

CHAPTER II.

Shoe making – Parrocks Lodge – Bone lace - Weaving – Pillow Lace - Honiton - Power looms – Enclosure – Common land - Canal – Chard Road Railway Station – Perry Street – Manor Farm – Pillow Lace and the Mill – The Creamery.

The second most popular trade for the poor was shoe making. The Collins family had their quota, begun by George Collins, born in Chard about 1770. George was a very popular name in the Collins family... a name taken from the then reigning monarch, George III. He had been an apprentice shoemaker and now, as a skilled artisan, believed he could afford to court Sarah Spence.

Shoes were to the farm labourer a fashion accessory. Boots, on the other hand, were part of everyday life. To the researcher shoe is a basic descriptive term covering both shoes and boots. As part of his stock in trade George made gaiters, aprons, belts and a range of other leather goods associated with farming and farmers. It would have been rare, for him to be asked to produce a pair of shoes or top boots. Boots for best and boots for working were straight and blunt toed. Hobnails were adopted as standard wear for work... It would take another twenty years before rights and lefts, pointed and oval toed, and heels were to be added. Later, metal eyelets invented to take the laces. The prosperity of the shoemaker was very reliant upon the well-being of the farmer... when he had hard times so did the shoemaker, cobbler and snob.

George married Sarah on the 29th April 1798, in Axminster. They had four children, two boys, both called John, and two girls - Mary, the eldest, and Rebecca, all born in Chard.

Five years before, the town watermill was sold to John Deane, onetime owner of Parrocks Lodge. He converted the mill's floor space to house weaving looms – using the power generated by the watermill. It was a time of poor harvests and bitter winters, which together forced up the price of bread. The poor relied upon handouts of bread, which were not always forthcoming. Families were issued with bread based upon the number of dependants. The French Revolutionary Wars created inflation that further drained the town's wealth – harmed domestic producers and agricultural interests. John Deane's family had been prominent clothiers in the 1500s, and thereafter for a further two hundred years. When John Deane died Benjamin, Coles took over the ailing weaving house - trying to reinvigorate the business. Three years later, Coles, in 1818, gave up the unequal struggle and sold the mill. The new owner converted the wool weaving looms into the manufacture of lace.

John Collins, the eldest son of George and Sarah, born in 1801, married Mary Dowling, *b1813, in Combe St. Nicholas, on 23rd*. July 1835, in Chard. John was a journeyman shoemaker, trained by his father, and Mary, a skilled lace mender who worked out of a shop in Chard sewing lace onto hems and lace patterns into collars and cuffs. It was accepted practice to remove the collars, cuffs and hems from worn clothing. This lacework was washed and repaired ready to be sewn onto new body material or to be sorted into batches of like design to be made into new 'all lace shawls' and accessories. Many of the new workings were crocheted together with silk or sold on to other shops.

In about 1820, John continued where his father had left off – making shoes of a particular style unchanged from a century before. If any individuality required then it was a change of material and decoration rather than an alteration of design or pattern. The local trade included gaiters, buckets and straps as well as boots, shoes and binders. The boots were still heavy and clumsy although now fitting for left and right feet. They were made out of bark-tanned leather, with hand stitched soles and tongues with a welt. The threaded needle with wax-coated hemp passed through prepared holes. John closed all his own work selecting the leather, cutting out the uppers and soles then stitching to the welt. He worked from a shed at home, which was also his shop, soaking the

leather to dress it – beating it to close the pores and make it supple. He had been taught by his father to tan the hide with oak-bark or chestnut. A metal tool – driver, very much like a smooth file, is used - to hammer the leather – to make it soft, the same tool used to drive in the sprigs or tacks. The bootjacks, awl, hammer, knife and rasp were in my grandads shed many years later – passed down through the ages.

John's introduction to the trade began just as the heel became obsolete. The use of a heel, to retain the gaiter or trouser strap was no longer required. By the middle of the nineteenth century, heels returned, as built-up leather pieces, to give a platform of about an inch. The penultimate operation of the shoemaker was to use a heated iron to take out the wrinkles and tighten up the grain surface, before applying the wax. As with most of the cottage industries, the market fluctuates according to fashion and the state of the local economy. When the shoe trade faltered bags, slippers, straps and gaiters filled the books. All these items were passed to the local carrier to take on his round to sell to those unable to come to the shoemakers shop. The village Carrier's cart would hold all these items and many more including, baskets and besom brooms to sell on... making a percentage of the price for his labour. It was a similar story for the lace trade...

Chard's connection with the 'bone lace', trade goes back to Charles II and the Restoration period – a period of exceptional expansion dictated by the return to flippancy in wearing apparel and the dictates of a boasting aristocracy. On the continent, the craft goes back a further hundred years.

The dilettanti years of the Restoration saw the highest point of English lace making not just for the number of people employed but the delicacy of the quality and design.

The trade had many unproductive setbacks caused by trying to maintain a production line during times of war and public unrest; later, having to pander to high fashion and more prosperous times. In 1698, Chard had 156 lace makers whilst Honiton had 1341, which shows how lace production contributed greatly to the wreaths of towns. It was recorded in this period that there was not a cottage in all Somerset, where white lace is not made – to supply the whole kingdom and to export. There is recorded, young children earning 1s .8d per week.

People from France and the Netherlands seeking refuge from religious and political persecution brought skills and new methods of manufacture that were greater than our own. They introduced different designs entailing complicated patterns and finishing. The immigrants, worked in a close-knit communities - lodging where there were already fellow compatriots living – making ghettos in mainly town and city locations. They gradually took delicate work away from outlying centres leaving the simpler work to country locations. However, Honiton retained its position for lace making as the main centre for the upper end of the market sending the bulk of the production to London. In the early 1700s, there was a decline in the output caused by the importation of cheap, intricate lace forms from Flanders...

