



#### THE CRESSBROOK MILLS

1. The Arkwrights' second mill (marked by X) built on Newton's foundations.
2. Wye mill — the big mill built 1814-16.
3. Cressbrook mill — the small mill (on the extreme right) built 1822-3.

# CRESSBROOK AND LITTON MILLS

1779-1835

## PART I

By M. H. MACKENZIE

SERIOUS study of Cressbrook and Litton mills has been bedevilled by two of the sources. The names of these mills are still evocative and bring to our minds Robert Blincoe's *Memoir*<sup>1</sup> and Anna Seward's *Letters*.<sup>2</sup> The style of neither publication is calculated to appeal to 20th-century readers: the Dickensian pathos and tedious repetition of the *Memoir* and the studied circumlocution of the *Letters* irritate us, but, having read them, it is difficult to be impartial. Ellis Needham remains the monster, who ill-treated parish apprentices, and Anna Seward the patroness of William Newton, whom she discovered in the cotton mill at Cressbrook. This was the effect the authors intended. The *Memoir* was propaganda on behalf of the factory act of 1833, and the letters and poems were selected for publication by Anna Seward during the last two years of her life to establish her posthumous reputation as a literary genius. It is now realized that this material is tendentious. In November 1941 James L. Clifford challenged the authenticity of Anna Seward's published correspondence.<sup>3</sup> A comparison of some surviving originals with the printed version shows that, for publication, she altered dates and interpolated sentences. There are no means of telling if the letters and references to William Newton are genuine, but it is clear that she was only interested in his activities from 1783-1795, because, within this period, there were certain situations in which she could appear to advantage.<sup>4</sup> Very little is known about his life from 1800 to 1810, except that these were hard years. Anna Seward kept in touch with him up to her death in March 1809,<sup>5</sup> but she has given us nothing about his whereabouts, failures and disappointments. Dr. Chapman in his recent book<sup>6</sup> has argued that the *Memoir* was

<sup>1</sup> John Brown, *A Memoir of Robert Blincoe*, pub. J. Doherty, Manchester, 1832. In this article references are to the edition published by the Local History Section of the Society in 1966.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Anna Seward*, 6 vols. Constable, Edinburgh, 1811.

<sup>3</sup> James L. Clifford, "The Authenticity of Anna Seward's published correspondence", *Modern Philology*, November 1941.

<sup>4</sup> Anna Seward, *Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1785; *Letters* I, xxl, xlix, lxiii; II, xvii, xxix, xl; III, lxxiv; IV, xxvi.

<sup>5</sup> Bateman, *Commonplace Book*, MSS. 3460, Derby Borough Library. The following abbreviations are used hereafter: Derby Borough Library (D.B.L.), Derbyshire Record Office (D.R.O.), Sheffield Central Library (S.C.L.), Manchester Central Library (M.C.L.), *Derbyshire Mercury* (D.M.).

<sup>6</sup> S. D. Chapman, *The Early Factory Masters*, 1967, 199-209.

a malicious attack on Ellis Needham, who was neither better nor worse than the managers in neighbouring cotton mills, and that the unstable John Brown was not an impartial amanuensis to the illiterate Blincoe. While disagreeing with the author's attempts to rehabilitate Ellis Needham's reputation by the denigration of Barker Bossley's management at Cressbrook, I entirely agree that this evidence should be examined objectively. A third source that requires some comment is parson Brown's diary.<sup>7</sup> From 1780 to 1796 the Reverend Thomas Brown was, in turn, curate of Tideswell, Wormhill and Taxal and from 1796 to 1836 vicar of Tideswell. He taught for some years at Wormhill and from 1790 to 1832 was master of the free grammar school of Tideswell. Between 1785 and 1799 he kept a diary, which is a valuable source of information, for he knew the mill managers and business men personally. Unfortunately volumes 1 to 7 and volume 12 have been mislaid. Other sources do not require any special comment, except that only one book of accounts has survived<sup>8</sup> and no articles of agreement.

The first chapter in the history of Cressbrook is short, but the chain of events which led up to its opening is complicated and must be considered briefly, in particular the effects of the enclosure of the manor of Litton on the district, the problems of dating the mill and of organizing a labour force in this isolated district and William Newton's early life.

William Bray in the first edition of his *Tour into Derbyshire and Yorkshire*<sup>9</sup> in 1778 noted that the countryside round Tideswell was "bleak, open and bare of trees" and that, except for a large church, the town was meanly built. He had taken the road from Middleton Dale over the moors. But Tideswell was not poor: the district had depended for its prosperity on lead and wool, and in that order, but from 1750 onwards textiles were becoming more important. In the parish registers the numbers of weavers, flaxdressers, woolcombers and framework knitters increase and, after 1783, the names of fustian cutters appear.

The outlying village of Litton had taken the lead in this development and had become a progressive community of hosiers. Since 1700 the lords of the manor of Litton had enforced a policy of enclosure, designed to put a stop to the further deterioration of grazing land and to the loss of sheep on the extensive commons. The freeholders agreed to the enclosure of commons and pasture:<sup>10</sup> in 1763 these changes were confirmed and the enclosure of the open fields was carried through by act of parliament.<sup>11</sup> As a result of the usual practice of exchange and consolidation, two large estates were formed, bordering on the river Wye. The land from Millers Dale to Water-cum-Jolly was allotted to Lord Scarsdale, the lord of the manor, and from Water-cum-Jolly to the junction of the Cressbrook and

<sup>7</sup> Rev. Thomas Brown, *Diaries 1785-1799*, S.C.L.

<sup>8</sup> Building accounts, Cressbrook, 1814-1816, D.R.O.

<sup>9</sup> William Bray, *Sketch of a Tour into Derbyshire and Yorkshire*, 1778, 102.

<sup>10</sup> Bagshaw papers, 353 and 354, S.C.L. Bagshaw papers, 13/3/434, John Rylands Library, Manchester.

<sup>11</sup> Enclosure award, Cressbrook papers, D.R.O.

