

The Centre for the Social History of Health
and Healthcare, Glasgow

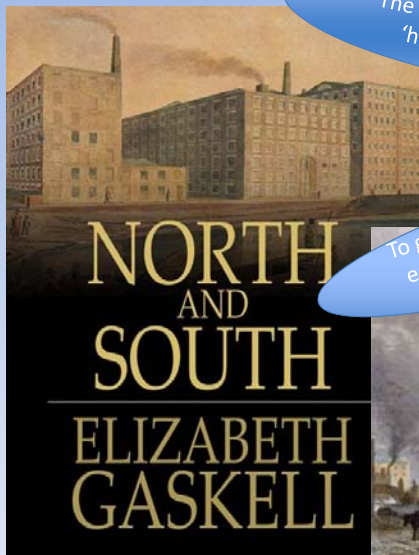


A research collaboration between the University of Strathclyde
and Glasgow Caledonian University



“I shall Ne’er get the whirr out o’ my ears’: Lancashire mill workers and their working envirnment

Dr Janet Greenlees
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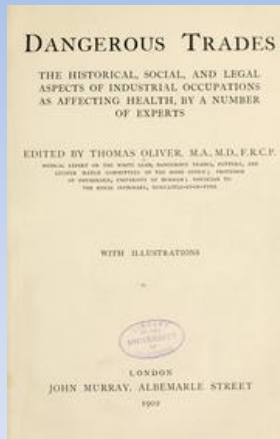


The noise makes my
'head ache so'


To get 'away from the endless,
endless noise, and sickening
heat'



Thomas Oliver, 1902



- Byssinosis - one of 4 recognised types of pneumoconiosis
- Byssinosis: 'a lung disease caused by inhalation of cotton particles', p. 273



Card room dust

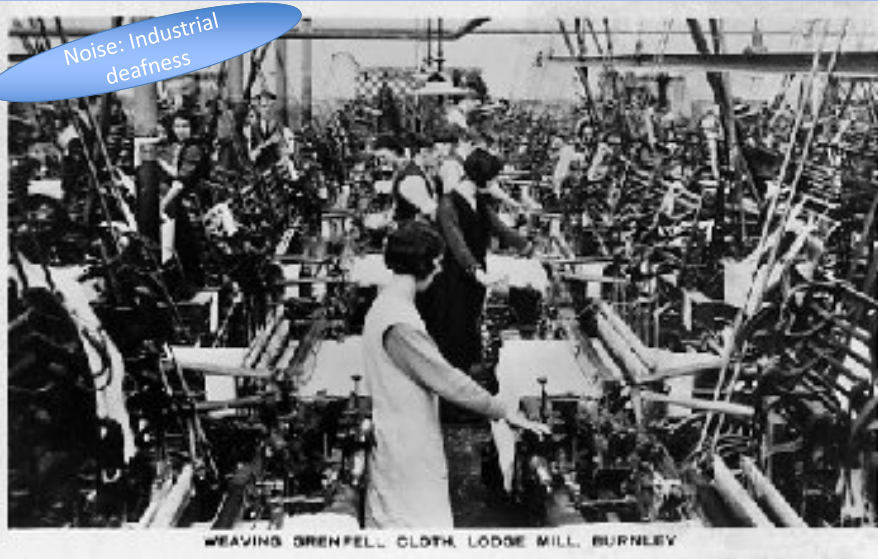
Madge Shaw, Oldham weaver, 1940-56
Q: 'Was it dusty in the weaving shed?
A: Well it could be but it wasn't the cotton fibres really, I don't think so. I mean anything batting against something else will cause a dust won't it, of some sort... there was a lot of dust as I tell you when we were cleaning the looms. See they used to put size on the warp what they called size. Oh it used to smell something awful, going through that room, the warp used to go through this tank, with this size in, starchy stuff to make it stronger for weaving. And that would cause a dust, the size, cos it would go powdery once it'd dried.'

