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Rural industries
of England &
Wales

Vol. 3

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**THE RURAL INDUSTRIES
OF ENGLAND & WALES**

III

**DECORATIVE CRAFTS
AND RURAL POTTERIES**

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THE RURAL INDUSTRIES OF ENGLAND & WALES

A SURVEY MADE ON BEHALF OF THE
AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
OXFORD

III
DECORATIVE CRAFTS
AND RURAL POTTERIES

By
HELEN E. FITZRANDOLPH
and M. DORIEL HAY

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P R E F A C E

IN any consideration of the development of the countryside the place and function of local industries in rural life must occupy a prominent position. Their importance in the past is obvious, when the village was largely an isolated economic unit ; in view of the part they might still play in maintaining a fuller life for the country dweller, in stemming the flow of population from the rural to the urban centres, and in solving some of the problems of modern industrialism, the need for a study of their present state, of the extent to which the changes in modern, social, and economic conditions demand their supersession, and of the possibility of adapting and developing them to serve these same conditions, becomes increasingly apparent.

It may be that rural industries can continue to supplement agriculture in the complete rural community, by providing subsidiary employment for the part-time land-worker and the small-holder ; by affording the chance of employment in their own homes or villages to the various members of their families ; by providing certain requisites of agricultural industry. It may be possible that in the revolution of economic principles and systems which is now being made by all sorts and conditions of persons, certain human advantages in rural industries may be set against the greater production of goods by the larger industrial units of the towns. In particular, the smaller industrial concern enables a man to see the whole series of connexions between the making and using of an article, and brings his work into direct relation not only with his own life, but with that of the community of which he is a member. There is little or no distinction between producer and consumer, and one of the chief causes of present social conflicts is non-existent. The worker in the country 'sees the nature of what he is doing ; he is getting products from the land and making use of them by industry. He sees the whole process, and the fact is plain that labour and land are for the sake of himself and others

like him who needs the goods. He sees the grain become flour, the wood from the forest become furniture, the hide become leather, and the leather boots, and the wool cloth—all beside him, and all of it a plain process of natural goods made useful by men.'¹ The men of the towns, however, have a genius for organization, and if it be necessary that their business should be arranged on a basis involving less specialization than at present, or so that some of the evil effects of over-specialization were eliminated, they may be able to modify existing systems without seriously affecting their productivity. The only basis upon which rural industries can be firmly established is that of a high standard of technical knowledge and skill, suitable machinery, and commercial organization. On the other hand, the moribund condition of many once-flourishing country trades and crafts may have to be recognized as the price of industrial progress in other centres. The modern tendency towards the centralization of industry and large-scale production; the enormous development of transport facilities which has broken down the barriers between town and country; the danger of these small unorganized enterprises becoming sweated industries serving only to subsidize agricultural wages, all of these things may render undesirable any effort towards the resuscitation of many of these ancient crafts.

With so little knowledge available it became clear that a thorough investigation of the position of rural industries, both economic and social, would be advantageous and, in 1919, at the suggestion of the Development Commissioners, an inquiry into the condition of rural industries in the neighbourhood of Oxford was set on foot by the Agricultural Economics Research Institute, at Oxford. It was rather of the nature of a trial trip, an experimental inquiry to explore the possibilities of a more complete investigation, and in the following year arrangements were made with the Development Commissioners and the Ministry of Agriculture for an extension of the survey so as to bring under review the principal rural industries of England and Wales.

¹ D. H. Macgregor, *The Evolution of Industry*, p. 24.

The terms of reference of those responsible for the work were to consider—

(1) the existing rural industries and the causes of their establishment in particular localities, such as easy access to local supplies of raw material and labour, and local markets for the finished products ;

(2) the various types of organization in these industries, such as small factories and workrooms or individual production, organizations for the purchase of raw materials or the sale of finished products. Educational facilities and the possibilities of technical instruction were also to be borne in mind in this connexion ;

(3) the economic and social effects of rural industries, the conditions of labour attendant on them, the connexion between rural industries and agricultural employment, and how far such industries tend to depress or to ameliorate the lot of the agricultural worker ;

(4) the prospects of development of existing industries and of the introduction of new enterprises, or of the resuscitation of former industries now dead or in a state of suspended animation. In this connexion the existence of competition, both urban and foreign, was to be borne in mind, and consideration given to the conditions under which rural industries can compete with urban production.