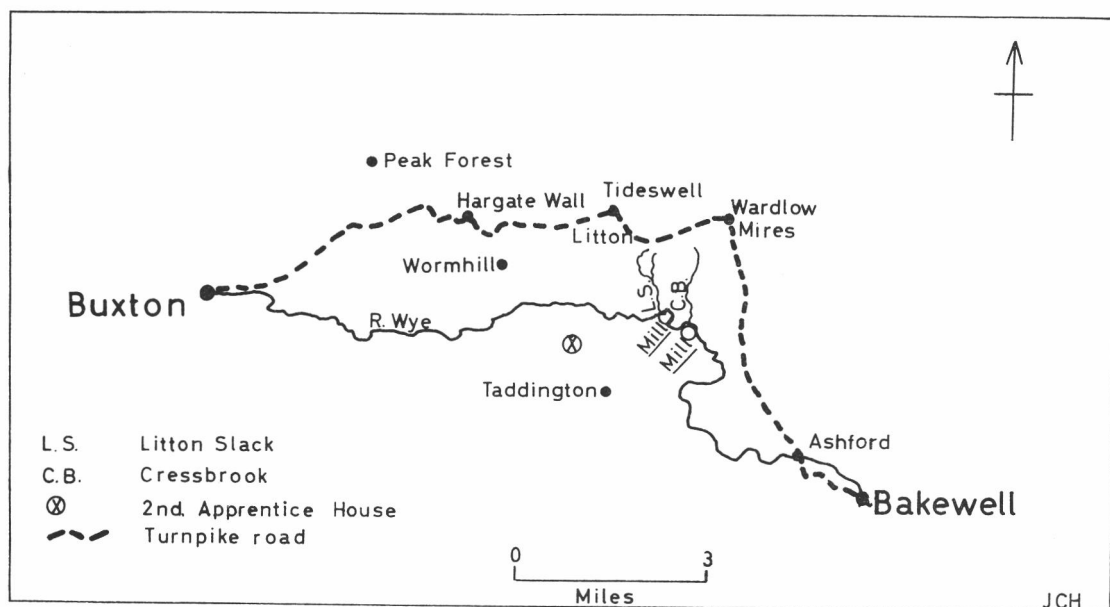


FIG. 1. The location of the mills.

the Wye to John Baker, gentleman. John Baker's land was called Litton Frith, and, as the name indicates, was woodland. This article is concerned with these two allotments, for it was here that the cotton mills of Litton and Cressbrook were sited. John Baker was the head of a large family of hosiers. As a young man he had been John Gardom's partner<sup>12</sup> and owned the little stocking factory behind Litton church, referred to in the Tideswell parish register as the "Litton frameknittery". At some date they dissolved partnership; John Gardom to work with his three sons and eventually to build Calver mill, John Baker to open up commercial interests in Manchester and Liverpool, and to develop the Frith.<sup>13</sup> The valley of the Cressbrook is deep and sheltered, and had become overgrown. John Baker began to tackle the problem of the undergrowth and cultivated watercress beds in the stream so successfully, that the name Cressbrook began to supersede the older name of Grassbrook. Between the rocks on the hill-side he planted fruit and filbert trees, and on the flatter ground, which slopes down to the river Wye, beds of lavender and peppermint. But the greatest attraction was his new house, "three Stories high, built under a beautiful Concave Rock, forming a complete Roof, which adds greatly to the romantick Scene".<sup>14</sup> There is a rock by the Wye mill dam which answers to this description, but today there is no trace of a house.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> M. H. Mackenzie, "Calver mill and its owners", *D.A.J.*, LXXXIII (1963), 24-34.

<sup>13</sup> Petition of John Baker, 10 November 1769, no. 47. Will of John Baker, 12 June 1778, Cressbrook papers, D.R.O.

<sup>14</sup> *D.M.*, 10 August 1786.

<sup>15</sup> It was probably demolished when the dam was built.



These improvements had involved John Baker in debt. As a long-term policy, he hoped that on his death one of his two elder sons, Joseph or Edmund, would purchase the freehold of the Frith for £3,000, so that his debts and bequests to his family could be paid. As a short-term policy, he had erected a distillery to exploit the aromatic herbs commercially, and was letting out the Frith to tenants.<sup>16</sup>

The names of Richard Arkwright, esquire, and Ellis Needham, gentleman, appear in the list of tenants. The year 1784 is given for the Needham lease, but there is no date for the Arkwright lease,<sup>17</sup> yet it has always been assumed that Cressbrook mill was built in 1779. Arkwright may have signed the lease in 1779, and, as in the case of the Bakewell lease, he was sufficiently important for the matter to be discussed in the district, but for the following reasons 1783 seems a more likely date for the construction of the mill. Firstly, Cressbrook is not mentioned in the insurance policies, which Arkwright took out with the Royal Exchange on 18 February 1779 or 3 April 1783. The first date is too early, but, if built, it would almost certainly have been included under the second date. Secondly, the Arkwrights chose a site on the tributary and not on the main river. In this part of the Wye the water rights and the opposite bank belonged to the duke of Devonshire. By 1783 the quarrel at Bakewell between the duke of Rutland and the Arkwrights over water rights had become very serious, so that it is understandable that they chose a site, which would not bring them into conflict with ducal claims.<sup>18</sup> Thirdly, we now know that William Newton built the first mill at Cressbrook. In a letter of 2 February 1811 to his friend, James Montgomery, editor of the *Sheffield Iris*, he gave his address as "Cressbrook Mill, near Tideswell" and wrote: "After much touring about into a variety of places & societies — a great deal of troubles and disappointments I am again settled *here*: in the Mill I originally constructed and worked till it was destroyed by fire about twenty six years ago".<sup>19</sup> In 1780 he was engaged as one of the duke of Devonshire's head carpenters at the Crescent, Buxton, and presumably was employed there for some time.<sup>20</sup> He would not have been free to work for the Arkwrights until some date after 1780. Fourthly, Bray published the second edition of his *Tour into Derbyshire and Yorkshire* in 1783, and was collecting material in 1780: he was impressed by the scale of the duke's development plans at Buxton.<sup>21</sup> This time he approached the Tideswell district from Monsal Dale, and wrote an accurate description of John Baker's improvements, but he did not mention a cotton mill. If it had been built, he could not have failed to notice it, because the site was so near the peppermint and lavender beds. Pilkington gives an even fuller account of the improvements in the Frith, but it does not help, because the date

<sup>16</sup> Bray, 1783 ed., 158. There was always a market for lavender and peppermint. cf. *D.M.*, 9 July 1801.

<sup>17</sup> Release to Richard Arkwright, 6 October 1787, D.R.O.

<sup>18</sup> M. H. Mackenzie, "Bakewell cotton mill and the Arkwrights", *D.A.J.*, LXXIX (1959), 61-79.

<sup>19</sup> W. Newton, Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society, 36-226, S.C.L.

<sup>20</sup> J. M. J. Fletcher, "William Newton, the minstrel of the Peak", *D.A.J.*, XXXIV (1912), 162.

<sup>21</sup> Bray, 1783, 230.

of these observations is not known. Again there is no mention of a cotton mill.<sup>22</sup>

From the beginning Cressbrook had to depend on parish apprentices in view of the isolation of the site and the nature of the country. This may not always have been the case at Litton. Until Henry McConnel in the 1850s made the outer road to Tideswell with its gentler gradients, pedestrians and cotton-carts had to take the steep track over the top. There was a road to Bakewell, and, as long as the Arkwrights directly or indirectly owned Cressbrook, it was linked with Bakewell.<sup>23</sup> Ashford and Longstone could supply the mill with a few adult workers, but not with children in sufficient numbers. Giving evidence before the Select Committee of 1816, the second Richard Arkwright said: "I never had any apprentices of my own: but in one of those mills with which I was connected, there were about fifty or sixty at the most." Clearly he was referring to Cressbrook.<sup>24</sup>

From the middle of the 18th century, enlightened opinion was beginning to realize that parish apprentices were the most defenceless section of the community. Quarter sessions dealt severely with proved cases of cruelty, but these good intentions were frustrated, because the overseers of the poor could persuade any two of these same justices to bind a child, without making adequate enquiries as to the character of the master. The system was distorted in the 1780s, when wagon loads of pauper children from orphanages and workhouses in London and the south were transported to the water-powered cotton mills of the north. It could be argued that young workers were taken from areas, where they were redundant, to areas where they were needed. This was true, and it was also true that there were many responsible masters, but the system was abused by bad employers, seeking cheap labour. The hazards of the carding room were common to good and bad mills. The second Richard Arkwright was one of the first mill-owners to tackle this problem, but cotton flue for a long time took its toll of those apprentices, who were subject to lung complaints.

