

## Chapter 5

# TEXTILES AND LEATHER

'Of old times divers cloths were made in the town of Guildford and other places within the counties of Surrey, Sussex and Southampton called Cloths of Guildford, which were of good making and good value, and did bear a great name'. This quotation from a statute of Richard II of 1391 shows that well before the late fourteenth century Surrey was part of a larger cloth manufacturing region which extended into neighbouring counties. After the woollen industry declined, there was framework knitting and minor textile industries have included linen, silk and the manufacture of military braids. Other textile industries of historic Surrey, in districts now in London, are outside the scope of this book and too are the stories of the foreign artisans who worked in many of them – the Mortlake tapestry works supported by the Stuart kings in the seventeenth century, felt and hat making, dyeing, bleaching and calico printing in Bermondsey and Southwark, and the bleaching and calico printing works of the Wandle valley.

The leather industry was of such importance in the historic county that in 1703 Queen Anne granted a charter to 'the Master, Wardens and Commonalty of the art or mystery of tanners of the Parish of St Mary Magdalen, Bermondsey in the County of Surrey'. The area was close to the London markets which supplied the skins and tidal streams flowing into the Thames provided a plentiful water supply for the manufacturing processes. Though on a much smaller scale, there was also a substantial leather industry in south-west Surrey, around Guildford and Godalming and in the east of the county around Reigate. Small-scale tanning was carried on in many towns and villages in the past as animals were kept and slaughtered locally.

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### Cloths of Guildford

The early wool textile industry made woollens, to which the word 'cloth' strictly refers, as distinct from the lighter worsteds or 'stuffs' which became fashionable in Tudor and Stuart times. Woollens are made from short-stapled wool which is prepared by carding, using pairs of hand-held boards studded with wire. The carded wool is spun into a soft, springy yarn which produces fabric with a soft bulky texture. Worsteds are made from long-stapled wool which is combed to keep the fibres straight and sleek. Woollen cloth came from the loom in a greasy state with a loose, open weave. It was therefore scoured with detergents, such as fuller's earth, to remove the grease,

and shrunk and thickened by beating it with heavy wooden hammers in fulling stocks. It was then stretched out to dry on racks or tenter frames, consisting of upright wooden frames studded with tenter hooks, then brushed with teasels to raise the nap and sheared to produce a smooth, even surface. The product could be dyed at any stage, in the fleece, at the spinning stage or after the cloth was woven.

England was renowned first as an exporter of raw wool, much of which was produced on monastic lands, particularly those of the Cistercian order. Waverley Abbey near Farnham, which the Cistercians founded in 1128, and the Augustinian Merton Abbey in the north of the county, were both supplying wool to the cloth-manufacturing centres of Florence and Flanders in about 1300. The early English cloth industry was carried on in major towns such as Beverley in Yorkshire, Stamford in Lincolnshire and Bristol and Winchester in the south of England. It was organised by merchant and craft guilds. Mechanised fulling mills appeared in the twelfth century and were widely adopted in the thirteenth. The woollen industry spread to rural areas where water-power was available and where guild regulations could be avoided. It is from this period onwards that records are known of the Surrey woollen industry.

After corn-milling, fulling was the next industrial process to use water-power, and the rapid spread of fulling mills in the thirteenth century has been described as an early industrial revolution.<sup>1</sup> The mills were small affairs, housing just a trough with a pair of hammers. These were raised by tappets on a shaft turned by a water-wheel and then allowed to fall under their own weight. Many such mills were set up alongside existing corn mills and sometimes under the same roof. The King's mills in Guildford, for example, established in 1251, consisted of a corn mill, malt mill and fulling mill. Later there were at least four fulling mills on the River Wey in Guildford. Fulling mills are also recorded in the manor of Woking in 1271 and by 1360, at Catteshall, Godalming, where one was set up beside a long-established corn mill. The fulling mill at Catteshall may have been built earlier because tax returns record the names of Robert le Follar, William le Follar and Thomas le Follar at nearby Farncombe in 1332. There was a fulling mill at Rake near Milford in 1577 and a corn mill and fulling mill at Chilworth in 1589. Many of these mills were converted to other uses, such as paper-making, when the woollen industry declined, and some of them continued as industri-

al sites up to the twentieth century. Chilworth for example became a gunpowder mill and Catteshall a paper mill followed by an engineering works.

