

Paisley People's Archive

Paisley's Thread Mills

Anchor Mills Heritage Trail



AND

Ferguslie Mills Heritage Trail



Introduction

There had been mills in the Seedhill area for many centuries but the story of the Anchor Mills complex begins with John Clark, whose family discovered a technique to produce spooled cotton thread. During the 1860s, John brought his mill, and the family's three other mills, to Seedhill; under the new name of Clark and Co., they named their complex 'the Anchor Mills'.

Clark's main competitors were J&P Coats, another Paisley family firm concerned with thread manufacturing. In the late 1880s, the two firms cooperated to combat the price-cutting trend that was reducing profits. The two firms merged in 1896, bringing the Anchor Mills and Coats' Ferguslie Mills complexes under the one umbrella and under the name of Coats. Further national and international expansion and acquisitions followed, and by 1913 Coats was Britain's largest textile company, employing 40,000 workers worldwide - 12,000 of these in Scotland. Read much more about Paisley's mill history and an accompanying PDF of the heritage trails at: <http://www.paisleypeoplesarchive.org/>

The Project

We are immensely grateful to: the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding our ongoing project exploring the rich and colourful history of Paisley's thread mills; to Dr Sue Morrison for successfully managing the project; and to the Scottish Oral History Centre. Special thanks to all the people who participated in this project, especially our volunteers, respondents and dedicated commissioned professionals. We hope that this heritage trail booklet encourages you to learn more about Paisley's famous mills and to appreciate their enduring legacy. We hope that you enjoy exploring the mill trails!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PAISLEY PEOPLE'S ARCHIVE STEERING COMMITTEE/ VOLUNTEERS:

Shirley McLean (Chair)
Richard Vassie (Treasurer)
Margaret Dymond
Grace Lamont

VOLUNTEERS:

Bryce Adam
Annie Bowyer
Maureen Gilmour
Alan Hannah
Evelyn Haughey
Rebecca Joyce
Louise McCulley
Derek Millar
Phyllis Mitchell
Ann White
Carol Wiseman

COMMISSIONED PROFESSIONALS:

Dr Sue Morrison (Oral History Consultant/ Manager) Contact: sue@sue.morrison.co.uk
Dr Michael Smith (Social Historian)
Contact: masmith371@gmail.com
Mark W. Downie (Web Developer)
Contact: markwdownie@outlook.com
Donald John MacLean (Photographer)
Contact: djjmaclean@hotmail.co.uk
Tim Mitchell (Film Maker - Rubikon Pictures)
Contact: tim_rubikon@hotmail.com
Betty Spoke (Narrator/ Fashion Designer)
Contact: info@bettyspoke.com

FUNDED BY:

Heritage Lottery Fund

SUPPORTED BY:

Scottish Oral History Centre (SOHC), University of Strathclyde: Contact: sohc@strath.ac.uk
Mr Marcus Dean, Abbey Mill Business Centre

ADDITIONAL THANKS TO:

Mr Harry Green



Anchor Mills Heritage Trail



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| 1. East Gatehouse | 13. Box-making, Printing and Storage sheds |
| 2. Mile End Mill | 14. Fire Station |
| 3. First Aid Station | 15. Seedhill Footbridge |
| 4. Gassing Mill – now Sir James Clark Building | 16. Before Morrisons.... |
| 5. Atlantic and Pacific Mills | 17. Mercerising Building |
| 6. No.1 Embroidery Mill | 18. Anchor Bowling Green |
| 7. Anchor Building | 19. Anchor Mill Recreation Ground |
| 8. West Gatehouse | 20. Bleach Works |
| 9. The Hammills | 21. Eel Farm |
| 10. Domestic Finishing Mill | 22. Coal Bing |
| 11. Counting House | 23. Dye Works |
| 12. Caustic Building | 24. Auchentorlie House |

The Anchor Mills complex employed many hundreds of local people, and when the finishing mill was built, the complex filled 9 acres. By 1914, it covered 28 acres and by 1952 it had spread to 51 acres. Production finally ended on the site in 1993. Many of the buildings have been demolished, but as well as the Domestic Finishing Mill, those

buildings still standing include the Mile End Mill, the Embroidery Mill, the Gassing Mill (now named the Sir James Clark Building), two gatehouses and the Anchor Recreation Club.

1. East Gatehouse

The single storey gatehouse stands at the eastern entrance to the Anchor Mills site. Built at the same time as the Mile End Mill, it was used by staff and for deliveries. It has been refurbished since the last of the mills closed in the 1990s and is now used as office space.



2. Mile End Mill*

Built between 1899 and 1900, the Mile End Mill was constructed just after the Clarks' and Coats' family businesses merged in 1896, along with Jonas Brook & Bros., to form J. & P. Coats. It was designed by W. J.



Morley of Bradford, and is Grade A listed. The nearby free-standing octagonal brick chimney stack was also designed by Morley, and is the only surviving stack in both the Anchor and Ferguslie sites. The chimney stack is Category B listed, and is now put to use as antennae facilities for the mobile phone industry.

The Mile End Mill's main operation related to the twisting process in thread manufacture, in which at least two yarns were combined to make thread strong enough and controllable enough for sewing. The now famous 'invisible thread' was

invented here, though much secrecy surrounded the invention during its early years.

By 1993, the Mile End Mill time as a working mill was ended, and the refurbished building now houses a large numbers of offices, a child care nursery and a gym facility.

