Hidden hands and missing persons

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Abstract
This paper reflects on a pilot study which examined an incomplete set of mid-20th century lace manufacturer's business records. The Nottingham Trent University Lace Archives hold the partial business records of W.J. Walker and Son Ltd., which offer an interesting insight into the industry in this complex trading period. The research interrogates these business records not to assess the profitability, or otherwise, of the business but to evidence the large number of hidden hands, technology and processes involved in the lace industry.
The breadth of the documents highlighted the wide influence of this branch of the lace trade through direct employment and its external supply chain. Purchases included everything from soap to machine parts and thread to insurance, the latter including 'war damage'. Wages books evidenced the planned wartime contraction of the industry as well as the names of employees. Documents from lacemaking Trades Unions and entries in the wages books can be read as vivid accounts of the variations in pay scales according to skill levels and gender.
Correspondence from companies in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Kenya highlighted the international scope of the industry. This was further emphasised by the international lists of potential purchasers for the lace machines when the company ceased trading.
The findings of this pilot study indicate that the business records of companies engaged in the lace trade, which are an under-researched area, are worthy of greater study especially in relation to their social history content.

245 words

Key words
Lace, Nottingham, Archive, W.J. Walker, Accounts

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Introduction

The fragmented nature of the Nottingham lace trade, in which many individual companies may contribute to the finished product, mirrors the way in which many individual threads are interlinked in the lace itself. At its most simple level the industry could be said to be formed of the machine holders who physically made the lace, the finishing trades who undertook the processes necessary to make the lace ready for sale and the wholesalers who sold and distributed the lace. This simplified description belies the true scale of the number of different processes, companies and people who were involved either directly or indirectly with the lace trade. Nix (1997:19) acknowledged the complexity of roles within the latter stages of the lace trade when he stated that: 'Those who performed the supply-side role in the Lace Market were themselves also buyers – from the factory-based lace producers, or, in many instances were themselves producers merchandising their own products'. He also noted that the situation was further confused by the fact that 'some production functions' were also performed in the Lace Market premises rather than on the factory floor of the lace producers.[1] Between the lace leaving the machines on which it was created and its arrival in the lace market it may have passed through innumerable, usually hidden, hands. Felkin (1867) mentions that, at one point, in addition those employed in the actual production of the lace in Britain there were 15,000 'brown net menders' who repaired flaws in the lace and 'not much fewer than 40,000 children employed in external warehouses and private rooms to finish the lace'. Beyond this there was the external supply chain which in many cases was entirely dependant on the lace trade.

Depending upon the way in which lace is viewed it can reveal or it can conceal. The same can, in many ways, be said of historical business archives. Such archives can be seen as historical documents which have been stored for potential future reference. Derrida (1995:36) states that 'the question of the archive is not, we repeat, a question of the past'. Archives may be a record of past information, or occurrences, but they are primarily created for future use. An archive's relationship to the past may be mediated through many hands including the compiler, archivist and researcher. It should also be noted that, in terms of interpretation, what is not contained in the archive may be as important as that which is present. To the untrained eye business archives may appear to be lists of dry figures and dusty order

[1] The historical usage of the terms 'Lace Manufacturer' and 'Lace Maker' have varied within the industry. For clarity 'Lace Producers' is used in this paper to denote companies who owned, or rented, machines which made Nottingham lace.

books from companies which may no longer exist. Closer inspection, however, can reveal details of the way that a company operated, the people it employed and a raft of external supporting players. This researcher suggests that, whilst not as glamorous as the large volumes of lace samples which are so visually attractive and technically educational, the business records of companies engaged in the lace trade are a much under-researched area worthy of greater investigation for the deeper insights that they may reveal.

This paper considers a pilot study into how the business archives of a Nottingham lace producer might be used to shed light on some of the people, technologies and supporting industries behind the finished product. The research focused on a collection of business papers within the Nottingham Trent Lace Archive from lace producers W.J. Walker & Son.[2] The papers included Ledgers, Order Books, Wages Books, correspondence and a set of Annual Accounts. There were also a number of production sample books which contained details of the type[3] and design of lace that was made, what it was made from and for whom it was made. Although reference is made to them, these books were not a formal part of this research. Whilst the company was established in 1891 most of the papers in this holding relate to the period running up to the closure of the company in 1957. These cover a complex period of trading for the lace industry including planned contraction during the war years.

