

Fire Badly Damages Historic Herdmans Mill

Celia Ferguson, descendent of the Herdman family, watched helplessly as the renowned Herdmans Mill, part of the large Sion Mills complex, suffered extensive fire damage which had started in the early hours of Saturday, 30th July. Firefighters spent several hours battling the fire before they were satisfied all flames were extinguished and left the scene. However, the fire re-ignited and burned for several hours before the second fire was spotted.

Four brothers from Belfast, James, John and George Herdman, built the mill in 1835 to complement the flax spinning business in Sion Mills. They aimed to create a 'moral, temperate, educated, non-sectarian community' where, at its height, 1,500 flax mill workers were employed and the work continued for 170 years, ending in 2004 with the mill's closure.

In October 2010 a derelict part of the Sion Mills was gutted by fire

Quoted as being the most important industrial building in Ireland, the Sion Mills Preservation Trust have maintained the mill and the other historic buildings in the complex and now fear that this building may be too fire damaged to repair.

Earlier in July, the boarded up old Sion Mills pub was badly damaged by fire, thought to be arson, and a few years ago the tower part of the nunnery complex was fire damaged too.