

The New Mills Cloth Manufactory

For a time Haddington was home to the largest textile concern in Scotland. A recent query to the Society on the location of the New Mills Manufactory renewed my interest in this company.

Scotland in the late 17th century was a much poorer country than England. The 1681 'Act for Encouraging Trade and Manufacture' was an attempt to improve the Scottish economy. New enterprises were encouraged by preventing foreign imports and removing duties on exports. On this basis the company was launched.

The New Mills Cloth Manufactory was set up on the south side of the Tyne, near the present cauld in what is now Haddington's golf course at Amisfield. 'New Mills' refers to the two corn mills built there by Patrick Hepburn prior to 1600. The land, and an earlier wauk mill, had belonged to the Abbey of St Mary. The Hepburns acquired the Abbey itself and substantial monastic holdings after the Reformation. It is possible the corn mills were constructed from the stones of the demolished Abbey. A village had grown up at New Mills and a cloth-making enterprise had operated on the site from about 1649.



Sir James Stanfield, burgess of Edinburgh and one-time MP for Haddington, purchased Amisfield in 1672. He rented the New Mills buildings and land to the new company. Together with the dyehouse and other buildings the tack of 1681 included "*that great manufactory stone house on the south side of the village of Newmylnes being one hundredth and one foot in length, twentie-one foot in breadth ...and three storie high*". (Scott, 158) The story of Stanfield's murder is better known than the history of the cloth-making enterprise. This account is an attempt to redress the balance. The murder may be retold later.

Minutes of the Managers' Meetings (Board of Directors) held in Edinburgh were transcribed and edited by W.R. Scott. Published in 1905 by the Scottish History Society, they have been digitised by the National Library of Scotland and are available online. They cover the period from the company's foundation in 1681 to 1691 and from 1701 to 1703. Other years are lost. Through them we learn about the workforce, the company's products, the materials used, and the vicissitudes of trading at a time of upheaval including the 1688 Revolution and the failure of the Darien Scheme.

The workforce

The company's prospectus envisaged a workforce of 233. An attempt was made to recruit some local labour. An announcement at the Cross of Haddington on Fair day September 24th 1681 appealed for "*honest ingenious men for prentices*" (Scott, 7). However from the outset it was clear that skilled labour would have to be recruited from England, mainly from the cloth-making areas of Yorkshire, although Dutch and French workers were also employed. Incentives were paid to attract

the right skills. The range of workers required to turn fleece into yarn and yarn into cloth of a colour and texture to appeal to buyers included fullers, dyers, spinners, bobbin winders, *scribblers* (carders), weavers, and shearers (who dressed the cloth). In addition to spinning, women were required for *'dighting and picking the wool'* (cleaning it prior to spinning). The company had its own piper, paid 20 merks annually. His duties are not specified. According to Scott, at its peak New Mills employed 700. (Scott, lxxv)

The concern was unlike any factory today. Apart from the wauk mills (fulling mills), which were powered by the Tyne, everything was done by hand. The company owned the looms and spinning wheels. The weavers and spinners paid rent for their use and for their accommodation. The loom rent for stocking weavers was 5 groats a week. Weavers were paid piece rates which differed according to the quality of the cloth: 15d Scots per ell for the finest and 5d Scots for the coarse. Spinners were provided with wool and paid for the yarn produced, with a return of yarn required in a fixed proportion to the wool. Some skilled workers employed their own *'covenant servants'*, not always paid punctually. A *'Master'* (Manager) had overall charge and lived on site. David Maxwell held this post. In turn he was overseen by the *'Managers'* (Board of Directors) in Edinburgh who occasionally visited. Not all the workers were on site. Eight to nine dwellings were constructed for spinners at Morham, where Stanfield had his residence, and other sites for spinners, including Bolton, were scouted within a 5/6 mile radius of New Mills.

Child labour was used, girls and boys. Boys were required for *'mixing and swinging'* the wool. A *'master of the boyes'* was employed, presumably to keep them in order. Some girls and boys were trained to spin in the *'Hollande fashion'*. The Minutes record disputes between workers as well as cases of theft of wool and yarn, *'embezzlement'*. Discipline was severe: in 1682 two workers, Evelling and Nicholes, were banished for debauching the workforce. The Provost of Haddington and the Nungate bailey were asked to ensure they did not take refuge there. A stable was converted to a prison where malefactors could be held until the next Fair day in Haddington when they were compelled to stand at the Cross wearing a paper with their crimes described *"in great letters"*. Runaway workers who broke contract to seek employment with rivals were brought back *"to be a terror to others"*. (Scott, 264) There were also acts of kindness: rent was not charged for Alexander Smith *"long sick of ane feaver and is most miserable but a very honest servant"*. (Scott, 96)

Products

The company produced cloth in four grades according to the wool used: Spanish (merino) made fine cloth; followed by Spanish/English half and half; all English; and Galloway. In addition to broad cloth, the company produced stockings including women's silk stockings *'dyed to the current fashion'*, for example *masarein* (deep rich blue), gold, green, and cherry. Striped hose were also made and silk gloves were produced. The Edinburgh managers, largely merchants, had first chance to purchase the output. Any balance remaining was put to rousp in the city.