Later, that century there was a decline in the death rate – people lived longer, and an increase in the birth rate – more children survived. In the first forty years of the new century, the population doubled... by the end of that period, the rural numbers were at their highest. From that, time on there was a migration, particularly for the young, away from the village to the town.

Lace making was a cottage industry, an expression used to describe a woman's earned income. It was paid at piecework rates – so much for a number of items produced. The work was taken on whilst their husbands were at work to augment their husbands poor wages. The women's fingers - so much more delicate and nimble, enabled them to work faster than men, although there were some men who made lace, either because there was no work on the land or house bound through circumstance.

Lace buyers would come round the villages every month to buy up and to exchange lace for thread and pins. They had their own districts and routes - looking on their contacts as members of

their team. In the sixteenth century, the pins needed to pattern the thread had no heads, which caused sore fingers. This was corrected by dipping the pins in sealing wax – to give a head.

Still, the call for lace was strong enough to entice inventors to create mechanical processes. In 1768, hand lace making began to give way to these mechanical innovations, which understandably, produced less complicated designs. This mechanisation lowered the cost per item that promoted greater interest in the uses of lace. It was an adaptation of a stocking frame, which made a net of not very wide proportions... it, helped save the industry and gave additional work for women to link those strips together... However, for detailed, complicated designs, necessary for high fashion of the period, hand lace making continued....

When it was warm enough, women sat outside their cottages, with their pillows or bolsters, using the strong daylight to follow the pattern. This may strike one as being quaint, even attractive – certainly following one's idea of a true Victorian watercolour, but in fact, it was essential - necessary to make ends meet! While the very young children had an afternoon sleep, the wife spent an active hour at her pillow. It was to earn a little extra for the children's clothes. Babies were not as a rule weaned until they were over a year old. It was cheaper, healthier, and more convenient to breast feed. It was thought fitting that they should sleep most of the time and not be mentally or physically stimulated. They were not allowed to sit up until they were six months old and not allowed to walk until they were two.

Lace makers produce both individual and repetitive patterns in the form of a netted tracery, which can be sewn together, or in sequence; the same operation used whether making a continuous tape, fringe, border, or circular design. It relies upon a pin-threaded sequence using pairs of cotton-wound bobbins... at their head the cotton – using the bobbin as a reel and at the bottom - seven beads linked to form a ring – prevents the bobbin twisting on the pillow... Twenty-four bobbins, a common number, to form a doily.

The pillow, is mainly for small circular and floral work, is fourteen inches in diameter and four inches deep - at the sides, a further inch thicker towards the middle. The term pillow applied to both the round and the square, bolster type. The former, more suitable for Honiton type sprigs, and the square - the Bruges, better for lengths. Pillows, as described, were pads - rather like a round kneeler, with a raised centre and held on the lace-maker's knees.

The bolster, made-up with exactly the same material, used for plain straight-edged, scalloped, or diamond-patterned borders: for cuffs, collars, table cloths etc. In size, were two-foot six inches in circumference by two-foot long, resting on the crossbars of a wooden horse. These workings, both patterned and straight-laced, sometimes joined to make-up the whole or part garment.

The pillow fabric was made of strong cotton or linen cut into two circles joined by a strip with an opening. The pillow was turned inside out, with the seams inside, stuffed with chopped barley or oat straw; evenly packed, pummelled, beaten and shaped into a very hard dome, left to 'settle' to allow more space to be filled. When finished the pillow sealed - by stitching. It is important not to include in the stuffing the nodes of the straw - too hard for the pins to penetrate.

The pillow then covered with one or two linen cases -the upper is the surface worked on. This is pinned by each corner under the pillow. This operation became known as 'dressing the pillow'.

The original daft - a design on graph paper, called 'the pricking', consisting of fine holes. This pattern was again pricked through with a needle, onto a sheet of parchment or good quality writing paper - about fourteen inches long by eight inches wide. The transferred copy had linen loops or tabs attached to the ends... so that it could be tacked to the pillow – kept taut on the case.

As the work progresses, covering cloths, folded in half – [folds facing], are pinned at the side of the pillow - to expose the area to be completed. These cloths kept the finished work clean allowing the weaving thread easy passage over the imbedded pins of finished work. Horn 'sliders',

today stiff plastic, half-slid under the covering cloth - allowing new work threads easy passage over the pinheads.

The lace thread is carried on bobbins, the size of 3-4 inch pencils with tapered necks, of which, there maybe thirty-six. The bobbins, each pre-wound - by hand, or using a bobbin winder, wound onto the second neck of the bobbin, called the long neck. The skein of thread was wound round pegs placed in crossed arms, of the blades, or 'yarningles'— the blades had a number of peg holes to carry a larger size of skein. The free end of the thread is given a couple of turns round the long neck, which is about three-quarters of an inch long... then the bobbin placed in the spool. Turning the handle of the winder operated the belt linked to the spool... when spun, pulls the thread off the crossed arms... The wound bobbin, with its two to three inches of thread, is now ready to take the place of an empty one... meanwhile, kept looped in pairs, in a bobbin-case suspended from the pillow.

The turned bobbins, generally made of fruitwood, are light in weight, with small heads. Below the head is the short-neck - which is just a notch, or turn, made when the bobbin is manufactured... the thread is unwound slightly off the long-neck and a couple of turns wound onto the short neck ending with a turned-over loop, to stop the bobbin unwinding. The remainder of the bobbin is called the shank. The bobbins, sometimes referred to as lace-sticks, laid flat upon the pillow whilst not in use. Below the shank – the body of the bobbin are threaded beads – carrying perhaps seven, looped in a ring; this extra weight gives tension to the thread and prevents the bobbin slipping and twisting on the pillow.

