TWEED VALLEY SESSION 8 - TWEED AND TWEEL

The Souters of Selkirk

IMAGE – SHOEMAKER STATUE, KIRK WYND, SELKIRK

Selkirk was once famed for manufacturing a particular type of shoe: **"` A sort of brogues with a single thin sole, the purchaser himself performing the further operation of sewing on another of thick leather.'**

In 1609, the shoemakers, or "souters" of Selkirk were granted by the Town Council a charter called a Seal of Cause, allowing them to establish a trade guild in the burgh.

In 1745, the industry was so strong in the town that the "souters" of Selkirk supplied more than half of the 6,000 pairs of shoes demanded for Bonnie Prince Charlie's army in Edinburgh.

Selkirk folk are still known as "souters" today

Church Street in Berwick was once known as Soutergate, or "shoemakers' street".

A custom that is said to originate from Selkirk's shoemaking trade is "Licking the birse", which is still carried out by newly-installed burgesses, or freemen of the burgh. The birse was a hunch of four or five bristles used by the shoemaker to point his threads before sewing the leather. For the installation ceremony, the birse is dipped in wine and the new freeman draws the bristles through his lips. Sir Walter Scott was made a Souter of Selkirk, when he was Sheriff of Selkirkshire, and it is possible that he invented the tradition himself!

In his first published work, "The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border", Scott recorded the verses of a ballad that became the burgh song:

"Up wi' the souters o' Selkirk
And down wi' the Earl o' Home!
And up wi' a' the braw lads
That sew the single-soled shoon!"

The Story of Rabbie Heckspeckle

There is a ghostly story about a souter of Selkirk called Rabbie Heckspeckle, who was a well-known local busybody.

One day a stranger came into his shop to order a pair of brogues, Rabbie did all he could to find out who the man was, but without success.

When the customer came back the next day to collect his shoes, Rabbie followed him all the way to the kirkyard, where he saw the stranger lie down on a grave-stone and promptly disappear.

Frightened out of his wits, the souter ran back to town to tell his amazing story. It was agreed that the grave should be opened to prove the tale was true and the corpse was found to be wearing a new pair of shoes. Rabbie didn't want to waste them, so he took the shoes back to his shop, but a few days later he disappeared. The grave in the kirkyard was reopened and the corpse was now found to be wearing not only the mew shoes but Rabbie's nightcap as well!

Early Cloth Manufacture

In 1587, the Scottish Parliament passed an Act to encourage Flemish weavers to settle in the Borders and employ Scottish apprentices. This restored the economic link with the Low Countries that had been broken during three centuries of Anglo-Scottish warfare.

The first mention of industrial manufacture of woollen cloth in our area dates back to 1585, when it was recorded that there were two "waulk" mills at Galashiels. These were places where the finished cloth was thickened by fulling, or felting. At first the "waulking" or fulling was carried out by men pounding the material with their feet. Later, the job was done by mallets operated by water-power, which was the first part of the cloth-making process to be mechanised. Walkergate in Berwick takes its name from the "waulkers" in the medieval cloth-making industry.

Despite the easy availability of wool in the Tweed Valley, until the 18th century most of the process of producing textiles was a cottage industry, carried out by families in their own homes.

The wool was first "carded" or teased out into strands by hand.

IMAGE – CHILD CARDING WOOL

The women-folk spun the wool into yarn on spinning-wheels

IMAGE – WOMAN WITH SPINNING WHEEL

Finally, the cloth was made using a hand-loom set up in the weaving loft in the upper floor of the weaver's cottage.

IMAGE – HAND-LOOM

The Early Textile Industry in the Tweed Valley

The materials and goods produced by the hand-loom weavers were generally rough and of poor quality. Galashiels became known for making a narrow coarse cloth known as "Galashiels greys", while woollen and linen cloth and carpets were made in Kelso and woollen stockings and tarred blankets in Hawick.

These goods were transported around the Tweed Valley in small quantities on pack-horses and sold in local towns and villages as the poor roads made it impractical to reach markets further afield.

Following the Union of the Parliaments in 1707, cheaper and better quality English cloth and woollen garments became widely available throughout Scotland, which further limited the opportunities for establishing large-scale woollen mills in the Borders.