Suction shuttle: Dust, dirt,
mould, size, contagious
diseases, esp. TB

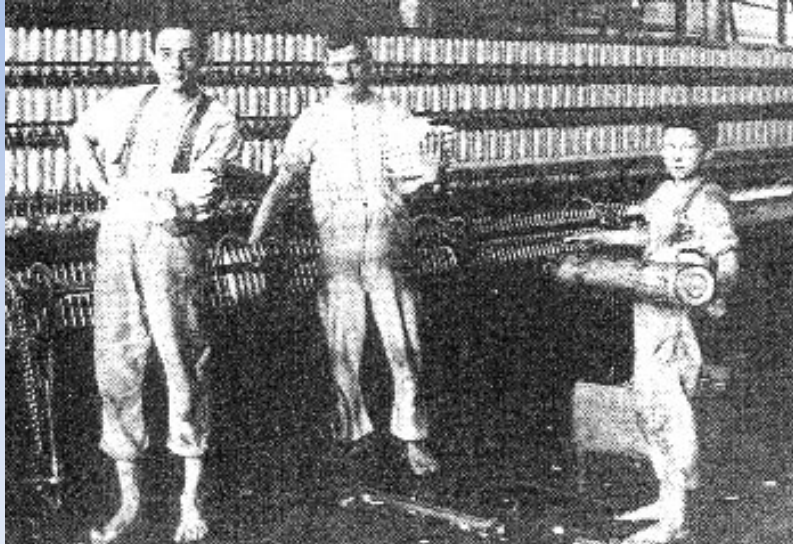


Weaving: heat &
humidity

Noise: Industrial
deafness



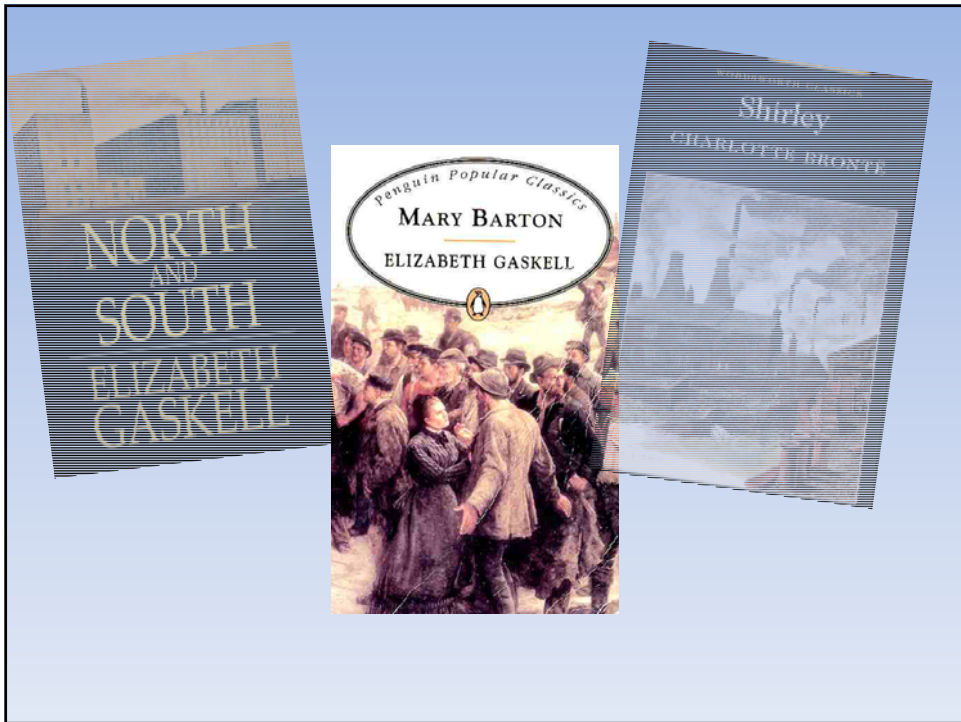
Mule spinners



Work injuries and fatalities: selected trades, UK, 1910-14

	1. Employed	2. Injuries	3. %	4. Deaths	5. %
Mines	1,075,780	177,684	16.52	1,477	0.137
Docks	138,273	15,463	11.18	200	0.144
Quarries	87,466	5,751	6.58	77	0.088
Railways	457,560	24,026	5.25	416	0.091
Shipping	252,980	7,904	3.12	497	0.196
Cotton	598,300	11,818	1.98	44	0.007
Wool/worsted	279,300	3,233	1.16	21	0.008
Other text.	227,100	3,152	1.39	15	0.006
Total text.	1,104,700	18,202	1.65	80	0.007
Wood	137,600	5,424	3.94	39	0.028
Metal smeltg	414,480	34,320	8.28	168	0.041
Metalwkg	801,460	39,865	4.97	155	0.019
Engineering	306,720	29,687	9.68	199	0.065
Pottery	68,330	1,296	1.90	8	0.012