The results of the lace maker, was very much like plaiting or crochet - where one twisted thread is laid over another - in sequence. In this instance pins one-inch high form the pattern - these, the thread wound round. As the pattern progresses the last pin worked round is pressed into the pillow... successive pins inserted along the pattern. It is the number of twists made using a pair of bobbins which maintains the pattern – stops the whole from unravelling, and the different gauges of thread ['gimp' is course] multiplies the opportunities for outlining and strengthening. Much of the work from Chard was 'trolley lace' which refers to the single neck of a rather shorter, heavier bobbins called 'a trolley' - for gimp thread – a thicker thread, used for outlining the design. The young girls of six or seven would use fewer bobbins, probably no more than eleven pairs, to make a simple fan, or shell shaped strip or fringe. The older girls would make point, honeycomb and Kat stitch, with picots loops on the scallop fringe. As most of the lace ended up in Honiton most of the workers were familiar with the Honiton flower motif which was sewn onto dress collars or a wedding veil, a number could be linked together to form a complete item. Hanging from the lace maker's pillow was a pincushion made of bran sewn into a heart shaped pad. A bobbin bag, with two pockets, one holding re-wound bobbins and the other empty, is hung over the pillow.

Girls, of sometimes five, others perhaps older, worked at the ends of their mothers pillow practicing their stitches. It was believed that this habit laid down a good basis for a future life of work – made the child control their, 'more casual demands.'

Much lace work was still done outdoors at the turn of the century but it was soon to be phased out by cheaper production methods. Using daylight, rather than sitting indoors using candles, was better for the eyes and allowed finer work to be made. Later, special rooms were built into the upper floors of outworkers houses – a cottage industry flourished; in some cases, two or three cottages were linked together - walls could be knocked through to form one large room. Special candle lit light globes and mirrors used to illuminate the workers lace. Extra wide windows - a number of windows linked together, were a feature of these building and still are seen today.

Girls sat round a table, in groups of two or three, so that each worker received the maximum light available from the candles and their light-reflecting globes. Quite often work continued right through the night leaving the girls exhausted. The lace makers who worked together in these large

rooms did so under a Head Lace Hand. The workrooms were heated by earthenware pots of hot ashes and charcoal, known as 'dickey pots', giving off fumes and smoke which clung to the ceiling between the beams.

'Outworking' still went on, but the whole industry became more organised; 'the gentry' who wanted particular intricate designs dictated the fashions of the day.

Lace makers children were expected to contribute to the family's income by working at every spare moment - they had to sit down each night and do a certain amount of work – complete so many heads of lace, before 'play' was allowed.

In 1800, machine net making began to be discussed by the workers and trades people. Gradually mechanical innovations to the existing looms crept in - making inroads into traditional work - producing a cheaper product. In lace-making areas, it was then very usual to find a mother and two daughters all making lace together. Their combined work brought in about a third less than that of a father and son. Whereas the men were out all day, at least until six or seven, the women were doing household chores – combining earning with building a home. This was for a five-day working week, the money earned allowed one-third to be saved for dressmaking and the remainder 'put by' for a rainy day. Lace continued to be made in many counties but the greatest being Honiton and the East Midlands. Most of the lace made in Chard found its way to Honiton where it was made up and sold on. Three years later, cotton had overtaken wool as Britain's leading export.

The first mechanical means of increasing production was the mill driven by natural forces. Wool, in its natural state could be used as a covering – woven, made it versatile. The development of the loom increased production and quality. Using steam, as a driving force, gave the industrialist a choice where to set up his factory – close to both labour and customer. This was the history of Chard, and other fortunate towns, initially made possible by its rivers and trading position

The enclosure of Chard Common, begun 1819, allowed scrubland to be brought under cultivation. The total enclosure of the common took twenty-five years throughout this time ditches introduced to drain away excess storm water. It was unusual for French drains to be dug and piped land-drains took even longer to be laid. There was a fear that there still would not be enough corn harvested to provide bread for the poor. The price of wheat fluctuated dramatically due to bad weather. Corn was imported free, which promoted a backlash of political unrest - demands for a law to ban imports.

At times, the lot of a farm labourer was very hard particularly if injured or became ill. His only recourse was The Friendly Societies or the Labourer's Friend Society, founded by prominent businessmen and politicians.

In the early eighteen hundreds, another grand project to promote trade was the building of Chard canal – finally opened in 1842. This became one of the last and probably the finest constructed waterways in Britain. The main haulage being coal from Taunton - for the growing industrial expansion requiring steam power, as well as for normal domestic heating. The weaving trade still relied upon waterpower to work their looms. Soon steam began to make inroads in the production processes giving greater flexibility to where new factories built.

By the early to mid nineteenth century, there was a baby boom - an increase in the population. As these children grew up a number of poor harvest, wet summers, put pressure on grain stocks - the poor were beginning to go hungry – particularly the children. At the same time there was experienced another period of prosperity in Chard town - which saw the building of a new weaving mill, for the production of lace.

On the farms the husbandry of animals had begun to be improved... there was a move to increase the numbers per acre In the middle of the nineteenth century grazing one sheep to the acre was considered average and maintaining fifteen areas sufficient for one man. A farm labourer earned eight shillings per week for a twelve-hour day, usually from six to six. This was the start to the

industrialization of Britain, naturally of Chard too which was to have such a dramatic effect on the life of country dwellers.

