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The Hatters

By J. H. SMITH

R. Stevens.

FOREWORD
by
Harold Walker
General Secretary
Felt Hatters' & Trimmers' Unions of Great Britain.

I am sure that this booklet will be appreciated by all who are interested in the Industrial history of this country and in particular by those who have, in any way, been associated with the hatting industry.

Those of us who are proud of our Union and its long history are grateful to John Smith for so vividly recording its activities for over 200 years.

Harold Walker.

The making of felt hats was probably introduced into England soon after 1500 by immigrants from Normandy and the Netherlands, where the craft had been carried on for some hundreds of years. Before 1500 only the wealthiest people in England could afford felt hats but by 1579 enough felt hats were being sold to keep 3,000 English feltmakers at work, and the knitted cap was worn by fewer and fewer people.

During these years when the craft was growing, it was controlled by the Haberdashers Company, an organisation of merchants who imported wool, fur and hats, as well as selling the hats made by English Feltmakers. After a long struggle the feltmakers succeeded, in 1604, in obtaining a Charter for their own company and the Feltmakers Company was established.

In 1650 the Company became one of the city liveries and in 1667 received a second Charter under which it drew up a list of regulations for the feltmaking trade in the City of London. Under these regulations each master was allowed only 2 apprentices, and could employ no one who was not a member of the Company. For their part the journeymen were forbidden to raise wages by combining together and wages were fixed each year by a piecework list presented by the Company.

Many of the masters employed only one or two journeymen but some of them were on a bigger scale and increasingly prosperous and these greater masters exercised control over the company. When the apprentice became a journeyman he had to make his trial-piece, and the journeyman who wanted to set up as a master in London had to produce a masterpiece. In addition he had to provide a dinner for other masters and pay high fees for entry to the Company, and from 1667 on these fees rose so much that only a few journeymen could hope to become masters. They combined together, therefore, to raise wages, and as early as 1696 had a dispute with the masters in which they had their own club and paid regular subscriptions to it. One journeyman who accepted the masters' prices at this time was seized by apprentices, tied in a wheelbarrow and 'in a tumultuous and riotous manner' driven in it through London and Southwark.

Thanks to their skill and their organisation the London journeymen of the 1690's had good wages, 12s. to 20s. a week, as well as their board or, if they were married, their meals. Only the old men who worked at home on piece work rates were badly paid, the other journeymen getting rise after rise, until by 1700 they were among the best paid craftsmen in London.

It is almost certain that the trade clubs which were started soon after 1667 continued in operation right through the 18th century though we find little about them between 1708 and 1771. In this latter year a Congress of London hatters made a number of bye-laws for the trade which were adopted by hatter's societies outside London. There were regular meetings of this congress in the 1770's and by 1790 the clubs were more closely organised as the Hatters' Society of Great Britain and Ireland, usually known as the Fair Trade Union, with its head office in London. The Union established the system of blanks or travelling cards in the same year, issuing white blanks to members, as a proof of Union membership when they went on the tramp. Tramping in times of shortage of work had begun by 1708 and by 1800 every hatting district had its turn-house where the tramper could draw local benefit and find out if there was any work available.

By this time felt-hatting was being carried on in many parts of Great Britain but some areas, such as Manchester, Bristol, and Newcastle-under-Lyne, were developing more rapidly than others. In these 'country' districts most of the bodymaking and ruffing was done at the workers' own homes, or in small piece masters' shops, where there might be only one kettle and four or six planks.

Wages were, of course, lower than in London and manufacturers began to get more and more of their making done in the country, only bringing the hats to London for finishing and packing. As the country journeymen became more expert these processes too were carried on outside London, particularly in the Manchester area where both wool and stuff hats were made. Like the London men the country journeymen served a seven-year apprenticeship but in the early nineteenth

century the Lancashire men allowed masters to take more than two apprentices and this produced a split. The Fair Trade Union in London held to its apprentice rule and the northern men formed a separate society of seven-year men which issued blue travelling cards and was known as the Blue Blank Union. From 1820 until the 1840's these two unions, both of them made up mainly of finishers, worked to the same price lists but bitterly opposed each other on the question of apprenticeship, Blue Blank men even travelling to London to take the places of Fair Trade strikers. The makers, most of whom were domestic workers, were difficult to organise and, though they had periodic strikes, only special groups like the stuff body makers of Frampton Cotterell in Gloucestershire played a leading part in early nineteenth century unionism.

The struggle between the two unions was for control of the felt hatters but during the 1830's and 1840's a change came over the trade, and the felt journeymen rapidly fell from comparative prosperity to poverty. Since the late eighteenth century, hats of felt covered with silk plush had been made but when the bodies began to be made of light but stiff calico, and the finest French plush was skilfully used to cover them, silk hats became enormously popular. They were lighter and cheaper than the old stuff hats, took a good colour in dyeing and shone with a fine gloss. The felt journeymen had, on the whole, resisted learning how to make these hats and the silk hatters were not, at first, allowed to join the Fair Trade Union but by about 1850 the silk hatters were joining the Union and many felt finishers had become silk finishers. At this point the felt trade began to revive with new low-crowned soft and stiff felts both increasing in popularity together. As the demand for felt journeymen began to build up however the industry was struck by a new change, the introduction of machinery, and this produced a new situation for Unions and journeymen alike.