Besides mill sites, reminders of the industry survive in the borough arms of Guildford and Godalming, which feature woosacks, and in inn names such as the *Woolpack* and the *Golden Fleece*. In 1574 every alehouse keeper in Guildford was required by the corporation to display a signboard bearing a woosack.

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Another reminder of the industry in Guildford is the place-name of Racks Close, denoting a place where racks or tenter frames stood.

Most of our knowledge of the woollen industry comes from documentary sources, particularly the wills of clothiers and records of court cases arising from the breaking of regulations. Spinning and weaving were domestic occupations, carried out for the clothiers by families in their own homes, women generally spinning the yarn and men weaving. The clothiers received the cloth from the weavers, had it frilled at the mill and carried out the finishing processes on their own premises. Dyeing was often carried out by specialists but some was under-taken by clothiers themselves. John Woods of Godalming, for example, whose will was proved in 1685, left his 'messuage and dyehouse with the vats, furnaces and all other implements and things belonging to the dyeing trade and dyehouse, also his shears and shearing boards, cloth press and parchment for pressing of cloth, and all his racks for drying of cloth and all other implements and tools used about his shearing trade'.<sup>2</sup> Some of the records of law-breaking in the cloth industry are concerned with clothiers dishonestly stretching their cloth. Indeed, this was the occasion for the statute of 1391, which spoke of the high reputation of 'Cloths of Guildford' in the past. The Tudor period saw a great increase in the number of laws regulating manufacturing industries, including the woollen industry. In the 1330s it became illegal for cloth to be produced outside market or corporate towns, which in south-west Surrey restricted the manufacture to Farnham, Guildford and Godalming. Many clothiers were prosecuted for making cloth outside these towns. For example at Frensham, Witley and especially Wonersh. The reason for this legislation was said to be to prevent the decline of the towns, but it may also have been intended to make the industry easier to regulate. Cloth brought to market was inspected by officials known as ulnagers who attached a seal and collected duty on each piece. Laws were passed to regulate the number of yards in each piece and many prosecutions were made against clothiers who made their cloths longer to reduce the amount of tax.

The records of these various prosecutions provide information about the products of the industry as well as about the families involved and the places where cloth was made. The type of cloth most frequently mentioned is kersey, a fairly coarse narrow cloth, about a yard (90 cm) wide, which originally took its name from a village in Suffolk, but wider cloth known as broadcloth was also made in the region, and John Aubrey, writing in the late seventeenth century, noted that the parish of Shere 'is considerable for the fustian wearers, and hath been so anciently'. Fustian is properly a cotton fabric but the word had other meanings and most likely referred to some kind of woollen cloth in this case. Aubrey also reported that Godalming made 'mixed kerses and blue kerses for the Canaries, which for their colour are not equalled by any in England'.

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The blue cloth mentioned by Aubrey was dyed with woad. This was imported, particularly from France, until the middle of the sixteenth century, when the government began to encourage its cultivation in England. The fens and Somerset became the main areas of production in the eighteenth century but in

Tudor and Stuart times the crop was more widespread. Several clothiers grew woad around Guildford, Wanborough and Godalming and in 1604 a woad house was listed in an inventory of the property of a Wonersh clothier, Nicholas Monger. In 1585 a report on woad-growing in Surrey was written by 'order of the Privy Council to enquire what Oade is sown, on complaint of its occasioning great decay of corn, and damage to clothiers by their spinners leaving their work to engage in this'.<sup>3</sup> Woad was a profitable crop - six times as profitable as corn - but it exhausted the soil. It was gradually replaced by indigo, imported from India, which contains the same dyestuff as woad but gives a stronger colour and was less expensive.

Various other dyestuffs are mentioned in the wills and inventories of clothiers in the district. In 1616 for example John Purchase, a dyer of Godalming, left dyers' weeds, madder, brazil and alum and an inventory of Joshua Toft of Godalming, who was a dyer and clothier in the late seventeenth century, listed red wood, logwood, fustic, sanders, galls and alum. Dyer's weeds may have been weld, which gave yellow colours. Madder and brazilwood gave reds, logwood blues and black, fustic yellows and sanderswood browns. Alum and oak galls were used as mordants, to fix the dye to the cloth.