The survey was carried out during three years by a specially appointed group of workers. They surveyed the country, county by county, and the results of their inquiries were embodied in reports dealing with the industries of particular localities. From these interim reports (which are available in manuscript, for consultation, at Oxford) the final reports were compiled, dealing with the various industries separately as they occur throughout the country.

As has already been said, the first district surveyed was that of Oxfordshire, and the investigator in this instance was Miss K. S. Woods, who was assisted in part of the work by Miss C. D. Biggs. The results of the survey were embodied in book form, and published early in 1921.¹ From

¹ K. S. Woods, *Rural Industries Round Oxford* (Oxford University Press).

1921 to 1922 the work was continued by Miss Woods and Miss Helen FitzRandolph, and in the summer of 1922 Miss M. Doriel Hay took Miss Woods's place. The survey of the Welsh industries required a knowledge of the Welsh language and was undertaken, apart from the English survey, by Miss A. M. Jones, in 1922 and 1923. All these investigators worked under the direction of Mr. A. W. Ashby. A list of the districts surveyed by each is appended.

The investigators must be congratulated upon the results of their work. Inquiries of this kind are not always too easily conducted, and call for a measure of enthusiasm and even of courage in those concerned if the best results are to be obtained.

It is impossible to name all those who assisted them in their work, but I should like to make grateful acknowledgment of the friendly reception accorded to them, and of the readiness with which those engaged in the various industries investigated gave of their time and knowledge. Without their cordial co-operation it would have been an impossible task.

For convenience of publication the reports have been collected together in four volumes, as follows :

Vol. I. Timber and Underwood Industries and some Village Workshops.

Vol. II. Osier Growing and Basketry, and Some Rural Factories.

Vol. III. Decorative Crafts and Rural Potteries.

Vol. IV. Rural Industries in Wales.

The following report is Vol. III of the series. The industries with which it deals are largely those which have been developed by the Women's Institute movement and by similar social organizations, and considerable progress has been made in some of the handicrafts described since the date of their investigation. But reviewing this growth nothing seems to have occurred to necessitate any revision of the general conclusions drawn by the investigators three years ago.

C. S. ORWIN.

ORDER OF THE SURVEY

<i>Date.</i>	<i>District.</i>	<i>Investigator.</i>
1919-20	Oxfordshire	K. S. Woods and C. D. Biggs
1920-1	Bedfordshire	Helen FitzRandolph
1921	Derbyshire, Leicestershire, and Nottinghamshire	"
1921-2	Kent, Surrey, and Sussex	"
"	Westmorland, Cumberland, and Lancashire	"
1922	Shropshire, Staffordshire, and Cheshire	K. S. Woods
"	Herefordshire and Worcestershire	"
"	South Western Counties	"
"	Durham	Helen FitzRandolph
"	Northumberland	"
"	North Riding of Yorkshire	Helen FitzRandolph and M. Doriel Hay
"	East and West Ridings of Yorkshire	M. Doriel Hay
"	Carnarvonshire	A. M. Jones
"	Denbighshire	"
"	Flint	"
1923	Gloucestershire	Helen FitzRandolph
"	East Anglia and Essex	"
"	Lincolnshire	M. Doriel Hay
"	Warwickshire	"
"	East Midland Counties	"
"	Merionethshire and Montgomeryshire	A. M. Jones
"	Brecon and Radnorshire	"
"	Pembrokeshire, Cardiganshire, Carmarthenshire, and Anglesey	"
"	Monmouthshire and Glamorganshire	"

CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTORY. DECORATIVE CRAFTS AND THEIR PLACE IN VILLAGE LIFE .	1
II. HAND-LOOM WEAVING, DYEING AND SPINNING	7
Distribution of the Weaving Industries .	7
Raw Materials	16
Processes	20
The Workers	31
Business Organization	41
Markets	42
Prospects	45
Mat-Weaving	48
III. LACE-MAKING	50
Lace-Making Districts	50
Varieties, Materials and Apparatus	53
Organization	60
Markets	65
The Workers and their Earnings	67
Prospects	69
IV. HOME CRAFTS AND INDUSTRIES	72
Distribution and Organization	72
The Principal Crafts	91
The Workers	106
Markets	115
Some Difficulties	123

CONTENTS

xi

V. RURAL POTTERIES	130
Location	130
The Clay and its Treatment	136
The Craftsmen and their Work	138
The Marketing of Pottery	147
Character and Development of Small Rural Potteries	149
Glass-Making	155
VI. LAPIDARY WORKERS	157
Jet and Serpentine Cutters	157
APPENDIX. The Brandon Flint Knappers	161
INDEX	166

