



# From Salt to Silver

by photographs Ian Beesley  
and poems by Ian McMillan

Salts Mill, 2017

© Ian Beesley and  
Ian McMillan, 2017

Salts Mill



## FROM SALT TO SILVER

I suppose it must have been sometime in the 1960s - I remember waiting on Victoria Road in Saltaire for my Aunty to come out of Salts Mill. I scanned the swarm of bustling faces until I saw her strolling out the gates, arm-in-arm with her friends, laughing and joking. She worked at Salts as a burler and mender - a highly skilled job mending defects in woven cloth.

Twenty years later, I walked through the same gates to photograph the last days of production at Salts. I had been commissioned by the newly opened and then-called National Museum of Photography in Bradford to document the demise of the textile trade. In February 1985 I made my first visit inside the mill. The weaving shed was in full production and spinning was running shifts. I was given complete access to come and go as I pleased. I was a regular visitor for the next 18 months, during which time production ceased, the mill was stripped and eventually sold. Just a few of these images have been exhibited, the rest stored in my darkroom cupboards.

In 2016 Maggie Silver asked me to see what photographs I had. I was surprised to find that I have over 1000 negatives of Salts. So thirty years after I first photographed this Mill - with some new additions shot in July 2017 and new poems by Ian McMillan - here they are: partly a small tribute to those who worked here when it was a textile mill, but more importantly a celebration of the development of Salts by the late Jonathan Silver, his wife Maggie and their family into a world famous hub of modern industry, creativity and enterprise.

*Ian Beesley Hon FRPS 2017*

# PHOTOGRAPHS ARE SILENT

Photographs are silent, the world is loud  
Photographs are then and the world is now.  
Photographs are flat, the world is round.  
Photographs are mirrors, the world is sound.

Photographs are framed, the world spills out  
Photographs are echoes, the world's a shout  
Photographs are still and the world, it turns.  
Photographs just know and the world just learns.

DATE FEB 1986  
SUBJECT SAIS Mink. SACTAVEL Ney Ref 65  
TECHNICAL DATA 35mm lens. Leica M6 - Film Ilford HP5





## THE CASTING OF AWKWARD SHADOWS

Light, tight as your head as you walk to the mill  
On the early shift, casting awkward shadows  
Across the roof, across today, across tomorrow,  
Across this moment when the shadow's angle  
Shifts like history.

Sound, loud as your steps as you walk back home  
In the evening, throwing awkward echoes  
Across the terrace, across the day's noise,  
Across this partsong when the sky's window  
Parts like memory.





## CHANGE OF USE

The vision to look beyond the frame,  
Beyond the looming walls  
And the ceilings that held the sky tight

And imagine this: art, coffee in tiny  
White cups, conversations  
That you don't have to shout

