The story of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site

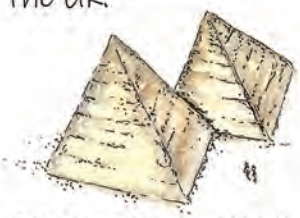
What is a World Heritage Site?

World Heritage Sites are places that UNESCO (part of the United Nations) decides have 'Outstanding Universal Value to Humanity.' This means they are special, valuable and unique and belong to all the people of the world no matter where they live.

World Heritage Sites are from the past and still survive today. We want to protect and preserve them for the future.

There are sites all around the world - some are 'natural' like the Virunga National Park in Congo protecting the mountain gorillas or the Jurassic Coast in Dorset and East Devon, UK, where there are lots of dinosaur fossils.

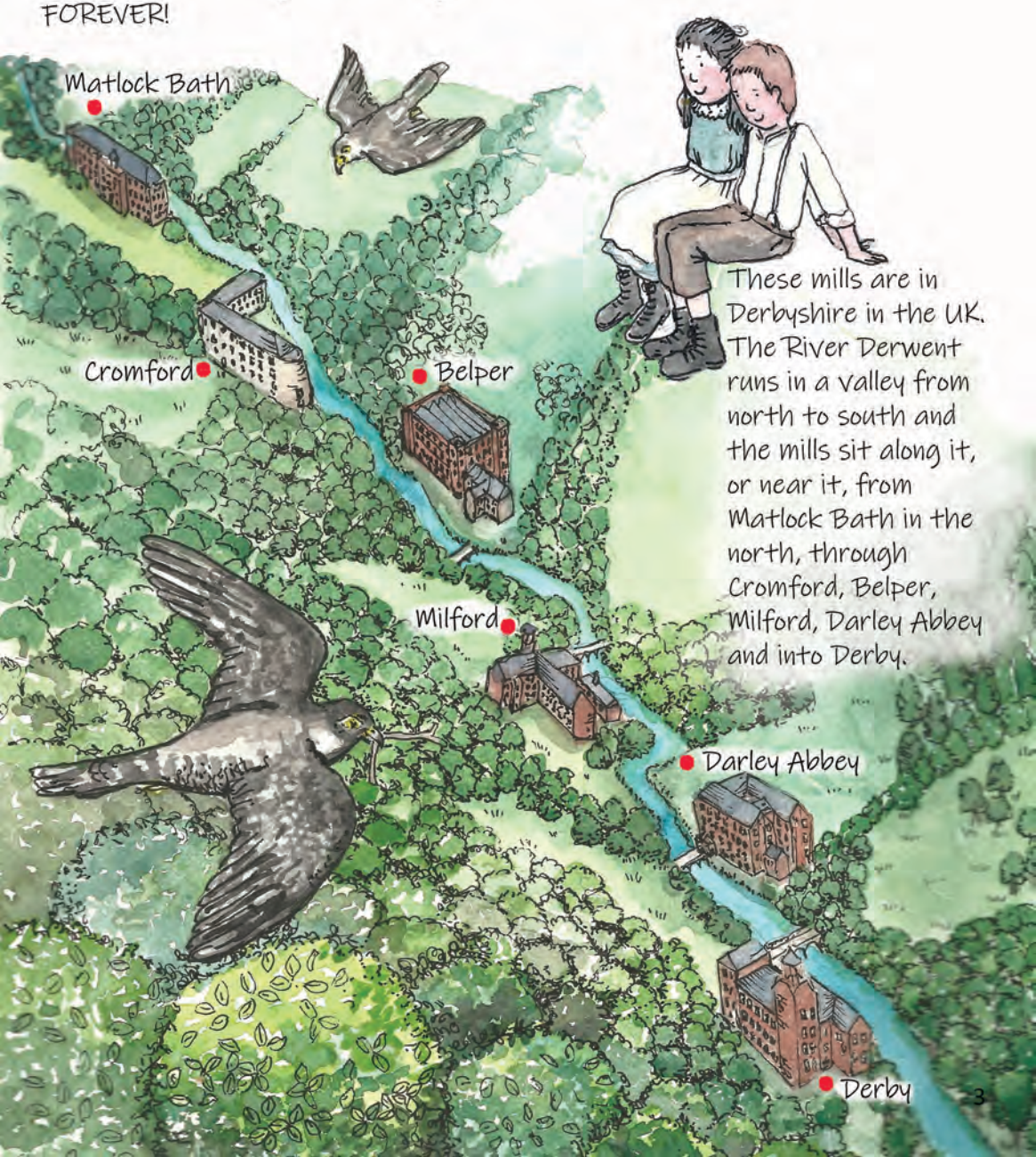
Other sites are 'cultural', to do with buildings and ways of life like the pyramids in Egypt, the Taj Mahal in India or Stonehenge in the UK.



