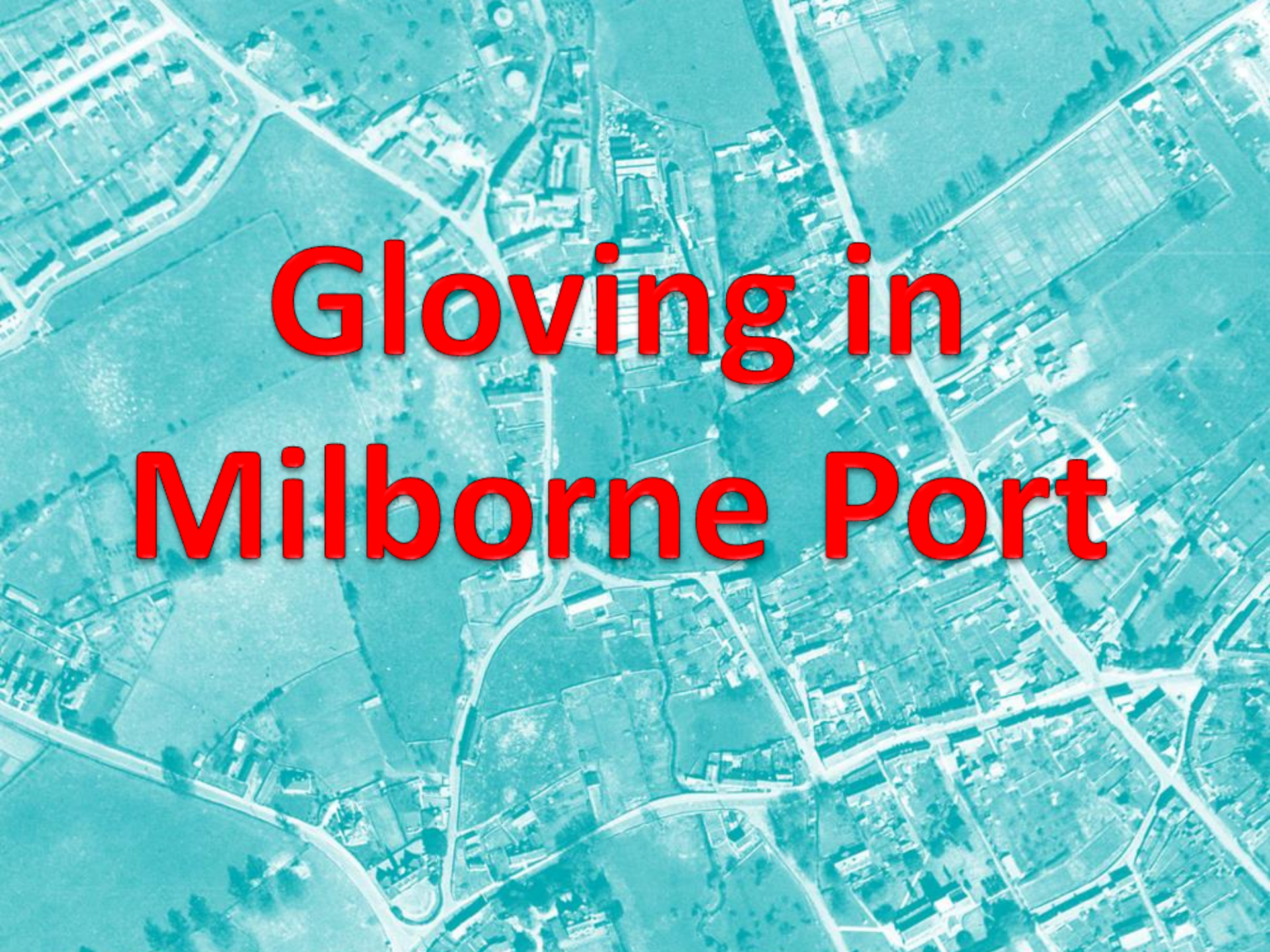


An aerial photograph of a coastal area, likely Milborne Port, showing a mix of residential housing, industrial buildings, and a large body of water. The text "Gloving in Milborne Port" is overlaid in large red letters.