When Aubrey was writing, the cloth industry in Surrey was in decline, and had already died out in Farnham, which was by then a centre of hop-growing and noted

for its wheat market. Aubrey commented that the decline of the industry came about through clothiers dishonestly stretching their cloth and in the sixteenth century several clothiers in the district were indeed charged with that offence. In fact a change in fashion was beginning, from heavy woollens to the lighter worsted and mixed fabrics which were known as the 'new draperies', and the old woollen industry was declining in many parts of the country. In Guildford, George Abbot, the cloth-worker's son who became Archbishop of Canterbury, built the manufactory known as the Cloth Hall, in North Street in 1629 in order to employ poor people in linen and woollen wearing. The project was not successful and the manufacture was closed by a Decree in Chancery in 1656.<sup>4</sup>

The woollen industry had received a serious blow in 1636 when its export market suddenly collapsed. The district's products had all been purchased by a particular merchant, Samuel Vassall, who had an eventful career, trading in various goods in America, the West Indies, Guinea and Dalmatia. He was a Puritan and opposed to the policies of Charles I. Among his clashes with the authorities was an incident in 1630 when his cargo was seized for his refusal to pay tonnage and poundage, or import duty. He broke into the government warehouse, retrieved and sold his goods and was sent to prison. His trade in Surrey cloth in Dalmatia collapsed when the merchants of Ragusa (the modern Dubrovnik) ceased to buy the cloth and prevented him from selling it elsewhere in the region.<sup>5</sup>

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There was only one fulling mill in Guildford after 1649 and in 1701 this was used to house pumps for the town's water supply. Finally, in 1713 the fulling mill was converted to corn milling.

The woollen industry survived longer in Godalming, on a very small scale and in the late eighteenth century water powered machinery was being used for preparing the wool. Caleb Hackman insured his 'mill for carding and scribling wool going by water, dyeing



The Cloth Hall, North Street, Guildford, originally built for Archbishop Abbot's Manufactory Charity. The building was a school from 1856 to 1933. The tower was added in 1891.

house and dwelling house all adjoining' for £300 in 1782 and trade directories show that in the 1790s Edward Rutt was manufacturing blankets, William Seward was making cloth and there was a fulling mill at Westbrook. In the 1810s Charles Cheyne was listed in directories as a manufacturer of flannels and woollens. By this time, however, weaving had long been eclipsed by knitting as the main textile industry of the town.

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### Framework Knitting

The stocking frame was invented in 1589 by William Lee of Calverton, near Nottingham. The early framework knitting industry was based in London and was a luxury trade, producing fine worsted and especially silk goods. The industry developed slowly at first but by the late seventeenth century there were two main centres, one in London and nearby country districts and one in the East Midlands. From about this time it began to grow rapidly and to cater for an increasingly popular market, first in worsted stockings and then also in cotton hosiery.

The trade was regulated from London by a city livery company, the Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters. The company lost control during the eighteenth century as the industry became increasingly concentrated in the midlands - in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire and Derbyshire - and as it became more and more overcrowded with workers whose poverty became proverbial. The saying 'as poor as a stockinger' was heard as early as the 1740s and a century later a Royal Commission was appointed to report on the condition of the framework knitters, so dire had their situation become.

Framework knitting spread from London to Surrey, and also to Hampshire, Berkshire, Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire, by the late seventeenth century. To some extent it replaced cloth manufacturing in the local economy but it bore no relation to the old woolen industry because the worsted technology which it used was quite different. Godalming and Odiham in Hampshire were the main centres south-west of London. The Framework Knitters Company held courts in various places for members to pay their fees and lists survive in the Company's records of 57 members who paid at Godalming and 30 at Odiham in 1729. Many of the Godalming names are familiar as members of old clothier families - the Bowlers, Chittys, Hookes, Mongers, Shrubbs, Tofts and Woods - some of whom turned to framework knitting when the cloth trade declined.

