

## Bringing the Page to Life

# Role of the Mills in the Community



**T**he mills were the largest employers of labour in the communities where they were situated. Most employees came from the villages surrounding the mills and often several generations from the same family could be found working there. By the 1960s demand for labour in the mills was so great that mills actively recruited and bussed in employees from villages further afield such as West Calder. The villages that grew round the mills were often communities centred round mill work. Many mills on the Water of Leith were involved in fostering the community spirit of village life. John Galloway took a strong paternalist interest in the development of Balerno. Retired employees were given Christmas



hampers; the local primary school was kept provided with paper; donations were also sent to the school for their Christmas party; and recreational facilities were provided for the residents of Balerno.



*“One of the social aspects was that they did have quite a lot of housing property in Blinkbonny and around the mill.”*

The villages along the Water of Leith greatly increased in size when mills and industrialisation moved to the area. Mill owners realised that to attract employees they would have to offer some form of accommodation. They provided mill houses close to the mill for employees from all different ranks and departments.

In Balerno a block of mill houses for the engineers and managers was nicknamed ‘Piani Row’, because it is said that when they were built, a piano was hoisted into each house. Housing was provided at an affordable rate and the properties were maintained and decorated by the mills. Though the cost of mill housing was a major benefit, many employees felt that it was not always such a good thing to be on the doorstep of their work. Such close proximity meant that, if there was a problem with the running of the shift, they were called out at all hours of the night.

