DEVELOPMENT OF THE
BOOT AND SHOE INDUSTRY
IN LEICESTER DURING THE
NINETEENTH CENTURY

David Holmes

The development of the boot and shoe industry in Leicester during the
nineteenth century radically changed its commercial prosperity. This paper,
the first of two, considers the factors that led to the development of
shoemaking from a purely domestic activity to a fully mechanised industry by
the end of the century. Individuals and firms were so successful that Leicester
became the largest shoe manufacturing centre in the country. The stages of
evolution from craft trade to mechanised industry are clearly seen as the
industry developed. Ancillary industries producing materials, machinery etc.
grew up round the manufacturers. Most of this paper deals with firms in
Leicester town as space permits relatively little discussion on the role of other
production centres in the county. The second paper will deal with the growth
distribution. As industrialisation developed and people migrated from the
countryside to fast-growing towns and cities, new methods of retailing and
distribution evolved to meet changing market requirements. Leicester firms
were first to appreciate the changing needs and first to implement new systems.
The growth in Leicester’s prosperity largely resulted from the concentration of
production and distribution facilities in the town.

BACKGROUND TO THE INTRODUCTION OF SHOEMAKING

Production of hose had been the main source of industrial employment in the
county since the introduction of the knitting frame in the seventeenth century.
War with France had created a demand for hose that provided work and relatively
high wages for framework knitters and their families. Prosperity during the war
period and a short-lived boom afterwards was soon replaced by shortage of work,
reduced piece rates and unemployment. It had been recognised for some years that
the number of framework knitters considerably exceeded the amount of work
available, a problem that caused workers to compete with each other for whatever
work was available, and in so doing created a low-wage economy.¹ At the same
time, hosiery manufacturers unable to keep their frames fully occupied cast round
for alternative goods to produce.

¹ 1845, XV.1, 609, Report of the Commission on the Condition of the Framework Knitters (1845),
During the 1840s, the hosiery industry employed more than a quarter of Leicestershire’s population.\footnote{Spencer, \textit{Illustrated Leicester Almanack} (1891), p. 50; 60,000 men, women and children were employed in hosiery production.} Wages were even lower in the surrounding villages than in Leicester. Poverty became ingrained in those areas that were most dependent on hosiery. Thomas Winters, a witness to the Royal Commission on Framework Knitting (1845), said that wages had halved during the last 10 years.\footnote{1845, XV.1, 609, \textit{Report of the Commission on the Condition of the Framework Knitters} (1845), p. 111.} By 1850, wage rates in the villages were generally 30 to 50\% below those in Leicester.\footnote{B. Lancaster, \textit{Radicalism, Co-operation and Socialism; Leicester Working-class Politics, 1860–1906} (Leicester, 1987), p. 9.}

This prolonged period of industrial weakness during the 1820s and 1830s culminated in a severe depression between 1837 and 1842.\footnote{A. T. Patterson, \textit{Radical Leicester, a History of Leicester, 1780–1850} (Leicester, 1954), p. 238.} Fig. 1 shows the main

---

\textbf{Fig. 1.} Framework knitting centres, 1844 (200 or more frames).
framework knitting centres in 1844. Felkin calculated that 45% of all the knitting frames in England and Wales were to be found in Leicestershire, and a quarter of those (4,000 frames) were in Leicester. Many of these industrial towns and villages were to provide labour for the boot and shoe industry as it developed later in the century.

Comparison of Figs 1 and 2 shows most of the towns and villages that later became shoemaking centres had previously been centres of framework knitting. In addition to Leicester, Anstey, Barwell, Earl Shilton, Hinckley, Sileby and South Wigston became major production centres. Blaby, Cosby, Enderby, Glenfield, Market Harborough, Mountsorrel, Oadby, Rothley, Shepshed and Syston became centres of lesser importance. Shoe manufacturing replaced hosiery in Anstey and Barwell while in others, notably Leicester, Hinckley, Earl Shilton and Shepshed, the hosiery and shoe industries developed side-by-side. Only Market Harborough, Rothley and South Wigston had not been hosiery centres. Shoemaking came late to Rothley, where the first shoe factory opened after 1890. The situation in Wigston was complicated because a new community, South Wigston, was built after 1870 near the railway line. Wigston had several shoe manufacturers in the middle of the century but shoemaking gradually moved to South Wigston so that, by 1900, Wigston had returned to hosiery manufacture and South Wigston became a shoemaking centre. Market Harborough was better known for its tannery and ancillary shoemaking activities than for shoe manufacturing. Several shoe factories were established there during the 1890s but none survived for long.

With few exceptions, boot and shoe manufacturers generally commenced with very little capital. The vast majority started on their own or with a partner. Most firms remained as small family businesses for the whole of their existence. Records are limited and those that have survived seldom provide information that is in a form that can be used. Such information as is available has been used to provide an insight into the industry’s growth.

**FIRST STEPS, 1820–50**

It is difficult to say exactly when shoemaking occurred on a scale to meet more than local requirements. There were 17 shoemakers in the town in 1794, just sufficient to satisfy the needs of the town’s population. Indications appear from c. 1800 that suggest the first signs of industrial change were in the air. The first significant name associated with shoemaking in Leicester was Henry Davey, a pattern maker, who arrived about 1800, having recently completed a seven-year apprenticeship in Guilford. In 1815 he was making pattens (not patterns) in the town and later became the largest last manufacturer and an important influence on the growth of the industry. As early as 1808, an advertiser offered master
shoemakers ‘as much work as they wanted’, which suggests that existing shoemakers either could not cope with local demand or there was insufficient capacity in Northampton and Stafford to produce all the military footwear required.\(^8\) Then, in 1819, Nicholas Corah is said to have purchased children’s shoes from Leicester manufacturers for sale on Birmingham market.\(^9\) The above examples point to the first stirring of shoemaking on something more than a purely local scale. A more substantial movement occurred sometime during the 1820s when several firms introduced glove making and other forms of fancy hosiery, including lace making, while one or two also experimented with shoemaking.

The earliest confirmed mention of shoe manufacturing was in 1827 when Sir Richard Phillips visited Leicester during his tour of the country and noted in his diary that ‘a new and important branch of hosiery, called fancy hosiery, had recently appeared, which included cotton and worsted net braces, worsted cravats,

worsted under-waistcoats, children’s shoes, stay laces, tippets, etc.10 He calculated that fancy hosiery employed 1,500–2,000 people at that time, which suggests that it must have started no later than 1825. A town guide of 1868 quoted the recollections of an elderly resident who said production had commenced 35 to 40 years previously, i.e. between 1828 and 1833.11 The guide continued:

The first articles in the boot and shoe trade were begun to be made for the country trade, and were called ‘cacks’, that is children’s strap or ankle-band slippers and boots, the tops of which were made either of bright coloured or black roan or morocco leather, sewn to the sole by hand, and known by the trade as ‘turn-rounds’. These formed at the time, and for years afterwards, the product at Leicester for the wholesale market, and at its commencement employed probably twenty or thirty persons.

Sir Richard Phillips’s remarks can be considered to be accurate since he had some previous knowledge of shoemaking, having described in detail his visit to an army boot factory during the recent war, and was writing immediately after his visit to Leicester while the impressions were still clear in his memory. There is sufficient evidence to be certain that some form of children’s shoe manufacturing for more than purely domestic consumption was taking place in 1827 and most probably several years earlier. Though we do not know the quantities being produced, we can be certain that output started to increase from that time. By 1835, there were 168 shoemakers in the town.12 A further indication that the scale of shoemaking had increased is supported by reference in the same commercial directory to the presence of a number of associated tradesmen, namely three tanners, 12 curriers and three leather cutters.13 In particular, the presence of leather cutters indicates that uppers and soles were being cut out for shoemakers to make up.

Hosiery manufacturers were the main investors in shoe manufacture during the very early stages. Phillips mentions Richard Harris & Co., W. & S. Kelly and Marston & Co. as the three leading firms in fancy hosiery and they would have viewed expansion into shoemaking as diversification into a completely new market. In 1911, another writer claimed that R. Harris & Sons, hosiery manufacturers, introduced a range of worsted gloves, braces and children’s shoes about 1830.14 In 1835, James Dilkes was listed as a hosiery manufacturer and children’s wholesale shoemaker, as was Thomas Crick who was listed as children’s shoe manufacturer (wholesale) and leather cutter.15 James Knott, a recognised shoemaker in the town, advertised in 1842 as being ‘a fashionable boot and shoe manufacturer, having constantly on hand an excellent assortment of

---

ready-made ladies’ and gentlemen’s boots and shoes’. He also advertised himself as ‘a retail dealer in leather, hemp, shoe knives, buttons, sewing silk, thread, galloons etc.’, which also supports the argument that other manufacturers were in existence and were purchasing raw materials. The same directory also listed two last and boot tree manufacturers.

