

Oral History transcription for 360 Archive Film

June a Burler and Mender at Sunny Bank Mills, 1949 - 1959

I started at fifteen years of age in 1949 after leaving school. I worked there for about 10 years. Served a 2-year apprenticeship erm finished up working down in the finish mending.

We started at half past seven in the morning and we finished at quarter past five and on a Saturday morning we used to work from seven o'clock till eleven o'clock.

I seem to vaguely remember when I first started it was about £2 something a week. A man used to come round with a basket with all your pay packets in and then we had another man that used to come round and he used to collect if you wanted to be in, what they called the 'Holiday Club'.

When you got your piece, when it had been brought off the loom. It was in what they called 'in the grease' And it was rolled up and every piece had a number which we had a lady and she had a sewing machine and on the sewing machine every piece that came through she would machine a number. And then when you were ready to work on a piece the Over looker, like the boss he would choose a piece for you to do. So, you had a book and you wrote that piece number in your book. And then when you started, you unrolled it and started to work on your piece. First you had to burl it. Pulling up knots because the lengths of weft and warp had to be knotted at certain areas. So, you had to pull up the knots, in some cases you would pull them up and cut them off. And in other cases, you had to actually undo the knot and then sew them, back stitch them, backwards and forwards so that they didn't run. Now a slub is where the weft or the warp has not gone through the spinning erm area and come out clean. That forms like a thick piece of weft or warp so with your burlers you had to gently pull out the spare wool that was round the core of the weft or the warp.

The burlers were an instrument that were just like a big pair of tweezers. Very fine points and you used to use your tweezers to pull the knots up, pull your slubs out and also if you had thick ends which were like a long slubby end which might go, sometimes they went for yards. You'd have to pull them out with your burlers. But on the other side of your burlers, the top end it was rounded. And when you'd done some pulling up it would show on the material like you could see it being pulled. So, you were able to turn your burlers over and used to push with the other end. You used to push the other ends back to make it, so it was the right tension again.

Each piece that you got you were given a time limit to do it in. So, you might have say eight hours depending on the complexity of the pattern. And if you worked and you finished it within two hours of that time, of course it was a bonus if you worked over well of course you were losing. So, it was a case of heads down because you never knew when you opened a piece what you were going to find there.

When you started off on a morning, your thimble on your middle finger and your needle. And then your cloth you had to learn how to hold your cloth, you used to have to hold your cloth, you had to grip it between your thumb and your finger and then you had to stretch it and you worked it on that that gap between those two fingers. Because you had to keep the tension through and so you would work with your needle like that, that's the way you held it and then you would move it up and do a bit more. And some of the bad pieces they could have ends missing or lots and lots of picks. And if they were really bad what they would do is, they would stretch them over two or three boards and the other menders would help you. Because everything had to be done, there was no waste, very little waste in them days.

The only men we saw was the boss. A percher is where, when the pieces first come up from the weaving. The percher, a percher is if you imagine like a big rack going up nearly to the ceiling actually and it goes up one side and down the other. Like a big square that goes up and down. And he would stand inside, and he would pull the pieces down to see what there was. So, sometimes when you unrolled your piece there was already anything that was drastic was already marked up because he would have marked, marked it up. He used blue chalk for all your greased, now when you went to work in the finishing, he used white cotton. So, it was quite noisy down in the finished mending compared to the grease mending, which was very quiet, a quiet environment. But there was always so much going on in the finishing because erm people were coming in and out and the machinery was going. There was steam rising, the press, the big press that went down and I mean the press went from one floor right down to another floor down below. These huge sheets of cardboard were, and they were heavy sheets as well and they were pushed in between each piece of erm material. The material was again a bit like on a perch. Once they were on the machine and they were halfway through a process, you couldn't really chatter. Erm the only time we used to really erm get together and have a chat like was at break time if we were all making tea together or whatever. The boiler was where I worked in the erm finish mending was near the window and we had a sink and a boiler there which we used to have to fill and then when it got to about half past ten we all had a break.

At that particular time in Farsley when the Mills were here there was lots of little places you could go for a meal, so it was like a bit of a social time. And you would have a meal and everything and then come back into the Mill.

One of these cards was slotted in from left and then right so actually it was like a concertina going down with cloth and card on top of each other and that went right down piece after piece after piece until the press was filled and then of course the press was closed and held there for at least twenty four hours. And then they would un lease the press and then they would reverse the cards had to come back out so there was cards to left and cards to the right and the material was brought out and then that was erm because it was a press finish was different to the other processes of finishing.

Erm I found it boring at times, I think it got to be monotonous really but we did have breaks of monotone because a lot of us had left school together and we were all working together we were all of an age group. So, and there was erm a lot of the women, some of them were stiff and starchy. A lot of them were very religious but you did get the odd ones that had something about them, and we had Mrs \* and she had daughters who were to erm went in for dancing competitions. She used to be making all the costumes and she would be telling us how many sequins she'd sown on the ball dresses and everything, you know. And she used to take us all into the toilets on a Friday in turn (laughter) and she'd pluck our eyebrows for us with the burlers (laughter) So you'd go in and sit on the toilet and she would come in with and pluck your eyebrows (laughter) for you.

And we used to have day trips Mr Gaunt used to pay for us to go on a day trip once a year. So, we would the charabanc would pull up, the buses and they would take us to Blackpool or a, mostly Blackpool or Scarborough. And they were very nice, you'd set off early on a morning and usually get to the seaside about lunchtime and then we would meet up again about six o'clock and then they would bring us back home. So, there was always lots of fun and merriment going on, you know on the buses. So that was quite good, that was always something to look forward too.

The patterns changed we went through the Cavalry Twill, went through the Birds Eye, we went through the Reversibles. You know we went through different kinds of material which became popular the Gaberdines came in and each one had its own pattern.

I left in fifty-nine. I went to work in another Mill and I worked there for nearly two year. I've worked in a Mill in Scotland and I worked at the Broom in Farsley and I also did a bit of out mending. And once I left Woodhouses and the whole way of mending in a different Mill which I went to, it changed. And I found it difficult to cope with not doing things which had been taught to do and it was, it's a bit like you mend an engine but your allowed to leave a nut out. I were wanting to put the nuts and bolts in.