Lace production

W.J. Walker and Son's letter heading stated that they were 'Specialists in the production of fine laces'. A letter sent by the company, dated 23rd April 1956, summarised the nature of their role within the lace production process:

> 'We thank you for your letter of the 20th instant, concerning laces for export to Ceylon, and regret we are not in a position to let you have samples as all our lace is manufactured in the 'Brown' or natural colour and then it has to be bleached, dyed and finished.
>
> All our productions are sold to the Nottingham Lace Goods Merchants or Finishers, who market and ship the goods'. (NOTLC:2007:36)

This letter reinforces the complexity of the number of stages in the wider lace production process. Within the factory itself the work would have been inherently collaborative. Auxiliary workers kept the twisthands, who operated the machines,

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[2] Accession numbers NOTLC:2007:08 to NOTLC:2007:49. This collection also includes some books from Lambert and Wood, a sister company part owned by W.J. Walker Junior.

[3] The samples in the collection indicated that Walker's made dress laces, on Leavers lace machines, rather than plain net or curtain laces.

supplied with wound bobbins, warps etc., and the twisthands would aid one another in the event of machine failures. Although there was keen competition between the various companies involved in the finishing trades each stage was dependant on the quality of work produced by the others in that chain. The fact that the letter was in response to a request to supply lace for export to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) hints at the international influence of the Nottingham Lace trade.

Walker's were primary makers, they owned[4] the machines which made the lace but they did not necessarily follow the production of that lace through to its finished state. The term 'in the brown' refers to the silver-grey colour of the lace when it is removed from the machine. This is due to the graphite used to lubricate the machines which renders the white threads of the lace a silver-grey colour and which tended to permeate the entire factory environment. The 'Nottingham Lace Goods Merchants' referred to in the letter would have been wholesale companies trading from Nottingham's Lace Market area.

In order to make lace specialist machines had to be built; this was an area of heavy industry quite at odds with the delicate web of lace that the machines produced.[5] The records showed that Walker's owned up to 15 machines[6] and correspondence indicated that they dealt with machine manufacturers William Hooton Ltd., of Continental Works, Great Eastern Street, Nottingham. Established in 1870, Hooton's built all types of lace machines and every accessory required for a lace manufacturing plant including carriages, bobbins, combs, springs etc. Hootons not only supplied machines to producers based in the Nottingham area but also the lace factories of the Irvine Valley in Scotland. In 1914 Grace's Guide to British Industrial History indicates that they had 400 employees. There were much larger firms, such as Jardines, and it could be said that the machine makers formed one of the great hidden workforces associated with the lace industry.

[4] Smaller makers often rented, rather than owned, the machines that they used.
[5] Leavers lace machines may weigh in excess of 10 tons and be over 10 metres long by 3 metres high.
[6] The samples in the collection indicate that these were Leavers lace machines.