Hawick Stocking Manufacture

IMAGE – STOCKING MAKING, 1740

In the 18th century, Hawick became the centre for the production of hosiery in Scotland.

In 1771, Baillie John Hardie obtained a grant from the Board of trustees for Manufacture to set up four knitting frames to make stockings in Hawick. By 1780, the business was employing 65 men and had been bought out by a Nottinghamshire man, John Nixon. Most of the 4,000 pairs of stockings produced each year were sold locally.

The Napoleonic wars changed all this as it created a huge demand for stockings for the army. The nearby new township of Denholm was built to house the growing number of stocking-workers. By 1816, 328,000 pairs of stockings had been made in Hawick on some 500 frames, which comprised about 60% of all the stocking frames in Scotland.

Changing fashions in the mid-19th century meant that Hawick companies like Lyle and Scott converted to producing men and women's woollen combinations and under-shorts.

The arrival of the railway in Hawick in 1862 brought high quality merino lambswool from Australia and New Zealand, which was more suitable for underwear than the coarser local Cheviot wool.

At the height of the Borders textile industry in the 1880s, eight new mills were opened in Hawick, doubling the production capacity in the town,

The development of the textile industry in the Tweed Valley had to wait for improvements in factory machinery and the road network.

Linen and Cotton Manufacture

The manufacture of cloth in the Tweed Valley was not confined to wool.

In the 18th century, the Scottish government attempted to develop the manufacturing of linen by giving financial support for the growing of flax. However, foreign flax provided most of the raw material for the linen industry.

The linen cloth had to be whitened by bleaching and the weavers were granted £50 per acre to set up a bleaching field in Melrose.

IMAGE – BLEACHING FIELD

By the middle of the 18th century, Melrose was producing more than 30,000 yards of linen cloth per year. The quality was excellent, **"Melrose land-linen being famous throughout the kingdom",** as Adam Milne commented in his 1748 description of the Parish of Melrose.

However, the price of imported flax rose considerably during the century and home-grown flax supplies were unable to meet the demand. The cost of the raw material was too high to yield a reasonable profit. Bleach-fields at Kelso and Ednam had failed, leaving Melrose as the only substantial linen town in the Tweed Valley.

By 1785, linen production had halved. The number of looms in Melrose had dropped to about 80, only about 30 producing linen and the same number weaving wool. 20 of the looms were weaving cotton, producing gingham and muslin as agents for manufacturers in Glasgow.

The American Revolution and the War of 1812 with the United States hit supplies of cotton and flax. The price shot up and the Melrose weavers were in dire straits. On 30th June 1814, George Laurie wrote to a potential customer: **"Dear Sir, I have just received yours of the 28th current. I have no gingham on hand at present that would answer your purpose of my manufactory. Trade has been so bad for a long time I had almost given up the making of fine gingham. I could however make you a piece like this swatch in the course of six weeks, but I believe it will cost as high as they ever did, the price of cotton yarn is so much advanced."**

By this time, the mills at Galashiels were mass-producing woollen cloth. The Melrose weavers could not compete and the Tweed at that point was not fast enough to power the new-style machinery.

By 1826, there were no looms left in Melrose. Manufacture of linen, cotton and wool had ceased, and in 1830 the Melrose bleach-field was turned into pasture.

The Galashiels Manufacturers' Corporation

In 1776 there were 140 looms in Melrose, which was the only town in the Tweed Valley manufacturing textiles on a relatively large scale. There were 65 looms working in Hawick, 55 in Jedburgh, 40 each in Kelso and Peebles, about 38 in Selkirk and 30 in Galashiels.

In 1777, the clothiers who organised the woollen industry in Galashiels came together to form a Manufacturers' Corporation.

Weavers' corporations, or guilds had been established in the Scottish burghs in the 16th and 17th centuries. For example, the Galashiels weavers were granted a Seal of Cause, or charter of incorporation in 1666 and the weavers of Melrose two years later.

THE MOTTO OF THE CORPORATION
"We dye to live, and we live to die".

However, the Galashiels Manufacturers' Corporation was the first attempt to organise and promote the industry in a co-ordinated way.

