

Leeds, ca. 1725

From hence to Leeds, and every way to the right hand and the left, the country appears busy, diligent, and even in a hurry of work, they are not scattered and dispersed as in [...] Halifax, [...]; but in villages, those villages large, full of houses, and those houses thronged with people, for the whole county is infinitely populous.

5 A noble scene of industry and application is spread before you here, and which, joined to the market at Leeds, [...] is well worth the curiosity of a stranger to go on purpose to see; and many travellers and gentlemen have come over from Hamburg, nay, even from Leipsick in Saxony, on purpose to see it.

Leeds is a large, wealthy and populous town [...].

10 The increase of the manufacturers and of the trade, [...] made the market [very] great [...], and it is now kept in the High-Street [...]. The street is a large, broad, fair and well-built street, beginning, as I have said, at the bridge and ascending gently to the north.

15 Early in the morning there are trestles placed in two rows in the street, sometimes two rows on a side, but always one row at least; then there are boards laid cross those trestles, so that the boards lie like long counters on either side, for one end of the street to the other. The clothiers come early in the morning with their cloth; and as few clothiers bring more than one piece, the market being so frequent, they go into the inns and public-houses with it, and there set it down.

20 At seven o'clock in the morning, the clothiers being supposed to be all come by that time, even in the winter, the market bell rings; it would surprise a stranger to see in how few minutes, without hurry or noise, and not the least disorder, the whole market is filled; all the boards upon the trestles are covered with cloth, close to one another as the pieces can lie long ways by one another, and behind every piece of cloth, the clothier standing to sell it.

25 This indeed is not so difficult, when we consider that the whole quantity is brought into the market as soon as one piece, because as the clothiers stand ready in the inns and shops just behind, and that there is a clothier to every piece, they have no more to do, but, like a regiment drawn up in line, every one takes up his piece, and has about five steps to march to lay it upon the first row of boards, and perhaps ten to the second row; so that upon the market bell ringing, in half a quarter of an hour the whole market is filled, the rows of boards covered, and the clothiers stand ready.

30 As soon as the bell has done ringing, the merchants and factors, and buyers of all sorts, come down, and coming along the spaces between the rows of boards, they walk up the rows, and down as their occasions direct. Some of them have foreign letters of orders, with patterns sealed on them, in rows, in their hands; and with those they match colours, holding them to the cloths as they think they agree to; when they see any cloths to their colours, or that suit their occasions, they reach over to the clothier and whisper, and in the fewest words imaginable the price is stated; one asks, the other bids; and 'tis agree, or not agree, in a moment.

35 The merchants and buyers generally walk down and up twice on each side of the rows, and in little more than an hour all the business is done; in less than half an hour you will perceive the cloths begin to move off, the clothier taking it up upon his shoulder to carry it to the merchant's house; and by half an hour after eight o'clock the market bell rings again; immediately the buyers disappear, the cloth is all sold, or if here and there a piece happens not to be bought, 'tis carried back into the inn, and in a quarter of an hour, there is not a piece of cloth to be seen in the market. Thus, you see, ten or
40 twenty thousand pounds value in cloth, and sometimes much more, bought and sold in little more than

an hour, and the laws of the market the most strictly observed as ever I saw done in any market in England.

45 By nine o'clock the boards are taken down, the trestles are removed, and the street cleared, so that you see no market or goods any more than if there had been nothing to do; and this is done twice a week. By this quick return the clothiers are constantly supplied with money, their workmen are duly paid, and a prodigious sum circulates through the county every week.

Daniel DEFOE, *A Tour Through The Whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-1726)