

A.Sindall: Textile trimming manufacturer, Dalston an interview with Mr. Cecil Sindall

Recorded and transcribed by Dr Denis Smith

The family firm of Albert A Sindall, textile trimming manufacturer, was founded in 1864 by Mr Cecil Sindall's grandfather in Bethnal Green, moving to Dalston 10 years later. The area was well known until the 1970s for furniture and soft furnishings, with many firms providing a major source of employment. From small beginnings the firm grew to a peak of over 100 staff before 1939; after 1945, with increased mechanisation, about half that number were required. Sindall's materials were used on state occasions, and for uniforms in war and peace. Mr Sindall (Plate 1), who lives in Dalston close to the firm's former premises, started work in 1915 and retired in 1981, aged 81! when production moved to Derby. Mr. Sindall was recorded at his home Clifton House, 17 Malvern Road, Hackney, London E8 3LP Friday 15th March 1985.

"Mr. Sindall's grandfather, George Bernard Thomas Sindall, started the firm, Albert A. Sindall in 1864, he was in his early youth at the time, he was working for Faudel Phillips in Newgate Street, City, and the buyer there wanted some tassels. So he said he thought his sisters could make those, and he bought his silks from Pearsalls in Little Britain, as they were then, and apparently made a success of the job with the tassels and was able to get started himself in business, gradually. He made a spinning walk down his garden at his home at 12 Peters Street in Bethnal Green - its not there anymore, its been built on. He gradually employed people, handloom weavers (Plate 2), and one thing and another, and built up until he wanted to enlarge and he went to Lansdowne Road, in 1874, where the church is built now, on the site there. He bought three houses - he occupied a large double-fronted house, number 102, Adelaide Lodge, with his family, numbers 100 and 98 were converted and a factory, plus the gardens - the gardens were built on, and my mother and father Albert Alexander Sindall, were married and lived in the upper part of number 98, where we were born, in February 1900, my twin brother, Redvers George, and myself. We had no light downstairs - when we were in the kitchen, if we wanted to look out of the window, we opened the window and watched the spinners walking up and down. When we were about five, my brother was ill and I was

allowed to go in the street with a little railway engine and run up and down on the pavement. I wasn't out there ten minutes before the old lady in the house next door came out - or sent her companion out to complain to my father about the noise I was making and we were not allowed to play in the street anymore - its a bit of a contrast with what you get today.

In 1906 we moved to the new factory, a 2-floor building approximately 130ft x 23ft, in Middleton Road, on the site of the stables attached to number 36, Albert Road, I should say - it didn't become Middleton Road until 1933, I think it was (Plate 3). We had to go to school, but we spent all our spare time playing in the factory, or trying to help somebody around the factory. In 1909-10 and 1911, additions were made to the factory by building on the garden of number 38 Albert Road. As we grew up we couldn't leave school fast enough, we didn't want to go anywhere else and when war broke out in 1914 my father decided to try and capture some of the German trade and he put all the power looms in. The floor was lowered by 6ft - which meant removing many tons of soil - to accommodate 10 new Jacquard looms which were built in Coventry by Thomas Chaplin & Co. The 400 needle double lift Jacquards, with 800 hooks and springs controlling 2,400 ends of harness each with a maileye and lingoe weight were built by William Devage & Co. Ltd., Manchester. The first loom arrived in 1915 and the remainder arrived at intervals throughout the war (Plate 4).

My brother Redvers and I were anxious to work in the factory and left school in 1915, in time to help to build them, working mainly in the new department, assisting in the erection of the 14 foot high looms, and it was a good job we did, really, because the manager that was engaged to do the job, he got his calling up papers, and he didn't want to go in the army, so he went to Manchester and he picked up a chap there in a pub who was quite prepared to join the army in his name, as he was a corporal, and would get the extra money and our man skidaddled to Canada in 1916 and stayed there until the war was over. So we were left on our own and what we had learnt in erecting the first two or three looms carried



Plate 1. Mr Cecil Sindall demonstrating how sergeants' sashes were woven (Photo RJM Carr 1981)

