*...esteemed to be the most extensive manufacturers of hosiery goods in the world. They employ about four hundred silk stocking frames, which produce two hundred dozen pair of hose weekly, besides two thousand, five hundred cotton-hose-frames, which on the average produce nine pairs each per week, making on the whole little less than one hundred thousand dozens yearly.'*⁴⁹

By the time of the Inquiry, Ward and Brettle had separated and formed two companies, Brettle & Co. and Ward & Co. and the commissioners heard from both.⁵⁰ Ward was then the larger company and according to Thomas Whitaker McCallum, their cotton manager, they employed about 4,000 frames across Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. John Withers Taylor, manager of the silk department, testified that there were about 1,000 silk stocking frames on site in Belper, another 1,000 rented out, and others owned independently or by bagmen. Of the cotton frames only 26, chiefly 24 - 48 gauge, were in Alfreton but a greater number in villages round about. For example, Joseph Morley testified to 50 cotton frames in Tibshelf, fifteen working for Brettle, three for Ward and the rest for bagmen, while William Smart stated that in Wessington and Brackenfield all but one of 115 cotton frames were worked for either Brettle or Ward. Wessington knitters took their work to the warehouse at Alfreton but Alfreton knitters generally walked into Belper once a fortnight with their finished articles.

McCallum presented a list of the Alfreton knitters with frames and locations and the wages paid in August and September (Table 4). He computed an average pay of £2 17s. 7d, a weekly rate of about 7s. Some received less than half this sum but an offered explanation was that it was customary for a 'great number' to go out harvesting.

William Wallis, manager of Brettle's cotton department, had drawn up a table of prices paid per dozen of hose of varying gauges from 1811-1844, which showed a considerable price reduction over these years. A 30 gauge stocking which had cost 16s in 1811 fetched only 9s 6d in 1844 and 48 gauge hose had fallen from 37s to 25s per dozen. The silk department manager was John Webster Hancock who had a marked lack of sympathy for the knitters' complaints, especially those about the charge of frame rents, which had not changed since Mugliston's time (1779) but were now an increasing burden.

The knitters' spokesman for Alfreton was John Cross in whose workshop lay seven frames, one not in work and the rest worked by himself and journeymen. Cross stated that neither hosiers nor bagmen operated there and presented a list of the number and distribution of 144 cotton-worked frames (Table 5) of which 116 were owned by Messrs. Brettle, 22 by Messrs.

Ward, two by Samuel Fox of Derby and four by out of town bagmen. When asked about female labour he said that nearly half the knitters were females and young persons. All made hose from 'a kind of brown Persian thread, which comes under the designation of cotton, and a little extra is paid for the manufacture of it, because there is a little more trouble'. Cross stated that the wages were too low, objected to frame rents and the incremental lengthening of stockings over time with no increase in pay for the extra work.

Alfreton	No of frames	Total wage for 7 weeks Aug 3 - Sept 21			Swanwick	No of frames	Total wage for 7 weeks Aug 3 - Sept 21		
		£	s	d			£	s	d
John Hall	1	2	17	3	Barnet Yarneld	1	2	8	6
John Cross	7	12	5	1	Gregory Yarneld	3	9	19	6
John Carey	1	1	3	0	John Haslam	5	13	8	3
John Elliott	4	11	2	6	James Haslam	2	3	4	0
James Elliott	2	4	12	6	Isaac Cartledge	1	2	2	3
John Rowe	2	2	4	3	A. Lilley	6	7	9	4
Elizabeth Walker	1	2	7	0	Edward Bramley	2	5	14	6
Samuel Clay	5	27	7	6	Mrs. Kerrett	2	3	13	6
James Birkin	1	2	19	6	F. Rawson	9	17	11	0
Abraham Bullock	2	3	12	0					

Table 4: McCallum's list of Alfreton and Swanwick knitters employed by Ward between Aug 3 - Sept 21 as presented to the Commission of Inquiry in 1845 - with a wage summary.