Letters in the Company's records give an insight into the industry in Surrey in the 1720s. Work was sent out to country districts by London hosiers and carried out by the framework knitters in their own homes or in small workshops containing a few stocking frames. The ill-treatment of an apprentice, John Hart, by his master, James Toft, resulted in a prolonged correspondence, as did the case of another apprentice, Thomas Denver, who set up on his own in Mr Willmore's worsted manufactory at Farnham before he had properly served his time. The industry seems to have been successful in the early eighteenth century, but prospects were evidently less promising by 1735

when Mary Monger made her will, leaving her goods to her grandsons 'for apprenticing them to a handicraft, except that of framework knitter'. By the 1750s many of the framework knitters were earning so little that they were receiving parish relief and the industry in the south of England had begun to decline. By the end of the eighteenth century nearly 90 per cent of the country's frames were in the East Midlands and the industry continued in the south only in London and Godalming. It survived in Godalming mainly because the town began to specialise, first in underwear, from the end of the eighteenth century and then in knitted sweaters from the end of the nineteenth.

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In 1788 George Holland, a London hosier, patented a method of manufacturing fleecy hosiery and set up a 'manufactory' in Godalming in about 1790. His method was to work a layer of combed, unspun fleece into knitted garments so that it formed a coating on the inside. This could be anything from No 1, which had 'a thin sprinkling of the finest wool' and was recommended for summer wear, to No 6 which had a layer of fleece an inch thick and was intended for sufferers from rheumatism and gout. The firm made a variety of shirts, drawers and pantaloons, stockings, night-caps, bootkins, breast-plates or bosom-friends and miscellaneous items such as feet baskets, muff linings and coach carpeting. A broadsheet advertisement for their products contains several letters from satisfied customers, including the Governor of Nova Scotia and the late Lord Heathfield, who wrote:

Having been a long time dangerously ill of the palsy, the gout, etc. I procured in October last some of your Fleecy Hosiery in stockings, socks, mittens, etc, and to the use of them I attribute my recovery.

Holland's fleecy hosiery manufactory brought prosperity to Godalming while the owner's patent lasted and on Boxing Day in 1791 the workforce celebrated by holding a St Blaise procession. St Blaise was the patron saint of woolcombers, having been martyred with the tools of their trade, and processions in his honour were held in many textile manufacturing districts. The Godalming procession was described in the *County Chronicle & Weekly Advertiser* for 3 January 1792. It was led by a man dressed in fleecy hosiery followed by twelve boys in white, a shepherd and a shepherdess with a lamb in a basket, Bishop Blaise and his chaplain on horseback, the woolcombers to the factory, a band of music and one hundred and forty manufacturers wearing cockades, sashes and ruffles made of fleece. The procession walked to Guildford, where it was greeted with church bells and cannon fire, and then returned to Godalming to be regaled with a good dinner by the patentees.

Although the establishment was called a 'manufactory' it was not a factory in the modern sense but an organisation in which the knitters worked as independent craftsmen, usually renting rather than owning their frames. Some of these machines would stand in workers' own homes but most, and certainly the wide machines needed for making underclothing, were in frameshops set up by hosiers or by other people who merely invested in the industry. Whole families were involved in the work, with the men operating the frames, women seaming (all the garments were knitted flat and had to be made up) and children winding yarn for the knitters. This domestic system survived longer in framework knitting than in other textile industries, partly because of technical difficulties in developing powered machinery but also because of the overcrowded labour market.

The late eighteenth century saw many innovations in the knitting industry, of which fleecy hosiery was one. Others were the development of machine-made lace - Nottingham lace - which is technically akin to knitting, and of decorative patterned hosiery. Then in the nineteenth century fashions changed. Women wore longer skirts which covered their ankles and men began to wear trousers instead of breeches. With the depression after the Napoleonic wars and increasing overcapacity in the industry, conditions worsened and in the first half of the nineteenth century there were several political campaigns to try to address the problems. Godalming framework knitters joined a national campaign but this was declared illegal under the Combination Acts often used against trade unions and its papers were seized. Among them, in the record office in Nottingham, are several letters about the campaign in Surrey.

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By 1850 there was another revival of the knitting industry in Godalming with the establishment of some of the earliest hosiery factories in the country. Indeed several skilled hosiery workers and their families moved to Godalming from the midlands to work in them. The Holland family, who had started the fleecy hosiery manufacture in 1790, had built the Langham Factory by 1851 when they showed examples of their work at the Great Exhibition. In about 1860 one of the large hosiery firms in the east midlands, Allen & Solly, took their first step in factory production in Godalming. They probably had connections in south east

England already because it was usual for hosiery firms in the midlands to have a marketing base and warehouses in London. Allen & Solly built a new factory in Godalming in about 1870 but within twenty years they decided to adopt the factory system on a larger

scale, closed down their Godalming works and built a new factory in Nottingham. The Langham factory, then Nevill's, also closed in about 1890 and moved its operations to south London.

