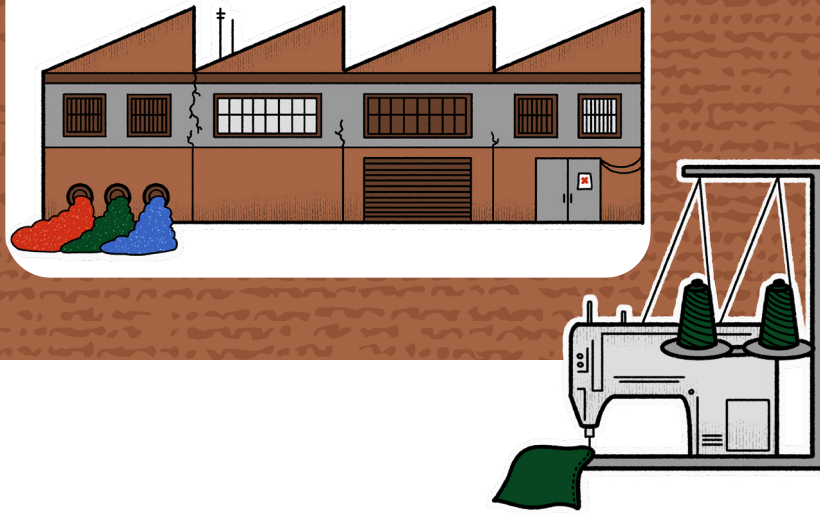


#3: Factories: have we learnt anything?



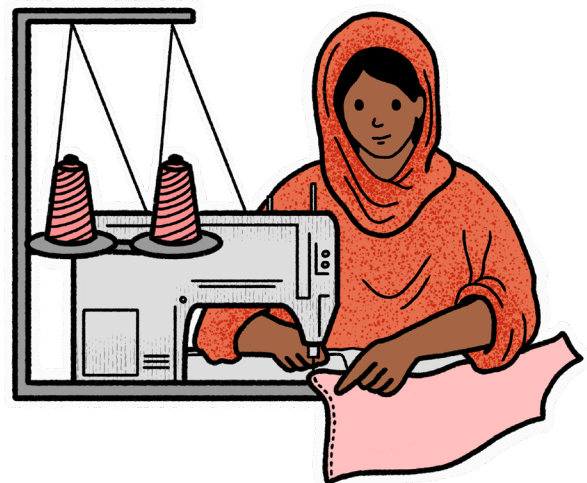
Summary

On 24th April 2013 a 9-storey garment factory in Bangladesh collapsed, killing over 1100 people working as garment workers. These garment workers were making clothes that were directly linked to UK shops. Many brands and shops that you would recognise were having clothes made in that factory. This tragedy made people question the industry that often puts making money above the safety of workers. However, this is not a new issue. In this activity, learners will explore the history of garment workers and factories in Birmingham and the Midlands from the 18th Century onwards, using Birmingham Museums collections.

This activity is designed to help learners explore the human impact of the clothing industry, now and in the past.

At the end of this learners will

- Be able to compare the experiences of factory workers in the past and present.
- Develop an understanding of chronology
- Develop their understanding about how different types of historical sources can be used, questioned and analysed.
- Be aware of ways to ask brands for information about their sustainable credentials with a focus on workers' rights.

