

Mealbank Weavers went on Strike

Annie Edmondson was Born in 1918 and interviewed in 1993

I was born and lived in Mealbank. I lived with my mother and father three brothers and three sisters I was the youngest and the only one born in Mealbank. We lived in a three bedoomed house plus a big attic which was like a bedroom. Downstairs there was as living room, and a sitting room and an extension back kitchen with an old black-leaded grate. The toilet was outside across the green.

My mother was a lovely pianist. She played at Gillingate Chapel for years on the organ and piano. We had a piano in the house. Me eldest brother could hear a tune on t'wireless and could then sit down and play it, no effort but he couldn't read a note of music. I could play but I wouldn't call meself a pianist.

Mother used to walk twice a week into Kendal for shopping. There was only a bus on a Saturday – Mitchells used to run it. They used to come up to the village for nine o'clock and used to come back from the corner of Wildman Street at twelve. There was another came to the village about six o'clock in the evening for the pictures then one back at nine and another back at eleven o'clock. If you missed that you walked home. Sometimes, if you were lucky Mr Shepherd, he was like gentry, and had a horse and trap would give her a lift. He was often drunk as a newt; it was a good job horse knew it's way home.

We all had bikes. Me Dad used to have one as well but he daren't ride it downhill in case the brakes failed and he couldn't ride it uphill because he was too puffy. We used to say "Me Dad's taking t'bike for a walk again." I've biked home many a time after t'second house of pictures at eleven o'clock and if you met anybody on't way they'd shout "Night" and you never thought that anything could ever happen to you – and it never did!

We went to Sedbergh for dances when we were young. They used to have them up at Kendal Town Hall. It used to be about half-a-crown and that included your supper. We used to have a dance at Skelsmergh Church Hall. There was always plenty of dances in Kendal, there was the Labour Hall, Conservative Club, Parish Hall and there was the Town Hall. We used to go to boxing and all-in wrestling on a Friday night in the Ike Kilshaw's rooms on Sandes Avenue, that's where the Sports Shoe Shop is now.

There were the picture houses, three of them, the Palladium and the Kinema we used to call it then, Roxy later. You'd a choice of six films 'cos they changed the film on Wednesday. There were rep companies used to come to St Georges Theatre which frequently had plays. Stratford Johns a well known TV actor who had a leading role in "Z Cars" took part quite frequently.

The railways used to run trips to Morecambe. A shilling was your rail fare and your ticket into the Winter Gardens. I was courting then and coming back from Morecambe the lads and lasses got in a carriage and they'd take the light bulb out so it was dark. But they never broke any. They always carefully put them back.

A week before I was 14 the t'manager of the Mealbank Mill, Mr Robinson just called. He lived in the school house. He said "Your daughter can start on Monday if she wants." There was no looking for a job it was just there. Me sisters already worked in the mill. One of me brothers worked there for a bit, and he didn't like it. There were more women than men but there were some jobs that were men's work.

To start with I worked one loom but later on they brought in two looms which caused a strike. We'd no union. There was never a union got into the mill. They tried but they couldn't get in. They brought this idea of two looms out. When you first started you got seven shillings a

week and if you didn't make anything you didn't get any wage. So when we found out those people with two looms were guaranteed twelve shillings and sixpence a week before they made anything well that caused a riot. So the Order Hand just came round and knocked our loom handles off. "You're on Strike" he said. So we all sat in the yard and the owner of the mill, Mr Applegate, came and said "What's the to do? So we told him and we all walked back down to Kendal and said "Now nobody goes back. We daren't we were only young then. That was on the Wednesday. I can allus remember and on Saturday we all got the word to go back, "You've all got t'word to go back; you've all got the same. We went back on the Monday, that was the strike over, which was easier than if we'd had a union.

Once we got on "Piece" the money wasn't bad at all. You always handed your wages over and got pocket money. I got ninepence a week pocket money and you could do quite a lot with ninepence – fish and chips was only three pence.

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