

MACCLESFIELD MUSEUMS SERVICE

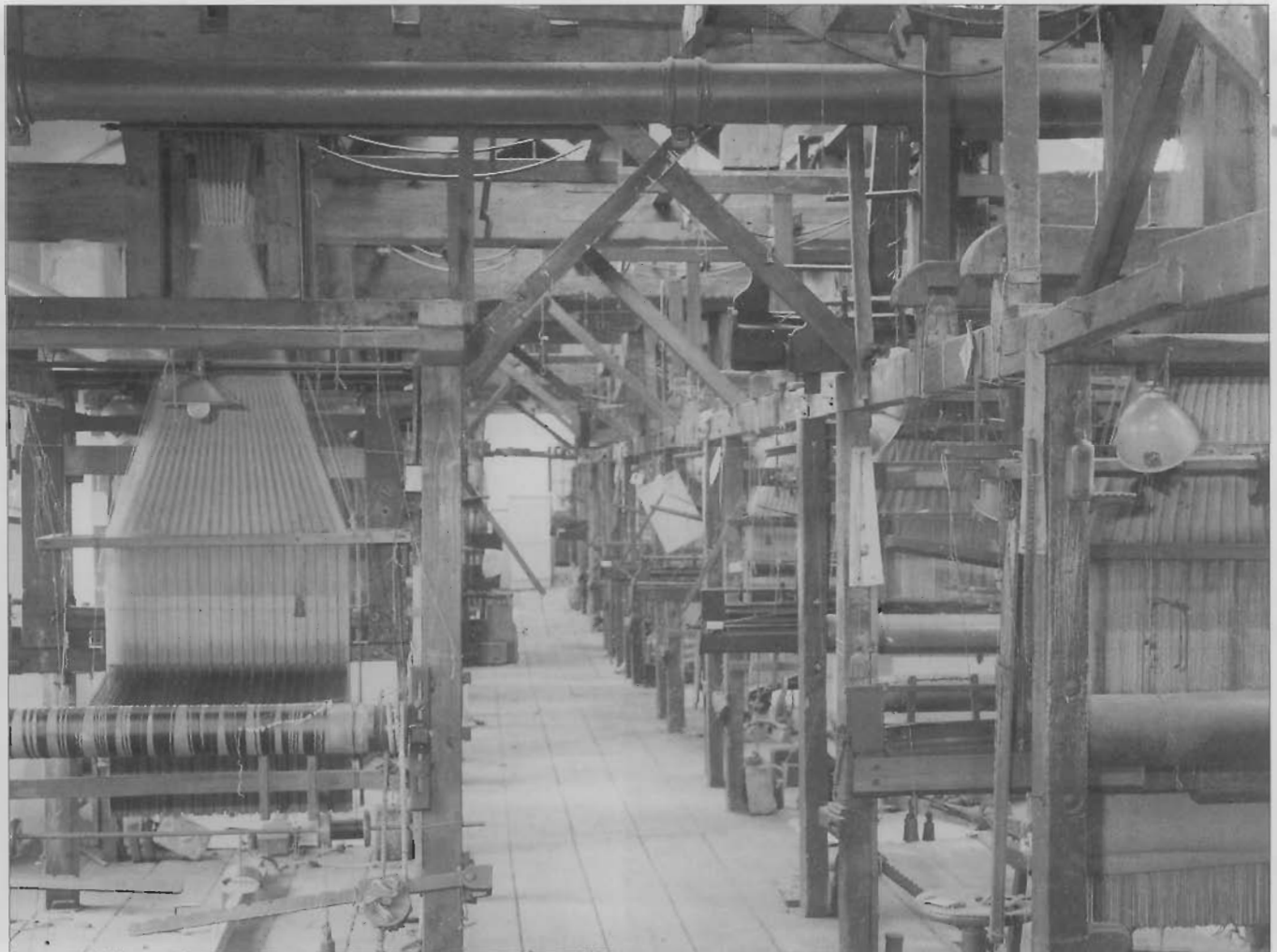
Louanne Collins

Macclesfield Museums Trust was established in 1987 to run museum services in Macclesfield. These consist of: The Silk Museum and related activities within the Heritage Centre, Paradise Mill Museum, West Park Museum, (which is owned by the Borough Council and managed on its behalf by the Trust) and an off-site store and textile conservation studio. The Trust has to raise 65% of revenue funding from income generation; these resources are raised from admissions, retail activities, a catering franchise, room lettings, grant aid and sponsorship. The Heritage Centre is owned by a separate Heritage Centre Trust and provides a venue for community and arts activities. The Heritage Centre and Museums have been managed as one since 1992.

West Park Museum

The West Park Museum, which celebrated its centenary in 1998, is situated on the edge of one of the country's first public parks, with the largest bowling green in England. It was the gift of Marianne Brocklehurst and her brother Peter

Pownall Brocklehurst, members of one of Macclesfield's leading families. In the nineteenth century many people thought that looking at works of art was not just enjoyable but was also morally improving. The Museum was given to the people of Macclesfield for "the education, refinement and pleasure of the people for all time to come".¹ The architect was Mr Purdon Clarke, Deputy Director of the South Kensington Museum. The interior design is based on the south gallery of the Whitworth Art Gallery in Manchester and the frieze of plaster casts of the Elgin Marbles is an original design feature. Curios and paintings were donated by local people and the Brocklehursts lent artefacts from their private collections. Miss Brocklehurst and her companion, Miss Booth, travelled extensively on the Continent, and made three trips to Egypt; in 1873-4, 1882-3 and 1890-91. Miss Brocklehurst kept an illustrated diary recording their exploits and became a close friend of Miss Amelia Edwards, the well-known travel writer. The artefacts collected by Marianne were later donated to the Museum by her niece, Lady Yarborough. Samuel Moss was the first curator, and when he died in 1935 an Honorary Curator was appointed who arranged the loan exhibitions from the



