

Building the Community

Tentative steps

The first houses Richard Arkwright built, the North Street terraces of 1776-77, epitomised the essence of what was to become a pattern for the Derwent Valley factory masters. Children were perceived to be an under-utilised resource in society, and with machinery available which was simple to operate they became the workhorses of the factory system.



Once the factory masters had tied themselves to child labour delivered in family units, rather than the apprentice labour favoured by, for example, the Gregs at Styal Mill, they were inexorably committed to house building and to community development. If their mills were to flourish, the families which migrated to the new factory colonies must also flourish, and this meant providing jobs for those members of the workforce who would not find employment at the mill. Many years later a member of the Strutt family declared this to be the hardest part to deliver, and claimed his family's mills in Belper would have grown larger but for the difficulty in finding adult male employment in and around the town.

In North Street, Richard Arkwright proposed a neat solution. He would offer employment to the wives and children of the weavers who occupied the houses and in the workshops, on the topmost floor, they would weave his yarn into calico. All the Derwent Valley factory masters did much the same. Peter Nightingale could not have been more explicit when he established his own mill and advertised for labour in 1784.

"Weavers, good Calico weavers may be employed and if they have large families, may be accommodated with houses and have employment for their children".

Nightingale at Lea, in his lead works, and Evans at Darley Abbey with the paper mill, corn mill and other long established water-powered businesses close to the cotton mills, which employed predominantly adult male labour, used these connections to support their cotton mills. The Strutts employed men on their farms and as carriers and in many other capacities, but they also invested in nailshops and framework knitters' workshops. As early as 1790 the Strutts had built a nailshop in Belper Lane and were still investing in new nailshops in the 1830s.

The weavers Arkwright attracted to Cromford were not limited to those who found a home in North Street. There were others working in the loom shop at the mill; also at the mill there is believed to have been space set aside for framework knitters. Each of these predominantly male occupations played their part in insuring the child labour force was maintained.



Weaver's Workshop

The factory village takes shape

After 1789 with the Cromford estate in their own hands, the Arkwrights developed the village skilfully and energetically. The creation of the Market Place gave the settlement a new focus. Traders were attracted to the Saturday market Sir Richard established and were offered inducements to maintain their attendance. At the end of a year prizes such as beds, presses, clocks, chairs etc. were awarded to the bakers, butchers etc. who had attended the market most consistently.

'by 2 o'clock I was at the Black Dog at Cromford; around which is much levelling of ground, and increase of buildings for their new market, (for this place is now so popular as not to do without) which has already been once held, and will be again tomorrow'

Account of Market

In due course the settlement the Arkwrights had planted and nurtured became a viable economic entity. It continued to grow until c.1840. The cotton mills had by then reached their height or even started to contract as the effects of the dispute over the Cromford water supply began to be felt. It is not known how closely the Arkwrights maintained a tie between residence in their cottages in Cromford and work at their mills. As late as 1866 the Strutt rent books imply a close linkage, rent still being deducted from the weekly wages. No similar records survive for Cromford and with the premature decline of Cromford Mill it seems likely that by 1850 some at least of the Cromford housing would have been occupied by families who had no connection with the mills. It is also interesting to note that as early as 1816 half the Cromford Mill workforce of 725 lived outside Cromford and therefore in houses which were not linked to their employer.

Making people do their best

Even before he took possession of the Cromford estate, Arkwright had established his reputation as an employer who recognised the need for his new community to foster its own identity, social life and tradition. He is credited with the creation of customs in Cromford similar to those which existed elsewhere in older established settlements.

So, in September each year (and certainly by 1776) there was the annual festival of candle lighting when workmen and children, led by a band and a boy working in a weaver's loom, paraded from the mills round the village. On their return to the mills they received buns, ale, nuts and fruit. In 1778 on such an occasion, a song was performed "in full chorus amongst thousands of spectators from Matlock Bath and the neighbouring Towns".

Ye num'rous Assembly that make up this Throng,
Spare your Mirth for a Moment, and list to my Song,
The Bounties let's sing that our Master belong
At the Cotton Mills now at Cromford
The famous renown'd Cotton Mills,

Our number we count seven Hundred or more,
All cloathed and fed from his bountiful Store,
Then envy don't flout us, nor say any's poor, etc.

Ye know we all ranged in Order have been,
Such a Sight in all Europe sure never was seen,
While thousands did view us to complete the Scene, etc.

Likewise for to make our Procession more grand,
We were led in Front by a Musical band,
Who were paid from the Fund of that bountiful Hand, etc.

Ye Hungry and Naked, all hither repair,
No longer in Want don't remain in despair,
You'll meet with Employment, and each get a Share, etc.

Ye Crafts and Mechanics, if ye will draw nigh,
No longer ye need to lack an Employ,
And each duly paid, which is a great Joy, etc.

To our noble Master, a Bumper then fill,
The matchless Inventor of this Cotton Mill,
Each toss of his Glass with a hearty Good-will
With Huzza for the Mills now at Cromford
All join with a jovial Huzza

Song of 1778

Cromford		
	Houses	Population
1801	208	1115
1811	239	1259
1821	238	1242
1831	239	1291

Population of Cromford

Come let us all here join in one,
And thank him for all favours done;
Let's thank him for all favours still
which he hath done besides the mill.

Modistly drink liquor about,
And see whose health you can find
out;
This will I chuse before the rest
Sir Richard Arkwright is the best.

A few more words I have to say
Success to Cromford's market day.

Verse pinned to the door of the Greyhound

As Sylas Neville observed, Arkwright "by his conduct appears to be a man of great understanding and to know the way of making his people do their best. He not only distributes pecuniary rewards but gives distinguishing dresses to the most deserving of both sexes, which excites great emulation".

The Cromford community was also sustained by the creation of various clubs and friendly societies including a cow club, but the full range and details of this provision is unknown. Information is sparse also for the educational investment in Cromford.

In 1785 a Sunday School was established which immediately attracted 200 children; subsequently there was a day school, the precursor of the school erected in 1832 and which remains open.

The religious life of the community was less well provided for. The chapel built in 1777 on the edge of Matlock Bath by Arkwright's partner Samuel Need, near the spot which was later to accommodate Masson Mill, was clearly intended for

We went to church at Cromford where is a chapel built abt. 3 years and 1/2 ago by Mr Arkwright...On each side the Organ is a gallery in which about 50 boys were seated. These children are employed in Mr Arkwrights works in the week days, and on Sundays attend a School where they receive education. They came to Chapel in regular order and looked healthy & well & were decently cloathed and clean... The whole Plan appears to be such as to do Mr Arkwright great credit".

Joseph Farrington diary extract—1801

Matlock Bath's fashionable visitors rather than the mill workforce. In any case, its life was cut short by Need's death in 1781; and when it did re-open in 1785 it was soon in the hands of an extreme Calvinist sect serving a small congregation.

It was not until 1797, when Richard Arkwright junior opened Cromford Church - which his father had planned as a private chapel for Willersley Castle - that the community's needs were catered for. The Church was in these early years pressed into service as an adjunct of factory discipline. Unlike the Strutts, the Arkwrights are not known to have encouraged other denominations to establish themselves in their village. The several Methodist sects with their own chapels, which prospered in Cromford in the 19th century were all built on land outside the Arkwright estate.