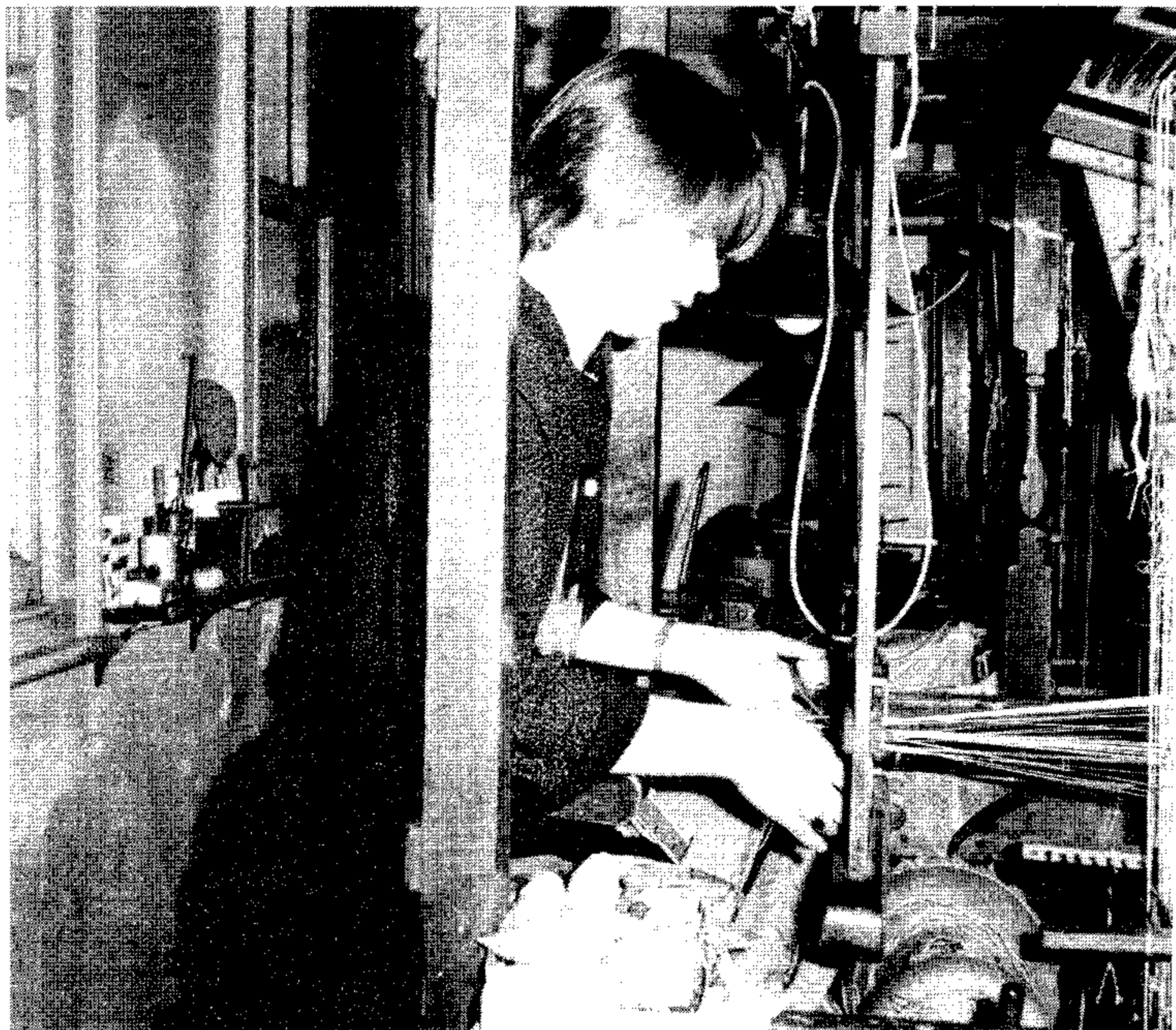


Plate 2. Wendy Cushing working at a traditional narrow fabric hand-loom (Photo RJM Carr 1981)



Plate 3. Exterior of Sindall's works, 116 Middleton Road E8 (Photo RJM Carr 1981)

us off in good stead. We erected the first of them with the help of the spinners and people in the factory.

In 1918 we had our calling up papers - my brother was unfit, he suffered from bronchitis and asthma, and I was unfit because I was getting over rheumatic fever, I've got a weak heart, so we were very lucky really - we probably wouldn't be alive today. This chap, Mathias Reish, came along in 1918 from one of our friends in the trade, he wasn't satisfied where he was, and my father engaged him. He'd had his training in France and he was running the factory for J.R. Foster, Foley St, in the West End and he stayed with us for over twenty years - he knew everything. He taught us how to do the designing, draughting, and everything, that was my job. We had a very happy time with him. We carried on from there and before my father died in 1929, he put a new floor on the front part of the building in 1925 by raising the slate roof on jacks - 22ft x 30ft and weighing approximately 50 tons and that was the last of the extensions until we were able to extend again after the second world war. Redvers managed the office and dealt with colour matching and purchasing of supplies and I attended to the plant and the visiting of customers. Mr. Mathias Reish in the Weaving Department and Mr. Joseph

Woods in the Spinning Department were very good friends and in spite of the slump, in the 1930's, we managed to hold our own whilst quite a number of manufacturers went into liquidation. We purchased a number of second-hand machines and converted them for our own purpose and bought some new machines. In 1936 we ordered 6 new machines from Germany for spinning, braiding and fringe weaving and were very fortunate to get delivery just as war was declared in 1939. As the machines came into operation we gradually stopped all hand spinning on the ground floor.

