



DANIEL MEADOWS SHUTTLES, STEAM AND SOOT - A COTTON MILL IN LANCASHIRE

In 1975 Daniel Meadows began a two-year post as photographer-in-residence to the Borough of Pendle in Lancashire. Here, he found himself drawn to Bancroft Shed, the last remaining steam powered cotton weaving mill in the district.

Against the backdrop of a declining industrial landscape, Daniel began documenting the life of the mill and speaking to the people who worked there. From retired weaver Bessie Dickinson, to engineer Stanley Graham, flue cleaner Charlie Sutton and steeplejack Peter Tatham, he created a remarkable portrait of Bancroft Shed's workers and their disappearing trades.

Shuttles, Steam and Soot was first exhibited in 1978, as part of the Half Moon Photography Workshop's radical programme of affordable, portable, plastic-encapsulated touring shows. Sent from galleries to community centres, from the Shetland Islands to Germany, the exhibition was eventually lost.

Fifty years on, Daniel worked with Four Corners to recreate his touring exhibition. A rarely seen body of work by a leading figure in British documentary photography, we are thrilled that *Shuttles, Steam and Soot* can continue its journey.

Daniel Meadows, photographer and digital storyteller, is a twentieth century pioneer of British documentary practice. His photographs and audio recordings, made over almost fifty years, capture uniquely the felt life of the everyday in England. Challenging the status quo he has always worked collaboratively.

He is best known for his 1973-74 journey around England in the Free Photographic Omnibus, when he travelled 10,000 miles in a converted double-decker making portraits in free sessions on the streets of 22 different British towns and cities. His digital storytelling project, which the BBC developed as Capture Wales and for which he was creative director (2001-06), won a BAFTA Cymru in 2002.

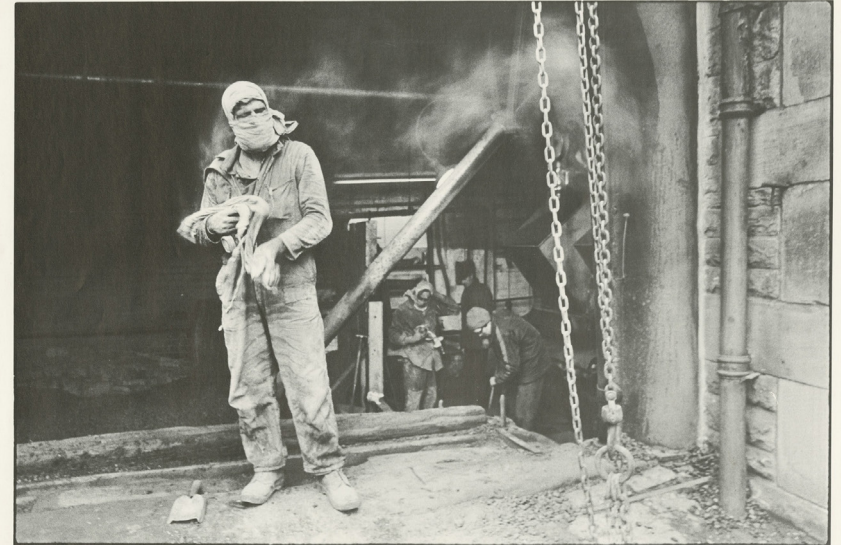
His work, which paved the way for many of those now working in participatory media, has been widely exhibited both at home and abroad. Solo shows include the ICA London (1975), Camerawork (1978), the Photographers' Gallery (1987) and a touring retrospective from the National Media Museum (2011). Group shows include Tate Britain (2007) and Hayward Gallery Touring (2008).

His books include: *Book of the Road* (Bluecoat Press 2023) and *Now and Then: England 1970-2015* (Bodleian Library 2019). He has also made 20 zines with Café Royal Books.

