

## **Off to work with the clickers**

In the late 20'S when I became 14 years of age it was time to leave school for full-time employment, the system having been altered some time previously where for a start one worked half a day and went to school half a day -- hence the term "half-timer" •

Work wasn't easy to obtain so the idea was to take half a day off school a short time prior to school leaving time, which was Easter, June 30th, September 30th and December 31st, and go round the factories asking if they wanted anybody. The industries at that time were cotton and slipper factories with a new trade, silk spinning, just starting. There were also the various apprenticeships in joinery, electrician, painting and decorating, engineering, motor engineering, etc. But as a £50 premium had to be paid to be articulated and a very low wage (5/- per week) to be received, this put apprenticeship out of my family's reach.

My father, who had spent most of his working life down the pit as a miner and was now a ganger on Bacup Corporation, decided against my being a miner, and mother---most of whose working life had been spent in the cotton mills--decided against my being a mill worker. This left the slipper works, so off with my mother I went to Maden and Irelands at Kilnholme Mill. and asked if we could see the Clicking room foreman, Mr Harold Holt.

### **PRICKING AND MARKING**

He duly appeared and after hearing what I wanted, asked some questions, looked me over, and told me I could start on a certain date on pricking and marking -- wage to be the union rate of 1s/9d per week. This work consisted of pricking holes and making larks via cardboard patterns, to guide machinists when sewing together and putting fancy stitching on vamps (fronts) and quarters \backs7 o shoes and slippers. It s part of the clicking department.

There were about 20 young's like myself on this work from Sam to 12-30 and 1-30 to 5-30pm; Sam to 12 noon Saturday. I used to catch a tram from the Market Hotel to the Cemetery Hotel and I got what was called a four penny double which entitled me to 4 rides (2 each way) for 4d instead of 1td each way.

### **BIKE SAVES MONEY**

At that time about 90 people worked in the clicking room, foreman H Holt, and four in the pattern cutting department, foreman Dave Pilling (Boots). Once I bought a bicycle I started using it for transport to work, thus saving 1/10d which was a lot in those days. We had to work hard as all the jobs we completed were entered on a production card which was checked by the foreman and the remarks he passed if you hadn't done your quota put the wind up you. Sometimes when we had nothing to do we dipped one end of a piece of string in rubber solution (which we used for sticking linings on vamps) and threw it up to the ceiling over another person's bench, where it stuck for a short time before dropping on someone's head or body. On occasions a string would have been thrown onto the ceiling when in walked the foreman. One prayed then it would not drop, or if it did so, it would miss the foreman. I have seen fights develop as a result of this prank when lads would throw brushes dipped in rubber solution at one another. I have seen faces and hair caked in solution which required a lot of removing. In the clicking room benches over a yard wide were fixed to the walls and in rows down the room on which were clicking boards 1 yard long, 18" wide and 5" thick, made of some wood which was soft enough to allow a special knife blade to penetrate t" and yet hold together for years, getting a weekly dressing of boiled linseed oil after having been buffed to keep the surface level and hard .

### **PROMOTION AT LAST**

On these boards clickers (cutters) cut round brass bound special shaped patterns to produce uppers or linings of shoes or slippers, and were paid so much per pair according to shape and number of cuts required. The uppers were usually patent leather, suede, glace kid, and other colours and kinds of leather, whilst the lining were of stiffened calico or cream coloured leather. After pricking and marking promotion was of the order, lining cutting or on a small round press, cutting back straps, underlays, etc, then upper cutting, after which sample cutting. Machines called presses cut out both uppers and linings.

Knives shaped like the cardboard patterns were used These were half a inch high, being sharp at the bottom and broadening up to three eighth at the top, the idea being to use a board of harder material as in a clicking board, place the knife on the material to be cut, swing a heavy platform over it, press a handle and down would come the platform, bang the knife and return to its original position, all in a split second.

### **MARRIED MAN'S WAGE**

The presses were driven by a dynamo, shafting and individual belts to each press. The shape would be cut out and was a faster process than hand clicking but it was only a paying proposition when plenty of orders for that particular pattern were received, as the cost of a full set of knives was high. I graduated to upper Clicking, a job I was happy to do, until the outbreak of war in 1939. I was on day rate and for my reward I received £3.16.10d per week. This amount I was getting when I married to Vera Greenhalgh on 25th April 1939.

As the time for knocking off for dinner approached (12.30pm) one made ready for a mad dash down flights of stairs from the top storey, along the mill yard, up Kilnholme Brow to two waiting tramcars. You arrived breathless for the journey to Bacup but if you missed these special trams, you had to wait for an hour for an ordinary service tram which meant losing at least 10 minutes off your dinner hour.