

The Strutt community in Belper

It now requires a conscious effort to distinguish the Strutt settlement from the older Belper community. Over the years the two have coalesced, but in the 1780s they would have been separated by a green no man's land nearly a quarter of a mile in width. The older settlement, based on agriculture and nailing, had been growing steadily as a market centre even before Jedediah planted his first mill nearby and it is clear that this growth continued alongside, and was further stimulated by the later Strutt investments.

Choosing a community which already had an economic infrastructure meant that the Strutts were spared some of the problems which faced Richard Arkwright in Cromford, a smaller and less developed community. Belper had a market place, public houses, shops and a chapel. From 1801 the town also had a rapidly growing hosiery business established by John Ward and others and later including George Brettle. By c.1830 the one business had become two and Belper could claim two of the largest hosiery firms in the country. The hosiers bought yarn from Strutt's, they also provided further employment in the town in the warehouses and mending rooms so helping to sustain Belper's accelerating growth.

The Strutts' land purchases in Belper and Milford followed the same pattern and priority. The first steps were associated with securing land for the mills. In Belper, almost all the purchases between 1777 and 1786 related to the mill and the acquisition of land which controlled the river. The same first steps were taken in Milford where, until 1791, land purchases were concentrated on the immediate area of the mill site and the adjoining meadow.

In Belper, it was not until 1787-88 that Strutt made the crucial purchase which would enable him to build his chapel, later to be known as the Unitarian Chapel, and the houses around it, the Short Rows. By 1801, there were 893 houses (built or being built) in Belper, an increase of 460 over the estimate made by Pilkington in 1789. Thus, in 1801, Strutt owned some 280 houses, or about a third of the total number of houses in Belper. It is clear there were others investing in Belper's growth apart from the Strutts, just as it is also clear in physical terms that Belper never became truly 'Struttville' - the company town with total ownership of the settlement in the mill owner's hands, as was the case in Cromford and in Darley Abbey.

During the 1790s the Strutts turned their attention to building up their estate. This was made possible by the Enclosure Award of 1791 which brought with it many opportunities to

January 15th 1801 An account of dwelling houses and sundry other buildings in the Liberty of Belper.	
Bridge Hill House and appurtenances	11
Farmhouses and appurtenances	38
Ale House and appurtenances	20
Other dwelling houses	814
Total dwelling houses	873
Cotton Mills	3
Hosiers warehouses	1
Nailers warehouses	6
Hat Factories	2
Potteries	1
Tan-Yard	1
Corn Mills	4
Malthouses	2
Bake Houses	12
Mercers, grocers, butchers shops	35
Joiners shops	7
Blacksmith's shops	7
Nailers shops	162
Stockinger's shops	27
Weaver's shops	14
	284



purchase small parcels of land. Whereas in the first 10 years of development in Belper and Milford Jedediah had bought 48 acres of land, in the following five years, 1786-91, 144 acres were added; and between 1792 and 1796 a further 185 acres. When Jedediah Strutt died in 1797, the estate totalled around 380 acres.

There is no obvious pattern to the Strutts' house building. The earliest housing, which is thought to be the Short Rows, close to the chapel of 1788, was on the meanest scale, some, if not all, originally containing two cells, one up and one down. This was followed in 1790 by the back-to-backs in Berkin's Court; but by this time, houses of better quality, three-storey houses, were being erected at Belper Lane.

Belper		
	Houses	Population
1801	893	4500
1811	1043	5778
1821	1262	7235
1831	1547	7890

During the years of 1792-97 the bulk of the three-storey houses in Long Row, Hopping Hill and Smith's Court were built. Finally, concluding the first phase of house building, the Belper cluster houses were added in 1805.

Of all the surviving examples of this house type, those in Belper most obviously demonstrate the intention to make these houses the first choice for the most important members of the workforce, the overseers. In Belper, unlike Darley Abbey, each had an extension, a substantial garden and an individual lavatory and pigsty.