Commercial directories for Leicestershire before 1861 did not distinguish between shoemaker (wholesale), shoemaker, shoe manufacturer or wholesale shoe manufacturer; all were listed as ‘Boot and Shoe Maker’, occasionally followed by ‘wholesale’. Consequently, it is difficult to be certain when a firm had reached the stage that it was producing more than just for the local market. The difference between manufacturer and wholesale manufacturer is made even more difficult because firms were listed under different headings from one year to another. Moreover, they sometimes appeared one year, disappeared and reappeared several years later, suggesting that they were probably in existence all the time. It is impossible to judge how editors of commercial directories distinguished the difference between large-scale shoemakers and small manufacturers or between manufacturer and wholesale manufacturer. There would often appear to have been little practical difference between the various classifications. It was a time of great change and editors no doubt found it difficult to keep up with developments.

Some firms had dual roles, e.g. shoe manufacturer and grindery dealer or shoe manufacturer and currier. Others are listed both as shoemakers and shoe manufacturers in the same issue, presumably to announce themselves to the widest possible range of customers. In 1846, Thomas Crick was listed separately as shoemaker (wholesale) and currier & leather cutter. In 1849, he was only listed as a shoemaker. In times of rapid development it was both easy and natural for firms to take up and drop aspects of their business in line with the changes that were taking place around them.

ORIGIN OF FIRMS

Before considering the period of dynamic development after 1850, it is necessary to understand how firms started and the problems that were encountered. Apart from co-operative societies, which are considered separately, the most common means of entry into shoe manufacture were either on the back of an existing business, as a partnership or as a journeyman shoemaker who wanted to expand. The first group mainly consisted of firms that were already working in the leather trade and either decided to leave their existing business and invest in shoe manufacture or use their existing business as a spring-board to start making boots. For example, in 1834, Stead & Simpson started as curriers and leather dealers in Leeds and began to make boots about 1840, which were sold through their

---

18 Hagar, *Directory of Leicestershire* (1849), p. 64.
existing leather customers.\textsuperscript{19} In Leicester, Stephen Hilton started as a currier and leather cutter in 1869 before producing boots and shoes in 1876.\textsuperscript{20} Such firms were able to buy leather at advantageous prices to send out to journeyman shoemakers and, as a result, prospered and became leading firms in the industry.

Apart from single ownership, a partnership agreement was the usual method of running a business prior to the introduction of limited liability companies and applied equally to small and large firms. Stead & Simpson, the largest shoe business in the country, was managed by partners until it was converted to a limited company in 1889, when there were more than 2,000 employees.\textsuperscript{21} Partnership was normal when capital was available for investment either from family members or outsiders.

At the working level, a partnership consisting of two or three men allowed business to commence without conflict. It enabled men with different skills to come together and pool both their financial and technical resources. Many firms that originated as partnerships developed into large well-respected companies. Agreements were sometimes unwritten, the partners simply working together, perhaps in one man’s house or garden workshop, or separately. The importance of religious contacts was considerable. It is well known that Quakers borrowed money from fellow believers in order to develop a business.\textsuperscript{22} Small traders also used church contacts to develop business.\textsuperscript{23}

Where a written agreement was made, the partners decided what to include. For example, Amos Moore (Finisher), George Farrin (Clicker) and Mark Gent (Grocer), all from Barwell, made an agreement in 1887 to make boots and shoes in three rooms adjoining Amos Moore’s house, for which Moore was to receive rent of 2s. per week. Each partner invested £100 in the business, on which 5\% interest was to be paid. The business was to trade under the title of Farrin Moore & Co.\textsuperscript{24} Farrin and Moore were each to receive payment of £1 10s. 0d. per week, while Gent was a sleeping partner and did not receive any salary. It was quite common for sleeping partners to put capital into new businesses and the shoe industry was no exception. Most businesses were run by men but women occasionally appear as partners, as in 1893, when Eliza Sexton and Jane Rimmington agreed to invest £50 each in a partnership that was to trade as Sexton & Rimmington.\textsuperscript{25} Partners normally signed the agreements but, in some cases, they signed with a mark.

Partnerships could be extended after the initial term had been completed, as in the case of William Thomas Doore and George Wilson Freestone who, in 1902,
agreed to continue their partnership of ‘Freestone & Doore’. The partners were in future allowed to draw £2 10s. 0d. each per week and profits were to be shared equally between them. 26 Other agreements were more detailed, such as that between Walter Johnson and George Cholerton in 1897. The buildings, stock, plant etc. had been valued at the end of 1896 for a total of £11,274 15s. 7d. As Johnson owned 86% of the capital, so profits were to be divided between the two on the same basis. Each was to receive a salary of £150 per year. It was agreed that Johnson’s son might join the business and, more unusually, it was agreed that ‘neither partner shall dismiss a clerk, servant or workman without the other’s agreement except for flagrant misconduct’.

Retirement of a partner was an inevitable occurrence if a business survived for any length of time. Many agreements stated that the remaining partner or partners would buy the retiring partner’s share for an agreed amount, payable on defined terms. Two-man partnerships usually traded under their joint names. When one partner retired, the agreement often included a clause that permitted a change of name as well as terms for acquiring the retiree’s share of the business. 27

Partnership agreements sometimes provide a useful insight into the relative success of a business. When Mark Gent died in 1895, Farrin and Moore bought his share for £773 8s. 10d., which was a very respectable increase over seven years on his initial £100 investment. This sum does not tell the whole story because, due to its success, the business had moved to a larger factory and it was agreed that Farrin and Moore would purchase the building separately, thus increasing Gent’s ultimate payment. 28

Inevitably, not all partnerships were successful. An agreement to dissolve a partnership in 1903, when one of the three partners decided to retire, stated that the retiree would receive £10 and the other partners would share his liabilities of £160 when they resumed trading. 29 This last example indicates that the business made sufficient profit in good times to enable the partners to make a modest living but never made sufficient profit to enable the business to expand or survive hard times.

By far the largest group of new businesses consisted of journeymen shoemakers who felt that they could make their fortune by working for themselves. Previous writers have all agreed that shoemakers could set up in business with virtually no capital. Mounfield considered that most started as craftsman-artisans. 30 Head thought little capital was required, most coming from personal savings. 31 Mounfield suggests that most would have had a second occupation to supplement their income. This would have been true, especially for those who lived in villages

29 ROLLR, DE 451/1118. Dissolution of Partnership, Hall & Harris, Barwell.
and helped on the family farm or smallholding. It was not unusual for men who
moved away from home in order to live near to their place of employment, to
return home to help with the harvest.

It was possible to commence trading with as little as £10 capital though there
are examples of men starting with no capital at all.\textsuperscript{32} Those that had little or no
initial capital found it very difficult to survive for long and, if they did, there are
no records of any that later became prominent firms in the industry. Their struggle
for survival was one factor that made the shoe industry so competitive.\textsuperscript{33}

**GROWTH AND EXPANSION, 1850–1914**

By 1851 about 1,400 people were employed making boots and shoes.\textsuperscript{34} Production
developed steadily during the 1850s. More hosiery manufacturers, such as John
Biggs & Son, J. Langham & Sons, Joseph Pool and James Preston & Sons, started
to make shoes and a number of local shoemakers decided to expand their activities
to meet increasing demand. Apart from Walter Bostock, who only stayed in
Leicester for a few years, the most important outside firm to come to the town
during the early development period was Stead & Simpson, which started
production in Cank Street in 1854.\textsuperscript{35}

Undoubtedly the most influential person connected with the development of
shoe manufacturing in the period up to 1860 was Thomas Crick (1803–79), who
is generally considered to be the father of the Leicester shoe industry. He had
started in the 1820s with his father (also Thomas) as a translator, refurbishing old
boots and shoes for resale. He then began to make children’s shoes and
experimented with a riveting process in the 1830s, which led to his patent of
1853.\textsuperscript{36} The enumerator’s sheet for the 1851 census shows that he employed 27
men and 12 women.

After 1853, success with the process was rapid and he soon moved to larger
premises.\textsuperscript{37} By 1862 the firm employed 420 women and girls and about 300 men
and boys.\textsuperscript{38}

In 1863 he entered into partnership with his son, John Throne Crick, at which
time the business had premises in Highcross Street and Redcross Street.\textsuperscript{39} Thomas

\textsuperscript{32} BSTJ, 27.9.1901, p. 414. J. Perkins started with no capital and traded until credit ran out. BSTJ,
11.10.1901, p. 480. F. Eaton started with no capital but obtained a bank loan of £150, which was
consumed within a year.
\textsuperscript{33} BSTJ, 7.10.1899, p. 452. ‘The presence of so many impecunious producers is responsible for the
keen competition and unfair dealing. On them the factor and multiple retailer lives.’
\textsuperscript{34} 1851 Census return records 1396 boot and shoe workers.
\textsuperscript{35} Anon, *Stead & Simpson Centenary 1834–1934* (Leicester, 1934), unpaginated.
\textsuperscript{36} ROLLR, DE 3225/32, includes copy of Crick’s patent. See also Mounfield, ‘The footwear industry
of the East Midlands’, p. 10.
\textsuperscript{37} Mounfield, ‘The footwear industry of the East Midlands’, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{38} BPP (HC): 1864, XXX vol. 1, 3414, 2nd Report of the Children’s Employment Commission (1864),
p.166 (312).
\textsuperscript{39} ROLLR, DE3225/32, Partnership Agreement between Thomas and John Throne Crick, dated 20
June 1863.
invested £22,000 and his son £2,920 in the partnership. The scale of the business can be judged by the fact that output reached 5,496 pairs in a week in 1865.40

The firm was an acknowledged leader in the installation of machinery. Apart from riveting machines of his own invention, which he must have been using before 1853, Crick had also installed a Thomas sewing machine by 1854 and, possibly, a French sole sewing machine by 1862.41 He installed the first steam engine in a Leicester shoe factory about 1860, possibly the first to be installed in any English shoe factory.42 Apart from riveting machines of his own design, a report in the *Leicester Chronicle* listed six or seven other types of machine that were used in 1861 to assist manufacture and concluded by stating that ‘the resulting boots are better and cheaper than hand-sewn boots’.43 This is the earliest

---

43 *Leicester Chronicle*, 22.6.1861, p. 5. Crick installed leather rolling machines, sole cutting presses, sole edge trimming machines, sole perforating machines as well as upper sewing machines.
written record known to the writer that acknowledges machine-made boots are better than those made by hand.