Gloving in Milborne Port

During the Industrial Revolution glove making was one trade that lent itself to industrialisation.

By the early 1800's weaving was dying out as a home industry, so when gloving came to Milborne Port it found a ready workforce.



In 1810, the first gloving factory was set up in Milborne Port, started by John Henning in his house, one of six on West Hill.



Many small Glove Manufacturers came and went over the years.

The industry was encouraged by the Marquis of Anglesey who was a Tory who used the village MPs for political power. Before the 1818 general election, William Foot, Thomas Shepherd, and John Henning, approached Lord Darlington, to get Whig MPs voted in.

He started to build Newtown, and nominated two Whig candidates. Anglesey's steward was told to pay bribes, and purchase more land and property in the Borough, to ensure the Whigs did not win.

THE FIGHT WAS ON.

It resulted in a lot of money being spent in Milborne Port.



Soon three major glove companies came to the fore.

Minchinton, Ensor and Dyke.

In 1833 John Pitman had started a glove manufactory in South Street, he later moved to Rosemary Street and then sold to Mark Minchinton in 1841.

In 1871 Minchinton employed 468, in his premises behind The Red Lion Inn.

Two years later, when battery of Horse Artillery passed through the town en route for Exeter, Mr Minchinton gave the tired soldiers light refreshments.

The factory closed sometime between 1875 and 1880.



In 1810, Edward Ensor, rented Cross House from the Marquis of Anglesey.
Although he initially opened a sail cloth manufactory,
in April 1820, he set up a glove factory.

Lord Darlington owned a Glove factory on Brook Street and had introduced
another glove maker who brought with him fifteen workmen from Yeovil to
occupy new houses and vote for him.

Since the factories employed the females of the town as outworkers,
Anglesey's supporters could be turned.

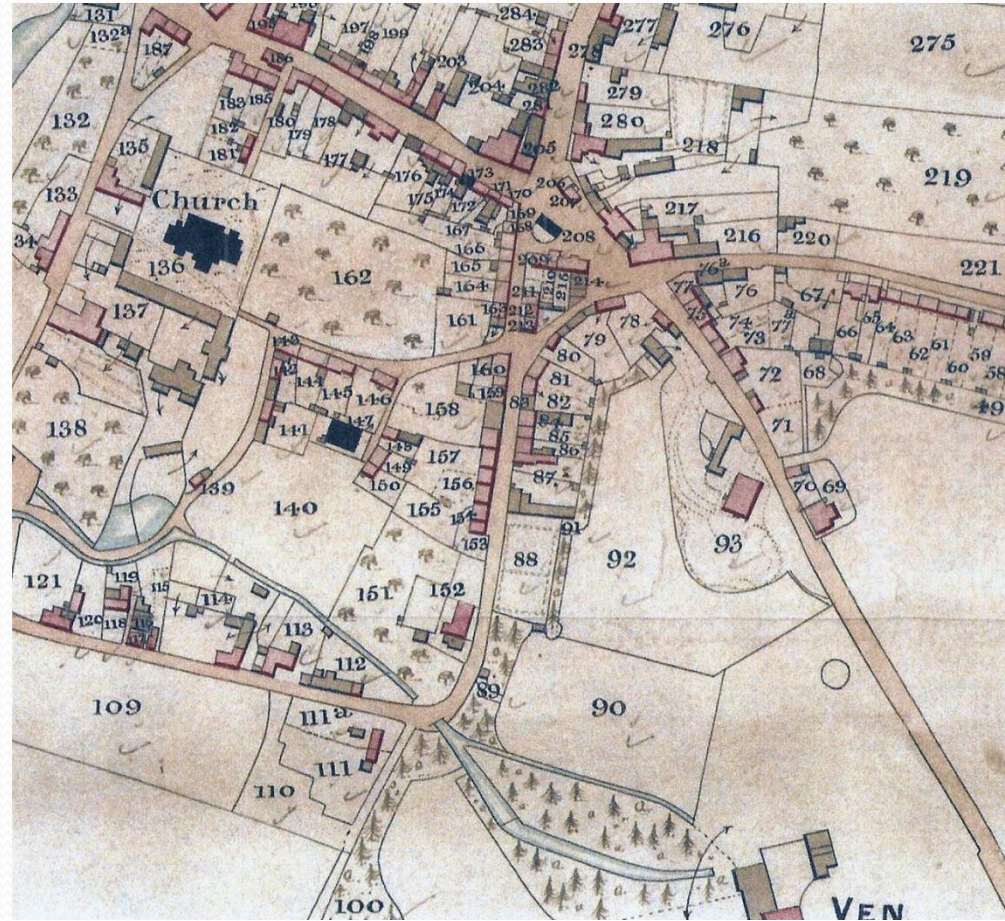
Following many ups and downs in the industry, in 1900, Ensor's, then close
to bankruptcy, was sold to Southcombe and Sons of Tintinhull.

