

WOMEN'S WORK



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_pen_trade#/media/File:Thinktank_Birmingham_-_Gillott\(1\).jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birmingham_pen_trade#/media/File:Thinktank_Birmingham_-_Gillott(1).jpg)

This picture is from the Illustrated London News, 1874. It shows a royal visit to Gillott's pen factory that year.

Women were very important members of the pen trade work force. They would often begin their working life at 14 years old. Their small, nimble fingers were perfect for the detailed work. It took about 9 months to learn the job and be skilled enough to make the 14,000 pen nibs a day that they were expected to make - that's 30 a minute! Chatting with other workers was discouraged as not concentrating could result in an accident and potentially stop that person from being able to work.

Look closely at the picture and think about the differences between the royal women visitors and the women working the hand presses. For example, why do the workers have their hair tied up short?

Imagine you are the worker in the front of the picture. The Prince of Wales has asked you to describe your job. Write a diary entry for the day. What did you say to him? What did you think of the women visitors? Describe your feelings about the day.

