

# Stanley Mills - an early factory village

Anthony Cooke looks at the development of Stanley Mills and its impact on the history of the surrounding area

## The foundation of Stanley Mills

Stanley lies seven miles north of Perth on the great bend of the River Tay, situated just downstream from the rapids at Campsie Linn giving access to unrivalled resources of water power. Lord Nairne was the first to exploit this resource when he drove a tunnel through the peninsula and built a corn mill in 1729. After the '45, the Nairne Estates were forfeited and fell into the possession of the Dukes of Atholl.

In February 1784, the 'Nottingham Journal' reported that *'very large cotton works are going to be erected at Glasgow, Perth and Lanark under the patronage of Messrs. Dempster, Arkwright and some capital Merchants and Manufacturers of that Kingdom.'* (Fitton 1989, 75) In August 1784, the Duke drew up a letter of agreement with the Stanley Company to feu 70 acres of ground at Stanley to commence at Whitsuntide 1785 for 31 years. (Atholl Mss 25/ IX/ 1)

In October 1784, Arkwright visited Scotland and was presented with the freedom of the burgh in Glasgow and in Perth. The Duke of Atholl reported in February 1785 that he had sent Graham of Fintry *'the length of Derbyshire'* to see Arkwright's mills and persuade Arkwright to become involved. Arkwright was due to visit the area in March and Atholl would enter into no agreement until then *'though some of the Men of most Capital and Spirit in Perth'* wanted to begin immediately. (Atholl Mss 65/5/43)

In April and May 1785, Atholl advertised in the 'Manchester Mercury' :

### TO MANUFACTURERS

*'The Proprietor of a Situation where Mills may be erected, and a Power of Machinery worked, hitherto unattempted at any one Place in Great Britain, calls the Attention of those Manufacturers, whose Business may require a great Command and Weight of Water, especially those concerned in the COTTON BRANCH. The populous and thriving Port of Perth, in Scotland, from whence there is a constant and easy Access to the London Market, lies within seven measured Miles. Coal is reasonable, Labour cheap and the adjacent Country populous. Workmen being already engaged, and all Materials for Building collected, extensive Works may be prosecuted immediately...Letters (should be) ad-*

*dressed to the Duke of Atholl at Dunkeld. Proposals unaccepted of shall be kept Secret, if desired.'* (Manchester Mercury, 5 April 1785)

Atholl had already signed a letter of agreement with the Stanley Company by which they were to pay £69 10s annual rent for use of the existing corn mill and water rights and the Duke *would grant a 21 year lease for 30 acres of ground to build a village. He also agreed to have 'the sole expense of building a house fit for the necessary machinery'* and to advance £2000 for putting up buildings for which the Company would pay 7.5% interest. (SRO, SC 49/59/99, 307-22)

Although Atholl's involvement was crucial in terms of access to land and water rights, there were other requirements for Stanley to succeed, some of which were mentioned in the adverts. Access to the London markets via the port of Perth was considered an important factor, as was local expertise in textile production and the low cost of local labour. Other important factors were the supply of capital from a number of Perth merchants and William Sandeman of Luncarty bleachfield. However, the technology of cotton spinning had to be imported from England and here Arkwright's involvement was secured by the intervention of George Dempster, the MP for the Perth burghs.

In a letter to Sir John Sinclair, dated January 1800, Dempster describes how on his journey to and from Parliament, he was taking the waters at Matlock Spa in Derbyshire for a few days:

*'In the course of a forenoon's ride, I discovered in a romantic valley a palace of a most enormous size having at least a score of windows of a row and five or six stories in height. This was Sir Richard Arkwright's then Mr. Richard Arkwright's cotton mills.... Some business brought him soon after to London. He conceived I had been useful to him and offered to assist me in establishing a cotton mill in Scotland by holding a share of one and instructing the people. Private business carried him the following summer to Scotland where he visited Perth, Glasgow and Lanark and I believe Stanley for I was not then in Scotland. Mr. Dale and I became partners in mills to be erected in Lanark. A company of five or six Perth gentlemen, he and I, entered into partnership in mills to be built at Stanley in Perthshire. Some misunderstanding happening*