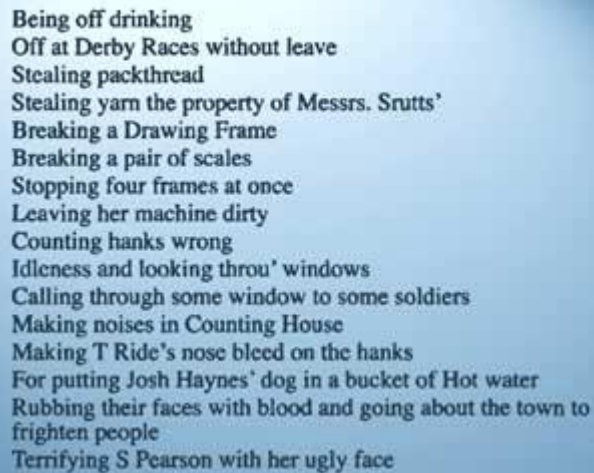
The documentary evidence which has survived suggests that the tie between working in the mill and residence in a Strutt house was strictly enforced and remained in existence as late as the 1860s. The rent books which include all known Strutt housing, demonstrate how rent was collected through deductions from the wages of the member of the household concerned. The variety of house types in the Strutt housing stock and the range of rents charged to the residents leaves no doubt there was a hierarchy. The best houses, the Clusters or Field Row, could cost 4s 6d per week while at the other end of the scale a house in the Short Rows or Mount Pleasant could be as little as 1s 3d. Smiths Court and Long Row were around 2s 6d. What is not clear is how the houses were allocated. From the tariff it seems unlikely it was arranged on the basis of family size.

A very large business

The size of the workforce in Belper and Milford has been used to suggest that Strutt's was the largest cotton factory enterprise in the United Kingdom in the early years of the 19th century, but comparisons between the competing claims of the Arkwright empire, New Lanark and the Strutts' business are difficult. What is certain is the supremacy of the Strutt business within the Derwent Valley.

In 1789, there were judged to be 800 people employed at Cromford and Masson and no more than 600 in Belper and Milford. Yet by 1802, though the Arkwright business had grown to 1,150, the Strutts now employed 1,200 to 1,300, a figure which grew steadily until a plateau was reached around 2,200 in the early 1820s. Subsequently, though there were peaks and troughs, the business maintained this level until at least the 1850s, after which consistent employment information ceases to be available. In Milford, employment reflected a different pattern. Between 1823 and 1837 the number employed in the mill fell from 537 to about 360, and there were corresponding falls among the in-workers, the skilled staff who

maintained the machinery. But in March 1824 the foundry and the gas works opened, a year later a dye works; by 1837 this employed over 70 people.



Being off drinking
Off at Derby Races without leave
Stealing packthread
Stealing yarn the property of Messrs. Strutts'
Breaking a Drawing Frame
Breaking a pair of scales
Stopping four frames at once
Leaving her machine dirty
Counting hanks wrong
Idleness and looking throu' windows
Calling through some window to some soldiers
Making noises in Counting House
Making T Ride's nose bleed on the hanks
For putting Josh Haynes' dog in a bucket of Hot water
Rubbing their faces with blood and going about the town to frighten people
Terrifying S Pearson with her ugly face

Forfeits had to be paid for inappropriate behaviour, including the incidents recorded above, between 1805 and 1813.

The hours worked in the mills were six before dinner, which was taken between 12 and 1, and six after dinner with time allowed within each six hour period for breakfast and tea. The Strutts were quite clear the basic day that had been inherited from the Derby Silk Mill where "this has been the invariable practice... for more than 100 years". Discipline within the works was maintained by overseers and by a system of fines. Outside working hours, watchmen employed by the Strutts' reported anyone whose behaviour became too wayward. In the early days payment was largely in **truck** and no more than one sixth was in cash. Deductions were made from wages for rent, food stuffs, coal, milk and vegetables. Some of the produce came from part of the Strutt estate, the garden of Bridge Hill House and from Wyver Farm.