Bulk contracts, especially for cloth for soldiers' uniforms, were particularly sought. Scott quotes an order from the Privy Council that uniforms should be made *"to distinguish sojers from other skulking and vagrant persons"*. (Scott, lxiv) Not all military customers were satisfied with the quality of the cloth provided. Lord Balcares complained about the cloaks provided for his troop and refused to accept them. One way to avoid such an outcome was to offer sweeteners to the purchasing officer. A Major Balfour received a number of gifts – 2 ells of red cloth, a beaver hat with hat band and fringe gloves, 4 or 5 coats - , *"that he may favour the companie in receiving the cloaths and not casting them"* (Scott, 81) and *"in respect he has promised to be the manufactory friend in getting Marr's*

Regiment cloaths to furnish.” (Scott, 102) This proved a successful strategy. Marr’s Regiment purchased 840 suits for soldiers at 20s Scots per suit in 1686. (Scott, 129)

Amongst the company’s military clients for red cloth were Claverhouse⁽¹⁾ and Lt. General Douglas. Douglas is named on the grave marker of the Covenanter John Hunter, a distant ancestor, as the commander of the dragoons who pursued and killed him in the Tweedsmuir Hills.

Raw materials

Spanish wool, from Segovia, was bought in Holland; Scottish wool in Wigton and Kelso. Silk came from London, soap from Edinburgh. Hogsheads of olive oil, Italian (*Gallipoli*) and Spanish (*civill*), used to treat washed wool prior to spinning were imported from Holland. Dyeing required great skill and a host of ingredients: potash (to make lye to ensure the yarn was receptive to the dye), alum and *coppertas* (ferrous sulphate) as mordants to fix the dye, *argall* (orchill lichen for violet), *tesselo* (perhaps tussilago – coltsfoot – for yellow/green), madder and cochineal (for reds, especially for soldiers’ uniforms), and Jamaican indigo. The dye master bought his own supplies, largely from Holland and London, then claimed his costs from the company. Closer to home, one source states that madder was once grown near Aberlady for Haddington dyers but no date is given. (Darwin, 38)

