

The Arkwright Business Empire is Born



The development of the second Cromford Mill in 1776-77 was followed by a period of intense activity. In 1777 mills were built by Arkwright and his family at Birkacre, Bakewell and Wirksworth; at Rocester in 1781 and at Cressbrook in 1783. Between 1776 and 1781 his partner in the first Cromford Mill, Jedediah Strutt, built his first mills at Belper and at Milford. Elsewhere, royalty agreements licensing the use of Arkwright machinery allowed the Arkwright system to proliferate in addition to which there were those who pirated his machinery and operated outside the law. Notwithstanding substantial expansion further afield, Arkwright continued to develop his mill enterprise at Cromford. There is more than a hint of major growth in 1781 when the mills advertised for:

FORGING and Filing Smiths, Joiners and Carpenters, Framework-Knitters and Weavers, with large Families. Likewise Children of all Ages; above seven Years old, may have constant Employment. Boys and young Men may have Trades taught them, which will enable them to maintain a Family in a short Time. Two or three young Men who can write a good Hand, are also wanted.

By personal Application at the COTTON-MILLS, Particulars may be known.

SEPTEMBER 19, 1781

It has not yet proved possible to link this expansion to a particular building phase at Cromford.

In 1783 he turned his attention to Matlock Bath and to the construction of Masson Mill. This was built on land acquired in 1780 from the proprietors of the adjacent paper mill which had been erected in 1769. It is not known when Masson was first in production but it is likely to have been in time for the boom years of 1786-87.

After Sir Richard Arkwright's death in 1792, Richard Arkwright junior sold most of his remaining cotton mill interests outside Matlock Bath and Cromford. That he retained these mills may well have had more to do with their role in sustaining the Willersley Estate than their inherent profitability.

At Cromford the disputes over water rights which had rumbled on through the 1830s reached a conclusion in 1839 and, by 1847, when Thomas Carlyle visited the area, he was made aware the end was near. He wrote to his brother "the Mother of all the Mills [is] very nearly fallen silent now, likely soon to go out altogether".