It was with parish apprentices that William Newton ran Cressbrook mill. We may ask why this comparatively young man — he was thirty years old when he went to the Crescent — had been selected to work for the duke of Devonshire and the Arkwrights. The story of his early life has been dramatized by Anna Seward and told more factually by Canon Fletcher.<sup>25</sup> William, born on 28 November 1750, was the only son of George Newton of Cockey Farm in the parish of Hope by his second marriage. George Newton's working life must have followed the pattern usual for a husbandman: he would farm his holding in the summer and follow his craft in the winter. A joiner by trade, he specialized in the

<sup>22</sup> J. Pilkington, *A view of the present state of Derbyshire*, I, 1789, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Litton enclosure map, 1764, D.R.O.

<sup>24</sup> Report of the minutes of evidence taken before the Select Committee on the state of the children employed in manufactories of the United Kingdom, 1816, 277.

<sup>25</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1785; *D.A.J.*, XXXIV (1912), 161-80.

making and repairing of spinning wheels, and there is a tradition that he himself was a spinner. He could only afford to give his son the minimum of education: the boy may have learnt to read in the dame's school, but it was to the writing master in a Sunday school that he owed a great deal. In 1790 William Newton wrote "Lines occasioned by Sir Richard Arkwright's Institution of a Sunday School at Cromford, written by one educated in a similar Seminary."<sup>26</sup> In later life he always considered the establishment of Sunday schools the most practical method of making the basic skills of reading and writing available to the illiterate. The young William learnt his carpentry from his father, and there was something else he learnt at Cockey farm, gentle manners. A friend described the Newtons as "a very nice family". The training of a joiner offered scope to a craftsman, particularly in that district and at that time: there were the ordinary carpenter's jobs and the specialized work of a framesmith or millwright. Little is known about William Newton's youth, but Canon Fletcher states that, about the time of his marriage in 1778, he was working as a framesmith at Bradwell and Tideswell. There is a tradition that he "worked a mill" at Brough, which might mean that he employed a few spinners.<sup>27</sup> Already he had the reputation of being an excellent workman with a flair for invention, but he did not associate much with the young men of the village. He had a secret hobby, on which he spent his free time and spare cash. When working in the big houses of the district, he had found an opportunity to browse among the books. He could read and write and had enough education to realize what he had missed: he now undertook a severe course in self-tuition. When Peter Cunninghame, curate of Eyam, penetrated his secret in 1780, he had read widely in the English classics, had collected a number of books and was writing verse in imitation of Pope, who was his favourite author. Even if Anna Seward's ecstatic article in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for March 1785 was exaggerated, it was a great achievement. The Reverend Thomas Seward, rector of Eyam, had removed to Lichfield in 1754 on his appointment as residuary canon, but he and his daughter returned to Derbyshire for the summer months. In 1783 Cunninghame introduced Newton to them. It is difficult to see why Dr. Chapman doubts his outstanding ability as a framesmith. He did not meet Anna Seward until the summer of 1783, so her influence cannot explain his advancement from 1780 to 1783.<sup>28</sup>

Miss Mitford described Anna Seward as "all tinkling and tinsel, a sort of Dr. Darwin in petticoats".<sup>29</sup> Dr. Darwin and his coterie of affected admirers flattered her into believing that she was a poetess and distinguished writer. When after her death Sir Walter Scott reluctantly published three small volumes of her poems, he indicated in the preface,

<sup>26</sup> *Sheffield Register*, 10 December 1790.

<sup>27</sup> I am indebted to Mr J. Newton for this information. cf. Sterndale, *Sheffield Iris*, 13 November 1830.

<sup>28</sup> Chapman, 92.

<sup>29</sup> Mary R. Mitford, *Letters*, 2nd series, Chorley, I, 29.

as delicately as he could, that she had cherished an illusion.<sup>30</sup> Any advice she gave William Newton on literary style was bad and made his expression more formal and pedantic, but she gave him her friendship and this helped him immeasurably. Her heart was better than her head. She accepted him as he was, introduced him to her friends, invited him to stay with her at Lichfield and, when he was summarily dismissed from Cressbrook mill, it was Anna Seward who came to his rescue. The Lichfield set had all adopted fantastic nicknames: she gave William Newton two names, Edwin for her special use and the "Minstrel of the Peak" for general use.

### CRESSBROOK MILL 1783-1808

A very good idea of William Newton's mill is given by an old photograph of the second mill, which was built up after the fire on the original foundations. Its size was determined by the water supply provided by the Cressbrook, which is a small stream. It was, therefore, a three-storied building — that is three storeys above the ground floor, the third storey being lighted by skylights. William Newton was in charge, but it is not clear if he had the status of manager. According to Anna Seward "he was articled for seven years, upon a salary of £50 per annum, as machinery — carpenter in a cotton-mill, in beauteous Monsaldale".<sup>31</sup> This statement may be true, but in Anna Seward's fertile imagination it became the first link in a fantastic success story, which she planned for William Newton.

Cressbrook was a small mill: at a maximum there were only sixty apprentices, who lived in cottages nearby, and the surroundings were pleasant, but he found the post hard and tedious. He was flattered by the praise he received from his new friends and depressed by his first taste of factory life. At this date the Arkwrights worked their mills fourteen hours a day and all night. On 24 October 1784 he wrote to Anna Seward: "Expect not from me, my affectionate friend, either elegant prose or verse, who am confined fourteen hours each day to Mechanical drudgery in a — Cotton Mill; and months together enjoy not the conversation of one man of Letters or Taste; and, by some neglect of the person who serves me with the monthly review, I know nothing that happens in the Literary World."<sup>32</sup> He now felt that he belonged to the literary world, but he could only live in it morning and evening during the three-mile walk from and to Tideswell, where he rented a cottage.<sup>33</sup> On 15 November 1785 a fire swept through the mill at midnight, "occasioned," the *Derby Mercury* stated, "by a lighted Candle falling among some waste Cotton". Newton

<sup>30</sup> Anna Seward, *Poems*, ed. Sir Walter Scott, 1810; cf. *D.M.*, 13 April 1809.

<sup>31</sup> *Letters*, IV, 134, 9 December 1795.

