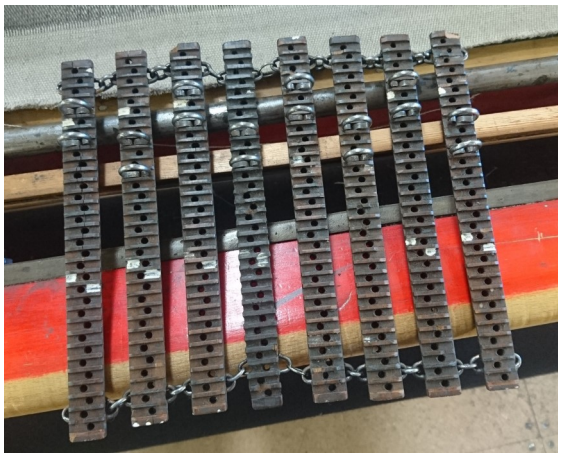
THE WEAVING SHED

Our weaving shed today gives you some idea of its appearance in the past. The historic layout was designed to fit a large number of looms in a small space to increase productivity and reduce running costs. The power looms were manufactured between the 1890s and 1960s.

The oldest looms were water powered – electricity was only introduced from the late 1920s. It can take at least three weeks to thread up a loom before weaving can begin. This is in addition to the time taken to prepare the warp upstairs. The weaving itself is a relatively quick process and it is possible to weave five metres of plain silk taffeta a day.

PEGS AND LAGS

In order to weave a specific pattern on a loom, the weaver has to tell the loom what to do. With a dobby loom, this can be done by using a dobby chain.



- The spaces between bars on a dobby chain are called lags and each lag has a small hole in it to hold a metal peg.
- The holes are in pairs, corresponding to each of the frames on the loom which hold the warp threads.
- To create a design, the warp threads in the frames must be raised and lowered in a set order. This order is set by the weaver placing the pegs into holes on the chain following a set pattern.
- The chain is fed into the loom, providing the operating instructions.

Discussion point… what else is programmed in this way? Could weaving be an early form of computer programming? How does it compare?

WHITCHURCH SILK MILL
HERITAGE OF WEAVING