

# TESTIMONY

The stories of the lives of Lymm fustian cutters of the nineteenth century, told partly in their own words.



**LEVI BRADBURN 1868**



**SUSANNAH BRADBURN  
(HAMILTON) 1868**

# TESTIMONY

Government Inspectors came to Lymm in 1863 to see for themselves the appalling conditions in the fustian cutting trade, in particular for children as young as 7. Their visit to Lymm and their subsequent report contributed directly to the 1867 Workshop Regulation Act which extended earlier factory legislation to workshops. It specified for the first time that children between the ages of 8 and 13 should have a minimum of 10 hours education a week, (though 8 year olds would still be able to go to work. )

These testimonies and other stories appear in alphabetical order.

Samuel Appleton  
Sarah Bond  
Levi & Susannah Bradburn  
Samuel Butterworth  
James Clayton  
Elijah Collins  
Henry Dandy  
George Davies  
The Drinkwater Family  
Elizabeth Forrest  
Bridget Harrison  
Mary Holt  
Samuel Jackson  
John Johnson  
James Johnson  
John Leigh  
Thomas Lewis  
George Lewis  
Benjamin Moston  
Henry Moston  
William Moston  
Noah Profitt  
Elizabeth Skellon  
Mary Walker  
James Woodhead



## **Levi (b1840) and Susannah (b1845) Bradburn in 1868.**

They had married the previous year and lived in Booth's Hill. Levi's father Peter had been a fustian cutter (and a Chartist) and so were both Levi and Susannah for a time. On Susannah's knee is their first child, William. He too became a fustian cutter for a while as did some of the other six children that followed. Levi was notable for reaching the age of 89, making him the oldest resident in Lymm at the time. His passing merited this obituary in the Warrington Guardian which was later reproduced by Lymm & District History Society in the format below.

### **AN OCTOGENERIAN'S DEATH**

#### **MR LEVI BRADBURN**

#### **OLDEST RESIDENT OF THE VILLAGE - LYMM 1928**

The village lost a most interesting resident in Mr Bradburn of Booths Hill who died on Monday. Mr Bradburn was Lymm's oldest native resident and boasted a working record equalled by few men. Of his long lifetime, seventy-seven years had been spent in active employment. Despite his advanced years he was hale and hearty, in full possession of his faculties; and had wonderfully retentive memory.

Born in July 1839, in a little cottage that was situated on Eagle Brow, he received his education at the Free School, which formerly stood in the Parish Churchyard; the Master then being Mr Jonathan Millican. At the age of eight years he commenced work and was bound apprentice for four years to fustian cutting. That industry was then an important one in the village and he continued at it for five years and two months. "Then", said Mr Bradburn, "as I was fourteen years of age and a big lad, I thought it was time to look for something better."

## **A TANNER**

Mr Bradburn was as good as his word, and in August 1853, commenced work at the tannery in Cherry Lane, then owned by the late Mr Draper. He spent a quarter of a century at the tannery. On its being closed down he accepted an invitation to go to Bolton to give instruction in certain tanning processes.

Returning to Lymm three months later he went to work at High Legh Hall, a portion of which was being rebuilt. The offer of another situation took him to Grappenhall Tannery, but within a year he was back at his own trade of fustian cutting in Lymm. It was prior to the War that he accepted employment with Mr H N Johnson, of the Old Tannery House in Cherry Lane, thus coming back to the scene of his early labours.

## **RUSHBEARING FESTIVAL**

From his earliest years Mr Bradburn was acquainted with the old rushbearing festival. His grandfather, Mr William Cheetham, assisted by James Cheetham, George Cheetham, John Cheetham and Matthew Statham, always made the rush cart, which, drawn by four grey horses, carried the rushes to the Church. He played in the band on the rush cart when he was a boy. The last rushbearing festival he remembered was twenty-two years ago.

## **VOLUNTEER AND BANDSMAN**

When the local Volunteer Company was formed in November, 1859, he was one of the first members and was enrolled the following year. He was also one of the first members of the company band and played the euphonium.

## **BELLRINGING**

Bell ringing was another department in which he had taken a deep interest. For a period of twenty-seven years he was a paid ringer in the old church tower which was demolished about forty years ago.

The first May Queen Festival was also witnessed by him. At that time all schools combined in the procession and the dances were taught by the school teachers.

## **A GOOD OLD TORY**

"What am I politically?" In reply he stated, "I am a good old Tory and proud of it. I assisted Mr John Brooks, the first candidate for Altrincham and we put him in. My father was a Chartist and served seven days in Knutsford Gaol for his convictions."

In 1867 Mr Bradburn married the daughter of the first local Stationmaster (Mr Hamilton). She died in 1910.

He remembers seven Rectors at the Church of which he was a member, the earliest being Rev. Johnson.

He could read without the aid of glasses.

## **Name: The Drinkwater family**

### **Address Henry St**

When we were researching the 1861 census we found plenty of Johns and Marys as well as a good few Samuels and Sarahs. So the names of Samuel & Mary Drinkwater's family on Henry St rather jumped off the page. After their first daughter, Sarah, came Alma (a boy), Maroni, Nephi, Samuel and Hyrum. Our first thought was that perhaps Samuel had had a first wife who was foreign, but that would have been extremely uncommon for the time. A little further research revealed that several of these names were from the Book of Mormon. In Lymm? But no, Samuel hailed originally from Middlewich. As a boy of 15 in 1841 he had been apprenticed as a shoemaker near the canal with no trace of his parents. By 1851 he was described as a coal agent, a definite progression in social status, and almost certainly linked still to the canal. He married Mary around 1845.

Just a few years before this the first Mormon "missionaries" had arrived from USA landing at Liverpool in 1837. They started their preaching in Preston but soon spread to Cheshire and Staffordshire and seem to have hit a particularly rich seam of conversion in the Middlewich area.

