

Made possible with Heritage Fund

Rossendale Sole.

Audience Development & Interpretation Strategy

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Part 1: Introduction.



1.1 Valley Heritage.

Valley Heritage is a not-for-profit organisation established in 2015, aiming to breathe new life into Rossendale's heritage. We are a group of volunteers with a passion for our local area, seeking creative approaches to bring historic buildings back into use and safeguard heritage whilst supporting the growth and development of the local community.

Our long-term goal at Valley Heritage is to create a strategy for tackling buildings, places and collections that are at risk, particularly addressing their commercial viability and bringing them back into sustainable use. In essence we want to collaborate with other organisations to find ways to help these places and collections operate in a way that is sustainable, makes a positive contribution to their local community and engages with more audiences.

VALLEY HERITAGE



1.2 Project Introduction.

In early 2021, Valley Heritage were alerted to a locally significant collection of shoes and associated objects being disposed of in the region. That collection had formed the 'Rossendale Footwear Museum', housed since 2000 at Greenbridge Works in Rawtenstall, the former home of Lambert Haworth shoe manufacturers. It paints a unique picture of a significant shoe industry in East Lancashire - an industry that has shaped its communities, industries and landscape for hundreds of years.

The collection was in poor condition, having been damaged in the Boxing Day floods of 2015. The then owners retrieved it from the flooded space and stored it on an upper floor of Greenbridge Works.

Valley Heritage entered discussions with the owners to open up the collection to visitors and researchers but, in 2021, Greenbridge Works was put up for sale throwing its future into further jeopardy. Reacting quickly, Valley Heritage went over to the site and were, with the owners' consent, able to retrieve the vast majority of the collection from the skip and store it temporarily at Stubbylee Hall.

Volunteers have done amazing work in stabilising and cataloguing the collection. Now is the time to take the next step, exploring how we can make the collection dynamic, getting a wider range of people involved in the use and development of the collection and ensuring that we have a strategic way forward to secure its future.

The long term aim is to create an accessible and inclusive permanent home for the collection, with the right environmental conditions for its long term care, and work towards accreditation. We want to create opportunities to interpret and showcase the collection to as wide a range of people as possible, bringing it to life in a relevant, inclusive and enjoyable way. We want to generate new activities which bring the collection to its audiences and allow for meaningful, relevant and enjoyable engagement with its stories.



The Rossendale footwear collection paints an incredible picture of an industry that has shaped its communities and landscape for hundreds of years; one that was hard both physically and emotionally.

1.3 Aims and Objectives.

The project focuses on the safeguarding, conservation and engagement of the collection with new audiences.

The idea for the project is to lay down the 'sole' for these longer term aspirations, planning to add the insole, quarter, toe box, upper, counter, tongue, eyelets and finally the lining over time. It has the following key aims and objectives:

1) Safeguard the Rossendale footwear collection and local shoe industry heritage for the future.

2) Create an accessible and permanent home for the collection, to museum standard environmental controls and collections management systems - leading to full accreditation.

3) Make the collection more visible and dynamic.

4) Ensure a wider range of people have access to, experience, and are involved in the development of the collection.

5) Maximise opportunities to interpret and showcase the collection in creative ways so that it remains relevant, accessible, inclusive and enjoyable for all.



Part 2: Consultation.



2.1 Who do we want to target with this project?

The project looks to widen the range of people who can experience, access, or engage with the collections and heritage of the Rossendale footwear collection and history.

Whilst the primary and secondary audiences are mainly focused on the region and those with an interest in shoe manufacturing, the project will also explore other opportunties to widen its reach to a general audience in the North West and nationally.

Primary audiences:

1) Rossendale residents

2) Local people who worked in the footwear industry, or have connections to it
(international, import/export, family connections, music, social, leisure, community)

3) Local young people

4) People studying shoe manufacturing, textiles, fashion design, local history or social studies

Secondary audiences:

5) Families with children

6) Multi-cultural audiences across the world linked to the shoe industry

7) People with dementia or memory difficulties



2.2 What do we want to find out?

The Heritage Open Day and project launch events provide a unqiue opportunity to engage with key stakeholders and audiences to understand their needs, and what they want for the future of the Rossendale Footwear Museum collections.

1) Why is the shoe manufacturing industry in Rossendale significant?

2) Why is the safeguarding of the Rossendale Footwear Museum collections and heritage important?

3) What do you want to see happen to the collection and this heritage in the future?

4) What involvement would you want to have in the future development of the collection and its use?

5) How would you want to access the collections, stories and heritage?

7) What stories would you like to see and hear about?

8) What themes interest you or would make it relevant to you?

6) What techniques would help to bring the heritage and collections to life for you?



2.3 Audience Consultation.

A range of consultation has taken place during the development of the project to understand the needs of former workers, local communities and target audiences. These findings help us to understand what audiences want to see happen with the shoe collections in the future and ideas and themes for their interpretation.

The consultation has included:

- Heritage Open Day - 17 September 2023
- Session with Local Community associated with shoe industry - 18 December 2023
- Session with Local Community associated with shoe industry - 13 January 2024



2.3.1 Heritage Open Day

Stubbylee Hall and St Saviour's Church in Bacup opened their doors for guided tours on 17 September 2023 as part of Valley Heritage Open Day. Visitors were asked to explore the future of the shoe collection, and any interpretative ideas and themes they would like to see included in the project development.

The Collections

Participants on the day were surprised at the extent and wealth of collections saved. Many spoke about the fact that a museum could easily be created with them:

"This place could be a museum"
"Yes - it should be a museum - it was the main industry of the valley. The church [next door] would be a good place to have it."
"[the museum] needs to be in a big mill"
"It needs to be saved and to have a real museum"
"It's Rossendale's unique story"

The conversation extended to ideas around what a museum could look like and the type of experience participants they would want to see and the interpretative techniques they would want to take see there. The conversation centred on interactive ideas where participants can get 'hands-on', learn new skills and feel like they were part of the shoe industry.

"Hands-on museum"
"Slipper-making"
"Victorian re-enactment for schoolchildren"
"Video of people telling their stories and have them on a reel"
"Could you do workshops to make your own slippers - this would generate income"
"What about looking at developing a system for apprenticeships"

"It needs to be saved and to have a real museum. It's Rossendale's unique story."

Heritage Open Day participant



2.3 Audience Consultation.

Stories and Memories

The collections sparked conversations and memories with participants. It was clear that the shoe industry affected not only the workers themselves, but the enitre family and community around it. A number of participants talked of the 'working day' and the types of jobs they or family members had in the mills and factories:

"Grandma had to be up at 6am to milk cows. Great Aunt had to be up at 5.30 to sew shirts [this type of machine] before going to school in the 1890s"

"My dad has a sewing machine like this"

"My father mended my school shoes and my sibling's shoes, using a shoe iron and leather to make them last longer..."

"I worked at Tricketts for 6 months when I was 16. I used to sneak off to fish! I used to organise the crepe that came in from India in huge compressed blocks. Crepe was the sole for desert boots [in late 60s and early 70s]"

"My mum was so quick she was head hunted by each factory. She worked with leather and I work with leather now"

It was interesting to find out that the workers had their own unique way of communicating due to the noise levels in the factories and mills:

"Our Supervisor used to lip read us when we were working. We had to face the front so she could see us"

"My relatives all knew sign language to talk to each other"

...and to understand the potential of the collection to transport people and evoke memories:

"I remember being on Southport beach... Seeing the [sandals] took me right back there... hairs on my arms are standing on end"

"I worked at Tricketts for 6 months when I was 16. I used to sneak off to fish!"

Heritage Open Day participant



2.3 Audience Consultation.

2.3.2 Local Community Session 1

The project team held the first local community session with those associated with the shoe industry in Rossendale on 18 December 2023. Eight participants came along to the session, all of whom worked in the local shoe industry in various roles from design and import to technical production and the finishing department.

As part of the session, participants were firstly invited to look at the collection and then, secondly, sit down together to discuss the collections and the memories and information they evoked.

Stories and Memories

The conversation around the collections naturally started around describing life in the factories, daily operations and the roles people played there:

"Rossendale works had 200 women on the floor [referring to a photo]"
"People moved from factory to factory - if a designer moved on, they would take others with them. Could finish on a Friday and start on a Monday. Vacancies were quickly filled."
"Piece work was common. I learnt reef knots really well."
"Harry's mum was at Hargreaves and Crowther [now the GP's]. She worked at the very end of the process, precisely cleaning shoe with a toothbrush and then boxed them."
"The master clock operated the whole factory. It sat in reception, but also ran the clocking in system. The int time recording company would set the time every couple of months."

Everyone spoke of the daily challenges of working there. It was hard, difficult and repetitive work:

"The women were 'vicious' especially in the closing room. Young lads were scared to walk through, it was like a cattle market."
"Everyone had needles going through their fingers."
"The factories were dirty, smelly and made a funny shape of peoples hands and backs. It was hard work. But the emotion people felt when it was closing, it was sad."

But all participants spoke about the strong comraderie and 'community spirit' that was felt among the workers and the social events that were put on by the owners. It was this element that was most keenly felt and was the overriding factor of why they enjoyed their time in the shoe industry:

"The factories were dirty, smelly...It was hard work. But the emotion people felt when it was closing, it was sad."

