

It was changing fashion that was a cause for concern to the Bradford Chamber of Commerce. In the 1860's and early 1870's Bradford trade flourished, but when adversity began to show in closed mills and partially used machinery it was time to analyse the cause of the depression and to find means of restoring Bradford to its former prosperity.

Women's fashions had turned in favour of softer, clinging materials, rejecting now the harsher yarns and 'lustres' of British cloth. The crinoline, which had required so much material, had gone. Bradford industrialists realised that in the boom time of their prosperity they had neglected to see the need for diversification of textiles in the light of the vagaries of fashion and foreign competition. While some manufacturers just accepted the fact that France had taken the lead in the art of weaving and harmony of colour, others knew that this was time for action.

As early as 1825 a Mechanics Institute - for the advancement of the working class - had been started in Bradford, and the movement grew rapidly over the decades of the middle of the century. In 1871, W. E. Forster, the Bradford M. P., opened the imposing new building in Bridge Street, when the Institute had a membership of over 1,500 and a permanent paid staff.

Early in 1877, the Council of the Mechanics Institute met representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and local industrialists, and appointed a sub-committee to consider the establishment of a weaving school. Within four months the committee presented its report in favour of "the formation of an elementary class for instruction in weaving; the providing of looms for the use of students attending the class; the formation of a higher class in which designing and harmony of colour should be taught; and an appeal to the merchants and manufacturers of the town and neighbourhood for subscriptions in maturing such a scheme as would likely accomplish the desired object".