

## Textile Industries – PART 3 – Calverley Old Hall

### Calverley Old Hall

Calverley Old Hall lies at the bottom of Woodhall Road, a steep hill rising to the hamlet of Woodhall Hills. Local lore says that, from the top of the hill, the next highest place you would come to travelling eastwards in a straight line are the Ural Mountains! More importantly, for the history of Calverley and its neighbour Farsley, it means that there were plenty of streams and springs flowing downhill, providing the water necessary for the production of woollen cloth.

Records show that there were fulling mills in Calverley as far back as the 13th Century. After the cloth had been woven, it was wet - originally with urine, then pounded, so that it shrank and became stronger. By the 19th Century, water powered stocks were used to carry out this fulling process.

For centuries, the woollen industry was based in people's homes, and the whole family would have been involved. The yarn was prepared and spun downstairs, then the cloth was woven on a hand loom upstairs. We can still see some of the houses where this happened in Calverley, in the older part of the village, and in Farsley, on Town Street and the upper part of Gladstone Street. The houses were two, three or, in Farsley, even four storeys tall, with larger windows in the upper floor because good lighting was essential for the weaving. The families lived downstairs. Sometimes, the rows of cottages would have a shared upper floor, which ran the whole length of the terrace. The cloth would then have been taken by packhorse to be sold to the wool merchants in the cloth halls in Leeds.

The domestic system continued well into the 19th Century in some homes in Calverley because there was a demand for the weaving of 'fancies' or 'fancy cloth,' a type of design. However, in most areas of the West Riding, the textile industry gradually became centralised in the new mills.

In the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, the woollen industry began to adopt and adapt the machinery developed for the Lancashire cotton industry, as well as to develop new machines and techniques of its own. Some of the first mills were called Company Mills, like Roberts Ross & Co, which was established in 1829 in Farsley. Company Mills established when a number of clothiers (cloth makers), joined together as shareholders to form a business. A relationship between the Company Mills and the domestic clothiers developed. At the Farsley Club Mill the clothiers took the wool they had bought from Bradford, Leeds or Liverpool to the mill, where it was scoured - the fibres combed and straightened, to make it ready for spinning. Then they took the spools of wool – the slubbings back home to be spun, then woven into cloth. Then the cloth was taken back to the mill for fulling. After that, the cloth was taken to Leeds, sold to the cloth merchants or 'meisters', who would pass it on for finishing. So, by some of the preparation of the wool being carried out at the company

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mill, it meant that the domestic clothiers had more wool to spin, and could then weave more and better quality cloth, which ultimately meant more to sell. In this way, the clothiers still managed to survive against the competition of the larger mills.

A vertical mill is where all the processes take place in the same complex: the wool arrives in a raw state and the end result is a finished piece of cloth, ready for sale. Huge woollen mills had been built since the late 18th Century, like Benjamin Gott's Bean Ings and Armley Mills in Leeds, but it was from the 1850's onwards that most mills in Calverley and Farsley were built, with the gradual introduction of steam powered looms. The nearby Leeds-Liverpool Canal, finished in 1777, and the opening of railway lines passing Calverley in 1846 and Farsley in 1854 gave easier access to raw materials, like the coal needed for the boilers.

In addition to Roberts Ross & Co, a number of mills were built in Farsley in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Calverley, Clover Greaves Mill was built in 1834, with Lydgate Mill next door. Holly Park Mills opened in 1866 and used power looms. The woollen mill at Ravenscliffe was built later in the century.

The 19th Century also saw a lot of diversification and specialisation in the types of cloth produced in the West Riding. There were cotton mills in the western part of the county, in the Upper Calder and Aire Valleys, across from the border with Lancashire. Marshall's Temple Mill in Holbeck, Leeds was one famous example of a flax mill. The Heavy Woollen District, around Dewsbury and Batley in Kirklees produced a cloth called 'shoddy,' where waste woollen products were shredded, mixed with new wool then woven, and 'mungo,' an even cheaper cloth, made from rags. This area became famous for making blankets.

Woollen cloth is made from short fibres of wool, which mesh together when the cloth is fulled. It is a thicker cloth and can seem not to have a visible pattern. Worsted cloth is made from longer woollen fibres or staples and is not fulled. It is a very fine cloth and has a clear pattern to it. These were the types of cloth being woven most often in large parts of the West Riding by the second half of the 19th Century. Instead of the wool coming from sheep from the Yorkshire Wolds and Lincolnshire, they began using the longer wool from merino sheep, imported from Australia and, to a lesser extent, the Cape (South Africa) and eventually South America. The first merino wool was brought to England by a Farsley man, the Rev Samuel Marsden, in 1808. Today, there is a memorial garden dedicated to him on the site of his original warehouse on Farsley Town Street.

