Boots and shoes in Northamptonshire

An Educational resource for Key Stages 1 - 3
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is an Archive?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What different types of archival records can tell us about the boot</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and shoe industry in Northamptonshire?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Census returns</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights from our collections</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Suggestions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights from our collections</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Suggestions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps and plans</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights from our collections</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Suggestions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boot and shoe company records</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights from our collections</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Suggestions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other written records</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlights from our collections</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity Suggestions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key questions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worksheets</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary of technical terms</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going further</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful Websites</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Heritage Education at Northamptonshire Archives:
Boots and Shoes in Northamptonshire

What is an Archive?

Archives look after and let you see the documentary and recorded heritage of our past.

All organisations and individuals produce records and archives in the course of their daily activities. Archives may be written on paper or parchment; they can be books, maps or plans, photographs or prints, films or videos, or even computer-generated records. Archives are kept because they answer our questions. They can tell us where we come from and how our ancestors lived. They are an important and fascinating source of information for historical research. They also provide vital evidence of rights and obligations, of decisions and judgements.

Archives are different from libraries as they hold unique, original and often irreplaceable documents. A Record Office collects archives relating to a specific geographical area, usually relating to a county or city and its people. Archivists catalogue records so that people can easily locate material which may be of interest to them. The archives are preserved and conserved to ensure that items are held in the best environmental conditions and are packaged in appropriate materials. Northamptonshire Archives houses collections dating from the 12th century to modern times relating to the history and heritage of the county and connections with the wider world.
The boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire

“...it was impossible to escape the sights, sounds and smells of footwear manufacture.”

Built to last? The buildings of the Northamptonshire Boot and Shoe Industry

Northamptonshire has a long, rich history of footwear manufacture. The first reference to shoemakers in the county is Peter the Cordwainer, who is mentioned in early 13th century records. By 1401 Northampton had established a Guild of Shoemakers and from the 16th century an important trade in the industry developed. During the English Civil War a consortium of Northampton Shoemakers were contracted to make six hundred pairs of boots and four thousand pairs of shoes for Oliver Cromwell’s army. In 1725, Daniel Defoe, the author of Robinson Crusoe, said everyone’s shoes, from the poorest countrymen to the master, came from Northampton, although this is probably an exaggeration. By the 18th century shoemakers were beginning to store shoes in communal warehouses and shoes were being produced in bulk quantities.

Before the introduction of the sewing machine revolutionised footwear manufacture, in the mid 19th century, boots and shoes were made in small workshops at home and sewn together by hand. With new mechanised mass-production methods, footwear manufacture was much faster and cheaper. In towns like Northampton, factory-owners built many rows of terraced housing for their workforce, much of it very close to the centre of the town. By 1871 almost half the men living in Northampton were shoemakers. People were encouraged to work in factories rather than at home, although outworkers existed throughout the 19th century.

Northamptonshire shoemakers were often responsible for providing military footwear. During the Napoleonic wars, at the beginning of the 19th century, the Navy Office frequently ordered thousands of pairs of boots and shoes from Kettering shoemakers. Northamptonshire shoemakers were responsible for supplying around fifty million pairs of boots to the allied forces during World War One. In 1905, a group of shoemakers from Raunds negotiated a standard rate of pay for producing army boots when they marched from Raunds to the Houses of Parliament to demand fair pay. In World War Two shoe factories once again produced boots to supply the allied forces.

