

This letter was dated 1786

**To the Merchants, Clothiers and all such as wish well to the Staple
Manufactory of this Nation.**

The Humble ADDRESS and PETITION of Thousands, who labour in the Cloth
Manufactory.

SHEWETH, That the Scribbling-Machines have thrown thousands of your
petitioners out of employ, whereby they are brought into great distress, and
are not able to procure a maintenance for their families, and deprived them
of the opportunity of bringing up their children to labour: We have
therefore to request, that prejudice and self-interest may be laid aside, and
that you may pay that attention to the following facts, which the nature of
the case requires.

The number of Scribbling-Machines extending about seventeen miles south-
west of LEEDS, exceed all belief, being no less than *one hundred and
seventy!* and as each machine will do as much work in twelve hours, as ten
men can in that time do by hand, (speaking within bounds) and they working
night-and day, one machine will do as much work in one day as would
otherwise employ twenty men.

As we do not mean to assert any thing but what we can prove to be true, we
allow four men to be employed at each machine twelve hours, working night
and day, will take eight men in twenty-four hours; so that, upon a moderate
computation twelve men are thrown out of employ for every single machine
used in scribbling; and as it may be supposed the number of machines in all
the other quarters together, to nearly equal those in the South-West, full
four thousand men are left to shift for a living how they can, and must of
course fall to the Parish, if not timely relieved. Allowing one boy to be
bound apprentice from each family out of work, eight thousand hands are
deprived of the opportunity of getting a livelihood.

We therefore hope, that the feelings of humanity will lead those who have it in their power to prevent the use of those machines, to give every discouragement they can to what has a tendency so prejudicial to their fellow-creatures.

This is not all; the injury to the Cloth is great, in so much that in Frizing, instead of leaving a nap upon the cloth, the wool is drawn out and the Cloth is left thread-bare.

Many more evils we could enumerate, but we would hope, that the sensible part of mankind, who are not biassed by interest, must see the dreadful tendency of their continuance; a depopulation must be the consequence; trade being then lost, the landed interest will have no other satisfaction but that of being *last devoured*.

We wish to propose a few queries to those who would plead for the further continuance of these machines:

Men of common sense must know, that so many machines in use, take the work from the hands employed in Scribbling, and who did that business before machines were invented.

How are those men, thus thrown out of employ to provide for their families; and what are they to put their children apprentice to, that the rising generation may have something to keep them at work, in order that they may not be like vagabonds strolling about in idleness? Some say, Begin and learn some other business. Suppose we do; who will maintain our families, whilst we undertake the arduous task; and when we have learned it, how do we know we shall be any better for all our pains; for by the time we have served our second apprenticeship, another machine may arise, which may take away that business also; so that our families, being half pined whilst we are learning how to provide them with bread, will be wholly so during the period of our third apprenticeship.

But what are our children to do; are they to be brought up in idleness? Indeed as things are, it is no wonder to hear of so many executions; for our parts, though we may be thought illiterate men, our conceptions are, that bringing children up to industry, and keeping them employed, is the way to keep them from falling into those crimes, which an idle habit naturally leads to.

These things impartially considered will we hope, be strong advocates in our favour; and we conceive that men of sense, religion and humanity, will be satisfied of the reasonableness, as well as necessity of this address, and that their own feelings will urge them to espouse the cause of us and our families

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Signed, in behalf of THOUSANDS, by

Joseph Hepworth

Thomas Loblely

Robert Wood

Thos. Blackburn

From J. F. C. Harrison, *Society and Politics in England, 1780-1960* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 71-72.