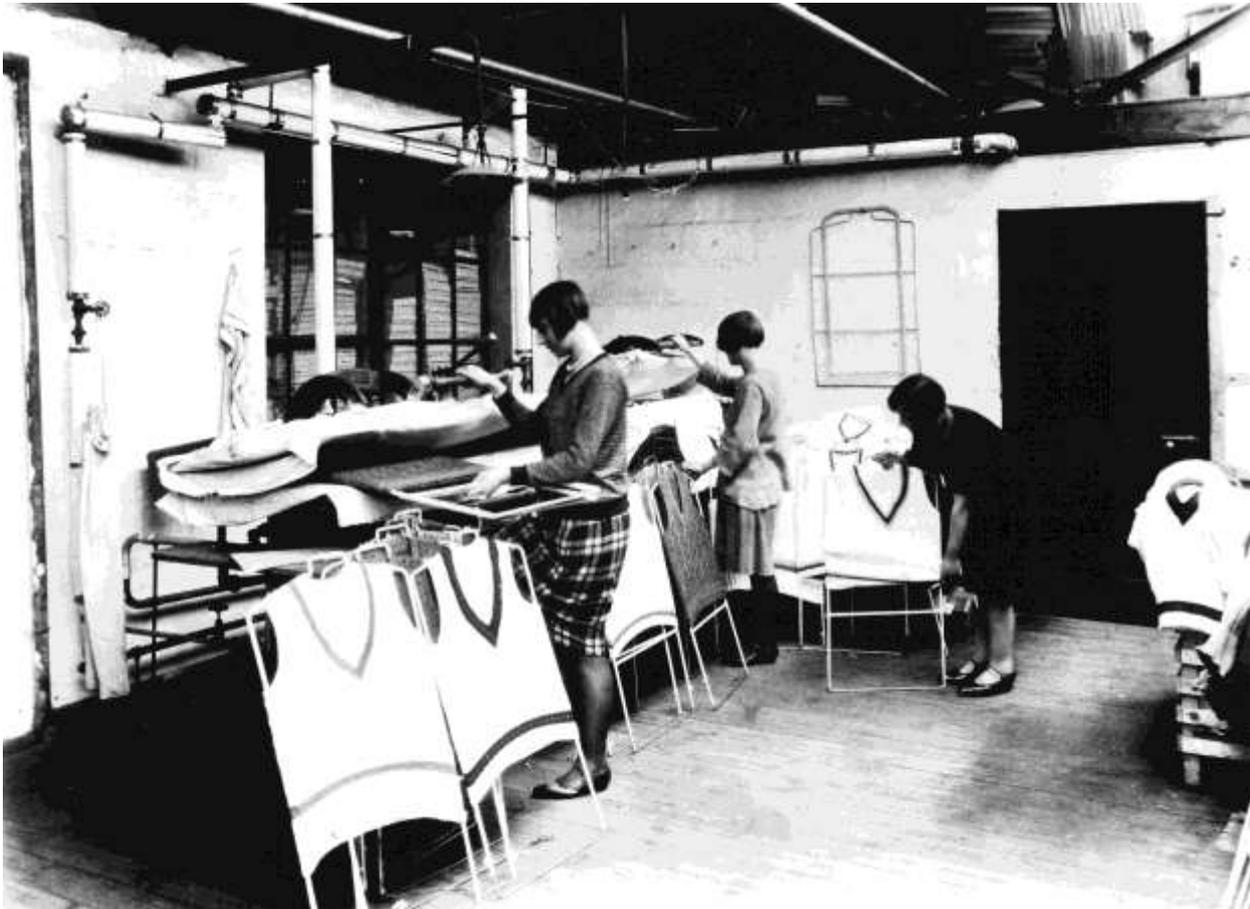
The nineteenth century factories in Godalming had specialised in underclothing, especially fleecy underwear and luxury silk goods. As this branch of the industry left the town, another was beginning, and Godalming was again becoming a centre of innovation, this time for the manufacture of sports sweaters. This enterprise was started by Lucy Pitchers, wife of William Thomas Pitchers who was tailor and outfitter to Charterhouse School. Trade directories show that Mrs Pitchers ran her own millinery and drapery business and mourning warehouse in Godalming, but the documentary record gives no indication of her pioneering work. Her descendants recall that she began by employing women to knit cable-stitch cricket sweaters by hand, in the traditional manner, and then devised a method of forming cable stitch on the modern knitting machines of the day. Rapid progress was being made in the design of knitting machines in the 1890s and Mrs Pitchers interacted with manufacturers to have punched cards fitted to their machines. This enabled her to create repeat patterns of purl stitches on a stocking stitch ground. The family firm of W T Pitchers branched out into knitwear and registered many designs for patterned sweaters and stockings in Britain and the USA. The business grew and a new factory was built in the 1920s. This was extended several times over the following decades, particularly after the firm was taken over by the Jaeger company in the 1940s, but it closed down in 1970 and was demolished to make way for road building in the 1980s.