In 2019 his archive was acquired by the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford.

danielmeadows.co.uk

SHUTTLES, STEAM & SOOT – A COTTON MILL IN LANCASHIRE



PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL MEADOWS

With the support of the Arts Council of Great Britain and Greater London Arts Association. A Half Moon Touring Exhibition

ABOUT DANIEL MEADOWS



REQUIREMENTS

SPACE REQUIRED

39 panels, each (W) 508 x (H) 635mm

LIST OF WORKS

96 images printed across 39 panels.

8 minute film by Daniel Meadows, featuring photographs and audio interviews with Bancroft Mill workers portrayed in the photographs.

Reproduction of original 1978 exhibition poster on fabric banner, (W) 230 x (H) 160cm

Additional archival material related to the history of weaving, from Daniel Meadows' collection, available upon request.

INTERPRETATION

The 39 panels feature texts alongside Daniel Meadows' photographs.

Additional introductory text can be provided upon request.

FRAMING

Each panel is encapsulated in plastic, in the style of the original 1978 exhibition. 1cm eylets in each corner.

EQUIPMENT

Venue to provide installation and AV equipment. The panels can be hung using screws or pins, and the film is provided on a memory stick or via transfer.

PREVIOUS VENUES

Four Corners, London 28 February - 29 March 2025

CONTACT

ruby@fourcornersfilm.co.uk

HIRE FEE

£1000

TRANSPORT AND INSURANCE

Venues will be responsible for two way transport within mainland UK and for insurance in transit and in situ.

The dimensions of the transportation box are (L)70 x (W)59 x (D)10cm

PUBLICATION

Three newspaper-style publications, *Shuttles*, *Steam* and *Soot*, featuring Daniel Meadows' photographs, published by Bluecoat Press.



Queen Street Mill, Leeds, Yorkshire

To contend with the appalling noise, the weavers of Lancashire invented a new way of communicating. They call it 'mee-mawing' or 'mi-mewing', a language based on lip-reading and gestures. Not only is it a quick and efficient method for passing information around the mill, it also works as a propeller for gossip. When a weaver wants to draw another into conversation she will let out a high-pitched wail which carries above the hums and attracts the attention of the person she wants to talk to. From then on, messages can travel through the shed without anybody having to shout or raise their voice. However...



Spring Bank Mill, Lancashire

...if two weavers want to have a private conversation they have to get into a huddle and make sure no one can see their lips moving, otherwise everyone in sight will be able to 'overhear' what they were saying.

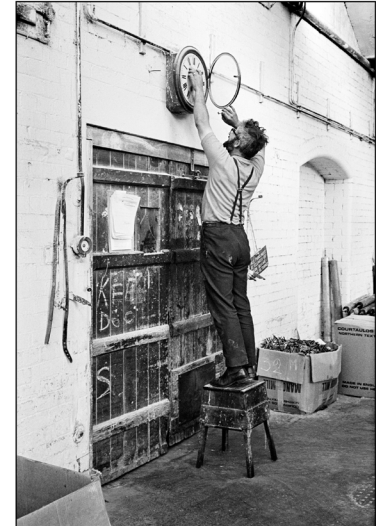


Spring Bank Mill, Lancashire

Eaves-droppers see no good of themselves.



Stanley relaxes with a friend, Dr. Pickard, one of the compensations for long hours and poor pay is that people can drop by for a chat.



Winding the checks, which is done every Sunday. Once fired the boiler has to be kept in steam by Stanley or the firebrake who at weekends take it in turn to tend to its needs.



When resting, Stanley will hear if anything goes wrong: "As you sit and watch the engine you become part of it. Your heart even starts beating at 67 revs. per minute."



Heaghts having a broken arm, Eric Hagitholthorn ("Hagg") keeps working on the chimney.

The work here was made by Daniel Meadows during a two year post (1975-77) as photographer-in-residence in the Borough of Pendle in north-east Lancashire which includes the towns of Nelson, Colne, Barnoldswick, Earby and surrounding areas. In addition to the borough council, his sponsors included The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Nelson and Colne College, as well as Mid-Pennine Arts Association based in nearby Burnley.