In the 1851 census, half the population was living in urban areas. Although we must not confuse urbanization with industrialization in the instance of Chard, they are the same, and for that matter, Tatworth could be included as well. You would think that as food production increased wealth would remain where it was produced... but it did not. The wealth of the country was in the towns, not any town but industrial towns... and that is where the population flowed. What saved Tatworth as a thriving village was its river, its lace mill, Chard Road railway station and the butter factory. Like its parent town Chard they were dominated by the manufacture of lace and their mills their principle employer. In thirty years, between 1821 and 1851 Chard Parish increased in population by over two-thousand souls. On the day of the census, Sunday March 30th 1851, 5,297 people lived in the parish. According to the census, there was full employment and nearly half worked in the four lace mills making 'plain net' lace. As with all weaving mills, the workers had to get use to the vibration, noise, dust and danger. The working day was organized in shifts and turns linked to time and the insistence of good work as a way of life.

The remainder of the working population retained a rural life – worked at the same job for life working their way up the ladder from junior to journeyman, farm boy to farm worker. It was a steady existence regulated by the seasons and nature. What was certain was that their working hours were flexible, frequently exhausting, certainly long, and poorly paid. This secondary group of workers were in the main craftsmen doing jobs very much like those a century before: building, metal working, leather work, making carts and farm implements, and carpentry. Farm work was noticeable so too domestic service. It would be safe to say that the majority of children worked too from the age of nine upwards. Of the fifty percent who did not attend full-time work by far the largest percentage were housewives then children under fifteen. Only a very small proportion of the population lived beyond seventy.

In the 1840s short time was ordered at the lace mills – there were some closures. This caused enormous suffering. There was no work on or off the land and over a period of months, the situation got much worse – militancy began to be formed amongst the unemployed. The Chartist movement had support and there were disturbances. The mill workers from a number of mills ganged together and picketed Holyrood Mill and the troops were called out to back up the special constables. The mill-workers marched to Perry Street to try to engage more strikers. Eventually the gangs were dispersed. \the next day saw virtually a general; strike with all workshop and shops closed. Over a thousand people attended a meeting. It was a difficult time, which was not forgotten. Eventually the workers returned to work but they were hard times... it took the Crimean war 1854-56 to bring about any sort of industrial expansion.

By the middle and late nineteenth century there was almost twice as many lace makers in Buckingham as there were in Devon. Thirty years later the statistics had changed to the opposite position - Devon outstripped Buckingham. In the use of finished work – making lace up into garments it was eleven to one; Devon had considerably more dressmakers than any other county in Britain, similarly for glove making.

In 1864, the school leaving age was twelve, if not required to work at home. In Tatworth if the lad was not to go into the mill it was to the farm he went – to work on the land. His first job was pig minding on the corn stubble and in the woods on the common. Other days were spent rook scaring rattling his cans at the same time he would be picking up stones from the field. For this, he was paid sixpence a day, which he gave to his mother. If he were lucky, he could go back to school to finish off his schooling. Unfortunately, parents often continued taking him away from school the older, the boy got even though the law stated that twelve was the correct age to leave school.

By the time he was twelve he was able to follow the plough which meant being up at five o'clock and under a carter take out a team of four horses. Their life was hard. There were no days off and no holidays. If he was not required for ploughing, he took his turn carting corn to the mill in Forton. The horses were decorated with bells and either he was paid with a bundle of straw for beer money or given a shilling or if he were lucky the miller would give him a small jug of beer.

What the census reports of 1871 and 1901 confirm Devon outstripped all other counties for most country trades... the exception being straw plaiters. It must be emphasized again that Chard is close to three west-country county borders and sits on a main arterial road, within easy reach of Lyme Bay. These geographic facts place their working populations in a most beneficial position.

The farming system in the middle of the nineteenth century was traditional and caused no real problems for the villager. It was based in the main on sheep and corn – an age of *High-Farming*. The sheep were hurdle flocks, feeding on the wasteland in the summer, fallow field mainly after the harvest - in the autumn, and strewn turnip and mangels in the winter. It was a period of plenty and gave an appearance of well tended stock on well maintained land.

The Tatworth farm labourers were local lads raised by local people to live and die in the place they were brought up... which they were happy to do. They knew their neighbours, their relatives lived locally and they all attended chapel together. When they courted it was to local girls and when they married and had children they perpetrated the life their parents had lived. They did not reach out beyond the parish boundaries – they stayed in their own small world. This comfortable existence was about to end with the means of movement - the age of mass transportation of people and goods... broke the mould. But hold on, this did not happen overnight, especially in a place like Tatworth. Ships had to be built, railways had to be laid, and Mister Ford had to start his conveyor belt!

The Langdon family at Parrocks Lodge prospered too. The land provided a good income and the farm gave them all the food they needed. It is little wonder that they could have such a large family and live such comfortable lives. The agent made positive noises about the state of the estate's finances. Improvements to the estates land was put in hand and another round of land drainage was put in place.

This rosy picture ended when imports started to arrive in Britain in 1875. Thereafter, the rising population in the cities were offered cheap imports of corn, and lamb and mutton gave way to beef. The production of milk products began to make itself felt and the nations diet changed to prepared cereals. The industrialization of Britain continued unabated and the population kept up with it. The yearly harvest could only just manage to provide sufficient food and it seemed likely that food shortages would come about.

The imported grain surplus from America and Canada flooded the markets and the new refrigerated ships from Australia and New Zealand provided the lamb. The twenty-year period between 1879 and 1890 saw prices halved. This very quickly resulted in farmers going to the wall, land being sold, marginal land abandoned, downland left to grass and farmhouses and outbuildings fell into disrepair. This was no five-minute downturn but a long-term disaster.

