

# Portraits of the Working People of Somerset

## Strand 2



## How Industrialisation changed the world of work

We have looked in depth at the medieval world and the way that society worked then. For many centuries the changes to the working lives of ordinary people happened very slowly. Traditional

skills, crafts and trades were passed on from father to son and from mother to daughter and people on each rung of the social ladder knew their place. It was a society that worked well if you were able to support yourself, but it was very harsh for those near the bottom of the pecking order.

With the advent of the inventions from the Industrial Revolution, life began to change radically and swiftly. There was drift of working people away from self-sufficiency and into the towns where the new factories could provide work for many people initially.

The Museum of Bath at Work is a good place to take students to have an experience of what this change was really like for working people. The museum is based around the processes of a soft drink bottling factory which once stood on the outskirts of Bath.

You are able to see the mechanized workshop at work and admire exactly how the new machines were powered, how big, noisy and heavy they were. It is possible to imagine how the simple process of filling bottles with drinks, became an entire factory process. There are links to the Somerset Levels, since the Clarks family, now running the Clarks Village Shopping Outlet in Street, had a share in this factory also, since the Clarks are a Quaker foundation who would not allow 'hard drink' within their village.

The visit would be a good introduction to the changes in society which came with industrialization and provide a window for looking at new working patterns and changes that over time affected the lives of everyone in society. Clarks village shopping outlet becomes a good focal point for looking at the further changes in society as mechanization began to erode the industrial base of British Society and the world of virtual technology started the most recent changes in society.

For this reason the pictures used to start each of the three sections of the project have been chosen: simple hand tools characterize the medieval period, large factory processes characterize the industrial heritage and long distance conferencing using modern telecommunications characterizes the modern work place.

# Portraits of the Working People of Somerset

## Strand 3



## How we work today

## Living in a 21<sup>st</sup> century world

If you have followed the project so far, your students should now know a great deal about the patterns of work for people who lived in two earlier periods in your locality. They should have some understanding of the medieval world, where you were very much more self-sufficient than today in making and growing the things you need for your day to day existence. They should understand that as we became good at making machines to help us, a lot of the work that was previously done by hand and at home, started to be done collectively in factories, using fewer people and very different skills from the crafts that people had passed down from generation to generation.

Now that the idea of changes over time has been established, it will be helpful for children to compare what they have learned with their own perceptions of life today. The world of work, can be a sensitive issue, especially for families affected by the current recession, but by keeping the frame of reference wide and the questions general, it should be possible to look at some indicators for the contemporary world.

A questionnaire which children could take home as homework research might suggest:

Dear Parents,

We are doing a local studies project at school, looking at how the working lives of people in the Somerset Levels have changed over time. We would like to find out what sorts of work people are doing in our world today and how our lives have changed since the medieval world and the Victorian world.

Please could you tell us:

What the adults in the family do to bring in money, whether they work for themselves or whether they are employed.

Don't forget to ask your older brothers, sisters and cousins what they do if they have a Saturday job while they are still at school.

Some people own their own business and so they only get paid when they are working.

Does your work make something that can be sold? Do you use machines to help you?

Do you have a hobby that involves making something?

There are some 'case-histories' on the next sheet to show you the sorts of things we would like to know about. Please don't be offended that we have asked these questions. We just want to get a picture of what our world of work is like today. If you don't wish to take part in our questionnaire, that is not a problem.

Thank you for helping us.

The results of the survey could be collated together to form a discussion point and some work about today's world.

Suggested outcomes to look for:

Jobs that are about making things that people need:

Jobs that are about selling people the things they need:

Jobs that offer a service to help people in our very complicated world.

Are there any jobs today that are about using your skills to make/repair something to use in your daily life?

How many of the people interviewed use some kind of machine to help them in their work?

Include computers, phones, vehicles, cash tills etc.

Do people today have more money that they did in the past?

How much of each persons life is spent earning that money?

All of it,

Most of it

Less than half of it

Would you say life is better now compared to the periods we have studied? Why?

## The 21<sup>st</sup> Century World

## Clarks Village Outlet, Street

**Local Study:** Changes in working practices in one local company

One of the trades of the Somerset Levels has traditionally been sheepskin. Sheep are farmed on the slopes of the hills around the Levels and their wool is used in other local industries. The meat is farmed and sold as food, originally in local markets, but today is sold to supermarkets. The skins of these animals have been used to make sheepskin coats, at the Moorlands factory between Street and Glastonbury, and an offshoot of this industry became the Clark's Shoe Company, a brand which is sold throughout the country today.

You can see the story of the Clarks Shoe factory at the Museum on Street High Street. Many people living on the Levels will have had family members who worked at Clarks, Moorlands or in associated trades over the last 50 years.

Originally the leather off-cuts were sent out to outworkers, who had small workshops in their back yards and they would make up the shoes and slippers and bring them back to the factory to pack and sell them on.

Today Clarks Village is more famous as a shopping outlet than as a factory, and new generations of people will be employed in the retail industry and associated service industries, than in the factories. So you can see the pattern of working at home, then moving into mechanisation and factory working, then as machines become driven by computers, the work pattern changes again to retail trades and enters new realms such as on-line shopping. Where will we go next?

Classroom research:

Ask each child in the class to find out from 10 different people what work they do. Many people today have had several different jobs, so you can get quite a varied list. Group the lists into skilled/unskilled, manual/white collar, practical/ideas based, using machinery/creative.

Discuss how we can best categorise what people today do to show what has changed since the medieval world. Discuss what happened when mechanisation changed the way we work, eg people living in towns and cities to be near workplaces. Discuss which machines made the biggest changes to the way we work today. Eg Computers

and cars may have made some of the biggest changes to the way we work today.

We have come to the end of the project.

You should now know something about three very different parts of the history of your local area and how they changed in the ways that families earned their living.

### **500 years ago**

You have heard about the Medieval World, when tools were very simple and people spent lots more time making what they needed and less time buying and selling things.

### **200 years ago**

You have heard that machines were invented to help people do the hard work of making things and it became easier to go to work in a factory than to try to grow your own food and make your own goods. To do this people began to leave the Levels and move to big towns like Bath so they could work in the factories.

### **Today**

Even this enormous change in the way we worked has now passed away. Our machines have become so clever that we depend on them for everything. Cars drive us long distances so we can work in different places. Computers do lots of thinking for us and are teaching us new ways of communicating together, like email and mobile phones, so many more people work in offices. Almost everyone buys what they need rather than growing their own food and making their own clothes. Lots of people work in the places that sell us the things we need. But, as the Monumental Portraits exhibition shows us, there are still a very few people who know how to make things the way they were done in the past.

Just think of all the choices you will have when you get old enough to go out to work. What would you like to do? Your education is a good way of helping you to develop all the complicated skills you will need for this fast and amazing world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. I wonder what they will invent next, to make this world a bit easier. Perhaps you will be an inventor....