In 1861, Drake’s *Directory of Leicestershire* lists 23 wholesale boot and shoe manufacturers, the first time that ‘Boot and Shoe Manufacturer’ appears as a separate classification in a Leicestershire Directory. This picture of industrial development is corroborated by the 1861 *Leicester Chronicle* article, referred to above, that reported:

> About four years ago demand increased significantly and capitalists were tempted to enter the trade. The number of firms increased rapidly and there are now about 18 leading houses involved in the shoe trade. Together with smaller firms they employ about 2,000 people and make about 50,000 pairs per week.**44**

At that time Leicester manufacturers were known for the production of low quality, very cheap goods that satisfied a market not catered for by firms in Northampton or elsewhere. The number of suppliers also grew rapidly to meet the needs of an expanding footwear industry.

Of the 23 manufacturers listed in Table 1, four were also hosiery manufacturers. Two of them, James Preston & Sons and Walker & Kempson, ceased hosiery production in favour of shoemaking. Most of the firms listed would have been considered by the *Leicester Chronicle* to be industry leaders as they were the largest and best known in the town and probably utilised the most machinery.**45** Only four (names in bold type) were still in production 30 years later.**46** Several ceased shoe production and became factors.

It is clear that shoe manufacturing had become an established industry by 1860. Table 2 shows the rate at which manufacturers set up in business. The period to 1880 was one of continuous expansion. Every new commercial directory listed an increase in the number of firms. Some had neither the financial backing nor technical expertise to survive for long, but a considerable number developed into established firms that played an important part in the development of the town and a few became major employers.**47** Fewer firms were established after 1880 but those that did start up tended to be better prepared and remained in business for a considerable time. The 1880s was also the decade when existing firms that had not embraced mechanisation realised that their only choice was mechanisation or closure.

Table 2 shows that the number of firms reached its maximum in 1900. Following a boom after the end of the South African war, there was a long period of difficult trading that caused consolidation of factories so that, by 1915, there were 214 firms in the town. Output from firms increased as the mechanisation process was completed. Some firms established satellite factories in outlying villages.

**44** *Leicester Chronicle*, 2.6.1861, p. 5.

**45** Sewing machines were in general use. All five firms that gave evidence to the Children’s Employment Commission (1862), namely John Biggs, T. Crick, T. & W. Goddard, Stead & Simpson and Walker & Kempson, used sewing machines and reference is made to machines having been installed in other factories. Many firms used Crick’s riveting machines.


Fig. 4 shows how employment increased along with the number of firms. The increasing use of machines did not adversely affect the level of employment until the end of the century. Two main factors contributed towards the reduction in employment; firstly, the lockout of 1895 resulted in employers thereafter being able to use machines to their full capacity; secondly, lasting machines had achieved a level of competence and acceptance by 1900 that lasting by hand was no longer necessary. Employment levels gradually fell after the turn of the century.
as the full benefits of mechanisation were achieved and continued with the consolidation of factories after 1903. At the same time, Fig. 15 shows increasing levels of employment in the county towns and villages.

Fig. 5 compares levels of employment in the hosiery and shoe industries. It illustrates how the boot and shoe industry absorbed unemployed hosiery workers up to 1870 when boot and shoe manufacturing became the dominant source of employment. Thereafter, the two industries began to compete for labour. The level of competition was mitigated by their differing labour requirements; hosiery employed two females for every male while the shoe industry employed two males for each female.
OUTDOOR WORKING

Sidney Pollard considered that the domestic system was an ideal form of organisation for small-scale production of goods that had a mass market and noted that a putting-out system was used in most industries in the early nineteenth century.\(^{48}\) The hosiery industry in Leicestershire had embraced it from the beginning of the century; it was later defined by Peter Head as:

> that system of industrial organisation in which the wholesale merchant put out material, either direct from his warehouse to workmen or through middlemen, to be worked up on mainly hired machinery into garments or parts of garments, and to be finished by other workers, for eventual sale by the hosier.\(^{49}\)

Outdoor working, putting-out or the basket system, as it was variously called by shoemakers, was adopted for a time during the nineteenth century in all shoemaking centres but here we are concerned only with its application in Leicestershire. Leicester manufacturers made relatively little use of middlemen, preferring to maintain direct contact with their outdoor workers. Early outdoor working was based on the family unit, but as output increased to meet demand, workshops evolved that could employ up to 20 or 30 people.\(^{50}\)

When sewing machines were first introduced in the mid-1850s, they were installed in the factory so that manufacturers could control their use and output. By the mid-1860s, attitudes had changed with manufacturers encouraging operatives to use machines in their own homes. Giving evidence in 1862, several Leicester manufacturers said that they had started to give out work to women to close at home, using machines that the women either owned or leased and they wanted to develop this method of working.\(^{51}\)

Outdoor closing was done almost exclusively by women and girls in the home, working in an upstairs room. If the business developed to the extent that there was not sufficient space in the room, an extension was built so that up to 30 workers could be accommodated. Two assistants were normally required for each sewing machine and it was unusual to have more than 10 machines in a closing room.\(^{52}\) Machines could either be bought or rented from the manufacturer, for which the cost ranged from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. per week.\(^{53}\)

Making and finishing was also done on an outdoor basis by men and boys, originally in family groups, but gradually larger units were established during the 1860s and 1870s. It was quite normal for a shoemaker to build a shed at the bottom of his garden where a number of men could work together. All types of hand-made shoe could be produced in the sheds or ‘shops’ as they were called and

---


\(^{50}\) *BPP (HC)*, 1888, XXVI.395, c. 5328, *Report of the Chief Inspector of Factories & Workshops* (1887), pp. 84, 88.


this remained the accepted means of production until new factories were constructed and indoor working became normal for everyone towards the end of the century. Fig. 6 illustrates the types of building used.

Working conditions for outdoor workers were basic, though doubtless no worse than experienced by workers in most industrial towns. Joseph Dare, who, in 1845, was appointed missionary to The Leicester Domestic Mission Society, prepared a series of annual reports between 1846 and 1872 that provide an insight into the conditions of the poor. In his first report, he comments that ‘few can form a just estimation of the difficulties with which the poor have to contend’. In 1858, he notes that ‘one of the greatest blessings that could be conferred on the working man would be regular occupation from day to day and not by fits and starts’. His first reference to the shoe industry is in 1862 when he states:

Finishers work with gas lights and seven or eight men in a room 8ft × 10ft. They use heated burnishing irons. The chimney is boarded up so there is no air. In another room, 8’ × 8’, is a bed, no fireplace and four finishers. The men have to sit on the bed to work.

The following year he writes, ‘Nailers have excoriated lips and cankered mouths from having sprigs in the mouth all day. They also suffer from stomach cramps.’

54 ROLLR, M. 147, Annual Reports to the Leicester Domestic Mission Society, 1846–1872.
TRANSITION TO INDOOR WORKING

A number of factors, coming at broadly the same time, caused production to be transferred from domestic workshops back into factories. Firstly, the Workshops Regulation Act of 1867, which originally applied only to power-operated factories employing more than 50 workers, was extended in 1878 to cover workshops that had previously been exempt. Secondly, new machines were bigger, heavier, more sophisticated and required to be power driven, so owners had to install either a gas or steam engine, together with all the belts, pulleys and other items that constituted a line-shaft drive system.

The timing of machinery installations varied from factory to factory. Generally, Leicester firms were the first to use machines and were therefore first to bring workers back into the factory. By 1886 most closing and some lasting and riveting took place indoors. Closing was brought back into the factory, partly because much more space was available in the large new factories that were built during the 1870s and 1880s, and partly because many more closing machines had

55 BPP (HC), 1867, III.1, 62, Factory Extensions Act and 1877, II.179, 123, Factories Consolidation Act.
56 BSTJ, 23.10.1886, p. 301.
been introduced and it made sense to put them all together in one large room where production could be properly supervised. Fig. 8 illustrates a typical, late nineteenth-century, closing room layout. Sewing machines were placed on both sides of a long bench. Machines were driven from a line-shaft under the centre of the table. Ancillary hand operations were done on the side tables.