Samuel and Mary were clearly among those converts and the names of the next four children that quickly followed illustrate the strength of their conviction.

Converts were soon put under pressure to emigrate and join the new community in Salt Lake City. Many went, including some from the Middlewich area. It would have been an epic journey in the 1850s starting with a transatlantic sailing from Liverpool. The coast to coast railroad was not completed until 1869 so the converts who made the journey in those early days were rightly described as pioneers, travelling through Indian territory by wagon or even handcart.

The prospect of such a massive upheaval must have tested the family's

faith. There was already another Middlewich family living on Henry St in Lymm and Samuel would also have had connections with the coal boatmen who passed through Lymm on their way to Middlewich. They may have tipped off Samuel that a house was available and that there was plenty of work to be had in the fustian trade. So some time before 1858 the Drinkwaters moved their home along the canal to Henry St. It is likely that they would have had help from a friendly boatman to move all their belongings.

And so we find them in 1861 living on Henry St, Lymm next to the canal and the coal yard. In the census Samuel appears as unemployed ... a very unusual state of affairs at that time. Were his religious beliefs viewed with suspicion? But the oldest three children are already fustian cutters. The following year Samuel Drinkwater was interviewed by government inspectors who had come to Lymm to examine and report on the working conditions of children in the village. -see below Maroni aged 10 was also an apprentice.

The Drinkwaters eventually had nine children, not as unusual as you might imagine in those times. Children were part of the family workforce. Almost all of them became cutters at some point.

No. 10. *Drinkwater.*—My children cut over the way there. The eldest girl is 17 ; she is out of her time ; she is working hard now doing a piece and a half a week, and has to work 80 hours to do it. Last week she was agate for four days from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. That boy is an apprentice at the same shop, he generally gets there at 6 a.m. and comes back at 8 p.m. ; he begins earlier at times, not often ; when he does it is to finish the week's work ; the day's work set him is not too much for him to do in the time, but if he gets behindhand at the beginning of the week he must fetch it up at the end.

**Name: Mary Holt**                      born 1817

Address Pepper St

where she employed 50+ fustian cutters – probably in the three storey cottages opposite where the village school was being built in 1863. Mary was listed as a cutter as early as 1841 when husband Hugh Holt was still alive. One of the few who seems to have been able to retire on her earnings.

*Mrs. Holt.*—There are 52 persons in my cutting shops at Lymm, 7 boys and 4 girls under 13 ; the two youngest are 8 years and 10 months ; one boy and 6 girls between that and 18 ; 20 males and 14 females over 18.

All the work is by the piece, so that everything both as to hours and meals is optional ; the children generally work under their parents in my shops, but it is so nowhere else in Lymm ; none have been apprenticed to me since the death of my husband. We consider the hours to be from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. with half an hour for breakfast, the same for tea, and an hour for dinner. I do not, however, exercise any direct supervision or control myself, and they may come earlier and stay later if they please ; in winter we generally close at 8 p.m., and they can begin at 6 a.m. ; some do. The young ones get journey wage from me for their work, 9d. in the 1s. on what the manufacturer pays me ; in fact it is just as if they were not in a shop at all, for their father or mother or an elder brother or sister teach them the trade and look after them, getting their tools and frames ready, and I provide the frames and tools and the pieces to cut ; so there is no system of half earnings up to a certain age or time, and no need of any overlooker.

The women do very little of their washing and sewing themselves ; but if they have to cut, they haven't much time for other things, whether they can do them or not. I don't think limiting the hours of labour would be of any good ; stopping young children being put to cutting would ; for as they can do the work of journey hands, and their labour is cheaper, those who chiefly employ them, can underbid the employers of grown hands in taking work from the manufacturer ; and unless something were done to prevent people working in their own houses, factory regulations would only drive them from the regular shops to do as they liked at home.



Name: Bridget Harrison      born 1809

Address Pepper St—

worked for Mary Holt and lived in one of the terrace of cottages with workshops above. Husband Jeremiah and her 10 year old daughter ( whom she had at the very late age of 42 ) were both also cutters.

*Mrs. Harrison*, fustian cutter.—I cut for Mrs. Holt ; we are better off under her than at most places, for as she has capital she has no need to draw her money at the end of each week from the manufacturers to pay herself and us, and therefore is not forced to press us to finish so much in each week that she may take it in and get paid for it, as they have to do in the small shops. Many undertakers say “ there’s so much “ to get done in the week ; you must do it or you “ won’t get paid ;” and then if you get behindhand, you’re obliged to work late and early to get it up ; that’s the same with young and old.

It is the breadth of the piece that gives the round shoulder ; the right shoulder is the one—that of the hand that holds the knife ; it soon grows out if they are put young to it. The rollers used to be lower, and knock the side of the knee ; so they do still if the child is so small that he has to be raised to work. My daughter Jane there is 12, she began to cut at 9½ years old, but she had 2 years school before ; she can read ;\* she doesn’t often do over 12 hours a day.

**Name: Noah Proffit**      born 1842

Address : Lived and worked on Pepper St. In the 1881 trade Directory Noah is listed as a "fustian master" in his own right, living in Rush Green. His wife and children worked with him then but they also had a lodger who was employed by Noah. One of his daughters, Minnie became a dressmaker, while eldest son James was an "engine cleaner" - the first signs of a break from the fustian trade.

*Noah Proffit, cutter.*—Am 19 ; was 10 when I began ; my brother Jim is 11 ; he has been a year at cutting ; he comes at 7 a.m. and goes at 8 p.m., generally ; we have from 12 to 1 for dinner, and half an hour at four for tea. At Mrs. Holt's, where we are allowed to work in families, the father or mother bring their children, and they all work at frames in the same room near one another ; in other places the young ones will be all apprenticed and put in a room together with an overlooker, and, may be, other grown journeymen and women.