Meanwhile a second knitwear factory had been built in Godalming in 1922 by William Paine, another tailor who had turned to the manufacture of sweaters. This business grew into Alan Paine Limited, which specialised in high quality sweaters made from natural fibres and received three Queen's Awards for export. The Godalming factory closed in 1990 and its site was redeveloped for retail stores.

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### **Worsted Lace and Military Braid**

Another specialised textile industry which was carried on in Surrey in the nineteenth century was the manufacture of worsted lace and epaulettes for the trimming of military uniforms by the Appleton family at Haslemere and Elstead. The earliest information about the firm comes from the diaries of the Haslemere papermaker James Simmons.<sup>6</sup> The father of the family, Henry Appleton, lived in London and in 1835 his son Thomas, then aged about nineteen, set up machinery for spinning and weaving in Pitfold Mill



Pressing sports sweaters at Pitchers' knitwear factory, Godalming, in the 1920s. *Michael Pitchers Collection.*

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at Haslemere, one of the mills which belonged to Simons. Soon afterwards he married and settled at Elstead, where the corn mill had fallen vacant, and started a manufactory there. Details of his workforce are given in the ten-yearly census returns from 1841 onwards and these show that several workers moved to Elstead from outside the county. A wool comber named William Baker came from Mountsorrel in Leicestershire by 1847, married in Elstead and later moved to Godalming to work for the hosiery factories. Others included a worsted weaver, George Cooper, his wife Mary and six children, whose ages ranged from fifteen to three, six woolcombers and two worsted spinners, all men, who lodged with families in the village and a married couple in their thirties who both gave their occupations as 'worsted lace'. In one household, that of an agricultural labourer and his family, there were seven lodgers, all girls and young women aged from ten to twenty who were 'yarn twisters'. Two other young women gave their occupations as 'weaver' and 'lacemaker'.

In 1851 Thomas Appleton, now aged 35, was in the Elstead census as a 'Master Manufacturer of Small Ware employing 100 hands'. He was still renting mills in Haslemere and bought Sickle Mill from James Simons the papermaker in 1854. The firm left the district in the 1880s but the firm of Appletons still continues in west London in the 1990s and is known for its fine worsted embroidery thread.

### Linen

Before it developed as a major industry in Ireland and Scotland and parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire, linen weaving was carried on almost everywhere, on a small scale, for local markets.<sup>7</sup> Flax and hemp (which was also used for linen) were widely grown and are reflected in placenames such as Little Flexford near Guildford. Margaret, a flaxwoman, to whom Alice Peto of Stoke-next-Guildford left 'all the printed cloths' in her will of 1604, was probably a spinner of linen thread. In some districts weavers worked in both wool and linen, like James Baker of Reigate, who in his will of 1608 left both a woollen loom and a linen loom, which stood in his kitchen. Where a major woollen industry existed in south-west Surrey a few weavers, members of the Purchase and Edsell families, specialised in linen but moved into framework knitting when this industry offered new opportunities.

