

The cotton bobbin: symbolic of a lost heritage?



The cotton bobbin – a spool of thread to be found in every household sewing kit.

This humble object was once a symbol of the dominance of British manufacturing – the source of sustenance and pride for a generation of workers.



Cotton and the Industrial Revolution



Cotton was the driver of the Industrial Revolution

Richard Arkwright and Cromford Mill of 1771



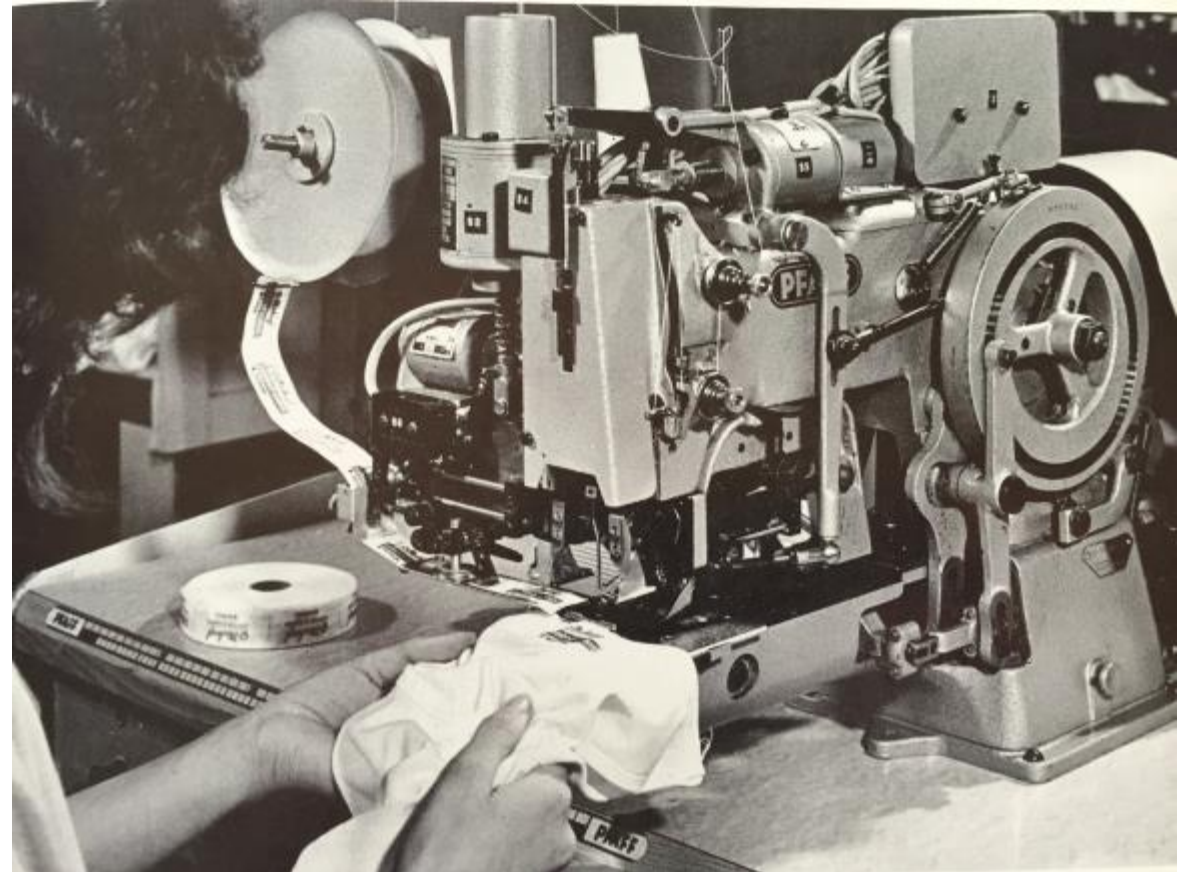
Cotton and Leicester



The cotton bobbin symbolises something more local in Leicester – a labour market, which has been synonymous with three manufacturing groups; engineering, textiles and footwear. At their peak in the 1960s, these groups employed over 140,000 people.

A Golden Age

The concept of a 'golden age' is used as a shorthand term to describe the post-war period (between the 1950s and the late 1960s) which has been characterised by many authors as a time of mass employment and straightforward school to work transitions.





One of the largest factories in Leicester in its day, employed thousands of people and supplied a large proportion, if not all, of the textiles and hosiery for retailers such as Marks and Spencer

A Symbol of Decline ?

- In a drive to obtain cheaper goods, retailers shipped their production and purchasing overseas from the late 1970s onwards.
- The impact of such globalisation meant a total collapse of the local labour market and the three interrelated industries.
- Manufacturing, especially hosiery and boot and shoe manufacture, have been simply (and almost totally) eradicated from the British economy in a similar way to coal and steel.

- The Corah plant, like the vast majority of Leicester's traditional factories, closed down fully in the 1990s.
- Cotton bobbins lie in derelict factories, forgotten and unwanted; reflective of the loss of a significant manufacturing industry in the region and the UK



Generations of Workers

- What often gets missed in discussions such as these is the impact that such a decline has had on the lives of those who once worked for these companies.
- They entered a labour market fresh from school with expectations of a job for life and would never have predicted that some forty-five years later very little of these industries would remain.





See the everyday in a new way

Looking at everyday objects, University of Leicester academics share their fresh perspectives in 10-minute lectures each lunchtime for a week.

Bring your lunch, and start to see the everyday in a new way.

www.le.ac.uk/socialworlds