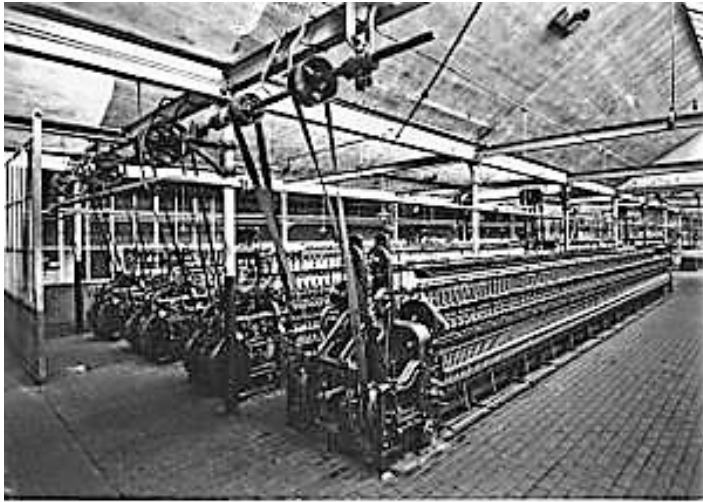




Family History Tourism – Episode 4

The Last Cockshutt
Cotton Mill -
Penwortham

“Ted” E.D.H. Flack PhD., JP.

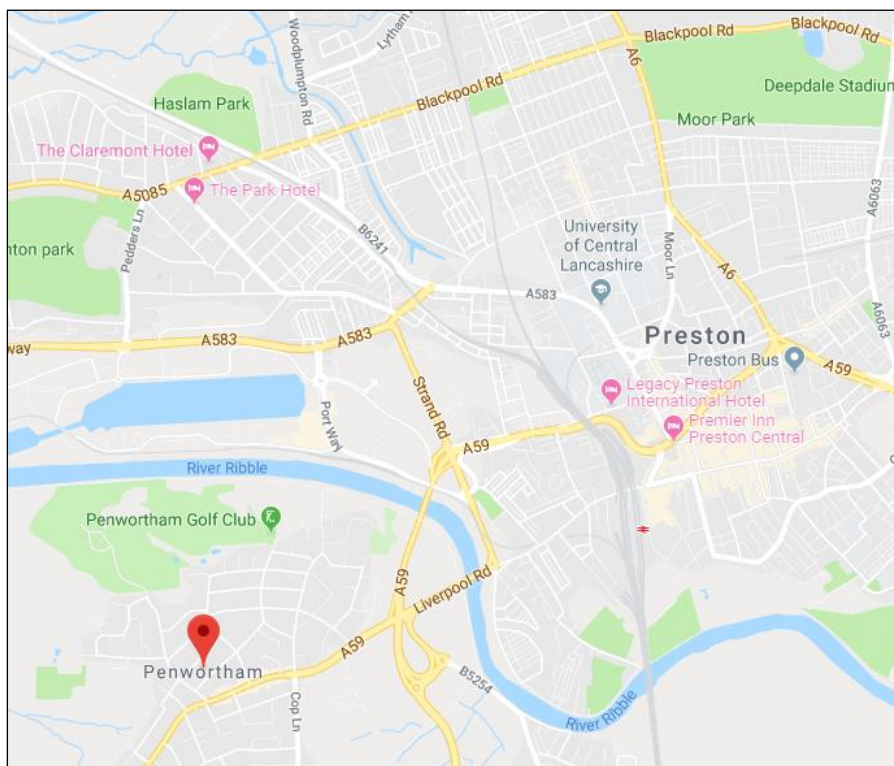
Family History Tourism – Episode 4 The Last Cockshutt Cotton Mill

I remember in the late 1950's my Great Uncle Edmund Cockshutt telling me that the Cockshutt family had always been in textiles. He said that he had been involved in the silk industry in Macclesfield and that his grandfather had owned a cotton mill. He said that his Grandfather, Joshua Cockshutt (1840-1916) was the last generation of Cockshutts who were engaged in the cotton industry.

In researching my Cockshutt family history (see <https://goo.gl/FNA9QN>), it was found that Great Uncle Edmund Cockshutt's grandfather Joshua Cockshutt was the son of Edmund Cockshutt (1809-1871) and Elizabeth (known as "Betty") Cockshutt nee Ashton. Although born at Ball Grove in Colne in 1840, within a year of his birth Joshua's family is recorded in the 1841 Census as living in Preston. It appears that Joshua's father, Edmund Cockshutt (1809-1871) was managing the Cockshutt family engineering business in Preston.

It seems that the family had retained a financial interest in Ball Grove and Bough Gap Mills via a trust arrangement set up in 1825 following the death of Edmund Cockshutt "The Younger" (1779-1825), Joshua's grandfather, which was the subject of prolonged legal disputes that were not finally settled until 1850.

Subsequently, Joshua's father's engineering business in Preston prospered, no doubt assisted by the family's many connections with the booming cotton industry in Lancashire. By the time the legal dispute had been settled, Joshua had taken over management of the business from his father and Edmund, his father, was able to reinvest in the cotton industry by purchasing an interest in Penwortham Cotton Mill in Preston.

