

# Riots and strikes

The *Nottingham Review* gives one explanation for the origin of the term 'Luddite', claiming that a disgruntled apprentice framework knitter named Ned Ludd once took a hammer to his frame.

*Nottingham Review*, 20 December 1811. East Midlands Special Collection Periodicals:Not.

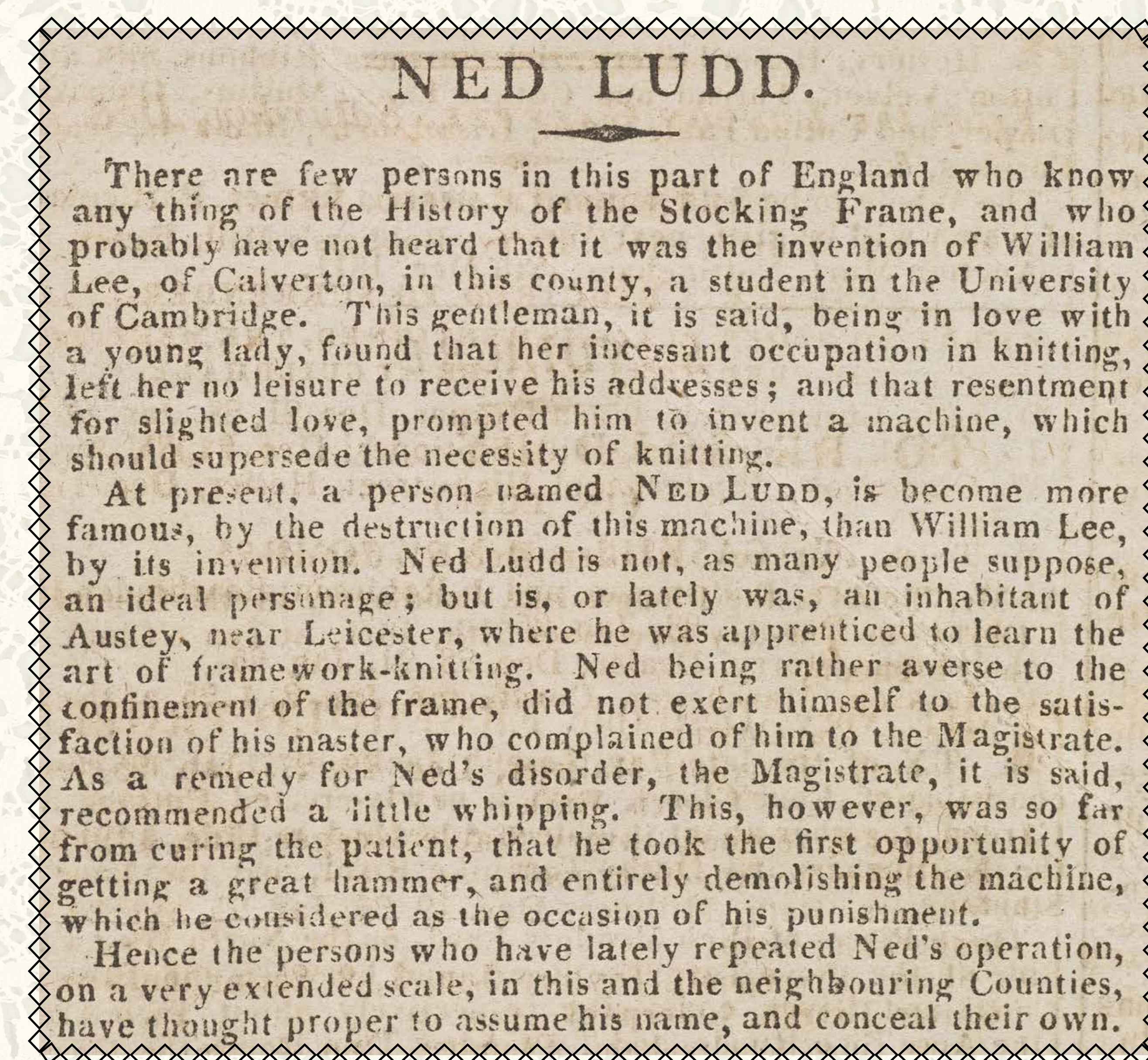
The early 1800s were a time of turmoil for the framework knitting industry. Appeals to Parliament failed to alleviate the sufferings experienced by framework knitters as a result of over production, the Napoleonic War (which hindered export), and a change of fashion that favoured trousers over hose and breeches.

The East Midlands Luddite campaign began in 1811 and involved gangs of masked men smashing the machines of the hosiers exploiting workers. Attempts to unionise had failed and many may have felt that violence was the only option available. Their actions have been described as a form of negotiation by riot and they had very specific aims: to protest at unfair pay (they had to pay rent on the frames they worked, and the bag hosiers who collected their work might pay them 'in truck' with goods not money); the production of 'cut ups' made on wider frames and cut and sewn to shape which were being passed off as superior fully-fashioned stockings; and the use of untrained workers.

