

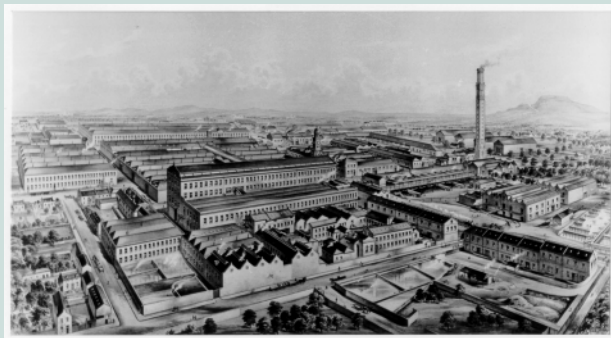
# Camperdown Works

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## Introduction

"The world's greatest jute works" is the description given to the former Camperdown Works, Lochee, by Mark Watson in his book "Jute and Flax Mills in Dundee" (Hutton Press Ltd). Although no longer a jute works and substantially redeveloped it is still an imposing complex and is significant in the renewal of Dundee. To make the study of the new development more interesting it is useful to briefly look at the history of the factory complex, then the background of regeneration in the inner city of Dundee to which Camperdown Works contributes, then to the progress of the new development.

Camperdown Works circa 1900.



## Historical and Technical Background

Last century Dundee flourished as a textile manufacturing centre. As with many industries in the 18th and 19th centuries, being beside a river or stream was important, in the first instance for water power and then through the need to make steam, and also because a lot of water was used in the manufacture of jute.

In Dundee, by looking at old maps and noting where the factories were you can trace where the original streams were. These are no longer visible but are under the streets in big pipes or culverts. Dundee has a long association with the textile industry. Prior to 1830 it was the

greatest flax-spinning town in the world. After 1830 jute became more important. Jute is one of the world's major textile fibres, second only to cotton.

The city monopolised the trade from 1830-1850 and it was not until the 1880s that serious foreign competition was encountered from the countries growing the plant, mainly India and Pakistan. In Dundee in 1911 there were still 41,000 people, almost 50% of the working population, engaged in textile manufacture.

A brief description of the technicalities of flax and jute spinning may be of interest. Jute, flax and hemp are fibres obtained from the stems of plants. They are strong but elastic and in their raw state are like long woody ribbons. Considerable effort is needed to prepare the fibres for spinning. They have to be softened, spread, carded to align the fibres and then spun. This all required a varied range of buildings and Dundee developed some of the greatest textile complexes in Britain.

While the materials they worked were cheap and coarse the mills were often magnificent and many are amongst the finest examples of industrial architecture in Britain, with pride of place going to the massive Camperdown Works. There were many technical and social innovations. The use of cast iron in decorative forms is superb. The buildings ancillary to the main mills such as boilerhouses and offices are often spectacular. Remnants of these are preserved at Camperdown Works and there is, of course, Cox's stack, Dundee's great landmark, the finest chimney in Scotland and arguably the best in the UK.

Social developments such as part-time schools, workers' housing and the provision of city parks by the "Jute Barons" were important steps in the social reform of the times. In Lochee the

part-time school still stands in Bright Street. Lochee Park was a gift from the Cox family.

The greatest of the jute works was Camperdown Works at Lochee. Construction of the works as we know it began in 1850, on the north side of the Lochee Burn (Burnside Street is the clue to where this was). By 1878 it consumed an eighth of the total jute importation into Dundee, had its own branch railway (the railway warehouses have been converted into flats and sports club Polysport), made its own machinery, had its own timber yard, stables and paddock for the horses. By the turn of the century it employed 5,000 people on a 35 acre (14.5 hectare) site. The complex was laid out on a regular grid pattern, which, compared with Dens Works, appears very efficient. The dramatic changes in level were used to effect, for instance with the way the railway was able to drop coal into the bunkers to feed the boiler range. The model in the museum at the McManus Gallery shows this well and is worth a visit. There was great ingenuity employed in the structures and water storage system and in the detailing, but it is perhaps the High Mill and Cox's Stack which capture the imagination.