The Corporation owned a number of "articles of the trade" including a flag with sashes for the annual procession, a grinding stone, a pair of smiths' bellows and a teasing willy." The "teasing willy" was used to pull out the fibre before spinning, to make it ready for spinning, to avoid it tangling. This machine was rented out for a year to one of the members of the Corporation who could profit from processing the wool belonging to the other manufacturers, as well as his own.

In 1791, the Corporation built a Cloth Hall with the aim of turning Galashiels into a cloth-marketing as well as cloth-manufacturing town. Sellers could display their cloth in the Hall and buyers could inspect the products of several manufacturers before making their choice. The first sale took place on 30th July 1792 when **"upwards of 3,300 yards were exposed to sale and mostly the whole were sold in less than ten minutes. The average price was about 3s per yard".**

Although Galashiels never became a centre for wool-marketing as the manufacturers intended, but the formation of the Corporation was effectively the beginning of an era when the Tweed Valley became an internationally famous centre for woollen manufacture.

Mechanisation

Mechanisation of the Tweed Valley textile industry began when the hand-looms were improved by the introduction in the 1780s of John Kay's "flying shuttle".

IMAGE – JOHN KAY'S FLYING SHUTTLE

This invention allowed the shuttle to be thrown across a wider loom to produce broader cloth, and also speeded up the weaving process. Previously, the weaver could only make narrow cloths, usually about three-quarters of a yard wide, because he could not throw the shuttle side to side by hand across a wider area. Cloth could now be made to a full English yard width, which would enable them to sell into the English market..

Home-weavers needed to make expensive upgrades to their machinery, but they were helped by the Board of Commissioners and Trustees for Improving Fisheries and Manufactures in Scotland, which gave grants for the purchase of new equipment and for manufacturers to travel to learn about the new techniques in the industry.

In 1789, the weavers of Galashiels wrote to Dr David Douglas, the local minister: **"Sir, we suppose that you have heard the repeated complaints of our cloths being so narrow which obliged us to adopt the Leeds plan in erecting fly shuttles, and indeed many of us is standing indebted to the tradesmen for the expense owing to our want of stock. The reed makers tell; us nothing but steel reeds will stand, which is altogether out of our power to purchase, and we are persuaded that, if the matter was represented to the Honourable Board of Trustees by any kind person, they could lend their aid to purchase such a necessary thing, for unless we be helped we will be reduced to our old ways."**

Leeds is referred to here as it was the foremost centre in Britain for the manufacture of woollen cloth and was the first town to embrace the technology of the industrial revolution.

The appeal to Dr Douglas was successful. He put forward the weavers' case and, between 1789 and 1796, the Board of Trustees awarded them several grants of £20 to purchase the necessary steel reeds, which were used to separate the strands of yarn on the loom.

Spinning Jenny

Around this time, the traditional spinning wheel was being gradually replaced by the "Spinning Jenny", which had been patented by James Hargreaves in 1774.

IMAGE – JAMES HARGREAVES' "SPINNING JENNY"

The jenny enabled a number of threads to be drawn and spun at the same time on one machine. Hargreaves' first machine had 16 spindles.

The first spinning jenny that was introduced to the Tweed Valley by James Roberts in 1791 had 24 spindles. By 1798, there were 18 hand-operated jennies in Galashiels, each spinning on 36 spindles at a time, and later jennies had as many as one hundred.

The early jennies could still be erected and operated in the cottage weaving lofts.

Another innovation was the carding machine, which first appeared in the Borders in about 1790.

IMAGE – CARDING MACHINE

This machine used two plates studded with teeth to make the woollen yarn into springy strands suitable for spinning.

Some new planned townships were built in the region for hand-loom weavers such as Denholm for the manufacture of stockings, Carlops near West Linton, in 1784 for cotton weaving and Newcastleton, in 1793 for wool-weaving,.

PLAN – NEWCASTLETON, 1793

At the end of the 18th century, the textile industry was still mainly home-based, carried out in cottage weaving lofts, until the fast-flowing waters of rivers like the Tweed, the Gala Water and the Teviot were harnessed to provide power to operate the machinery in factory mills.

The Woollen Mills

Caerlee Mill at Innerleithen was the first water-powered textile mill to open in the Tweed Valley.

IMAGE – CAERLEE MILL

Caerlee Mill was built in 1788 by Alexander Brodie, a blacksmith from Traquair and it was equipped with the latest machinery such as Richard Arkwright's water-frame

The process of spinning the yarn was moved out of the weaving loft into the factory with the introduction of the water-powered "spinning mule".