*between him and Mr. Dale which they submitted to me, I met them both at Sir Richard's house in Cromford in December 1785. Each gentleman offering to take the whole concern and to take my share also, I awarded the whole to Mr. Dale as being most convenient to him to manage.'* (SRO RH 449/2 vol 3, 266-8)

The Contract of Partnership for the first Stanley Company was drawn up in December 1785 and registered in January 1787. The seven partners contributed a total capital of £7,000 which compares with a Scottish average of c. £5,000 for insurance purposes in 1795 (Cooke, 1995, 91). The Duke of Atholl advanced £2,000 to the Company at 7.5% for 'erecting Houses or otherwise at Stanly' and the Company opened a cash account with the Perth United Banking Company for £3,000. The partners were Richard Arkwright, George Dempster, Graham of Fintry, William Sandeman of Luncarty and two Perth merchants, Patrick Stewart and Andrew Keay. Each partner agreed to advance £1,000 towards the capital stock of the Company and this share could only be sold to one or other of the partners or with the consent of the majority of the partners. An exception was made for Arkwright 'whenever the spinning of cotton at the said mill shall so far succeed as to be a profitable concern'. (SRO SC49/59/104, fos 1-5)

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## The Mill buildings

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The Bell Mill was probably begun in the Spring of 1786 and was certainly finished by the time of the feu contract of 13 February 1787, which refers to 'the Stanley Corn miln and a Cotton miln and other Buildings thereto belonging ... erected situated along the side of the River Tay.' The name 'Bell Mill' is a later title - in the 1830s it was referred to as the 'Old Mill' or the 'Brick Mill'. It is a handsome six storey building, the two lower floors built of stone, the rest of brick with segmentally arched sash windows. The use of brick is very early in this part of Scotland and shows the influence of Arkwright and the early Derbyshire mills on the design at Stanley.

In 1833, the manager reported 'the Brick Mill was erected about fifty years ago and part of the East Mill about thirty three years ago; the other part of the East Mill and all the other buildings were erected by the present proprietors.' (Parliamentary Papers 1834, XX, A1, 160) The 'present proprietors' were the Buchanans, mill owners from the West of Scotland, who took over the mills in 1823 after a long period of closure. Since then 'Two new Mills larger than the old ones have been finished and a third one is in progress.' The mills were planned to form a square 'in the centre of which an extensive Gas works has been constructed for the purpose of lighting them, the vent of

*which is upwards of one hundred feet in height.'* (Scots Magazine, 14 September 1825, 496)

Samuel Howard of Burnley in Lancashire bought the mills from the Buchanans in 1852. A plan of 1855 shows substantially the present day lay-out of mill buildings with water wheels placed on the courtyard side of both the Bell Mill and the East Mill. The plan also shows a Bleachhouse, a circular mill lodge at the mill entrance and a grain mill to the west of the Bell Mill. Colonel Frank Stewart Sandeman, who owned Manhattan Jute Works in Dundee, took over the mills in 1880. The Sandemans carried on business as cotton spinners, bleachers and finishers at Stanley and a valuation of 1912 lists a stone built bleaching croft, a brick built chlorine house and a stone and brick drying house on the site at Stanley. Frank Stewart Sandeman Ltd. joined the Dundee-based Jute Industries consortium in 1921 and a substantial investment in a new hydro-electric scheme with Boving turbines was carried out shortly after.