Bernard Southcombe and his family came to live in Cross House,
although the business still traded under the Ensor name.

Silas Dyke had been one of Ensor's first apprentices, and in 1837, he decided to start his own firm.

He was in Puddlebrook in 1837, and in 1840 moved to the Commonalty House in 1 Church Street where he employed 20 Men and 80 women and girls.

By 1851 he was living in Church Street, with his wife and six children, and employing 21 men in his factory in Puddlebrook.



As business picked up Silas Dyke expanded, in 1858 he bought Limerick Farm and the factory in North Street was built. The same year he bought 'the Doctor's House' in Kingsbury and started his own tannery.

In the 1871 census, Silas Dyke was living in North Street and employed 98 men and boys and 1,100 women. His eldest son, Henry was living in Church Street.



Making Gloves

The main stages of Gloving in Milborne Port are

- 1 Cleaning and dying the skins
- 2 Softening and drying the skins
- 3 Finishing the skins for storage.
- 4 Sorting the skins
- 5 Cutting the skins
- 6 Sewing and finishing the gloves
- 7 Checking, ironing and packing the gloves

All these operations were dependant on the company buying the right skins and getting orders for the gloves!

1 Cleaning and dying the skins

The imported goatskins had to be soaked clean in fresh water.

When all the dirt and dust was gone, a final soaking in water with lime loosened the wool which had to be removed by the dressers, who dragged a blunt curved knife with two handles across the skins which were supported by a sloping convex-shaped baulk of timber.



The wool was an important by-product, washed and sorted it fetched a good price.

A dressing of lime and arsenic was applied to the flesh side of the skins to loosen it.

The skins were now treated with chromium salts so they would be an even colour when dyed.

2 Softening, drying and finishing the skins

Hung in huge drums the carefully measured dyes were added, the drums revolved until the colour was right.

Next the skins had to be softened; until the 1950s urine was used, collected from local dog kennels!

The next step was to treat the skins with a mixture of chrome and egg yolk to soften and nourish the leather, before the skins were dried in large ovens.

