

Clickers, Rough Stuff Cutters and others

By Sue Miller

Clickers

Clickers were the aristocracy of the trade, this was carried on from the old hand-sewn tradition, where the 'Gentlemen John' of the trade often walked in to work in tall beaver hats. They cut the seen part of the shoe. When outwork (people working in their own homes) became common, the Clicker still worked on the employers premises, as we see with the Ives family advertising for Clickers to work at 97 Charles St in 1882. They were also paid on day rates, rather than piece work and were exclusively men.

Rough Stuff Cutters

Rough stuff cutters, sometimes called Press Men, again all men. Their status was lower than the Clickers and the process was mechanised much earlier but they were still considered to be skilled workers. They were responsible for cutting the thicker, unseen components of the shoe, such as the soles and heels. They were considered to be 'uncouth' of manners!

The Fitters and Machinists

The Fitters and Machinists of the closing department were women and girls, sometimes paid a day rate but increasingly on piece work in their own homes. Skill wise they were considered above Rough Cutters, but were considerably less paid.

Riveters, Lasters and Finishers

Riveters, Lasters and Finishers were all on piece work and without respectability, again all men. They often exhibited an independence of spirit, carried on from the hand-made trade where shoemakers were considered doubtful characters by other artisans, as well as by the middle class. They vigorously upheld the 'St Monday' tradition to attend local race meetings, rabbit coursings and bicycling. As well as having been on the booze at the weekend, meaning they were unfit for work on Monday. Being outworkers meant they could make up the hours at night. They did not take kindly to factory work. This independence of spirit may have contributed to the election of Charles Bradlaugh four times by the 'godless shoemakers' of Northampton.