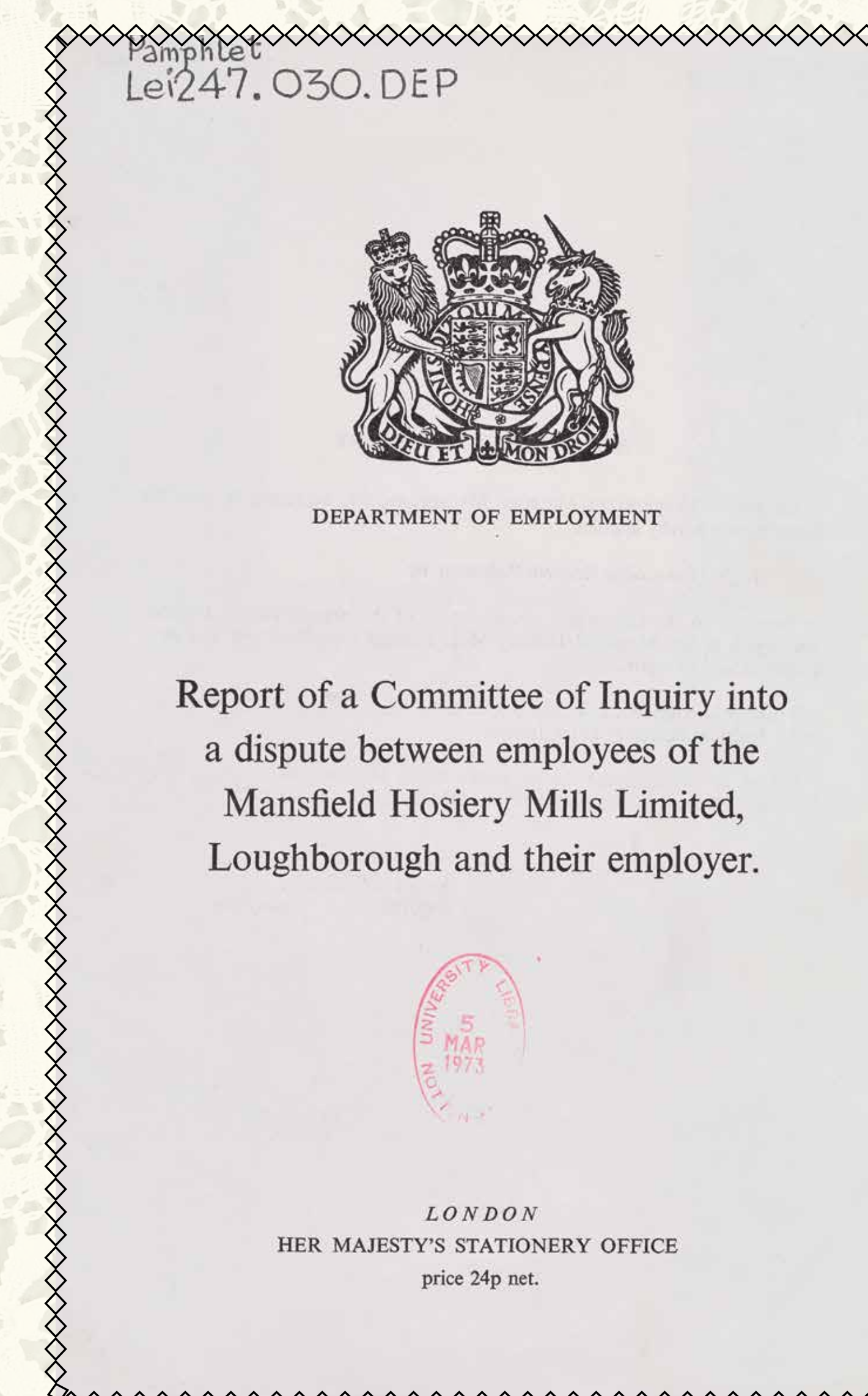
James Towle of Nottingham and his accomplices were executed under the 1812 Bill which made frame-breaking a capital offence, charged with breaking 54 lace machines at Heathcoat and Boden's lace factory. It was rare for lace frames to be targeted, and it seems that a gang was recruited following a decrease in wages. The 'Loughborough job' was to have lasting consequences; after the attack, Heathcoat moved production to Tiverton, Devon. Despite the efforts of the Government's Secret Committee and the sizeable rewards offered for information, it was rare for Luddites (or Neds) to confess, or for witnesses to come forward.

The unions of the twisthands and framework knitters were reluctant to give equal pay or status to the women or Asian workers who formed a large proportion of the workforce. In the Mansfield Hosiery strike Inquiry, the Race Relations Board found evidence of "opposition of members and officials of the Union to training coloured workers as knitters".