Before 1860 every process of fur hatting after the blowing of the fur, and many of the processes in wool hatting, were carried out by hand. The machine forming of wool bodies seems to have been invented before 1840 and many machine

bodies were used for wool hats, cordies as they were called, or were covered with a napping of fur for plated or ruffed hats. The fur for stuff or plated hats, was, however, bowed by hand in a bowgarret, then formed and hardened, planked, ruffed, finished and shaped, entirely by hand until 1859. In that year both Christy's of Stockport and Wilson's of Newcastle-on-Tyne began to use Fur-forming machines imported from the United States of America. Hardening and planking machines were also imported and the development of hydraulic presses for blocking and shaping and lathes for pouncing and luring soon mechanised work for the finishers as well as the makers.

The trade union position was now very complicated indeed and it is not completely clear today what was happening. The Fair Trade Union seems to have been in decay for a few years, being reorganised in Manchester in 1859 largely as a silk hatters' union but with a number of members in the felt trade. Many felt makers however remained outside the Union and during the mechanisation of the industry in the 1860's the unions seem to have been largely ignored, many new men being brought in and trained to work the machines. Old journeymen who had served their time to the handcraft disliked the machines but they could do nothing to stop them from being set up and worked.

In 1862 the Fair Trade Union revised its rules at a delegate meeting, again held in Manchester, an indication of the replacement of London by the North-West as the leading hatting centre. The new meeting was necessary because 'the laws agreed at Manchester in 1859 had not been sufficiently understood' and even at the end of the 1862 meeting it was stated that the broken fragments of the union had not all been reunited. The rules drawn up were probably similar to earlier ones in most respects and give us a picture of the life of the journeyman hatter in the days when it was a handcraft.

The contribution for members was 6d. per week and the out of work benefit was 7s. per week for 13 weeks, with a funeral benefit of £5. for each member or his wife. Each year a journeyman was allowed not more than 2 'turns' to look for work in other districts if he was unemployed and during

this time of tramping his wife would receive 6s. per week with 1/- for each child under 10 for 13 weeks. The journeyman himself received a certain sum of money for each journey, all of which were laid down in the rule book. If he started from Denton he would receive 9s. if he went to Bristol, 6s. if he went to Newcastle or Carlisle and other sums in proportion, falling to 1/- for Manchester, Oldham and Stockport. When he arrived at his destination, complete with his travelling book, he went to the 'turnhouse', a public house such as the Red Lion at Denton, and waited for the Union man or 'short turn' to come in, which he did every day. The 'short turn' would then take the man round the local hatting shops with his asking ticket and see if any master would give him a pad. If the journeyman got a start, all well and good, if not, he was allowed one rest day, paid for by the local district then set off on the tramp to the next district. If he fell ill on the road he was allowed 1/- per day until he went into an infirmary where he was entitled to 1/6d. per week. A member wanting an 'asking ticket' had to pay 10/6d. to the Union for it but presumably unemployed journeymen were allowed to get their tickets on credit, paying the money to the Union when they were back at work. In the case of a turnout, whether strike or lockout each journeyman received 12/6d. per week for 13 weeks, with 1/- for each child under 10.

Apprenticeship was for 7 years but the union had by this time lost its old rule of 2 apprentices to each shop and allowed one apprentice to two journeymen, 2 apprentices for 10 journeymen and one each for additional 10 journeymen. Piece masters who worked for larger houses, usually at body-making, were not allowed to take apprentices and any journeyman binding his son apprentice in a 'foul' or non-union shop was fined £2. 10s. 0d. No man was allowed to find his own candles or other light or pay walking money or standing room to the master.

Before the coming of machinery in the felt trade each department in a hatter's shop was virtually run by the men who worked in it. They were all pieceworkers and the speed of their work, and their earnings, were governed by their own skill and perseverance. A journeyman could work hard and steadily to make good wages at the busy season or, as some did, drink, talk or even sleep in the shop and be content

with a smaller wage. If a man did too little work the master would obviously 'give him the bag' but on the whole the hatters, as skilled journeymen, were very much left alone to organise their own shops. Even after the machines changed all this for the felt hatters the silk men carried on in the old way right up to the 1920's, cooking their meals in the shop and working in much the same way as their fathers and grandfathers had done.