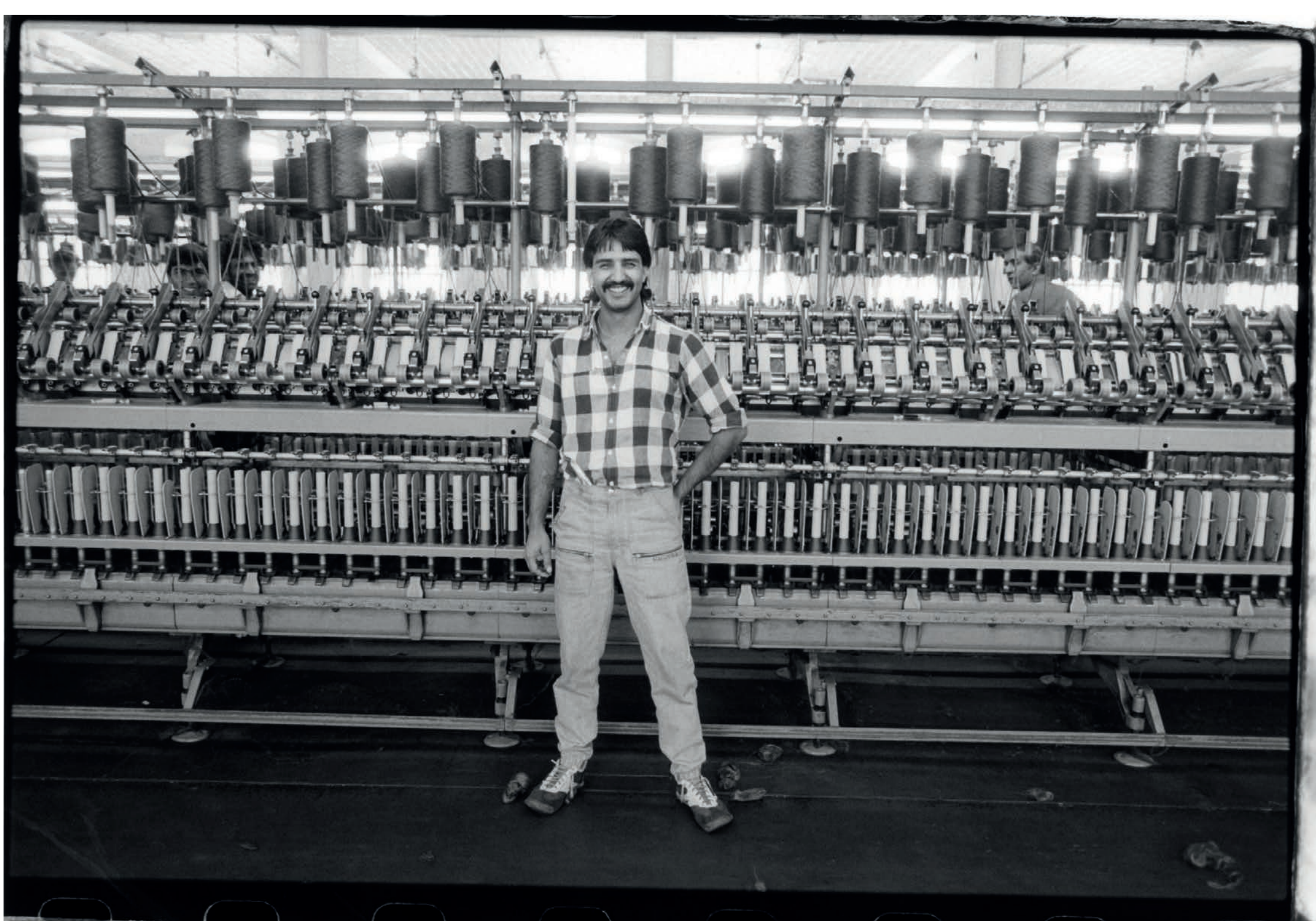
And the opposite of managed decline.  
This is the past unwrapped  
And presented to the present as the future.

## THE INVENTION OF PERSPECTIVE AT SALTS MILL

Maybe the two men in the photograph  
Are talking about perspective  
Although perhaps that's not what they call it.  
They're talking about how empty the room is,

How far it is from here to there, from then  
To now, from noise to silence, from front to back.  
Listen: their voices echo, throwing the words  
Against the unforgiving walls, chucking them around  
Until finally they fall to the floor and roll away.