## Silk

Silk crape was manufactured in Haslemere and Thursley at the end of the eighteenth century, by the Nalder family, who were engaged in the silk industry in east London. In 1793, Ann Bicknell, a 'poor child' of Haslemere, was apprenticed to Messrs Frederick Nalder of Cheapside, Thomas Nalder of Shoreditch, crape manufacturer, and Isaac Hawkins of Thursley, silk throwster. Mr Nalder had a crape mill on Thursley Heath which used water power from the hammer pond of the former iron works to drive silk-throwing machinery. There was a crape factory in Haslemere, located where Church Lane now crosses the railway, and the meadows through which the railway cutting was made were known as 'Silk Shop Meadows'.<sup>8</sup> Edward Brayley, in his *History of Surrey* of 1848, recalls that 150-200 inhabitants of Haslemere had been employed at looms in their own houses, but the industry had ceased by this time. It probably ended by 1812 but there was still a row of houses in Thursley called 'Silk Mills', occupied by labourers' families, recorded in the 1851 census returns.

In the twentieth century, Zoë Lady Hart-Dyke began manufacturing silk on a small scale at her home near Leatherhead, heating the cocoons in a domestic oven and at first reeling the thread by hand. The Hart-Dykes opened a small factory but complaints about the smell forced them to close it and they moved the expanding business to Lullingstone in Kent. Artificial silk was also made for a few years from 1926 by the Rayon Manufacturing Company at Ashted.

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## The Poor House

Besides George Abbot's manufactory in Guildford in the seventeenth century, there were many schemes to employ the poor in textile trades. Some textile manufacture was carried out in parish workhouses. This was probably the purpose of several consignments of wool which were sent up the Wey and Godalming Navigations in 1783 for Mr Manning, the Reverend Owen Manning, who was vicar of Godalming.

There are several records of spinning and weaving in the poor-houses of east Surrey in the early nineteenth century, and of blanket weavers from Witney in Oxfordshire moving to Surrey to supervise the work. There was unemployment in the Witney blanket industry at the beginning of the century because machines were replacing hand-looms and weavers were leaving the area to find work elsewhere. Two such men were Thomas Kent, who came to be master

of Charlwood poor-house, and John Rooles who came to be master at Newdigate. Spinning appears to have been done by hand, as there were seven spinning wheels in the spinning room at Charlwood.

The woollen manufacture was started in the Newdigate poor-house in 1801 to make cloth for 'Great-Coats, Waistcoats, Blankets, Horse-collar cloth, Yarn for stockings et''. The Overseer's account book records that 'the first garment a waistcoat that was made was for one George Weller, son of Peter Weller, Price 4s 9d made by Thomas Chart, Vestry Clerk. Name of cloth: Newdigate Frizzle.'<sup>9</sup>

Some of the work was carried out under contract for textile mills in the north of England. The Guardians of the Poor of Reigate; Horley and Nutfield placed an advertisement in the *Leeds Mercury* in 1816, inviting tenders for 'the maintenance, clothing and employment of the poor of the said parishes'. It stated that for the last twenty years 'a manufactory of blankets and coarse woollens has been carried on in the Poor House, to which a fulling mill belongs' and explained that fuller's earth was dug within a mile of the establishment.

## Arts and Crafts

The leader of the Arts and Crafts Movement, William Morris, founded his model factory in Merton High Street in 1881 and made carpets and tapestries as well as wallpaper and stained glass. Nearby in Station Road, Littler's mill began printing fabric for Liberty's of Regent Street in 1875. Liberty's took over the mill at the beginning of the twentieth century and as Liberty Mill it continued printing textiles until the early 1970s, while in the modern county of Surrey, the Arts and Crafts movement is represented by the Stockenden Industry which carried out hand-loom weaving at Limpsfield.<sup>10</sup> At Haslemere a Peasant Arts Society was established which produced pottery, furniture and toys as well as textiles. In 1898 Joseph King, a barrister and Liberal MP, set up the Weaving House in Kings Road and cloth was produced there until the 1930s. Silk damasks, brocades and velvets were woven by Harry Hedges at his 'Spitalfields Silk Weaving Works', a small wooden building at the bottom of Wey Hill, and Edmund Hunter wove silks at his St Edmundsbury Works. The Peasant Arts Society as an organisation was disbanded in 1927 and its collection was deposited at Haslemere Educational Museum.<sup>11</sup>



Workers stretching skins at Chuters' chamois leather works, Mitcham. *Wandle Industrial Museum*.