Jacquard hand looms at Paradise Mill 1984



Engraving of Macclesfield Sunday School c1814



The Heritage Centre, 1993

South Kensington Museum. Over the years the Circulation Department of the South Kensington Museum (now the V & A) introduced local people to a huge variety of treasures, from Rembrandt etchings and Turkish textiles to Japanese porcelain and the arts of Ancient Rome.

The day-to-day running of the Museum was undertaken by a Museum caretaker who was responsible for cleaning and security. In 1951, Colonel Charles Brocklehurst became the Honorary Curator, a position he held until his death in 1977 when the Brocklehursts' links with the Museum ceased.

In 1974, Cheshire County Council took over the management of the Museum, refurbished the building and re-displayed the objects and paintings and improved environmental conditions. In 1987, responsibility for the Museum passed to Macclesfield Museums Trust. The Museum has become the venue for the Museum's temporary exhibitions programme which cover a wide range of topics. Exhibitions are mounted from the Museum's own collections and in conjunction with local community groups. In 1996 the gallery was re-furnished and exhibits once again re-displayed, with grants from Museums and Galleries Commission/Wolfson Improvement Fund, Macclesfield Borough Council and North West Museums Service.

History of Macclesfield Sunday School

Before the eighteenth century only sons of the rich had the

opportunity to attend school. Macclesfield Grammar School, founded by Sir John Percival in 1498, taught mainly Latin and theology. Girls were educated at genteel academies or by private tutor.

The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, founded in 1698, promoted the education of working class children through charity and religious schools. By the early eighteenth century, there were also a large number of dissenting charity schools. The charity schools aimed to teach reading and writing to both boys and girls and to teach a trade to older pupils. The Sunday School movement developed in the late eighteenth century and Sunday Schools were seen as primarily educational establishments which based their teaching on Christian beliefs. Scholars were taught to read and write, the most able were taught arithmetic, and time was set aside for Bible reading or church attendance.

