CHAUNTRY MILLS – EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

Chantry/Chauntry, an endowment, or chapel for the chanting of masses. (Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, 1983)

Middle English chanterie, from Old French, from chanter, to sing;

The Gurteen family is thought to have moved to Haverhill from nearby Clare in the second half of the 17th century. An apprenticeship indenture dated 1664, shows that a Daniel, son of John Gurton of Clare, was apprenticed to a basket maker in the town. The spelling "Gurteen" instead of "Gurton" was established by 1820.

The business was established on 28th September 1784, when Daniel Gurteen (I) (1750-1813), a Master Weaver of Huguenot descent, paid £1,000 into the bank. He specialised in the weaving of a material called drabbet which was used for making the smocks worn by the agricultural workers of the time.

In the early years weaving was a cottage industry. Raw materials were distributed by the Masters to the weavers in their homes and the fabric collected when complete.
Haverhill was full of weaver's cottages, all built with the main room big enough to accommodate the loom and with large windows to give maximum natural light. The hemp provided by Daniel Gurteen came from Leeds and the cotton from Stockport.



Definition of drabbet:
a coarse unbleached linen fabric usually in twill weave.



The cloth was woven in lengths of one 'chain', which took a man about a week to make. About half of the weavers were women or girls. They needed two weeks to make one chain. The weaving apparatus belonged to the weaver and had to be maintained and kept in good repair at his expense. The whole family would be involved in the processes, working very long hours.

Did you know?
The chain is a unit of length that was used in England for several centuries.
There were 80 chains to the mile.
1 chain is equal to 66 feet (22 yards). It could be subdivided into 100 links or 4 rods.
10 chains is equal to 1 furlong, and 80 chains is equal to 1mile.
In metric terms, 1 chain is 20.117 metres long.

During the 19th Century the Gurteen business developed from cottage based hand-loom weaving to a major industry with purpose built loom sheds which housed steam engines and power looms and made drabbets, hair cloths and towelling. Within a few years they opened a factory manufacturing men's and boy's clothing, with later additional departments making leather work wear such as gloves and mats.



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