

Memories of Kibworth's Factories 1920-1980

By Rose Holyoak

[Rose was assisted during the recording of this article by her cousin Doreen Deacon, nee Holyoak]

Johnson and Barnes had a hosiery factory on the corner of Fleckney Road and Dover Street. They were manufacturers of ladies' stockings and men's socks, and the factory was an important employer for people in Kibworth and the surrounding villages such as Smeeton, Great Glen and Burton Overy. These products were knitted from cotton, rayon and cashmere wool yarns.

My father Jack (John William Logan Holyoak) worked at the J & B factory, as did my Uncle Dick (Dick Holyoak), my Uncle Vic (Ernest Victor Iliffe) and Aunt Polly (Mary Florence Iliffe, Vic sister). I personally did not work there but did go in the premises occasionally with my uncle: he was responsible for feeding the cats over the weekends. The factory had long sheds in which there were large frame knitting machines which the men looked after. Offices and the warehouse were also on the ground floor. Women were the main workers on the upper floor, with large windows for good light, carrying out fine work such as linking, and sewing toes and heels on to the stockings. In the 1920s, to supplement the meagre family income, mother (Alice Emily nee Iliffe) did some 'running on' work.



Vic Iliffe in the 1950s



For many years Uncle Vic was the Chief Mechanic: in World War 2 he supplied his own kitchen table to provide a base for the air-raid siren on the factory roof. The table remained there until the factory was demolished in July 1993 as shown in the photograph. Cousin Doreen worked at J & B's in the mid-1950s, also doing linking: one was paid by the dozen units completed and if the machine broke down your pay was nil until it was back in action. Dyeing and other finishing of stockings and socks were

carried out at another J & B factory.

I recall my mother telling me of an incident: she glanced out of the factory window and saw two small children in difficulty in a deep watery pit (where the Kibworth fire station is now situated). She called for help from other workers and both girls were rescued. One girl was from the Sedgley family (the local butchers) and her mother was repeatedly grateful for this prompt action by my mother and would sometimes bring gifts of grapes from their greenhouse.

The J E Slater company were designers and manufacturers of display materials and at its peak had a large workforce and several branch factories. Their numerous customers included some very well known organisations such as Max Factor, Decca Records, Saxone, Lilley & Skinner, and Fleming Reid. One of their smaller units was for a time at the Empire Hall, now the Scout hut in Fleckney Road. I worked at the main central studio factory off Smeeton Road in Kibworth from 1958. My position was secretary and assistant to Mr Deighton, the sales director. I well remember typing up the many job sheets and instructions for each staff member in the department. We worked a 5½ day week, finishing at 1.00pm on a Saturday, but it was good company to work for.

Slater's Kibworth factory was closed in the 1970s and the staff moved to the Market Harborough premises. I was there from 1977-79 and then retired, receiving a watch for this 21 years' service.

Prior to Slaters occupying the factory buildings in the site off Smeeton Road, there was a hosiery factory owned by Maurice P Poynor. My mother worked there for awhile after leaving school at 12 years old. Before that there was a slaughterhouse on that same site run by Sammy Rudkin. When I later worked at Slaters, the canteen was built over the same ground.

There was another slaughterhouse at the bottom of Buller Street on the north west corner with White Street. This was owned by Terry Sedgley's butchers in Fleckney Road.

Recorded in January 2009