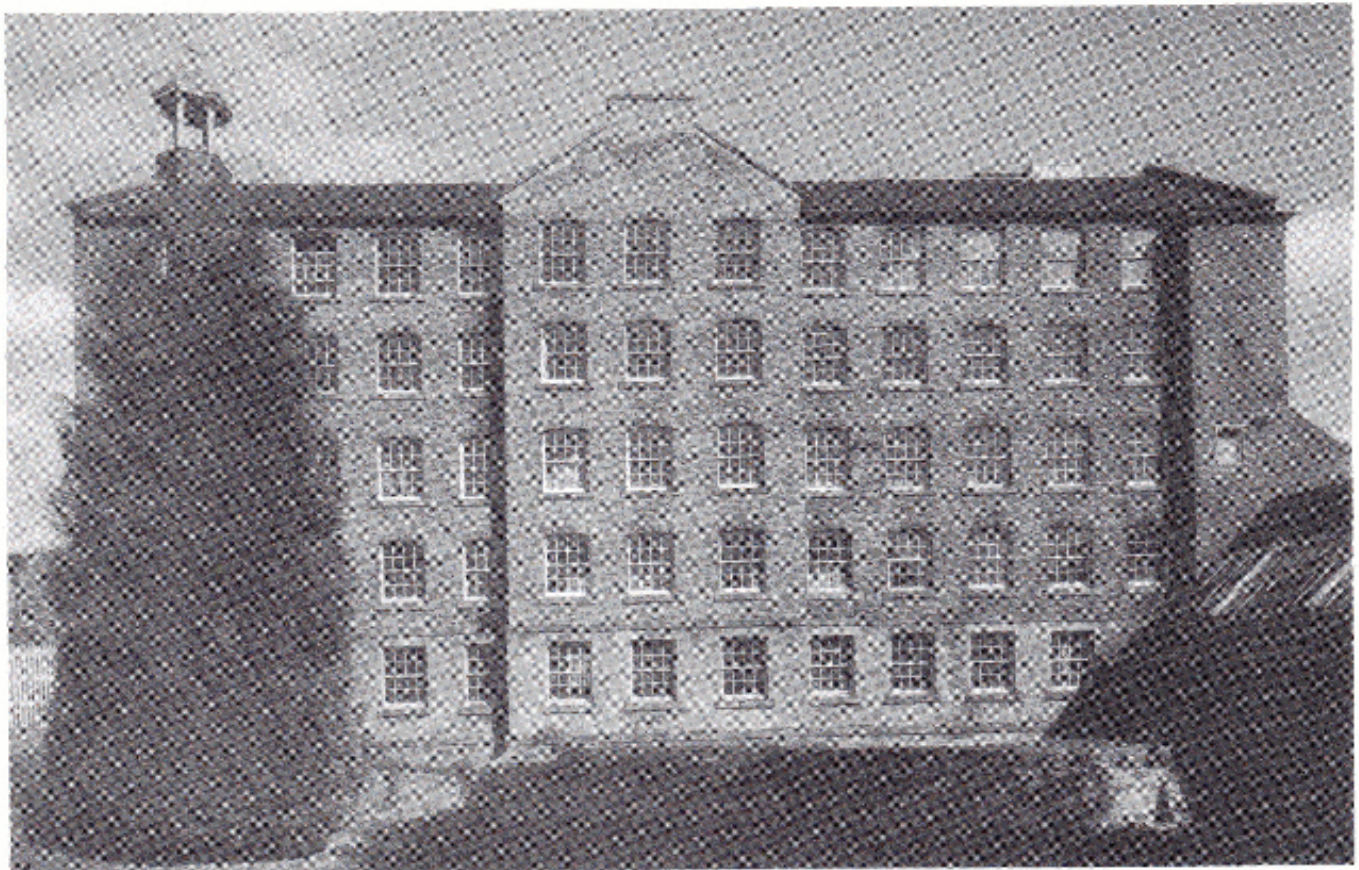
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## Village planning

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Stanley was a green field site when the cotton mill was developed. The first plans were drawn up by James Stobie, the Duke's factor for the area, on a rectangular gridiron plan which survives in its essentials down to the present day. The square was originally named Arkwright Square, later changed to Duke Square. By January 1800, the mills at Stanley had shut down. They were started up again in June 1801 by James Craig, a Glasgow muslin manufacturer, who kept them open until 1814 when the Company was blamed by the Duke for 'the carrying off of the most industrious part of the villagers and the consequent leaving of a host of beggars'. (Atholl Mss 25/X/1)