Feeding the community

The milk supply was a matter of special concern. The Strutts established a dairy and to see that it received milk throughout the year, they agreed to buy such quantities of milk from suppliers at a price that made it worthwhile keeping cows through the winter, the suppliers paying the Strutts if the supply fell short. Here again, some of the supply was from the Strutts' own farms at Bridge Hill and Green Hall. The provision of tea and coffee, which began in 1826, attracted attention because of the arrangement whereby any profits were used to pay for medical care required by any of the subscribers. There was also a sick club for all females employed in the mills, which may have been set up as early as 1801 and was certainly in existence by 1821.



By 1821 the Strutts had established the Belper Provision Company, a co-operative enterprise which distributed profits among its customers in proportion to the value of their purchases. A similar society existed in Milford. The arrangements to sell milk continued until April 1854, by which time the scheme had been running for some years at a modest loss. It is not clear

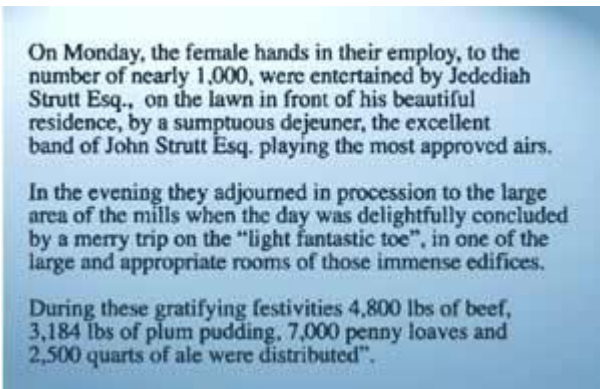
whether it was cost or lack of demand which led the Strutts to dismantle this well intentioned strategy.

The Strutts demonstrated their belief in toleration by assisting others to provide places of worship in Belper and Milford. Jedediah's personal convictions led him to build a chapel in Belper and provide accommodation in Milford for those who shared his Unitarian faith, and the company continued to support the Belper Unitarian chapel financially until at least 1847. But the Strutts were not doctrinaire in their beliefs and actively encouraged other denominations to establish places of worship sometimes contributing financially or by making a gift of land.

Education and music

The Strutts' commitment to education embraced Sunday Schools and Day Schools and a number of cultural initiatives which seem far ahead of their time. Before the introduction of the half-time system, the Strutts insisted upon children attending day school before they were offered work in the mills, so guaranteeing a certain level of literacy among their labour force. By 1817, 64 children were attending Day Schools and 650 the Sunday Schools at Belper, while at Milford 300 were in the Lancasterian Sunday School and the numbers grew as the company and facilities expanded. The Strutts insisted on attendance at Sunday School for all their young employees under 20. The cultural life of the community was also taken care of with dancing and meeting rooms made available at the mills and through John Strutt's band. This was in fact a 40 strong orchestra and choir recruited from work people employed at the mills. They received regular instruction in work time and in return agreed to remain in the Strutts' employment for at least seven years. The orchestra performed in and around Derby. John Strutt rewarded the members of his orchestra with occasional visits to the opera and to concerts in London.

Like the Arkwrights at Cromford the Strutts were not slow to recognise the value of communal celebrations in fostering social cohesion and loyalty. The events which thrilled Belper and Milford were generally in honour of some great national news. In 1802 it was the treaty of Amiens; in 1814 the declaration of peace; in 1821 the coronation of George IV ; but it was the passage of the Reform Bill which produced the most whole-hearted reaction. "The festivities in honour of the reform bill", the Derby Mercury reported,



On Monday, the female hands in their employ, to the number of nearly 1,000, were entertained by Jedediah Strutt Esq., on the lawn in front of his beautiful residence, by a sumptuous dejeuner, the excellent band of John Strutt Esq. playing the most approved airs.

In the evening they adjourned in procession to the large area of the mills when the day was delightfully concluded by a merry trip on the "light fantastic toe", in one of the large and appropriate rooms of those immense edifices.

During these gratifying festivities 4,800 lbs of beef, 3,184 lbs of plum pudding, 7,000 penny loaves and 2,500 quarts of ale were distributed".

"have been conducted at Belper on a scale, that we doubt not will equal if not surpass any other in the country. The whole has been arranged by a Committee of Management, aided by the invincible energy of their justly popular towns men, Messrs Strutt".