
Who were the handloom weavers?

The handloom weavers have left their mark on Blackburn. Their characteristic cottages can still be seen on the fringes of town. You can usually tell a handloom weavers' cottage by the row of windows, now often blocked up, which let light into the cellar loom shop.

They often date to the middle of the 18th century. The handlooms were placed in cellars because the damp atmosphere helped to prevent the cotton threads from breaking. The weaver received spun yarn for their loom and sold their finished cloth to a 'putter-out', who traded in cotton goods at local and regional markets.



Old handloom weavers cottages, Blackburn. © [BwD](#)

BM&AG

Blackburn Museum
& Art Gallery

WWW.BLACKBURNMUSEUM.ORG.UK

Who were the handloom weavers?



Darwen's Last Hand-Loom Weaver, Mr. Edward Eccles, 1911. © [BwD](#)

Handloom weavers often worked on a system of credit, taking spun yarn in part payment for their cloth. Their business operated on the simple economics of supply and demand – as long as they had a steady source of yarn, weavers could charge a fairly high price for their labour-intensive product.

The invention of new spinning machines simply meant that weavers had more spun yarn than they could weave. More people were

BM&AG

Blackburn Museum
& Art Gallery

WWW.BLACKBURNMUSEUM.ORG.UK

Who were the handloom weavers?

encouraged to invest in a loom and take up the trade – 240,000 handloom weavers were producing cloth in 1820, earning around 3s 7d for each piece of calico they wove.

All this changed with the widespread introduction of the power loom from about 1805. Rumour spread that an unskilled boy could weave three and half pieces of material on a power in the time a skilled handloom weaver could weave one. Demand for hand-woven cloth fell as the new machines were introduced. By 1825, with around 60,000 power looms in action, the average earning for each piece of handloom weaver's cloth fell to around 2s. The long decline had begun.