20 persons have 1 each		20
12 "	2 "	24
7 "	3 "	21
3 "	4 "	12
8 "	5 "	40
2 "	6 "	12
1 "	7 "	7
1 "	8 "	8
	Total	144

Highest clear weekly earnings in one frame	10s	2 1/2 d
Lowest earnings	2s	0d
Average of all (about)	5s	9 1/2 d

Table 5: Distribution of Frames in Alfreton in 1845 as reported by John Cross.⁵¹

George Walters represented the cotton knitters in Swanwick. He stated that there were 139 frames, 115 working cotton, 24 silk and three 'needle' frames. Of the cotton frames, 65 were worked for Brettle, 40 for Ward and 10 for 'Mr. Morley' of Nottingham. Of these 120 were in work, the knitters earning a gross wage of £44 2s 1d, a net wage of £29 9s 7½d and a weekly average per knitter of 4s 10¾d. He spoke of a custom 20 years earlier when knitters joined a frame club, run by a framesmith, paying in a monthly sum. Every so often lots were drawn for a frame, *'but they got thrown out of employment afterwards, and the men were glad to sell them for anything they could to the hosiers, and as soon as ever the hosiers had bought them they could employ them'*. He brought in a 'long' stocking, two inches longer than the standard, or 'maid's, stocking but for which the knitters received only standard pay. This he deemed 'injurious'. He also objected to cut-ups with which they could not compete. Isaac Cartlidge spoke for the knitters of silk hose. He ran a workshop of five frames, employed three journeymen and an apprentice who earned about 12s weekly but after stoppages 7s - 8s. All the witnesses objected to burdensome frame rents.⁵²

In June 1850 parliament was again petitioned to remove frame rents and 'truck', a practice of paying part of a wage in tokens. The *Derby Mercury* reported, *'The wrought hose branch is in a wretched condition'* and families were in a state of destitution.⁵³

THE KNITTERS: A WAY OF LIFE

Framework knitting was a craft that demanded a steady hand and dedication to the task. It produced men such as Francis Carey, a draper and 'stockinger', who was described at his death in 1806 as *'a man of unblemished reputation. He was universally respected, and his loss is deservedly lamented by all who knew him.'*⁵⁴

William Shawcroft (1747-1831) grew up and learned his knitting skills in Nottingham. Having become a convert to the Baptist church, he moved to Riddings in 1806 where he set up a Sunday school. This won him wide respect and when, soon after his death, the Anglican church of St. James was built, a memorial cross was set up in the churchyard:

To the glory of God and in memory of William Shawcroft, a humble framework knitter, who lived in Riddings at the close of the 18th century, during the interval between the decay of the ancient church of St. Mary Magdalene and the erection of the present church of St. James.

*By his means, assisted by fellow labourers, (sic) the standard of the Cross was raised among the benighted inhabitants of the hamlet.'*⁵⁵

However, although many knitters can be linked to church and chapel, not all were so religious and they could be very colourful individuals, as appears from an advertisement in the *Derby Mercury* inserted by Thomas Woodward of Higham for the apprehension of his absconding wife Elizabeth in 1825, with the promise of a five guinea reward:

*The person who she went with is a Framework Knitter by trade and goes by the name of Long Bob, is about 5 feet 10 inches high, light complexion, wears his hair in ringlets round his face, has long whiskers and a Roman nose ...*⁵⁶

The arduous physicality of their trade encouraged trials of strength, with bets laid on the outcome, as in this advertisement from 1788:

*Samuel Parker, framework knitter of Alfreton, undertook for a considerable wager to pick up 100 stones laid at a distance of 1 yard from each other, in the space of 40 minutes, which he performed within 16 seconds of the time allowed, notwithstanding that the distance was near six miles and two heavy showers of rain caused the ground to be very disagreeable for the purpose. Great rejoicings were made as considerable bets were depending.*⁵⁷

Bare knuckle contests, albeit illegal, also tested their quick thinking and endurance. In September 1824 George Clarke fought John Wildgoose on Wessington Green for a prize of five guineas and unwittingly killed him. Clarke fled:

Abscinded from the township of Washington near Alfreton on Monday evening 6th. September inst. GEORGE CLARKE, Framework Knitter, aged about 22 years, stands 5 feet 8 or 9 inches high, a stout man, round shoulders, full mouthed and fair complexion. Had on when he went away a brown coat, yellow striped waistcoat with glass buttons and blue velveteen trousers.