ILLUSTRATIONS

The Spinner	<i>Frontispiece</i>
Hand Looms <i>facing</i> 26
Weavers at Work	32
Buckingham Lace	54
Honiton Lace	54
Lace-Makers Old and Young	60
Plaiting Rush Baskets	96
Sedge Workers and their Products	96
Pottery. Mixing Clay and Moulding	138
The Potter's Wheel	142
The Output (the Compton Pottery)	142
Flint Knapping. Quarrying and quartering the Flints	162

APPENDIX

THE BRANDON FLINT KNAPPERS

AN industry which is probably the oldest in the British Isles and is of interest chiefly for that reason, still exists at Brandon, on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk. This is flint knapping, which is carried on in much the same way to-day as in the neolithic age, although in the course of time the flints have been prepared for many different purposes. About three miles from Ling Heath, where the flints are now dug, are the circular shafts known as Grimes' Graves, from which the prehistoric men dug their flints to be made into arrow-heads, knives, and fish-hooks. After the use of iron became general for weapons and edged tools, flints were still used for tinder lighters, and it is probable that the working of them never stopped. In 1686 flint locks were introduced into the British Army and the flint knapping industry became an important one and flourished until 1835, when flints were superseded by percussion caps. Since that time the industry has gradually declined, but there is still a certain demand for gun flints for use in the old-fashioned fire-arms which are supplied to the natives of West Africa and the Gold Coast, who must be armed so that they may shoot game but whom it is politic to arm less efficiently than the representatives of the ruling race.

In 1868 there were thirty-six flint knappers at work, not including the stone diggers; in 1878 the number had fallen to twenty-six, and there were ten diggers; in 1923 there were only four men engaged in flint knapping, of whom at least one had an alternative occupation, and one old man digging the flints, who has been a digger since boyhood. There was a steady trade in gun flints until 1914, but the war caused an interruption. Some of the men were needed for other work and, although they have since returned to their industry, it is in a flagging condition and the workers gave it as their opinion that it will probably die out.

The work of the flint knappers is described in detail in the monograph written by Mr. S. B. J. Skertchly in 1879. He shows that their tools and methods are based on those of their prehistoric forerunners, whereas the methods of the French knappers, who were at work until recently, show

a complete break with tradition. The one-sided pick still used in England is a remarkable link with the neolithic man's tools, for it is simply a replica of the deer's antlers used by him. The French use an ordinary double-headed pick. The neolithic tool used for flaking was a smooth, oval pebble of quartz. Later, a slight notch was made on one or both sides to give a better grip, and later still holes were drilled through and a small handle inserted. The old English flaking hammer was identical in shape with this stone tool, but a French hammer is now used.

Flints have been knapped in modern times at Beer Head, in Devon, where a landslip on the cliffs disinterred a quantity of black flints ready to hand, and also at Glasgow, but the Brandon industry seems to be the only one now surviving.

Ling Heath, where the flints are dug, is a common about one hundred and sixty acres in extent, held in trust for the poor of the village of Brandon a couple of miles away. The heath is let by auction every seven years and is usually leased for the sake of the game by the owner of one of the neighbouring estates. The lessee charges a groundage of 1s. 10d. for each 'jag' or cartload of flints which is taken away. A jag has been variously described as being about half a ton or one ton in weight. A jag which was weighed by Mr. Skertchly proved to be 13 cwt. 1 lb. Not more than fifty or sixty tons of flint are now removed annually. At one time there were elaborate unwritten laws as to digging rights, but now that only one digger is at work these have fallen into disuse.

The digger sinks a shaft from thirty to seventy feet in depth and brings up the big flints, as he finds them, on his head. There are three grades of flints—tops, walls, and floors—the first being of inferior quality. The flints are piled on the ground beside the shaft until a jag is collected, which is sold to the local flint knappers. Two days is the average time taken to bring up a jag, a pit yielding from two or three to four or five jags a week. The average time taken to sink a shaft thirty feet deep is three weeks. In 1923 a jag was sold for 15s., the buyer paying both groundage and carting.

After the flints have been dug there are four processes of manufacture—drying, quartering, flaking, and knapping. The flints are first dried before a fire to evaporate the moisture. The necessity for having them very dry makes the work unhealthy, the dusty particles which are thrown off in the other processes being inhaled by the workers.