The mills were reopened by the Buchanan family of Glasgow in 1823 and the new owners began a large building programme. The Scots Magazine reported in 1825 that 'a new Street has been laid out, to run parallel with the South Street, in which houses, two stories high with attics are already finished, sufficient for the accommodation of one hundred and twenty families.' This was the brick tenement on Store Street, which still survives as a (much altered) two storey brick row with a pepperpot stairtower at the rear of the building. Two other streets were laid out in the 1820s and 'the spirited Proprietors are building a large Store-House from which the workpeople are to be supplied with all kinds of provisions and merchandise to be purchased by the Company from the best markets and sold at merely a saving profit.' (Scots Magazine 14 September 1825)



*The Stanley Mills, Ben Mill, West Side. With kind permission of the RCAHMS.*

Company ownership of housing continued into the late twentieth century. In 1967, the Company announced that 100 dwellings in Store Street, Charlotte Street, Mill Street and King Street were being handed over free of charge by the Company to the Tay Valley Housing Association for modernisation. (Perthshire Advertiser, 25 November 1967, 1)

### ***A 'Sober, virtuous and industrious' workforce - worker recruitment & training***

Stanley was a greenfield site with little population in the immediate area. It was chosen for its access to water power resources rather than labour. Workers had to be recruited, trained and housed by the Company. However, the village lay only seven miles from Perth, which in the late eighteenth century was an active centre of textile manufacture. Stobie's map of 1783 shows a ring of water powered sites around Perth including the large bleachfield at Luncarty, only three miles south of Stanley, which had been founded by William Sandeman in 1752 (Cooke, 1984)

The skills of the local workforce seem to have been a key factor in persuading Richard Arkwright to become involved in the Stanley project. George Penny recounts that when Arkwright visited Perth, he met Penny's father, William Sandeman of Luncarty bleachfield and the Duke of Atholl in the

King's Arms Inn to discuss the Stanley project. Arkwright was *'highly delighted'* with the quality of the muslin cloth produced by Penny in Perth and asked if Penny *'could weave them himself and teach others.'* On being told yes, Arkwright said that *'the erection of the Mills might be immediately proceeded with ; there could be no fear of success.'* Building began and *'a number of boys and girls were sent up to Manchester to learn the spinning trade.'* (Penny, 1836, 251)

The original Contract of Co-partnership, in 1785, refers to *'Sundry Indentures with different persons to be sent to the said Richard Arkwright at Cromford aforesaid to be taught the constructing and making of the Machinery used by him in preparing and Spining of the said (cotton) wool itself.'* (SRO SC 49/59/104 fos 1-5) In the isolated Peak District community of Cromford, the new arrivals clearly made an impact. The *'Derby Mercury'* reported in May 1785 :

*'A few days since, between forty and fifty North Britons with bagpipes and other music playing, arrived at Cromford near Matlock-Bath, from Perth in Scotland. These industrious Fellows left that place on account of the scarcity of work, were taken into the service of Richard Arkwright Esq. in his cotton mills and other extensive works, entered into present pay and provided with good quarters. They appeared highly pleased with the reception they met with and had a dance in the evening to congratulate each other on the performance of so long a journey.'* (Fitton and Wadsworth, 1958, 105)

There was considerable resistance to working in a cotton mill from workers who were 'averse to indoor labour' and factory discipline. Owners had to resort to paying high wages or recruiting vulnerable groups such as widows with large families, orphans, or Highlanders who were moving or being moved off the land. All these methods were used at Stanley. In the late eighteenth century, clearances for sheep were taking place in the Perthshire Highlands. George Dempster reported in 1788 that '80 people came to us from the Highlands (80 families) which have all proved sober, virtuous and industrious.' He added 'by their means we lower our wages to the current price of cotton yarn and suffer less by its fall than most other cotton spinners.' (Laing Mss, III, 379/217)

Another source of labour was orphans from the poor houses. At New Lanark in 1800, there were between 400 to 500 pauper children aged between five and ten out of a total workforce of between 1700 and 1800. (Donnachie and Hewitt, 1993, 40) There is no evidence of pauper children being employed in the early days at Stanley but in the 1830s, orphans were employed who 'were sent to the works by the kirk session of Perth, and are looked after by their overseers.' (Parliamentary Papers, 1834, XX, A1, 161)