* There is a busy café on the ground floor, which is open to the public, and free-entry exhibitions are often displayed in the reception area. The mill also houses the Thread Mill Museum, which is run by an enthusiastic team of volunteers and contains a large collection of images and artefacts. The museum is a must-see for all those visiting the Mile End Mill.
<http://paisleythreadmill.co.uk/>

3. First Aid Station

Built in the 1920s, the now ruined First Aid Station was staffed by a doctor and several nursing staff and served the entire Anchor Mill site. The Station was the first point of contact for anyone suffering serious injury or illness and provided vital first aid. J.&P. Coats owned their own ambulance, and, if needed, could take their staff to the local hospital if necessary.



Prior to the introduction of improved health and safety measures, on-site medical staff were needed to care for workers suffering from burns, from slippages on greasy or wet floors, or from coming off worse after an entanglement with a machine. Station staff worked double shifts, as did the mill

workers, so that basic cover was always available.

4. The Gassing Mill (now the Sir James Clark Building)

The Gassing Mill was built in 1923 and is now a Grade B listed building. The Gassing Mill housed an important part of the mercerising process of cotton thread manufacture, which enhanced the lustre of the cotton and increased its strength. Mercerising involved two processes, namely, gassing, and mercerising. Thread was given a smooth surface by being passed through a gas jet, or over an electric burner. Once this had been achieved, the thread was



mercerised by passing the gassed thread through a caustic soda solution. After this, it was stretched in hot water, before being rinsed. This was a very delicate process, where temperature, duration of exposure, and stretching, were closely monitored. The end result was a thread that could be used whenever a silk-like appearance was required, making it useful for general clothing and embroidery.

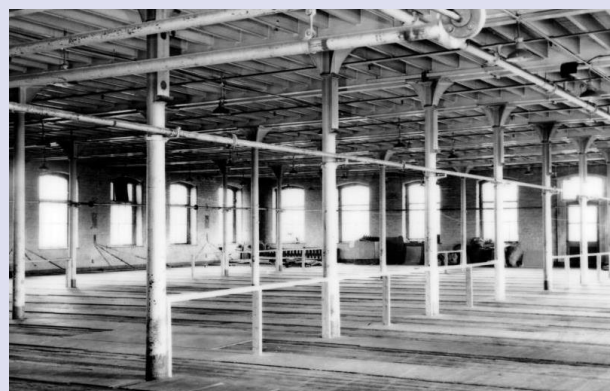
By the time the site was winding down production during the late 1980s, processes such as gassing, mercerising, and dollying of fancy threads had been moved abroad.

5. Atlantic and Pacific Mills

Across from the Gassing Mill there stood two imposing buildings that were central to the Anchor site. Built in the 1870s, the Atlantic Mill and the Pacific Mill were linked by a central tower that was added in 1886. The impressive Atlantic Mill contained 71,000 thread-producing twisting



spindles, whilst the Pacific Mill held 80,000 spindles. Each corner tower of the Atlantic Mill was adorned with a huge stone plaque inscribed with the words 'Anchor Thread Mills'. These plaques were each surrounded by wonderfully ornate carved floral garlands and could be seen from across Paisley. Before cotton could be spun, it was reduced to a suitable thickness through carding, lap forming, combing, and roving processes.



The Atlantic Mill was used for the spinning process, where the cotton was drawn out and reduced in diameter. This produced a fine yarn that had to be strengthened for sewing purposes, so it was sent next door to the Pacific Mill where the twisting process was carried out; the resulting grey hank-formed thread was then sent to one of the

wet processes. This twisting process was later moved to the Mile End Mill.

Together, the two mills employed more than 3,000 people.

The Pacific Mill was the first to close when the Ferguslie site took over production; the Atlantic Mill followed suit in the 1950s as production shifted to Ferguslie's No.3 Spinning Mill. The two famous Anchor mills were demolished between 1972 and 1973.

Unfortunately, three of the four stone plaques from the Anchor Mill were lost but one was saved and erected on the side of the old spinning shed. It now lies all but forgotten at the back of a car park and is in need of major restoration.

6. No.1 Embroidery Mill

Paisley was also once famous for its weaving industry. For nearly a hundred years until the 1870s, Paisley pattern shawls were highly fashionable. Initially a thriving cottage industry, the 1820s invention of the Jacquard loom led to the industrialisation of the process. As a result, many of the weavers lost their livelihoods and left Scotland for Canada or Australia. The Embroidery Mill was built during that period of upheaval, in the early 1840s.



This is the only building on the Anchor site that has been in continual use since its construction, and is listed as Category B. Today, the building houses a variety of local businesses.

7. Anchor Building

Built in 1880, the Anchor Building is a row of four-storey five bay tenements that housed key employees of Clarks, including members of the Anchor Mills Fire Brigade who were on constant standby. The firemen were mill employees who could live in the houses as long as they agreed to



be on call. Every house and mill flat had a bell system and if there was a fire in the flats, the fire master in the fire station rang the bells which sounded in the houses and the part-time firemen were alerted.



The Anchor Building was sold in 1984 and now contains 20 privately owned or rented flats.



8. West Gatehouse

Opposite the Anchor Building lies the Seedhill Gatehouse. This was the West Gatehouse for the Anchor Mills site. It was built in 1909, and is Category B listed. It is reportedly the last surviving gatehouse that had a water-controlled gate, whereby water was pumped into a tank in the roof and then passed through a control system to release the gate when required.

This building formed the gateway to the Anchor Mills site, and it was adorned with ribbons and banners whenever official



events, including royal visits, occurred. The building fell into disrepair after the mills closed and it now belongs to the present owner of the Anchor Site.

9. The Hammills

Sometimes named locally as ‘Little Niagara Falls’, or ‘Seedhill Craigs’, the Hammills form a natural weir, created by a ledge of volcanic rock crossing the White Cart. As



early as the 6th century, this natural ledge enticed several manufacturers to establish mills on both sides of the river. By the 19th century, the Hammills was home to grain mills on the north bank and textiles to the south, and the area was an obvious location choice to build the Clark (later Coats) thread milling complexes. The natural formation was enhanced as a powerful water source by the construction of man-made dams, including one further up-river, which was built to serve James Doxon’s ‘Lower Mill’ at Busby.