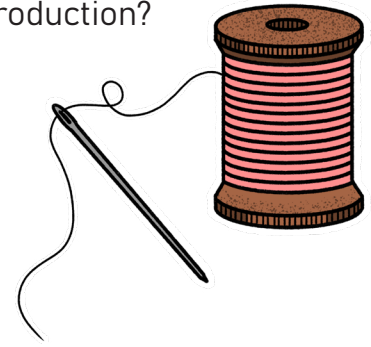


Time frame

45 minutes

Lesson format

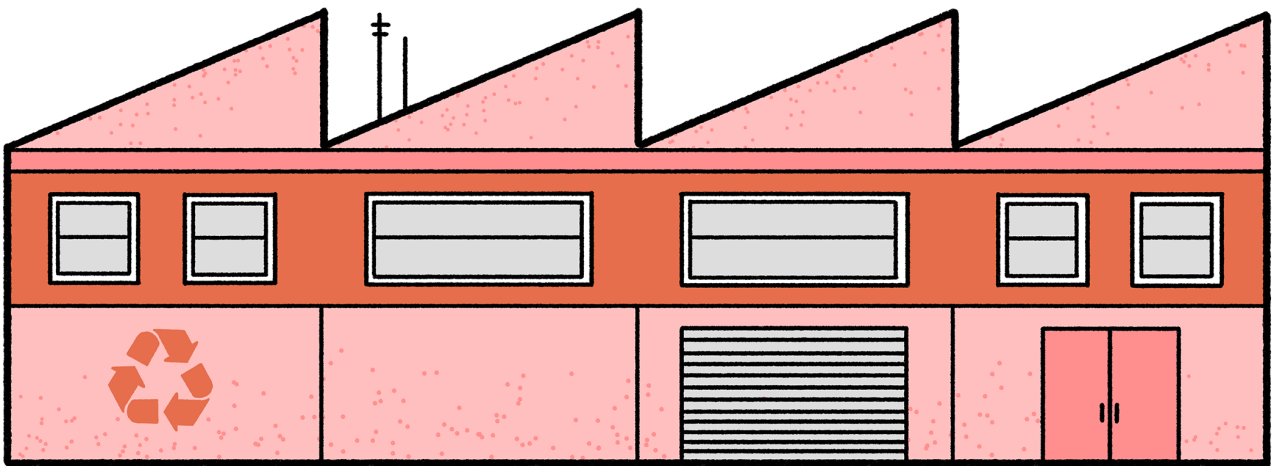
- Ask the question. What is the human cost of fast fashion production?
- Look at Rana Plaza disaster news report.
- Discussion about Rana Plaza reading.
- Create a timeline of garment production.
- What stories do objects tell us about workers in the past?
- Why are fewer garments made in UK today?
- What can we do to protect garment workers?



Note: We have provided a choice of two videos about the Rana Plaza disaster. One contains graphic scenes some viewers might find disturbing, please view both videos before showing either to your learners to check which one is most appropriate for learners. This session includes reference the cotton industry and enslaved people within the group research activity (Activity 2).

Key resources

- 3 Factories have we learnt anything Presentation
- 3 Factories have we learnt anything Activity 1 – each learner needs 1 printed copy
- 3 Factories have we learnt anything Activity 2 – each group needs 2 corresponding sheets printed. You may also choose to enable each group to use a device to access the internet.



What to do

1. Ask the question. What is the human cost of fast fashion production?
2. Slide 2 **Task 1** Watch one of these videos about the Rana Plaza disaster (3 min) This video, made by Oxfam, contains scenes of one of the survivors of the collapse speaking about her experiences.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wPoM604gA

Discussion points:

- How many people were killed?
- What concerns did workers have about the factory?

- What has been the impact of the collapse?

OR

(5 min 6) This video, made by the New York Times, contains graphic scenes of the aftermath of the collapse some viewers might find disturbing, please check it is appropriate for your class.

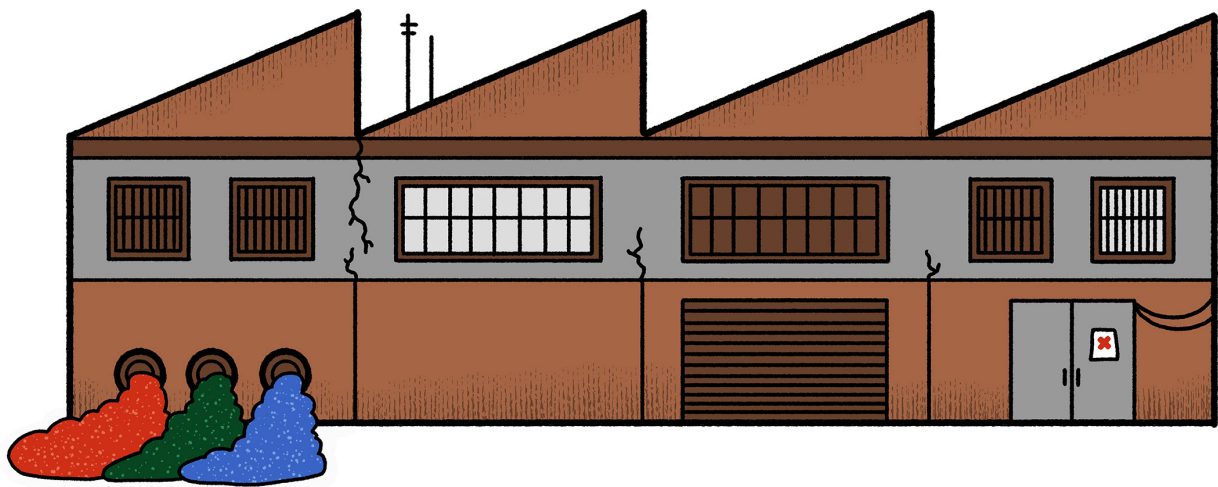
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Fkhzdc4ybw>