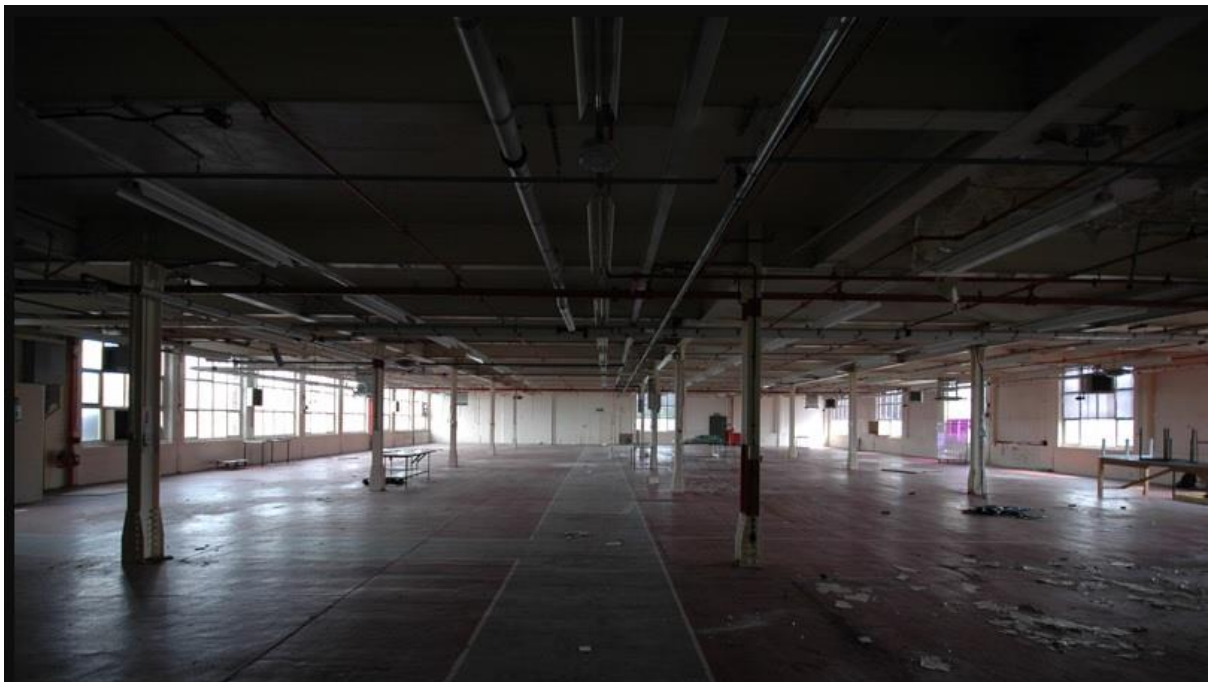


So on our recent trip to Europe and the UK in the 2018 northern summer, Penwortham Cotton Mill was on our itinerary. We had booked to stay in Preston for the weekend 30th August – 2nd September and having booked into the Claremont Hotel by midday, we set off to find the mill.

Our satellite navigation system quickly took us to the site and although it was closed to the public, we were able to get a good look around the deserted buildings.



Although deserted, the interior of the main mill buildings is in surprisingly good condition as shown in this recent photograph.



This aerial photograph copied from Google provides an overview of the site.



Former Vernon Carus Factory, Factory Lane, Penwortham

The following is an extract from the entry for Walton - Penwortham Mill in Historic England.

Cotton Spinning mill established by John Watson as a water-powered mill on the River Lostock sometime prior to 1791; John Watson insured a new carding and spinning room at Walton-le-Dale in 1796. By 1807 John Watson was forced to close the mill due to bankruptcy. The mill was advertised to let with 15,000 spindles during the following year. Cooper and Sherrington occupied the mill briefly before it was up for let again in May 1811, together with full machinery which was ready for immediate use.

In 1825 the mill was being run by Thomas German & Co, which later became known as German & Petty. The mill was advertised for let in 1833, and was described as being powered by a steam engine of 36hp, all the machinery required for cotton spinning, a gas house, apparatus, and 51 cottages. In addition, the factory was supplied by an inexhaustible supply of water from a reservoir of eight acres.

The mill is recorded as the Walton Factory (Cotton) on the Ordnance Survey first edition 1:10,560 map of 1848. Sometime around 1860 Edmund Cockshutt occupied the mill, during this time an engine house with boiler and chimney were added, and later still, the present outbuildings were erected to cope with the increased trade.

By 1891, the factory contained 25,000 spindles, and produced 40s/60s twist and weft, and was occupied by Joshua Cockshutt. By 1910 the mill had changed hands to Vernon & Co Ltd, Cotton Spinners and Manufacturers of surgical dressings. Vernon & Co enlarged the complex during 1920, and the mill now occupies 2.28 acres.

The mill buildings are extant, but at the time of the survey visit, in 2008-10, they were derelict. The surviving buildings appear to be largely of late nineteenth or twentieth century date.

The history of Penwortham Mill is not without its darker episodes. It appears that during the early years of the mill's operations, the owners purchased large numbers of children from workhouses and orphanages in all the larger towns and cities, including London. By the late 1790s, about a third of the workers in the cotton industry were children and known as pauper apprentices.

However Britain was the first to pass laws regulating child labour. From 1802 to 1878, a series of laws gradually shortened the working hours, improved the conditions, and raised the age at which children could work.

As we left the site to return to our hotel, two thoughts crossed my mind:

- The factory was huge despite only the main building remaining even after much of the complex had been demolished;
- A forlorn hope that the proposed redevelopment of the factory building into flats might save something of the old Mill.

It had been a great experience to visit the Mill where my 3*great grandfather, Joshua Cockshutt, had been "the last of the Cotton spinners" in our family.