Thousands of farmers who had managed through generations to husband the land went bankrupt. Landowners despaired of ever finding tenants. Estates were put on the market at rock bottom prices... even so, much left neglected – land was considered a liability not as an asset. Gradually, as in most things, the problem of cheap imports became absorbed farmers diversified, adapted, and slowly recovered. The displaced labour found their way to towns and cities.

The difficulty finding work began to be felt... not in all trades at once though... It was a predictable consequence of mass production of factory products, providing for an increased population. Many local trades began to disappear, as the workers retired not being replaced by young trained journeymen. A pressure could not be dissipated except by having fewer young people

needing employment. The gradual move away from the home-village began, helped by the greater numbers of bicycles available and the expanding railways. The new mass production methods affected cottage industries as well not just, because those skills could be reproduced by machinery but modern methods required different dress – fashions changed – there were new ways of doing things and these advances and changes could be read about, discussed, and acted upon. The social and economic changes did not just happen here in England but further afield too. Imports had their effect and the supply of raw materials had to be kept up and increased. As this change came about workers tried to stem the tide – slow down the effect of industrialisation, by working longer and harder. [This compensation by workers to increase productivity to slow down change happens in all industries at all times] Children were brought into the production line sooner. Women persuaded to take on outside work, work all hours – into the night. This increase in hours worked was sufficient to fill order books but only for a limited period. Workshop Regulation Acts, Factory and School Inspectors saw to it that these long hours of work in bad conditions stopped.

The girls in the village were keen to start work after leaving school. Nearly one in three, between the ages of ten to fifteen worked as a lace-maker. When completed the lace was sold by the parents to a dealer who collected the work on his round. Workers were enticed to buy their threads, pins, patterns and material off the same man. This was convenient for outlying areas but the price was increased accordingly.

It was fortunate for John Collins that the workers at the mill required boots and shoes. By the middle of the century John earned just enough money, as a shoemaker, to pay the rent, buy food, and clothe the family. His eight children would have had very low priority for schooling. He was fifty-two years old and his children were expected to help with the household chores especially the two girls. George, the eldest son - was thirteen, helped his father in the cobblers shop, as a snob, serving as an apprentice.

His brother Eli had to find employment outside the home as a ploughboy. Daughters were sent to the local 'big' house as scullery or kitchen maids. If children went to school at all, it was only for one year at the cost of a penny a week. The attitude of country folk of the times was, 'that it was more important that children worked in the home or field, to earn their keep'. If there were a school, it would probably be at the Rectory.

There was no compulsory education in the early eighteen hundreds. It was not though necessary to have children taught who were only going to work on the land or to do jobs associated with farming. Even in those areas that did have a school the cost of lessons – charged according to the ability to pay, was one penny. Even this was considered wasteful.

Lace and plait schools were set up later that century in cottages catering for, 'as many as can be seated'. This overcrowding made it almost impossible to teach sensibly. It was found by Inspectors that children could read but not write and that proper registers for attendances were not kept.

In those lace workshops engaging young women a percentage of the wage was paid, 'in kind' – tea, sugar, flour or bread rather than cash. As these items were essential for feeding the poor's, large families, any payment were welcomed, furthermore, when cash was demanded the relative payments less that the bartered items, so demands were exceptional.

At the end of the nineteenth century, education for children was placed into law by the passage of the 1880 Act – education for children up to ten. There were various bodies who tried to promote lace making as a cottage industry but these did not stand the test of time – the industry declined. Even towards the coast in Dorset, a body of people specialized in making net, which, because of its particular nature, found a ready market. This cottage industry floundered just before The First World War.

John and Mary had eight children, the sixth named Phillip Alfred - [*my great grandfather*], born 1847, and apprenticed as a lace hand in Chard. He married Mary Jane Web [*b1843 in Chard*] in 1870, at St. John the Evangelist, Tatworth. This was a daughter-church of Chard Church built in 1851 on land donated by Lord Poulett. Mary died after fifty years of married life giving birth to five children, four boys and a girl named Helen.

Phillip, later married widow Susan Hoskins, daughter of Isaac England - a piano tuner. Susan gave birth to three boys [1873, 1876 and 1878], all born in Chard. The eldest son - my grandfather, named Phillip Alfred Henry, after his father – later called Harry to differentiate him from his father.

From Harry's first cries, England's rural economy declined... to be precise, in-between the years 1861 – 1881, the agriculture industry lost twenty percent of its workers, and even more females. Children under eight and soon to be fewer than ten had to go to school removing their contribution... These losses to the industry pushed up the price of food and increased the import of grain. These absentee farm workers found their way into town businesses, the mining industry and the factory floor.

With a good school report and a family connection with the trade, Harry was accepted as an indentured lace hand to John Payne - at the same mill his father worked... He served for six years.

After coming out of his time, he signed on in the army, to the call for volunteers for The Second Boer War - for three-years. Major-General Hamilton was given command of 1st Devon and 1st Manchester Regiments, part of the 7th Infantry Brigade. Harry Collins was in this force as a volunteer, having completed his apprenticeship, served as a Military Policeman - with the eventual rank of Sergeant, to take part in the Second Anglo-Boer War at the battle of Elandslaagte and later Wagon Hill; he remained as such until 1901; a year later the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed on 31st. May 1902, after the Boers capitulated - peace was declared.

When he returned to Britain he went back home to Chard. Since his departure, his mother had died and his father was coping with the family. Harry was the eldest child and his brother Frederick the only family member living with the father.

After he became a journeyman, he served as a senior lace hand running three looms. He was asked by John Payne to take over one of the vacant positions of Engineer, knowing that Harry was competent at servicing the looms and was technically minded. Payne, who was in his eighties, helped him enormously to become conversant with all the different machines then in service with the company.