Changes in the latter half of the 20th century meant a decline in footwear manufacture in the county as boots and shoes could be produced more cheaply elsewhere. The boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire became more specialised. An example of this is the introduction of Dr Marten boots, a style of boot named after a doctor in the German Army, Klaus Märtens. During World War Two Märtens designed improvements to his army boots, with soft leather and air padded soles. British shoe manufacturer R Griggs Group Ltd bought the rights to produce the boots and production moved to Northamptonshire in 1960. The boots proved popular with skinheads in the 1960s, followed by the punk-rock and new wave musicians of the 1970s. They continued to be popular with a range of different customers throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the range expanded to include a variety of colours and styles. However, because of declining sales figures, production moved to the Far East in 2003. In 2007 production returned to the UK when Cobbs Lane factory in Wollaston began producing the vintage line.
What can different types of archival records tell us about the boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Archival Record</th>
<th>What it tells us</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Census returns</td>
<td><strong>Census returns</strong> tell us about the different tasks people working in the boot and shoe industry did, for example <em>shoe finisher</em> and <em>clicker</em> are both specialist roles in the shoe industry. They also tell us about whole families who worked in the same industry.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photographs</td>
<td><strong>Photographs</strong> show us what it was like working in a boot and shoe factory. We can use them to find out what people wore to work in the past and the different tasks people working in the boot and shoe industry had to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps and plans</td>
<td><strong>Maps and plans</strong> tell us where boot and shoe factories were located in the past and what they looked like. They can also tell us how big the factories were. On some maps we can see the houses that were built for the boot and shoe workers in the past.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boot and shoe company records</td>
<td><strong>Boot and shoe company records</strong> have lots of information. For example ‘order books’ and ‘sales books’ tell us about different types of footwear and where these were sold. Plans show us how factories would have looked and ‘stock books’ tell us about the raw materials for shoemaking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other written records</td>
<td><strong>Other written records</strong> include apprenticeship indentures, newspapers and trade directories. They can tell us about people who worked in the boot and shoe trade. Sometimes they include more information about companies or adverts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The need to have a clear understanding of the growing population was recognised towards the end of the 18th century. The Census Act 1800 stated that a census should be carried out every 10 years to record the number of people, their occupations, and the numbers of families and inhabited and uninhabited houses. The first official census was on 10 March 1801 and estimated the population of England and Wales to be 8.9 million. With the exception of 1941, the census has been held every decade since this Act, normally on a Sunday, as this was traditionally the day of least population movement.

The census returns for 1801 to 1831 were taken by the government for purely statistical purposes and the details of households and individuals were only used to create local summaries and then, supposedly, destroyed. Census returns from 1841 are more instructive to the historian because they contain surviving information about individuals’ lives. From 1851, householders were asked to give the precise place of birth of each resident, to state their relationship to the head of the household, their marital status and the nature of any disabilities from which they may have suffered - ‘blind, deaf-and-dumb, imbecile or lunatic’.

The information on a census is often used by people researching their individual family histories but also helps with other areas of historical research, such as house and village history. In addition, they can be used as a source for the study of occupations. For example, how many people were domestic servants, agricultural labourers or people described ‘as of independent means’? Professions that appear frequently on census returns include agricultural labourers (or Ag lab), lace making and, in Northamptonshire, work associated with the shoe trade.

At the Northamptonshire Archives we hold census returns on microfilm. Free access to the Ancestry website is available on site at the Record Office and through the Northamptonshire Libraries. This website is particularly useful for searching census records both locally and nationally. Census returns, from 1841 to 1911, can be searched to show the range of specific tasks within the footwear industry, such as clicker and closer, as well as the generic shoemaker. They also show different generations of families engaged in the same trade.
Activity Suggestions

Students can investigate the census to find out more about the variety of tasks involved in footwear manufacture and the ages of the people involved.

Key questions

Find the oldest person.
Who is it? How old are they?
Find the youngest person.
Who is it? How old are they?
How many men or boys are there?
How many women or girls are there?
How many people were born in...?
What was Joe Blog's occupation?
Where was Jane Smith born?
How many people worked in the footwear industry?

Key Stage 1

Children could look at transcripts of census returns and find the names and ages of people working in the boot and shoe industry in their local area in the past.

Key Stage 2

Children can investigate the handwriting styles and answer comprehension questions about the census. They could look up the meaning of the different roles and create a footwear glossary. There is a numeracy link where children can sort the information into a two-way Carroll diagram (see worksheet section for an example).

Key Stage 3

Students could compare and contrast census returns from 1851 and 1911 to see how the footwear industry had developed. They could look for evidence of outworking or investigate issues such as the role of women in the footwear industry; whether they could trace generations of shoemaking families through the census; how far people travelled from their place of birth to find work, etc.
Photographs

Photographs are a good source of finding out about the past. It is not just what we know about the image but the internal evidence that archivists use to date an unknown photograph. The clothes people wear and the types of transport they use tell us more about the time in which the photograph was taken. Photographs of the footwear industry reveal information about what it was like to work in a shoe factory, both on the shop floor and in the office, or what a shoe shop looked like in the past.

Highlights from our collections

Within the boot and shoe collections held at the Northamptonshire Record Office there are photographs of the footwear industry.

We have a collection of thirty five photographs taken inside the C. E and Lewis Shoe factory in Northampton in the early 20th century. We also hold twenty nine photographs from the Lotus Shoe Factory in Northampton, taken in 1929, that show all aspects of work inside the factory, including office scenes complete with rows of type writers, where in the modern workplace we would see computers.

The Manfield collection includes photographs of their shoe shops in Calcutta (India), Dublin (Ireland) and Manchester (England) taken in 1910.

Please contact Northamptonshire Archive Service for more information about how to obtain copies of these images. Please note some images may have copyright restrictions.