The strike at Crepe Sizes Limited in Lenton concerned poor conditions, racism and discrimination against unionised staff. As trade declined, conditions for textile workers deteriorated and by the 1990s Leicester had become known as the sweatshop capital of Britain.

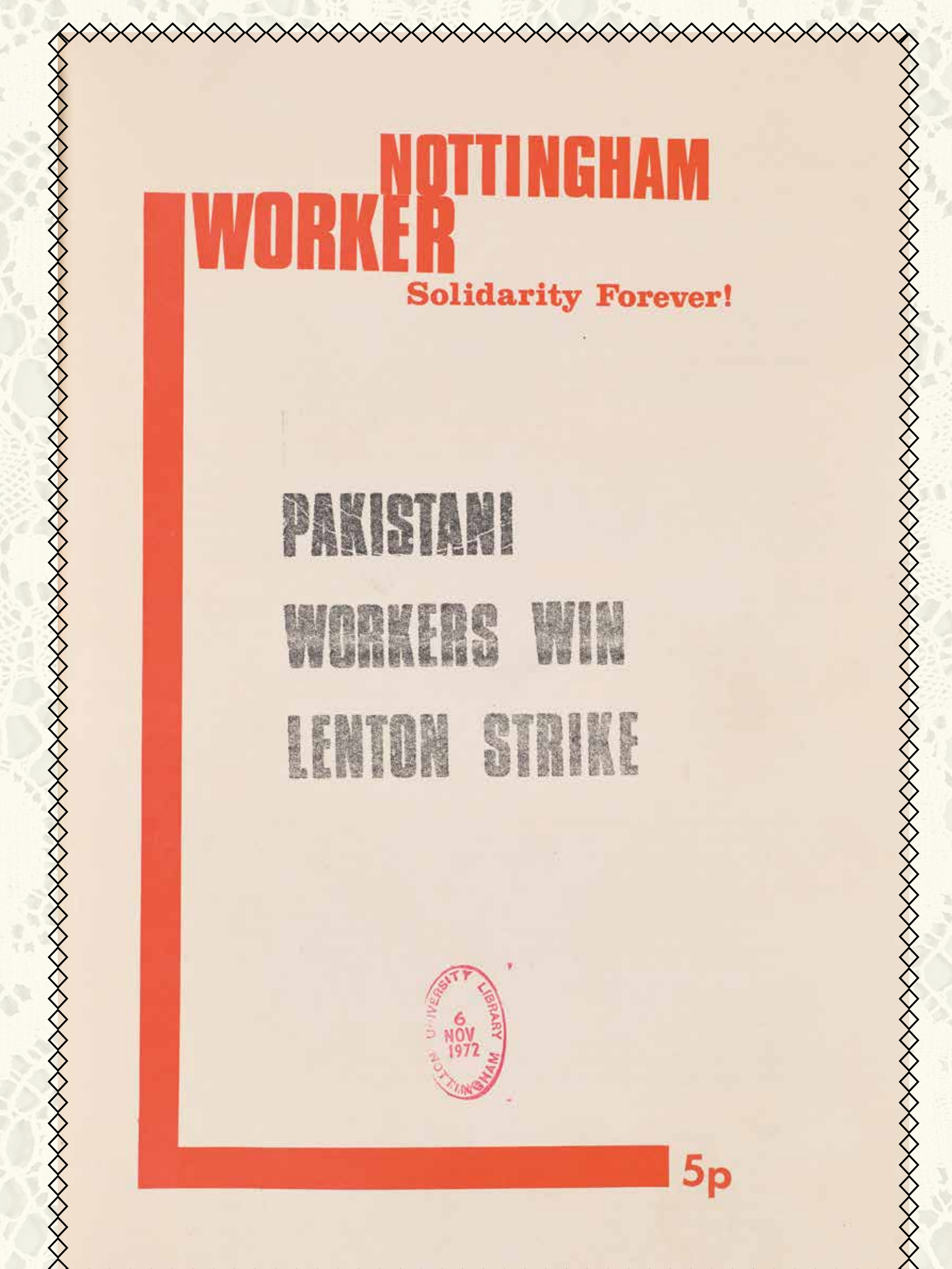


Left: Album of broadsides relating to Nottinghamshire trials: 1759-1862. East Midlands Special Collection Oversize Not 1.H64 ALB. Top: *Reports of the trial of James Towle...* (Nottingham, 1817). East Midlands Special Collection Lei 3.H64 REP. Right: Statement made by James Towle on the morning of his execution, 20 November 1816. Ne C 4968/3.



Left: *Report...Mansfield Hosiery Mills Limited...* (London, 1972). East Midlands Collection Pamphlet Lei 247.O30 DEP.

Right: *Nottingham Worker* Vol. 1 no. 1, June 1972. East Midlands Collection Periodicals:Not.



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