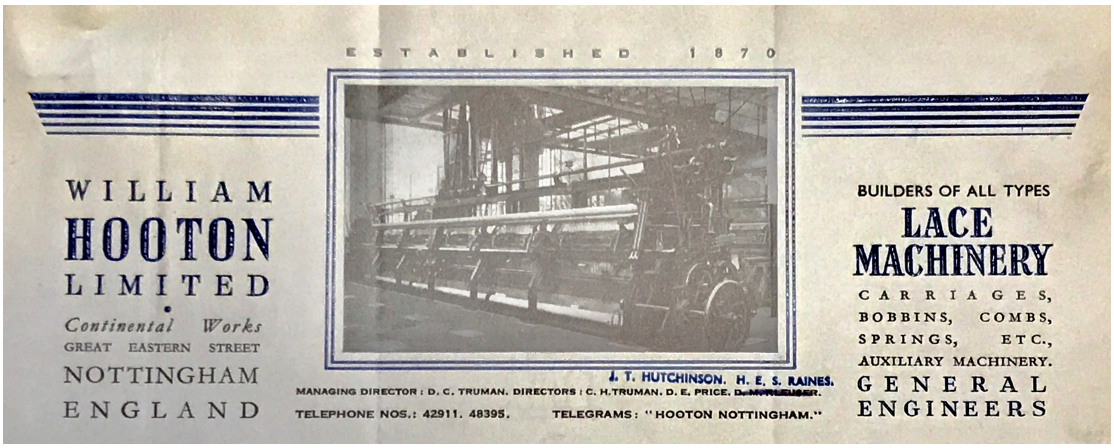

Fig. 1 William Hooton Limited, letterhead

Before the machines could begin production the lace had to be designed and draughted and the Jacquard cards punched and laced together, all of which required highly skilled workers. These processes also required specialist supplies and equipment such as point paper for draughting and punching and lacing machines for producing sets of Jacquard cards. These processes could be undertaken by independent businesses or incorporated as part of the production or wholesale businesses. It was hoped that the papers of W.J. Walker and Son might show some indication as to the origin of the designs that they produced.

Walker's were 'specialists in the manufacture of Fine Gauge laces, fabrics, trimmings etc, in cotton, artificial silk and wool'. (NOTLC:2007:37) In order to produce these laces supplies of a variety of threads types and thicknesses were required. When it was first produced on machines lace was only made in cotton thread. Silk threads are known to have been introduced for lace production in Calais in the early 1850s.[7] Walker's production sample books included lace made in cotton, rayon (Art Silk) and wool and a variety of combinations of these threads. The records indicated that in 1947 threads were purchased from Geo, Wigley & Sons (Nottingham) – Cotton Spinners & Doublers. (NOTLC:2007:37) This included an order for 170lbs of 2/92 combed, plain, prepared thread at a cost of £65. A letter to British Nylon Spinners Ltd., dated 5th March 1956, indicated that, although it was a relatively new material to the industry, Walker's had been purchasing Nylon thread. (NOTLC:2007:36) They

[7] International Centre for Lace and Fashion in Calais. Legal deposit Register No.1, (inventory number 2008.0.1). Deposit number 257, 11th June 1853, Champailler Fils, 'Soie' (Silk).

must also, therefore, have been purchasing the new, white, 'Lyra' lubricant which was necessary to work effectively with Nylon thread on their machines.[8]

Once the thread had been purchased it had to be made ready for use. This included it being wound onto bobbins, warps, beams etc. Additionally the bobbins had to be put under pressure to ensure an even tension in use. After use any threads that remained on the bobbins needed to be removed in a process known as 'Jacking Off'. These winding, and unwinding processes were known as auxiliary trades and could be carried out in-house by the lace producers but were often contracted out to small specialist firms. In either case someone had to operate the winding equipment and these people would have formed another unseen, and largely undocumented, workforce within the lace trade.

Wages books

The W.J. Walker and Son collection includes a number of Wages books which it was hoped would shed some light on the, usually anonymous, people who worked in this sector of the lace trade. The volume covering the period 1943 to 1948 was chosen for closer investigation. (NOTLC:2007:19) The entries for February 6th 1943 indicated that a total of 28 staff were directly employed by the firm. Within the double page spread of entries the entire left hand page was given over to the 11 machine operators, the twisthands, with details of their names, the machine which they operated, their output and wages. The right hand page listed 12 numbered, but unnamed, day workers with their wages. In a separate column the five office based staff were listed with their wages but no indication of their role.

Finally the payment totals were listed:

Office staff and draughting	£25.2.0
Machine wages	£40.6.8
Day workers	£31.11.6
Total wages for the week	£97.0.2

As the heading for the Office based staff included 'Draughting' this would appear to indicate that the company has their own in-house draughting, and possibly designing, team. Top designers were amongst the most well paid people in the lace industry, sometimes taking home as much as management, and most in demand when times were tough and competition keenest. Three of the office based staff were taking home over £6 a week suggesting that they were either designers, draughtsmen or management. The names, and thus genders, of the office staff

[8] The traditional graphite lubricant ingrained itself into Nylon thread, and would not wash out, making it impossible to produce truly white Nylon lace prior to the introduction of this new white lubricant.

remain unknown. Twisthands were paid on a piecework system[9] according to the type of lace they were producing. In the week under scrutiny their take-home pay varied from £1.14.9 to £6.4.11. The reasons behind this considerable difference can only be a matter of speculation but could vary from short-time working to the quality of the lace being produced as finer and more complex patterns were paid at a higher rate than standard simple edgings. It was noted that all of the machines were operated by men. This was a standard practice which was jealously guarded within a highly unionised industry although exceptions were made during times of war. The majority of the Day Workers were earning approximately £2 a week but one took home £3 and another in excess of £5. Unfortunately there was no indication as to why one worker was earning so much more or what jobs any of the day workers were undertaking.

