CHAUNTRY MILLS – EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

Walter Basham – Cotton Beamer

Walter Basham was born in June 1850, the son of drabbet weaver David Basham and his wife Harriet nee Poole. He was one of eight children.

When Walter was born David and Harriet were living in Burton End with their first born child William who was 2 years old. By the time Walter was 10 the family had moved to Quakers Lane and he was one of five sons under 12 years of age. By 1871 Walter was 20 and the family had moved back to Burton End with two new additions to the family, another son and a daughter. Two brothers were working as silk weavers but Walter and his father were working in Chauntry Mills. Walter's occupation is described as a factory man.



Signature Walter Basham



173 Years' Service in one Department.

Wonderful Record at Haverhill Factory.

[Photo by Godden, Haverhill.

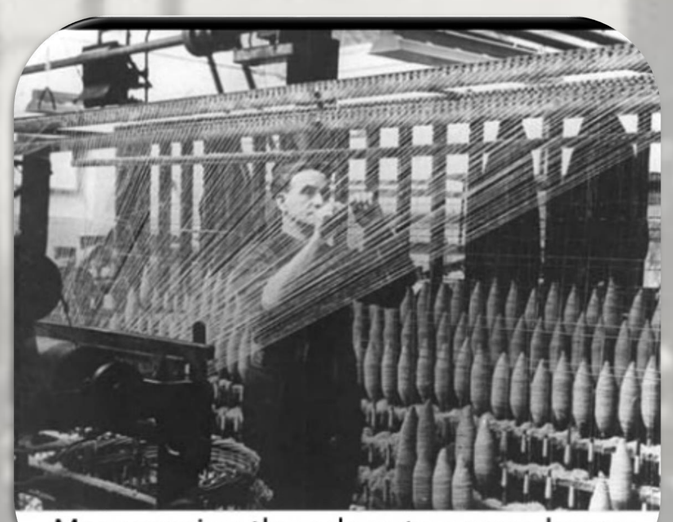
The photograph here given is of three employees who recently retired from the service of Messrs. D. Gurteen and Sons, Ltd., of Chauntry Mills, Haverhill, after a combined period of service totalling no less than 173 years. From left to right are Mr. Frank Poole, 19, Crowland Road, Mr. Walter Basham, 38, Primrose Hill, and Mr. William Starns, 32, Primrose Hill.

Mr. Poole's length of service, all of it in the textile department, came to 47 years, including the first four years as a "half-timer."

Mr. Starns was at Chauntry Mills' textile department in all for over 56 years, but his was not unbroken service, as a good many years ago he was in other employment for a short time. He is now 68 years of age.

Mr. Basham, who reached the age of 80 in June last, is a wonderfully well preserved man for his advanced years. Had he remained with Messrs. Gurteen and Sons until January next his length of continuous service with the firm, all of it in the textile department, would have amounted to 70 years. He started work at ten years of age, being the first "half-timer" to enter employment at the Haverhill factory. This part of his working life was entered upon before he had attended school at all.

In 1872 Walter married Rosetta Lane, a machine hand from the factory. Rosetta had been born in Carlton near Linton but in 1871 was living with her sister Jane and brother in law Zebedee Jobson in Millers Road, Haverhill. Her sister also worked in the factory as a tailoress so perhaps it was her who had encouraged Rosetta to seek work there too.



Man warping threads onto a warp beam ready to put into a loom. c1940s.

We know from the newspaper article which was published when Walter retired after almost 70 years of service in the textile department that he started work as the first 'half timer' in the factory when he was only ten years old and before he had even started school. Once at school he would have worked mornings in the mills and attended school in the afternoon.

By 1881 Walter and Rosetta had made a home in Chauntry Row for themselves and their family of five children, Henry, Kate, Alice, Rosetta Jane and Walter jnr.. He was now employed as a cotton beamer, the job he held until his retirement almost 70 years after joining D Gurteen & Sons.

What did a Beamer do?
A Beamer took cones of thread by the hundred and organised them to make the warp ready for weaving. The beam is essentially a huge bobbin, a long cylinder with flanges where 400 plus ends (threads) are wound side-by-side. The Beamer might also have organised the pattern of threads, taking threads from many bobbins of thread possibly forming a pattern. The individual threads are initially on bobbins which are placed on a large framework arranged to keep them apart.



They were to move once more, this time into 38 Primrose Hill. The family grew with the arrival of William, Lillie, Ada, and May. We know from subsequent census returns and the newspaper article that this was Walter's home until his retirement and possibly his death in 1939.

Walter's wife, Rosetta died early in 1911.
Walter died in 1939, not long after his retirement.
He outlived his daughters, Alice (1876 – 1917) and Rosetta Jane (1878 – 1926) and son, Henry (1872 – 1933).

Did you know?
Weaving was a very noisy operation, leaving many weavers deaf. Whether deaf or not, most weavers learned to lip-read since this was the only way to hold a conversation in the weaving shed. Making the lip movements without bothering to produce sound is known as "Mee-mawing".

Like so many other families, they were dependent on Chauntry Mill for employment.
Walter Snr (1850 – 1939) Cotton Beamer
Rosetta (1851 -1911) Machinist cotton material
William (1872 – 1933) Hair Cloth Worker
Kate (1874) Machinist
Alice (1876 – 1917) Cotton Weaver
Rosetta Jane (1878 – 1926) Cotton Weaver
Walter Jnr (1881) Beamer and Cotton Finisher
William (1883) Hair Cloth Weaver (emigrated to Canada in 1913)
Lillie (1887) Machinist Cotton Material
Ada (1889) Tailoress
May (1892) Cotton Weaver

Family History HAVERHILL GROUP (Member of the Suffolk Family History Society) · HAVERHILL TOWN COUNCIL · PRO BONO PUBLICO · GURTEEN Since 1784