Women and children made up the major part of the workforce at Stanley, as in other cotton mills. The Old Statistical Account reported that 'Near an hundred families now reside in the village of Stanley. Above 350 persons are employed about the cotton mills - of this number 300 are women or children under 16 years of age. The boys and girls, although confined at work in the mill for many hours of the day, and at times during the night, are in general very healthy.' (OSA, XVII, 556) The total workforce at Stanley was much smaller than the estimated 1,334 employed by David Dale at New Lanark in 1793 (Donnachie and Hewitt, 1993, 35)

The Stanley workforce remained predominantly young and female under the Buchanan regime. In 1833, the total number employed in the mills was 885, 345 males and 540 females. Working hours were 5.30 am to 7.00 pm with three quarters of an hour for breakfast at 9.00 am and the same for dinner at 2.00 pm. Work on Saturday stopped at 3.15 pm. There were two holidays a year, when pay was stopped. Wages were 13s to 16s a week for male spinners, 9s to 11s for female spinners, 6s to 9s for reelers and 2s a week for the youngest children. The diet of the workers consisted of 'porridge, potatoes, kale or broth, and oat cake, which with fish or fat, constitutes the universal food of the working classes in Scotland.' Breakfast was generally porridge for the young and tea and coffee for the older workers.

Dinner would be potatoes and broth and sometimes a bit of meat. (Parliamentary Papers 1833, XXI, A3, 36 and *ibid*, XX, A1,62)

In 1835, the mills employed 850 workers of whom 275 were between 13 and 18 and 161 were under 13. (Baines, 1835, 390) The youthful workforce and the degree of control that the company could exercise in a small factory village like Stanley must have inhibited trade union organisation. However, in the late 1830s, when a bitter strike was going on amongst the Glasgow cotton spinners about entry to the trade, it was reported that 'the baleful influence of the Cotton Spinners Combination' in Stanley had undermined attempts to start a Savings Bank in the village. The workers believed that if they were seen to be saving from their wages, then the employers would be likely to reduce them. (NSA, 1845, X, 447)

In 1852, when the Buchanans sold the mills to Samuel Howard of Burnley, it was reported that nearly 1,000 people in the village were 'entirely dependent on the works.' (Perthshire Courier, 23 December 1852, 3) The Cotton Famine during the American Civil War brought great hardship to Stanley as to most of the rest of the British cotton industry. The mills were closed in 1862 and remained closed for the next five years.

The population of the village fell from a peak of 1,973 in 1841 to a low of 932 in 1871 to recover to 1,030 in 1881. A boom period came with the First World War when the mills were manufacturing cotton webbings for the armed forces. Women workers were recruited from Fife, a hostel for 70 women was established at White's Hotel and workers were housed in other buildings such as Hobart House. A photograph of 1915 shows an all-female trade union committee and there is oral evidence that women were transferred to 'men's work' during the First World War. (Perthshire Advertiser, 8/7/64, 8)

The end of the war saw a trade depression throughout the textile industry and strikes to protest at wages cuts and short time working. There was a strike at Stanley in January 1919 and strikes in the nearby bleachfields of Luncarty and Pitcairnfield in 1920. At this time, the average wages at Stanley were £1 a week for a 55 hour working week. (Cooke, 1977, 40) Heavy cotton belting, which was exported all over the world, and coarse sewing twines were staples of production.