In 1796 John Whitaker, a prominent Macclesfield man, commenced a free Sunday School on Pickford Street with 40 pupils. He was greatly influenced by Robert Raikes of Gloucester, who was the founder of the national Sunday School movement. John Whitaker's objective was "to lessen the sum of human wretchedness by diffusing religious knowledge and useful learning among the lower classes of society".² Macclesfield Sunday School, as it was known, was set up as a non-denominational school. Numbers grew rapidly: in 1798 there were 812 pupils and by 1800 1128. Between 1800 and 1812 the school grew steadily to 2149



Handloom weaving at Paradise Mill



The Buttonmakers set, Silk Museum



Handloom weavers at Paradise Mill 1933



Pinminding at Frederick Hall c1910

pupils, meeting in five different locations. The Management Committee resolved that "a building capable of containing all the children now under instruction and providing for a moderate increase, be erected in some central location of the town".³

A site on Roe Street was chosen and £3000 was raised by public subscription towards the new building. Teachers and scholars raised a further £1000 and the building, based on the design of the Stockport Sunday School, was finished in April 1814 at a cost of £5639. There were 1127 boys and 1324 girls on the register, paying a subscription of 1d (0.5p) per week.

John Whitaker drew up a set of rules in 1796 which governed the behaviour of both scholars and teachers and this remained in force until the late nineteenth century. Children had to be at least six years old before they could attend school. They were expected to be clean in dress and attend regularly. The hours were 9.30-12, 1-4 and 5-7.30.⁴

While the school was always short of money, it played an important role in the education of the working children. Its use as a day school increased as compulsory education released working children for weekday lessons. As the number of Sunday Schools in the town increased, attendance at the Macclesfield Sunday School decreased and the building took on a social role as a centre for many clubs, societies and events. Attendance continued to drop and by 1960 there were only forty scholars. The school formally closed in 1973. The building quickly deteriorated and its future became very uncertain until it was decided to restore the



Guided tour at Paradise Mill

Sunday School as a community centre and to house the Silk Museum.

The building comprises four storeys with the ground and first floors devoted to classrooms arranged either side of a corridor. Originally, there were two stone flagged staircases at either end of the corridor affording vertical circulation. The third staircase, added in 1895 to satisfy fire regulations, destroyed the symmetry of the building. The space on the second floor, traditionally known as the 'Large Room', is two storey and resembles a non-conformist chapel in its arrangement. The room had a raked floor and gallery to accommodate the large numbers anticipated at the annual fund raising sermon. The Renn organ, a later addition, is situated at the east end of the gallery above where the tiered pulpit was located on the main floor. The Macclesfield Sunday School is a Grade II* listed building and regarded as the best preserved example of this particular building type.

History of Paradise Mills

The complex known as Paradise Mills, which are situated in the Park Green area of Macclesfield, consists of two buildings; the Upper Mill built about 1824 and the Lower Mill built in 1862 on the site of a much earlier cotton factory. Until 1891, the mills were occupied by both silk and cotton manufacturers who rented space according to the size of the business. After that date the mills were used exclusively for silk. The most important tenant at that time was James Kershaw, who founded a large weaving firm noted for the richness and variety of its silk fabrics.