Watermill Hotel: Sited across from the Hammills, the famous old mill now houses a lovely restaurant, a pleasant bar, and a large function room.

<http://www.thewatermillhotel.com/>

10. Domestic Finishing Mill

The Domestic Finishing Mill once more stands as a proud reminder of Paisley’s industrial heritage. Now a Grade A listed building, the Mill was designed by

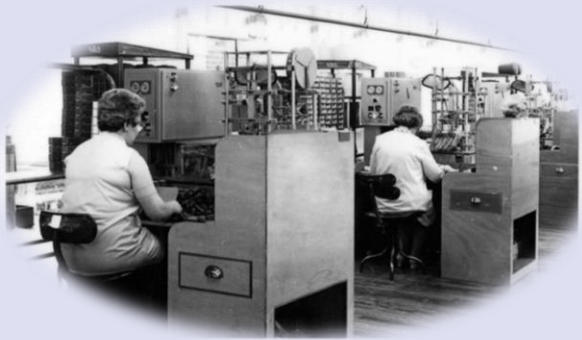


Woodhouse and Morley of Bradford and originally named the Spooling Mill. Built in 1886 and sold by Coats in 1984 as part of the restructuring of J. & P. Coats U.K Ltd., the Domestic Finishing Mill was the largest of the Paisley finishing mills.

Built of red brick with a sandstone balustrade, this beautiful riverside building

was one of the first in Paisley to be lit with electricity and also one of the first to have a partial water sprinkler system installed. Internally, the mill has an open atrium between the first floor and the fifth, which is said to be one of the finest in Britain. The atrium allows light in, and also provided space for the drive belts from the mill engine on the ground floor to reach the machines on the upper floors. The Mill was latterly used for the finishing of domestic sewing thread and handicrafts.

Production at the Domestic Finishing Mill ceased in the 1980s, and the building progressively fell into a state of serious



disrepair and serious consideration was given to its demolition. Thankfully, this was avoided, and gradually the mill was restored to its former glory at a cost of £12m. Today, it houses a combination of domestic properties and business space.

11. Counting House.

Built in 1874, the Counting House was used for administrative purposes and was occupied by the mill manager and superintendents. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Counting House had on display a beautiful model Spanish galleon ship created by Anchor apprentices from silver bobbins and thread. Sadly, the model was

sent to the London offices, never to be seen in Paisley again.

12. Caustic Building

The Caustic Building was a wooden and glass shed that became weakened through the storage of caustic, which arrived and was kept in sacks. The shed was demolished in the 1950s and it was discovered that the caustic had seeped through the wooden floor and burnt into the ground supports, weakening the entire structure.

13. Box-making, Printing and Storage Sheds

To the front of the Domestic Finishing Mill was a range of buildings used to make packing and printed materials, and to store bales and colour stocks. These buildings included the old Linside Mill, which was originally built around 1859 and burnt down in 1879. Rebuilt soon afterwards, the Linside gained status as a B listed building before again being ravished by fire in 1993. The mill was placed on the 'Buildings at Risk Register' and eventually demolished.

14. Fire Station

The Anchor Fire Station became an important part of the Seedhill complex after the original Seedhill mills were entirely destroyed by fire on the 18th October, 1799. The station was so important to the rebuilt mills that it had its own fire engine – a Merryweather. According to rumour, the iconic Anchor Merryweather was bought by Disney Films and shipped to America when the fire station closed.

15. Seedhill Footbridge

Seedhill Footbridge was constructed in the 1880s to allow access the White Cart River to Anchor Mills complex. Many hundreds of mill workers would have passed over the bridge as they walked to and from work. The bridge fell into disrepair after World War II and remained unused for decades. However, in 2006, the bridge was removed by crane, restored and relocated a few hundred feet upriver, at a cost of £560,000.

16. Before Morrisons....

It is difficult to imagine how the site looked before buildings were demolished and the Morrison's supermarket built. The whole area previously contained a myriad of buildings used to service and carry out production, finishing, and dyeing processes.



If you stand with your back to the footbridge and face towards Morrison's

store, you will be looking at the old location of the West Colour Dye Works;



behind that was the thread stores and behind those, the mighty Pacific and Atlantic Mills. Turn slightly to the right and, when the site was in operation during the early 1960s, you would have seen the East Colour Dye Works. Still further to the right, where the new houses now stand, was the site of the Spinning Shed, the South Bale Store and the Filter House. Beside those buildings there stood the Mercerising Building.

17. Mercerising Building

The Mercerising Building was where thread was passed through various tanks of caustic soda; as the thread moved through the process it absorbed the caustic, causing the fibres to swell. This gave the thread a lustre and made it very strong. In fact, mercerised thread was the strongest that could be made at that time

18. Anchor Bowling Club*

At the far end of the houses there sits the Anchor Bowling Green and Pavilion, which was built in 1896 and used by the mill workers. A similar bowling club was established at the Ferguslie Mills complex



and the workers organised inter-mill competitions, which were quite hotly contested events.

*The Anchor Bowling Club is still in use and the Pavilion is rented out for events. (Tel: 0141 889 2938)

19. Anchor Mill Recreation Ground

Working conditions at the mills were harsh during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To improve morale among the workers and thereby make them more productive, Coats built leisure facilities for the employees. The Anchor Recreation Club opened in 1923 with a sports event to mark the occasion. The day's events were

filmed and then screened at the Palace Cinema in Paisley High Street, much to the amusement of the mill girls, who clapped and cheered when seeing themselves running in three-legged and sack races.