Alternatively, Northampton Museum uploaded some images of their boot and shoe collection on flickr: [www.flickr.com/photos/northampton_museum](http://www.flickr.com/photos/northampton_museum)
**Activity Suggestions**

Students can use photographs to investigate how the footwear industry looked in the past. They can use the internal evidence of the photographs to find out more about the lives of people involved in the footwear industry.

It is worthwhile drawing the students attention to the clothes people wore and the high quality formal footwear you can often see people wearing to work. There is an opportunity to discuss the difference between casual and formal footwear in modern society and how this links to the development of the boot and shoe industry.

**Key questions**

What does this photograph tell us about the footwear industry in the past?
What is happening in the photograph?
Can you see any special tools used in the footwear industry in the photograph?
What sorts of clothes are people wearing?
What do you think it would be like working in a shoe factory?
What makes you think this?

**Key Stage 1**

Children may not be aware of the large numbers of people who worked in footwear factories. They can also investigate what people wore such as protective aprons.
They can look at photographs of a shoe shops around the world at the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century and compare these with images of shoe shops today.

**Key Stage 2**

Pupils can investigate the photographs and use the images as a stimulus to write a multisensory setting description, saying what it may have been like in a particular room within the shoe factory. A scaffold for multisensory writing is included in the worksheets section.

**Key Stage 3**

Students could investigate photographs of an Office in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century and compare this with a modern office. For example, investigating what an office environment was like before computers became common place. They can also investigate how fashions have changed and what people wore for work.
Maps and plans

When studying the history and heritage of the footwear industry in the local area, it is worth considering where the factories were situated and what they looked like. Some of the actual buildings that were once part of the footwear industry have now been converted for other uses or are in a state of disrepair, others are still in use. Historic maps and plans can show where these buildings were located in the past.

Large scale Ordnance Survey mapping of Great Britain begun in the mid 19th century. Before World War Two, surveys were carried out county by county rather than using the National Grid system we use today. The earliest OS maps of Northamptonshire are from the 1880s. The majority of these maps are either six inches to one mile (1:10000) or twenty five inches to one mile (1:2500). 25 inch OS maps of the local area often show the location of boot and shoe factories and the associated leatherwear industry. It is also possible to see the layout of the houses some of the factory owners built for their workers in the Victorian period and earlier.

Plans and other architectural drawings show the layout of different factories and rooms where different activities such as clicking and finishing were carried out. Some of these plans include elevations of the building, showing large windows that allowed plenty of light was able to enter the building. This provided a well lit working environment.

Highlights from our collections

At Northamptonshire Archives we hold 25" OS maps covering the county dating from the 1880s to just before World War Two. The specific editions vary depending on locality.

Plans of boot and shoe factories in Northamptonshire include plans of Jaques and Clark Ltd, Rushden in 1942; elevations of Whitney and Westley Ltd, Burton Latimer in 1969 and various plans of Northampton boot and shoe factories from the Victorian period to the mid 20th century.
Activity Suggestions

Students use maps and plans to investigate where buildings and places associated with the footwear industry were located in the past.

Key questions

What does this plan tell us about the layout of a boot/shoe factory?
Do you think there is a reason why different rooms in a boot or shoe factory were arranged in a particular order? Why do you think this is?
Where are the boot/shoe factories located on the map?
Where do you think the factory owners would build houses for their workers?
Where are the tanneries located?

Key Stage 1

Children could go for a walk round the local area and take photographs of buildings, and places associated with the local footwear industry. They could then put these photographs on a historic map of the area.

Key Stage 2

Children can locate boot and shoe factories on old maps of the local area and go for a walk to investigate the function of those buildings today. In addition, children can use plans in conjunction with photographs and think about the different processes involved in making footwear. They can identify the main stages of producing a shoe/boot and match photographs to the different rooms on a plan.

Key Stage 3

Students can study maps of the local area and think of reasons why the buildings of the footwear and associated leather industries are sited where they are. For example, tanneries used a huge amount of water in the tanning process and are often sited near rivers. Students can look for proximity to the local transport network, so the finished footwear could be transported all around the world.
Boots and shoe company records

Records and archives are created as part of the day to day running of the footwear industry. Cash books, stock books, sales ledgers and wages books all tell us information about a particular company, from how much an individual was paid to do their work, to how many thousands of shoes were sold. Some collections also contain plans and photographic records (see separate sections).

Boot and shoe company records sometimes contain other documents such as catalogues and magazines that have interesting images that can be useful in the classroom. Letters and other papers reveal more information about a particular factory, such as the firm of G.T. Hawkins Ltd of Northampton, who supplied boots to the Olympic equestrian team in 1984. There are also copies of the factory rules which can be quite interesting.

