

Memories

Ruth Andrews

I have been thinking about how I can fill a newsletter with no access to news of Hampshire mills and I have decided to delve into my past and explain why I got interested in the subject in the first place. It was not flour milling at all – it was textile manufacture and its associated architecture and technology.

I grew up in Middleton, in what is now Greater Manchester. As a child, I remember smoking chimneys on looming black buildings, and mill girls in scarves and curlers with white fluff stuck all over their clothes. I always wanted to see what went on inside the mills.

I was unsuccessful until I went on an early IA trip in August 1984 with SUIAG (see *Keith's article on page 8*) organised by Dr Edwin Course. Manningham Mills in Bradford was my first experience of a working textile mill. Manningham Mills were established in 1838 by Samuel Lister as a steam-powered worsted combing and spinning mill. It was converted to silk manufacture in the 1850s but suffered a major fire in 1871. It was immediately rebuilt in the Italianate style of Victorian architecture; the ornate chimney is a famous landmark. It grew to become the largest silk spinning and weaving mill in Great Britain.



The machines are now all electrically powered so there is no longer any line shafting or belts in position, but the need for good light provided by the large strip lights and the northern light roof is very evident. This was a specially arranged visit to a fully working mill, definitely not a museum, and I have not been able to get inside any large working mills since.



I was always subconsciously aware of the presence of this industry in local townscape of Oldham, Rochdale, Heywood, and so on. It was unavoidable. All the buildings were soot-blackened (*right, upper*), and when we blew our noses we expected the handkerchief to be black. It was many years before I realised that sheep are naturally white! A lot of the air pollution was caused by coal fires in the rows of terraced houses that surrounded the mills. Things suddenly got better in 1956 when the Clean Air Act and smoke prevention zones were introduced to reduce the Manchester smog episodes which I also vividly remember. The terrace (*right, lower*) shows a mixture of blackened and cleaned houses. I always preferred the look of the black ones!



I didn't have a camera until I was at least 20 and didn't really get interested in the subject until nostalgia kicked in when I became a 'southerner' in about 1972.

Fortunately, Keith was interested in canals, and of course the mills – like the one on the previous page at Middleton Junction built in 1874 on the Rochdale Canal near where I grew up – sneaked into the pictures. (So did I!)

By this time the era of the mills, cotton in particular, had ended and the characteristic mill chimneys were being demolished apace. That's why I have never admired Fred Dibnah! He was personally responsible for felling some of my favourite landmarks, including the chimney that used to be alongside Briar Mill (1906) at Shaw, which I frequently passed on the train. Fans of the *Scott & Bailey* detective series might recognise this mill from the opening titles.



On the other hand, Hartford Mill (1907) at Chadderton, which we also photographed in 2013, still had its chimney, but unlike Briar above which has been converted for other uses, it had become derelict. Now in 2020, despite its grade 2 listed status, it is being demolished.

Revisiting Rochdale in 2006, we photographed Facit Mill (1904), and I suddenly realised that what I had thought was just the name of a bus stop where my parents and I used to start a walk, was actually the name of the mill. Notice the single storey rows of stone-built weaving shed to the right with its distinctive northern light (zig-zag) roof. It was demolished in 2012.