Patrimonito, our heritage guardian, can tell you lots more about this at http://whc.unesco.org/en/patrimonito/

So why are the Derwent Valley Mills a World Heritage Site and where are they?

In the 1700s, mills in the Derwent Valley used water to turn waterwheels which powered machines to spin cotton and silk. It was the first time this had happened on a large scale anywhere in the world. They were the world's first factories AND changed how things are made, how we live and how we work - FOREVER!

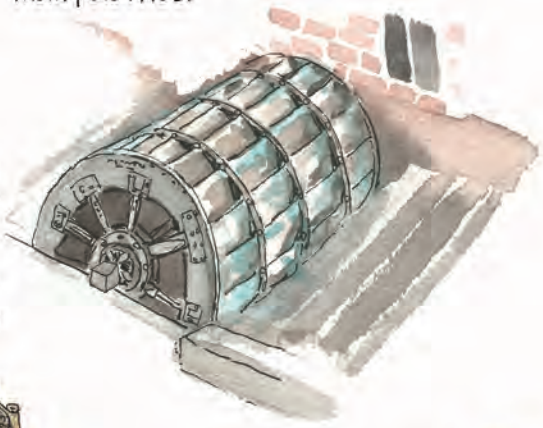


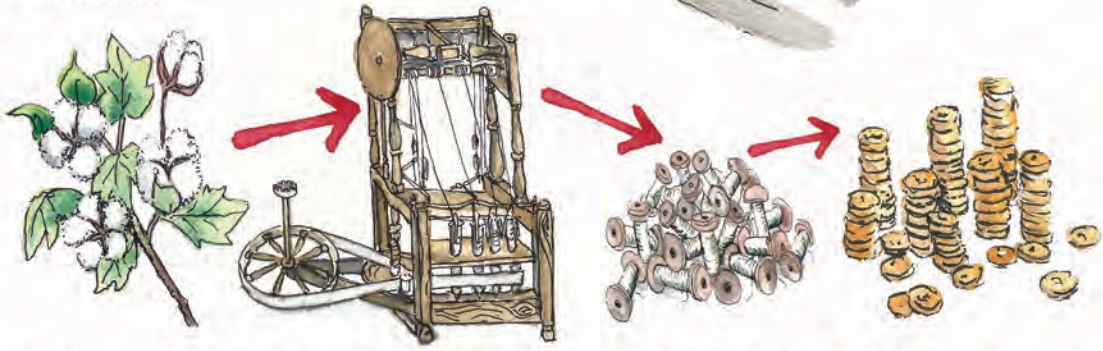
Why is it special?
Because of the water power!

In the early 1700s before the mills, many products were made by hand at home, on a small scale.

For textiles this meant spinning cotton or wool on a spinning wheel. One person spun one thread. It took a long time so people didn't have many clothes!

From 1721 the mills were built along the valley. They were powered by waterwheels so they could run all the time using flowing water, often from the River Derwent. New inventions, like Richard Arkwright's Water Frame, spun hundreds of threads of cotton all at once.

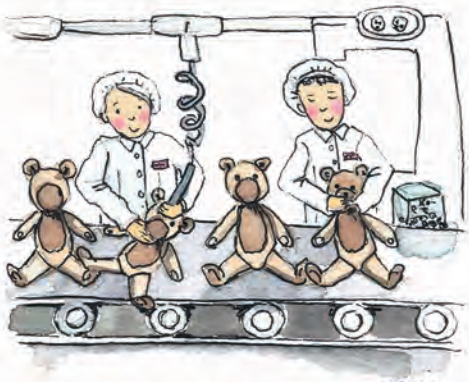




Production was moved to a 'factory system' where each part of the process was done by a different person and machine. Spinning cotton became fast, products were cheaper and mill owners made large profits.