In many ways the high Mill was the greatest Victorian textile mill in Scotland. Perhaps Tay Works or Paisley's Ferguslie Mill could dispute the title having more striking exteriors, but those internal spaces are eclipsed by Camperdown. The High Mill was built between 1857 and 1868. It is 430 ft (131 metres) long, has three storeys and attics on its north elevation set off by two five-bay pediments, leading the eye towards Cox's Stack, a 100 ft (30 metres) tall clock tower with big cast iron domed bellcote. All of this is crowned by the exuberant chimney stack, built to remind their competitors in Dundee of their presence in Lochee in 1865-6 by replacing three chimneys with one stack of stupendous size. It is 282 ft (86 metres) tall (now a little less because of a lightning strike) polychrome red, white and black brick campanile based on Italian cathedral campanile. It was then a magnificent example of one of the world's first

fully integrated industrial complexes.

Sadly, like many other jute mills, by 1980 it was redundant, through the almost terminal decline of Dundee's traditional industry. Most jute production is now carried out in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Derelict works



## The Demise of Camperdown Works

Mill complexes like this and buildings with lots of iron columns are of little interest to modern industry whose main requirements are based on manoeuvring articulated lorries and fork-lift trucks. Therefore, alternative uses had to be found. These had to be uses which could generate enough money to overcome the problems associated with such a complex - underground ducts, difficult changes in level, old ponds - and which could restore and convert some of the interesting buildings listed as being of architectural or historic interest.

The Council saw Camperdown Works as another, albeit grand, opportunity to help regenerate older Dundee. Similar to other redundant jute works it was included in the Inner City Local Plan for housing with parkland around the Stack.

The plan sought to secure some industry on Harefield Road and also stipulated that there should be included sheltered flats for elderly people and family houses with gardens, as well as flats. Research showed that many people did want houses in the inner city, and that in

fact 90% of the housing stock of inner Dundee is flats, which does not offer much choice. However, this was just a plan.

The Council was not in a position to either buy or develop the complex itself. The scale of regeneration the inner city needed during the 1970s was considerable, and the Council did not have resources to deal with this on its own. What the Council had to do was to help create a climate in which developers would be keen to invest in the older areas and in which people would be happy to live. Most new developments during the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s were on the edge of town, and allied with the decline of older industry, left a depressing environment in the older areas. To rectify this the Council adopted a simple, practical policy:

- Recreate the close grained appeal of the inner city, with small scale industry close to housing areas, and supporting the variety of local shopping areas.
- Root new development in the past by keeping and working around serviceable old property.
- Use publicly funded new development to create confidence.
- Spend public money on environmental improvements that are of lasting quality, that will encourage people to invest their lives in that area.

To achieve this the Council bought smaller scale derelict property and demolished it either for environmental work or to sell on to others as development sites. Meanwhile, Camperdown Works was languishing and festering because of its size. In 1985 an English demolition contractor bought the property and demolished the buildings which were not listed and left the site in a terrible mess. Vandals made the situation worse. The new owner hoped also to profit from the sale of the site. During 1986-9 various architects and developers brought forward

schemes which mainly involved filling the site with supermarkets and retail warehouses. Not only was this against the Council's policies but there was no respect for the heritage of the site and there was no serious desire to rescue most of the important buildings.

Plan of the development



## The Rebirth of Camperdown Works

In 1990 good fortune befell the site, when local developer Mr Michael Johnston, purchased most of what is the current redevelopment site and determined to achieve a useful comprehensive development. His first thought was to have a few warehouses (not retail warehouses) along Harefield Road with housing on the remainder (March 1990). Then he thought there might be an opportunity to develop leisure uses instead of warehousing. Although not exactly what the Council originally had in mind it was not against major policies and was imaginative. Outline planning consent was granted (June 1990). Detailed consent for the Megabowl, nightclub and bar was then granted, following extensive discussions on how to give the imposing High Mill and Cox's Stack the best setting and how to not prejudice the potential to involve another listed building, the Calender Works (now Tesco supermarket), in the development (this was not then part of the site and was still in use by Sidlaw Industries, September 1990). Meanwhile, Mr Johnston negotiated the sale of

ground at Camperdown Street and Burnside Street to two local housing associations and builders for housing development and purchased the High Mill to develop as flats by his own company. He then purchased the former Calender buildings at Methven Street and the former stables and paddock which were not part of the original development site, and persuaded Wm Low to be part of the grant redevelopment. This was acceptable because Methven Street adjoins the High Street where retailing is encouraged.