## WORK IS A CIRCLE

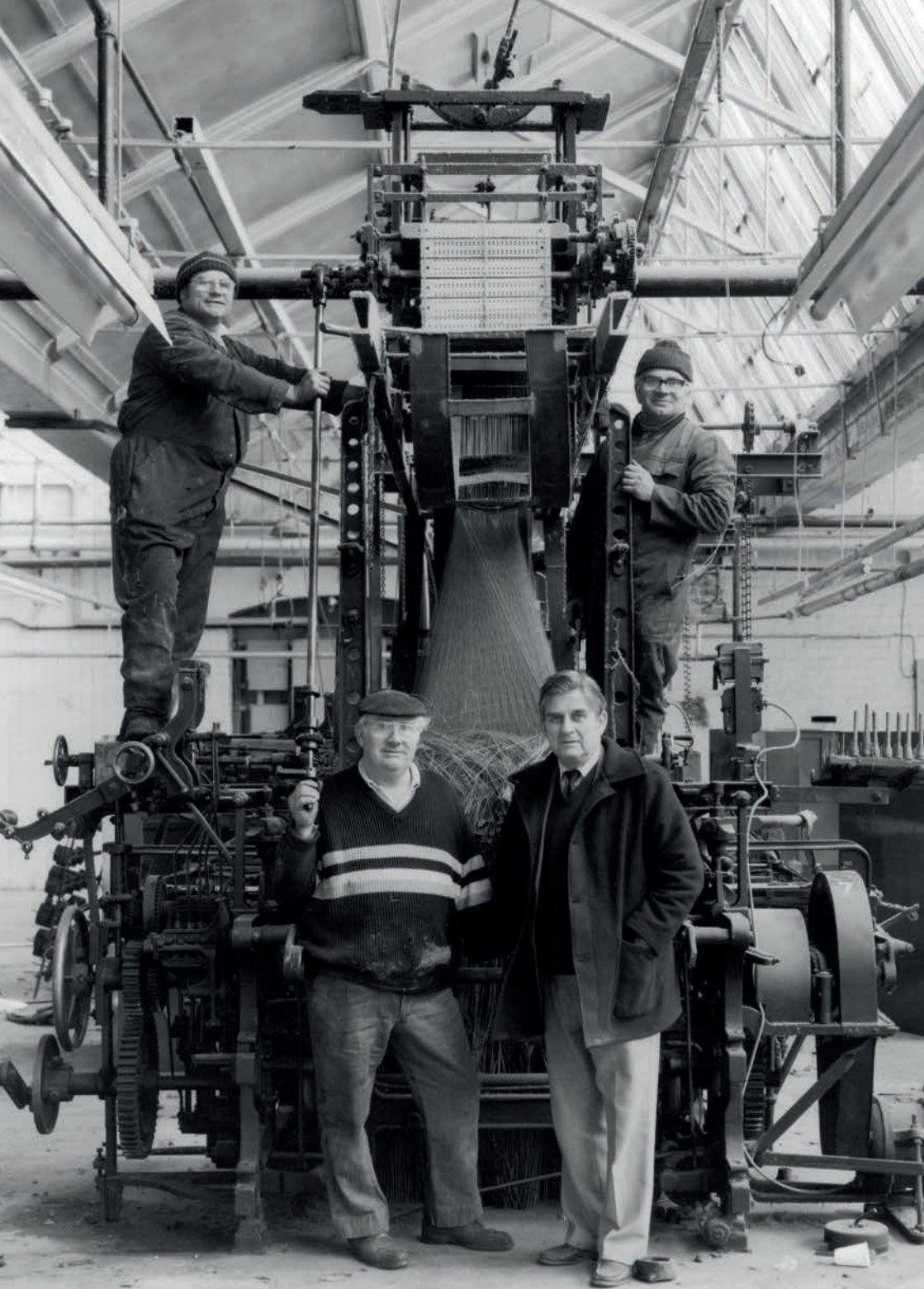
From first breath in the morning  
To last yawn at night  
Work is a circle that turns and returns.

From first day of the week  
To Friday's bright light  
Work is a circle that uses, re-uses

Your muscles and sinews  
And shoulders and brain,  
You go home, fall asleep

Then get back up again.  
Circle on circle; a roundabout seems  
To spin you right back

To when you first got on  
When the clock broke your dreams  
And the silence had gone.





1986

## THE DIFFUSION OF LIGHT

Just this, very simple, thought:

Would any of the light from all those years ago  
Still be hanging around in the mill,

Like water in a puddle from a storm  
That crashed and rumbled in the 80's?

Would it illuminate the working heads  
Of these men in these chairs,

And would there somehow be a mingling  
Of the shine from then and now

And in the moment a second splits,  
Would they mix like paint in still water?