We still use the 'factory system' today to mass produce everything from cars, computers and toys to thread.

The industrial revolution brought many benefits, but also problems, like burning fossil fuels which damage our environment.



The Cotton Trade & Enslaved People

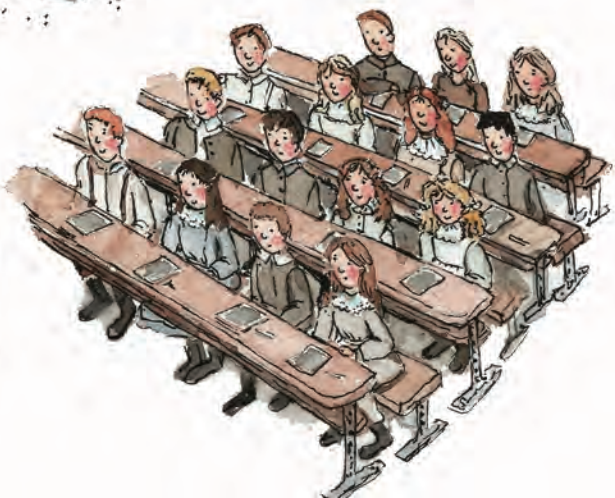
Where did the cotton come from? The raw cotton mainly came from plantations in the southern states of North America, the northern countries of South America and the Caribbean. The cotton was picked and processed by enslaved African people. The mill owners profited from this transatlantic slave trade, as did much of the UK. This cruel triangle of trade devastated generations of African families and its influence is still felt today.

Why is it special?
Because it changed lives!

In the early 1700s the UK mainly had small villages and farms. Families lived and traded goods on a small scale.

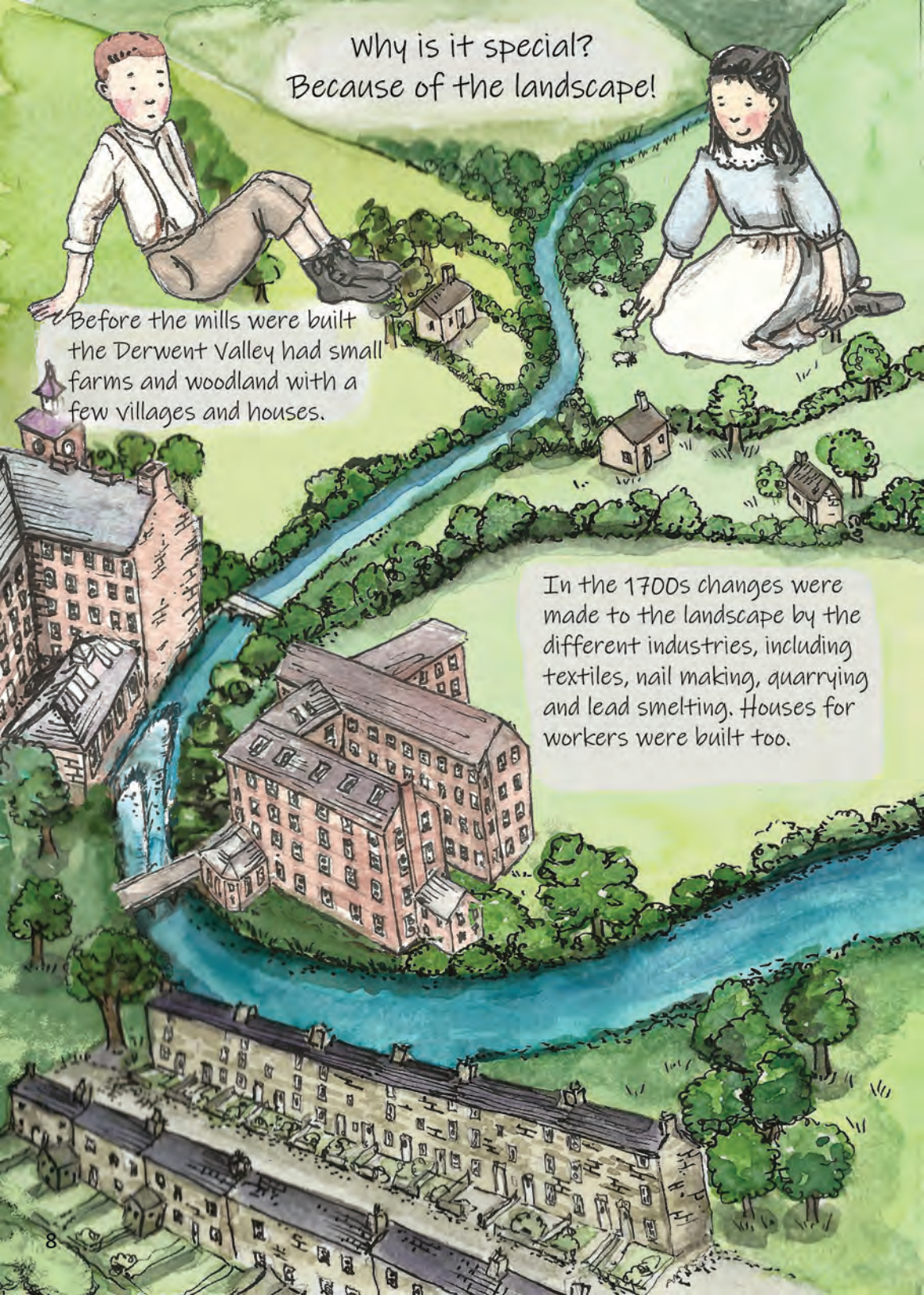
When the mills were built, workers were needed to operate the machinery. The mill owners built houses to attract families to work for them. The houses were much better than families in Derbyshire had been used to. You can still see them in North Street in Cromford and Long Row in Belper.