<sup>32</sup> Fletcher, *D.A.F.*, XXXIV (1912), 166.

<sup>33</sup> M. Sterndale, *Sheffield Iris*, 9 November 1830.

was down at the mill at the time, did what he could and, according to Anna Seward, was nearly trapped by the flames.<sup>34</sup>

Arkwright held Newton responsible for the disaster, but the latter could not be in charge day and night and fire was a hazard every mill-owner had to accept. He was dismissed and given no compensation for his tools, which were valued at £30 and had taken some time to collect. This was unreasonable, but Richard Arkwright could be petulant and unreasonable. November 1785 was a bad month for him: he had finally lost his carding patent and now a cotton mill, which had only been in production for a short time and which was uninsured. From Anna Seward's correspondence it is clear that Newton thought this treatment very hard, but he did not bear malice against his former employer, because Arkwright promoted Sunday schools. In the future he was to establish friendly relations with the son. The next year he wrote a poem "On the burning of Grassbrook cotton mill, near Tideswell"; the terrified apprentices escaped in time and watched the machinery crash to the ground, as the floors burnt out. He added two verses of sympathy and good advice for Arkwright's benefit.<sup>35</sup>

For two years the Arkwrights did not rebuild Cressbrook mill, because the Bakers' affairs were in confusion. John Baker had died on 3 May 1783, but neither of his elder sons could apparently raise £3,000 for the purchase of the freehold of the Frith. On 10 and 24 August 1786, advertisements appeared in the *Derby Mercury* for the sale of the property and, by coincidence, of Litton mill. The improvements which John Baker had carried out were very cleverly presented, but in neither case was there an offer, or an offer worth accepting. It was very usual for a mill-owner to lease a site and, if it proved suitable, to buy it at a later date. This Arkwright now did on 6 October 1787.<sup>36</sup> Edmund Baker, hosier, could not purchase the Frith, but he was prepared to take a lease of the mill in a partnership with his brother-in-law, Barker Bossley, mercer. The Bossleys were an old-established Bakewell family and had wide interests: Alexander was an attorney of note, James and Barker were mercers and William was vicar of Chesterfield. Neither of the Cressbrook partners had worked in a cotton mill, but both had had experience in the textile trade.

The mill, when rebuilt, was the actual building in the photograph except that, when this was taken, the skylights of the spinning gallery had been removed and the roof slated over. The marks of the fire on the lower inner walls were still visible at the beginning of this century. There used to be two rows of cottages, parallel to each other and with four cottages in each row, which may have provided sleeping accommodation for the apprentices. Four children probably slept in a room and each cottage consisted of two rooms, which did not communicate. The ground-floor room was approached from the front of the cottage, but the only way

<sup>34</sup> *Letters*, IV, 134, 9 December 1795.

<sup>35</sup> Signed Corpret, *Sheffield Register*, 17 May 1788.

<sup>36</sup> Lease and release of freehold estate in Litton to Richard Arkwright, 5/6 October 1787, Cressbrook papers, D.R.O.

into the basement room was by an outside flight of steps at the back of the cottage. The eight apprentices could be locked up at night and could not concert plans of escape. This system may have been preferred to dormitories to ensure control of the children by a small resident staff. One of these cottages is still standing.

In 1792 Sir Richard Arkwright died, and the cotton mills passed to his son, who immediately disposed of the two small outlying mills at Cressbrook and Wirksworth.<sup>37</sup> He moved into Willersley, as soon as the damage caused by the fire had been made good, and his brother-in-law, Samuel Simpson, became manager at Bakewell and purchaser at Cressbrook. In 1793 the latter bought the freehold of Litton Frith for £3,100, including "all that Edifice or Building standing upon a part of the said Frith and lately erected for the purpose of Spinning Cotton Wool with several Out-buildings adjoining or standing near the same and now in the possession of the said Edmund Baker and Barker Bossley".<sup>38</sup> The firm seems to have been sufficiently prosperous to warrant expansion: Barker Bossley opened weaving sheds in Bakewell, nearly opposite the Arkwright cotton mill and conveniently placed on the road which led to Cressbrook.<sup>39</sup> Between 1796 and 1798 six parish apprentices from the poor law authorities of Ashover were bound to "Barker Bossley, Bakewell". He may have got all the labour he needed for his weaving sheds from this source. In 1805 he again applied to Ashover, when five of his apprentices at Cressbrook had died.<sup>40</sup> An entry in parson Brown's diary for 22 April 1797 shows how the partnership at Cressbrook worked. Accompanied by his son and one of his churchwardens, parson Brown was engaged in the congenial task of collecting his Easter dues: "We drank Tea at Mr. Edmd. Baker's at Cressbrook. Mr. Barker Bossley there." Edmund Baker was the resident manager, living in the house his father had built and, from time to time, Barker Bossley rode over from Bakewell. Two years later Edmund Baker became ill and had to give up the management of Cressbrook and sell the contents of his house. Parson Brown and his wife, who were furnishing the vicarage, never missed a bargain and now bought up books, linen, china and furniture. "I went over to Litton to see Mr. Edm<sup>d</sup> Baker who is poorly," parson Brown wrote on 17 August 1799, "I drank Tea and supped at Mr. Fras. Baker's, where Mr. Edmd. boards etc. . . . Let Ed. Baker have a Bottle of Red Wine." Edmund Baker seems to have been in straitened circumstances, for he asked the Browns to take a quantity of linen yarn. They did take it, but they did not pay much for it, because it was of poor quality.<sup>41</sup> Linen yarn would be a side line at Cressbrook, but this incident makes us wonder if the cotton yarn was up to standard.

<sup>37</sup> Arkwright sold to Mr. Eley, Land tax assessment, 1794, D.R.O.

<sup>38</sup> Conveyance by release to Samuel Simpson, 23 March 1793, Cressbrook papers, D.R.O.

<sup>39</sup> In some deeds of 1802 Barker Bossley is described as "calico manufacturer of Bakewell". Bar. D. 177, Bar. D. 302, S.C.L.

<sup>40</sup> Ashover poor law records, D.R.O.

<sup>41</sup> Diary, 26 July, 1, 7 October, 22 November, 20 December 1799.



Edmund Baker had been the leading partner, but after his retirement the firm is always referred to as "Barker Bossley & Co."<sup>42</sup> There is no evidence about how many partners there were or the amount of their shares, but from 1800 to the bankruptcy in 1808 it is clear that the mill was struggling. In 1802 Barker Bossley was raising money on his property in Bakewell.<sup>43</sup> Supervision may have been slack: in 1806 two apprentices absconded "from their servitude at Cressbrook Cotton Mill near Bakewell".<sup>44</sup> From 1787 to 1802 no deaths were recorded in the Tideswell register, but between 1803 and 1806 six apprentices died.