Local Community Session participant



2.3 Audience Consultation.

"There was a band. Harry Whitaker, Keith Hawks, Clifford Greenwood (who played clarinet), George Clarke. George wrote a book about the band."
"There was a beauty pageant and competition. It was noticed that the winner usually became pregnant...in fact most of those who entered did."
"The Rossendale works union would take the children to the picture house. If the child didn't go, they got a pencil and a shilling."
"Went into the attic at the works. There were goldfish in the water tank... they were being bred to sell to the Burnley fair."
"Used to hire the room in Suttons for karate. Had to sweep the floors, full of tacks and glue."

This extended to the people they worked with and the kindness they received. One said that his supervisor:

"...used to buy presents for staff for their birthdays. At the centenary, all of those on the books got £1000 - even if they had just started."

"When I went to John and asked for more money. He asked me what I wanted the money for. I said I hadn't thought of that. He told me:

'You don't want that, you will spend it at the Astoria on drinking. You are special to me, I have special plans for you'. I went out feeling fantastic and walking tall- but no raise."

Other key themes that emerged during the conversation were expertise, ingenuity and innovation - many factories changing the way the business operated during the season, created their own bespoke tooling or had workers so skilled that the area became a hot-bed for shoe manufacturing expertise:

"A lady wanted to heat up her pie in the flow moulding machine... it made a right mess, pie everywhere."

Local Community Session participant

"A clicking knife 'aft' was made from old hacksaw blades and ground down / sharpened."
"Fred Howarth could find the one pair of shoes on the rack that was faulty. He had a skill for it."
"Rooms at the hat band factory were used for storing excess shoes. Sometimes production continued, even when people weren't buying e.g. if it was raining, people wouldn't go out and shop."

...and many designed shoes with royal connections...

"Kath Thompson designed slippers for Princess Diana. Won a competition for the design."
"Trickets made Queen Victoria's daughter the satin shoes."
"Butlers' shoes were made in the area – leather shoes for Buckingham Palace"

...or bespoke shoes for larger or different shaped feet...

"Springline made their own lasts. Some made for famous people. They're still producing them. A last for size 22 was created by them."
"Extra pieces would be added to shoes for the bunions"



2.3 Audience Consultation.

One participant spoke of Johnny Lord from Trapp Forge who ended up making some size 13 desert boots for a child who went to Gordonstoun School. These examples demonstrate Rossendale's place at the centre of shoe manufacturing expertise - akin to Northampton. And with Lambert Howarth's long-standing contract with Marks & Spencer, the standard of work needed to be extremely high:

"M&S would come and inspect the factory - they would even inspect the toilets. They would discard the whole range of shoes if they found just one stitch out of place..."

"When I was at school I found history boring, but all of this is really interesting"

Local Community Session participant

When the shoe industry in the area did start to shut down slowly, it was keenly felt by many families:

"One family - the Tigh's - had multiple generations employed there. Six of them were made redundant at the same time."

...and the equipment / heritage not cared for at the end...

"All the Sutton's equipment was auctioned and, if not sold, was binned."

"The lasts were sold to Harrods to make legs of coffee tables."

"There are lasts and shoes buried in concrete as a time capsule under a building."

"Heritage didn't feel valued, lots of things were thrown in the skip. Lasts were in the concrete loading bay."

2.3.3 Local Community Session 2

The project team held a second local community session with those associated with the Rossendale shoe industry on 13 January 2024, this time on a Saturday responding to the fact that some could not attend the first session. 20 participants came along to the session, all of whom had connections to the local shoe industry.

As with the first session, participants were firstly invited to look at the collections and then, secondly, sit down together to discuss the collections and the memories and information they evoked. Before the session even began a local young person contracted to take photographs of the session said:

"When I was at school I found history boring, but all of this is really interesting. My neighbour Jack Crawshaw used to make clogs - hundreds of them. He has passed away now, about 10 years ago."



2.3 Audience Consultation.

Stories and Memories

As part of the session project team members had one-to-one conversations with participants while looking at items in the collection. The stories from individual participants are captured below.

Wendy spoke about her time at Mcleries at age 15, but didn't like it there. She went to Asda for a while and then to Suttons at age 17. After her child was born, she returned to work on the 'twilight shift' 5-8pm.

"I remember sticking on bows with the new glue that had come onto the market – superglue... and yes, I stuck my fingers together.

Her ex-husband was a member of the 25 club for those people who had worked for 25 years. In November, they would get a bonus, a day out and drinks. There was also a 40 club too. She remembered working on the side seam welding.

"There was great comeraderie and it was lovely. The day went quickly. Sometimes we talked so much and would be told to 'shut up and get on'. I liked the piece work and would set myself a target to aim for."

But, it was dangerous work. There were not any guards on the machine and sometimes it would spark (like when you first strike a match).

Sarah told us about her experiences. Her dad was Lesley Cliff, one of the managers at Suttons. He started at South St until it collapsed (from the age of 16–66). She worked at the factory sticking bows on the shoes. She remembered the radio being on Radio 1 between 10 and 4 and Wham! being on a lot and everyone going 'ooh and ahh' at the love stories section of the programme.

"There were lots of characters in there. .. lots of banter about sports. Not everyone got on though. People lived and worked together, they also socialised together... if they didn't like each other, it was hard. Cliques would be formed."

She recalled how, in the 1970s, manufacturing quickly started to move to Spain and Italy. She said that, at the start, people only had two pairs of shoes but cheap shoes were needed, and this is where the manufacturing took off in the valley.

She spoke of the challenges of working in the shoe industry and the changing times everyone faced:

"I was only working for 6 weeks in the holiday, before going to University. In those days I was the first in the family to go to uni and, as third generation in the industry, it was a good thing, as the industry couldn't support whole families. Some factories did and then struggled. Suttons' policy was to not have children working there. She heard so many stories from her dad at home. There were tough decisions and soul searching."



2.3 Audience Consultation.

She told us that her dad had gone to night-school and a lot of his classmates and colleagues continued to work in the industry and (wouldn't have thought it) but were pioneers:

"Reebok was started in Bolton and there was a friendly and natural competition between them. Doc Martens was a great collaboration. Max Greggs was a friend of dad's. The brand wax and waned depending on fashion and whether they had been seen on TV by someone famous. If demand was high, Suttons stepped in and they were made in Bacup and sent to Northampton."

There were many offshoot businesses that came from and depended on the shoe industry e.g. Lancashire socks and last manufacturing. These also collapsed when the shoe industry finished.

She spoke about how online selling was also hard for her dad to get his head around:

"In the past, if shoes weren't right, you would have to go back to the shop and explain to a person why they were wrong. They could see if there were scuffs and had been worn or not.

"The mill's order and easy returns made it easier for people to just send back. He stepped back and gave jobs to new people with new ideas."

"People tended to work for a long time. The social clubs kept people going...the importance of the social interaction, especially for mental health"

Local Community Session participant

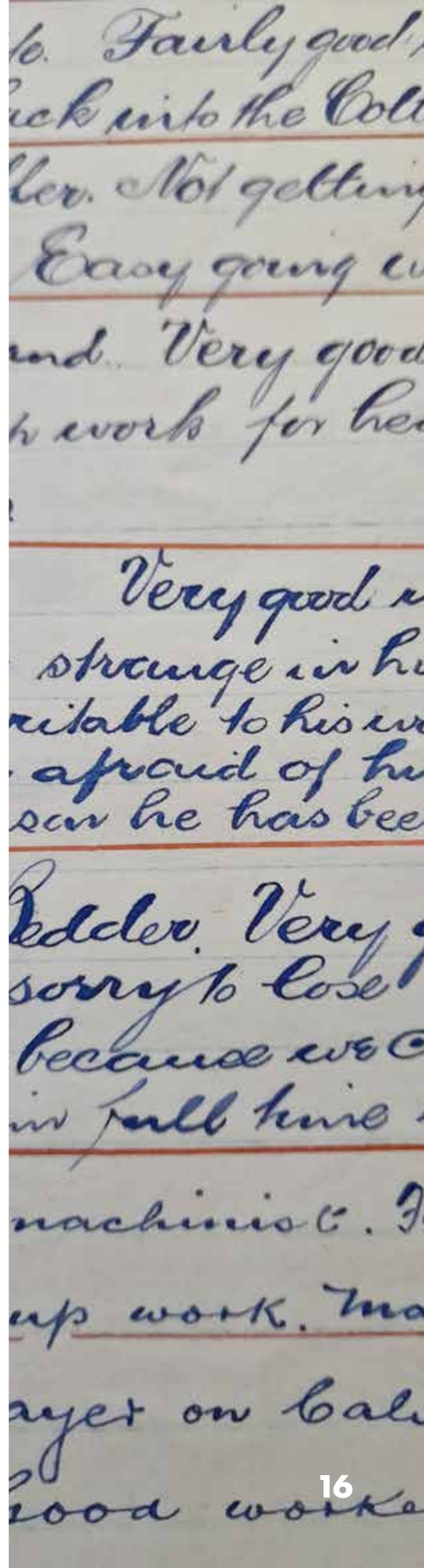
Adrian told us that health and safety didn't really exist. No breathing apparatus was use when working with the glue. They all agreed that they liked the smell of glue though!

The operation was dependent on the season and the way the workers chose to operate during the working day:

"Kipper season was is January and February when it was quiet. They went out drinking with the buyers and would place huge orders when they were drunk, and then cancel them the next day."

"If there was a time and motion observation, you would work slowly whilst they were there and, as soon as they went, we would speed up again. The cost of shoes would go down if we were too fast."

If there was a 'weak link' in the production line, they got a tough time from the other workers, because it slowed them all down and that affected their pay. He also told us about the Christmas Footings, the last day of work. They would all finish about 11am and got an individually-plated buffet and cans. Some were drinking as they were still working, and then they all went on to the pub for a 'rumble'.



