

Bringing the Page to Life

Decline of an Industry



The papermaking industry was deeply affected by the state of the domestic economy and it was often prone to booms and slumps in fortune. Until 1960, however, the industry was protected by government tariffs imposed on paper imports into the UK. This was to change with the implementation of the EFTA (European Free Trade Association) Treaty, which reduced the annual duties imposed on imports from countries such as Norway, Sweden, Finland and Austria. By 1966 all imports from treaty countries were duty free. This was to have a major and lasting effect on British mill costs and production. Lacking protective tariffs UK mills, faced the prospect of matching Scandinavian



import prices without the natural advantages these countries enjoyed such as enormous raw materials and integrated mills. Added to this were the limited opportunities for expansion of the mills along the Water of Leith, a lack of investment in new machinery, and reduced funding for research and development. These pressures proved too great for many of the mill owners, and the late 1960s and early 1970s saw a drastic reduction in the number of papermills at work along the Water of Leith.

Closure of the Mills

In 1966 Inveresk announced that it was closing Kinleith Mill. This heralded the demise of the papermaking industry on the Water of Leith and ended the production of paper on a site that had been producing since 1792. In 1971 Galloway followed



suit and announced the closure of Balerno Bank Mill. With the subsequent closure of Woodhall Mill, and finally the closure of Inglis Mill in 1989, the papermaking industry that had been active on the river for nearly 400 years disappeared.

“And if something happened we were all involved in caring. And once it closed all of us were heartbroken and you never found the same quality as you did there.”

These closures had a profound effect on villages that relied on papermaking not only as a source of income but also as a focus for their community. The closure of Kinleith and the ensuing reduced railway traffic meant the end of the Balerno Branch railway line which closed in 1967. In addition, local businesses such as lorry firms, joiners and small shops suffered from the effects of the mill closures. The communities around the mill sites became commuter towns for Edinburgh and the close, tight-knit community that had thrived from living and working in close proximity to the mills changed in nature and focus.

“But I think one of the saddest things was seeing these great lorries taking away the machinery. Standing at the staff room window and watching the papermaking machines, the machines going down. A whole fleet of lorries. And then you felt that the heart had gone out the village. And the village has never been the same.”