2017





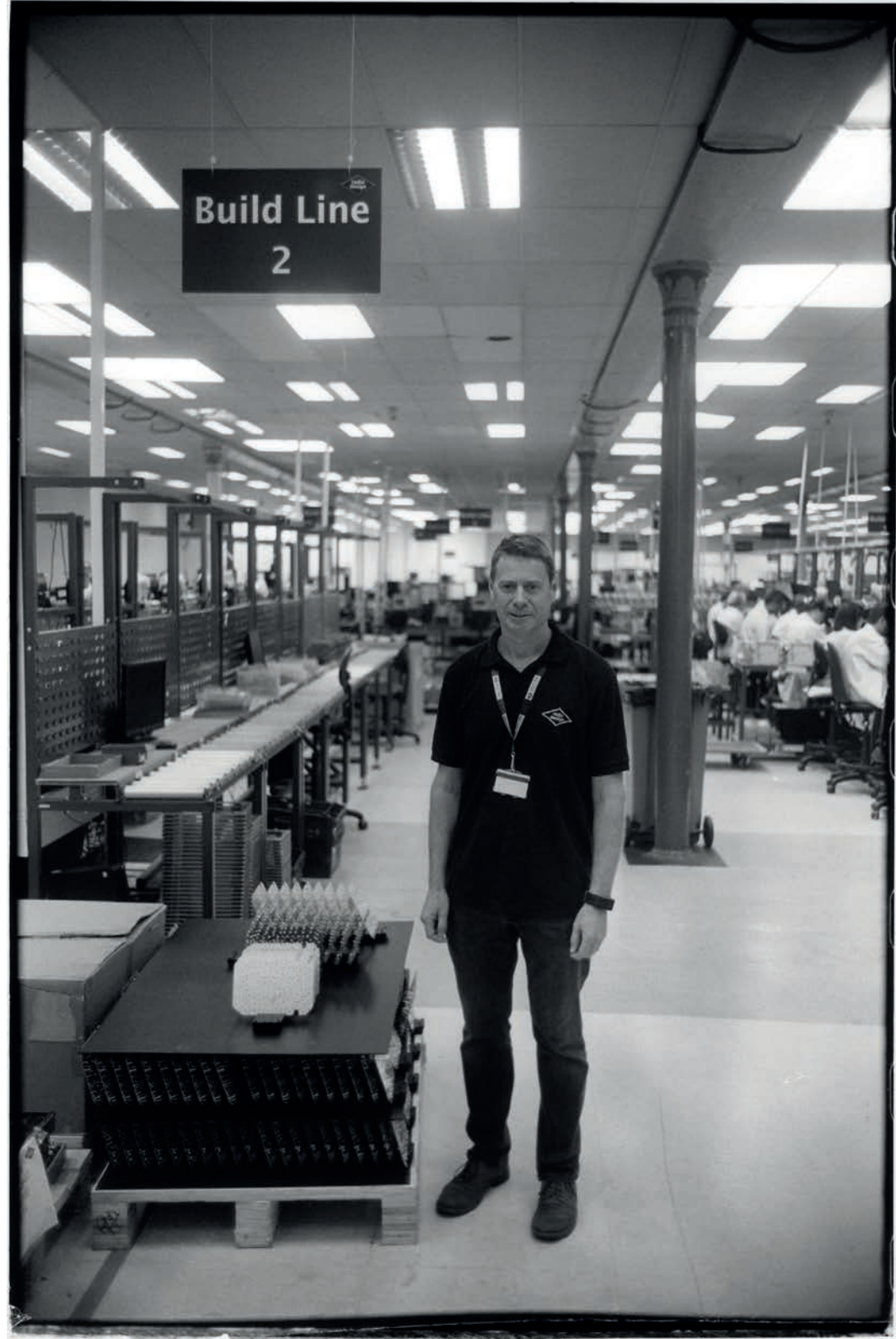


## THEN AND NOW AND NOW AND THEN

The old image waits in the new,  
Unblinking, thinking of yesterday  
And how today fits into it  
With a sharp *click*.

The new image floats over the old,  
Unmoving, reflecting today's light  
Shining on yesterday's surface  
With a low glow.

These photographs, then and now,  
Nod to each other, shake hands  
And exchange a few words  
Now and then  
About how things have shifted,  
How times have changed  
Or stayed the same.









## A POEM ABOUT A PHOTOGRAPH

This is a poem about the dance  
Of lines and light and time  
That a photograph is.

This is a poem full of words  
Trying to tell the tale of a shape  
That a photograph is.

A photograph is a kind of poem,  
Built from images and narrative  
And a solidified visual rhyme

That reminds you of something  
That you just can't place  
Until the photograph places it for you.

The poem ends here.  
The photograph never ends.



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