2.3 Audience Consultation.

Eamonn was a pattern cutter, and also graded the leather. He has a picture of himself beside one of the two computers that were the first in the country. He told us a story about making shoes for a clown:

"I made bespoke shoes for Lorenzo, who is a clown. They were made to Lorenzo's specification. I used red, blue, green and yellow leather and they were rather long. At the time he was going out with rather a snooty girlfriend. They went to a fair that was on Townsend Gardens. Lorenzo was in full clown regalia.. When he saw me, he rushed over and hugged me.. My girlfriend was furious, and said 'I knew you'd know him.' "



Eamon said that it was Marks & Spencers that started using letters to determine the width of shoes. Previously, they were described as slim, normal, wide, extra wide, extra extra wide etc., but they changed to C,D,E,EE,EEE.

"At one time the rep for Marks & Spencers, from near Marble Arch, called into the factory to get a pair of slippers. He said that he had had a request from Parliament, for a senior member, who needed a pair of slippers. Marks & Spencer didn't have the size they needed anywhere. Someone in the factory says in a strong accent, aye, that' ll be for Margarate Thatcher."

Tom made the children's shoe die in the collection. There were only two that were made. One was given to Gaghills Museum. The one in the factory broke, so Eamon went to the museum and swapped it with the one that wasn't broken. The very broken die in now in the Rossendale Valley collection.

He also spoke of some Velt shoes that were very expensive, but he managed to get some for £27. He had them resoled 30 years ago and mentioned that he might eventually donate them to the museum. He also brought a scrapbook along with all his memories and shared stories with the group about his time in the shoe industry.

"You were part of a community. You could see streams of people walking into and out of work at 9 and 5. Hooters and bells to start the working day."

Local Community Session Participant

Wendy spoke about the difficulties of working in the factory, and how that balanced with the social life and community spirit the factory life provided:

"The noise in the factory was so awful. I can't describe the pain only to say that it was like childbirth, so very painful."

"Mad Friday was the last Friday before Christmas. All staff would go out on the Friday, some not together, as it would be very cliquey between departments. If you didn't have a hangover, you didn't have a good night."

2.4 Summary Findings and Analysis.

In progress

Part 3: Heritage.





3.1 Rossendale Footwear Heritage.

Rossendale Valley was once the centre of footwear manufacturing in the UK and was home to the birth of the first pair of slippers. Its story is a unique one, which deserves acknowledging and preserving nationally.

The origins of Rossendale's shoe monopoly date back to the woollen mills and cotton industry for which Lancashire was a source of national pride. The county's textile industry was at the forefront of innovation; adopting both steam power and the factory-based system of production. Around 1854 a new manufacture, the making of felt, emerged in the area, led by Edward Rostron.

Felts were sent to Myrtle Grove Mill in Rossendale from Leeds for dyeing and printing, and returned after processing. His felt found a ready market and was used as under-carpets, bath mats, saddle felts and printed carpets, for which Rossendale became famous.

And this is where, perhaps fortuitously, the footwear industry began. Felt block printers made wrappings out of used pieces of felt to cover their feet when they were walking over the carpets to avoid spoiling the work. Soon, these wrappings were fashioned into crude shoes for family and friends. Those makeshift shoes are what we now call slippers.

From the 1870s, slipper manufacturing took off with Samuel McLerie and John William Rothwell taking the early mantle. The industry soon developed exponentially with Sir H. W. Trickett and Lambert Howarth & Sons leading the way.

By 1893, Trickett was producing 40,000 of the 70,000 pairs of shoes in the Rossendale Valley. By 1900, Gaghills Mill was employing over 1,000 people and producing 72,000 shoes a week. By 1916, 13,800,000 pairs of shoes were made in the valley rising to a peak of 20 million in 1939.

The decline of the industry began in the 1980s as cheaper imports began to flood the UK market and manufacturing moved to Asia.

Although only a few shoe companies still exist in Rossendale a short drive along Bacup Road in Waterfoot gives a clear indication of its legacy. The road is lined with footwear companies and although some of the former mills are now used for other industries the signs left in place illustrate that it was only a generation ago that Rossendale was the heart of the UK's shoemaking industry.



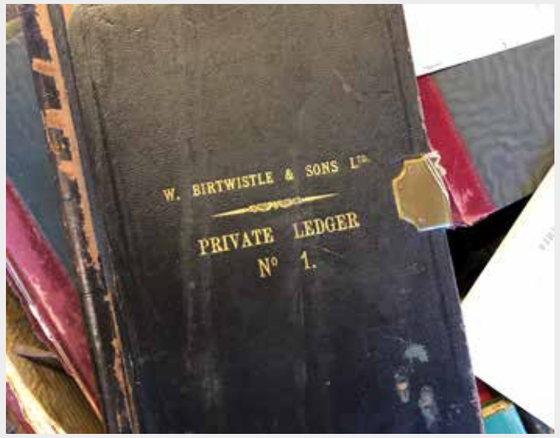
3.2 The Collections.

The collection consists of shoes (some samples), predominantly from Lambert Haworth and covering a time period from the 1900s to the 1980s, and when it was a core manufacturer for Marks & Spencer and own branch Osbornia. It also includes photographs, company ledgers and records, other archival records, sewing machines, tooling, office furniture, and other objects closely associated with Rossendale's prolific and significant shoe industry - and one of its most important manufacturers.

Valley Heritage has also acquired the Lorraine Dietrich collection after her recent passing in 2023, a local self-made shoe manufacturer. Her collection of teaching materials from Rossendale College, design drawings and tooling allow us to explore her creative process, and understand how she adpated her craft to create bespoke shoes for local needs.

Valley Heritage also has access to, and plans to relaunch, the National Lottery Heritage Fund 'Rossendale Footwear Heritage' website content. The many assets (oral histories, photographs and heritage information) will be transferred free of charge and reworked to link it to this project - putting all Rossendale shoe industry heritage in one easy-to-access location.















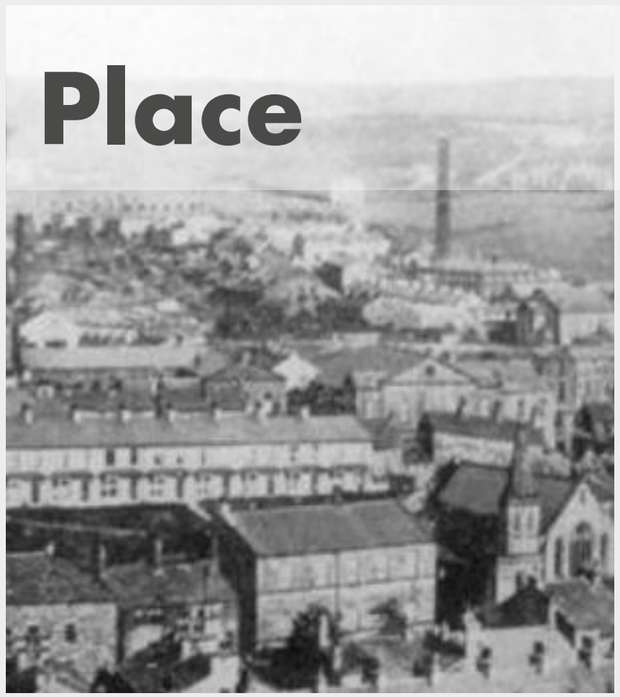


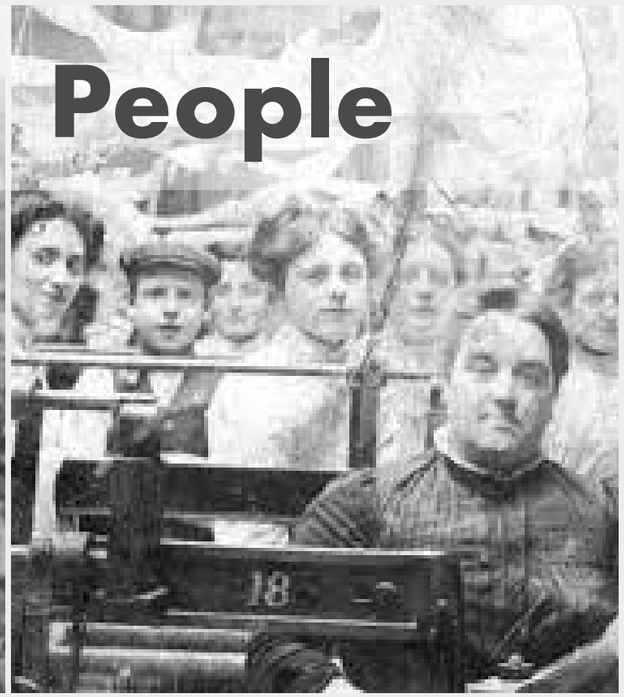


Part 4: Stories.



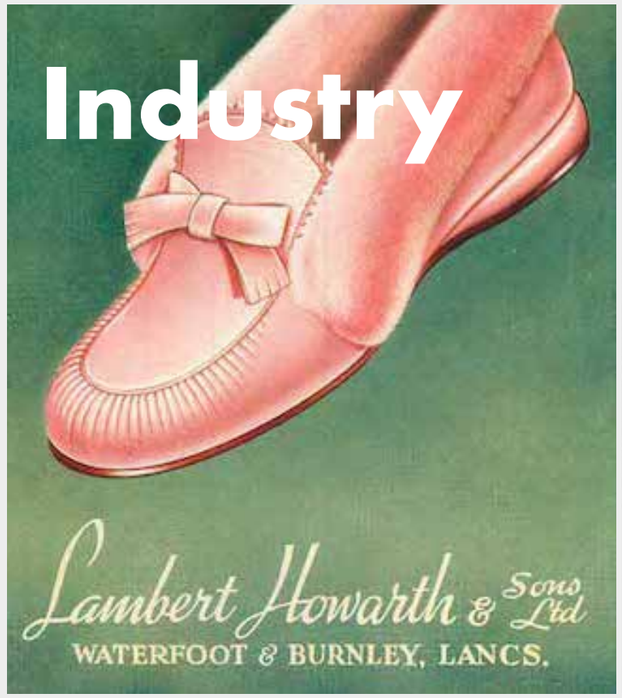
4.1 The stories we want to tell.