Children were expected to work from a young age and working conditions in the mills were extremely tough. Mill owners wanted children to be able to read and write. They had classrooms in the mill attics and later built schools, so everyone knew their three 'R's' (reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic!)



Cotton Mills often burned down. All the dry cotton fibres, lighting provided by candles and lamps, and wooden framed buildings were a recipe for disaster.
Inventor William Strutt built the first iron-framed buildings that wouldn't catch fire. These metal frames allowed people to build taller and taller buildings - William's ideas helped us to develop skyscrapers!

The changes here helped start an 'Industrial Revolution' which was copied all around the world.


Why is it special?
Because of the landscape!
Before the mills were built the Derwent Valley had small farms and woodland with a few villages and houses.
In the 1700s changes were made to the landscape by the different industries, including textiles, nail making, quarrying and lead smelting. Houses for workers were built too.

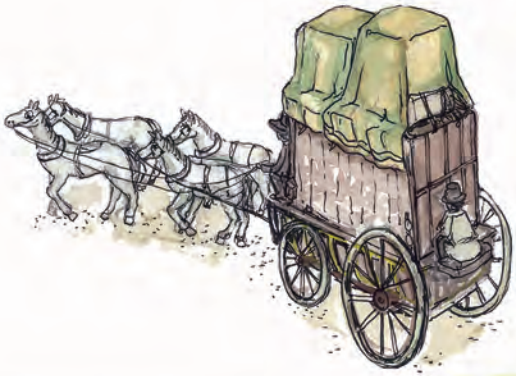
Later on, special parks and gardens were also created. In other places, as the number of factories and workers grew, large cities were built, and early buildings were knocked down.

This didn't happen in the Derwent Valley because the valley was too narrow and steep to expand, so it is still much as it was - almost frozen in time.

Most cotton production moved elsewhere, leaving a beautiful protected landscape here in the Derwent Valley. It has lots of wildlife and the parks, gardens and mill buildings are still here for us to enjoy.