His father and brother were brought to trial for manslaughter but were found not guilty. In spite of a further advertisement, and a five guinea reward, George Clarke was not found.⁵⁸

Knitters in Alfreton tended to live in small communities with some working individually and others organised into workshops of up to eight to ten frames. No framework knitting workshops remain in Alfreton but a good example can be seen at Wigston in Leicestershire where the master's house fronts the street and a typical long windowed workshop stands to the rear.⁵⁹ Sometimes the journeymen took lodgings but in Samuel Clay's house, one of a block of four cottages on Independent Hill at the corner of King Street, they lived in with the family; the 1851 census naming the frame operatives as himself (aged 45), his wife (30), James Taylor (23), Edward Gillot (30) and Samuel Alvey (22).⁶⁰

Census returns indicate that on both sides of the Derby Road, as it climbed from Colliery Road at the southern end to the Market Place, knitting families lived side by side in terraced blocks or 'Rows', possibly purpose built. The frames would often be housed in the upper rooms lit by long horizontal, multipaned windows to catch the light and save on candles or oil lamps. In 1841, knitters occupied all but one house of a Row of eight. John Cross, witness at the 1845 Inquiry, and his wife Ann lived there, both knitters. Next door was Edward Cross with four journeymen or apprentices living in. The last house was occupied by George Shepperson (1798-1886) where four of his eight children were knitters by 1851. Almost all the Rows have now been demolished but one remains on Bonsall Lane, though the horizontal windows have been replaced.⁶¹

A few Rows had gardens attached. In the 1845 Inquiry the knitters' voices are heard in favour of the Chartist ideal of a piece of land or allotment, which Cross believed was a general desire. When asked whether the cultivation of land might injure their ability to work, George Walters replied:

I have worked silk myself, and when we have been working at hard work, we use sand and soap to get our hands into condition again. A great number of the stockingers about here go harvesting, and if it was calculated to injure them it would be proved by that.⁶²

In 1848 the third and final Chartist petition was brought to parliament and was rejected. Chartists remained active for a while but their following gradually diminished.⁶³

KNITTING IN DECLINE BUT NOT QUITE OUT

The Crimean War (1854-56) brought another downturn in trade and 'An Inquiry into the Payment of Wages in the Hosiery Manufacture' was set up. This only recommended an end to stoppages such as 'truck'.⁶⁴ By the mid 1840s steam powered knitting machines, which could produce ten to twelve stockings at a time, were being installed in Nottingham. Once one was introduced at Wards c. 1855, and perhaps by 1860 at Brettles, knitting became largely factory based and what had seemed a secure partnership between the knitters and the companies was actually the knitters' downfall.⁶⁵ (Table 6).

Framework Knitters in Alfreton Town

	<i>total</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>age range</i>	<i>under 15</i>	<i>av. age</i>
1841	144	102	42	11-75	5	31.0
1851	129	92	37	12-73	2	36.6
1861	56	35	21	13-80	1	45.9
1871	25	16	9	16-78	0	52.0

Framework Knitters in Swanwick

	<i>total</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>age range</i>	<i>under 15</i>	<i>av. age</i>
1841	133	120	13	9-81	5	31.2
1851	162	118	44	8-71	20	32.1
1861	90	58	32	11-78	10	39.0
1871	35	29	6	14-80	0	41.0

Table 6: Census Returns: 1841-1871.