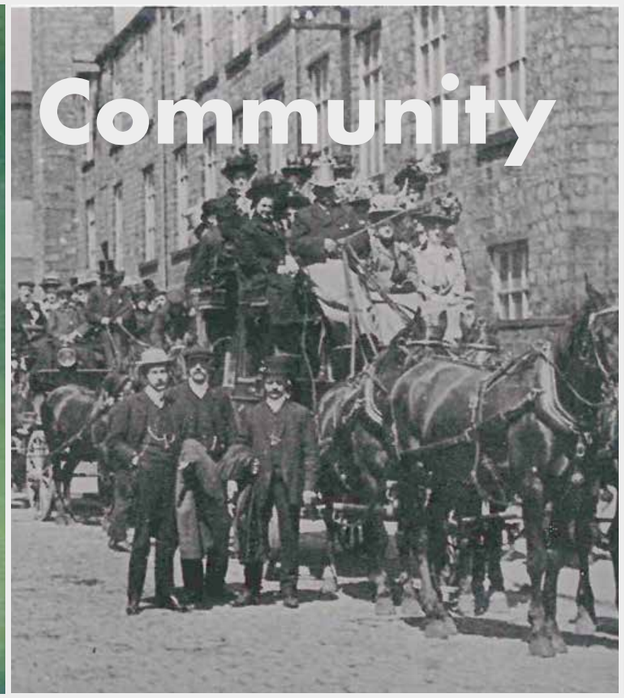


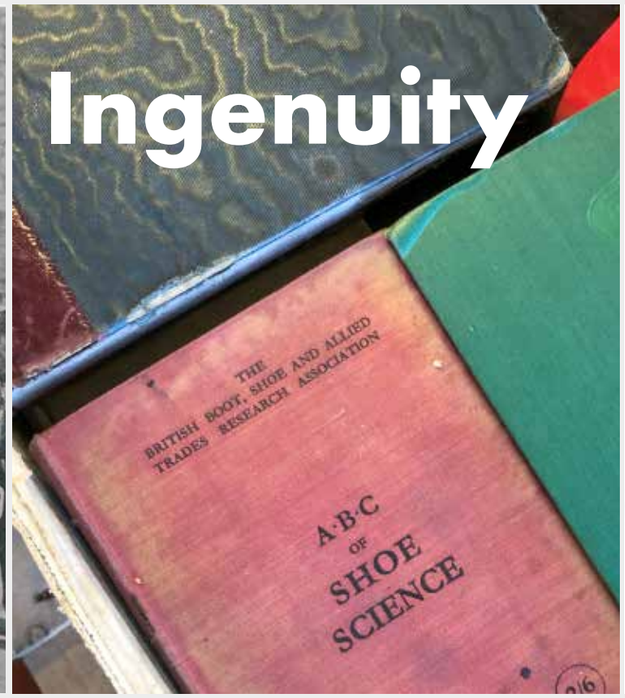


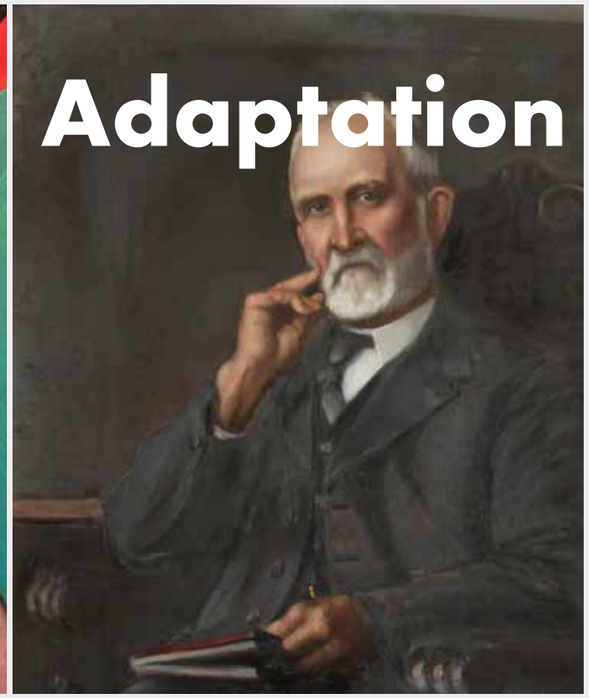












4.2 Place.

The Rossendale footwear industry was shaped by the growth of industrialisation and the introduction of cotton and wool production across Lancashire in the early to late 19th century. Hundreds of mills rose up along the River Irwell as it weaves across the landscape, transforming the agricultural towns and villages of the region.

The opportunity for work transformed Haslingden, Rawtenstall, Waterfoot and Bacup, bringing thousands of workers to **this place** from all across the UK and upskilling retraining local people. It became a melting pot of different people coming together for one common reason - **the opportunity for work** - changing local communities forever.

The shoe manufacturing industry launched from these former mill locations, diversifying a dying textile industry into one that would shape these towns and villages across Rossendale in the late 19th and 20th centuries. These mills and worker homes remain a built legacy of a shared heritage.

- **Heritage locations**
- **Industrialisation**
- **Built heritage**
- **Regeneration and reuse**
- **Nature and landscape**
- **Workplace**
- **Local pride**

Industry shaping landscape.

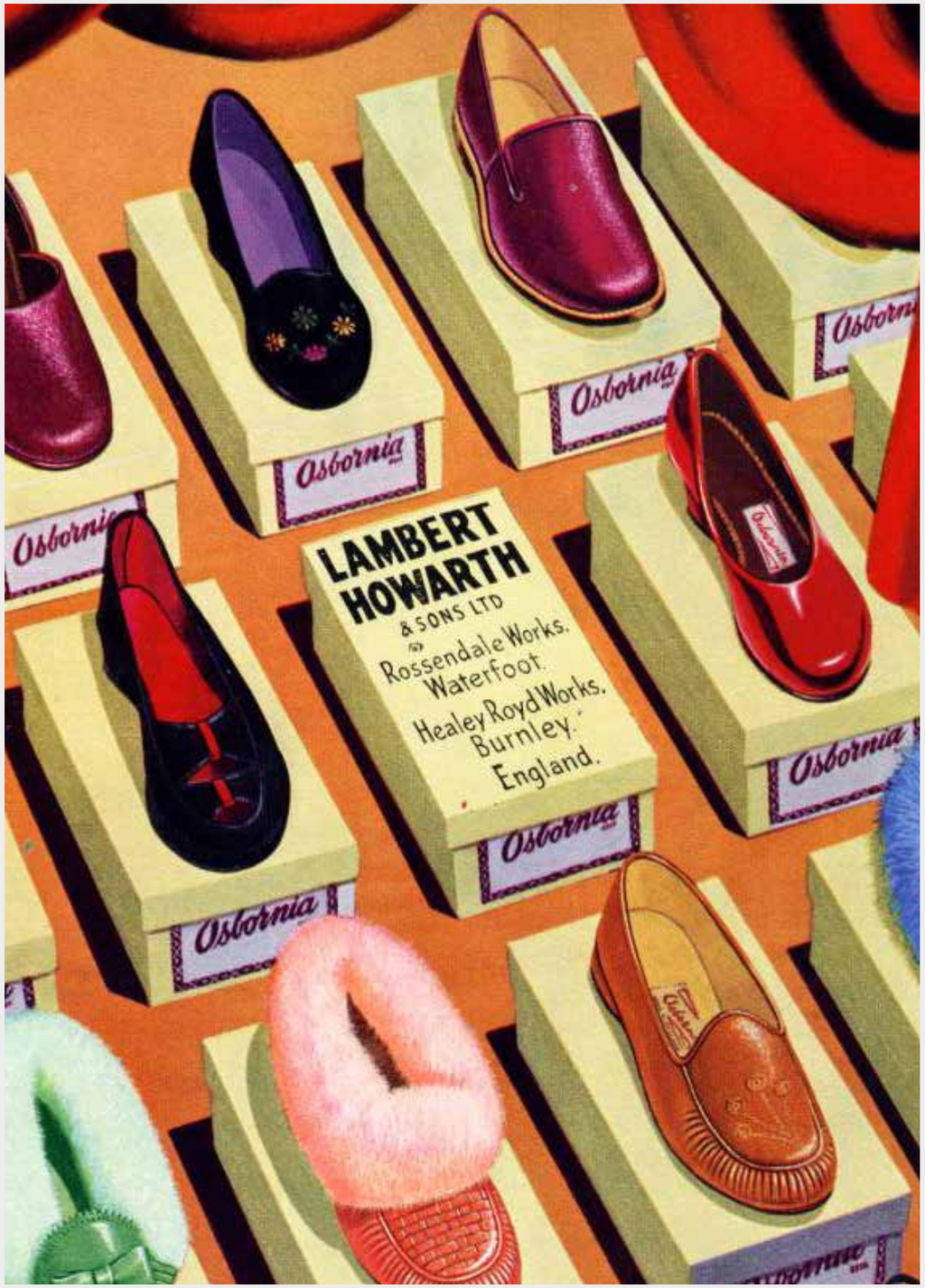
4.3 Industry.