Finishing was still done outdoors even though finishing machines were available from the early 1880s. All finishing machines were power driven, so whenever they were installed, men had to work indoors and be subject to factory discipline, a situation they resisted as long as possible. Consequently, finishing machines were more commonly installed when indoor working had been agreed.

Union pressure was the third factor that encouraged transition to indoor working. In 1891 the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO) submitted a request to the Leicester manufacturers that all workers should be employed as indoor workers.\(^{57}\) Ostensibly, NUBSO leaders were more interested in the improvement of working conditions by ensuring that all workers, whether union members or not, came under the umbrella of Factory Acts legislation, a situation that did not apply to outdoor workers. They also hoped to strengthen

\(^{57}\) A similar request had been made to London manufacturers earlier in the year but was not followed up.
union membership and negotiate better wages. Leicester manufacturers agreed to
the request because a considerable number had already installed many machines
and employees were working indoors. Manufacturers saw it as a means of
encouraging the process of mechanisation. Almost all factories in Leicester had
implemented indoor working by the end of 1891. Some factories had to be
modified to cope with the influx of indoor workers, which delayed the change for
a few months. Indoor working applied whether or not operations had been
mechanised. Despite this, a level of outdoor working, mainly closing, has always
existed with the agreement of employers and unions.

EFFECT OF TECHNICAL CHANGE ON WORKING
PRACTICES AND FACTORY DESIGN

The greatest period of shoe factory building in Leicester took place between 1870
and 1890. Factories built during the 1890s were mainly located in the new
suburbs that were built following the Leicester Extension Act of 1891. After 1900,
many factories were built in villages as lower grade production was transferred to
manufacturers in the county.

All factories built before 1890 were multi-storey and looked like mills. After
1890, the tendency was to build factories where all production took place on one
floor. This change of layout originated in America. A much larger ground area
was required to produce the same output but the building costs were less.
Improved natural light for the whole factory was obtained by use of the north
light principle, in which the roof was a series of zig-zags, one half of which faced
north and was glass while the other was solid (see J. J. Morris factory below).
From a production point of view, it was easier to progress work on one level than
many. Insurance companies recognised the benefit by halving the cost of
insurance.

Multi-storey factories were organised on the cascade principle in which the
production process started at the top of the building and descended through the
floors until the shoes were completed and could be stored on the ground floor.
Upper leather was stored on the top floor, where the light was best, and given out
to the clickers who worked on the same floor. The closing room was either on the
top floor, if there was sufficient space, or if not, on the floor below. Lasting,
making and finishing departments were situated on the floor below that. The
warehouse was located on the ground floor along with stores of all other items.
Sole, heel and insole leathers need to be kept cool and moist. For that reason, the
bottom stock department was located on the ground floor unless the factory had a

58 A. Fox, A History of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives, 1874–1957 (Oxford, 1958),
59 ROLLR, DE2973/48–50, Leicester Arbitration Board Minute Book records that, at the meeting of
1 July 1891, 14 firms had asked for an extension of time to find suitable space to employ their
workers.
60 BSTJ, 15.3.1901, p. 389. Insurance rates were 2½% per mil for single storey and 5% for multi-
storey buildings.
Fig. 9. Multi-storey shoe factory.
W. Jennings, Leicester, 1877.

Fig. 10. Single storey shoe factory.
J. J. Morris c. 1895.61

61 ROLLR, Misc. 364, Gordon Works.
basement, in which case that was the preferred position. Management offices were usually situated on the first floor.

Once a factory was mechanised, output was limited by the capacity of the slowest machine or operator. Leicester factories evolved so that they had a capacity of 500, 1,000, 1,500 or 2,000 pairs per day; any excess output depending on the amount of over-time worked. Most firms were small with one or two people making all decisions. Even when a firm was successful, there was only a limited amount of management time available to control the three key areas of design, manufacture and sales. A unit producing 500 pairs was considered to have the best balance of men and machines. Rarely did output exceed 2,000 pairs because of the difficulty of controlling all the various aspects of production and sales. Even in very large firms, such as CWS or Stead & Simpson, total production was divided between smaller production units making different types of shoe, so that no one unit produced more than c. 2,000 pairs per day. They used common facilities, such as design, purchasing and sales to increase their range of products. E.T. Penrose considered that it was natural for large firms in all industries to develop in this way as it enabled them to utilise central services in order to grow without incurring undue capital expenditure.\(^\text{62}\)

Notwithstanding the fact that key machines were relatively complicated, most machines were simple and not patented by their designers. They were installed by customers as and when they were required or could be afforded. However, it is difficult to determine the rate of diffusion because availability does not necessarily equate to acceptability. The larger, more successful firms were normally the first to introduce new models though no records have survived to provide a long-term picture in any one firm. Though many shoemaking machines were available by the late-1880s, virtually no information has survived about their installation and early use. We must rely on occasional comments, the press and census information to build up a picture of the rate of mechanisation.

One way of gauging the acceptance of machinery has been to analyse the number of occupations or job titles listed in census enumerators’ records. This method can only be used as a guide but it does throw some light on the rate at which new occupations came into existence. Enumerators’ sheets became of less value after the 1891 census when more generalised job titles, such as ‘factory operative’ and ‘warehouseman’, came into common usage. Table 3 lists the number of new occupations that were recorded by enumerators between 1851 and 1901. No attempt has been made to ensure that there is no overlapping of descriptions. For example, it would be impossible to state categorically that ‘sole sewer’ and ‘Blake sewer’ were one and the same because ‘sole sewer’ is ambivalent and could refer to hand or machine sewing.

Only nine occupations were recorded in 1851, the most common being cordwainer and shoemaker. All the occupations listed were hand operations. Four of the 21 new occupations listed in 1861 were clearly machine operations, though

two of them, machine girl and shoe machinist, may be the same. It does, however, confirm that sewing machines were in use. The significance of the list lies in the widening range of occupations, which would be expected as more machines came on to the market and were installed in factories. The small number of new occupations appearing during the 1860s is rather surprising but may indicate that fewer new types of machine than expected had gained factory acceptance.

The rate of machine installation increased during the 1870s. Seven of the occupations were clearly machine operations. One, ‘fitter and machinist’, tells us that the method of using a sewing machine had changed: instead of a fitter gluing together pieces of an upper before handing the upper to the machinist, machinists had gained enough experience to hold loose pieces in position and sew in one operation. Factories also became more organised with administrative occupations such as ‘manager’, ‘foreman’, ‘warehouse manager’ and ‘clerk’ appearing for the first time.

More new occupations are listed in 1891 than at any other time, indicating that many different types of machine had been installed during the 1880s. At least half of the 59 occupations listed were machine operations and some of the others could be done either by hand or machine. Some occupations are almost identical to others previously listed, which may be duplication or could indicate that firms used machines in slightly different ways. The list clearly shows that at least one model of lasting machine and the full range of finishing machines were in use by 1891. Increasing sophistication of the production process is apparent with the appearance of job titles, such as ‘designer’ and ‘pattern cutter’. The occupation of ‘timekeeper’ also appeared for the first time, confirming that in-door working was a reality. The most significant new occupation in 1901 was ‘puller over’, thus proving that the last key machine model was working in a Leicester factory by April of that year.

THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT AND SHOE MANUFACTURING

No discussion on the growth of shoe manufacturing would be complete without mention of the role played by the co-operative movement. Various attempts were made to establish manufacturing co-operatives during the 1840s. Redemption Societies had started in 1846 for the ‘redemption of labour, financed by a subscription of 1d. a week to create self-governing workshops’. By 1849 it is

---

known that some small co-operative workshops in Lancashire were making boots. Between 1862 and 1880 seven societies were registered to produce boots and shoes, two in Northampton, and one each in Bury St Edmunds, Leeds, Norwich, Sheffield and Stafford. None of these early ventures was successful.64

The movement’s practical involvement with boots and shoes started when the Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS), based in Manchester, formally started to buy boots and shoes in 1862 for distribution through the retail societies. At first everything was purchased from commercial firms but gradually grass roots feeling, expressed through letters in The Co-operative Times, questioned why the movement did not produce more of its own products and so create employment for members as well as cutting out private sector profit. Not all members considered that the movement should become manufacturers but their opinion was in the minority. A conference was held in Banbury in October 1872 specifically to consider ‘reorganising the district and the necessity for starting a boot and shoe manufactory’. Mr Butcher, a national representative, gave a paper in which he ‘encouraged someone to start a shoe factory. The need was there, the market was there’. A Leicester representative said that a decision had been made the previous year to start a shoe factory in the town and a society had already been registered for the purpose, but he hoped that the CWS would take up the project.

The following resolution was passed:

that in the opinion of this conference the Co-operative Wholesale Society should be requested to commence as soon as possible the manufacture of boots and shoes, or to assist by their support in the formation of a manufacturing society in some suitable town such as Banbury or Leicester.65

The resolution seems to have fallen on fertile ground for the CWS Management Committee approved the resolution at its first meeting after the Banbury conference and decided to open the first co-operative boot and shoe factory.66 A small factory was purchased in Dunns Lane, Leicester in which production commenced the following year, 1873. In that same year the CWS had taken over an existing biscuit factory and had begun to produce under its own label but the shoe factory was the first manufacturing unit to be started from scratch by the organisation.