The Second World War brought a boom in production, as demand soared, and a labour shortage, as young men left for the army. After the War, there was an acute labour shortage, and Displaced Persons and European Voluntary Workers were brought in to try to fill the gap. When they drifted away, women were recruited from Germany and Italy, and Stanley

Hotel was converted to a hostel to house them. (Cooke, 1977, 40-41)

In the boom of the late 1960s, the mills ran a recruitment campaign under the slogan 'Stanley Mills has a way with women' designed to recruit 80 women to its tape department where they would earn an average of over £11 for a forty hour week. The mills offered a ten week training course, a modern canteen, 'excellent working conditions, clean secure employment, transport to and from work and a sick pay scheme.' (P.A., 28/10/67, 7 and 13)

By 1977, only 83 people were employed at the mills, of whom 58 lived locally and 25 came from outside the village. (Cooke, 1977, 42) By this time, the mills were producing man made fibres as well as cotton. In 1979, there was a management buyout from Sidlaw Industries and Stanley Mills (Scotland) was established which concentrated on acrylic yarn for the sock industry in the English Midlands. When the mills closed in March 1989, there were only 54 staff left and the production side could be operated by a mere 30 people. (P.A., 3/2/89, 5)

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### The social history of the village

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When Stanley began to be laid out as a village there was no school or church in the immediate area. A private school, supported by fees, was set up about 1786 'to meet the wants of an increasing population' (Parliamentary Papers, 1826, (18), 768 and 1837, (47), 571) In 1825, the school had about 70 pupils,

who were charged fees of three to four shillings a quarter although the fees were paid very irregularly. A basic education was provided in reading, writing and arithmetic. (Parliamentary Papers, 1826, (18), 768-9)

The provision of a church in Stanley had to wait until 1828, when the Buchanans petitioned the Presbytery of Dunkeld for permission to build a chapel of ease. The Company spent over £3,000 on the new church, which was capable of holding 1,150 people. They paid the minister's stipend of £150 a year and also supplied him with a house and garden. The average number of communicants at Stanley was said to be 600. (NSA, X, 444-5)

The Company also provided a school and paid the teacher a salary of £20 a year plus a house and garden. The school was attended by 136 children in 1834 and the teacher was 'qualified to teach the higher branches of knowledge, including those of Latin, Greek and French.' It was claimed that 'few children in this parish are sent to school until after the age of five years, but all without exception can read long before they attain the age of fifteen years. (Parliamentary Papers, 1837, (47), 571)

John Scott, a yarn dresser at Stanley, testified to the Factory Commission that although the Company provided a school, the children preferred 'to run about' when the mill finished because of the long hours they worked. Mary Macgregor, aged twelve, the only young Stanley worker to give evidence to the Commission, revealed that she could not read,



Stanley Turbine. With kind permission of the RCAHMS.

although she had worked at the mills for three years. (P.P. 1833, XX, A2, 43-44)

A greater impact on the education of the young mill workers must have been made by the Sunday School which was attended by 400 young people - 150 males, 250 females. The Sunday School was taught by the schoolmaster and the minister, who were assisted by 30 to 40 adult monitors, appointed by the Stanley Company. (P.P. 1841, XIX, 613)

The first crack in Company control came with the Disruption in 1843. Most of the congregation left the company church with their minister and established Stanley Free Church at the north end of the village. A school attached to the Free Church was established three years later which attracted the bulk of the village children. By 1854, numbers at Stanley School had fallen so low that the General Assembly were asked if they would take over the school. (Cooke, 1977, 45, 52) The Disruption led to a long-running split in the village between the 'up-byes' or the Free Church end and the 'doon-byes' or the Established Church end. (Fergusson, 1893, 66)

## Stanley Mills - the future

The closure of the mills in 1989 led to an alarming deterioration in the condition of the historic mill buildings. The site was eventually bought by Historic Scotland and in May 1998 Historic Scotland and its partner, the Phoenix Trust, were awarded £7m by the Heritage Lottery Fund for restoration work at Stanley. The first stage of the work involved recording, historical investigation and external conservation of the Bell Mill, North Range and Lodges. The next stage involves the development of interpretation and visitor facilities by Historic Scotland at the Bell Mill and the conversion of the East Mill and part of the Mid Mill for housing by the Phoenix Trust. Two large wheel pits have been uncovered alongside the Bell Mill and it is planned to install new waterwheels. Plans are also afoot for small office/workshop accommodation on the site.

From an isolated mill village with the overwhelming majority of its population dependent on the mills for employment either directly or indirectly, Stanley has become an expanding commuter settlement for Perth with rapid access via the improved A9.

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