Further planning consents rapidly followed:

D16052	Consent for Bingo Hall	(March 1991)
D15966	Consent for supermarket (Tesco) (Nightclub, fast food, etc)	(March 1991)
D16502	Consent for new housing for rent, Site 2, Burnside Street 64 houses and flats and conversion of railway warehouses to flats for sale, Site 3, 36 flats (Cleghorn Housing Association)	(November 1991)
D16501	Consent for conversion of the High Mill into 85 flats and for the development of parkland (Cox Johnston Ltd)(December 1991) Consent for private housing Site 4 Wellbank Lane, 100 houses and flats	(December 1991)
D16653	Consent for Multi-screen cinemas	(February 1992)
D16890	Consent for 51 houses at Site 4a	(December 1991)
D18874	Consent for 42 houses at Site 4b	(December 1993)

This was one of the biggest and most complex redevelopment projects the city had encountered and the pace of design and planning applications was intensive. Behind the rapid pace were a few serious negotiations, the most important of which was trying to start the rehabilitation of the High Mill to the development of the cinema to ensure the most important part of the jigsaw did happen. However, the process was relatively painless because the quality of what was being proposed was good, imaginative and resulted in the variety and close grain referred to earlier.

The fact that the developer had the foresight to engage a good firm of architects, James F Stephen, Architects, and insist they were used

for each development, should not be underestimated. As a result of this the cohesion of the development is evident. Architecturally the significant points to note are the references to the heritage of the site. There is the re-use of the high Mill, the railway warehouses and the former Calender building (supermarket). There is the retention of part of the office building and gate lodge wall forming a courtyard to the sheltered flats along with the works gate piers and the way the warden's house at the sheltered flats acts in the same way as the gate lodge did. In the parkland area the stack has a good setting and the boiler range arches and part of the railway bridge abutments serve to remind us of the way the site was used. Some of the cast iron columns form a gateway.

Along Burnside Street the former high stone wall has been built into the gables of the houses there reflecting the fact that originally factory buildings did likewise. The big leisure buildings are simple but elegant and have an appropriate industrial scale and the brickwork reflects the polychrome patterns found on the stack. Similarly, in the new housing you can find a sequence of patterns taken from the stack.

The new development



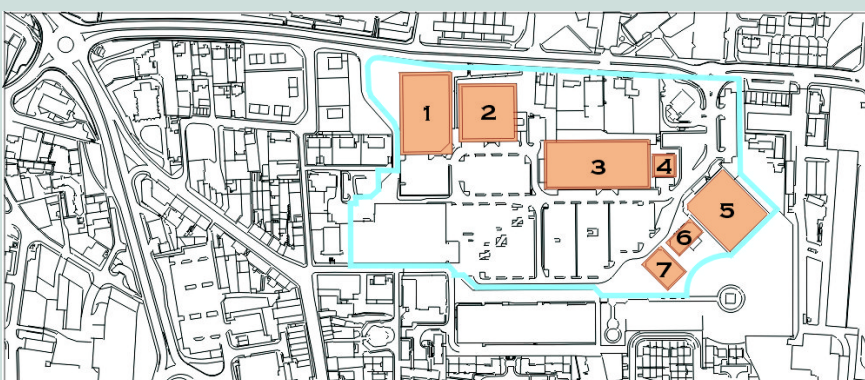
## The Impact of the Redevelopment on the City

What is the redevelopment doing for the locality? There is no doubt there is an increasing vitality in Lochee. Many people from elsewhere visit to enjoy the leisure activities and supermarket. The new residents will increase the local spending power helping shops survive. Choice of housing is being greatly improved with houses and flats to rent and to buy, and with excellent provision for elderly people and for some people confined to wheelchairs.

Although the housing and parkland development has required grant assistance from Scottish Homes the end result is a development which should help sustain the locality and is a first class example of sensitive and sensible redevelopment and of making a place for people to stay.

One worrying trend has seen the vacancy rates within the Stack Leisure Park increase dramatically. Only the Bingo and Bowling facilities remain open. The remaining five units are closed. Whether this is a temporary situation, only time will tell.

Plan showing vacancies within the leisure park



### The Stack Leisure Park

Map Ref. (No38083175)

- 1. Vacant Unit
- 2. Gala Bingo
- 3. Megabowl Bowling
- 4. Vacant Unit
- 5. Vacant Unit
- 6. Vacant Unit
- 7. Vacant Unit

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