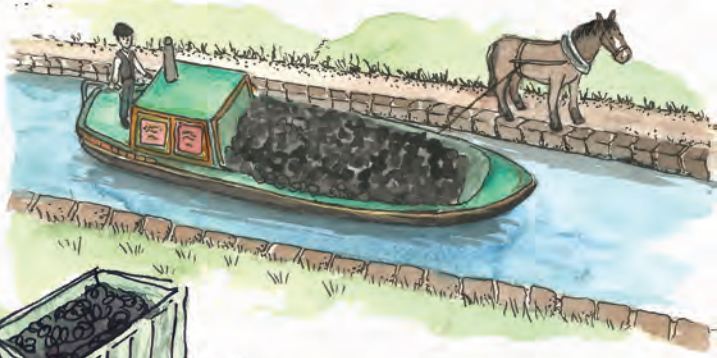
Why is it special?
Because of the transport changes!

Before the 1700s most people didn't travel far and if they did it was by walking or by horse. Products had to be moved by packhorses.



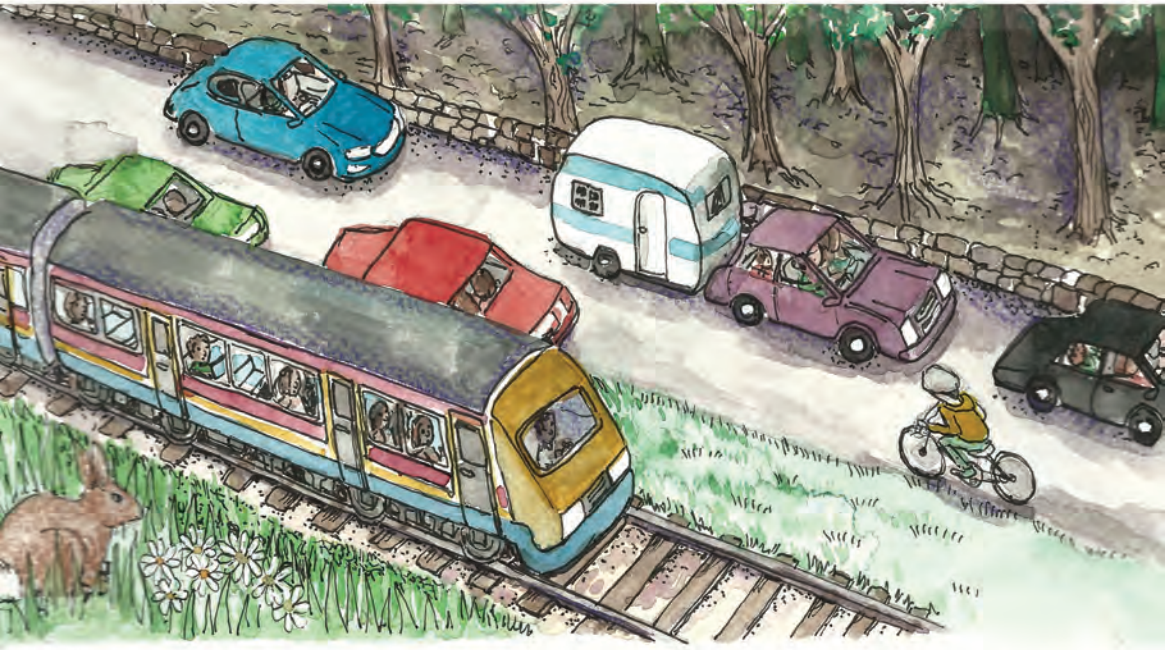
The cotton spun in the Derwent Valley Mills was being made in huge amounts and had to be moved out of the valley to be woven into fabric.
Over time roads were improved with toll roads and stage coaches.

Then the Cromford Canal was built, mainly moving coal and limestone across the country.



Later, steam trains and tramways allowed not just products but people to travel further and faster.

Today we still use the same road and rail routes, although cars and trains are even faster!



There are early railway workshops to see by the canal, and a boat runs on it, but now it is for visitor trips, not moving goods.

