

# Mossley Mill



## A Short History

*"Mossley was originally a bleaching establishment and carried on by a late Mr Thompson but ceased about 80 years back. It afterwards became a flax scutching establishment, next a cotton factory, which business was carried on by Stanton and Graham but ceased about 35 years back. It was next changed to a calico (cotton) printing establishment by the Messrs Grimshaw and remained so from about 1818 up to 1834, when it was changed to a spinning factory by the present proprietor (Edmund Grimshaw)."*  
Ordnance Survey Memoirs 1839



'Mossley' is believed to have been named after a town in Lancashire where the Grimshaws had family connections.

### *The Grimshaws*

Nicholas Grimshaw was born in Lancashire in 1743. This is where, as a young man, he learnt about the cotton industry. The first indication that Nicholas had arrived in Northern Ireland was in 1776 when he advertised in the *Belfast Newsletter*, promoting new techniques for linen, cotton and calico printing in Greencastle, three miles north of Belfast.

By 1800, Nicholas was ranked one of the most important men in the cotton industry. On his death in 1805, his sons Thomas and Edmund carried on his well-established cotton printing business at Whitehouse, in the Parish of Carrmonee. The Grimshaws also expanded to take over other mills in the area, Mossley being one of them.

Edmund continued the printing business until 1834, when it became more lucrative to convert to flax spinning. In addition to new buildings at Mossley, Edmund created a basin - or pond - utilising water power to run his machinery.

*"The basin situated contiguous to the building was erected by the present proprietor, occupies nearly 6 acres of ground and is one of the handsomest and best situated perhaps in the above county."* Ordnance Survey Memoirs 1839



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Edmund Grimshaw lived in Mossley House with his family.

## Flax spinning

Originally, flax was grown locally and harvested by farmers. With the rise in demand, Ulster began to import its flax from areas such as the Baltic States, the Low Countries and Russia. Spinning is the conversion of the raw flax into linen yarn. This transformation is time consuming and involves a range of processes.

Before spinning, flax is 'hackled' or combed to split and straighten the fibres. The longer fibres, or 'line', are then spread to form a continuous ribbon or 'sliver'. This is drawn out and lightly twisted to form 'rove'.



Hackling 1930's

Two methods of spinning were carried out at Mossley. Gill spinning is an almost dry process that produces a strong, coarse yarn. Wet spinning is, as its name suggests, a wet process that produces the finer yarns. Only a spread board and four drawing frames remain in Mossley Mill. These examples are now incomplete.



Spinning Room 1930's

The spun yarn would be used for weaving or thread production.



Thread Polishing 1930's

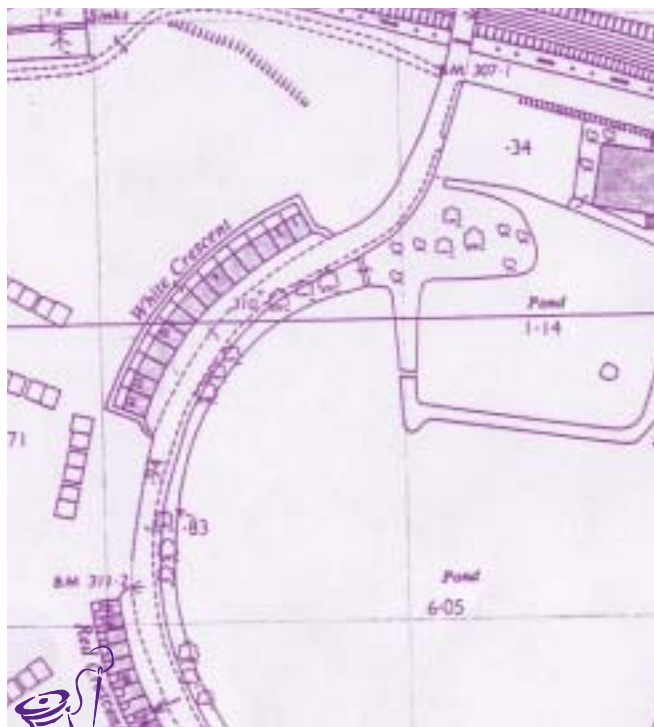
## The Campbells

The Campbell family bought the mill in 1859, when the property was described as:

*"Two mills for the spinning of flax and tow, 22 workers' houses, manager's house and garden with a dwelling house and grounds, ornamentally planted. The machinery of the mill was run by two steam engines with boilers (25 horsepower each with shafting and great gearing attached)." Ordnance Survey Memoirs 1839*

Henry Campbell & Co. consisted of second cousins Henry and John Campbell. It appears that Henry provided most of the capital for Mossley Mill, but John was the one who ran it. On Henry's death, his money was left in trust for the founding of a school or hospital and, in 1894, Campbell College was opened in Belfast.

John expanded the mill and the village, set up a school and improved conditions for his employees. He began by installing a new engine and building a boiler house. During the 1870s, several new buildings were also constructed on the west side of the mill.



Mossley Mill & surrounding area

John set up new workers' houses in the 'Old Row' and at Sunnyside. 'First' and 'second' class housing differed only in the scullery and the yard, and rents were paid to the Campbells. Mill housing was also built at White and Red Crescent, although both these streets have now been demolished and replaced with a housing estate. The weekly rent for a first-class house in the 1950s was three shillings and ninepence (19p).

Mossley School was established in 1868 to give factory workers' children a basic education. Night classes were attended by adult mill workers and local farmers.