The 1851 census shows a small decrease in the number of knitters in Alfreton, and in Somercotes there were now only six, but in Swanwick the industry was still buoyant. 1859 is said to have been a good year for trade in general, but the 1861 returns show that knitting was in sharp decline with few young people being recruited. By 1871 numbers were reduced again by c.50% in Alfreton and in Swanwick, and had all but disappeared in the rest of the parish. By 1881 there were only 65 knitters in all, the majority (53) living in Swanwick along the Belper Road.

In 1841 Alfreton was drawing in knitters both from distant knitting centres such as Tewkesbury and from the neighbouring counties of Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. Others came to work and settle there from towns and villages in Derbyshire. John Cross had

migrated from Nottingham but after the 1845 Inquiry he moved to Field Head in Belper to work as a silk glove maker, probably for Ward. By 1861 he had moved back to Nottingham and was a beerhouse keeper. Of his neighbours in the 'Row', George Shepperson was still knitting but the two youngest sons had turned to coal mining. The same was true in Swanwick where the Rawson name had been linked to framework knitting since the mid-eighteenth century. In 1861 the three eldest of John Rawson's seven children (aged 15, 14 and 12) were coal miners although the workshop was still in operation. The story for the framesmith, as traced through census returns, is much the same. Samuel Bower, born c. 1826 in Riddings, served an apprenticeship as a framesmith and set up a business in Alfreton, employing three men, but by 1861 he had moved to Crich and was described in census returns as innkeeper and framesmith, having taken over the Black Swan Inn. In 1871 he was simply an innkeeper.

William Carter (1830-1918) chose to emigrate, which for him was a very successful option. He was born in Colliery Road, on the southern edge of Alfreton, the son of John Carter who came from Nottingham to marry Mary Carey, daughter of framesmith William Carey. By 1851, having been taught by his grandfather, he was knitting alongside his parents in a small workshop which stood to the rear but soon afterwards he took employment as a miner at Swanwick Colliery. Disliking this, he emigrated to America, reputedly with 5s. in his pocket, and settled in Massachusetts in 1857. He set himself up on a hand knitting machine, producing high quality cardigan jackets and founded one of the leading American firms in knitted garments.⁶⁶

Owing to the enterprise of one knitter however, a few were able to continue in work without leaving the parish. This was Stephen Elliott (1815-1910). His start in life was typical of many children of knitting families. Born in Baptist Chapel Lane in Swanwick on 17 March 1815, he began work at the age of six, seaming stockings. At the age of nine he was apprenticed to a knitter in Sutton in Ashfield and walked there regularly. When his parents, Jonathan and Sarah, moved to Nottingham Road in Alfreton he went to work in George Bacon's workshop on the Derby Road. He next rented a 36 inch frame from Messrs. Brettell and set up on his own in Swanwick, later increasing it to 48 gauge but knitting 50 gauge work. Having, according to family tradition, met and received a large order from Miss Wood of Swanwick Hall, he was soon able to buy his own machine and in 1847 set up a workshop in School Lane. He had found a niche market, producing silk stockings for high society ladies, including the royal princesses and nobility both at home and abroad. By 1871 he was employing 20 men, including many Elliotts, and by 1881 three of his sons had established the firm of A & C Elliott on New Street in Swanwick.⁶⁷

Census returns for 1881 show that some of the knitters who learned their craft in the 1830s to 1850s were still in work. There are seventeen male knitters aged from 50 - 85, with two octogenarians, and four females, aged between 57 and 74. They may not all have worked for Elliotts as there was another hosier in Swanwick by the name of Noah Plumb (1841-1904). In 1871 he was living in Lambley in Nottinghamshire, the place of his birth, but by 1881 he had moved to Swanwick and had set himself up as a hosier, employing twelve people. In 1901, he was a self-employed knitter, working independently at home, and no longer a hosier. The firm of Elliott however flourished well into the twentieth century. The *Derbyshire Times* recorded that in 1932 there were 25 frames at work, supporting over 100 seamers and embroiderers. They continued to manufacture silk stockings for high society until 1943 when orders failed due to war time restrictions and the frames were left 'idle and rusting'.⁶⁸