IMAGE – SPINNING MULE

When it closed in 2013, Caerlee Mill was Scotland's oldest continually-operating textile mill.

In 1814, David and William Thomson installed the first water-powered "spinning mules" in Galashiels, in the Rosebank Mill they had built in 1805.

The mules soon replaced the hand-operated jennies and the work that had been done by some 200 women in the town using spinning-wheels in their own cottages also came to an end. The process of spinning was now being carried out by about 30 men and boys working in the factory mill.

Water-powered woollen mills were soon being built in other towns in the Tweed Valley such as Ednam, Hawick and Peebles.. They were generally built, not on the Tweed itself but on the faster-flowing tributaries of the Gala Water, the Leithen, the Ettrick and the Teviot.

The first water-powered mill in Galashiels was built in 1800, at Wilderhaugh by George Mercer. Appropriately, the name Mercer means "cloth finisher".

A total of about 50 men and boys were employed in the mill, but there were also 43 hand-loom weavers and about 240 full-time spinners who continued working in their cottages until they were replaced by the spinning mules in the.

In 1803, William and Dorothy Wordsworth travelled through the Borders and visited Galashiels, which had perhaps 600 inhabitants at the time. as they travelled through the Borders. Dorothy wrote about the town in her diary: **"A pretty place it has once been, but a manufactory has been established there; and a townish bustle and ugly stone houses are now taking the place of the brown-roofed thatched cottages, of which a great many remain."**

In fact, there were three water-powered mills, or manufactories in Galashiels when the Wordsworths visited the place.

Changing Styles – The Invention of Tweed

The principle cloth produced in the area in earlier times was known as "hodden grey", which was worn generally by the ordinary Border folk of the day.

Wars during the 17th and 18th centuries increased the demand for cloth.

The soldiers of the Scottish army of the Covenant that crossed the Tweed in 1644 to support the English Parliament's cause against King Charles I wore uniforms of hodden grey and blue woollen bonnets from the weavers of the Tweed Valley, and single-soled shoes made by the souters of Selkirk.

The Napoleonic wars brought a massive boost for the area's expanding textile industry and the newly-built mills turned out huge quantities of cloth to meet the needs of the army.

Peace with France in 1815 resulted in a period of depression for the Tweed Valley woollen industry, which was only brought back to life by a change in fashion.

By the early 19th century, check twill material, or "tweel" was being produced, mainly for local use, but also made into blankets and travelling cloaks. This became known as the "shepherd's plaid".

IMAGE – JAMES HOGG IN SHEPHERD'S PLAID

In the 1820s, the shepherd's plaid was adopted by two of the most famous Borderers of their day, James Hogg and Walter Scott and it soon became fashionable in England, too.

As a result of the upsurge in interest in the style, Mr Dickson of Peebles manufactured trousers of shepherd's plaid for the London market.

IMAGE – SHEPHERD'S PLAID TROUSERS

At first the colours were cream and bluish grey, but Sir Walter Scott favoured a less-subtle black and white colour, in various sizes of checks. Later, tartans of other colours were tried and Scottish fancy woollens became very fashionable. People in London were soon buying considerable quantities of Scottish tweel.

The story goes that in 1840 a clerk in James Locke's London warehouse misread an invoice attached to a consignment of tweel from William Watson's mill at Hawick. The clerk took the word to be "Tweed". The name caught the public's favour and "tweed" became the accepted description for this type of check pattern woollen cloth.

In his memoirs written in the 1870s Archibald Craig recorded the impact created by the new style of dress:

"It was in the autumn of 1829 that I returned to Edinburgh by way of Liverpool from London, and upon landing at Glasgow a rather conspicuous object attracted my attention among the crowd on the Broomielaw, namely, a man dressed in a pair of black and white large-checked trousers.

In the present day, such an article of dress would not have been noticed, but when I explain that at that period nothing was worn for trousers except plain colours such asd drab, greys and blacks, the effect of such a marked change of dress will be better understood.

I think it highly probable that this man's trousers were made from either the grandfather's plaid or the grandmother's shawl, as the white was so well "smoked", not with sulphur however, but with an age of peat reek which by no means improved the appearance.