The Recreation Club was well used by the mill workers, who organised cricket, football and hockey teams, and held sports contests involving athletic events. Best attended were the events where Anchor competed against Ferguslie mill teams. Some of the ground's activities were well-known but, perhaps thankfully, not recorded, including the stories about mill workers 'courting in long grass'!

20. Bleach Works

The Bleach Works was sited across from the mills, at the far eastern edge of the Anchor Mills complex; this was beyond the Recreation Ground and beside a hugely historic bridge. The bridge carries the Paisley canal railway over the White Cart river and is the oldest bridge in the world to still be used for railways.

The Bleach Works were demolished round about 1984.

21. Eel Farm

In the 1970s and 1980s, Coats Lid looked for ways to diversify productivity and researchers came up with some innovative ideas for the Anchor Mills. One of those ideas was to create an eel farm.

Mill processes, dyeing, bleaching, and processing thread, all involved considerable amounts of water, which was often heated. In 1976, Dr Dominic McKay came up with the idea of farming eels when the Coats Paton company suggested that he might experiment with available resources, mainly water. Two years later, Paisley's first eel farm went into production, using domestic fresh water in a circulation system. The venture was named 'Easgan Fisheries' and its policy was to farm fish in a successful enterprise while simultaneously conserving energy. Unfortunately, there were a few problems, not to mention that the area badly smelled, and the venture closed soon after starting.

22. Coal Bing

23. Dye Works

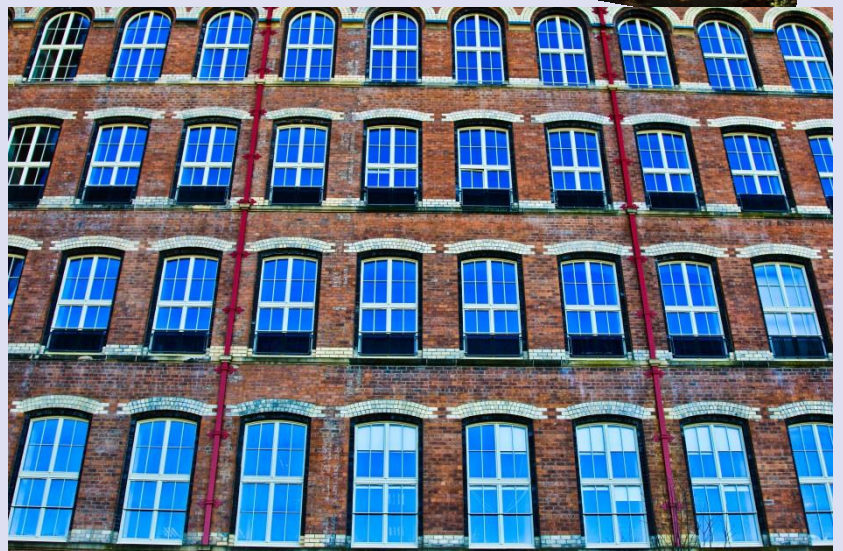
24. Auchentorlie House

Whilst the Anchor Mills were thriving and employed thousands of people, visitors may be interested to learn that a poorhouse and lunatic asylum was located just behind the Mile End Building. After 1910, Auchentorlie House became a children's home for 'children of good character'. Modern housing now occupies the site.