In February 1945 only seven of the company's 15 machines were listed as being in operation.[10] Entries for 21st March 1947 show that 9 machines were operating but only 8 twisthands were listed. This would appear to indicate that one of the twisthands was switching between machines in order to produce a wider range of patterns.[11] Their take-home pay varied from £4 to £6.8.10. This range was distributed fairly evenly between the workers with four in the £4 bracket, two in the £5 region and three receiving over £6. The twisthands' union was highly effective in wages negotiations and maintained a system whereby the quality of the lace being produced dictated the rate of pay received.

[9] Known as the 'Rack Rate'

[10] The Government had placed restrictions on lace production during the war which resulted in many machines standing idle.

[11] 'Doubling up' or minding two machines was a practice common in France but rare in Nottingham.

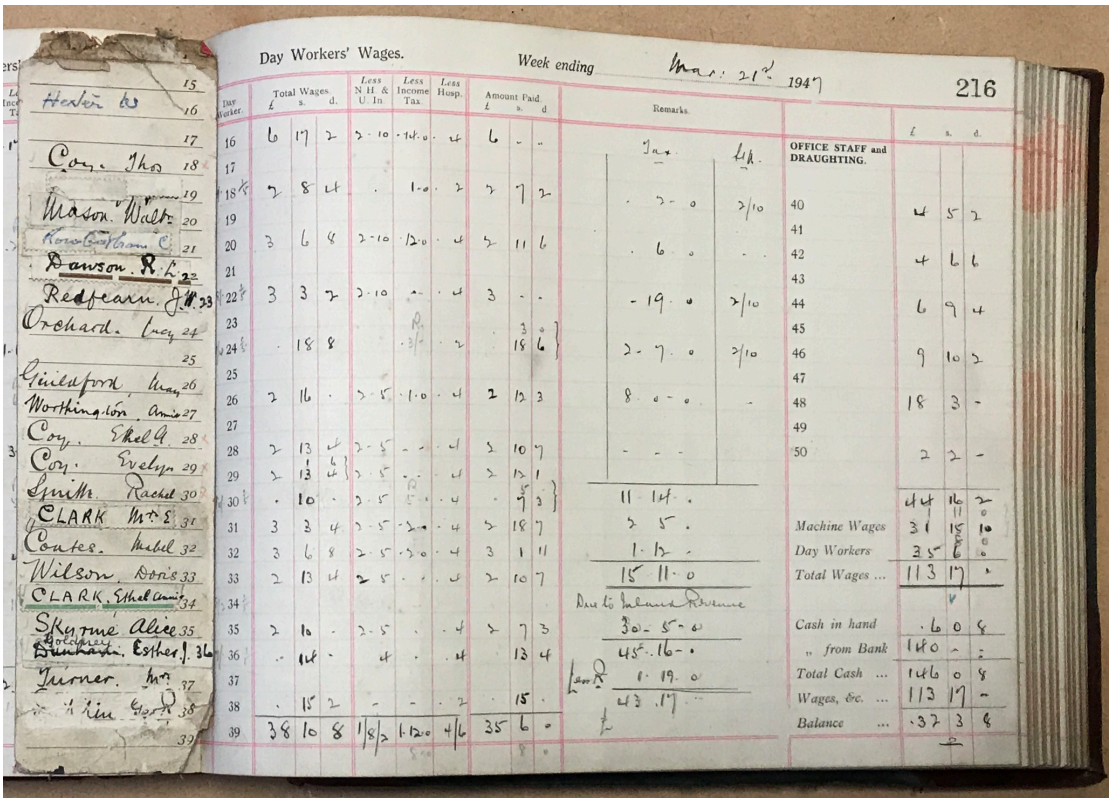

Fig. 2 W.J. Walker & Son Ltd., Wages Book for Week ending March 21st 1947

A loose, hand written, list of day workers names was discovered tucked into the pages for the week ending March 21st 1947. Looking more closely at these entries showed that there were 15 day workers at this point, of whom just four were men. There was no indication as to what jobs these workers were undertaking. Cuthbert noted that:

> 'The rates of pay of the semi-skilled auxiliaries tended originally to be based on those of the twisthand. … examples indicate that the average male auxiliay's rate and earnings appeared in the early twentieth century to range from one half to three quarters of those of the lace maker'. (1960:178)

