

The changes in industrial relations and working conditions of the needle makers around Redditch, 1802-1878

- Introduction – The early state of industrial relations and working conditions in Redditch.
- The economic factors and conditions that led the manufacturers to form a tight combination and the workers to change their method of strikes, riot and destruction of machinery from 1846 onwards.
- Improvements of industrial relations, underestimation of the influence of the 1845 National Union, refuting local folklore and future work.
- Impact – What will happen to this research?

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- The needle – makers around the Redditch area were a mixture of employers, subcontractors and workers with over half the men, women and children in the area employed in the highly specialised trade. Many Factory Acts passed in this era did not apply to metal working trades. Yet from the 1850's the employers across this area almost unilaterally sought to change working practices to meet many of the Acts whilst petitioning Parliament to include their trade in the Acts.
- Using early trade union research, local and national newspaper archives, census and economic tariff data and local employers' personal archives, this research seeks to answer the question, "What made the employers suddenly seek to follow the Acts?" Scientific experimentation on the needles themselves has also been started to compare foreign needle quality to determine if the Redditch area had an advantage in material quality or workers' skill.
- Research so far has emphasised the importance of the export market and foreign competition and employers' strategies to retain skilled workers in the area, preventing migration. This is supported by the initial scientific study of the needles themselves showing Germanic competitors used an equivalent standard of metal. However, it has also revealed that the workers, influenced by key Chartists, were instrumental in forcing the hand of their employers through negotiation and conciliation techniques initially supported by a national union; an early form of industrial relations that was to continue to influence the industry beyond the period studied.