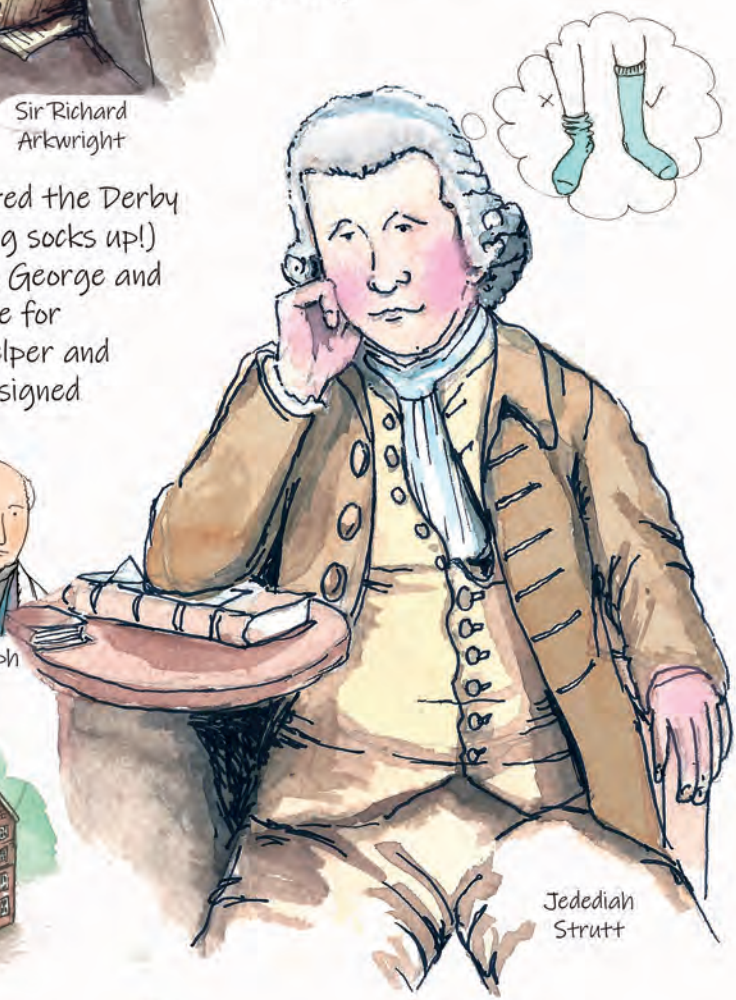
Who made these changes?

Sir Richard Arkwright

Richard Arkwright invented the Water Frame and transformed the Cromford area. His business partners Strutt and Need helped finance him to get started. He became the richest man in the country.

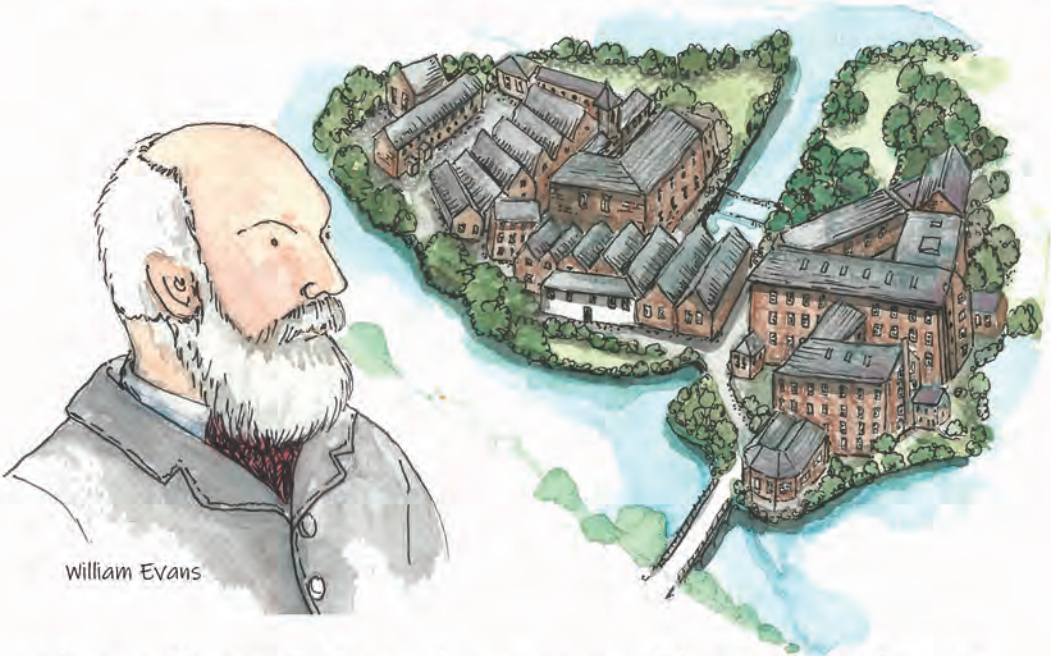
Jedediah Strutt invented the Derby Rib machine (for keeping socks up!) He and his sons William, George and Joseph were responsible for developments in the Belper and Milford area. William designed fireproof buildings.