The emergence of the slipper industry grew from the warehouse floor of the felt industry in Rossendale. Workers would make themselves footwear from the scraps that were left over, and from this seed grew the footwear businesses of John William Rothwell, Samuel McLerie and other commercial retailers in the late 1800s.

This manufacturing technology and craft skills developed to produce all kinds of footwear, most significantly by companies such as Gregory & Co, H.W. Trickett, Lambert Howarth Group, Deardon & Co, Hoyle and Hoyle, The Bacup Shoe Company, The Newchurch Boot Company, Samuel McLerie & Sons, JH Hirsts, JW Rothwell, Maiden and Ireland Ltd, Rawtenstall Shoe & Slipper Co Ltd, E. Sutton and Sons and Ashworth and Hoyle.

At its peak the Lambert Howarth Group produced 10 million pairs of shoes a year from Rossendale, reaching international status and ultimately becoming the main footwear supplier for Marks & Spencer Ltd in the 1950s and 1960s and other high street retailers like French Connection. For around a hundred years up to the 1980s, when the UK shoe industry declined as cheaper foreign imports took over, this industry shaped the lives of local communities. Some still remain in the area, diversifying to stay relevant to modern customers. The shared experiences of working at the shoe factories still remain in celebration of a remarkable and unique heritage in this part of the country.

- **Shoe Manufacturing Industrialists**
- **Rise and fall of footwear industries of Rossendale**
- **Factory operation**
- **Factory life - sounds, smells, experience**
- **UK footwear industry today**
- **Marketing and advertisement design**



“The felt carpet slipper trade is a new and profitable manufacture almost wholly confined to the Rossendale district...” **The Accrington Observer, 18 May 1889**

4.4 Community.

Out of the burgeoning Rossendale shoe industry was borne a modern and compassionate support system for its workers. Company owners understood that the treatment of workers ultimately dictated the bottom line, but some went further, providing all manner of welfare support, social clubs and holidays for the workforce.

The collections contain a rich picture of what Lambert Howarth Group provided for its workers, which included:

- Social Clubs
- Sport Clubs
- Worker Holidays and Wakes Week
- Health Welfare
- Meals
- Company parties for Christmas and Anniversaries
- Fetes and festivals

- **Factory Social Life**
- **Company welfare**
- **Community**



"Mad Friday was the last Friday before Christmas. All staff would go out...If you didn't have a hangover, you didn't have a good night." **Local Community Session participant**

4.5 People.

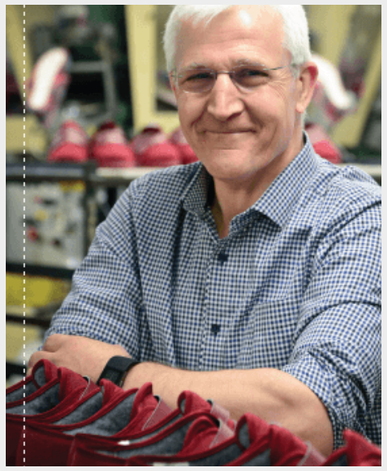
The story of the Rossendale footwear industry is one of an incredible group of people, from entrepreneurs and industrialists, to workers and craftspeople, to creatives and renegades. It is a celebration of the extraordinary ordinary shaping an international industry using their individual skill, creativity and craft.

Generation after generation of people worked at the Rossendale factories creating a shared memory of an industry that still lives on today. The many company worker groups on social media are testament to the common interest of local people in sharing and safeguarding this heritage and passing it on to the next generation in a relevant way. This project will look to build on, share and diversify the stories of people in the footwear industry, so we can understand what it was like to work there - both good and bad - and appreciate the incredible skills of the workers involved through first-hand testimony.

- **Workers**
- **Company owners and family**
- **A family of workers**
- **First-hand testimonies and people stories**
- **Language, phrases, dialect, accent**
- **Comeraderie and community**
- **Laborious tasks aided by social side**










“One family - the Tigh’s - had multiple generations employed there... Six of them were made redundant at the same time.”

Local Community Session participant

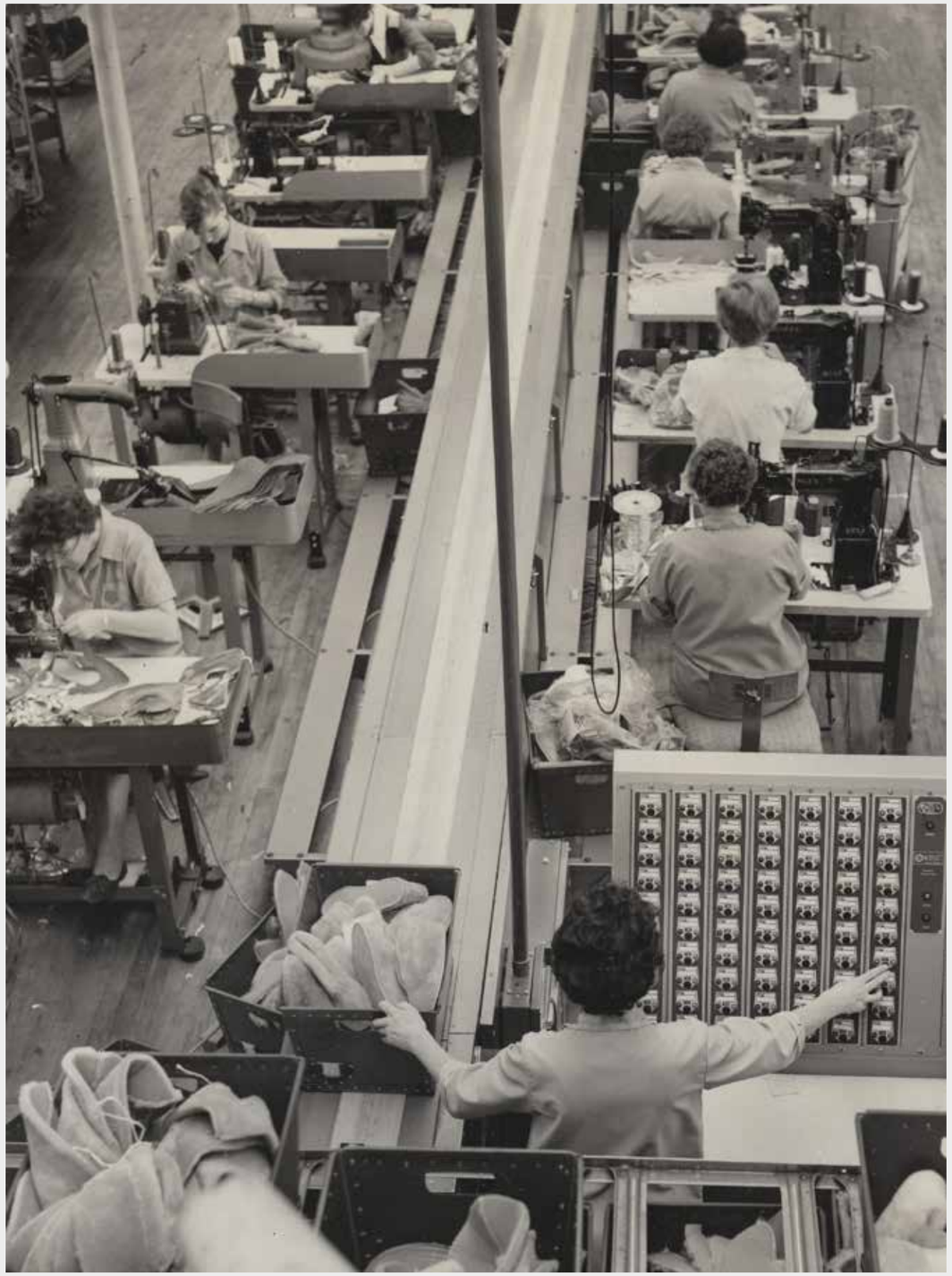
4.6 Skill.

Understanding the complexity and craft involved in the creation of a simple pair of shoes gives rise to a new-found admiration for the hundreds of workers that have been part of the Rossendale shoe industry. It is important for us to understand and celebrate this incredible skill, and use it to inform students, manufacturers and craftspeople today.

Some of the techniques and methods used in Rossendale Valley were unqiue to the industry here e.g. xxxx and the skill of workers trained here was sought after across the country. Local colleges emerged to train people in shoe manufacturing, design and the business as a whole.

The opportunity to conserve the shoe collections is also a craft in itself - a painstaking process of cleaning, repairing, cataloguing, researching to stabilise and protect these shoe samples from across the eras. This process, along with the skill involved in manufacturing, offers a multi-dimensional approach to exploring the collections with new audiences.

- **Shoemaking craft**
- **Shoemaking process**
- **Conservation process**
- **Passing on skills - upskilling, teaching**



“Fred Howarth could find the one pair of shoes on the rack that was faulty. He had a skill for it.”