Discussion points:

- What products were being made?
- What clothing brands were being made there?
- How many people were killed?

3. Slide 3 **Task 2** Read this article

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2018/apr/24/bangladeshi-police-target-garment-workers-union-rana-plaza-five-years-on>



Discussion points:

- Why did the factory collapse?
- How do you feel about what you have learnt?
- Do you think this is a one-off incident? Check out this article to see if other incidents have happened since: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-fire-workers-factbox-idUSKBN1YE1PT>

4. Ask the question: Has it always been like this? Let's look at how clothes were made in the past.

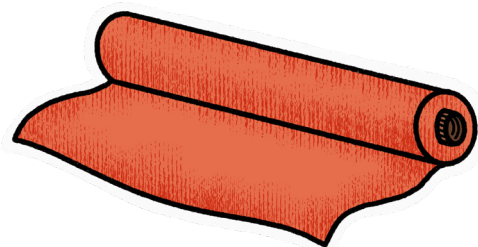
Slide 4: The raw materials for cloth such as flax (for linen) and wool even had to be spun by hand first.

Slide 5: Cloth for garments used to be woven in the homes of weavers.

Slide 6: Each garment would then have been made individually by hand from this woven cloth.

Slide 7: In 18th Century Britain machines were introduced that meant more cloth could be woven in factories using machines, during what is sometimes called the Industrial Revolution.

5. Slide 8 **Task 3** Learners create their own storyboard timeline of the British garment



industry, using the timeline provided in 3 Factories have we learnt anything Activity. This will help them conceptualise when looking at artefacts in the next stage of this lesson.

Extension idea: You might also want to use the timeline squares in Section 7, to see the impact of humans on our changing planet. How do the two timelines fit together?

6. Slide 9 **Task 4** Learners split into 4 groups. Each group will use the information provided to find out garment production and the fashion industry in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

Learners should start by looking at the picture of the object and reading the information. Make some notes about the object.

They should then consider these questions:

- What are you able to find out about the workers that made or used the object?
- What are you able to find out about the working conditions associated with the object?
- Think about the evidence and information you are using. Is it a source from the time? If it is a written source, who wrote it? What does it not tell you about?
- What else would you like to find out about working conditions in the 18th and 19th century?
- Why do you think goods for the garment industry were made locally in the past?

(**Note:** Each group works with their two sheets of information (Activity 2, which you will need to print beforehand.). You may wish to use the activity sheet on page 9 within Activity 2 to support learners.)

Links are saved on slides 10–14 to enable content such as videos to be easily shared to the whole group, if individual research groups wish to do so.

Groups will look at:

- Slide 10 A collection of buttons made between 1770–1830
- Slides 11 and 12 A button shanking machine from 1794
- Slide 13 A steam engine made in 1891 which generated electricity for a factory that made corsets
- Slide 14 A steam engine similar to those used to make cloth (it was used to train engineers) made 1909.



7. Slide 14 **Task 5** Why are lots of garments today not made locally?

Discussion points:

- How have changes in technology changed the way garments are made?
- How have changes in travel changed the way garments have been made?
- How have changes in people's rights influenced where and how garments are made (e.g. child labour and compulsory education rights)?
- Are there still garment factories in the UK today and what are the working conditions? (check out this report about garments workers in Leicester in 2020

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/oct/11/exploited-workers-at-uk-garment-factories-robbed-of-27m-since-july>)

8. Slide 15 How might we reduce the impact? Start by taking suggestions from learners. We have included some suggestions and prompts to help learners think about potential solutions at this stage in their learning and in order to facilitate discussion. Sections 2, 5 and 8 also suggest further potential solutions and positive actions in more detail.