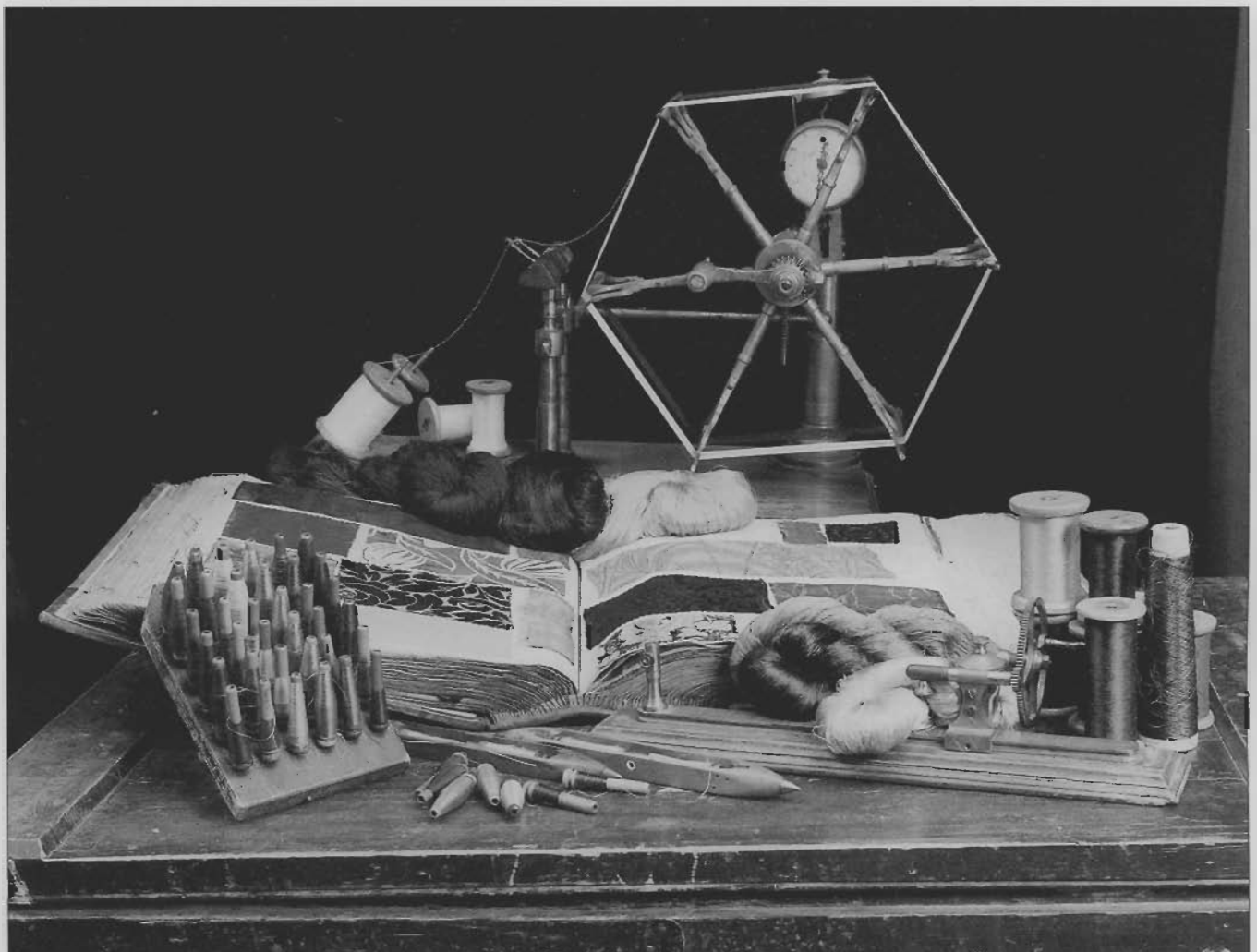
Object Handling

In 1912, Arthur Cartwright and Percy Sheldon, who had worked as designers for John Birchenough, formed a partnership and rented rooms in Paradise Mill. Their business quickly expanded and in 1920 they bought both the mills for £6000. "Cartwright and Sheldon have, from their inception, specialised in exclusive fabrics, the whole preparatory and process work – from the creation of the design to the finished fabric – being carried out on their own premises by expert craftsmen in the direct employ of the firm. At the outset, the manufacture of 28 inch squares by hand loom was their speciality and has remained so ever since. Today they employ more handloom weavers than any other firm in the country".⁵ In addition, Cartwright and Sheldon established a large making up department, a hand frame knitting section and developed a power loom weaving operation in a purpose built factory. During the second World War, the power looms wove mainly silk for parachutes and after the war the firm continued to flourish. However, by the late-1960s business was declining and the firm finally went into liquidation in 1981. The site is now owned by a local businessman who lets out the spaces to small companies.