The enterprise was such a success that the factory had to be extended in 1876. In 1877 it was reported that 420 hands were producing 7,000–8,000 pairs per week.67 Further expansion took place in 1884, by which time the original building had been demolished and replaced with a larger one. During this period of growth, CWS factory management found it necessary at times to use outdoor labour even though they were well aware of ‘sweating’ in domestic workshops. Work was sent out for closing in Enderby from 1874 until a factory was built there in 1888, when complete boys’ and girls’ boots and shoes were produced. In 1890, a new Leicester

65 The Co-operative News, 2.11.1872, p. 553. The conference was reported in detail.
factory (Fig. 11) was built that was the largest in the country. When production started in 1891, weekly capacity was 50,000 pairs though actual production was about 35,000 pairs. The Dunn’s Lane and Enderby factories were retained as production units. In 1913, a closing factory was established in Wellingborough to produce uppers.

With ever-increasing demand for their products and the experience of success in Leicester, CWS management decided to expand production by establishing factories at Heckmondwyke (Yorkshire) and Rushden. The Heckmondwyke factory commenced in 1888 as a currying factory. In 1890 the building was extended for the production of agricultural and industrial, mainly miners, boots. The Rushden factory started production in 1900. The overall success of the project can be measured by the fact that during 1914 the Leicester factories produced 1,772,308 pairs, Rushden produced 318,366 pairs and Heckmondwyke 450,000 pairs.

The next stage in co-operative manufacturing involved the Co-operative Productive Federation (CPF), which had been founded in 1882 by E. V. Neale and E. O. Greening and was based on the Christian Socialist principle of cooperative workshops. The object of the CPF was to help member firms to find sales and capital and to operate within a co-partnership profit-sharing framework.

---

68 CWS, *Year Book* (1915), p. 89.
69 CWS, *Year Book* (1915), pp. 94–5.
70 *Co-operative Congress Souvenir* (Manchester, 1915), p. 191. The 1915 Co-operative Congress was held in Leicester.
In 1886, CWS factory management decided to cease sharing profits between shareholders and workers and in future give it all to their shareholders who were the retail societies. This caused the men to strike. As a result of the strike, a number of them decided to form a breakaway society that would be run on more democratic lines. With the guidance of E. O. Greening, they formed the Leicester Boot and Shoe Manufacturing Society (Equity), which commenced trading in 1887 as a member of the CPF. It adopted a set of rules that re-defined how profits should be divided. The rule book divided any profit as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management committee</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provident</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special service</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share capital</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customers</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The object was to ensure that workers received the largest share as a reward for their effort. Education and social provision for ill-health and pensions was deemed important for the future of members and their families. The Society amended its rules from time to time as circumstances changed although it always maintained its original principles. Nearly all boot and shoe manufacturing societies adopted this approach and became members of the CPF.

Three other co-operative manufacturing societies were established in Leicester during the following decade; see Table 4 for a full list of manufacturing societies formed in the county. In 1892, a group of men, encouraged by the Equity workers, met to discuss the possibility of establishing a society to produce nursery and children’s boots and shoes. As a result of this meeting, the Leicester Anchor Boot and Shoe Productive Society was formed and started production in 1893. A second society was established as a result of the 1895 lockout. Following that conflict, a number of men, fearing for their jobs, decided to join together and form a co-operative venture. This new society was called the Leicester Self-Help Boot and Shoe Manufacturing Society and started production at the end of the year though the name was not finally registered until December 1897. Both societies were members of the CPF. Both were successful and subsequently moved into new, purpose-built factories, Anchor Boot and Shoe Productive Society in 1895 and the Leicester Self-Help Society in 1909. Both societies installed machinery as and when they could afford to but were careful not to do so at the expense of making men redundant. Machinery was used to increase output rather than save labour.

---

73 A. Mann, *Democracy in Industry* (Leicester, 1914), pp. 4–6.
74 *Co-operative Congress Souvenir* (1915), p. 213.
Leicester St Crispin Boot and Shoe Manufacturing Society was formed in 1893 with sponsorship of £1,000 from NUBSO which hoped to combine the ideals of trade unionism with co-operation. Despite the benefits of funding and local enthusiasm, it seems to have survived for less than a year because no record appears after 1894. The last pre-war shoe manufacturing society was established in 1906 at Sileby. It was formed out of frustration with the town’s employers who refused to recognise the union. Not surprisingly, all employees were members of the union.

Types of production

Infant’s and children’s shoes were produced during the 1820s. Manufacturers concentrated on making small sizes for the next 20 years and did not produce larger sizes of women’s, boys’ and girls’ boots until the 1850s. Some firms produced men’s boots but this type of production never constituted more than a small proportion of the total.

Confidence of manufacturers increased during the 1880s to the extent that they increased output of ladies’ shoes. Manufacturers made a concerted effort to improve quality during the 1890s to satisfy an increasing demand for better fitting footwear.

They changed from making low quality products to good value medium quality ladies’ footwear, for which Leicester firms were renowned throughout most of the twentieth century.

As town manufacturers upgraded, production of lower priced products, especially children’s boots and shoes, was transferred to firms in towns and villages in the county where costs were lower. Some firms opened branch factories, others transferred their whole business. As a result, production outside Leicester increased rapidly between 1890 and 1914.

---

75 Co-operative Year Book (1896), p. 222. The Society is not mentioned in returns for 1895.
Fig. 12. Football boot, 1890s.
Copyright 2009 Leicester Arts & Museums Service.

Fig. 13. Canvas tennis shoe, 1890s.
Shoe collection, Northampton Shoe Museum.
Introduction of sport for the masses from the 1870s created a new market sector that provided an opportunity for manufacturers to produce new types of boot and shoe not seen before. A number of firms commenced production of football, rugby, hockey and cricket boots, some of which developed into specialist sports manufacturers. Walker, Kempson & Stevens is credited with the introduction of ankle pads. Cycling, dancing and skating (both ice and roller) offered further opportunities. Canvas shoes with rubber soles for tennis and general wear added another opportunity to increase the range of styles that could be produced.

Infants’ and small children’s shoes continued to be an important part of Leicester manufacturers’ output up to the middle of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{77} The Leicester Nursery Shoe Manufacturers Association, which was quite separate from the Leicester Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Association, was established to represent the special needs of its members. In 1893 there were 12 members of the Association, producing c. 4,500,000 pairs per year.\textsuperscript{78} Some Leicester firms produced a small quantity of nursery shoes to supplement their regular production but members of the Association produced nothing but items in the smallest size range. This was clarified in 1895 when the Leicester Arbitration Board stipulated that, in order to become a member of the Association, at least 80 per cent of a firm’s production must be under infant’s size 6 and none larger than children’s size 1 (4¼ inches long).\textsuperscript{79}

\textbf{SIZE OF FIRMS}

Our knowledge of the size of firms, whether measured by output or number of employees, is limited by the small amount of available information. Table 5 lists some of the largest employers. In the 1890s, very few firms employed over 500 workers and those with over 200 workers were considered large.

Factory output is even more difficult to calculate as totals given may refer to theoretical capacity rather than actual factory output. Levels of unemployment or under-employment only add to the difficulty. Table 6 provides a very limited picture of the output of some of the larger firms.

\textbf{TRANSPORT}

Railways were an important factor in the industry’s development (see Fig. 14). The first railway connection between Leicester and London via Rugby opened in 1840. However, the most important line for boot and shoe manufacturers was the Midland Railway, which opened in 1857 from Leicester to Hitchin, giving direct access from Leicester to London via the Great Northern Railway. Its significance lay in the opportunities it afforded manufacturers to dispatch goods to London.

\textsuperscript{77} SLN, 9.10.1953, Leicester Supplement, p. 47, states that 20 firms still produce infants shoes.

\textsuperscript{78} ROLLR, DE 2973/48, Leicester Arbitration Board Minutes (24 April 1893).

\textsuperscript{79} ROLLR, DE 2973/48, Leicester Arbitration Board Minutes (28 February 1895).
which was the largest retail market and home to many wholesale distributors. At the same time, producers were able to obtain raw materials more easily and at lower cost. (In the next paper we shall see how the railway benefited distribution companies as they developed after 1870.)

As Leicester firms developed, some established factories in Northamptonshire, either as a source of men’s boots and shoes or to overcome labour shortages in Leicester. Table 7 lists some that are known to have established manufacturing facilities in Northamptonshire, including three of the largest multiple retailers, Stead & Simpson, Freeman, Hardy & Willis and W. & E. Turner. It is not surprising that Desborough was the first and most popular destination as it was only 50 minutes by train from Leicester.