When considering using boot and shoe company records in the classroom it is important to consider that records created in the last 100 years may sometimes be subject to the Data Protection Act (1998) and have restricted access.

Highlights from our collections

More than fifty boot and shoe companies have deposited records with Northamptonshire Archive Service. The nature of these deposits varies from company to company. For more information about specific details of our boot and shoe collections, please contact the Archive Service or, alternatively, see our website [www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/heritage](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/heritage).

The Gotch of Kettering archive contains letters about Navy Office contracts between 1803 and 1816. These letters show that the Navy Office was ordering thousands of boots and shoes to be shipped around the world to provide footwear for people fighting during the Napoleonic wars. This collection also contains 18th century stock books belonging to Thomas Gotch which show the vast numbers of shoes that were being produced at a time before the introduction of the sewing machine and purpose built factories.
Activity Suggestions

There is a vast array of information to be discovered within boot and shoe company records but the activities would depend on the records that were available for a specific company.

Key questions

There are no key questions.

Key Stage 1

Children could look at different shoes in catalogues from the 1950s and use these as a stimulus to design their own shoes from mod roc or similar art materials.

Key Stage 2

Children could investigate where shoes were sent and mark the export locations on a world map.

Key Stage 3

Children could choose a particular factory and concentrate on investigating different sources as part of a class project.
Other written records

There are other written records that can reveal information about the footwear industry in Northamptonshire. Newspaper clippings tell stories about individuals related to the industry. Articles vary, from stories about long serving members of a particular factory, to adverts for a particular style of boot or shoe.

Apprenticeship indentures tell us what it was like for some one learning a trade and set out their conditions of service stating what the master craftsman would provide and what is expected of the apprentice.

Eighteenth century Militia lists, record names of men who are of an age to fight for their country if necessary; these can be interesting source of information as they often also list the professions of those men.

Trade directories are another source of information as they sometimes contain adverts for local boot and shoe factories. In addition, they occasionally have more information about particular factories such as the number of people employed and which countries the footwear is exported to.

Highlights from our collections

At Northamptonshire Record Office we have a collection of 18th century Militia lists. The 1777 militia list for Kettering names Thomas and Edward Gotch as shoemakers. Thomas Gotch established a boot manufacturing and banking business in Kettering at the end of the 18th century. His son, John Cooper Gotch, was responsible for providing thousands of shoes for the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century.

The 18th century militia lists have a good survival rate and most areas of the county are represented. However with other records, such as newspaper cuttings and apprenticeship indentures, what we hold depends on location, for example, we hold a copy of the 1912 trade directory for Wellingborough which gives information on local businesses, such as the footwear industry.
Activity Suggestions

This is dependent on what sources are available for the local area.

Key questions

There are no key questions

Key Stage 1

Children may enjoy hearing about stories from newspapers or investigating transcripts of lists to find out about occupations in the past.

Key Stage 2

Children can investigate militia lists of the local area to find out about professions of people living in the 18th century. On a copy of a local militia list they can highlight the shoemakers and cordwainers. There is also the opportunity to look more generally at professions in the 18th century.

Alternatively, children can study factory rules introduced in the 1890s and think what it may have been like to work in a Victorian boot or shoe factory.

Key Stage 3

Students can investigate sources to find out more about the boot and shoe industry in their local area. They can evaluate sources and say what type of information they provide and how useful this is to the historian.
Heritage Education at Northamptonshire Archives:
Boots and Shoes in Northamptonshire

Worksheets

My Northamptonshire boot and shoe KWL grid
A KWL grid allows students to organise what they know about a topic, what they want to find out during the course of their learning and finally what they have learnt throughout the topic.

Questions, Questions, Questions
This worksheet allows students to think about the range of questions they may want to ask someone who worked in the footwear industry.

Questions, Questions, Questions: Motivations and beliefs
This worksheet allows students to think about a range of higher level questions they may want to ask about the motivations and beliefs of someone who worked in the footwear industry.

Two-way Carroll Diagram
This is an example of how students could sort information from within a census return.

Creative Writing Scaffold
This is a scaffold to plan a piece of multisensory creative writing about what it may have been like to work in the shoe factory.
### My ‘Northamptonshire boots and shoes’ KWL grid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I <strong>know</strong></th>
<th>What I <strong>want to know</strong></th>
<th>What I have <strong>learnt</strong></th>
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If you could meet someone who worked in the Northamptonshire boot and shoe industry, what questions would you ask?