Bradford expanded rapidly and, as the centre of the worsted trade, became known as 'Worstedopolis.' Calverley and Farsley had mills specialising both in worsted and woollen cloth. With their reputation for quality, the demand was huge.

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Edwin Woodhouse wasted no time in developing the Sunny Bank site and introducing the production of worsted cloth for fine suiting's. In 1884, he added a new spinning mill, then formed Edwin Woodhouse & Co Ltd in 1895. A finishing shed, and a pattern weaving and design department followed, with a new four-storey spinning mill in 1912. Over 900 people worked at the mill. It had 100 looms and its worsted cloth was exported all over the world.

The expansion of the mills led to the growth of Calverley and Farsley. The growing number of workers at the mills needed places to live, shop and worship. This meant adding to what was already there, and not creating purpose-built villages for the workers to live in, as Sir Titus Salt did at Saltaire, a short distance away along the Aire Valley. Farsley, already much bigger than its neighbour, saw the building of back-to-back, stone, terraced houses up above Sunny Bank Mills. Further terraces and below the mill at the lower end of the village. Much larger terraced and semi-detached houses were also built. Where you lived depended on who you were and what your occupation was. The largest houses were built by the prosperous mill owners and businessmen, mainly in New Street and along the lanes through the fields leading to Calverley.

In Calverley, the 19th Century stone houses were built in a more uniform way than the higgledy piggledy streets from earlier times. The stone was quarried in Calverley Woods- some of it left over after a failed attempt by the local landowners, the Thornhill Estate, to attract prosperous mill owners to build new houses down Calverley Cutting – which eventually proved too steep for carriages to travel. Some of the 19th Century housing which was built for weavers still working at home can be seen opposite Calverley Old Hall.

As well as housing, both villages saw the building of shops to serve the growing population. Schools were constructed and opened. Farsley became a separate parish and got its own church in 1843. With a very strong Non-Conformist following, both villages built Methodist, and in Farsley, Baptist Chapels. Victoria Park was opened in Calverley, and the Hainsworth family, from Spring Valley Mills, donated land to form Hainsworth Park in Farsley.

Without the health and safety regulations of today, machinery and working practises were hazardous. In the domestic system, the workers were their own bosses. As people began to work in the mills, they had to get used to working for other people and following their instructions. They worked long hours. Whole families could work in a mill, and older people worked for as long as they could because old age pensions did not exist until shortly before the First World War. Alfred Gaunt started a Workpeople's Fund to provide pensions for workers at Sunny Bank Mills in 1946. Even into the early 20th Century, children were still working as half-timers. There were few restrictions or safety guards and accidents, of different types and severity, were common. Much of the machinery, like the looms, was very noisy, and deafness was a common problem. People had to learn how to lip read what each other were saying, because they couldn't be heard above the machines. The machinery made the sheds hot and stuffy. The scouring, fulling and dyeing departments were humid and very smelly. Fibres got into people's lungs. With the grease from the wool and the oily

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machines, fire was a big threat, with several of the mills experiencing devastating fires. Similarly, the workers had to be careful when they went home. Within living memory, one worker at Sunny Bank burned to death when she stood too close to the coal fire at home in the apron she had worn to work. Reforms and Acts of Parliament in the 19th Century made some changes to the safety in the mills, but it was only as the 20th Century progressed that significant improvements were made.

But all was not doom and gloom for the workers. The years spent training as apprentices meant that the workers were highly skilled and workers could get a job anywhere, such was the reputation for excellence. Relatives often followed each other into the same mill and stayed there for a long time. People sometimes moved around the local mills for better pay. In the 20th Century, the different mills had cricket and football teams. The annual work's outing, quite often to the coast, was very popular. Workers socialised together and there was a lot of camaraderie at work, as the photographic collection at Sunny Bank shows!