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## Leather

The leather industry was made up of several different trades.<sup>12</sup> xxx There were skimmers; fell-mongers, who removed the wool from sheepskins; tanners who impregnated skins with tannin from oak bark or sumach to turn them into leather; curriers who prepared tanned leather for more refined purposes, such as the making of shoe-uppers; and cordwainers (the name is derived from Cordoba leather from Spain) who made up the leather into shoes. Instead of tanning, the process of tawing, or impregnating with alum, was used for kid leather. Chamois leather was produced by impregnating skins with oil. For this, the outer or grain surface of the skin was generally removed by the process of frizing, to give a softer and more pliable texture, and the oil was beaten into the skins in machines resembling the fulling stocks used in the woolen industry. Tanneries which used bark as a source of tannin had bark mills, for grinding the raw material, and these are mentioned in many records of the industry.

The place-name Leatherhead has no connection with the leather industry, but there was a tannery beside the town bridge from 1826 to the 1870s. Small local tanneries include one at Thursley, where the 1851 census records Martin Tidy, master tanner employing seven men.

Godalming had several tanneries in the nineteenth century. In 1808 Richard Lee built a bark house for his tannery in Mill Lane which later became the important works of Messrs Rea & Fisher. There was another tannery near Meadow, to the north of the town, and at Westbrook Mill Messrs Pullman Limited manufactured oiled leather. Workers at these tanneries are recorded in the census returns which show that in 1871, for example, 72 men were employed in the industry in Godalming.

Some workers had come from outside the district and some had connections with the leather industry in Bermondsey - Thomas Brophy, a 'skinner and frizer' from Ireland, had evidently worked in Bermondsey, where one of his children had been born, before coming to Godalming. The manager of the Westbrook leather mills in 1871, William Henry Lyon, had been born in Bermondsey, and so had a young leatherdresser, John Vaughan, who lived in lodgings at Railway Station Cottages. A tanner called Isaac Woods, a local man, also kept the Waggon and Horses beer house. Thomas Rea of the Mill Lane tannery, described in the 1881 census as Alderman, Magistrate and Tanner, was born in Scotland.

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Many tanneries closed in the early twentieth century. Swabey & Saunders' Rosary Leather Works at Ashted, (locally known as the Skin Factory) operated only from 1911 to 1922. The leather industry ended in Godalming in the 1950s but at Gomshall, in the parish of Shere, a few miles east of Guildford, a long-established tannery was modernised after the Second World War and continued until the 1980s. 'Pelterers' are recorded in Shere as early as 1380 but the earliest recorded named tanner is Anthony Bygnall in 1568, who was charged with selling leather which had not been properly examined and sealed by the excise authorities. There were several later tan-yards in Gomshall. The one which became the modern Gomshall Tannery, on the bank of the Tillingbourne in the centre of the village, was owned by the Coe family (later associated with the growing of watercress) in the seventeenth century and by the Goddards in the eighteenth. The works began to expand in the nineteenth century under the management of John Evershed, especially after the opening of the Reading, Guildford and Reigate railway line in 1849. In 1861 the tannery employed 28 men, five women and two boys. It was bought in 1880 and expanded further by Gilligan and Son, who had offices in Reading and had owned a tannery at Hungerford. There were problems of pollution of the Tillingbourne and a setback in 1892 when the works caught fire, but business was restored and the firm was featured in the *Leather Trades Circular & Review* of 9 February 1893. Their staple product was bark-tanned leather for boot and shoe manufacturers.

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After the Gilligans, there were several short-term owners until The Gomshall Tanneries Limited was formed in 1917. The works still made heavy leathers from hides but after the trade depression of the 1920s and 1930s, when they closed for several years, they turned to lighter products for fashion accessories and garments. These were made from sheep and lamb pelts and they were processed in revolving drums instead of in tan pits. After the Second World War many firms amalgamated and Gomshall became the headquarters of Gomshall and Associated Tanneries. The works flourished up to the late 1970s, becoming a world leader in fashionable for leather garments and developing special products such as dyes for pastel colours and the washable 'Suede 66'. But economic problems in the 1980s brought a decline and the works finally closed in 1988.

### Notes

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