(**Note:** Protecting garment workers might include asking companies to:

- Having safe working areas
- Fair pay
- Access to education and medical services for workers and their families.
- Setting up unions to support workers if they are not being treated fairly.)

Extension ideas

- Try weaving your own piece of fabric to see just how tricky it can be and get a little taste for pre-industrial craft. <https://www.artbarblog.com/weaving-kids/>. Want to make it sustainable? Ask around – could you use existing resources? Could you use old t shirts to make t shirt yarn? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fLfZHA7wFg>



Further resources

Links about the history of garment production in UK

- <https://apps.npr.org/tshirt/#/people>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Textile_manufacture_during_the_British_Industrial_Revolution
- <https://www.theglobalcircle.com/what-happened-to-the-british-textile-industry/>
- https://www.bbc.co.uk/nationonfilm/topics/textiles/background_decline.shtml
- <http://www.cossa.pv.it/wp2017/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/History-of-the-British-Textile-Industry.pdf>
- <https://www.rathbones.com/knowledge-and-insight/made-britain>



Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Task 3 : Look at the timeline provided of key events in the British textile industry. Decide which events you feel are significant and record them on your storyboard timeline.

Draw here		
Write here		

Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Button making was a huge industry in Birmingham.

These buttons are part of the Luckcock Collection. Over 500 buttons were collected by James Luckcock, a jeweller in St Paul's Square, Birmingham in the 1780s. He collected them as some of the best examples of Birmingham button making.

The Luckcock Collection is almost entirely composed of buttons made to be worn on men's coats or waistcoats. For wealthy men, large and intricately decorated buttons were important accessories, often ornamenting expensive and flamboyant clothes. Buttons were glamorous and fashionable, demonstrating the wealth and taste of those who wore them.



(Luckcock Button Group)

These buttons date from between 1770 and 1830 and were made at a period when Birmingham buttons had an international reputation. Birmingham was famous for the quality of its buttons, and the trade prospered, employing thousands of people in 18th Century Birmingham. In 1865 6,000 people in Birmingham were working in button trade, with an overall population in 1861 of 296, 076¹.

Button manufacture brought vast wealth to some: one button manufacturer, John Taylor, left a fortune of £200,000 after apparently creating a cheaper process for gilding metal buttons.

In the 1760s, it was calculated that one button would pass through fifty pairs of hands, and each of these would shift up to 1,000 fastenings a day. However, conditions for the workers producing these beautiful objects were not ideal. As in other industries at the time, the health and safety of the workforce was barely considered. Poor ventilation and noxious chemicals and dust created a hazardous environment.

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_Birmingham

Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Further research ideas about buttons

- Read this account about the Birmingham company Buttons Ltd. This company made fabric covered buttons, and buttons made from corozo, metals, leather and casein. This account describes the working conditions at Buttons Ltd, as described by Robin Evans, in 'Company Extraordinary: Buttons Limited 1908-1959'.

'amid a jungle of scrap metal and rubbish, was a great pile of horn and hoof, newly arrived from overseas. The stench was appalling, the mass alive with maggots, while from an open doorway came a whiff of seam and the same pungent smell. I peered inside, and there sitting on a high stool stirring a bubbling cauldron of this obscene mixture, was an elderly woman wearing a man's cap. I turned away, nauseated, but realised that this process was necessary before buttons could be made from such material.'²

- Think about the raw materials used to make buttons. What are corozo and casein? Where do they come from? What were health risks? What is mother of pearl?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vegetable_ivory

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casein>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nacre>

- Read a short overview of the button trade:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/w8a88pleRCmjgWEqPZHPfg>
- Learn more about John Taylor, Birmingham button manufacturer:
<http://mappingbirmingham.blogspot.com/2019/07/john-taylor-birminghams-first-factory.html>
- What was it like to make a button? Watch a button being made:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRTvubwXRqY>



² Carl Chinn, Birmingham: The Great Working City', 1994, Birmingham City Council, Department of Leisure and Community Services, ISBN 0-7093-0203-7, page 12 and 13