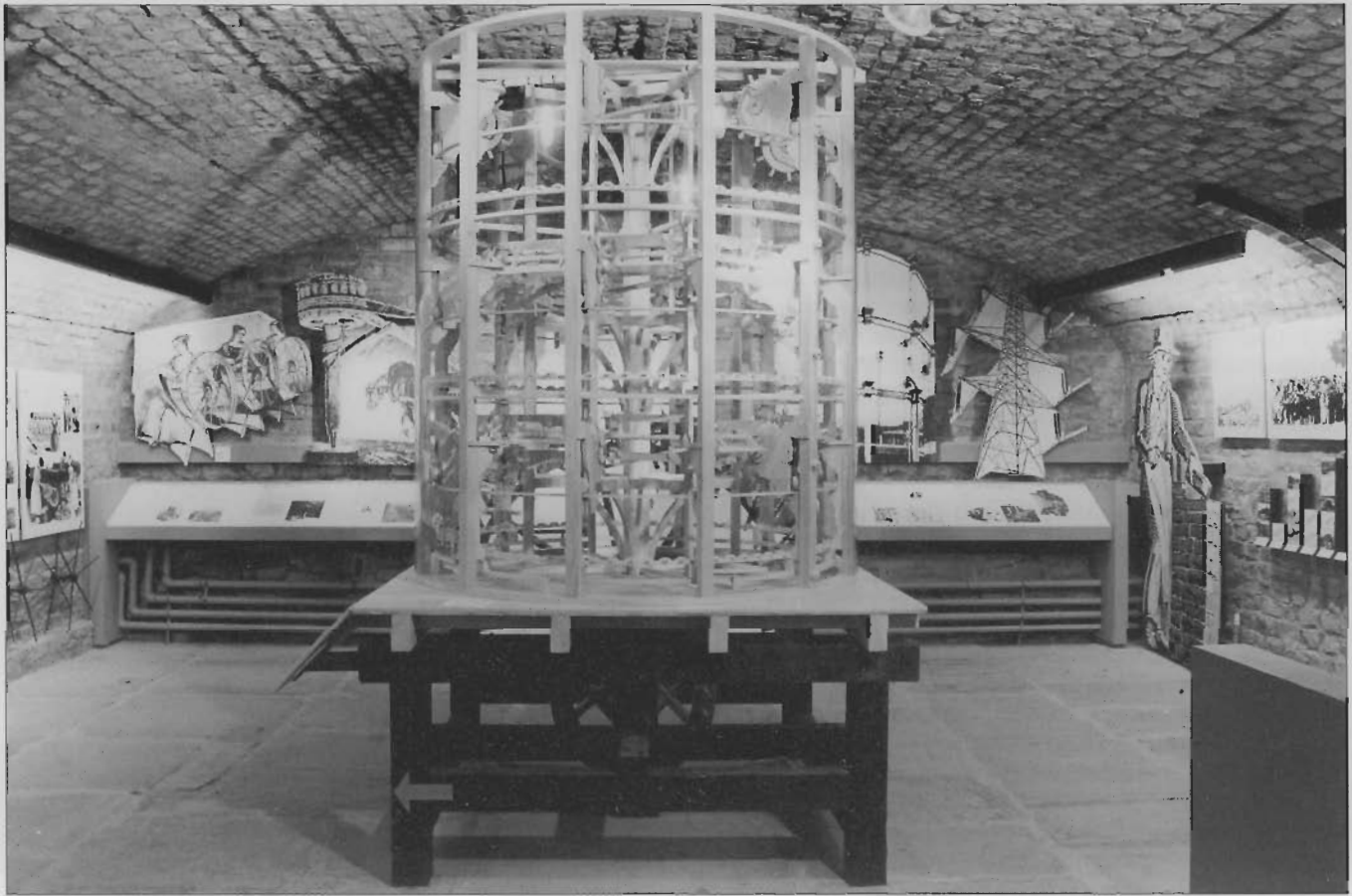
Handloom weaving had continued on the attic floor of the Lower Mill right up to the firm's closure. The twenty six hand jacquard looms which remained were recognised to be of national significance and were acquired by the Museums Trust who rent the top floor of the Mill where an industrial museum has been established.