I had not been many weeks in Edinburgh, however, before another pair or two of a smaller and more modest size of check were to be seen, and these I ascertained were made out of travelling cloaks. About four or five years previous to 1829 shepherd check cloaks, not unlike the Inverness cape of the present day, were much worn by gentlemen for wraps, and it was out of these cloaks that trousers were made.

Shortly afterwards I had an enquiry from London for "a coarse woollen black and white check stuff made in Scotland, and expected to be wanted for trousers", and requesting some patterns to be forwarded. This was easier asked than performed as at that time these goods were only made in plaids, with borders and fringes. However, cutting a small piece from the seams of a cloak, it was forwarded. It turned out to be the article required, and an order for half a dozen pieces was received. Those were soon made and were, I believe, the first Scottish tweeds that were sent to London in bulk. They were introduced into influential quarters and increased orders followed rapidly, and the firm with which I am connected had about a monopoly of the trade in London in these goods for a considerable time."

Expansion

The textile industry in the Borders expanded rapidly during the 19th century. From ten woollen manufacturers in Galashiels in 1788, the number had risen to 35 by 1825.

In 1792 there were 40 looms in Galashiels and about 50 weavers using 2,916 stones of wool a year, made into narrow cloths, blankets, and some flannels and worsted. By 1833 the number of looms had risen to about 130, using 21,500 stones of wool, about half of which was made into flannels, blankets, shawls, plaids and stockings, the rest into narrow cloths mostly, but some into broad cloths including fancy ones, featuring broken check patterns.

The industry in Galashiels was outstripping the ability of the Gala Water to power it, so woollen manufacturing expanded to the banks of the nearby Ettrick Water at Selkirk, where the first woollen mill had been established in 1767.

PLAN – MILLS IN SELKIRK

According to the Ordnance Gazetteer of Scotland, by 1885 there were in Selkirk: **"now three mills engaged in spinning woollen yarns, one in spinning Cheviot and Saxony yarns, and six in the manufacture of tweeds and tartans, etc."** as well as several other factories producing woollen goods.

More than 1,000 men and boys were employed in mills like these in Selkirk:

IMAGE – PHILIPHAUGH MILL, SELKIRK

IMAGE – FOREST MILL, SELKIRK

In about 1855, the town of Walkerburn was built to house workers at John Ballatyne's Tweedvale Mill. A second mill, Tweedholm, was built soon after.

Steam, not water, provided the next boost to the industry in the Tweed Valley.

IMAGE – STEAM POWERED WOOLLEN MILL, circa 1840

Steam-powered machinery was first installed in a Galashiels mill in 1831, and in 1839 Robert Gill bought, enlarged and added steam power to the Caerlee Mill in Innerleithen.

The coming of the railways to the Tweed Valley from the late 1840s made it easier for coal to be transported from the collieries in the Lothians to power the machinery in the mills and for the finished goods to be taken away from towns like Galashiels, Hawick and Selkirk and exported to markets far afield..

The railways also brought in cheaper wool from Britain's overseas dominions to feed the looms in the Border mills. The demand for woollen goods was so great that the local supplies of wool proved insufficient.

In 1834, the first fine merino wool had been imported from the Continent. Within six years, four fifths of the wool used in the Borders mills came from abroad. Increasingly, it was supplied from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, in the form of untreated fleeces.

By the mid-19th century, Galashiels had become Scotland's foremost town for manufacturing woollen cloth.

At the height of the textiles boom between 1865 and 1893, eleven new mills were built in Selkirk, four in Galashiels and new weaving sheds were added to nine existing mills. By the end of the 19th century, there were 26 mills operating in Galashiels alone..

The advances in technology created a need for training so, in 1883, the Galashiels Manufacturers' Corporation set up classes to teach the techniques of woollen manufacture.

These classes were so successful that, in 1909, the Scottish Woollen Technical College was founded in Galashiels.

Renamed the Scottish Woollen Technical College in 1922, it had a self contained woollen mill installed with a wide variety of machinery for the training of cloth darners and menders, weavers and a whole range of other skilled workers.

In 1997, the college became the Heriot-Watt School of Textiles & Design.

Growing Population in the Tweed Valley

The development of the textiles industry in the Tweed Valley led to a massive increase in the population.