Local Community Session participant

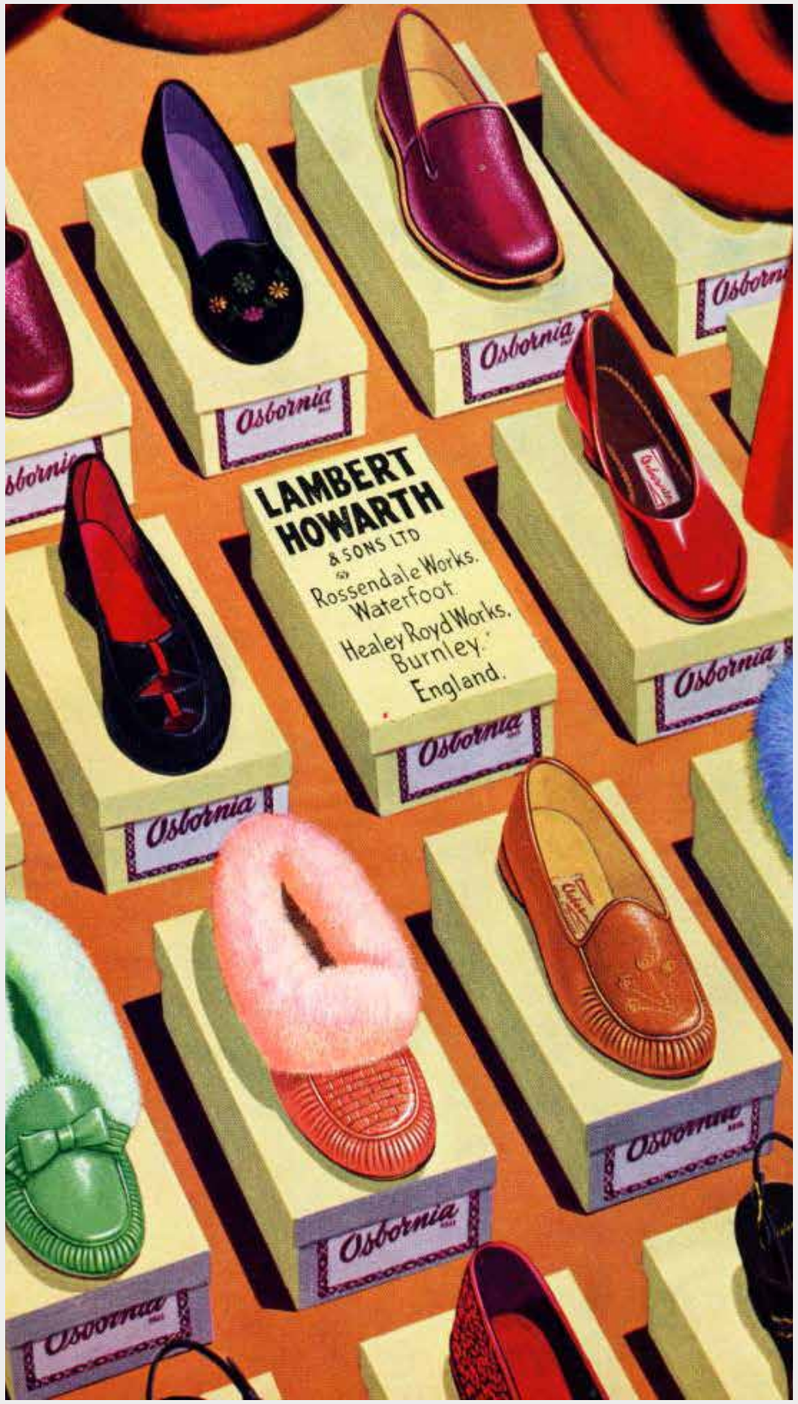
4.7 Product.

The Lambert Howarth shoe collection, in particular, offers an incredible insight into how a shoe manufacturing company operated on a day-to-day basis, obtaining exemplar footwear from the continent as inspiration for design, and producing samples to inform contracts with high street retailers as part of its manufacturing portfolio.

What now remains is a rare collection of footwear design samples from across one hundred years, showing changing fashion styles and advancing manufacturing techniques, and the interplay with high street demand.

The Whitaker in Rawtenstall houses a small selection of the Rossendale Sole collection as part of an overview of the valley's production, but does not tell the full story.

- **Shoe design**
- **Fashion through the ages**
- **Marketing and promotion**







4.8 Adaptation and Ingenuity.







Business Diversification

The shoe industry in Rossendale was borne out of the creativity, agility and ambition of a few entrepreneurs to diversify in the face of a declining textile industry. By using skills gained in the general textile industries, they were able to modify equipment, techniques and materials to plug a gap in the shoe market and open the designs up to a mass market. The Lorraine Dietrich collection shows how she creatively adapted her shoe-making to support people who could not get regular shoes from the high street. Even today the shoe industry in the area has reinvented itself for a contemporary market, and is now supporting the orthotics industry.

Machine and Tooling Adaptation

The conservation of a range of sewing machines and tooling has highlighted how skilled engineers would modify and adapt simple machinery so it could withstand thicker materials being processed as part of the shoe industry. Sometimes they would add something to standard machines to try and solve even more problems or fashion new parts in tool shops that would keep production going instead of waiting for new parts to arrive . The collection offers a real insight into this problem-solving and the creative engineering process.

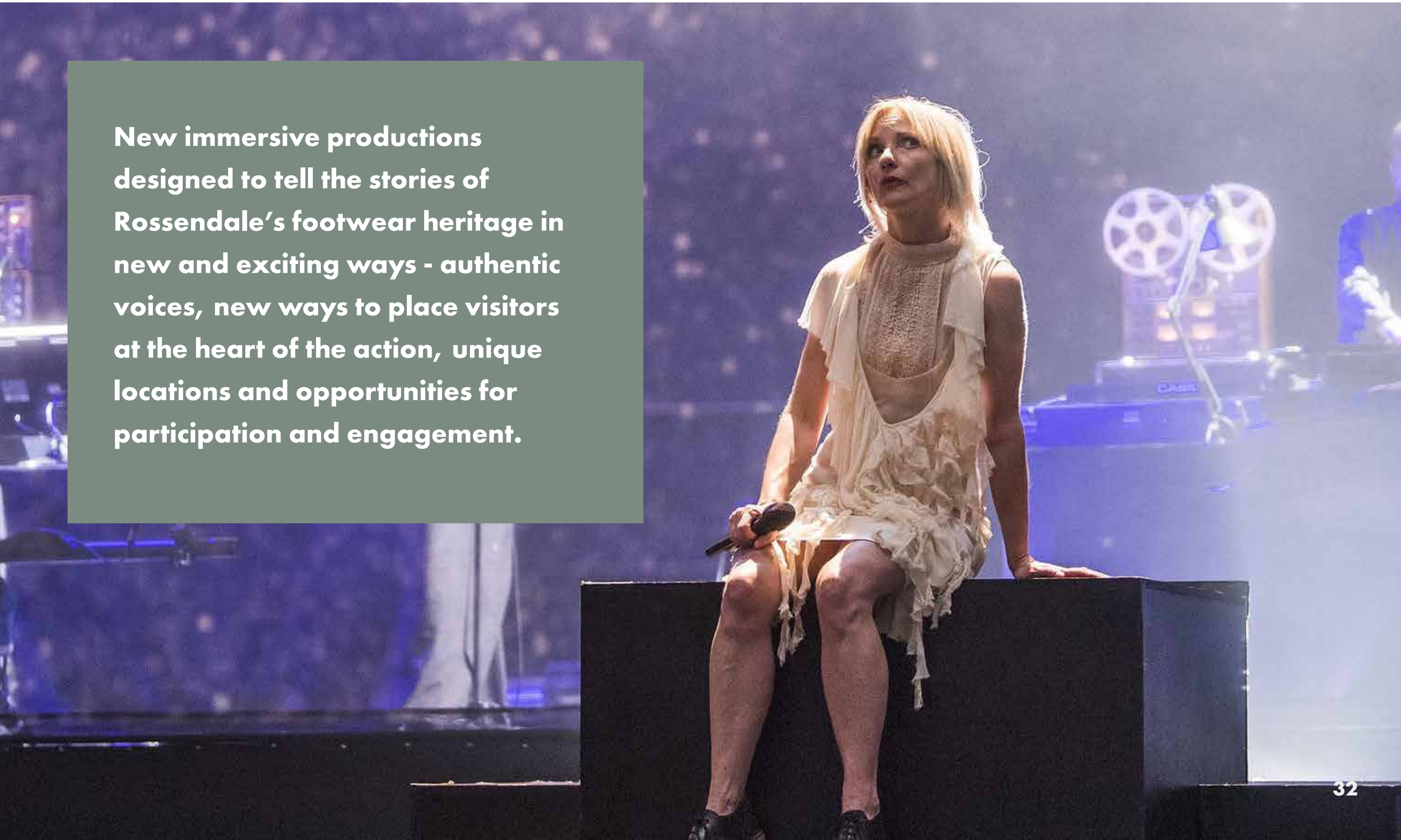
Repair, Re-use and Sustainability

Shoes are an essential part of our daily lives. From the raw materials used to make them to the way they’re produced, shoes can have a significant impact on the planet. The fashion industry at large is responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions and is the second-largest consumer of water worldwide. The footwear industry alone is responsible for 1.4% of global carbon emissions, with the production of materials being the biggest contributor. The collection allows us to reflect on the position of the footwear industry today, fast fashion whether to repair and re-use before buying new (e.g. football boots/ clogs), and the impact of the industrial age on our world today.

Part 5: Interpretation.



5.1 Theatre, Sensory and Performance.



New immersive productions designed to tell the stories of Rossendale's footwear heritage in new and exciting ways - authentic voices, new ways to place visitors at the heart of the action, unique locations and opportunities for participation and engagement.