I think the mixing of the girls and boys is bad ; here they all use the same privy ; but it's much better where the families keep together, both for the work and for the morals.

**Name:** Elizabeth Skelhorn      born 1831

Address Pepper St – another employee of Mary Holt.

Elizabeth tells us she started cutting in 1843 at age 12. She was still cutting 50 years later. –then living on Booths Hill.

A lifetime spent in the trade was not unusual.

(Inconsistent spellings on names were very common at that time)

Elizabeth may well not have been able to read nor write though she did send her own daughter to Sunday School.

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*Elizabeth Skellon*, cutter.—I began cutting at 12 ; that was 20 years ago. I don't get to work early ; a mother with a family can't ; but the husband generally comes at 6 in the morning and works till 9 at night, and 19 children out of 20 come to work with their fathers. In the small shops they have the long Thursday and Friday ; we don't here. The taking Monday and Tuesday for play is not general, but many are ready enough to give cutters a bad name ; they don't have to work late towards the end of the week because they are idle in the beginning ; they have to work late and long to earn anything, and it's little enough they do earn after all.

My girl goes to Sunday school ; she began to cut at  $8\frac{1}{2}$  years old ; after working all day they're not fit for school. It's a sin, that a man can't get a fair day's wage for a fair day's work ; if a man could earn what he ought to earn, the children needn't come to cut.

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**Name: Mary Walker** born 1842 .

We have not yet been able to tie this back to a census entry but there was a Walker family of 10 people all living on Pepper St and all but the five year old being fustian cutters. In 1861.

Mary almost certainly worked for Mrs Holt on Pepper St.

The first name may be an error of reporting by the inspector.

*Mary Walker*, cutter.—Am 21 ; began at 10 ; often have to work from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. ; the little ones have too ; they come so young that they are too weak to stand long, and get out of shape. They get very tired.

There's not much dust made at cutting, but before we cut, we card each length, and that makes a dust, partly the stuff that comes off and partly the lime ; I don't suppose that's very good for us, but I don't know that we are liable to any particular disorder of chest or lungs. We often have colds, but that comes of the drafts where they will have the windows open.

**Name Thomas Lewis** Born 1821

Address Pepper St

Already cutting in 1831 at age 9, Thomas died just two years after this interview, at age 44, still a cutter.

*Thomas Lewis, cutter.*—I cut now for Mrs. Holt at Lymm. I was cutting soon after I was 9 ; they begin earlier now. There's Henry my son ; he began at 8½. Why, the grown men and women among us can't read. There's not a proper scholar among all the cutters.

Thomas refers above to his son "Henry" but there is no Henry in the census. He did have four children – Thomas, Ann, Hannah and George. – It could have been an error by the inspector in his notes. George's story follows on the next page.

## The story of George Lewis- The one that got away.

Quote from the Children's Employment Commission report 1863:

*"George Lewis, cutter,- I am 12: began 2 years since. Thomas Lewis is my father. I generally come to work at 7, sometimes half past 6, sometimes 8, and stay till 7 or in winter till 8. About a year ago I got up 3a.m. and came to work and went on till 8pm., that was on a Friday. I haven't done so since: I have begun as early as 5a.m. three or four times, and gone on till 7 or 8p.m. I go to the Baptist Sunday School".*

George Lewis was born in Lymm in 1851. His parents were Thomas and Mary Lewis. George had four brothers and three sisters.

The England Census 1851 shows George, then one month old, living with his parents and siblings in Pepper Street, Lymm. Both George's parents and his older brother, William, who is ten years old, are fustian workers. George's brother, James, is a six year old scholar, and he has two sisters, Ann, four years old, and Hannah, who is one year old. The family have three lodgers who are also fustian cutters. The house must have been very crowded! Looking at the census returns it would appear that the majority of the occupants of Pepper Street were employed as fustian cutters.

The England Census 1861 shows George and his family still living in Pepper Street. George is ten years old and he is employed as a fustian cutter, as are all his older siblings and his mother and father. He now has a younger brothers, Joseph, five years, and Edwin, four years old. Both boys are scholars. George also has a baby sister, Elizabeth, who is one year old.

George was twenty years old when he married Sarah Leather, also twenty, on 23 April 1871 at Manchester Cathedral. Of note is that George and his brother, James who was a witness at the wedding are able to sign their own names on the marriage certificate, whereas Sarah and the other female witness, Ellen Wyche, cannot write their names. George, his father Thomas, and Sarah are all shown to be fustian cutters on the certificate. Sarah's father, John, is a labourer.

The England Census 1881 shows George and Sarah living in Rush Green, Lymm. George has a change of occupation as is a clerk to a bus company. Sarah is still employed as a fustian cutter. The couple have two

daughters, Annie, nine years and Agnes who is two months old. Sarah's mother, Margaret Leather is also living with the family.

George's wife, Sarah, died sometime after this census return was completed. George remarried on 24 May 1890 at All Saints Church, Chorlton, Manchester. His bride, Eliza Shackleton, was also widowed. Thomas's address on the marriage certificate is given as 34 Sidney Street, Chorlton, Manchester, and he is a clerk.

The England Census 1891, shows George and his family living in Manchester at 45 Roberts Street, Chorlton, Manchester. George is now forty years old and he is a commercial clerk. Living with the family we have Agnes, George's daughter from his first marriage, and Eliza's son from her first marriage, Tom Shackleton who is nine years old. George and Eliza also have a daughter, Elsie, who is five months old. George's mother, Mary, is living with the family and it would appear that his sister, Hannah and her son George Leigh are also living there or visiting!