Table 5. Number of Employees c. 1890.
Sources: BSTJ, 7.8.1886, p. 104; Leicester Illustrated (1891), pp. 51–60; W. & E. Turner, Directors Minutes (1890); CWS Yearbook (1915), p. 89.
Note: Stead & Simpson total includes production and retail staff.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Firm</th>
<th>Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stead &amp; Simpson</td>
<td>2,300</td>
<td>E. Jennings &amp; Co.</td>
<td>200–300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. &amp; E. Turner</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>Nichols Son &amp; Clow</td>
<td>200–300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWS</td>
<td>1,000+</td>
<td>Shimeld &amp; Co.</td>
<td>200+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker, Kempson &amp; Stevens</td>
<td>700–800</td>
<td>T. Hilton &amp; Co.</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Cooper &amp; Sons</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>C. Skinner &amp; Co.</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Ellis &amp; Co.</td>
<td>500+</td>
<td>J. W. Black</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royce Gascoine &amp; Co.</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Lennard Bros</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Brown &amp; Co.</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>W. &amp; C. Payne</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavesley &amp; North</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>J. Percival &amp; Co.</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Factory outputs.

which was the largest retail market and home to many wholesale distributors. At the same time, producers were able to obtain raw materials more easily and at lower cost. (In the next paper we shall see how the railway benefited distribution companies as they developed after 1870.)

As Leicester firms developed, some established factories in Northamptonshire, either as a source of men’s boots and shoes or to overcome labour shortages in Leicester. Table 7 lists some that are known to have established manufacturing facilities in Northamptonshire, including three of the largest multiple retailers, Stead & Simpson, Freeman, Hardy & Willis and W. & E. Turner. It is not surprising that Desborough was the first and most popular destination as it was only 50 minutes by train from Leicester.

81 The ABC Railway Guide for 1946 shows that travel time by passenger train from Leicester to Desborough was between 42 and 51 minutes.
Boot and shoe production was introduced to the county's towns and villages partly because wages were lower outside Leicester,\(^{82}\) partly as a result of a shortage of labour in Leicester that caused the town's manufacturers to look further afield and partly as a result of upgrading by town manufacturers. Development of shoemaking in villages outside Leicester was first mentioned in the 1851 census when William Moore was listed as a shoe manufacturer in Anstey. In 1862, about 800 sewing machines were in use in Leicester factories, employing 2,500 to 3,000 women, including 'a few from outlying villages who were being trained to work at home'.\(^{83}\) Belgrave and Aylestone are two villages where shoemaking developed early to supply workers to Leicester factories.

\(^{82}\) NUBSO, *Monthly Report* (April 1889), pp. 2–4. This caused dissent among Leicester workers, especially when it was felt to be the cause of unemployment in the town.

\(^{83}\) BPP (HC), 2nd Report of Children’s Employment Commission (1864), p. 165. Evidence supplied by Mr Walker of Walker & Kempson. Each machinist required two or three other workers (usually called fitters) to do ancillary jobs.
Neither is shown in Fig. 2 as both were amalgamated into the Borough of Leicester following the Leicester Extension Act of 1891. Several firms established closing rooms in Melton Mowbray and Oakham during the 1870s but they do not seem to have survived for long.  

Anstey, Barwell, Earl Shilton, Hinckley and Sileby subsequently became the largest shoemaking centres outside Leicester. However, as Fig. 15 shows, the dominance of Leicester was never challenged by any other centre. The total number of shoe workers employed in the county did not rise to much more than 10,000, which was no more than 40% of the number employed in Leicester itself. Employment increased rapidly after 1881, with the greatest expansion taking place during the decade after 1900, which corresponded with the transfer of work from Leicester. The factory workforce in virtually all villages was a mixture of locals and people who lived in outlying settlements.

---

Table 7. Leicester firms with manufacturing facilities in Northamptonshire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snow &amp; Bennett</td>
<td>Desborough</td>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Branch factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys', girls'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George Green</td>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>Men's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toone &amp; Black</td>
<td>Desborough</td>
<td>1888</td>
<td>Branch factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Boys', girls'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. &amp; E. Turner</td>
<td>Desborough</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Branch factory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Men's, youths'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Crick &amp; Co.</td>
<td>Desborough</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>Boys'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stead &amp; Simpson</td>
<td>Daventry</td>
<td>1844</td>
<td>Men's, boys'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>1870s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blisworth</td>
<td>1870s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CWS Leicester</td>
<td>Wellingborough</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Uppers, gaiters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walker, Kempson &amp; Stevens</td>
<td>Higham Ferrers</td>
<td>1900</td>
<td>Bought Charles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wellingborough</td>
<td></td>
<td>Parker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward Wood &amp; others</td>
<td>Kettering</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>Acquired H.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stanley, Renamed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Kettering Boot &amp; Shoe Co.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Cooper &amp; Sons</td>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>Eventually moved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HQ to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Northampton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. Brown &amp; Co</td>
<td>Irchester</td>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Uppers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lennard Bros</td>
<td>Northampton</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Men's</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&amp; Kettering</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: NRO, 103P/229, Kettering Union Rate Record; BSTJ, 29.9.1905, p. 615; ROLLR, DE2835, W. & E. Turner Private Ledger (1877); Leeds Mercury, 24.12.1875; Leicester Chamber of Commerce, Year Book (1911), p. 24; Congress Souvenir (1915).

---

White, Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland (1877), lists Snow & Bennett and T. Brown with factories in Oakham. Leeds Mercury, 24.12.1875, states Stead & Simpson also had a factory in the town.
SUPPLIERS TO THE INDUSTRY

Growth of boot and shoe production depended on the ability of manufacturers to obtain all the materials and services they required. This section details development of a number of the most important of these. Leicester was fortunate in that materials such as thread, decorative ornaments, woven fabrics, cardboard boxes, were also required by the hosiery as well as the shoe industry; producers of these items, therefore, had two local industries to supply, a fact that encouraged investment in the town.

Machinery production

Production of shoe machinery was first mentioned in an 1862 directory when E. Tomlin was listed as an engineer ‘for the rivet boot and shoe trade’. Tomlin had originally started as a cutler in 1840, before turning his attention to the boot and shoe industry. In 1864 he advertised as a maker of ‘machinery, lasts and every other article used for the manufacturing of boots and shoes by riveting’. The first Leather Trades Directory (1871) lists three ‘Boot and Shoe Tool Makers’ namely, Gimson & Co., E. Tomlin & Sons and T. Tomlin & Sons. Table 8 illustrates the rate at which firms started production of shoemaking machines and tools in the

---

85 Slater, Directory of Leicester (1862), p. 61.
87 Wright, Midlands Directory, Leicestershire (1864).
town. Machinery production was concentrated in Leicester and not found elsewhere in the county.

In 1883, Charles Bennion, an engineer, came to Leicester from Nantwich and entered into partnership with a Mr Merry who was already producing shoe machines. The following year they acquired E. Tomlin & Sons. After Merry’s death, Charles Bennion joined with Pearson & Co., London and Leeds to form Pearson & Bennion, Leicester, in 1886. Pearson & Co. were manufacturers of wax thread sewing machines, punching and eyeletting machines, leather rolling machines and presses. When added to Bennion’s shoe machine production, the new firm soon became the largest British producer. During the 1890s they also became agents for several American firms, most notably the Consolidated and McKay Lasting Machinery Company.

Formation of the British United Shoe Machinery Company (BUSMC) in 1899 out of Pearson & Bennion consolidated the vast majority of shoe machinery manufacturing in the town (see Fig. 16). At its formation the company employed 200 people. It expanded at break-neck speed during the next decade partly by a natural increase in demand for the company’s products and partly by assimilation of competitors. In 1906, there were 800 employees, a number that had increased to 2,000 by 1912. The manufacturing floor area increased from 80,000 in 1899 to 230,000 sq. ft. in 1911. In 1912, tack production was transferred from Northampton to Leicester.

Josiah Gimson began business as general engineers before becoming a supplier of shoe machinery. Their involvement with the industry commenced with the production and installation of steam engines. From this, the firm gradually developed a range of shoe machines and later acted as agent for several American firms. That part of the business grew rapidly until it became a separate firm in 1880 titled the Gimson Shoe Machinery Company. After 1899, it was the only machinery house that could compete seriously with BUSMC.

Standard Engineering Company was founded in 1893 and produced a range of machines including finishing machines that could be used by repairers. Repair machinery later became its main business.

---

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1864</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1904</th>
<th>1914</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8. Shoe machinery manufacturers.

---

91 The tack factory was of great importance because leases for machines that used tacks always stipulated that customers must use the company’s products.
92 BUSMC bought Gimson Shoe Machinery Co. in 1930.
The Singer Sewing Machine Company originally established its headquarters in London but moved to Glasgow when they built a factory there in 1884. Though the factory was located in Glasgow, Singer established its main shoe industry sales and service centre in High Street, Leicester.

**Tanning and leather finishing**

Tanning had not been and never became an important industry in the county. Tanneries certainly existed in Leicester and Market Harborough, but the advent of large-scale shoe production did not lead to a major increase. The number of curriers increased as demand for leather rose, but not to the extent that it became a major industry. Many leather dealers and merchants, usually acting as agents or importers, started to supply the local shoe industry. Few of these firms became widely known outside the county.