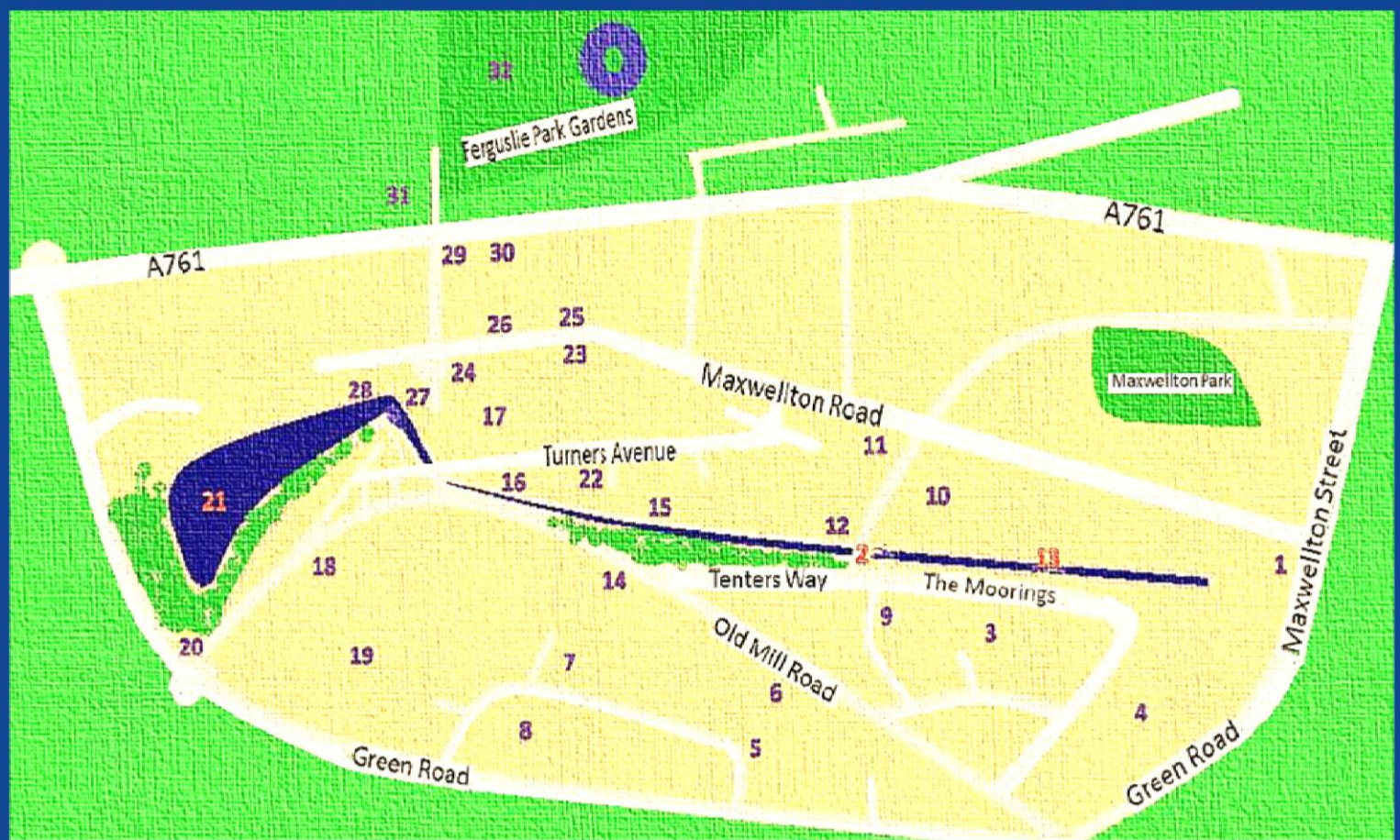


Final words

In total, the Anchor Mills complex employed many thousands of local people. By the middle of the twentieth century the whole site was spread over 51 acres and, at its peak, it employed roughly 5,000 people. Today the site remains a physical legacy of Paisley's proud manufacturing past.



Ferguslie Mills Heritage Trail



- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. The Half-Timers School | 17. Original No.1 Mill (Auld Mill) Complex |
| 2. Bridge Lane Gatehouse | 18. No.8 Twisting Mill |
| 3. No.1 Mill | 19. No.9 Twisting Mill |
| 4. No.2 Mill | 20. Ferguslie No.1 Spinning Mill Plaque |
| 5. No.3 Mill | 21. The Canal Basin |
| 6. Polishing Shop | 22. Boiler House |
| 7. Generating Plant | 23. Maxwellton Road Terrace |
| 8. Dye Works | 24. The White House |
| 9. Experimental Mill | 25. Senior staff Canteen |
| 10. Spooling Store | 26. Highland Girls Building |
| 11. Wood Turning Shop | 27. North Gate House |
| 12. Fire Station | 28. Stables and store |
| 13. Nineteenth-Century Footbridge: 'Tannahill's Hole' | 29. General Managers House |
| 14. Southside Finishing Mill | 30. The Girls' Club |
| 15. Joiners Shop | 31. Ferguslie Stables |
| 16. The Counting House | 32. Ferguslie House and Gardens |

Introduction

The Ferguslie Mills site was once a bustling hive of activity. At its peak, it

housed a total of nine working mills, each performing different parts of the thread-making process. Ferguslie was also home

to mechanics works, administrative buildings, worker canteens, education and training facilities, recreational areas, and even a power plant. Workers would enter through one of the three gatehouses that sat in the north, west, and east sections of the site, and at its peak, thousands clocked in and out through their gates every day. The earliest part of the site dates from around 1826, when Peter Coats built his first mill behind his house; the White House is still there, though the mills have gone. Following Peter Coats' initial enterprise, the site developed as the business grew, and by the end of the nineteenth century, rising demand and changing production methods had led to the construction of magnificent late-Victorian brick mill



buildings, similar to the Domestic Finishing Mill at the Anchor site. The peak era for production was after the Second World War but, by the 1970s, the Ferguslie site was being wound down due to economic changes that saw thread production being increasingly shifted overseas. Many of the original buildings have been pulled down since the early 1990s, though a few remain to remind us of Ferguslie's illustrious past.

1. The Half-Timers School

The remains of the Half-Timers School mark the beginning of the Ferguslie Heritage Trail. Like many sites on this trail, visitors need to use a little imagination to visualise the grandeur of what once



stood here. This building offers an important insight into both the commercial success of the thread industry in Paisley. Opened in 1887 by Peter Coats Jr., the Half-Timers School allowed young mill girls, who would have been aged between 10 and 14 years, to attend school one day and work in the mill the next, which led to the term 'Half-



Timers' being applied.

This once beautiful building could house up to 400 pupils, though education would have consisted of basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. The Coats' building stopped functioning as a school in 1908 and then underwent a variety of uses; by 1921, it was being used as a dining hall for the mills' clerical workers, while by 1969 the building was being used by the mills' fire prevention team.

Coats eventually sold the building and it was then used as the social club for 'Ciba-Geigy', before it became a nightclub known as the 'Cotton Club', and then the 'Institute'. In 1998, a serious fire gutted the interior and severely weakened the outer walls and Boxing Day storms resulted in widespread damage to the vulnerable exterior, including the collapse of the magnificent east gable. Currently (March 2014), the Half-Timers building is in 'critical' condition and listed as 'ruinous'.



2. Bridge Lane Gatehouse



Bridge Lane Gatehouse stood at one of the three entrances to the Ferguslie Mill site. The gatehouse was finished in the same year as the Half-Timers School, in 1887, and is Category B listed. Predominately, the Gatehouse would have been used for reception and various administration purposes. However, it was also used as a storage facility and, during the latter years of production on the Ferguslie site, it was the personnel office. Today, it has been divided into private residences.

What went before...