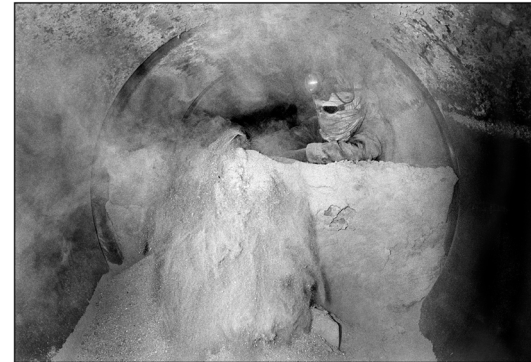
This exhibition is a reconstruction by Daniel of the original 1978 Half Moon Photography Workshop exhibition 'Shuttles, Steam and Soot', a show designed by Ed Barber with text by Jenny Matthews. It toured extensively in the UK and was also shown in Germany but was lost, presumed destroyed, sometime in the 1990s. No facsimile exists.

In remaking the exhibition, Daniel's reference material was limited to some images of the captions and two snapshots taken when the show was first displayed. So, although he has kept faith with the original concept, what he has done should be regarded as a 'fresh representation' rather than an exact replica.

Daniel acknowledges the generous contribution of the Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford, in making available original negative scans of many of the images reproduced here.

'Shuttles, Steam and Soot' is a Four Corners Touring Show. For details of cost and availability of hiring contact:

Four Corners
121 Roman Road
Bethnal Green
London E2 4NY
020 9961 4111



Inside the flues it is dark and very hot. Dust blows all around. The boiler is still dangerously hot because it is only 18 hours since it was last in steam.

The 'inside men' move along the 3ft. high 'sole flue' leaning on hand-rakes to keep their hands from burning on the hot floor. So that each man knows the exact location of his partner as they work, they talk to each other all the time. If the conversation dries up they sing. It is important for each to keep up some kind of noise so that his mate knows he has not been overcome by the heat.

The picture above shows Charlie in one of the furnace tubes, shovelling flue-dust into the ash-pit under the fire bars near the front end of the boiler.



The first job is clearing out the pit under the 'commodes' (an arrangement of tubes sealed upright into the flue which uses waste gases to pre-heat the feed-water for the boiler). The 'commies' have to be kept free from soot and this is done by a system of scrapers that ride up and down the pipes dropping lumps of soot into the pit.



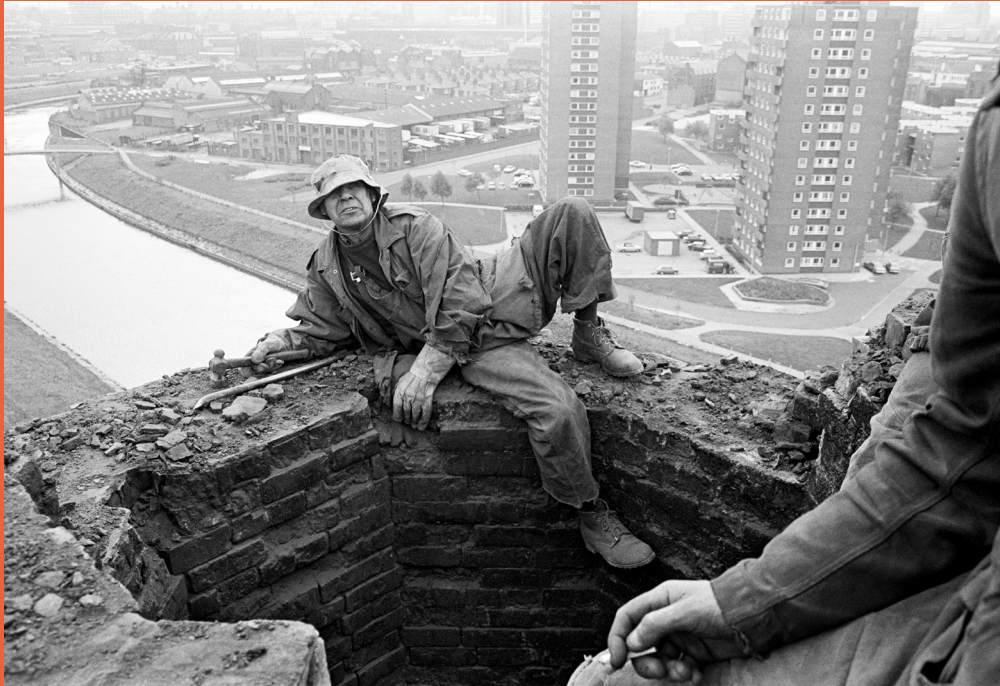
Weaver, Queen Street Mill, Harle Syke, Burnley. January 1976.