As a result of their rates of pay being derived from the twisthands' pay scale the auxiliary trades benefitted from proportional increases when the twisthands gained pay increases. In the week under consideration one male day worker took home £6.17.2, two more took home a little over £3 and the fourth £2.8.4. This variation was broadly in line with the rates suggested by Cuthbert (1960:178) when he noted that the 'differential has narrowed throughout the century, and in 1960 the average male auxiliary's earnings fall little below those of the average twisthand, with a larger range between the best paid workers of the two categories'. Two of the female workers were earning over £3 but four earned less than £1 with the rest averaging £2.13.4. The disparity in earnings might be accounted for by short time or part-time working. The differences between male and female pay is likely to be

accounted for by the skill levels of the workers and the traditional gendering of the jobs that were available to them.

The degree of Unionisation within the industry was considerable[12] and this was emphasised by two sets of documents in the collection relating to pay increases. (NOTLC:2007:36) Both of the agreements are between the Midland Counties Lace Manufacturers' Association (for the employers), and The Transport & General Workers Union (Textile Section) and The Amalgamated Society of Operative Lace Makers & Auxiliary Workers (for the employees). The first of these was from 12th January 1954 with the increase coming into operation on the first pay day in February 1954. In short there was to be an overall percentage uplift on all wage rates of 22.5% for twisthands and auxiliary workers. This was based on the rates set out on 1st Feb 1952. To assist in the application of the uplift a ready reckoner was included for the addition of this amount. It was suggested that the increase should be implemented by calculating wages at the 1952 rate and then adding the uplift 'to avoid any possibility of error'. The second review operated from 1st Jan 1957 with an overall 8% uplift added. According to the correspondence all uplifts were to be based on the Arbitration Court Award of 1952 i.e. pay levels were now set at 42% above the 1952 agreement. Although the 1957 award was of little relevance to the finances of W.J. Walker and Son an increase of 42% in wage rates over a five-year period can be viewed as a significant adjustment.

Annual accounts

The company records included a set of accounts for the year ended 20th October 1952. (NOTLC:2007:21) By looking beyond the state of the company's bank account a raft of supporting players can be identified. The accounts were audited which means that a firm of accountants would have inspected the books, checked the stock audit and written a report. An employee would have been paid to type the report, duplicate it and distribute it to the shareholders. The Balance Sheet statement showed that the capital was made up of 9,695 issued shares at £1 each. Unfortunately there is no way of telling, from the accounts, how many shareholders there were but the company was proposing to pay out dividends totalling £1,272.9.4.

In a more detailed section of the audit some of the fixed assets were listed including:

Freehold Property – £3,165

Plant & Machinery at cost – £13,094 (less depreciation of £9,727)

[12] See Cuthbert (1960) for the Trades Union and Varley (1959) for the Employers points of view

Patterns at cost – £1,902
Current Assets including Stock in Trade – £1,469
Balance carried forward to next year – £15,101

These would all be interesting facts and figures for financial historians but from the point of view of this research they offered useful insights into the way that the business operated and what the company actually did.

It was noted that Freehold Property was included in the assets. It was not stated what this property was used for but a receipt from S. Bradley, Joiner and Property Repairer, was issued in relation to work carried out on a property at 6 Berkely Avenue, Long Eaton. (NOTLC:2007:25) Entries were later discovered in the ledgers for rental income from three tenants at numbers four, six and 19 Berkley Avenue, suggesting that there might have in fact been three properties. The freehold property in the fixed assets did not include Walker's main production premises. In 1905 W.J. Walker and Son had become one of the first tenants in a newly built mill at Long Eaton and maintained their production there until the company closed in 1957. (Archer, 2007)

The entry for Plant and Machinery showed it's original cost but did not specify what this plant and machinery was. Despite the fact that lace machines can have a working life in excess of 100 years[13] it is normal accountancy practice to write off the value of such equipment, through depreciation, over a much shorter number of years. Thus, although the Accounts show only £3,367 worth of plant and machinery the replacement value of the lace machines would have been quite different. Similarly their sales value would be significantly more, as was proven four years later when nine of the lace machines were sold for over of £2,000 each.