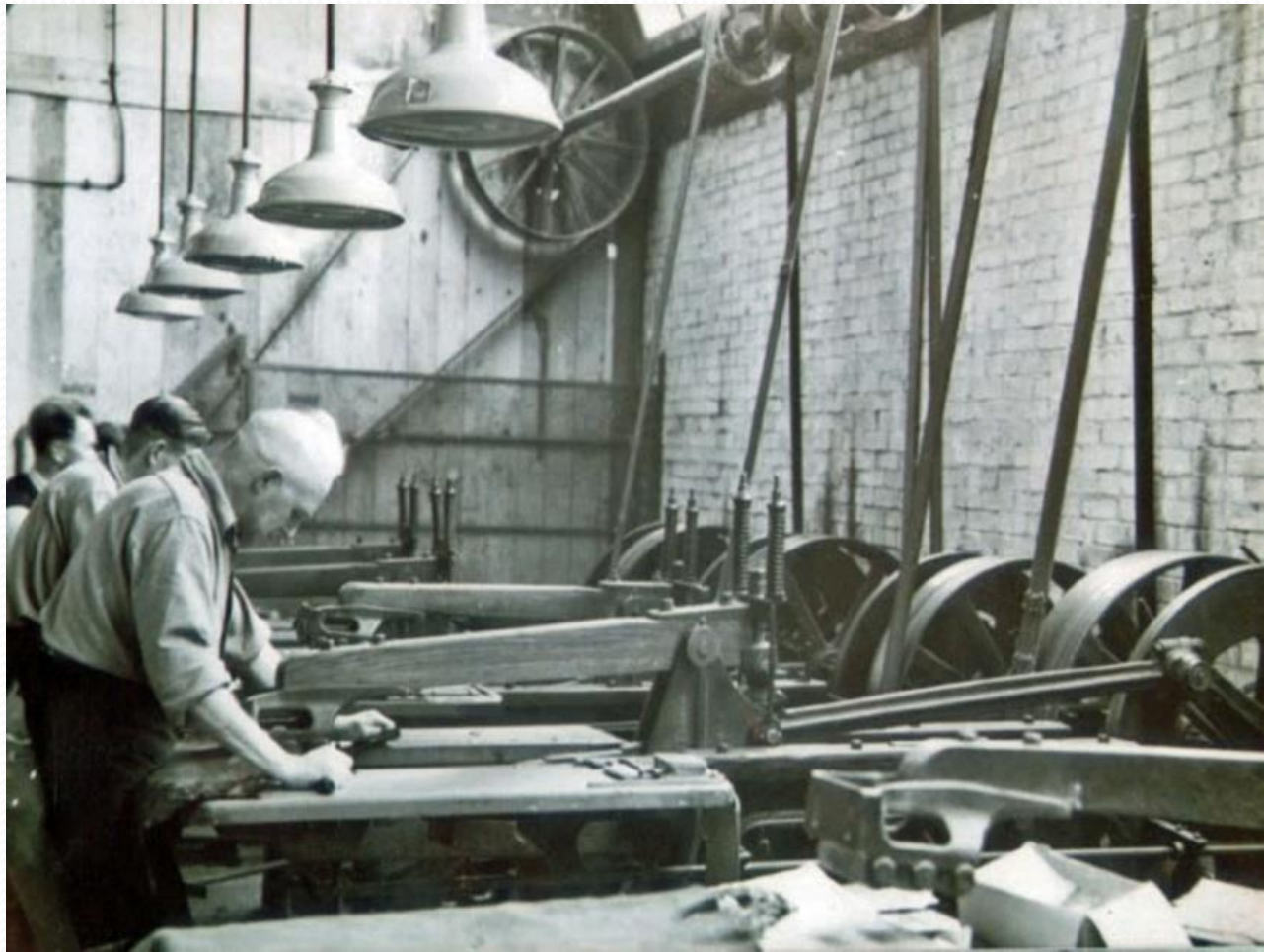


3 Finishing the skins for storage.

Once dry, there was a final cleaning of the flesh side of the skins. Then they had to be thinned to get an even thickness for use.

This was done by passing the skins over a row of revolving emery wheels which had to be dressed every two hours with fresh glue and emery crystals. Although this was a highly skilled job, it was also dirty, the men getting covered in the emery dust, and breathing it in.

The leather was then stored to consolidate the effects of dressing.



4 Sorting and cutting the skins

The sorters were usually the older cutters, and were probably the most expert and experienced men in the factory.

They would examine the skins for flaws and faults, and then grade them for quality. A sorter would select a batch of skins of approximately the same character and grain, and bundle them together for the next processes.

The sorters also decided the number of gloves which could be cut from each skin.



5 Cutting the skins

The cutter needed to know the number, style, and sizes of the gloves to be made, the stitch to be employed in their sewing and the style of 'point.'

Each skin was different and had to be cut to the best advantage.

The first step was to pull and stretch the skin to ascertain its spread.

The skin would be measured off and cut into oblong trunks, then passed to the stamping room where the actual shapes were cut.

Left-over pieces were used for the smaller parts of the glove, such as the thumbs and gussets.

Very little of the skin remained when all the parts of the glove had been cut, these scraps were collected and sold to be turned into glue or manure.



6 Sewing and finishing the gloves

The factory sewing rooms began as small rooms where young girls sat on stools sewing. Later machines were introduced.

Pointing was the first step in the sewing operations. Because pointing often involved the use of more than one machine, it was usually a factory operation.