This was the year Queen Victoria died. The Commonwealth of Australia came into being and Lord Sainsbury's Unionist government had been in office for fifteen years. Home Rule for Ireland, was the hot topic of political conversation, and most of the six and a half million children were at school. The previous year Keir Hardie was elected for Merthyr as the first socialist MP, and two years later Mrs Pankhurst started a new Social and Political Union. The Edwardian age was an interesting time for political commentators and the Collins family...

Harry started courting Rosa Bevis almost as soon as he returned from Africa... being married at St John the Evangelist, Tatworth, that same year... he was twenty-eight and Rosa Jane one year younger. Harry had travelled abroad – seen a part of the world he was not likely to forget. His position as police sergeant he given him authority and standing... now transferred to his position as a lace engineer at the mill. Being married with a new home within walking distance of his work was everything he had looked forward too. Now he could begin to raise a family and settle down to concentrate on his job. Having trained in the mill was of a practical nature and he was soon putting up shelves and building a large chicken house at the bottom of the garden.

The newly married Collins' had their first child, which was stillborn. It was a great shock for both the couple and Rosa's sister who was attending her. Unfortunately, this was not to be her only

one. By 1913, five of their children died in the first year of life and another aged four. In all Rosa had fifteen children all born in the same house, eight eventually marrying.

Chard Farm [Manor Farm] was formed on a Roman site – archaeology suggests a farm, and may have housed in 1235, a Bishops Court. The farmhouse, pre c1700 – close to St Mary's Church on the Tatworth Road, also known as Chard Church, built c1440. The vicar was also a magistrate and Trustee of the Turnpike Trust. A year later, at the time of The Great Exhibition 1851, Chard Farm was registered as having 500 acres, which was large for those times...

John Bevis had nine children, and two servants. His good standing in the community and trustworthiness stood him in good stead when offered the Trusteeship of the Chard Turnpike Trust. Banker, Major John Churchill Langdon of Parrocks Lodge and Lord Bridport were also Trustees as were other town notables. The trustee's task was to instigate proper meetings set the tolls maintain the roads and staff tollhouses. The Trust lasted until the 1860s when the railways finally became so successful, particularly carrying freight that road tolls began to fall. The government could see that road repairs - by subsidies and local taxes - from the various county highways departments, would have to increase to take over the maintenance... thereafter, tolls began to be phased out and the Trust wound up in 1875.

Through good farming practices, John Bevis in about 1860 increased his grain tonnage. This was a time after the Napoleonic Wars as home prices rose for grain products... again it was profitable to plant and harvest corn. John appreciated that to make greater profits from this increased production; he should operate his own granary - to replace the previous mill. To maximise his outlay - even out less productive times, he offered a milling and storage service to other farmers. His son William sold the farm in 1920.

Rosa's father was a witness to her marriage as was Elizabeth Buller. The newlyweds set up house in Tatworth in a house Harry called Rosalie Cottage, naming it after his wife. It was a knapped flint and brick end-terraced cottage of three. They had sixteen children – eight boys and eight girls [one adopted] – a girl and a boy twins. Five of the children died within four years of birth. The eleventh child - the fourth girl, was to be my mother Elsie May, born 10th August 1908, the same year Campbell-Bannerman resigned the premiership... two years after the Liberal landslide election.

It would have been noticeable, to the interested bystander at the turn of the nineteenth century, the changes made by the Enclosure Acts. The common land, which occupied the land beyond the village, became enclosed fields and ploughed... taken over by stealth by wealthy farmers and landowners. Some of the poor, living in their hovels built higgledy-piggledy on scraps of land in and out of the woodland, was ordered off. They were as entitled to be there as anyone, had squatter's rights, but had not the power or support from the community to resist.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, agriculture was the principle employment for men and boys. For women and girls it was domestic service. This state of affairs was changing – fast in areas close to town but slowly in outlying areas. The depopulation of the village started when the harvests were poor, as machines took over from the horse and industrialization enticed men away from a hard rural existence. This decline in the population had a knock on effect making struggling businesses even more difficult to continue. Cottage industries took up some of the slack. Lace making, mat making, straw plaiting and knitting bought in a little money to make ends meet. It was welcomed news to hear that the mill was to be kept going by Cuff & Company when they converted the mill to drive looms - to make bobbin lace.

Cotton arrives at the mill in bales, which is turned, into thin rope by blending, carding, and combing. Spinning draws out and twists the thread, winding the thread onto spindles. Richard Roberts designed the first fully automatic mule [rotating the thread from delivery, inserting a twist

then winding the thread onto a bobbin] previously they had been either hand operated or partially automatic] at the time, the mule spinners joined the union.

The first power-loom invented and perfected by Cartwright in 1784. Dressing the threads further perfected weaving - giving the thread strength. By the time of The Great Exhibition, spinning and weaving mechanically perfected. It only required the introduction of the refill of the shuttle, by a rotating hopper, designed by the American, Northrop, to complete the development. The slump and national strike of 1926 saw the start to a savage decline in Britain's industrial might... all these happenings affected the mill workers of Chard.

The first lace mill was built on Boden Street, Chard in 1821 turning out plain net. Coles weaving mill in the Old Town was taken over by Wheatley & Co., which was the start to the area becoming well known for lace production. By 1830, Chard could boast four lace mills becoming a centre for the production of clothing, curtains and military products. A machine called 'the bobbinet' was perfected in 1808; this led to the 'Levers' - a control mechanism, which further developed the lace making industry. The early looms had to be stopped every few minutes both to adjust the cloth and to 'dress' the warp threads as they unrolled. The weaver had to brush a flour paste on the threads to give them strength. This, at the same time as Arkwright's 'Spinning Jenny', Kay's 'Flying Shuttle' and Heathcoat's 'Lace Making Machine', came together in the 1820s to industrialise production. Up until the middle 1830s all lace made around the town of Chard was made by hand and called bobbin lace, [*needle lace - another process, was made in other areas*].