The England Census 1901 shows George and his family living at 7 Chorlton Terrace, Manchester. George is a tramways clerk, and his wife, Eliza, is a Police Court Missionary Preacher. Agnes is a commercial clerk and Tom is a warehouse clerk. Elsie is a ten year old scholar. George and his family must be doing very well because they have a servant called Annie Broadhead!

By 1911, the family had moved just across the road to 4 Chorlton Terrace. George is sixty years old and is a tramways traffic inspector. Eliza is still employed as a police court missionary. Agnes is thirty years old, still single and a school nurse. Elsie is twenty. The family have an eighteen year old servant, Annie Mansfield.

So as we look at the story of George Lewis, it would seem he made a successful life for himself. He grew up in what must have been very overcrowded cramped conditions with his large family, and for all we know, he was a very happy boy. But he would have had to grow up quick, working long hours as a fustian cutter with his parents and siblings. Something drove George to look for a better life, and his change of occupation to clerk set him on a road that would lead to him eventually having a servant of his own and presumably a reasonably comfortable lifestyle.

Well done George ! *(researched by Jackie Cooling, Heritage Centre volunteer)*

**Name: Henry Moston** b 1829

Address: Booths Hill... where he ran a workshop. The Moston family was very involved in running several shops over the whole period of the industry. There was even a Moston St near the West Hyde workshop.

In 1841 the whole family had been cutters on Higher Lane under the guidance of father, Benjamin.

*Henry Moston*, master cutter.—I have 28 frames in work; there are six children here under 13 years of age, 4 of whom are girls; between 13 and 18 there are eight males and two females; and 12 adults, seven males and five females; 10 are apprenticed; I take none under 10 years old as apprentices. Our usual hours are 10½ for work, and 1 and a half for meals; there is no regular time for beginning or leaving off, say 8 to 8; but it's all their own fault; if they chose to work steadily, there need be no night work. The men will be irregular, some drink a fortnight together; I have none that do, for I send them off if they drink; but they don't care, they are sure of being employed by some one else. It was the irregularity of the men that forced us to get children to cut; and they are nearly as bad, only we can have more control over them. They very soon get masterful and independent, and their parents can't control them if they would. What I give them to do is nine lengths in the day; ask them yourself whether they can't always get through that if they like; if they stop after, or come before, the usual hours it is because they have not done their nine lengths a day when the end of the week comes. I pay as the piece is finished, whenever that may be.



I see no objection to regulating juvenile labour, it would be good for all ; they could do in half a day nearly as much as they used to do in a whole day ; I don't like money got at night, and as for their age, why, a man is a brute who takes children so young as 7 or 8 for such work.

The work used to be harder for them ; for the lengths were 7 ft. 2 in., but now they are 6 ft. 6 inches, and of course the further they had to reach forward the greater the effort to recover themselves.

Ours is too much a ready money trade ; that is, there is no capital required ; it is among the smaller ones, who are obliged to draw for each piece as it is cut, in order to pay themselves and their cutters, that most irregularity and longest hours prevail.

A number of the young women go wrong, as might be expected ; in a small place like this every body is known ; so when I say I won't ever employ a young woman who is unsteady, I don't mean that there is any arrangement among the masters to give characters among themselves, for there is nothing of the kind ; mine are steady, and keep so ; it is often the master's fault, if the workers are worse than they should be.

The trade is very low now ; before this American war we were getting 11s. a piece for what we are now getting only 7s.

I was born a cutter, began at 9, and have been 35 years at it ; I was the eldest child of six, and my father only earned 13s. a-week ; things were twice as dear as they are now, that's why I went so young ; but he brought us all up on that, and owed no one anything when he died ; but he was a sober man.

**Name Henry Dandy: Age 15**

Address – Lymm Railway Station

As the son of the Station Master at Lymm, also Henry Dandy, one might have expected young Henry to have done a little better. He did in fact find work on the railways and was an errand boy in Manchester for the railway company at age 13 but was dismissed – for pilfering plums ! So he and his young brothers joined the hundreds who were fustian cutting.

Later Henry moved to Pendleton in Lancashire. Where he died aged 45 in 1890.

*Henry Dandy, cutter.*—I cut for Henry Moston, sometimes come at 7, generally at 8, nearly always leave at 8. Am 11 years old, began 1 year since ; used to go to school; could do my day's work in nine hours if I chose, and have an hour for dinner out of that.

**Name: Elizabeth Forrest** born 1852

Address — Booths Hill . — probably in one of the terrace of cottages run by Henry Moston. Elizabeth's father was an agricultural labourer while mother is described a shoe binder, but all three children were put to cutting. Elizabeth's testimony stating that she could do the work in seven hours was common among the children. One can't help feeling that they were "primed" by their employers to say this to the inspectors who may have feared some sort of penalty.

*Elizabeth Forrest, cutter.*—Am  $10\frac{1}{2}$  years ; began at  $9\frac{1}{2}$  years old ; generally come at 8 or  $8\frac{1}{2}$  a.m. and stay till 8 p.m. ; my work I could do in seven hours working hard ; we have half an hour both for dinner and for tea. I haven't been to dinner yet, though it is half past one ; I haven't done my four lengths.

Note there was more than young John Leigh in Lymm cutting at this time more research needed to identify which this was...

*John Leigh*, cutter.—Am 12 ; have been at cutting two years ; come at 8 and stay till 7 or sometimes 8 ; don't think I could do my day's work in much under eight hours.

Name **John Johnson** b 1824

Address Henry St. - He was a fustian master but was his workshop on Henry St or could it have been Legh St on the site of the Heritage Centre?

Another who had been cutting from the very early days . He tells the inspector in 1862 that he has been cutting for 29 years. He would continue cutting for at least another 29 according to the 1891 census.. Described as living then on "Bridge St"

John tells the inspector ....