Against this background Dr. Chapman's criticisms must be considered. He is concerned to show that conditions at Cressbrook and Litton were not very different. He writes: "Some time after the Cressbrook mill was burned down, the site was purchased by a firm called Barker Bossley & Co. The managing partner of this enterprise was William Newton (1750-1830), a Tideswell machine builder."<sup>45</sup> Dr. Chapman's facts are wrong: Edmund Baker and Barker Bossley were, in turn, tenants of Sir Richard Arkwright, of his son and of Samuel Simpson, and William Newton's letter on 2 February 1811 to James Montgomery proves that he was not at Cressbrook from November 1785 to May 1810. Then follows an analysis of the mortality of apprentices at Cressbrook and Litton mills between the years 1780 and 1810: the number of deaths in both mills is given as six. A comparison is suggested, but statistically this use of figures is invalid,<sup>46</sup> because at present accurate information as to the total number of years or apprentices involved is not available. It can be ascertained from parish registers that 27 parish apprentices from Litton mill died between 1780 and 1810: Wormhill 1, Tideswell 5, Taddington 21. The statements in the *Memoir* about the mortality rate are so palpably exaggerated that they do not merit consideration, but Dr. Chapman's presentation of deaths gives a wrong impression. He continues: "A cripple child employed there (Cressbrook) in 1800 was beaten by the overlooker and ran away, and there is no reason to suppose that this instance of corporal punishment was unique. In 1807 Cressbrook was reported as being dirty . . ." There are two allegations here — the beating of a cripple and the dirty state of the mill in 1807. It is convenient to discuss the second point first.

In 1802 the Health and Morals of Apprentices Act was passed by which Sir Robert Peel sought to establish minimum conditions in cotton factories, which employed three or more parish apprentices. The following were the most important terms: work-rooms were to be whitewashed twice a year and properly ventilated; working hours were limited to twelve a day; night-work was to be abolished; apprentices were to be instructed daily in the 3Rs and to be taken to church or chapel at least once a month,

<sup>42</sup> Land tax, D.R.O.

<sup>43</sup> Bar. D. 177, 301, 302, S.C.L.

<sup>44</sup> D.M., 29 May 1806.

<sup>45</sup> Chapman, 206.

<sup>46</sup> I am indebted for this critique to Dr. Jean Firth, the University of Newcastle upon Tyne.



separate sleeping accommodation was to be provided for boys and girls; and visitors (a J.P. and a clergyman) were to inspect the mills and send their reports to quarter sessions. A good first charter for parish apprentices, but J.P.s did not like their rôle, bad mills could evade and in good or bad mills up to 1833 daily education was the principal casualty. Joshua Denham, J.P., visited Cressbrook in 1807, and on 1 August sent in his report for the five cotton mills of the High Peak. With regard to Bakewell, Calver and Eyam, which employed free labour, he was only concerned with cleanliness and ventilation, but, in Cressbrook and Litton, he had to find out if the requirements of the new code were observed. The report on Cressbrook was as follows: "This is a small concern. The mill is not in so exact a state as might be wished, particularly as to the cleanliness of the floors. There are about thirty apprentices, male and female, belonging to the mill, for whom there are separate apartments in a lodging-house a short distance from the mill. The apartments, though small, are clean, not crowded, and apparently well conducted."<sup>47</sup> Dr. Chapman has given the adverse and omitted the favourable comment. The floors of the mill were dirty, but the lodging-house for the apprentices was clean and well run: both facts should be stated. Are we to assume that the other provisions of the 1802 act, if not mentioned, were enforced? From the report on Litton mill this could be the case, and it may be that Barker Bossley can be credited with the abolition of night-work and the introduction of the twelve-hour day, but there is no definite evidence. There is also no information about diet or education. The six deaths may have been due to generally dirty conditions and the accumulations of flue in the carding room.

When all the facts are stated, Barker Bossley comes out of the case of "the cripple child" as a good employer. The following account is taken from a book of settlement papers.<sup>48</sup> At the time when William Williamson, the apprentice in question, was beaten and ran away to his home in Staffordshire, there is no suggestion that he was a cripple. The overseer took the boy back to Cressbrook mill and a fortnight later Barker Bossley called him into the counting house and read to him the terms of apprenticeship. "He asked the examinant if he was satisfied and said he would be a good master, if he would be a good boy, which the examinant promised and to attend to his work . . . about five years afterwards Messrs. B. Bossley & Co. failed and the whole works were stopped . . ." Barker Bossley would have assigned him to another master, but the boy had become a cripple and his mother sent word that she would find him work. Barker Bossley paid Williamson 3s. to return home and allowed him 1s. 6d. for 64 weeks, when he could not afford further payments.

Of the twenty-one years Barker Bossley spent in the Cressbrook partnership fifteen were war years and, with three businesses to manage,

<sup>47</sup> Lords papers, 1819, III (66), appendix G, 48.

<sup>48</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., vol. 15, MSS. 3560, no. 43.

his resources were probably too slender to enable a small cotton mill to survive in a period of rising prices and taxation. The inefficiency that is all too plain at the end was probably due to the lack of a resident manager, but it is pleasant to read that satisfactory standards were maintained in the apprentices' quarters and that the master felt a personal responsibility towards an apprentice, who had become lame in his employment. Some years later Barker Bossley moved to Macclesfield, where he died in November 1819, and the Reverend Francis Hodgson, vicar of Bakewell, added this thumb-nail sketch of the man in the burial register: "Barker Bossley Aged 68 Years he died at Sutton near Macclesfield on the 15th Inst. he had been a respectable Mercer & Draper in Bakewell a many years."<sup>49</sup>

### LITTON MILL 1782-1816

In 1781 Arkwright temporarily lost his carding patent, and in the next year the Litton mill company was founded. An advertisement of sale in the *Derby Mercury* of 10 August 1786 states that in 1782 Ellis Needham had taken a lease from Lord Scarsdale of a site on the Wye, where, in partnership with Thomas Frith, he had built a water spinning mill. Family circumstances help to explain his motives for entering the cotton trade. Robert Needham of Perryfoot, Peak Forest, Ellis Needham's grandfather, was a substantial yeoman, but three of his four sons were sufficiently ambitious and successful to describe themselves as gentlemen.<sup>50</sup> The last visitation from the college of heralds to Derbyshire had been in the 17th century, and a hundred years later standards had lapsed. But there was an unwritten law, that before a man could write "gent." after his name, he must live in a style suited to a gentleman. Elias, the eldest, claimed the coveted distinction on his marriage, when he acquired property in Chapel-en-le-Frith from his father and in Meadow and Monyash from his wife. Samuel was a farmer and probably a lead merchant of Hackney Lane, Matlock, and, as he made his fortune, he invested it in estates in the Peak district: in his old age he built a notable farm-house on Rushup Edge.<sup>51</sup> When John, the youngest son, married Hannah Hague of Hargate Wall in 1760, he was returning to the home of his ancestors. The Needhams had been foresters of the Peak in the middle ages, but had sold out in Elizabeth's reign.<sup>52</sup> The hall passed to the Eyres and was rebuilt in the early 18th century.<sup>53</sup> Hannah Hague came of yeoman stock and had inherited a small house in Hargate Wall, but the hall was a dignified home for a gentleman and John must have bought it.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *Derbyshire countryside*, October 1952, 95-6; April 1953, 151. I am indebted to Mr. I. Wright of Parwich for drawing my attention to this register.