In 1837, flowered nets invented, although originating in France copied in England - known as Blonde - made in nine-inch strips. The further invention of a net making knitting machine opened the way for greater widths to be worked. Now the method of powering the mills was steam. At this time there was a great effort made to stop workers from joining Trades Unions.

Poor parents of young children expected their offspring to work as soon as possible - even before the age of eight. The Workshops Regulation Act of 1867 gave some protection allowing children to work shorter hours. This did not stop the exploitation even though Government Inspectors were given the power to fine the perpetrators... this continued until the hand lace trade declined after 1870. The English braid and pillow lace industry suffered in a far greater proportion than continental producers did.

The English fashion industry brought about the change. Peasants, and particularly religious institutions, in France, Flanders, Spain and Italy still desired lace produced in the traditional manner - which showed complicated designs. Now the trade began to reverse... more lace imported into England than exported... quality dropped and skills lost. Many lace-makers went into service, which was the only trade suitable for them.

Records thirty years later indicate there were no lace makers in 'Farmers' households. This could only suggest that lace making was a country cottages industry, not occurring in town houses. Lace makers were wives, daughters or granddaughters of male 'heads of households' who usually worked as a farm labourer. The next most common trade for men was shoemaking. This describes the economic position the Collins family found themselves in - as people from a rural parish. Towards the end of nineteenth century, there was a general falling off in the more elaborate side of the hand made lace trade. The workers were mainly women between the ages of thirteen to twenty-two, although much younger children did participate - even to as low an age as eight.

Most women wore under garments trimmed with lace, which gave lace-makers a great deal of work. New patterns were brought over from France and then skilfully copied. However, the bottom dropped out of the lace making by the end of the century. The Lady of the Manor gradually ceased to employ a needlewoman. Home sewing started again with the advent of the sewing machine - made at an affordable price. This was the end of the 'age of lace' especially for collars and cuffs. Ladies and children's wear, handkerchiefs, tableware and chair-back and arm covers were some of

the items, which kept lace makers busy for few more years. As a means of employment, the net making industry came at the right time. By the middle of the next century, production was well established.

The manufacture of plain net was begun in an old wool-weaving shed in Mill Lane, Chard in 1822. The venture, proving to be successful, transferred to a larger factory, in 1830. Patterned lace still had its customers who preferred the old-fashioned style for cuffs and collars, this work continued to be made by hand. The mill in Chard began making bobbin lace in about 1836 and by 1840 could produce a pattern. At the same time, G W Cuff & Co converted the watermill at Perry Street, Tatworth, to make bobbin lace. Five years later the mill was leased to John Payne in 1844. Payne was a skilled millwright and engineer who adapted and developed the mill's machinery. The finished net was taken from the mill to Nottingham's 'Finishing Shop' [*closed several years ago*] to be dyed and dressed.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, when Britain was fighting the Crimean War, workers wages gradually increased for a period of twenty years. Thereafter, after a slight hiccup in 1879, wages continued to rise, staggering in 93 to resume until 1902. However, the starting base was low, and even though this upward movement was reported farm workers were, still the lowest paid. The building of canals then railways soaked up many unemployed and kept wage rises moving upwards. The twenty-five year period between 1850 and 1875 saw a massive influx of Irish workers eager to find work and remove themselves from poverty and starvation. The industrialization of Britain and the rise in homebuilding gave these men a future and took the strain of agricultural workers who might otherwise have suffered more.

Most key mill workers, and some of those retired - lived in ten three-story factory owned cottages, close to the mill. The offices and canteen adjoined the factory. Behind the cottages lay the millpond that maintained sufficient water to drive the massive waterwheel..., which in turn, powered the looms and engineering machines. The other employees, the bulk, were 'outworkers' who lived in Tatworth, South Chard or Perry Street. Amongst these outworkers were juveniles... The 1851 census records that there were children as young as five upwards working in the lace industry, and that by the age of nine, seventeen per-cent of children were at work. There were four lace mills working in Chard one of them being the Perry Street Lace Mill owned by John Payne, employing between fifty and a hundred workers depending on the fluctuating business. As one of the Guardians of the Poor Law Union ['The Union', a number of parishes linking together to run a workhouse, in this instance thirty-three, set up in 1836... the inmates, mainly young people were obliged to work] he oversaw the working of the workhouse helping to find work for the inmates and provide medical care.

There was a great distinction between the social strata in England – differences of wealth, education and leisure. The wealthy tended to attend the Established Church whilst the poor worshiped at the nonconformist chapel; the upper classes voted Tory and the less wealthy the Liberals. The barriers could be observed regarding schooling where the fee-paying child followed hunting, rugby, cricket and tennis and the state educated child fishing, football, pigeon and horseracing. The difference between many towns and Chard, and others of a similar kind, was the closeness of its society - due to town limits, inter-mingled community housing, local schooling and religious nonconformity. In the 1600s Chard was a strictly parliamentary town where three-quarters of the population attended the non-conformist chapel... the town never lost this tradition or faith.

Although there were 'Chartist' agitators amongst the mill workers in Chard it does not seem as if the unrest travelled to the mill at Perry Street – no picketing and strikes recorded.

John Payne donated an organ to Tatworth chapel in 1860 as a way of promoting his position and constructing a link between work and religion. It was in his interest to forge a strong partnership between the village and the factory.