There was, therefore, in 1862, a whole set of rules laid down to help in the running of the shop. A man could be fined £2.2s.0d. by the Union for robbing an employer or fined the same sum for accusing someone else of doing it without proof. Any man drunk in the shop was fined 5/- and drink was obviously a problem, for all the old compulsory dues, such as marriage beer, garnishes, plank beer, fancy gallons, wager beer and so on, were declared illegal. Formerly journeymen had 'caulked' or challenged each other, sometimes on trivial matters, the loser having to pay in beer drunk by the whole shop. 'Weighing out a caulker' or issuing a challenge was done in traditional style. 'I shall insist upon you proving — and paying or giving your word to pay for a gallon before you hat, cap, wig or waistcoat, roll up or roll down, or do any good for yourself, wife or family.' The men 'caulked' could either pay for a gallon or give the 'wrong-un', that is refuse, in which case a garret of the shop sat in judgement. If either man refused the verdict of the shop garret then a garret of the whole house was held and if the matter was still unsettled a 'dozening' of one man from each of the nearest twelve hat factories was called. But this long procedure of garret and dozening was, by 1862, used only for serious trade union matters and the fines were paid to the Union, not spent in beer for the shop.

Fighting too seems to have been a problem. If two men were fighting in the shop they were fined a total of 3/-, 2/- to be paid by the man who struck the first blow and 1/- by the other, unless the first blow was struck without provocation in which case the striker paid the whole 3/-. There were also rules against quarrelling, abuse, challenging to fight and interrupting at union meetings.

The procedure for governing the union seems odd to modern eyes, but was probably the traditional way of doing it. Each year the districts voted for the following years returning district. The successful district then collected all the national books of the union and elected an Executive Committee with a Secretary paid 7/6d. per week, all the members coming from the returning district. This committee then collected returns of membership and other necessary information from the other districts and made a levy on them if national funds fell below 5/- per man. If any district had a dispute it reported it to the returning district which consulted 2 other districts; if these 2 were unanimous that was the decision, if not the returning district had the casting vote. If a very important matter was raised a delegate meeting could be convened by the returning district if a majority of the trade agreed and districts were allowed one delegate for every 100 members.

There is no doubt that the Fair Trade Union was the only nationally organised union for hatters in the 1860's and, if societies of felt hatters did exist, they were small and only local in their scope. It was not until machine hatting and the growth in popularity of stiff and soft felt hats had revolutionised the industry that the feltmakers again began to appear as trade unionists in their own union.

In the 1870's the felt unions began to take shape. In 1872 the Society of Journeymen Hatters of Denton, almost certainly a district of the Fair Trade Union, issued its rules, based on the Fair Trade Union rules. At about the same time the Felt Hat Body Makers' Association of Denton and Districts was formed, its Executive Committee meeting at Guide Bridge. There were also a number of Hatters' Mutual Associations in existence at the same time and these seem to have been local unions of finishers which, like the Bodymakers, had an Executive Committee. By 1875 the Bodymakers and the Mutual Association executive committees were meeting jointly when necessary and had an Amalgamated Emergency Fund administered by a joint committee. At first the Fair Trade Union did not join in the Amalgamated Fund but by 1878 the Fair Trade districts at Denton, Stockport and Oldham subscribed to it. Hatters Mutual Association districts at Denton, Stockport, Hyde, Gee Cross, Hurst Brook and Bury and Bodymakers' districts at Denton, Stockport, Bredbury,

Hyde, Gee Cross, Hollinwood and Hurst Brook were also represented.

The districts of these societies were mainly small and often struggling, but they were active in trying to get a common rule for apprentices in all districts. They also attempted to clear the local shops, one by one, and to set up new districts outside the North-West. Relations with the Fair Trade Union were often difficult as some Fair Trade districts would not clear members of the Felt Unions for work with the result that the Felt Unions refused clearance for the Fair Trade. This bad feeling between the Unions was made worse in 1879 when there was a strike in a number of shops at Denton and Haughton over prices and apprentices. The Denton Fair Trade Union seems to have cleared these shops for its members and as a result the Emergency Committee collapsed. The Bodymakers and the Mutual Associations now decided to amalgamate and in June, 1879 they formed the Amalgamated Society of Journeymen Felt Hatters. Their intention was to unite all the felthatters in one union, but, quite apart from the very large numbers of journeymen working in unorganised districts and non-union shops, the Denton Fair Trade district at the King's Arms, Denton, would not join. It was not until 1888 when the Fair Trade Union became almost totally a Silk hatters' union that these Denton men joined the Amalgamated Society.

Even before the Amalgamated Society was formed strikes at Stockport and Bury had thrown some 250 men onto Union benefit and 75 men were still dependent on the Union at the end of 1879. The Society had spent £3,713 on benefits and its funds were so low that an appeal was made to all Trade Societies in the United Kingdom at the end of 1879, recommended by the Manchester & Salford Trades Council. The unhealthy state of the society can be seen from the fact that it had only 471 members in 1880, 293 of them in the Denton district. When members complained of conditions or wages in their shops the union committee could do little more than tell them to look for fresh ones.