CONCLUSION

Framework knitting was an established industry in Derbyshire by the end of the seventeenth century and in the parish of Alfreton it continued for about 350 years. There is no doubt that knitters were often close to penury as their wage not only fluctuated but fell in real terms from the late eighteenth century. However, it was neither a dangerous nor an unhealthy occupation and it built strong bodies. Knitters could live to a good old age. Stephen Elliott was 95 when he died and as this study shows, there are many examples of knitters working into their 70th and even their 80th year.

With the notable exception of the Pentrich debacle in 1817, the Derbyshire knitters appear to have been more inclined to peaceful rather than violent protest, perhaps because the scale of the industry was small in comparison to that of, for example, Nottingham. There also appears to have been a more benevolent spirit and a greater willingness to understand their financial problems. In the end, war brought the firm of Elliott to an end but, over all, innovation was both the creator and the nemesis of knitting in Alfreton.

Postscript

Apart from John Heath's study of framework knitting in Ilkeston and a useful chapter in Doris Howe's *The Story of Holbrook*, a centre of silk stocking and glove production where the long windows can still be seen, little detailed study has been undertaken of framework knitting in Derbyshire towns and villages.⁶⁹ It is hoped that this article will spark some further interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Jane Steer, Keith Reedman and Irene Brightmer for reading the draft article and for their useful comments, and Keith also for making me aware of the will of silk stocking maker John Bowley of Long Eaton (1678). Thanks also to Rachel Walker and the Alfreton WEA for whom this article is written. I would also like to acknowledge the important work of the Lichfield Record Office Volunteer Group and the British Records Society in producing the Lichfield Wills Index (1630-1780) and making it available on line.

REFERENCES

- ¹ R. Johnson, *A History of Alfreton* (undated, c. 1968); E. Lucas, ed., *Alfreton in Hanoverian times 1780-1837. Extracts from the Derby Mercury*, pub. Alfreton W.E.A. Local History Group (1995).
- ² S. Bagshaw, *History and Directory of Derbyshire* (1846), 569.
- ³ Johnson, *Ibid.*, 23-4.
- ⁴ Lichfield Record Office (LJRO) wills, B/C/11 John Leeson Snr, 1697, of Alfreton, framework knitter.
- ⁵ Johnson, *Ibid.*, 56-7.
- ⁶ J. C. Cox, *Notes on the Churches of Derbyshire*, I, 3-4; IV [Addenda], 441; J. Beckett, M. Tranter and W. Bateman, eds., *Visitation Returns from the Archdeaconry of Derby, 1718-1824*, Derbyshire Record Society (DRS) 29 (2003), 64.
- ⁷ D. Edwards, ed., *Derbyshire Hearth Tax Assessments 1662-1670*, DRS 7 (1982), lxiv; 141-142. 81 entries of 1 hearth; J. C. Cox, 'A Religious Census of Derbyshire 1676', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal (DAJ)*, vii (1885), 32. One papist and 12 conformist