The Silk Shop



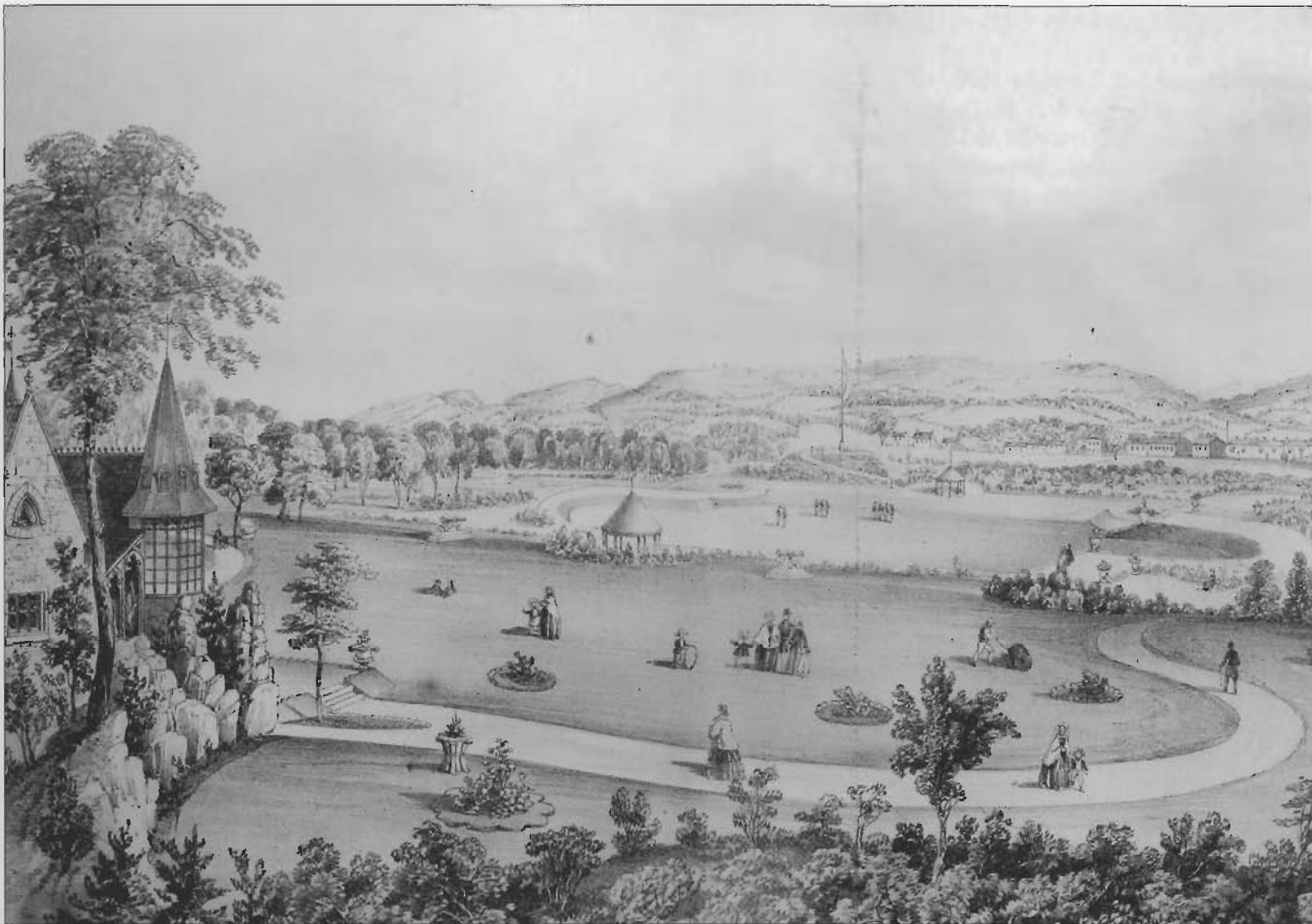
Pattern book from silk museum collection