The first General Secretary of the Amalgamated Society appears to have been Robert Stuart Redfern who later became Unitarian Minister at Great Hucklow, but the leading part in organising was taken by the Denton district secretary George

Wilde. Wilde became district secretary at Denton in 1880 when he was only 23 years old and he rapidly made his mark. In 1881 he added sickness benefit to dispute and funeral benefit and started a recruiting campaign in the Denton area. Between 1881 and 1891 the district membership grew from 293 to 1,300 and in 1889 it felt strong enough to establish out of work benefit in addition to the existing ones. Wilde was not content with the advancement of his own district only however, and he was a regular visitor in the other districts where he helped them to organise as well as helping to start new districts at Bredbury, Atherstone, Luton and Bristol. One of the minor irritations he got rid of in this period was the charge of 3d. or 6d. per week for tea, water and gas which some employers charged. His interest in wider labour questions was shown when he attended the Industrial Remuneration Conference in London in 1885.

Up to this time the Amalgamated Society had followed the traditional hatters' policy of organising only the men in the industry. Before mechanisation women had worked only in the fur cutting stage at the beginning of the hatting process in trimming, binding and removing kemps or coarse hairs at the finished hat stage. When mechanisation took place however, both women and youths were brought directly into felting on the wool forming machines and the number of women in the industry grew. Without any union to protect them, the women working the machines represented a continual threat to the men because of their lower wages and it was clear that the union would have to do something. The old tradition of hatting unionism was strongly masculine and there would certainly have been strong opposition among the men to allowing women to join the union but there were other equally important factors. The Society's subscriptions, based on men's wages, were comparatively high and would have been a serious burden to women in the industry, and the society's benefits were too important to members for subscriptions to be lowered. It would have been possible for women to be admitted at a lower rate of subscription and given correspondingly lower benefits but, in fact, Wilde established a separate society for women in 1886. In that year the Felt Hat Trimmers and Wool Formers' Association was set up and with its own funds and executive council, though its officers were those of the Amalgamated Society. We

know nothing of the discussions that resulted in the setting up of a duplicate organisation but it is possible to make some suggestion as to why this happened. The wool formers, whose work on machines was similar to that of many of the men, seem to have been keen trade unionists from the start but the trimmers, who worked separately in the trimming room or at home were not. Forming was a hard job that required little previous education, whereas trimming with its need for neatness, tidiness and some degree of taste tended to attract girls from a rather higher social class. There was too an important difference in expectations. The girl working a forming machine left the firm when she married or had children but the indoor trimmer who had children very often carried on her work for the firm at home. The formers therefore were quick to identify themselves with the male unionists but the trimmers were divided, many of them preferring to depend on loyalty to the firm as a safeguard for the future rather than supporting the union. In addition to this, trimmers generally seemed much more satisfied with their wages and conditions than other hat workers and they were suspicious that they were only wanted as members for their subscription money. If the trimmers were to be brought into the union it was necessary to recognise these attitudes and by giving the women control over their own society and its funds Wilde provided a framework that proved successful.

By 1888, with the Amalgamated Society growing and the Trimmers and Wool Formers' Association launched the Union could turn to its third problem, the use of youths, and in that year Wilde established a Juvenile Society to stop firms using unindentured youths on productive work.

By 1891 the Amalgamated Society had grown from 471 members to 4,200 and the women's union had enrolled 3,000 members in five years. It is hardly surprising that Wilde, the architect of this growth, became general secretary of the Amalgamated Society when Redfern left. His salary in 1880 had been fixed at 10/- per week and the 45/- per week he was given in 1891 on taking up his new post and the office provided for him at Denton were a recognition of his services to the hatters.

The 1880's were not easy times for hatters. In addition to the seasonal fluctuation of trade there was serious depression in 1883 and from 1885 to 1887. In 1886 letters to the 'Hatters Gazette' complained of wage reductions and the use of unapprenticed youths, one writer 'a poor hatter' claiming that 'hundreds of hatters have not known which way to turn this winter in order to live.' Another writer, supporting this, stated that many hatters had earned only from 6/- to 10/- per week during the winter. In December, 1886, the Denton district gave each of its members one dozen and a half of flour and six ounces of barm as a Christmas gift, another indication of depression in the trade. Similar Christmas gifts were made in 1887 by the Denton and Hyde branches in another period of distress. Paradoxically overworking was also a problem, and in 1889 the Society mounted a campaign to reduce the amount of overtime worked; by 1890 the Denton employers had agreed to a working week of 56 hours but the Hyde shops were still working longer.

There were also troubles of another kind. The growth of the union was not unnoticed by the masters, many of whom tried to bind their men under agreement, as at Moore's, Denton, in 1882. In 1887 a Hyde firm sacked all their men, 6 of them being Union members, and tried to replace them with fresh men who would work at lower prices. The Union had therefore to fight a series of disputes, most of them only small in numbers and duration, though one strike at Hurst lasted over 29 weeks.

