



## Innerleithen Mills History

Innerleithen's industrial heritage was built on the secure foundations of a thriving textiles industry spanning the 18th to the 21st century, and this development transformed Innerleithen from a small rural village into a significant mill town. Manufacturing high quality wool and yarns for leading High Street brands culminated in the town's reputation as a producer of world class cashmere and knitted garments, most notably Ballantyne's.

1846 saw the building of Dobson's Mill (later Leithen Mills) on the west bank of Leithen Water about 300 metres north of the River Tweed and also in that year George Roberts & Son built St. Ronan's Mill a mile upstream, which produced yarn to be spun in Selkirk. This was fitted out with the latest carding and spinning machinery driven by an enormous water-wheel 8 metres in diameter and 2.7 metres across. The mill was later enlarged by Becket & Robertson who conducted a successful spinning business there.

Innerleithen had already been equipped with one of the earliest custom-built woollen mills in the Borders. In 1788 the philanthropist Alexander Brodie, originally a blacksmith from Traquair, paid £3000 for the construction of Caerlee Mill, a well lit T-plan building of four flats to provide employment for local people. Proper industrialisation, however, did not arrive until 1839 when Robert Gill bought, enlarged and added steam power to the original works, thus enabling around 100 people to be employed.

Power and water for washing for all three mills were channelled via the mile and half long mill lade running from the weir by the present day golf course and parallel to Leithen Water, flowing into the Tweed a few yards upstream from the confluence of this river and its tributary. Before the advent of steam and electrical power two farms, two sawmills, a meal mill, an engineering works and a printing works also used the swift flowing water from the lade to drive their water-wheels. Nearly all traces of these have disappeared but today Robert Smail's Printing Works, now in the care of the National Trust for Scotland, remains almost unchanged from its heyday in the early twentieth century. A replica water-wheel can be seen on the premises.



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1. When was Dobson's Mill constructed?
  2. Where was the yarn produced in St Ronan's Mill spun?
  3. What was Alexander Brodie's original job?
  4. How much did it cost to build Caerlee Mill?
  5. What were the dimensions of the water wheel?
  6. What other industries were supported by the river?
  7. What did Robert Gill do in 1839?
  8. How long was the mill lade, which provided power and water for the mills?
  9. Where can you see a replica water wheel?
  10. What was Dobsons Mill later called?



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Now find three words in the text that you do not know the meaning of and look them up in a dictionary or thesaurus. Write them below with their meaning.

1.

2.

3.



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In 1871 George, Henry and James Ballantyne, sons of Henry Ballantyne, who had founded the woollen manufacturing village of Walkerburn in the 1850s, built Innerleithen's largest mill, Waverley Mill, beside the railway sidings, utilising artesian water for washing and steam for power. The mills processed raw wool - cleaning, carding, spinning and weaving - to produce woven material for garments, uniforms and blankets.

During the early 1900s Caerlee Mill in particular began to diversify into the production of cashmere goods, initially hosiery and underwear, using yarn spun in Leithen Mills.

Innerleithen's mills survived the changings of the markets well into the twentieth century, thriving particularly on government orders during both world wars. After a series of mergers in the 1960s and stiff overseas competition in the 1970s woollen manufacture in Innerleithen suffered a gradual but relentless decline. Today the town's industrial base has all but disappeared but, along with Hawick, Innerleithen continues to be the world leader in the manufacture of high quality cashmere garments.

Sadly, with the decline of the industry in late 20th century, mills began to close down and the last of these, Ballantyne's, the town's largest employer, closed in January 2010, trading as Caerlee Mills Ltd with a greatly reduced workforce for a few years until finally closing and demolition work began of the factory buildings in 2015 to make way for new housing. The main mill remains and is hoped to be upgradable to residential properties.

1. What were the names of the Ballantyne brothers who set up Waverly Mill?
2. What village did Henry Ballantyne found?



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3. What were the four processes raw wool went through?
  4. What was the woven wool used to make?
  5. In the 1900 what type of goods did the *Caerlee Mill* start to make?
  6. In what decade did the mills go through a series of mergers?
  7. What is Hawick and Innerleithen a world leader in?
  8. When did the last mill close down?
  9. After the factory buildings were demolished, what was built in their place?
  10. What do they hope to use the mill for in the future?



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Find three words you do not know the meaning of and using a dictionary or thesaurus look up the words and write them below with their definitions.

1

2

3

LIT 1-14a, LIT 1-16a

KS1 History – a local history study

KS2 Reading Comprehension – develop positive attitudes to reading and understanding – discussing poetry, using dictionaries to check the meaning of words