<sup>50</sup> Will, 24 January 1769, diocesan registry, Lichfield; Needham pedigree, John Rylands Library.

<sup>51</sup> Will, 14 October 1801, Lichfield.

<sup>52</sup> E. G. Bagshaw to T. A. Needham, miscellaneous pedigrees, 14 August 1925, Bag. 33613, S.C.L.

<sup>53</sup> Bag. Hargate Wall nos. 2022, 2039, 2047.

<sup>54</sup> Wills, Michael Hague 1741, Robert Hague 1744, Lichfield.

Between 1772 and 1775 the family suffered a temporary setback. In May 1772 Robert of Perryfoot died; in November John died intestate, leaving a young family; and in July 1775 Elias died, also leaving a young family. Ellis Needham, the eldest child of John and Hannah and the future owner of Litton mill, was twelve years old, when John, his father, died.<sup>55</sup> The two widows had a position to keep up on reduced means. In describing Ellis Needham's background the author of the *Memoir* wrote: "His origin was obscure. He is said to have arisen from an abject state of poverty."<sup>56</sup> These statements are manifestly absurd; the Needhams were a well established Derbyshire family, but, on John's death, Hannah may have had to face relative poverty and it is worth considering whether a régime of economy, when Ellis was growing up, accounts for his meanness in later life. It was necessary that the boys should supplement family resources by entering some branch of trade. According to parson Brown, two of Ellis' brothers, Samuel and John, joined their uncle at Hackney Lane.<sup>57</sup> But three of the younger generation opted for a cotton mill, and, almost certainly, Samuel Needham financed these projects. Two cousins, William and Jasper, ran a very small water spinning shed in one of their rich uncle's fields on the outskirts of Castleton.<sup>58</sup> Ellis Needham did not possess wide resources; in the early days he was assessed for land tax at 12s. 4d., and in 1810, after he had increased his holding in freehold, he paid only £3. 3s. 0d. When choosing a career, he must have been impressed by young Richard Arkwright's opportunities at Bakewell, where he was reputed to be making a fortune.<sup>59</sup>

During the first four years, Litton mill does not seem to have been successful. In 1784 a weir had to be made to increase the water power and this involved flooding an area on the Taddington bank; perhaps Edmund Baker's lease to Ellis Needham of a small-holding in the Frith was connected with this problem.<sup>60</sup> In 1786 Ellis Needham made a determined effort to dispose of the mill and in August advertised it in the *Derby Mercury*, the *Manchester Mercury* and the *Nottingham Journal*. Perhaps this sudden change of plans was due to his impending marriage or he may have lost money.<sup>61</sup> No plans of the original building have come to light, but the cart shed and a warehouse, which are still standing, are roughly constructed. According to the advertisement the machinery was "on the best Construction comprising above 900 Spindles, with Carding Machines . . .". But the significant points are the omission of any mention of an apprentice house and the following sentence: "Litton Mill is one Mile and a Half from Tideswell in Derbyshire . . . and well supplied with Hands from the neighbouring Villages at Low Wages." As Pilkington

<sup>55</sup> Chapman, 200: Dr. Chapman has confused Ellis Needham of Hargate Wall with his cousin, Elias Needham of Little Houghton, near Eccles. See parson Brown's diary and Needham pedigree.

<sup>56</sup> *Memoir*, 25.

<sup>57</sup> Diary, 27 May, 4 August 1793; 19 March 1798; BL 3/3/595, John Rylands Library.

<sup>58</sup> Today it is partly ruined and is used as a cattle shed.

<sup>59</sup> P. Mantoux, *Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century*, 1961, 233.

<sup>60</sup> Release to Richard Arkwright, 6 October 1787, Cressbrook papers, D.R.O.

<sup>61</sup> He married Sarah Beard of Windley, Duffield, 25 January 1787.

pointed out, Miller's Dale was a catchment area for workers from Tideswell, Litton and the surrounding villages.<sup>62</sup> There was a quick cut from Litton village to the mill by a steep track called the Slack. Ellis Needham presented the supply of cheap, free labour as one of the attractions of the site, so it is surprising that, when he could not sell the mill, he changed over to parish apprentices.

At this point Anna Seward and William Newton come into the Needham story. According to Anna Seward, the fire at Cressbrook in November 1785 was not a disaster for William Newton, because she kept the family until he met with an advantageous offer in 1786 from another cotton mill, where "some monied people" (i.e. Ellis Needham's uncles), who had heard of his reputation as a framesmith, offered "to admit him third partner, if he would undertake to construct its machinery, keep it in order and could advance £200 to the common stock". The £200 was raised and the offer was accepted. "An old godmother of his, who had boarded with his wife for some years, and experienced from him the kindness of filial attention, sold, for this purpose, houses, which were her sole support, and which produced £150. I lent him the remaining £50, and he re-embarked in business, in the respectable station of cotton-manufacturer."<sup>63</sup> This letter of Anna Seward's, written nine years later, is full of ambiguous and inaccurate statements, but basically it is probably true. It would appear that the godmother raised a mortgage on her property.<sup>64</sup> There are four reasons why this offer can be connected with Litton mill.<sup>65</sup> Firstly, it is clear from parson Brown's diary that up to 1799, when the diary ends, William Newton was living in Tideswell and was working within walking distance of his home. Secondly, by her usual method of hints, Anna Seward in the letter just quoted indicated the move from Cressbrook to Litton, "a situation dreary as the former was Edenic". This is a very fair description of the two locations and, for Anna Seward, a lucid statement. Thirdly, though it has often been assumed that the gentle Newton could not have had anything to do with the monster of the Blincoe *Memoir*, in 1809 he was working for Ellis Needham's partner at Dane-in-Shaw, near Congleton. When the latter died, the mill had to be sold and on 14 September the following notice appeared in the *Derby Mercury*:

"Mr. Newton at the Factory will show the same, and for further particulars and to treat, apply to Mr. Needham of Hargate Wall, near Buxton, Derbyshire."

Fourthly, Mrs. Sterndale in her obituary of Newton wrote: "the important concerns with which Mr. Newton was connected at Cressbrook and Litton evince his scientific and practical knowledge."<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Pilkington, II, 411.

<sup>63</sup> *Letters*, IV, 134, 9 December 1795.

<sup>64</sup> I am indebted to Mr. J. Newton for showing me an abstract of deeds, which throws light on William Newton's financial position at this time.

<sup>65</sup> I am indebted to Mr. W. J. Broomhead for this suggestion.

<sup>66</sup> *Sheffield Iris*, 9 November 1830.