In 1755, the number of inhabitants of Galashiels was only 591. By 1825,it had risen to 1,600 and to 2,209 by 1831.

Fullarton's Imperial Gazetteer of Scotland described Galashiels in 1843: **"A small straggling industrial town on the Gala Water, Galashiels partakes not a jot of the dinginess and confusion, and the concentration of the character upon mere labour and gain, which so generally belongs to places of its class, but is lively and mirthful in its appearance, heedful of the adorning of taste and beauty, seems to reciprocate smiles of gladness with the charming scenery amid which it is embosomed, and has the dress and habits of far more rural than of city life."**

Other towns were cashing in on the industry too. Fullarton's Gazetteer gives this picture of Innerleithen in 1868: **"Til toward the close of the last century, it was a tiny sequestered hamlet, comprising only a few thatched houses, a mill and a church; but it acquired importance first by the erection of a large woollen factory, and next by the attraction of visitors from a distance to drink the water of the Spa in its vicinity. Three other factories have been erected in the vicinity within the last nine years, and another two miles to the east, so that the place is now a well-framed seat of the same kind of manufacturers which have in recent years brought such large wellbeing to Hawick and Galashiels".**

PHOTO – ST RONAN'S WELL, INNERLEITHEN

The Spa referred to in this account is St. Ronan's Well, which became a popular tourist attraction for the town in the 19th century after it was featured in Sir Walter Scott's novel of the same name.

The St Ronan's Mill, established in 1846 by George Roberts and Son about a mile upstream from Innerleithen, produced yarn for the looms in Selkirk. It was fitted with modern spinning and carding machines powered by a huge water-wheel, 26 feet in diameter and over 8 feet across.

By 1881, the population of Galashiels was 15,330 and more than 18,000 by 1891, which was higher than today's population of about 15,000.

Like the other woollen towns in the Tweed Valley, Innerleithen's population rose with the expansion of the woollen industry. In 1831, Innerleithen had 810 inhabitants. By 1861, the number had grown to 1,823 and to 2,581 by 1891.

Paper Manufacture

Paper-making was another local industry that depended originally on the River Tweed to power its machinery.

The first paper-mill in the parish of Edrom was built at Broomhouse by John Pitcairn in 1786. In 1842, the mill was moved three miles further downstream to its present location at Chirnside Bridge. The business was taken over by Pitcairn's brother-in-law, Mr Young Trotter, and Young Trotter and Sons continued to operate the mill until the company went into liquidation and was acquired by the American firm of C. H. Dexter Ltd.

We shall finish our journey through the story of the Tweed Valley with the pleasing picture of a picnic for workers of Trotters Paperworks and their families that took place on the banks of the Tweed, as reported in the Berwick Advertiser of 9th July, 1853:

PIC-NIC ON THE BANKS OF THE TWEED –

The people numbering 260 with their families in the employment of Messrs. Y. Trotter and Son, Chirnside Bridge, were allowed a day's pleasure on Saturday 2nd instant, and resolved to hold a Pic-Nic on the banks of the river Tweed.

Mr. Hood of Fishwick Mains very kindly granted them the use of his beautiful heugh named "Blue Shiel", opposite Horncliffe, about a mile and a half above the Chain Bridge.

The company assembled at the works at 7 o'clock, accompanied by the Chirnside Instrumental Band and two violins, with flags waving – the one in the van having on one side a representation of a paper machine with the words **"By paper we get knowledge"** and on the other a steam engine with the words **"Queen of the Whiteadder"** and **"By knowledge we get power".**

All seemed to enjoy the ride in the carts very much and were greatly pleased with the scenery as they passed along.

They arrived shortly after 9 o'clock at Fishwick, where the horses were to be put up for the day; and they walked on to the heugh preceded by a cart heavily laden with all the necessary provisions for the day's sport.

The company arrived on the ground a little before 10 o'clock and seated themselves on the grass, and were supplied with a hearty repast of bread and cheese, and a plentiful supply of ale to wash all down.

The repast over, the fiddlers were soon called into requisition, and the dancing commenced in right earnest. It was kept up till about 1 o'clock, at which time Mr. Cranstoun, the proprietor of the works, arrived on the ground and was greeted with a hearty welcome.

Berwick Advertiser, 9th July 1853