**Question Starters:**
1. Who...?
2. Where...?
3. When...?
4. Why...?
5. What...?
6. How...?
Questions, Questions, Questions
Beliefs and motivation

If you could meet someone who worked in the Northamptonshire boot and shoe industry, what questions would you ask?

Question Starters:
1. Why did you...?
2. What do you think about...?
3.Isn’t it true that...?
4. Are you happy with...?
5. What makes you...?
6. Why did you react...?
Choose 10 names from the census and sort them into this two-way Carroll Diagram

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Works in the shoe trade</th>
<th>Does <strong>not</strong> work in the shoe trade</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Not Male</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Imagine a world
You are going to write a setting description of a shoe factory.
Use this worksheet to plan your ideas

Where are you? What are you doing?

What can you see?

What sounds can you hear?

What can you smell?

What can you touch?

How does it make you feel? Why?
## Glossary of technical terms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>apprentice</td>
<td>Someone, working to learn a trade, who has signed a legal agreement called an apprenticeship indenture. In the past, apprenticeships normally lasted seven years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>boot binder</td>
<td>A person who operates the machinery in a factory that binds the leather edges on boots or shoes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boot riveter</td>
<td>A person working in a factory who put rivets (metal bolts or pins) into boots and shoes to attach the sole of the boot to the leather upper.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bottom</td>
<td>The sole and heel of the shoe. These can be made of leather, rubber, or, in more recent times, synthetic materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clicker</td>
<td>A worker in the shoe trade responsible for cutting out the different parts of the shoe. They were named because of the sound their clicking sound their tools made as they cut the leather.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clicking</td>
<td>The process of cutting out the materials to make a shoe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>closing</td>
<td>This is the process, after clicking, where the different parts of the upper shoe are sewn together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cordwainer</td>
<td>A word originally used to describe a boot or shoemaker who worked with cordovan leather. Later it became used more generally to mean a shoemaker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finishing</td>
<td>This is one of final stages in the shoemaking process. The edges of the heel and shoe are smoothed and the uppers are polished and, in some companies, final decoration is added.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>last</td>
<td>This is the shape around which shoes were moulded. Historically, these were carved from wood; in modern times they can also be made from plastic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lasting</td>
<td>This is the process where the boot or shoe is moulded into a foot shape around the last.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>making</td>
<td>This happens at the same time as the lasting process and is when the uppers and bottom part of the boot or shoe are joined together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>upper</td>
<td>The outer (and lining) that make up the top part of a boot or shoe. These can be leather, fabrics, or, in modern times, synthetic materials.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Heritage Education Service aims to make the collections of the Northamptonshire Archives accessible to all ages of school children. We offer bespoke workshops for both primary and secondary pupils. These can take place both inside and outside the classroom. We welcome groups of school children to the Northamptonshire Archives for tours and taught workshops; alternatively, we can visit your school. In addition the Heritage Education Officer is happy to offer free consultation and advice to teachers wishing to use our Heritage Education services.

For more information or to book a session please contact the Heritage Education Officer [heritagelearning@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:heritagelearning@northamptonshire.gov.uk)

For more information visit our website: [www.northamptonshire.gov/heritage](http://www.northamptonshire.gov/heritage)

Northampton Museum Service offers a ‘Shoemaking’ outreach session where pupils can look at authentic tools of the trade to learn more about making shoes by hand. For more information please contact[museums@northampton.gov.uk](mailto:museums@northampton.gov.uk).

### Useful Websites

There are a variety of websites available to find out more about the boot and shoe industry in Northamptonshire:

On the Northamptonshire Timeline [www.northamptonshiretimeline.com](http://www.northamptonshiretimeline.com) there are events that link to the boot and shoe industry, including Mechanisation comes to the Boot and Shoe Industry (1857), The Raunds March (1905) and Northamptonshire in Film (2005)

Disclaimer: The following websites are not part of Northamptonshire County Council. We have no control over the nature, content and availability of those sites. Their inclusion is for information only and does not necessarily imply a recommendation or endorse the views expressed within them.

Kettering Museum and Art Gallery has resources and teachers’ notes related to the local boot and shoe industry: [www.kettering.gov.uk/museums](http://www.kettering.gov.uk/museums)

Northampton Museum and Art Gallery have several learning journeys related to the boot and shoe industry on the ‘My Learning’ website: [www.mylearning.org](http://www.mylearning.org)

English Heritage ViewFinder has more images and information: [viewfinder.english-heritage.org.uk/default](http://viewfinder.english-heritage.org.uk/default)

[Select ‘Photo Essays’, the ‘Northamptonshire boot and shoe industry’ essay is found under the subject of ‘Field survey projects’.]