William George Joseph



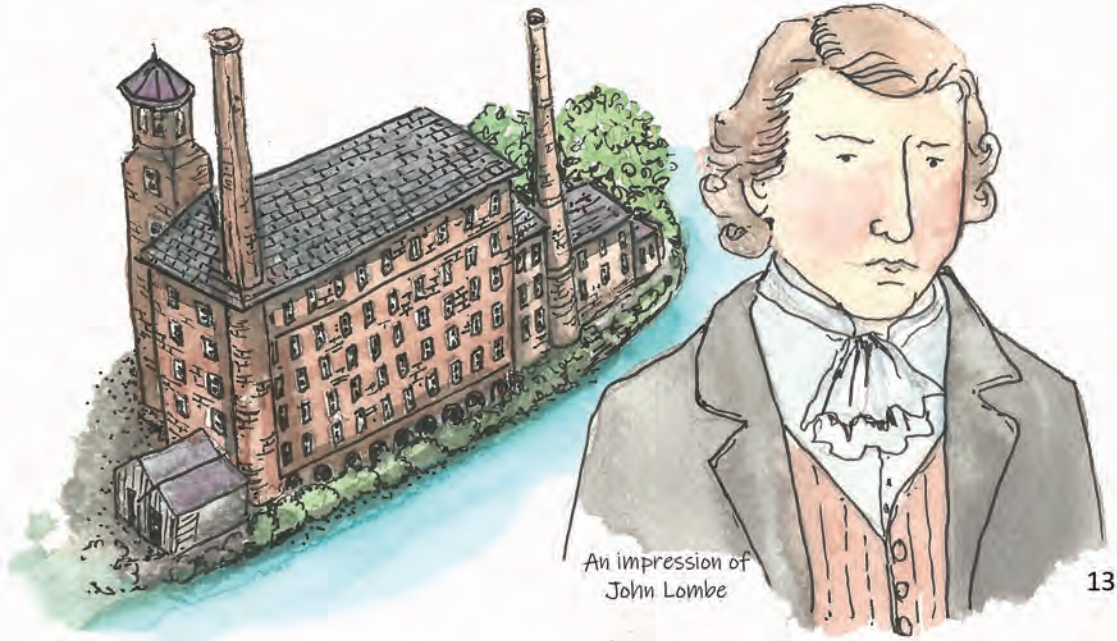
Jedediah Strutt

The Evans family were already rich and, with help from Arkwright and the Strutts, developed land at Darley Abbey.



William Evans

Thomas, Henry and John Lombe were responsible for the development of the Silk Mill in Derby, considered to be the world's first factory. Although the original building is gone their heritage of making continues in the city with the new Museum of Making on the site.



An impression of John Lombe

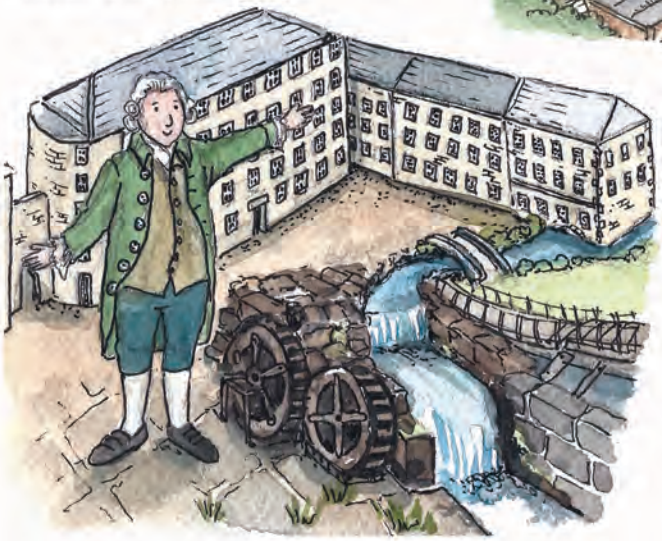
Want to find out more?