- recorded; A. Whiteman, ed., *The Compton Census of 1676: a critical edition* (1986).
- ⁸ Cox, *Churches*, iv, 441; Beckett *et al.*, *Ibid.*, 15-16, 64.
- ⁹ Gravenor, Henson, *History of the Frame-work Knitters* (1831, reprint 1970), 38-58; M. Palmer, *Framework Knitting*, Shire publication (1984); J. Thirsk, 'Knitting and Knitwear 1500 - 1780', in D. Jenkins, ed., *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* (2003), i, ch 13; J. Thirsk, *The Rural Economy of England* (2003), 255-6; Wills, B/C/11, in the LJRO, index on line.
- ¹⁰ J. Thirsk, 'The Fantastical Folly of Fashion; The English Stocking Knitting Industry, 1500-1700', in N. B. Harte & K. G. Ponting eds., *Essays in Honour of Julia de Lacy Mann*, Textile History and Economic History (1973), 68-73; S. D. Chapman, 'The Genesis of the British Hosiery Industry, 1600-1750', *Textile History* iii (1972), 7; LJRO, wills B/C/11 Thomas Bloodworth Derby 1696. There is no will, but there is an inventory.
- ¹¹ LJRO, B/C/11 John Leeson Snr 1697; John Tomlinson 1721; John Langton, 1719.
- ¹² *Derby Mercury (DM)*, 9/16/23 May 1766; LJRO, B/C/11, John Roper of Alfreton, 1766. No inventory.
- ¹³ Felkin, W., *A History of the Machine Wrought Hosiery and Lace Manufactures* (1867), 227-8; Derbyshire Record Office (DRO), D 654 A/PO 264; 267; 242; 246; 268; 272; 273; 276.
- ¹⁴ DRO, D654/A/PO/251, Bastardy bond, 1756; D2262, Newbold and Dunstan Vestry agreement.
- ¹⁵ South Normanton Wikipedia on-line.
- ¹⁶ *DM*, 16 October 1794.
- ¹⁷ *DM*, 23 October 1783; DRO, D654/A/PO/246 24 June 1808; *DM*, 24 November 1796; 2 May 1797; 16 November 1797.
- ¹⁸ *DM*, 28 May 1791.
- ¹⁹ Henson, *Ibid.*, 61-66.
- ²⁰ Derby Local Studies Library (DLSL), 4167, 'The Hosiers and Frame-knitters' Examination before a Committee of the House of Commons 28 May 1779', 54-57.
- ²¹ Felkin, *Ibid.*, 76; R. S. Fitton and A. P. Wadsworth, *The Strutts and the Arkwrights* (1958), 64-66; *DM*, 9/16/23 May 1766.
- ²² LJRO, B/C/11 John Leeson Snr 1697; John Tomlinson 1721; John Langton, 1719; Francis Carey 1806; William Dawes 1812; DRO, D37/MT/1287, Turbutt estate 1808 Sale of a message. John Carey, framework knitter and nephew and heir of Francis Carey.
- ²³ *DM*, 11 February 1808.
- ²⁴ DLSL, 4167, *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *DM*, 25 August 1806.
- ²⁶ *DM*, 25 July 1832; 20 March 1833.
- ²⁷ Fitton and Wadsworth, *Ibid.*, 2.
- ²⁸ Johnson, *Ibid.*, 51. The Holmes family were living in Alfreton in 1622, with land assessed at £2. In 1670 Christopher Holmes was taxed on 5 hearths; Fitton and Wadsworth, *Ibid.*, 32-34.
- ²⁹ *DM*, 20 February 1761; G. Holmes and D. Szechi, *The Age of Oligarchy. Pre-Industrial Britain 1722-1783* (1993), 173-4.
- ³⁰ LJRO, B/C/11 John Leeson Snr 1697; John Tomlinson 1721; John Langton, 1719; Joseph Dawes 1763; John Rawson, 1760.
- ³¹ LJRO, B/C/11 George Bland, Lower Birchwood 1757.
- ³² DRO, D654/A/PZ/10, W. Bateman, 'A Descriptive and Historical Account of Alfreton', (Mss. 1812) 20-22; www.Ancestry.com. William Mugliston, son of John and Jane, bap. St. Martin's, Alfreton, 23 May 1752. Twice married, seven children; *DM*, 29 May, 5 June