Home workers were provided with treadle machines, supplied by the firm they worked for. They sewed round the outer edge of the glove, round the fingers, and round the base of the thumb piece.

Next came welting and binding of the wrist, button holing and fixing of buttons, or other clasps such as press-studs might be fitted. If the gloves were to be lined, the sewers had to fit the linings before finishing the gloves.



6 Checking, ironing and packing the gloves

Once completed the gloves were sent to the finishing room, where they were pressed into shape on metal hands, kept hot by steam, later by electricity.

Then the gloves would be ironed and finished for packing; paired and banded into half-dozen pairs, before they were boxed ready for dispatch to the wholesalers.



World War One

During the first world war the Ensor factory buildings to the east of Cross House were used as billets for a remount regiment, with 200 horses being kept in the paddock (now the Meads housing estate.) Later this site became the headquarters of a Maxim Machine Gun motor cycle unit, the guns being mounted where the sidecar would normally have been.

The glove factories were doing war work, making motorcycle gauntlets, leathers for horses, bullet straps and holsters.

The first glove worker to be killed was Sergeant Frank Talbot, who died on 13 October 1915. George Bewsey Dyke, the eldest son of Mr & Mrs George Dyke, died on 26 April 1916. On 21st April, he was buried as the result of a shell explosion, rescued he carried on but was killed by shell fire at 6.30am on 26th April.

The local War Records for May showed that out of the 758 men in the parish, 270 had served; of these 23 had been killed in action, 14 had been discharged owing to ill-health or wounds, and two were reported missing.



In September 1919 the indoor employees of Messrs. Thomas Ensor & Sons Presented Bernard Southcombe with a grandfather clock, an illuminated address, and an album containing the names of over 200 employees to celebrate 21 years of owning the business. The presentation took place on the lawn of the house, adjoining the factory, the residence of the manager of the firm, Mr. J. A. Clarke.

World War Two

World War Two forced changes on the glove trade. Conscription meant many men left the village, although some were in reserved occupations because the factories were now producing military gloves.

These men served in the Home Guard. This was set up to fight the German invasion expected following Dunkirk. The Milborne Port Company, in excess of 50 men, was run by Major Bewsey Dyke and Hector Southcombe, kept at home to run the glove factories. The Home Guard manned roadblocks and observation points, and guarded strategically important sites such as airfields, factories and explosives stores, until late 1944 when they were stood down.





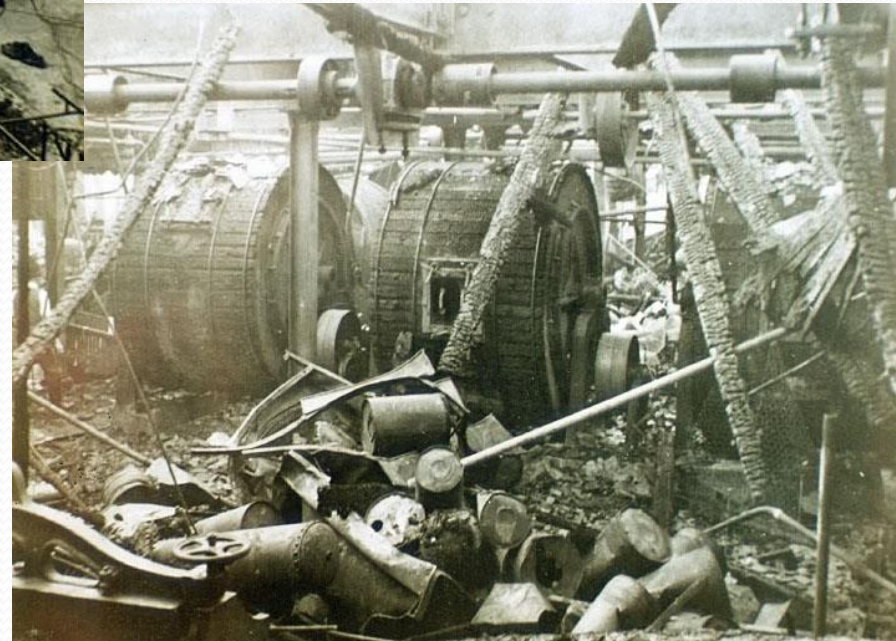
During the war, Ensor's processed horsehides as well as hides from elephants and lions, exotic skins from Bristol Zoo which had to be sacrificed. These were used for making dispatch riders gauntlets, while Dykes concentrated on the protective gloves used by Naval Gunners.