*John Johnson, master cutter.—Have been 29 years at it ; began at 10; have eight frames ; two are under 13, and five between 13 and 18 ; two are females, my own daughter one is ; she began at 9 years old, and had but little schooling. I have to come at 5½ or 6 a.m., and stay till 8 p.m., because I can't make them all come at one time. We have children to work, because they are less irregular than grown persons, who won't work more than three or four days in the week ; for one good journey hand there are 20 bad ones.*

In Lymm I should say there is always one shop or another agate all Friday night ; every shop is at one time or another except Henry Moston's. But that couldn't be, if the time was fixed by law, and they knew it must be observed.

Some time ago the masters agreed together that all the shops should open at 6 a.m. and close at 8 p.m. with a fine of 5s. for each time it was broken through ; but before long several were fined, but would not pay, so it all fell through.

Trade is very bad, last week we were a'most clemmed to death but for charity.

**Name: James Clayton** born 1810

Address Warrington Road

James Clayton had been involved in the trade since its very early days in 1821. His relationships may have contributed to the reputation for children born out of wedlock in the trade. Apparently James Clayton had four children with spinster Elizabeth (Betty) Bradbury from 1829-1836, including Henry; one child with spinster Mary Hinton in 1837; then married Catherine Fairbrother (nee Bibby) & had three more.

James Clayton actively campaigned for fair pay for cutters also to limit the use of child labour. He and Thomas Butterworth – also of Lymm met with cutters from other locations to discuss taking every legal means to secure their demands, including petitioning parliament.

Thomas's father was William Clayton born in 1783.

A William Clayton of Lymm was on the register of gamekeepers in 1804 but was also recorded as being a fustian cutter, the earliest reference to the trade in Lymm. It seems likely he was James's father.

*James Clayton*, master cutter.—I have been 40<sup>1</sup> years in the business, and it's worse than ever; the earnings less and the men more irregular.

Trade is very bad now; the "undertaker" or master is getting from the manufacturer, from whom he has his work, for velvets 6s. 8s.;  $\frac{5}{8}$  velveteens 8s. 10s.;  $\frac{3}{4}$  velveteens 9s. 10s. a piece; he will deduct  $2\frac{1}{2}d.$  or  $3d.$  in the 1s. from those sums for his own profit and "rent" of shop, tools, &c., and pay the rest over to the journey hand.

The highest prices we have had since '58 have been, for velvets 11s. to 13s.;  $\frac{5}{8}$  velveteens, 10s. to 14s.;  $\frac{3}{4}$  velveteens 11s. to 15s., and that was paid as late as January of this year.

As to the pay it isn't the manufacturers who reduce the pay, it's the cutters themselves by underbidding one another, particularly those who have large shops with a great supply of cheap juvenile labour; you'll find over 3,000 at Gravelhole and that way, chiefly children.\*

I have 25 persons at work, two boys and three girls under 13; five boys and three girls between 13 and 18; eight men, and four women; five are apprentices, the youngest just 10. We usually work 15 hours a day; they have meal times out of that, but no fixed amount of time, above an hour for dinner and half an hour for tea. The children seldom work at a stretch more than 14 hours in the day; some will come at 5 a.m., some at 6, and so on; so that I don't get out of the shop till  $10\frac{1}{2}$  for three nights a week, and on Saturday mornings you might find even here at my place young ones working till 2 a.m. sometimes, only last Saturday they did, aye and till 3 and 4 a.m. now and then; it is all laziness; they won't work when they might.

During the time we had those regulations of our own for opening at 6 a.m. and closing at 8 p.m. there was more work and better work done, and every one looked the better for it. If you can stop the irregular long hours, it's all we want. We seldom have special orders to cut a piece by a fixed time.

Name William Moston. b 1827

Address the Square.

William's father, Benjamin had five children. They lived on Higher Lane and in 1841 all seven were cutters right down to the youngest, Mary who was 8.

William's son Frederic would later inherit his father's business as well as being a leading light in the New Road Methodists

Henry's younger brother also went on to become a fustian master in his own right.

*William Moston*, master cutter.—I have 11 frames at work ; 5 of the cutters in my employ are under 13, one of those is a girl ; the youngest is 9 years and 5 months old ; three are between 13 and 18, and three adults ; two of the latter are females ; 5 are apprentices, I take no apprentice under 10. It would be a good thing for all, if no child was allowed to work under 11 years old ; perhaps that would be hard on parents, but there would be a difficulty in working in relays ; the same that begins a piece ought to finish it, else some lengths of the piece would be done differently to others, and you could not trust to any one part being a sample of the rest. When we put two hands on to the same piece, they begin at opposite ends and work up to the middle ; so there is only one line of variation where they meet.



A piece a week is what they are expected to do ; pieces vary in length and breadth, but the time for any piece that a child cuts will be about the same for all. 10 hours work in the day is all I want ; and if they would come to work regularly from 6 to 6 I should be satisfied. I open the shop every day at 6 a.m., and have to stop often as late as 10 p.m., for I stop as long as any one is at work ; and those that don't come till late will work late. It is worse for master than for men these late hours, and the children are as bad almost as the grown ones. I don't let the apprentices stop after 8½ p.m., unless there is a special order to be finished by a fixed time ; the work I set them for the day can be done in less than 10 hours without working hard, but they are sometimes disposed to work and sometimes not. They very seldom do more than the week's work ; when they do, I pay them journeyman's wage ; the rule for apprentice's wage is for the master to keep half the sum paid him by the manufacturer, and to let the apprentice, or rather his parents, have the other half, then the master furnishes shop, frame, tools, and light, beside learning the trade, and the parents find board and lodging.

