

The Jute Mill Song

Mary Brooksbank

Mary Brooksbank grew up in Dundee and had first-hand experience of working in a jute mill. She was also a poet and social activist. This song describes the hard life of the mill workers and long hours they worked for little pay. Shiftin', piecing and spinning were three of the jobs involved in working with the spinning machinery. Ten and nine (ten shillings and nine pence) refers to the weekly wage that was paid to the women working in the mill in the late 1890s/early 1900s.

E A E E A E A

Oh dear me, the mill's gaen fast - The poor wee

6 E C#m B E C#m A

shif-ters can - na get nae rest - Shif - tin' bob - bins coarse and -

12 F#m E C#m A B

fine - They fair - ly mak you work for your ten and nine

Lyrics

Chorus

Oh, dear me, the mill's gaen fast
The poor wee shifters canna get nae rest
Shiftin' bobbins coarse and fine
They fairly mak you work for your ten and nine

Oh, dear me, I wish this day was done
Running up and doon the pass is nae fun
Shiftin', piecin', spinning, warp, weft and twine
Tae feed and claithe ma bairnie affen ten and nine

Oh, dear me, the world's ill-divided
Them that work the hardest are the least provided
But I maun bide contented, dark days or fine
There's nae much pleasure living affen ten and nine

Words

gaen - going
canna - can't
mak - make
pass - passageway between the machines in the factory
shiftin' - the shifter was the person who removed full bobbins from the spinning frames and replaced them with empty ones.
piecin' - the workers who had to join the ends of broken threads
warp - threads on the loom through which the cross threads were passed
weft - the cross threads of a web of material
claithe - clothe
bairnie - child
affen - off of
maun - must
nae - no

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