

Know your village :
Skelmanthorpe in times past



**A HAND-LOOM WEAVER
AND HIS LOOM ARE
DIFFICULT TO PART !**

Front cover:

Ernest Pogson hand-loom weaving at Garratt Building, Skelmanthorpe.



The gable-end of this old weaver's cottage in Radcliffe Street, Skelmanthorpe shows how the roof of the house was raised so that the handloom could be fitted with a Jacquard to operate effectively.

**Daniel Defoe describing a visit to the West Riding in
“A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain” (1724):**

“This business is the clothing trade, for the convenience of which the houses are thus scattered and spread upon the sides of the hills... .. hardly a house standing out of a speaking distance from another... ..and we could see that at almost every house there was a tenter, and on almost every tenter a piece of cloth... .. Wherever we passed any house we found a little rill or gutter of running water... ..running into and through their work houses. Then, as every clothier must keep a horse, perhaps two, to fetch and carry for the use of his manufacture... ..so every manufacturer generally keeps a cow or two or more for his family and this employs the two, three or four pieces of enclosed land about his house... ..the women and children... are always busy, carding, spinning etc, so that no hands being unemployed, all can gain their bread... .. we presently saw a house full of lusty fellows, some at the dye vat, some dressing the cloths, some in the loom... all hard at work and full employed upon the manufacture.”

Background History

Previous to the introduction of textiles as an industry into the rural areas of northern England, with special reference here to such parts as lie in the West Riding of Yorkshire, cloth manufacture within the country had been vested in the hands of medieval guilds, then centred in such capital cities as London, York and Lincoln. Under their management the trade was carried on in much the same way as it had been in Roman times, being divided into separate contributory processes, each of which in their medieval setting came under the control of their own particular guild. Thus, in a medieval cloth-making city one would have expected to find guilds say for Fullers, Dyers, Wool combers, Coverlet weavers and so on, covering all the major processes associated with the kind of cloth being made in that city.

It must be said in favour of the guilds that they had for some centuries exerted a first-class influence over the trade and were at that time the only people legally allowed to practise the craft, often having a Royal Charter to verify the fact. They had always maintained a high standard of workmanship throughout the industry and seen to it that no fraudulent practices had been allowed to creep in. They had fostered excellent apprentice training schemes and had always seen to the protection and welfare of their members. But they had become restrictive in many ways and their administration had become cumbersome and somewhat out of date, being bound by tradition; and, perhaps more importantly, they had not encouraged the expansion of the market in lower quality cloths as they should have done and for which there was an eager and ready market, as subsequent events were to prove. It was the breakaway faction catering for that market which eventually overtook the guild system and brought its monopoly to an end.

If however the industry was declining in the old cloth making centres, it was very much alive and thriving in its new environment of the more hilly and remote parts of our county, where it spread readily along the hillsides and valley bottoms. In its new setting it was taken up with enthusiasm, for when the income from it was added to the scant living previously derived from a few acres of poor farmland, set in a poor climate, it made for a standard of living hitherto undreamt of.

Accompanying the vigour of the fledgling industry was also a new philosophy regarding the making of cloth. No longer was it seen as being made up of a

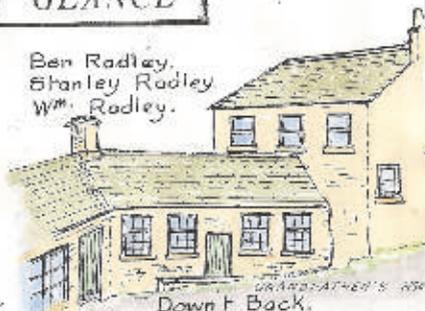
A BACKWARD GLANCE

John W^m Lodge. Norman Lodge.



Stable. Cart Shed.

Ben Radley.
Stanley Radley
W^m. Radley.



Down t Back.

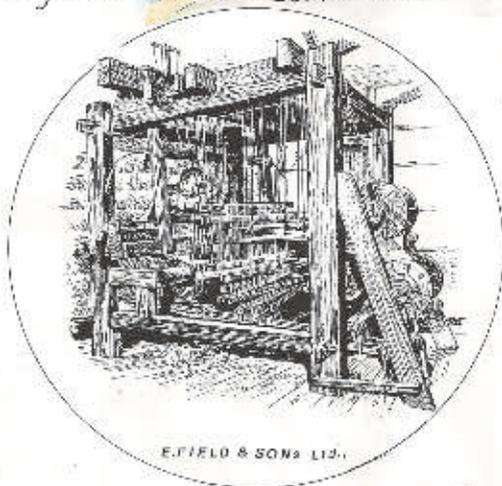
Jebson Fold.

Beaming Place.

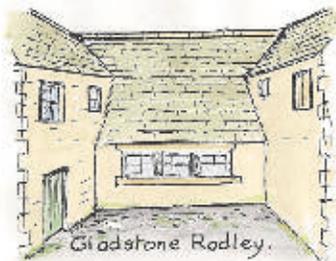


Allen Radley

Wash Kitchen Chamber.



E. FIELD & SONS LTD.



Gladstone Radley.

King Street.



Fred Dyson.



Warp Barrow.



Back Door

B
J M
1810

Date Stone.

This is the fourth volume of Leslie Robinson's "Know thy village" series, and the first to focus on Skelmanthorpe, following the publications "Remembering Marshall Mill", "The Fleet" and "Bagden Hall".

About the author...

Born in 1920, Leslie Robinson has lived in Scissett all his life. He has had a life-long passion for local history and over the years has built up a remarkable archive, which will eventually be housed at Huddersfield University.



Winding bobbins, Skelmanthorpe.

Note the woman's "fettling-apron", woven on a hand-loom.

From medieval times to the Second World War Skelmanthorpe was a textile village...and Leslie Robinson here takes us back to those days when the village's prosperity and future could truly have been said "to hang by a thread".