**Elastic web**

About 1839, Caleb Bedells developed a system of weaving strands of rubber with fabric to create a form of elastic web. Initially this new material was used for making braces and elasticated wristbands for knitted gloves. It was first used in shoemaking to make ‘sandallings’, the elasticated ankle strap on ladies’ sandals.

---

93 ROLLR, DE6349/4, BUSMC booklet, p. 5.
94 The Market Harborough tannery was owned by W. Staynes, Leicester until 1891. W. Staynes was established about 1852 and sold a range of leather and other supplies.
96 Leicester Chronicle, 29.6.1861, p. 5.
The process was successful in warm weather but the elastic web became brittle and broke when it was cold. It was not till the process of vulcanising was invented in 1844 that elastic web worked successfully in all temperatures. Real growth of its use followed introduction of the elastic- or spring-sided boot about 1850, a style that remained fashionable for men and women up to the 1880s.97

Leicestershire became the centre of elastic web production; factories were established rapidly, increasing from two in 1846 to 20 in 1861 and 47 by 1877. The Bates Rubber Co., founded c. 1850, supplied raw materials to these factories.98 The fashion faded during the 1880s so that only 30 firms were still in production by 1888. This completely new industry set Leicester on the road to innovation and leadership, not only in boot and shoe manufacture, but also in the provision of other materials for the industry.

Other materials

Many items other than leather, such as lining material, insole material, rubber, thread, grindery (rivets, nails, tacks), wax, polish, inks, lasts, adhesives, coloured foil, tapes, eyelets, laces, as well as more general items such as boxes, labels, marker pens, crayons etc. were required by manufacturers in order to produce boots and shoes. Leicester became a major source of production for a number of these items and home to the largest distributors of many.

98 It was taken over by the Dunlop Rubber Co. in 1929.
The leading producer of non-leather items was Faire Bros. The firm produced a wide range of woven products such as lining materials, bindings, tapes etc. Many of the products were similar to those used in the hosiery and garment industries, which it also supplied. To supplement their own production, the firm supplied many types of sundry items, such as eyelets, hooks, buttons, thread, boot loopings, elastic gussets etc. that were obtained from other firms.99

Mechanisation of shoemaking provided a boost to the ancillary trades. As new machines were installed in factories, opportunities arose to introduce new products for use with them. For example, if products such as thread and nails were to run successfully in machines, they had to be manufactured more accurately than was required by a hand shoemaker. By 1890, synthetic, that is non-leather, sole and insole materials that looked good and wore well were used in the production of competitively priced shoes.100 Table 9 shows the range of materials that were produced in the county. Leicester materials producers and distributors came to dominate the supply side in the same way that machinery producers and shoe manufacturers were pre-eminent in their fields.

### INDUSTRY ORGANISATION

Development of shoemaking during the nineteenth century encompassed its transition into a large-scale, fully mechanised industry. Inevitably, there were periods of tension between employers and workers. This paper does not attempt to deal with specific aspects of industrial relations or individual disputes. However, several problems, such as the level of child employment, low wages of outdoor workers and rates set to operate new machines, were ongoing throughout the second half of the century. Creation of a practical system of industrial relations evolved over a number of years and required workers’ and management representatives to work together. The concept of using conciliation as a means of resolving disputes was introduced by A. J. Mundella who instigated the Nottingham Hosiery Board in 1860; the first Conciliation and Arbitration Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Firms</th>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Firms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Binding material</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Imitation leather</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cork insoles</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Insole board</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elastic web</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Laces</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finishing ink</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Linings</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glue</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Socking</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grindery</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Manufacturers of materials in Leicestershire, 1893.

100 Sileby Mill had been equipped with machinery to produce insole board made out of reconstituted leather scrap.
for the shoe industry was formed in 1878 in Leicester. Following a prolonged period of industrial skirmishing, in 1895 employers locked out their workers nationally; this was the most serious dispute the industry experienced and served as a catalyst for both sides to establish a means of settling all disputes and negotiating wages. To their credit, a system was established that has served both sides ever since. The growth of worker and employer organisations are traced in the following pages.

**ORIGINS OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF BOOT AND SHOE OPERATIVES**

Changing methods of production created tension between shoemakers brought up in the craft tradition and men who had only experienced the new method of riveting. In the first half of the century most shoemakers were members of the Amalgamated Cordwainers Association. The commencement of large-scale machine-made production and the introduction of machines from the late 1850s soon produced circumstances that leaders of the Association could neither foresee nor control. At first they refused to accept men who worked in the machine-made section as members, preferring to limit membership to time-served craftsmen.\(^{101}\) The machine-made section, producing lower priced riveted boots for the mass market, developed rapidly at the expense of hand shoemakers. By 1870, the Association’s policy had changed and men from the machine-made section were welcomed. However, differing requirements of the two groups of workers ultimately made it impossible for one union to adequately represent and satisfy all their aspirations.\(^{102}\) The National Union of Boot and Shoe Rivetters and Finishers was formed in 1874 as a result of secession by the Rivetters and Finishers Section from the Amalgamated Cordwainers Association.

The new union was established by a few individuals determined to promote the position of workers in this new sector of shoemaking. Initial membership was in the region of 4,000 during the 1870s, of whom 1,000 worked in Leicester.\(^{103}\) The rest of the membership was scattered over 35 locations from Cork to Aberdeen. A national organisation was created by the new leadership to support members in all shoemaking areas. Leaders of the new union replicated the pattern of organisation used by the Amalgamated Cordwainers Association and established their national headquarters at Leicester.

Membership subscription in the early days was 6d. a week and covered sick pay, burial allowance, tramping allowance and strike pay.\(^{104}\) There was a probationary period of three months, soon extended to six months, during which members paid subscriptions but were not eligible to receive benefits. The main concern of the leadership was to establish financial viability and increase

---

\(^{101}\) Fox, *National Union*, p. 3.

\(^{102}\) Fox, *National Union*, pp. 4–6.


membership and thereby improve their ability to negotiate from a position of strength on behalf of members. The weakness of their position was understood by George Sedgwick, the first National President, who calculated in 1878 that there were about 25,000 men and boys in the machine-made sector, of whom not more than 7,500 were unionised.\textsuperscript{105} In 1883, it was estimated that there were 35,000–40,000 workers in the wholesale trade, of whom 6,000 were full or financial union members.\textsuperscript{106} Women were not allowed to join in the early years although they accounted for about one-third of the workforce. The attitude changed during the mid-1880s, after which they were encouraged to join.\textsuperscript{107} Apart from recruiting, union leaders spent the first two decades helping members to obtain the best possible piece rates.\textsuperscript{108} The leadership recognised that their negotiating position improved as membership increased.

As a result of the increased size of the union and the many changes that had taken place in the industry since 1874, it was decided in 1890 that the name should be more representative of a changed situation. Henceforth it was known as the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives (NUBSO).

**FORMATION OF MANUFACTURERS’ ASSOCIATIONS**

An increasing number of workers and firms in the main shoemaking towns around the country, the rising number of disputes, together with the increasing influence of NUBSO, forced employers to consider how they should deal with the changing situation. Following a meeting of a group of leading manufacturers in the town, Leicester Boot and Shoe Manufacturers’ Association was formed in 1871 to negotiate wage rates and working hours on behalf of all manufacturers in the town. W. J. Walker was elected its first President. Local Boot and Shoe Manufacturers’ Associations were established later in most Leicestershire shoemaking centres. However, not all employers were members and, therefore, not bound by any agreement made by their local Association.\textsuperscript{109} Small firms that paid low wages were least likely to join the Association.

A weakness of local associations that became increasingly noticeable was their inability to negotiate nationally on wages or any other matter with a union that had grown in size and authority. To remedy this, discussion began in 1889 to consider how the associations might form some type of federation. It continued until a meeting was held in Leicester at the end of 1890, at which it was agreed that a national federation should be created. The National Federation of Boot and Shoe Manufacturers was established in 1891 with its headquarters in Leicester. Thereafter collective bargaining on most matters of labour relations was possible, though not always practical. Mr Griffin Ward (Managing Director of Stead &

\textsuperscript{105} Fox, *National Union*, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{107} Fox, *National Union*, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{108} Fox, *National Union*, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{109} Leicester Footwear Manufacturers’ Association, *100th Annual Report* (Leicester, 1971), p. 40 states that there were over 400 non-federated firms nationally in 1906 employing over 50,000 people. Association records show at different times that only about half the firms were members.
Simpson) was elected first president and Leicester firms provided the president for the next 20 years.  

CONCLUSION

Though signs appeared earlier, the origins of the boot and shoe industry are rooted in the period of difficult trading during the 1820s when hosiery manufacturers were looking for means of diversifying away from traditional hose. The introduction of fancy hosiery, which included some children’s shoes, was the catalyst that was to establish Leicester as the most important production centre in the country by the end of the century. Shoemaking was labour intensive and Leicester, with its tradition of hosiery outdoor working, had a pool of workers who were used to working in small family groups, a system that was suited to shoemaking.