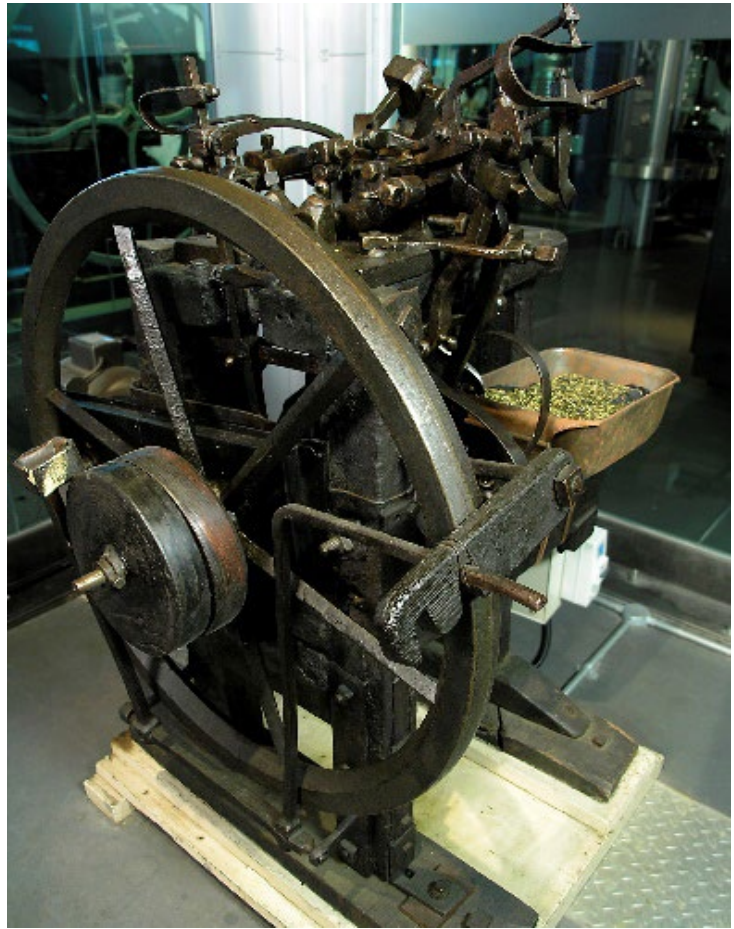
Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Button making was a huge industry in Birmingham.

The production of button making became mechanised.

Machines like this helped increase production in the Industrial Revolution. This machine made button shanks and was made by Ralph Heaton after 1794. Heaton was from Birmingham and was an engineer, inventor and businessman.

It is on display at Thinktank in We Made It Gallery.



(1958S00999)

Mass production in Britain took off at the end of the 18th Century. In the 1790s most machines needed a skilled person to work them. This machine was one of the very first to work automatically, allowing mass production. This machine made button shanks – loops of wire for attaching solid buttons to clothes. It made enough button shanks in one afternoon to last a typical button maker a whole month.



(examples of button shanks)

Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Further research ideas about button shanking

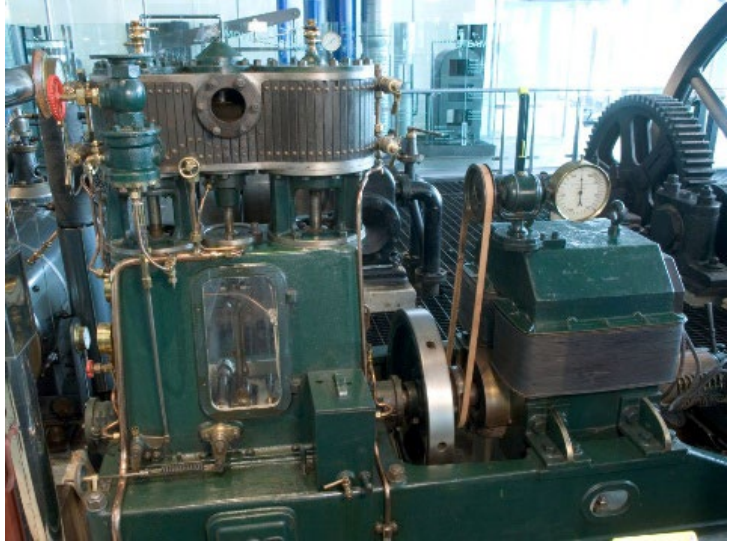
- Information about Ralph Heaton, the inventor of this button shanking machine:
https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Ralph_Heaton
- Ralph Heaton, the person who invented this machine for his factory, provided data about weekly earnings for men, women and children in the metal business. See pages 26, 91, 134-5 <https://theses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/9026/1/Nejedly2019PhD.pdf>
 - How many workers did he employ?
 - Did men or women make up the majority of the workers?
 - What was the average weekly wage?
- The industrialist, Matthew Boulton lived at Soho House, Birmingham. He and James Watt worked together and their engines marked the start of the Industrial Revolution.
<https://www.birminghammuseums.org.uk/soho/highlights/home-of-matthew-boulton>

Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Corset making.

