

Silk printing in Crayford

For over 150 years there was a print works on the site where David Evans & Co Ltd at Crayford used to be before it closed in the 1990s.

The founder was Augustus Applegath, a man of many talents and a prolific inventor. The silk was obtained in the 'grey' from weavers, most of whom are in Yorkshire. Once it has been printed it goes to be made up, some into ladies' scarves and dress goods but most into ties and other men's goods. Nearly all the production was exported, mainly to America.

Hand block printing

This is the oldest method. The cloth is smoothed out on very heavy tables 25 or 50 yards long. The tops of these tables are covered with canvas-backed rubber and spread with gum to prevent the silk slipping. The printer then systematically covers the entire length of cloth by repeated applications of the first block. Many blocks are needed to build up the pattern and each has to be applied with extreme accuracy on top of the earlier impressions. The printer's only guide, apart from his trained eye, is a set of pins fixed at the corners of each block which he superimposes on the marks left by previous blocks.

Impact printing

A mechanical adaptation of the hand block method, impact printing uses the same blocks but substitutes a system of levers and locks for the printer's hands and eyes. The block is automatically positioned for the successive impressions by these levers and locks. The machine is light enough to be pushed along by hand.

Screen printing

Here the design is first traced on translucent plastic and then photographed onto a screen of fine-mesh terylene. The screen is then painted over with a special paint so that the parts of the pattern required are not obliterated. In printing, the screen is carefully positioned on the silk, colour is poured on it and spread by a rubber

squeegee. In some designs many screens are required to complete the pattern.

If the design ordered calls for a coloured background the cloth is dyed before applying the screens. The dyes are mixed in the factory with a gum made from seaweed and potatoes and tree-bark to thicken them.

After printing, the cloth is steamed at high pressure to develop the colours, then washed many times in softened water, spin-dried, then roller-dried (on steam heated rollers) and finally rolled at high pressure to impart smoothness and gloss.