Leicester factories concentrated on the production of low cost, value for money, children’s and ladies shoes, which was a sector not catered for by producers in other towns. Output from Leicester factories increased rapidly during the 1850s and 1860s. When shoemaking had become fully mature in the 1890s, many manufacturers made the decision to change the emphasis of their business and produce higher grade, more expensive, fashionable ladies shoes. Leicester then became known for the production of good value, medium grade goods and remained so for most of the twentieth century. At the same time, the majority of lower cost production was transferred to firms in the county where they could be produced more cheaply. This active realignment of production facilities was the most significant change, one which was not repeated in any other shoemaking area.

Leicester firms were the first to take advantage of machinery when it was introduced in the middle of the century. The importance of Thomas Crick lay in the example he gave to firms that proved mechanisation increased output and profits. By the end of the century, the town had become the centre of shoe machine manufacture, materials and other supplies that were required by modern, mechanised factories. It was, therefore, almost inevitable that the national headquarters of the British Boot and Shoe Manufacturers Federation would be established here in 1891, alongside those of the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives and the Co-operative Productive Union. The national importance of Leicester at the centre of the industry was brought about by a combination of the dominant position of the town’s wholesale distributors and multiple retailers and the scale of its manufacturing companies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The place of publication is London unless otherwise stated.

British Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons)

Bills

1867 III.1, 62 Factory Extensions Act (1867)
1877 II.179, 123 Factories Consolidation Act (1878)

Reports

1863, XVIII.1, 3170 Report of the Children’s Employment Commission
1864, XXX vol.1, 3414 2nd Report of the Children’s Employment Commission (1864)
1878–79, XVI.439, Annual Report of Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops
c. 2274 (1878)
1888, XXVI.395, Annual Report of Chief Inspector of Factories and Workshops
c. 5328 (1887)

Business records

Community (formerly National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives), Monthly
Reports, 1889–1915
Stead & Simpson Ltd This archive has been transferred to ROLLR but is not yet
available for public inspection

Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Record Office:

7D66 Henry Davey & Sons, Leicester
10D68 Leicester Secular Society
16D69 Wm. Staynes & Son, Leicester
DE 2357 British Shoe Corporation, comprising:
DE 2357/131–4 The Kettering Boot and Shoe Company
DE 2357/16 Freeman, Hardy & Willis
DE 2357/81 True-Form Boot Company (J. Sears & Co.)
DE 2357/81 Dolcis (Upsons Ltd)
DE 2357/81 Lilley and Skinner Ltd
DE 2835 W. & E. Turner Ltd, Leicester
DE 2973/48–9 Leicester Arbitration Board Minutes (1891–1907)
DE 3225/32 Thomas Crick & Son
DE 3610 T. Roberts & Co., Leicester
DE 6181 Brown & Sons, Coalville
DE 451/1086 Farrin, Moore & Co., Barwell
DE 451/1094 Townsend Bros, Hinckley
DE 451/1099 Farrin & Moore
DE 451/1104 Walter Johnson & Co., Hinckley
DE 451/1105 Reynolds & Co., Hinckley
DE 451/1113 Jarvis & Co., Hinckley
DE 451/1118 Hall & Harris, Barwell
DE 451/1125 J. Harris & Co., Hinckley
DE 451/1123/1–3 G. Farrin and Smith, Barwell
DE 451/1131/1 Clarke, Wills & Co., Hinckley
DE 1141 Ney Bros, Barwell
DE 3989/40–66 National Union of Boot & Shoe Operatives, Monthly Reports.
DE 3992/20 Daniel Garner & Co., Leicester
DE 6349 British United Shoe Machinery Co. Ltd
12D57/187 Freestone & Doore, Leicester
12D57/189 Sexton & Remington, Leicester
12D57/193 E. Bush & Co. Ltd, Blaby
M147 Annual Reports of Leicester Domestic Mission Society 1846–77

Trade Press
Boot & Shoe Trades Journal
Boot & Shoe Reporter
Shoe & Leather News

Directories
Pigot, Universal Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland (1791)
Fowler, The Leicester Directory (Leicester, 1815)
Pigot, Leicestershire Directory (1830)
Pigot, Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland (1835)
Pigot, Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland (1841)
Cook, Leicestershire Almanack, Directory and Advertiser (Leicester, 1842)
Slater, Directory of Leicester (1847)
Hagar, Directory of Leicestershire (1848)
Post Office, Directory for Leicestershire (1848)
Cook, Directory of Leicester (1849)
Hagar, Commercial Directory of Leicestershire (Nottingham, 1849)
Slater, Directory of Leicestershire (1850)
Melville, Leicestershire Directory (1854)
Post Office, Directory for Leicestershire (1855)
Drake, Commercial Directory of Leicestershire (Leeds, 1861)
White, Gazetteer and Directory of Leicestershire (1863)
Wright, Midland Directory (1864)
Buchanan, Postal Directory for Leicestershire (1867)
Harrod, Directory of Leicestershire (1870)
Leicester Trade Protection Society, *Directory* (1870)
Leicester Trade Protection Society, *Directory* (1875)
Barker, *Leicestershire and Rutland Directory* (Leicester, 1875)
Kelly, *Directory for Leicestershire and Rutland* (1876)
White, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1877)
Wright, *Commercial and General Directory for Leicestershire* (Leicester, 1880)
Kelly, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1881)
Wright, *Directory of Leicester* (1886)
Kelly, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1888)
Kelly, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1891)
Wright, *Directory of Leicestershire* (Leicester, 1892)
Wright, *Directory of Leicestershire* (Leicester, 1894)
Kelly, *Leather Trades Directory* (1898)
Kelly, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1900)
Kelly, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1904)
Kelly, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1908)
Kelly, *Leather Trades Directory* (1915)
Kelly, *Directory of Leicestershire and Rutland* (1914)

**Guides**

Spencer, *New Guide to Leicester* (Leicester, 1868)
Spencer, *Illustrated Leicester* (Leicester, 1891)

**Newspapers and Journals, various issues**

*Co-operative News*

*Co-operative Year Book, various years*

*Leicester Chronicle*

**SECONDARY SOURCES**

**Published and unpublished works**

Anon, *Stead & Simpson Centenary, 1834–1934* (Leicester, 1934).


Mann, A., *Democracy in Industry* (Leicester, 1914).


**Theses and Dissertations**


**ABBREVIATIONS**

- **BPP (HC)** British Parliamentary Papers (House of Commons)
- **BSTJ** Boot and Shoe Trades Journal
- **CPF** Co-operative Productive Federation
- **NRO** Northampton Record Office
- **NUBSO** National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives
- **ROLLR** Record Office for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland
- **SLN** Shoe & Leather News
GLOSSARY OF SHOEMAKING TERMS

Cack  A type of children’s shoe produced in Leicester from the 1820s. The method used was to sew the upper by hand, in-side out, to a grooved sole and then turn the completed shoe right-side out. Definition taken from Granger, A., 'History of the boot and shoe industry in Leicester', *BBSI Journal* (March 1965), p. 470.

Clicker  One who cuts out the pieces of leather or other material that form the upper and lining of a shoe.

Close  To sew together the upper components of a boot or shoe. Originally referred to a but-seam when closing was done by hand. With the introduction of machines, the meaning gradually changed to include all operations necessary to produce a complete upper.

Components  All the individual pieces that make up a shoe.

Consumables  Items such as tacks, nails, thread, eyelets, wire, that are fed through a machine and become part of a shoe. Also, small items such as wax that lubricates thread and needles and drivers whose lifespan are variable and are not considered as spare parts.

Currier  One who undertakes the process of making the hide supple and giving it the colour to suit a customer’s requirement after it has been tanned.

Finishing  Operations done after the sole and heel have been attached to improve the appearance and durability of a shoe.

Grindery  Tacks, nails, rivets and other metallic fastenings used in shoe manufacture.

Last  Wood or iron form or mould, made to the shape of the foot, which forms the base on which shoes are made.

Lasting  Operation of pulling the upper over the last and fixing it to the insole before the sole is attached.

Nailing  Same as riveting. The words are interchangeable.

Patten  Old-fashioned type of overshoe with thick wood and metal base, designed to keep the wearer out of the mud on roads.

Rivet  A tack or nail used to attach the sole to the bottom of the boot or shoe.

Sprig  Rivet or nail.

Sprigger  One, usually a boy, who knocked sprigs into a sole after lasting.

Tanning  A process that changes the substance of the skin by forming a chemical combination of the true skin of animals with a vegetable astringent, principally by the use of tannic acid. There are various methods of tanning, such as the chrome system, bark system and mineral system. Definition taken from *The Shoe Manufacturers’ Journal* (mid-October, 1914).

Translator  One who bought old shoes and refurbished them for resale. By the end of the nineteenth century, this operation had changed and mainly consisted of repairing boots and shoes.

Turnshoe  A lightweight shoe, consisting of very flexible upper materials and no insole, made inside out. The sole is sewn direct to the upper after which the shoe is turned the right way round.
Upper
Part of the shoe that is attached to the sole and insole. Includes all the individual pieces of leather or other material after they have been sewn together.

Welt
Long, narrow piece of leather that is sewn on to the insole, following the shape of the last, and on to which the sole can then be stitched.