Corsets were made in a factory in Market Harborough, about 50 miles from Birmingham.

This steam engine is called the Belliss High Speed Steam Engine and Generator Set and was made in 1891. It generated electricity to light a factory in Market Harborough, where corsets were made. It is on display at Thinktank in the Power Up gallery.



(1996M26)

This is a fast steam producing engine that generates electricity. It was installed in the works of Robert and William Henry Symington, a corset maker in Market Harborough, and used to produce light to enable employees to see their work. The stitching on the corsets was so fine that the 500 workers needed very bright lights to see what they were doing. This machine helps us to consider the working conditions in the factory.



Replica corset like those made at Symington's (1952S00165.00001)

Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

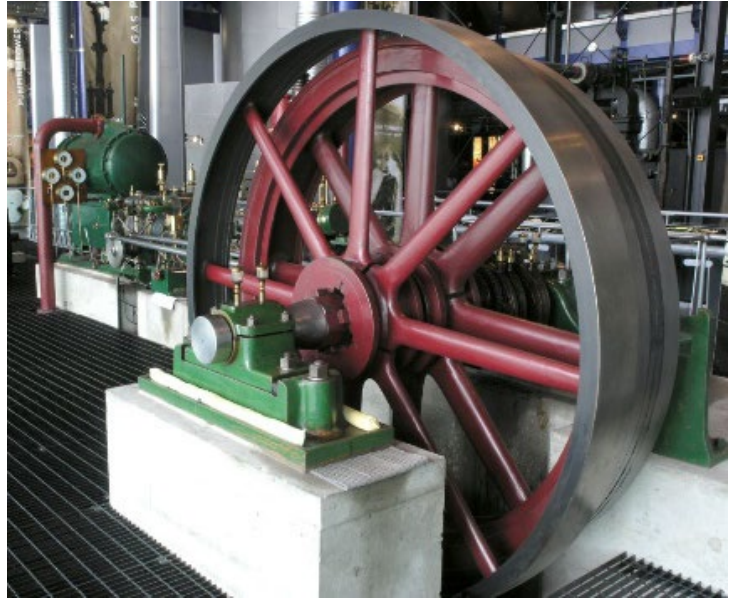
Further research ideas about Symington's

- Read this memory from worker at Symington's:
'a stitching job at Symington's was a skilled job because you had to assemble the things and you had to know which bits to put together. In some parts as many as ten or twelve different pieces were put together for a corset, and then they had to be strapped...'
Miss Abbott worked at Symington's in 1917
- A video of workers leaving work filmed in 1901 (4.11mins)
<https://player.bfi.org.uk/free/film/watch-workers-leaving-symingtons-market-harborough-1901-online>
- More info about the factory:
<http://www.harboroughmuseum.org.uk/museum-collections/r-w-h-symington-co-ltd-corsetry/>
- A Symington Corset,1885
<https://bit.ly/3Gpa5zq>
- How were corsets made? Watch a modern maker make a corset using a Symington's pattern. (39.5 mins)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWzXDuwrAgQ>

Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

In the 19th Century most cloth was made in mills.

