

LAST LINK WITH A DEAD CRAFT

By Echo staff reporter and photographer
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"WALK in and make yourself known," said the home help. "She's sitting at the table peeling the potatoes. I'm off shopping."

There, in the living room of her tiny cottage in Wick-lane, Christchurch, surrounded by mementoes and photographs of days gone by, was Mrs. Rose Andrews.

She will be 91 in April. She lives alone, does her own cooking and lights her own coal fire each morning.

"CHEERFUL"

The home help calls daily and visitors frequently look in for a chat with this cheerful old lady who is the only living link with what was once a thriving local industry

From the age of 15 until she was 20, Mrs. Andrews worked at a bench set against the front window of her cottage, making fusee chains.

The chains, with incredibly tiny links, were used in watches.

MINUTE

Mrs. Andrews produced one for us to see—together with a magnifying glass, without which one could barely see that this was not, in fact, a length of wire.

"You needed good sight," she said. "But on the whole it wasn't too bad. It was no worse than needlework."

The chains are so minute that it has been calculated that 5,000 weighed only one and a half pounds.

EMPLOYED 500

Robert Harvey Cox set up a watch shop in Christchurch around 1776 and later started the fusee chain industry. At its peak about 500 people were employed— Mrs. Andrews' mother among them.

After Cox's death, other local people started making the chains among them William Hart. It was Mr. Hart's son who later employed Mrs. Andrews. The advent of the gear wheel control put an end to the industry about 1900.

Mrs. Andrews recalls that the hours she worked were "not too bad"—from 9 am to 1 pm and from 2 pm to 5 pm, with a half-day on Saturdays. For this she received between eight and ten shillings a week.

"HARD TO BELIEVE"

Mrs. Andrews said she found it hard to believe reports that workhouse child labour was used in the early days of the industry.

"Children would not have had the patience to do it, would they?" she asked.

Her bench, where she worked with a foot pedal-operated hammer, she has promised to the Red House Museum.

Mrs. Andrews' specific job was making the hooks which fitted into each end of the fusee chain.

Her cottage has been in her family for 130 years to her knowledge, and possibly longer.

Her father was a policeman, her grandfather a gardener, and her husband, who died in his 70's several years ago, worked on the railway.

"NOT BEEN FAR"

Mrs. Andrews' life has been centred round Christchurch and the cottage in which she was born. "I have been away," she said, "but never for long. I've been to Eastbourne and Bath. Oh, and I went to London—I mustn't forget that. I've never been further North than London!"

"KEEP UP WITH THE NEWS"

For recreation, Mrs. Andrews looks at her Echo each evening. "You've got to keep up with the news," she said with a laugh.

She and her husband had no children.

Soon she will be leaving her home. She has agreed to go into care, as increasing age makes the daily tasks more difficult for her.

Meanwhile, she sits in the winter evenings by her fire, close to the old workbench, and with a fusee chain wrapped in tissue paper on the sideboard, near to hand.

AN ERA ENDS WITH DEATH OF LAST CHAIN MAKER

C.T. January 5, 1968

AN ERA of Christchurch's industrial history came to an end on Monday when Mrs. Rose Andrews died. She was 91.

For Mrs. Andrews was the last of the borough's chain makers.

She was born in 1876 in a cottage in Wick Lane. She lived there until just before Christmas, when she moved to Sunnyholm, Mundeford.

She began work in Hart's watch and clock fusee-chain factory (which still stands in Bargates, although it is no longer used for chain making) in 1891, when she was 15.

FILE AND POLISH

Her job was to file and polish the hooks which were fitted to the end of the tiny watch chains. It took her an hour to do a gross, for which she was paid 2¼d.

Later she formed part of the cottage industry, making the chains at a window bench in her home. In the Red House Museum, the small hammer, anvil and punch she used can still be seen.

Mrs. Andrews' mother also worked on chains, earning 2s. 6d. a week. In 1896, Mr. Frederick Hart died, and Mrs. Andrews stayed on to help his daughter Sally wind up the business. It was finally closed down in 1899.

Mrs. Andrews' husband died in 1919. They had no children.

She is featured in a booklet written last year by Mr. Allen White. Entitled "The Chain Makers" it gives full details of a lengthy interview with Mrs. Andrews about her place in the chain industry.

Mrs. Andrews is also remembered as a keen worker for the Priory Church, and Sunday School teacher for many years.