Commander Cole, son-in-law of Mr T E Dyke, was awarded the DSC for his actions on a voyage to Murmansk. Stanley Southcombe served in the REME, he was mentioned in Dispatches for his service in March 1945, setting up mobile tank service units following D Day. Mary Southcombe was one of the code breakers at Bletchley Park, a fact she kept secret until 50 years after the war.

Many of those who had been employed by the glove factories were killed, injured or taken prisoner during the war. Unfortunately it has not been possible to name them, but thanks to the work done by Naomi Thorpe, we can say that three men who had been employed by Ensor's were among those named on the village war memorial. They are Ronald Greenstock, who died 17 August 1940, Herbert Hinks, who died 29 June 1942, and Clifford Woodhouse, who died 27 June 1944.



**On 5 November 1947,
disaster hit Ensor's
when the factory was
gutted by fire.**



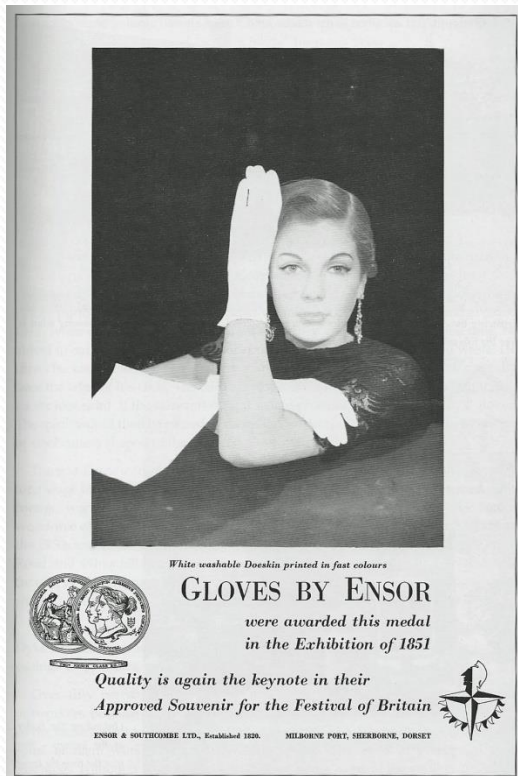
A stray firework rocket set the wool loft on fire. The fire spread and much of the factory was destroyed. A breeze spread the blaze, which destroyed all the records, the general office, wool drying, felt mongering, and tanning departments. The wool loft, crust leather room, finished leather workshops and wheeling department, and a huge stock of raw materials were lost; worse was the loss of the machinery which, following the war, could not readily be replaced.

Stanley Southcombe put a huge effort into getting the factory rebuilt and running again. The fire proved a blessing in disguise, allowing the old buildings that had been slowly Acquired over many years to be cleared away and a new factory to be built to meet the challenges of peacetime production. By the following year this new factory was in full production offering plenty of employment in Milborne Port.



In 1952 The Festival of Britain opened.

Gloves were one of the items on show with a stand from the Yeovil & District Glove manufacturers. Ensor's Gloves were featured, with a poster showing that they had won a medal 100 years before at the Great Exhibition.



In 1960, Donald Campbell wore gloves designed and produced by Dykes, when he attempted the land speed record in the jet-engined Bluebird at Bonneville Salt Flats. About a year earlier, Mr Bewsey Dyke heard of Donald Campbell's intention to try and become not only the fastest man on water, but on land as well. He wrote to Mr Campbell, offering to supply him with a pair of specially designed gloves. They were a tight fitting leather glove similar to that issued by the RAF to their flying crews. They gave the high degree of sensitivity and the firm grip required, as well as protection against any 'flash' burns which might occur during the high-speed bid.

Following the land speed attempt they went on sale to the public as motoring gloves.