The Mechanic's Institute in Calverley was established in 1873 to provide training and a wider education for the local workers. It had a library, education rooms and the local dramatic society rehearsed there. The Springfield Institute was set up at Springfield Mills in Farsley. It too offered vocational training, but also wider classes such as French, German and gardening. It held concerts and lectures by visiting speakers and had a dining room. Recent research carried out by the Sunny Bank Mills Archive into Farsley and the mills in World War I, showed that the workers at the mill raised money, for the war effort and for injured servicemen at Beckett's Park Hospital. They also went to the hospital to entertain the troops.

Around a century ago, there were seven mills in Farsley. Now there is just one and Calverley has none.

The surviving mill is AW Hainsworth & Sons Ltd. They were making the scarlet cloth for army uniforms as far back as the Napoleonic Wars and still supply cloth today to dress the British Armed Forces, as well as other forces overseas. The firm was the hub for the local production of khaki cloth in the First World War and a major supplier of cloth in WWII. The company benefitted from huge orders for cloth for the Queen's coronation in 1953. Three quarters of the mill was destroyed by fire in 1955 after which it was rebuilt and modernised, including the introduction of electrically powered weaving looms. Since that time, Hainsworth's has invested in developing new textile technology. It makes baize cloth for snooker tables; fine cloth for leading fashion houses; woollen coffins; felts for Steinway pianos and protective fabrics for the fire service. In 2003, the company was awarded the Queen's Award for Enterprise (Innovation) and it has held the Royal Warrant for supplying furnishing fabrics to the Queen since 2004.

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Not all the local mills were as fortunate or were able to react to the market in this way. Trading in the woollen textile industry had always varied. The two World Wars were busy and profitable times, with the huge demand for cloth, but, in general, the industry had been in decline since the 1920's and there were strikes in the 1930's. The mills had to balance maintaining standards with producing the right amount and type of cloth for which there was a demand. Powered looms had replaced hand looms and were in turn replaced themselves by electric ones. Holly Bank Mills in Calverley was a rarity, producing what became known as the Calverley Trade, a fine, sturdy cloth, as used for riding breeches, on hand looms until 1966. New machinery was expensive. Different processes became financially unviable. Jobs were lost. International competition was growing. The recessions of the 1970's and 80's meant that many mills closed. Clover Greaves Mill in Calverley was demolished in 1971. The land where it and the adjacent Lydgate Mill had stood was replaced by modern housing, only the name 'Clover Court' remains. Other mills in the area remained standing but were converted into small industrial units.

Cloth production at Sunny Bank Mills survived until 2008. Edwin Woodhouse had sold the mill to the Ives family in 1912, and they in turn, sold it to the Farsley-born, multi-millionaire WC 'Billy' Gaunt in 1917. Still known as Edwin Woodhouse & Co Ltd, the mill was very successful from the 1940's to the 1960's. New Hattersley looms - made in Keighley and the best you could get, were bought in 1940 and a piece dyeing machine in 1948. The spinning mill was re-equipped in 1955, but had become obsolete by the 1970's, such was the speed of technological change. Worsted cloth of the highest quality continued to be woven and was in demand, but gradually, as different processes became unviable, they ceased.

The Worsted cloth produced at Sunny Bank Mills was regarded as being some of the finest available. From the 1880's it was sold throughout Britain and Europe and from the early 20th Century also to the Americas, Australia and Japan. In Britain, it was bought by firms such as Pierre Cardin and Burberrys. From the early 1970's, new markets emerged in the Middle East and trading took place with Iran, Iraq and the Gulf States. The demand there was for self-patterned, super-fine cloths, so fine you can hardly believe that they were wool. Customers there loved the beautiful, subtle blue shades and desert browns, and the slight sheen, which was the result of the mill's secret 'finishing ' process.

Sunny Bank Mills survived because it supplied exclusive cloth, but this was expensive to produce. By the 1990's, Italian firms were also producing very good quality worsted cloth and were selling it at a cheaper price. Chinese firms began undercutting prices too. The conflicts in the Middle East were the final straw. The mill ceased production in May 2008.

But that wasn't the end of Sunny Bank Mills. In the last 12 years, the mill buildings have been preserved and converted into small businesses and an art gallery. The mill has worked with, and won an award from Historic England, for the way the site has been developed. The Sunny Bank Mills Archive is regarded as internationally important, with its collection of guard books, cloth, weaving patterns, dye cards and myriad other artefacts dating back to the 1880's. The most recent developments are the creation of Weavers' Court; plans to

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convert the oldest part of the mill, the Old Woollen, into a performing arts venue and establishing a series of weaving workshops with textile artist, Agnis Smallwood.

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