

L. Crow, 3 Sep 2005 (Edited by S. Crow)

## **The Linen Trade in Barnsley**

Here are some facts from my 'Aspects of Barnsley' books about the Linen Trade in Barnsley with special reference to the Sheffield Road area around Taylor Row near Quarry Street. In book no. 3 there is a section called, "Taylor Row and the Handloom Weavers of Barnsley". There are excellent photos and details from Census returns of families living here and in other parts of Barnsley including Sheffield Rd and Thomas Street areas who were involved in home based Hand Loom Weaving.

Locals were joined by incomers from Ireland and Lancashire to take houses provided by various Mill Owners (such as Taylor's on Peel Street) for the production of linen cloth from yarn produced by the mill. They produced cloth after collecting yarn from Peel St. working in the basement of their back-to-back homes. The workroom was half underground so that they could get into the living floor via steps to the house door and so that a window could be placed to give light to work by. When it was dark they used candles with extra expense. To keep the yarn pliable it was better for the room to be slightly damp so conditions were bad and many died. Working hours were left to the family sometimes looms being used in shifts by all family members. It was payment by results so the more cloth you produced the more money you got.

There are few details of families by name but there are graphs and lists to show which houses and how many looms were known to be in houses in Barnsley. Many came to the area seeking work without any experience of weaving, learning on the job. Their early efforts often produced poor cloth and some were evicted from their tied homes where the Linen Warehouse owner owned the houses and looms and loaned them at a rent to weavers producing cloth for their factory to sell.

During more prosperous times weavers were allowed to keep the piece of cloth at the end of each roll which was called a Fent. These were used to make clothes, blankets, curtains, etc by the family or they took them to the markets for sale. The bosses didn't like that as it challenged their sales efforts especially when times were hard. When they stopped this privilege there were big riots in May Day Green.

Because of the damp and unhealthy conditions, factories were eventually set up where all the weaving was done under one roof and on power-driven looms so home-based hand weavers were not needed and young men went to join the growing mining industry. There were several linen manufacturers and one

warehouse is still exists behind the Technical College - the old Joan's Clothes Warehouse just below the Magistrates Court and Police Station on Churchfields.