In the 1870s, the mill sheds had many rows of looms... each lace-hand allotted three or four looms to look after... these were packed together, with very little space in-between. The mill wheel drove the gearing and shafts that turned the belt-wheel operating each loom... the motion, in-turn, spun the bobbins and drove the shuttle... that producing the woven net. It was expected, lace hands to do all their own cleaning and oiling... to pull the cuts off the roller and fetch their own weft. When a weft thread broke or the spool ran out the weaver had to lift the shuttle from the loom, change the spool and reconnect the weft. Young girls and boys who had just left school helped the weavers clean and oil, by squeezing under the looms. There was very little heating provided in the winter and no cooling in the summer. The atmosphere was purposely kept damp to make the warps weave better. In the summer, water was sprayed on the floor to keep moisture levels high. In the winter, condensation was always dropping from the shaft and belt wheels. There was a tremendous racket made by the clack of shuttles and the whirring of spinning bobbins... the slap of driving belts and rumble of the millwheel and shafts... all made any conversation impossible.

It was estimated that in 1891 thirty percent of country folk over the age of sixty-five received some kind of poor relief. Initially poor relief for those living in their own homes had been paid to the elderly rather than taking them into the workhouse. This was in the order of one or two shillings a week depending on circumstances.

Payne sought retirement from the business that same year and engaged John Small to be its works manager. John Small was originally employed as a clerk at the factory. Although Payne continued to show an interest in the mill's operation he was gradually forced to quit, transferring property investment loans that allowed Small to take over ownership.

In 1895, the Perry Street Lace factory, situated on the main road near the lake and water mill, began production. The power for the mill was supplied by the watermill built in 1895. The mills manufacturing technique wove warp and weft yarns to make Bobbinet, which tried to copy the most complex of Honiton lace designs. This was done in big weaving sheds on large machine looms.

To operate a lace factory - that relies upon complicated machinery, it is essential to employ a tool shop and engineering department. Payne developed the engineering branch of the factory not just to service the machinery but also to serve his own inventions and patents... To accomplish this dual goal he had to purchase many machines and tools a normal engineering shop would not stock. Payne's comprehensive workshop relied upon outside sources to supply iron girders, sheet steel, details and a host of other components. The engineers would maintain their own machine tools and those of others, designing improvements as they did so. Riste and Gifford were two such designers who patented their own inventions. In times of low production, these skilled engineers took on outside contracts making and maintaining agricultural equipment, steam engines and specialized foundry work.

Needing further labour in the engineering shop Harry Collins accepted a position there - to study under the supervisor to become a qualified engineer.

Small, who now owned the factory, continued to operate the machine shop on a variety of jobs to keep the men employed. Gradually these engineering sidelines and their subsidiaries became dominant, changing the core work of the area. Within these changes worked Harry Collins, by now self-employed - as an independent engineer. Being too old to be called up in 1914, Harry was called on to do many outside jobs on local farms as well as being on call at the mill.

At first, the changes brought about by The First World War were not immediately apparent - they came about slowly - especially in places like Tatworth. The happenings in London's society and the advent of the 'Bright Young Things' were of no account to Harry Collins and his family. They

were more concerned about their children and the order book of the mill. Life was little different since Queen Victoria's coronation. Of course, there had been The Great Exhibition and the coming of the railways, and Chard canal, but most of that was all so very far away. The General Strike was certainly felt and the slump, which followed, did affect the local economy. There was a great deal of unemployment and try as they might the local authority could only find more roadside walls to build and ditches to dig - to provide some work.

All children were now educated and as result expectations had been raised especially for the boys. The girls looked longingly at the magazine photographs of the latest fashions. The aristocrats and gentry never expected their girls to work anyway and passports would describe the men as independent gentlemen.

In the local 'big houses' the butler was held in as much esteem as the owner and the cook reigned supreme. The Lady's Maid and the Governess lead lonely lives – they did not fit into either camp. Social etiquette was closely adhered to for each section of the house 'knew its place' each maid and footman fitted onto their own rung of the social ladder. Many of the estate workers lead very happy lives and the workers living conditions was a great improvement on those left behind. If suitable and had proved themselves to be loyal they had a place for the rest of their lives, including the availability of an estate cottage when they retired.

The employers were on the whole considerate towards their staff, if distant – acted unaware that they were there, until something went wrong. Unsolicited opinions and voices of discontent would lead to dismissal without a reference. This would lead to disaster – instant homelessness, the offender unable to seek further employment. If the recourse were to return home that would mean another mouth to feed from an already bare larder. An individual's class was not judged by ability or character but on what the father's occupation was. Money and possessions accounted for possible access to a higher rung not the top!

It was not normal for working men to own their own home and there was no stain on those of the middle class, who also rented. It was the general rule – to own your own home was an exception. Politics was rarely discussed and it was certainly not broadcast whom one voted for. There was a tendency for children to follow their father's preference and for estate, workers to vote as they thought their employers would.

Children of different class did not mix – farm worker's children did not play with the farmer's children and farmers children did not play with the estate owner's child. This lead to loneliness and isolation. It occurred between professional men's children and the owners of small businesses, too. As children, you only spoke when asked to; you were not to speak to strangers or your inferiors and certainly not to those who were of a higher status.

It was a hard life particularly in the winter. It was a large family and they all crowded into the living room in the evenings playing cards or shove-halfpenny on the dining table. They suffered chilblains for the range although hot its heat never reached the extremities of the room. The kitchen was worse still for there was no heating except for a paraffin stove. The girls had liberty bodices with suspenders hold up thick lisle stockings and the boys had to pull up their long socks over their knees. Their life governed by the seasons and church festivities. Helping in the home was done on a shared basis the tasks taken in turn. The start of the summer holidays were six weeks of fume damming the river and doing odd jobs on the nearest farm, helping our uncles and aunts pick their produce and feed the chickens.