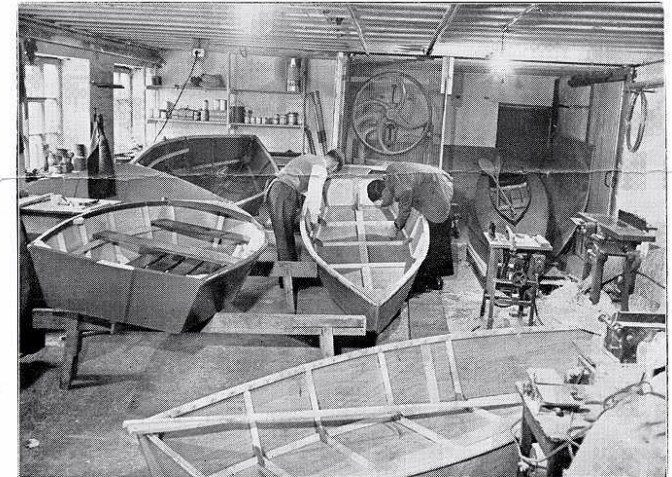


By the 1960's, gloves were no longer selling as they had. Competition from abroad and changes in fashion caused problems to the industry and many manufacturers went out of business.

Dyke's had a sideline in, boat building. The annual output was about 250 small craft, (the biggest made was an 18ft cabin cruiser) most sold in kit form.



BOAT-BUILDING AT MILBORNE PORT



A view of the boatshop, established at a Milborne Port glove factory, which is the latest industry to be introduced in the village.

By 1965, Ensor & Southcombe Ltd. were in negotiations with Messrs Pittards & Co for them to take a controlling interest in the company, but this failed.

On 20 November 1965, the Ensor Company ceased trading.

The factory continued under new management until 1970 when it closed. Southcombe Bros Ltd of Tintinhull purchased the assets and the tannery was transferred to Stoke-sub-Hamdon.

The closure had a huge effect on the village.

Not only on the employees who were directly hit by unemployment; especially the skilled men who now found their skills were not relevant elsewhere. The Southcombe family also suffered, while their financial plight was not as bad as their employees, they felt deeply the loss of the company. This was made worse by the contempt they faced from some villagers who blamed them for not managing to keep the company going. Mary Tyler (nee Southcombe) wrote:



We did invest in machinery and I remember Hector saying that this was so expensive that we ought to have introduced a shift system to utilise it sufficiently – but this idea was not acceptable!

It was particularly galling that we were then bought out by asset-strippers. The sight of the decaying buildings is very painful.

In March 1969, more than 100 people were made redundant when the tannery of Percy E Fisher Ltd closed.



The following year L. H. Nichols moved into Milborne Port.

In February 1972, the Dykes Dressing Yard was sold to Mr Wilford of Joseph Clark & Sons Ltd

The tannery had been losing serious money and its sale helped Dykes to survive a few years longer. Dyke's gloving business had the distinction of being the oldest glove firm in the country still owned by the original family, until 1976 when it was merged with Millar Gloves to become the Glove Corporation.

From then on the factory in North Street concentrated on sporting gloves, but production was scaled back until it finally closed in 1984.

Gloving had finished, but the tanneries were still operating.

L. H. Nichols was followed by Wingrove and Edge and Whitmore Bacon Ltd, who continued to trade until 2005.

In 1984 Clark's employed up to 90 people at its tannery and was planning further expansion. They took on school leavers, providing a chance to work in their home village. They also provided work for housewives to earn some extra money in the evenings. The women worked from 6 to 10 pm hanging up newly dyed hides ready for the day shift. The leather was from chrome tanned skins purchased mainly from Sweden, producing clothing and shoe leather from bovine cattle skins. The skins came into the U.K. partly tanned but all other processes were carried out in Milborne Port. The tannery closed in 1987.

The property is now rented out.



So Gloving finished in Milborne Port.

It is not forgotten, street names keep the memories alive and there are still people living here who worked in the industry.
Queenie Southcombe's daughter, April Walker, is now a member of the Glovers' Company.

The Worshipful Company of Glovers
of London
Established 1349