In 1883 the Union had started to hold its meetings at the 'Jolly Hatters Arms' in Denton and from then on the headquarters of the Union remained in Denton. In 1884 a conference there produced a revised Rule Book in which the old objects of the union based on the defence of the members' welfare were supplemented by a new clause. This was 'the introduction of industrial co-operation in our trade by way of fostering Co-operative Hat Factories', and it seems to represent a move towards Syndicalism. It was however the more workaday sections of the rules that were of immediate importance. Members paid an admission fee of 1/- and weekly contributions of 6d. to their district, of which the district paid 6d. admission fee and 4d. per week per member to the

Society's Executive Council. This doubles the district contribution and undoubtedly strengthened the Executive Council at the expense of the districts particularly as no strike could take place without the sanction of the Executive Council. In return for his contributions the member received strike pay of 12/- per week plus 1/- for each legitimate child under 10, 16/- plus 1/- per child for victimisation benefit for 13 weeks and 10/- per week plus 1/- per child for fire and failure for 13 weeks. Funeral benefit for members was £3. after 12 months and £6. after 2 years, and for members wives £2. and £4. The Sick Fund contribution of 2d. per week was additional to the Union contribution and no one over 43 years of age was admitted. In addition to the weekly contribution there was an admission fee graduated according to age.

Age	s.	d.
21 to 25	2s.	0d.
25 to 30	4s.	0d.
30 to 34	6s.	0d.
34 to 37	7s.	6d.
37 to 40	9s.	6d.
40 to 43	11s.	6d.

Benefit was 8/- per week for 13 weeks, 4/- per week for 13 weeks and 2/6d. per week for 26 weeks.

Taken as a whole the Rules of 1884 differed very greatly from the old rules of the Fair Trade Union with which the Amalgamated Society had started its life. The workshop, caulking and fighting rules disappeared as did the whole subject of tramping for work, following the concentration of felt hatting in mechanised factories in a few centres. Another change from the same cause was the permanent headquarters at Denton which replaced the old system of elected Returning Districts and helped to stabilise the Union.

An English hatter, Francis S. Knowles, who visited the Paris Exhibition of 1889 with other artisans on behalf of the Mansion House Committee had some interesting things to say on English hatting. From his observations he claimed that the British were far ahead of any other nation and 'the wholesale price of our goods is sufficiently low to admit of a much

wider trade being done across the seas.' Felt hatters in the United States of America earned an average 48/- per week as compared with 28/- in England and American trimmers £2. per week against 15/- in England. French hatters earned less than the English but worked less hard and took two hours for lunch. Knowles observed that they were frugal in their eating and drinking and more thrifty than English hatters. He continued, 'There is one arrangement in the workshops of Paris which is highly objectionable from an English point of view, and that is, the presence of the female hands in the same rooms as the workmen, or within earshot. I commented upon this peculiarity, when in some of the factories; but was only laughed at, and told the English were pruders.'

The 1890's opened with the union claiming wages of 25/- for Pressers, 30/- for bodymakers and 35/- for finishers as well as the 56 hour week. An attempt was also made to recruit all the outdoor plankers, men who worked at home or in small commission shops, and to prevent the spread of employers using youths to do men's work. Internationally there was a complaint from the Finishers' Union in America that many British hatters were working foul in the United States as a result of which one British hatter who wrote to Denton for clearance was fined. In 1892 clearances for America were stopped because so many hatters were out of work there.

Organisationally the 1890's was a continuation of the developments of the 1880's. In 1890 Hyde and Stockport districts began to employ full time secretaries in addition to Denton and the resignation of George Wilde to become Secretary of the Grand Order of Oddfellows in 1894 opened the door to another capable man, Thomas Mallallieu. The whole character of the hatting unionism was reviewed in March and April, 1891, when there were proposals from members to amalgamate the men's and women's societies and to take labourers, engineers, stokers and warehousemen into the union. Both proposals were lost, the labourers being urged instead to join a labourers' union, and the craft and sex segregation continued. The Trimmers' Union revised its rules in 1893 and established the Amalgamated Council made up of delegates from the Districts as the equivalent of the men's Executive Council. Members paid an admission fee of 1/- and weekly contribution of 3d. to the District and the District

paid 3d. per week per member to the Amalgamated Council. In return for this the members received 5/- per week benefit for 13 weeks on Fire, Failure or Retirement, 6/- per week for strikes and lockouts and 7/- per week for victimisation. The Funeral benefit was £3.

The men too revised their rules in 1896 when they raised the admission fee to 10/- and the in benefit age for children from 10 to 13. They also ruled that no member should work on hats where non-union labour was employed without the consent of the District officials or Executive Council. Mr. Mallallieu used the publication of the new rules as an opportunity for a bugle call "— in our own, as in other Trade Spheres, the manufacturers have felt it necessary to establish combinations to safeguard their interests against the "encroachments" of labour. These efforts of the capitalistic class, should serve as a Warning Note of the highest order for the Workman to combine." The employers' habit of calling non-union people free labour roused him still further, "Weak in his own defence — the very slave of his employers' will and caprice is the man thus held as "free"."