3. No.1 Mill

Standing outside the Bridge Lane Gatehouse, it is difficult

to imagine the outlook when the whole area was covered with mill buildings. Facing south, slightly to the left stood the No.1 Spinning Mill. Built in 1887, this imposing six-storey building was designed by Woodhouse and Morley in French Renaissance style. This building was arguably the grandest and most impressive on the whole Ferguslie site. No.1 Mill was mostly related to cotton spinning and processing, with one floor dedicated to tube winding. The building itself was constantly developed throughout its history, as new processes and demands were introduced to thread production. By the 1970s, as the Ferguslie site was being wound down, all of the spinning machines were removed from the No.1 Mill, and twisting machinery was installed.

Despite being Grade A listed, and a heated public campaign to save it, Ferguslie's No.1 Mill was demolished in 1992.

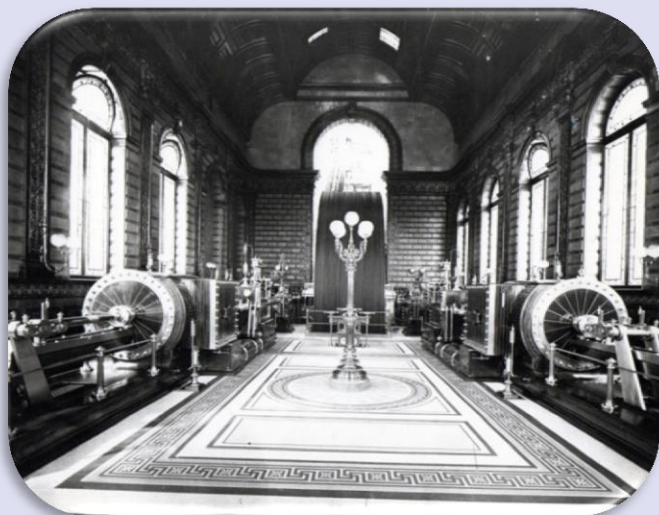
4. No.2 Mill

Behind the No.1 Mill, slightly to the left, sat the No.2 Mill, which was built in the 1930s as production demands increased. Many of the women who worked in mills, like the No.2 Mill, were paid in 'piece rates'. This meant that whatever was weighed at the end of their shift was

calculated to make up their wage. Sometimes they would hardly stop during their shift because if they did so, then the machine would stop.



No.2 Mill had three floors, known as 'flats', and was well known among the workforce for its heat and humidity. Operating at the correct temperature levels were important to thread-making processes so they were constantly monitored. Air conditioning was regulated by opening and closing doors and windows, and all mill-processing and storage buildings were non-smoking because of the large amounts of cotton and oil that were present. No.2 Mill experienced a serious fire when someone failed to pit out an illicit cigarette but catastrophe was avoided thanks to the staff at the on-site Fire Station.



5. No.3 Mill

To the far south/ south west of the mill complex, at the rear and to the right of No.1 Mill, there sat a number of buildings, including the Polishing Department, the Generating Plant, and the Dyeworks. Amongst those buildings was the No.3 Mill. This was built in the 1950s, and at the time, it was the most modern threadmill in Britain. It was built to take up the spinning from the Atlantic Mill on the Anchor site when that was closed down. It also had an adjoining Blowroom, which was the first stage of thread production, as this was where the raw cotton arrived to be cleaned and readied for making thread. As

orders began to shrink in the 1970s, and some of the mills were being shut down, many of the processes, such as cheese winding, or cone winding, were moved to this building. No.3 Mill was pulled down in 1984.



6. Polishing Department

This deceptively large department housed large cylindrical drums which formed part of the thread polishing process. This process created a lot of heat, hence the large interior to disseminate the warm air.

7. Generating Plant

8. Dye Works

The dyeworks were known locally as the Turkey Red Dyeworks.

9. Experimental Mill

Beside the No.1 Mill, to the right, there was an Experimental Mill, which was built at the same time as its enormous neighbour. This important building allowed new machinery and techniques to be tested before they were implemented, and the results not only benefited the mills at Ferguslie, but also the firm's mills around the world. This mill was also used to maintain machinery, including the rollers that were used on the spinning machines. These were covered in goatskin leather to protect the cotton, which hardens when under pressure, and it was important that the spinning mills had a constant supply of rollers. The Experimental Mill was one of the last buildings to be closed on the Ferguslie site.

10. Spooling Store

Spoolers Road lies to the north of the gatehouse; here sat the main store for the spools that were made in the turning shop, which was located just across the road. Spools were made from spruce, and when the diversification process began on the Ferguslie site, there were plans to turn this building into a production area.

However, its construction was not sturdy

enough to accommodate production. The building was demolished in 1992.



11. Wood Turning Shop

Across from the spool store there were a number of storage sheds and workshops, including the Wood Turning Shop.

12. Fire Station

The Fire Station was also on this part of the mill complex. Built towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was a crucial part of the site. Cotton is highly flammable and some of the processes would leave traces of cotton 'cobwebs'



around the machinery, so the site had to have a rapid-response fire team at the ready. The first fire engines at Ferguslie would have been horse-drawn, and the firemen would have sat on the side of the engine. The Fire Station housed two fire engines, with stables underneath the building, and was located across from the Bridge Lane Gatehouse. The firemen would train at the Half-Timers School, which was ideal given its large hall and the adjacent classrooms.

13. Nineteenth-Century

Footbridge - 'Tannahill's Hole'

From the Gatehouse, turn left and follow the canal along Tenters Way until you reach a stone footbridge that remains a significant landmark in the local area. The footbridge, which is Grade C listed, straddles the Paisley and Johnstone Canal that runs through the Ferguslie site and

would have seen regular footfall from mill workers over the years. The canal itself was laid out by the famous civil engineer



Thomas Telford. Locally, the bridge has close connections with Paisley's weaving trade, given its connection with the poet Robert Tannahill. Tannahill is known as the 'weaver poet' because of his trade as a weaver and his skill as a poet. Just months before the canal was opened to traffic, Tannahill's body was found in this spot, and since then, this place has become known as 'Tannahill's Hole'. Today, the footbridge is blocked off at one side but, originally, it provided access to the Half-Timers School, as the girls who worked in the No.1 Mill would cross the bridge in the early afternoon to receive lessons.