There were several reasons for the success of the mill. Although the Campbells invested in new buildings and machinery, they did not over extend. It was not until the 1880s, with a good financial base established, that thread making was added to the business. In addition, the company looked after its workers well, given the standards of the time. This good business sense kept Mossley competitive.

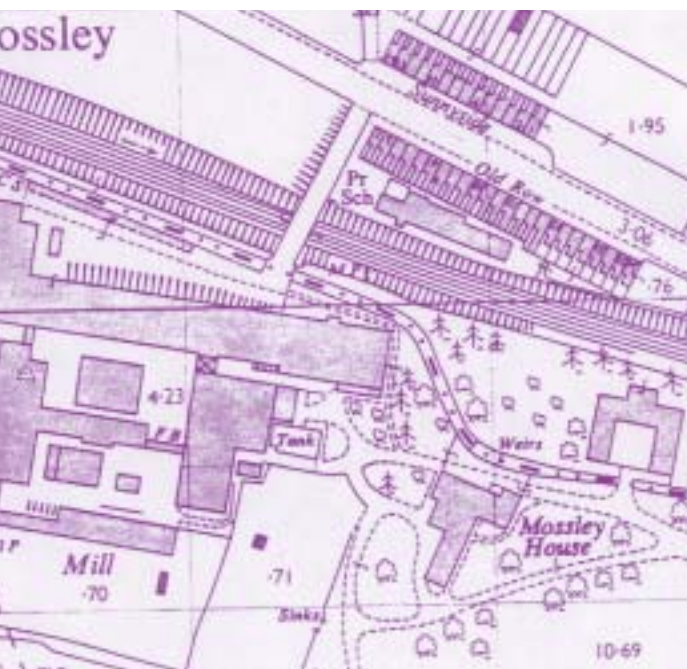
Mill workers faced the prospect of injury and ill health. Limbs could become entangled in the many moving parts of the machinery, and the dust from the flax and the warm wet spinning rooms caused a range of illnesses.

A young mill worker in the preparing rooms during the 1930s was paid six shillings a week (30p). At this time, one shilling would have bought about four pints of milk. By 1947, an average wage would have been fourteen shillings a week (70p).

Throughout the 1900s, conditions gradually improved in relation to working hours, holidays, and health and safety, with the introduction of various work-related government Acts and regulations. The Employee Handbook, produced in the 1970s, pays attention to safety and conditions in the work place.

After John's death in 1901, the Campbell family continued to run the Mill. Colonel Louis Sidney Henshall joined the business in 1921 and, along with many others, including his sons James and Herbert, contributed much to the mill's success during the 1900's. Expansion took place throughout the 1960's and 1970's with the introduction of synthetic threads, and in 1978 the company was sold to the London-based Hanson Trust. At this time, it was amalgamated with Barbour Threads of Hilden, near Lisburn. The resulting company was renamed Barbour Campbell Threads Ltd and all thread production was transferred to Hilden, while spinning remained at Mossley.

In 1993, Mossley was bought by Herdmans flax spinners of Sion Mills, Co. Tyrone, and it finally closed in 1995. Newtownabbey Borough Council bought the site a year later and has since converted part of the mill into the new Council Civic Centre, officially opened by His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales in June 2000.



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The Campbells built a sporting pavilion in the village, along with tennis courts, a lawn bowling club and an outdoor swimming pool. These facilities were open only to people who worked in the mill, and one penny was taken out of everyone's wages to pay for equipment and upkeep of the grounds. This was regardless of whether the worker used them or not.

The mill also boasted a reading room, canteen and a cinema. The price of the cinema was fourpence for mill workers and sixpence for the public.



Bowling Green 1930s



The council development has retained Mossley Mill as a significant element of the Borough's heritage. It provides new Council accommodation that complements the existing building, and expresses the openness and progressive thinking required of contemporary local government.

Modern materials and construction techniques have been used to integrate mechanical and electrical services into the building, while retaining its character. Industrial steel, glass and oak have all been combined to reflect the robust nature of the Mill.



The dam is home to a number of swans and ducks, and care has been taken to avoid disruption to wildlife - including nesting birds and feeding bats - throughout the building process. The timber boardwalk provides public access to the dam.



Full Council meetings are held every month, and members of the public are welcome to attend.

Plans are currently being developed to convert the remaining buildings and site.

***Acknowledgements:***

Ethna Webb, Private Contributor.  
Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

The open-plan office accommodation incorporates a raised floor (concealing ventilation and electrical systems), allowing the existing brick-vaulted ceilings and the original central iron columns to be exposed.

The double-glazed facade contains specially coated glass to give high thermal insulation and protect against heat from sunshine. The style of the new windows has been altered slightly to comply with safety regulations.

Mossley Mill has brought staff together from five separate council sites throughout Newtownabbey, resulting in substantial savings in time and resources. The open-plan setting helps teamworking within and between departments.



The information in this leaflet is also available on audiotape and in large print for the visually impaired.

Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Mossley Mill, Newtownabbey BT36 5QA

☎ 028 9034 0000 Fax: 028 9034 0200

e-mail: [info@newtownabbey.gov.uk](mailto:info@newtownabbey.gov.uk)  
website: [www.newtownabbey.gov.uk](http://www.newtownabbey.gov.uk)

The construction of the Council chamber on the top floor allows for a column-free area. The interior is detailed in fine joinery, to contrast with the robust nature of the rest of the building. The front wall cleverly conceals a presentation screen, and individual audio sockets are set into the board table.