The inclusion of Patterns at cost would refer to the sets of Jacquard cards which had been punched for specific lace designs and which were retained in case that pattern should be required again. Sets of Jacquard cards were expensive to make and, although bulky to store, were an important asset of any production company. Notes in the production sample books indicated that a pattern was sometimes put back into production for different clients. This would only have been possible if the production company held the copyright for the pattern or if the original copyright had expired and not been renewed.

The Stock in Trade of £1,469 would have been made up of lace which the company had made but which had not yet been sold. This could have been speculative

[13] Some of the more delicate moving parts such as combs and carriages need to be replaced on a regular basis as they are subject to wear through continual movement.

production; a later letter from Walker's to W. Wallis & Sons refers to over £200 worth of lace having been sent to Wallis 'on memo' and asking for their order to be marked 'Old Stock'. (NOTLC:2007:36)

After paying dividends, the balance to be carried forward of £15,101, was approximately £1,000 more than the opening balance. This would appear to indicate that despite continuing government restrictions on production the company were operating at a reasonable profit.

Payments ledger

There were a number of ledgers relating to income and expenditure in the collection, including a Cash Book for the period 1929 to 1946 (NOTLC:2007:33). The payments from the 1940-41 section of this ledger were explored at greater depth with a view to flagging up some of the usually hidden suppliers. The list of suppliers was substantial and included many whose services were not directly related to the production of lace such as Banks and Insurance companies. The expenditure categories offered a wealth of possibilities including: Oil, belting etc., – Rent, Tax, Insurance – Lighting, Power, Welfare – Printing, Stationery etc., – Warping, Dressing, Dyeing etc., – Sundry Expenses.

Oil, Belting etc., covered such consumables as the graphite used to lubricate the moving parts on the machines and the drive belts that powered them. Regular payments appeared at this period for insurance against War Risk for both stock and machines. The major danger could have been perceived as being from spreading fire rather than a direct bomb strike but both would have been considered distinct possibilities. Whilst Lighting and Power were obvious expenditures Welfare brought to light some less major but none the less essential suppliers such as Midland Soap.[14] Printing & Stationary covered everything from headed notepaper to specialist ledgers and the requisite pencils, pens and ink to write in them with. The Wages books were noted to be company specific and were thus specially printed and bound rather than being off the shelf supplies. One of the more intriguing payments was to Caribonum for 9/4. Further investigation showed this to be a stationary company in London offering amongst other things; Typewriter Ribbons, Carbon Papers, stickers and glue, all of which were an integral part of the office processes which supported the production of a lace factory. Caribonum also sold coloured writing inks which were an important element of the pattern draughting process. Warping[15] was an

[14] The graphite powder used to lubricate lace machines settled on every available surface and, quite apart from personal hygiene, regular hand washing would have been necessary to shield the office staff from this grey grime.

[15] Warping is the technical term for winding long lengths of threads onto cylinders.

essential part of the preparation of threads for use on a lace machine. These payments were indicative that Walker's outsourced this process rather than undertaking it in-house. Dressing & dyeing was a more unexpected category, suggesting that Walker's handled some of the finishing processes, via third parties, rather than selling all of their lace in its brown state. Inspection of the Sundry Expenses revealed donations to a number of charitable causes including: Merchant Navy, Air Force, Blind Institute and a Hospital for Children. More surprising perhaps were the donations to the Aid to China and Aid to Russia Funds.

Effects of war

Much of the information under consideration was concerned with the post war period.[16] Continuing Government restrictions, and a quota system, meant that between 1st May and 31st October 1952 Walker's sister company, Lambert & Wood, was only allowed to produce £871 worth of lace. (NOTLC:2007:37) Similar restrictions would have been applied to W.J. Walker and Son.