Come and visit us!

There are lots of places to visit where you can find out more about the amazing engineers, inventions, creations and communities that make up this World Heritage Site.

Why not visit by train? The Derwent Valley Rail Line stops just a short distance from most of the key visitor sites with group fares available.

Sir Richard Arkwright's Masson Mills at Matlock Bath have a working museum as well as shops and a great view of the River Derwent gorge.



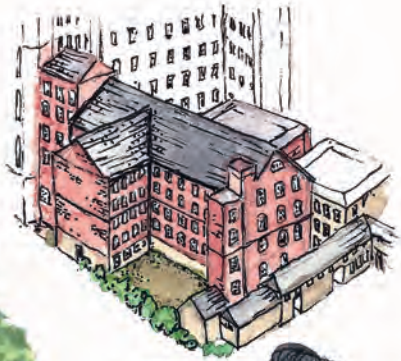
Cromford Mills are Arkwright's first mills where there is an exhibition and digital Arkwright experience where you can meet Sir Richard. There are also activities in the mill yard and a café.

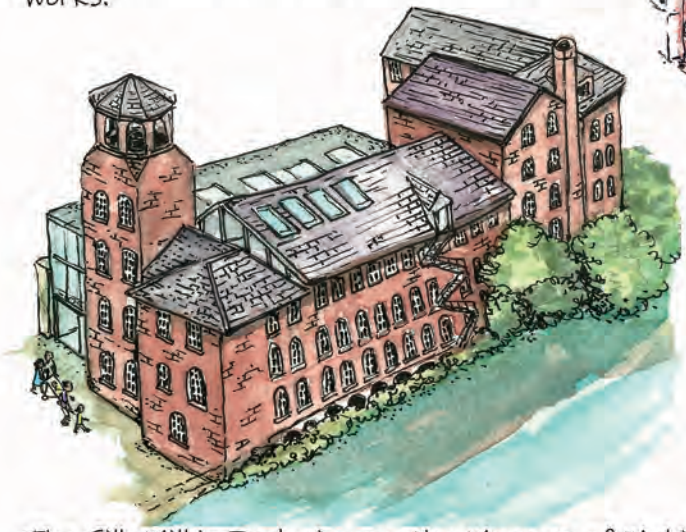
Cromford Canal has a great towpath to walk along, or you can take a ride on the Birdswood narrowboat. On special occasions you may even see Birdswood towed by a shire horse.

High Peak Junction Railway Workshops are amongst the oldest in the world. Here you can find out how trains were looked after, how goods were taken from the canal, up the steep incline to Middleton Top and over the hills.
From here you can walk to Cromford along the towpath or walk up the incline and hire a bike at Middleton Top!

A short walk from High Peak Junction is Leawood Pumphouse. It has a huge coal fired beam engine, which still works and was built to lift tonnes of water from the River Derwent to keep the Cromford Canal topped up.

Strutt's North Mill in Belper has a wonderful weir and a museum where you can learn how this special building works.





The Silk Mill in Derby is now the Museum of Making - what will you make?


Derwent Valley Mills
World Heritage Site
Matlock Bath
Masson Mills
Cromford
Willersley Castle
Cromford Mills
High Peak Junction
Leawood
Pumphouse
Cromford Canal
Whatstandwell
Ambergate
Belper
River
Gardens
Belper
Strutt's North Mill
Milford
Duffield
Little Eaton
Darley
Abbey
Mills
Darley Abbey
Derby
Silk Mill
Derby Museum
and Art Gallery
DERBY
Train stations
Road
River Derwent
Railway
UNESCO
United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization
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Derwent Valley Mills
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Illustrated by Rebecca Morledge