

## **A HISTORY OF TARLETON MILL.**

The Mill was built in 1919 by Leonard Fairclough Ltd. of Adlington (one of the North West's largest building and civil engineering contractors) as a weaving mill. Its location made it somewhat remote from the traditional Lancashire textile areas and made it the nearest 'classic textile mill' to Southport. It was perhaps located at Tarleton so that it could access a new labour market as Tarleton was at that time without a sizeable employer. The location, next to the canal was important for two reasons:

- Water could be obtained from the canal for generating steam for the stationary steam engine which was the motive power for the looms; this period being before mains electricity was available.
- Coal could be brought by barge from the Wigan Coalfield.

The location was also close to the terminus of the Tarleton Branch Railway which would have enabled products to be taken away by rail if required. The Branch closed in 1930 and it is not known if it ever carried any traffic in connection with the Mill.

Astland Mill as it was named, comprised a large single story weaving shed with an engine house on its eastern side (canal side) with a tall chimney; the whole constructed in red engineering brick (probably Accrington bricks). A Lancashire boiler (possibly more than one) generated steam for the stationary steam engine which was a uniflow engine made by Yates and Thom of Blackburn and named 'Margaret'.

The Mill was a well equipped unit comprising of winding, doubling and warping machines (enabling back beams to be prepared on the premises). It also had universal winding machines for weft winding. A making up department was also in operation, producing shirts and finished goods for gents' outfitters and stores throughout the Country.

From the opening of the Mill until 1959, production was of various cotton cloths made chiefly from yarns from the spinning mills of Oldham and Bolton districts. The first cloth woven at Tarleton was of a type known as 'Wigan Fabric'.

750 looms were installed weaving cloth widths of 38" reed space, 42", 46" and 72", the latter for sheeting. The looms were single shuttle looms obtained from Cooper Brothers of Burnley and John Pilling of Colne. There were five shaft looms with cross rods and 16 shaft dobbys 38" wide. Each weaver would operate six looms and, with ancillary labour, the total labour force would have been about 180.

As weaving was a new industry to the village, a housing estate was begun with a view to attracting some experienced labour from the traditional textile towns. Unfortunately, the house builders only managed to lay the foundations before going out of business and eventually the estate was taken over and

completed by a firm from Kearsley near Bolton and named Kearsley Avenue, a name it still bears.

The mill owners were also beset by a further problem which delayed the opening of the Mill. The construction of the steam engine was delayed by a strike in the foundry industry. The opening was followed immediately by the major slump of the 1920's which caused cancellation of orders and left the Company in a hopeless financial position and it had to go out of business. After a lengthy stoppage, the Company was reconstructed and another effort was made to enter the market. This also was unsuccessful as trade was still depressed and the Company laboured under high overheads of bank and debenture interest. The Company again had to be 'wound up'.

Yet another effort was made to restart the business, this time under a new company: Tarleton Mill Ltd, but after struggling for a few years it had to close down.

In 1933, when manufacturing was again at a low ebb, Neuss, Hesslein and Kempton Ltd (NEHESCO), a firm of Manchester merchants and shippers came on the scene and managed to bring prosperity to the Mill. In August 1941, the Mill was closed down under the Government's Concentration of Industry Scheme (which was intended to redirect manufacturing operatives into the war effort) and was occupied by the Royal Navy as a store.

The Mill reopened in 1947 and continued to produce cotton cloth until 1959, when the Mill was entered into a Government scheme for the reduction of the number of looms and spindles. Compensation was paid to displaced operatives and to the Company and the looms were broken up.

This was not the end of the story however as the Mill was taken over by the firm of Carrington & Dewhurst Ltd on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1960. They commenced manufacturing on 31<sup>st</sup> July 1961 and in 1966 extended the undertaking by the provision of a new weaving shed. This too was built by Leonard Fairclough Ltd.

Modern, fully automatic electric driven machinery was then installed and the steam engine decommissioned although the boiler was retained for heating. At this time 576 'Ruti' looms 160 cm wide were producing cloth from man-made fibres: polyester, nylon and terylene, chiefly for linings, coatings, lingerie and dress wear. Material was also produced for flags.

The modernised Mill was air conditioned with a working temperature of 78 deg. Fahrenheit and a relative humidity of 58-60%. It was then working a three shift rota 06.00-14.00, 14.00-22.00 and 22.00-06.00 Monday to 06.00 on Saturday so that the machine working week was 120 hours. Both male and female weavers were employed with the female weavers usually working on two shifts 06.00-14.00 and 14.00-22.00. Each weaver was responsible for 60 looms and the total labour force at this time was of the order of 215.

The boiler was converted to oil firing in 1973.

Cloth production continued at Tarleton until the 1980's when the Mill was closed down and the looms removed. The chimney, a local landmark was taken down in two stages during the 1980's. The Mill was then occupied by 'Comfilux', a Southport firm that produced soft furnishings who ran a successful business there for a number of years until they succumbed to the pressures of globalisation.

The Mill still stands as a reminder of period when the canal basin area at Tarleton was a hive of industry and as a link to a time when industry made Lancashire world-famous. It is to be hoped that a viable future use can be found for it, so that it is not simply demolished and the site used for housing. The name 'Astland Mill' is still visible, cast into an iron beam over one of the entrance doorways. (Astland or Asland is of course the alternative name for the lower section of the River Douglas.)

*This article is based upon a leaflet given to the writer by one of the managers of the Mill when it closed as a weaving mill in the 1980's. This leaflet contains a number of textile industry terms that are 'lost to the writer' and these have been quoted verbatim. Information from the leaflet has been supplemented by local knowledge of the writer.*

*© Research undertaken and article authored by Graham Fairhurst, Southport, Lancashire.  
If the information is reproduced, appropriate credit should be made about the source.*

Graham Fairhurst 7/09