5.1 Theatre, Sensory and Performance.



Sensory experiences

A new sensory experience that transports visitors into the Rossendale factories and evoke the sounds, smells, atmosphere, tactile nature of the shoes and the daily life of the workers, using the collections as a starting point. Abstract in nature, focusing on the sensory elements of the heritage. Potential for a simple infrastructure set-up within a meanwhile use building or mill location; could be tourable across the region or nationally to different locations.



Immersive theatre

An immersive walk-through theatre performance related to the content of the Rossendale footwear collection, where visitors get to be part of the action, and the actors engage the audience as part of the script to include them in the stories. The audience can choose the outcomes and are as much a part of the scene as the main storyline. Potential to partner with a local theatre company and tour to different locations.

https://www.punchdrunk.com/

https://www.imitatingthedog.co.uk/company/



Interactive theatre experiences

A new interactive theatre programme aimed at a general audience in partnership with Horse and Bamboo (could be in any creative medium - special effects, participation, puppetry, etc.) that brings to life the stories of the local shoe industry and the experience of people who worked there. It could also form a larger puppet element that parades through the streets of Rossendale acknowledging the shoe manufacturing history and heritage of the area.

https://horseandbamboo.org/

https://autindt.co.uk/parade/

https://autindt.co.uk/out-of-the-deep-blue-ootdb/

5.1 Theatre, Sensory and Performance.



Mill projection theatre

The incredible footwear heritage could be ‘highlighted’ literally through a digital projection project that tells particular stories at different locations across the region. These pockets of digital art could come together, and culminate in a Rossendale Sole festival with larger 3D mapped projection on the mill buildings becoming a heritage beacon for all to see.

https://thebrickbox.co.uk/projects/the-mills-are-alive/



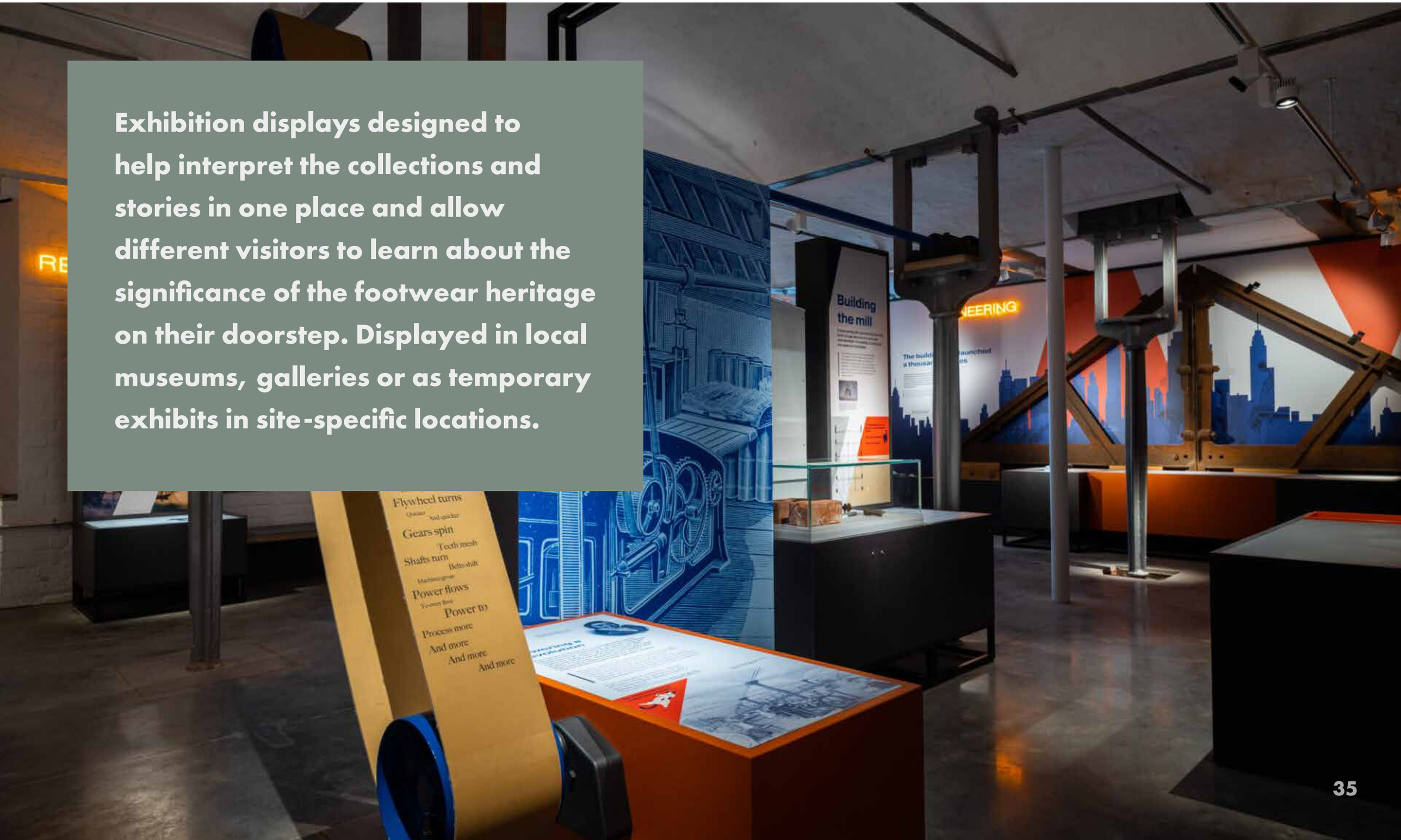
Spoken word performance

Valley Heritage could work with local spoken word producers, artists or actors (such as Jane Horrocks) to voice a spoken word piece that captures the history and heritage of the shoe-manufacturing region and that gives a **‘voice to the voiceless’**. Steeped in pride of place, of local dialect and accent, of community and people, it will cleverly weave together to form an original commissioned performance.

https://factoryinternational.org/whats-on/cotton-panic/



5.2 Exhibition and Display.



Exhibition displays designed to help interpret the collections and stories in one place and allow different visitors to learn about the significance of the footwear heritage on their doorstep. Displayed in local museums, galleries or as temporary exhibits in site-specific locations.

5.2 Exhibition and Display.

Exhibitions and displays can take many forms and do not need to be traditional in approach. They can be curated in house or co-developed in partnership with local former workers, young people, local art scene and community groups. Options to explore could include:

Heritage display

A more traditional heritage display that can tour to different locations across the region (e.g. museums, galleries, libraries, community centres, other public places), or have a permanent home where the collection is located which can have a supporting programme of activities and programming.

Creative Responses

Valley Heritage could commission a series of artist responses (in different mediums) that each capture part of the story using the collections and oral testimony, or respond to the various themes of the project e.g. ingenuity, creativity, repair and reuse, invention, adaptation. The resultant works could be brought together in an exhibition display.

Virtual Exhibition

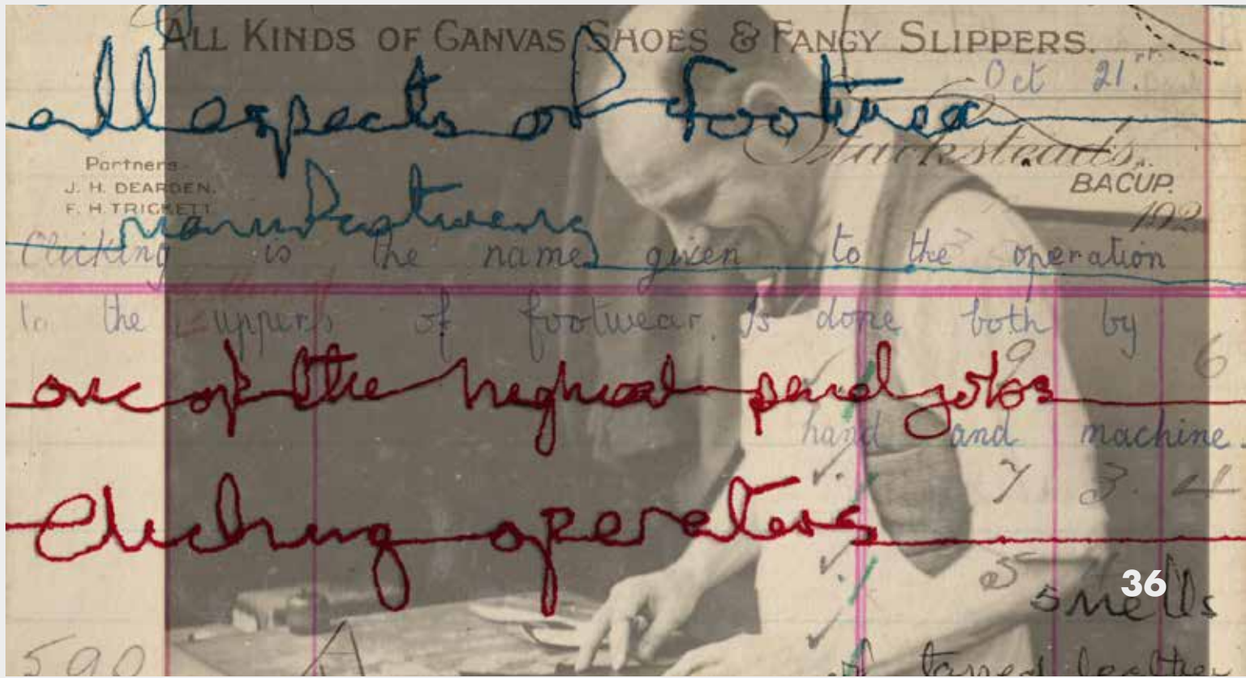
The 3D scans of the shoe collection and other assets could be transformed into a rich, curated online exhibition or virtual museum that could be accessed from around the world. This could also work in tandem with a physical exhibition in the collection's permanent home.