In the quartering process the knobby flint is held on the



QUARRYING THE FLINTS



QUARTERING
FLINT KNAPPING

has been known to yield eighteen thousand flints, including some of the smallest size. The finished flints represent only a very small proportion of the bulk of the raw material. For example, from the jag of thirteen hundredweight which Mr. Skertchly weighed, the total number of flints made (10,850) weighed only one hundredweight six stone.

The most skilful of the knappers now at work can make four hundred finished flints in an hour, but his speed was said to be exceptional. Another man makes from seven hundred to eight hundred flakes, or about three hundred flints, in the same time. Mr. Skertchly estimates the average number of flints made in a minute as eight, which, representing four hundred and eighty in an hour if the pace was kept up, would seem to indicate that the speed of the knappers at that time (1879) was greater than at present.

The flints may be sold to a middleman in Brandon at from 5s. to 6s. a thousand, according to quality, or direct to the gun manufacturers at from 9s. to 12s. a thousand. The advantage of selling to the middleman is that he will take the knapper's whole output, so that the latter is sure of a regular weekly income, whereas the orders received from the gun manufacturers are irregular, and the knapper may be unlucky enough to have a large stock of flints of one particular size left on his hands for some time when the demand is only for other sizes.

Supposing that a knapper spends eight hours a week on the preliminary work, he might then make some 9,750 flakes in thirteen hours and in another thirty-two and a half hours would make 9,750 flints from these flakes. Thus, his output in a week of fifty-three and a half hours might sell for about £2 8s. 9d. (a minimum price) to the middleman, or for as much as £4 17s. 6d. direct to the manufacturers, but from this must be deducted about £1 as the price of the jag, with groundage and carting.

There is, of course, no possibility of the revival or development of the flint knapping industry, which is already an anachronism and is doomed to die out in the natural course of events. Although the industry is of considerable interest as a link with prehistoric times, its extinction cannot be regretted from the point of view of social reform owing to the fact that the work tends to engender consumption and diseases of the throat and chest. It is said that most of the workers die from these causes. There does not seem to be any means of improving the conditions of the industry, for the flints can only be worked in a dry state and it is their

dryness which causes the fine dust during the flaking and knapping processes, which permeates the whole workshop. The supply of flint lock rifles to the natives of Africa is hardly an end of sufficient importance to justify the continued employment of men in these unhealthy conditions.

Flint knapping is in no way related to any other rural industry except by the fact that a local cooper supports himself by making the kegs in which the flints are packed to send away.

INDEX

- Anglo-Belgian Lace Industries, 61.
- Apprenticeship, 5.
 In metal work, 90.
 In pottery, 145.
 In weaving, 33-4, 35-6, 37.
- Artificers' Guild, 15, 40, 41, 42, 73, 122.
- Artificial flower-making, 81.
- Arts and Crafts Movement, 3, 4, 116-17, 123, 124.
- Basket-making :
 The craft, 4, 88, 98-100, 108-9.
 Markets, 6, 116, 119, 122.
 Prospects, 127, 128-9.
- 'Battlejack' making, 78, 80, 93, 118-19.
- Bedford Lace Education Committee, 61.
- Bedfordshire Hand-made Lace*, A. A. Carnes, 59.
- Belgian refugees, 10.
- Blind workers, 39, 48-9, 111, 128, 129.
- Bowl-making, 80.
- Button-making, 81, 102, 114.
- Carnes, A. A.*, 59.
- Carpet factories, 8, 26.
- Chipping Campden craft workers, 74-5, 111, 116, 119-20, 122, 127.
- Clark, Alice*, 31.
- Coggeshall Tambour Lace Workers, 65, 67.
- Competition, *see* Factory competition.
- Cotton weaving, &c., 16, 18, 20, 29, 30, 37.
- Country Industries Trading Society, 113.
- Craft Guilds, *see* Guilds.
- Crippled Girls' Weaving School, Stratford-on-Avon, 15, 26, 28, 39, 41.
- Crippled workers, 15, 26, 39-41, 70, 81, 88, 106, 111.
- Dentelles aux fuseaux*, Les, Th. de Dillmont, 62.
- Dillmont, Th. de*, 62.
- Distribution, *see* Geographical distribution.
- Dorset Arts and Crafts Society, 73, 76, 81.
- Dyeing, 2, 15, 20, 29-31, 39, 41, 127.
- Earnings, *see* Wages and earnings.
- Education Act, 1870, 51.
- Embroidery, 73, 80, 82, 83, 101-2, 106, 117.
- Englishwoman Exhibition, 67, 117.
- Enham Village Centre, 88.
- Exeter Art School, 64.
- Exhibitions, as market for craft work, 6, 43, 67, 102, 116-17, 119, 123, 148.
- Ex-service men :
 In weaving, 9, 13, 31-2, 39.
 In other crafts, 80, 88.
- Factory competition, 1-3, 4.
 In lace-making, 51, 65, 82.
 In weaving, 25, 32, 35, 47.
- Feeble-minded, *see* Mentally deficient.
- Flax and linen weaving, &c., 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 29, 30, 31, 87.
- Flemish refugees, 9, 11, 50, 53.
- Flint knapping, 161-5.
- Flower-making (Artificial), 81.
- Fur craft, 83-4, 93-4, 127.
- Geographical distribution :
 Of flint knapping, 161-2.
 Of glass-making, 155-6.
 Of home crafts, 72-90.
 Of jet, 157.
 Of lace-making, 50-3, 82, 87.
 Of pottery, 131-6.
 Of serpentine, 159.
 Of weaving and spinning, 7-15.
- Glass-making, 155-6.
- Glove-making :
 Labour, materials, processes, 4, 81, 91-4, 109.
 Markets, 83, 85-6, 117-18.
 Subsidiary crafts, 92-4.
 Wages, 113.
- Great Exhibition, The*, 1851, 51.

