

Arthur Young on the Southern Woollen Industries, 1768

(Arthur Young. *A Six Weeks Tour, through the Southern Counties of England and Wales*, 1768, 58-9, 99-101, 171; in J. T. Ward, ed., *The Factory System, Vol. I, Birth and Growth* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp. 35-36. Before the Industrial Revolution, the woollen industry was widely spread around the country and was particularly strong in such southern areas as Norfolk and the West Country. From)

[24 June 1767]

From *Hadleigh* I continued my journey to Sudbury, an exceeding dirty, but a great manufacturing town. I made such enquiries as were most likely to acquire some good information relative to their manufactures; and my intelligence ran as follows: they possess a great number of hands, who earn their livelihood by working up the wool from the sheep's back to the weaving it into says and burying-crape, which are their principal articles. The spinning is here a poor business; a stout girl of 15 or 16, not being able to earn above 6d. a day; but the combing is the best of all their employments, yielding from 12s. to 14s. a week; the weavers of the says and burying-crape earn from 7s. to 9s. but the first price the most common; besides these articles they weave ship-flags, which employ the women, and girls of seven or eight years of age, yielding the latter about 2s. 6d. or 3s. a week. The whole manufactory works chiefly for the *London* markets; but some says go down their river (which is navigable hence to *Maningtree*) for exportation.

[2 July 1767]

Witney is very famous for its woollen manufactory; which consists of what they call kersey pieces, coarse bear-skins, and blankets. The two first they make for the *North American* market; vast quantities being sent up the river *St. Lawrence*, and likewise to *New-York*. Their finest blankets, which rise in price to 3 *l.* a pair, are exported to *Spain* and *Portugal*; but all are sent to *London* first in broad-wheel waggons, of which, four or five go every week. The finest wools they work, come from *Herefordshire* and *Worcestershire*, and sell from 8d. to 10d. a pound. The coarsest from *Lincolnshire*; they call it dag-locks; they sell for 4 1/2d. *per lb.* and are used for making the coarse bear-skins. There are above 500 weavers in this town, who work up 7000 packs of wool annually. journeymen in general, on an average, earn from 10s. to 12s. a week, all the year round, both summer and winter; but they work from four to eight, and in winter by candle-light; the work is of that nature, that a boy of fourteen earns as much as a man. One of seven or eight earns by quilling and cornering, 1s. 6d. and 1s. 8d. a week, and girls the same. Old women of 60 and 70 earn 6d. a day in picking and sorting the wool: a good stout woman can earn from 10d to 1s. a day by spinning; and a girl of 14, four pence or five pence. They weave according to the season; in winter kerseys and bear-skins ready for shipping in the summer up the *St. Lawrence*; and in summer blankets for home consumption, and *Spain* and *Portugal*. One remarkable circumstance is, that none of the manufacturers ever work for the

farmers. The blankets usually purchased at home, are about 23s. or 24s. a pair, ten quarters wide and twelve long; and the comers are wrought for a halfpenny a piece.

[13 July 1767]

As to manufactures, there are considerable ones of flannels and linseys at *Salisbury*; at which the journeymen earn from 7s, to 9s. a week the year-round: and at Romsey, near 500 hands are employed in making those shalloons which are called Ratinetts: the journeymen earn, on an average, 9s. a week all the year; and a girl of sixteen or eighteen, a shilling a day by weaving, but in the neighbouring village, by spinning, not above half as much; the children are employed at quilting very young.