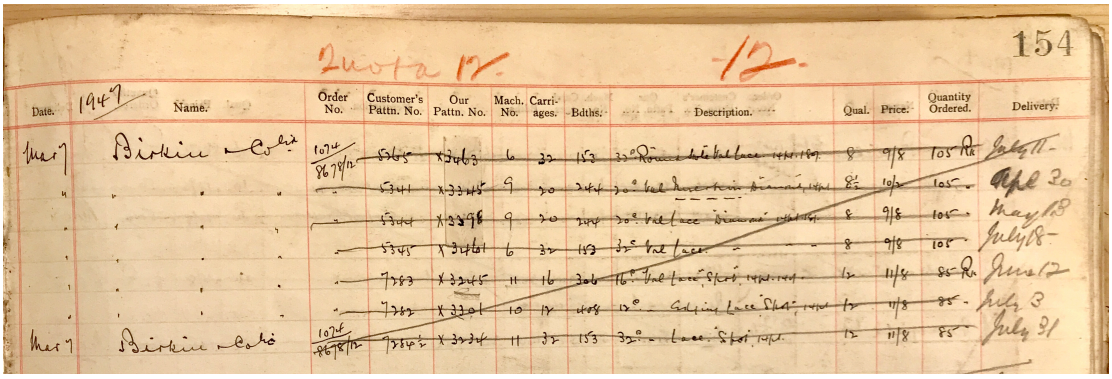

Fig. 3 Order Book record of lace manufactured in 1947, during Quota period 12, for Birkin & Co. of Nottingham

These restrictions had been introduced because of a shortage of thread during the war and the need to channel the thread that was available into the most vital industries. In the case of the lace industry this meant that the production of mosquito and sandfly nets and splinter nets, for use on windows, was given highest priority. These were produced by the lace curtain and plain net branches of the industry. Apart from the production of hair nets, the dress lace industry, in which both Walker and Lambert & Wood operated, was only permitted to produce lace for export.

[16] The Second World War officially lasted from 1939 to 1945 but its impact on the British economy was felt well beyond that with rationing continuing until 1954.

Despite the continuing restrictions there was an optimistic outlook in the industry. This was reflected in a letter received from Birkin & Co on 17th July 1947:

> 'we are forwarding the sketch which you prepared for us in 1945, which was proposed to make in the style of the Calais Lace, as per the cutting attached. A little set[17] on this order would certainly be quite attractive, and in the light of the fact that the quota system may soon be abandoned, we shall be glad to know whether you would be prepared to get on with the preparation of such a set. The 11pt. Point de Paris set is excellent, and this we shall order throughout immediately circumstances permit.' (NOTLC:2007:37)

The letter also highlighted the industry habit of adapting other people's patterns rather than always creating original designs. (This aspect of design is discussed in: *Principles and Pilfering: Nottingham Lace Design Pedagogy.* Briggs-Goode et al, this issue)

Despite initial optimism, trade continued to be suppressed and some companies which had successfully weathered the war found themselves in difficulties. On 23rd May 1956 Lace Productions (1948) Limited[18] issued a letter in relation to the re-deployment of trained hands:

> 'Your Board of Directors is very concerned at the possibility of the loss of labour in the industry owing to the present conditions of trade. It is felt that it would be most regrettable if employees were allowed to leave the trade when they could possibly be absorbed by other member firms. We suggest and request, therefore, that should your employees give notice that they are leaving the industry you should notify the office as quickly as possible in order that an effort be made to find them alternative employment with other firms within the trade. Also, if conditions are such that you have labour which may become redundant please notify these cases in good time so that their transfer to other firms can be arranged if possible.' (NOTLC:2007:36)

This proved to be a particularly timely letter as Walker's ceased to trade in 1957.

Closure

The decision to close the company was not due to a lack of interest in their products. This was underscored by a request to become agents for Walker's lace from The East African Commercial Agencies, Nairobi, Kenya. The letter of reply on 22nd May 1957

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[17] The term 'set' refers to the lace industry practice of producing a core design in a number of different widths, as edgings, insertions and galloons and sometimes also as an allover fabric.

[18] A strong umbrella organization created during the war to represent the business interests of the Nottingham lace trade in negotiations with the Government and Trade Unions.

gave the reason for ceasing production: '. . . regret to say that we have had to cease manufacture and wind up our business as the owners of our factory require the room for themselves.' (NOTLC:2007:36)

A more forthright summary of the situation was given in a letter to the local MP, John Jennings, on July 17th 1956:

> '. . . we will have to turn out of this mill where we have been housed for the past fifty years. This will mean that the machinery will have to be sold probably abroad or at heart breaking prices at home on account of the credit squeeze and the general slump in trade. We have fifteen machines weighing about ten tons each and carrying ten thousand points, ten thousand combs, ten thousand bobbins, and five thousand carriages each. And clothed with approximately a quarter of a million yards of nylon or cotton.' (NOTLC:2007:36)