- Guilds, 14, 15, 40, 41, 73-5, 116, 117, 119-20, 122, 133, 142.
- Gypsy workers, 78-9.
- Hand-loom weaving, *see* Weaving.
- Hand work *versus* factory work, 1-3.
- Handicrafts, Guild of, 74-5.
- Home Arts and Industries Association, 4, 42, 67, 72-3, 82, 103, 107, 116, 117, 123, 124.
- Home crafts :
 Definition, 4-5.
 Difficulties, 123-9.
 Geographical distribution, 72-90.
 Markets, 115-23.
 Organization, 72-90.
 Principal Crafts, 91-106.
 Workers, 106-115.
- Huguenot refugees, 9-10, 51.
- Huntingdonshire Pillow Lace Association, 60-1.
- Jet, 3, 157-60.
- Knitting, 79, 101-2, 109.
- Knox Guild of Design and Craft, 74.
- Lace-making :
 Foreign competition, 65, 69.
 Geographical distribution, 50-3, 82, 87.
 Markets, 65-7.
 Materials and apparatus, 53-60.
 Prospects, 69-71.
 Teaching and organization, 3-4, 60-5, 72, 125.
 Varieties, 60-60.
 Wages and earnings, 51, 67-9, 70, 112, 115.
 Workers, 67-71, 107-8, 128.
- Lapidary work, 157-60.
- Leather work, 78, 81, 92-4, 122, 126.
- Linen, *see* Flax and linen.
- Location, *see* Geographical distribution.
- London Craft Workers' Guild, 117.
- Lunn, Richard, 137.
- Machine competition, *see* Factory competition.
- Markets: *see also* Exhibitions and Shops.
 For baskets, 6, 116, 119, 122.
 For flints, 164.
 For gloves, 83, 85-6, 117-18.
 For handicrafts, 6, 79-80, 84-5, 115-23.
 For jet, 158.
 For lace, 65-7.
 For metal work, 119-20, 122-3.
 For pottery, 116, 117, 147-9.
 For serpentine, 159.
 For shoes, 119, 123.
 For sunbonnets, 119.
 For toys, 118.
 For weaving, 32, 42-5, 47, 48, 117.
- Mat- and rug-making, 19, 48-9, 80-81, 100-1.
- Mentally deficient workers, 15, 39-41, 111.
- Metal work, 4-5, 74-5, 81, 88-90, 105-6, 107, 109, 114, 116, 119-120, 122, 123, 125-6.
- Midland Lace Association, 61.
- Mole catching, 83-4, 93-4.
- Needlework, 101-3, 106.
- North Bucks Lace Association, 61.
- Northampton Lace School, 61-2.
- Northumberland Handicraft Guild, 73.
- Out-work, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 20, 21, 31, 33, 37, 49, 112-13, 124, 125.
- Papier mâché work, 105.
- Peasants' Art Guild, 41-2.
- Phillips, J., 130.
- Potteries of North Devon, The*, H. W. Strong, 130.
- Potters' Art in Devonshire, The*, J. Phillips, 130.
- Potters' Art Guild, 133, 142, 144, 148.
- Pottery :
 Location, raw material, products, 80, 130-6, 142-5.
 Markets, 147-9.
 Processes and materials, 136-44.
 Types and prospects, 2-3, 149-55.
 Wages and earnings, 144-5.
 Workers, 5, 144-7.
- Pottery*, R. Lunn, 137.
- Quilting, 5, 78, 103.

