

The Mill Workers (Cards) (1 of 3)



The Hacklers

Most of the men worked on the ground floor where they combed or hackled the tangled flax yarn. They spent all day every day doing this job from 6 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening. Dr Purdon, writing about the working conditions at the time, said that the workers were 'exposed to the effects of the dust or 'pouce' as it is called... and a great many die... accidents occurred frequently in machine hackling and the machine boys were said to be the hardest worked operatives in the mill?'



The Mill Workers (Cards) (2 of 3)



Women in the Mill: **The Spinners**

Most of the women in the mill worked in the spinning room and at 14 years of age girls could become full-time spinners. Dr Purdon, writing about the working conditions at the time, said:

'The spinners do not suffer so much from pounce but from the moisture and heat of the rooms which often causes them to faint and accidents have occurred by their falling on the machinery...A good deal of disease is generated by their garments being wetted by the spray from the spindles, which so saturates them that in going out into the cold air in the evening, the wet clothes give them bronchitis almost invariably.'

Spinners usually worked in their bare feet because the floor was wet although their bosses tried to persuade them to wear clogs. One of the conditions that the spinners suffered from was the swelling of their big toes. This was caused by them standing in dirty water all day. They also had difficulties breathing because of the dust affecting their lungs. The women wore shawls going to and from their work. The shawls were all hung at the bottom of the stands. One worker recalls that *'you had to take your shawl every night and shake it well in case it was full of clock and many a time it was. But they wouldn't have done you any harm, they were only wee yellow things, they weren't cockroaches like, they were yellow.'*

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The Mill Workers (Cards) (3 of 3)



Women in the Mill: **The Doffers**

A doffer was someone who removed ('doffed') bobbins from a spinning frame and replaced them with empty ones. The girls worked as doffers and they watched the bobbins spinning around to make sure the ends didn't break.

This is what one 19-year-old doffer called Mary Ellen Kelly said:

'I thought I'd never stick it, the awful thundering noise of the machines, and the heat and the smell made me sick, and having to work up to our ankles in water, but I got used to it.'

The boys helped and also oiled the machines. The doffing mistress was in charge and when she blew her whistle all the young doffers ran to her.

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This is what one worker thought of the doffing mistress:

'Always on to you the doffing mistress, always on, always at you, always keep on keep on, on and on and on, pushing, pushing you all the time, you never seemed to do enough.'