I have seen children grown up round shouldered and knock-kneed ; it comes of careless ways of standing ; that is, unless they are very young ; a good overlooker would prevent that in all other cases. I never allow any bad language to be used in the shop, but I believe many do.

Name Samuel Jackson b1852-1854

Address Rush Green.

Samuel does not appear on the name board as he was only 7 years old though he did start work before his 8th birthday.

At age 17 or 18 in around 1870 Samuel married Ann, the daughter of Richard Horsfall, who were neighbours and also cutters. He moved in with them. Ann would go on to bear FOURTEEN children only seven of whom were still alive in 1911. Samuel ended his working life as a labourer for the new Lymm Urban District Council.

*Samuel Jackson, cutter.*—I am going 10, began under 8 ; can read a bit. Work under William Moston ; generally work from 7 a.m. till 7½ p.m. About 3 weeks since I began at 4½ a.m. ; that was of a Saturday to finish off ; had worked regular time the night before, perhaps a bit later, may be till 8½ p.m., not later than that. Have meal times, not always at the same time exactly, but much about.

**Name Samuel Butterworth b 1838**

Address Oughtrington Lane — but in 1874 the Butterworth family were running the workshop behind the Golden Fleece in the village centre

One can sense from Samuel's testimony his genuine concern for the plight of the cutters. This was probably passed on to him by his father Thomas Butterworth who, along with James Clayton had met with cutters from other area in Manchester in 1846 to speak up for fair pay and an end to child labour.

*Samuel Butterworth.*—This is my mother's shop. I am overlooker, she pays me wage for that and for cutting. There are 16 frames here ; 1 cutter is under 13, and 9 under 18 ; only one is an apprentice, the rest all do journey work ; they come at 7 or 8 a.m. and stop till 8½ or 9 p.m., but they are not regular at that ; some days they all finish at 6 or 7, and others not till 9 or 10 ; the same cutters, I mean, and the same work ; they have 1½ hours for meals, which they take much about the same time ; it is in their own hands what they take, and when they take it.

We give them 9 lengths to cut on the 4 middle days of the week, 7 on Monday, and 6 on Saturday ; 49 lengths of 2 yards and a few inches will make an average length of a piece, or about 100 yards. But it's no good dividing the work, they won't work at the beginning, and will do 14 and 15 hours a day at the end of the week ; their parents can't or won't help it ; they grumble at the end of the week, but won't make them come at the beginning. It is very jading work, and they are very tired after a big day's work. Many are crippled for life. If some bill doesn't pass, all will suffer.

**Name Samuel Appleton b 1836**

Address Statham – his workshop was on Narrow Lane – now Oldfield Road.

Samuel Appleton was originally from Hollins Green.

This is where he learnt the trade living with his step-father. Surprisingly there were as many as 40 cutters in rural Rixton (next to Hollins Green) in 1851. There was no bridge across the Mersey in those days.

He was doing well for himself to be a master cutter running a workshop in his mid-twenties. The family also later bought the shop on Star Lane while the workshop was still running into the early years of the twentieth century. All this in spite of the workshop not being too well located at some distance and down a hill from the canal. (Appleton's workforce toward the end of their time is pictured on one of the exhibition storyboards).

*Samuel Appleton, master cutter.—I have 9 frames at work ; 2 under 13, and 7 between 13 and 18, cut for me ; there are 2 women over 18. I have 2 apprentices, they both were 9 years old when they were bound.*

Where I used to work, very indecent language was often used ; there were so many girls and boys and grown persons there altogether, and the master didn't look after us much, but left us to ourselves so long as the work was got through. I would not have any girls come, and cut here, who had been working for any time in a big shop. I wouldn't, for the harm it would do to my own children.

I don't see why relays should not answer ; the sort of cutting of one child doesn't vary so much from that of another, as to make a great difference.

Name: George Davies b1829

Address Rush Green

Grew up on Pepper St with his mother Susan Daniel. Not clear where his workshop was. It may have been in his home.

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*George Davies*, master cutter.—I have no apprentices. 2 of my journey hands are 14 years old and one 17 ; one of my own children began as early as 8 years old. We work from 6 or 7 a.m. to 8 or 9 p.m. ; till 11 p.m., perhaps, once a fortnight ; in winter the whole of us, all the trade, are later, scarce a shop is locked up before 10.

We are not always safe with the tools, they will break, the long thin knife particularly, and it may be 3 or 4 hours before we get agate again, and that lost time has to be made up. Nine lengths will take about 10 hours to cut, taking one length with another, and counting all the stoppages, from the knife having to be sharpened or breaking, and the "beaming up," and carding of each length before cutting.

There is more overwork than you will ever find out. I saw a boy of 11 years old, the very last week, who had been agate from 5 a.m. on Friday till 10 a.m. on Saturday morning. A child will follow the example of the grown ones about him, and if they play and are irregular, he does so too.

It is at night that the harm of the big shops comes, the master goes off and leave his journey hands, and then there is all sorts of talk. Only women should work at it. It is not men's work at all, if they could get anything else.

The evil is the working as they choose, the very children do almost as they like.

Name Benjamin Moston b 1793

Address Higher Lane

For some reason Benjamin himself does not appear in the 1861 census even though , clearly he was running a workshop as were two of his son William and Henry elsewhere in the village. One of the senior "masters" of the trade.

*Benjamin Moston*, master cutter.—None of my 8 apprentices began under 9 ; but 9 is too young ; it is quite a shame the early age at which they are put to it, it ruins a child.

I close at 8 p.m. ; it is the master's fault if they are irregular ; they come at 6 a.m., often not much before 7 ; from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. they will do nine lengths of velvet, with about 800 races or cuts in each breadth, or 13 lengths of the doubled velveteen, that is, with 620 races on each side of the centre selvage. .