Behind this apparent antagonism to the employers the union was aware of the need to reach realistic agreement with firms and from 1891 on there was gradual progress in negotiating with the employers. The union's policy was to meet employers in each district, starting in Denton where the union was strong, to negotiate district price lists. The policy was successful in Denton, Hyde and Bury, but Stockport, where the unions were weak, proved much more difficult and in Warwickshire it ran into disaster. At Atherstone, a wool felt centre, the employers had 2 lists of prices, one for men and a lower one for women doing the same work. Some of these prices were only 1/5th of the Denton list prices and in May 1892, the Atherstone employers reacted to Union pressure by locking out all the union employers. The dispute was fought out in great bitterness with the employers bringing in knobsticks from Nuneaton and some of the locked out men summoned under the Conspiracy Act. By October the unions were hoping for a settlement by arbitration but the employers were adamant and in December many Atherstone members were allowed by the unions to go back foul on the employers' terms. Even so there were still 400 men and women

out of work in Warwickshire in February, 1893, and the Unions had suffered a major defeat after spending almost £15,000. The Atherstone district president had to move to Bury in May, 1893, before he could find work, the union allowing him £7. 13s. 3d. for removal expenses.

The success and failure of the union policy in different districts posed some problems for the union. The Denton employers found themselves paying for work on a higher list of prices from their competitors in Hyde, also Union shops, the prices in Stockport were even lower and the Warwickshire lists were rock bottom. The unions had to offer some compensating advantage to employers who had co-operated and also to attempt to stop work leaving Union shops for the cheap non-union employers. The method chosen by the union was more common in the United States than in England and the Society followed the example of the American hatters in promoting a Union Label. The pink labels, twice as large as a postage stamp, were gummed to the leathers inside hats made by Union labour and a great advertising campaign was mounted to make everyone aware of them. Letters were sent to retailers and trade unions, posters and showcards were printed, advertisements inserted in newspapers and trade union journals and even sandwich men tramped the streets of Manchester carrying label posters. Most manufacturers with Union shops found the Union label a bitter pill to swallow but in the first four months of 1895, when the label had been reduced to postage stamp size, over two million labels were issued.

The organisation of men in the trade had reached a peak in 1891 with 4,258 members and after that year membership of the Amalgamated Society fell to just over 3,000 in 1900. Increasing use of machinery and a drift away from the union seem to have been responsible and the union, shaken by the Atherstone defeat, was unable to halt the drift. The women's society too, fell from 3,399 to 2,303 members and in 1899 thanked the men for writing off a debt of £4,100. incurred during the Atherstone dispute. In 1899 the unions voted to join the General Federation of Trade Unions.

The new century saw both the men's and women's societies eager to make progress and the first move was at Ash-

worth's of Bury where the trimmers were canvassed. The effort here failed after a strike of 21 weeks and some Bury members received benefit for 14 months before the Trimmers' Executive stopped payment in January, 1904. The women were still in a militant mood however and the full weight of the men's union was thrown behind them. With Denton and Hyde well organised the great effort was directed at Stockport where the women were almost completely non-union and only a minority of men members of the Union. Some of the Stockport masters were generally friendly to the men's Union but had no women union members while a few, among them the largest firm in the country, were traditionally hostile to any kind of Unionism.

By early 1907 the stage was set for a great campaign in Stockport. The two unions had, between them, over £26,000. in their pockets, their members were ready for the struggle and the officials almost certainly believed that the Stockport masters, always reluctant to work together, could be picked off one by one. In February the Trimmers' Union had claimed all trimming work 'as belonging to our members' and in March instructed the General Secretary to 'take such action as may be necessary to secure the legal abolition of Outworkers in our Trade.' The scene was set and the issue was clear.

On April 27th the Union opened their campaign by writing to the trimmers at Woodrow's works giving them one month to join the Trimmers' Association. The women refused and in such uncomplimentary terms that the men at Woodrow's threatened a strike unless the firm compelled the women to join. Woodrows refused and on June 15th, 60 of Woodrows men came out on strike. Woodrows now called a meeting of the Stockport Masters' Federation which threatened the Union with a lock-out if the strike continued. On July 4th the Mayor of Stockport persuaded the two sides to meet and after a long discussion both the strike and lockout were called off. The Woodrow trimmers were then enrolled in the Union.

The Woodrow dispute was a victory for the Unions, not only because the trimmers there joined, but even more because of the masters' actions. The threat of a lockout affec-

ted all workers in the trade, whether Union members or not, since the absence of Union people would close down virtually all production. As a result of this, many workpeople saw themselves as threatened by the masters and rushed to join the Unions in their own defence. By the end of September only three firms in Stockport were standing out against the Unions and one of these, Chestergate Hat Manufacturing Company, was dealt with in a similar way to Woodrow's. The only large firm left resisting the Union after then was Christys.