If this reasoning is correct, William Newton was connected with the reorganization of Litton mill in the autumn of 1786 and with the introduction of parish apprentices. Ellis Needham's three uncles — Samuel and Robert Needham and their brother-in-law, John Champion of Edale — were probably glad to secure the services of an experienced man for their inexperienced nephew. There is little evidence about the workhouses in London or elsewhere from which Ellis Needham at this date got his parish apprentices, and no clear evidence as to the numbers employed. Because of Blincoe's connection with St. Pancras, we tend to conclude that all apprentices at Litton mill came from that quarter, but this is not the case. Ellis Needham's name does not appear as a master in the register of apprentices for St. Pancras workhouse or for the Foundlings Hospital, another source of supply which has been suggested. There is a reference to St. Andrew's parish, and Robert Needham got his apprentices from the workhouse of Hatton Gardens and Saffron Hill, but that was twenty-seven years later.<sup>67</sup> Blincoe, who was at the mill from 1803 to 1814, gave total numbers in one passage as 200 and in another as 160, but these can be discounted, because in the visitors' reports of 1807 and 1811 they are given as 80.<sup>68</sup> These are the only reliable figures for Litton, and it is impossible to tell if they represent a reduction in numbers.

The articles of agreement have not come to light, but in the land tax assessment lists the firm is called Needham, Frith & Co. Thomas Frith, gent., was Ellis Needham's second cousin; he belonged to the catholic, and Ellis Needham to the anglican side of the family.<sup>69</sup> He described himself in his will as a "cotton manufacturer and cotton spinner", and in the Manchester and Salford directory for 1808 as "check manufacturer". His connection with Litton mill was mainly financial, but he and his wife, Emerentiana, were responsible for the cleaning and picking of the cotton and its delivery at the mill.<sup>70</sup> His factory was conveniently situated on Tideswell's little stream in Brook Bottom (today Manchester road) to receive the cotton carts as they came in from Chapel-en-le-Frith. His wife, a garrulous, interfering woman, caused trouble and on 22 November 1791 parson Brown noted: "Great disturbance in Tideswell this morning on account of Tom Frith's wife wanting to lower the price of picking cotton."<sup>71</sup> The cotton pickers had come out on strike. He also seems to have run a general retail store of produce from his farm and his factory, where parson Brown bought his oats and Mrs. Brown material for the the children's clothes.

William Newton was third partner for about ten years, if Anna Seward's

<sup>67</sup> Records of St. Pancras workhouse and of the Foundlings Hospital, County Hall, London. St. Andrew's workhouse and Saffron Hill workhouse, Derbyshire deeds, MSS. 3541, 1 February 1809; 3560, 7 June 1819, D.B.L.

<sup>68</sup> *Memoir*, 48, 30.

<sup>69</sup> Note on fly-leaf of Tideswell parish register, 1796.

<sup>70</sup> Diary, 25 August 1795.

<sup>71</sup> J. M. J. Fletcher, *Tideswell in the days of parson Brown*, 1927, 7.

letter of 9 December 1795 is accurate, in which she writes: "I find they are now going on very prosperously." The prosperity of Litton mill and the way it weathered the crisis of 1788 can be attributed to William Newton's judgement.<sup>72</sup> Anna Seward was very proud of her protégé and of the part she had played in helping him, but she saw his position through rose coloured glasses. "He tells me," she wrote to a friend on 17 August 1787, "he never made more than 50£ per annum by his former business, and that his profits of the share in the mill were last year 150£." Certainly the cotton trade was booming, but it is odd that Ellis Needham's frame-smith could earn in a few months three times what Arkwright had paid him for a year. A further statement that he had made £1,000 cannot be accepted. She boasted of his improved status: "the sometime carpenter" was "now joint-master of a cotton-mill", but in parson Brown's diary his name is not mentioned in connection with Ellis Needham's friends. The latter probably treated him as a superior working man and did not recognize him socially.

At first he seems to have been happier in his new post than he had been at Cressbrook. Hours were long, but Litton was nearer home than Cressbrook. He found solace in his poetry, in which he recorded what he had noticed and been thinking about on his daily walks to and from work. He wrote about his beloved Wye and the countryside, about the life of the poor and their struggles; the poems express contentment. Up to 30 September 1791 he published in the *Sheffield Register* and adopted the conventions of the Lichfield set. It is strange to find this modest, intellectual working man appearing in the Sheffield press under the pseudonyms of "Leonardo", "Juliana", "Corpret", "Philanthropus". These names probably conveyed nothing to the reading public of Tideswell, but they were reminded that there was a poet in their midst, when on 2 June 1789 "Singer" Slack gave selections in Tideswell parish church from *Judas Maccabeus*. The proceedings were concluded with an "Ode of Thanksgiving", written by William Newton "on the happy recovery of His Majesty, from severe illness". It is not known if the end of his publications was due to disillusionment with the cotton mill, but he retained his interest in reading and in music. There is no evidence about the discipline or the quality of food at this time, but there must have been a great deal he disliked, though in this period of relative prosperity there would be no need for extreme severity.

In the diary there are references to the management entertaining the workers. On 16 September 1797 parson Brown wrote: "I took a ride to Litton Mill to-night, Mr. Frith asked me; they were giving the workmen a treat. Gorton was there: also Mr. E. Needham." There is no mention of the apprentices. Thomas Gorton had weaving sheds near the church. In parson Brown's diary he is presented in an unfavourable light, usually quarrelsome and sometimes drunk. He seems to have had some connec-

<sup>72</sup> *Letters*, II, 141, 98; IV, 134.



tion with Litton mill and may have been a partner. At some date Francis Heyward, a cotton spinner of Manchester and Ellis Needham's brother-in-law, joined the partnership.<sup>73</sup>

It is obvious from the following incidents that William Newton had reason to be disillusioned with Ellis Needham's management and with his friend, parson Brown. The first apprentice house was built near the mill, presumably between 1786 and 1787, and was called Litton mill house.<sup>74</sup> Ellis Needham saw his mistake; his apprentices were gaining settlements in Litton. In 1794 he built a second apprentice house in Taddington: "a piece of ground was purchased by Mr. Needham on the contrary side of the water to the mill and in a different Township upon which an house was erected for the apprentices to lodge at, whereby their Parish Settlements were gained out of the Township in which the Mill and principal property was situate. Mr. Needham, having no other property in the adjoining Township but the apprentices' House, great complaints were made by the Inhabitants of the extraordinary burthen brought upon them by the relief of such of the apprentices as became Paupers and it produced a very serious depression in the value of Land there."<sup>75</sup> The dispute between the Newtons and the township of Litton on this very matter was to be bitter, but they did not try to pass the bill for settlements to another township.

But at this date any complaints from Taddington could be ignored, for Ellis Needham was a popular figure. Dr. Chapman writes: "He mixed freely with the smaller landowners and manufacturers of the district, enjoyed entertaining, and was a friend of the vicar of Tideswell and a leading member of the town's Anglican congregation."<sup>76</sup> Certainly Ellis Needham was a pillar of the church at Wormhill, where he scrutinized the churchwardens' accounts, but whether his association with parson Brown was creditable to either man is open to doubt.