Object-focused display

A display of objects telling their own story (see next section). Digital interpretation could reveal different first person accounts related to that object from different perspectives.

Textile Commission

Each shoe comprises 26 parts that come together to make the final piece. As part of the project Valley Heritage could commission an artist/ shoe craftsperson to work with communities related to 26 shoe factory sites each embroidering their story of a piece of a large-scale shoe sculpture.



5.2 Exhibition and Display.

Every object tells a unique story

Objects hold the stories of their makers, their wearers or owners, their journeys from factory to home and everything in between. Valley Heritage could explore the multitude of stories that are held within each object in the collection, allowing different voices and different perspectives to come forward to paint a rich picture of a shared heritage.

Different individuals and groups, both in Rossendale or further afield (even nationally or internationally) can be asked to select an object that speaks to them and respond with a story that is relevant to them. This could be about the materials, the way it was made, the design, memories from the time, the company it came from - however they want to respond.

This content could then be used on various platforms, online and in the physical space, to help people to engage with the collections and inform them about it.



"Every object tells a story if you know how to read it."

Henry Ford

5.3 Pop-Up Projects.



Surprising heritage that pops up when you least expect it. Fun, informal and exciting programmes that are designed to stop you in your tracks and engage those that may not have encountered the heritage and stories before in a playful way.

5.3 Pop-Up Projects.



‘Shoes with Sole’ Project

Working with local shoe manufacturers Valley Heritage could launch a ‘guerrilla shoes’ programme, where people can order some bespoke shoes crafted in the area (reflecting styles in the collection), but with a piece of heritage attached. This could be heritage quotes embroidered in, or personal messages from the maker. This is a heritaage project with a commercial edge to help sustain the industry that we are celebrating.



Pop-up installations

Valley Heritage could create a number of surprising pop-up installations that can appear in different locations to tell the story of Rossendale footwear heritage. The forms could be inspired by the collection - giant inflatable shoes, a huge shoe box, or tools of the trade. The surprising appearance of these installations is designed to pique interest; they are attractors demanding attention from locals and media alike.



Pop-up ‘makerspace’

To reflect the incredible craft embedded in the collection, we could create a touring ‘makerspace’ that not only communicates the heritage of the shoe industry in the area, but allows people to come along and take part in making activities with skilled shoe craftspeople from the area. This could also be extended to design, textiles workshops, recycling and upcycling and other making skills.

https://whitearkitekter.com/project/the-museum-of-making/

5.3 Pop-up Projects.



Viral online content

To extend the reach of the collection Valley Heritage could create a mix of viral ‘tik tok’ style online content designed to connect with and engage specific audiences. These could be a series of engaging films with actors or staff telling particular parts of the story or different fun snippets that people can digest easily online.

https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2021/jul/05/black-country-living-museum-tiktok-viral-john-homer



Heritage signposting

This idea is centred on highlighting where history took place - installing vibrant markers in key locations to tell the heritage stories of the shoe industry across the region. These could be done in a highly graphic or illustrated way, as 2D or 3D markers, for people to discover, but together form a heritage trail to find. It could also tie in with the region’s health and wellbeing agenda.



High Street pop-up

The high street has been suffering from the closure of retail across the country leaving empty shops and desolate town centres. This is particularly the case in northern towns in rural areas. This project could use these empty show windows to tell the heritage story of a significant industry that once led the world. There is also the potential to partner with different high street shoe retailers today to celebrate their businesses and the history of the region in context.

5.4 Activities and Programmes.

BLAZE

Future Soles 2

Building on the successful ‘Future Soles’ project, commissioned by Blaze Arts and The Whitaker with artist Sophie Gibson, and exploring shoe manufacturing in a world of fast fashion, Valley Heritage can develop a more sustainable programme of activities for different audiences that marry heritage and contemporary issues. This could include ‘pimp my shoe’ upcycling and other fun workshops. These could also be turned into a resource pack that can be issued across the country to spark conversation, creativity and debate.



Craft and Learn sessions

The Rossendale Sole project could be centred on a programme of craft sessions where the collections are used in an purely active way to keep the craft of shoemaking alive. Audiences come to see the collections and use them as inspiration to upskill, or look at design, tooling, craft, upcycling and re-use, in a series of bespoke sessions in partnership with lcoal artists, shoemakers and designers - even tying into famous designers such as Wayne Hemingway and Patrick Grant and TV shows such as Great British Sewing Bee.



Craftmaker residencies

Valley Heritage could host a series of craftmaker residencies who look at a particular aspect of the collection as inspiration - they could be artists, craftspeople, shoe manufacturers, designers, or historians. The culmination of the residency will be dependent on the person and their area of interest, but this could keep the content active and interesting going forward into the future. There is the potential to partner with educational facilities or commercial organisations.

5.5 Festival of [Shoe]making.



A new annual festival of [shoe]making for Rossendale to celebrate its history of making, manufacture and industry.

A fun-filled programme of events, talks, workshops and groups sessions embedded in the footwear heritage of the region, and bringing it to new audiences in a highly engaging and creative way.

https://www.hemingwaydesign.co.uk/projects/national-festival-of-making/

https://www.hca.ac.uk/event/ferrous-2022







5.6 Northern Sole Social Club.



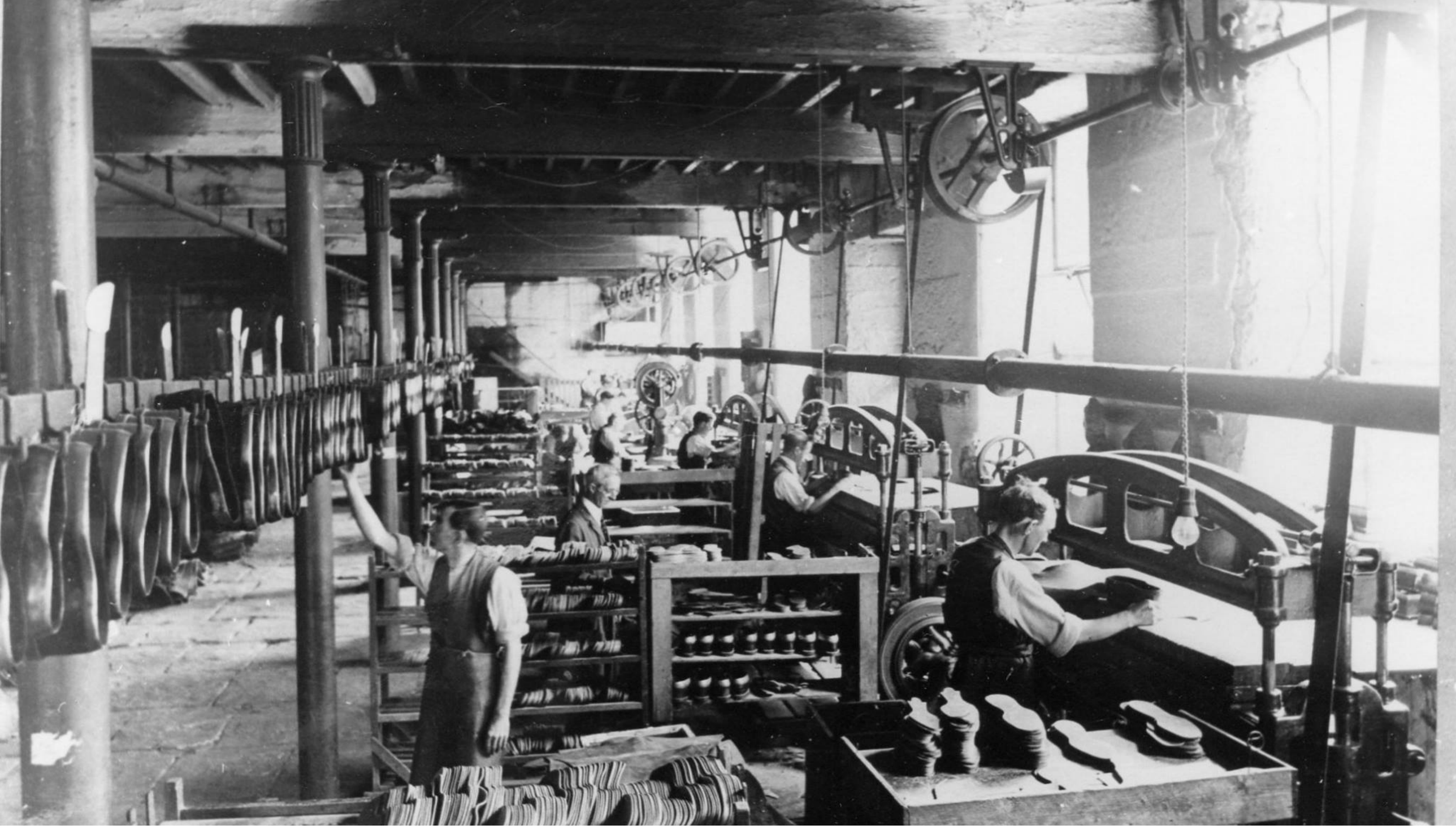
A new social club for those connected to the Rossendale footwear industry

A vibrant, fun and inclusive social club with programmes hosted in venues across Rossendale for former workers of the shoe industry. Opportunities to reminisce, talk about memories, reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing. Could grow the programme to include ingenerational sharing of skills and knowledge with those in the community looking to upskill, are school leavers moving into employment and those on benefits.









Prepared by Sarah Lee, Interpretation Consultant on behalf of:

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