- 1=Annual average numbers employed 1910-14
 - 2=Annual average of injuries for five years, 1910-14
 - 3=Percentage 2 to 1
 - 4=Annual average of fatalities for five years, 1910-14
 - 5=Percentage 4 to 1
- Source: Derived from data in the 18th Abstract of Labour Statistics, 1926, Cmd 2740 as found in A. McIvor, *History of Work in Britain, 1880-1950* (Palgrave, 2001), p. 120

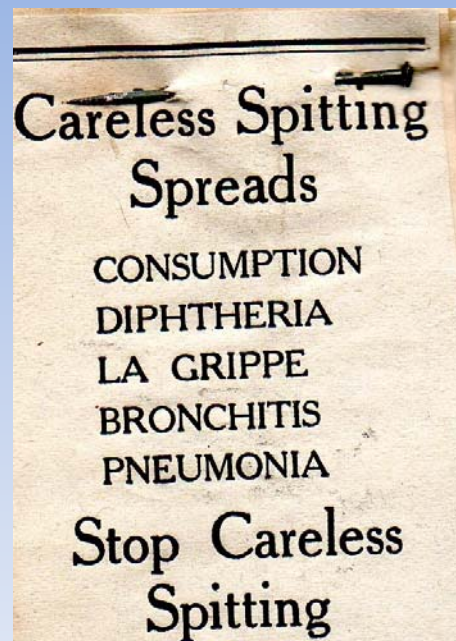


Variations in working conditions between mills

- **Bill Disby and Joe Richardson:** it was a 'common occurrence to get splinters. But it depended on the mill. If you got a modern mill, maple floor, you'd have no problem with it. It was only in older mills with softer woods.... conditions always varied from one mill to another. There were good shops and bad shops. In the good shops, there were... enlightened management, well equipped, well-serviced machinery, the job was a good one.'
- **Harvey Kershaw:** 'conditions in the sheds were very much dependent on the employer.'
- **Lucy Baker:** 'It (the King) were a lot cleaner than Bee. Cos everybody used to say 'oh I wouldn't work at Bee'. They've come from other mills when they've been on short time, to the Bee. But they haven't stuck it. It was a filthy place. Yeh'

Elsie Hansford, Oldham 1930s-50s

- 'Maple mill were different (at Hathershaw). What they did there, when I went there, they had, they had like things round the room, they were suckin, suckin the dust in. And you didn't see no dust at all proper. And you didn't get any on you. You know. It were a right big change (from the Monarch Mill) when I went there.' At the Monarch mill: 'it were very dusty, yeh. ...it were all in yer hair and all. You know. You used to be full of it in yer hair and on your clothes. It weren't too bad at Bank Top Mill.'