With virtually all the trimmers in the Union the emphasis now shifted from women to boys, and from Stockport to Denton. Many Denton masters employed boys on both forming and planking machines and the Unions decided to make an attack on these. In brief the Union case was that five-year apprenticed men were unemployed while boys were operating the machines they should have worked at half their wages. A man's wage averaged 34/- a week while the boys received 16/-. The masters reply to this was that the boys, unhampered by Union regulations, did half as much work again as the men and were economically necessary. In July the Union gave three month's notice to Moores of Denton that their members would no longer work with non-union labour on settling machines and sat back to await results. Denton had been for many years a Union stronghold and the officials must have been confident that after breaking their enemies in Stockport, the Denton masters would give way. They were wrong. In October the Denton masters handed out lockout notices and when, on November 1st, Moores' journeymen began their threatened strike the Denton masters shut up their shops, leaving 4,000 people without work. Worse was to come, for the Hyde and Stockport masters, seeing a chance to halt the progress of the Unions, joined the lockout and by the end of November, 10,000 hatters and trimmers were on the streets. Even Christys of Stockport never willing to act with other masters joined them in the lockout.

The workpeople now found themselves in a sad state. Union men had 17/- per week plus 1/- for each child but this was a sad fall from wages of £1. 15s. 0d. to £3. 5s. 0d. Non-

union people had nothing, of course, apart from a small Distress Fund donated by the Union, and many were forced to go to the Board of Guardians. In mid-December the dispute was ended through the mediation of Mr. Dunne, who was a large buyer of hats, but in reality his mediation only saved the Union from surrender. The position at Moores remained unchanged and the Unions had gained nothing. When the hat shops re-opened just before Christmas the workpeople had lost eight weeks' production. Even before the dispute Malla-lieu had said that he never liked to see a hatters' strike last over three weeks because of loss of markets and wages. The winter of 1907 must have strengthened this view.

So far as membership is concerned the disputes of 1907 were beneficial to the Trimmers' Union, whose membership revived from 1,984 in 1905, to 3,173 in 1908. The men also gained, from 3,302 in 1906 to 3,837 in 1907 and this was more significant since men's membership was more stable than that of the women.

In 1908, possibly as a result of the dispute, the Amalgamated Society again revised its rules. A new object was introduced, the obtaining of 'direct Labour representation on all public bodies and in Parliament' and it was laid down that a majority at a general meeting could approve the use of the Union's 'influence and funds' for this purpose. Contributions rose to 10d. per week and a new benefit of 8/- per week plus 1/- for each child under 14 for slackness of trade or breakdown was introduced. The Union also tried to tackle the problem of unemployment from another angle by prohibiting overtime when there were members unemployed, and limiting it to six hours in any one week whatever the state of trade. A new group of clauses focused attention on the outdoor plankers and battery masters, a group of workers traditionally used by masters to evade union control. Battery masters' shops were to be registered with the Union and follow the usual procedure of asking cards for new plankers. They were not to open before 6 a.m. or open after 7 p.m. or 12 noon on Saturdays and no apprentices were to be allowed in them. Another harsh sounding regulation was that no battery master could employ anyone to pad his work unless he was aged, and finally, members displaced by machinery were allowed to learn another branch of the trade but not in an

outdoor plank shop. The Union seems to have been determined to tidy up a dark corner of the trade.

From 1908 on organisation of the Industry proceeded quietly but effectively and the recruitment of Christy's trimmers in 1912 marked the virtual unionisation of the Northern trade. All the great hat firms embracing the greatest part of the men's felt trade were now union shops though Christys still refused to meet or negotiate with Union officials until the Great War forced them to co-operate.

The start of the Great War in August, 1914, caused a crisis in hatting as firms in a very vulnerable export trade tried to assess their position. All the hatworks closed for a short time and some of the smaller ones never re-opened but soon the depleted labour force was back at work on government and civilian work. From the workpeoples point of view the war meant more work, since there were fewer hatters to do it, but the rise in the cost of living cancelled any advantage gained. In 1916, pressed by the Union, the employers raised the price of hats and increased mens' wages by 5% to 15% for men and 10% to 20% for women. The journeymen were guaranteed not less than 36/- for a week of 55½ hours.

This increase was rapidly swallowed up by higher prices and in 1917, special war increases of 10% for men and 20% for women were agreed, the men's minimum wage rising to 40/-. In 1918 there were some adjustments to correct the relative wages of different groups and hours were reduced from 55½ to 49 without any rise in rates.