Many shops are more irregular than we. I have seen that one across the field illuminated in the middle of the night.

We masters agreed to form rules that no shop should open before 6 a.m. or remain open after 8 p.m. ; while they were in force there was more work done by the hands, and it was better work. For every body in the trade restrictions on the hours of work would be very valuable.

**Name Elijah Collins** born 1823

Address Sandy Lane. — Fustian Master .. Possibly a small home workshop.

Life Expectancy in Victorian England was far lower than today. The Collins family is a case in point.

Elijah married Ann Pearson of Manchester at age 19 in 1842. Ann bore two children but died aged just 30 in 1845.

He then married Jane and had six more children.

In 1863 when he gave the statement below, his wife and three eldest children were all cutting with five other children to raise.

The youngest child was still a babe in arms.

Elijah died just three years later at the age of 42 leaving Jane to bring up 8 children.

Jane herself died aged 49 in 1876.

*Elijah Collins.*—I have 4 apprentices, none under 12 ; they work from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m., we work more on Friday. Last Friday we began before 6 a.m. and worked till 11 p.m., and began at 4 a.m. the next morning. They have each of them worked once all night through in the last 2 years.

**Name James Johnson** b 1821

Address Statham – exact location of his workshop, which may have been in his home, is unknown.

James does not sound particularly sympathetic to the plight of the youngsters in his interview with inspectors. Is it possible that they went to see him specifically because just three years earlier he had been prosecuted and found guilty of assaulting his ten year old apprentice? Penalty a 10s fine! (This at a time when a theft of some vegetables would probably earn you three months hard labour).

*James Johnson, master cutter.—I used to work as a journey hand 18 months ago ; we generally worked*

*all through Friday night ; the little ones did too sometimes. The regular work set to an apprentice is 9 lengths a day, and that they can get through in 8 hours if they work without stopping ; they are able to do that as soon as they have been six months at it. It is often difficult to make the children work steadily, for their parents won't allow them to be corrected.*

*I have 4 apprentices ; one is bound for 3 years, the rest for 4. There are places where they are bound for one year only ; the parents won't have them bound so long as they used to be.*



**Name: Sarah Bond b 1809**

Sarah does not appear on the wall list of names as according to the 1861 census she is the only member of the family aged over 10 who is not cutting,

She could be forgiven for not working as she has a husband and nine children at home. It is unlikely that they would have had more than three bedrooms at most. With four frames in the house there would have been precious little space for anything else.

*Mrs. Bond.*—I am a cutter, and so are my girls, there are two of them. Mrs. Holt gives us out what she can't get done in her shops. My husband cuts too. We have 4 frames at home. I wouldn't let my girls work in a shop along with the men and boys ; no girl can do it, and remain a good girl. I never cut in a shop myself, but we all know enough about it ; there is no chance for a girl with the late hours, and the bad language and that. Last year we were for 17 weeks, and had only 5 pieces to cut.

**Name: James Woodhead** b 1806

Address Chapel House New Road ( This is presumably the house of the Methodist Church on New road ( now demolished) James is something of a mystery at present.

First of all he is one of the very few fustian masters from out of the area. He was born in Halifax in Yorkshire. He seems to have a large workshop but where was it ? There was reportedly a fustian "shop" next door to Haslehursts near Lymm Bridge Could this have been his? He needed space for at least 30 employees. James was almost certainly associated with the church in some way. His address is the most obvious clue but he also pops up as an attendee at the 1860 League of Temperance conference in Leeds. He appears to have married Mary Pemberton in Leamington in 1850 so was clearly a man of some means.

He may have been guided into his occupation by members of the Moston family, successful fustian masters, who were also active members of New Rd Methodists.

*James Woodhead, master cutter.—I have 30 frames now working ; none of my cutters are under 13 ; 8 are between that age and 18, 4 of each sex. My apprentices don't do more than 10 hours work a day, and have their hour and a half or 2 hours for meals ; there are only two of them. I don't think relays would answer, the difference of the cut of two hands shows when the cloth comes to be dyed ; it would be better to limit them at once to 6 hours a day, till they are 13, and let the piece stand in the frame for them to go on one day, where they left off the day before, and no boy should be put to it before 11, and no girl before 12.*

It is unhealthy work ; the dust is bad at times, not so much from the cutting as the carding before cutting. See the dust that woman is making ; it is partly the flue of the cloth, and partly the lime which we put on to stiffen the thread, and get rid of the grease which would turn the knife. Mine is more airy than most shops, and we are not so afraid of open windows.

I really don't think that the masters in Lymm ever work their apprentices longer than from 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. That is long enough for you, is it not ? Perhaps you may find here and there extreme cases happening occasionally, and more in smaller places out of the village ; and I don't think they are in the habit of making the apprentices do in extra time what the journey hands won't do. The fact is that the journey hands do do, what they have to do in the week, but do it at all times and any time. My shop is much as the others ; we are mostly all alike.

**Name : Thomas Gatley b: 1833 & Fanny Warburton b 1841**

Address: In 1861 Thomas lived on "Cow Lane" off New Road, presumably one of the lanes leading to a farm. Fanny at this time was living in Bridgewater Street with her family. Later when they lived together (e.g. 1818 census) it was on clay Terrace, described in the census as "Rookery".

Thomas, born in 1833 son of a fustian cutter and now aged 30, a fustian cutter himself. He could barely remember not being one, he was put to it so young and even before he worked he would sit under his mother's frame. Thomas and his wife Ann had two young children of their own. He would have liked something different for them.