- Raffia work, 83, 88, 100, 112-13, 122.
 Red Rose Guild of Art-workers, 117.
 Refugees :
 Belgian, 10.
 Flemish, 9, 11, 50, 53.
 Huguenot, 9-10, 51.
 Ribbon weaving, 9, 20, 22, 23, 27, 31, 37-8, 47, 87.
 Rug-making, *see* Mat-making.
 Rural Community Councils, 125.
Rural Industries round Oxford, K. S.
 Woods, 52, 79, 80.
 Rush work, 5, 19-20, 76-7, 81, 87-8, 94-7, 107, 126.
Ruskin, John, 12, 90, 108.
 Ruskin pottery, 73.
 St. Dunstons, 49.
 St. Ives Handicraft Guild, 14.
 Serpentine, 3, 159-60.
 Shoe-making, 82, 104-5, 114, 119, 123, 126-7.
 Shops for sale of handicrafts, 43, 44-5, 66-7, 83, 84, 115-16, 120, 121-3.
 Silk weaving, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18-19, 20, 29, 30, 31, 38.
 Silversmiths (*see also* Metalwork), 74-5, 111, 119-20.
Skertchly, S. B. J., 161, 162, 163, 164.
 Smocking, 79.
 South Hunts Lace-Making Association, 52.
 Spinning (hand), *see also* Weaving :
 Cost, processes, workers, &c., 2, 17-18, 21-2, 27, 33-6, 39, 42, 46.
 Location and origin, 3, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 20, 33, 34-5, 41.
 Wages, 36.
 Wheels, 22.
 Stool-making, 80.
 Straw plaiting, 77-8, 87, 97-8.
Strong, H. W., 130.
 Studland Arts and Crafts, 81.
 Sunbonnet-making, 81-2, 102, 114, 119.
 Tapestry weaving, 26-7, 39.
 Toy-making, 81, 83, 88, 103-4, 118.
 Toynbee Hall, 74.
 Velvet weaving, 11, 28-9, 31, 38.
 Wages and earnings :
 For flint knapping, 162, 164.
 For glass-making, 155, 156.
 For glove-making, 113.
 For handicrafts, 112-15, 126.
 For jet work, 158.
 For lace-making, 51, 67-9, 112, 115.
 For metal work, 89, 114.
 For outwork, 112-13.
 For pottery, 144-5.
 For raffia work, 112-13.
 For shoe-making, 114.
 For spinning, 17-18, 21-2, 36.
 For sunbonnet-making, 114.
 For weaving, 21, 33, 35-41.
Watts, G. F., 133.
 Weaving and spinning (hand) :
 Cotton, 16, 18, 20, 29, 30, 37.
 Distribution and origin, 7-16, 80, 81, 86.
 Dyeing, 2, 15, 20, 29-31, 39, 41, 127.
 Flax and linen, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 29, 30, 31, 87.
 Looms, 22-8.
 Markets, 32, 42-5, 47-8, 117.
 Materials, &c., 16-20.
 Mats, 48-9.
 Organization, 41-2.
 Prices of apparatus, 28, 35.
 Processes, 20-31.
 Prospects, 2, 3, 45-8.
 Ribbon, 9, 20, 22, 23, 27, 31, 37-38, 47, 87.
 Shuttles, 24-5, 28.
 Silk, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18-19, 20, 29, 30, 31, 38.
 Tapestry, 26-7, 29.
 Velvet, 11, 28-9, 31, 38.
 Wages, 17-18, 21-2, 33, 35-41.
 Wool, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16-18, 19, 20-1, 29, 31.
 Women's Institutes :
 Encouragement of handicrafts, viii, 4, 5, 70, 71, 75-110, 113, 116, 118, 121-29.
 Shops, 44, 67, 121-3.
Woods, K. S., 52, 79, 80.
 Wool weaving, &c., 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16-18, 19, 20-1, 29, 31.