

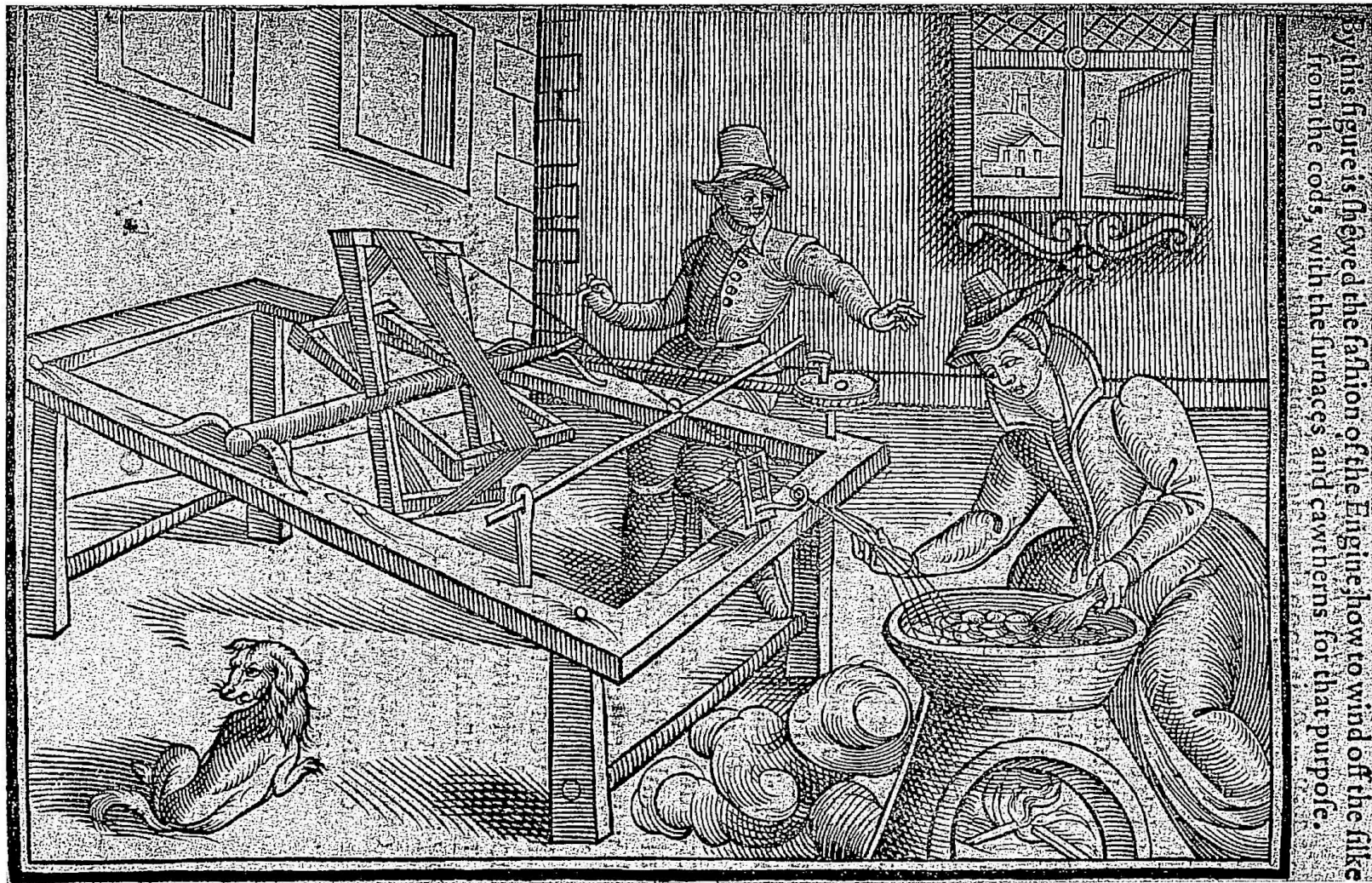
Promoting silk production in England



Jan van der Streit, known as Stradanus, was a Flemish artist working in Italy. In 1600 he produced a series of engravings showing how the secret of silk-making was brought from the east to the Roman empire, how mulberry trees were used to raise silkworms, and how silk was used and produced. This print showed women and children working in the silk industry, from his

Vermis Sericus, (c. 1600). Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth Century London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 88.

In 1559 silk fabrics constituted 3.3% of imports and 5.1% in 1622. Raw silk was 1.1% of imports in 1559 and 7.5% in 1622. During the 17th century as a whole, silk imports constituted from 23% to 29% of the value of all imports. By the late 17th century, silk, either raw, or as silk thread worked especially by the weavers in Spitalfields, London, was the most valuable of all raw material imports to England. The French developed a silk industry in the early 16th century. In 1599 William Lee developed a loom on which to knit or weave silk in England. In 1607 King James I took a direct role in promoting the development of a silk industry. He encouraged the planting of mulberry trees and the raising of silkworms. He even had four acres of mulberry trees planted on what is now the site of Buckingham Palace in London. The campaign to promote the silk industry in England used the language of mercantilism to argue that this industry would encourage employment through import substitution. He also encouraged the publication of Nicholas Geffe's translation of Oliver de Serre's, *The Perfect Use of Silk-Wormes and their Benefit* (1607), see the illustration below. The book included woodcuts explaining how to raise silkworms. These prints were used in every English tract on silk between 1607 and 1655. Despite the importation, distribution and planting of mulberry trees during the reigns of the early Stuarts, the attempt to produce silk in England failed. James I encouraged the Virginia Company to grow silk in the new world. This encouragement of the development of an English colonial silk industry was continued by Cromwell and the later Stuarts.



By this figure is shewed the fashion of the Engine, how to wind off the filke
from the cods, with the furnaces and cawtherns for that purpose.

Nicholas Geffe's translation of Oliver de Serre's, *The Perfect Use of Silk-Wormes and their Benefit* (1607). Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth Century London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 94.

While the importation of raw silk continued to increase during the 17th century, the importation of silk fabrics decreased as the English silk fabric industry expanded. James I sought to develop a skilled labor force in the industry and under Charles I silk throwers were incorporated in 1629. The working of silk was originally begun in England with the immigration of French Huguenots during the 1580s. Another wave of Huguenot skilled silk workers came into the industry after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. Despite the importation of Indian silk fabric to England by the East India Company, by 1700 silk manufacturing had become an important industry in England and even allowed English silk exports to challenge both the French and Italian silk industries. In 1716, Thomas and John Lombe brought back plans from Italy for a silk factory. They took out a patent in 1718 for three silk-throwing engines based on Italian plans: “one to wind the finest raw silk, another to spin, and another to twist the finest Italian silk into organzine.” The Lombe brothers opened a water-powered silk mill in Derby in 1721, pictured below. It was the first mechanical textile factory in England and should be recognized as such. It was a five-story building, which according to Daniel Defoe, had 26,586 wheels and 97,746 movements. Parts of the original mill building is now occupied by Derby’s industrial history museum. See Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth Century London*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 85-111.



An eighteenth century view of Lombe's water powered silk mill in Derby



Lombe's early eighteenth century silk mill as Derby's industrial museum.