Thomas was the self-appointed spokesman for the cutters, possibly encouraged by Mary Holt of Pepper Street who was one of the more enlightened masters. He took it upon himself to do his own head count of cutters in the village in 1862/3. He came up with 720. This is 10 more than on the census of 1861, but employment was a casual affair in those days. The cutters are reported as "flitting like martens" from shop to shop. Thomas could neither read nor write so needed to remember all he would say to the government inspector about the conditions of work in Lymm, about the hours, sometimes 16 hours at a go, about the poor pay, about the way child labour was used to undercut the competition.

Thomas clearly made his case well. The inspectors came and were horrified by what they saw.

Here are some quotes from their report.

*Thomas Gattley*, fustian cutter.—I work for Mrs. Holt of Lymm ; have been 19 years in the trade ; the journeymen there have deputed me to wait on you with Rowles and represent them. I agree with all he has told you about the employment of children in our trade. There is a very great degree of ignorance among them ; at Lymm 111 last December were employed under 13 years of age ; of them 78 were unable to read ; this we ascertained by inquiring personally. And yet many of the parents of those children are earning their 24s. a week regularly in other trades, but won't care for giving them a proper education and preserving their health and their morals.

As to that last they are very demoralized, not only from want of being taught, but from the mixing of the sexes at all ages. I speak from my own experience, I am sure it is very bad. Many of the girls are mothers before they are wives ; many are not married at all, though they have children, and those that do marry, don't know how to keep house at all, or bring up a family.

I am afraid that, even if we got brought under the Factory Acts, there would be plenty of ways to evade them. Those who now employ large numbers of children in one building, would send the work out to be done in the houses of the workmen, where, perhaps, only one or two besides the family would be employed, and no system of inspection could reach them. Or take the case, which is not unusual, for the employer to be the owner of a whole row of cottages tenanted by his journeymen, instead of 50 frames in one shed he has four in each of a dozen cottages, how could he be reached ?

I will give you some illustrations of the ignorance we are in ; why, there's myself, I can read indeed, but I can only write my name, and nothing else : I have picked up a few instances since I spoke first to you ; there's one boy at Cheetham's, 11 years old, he began at 8 years and 9 months, and can't read or write ; there is another the same age at Holt's, who began at 9 years and 2 months, he can't read or write ; so a boy aged 14 at one of the Mostons. I found several who had been put to cutting at between 7 and 8 ; it isn't to be wondered at that they could not read. If you ask as you go about, you will find it so everywhere, but some have been "put up" to answer you.

I think cutting by hand will have to go on some time yet ; machines have been tried, but none have succeeded. We do our work by the feel ; some sorts of work are too much for the young ones, cords and that sort, they do velvets and narrow velveteens.

The younger children are chiefly employed in cutting velvets, which are narrow, running from 18 to 20 inches ; they are about 20 inches, but shrink in stiffening ; or  $\frac{5}{8}$  velveteen, which are about 26 inches wide ; the bigger ones will cut  $\frac{3}{4}$  velveteen, that is 30 inches wide. The men cut "cords" and the wider or  $\frac{3}{4}$  velveteens, "doubles," and "patents," which the young ones can't possibly reach over. The strain in reaching is what injures them when they are so young ; that and knocking the side of their knees against the end of the roller ; their knee just reaches up to that when they are raised upon the board they have to stand on.

A piece of  $\frac{5}{8}$  velveteen will be from 96 to 109 yards long, and a piece a week will be a good week's work at 12 hours a day ; the pay for that now to us would be 6s. 8d. ; before last February we were getting 10s. 10d. for the same amount ; our wage had fallen as low as it is now in '58, then we journeymen combined to raise it, but that has fallen away now. There is not more work in the broader pieces, that is, not more races to cut, for the material is coarser, so the races are further apart ; it is rather heavier work, perhaps, but a piece of one will take much about the same time as a piece of the other ; the narrow velvets, which are finer, will have, perhaps, 900 races in a width, the wider and coarser ones not over 750.

Just this week many of the hands will be away hay-making ; that will only be the grown ones ; they can get 2s. a day in the neighbourhood at that, which is better pay than any we can earn at cutting.

The children who "cut" in Lymm are generally hired under an agreement to work for 4 years at half earnings ; very few are regularly bound, since the magistrates have held the masters bound to supply work.

It is a common habit here for the master to set the children so many lengths to do, four perhaps, before dinner, and keep them till they have done it ; they get some time for the meal, but it is often not half an hour. I don't know that what they do set is too much for them to do in the time, if they chose. They are not ill-treated generally speaking ; many are more or less inkneed from being put young to cutting, and working long hours without being properly looked after, but allowed to stand carelessly.

Most cutters “play” on the Monday ; still our supply of work comes in very irregularly ; that is not always the fault of those that send us the pieces to cut ; often they can’t get them from the maker, and having to complete an order by a certain day they have to push us to make up for that previous delay, though we may have had nothing to do for a day or two before.



“ They don’t look like children; they are often deformed in the shoulders and in the legs and chest as well and generally stunted”

“pale,dirty little wretches with the look of premature old age”.

Did it make any difference ? Well it was a piece in the jigsaw of a growing realisation that child labour needed to be acted upon. but for Thomas and his family? probably not ..

Before the end of the year they had their third child who died eight days old.

By the time of the next census both his children were fustian cutters.

Thomas’s wife Ann died aged 52 and by the time of the next census Thomas is living with Fanny Warburton and her five illegitimate children ( a couple at least were probably Thomas’s )- all destined for fustian cutting – as Fanny had been since childhood.

Things got worse rather than better. In 1887 local cotton magnate Mr Dewhurst stepped in with £200 to provide work (and food) for desperate unemployed families.

In 1891 Thomas probably marched through the village with striking fustian cutters demanding a far day’s pay. Within a week they were back at work - no better off.

Thomas died in 1907. Fanny lived till 1911 at time of death she was 72 – occupation still a Fustian Cutter.

*Read Thomas’s detailed testimony on the next two pages*