Quarter-size model of a silk throwing mill: Silk Museum



West Park Museum



West Park in the 1850s



Egyptian displays, West Park Museum 1979

Establishment of the Silk Museums

The idea for a Silk Museum dates back to the nineteenth century, when the Duchess of Teck, as patron of the silk industry, visited Macclesfield. In 1898, a town museum was established in West Park, through the munificence of Marianne Brocklehurst and her brother Peter Pownall Brocklehurst, members of a leading silk family. Whilst items of silk were displayed there alongside Egyptian antiquities, Victorian paintings and local memorabilia, the Silk Museum did not materialise. At various times subsequently interest was expressed in establishing a museum. During the 1970s, a time when many mills were closing, the Borough Librarian collected material related to the silk industry, and there was even a budget for the establishment of a museum. However, none of these attempts were successful and it was not until 1979 when a Manpower Services Commission STEP Scheme sponsored by Macclesfield Borough Council, Cheshire County Council and Quarry Bank Mill, Styal, was established, that the momentum for the present museum began. The Friends of Macclesfield Silk Heritage was formed in 1980 and was very active in promoting the development of the museum.

It was decided to restore the Macclesfield Sunday School to house the proposed Silk Museum. Between 1982 and 1987, the Macclesfield Sunday School Heritage Centre Trust, with the support of the Friends of Macclesfield Silk Heritage, and taking advantage of the Manpower Services Commission employment schemes which were available at the time, restored the building at a cost of £0.5 million pounds (excluding the Manpower Services Commission contribution). This was achieved with the support of the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Silk Museum was established on the ground floor and in the basement, with a Victorian schoolroom for use by school groups, meeting rooms for community use, a reference library, silk shop, cafe and the 'Large Room' refurbished as a concert hall. The Silk Museum charts the development of the silk industry in Macclesfield, set in a national and international context, through an award-winning audio visual programme, exhibitions, models, costumes and textiles.

The top floor of Paradise Mill with its unique handlooms was opened in 1984 as an industrial museum. Exhibitions tell the history of the mill and the firm, and show the machinery used for the preparatory processes. A design room, card-cutting room and manager's office have been recreated to explain the complicated processes of jacquard weaving and to illustrate working conditions in the 1930s, based on oral history, photographic evidence and original artefacts. In 1985, the Museum won the 'Museum of the Year with Limited Resources' award.

Collections at West Park Museum

The collections were formed through donations by the Brocklehurst family and local residents. As a result, it is a very mixed collection with fine and decorative art, ethnic material, local history artefacts and a small but significant collection of Egyptian material collected by Marianne Brocklehurst in the 1870s and 1880s. Worth particular mention is the collection of material by Charles Tunnicliffe R.A. Best known as a bird illustrator, the Museum collection concentrates on farm and animal studies which reflect his



The Giant Panda: West Park Museum

early life on a Macclesfield farm. One of the most popular items is the Giant Panda, shot by Captain Brocklehurst in the 1930s. It was exhibited in Berlin in 1938, but returned safely to Macclesfield before the outbreak of war.