Along the Canal Path

Retrace your footsteps along the canal and continue west on the pleasant and peaceful canal path past the Gatehouse. Along the way you'll pass the site of the



old Southside Finishing Mill, across the canal there once stood the Joiners Shop. The canal is now a haven for wildlife and you may be lucky enough to see a variety of small birds and waterfowl, and perhaps encounter a family of foxes sunning themselves on the banking.

14. Southside Finishing Mill



Often referred to as 'The Southside Winding', the building was originally a finishing mill. Latterly, the mill housed offices, including the south-facing colour matcher's office – the south-facing light was needed to correctly match the thread colours. Following changing packaging demands, the Southside Finishing Mill became a winding mill.

15. Joiners Shop

Follow the path to Turners Avenue and on the right you'll see the impressive Counting House.

16. The Counting House

Built in 1890 with some later additions, the Counting House is listed as Category B and exhibits many fine architectural features. This building was the financial hub of the thread business on the Ferguslie site, and would have been a familiar location to everyone who worked on the Ferguslie site as this was where the wages were distributed. Like so many

of the buildings relating to the thread industry that were built at this time, it reflects the wealth and confidence of the Coats' business.

The top floor of the Counting House held the costs and wages departments. On the ground floor was the general manager's office, a showroom, and a technical department. The Counting House was



also home to the standards department. When Coats sold the northern part of the Ferguslie site in 1972, the Counting House fell into disuse and subsequently suffered neglect and vandalism, including fire damage. Thankfully, the façade of the building remained intact and the remaining structure was subsequently redeveloped into a number of private properties.

What went before...

17. Old No.1 Mill – Auld Mill Complex

Across the street from the Counting House is where the original production mills were built in 1826. Here, there was



an L-shaped complex of mill buildings, including the original No.1 Mill, the 'auld mill', which dated from 1826. There were a total of seven mills in this complex, which also had its own engine house. This collection of structures was overshadowed by the later Victorian constructions, built when the old mills could not house newer, and far larger, machinery. There was also a large staff canteen, and behind this sat a single-storey dyeworks. One of the most imposing sights on this part of the Ferguslie site was the chimney stack beside the power plant. The stack was similar in size to the chimney on the Anchor site. Unfortunately, it was taken down along with many other mill buildings during the 1980s. Because it sat so close to various buildings, the chimney was painstakingly taken apart by hand. The power plant that used to sit here was built in the 1920s, replacing an older one.



At the time, it was one of the most modern power plants in Britain, and supplied power to the Ferguslie site, with excess power being sold to the National Grid. There were also cooling towers near to the canal basin, where residual water would be cooled down, and then filtered into the canal.

18. No.8 Twisting Mill

Standing at the front entrance of the Counting House, and looking to the west, there used to stand the No.8 Twisting Mill. Built in 1890, this was another grand and imposing mill building. It was iconic in the local area, although not quite on the decorative scale of the No.1 Spinning Mill. No.8 Mill was where the yarn came to after the spinning process, where it would be twisted into several thicknesses, and in



different directions. It would then be packaged for different 'wet' processes. The mill's interior was always very hot and both men and women wore as few clothes as decency allowed and, perhaps for this reason, one of the floors was a 'men's only' production area, even up to the end of production in the late 1970s.

19. No.9 Twisting Mill

Behind the No.8 Mill were buildings known as the 'wings' which housed more lightweight machinery than would be found in the twisting mill. Yarn that was imported from other mills, as well as yarn that was stockpiled in Ferguslie, would also be stored here in sheds. Here sat the No.9 Twisting Mill, which was another large, Victorian red-brick building, with three floors and a basement that was used by the basket makers.

Originally, it was constructed to take care of the twisting process, but as the site was being reduced, it was mainly used for basket-making and general

storage purposes related to on-site production. This part of the site was always packed with vehicles, given that the Transport Office was located here too. Coats also owned a fleet of electric vans, similar to old fashioned milk floats, which would be used to transport lightweight packages between the mills on the site. A canteen for both workers and managers also stood on this part of the site.

20. Ferguslie No.1 Spinning Mill Plaque

Follow the road west from the Counting House until you arrive at the roundabout, where you will be able to view all that remains of the aforementioned No.1 Spinning Mill. The plaque was salvaged from the mill before it was demolished in 1992 and now sits beside the road, a small and hardly visible reminder of the once splendid grandeur of the massive building that, over the years, had provided work to hundreds and thousands of Paisley buddies.

This part of the site marks the western boundary, and close to here stood the West Gatehouse. This building was similar in appearance to the Bridge Lane Gatehouse that lies towards the eastern end of the site; it, too, was a two-storey structure with a double-level tower housing a clock. Tradesmen would either clock in at this gatehouse or the Bridge Lane gatehouse. The West Gatehouse was said to be far larger and arguably even more ornate than the Bridge Lane Gatehouse, but it was sadly lost after years of neglect and vandalism.

21. Canal Basin

Visitors walking back towards the Counting House can take a short detour along the left-hand path to walk beside



the old canal basin. When the cooling towers were in operation and pouring still-warm effluent water into the canal basin, the warm conditions were found to be beneficial to the fish population. The basin is said to have been full of small fish, including goldfish, for many years – until someone released a large, hungry carp into the water. That act soon depopulated the canal basin of smaller fish! The basin has since been cleaned and is now a haven for wildfowl, particularly ducks, swans and a rather haughty heron.



