

TWISTON MILL

A Short history by Jenny Palmer

If you walk past the lodge at Twiston Mill today, all you see is a cluster of farm buildings and a house. It is hard to imagine that any industrial activity ever went on there. But for almost a hundred years, from 1792-1882, Twiston Mill was a hive of activity with up to 49 operatives working in the cotton mill at one time. (1861 Census).



Twiston Mill had been in existence as a water-powered corn mill since the 14th century, owned by the Cistercian monks from Whalley Abbey. After the dissolution of the monasteries in 1534, it became a 'King's Mill', according to Mike Rothwell. (1990) Later it was owned by the Listers of Gisburn and in the 19th century by the Asshetons of Downham. Rothwell

tells us the mill was converted to a water-powered cotton twist mill in 1792, probably by Robinson Shuttleworth, a merchant and banker of Preston. At the time it was three stories high, contained 312 water frame spindles and carding and breaking engines. Robinson Shuttleworth was bankrupt by 1796 and the mill was taken over by John Robinson. By 1828 waste cotton spinning and carpet weaving had been introduced to the mill, possibly by John Taylor and Sons. The firm commenced printing carpets around 1839 and during the 1840s was using five block printing tables.

But the mill had a chequered history. The British Library Online Newspapers reveal that in 1851 the partnership between Thomas Taylor and Robert Taylor was dissolved. (London Gazette, 1851) In October of 1855 the following advertisement appeared in the Blackburn Standard:

The Twiston Cotton Mill and Farm. The Mill consists of a large and commodious Building fitted up for Spinning and Weaving Cotton Waste with Outhouses and all requisite conveniences. New Water-wheel and other Gearing and two lodges for water, of which there is good and constant supply. There are also six cottages attached for labourers employed in the Mill.

In 1855 the mill was leased to Robert Moorby, who also worked Narrowgates Mill at Barley. The partnership of Moorby and Sons lasted until 1874 (Liverpool Mercury, British Library Online Newspapers). William Bailey succeeded Moorby and Sons as manager. At that time the machinery comprised 1400 spindles and 62 looms, driven by a water-wheel and steam engine (Rothwell, 1990).

One of the pieces of machinery that William Bailey owned was an old fire engine. (Clarke, 1989, quoted in Searle, 2009) It had come there from Clitheroe by a devious route. Stephen Clarke reports in 'Clitheroe in its Coaching and Railway Days,' (1989) that when the new steam fire engine, called Perseverance, was purchased in Clitheroe in 1876, the old manual engine, called Volunteer, was sold by Merryweather and Sons for £650 to Alderman Parkinson.

This, in spite of the fact that Alderman Parkinson had been run over by bothwheels while on fire duty some ten years earlier. On further investigation, it seems that the fate of the fire engine and that of Twiston Mill coincided. The old manual engine was rather unwieldy. Apparently it carried a tub, filled from the nearest brook, which needed 24 men to manage the pumps, or 'rude appliances', as they were called. The fire engine did not prove to be of much use, because in 1882 the mill burnt down and the fire engine was, as Clarke puts it, 'roasted alive'.
C. J Palmer July 2010

References:

Primary sources:

British Library Online Newspapers, The Blackburn Standard, 1855, 1882,

The Liverpool Mercury 1862,

The London Gazette

Censuses: 1851, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891 and 1901.

Secondary Sources:

Clarke S (1989) Clitheroe in its Coaching and Railway Days, Landy Publishers

Rothwell M, (1990) Industrial Heritage: a guide to industrial archaeology in the Ribble Valley, Bridgestone Press

Searle G (May, 2009) The Valley, in the Clitheroe Advertiser and Times.