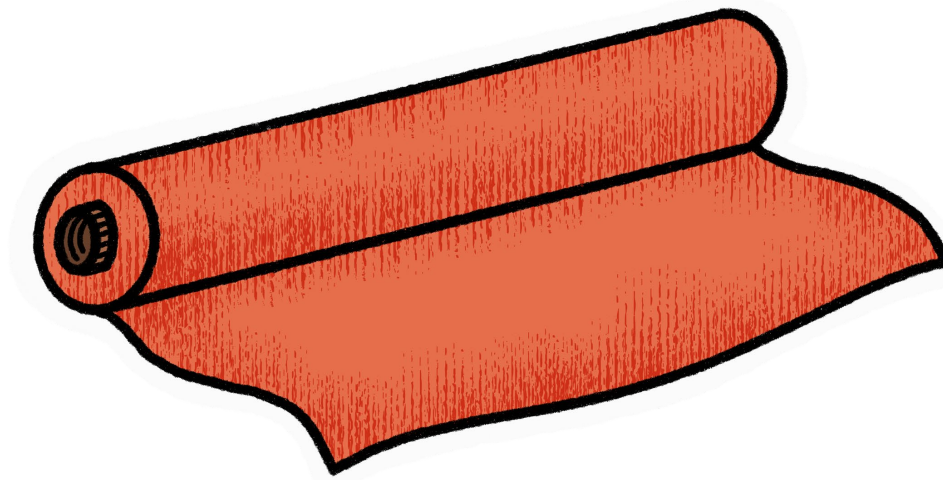
Engines like this helped mechanise the way cloth was woven. This engine was made by Pollitt and Wigzell Ltd. Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire in 1909. It is on display at Thinktank in Power Up gallery.



(1955S00557)

This engine can help us think about the working conditions in textile mills. Textile industries were revolutionised by steam engines that could power thousands of spinning machines and looms. In the 19th Century steam engines were used to spin cotton and weave into cloth. Many handloom weavers were put out of work or forced to look for work in the new mills. The engine could adjust its power if more, or fewer, looms were used at the mill. This kept the pattern of the cloth even. By 1880 Lancashire produced 82% of cotton goods worldwide.

This engine was used at Manchester University to teach students how to solve engineering problems. It is only half the size of the largest mill engines and has only 10% of the power.



Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Further research ideas about cloth manufacture

- As well as considering the impact of the cotton trade on factory workers in Britain, we also need to consider the impact of the cotton trade on the people who harvested cotton. The cotton trade and history of enslaved people in the Caribbean and America are inextricably linked. Cotton is of the main crops that formed the backbone of one side of the 'Slave Triangle', goods being transported to England, others being sugar, rum, tobacco etc. Enslaved people provided the raw materials for the cotton industry.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zc92xnb/revision/4>

Learn more about conditions that enslaved people experienced:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zq2syrd/revision/1>

- Many wealthy families directly profited from the labour of enslaved people. Sarah Holte (formerly Newton) married the owner of Aston Hall in Birmingham in 1755. Her family's fortune was built on the exploitation of enslaved people and their labour, to produce goods such as sugar on an estate in Barbados that she co-owned.

<http://wwwdepts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/2146650159>

<https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/slavery-and-british-country-house/slavery-british-country-house-web/>

- What is calico?

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calico>

- For more about Lancashire textile mills (7 pages):

https://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/work/england/lancashire/article_1.shtml

- How many people did the Lancashire cotton industry employ in the early 20th C?
- What can you find out about working conditions in the factories?
- What workplace hazards were there?

- In the 19th Century steam engines like this were used to power machines to spin cotton and weave it into cloth. This threatened skilled handloom weavers, who were put out of work or forced to look for work in the new mills. Some British textile workers in Manchester rebelled, originally led by Ned Ludd. This group became known as the 'Luddites'.

<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-Luddites/>

- The top sample of calico cloth was produced on a loom powered by an engine like this textile mill engine. It has a very even weave. The sample at the bottom shows what happens when the power supply to the loom varies. It leaves gaps in the cloth, and a very uneven weave.

Lesson 3: Factories: have we learnt anything?

Task 4 : Working in your group, use the information provided about your object to find out garment production and the fashion industry in Birmingham and the West Midlands.

All of the objects have a connection to Birmingham or the West Midlands and are cared for by Birmingham Museums. Most of them are on display at Thinktank, Birmingham Science Museum.

Start by looking at the picture of the object and reading the information. Make some notes below.

What is it? _____

What is it for? _____

When was it used? _____

Where is it from? _____

Now use the further research information to find out more. What are you able to find out: about the workers that made or used this object? _____

about working conditions associated with the object? _____

Think about the evidence and information you are using. Is it a source from the time? If it is a written source, who wrote it? What does it not tell you about?

What else would you like to find out about working conditions in the 18th and 19th century?

Why do you think goods for the garment industry were made locally in the past?

Write one fact or piece of information that you want to share with other people about this object.