The machines were offered to companies both locally and abroad including Calais, France; Santiago, Chile; Rhode Island, USA; Barcelona, Spain and Milano, Italy. (NOTLC:2007:36) The geographical diversity of this list demonstrates how international the production of lace had become. The influence of an industry that originated in the Nottingham area was now virtually worldwide. In 1947 Birkin & Co advertised Sales Agencies in Paris, New York, Toronto and Sydney (NOTLC:2007:37). Similarly, Simon May & Co., (1949) listed Agents in Arabia, Argentina, Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Denmark, Egypt, Italy, Malaya, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Palestine, Peru, Switzerland, Turkey, Uruguay, Venezuela and West Africa.

A hand written note recorded a telephone conversation of July 1956 in which lace machine manufacturers William Hooton Ltd., made an offer to buy some of Walker's lace machines (NOTLC:2007:36). They were willing to pay £3,100 each for 10 point machines and £1,500 for 14 point machines. It was interesting to note that the coarser 10 point machines were deemed to be much more valuable than the finer ones.

In a letter of 23rd November 1956 it was stated that all of the machinery had been sold:

> '. . . part to the Argentine, part to Portugal and the bulk to Calais at a heavy sacrifice.
>
> They are being given 10-11 weeks to dismantle and clear machinery from the factory space. Two machines had already gone and orders had been given for Packing cases to be made for the rest. The Machines for France were to be sealed in special containers which travel by rail from Long Eaton direct to Dunkirk.' (NOTLC:2007:36)

Walker's wrote to the buyers in Calais stating that they would accept £20,000 Stirling for nine machines. That one company was purchasing this many machines would appear to indicate that they considered the outlook for the lace trade to be positive.

Summary

Secrecy had been a watchword of the Nottingham lace industry since its earliest days and industrial espionage was rife throughout its history. [19] This endemic secrecy helped to conceal many of the hands at work in all stages of the design, manufacture and distribution of machine made lace. The wider influence of the trade, through a range of supporting industries and suppliers, is an under considered area.

Close investigation of archival documents has revealed a wealth of information pertaining to the operations of the lace trade on a national, international and global stage. These have varied in scale from the employment of local carpenters to undertake odd repairs to the sale and shipping of vast lace machines. The industry has always been seen as being male dominated with male merchants, machine owners, twisthands and designers being feted as the kings of their industry. These documents have shown that there was an understory of essential, skilled, team players who were less evidenced in traditional histories and were less well paid for their efforts. Many women fell into the category of hidden workers. Amongst these were the lace designers who due to the social pressures of their day often gave up work when they married[20] or continued to design at home but sold their designs under their husband's name.

This research has focussed on a company engaged in primary production but there were many processes which happened after the lace had left the factory. These included washing, bleaching and dying in the first instance. Most of these activities were carried out by small firms, many of whom were unlikely to have left comprehensive business records in formal archives. At later stages there were many other hands at work clipping and scalloping the lace before it was wound onto cards and packed for dispatch. Historically many of these processes had been undertaken in small independent workshops but later came to be controlled by the more major wholesaling companies operating in Nottingham's Lace Market. These wholesalers are an area of the lace industry which could be expected to have left substantial business archives.

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[19] Booklets and production manuals produced by Lace Productions (1948) Limited included a specific notice of confidentiality.

[20] Amy Atkins claimed to be the first professional female lace designer, active between 1904 and 1914, but she ceased to work on marriage.

It was the wages books which threw most light onto the individuals employed by W.J. Walkers and Son. The pilot study did not investigate these individuals in depth but this would potentially make a good area for study. This might include the turn over rate of staff, gendering of roles within the workplace and comparative rates of pay. Two letters in the collection touched on the issue of overseas Agencies and the international distribution of lace would offer a fruitful area for research. The effects of war on the industry could also prove to be illuminating.

This pilot study of the information contained in the extant business records of W.J. Walker and Son has shown that such records can offer an alternative window onto the workings of the lace industry and its employees. When examined with an eye to their wider influences these records offered insights into the importance of lace production to the wider community and to other business sectors. The findings indicate that the business records of companies engaged in the lace trade, which are an under-researched area, are worthy of greater study especially in relation to their social history content. There are many others sets of business records from companies engaged in the lace trade held in a wide variety of repositories including the National Archives at Kew, Nottingham University and various County Records Offices.

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