- 1788; *The Monthly Review* on-line, lxvi, 234-5.
- ³³ DLSL, 4167, *Ibid.*, 45-53; Henson, *Ibid.*, 394-5; *DM*, 2 August 1771.
- ³⁴ Felkin, *Ibid.*, 116-7.
- ³⁵ DLSL, 4167, *Ibid.*, 48-57.
- ³⁶ Bateman, *Ibid.*, 21-22. Mugliston died 1 May 1788, buried in St. Martin's churchyard Alfreton; *DM*, 3 July 1788; LJRO, B/C/11, will of William Mugliston 1778.
- ³⁷ J. Pilkington, Rev., *History of Derbyshire*, 319, 321.
- ³⁸ *DM*, 17 July 1800; 31 December 1801; 7 January 1802; 1 April 1802; 13 May 1802; 20 May 1802 (2), 10 December 1801; 1 April 1802.
- ³⁹ *DM*, 31 December 1801.
- ⁴⁰ *DM*, 13 October 1803; 7 July 1804.
- ⁴¹ *DM*, 12 December 1811; Felkin, *Ibid.*, 231.
- ⁴² *DM*, 21 May 1812; J. Heath, 'The Framework-Knitters between 1775-1850 with particular reference to the Ilkeston area', *Derbyshire Miscellany*, 8/4 (1978), 127.
- ⁴³ J. Stevens, *England's Last Revolution, Pentrich 1817*, 15-16, 20-21, 'The Pentrich Revolution', talk by Roger Tanner to DAS, 2017; The Pentrich and South Wingfield Revolution Group, Walk Leaflet No. 6. www.Ancestry.com. Rawson family tree; www.spanglefish.com. Pentrich Revolution Genealogy. Convict Indentures describe him as 5ft 9½ ins. tall with brown hair and hazel eyes.
- ⁴⁴ *DM*, 19, 26 August; 2 September 1819. Overseers Roberts (Alfreton), Innocent (Swanwick), Brown (Greenhill), Dawes (Riddings); Felkin, *Ibid.*, 445; W. Higgens, 'The Framework Knitters of Derbyshire', *DAJ*, lxxi (1951), 111-112; *DM*, 28 February 1821; 21, 28 April, 5 May 1824.
- ⁴⁵ Bagshaw, *Ibid.*, 569.
- ⁴⁶ *Northern Star and Leeds General Advertiser (NS)*, 17 April 1841; 28 August 1841; 13 November 1841; 10 February 1844; 22 June 1844.
- ⁴⁷ Reports from Commissioners appointed to Inquire into the Condition of the Frame-Work Knitters, xv, session 4 February - 9 August 1845.
- ⁴⁸ *DM*, 13 November 1800.
- ⁴⁹ N. B. Harte, *A History of George Brettle & Co Ltd 1801-1964* (1973), 13-20; S. Glover, *The History of the County of Derby* (1829), i, 242.
- ⁵⁰ S. Pigot, *Directory of Derbyshire* (1835), 20.
- ⁵¹ Reports 1845, *Ibid.*, 235. List of gauges omitted.
- ⁵² Reports 1845, *Ibid.*, 234-244.
- ⁵³ *DM*, 5 June 1850; 2 July 1851.
- ⁵⁴ *DM*, 23 January 1806.
- ⁵⁵ Johnson, *Ibid.*, 144; S. Greasley, *The Baptists of Derbyshire 1650-1914* (2007), 191-2.
- ⁵⁶ *DM*, 16 March 1825.
- ⁵⁷ *DM*, 3 July 1788.
- ⁵⁸ *DM*, 15, 22 September 1824; 2 March 1825.
- ⁵⁹ Wigston Framework Museum leaflet; www.wigstonframeworkknitters.org; A. Barrass, Belper. Looking into the Past, The Belper Historical Society (1994), 56, Plate 40, a photograph of a typical framework knitter's shop.
- ⁶⁰ *DM*, 20 June 1883 and 1881 census.
- ⁶¹ Employed by Edward Cross were James Anderson, James Weightman (both 25), William Clark (20) and Henry Clark (15); for an example of a Row see Crich, English Heritage, Grade II: ID 78673: SK3376254591.