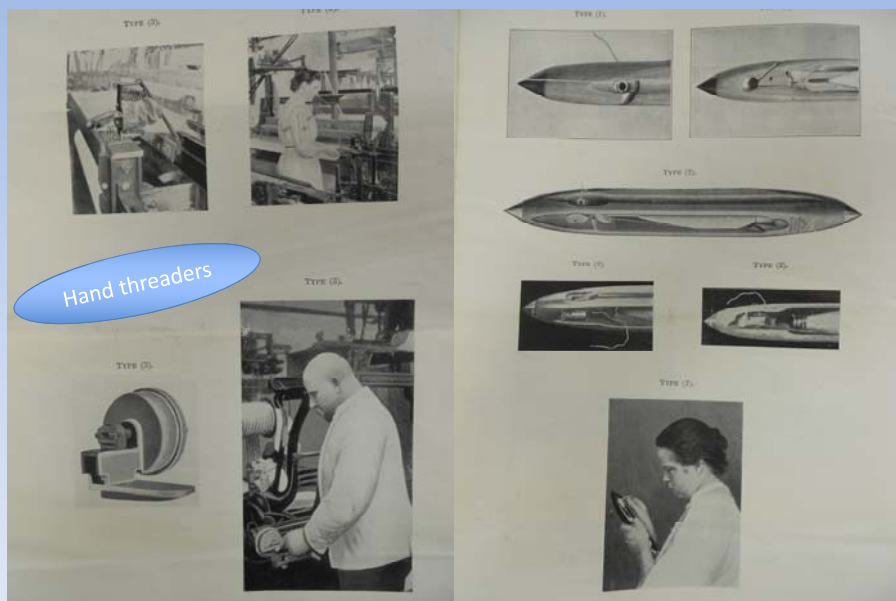


Workers' ignorance

- **Elsie Hansford**
- Q: 'Were you aware, could you feel you were breathing in dust?'
- A: 'Definitely, yeah, yeah.'
- Q: 'Did anyone talk about the fact that it might be dangerous?'
- A: No, nobody said that. They didn't start havin that. I went to another mill. They didn't have byssinosis pensions at that time. There were a lady there, she were very bad, very bad, oh she couldn't breathe properly.'

Workers' ignorance

- **Mona Morgan:** 'If anyone would have told me this would happen, I wouldn't have gone in.' (byssinosis sufferer and cardroom worker; employed 1936-46, 1953-1970s)
- **Ethel Fielding,** 'We were never told anything like that. You never dreamt of work hazards.' (employed in ring room, 1940 - 1980s; byssinosis sufferer)
- **May Mitchell:** 'Never heard the word, never heard the word til years after come out of t'mill.' (cardroom worker, 1930s & 1940s)
- NWSA – Interviews by Michelle Abendstern, 2002.



THE GRAPHIC

BEECHAM'S PILLS.

A little child lay on her bed of pain,
With deep blue eyes, and wealth of golden hair,
Longing that Summer hours would come again,
With all their sunshine and their pleasures fair.

With ministry of quiet, tender love,
The mother watched beside her as she lay,
A message came—O joy, all joys above!
It turned her sadness into brightest day.

It told of certain cure—what words of cheer
For weary sickness and all mortal ills!
Restoring health soon blessed the child so dear,
Who gladly took a box of "BEECHAM'S PILLS."

A maiden in life's Springtime, faint and weak,
And smitten down by fell Consumption's hand,
The hectic flush upon her fair young cheek,
That pitious scourge of this our northern land.

She read the tidings scattered far and wide,
And brightest hopes began her heart to fill,
Came back to health to be a beauteous bride,
Now rescued by the world-famed "BEECHAM'S PILL."

An old man in the Winter of his days,
With laboured breath, and many a bitter pain,
Tried the same cure—a cure beyond all praise,
And seemed to live his younger life again.

For all the pains that mortals can best,
'Mid life's sad change, and all its numerous ills,
One remedy unailing, we have yet,
Thank kindly Heaven for BEECHAM'S marvellous PILLS.

1880

Half Woman's Ills

begin with a sluggish, congested or otherwise unhealthy state of one or more of the important organs of digestion and assimilation—the stomach, liver, kidneys and bowels. If taken in time you

Need Naught But

Beecham's Pills to help you to perfect health. They improve the appetite and digestion—strengthen the nerves and help purify the blood. You feel better and look better—you will be stronger, more cheerful, more hopeful. You will eat better, sleep better and be better able to resist the assaults of serious diseases if you keep in trim by an occasional dose of

BEECHAM'S PILLS

"The Largest Sale of Any Medicine in the World"
Directions of Special Value to Women are with Every Box.

1914

Beecham's Pills for Weary Women Workers. Help prevent fatigue! CFT, 1918



Blackburn and District Power-Loom Weavers', Winders' & Warpers' Association

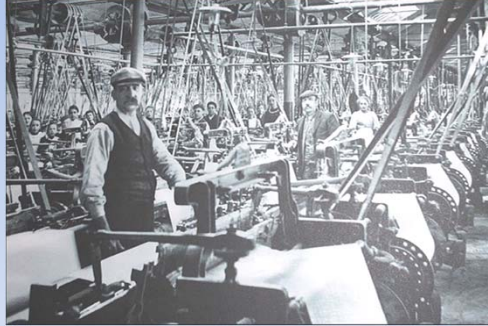
- '...are even willing, to receive less wages if they can bring about the abolition of artificial humidity. That to our minds gives us the possibility of arriving at only one conclusion, namely, that the system is considered and believed to be so injurious to their health that the weavers are prepared to face other difficulties rather than carry on their vocation under its operation.'
- DDX 1123/6/2/130 Blackburn and District Power-Loom Weavers', Winders' & Warpers' Association, Letter from Jos Cross, David Shackleton and Fred Thomas of the Weavers' Association to unknown, Nov. 30, 1910

