

## Fustian Cutting in Cadishead

Early in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, towns in South Lancashire had a reputation for making cotton goods, in reality these goods were made mainly of wool with a small mixture of linen, both constituents being home grown, whilst cotton had to be imported.

Large numbers of Flemish weavers had settled in Manchester and surrounding areas to escape persecution in their own land. They were the first to use cotton imported from India and Asia Minor.

To evade laws passed to protect the woollen manufacturers, the Flemish weavers mixed linen in with cotton and this material was the starting point for fustian that was used in the district up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

Cadishead is best known for fustian cutting, by the 1870's it would have been well nigh impossible to find a house without a cutting frame or a family unconnected with cutting.

Fustian cutting is an operation in the manufacture of velvet and involves cutting by hand of loops woven into the cloth to create the pile.

The basic requirements were a frame on which to spread the cloth to drum tightness, and a knife to cut the loops of the cloth. The frame was about 6ft by 2ft6ins wide and 3ft high. The knife was around 18inches long it had a wooden handle and the tip was drawn out to a sharp point which was ground to a sharp edge at the top.

The cloth was brought by horse and cart from warehouses in Salford and Manchester it was woven to give continuous tunnels along the length of the material. The pile was created by the cutter passing a knife through the tunnels cutting the threads at the centre of the arch. There were between thirty to forty of these tunnels per inch so one can imagine the skill and concentration required.

Most of the family would take part in the operation with the women working the frames in spring and summer whilst the men were working on the farms. The men would take over in the winter months when there was not a lot of work elsewhere.

Around 1770, fustian cutting was carried out mainly in farm workers cottages. By 1840 terraced houses were being built with cutting shops built on the end. This followed on from farm houses that had stables attached to them which had been modified for fustian cutting

By 1860 two storey terraced houses were being built with the attic built to house the cutting frame. The attic in Academy Row, Cadishead is set at the back of the terrace, giving a lop-sided appearance to the gable end. The higher part of the gable end would face towards the south to get the most light. The attic would run the whole length of the terrace, but could only be accessed from the end house.

By the end of the nineteenth century mill- type structures of three stories were being built. These buildings showed the change from cottage craftsmen to factory tradesmen. A

good example of one of these buildings is the building opposite the Ship Hotel in Irlam. Along with these factory type buildings a new longer frame was developed. These frames could be up to 12 yards long and the operator would walk along the length of the frame. The worker would be walking around twenty miles a day. As the fustian could only be cut in one direction the cutter would have two frames and would walk up one and down the other, totalling around twenty miles a day - twenty miles of precision cutting.

In the 1870's and 80's fustian cutting was at it's peak, the master cutters with an eye to business would convert a portion of their cutting shops into grocers, green grocers and shops of other trades, paying wages one day and then taking it back the next.

New industry was brought into the district through the building of the Manchester Ship Canal at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and young workers were attracted to these industries with the lure of better pay and better working conditions.

The industry of hand -cutting was finally doomed by the invention of machinery to do the job. The machines could cut fustian ten times quicker than a hand cutter. These machines were introduced just before the First World War even though hand cutting went on in Cadishead until 1928.

For more information on Fustian cutting, Irlam and Cadishead Local History Society are holding an exhibition on 23<sup>rd</sup> February in St Paul's Church Irlam. The church will be open 10.00am-2.00pm