Trade

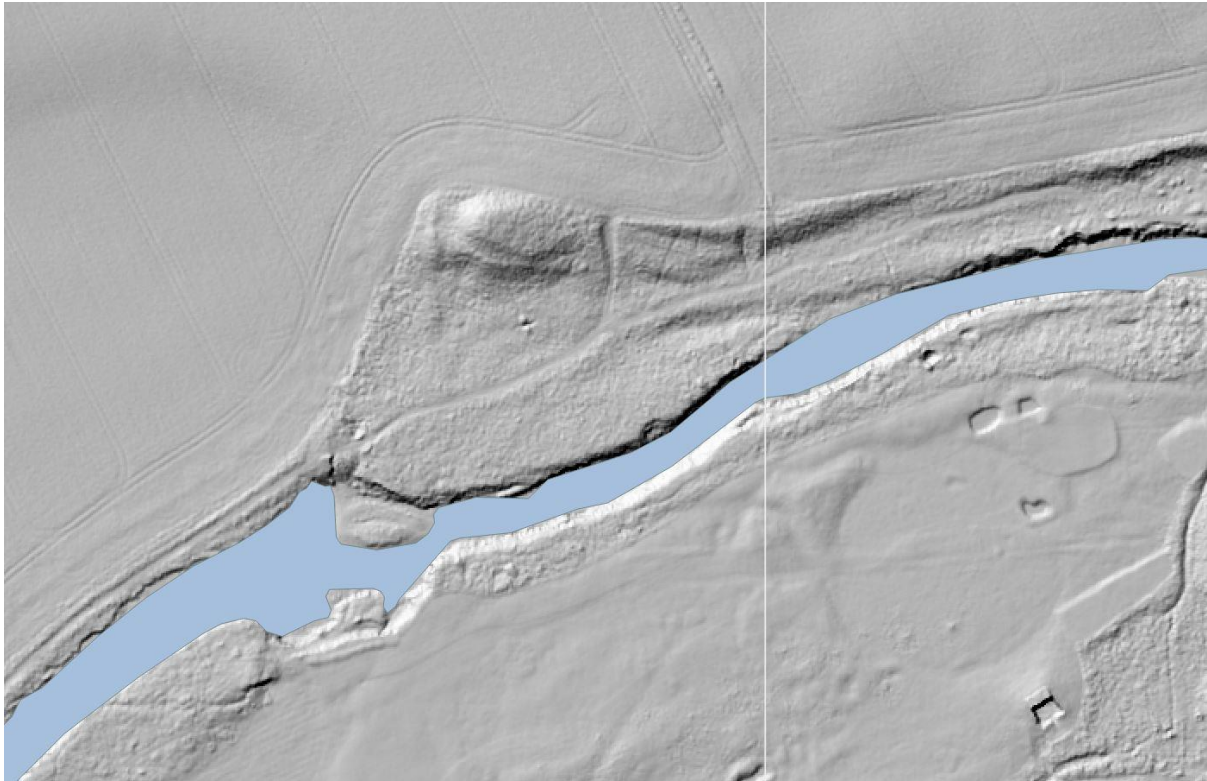
By 1685 the measures to prevent foreign imports were widely flouted with cheaper and often better quality English cloth coming in. The company was facing difficulties. The Master was instructed to encourage the weavers to purchase their looms with payment deducted over time from their piece rates. Sir William Patterson⁽²⁾ was given 6 dollars to promote a new act in Council to prohibit imports but this, too, was weakly implemented. Domestic competition grew. By 1700 there were large manufactories in Musselburgh and Glasgow. The Minutes for 1701 record that the company took steps to protect its favoured status. A cargo of wool on the skin bound for export was seized at Bo’ness. A Captain Charters was reported to the authorities for bringing home “*cloath stockings and other forraigne woollen manufacture*”. (Scott, 255) The Manager was ordered to raid William Ray’s shop in Haddington and to search for imported goods, “*particularly womens black cloathes*”. (Scott, 278)

Scott reports tension between woolmasters, landowners keen to export wool, and the Manufacturers, who wanted cheap raw materials. A compromise in 1704 banned cloth imports but allowed wool exports, a decision which largely favoured the woolmasters. Following the Act of Union of 1707, the company could not compete with the imports of cheaper English cloth. They had purchased the land and buildings from Stanfield’s estate in 1695. (Wemyss) In 1713 land, buildings, machinery and stock were sold. In 1726 Col. Francis Charteris purchased the site for his new estate of Amisfield. (Wemyss)

What remains?

The present cauld is most likely on the same site and at its core may be that which served Hepburn’s corn mills. Stonework supporting the bank on the south side of the Tyne may relate to these or be later reinforcement when the park was laid out. Humps and bumps adjacent to the cauld may be signs of the dyeworks, stable-cum-prison, wauk mills, pits (5’ 6” deep) for the ‘*brew fatts*’ (dye vats), warehouse, yard and workers’ accommodation which once occupied this area. The golf course pond may once have served the mills when the Tyne was low. Much would be swept away when Charteris laid out his park and Amisfield House was built but below the greens and fairways there may still be signs of this great enterprise which employed more workers than any Haddington business today, and which produced silk stockings for fashionable Edinburgh society and uniforms for the garrisons

of Edinburgh and Stirling Castles, the Bass Rock and numerous 'troupes' of the period. An archaeology project for our Society?



Lidar image of the Tyne at the Amisfield cauld showing what may be the New Mills site on the south bank and the gun platform on the north. Courtesy of David Connolly, BAJR.

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Notes

- 1 John Graham of Claverhouse (1648-1689), known to history as 'Bluidy Clavers', persecutor of the Covenanters, and as 'Bonnie Dundee', Jacobite commander at Killiecrankie where, at the moment of victory, he was killed.
- 2 Sir William Paterson (1658-1719), merchant and banker, founder of the Bank of England and a key promoter of the Darien Scheme.

Sources

- Darwin, T. (1996) *The Scots Herbal* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press)
- Scott, W.R. Ed. (1905) *Records of a Scottish cloth manufactory at New Mills, Haddingtonshire, 1681-1703*, Scottish History Society, Vol 46, (Edinburgh: Constable). Online at <https://digital.nls.uk/scottish-history-society-publications/>
- Wemyss Papers Inventory of the lands and Barony of Amisfield formerly called Newmills