The return of peace in 1918 brought a revival of the international hat trade and the Unions looked for further improvements for their members. A joint conference between the Manufacturers Federation Executive and the Union Executives in April, 1919, increased the War Bonus from 60% to 65% and reduced hours from 49 to 46½ per week but it was far less than the Union had wanted. No doubt the Unions hoped that with trade buoyant their claims were only postponed but in 1920 the hatting boom collapsed and manufacturers and workpeople alike saw an increasingly hatless public. Stiff hat sales were the first to decline but soft hats too sold in fewer and fewer numbers despite continual changes in

styles and colour. Wages were increased by negotiation in 1924 and 1929 and the membership of both Unions remained fairly steady, up to 1939 men at 3,700 to 4,000, women at 3,200 to 3,600. During the 1930's the average journeyman's wage for a full week was £4. 10s. 0d. but in many firms there was a good deal of short time and seasonal unemployment. The only major dispute was one at Bury in 1938 which cost the Union almost £5,000, and was marked by a successful appeal by the Union for the restoration of the strikers' Unemployment Benefit.

The Amalgamated Society rules were again revised in 1926 when admission rose to 20/-, asking cards to 20/-, and weekly contributions rose to 1/3d. Benefits too were raised by 15/- and 1/6d. per child under 16 for Fire, Failure etc. 18/- plus 1/6d. for Disputes and 24/- plus 1/6d. for Victimisation. Funeral benefit rose to £9. for a member and £6. for a member's wife. In that same year the Union seems to have opposed the General Strike though the Executive gave £1,000 to the Miners' Federation.

Thomas Mallallieu did a little research for the 1928 Annual Report of the Amalgamated Society and produced some interesting information. In 1900 when hours were over 55½ the average age of members at death was 45 years 9 months and one-half of them died with chest complaints. By 1927 with the 46½ working week and improved conditions the average age at death was 64 and only one-quarter died from chest complaints. This improvement would probably appear less marked if the age structure of the union and number of retired members were taken into account but it certainly indicates a real improvement in the industry.

During this period the Unions changed their headquarters twice, moving to 111 and 113 Manchester Road, Denton, in 1925 and then to 14 Walker Street, Denton, in 1935. The latter was a sad year for the Unions. Thomas Mallallieu, the General Secretary for 41 years, died and the whole labour movement of the area mourned a devoted comrade. Once again there was an able man to fill the breach and Fred Worthington succeeded as General Secretary to both Unions.

The start of the Second World War in 1939, the first year of holidays with pay, was similar to 1914 in that it brought confusion to the hat trade. Once again however the industry was busy during the war though the policy of concentration in 1942 closed many workshops for the duration of the war.

In addition to the many men and women released for more vital war work by concentration no fewer than 1,156 out of 3,694 members of the men's union served in H.M. Forces.

The end of the war in 1945 once again brought a brief flurry of good trade for the hatters as Britain mounted a series of export drives in the late 1940's but once again the boom did not last. All over the world the wearing of hats declined, a result perhaps of the spread of the motor car or a growing informality of fashion. Whatever the cause, the trade fought back with advertising and publicity campaigns but these could do no more than slow down the decline of the trade. As firm after firm found itself short of orders a series of closures and amalgamations took place affecting the oldest and most famous firms in Britain. The effect on union membership was dramatic. In 1939 the men's union had a membership of 4,004 and there were 3,325 members in the women's society; by 1965 there were only 1,553 men and 1,337 women in the unions and there was no sign that the shrinkage of the trade was slowing down.

Despite the unfavourable state of trade it was still the duty of the union to try to maintain and, if possible, improve, the living standards of its members. Neither manufacturers nor unions could now risk disputes on the scale of the great struggles of the past and patient diplomacy was necessary on both sides if the trade was to survive. On the union side this kind of leadership was amply provided by Fred Worthington and his right hand man, the Denton secretary, Percy Wilson. In 1951 he negotiated a comprehensive agreement with the manufacturer's federation which laid down a basic framework of industrial relations within the trade and set up machinery for reviewing wages and conditions and settling disputes. Under this agreement wages and bonus payments have been kept up to the level of other trades and there have been steady improvements in hours and holidays.

In 1945 the working week was 46½ hours but this was reduced to 42 hours in 1962 and again to 40 hours in 1965. During the same period holidays have been increased from 1 to 3 weeks plus 7 statutory days in 1968 and holiday pay arrangements have been improved by replacing the old fixed rate by average individual weekly earnings. In 1967 when Fred Worthington retired after a lifetime of service he was able to hand over a good working agreement to his successor Harold Walker.

This then, told in brief, has been the story of the hatters, a body of men with great pride in their ancient craft and hard won skills. Like other craftsmen of the old trades that flourished before the coming of the factory system they had to face the introduction of machinery and the rise of great and powerful masters. They also had to contend with the force of fashion which could make them prosperous in one year and paupers in another. For over two hundred years they put their faith in unionism, maintaining some organisation even in the worst times and always fighting, not just for wages, but for the dignity of the craft. Traditionally, since the time of Queen Elizabeth the First they have described themselves as gentleman hatters and as long as hats are made they will unite together to protect their ancient independence.