Collections at the Silk Museums

The collections are based on the evidence of the silk industry in Macclesfield. The most significant objects are the twenty-six hand jacquard silk looms situated in their original location in Paradise Mill and the archive of 1000 silk manufacturers' pattern books which illustrate the Macclesfield industry from about 1800. In 1993, a survey was undertaken of the pattern books, funded by the Pilgrim Trust. However, more work is needed to make the material readily accessible to researchers and the Museum is in collaboration with other institutions in the North West towards achieving this aim. The collection of silk costume and textiles is available for study purposes and reflects the products for which Macclesfield is best known.

The reference library in the Heritage Centre houses a collection of books, journals and articles relating to silk, costume and local history. Primary material includes a photographic archive of over 20,000 images, 350 oral history interviews and an index to the local newspaper, *The Macclesfield Courier and Herald*, which has been compiled over the last ten years by volunteers. Using Manpower Service Commission labour, the Museum has been able to undertake a number of surveys: Churches and Sunday Schools in Macclesfield (120 sites); garretted houses (600 identified sites); and the mills and dyehouse survey of Macclesfield and East Cheshire (500 sites). The reference library is available weekdays by appointment.

The Education Service

There is an extensive education programme offering both direct services and support resources to schools. This provision is targeted to the National Curriculum, particularly at Key Stages I and II. At the Heritage Centre schools are offered a Victorian school lesson in one of the Sunday School's original classrooms. Related activities explore Victorian artefacts and look at the hardships of Victorian living.



Jacquard woven silk picture of 108 steps, Macclesfield. James Arnold 1973.



The Cattle Market, Macclesfield 1920s oil painting by C. F. Tunnicliffe R. A.

At West Park Museum, life in Ancient Egypt is studied through the travels of Marianne Brocklehurst who collected the Egyptian artefacts now on display in the Museum. At Paradise Mill there are weaving workshops to complement a tour of the mill and the opportunity to study child labour. A wide variety of loan boxes are available for hire and archive resource packs researched and produced as a result of an education project (funded by the Leverhulme Trust) can be purchased for use in the classroom. In addition, a range of publications has been produced for the popular market. The Museum runs a holiday club and occasional adult workshops and lectures.

Future Development

There has been no capital development within the Silk Museums and Heritage Centre for ten years and the 1990s has inevitably seen a decrease in visitor numbers as new attractions appear in the locality. The collections have outgrown their storage and need to be made more accessible. The Trustees have plans to develop the Museum and its

facilities, using the former Macclesfield School of Art, a Grade II listed building erected in 1877, and the weaving sheds of the former Technical School, which are adjacent to Paradise Mill and recently vacated by the College of Further Education. The plans depend on a successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. Whatever the outcome, the people of Macclesfield fought so long for the Silk Museum it will surely survive.

For further details, please contact: 1) Macclesfield Silk Museum, The Heritage Centre, Roe Street, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 6UT. Tel: (01625) 613210; Fax: (01625) 617880. Website: <http://www.silk-macclesfield.org>. Open: Monday-Saturday, 11am-5pm, Sunday, 1pm-5pm. Admission charge. 2) Paradise Mill Museum, Old Park Lane, Macclesfield, Cheshire SK11 6TJ. Tel: (01625) 618228. Open: Tuesday-Sunday 1pm-5pm. Admission charge. [Please ring for Winter opening times]. 3) West Park Museum, Prestbury Road, Macclesfield SK10 3BJ. Tel: (01625) 619831. Open: Tuesday-Sunday, 1.30pm-4.30pm. Bank. Hol. Mon Free Admission.

Notes

1. Cheshire Record Office, Journals and Papers of the Brocklehurst Family D2435 16-20 (d), Macclesfield West Park and Museum.
2. Quoted in the souvenir handbook issued to mark the 150 years celebrations, 1946 (no pagination).
3. Quoted in the souvenir handbook issued to mark the centenary of the building, 1914.
4. Plan of Management.
5. *Silk Journal*, April (1937), p. 51.