To contend with the appalling noise ('clatter') weavers communicated using lip-reading and gesture ('mee-mawing').



Weaving Shed, James Nutter and Sons, Barnoldswick. April 1976.

Lancashire looms were arranged in alleys, each weaver minding ten looms. It was piecework. Although the loom came to a stop when a weft pirn ran out, this was not the case for warp breakages. Weavers had to be vigilant to keep their looms running.



Disused city incinerator chimney, Salford. September 1976.

150 feet up, atop of the stack and shortly after starting the demolition process, steeplejack Peter Tatham, poses for his portrait.



James Nutter & Sons, Bancroft Shed, Barnoldswick. April 1977.

During maintenance, when the boiler was drained, super-heated water would escape through broken drains and cracks in the paving.



James Nutter & Sons, Bancroft Shed, Barnoldswick. April 1976.

Charlie Sutton of the Weldone fluing gang with Jack his fellow inside man, ragged up before entering the boiler to clean the flues.



James Nutter & Sons, Bancroft Shed, Barnoldswick. Wakes holiday 1977.

Inside the vessel of the Lancashire boiler the insurance company's assessor conducts his annual inspection.

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL, DANIEL MEADOWS' COLLECTION

These items relate to Bancroft Shed and the history of weaving. They were collected by Daniel Meadows, who has written detailed captions on each item. They may be included in the exhibition hire upon request.

TOURING EXHIBITIONS

- 1.** Manuscript Notes on Weaving First Year, James Holmes, 1915.
- 2.** James Nutter & Sons Ltd, headed notepaper.
- 3.** Photograph, 1920, Eliza Jane Salter, eldest child of James Nutter, performs Bancroft Shed's opening ceremony.
- 4.** James Nutter & Sons Ltd, brass nameplate.
- 5.** Pre and post-war shuttles, used in the weaving process.
- 6.** A pair of women's clogs, traditionally worn by workers.
Bought at the Walkley clog factory in Hebden Bridge in 1978.







“Interesting and informative and above all, a very moving record of the detail and skill of mill workers and those associated with the industry. Thank you”

“Extraordinary social history, which often resonates today”

“I loved this exhibition! I could almost smell the soot (and the workers!) and sense the atmosphere of noise and heat. To think this was only in the 70s is quite surprising, it has the air of the 1800s. Thanks for the informative and eye-opening exhibition. The video brought everything together nicely” “Very potent images, meeting eyes with hardworking people who ran this country”

“An important reminder of the nature of industrial work and working conditions that are long gone and replaced by alternative lower paid and testing job opportunities”

“What an amazing, evocative and brilliant exhibition – of people’s lives and times. A background to the ‘humility’ we should all have in living caring lives”

HOW TO HIRE

To make a hire enquiry, please contact us at:

info@fourcornersfilm.co.uk

020 8981 6111

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VISITOR COMMENTS