Oldham spinners, 1918

- '...the most effective way of registering a protest against cold workrooms was for the operatives not to go on shivering and endangering their health, but to return to their homes and stay there until the temperature of the rooms had been raised to a reasonable level',
- *CFT*, Feb. 1, 1918.

Barnoldswick weaver Harvey Kershaw, about the 1930s

- *'The weavers were determined not to be frozen to death. They'd rather go home and sit in front of the fire and earn no money than be frozen to death in the factories.'*



- NWSA: Harvey Kershaw

Madge Shaw – Burnley & Oldham, 1940-56 and Elsie Hansford, Oldham

- **Shaw:** 'it was very noisy. But I knew that. Ahh, I knew it was noisy, but all the family had gone weaving, so I thought, well, it's in the blood. Foolish, you know. Very foolish, but there it is. And, ah, it didn't bother me. Cause everybody was talking with yer lips, you know, lip reading, and you could have a conversation and nobody would know what you were talking, only you who were eye to eye.'
- **Hansford:** 'it were very noisy, very noisy. I've wondered why I'm deaf (laughs) very noisy.'

Deafness

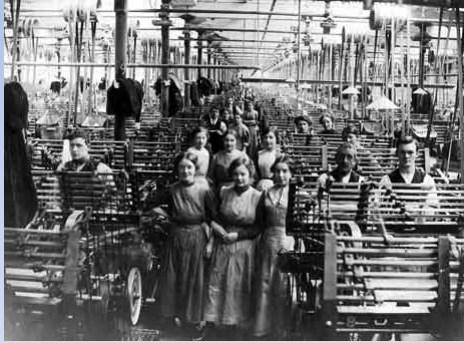
- **Raymond Watson:** 'They just didn't seem to bother about people goin deaf. The people themselves knew they were going deaf but they just accepted it in the old days, didn't they? They accepted it as that's what happened. If you worked in the mill, it affected your hearing.'
- **George Wrigley** – 'The noise was horrendous. But, like anything else when you're young, you just take it. It's your job. You've gone into it, get on with it.'
- **Tom Young** - 'Within the first week, I was violently sick. The noise levels were extremely high. But it was a fact of life, you just went in. You almost came out and banged your head against the wall to make the howling stop. But it made me extremely sick and people said, "It's normal, it' weaving sickness.'

• *Nation on Film, 2003.*

Gender and mill work – camaraderie

- **Joe Richardson:** 'Most of them resented it bitterly when circumstances forced them out of the mill. But again, in a large number, probably the majority, if you'd met them six months on, they would have said it should have happened ten bloody years ago. You know, with them never experiencing the conditions in other industries, conditions that were much better than in textiles. In spite of that, lots of people have happy memories of their time in mule spinning. They have no regrets.' NWSA: Bill Disby and Joe Richardson
- **Elsie Hansford:** 'It was a very happy atmosphere, really. It was very hard work, but we loved goin to tell you the truth, but we enjoyed it. But we did long hours.' NWSA
- **Madge Shaw:** 'There was a good camaraderie, you know. You couldn't live without the people round you... We all helped each other. You know. It was very good for that. Ah, they'd stop their looms and come and help you if you had what they called a mess.' NWSA
- **Stanley Graham,** Spring Vale Mill, Haslingden: 'Unless you've actually done it, it's hard to understand how anyone could work in these conditions all day.... There's something romantic about it. But it's also bloody hard work.' NWSA, Stanley Graham

Mass Observation, *People in Production* (1942)



- 'There is a direct correlation between the feeling of health and satisfaction with the job being done. Those who like their jobs feel better than those who don't like their jobs.'