LANCASHIRE

CLOGS AND SHAWLS

Archived by

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Lancashire Clogs

There were several types of clog used in Lancashire during the industrial revolution. Pit clogs (or boot clogs) corresponded to boots and came well up the ankles. They were secured with natural leather laces, and the toes were protected by a heavy steel plate. Such clogs carried no decoration and they were strictly for work, heavy work, such as that found in a foundry or mill.

Ordinary clogs for men were fastened with a clasp.

Above - Men's Work Clogs

Women's clogs were less substantial, and they were decorated all the way round between the alder wood sole and the welt with brass tacks. A woman's clog also had a strap across the instep.

Above - Clogs for Women

Children's clogs had a button for the fastener, and the clog sometimes had more ornamentation with the half-inch broad toe piece of brass being a decorative touch.

There were even red clogs for a baby. It was the only time that a departure from the traditional black was permitted.

Above - A Practical Pair of Children's Clogs

Above - Children's Clogs

Above - Children Wearing Clogs

Clogs were not worn in the spinning mill because the clog irons on the alder soles would have damaged the wood on the floors. However, the operatives often wore their clogs and shawls when going to and from work.

Clogs were the customary wear in a weaving shed where the weaver stood on a flagged floor that was cold and often damp. The clog iron, which lifted the wood base clear of the wet floor by one-eighth of an inch, was very beneficial to the weaver from a health point of view. In the clatter of a weaving shed the extra noise caused by clogs did not even register.


Above - Lancashire Lass with Clogs and Shawl

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Clogger Shops

Clogs were hand-made to the measurements of each customer's feet, and Clogger shops abounded. They could be found at most street corners, and a clogging service was even provided by the Co-op chain.

In the Burnley area many retail outlets were supplied with raw clog blocks by Sam Smalley, a farmer who resided at Grindleton. He would buy up all the alder he could, cut and season the blocks, and then deliver them on a flat cart drawn by a pony - his number-one customer, in Burnley, was the Co op.
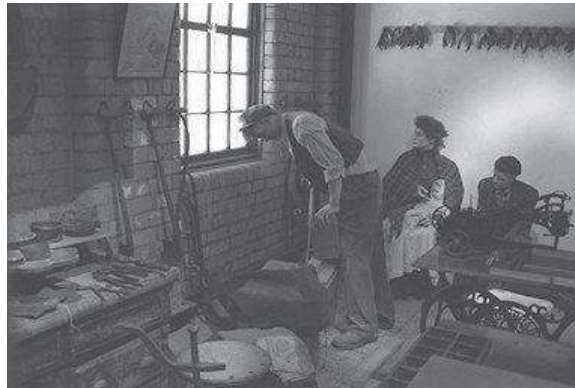
Above - Historical Reconstruction of a Clog Shop of c. 1900

Above - One of Clegg's Boot & Clog Stores

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Shawl

The shawl was an integral part of the Lancashire mill town image and was made of wool, and generally dark in tone. Every clothier sold shawls. Some of the new owners attached a fringe or decoration.

The shawls were large and warm, and were capable of covering the head - they were frequently kept in place at the chin by a large safety pin. The Lancashire shawl was possibly a development of a smaller shawl used in conjunction with a poke bonnet. However, the bonnet went out of fashion, and the shawl grew in size until it was able to cover the head.

Above - Lancashire Mill Worker with Traditional Shawl

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The "Brat"

Traditional clothing for weavers included an apron known as a "brat". It was of constant length, almost reaching to the ground.

Above - Mill worker wearing a "brat"

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Men's Clothing

Men's clothing was not exceptional - c.1900, and a factory worker was reported to be wearing a cloth cap, red neckerchief, check shirt, fustian trousers, waistcoat, and clogs.

Above - Mill Yard Workers, c.1900

Above - Mill Workers, c.1900

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Clog Dancing

Although the clog dancing of northern England was well known from the 19th Century, it was long before this that clogdancing began. Some authorities believe that "clogging" came to England as early as the 15th Century. Moreover, it was in the 15th Century that the original, completely wooden, clogs evolved into leather shoes with wooden soles.

In the 16 Century the clogs changed again and separate wooden pieces were used to make the heel and toe. It is believed that the earlier dancing was less complicated than the later "clog dancing".

Clog dancing is most notably associated with the 19th century Lancashire cotton mills, with towns like Colne. It is here that the term "heel and toe" was first used - this was derived from the changes made to the clog design in the 16th Century. Coal miners in Northumbria and Durham also developed clog dancing.

The clog was a comfortable and cheap form of footwear, with alder soles, that was ideal for industrial workers in the industrial boom period. It was especially important to have hardwearing footwear in the cotton mills, because the floors would be damp from the humid environment that was needed for the spinning process.

Initially, clog dancing began to alleviate boredom and to simply warm up - it could get very cold in the industrial towns of the north. It tended to be men that would dance and, later, as its popularity grew to its peak between 1880 and 1904, they would compete professionally in music halls. The money awarded to winners would be a valuable source of extra income. There was even a World Clog Dancing Championships, which Dan Leno won in 1883.

Women also began to participate and, later, their dancing also became popular in music halls. Dancers would wear colourful costumes and dance in the villages, carrying sticks to represent the bobbins in the cotton mills.

Dancing clogs (night/"neet" clogs) were made from ash wood and were much lighter than those worn to work. They were also more ornate and often brightly coloured. Some performers would even nail metal brads the soles so that when the shoes were struck, sparks would fly.

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Brawling

The age of the clog also added a new aspect to brawling. In the eventually outlawed clog fighting or "purring", men, being entirely naked, would wear clogs on their feet and violently kick each other.

This specialist type of brawling was often used to settle disagreements - permanently.

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02102012