22. Boiler House

Continue along the path and you return to the Counting House. Head east up Turners Avenue (passing where once stood the Boiler House), cross the small roundabout and take the short path between the houses to reach Maxwellton Road. Turn left.

23. Maxwellton Road Terrace

Maxwellton Road Terrace is a pleasant row of terraced houses standing opposite four buildings on the other side of the



street. The two-storey and attic terraced houses with slate roofs mostly date from 1886 and are Grade B listed. These were known as the 'Firemen's Cottages', and were used by Coats as domestic dwellings for employees. The houses were linked up to the fire station by a bell, so that in the event of a fire, the appropriate tradesmen could be mustered as quickly as possible. They would not have been used by ordinary labourers in the mills, but by staff who were higher up in the firm. It would mostly have been mill overseers who lived in these houses with their families.

24. The White House



At the end of the terraced row there sits a two-storey whitewashed house. This unassuming building is highly significant to the heritage of the Ferguslie site, as it

belonged to James Coats at the time when he decided to focus solely on thread manufacture. He chose to live here because of its close proximity to his first mill, which he built beside the canal in 1826. The White House dates from around 1820 and is Grade B listed.

25. Senior Staff Canteen

Opposite the terraces sit two important



former Coats' buildings. The first is a detached sandstone building. This two-storey and attic building dates from 1886, and was the former clerks' dining hall. This was where office staff and management would come to eat, and as well as having modern kitchen facilities, the building was also elaborately finished, supposedly to reflect the rank of those who ate there. The first floor was used by foremen and sub-managers, while the managers and directors would dine on the second floor. Today, this building houses a masonic lodge.

26. Highland Girls Building

This four-storey with attic building was designed in 1899 by local architect Thomas Graham Abercrombie and is Grade B listed. It was used by the Coats firm as a workers' hostel, and is known locally as the 'Highland Girls' building because it was used to house young

women who migrated from the Highlands in search of work, The girls were carefully



chaperoned within the building, which had its own kitchen, dining room and laundry. Today, the building has been converted to domestic use. To the rear of the building and once adjoined, stands the old Girls' Club, formerly a mill-workers' welfare club established by the Coats' firm.

27. North Gate House

The North, or West Lane, Gatehouse dates from around 1890 and is Grade B listed. Like the other two onsite gatehouses, this



building was where workers would clock in and out at the start and end of their shift. Staff would congregate under its long-gone glass canopy before their working day started, especially if it was raining. To the left of the gatehouse is a driveway, now closed off by cast iron gates. This entrance would previously have been used for industrial traffic,

originally horse and cart, and later automotive. The gates were operated from inside the gatehouse by means of a hydraulic valve. The gatehouse also offered a good vantage point for the whole site, and was used by firemen to keep watch for signs of smoke or flames. It was sold by Coats in 1972 and



afterwards was put to use by a variety of different businesses. Like so many of the original buildings that remain on the Ferguslie site, the North Gatehouse fell into a serious state of disrepair once production ceased. Fortunately, the building was purchased privately, and converted into a beautiful domestic dwelling.

28. Stables and store

Standing at the back of the North Gatehouse is a small building; this is all that remains of a cluster of store and stable buildings that were demolished in the 1990s. Only one original gable end wall with an inset clock remains.



Previously, there were two stable buildings here, dating from about 1850. The surviving gable once formed part of a building where thread was stored before being transported along the canal. This building housed a bell that was rung to

summon workers to work. The present building is residential.

29. General Managers House

Across from the White House is the rear of a large red-brick villa that faces onto Ferguslie Road; this house was used by the firm's general managers. Latterly, it was used by site-foremen, who would manage the various trades



related to the site, and would delegate work for these tradesmen.

30. The Girls' Club

Next to the General Managers' House stands a distinctive red stone building, which once adjoined the Highland Girls' Building at the rear. This was formerly



the Paisley Coats' Girls' Club. The Grade B listed building was opened in 1901, and was closely connected to the Highland Girls building, as it was a place where young mill girls could gather and socialise. The building has also been used for other purposes, including a girl guides' club, an employment office along with staff training areas, and a lecture hall. At one point it housed the original museum for the Coats business, which

was situated on the first floor and had various ephemera associated with the business on display, including old machinery. The building was latterly used by the local sea cadets, and is now deemed 'at risk' by the local authority.

31. Ferguslie Stables

Across the main road from the General Managers' House stands an elaborate two-storey turreted building, with iron gates to the side. This grand stable



building dates from 1870, and is Grade B listed. These stables served Ferguslie House, which sat in the grounds behind the building. The stables' staff accommodation would have housed various livery employees who served the Coats family, and who would have been on constant call for the family's business and recreational needs. The main part of the building, which faces onto Ferguslie Road, was the residence of the groundsmen who tended to the grounds and gardens of the Coats family home, Ferguslie House.



32. Ferguslie House

Ferguslie House was built in 1828, reportedly on the site of a former medieval castle. In 1845, Thomas Coats moved his family into the property and lived there for several years raising his eleven children. When Thomas Coats died in 1883, around 2,000 people walked behind his coffin along the route to his funeral service.



During the Second World War the house was used as a hospital and first aid station, the family having moved out some years before. The grand house was demolished in 1920.

Today, the Ferguslie House Gardens have been thoughtfully landscaped and provide a place of peace and relaxation for the area's inhabitants. On warm, sunny days, the Gardens are full of children, laughter and picnicking families. At trails' end, this is the perfect place to sit and contemplate the fine heritage of Paisley's famous thread mill industry.



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LOTTERY FUNDED

**Sue Morrison
Consultancy**



Email: sue@suemorrison.co.uk