At Lansdowne Road they had a small gas engine with tube ignition for driving new machinery for winding silk, cotton and wool, together with additional spinning and twisting wheels from Messrs J. Walker, Derby, and when they came to Albert Road in 1906 they had a larger one to run a little bit more winding machinery but the spinning and twisting wheels continued to be turned by men and boys until about 1916 (Plate 5). In 1914 when the looms were installed we had a 14 horse-power National Gas Engine which became my responsibility for a number of years and that eventually drove the whole factory until the middle '50s as we converted machines to power. It was only because of the disruption of the gas mains that we eventually

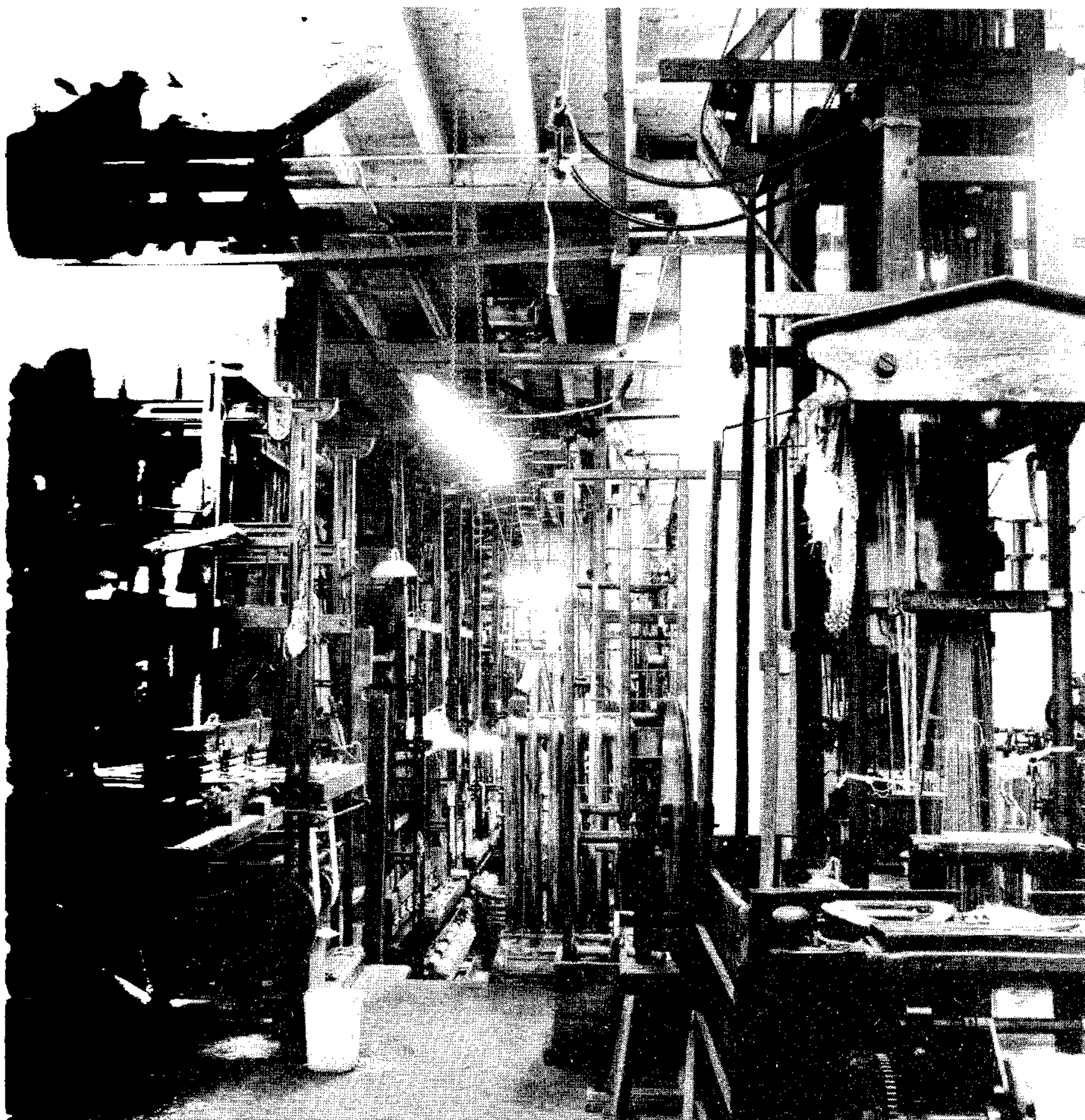


FIG 4 Narrow fabric Jacquard looms tightly packed on the ground floor of No116 (Photo RJM Carr 1981)

...to put electric motors in to drive the looms and leave the gas engine until the gas supply became more regular - that was during the second world war. During that time we were on almost total war work but we were asked to make dressing-gown cords and tapes and send them to Australia and New Zealand because the ships were going back empty after bringing in munitions and food supplies. During the war we made nearly two million yards of braid for the services, webbings and one thing and another, and nearly a million and a half lanyards of all types, also elasticated nets for map reading tables in tanks, and red wool pom-poms for the Royal Dutch Navy and Free French Navy.

We had a job when the war was over to get supplies of yarn because it was rationed very tightly, but we eventually got round that and we were lucky because we had quite a good staff. In 1946 our cousin, Basil Hibbard, was demobilised and he joined the firm, taking over the major share of the office control from Redvers. Very soon after the war the men began to come back, the girls were getting married and they were all leaving us again. But we were able to get young people from school, which is far better than getting youngsters when they are grown up, they don't settle down to work really, not that type of work - its a bit tedious at the beginning. We held a good staff and until the war we had just

