



Reading 347

Read a magazine article about jobs in Britain that used to be common in Britain but are uncommon now. For questions 1—13 choose from the sections of the article (A — D). The jobs may be chosen more than once.

In connection with which of the jobs are the following mentioned?

- 1 how hard it can be to find someone who does this job
- 2 a time when demand for this kind of work was at its height
- 3 people noticing examples of what people doing this job produced
- 4 a significant event involving people doing this job
- 5 the kind of people who need this kind of expertise
- 6 improvements that were made for people doing this job
- 7 a prediction that proved to be accurate
- 8 what people doing the job today use in order to do it
- 9 the impact of the cost of materials on demand for this kind of work
- 10 a positive result of not many people doing this job anymore
- 11 something that people doing the job now find surprising
- 12 an attempt to teach the skills involved in this kind of work
- 13 the reason why this job is no longer common in Britain but exists elsewhere

Disappearing Jobs in Britain

A Advertising signwriter

A couple of years into his career, Wayne Tanswell told his father he was in a dying trade. Having left school in 1980, to train in sign-painting, he then watched as high streets moved to plastic shop-front lettering. 'But my dad said: "Wait and stick at it; these things will come back. The more technology comes into it, the more you'll be seen as a specialist." He had a lot of foresight.' Technology has helped Tanswell. Now that his trade has become such a rare one, he is summoned far from his home, with work ranging from period numerals by the doors of London houses to shop fronts in the villages with strict planning restrictions.

Sam Roberts curates an online archive, blog and burgeoning maps of hand-painted wall ads. These signs painted onto brickwork, once kept sign-painters in demand. Their work remains, faded but unmistakable in many cities. 'Mention them to people and they will look quizzical' Robert says, 'but next time they see you, they'll have started to spot them.'

B Typewriter repairer

Though a few thousand new electric models are still sold in Britain each year, the typewriter is not what it once was. Search online for a once-indispensable brand of correction fluid and the first page of hits will be for something completely different. Search your high street for a typewriter repairman and your chances of a result at all are ribbon-thin.

There are still a handful of typewriter repair businesses operating in Britain, mostly on the South Coast. They not only serve septuagenarian retirees and technophobes (and diehard novelists who shun PCs), but are also approached by people weaned on digital keyboards who see typewriters as relics of a distant past.

In 1986 George Blackman set up an equipment and typewriter repair shop. He trained on the old manual machines and Blackman's employees still find themselves working on those beautiful, formidably heavy old machines. 'It amazes us the price the old manual machines sell for on the Internet,' one explains, and their new buyers want them spruced up when they've splashed out. They get the old machines gleaming and operational by raiding the vast collection of spare parts they've accumulated over the years (and you can't buy them any more).

C Matchgirl

There is a light that never goes out, even if it burns less brightly than it once did. Female match-makers have long been a celebrated part of British labour history. In 1888, thousands of matchgirls at the Bryant and May factory in London famously went on strike to protest over conditions. Other subsequent decades, the long hours, tiny pay packets and exposure to toxic chemicals were addressed before the industry largely relocated its production to other countries where labor was cheaper.

Today there are still female match-makers in Britain — in Bristol, at the country's last match factory, Octavius Hunt. The company long ago diversified into other products but still makes matches. Its commercial director, Kerry Healey, says that the majority of staff are still female. 'Matches are a small part of our business, but an important one. Depending on the size of orders, we have between two and 12 people working in the department, of which two are men — so it's still mainly female'.

D Lacquerer

Since the first pieces of Oriental lacquer work arrived on the continent in the seventeenth century, European craftsmen have attempted to replicate the incredible effects of this time — consuming process. By the time the craze for buying newly-available arts and crafts from Japan was at its height in the second half of the nineteenth century, wealthy Britons and Americans spent huge sums on lacquered objects d'art. They fell out of favour towards the turn of the twentieth century and by the 1920s, chemical shortcuts had been developed to replace the Japanese approach of applying, sanding and polishing numerous layers of paint. And shiny, affordable substitutes like shellac, began to eat away its aura. Important restrictions and the make-do-and-mend spirit of the Second World War saw lacquering revived — one magazine reprinted several slabs of an eighteenth-century manual on the subject as a how-to-guide.

Today, there are only a handful of traditional lacquerers. Pedro da Costa Felgueiras, who runs the London Lacquer Studios, has been the capital's go-to-guy for authentic lacquer work and period pigments for over a decade. In a world where even 'most paints are just plastic and dye', he's called in to provide historically accurate colours for walls and furniture from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century and to lacquer new things the old way with 30 or 40 coats of paint, each being left to dry and then being polished before the next. 'I remember a friend once telling me to be careful with my recipes as someone might steal and use them,' he recalls. 'My answer was: even if I show them how to do it, no one wants to.'

Key

1. B
2. D
3. A
4. C
5. B
6. C
7. A
8. B
9. D
10. A
11. B
12. D
13. C