In parson Brown's diary we see Tideswell society through the eyes of that astute careerist. In 1780, at the age of 24, he came to Tideswell a penniless curate;<sup>77</sup> in 1836 his will was proved for under £4,000. He was of humble origin and had not been to a university, but, with his energy and gifts, there were so many ways of making money. He could measure land and crops better than anyone in the district; present the accounts and records of the various Tideswell societies in his beautiful, small handwriting; with his capacity for making and saving money advance loans to small businesses and individuals, who could not hope for accommodation from a bank; and do the rough working for his brother-in-law's logarithm tables, "which he is to prepare for readiness in solving astronomical Problems".<sup>78</sup> He married into a family socially above him,

<sup>73</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3566, 7 June 1819: 3541, 1 February 1819.

<sup>74</sup> I am indebted to Mr. F. Robinson of Tideswell, formerly engineer at Litton mill, for this information. See Tideswell burial register, 23 August 1810.

<sup>75</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3560, 38, 23 February 1816. Later he bought 20 acres.

<sup>76</sup> Chapman, 200.

<sup>77</sup> Fletcher, *Tideswell in the days of parson Brown*, 1-2.

<sup>78</sup> Diary, 20 December 1798.



but his brother-in-law, the Reverend William Lax, who was Lowndes professor of astronomy and geometry and fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, did not forget his humble relation in Tideswell. Parson Brown had two aims — to secure his own appointment to the free grammar school and to the living of Tideswell. In 1796 he achieved both aims with the help of his distinguished brother-in-law and of Ellis Needham. The latter supported his suit in chancery for the headmastership and undoubtedly helped him to win his case.<sup>79</sup> In 1832 when the charity commissioners examined the terms of Bishop Pursglove's endowment, it appeared that for years parson Brown had not given to the poor of Tideswell the proportion of the income intended for their relief and could not account for £1,302. 14s. 1d.<sup>80</sup> When in the autumn of 1795 it became obvious that the Reverend Richard Shuttleworth, the incumbent at Tideswell, could not live long, parson Brown noted in his diary that "brother Lax" had let him know "that if I could procure Tideswell living for 100£ or 200£ it should not be wanting". That was probably how the bargain was struck. Meanwhile an opposition party had been formed, of which William Newton was a leading member;<sup>81</sup> he ceased to go to church and wrote a book of prayers for his family, but on Easter Sunday 1797 parson Brown noted; "W<sup>m</sup> Newton at Church this morning the first time since I was inducted". Newton was a realist and accepted defeat: he needed parson Brown's services to christen his children, to educate those that survived and to help the cause of the Sunday schools.

Tideswell standards were not high and parson Brown did not raise them, but he attended to his pastoral duties, when they did not conflict with his other interests, and was kind and obliging. He probably understood the purpose of the act of 1802 as little as did Ellis Needham. When Peel required that parish apprentices should be taken to church or chapel once a month, he had given the clergyman a watching brief on behalf of these children. But Ellis Needham was his patron and the Taddington apprentice house was not in his parish. He had a parish apprentice as a domestic servant and, when the girl took some raspberry wine and five "butter prints", he wrote in the diary: "I gave her a drubbing." In November 1799 the parish apprentices, bound to Thomas Frith and Thomas Gorton, ran away.

At the end of the century there were changes in the partnership at Litton mill. William Newton was the first to leave. For some years he may have been combining the management of the Peacock inn, on his godmother's behalf, with his post at Litton.<sup>82</sup> When she died in 1797, she left all her property to him and he seized the opportunity to gain his independence. In 1799 and 1800 he is described as "innkeeper" and "vintner", but it was a bad time to go into the wine trade, which depended

<sup>79</sup> Tideswell school records, 280, D.R.O.

<sup>80</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3547.

<sup>81</sup> Their candidate was Rev. Edward Goodwin, curate of St. Paul's, Sheffield.

<sup>82</sup> Newton deeds.

on imports. He evidently got supplies from Anthony Johnson of Chesterfield, grocer and liquor merchant, but he had to borrow heavily, and in 1800 was bankrupt. War taxation and the increase in the excise on wines and spirits killed this small business very quickly. For the second time he had to begin again. He spent the next ten years, or part of the next ten years, in Cheshire, where he appears to have retrieved his fortunes. Thomas Frith was the next to go, and parson Brown noted the terms on which this partnership was dissolved. "Mr. Ellis Needham is to give Mr. Frith 1,500£ for his concern in Litton cotton mill."<sup>83</sup> At some date alderman John Whitfield of Dane-in-Shaw joined the partnership, and by 1805 John, Ellis Needham's eldest son, had been brought into the business, but neither man compensated for the loss of William Newton.<sup>84</sup>

The years 1800 to 1815 are particularly interesting; Robert Blincoe was serving his assigned term at Litton mill from 1803 to 1814, Ellis Needham was at the height of his popularity and, at the same time, signs of his bad management were multiplying. From 1806 to 1812 he was churchwarden for Wormhill, in 1802 and 1803 a steward for the Tideswell assemblies, and in the winter season of 1808 to 1809 a steward for the Buxton assemblies.<sup>85</sup> According to Blincoe, reports of lavish hospitality at Hargate Wall reached the apprentices, always eager to pick up gossip about the management.

There was nothing wrong in these activities, if the visitors' reports of 1807 and 1811 had not revealed that the parish apprentices at Litton mill were working in illegal conditions. Dr. Joshua Denman inspected the mill in 1807 and Mr. Middleton of Leam in 1811, so there are two independent reports.<sup>86</sup> Both visitors confirmed, with reservations, that the mill was clean. Dr. Denman found that the act of 1802 was largely ignored: there were night shifts, a working day the length of which he could not determine, no attempt at instruction and excessive overcrowding in the apprentice house. During Mr. Middleton's visit to Litton in 1811 two apprentices came to him "with a complaint of being worked too hard, and of not having sufficient support", so he got from some of them a statement on oath of the working day, i.e. 5.50 a.m. to 9.10 p.m. with a dinner break of half to three-quarters of an hour. Many mill-owners extended the daily stint to protect themselves against waste of time on starting and stopping, but, having done this, the Needhams were unashamedly working their hands two hours overtime every day, and even cutting down on the hour usually allowed for dinner. Perhaps Dr. Denman had succeeded in doing something; the young children received instruction in reading and writing on Sundays, but, according to Blincoe, they were too tired to learn anything. Then attention was focused on the food, which consisted of water porridge for breakfast and supper and oatcake with treacle or broth for dinner. The kind of porridge given to

<sup>83</sup> *D.M.*, 2 May 1799. cf. Diary, March 1799.

<sup>84</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3560, 3 June 1819.

<sup>85</sup> *D.M.*, 21 October 1802, 27 October 1803, 17 November 1808, 26 January 1809.

<sup>86</sup> Lords papers, 1819, III (66), appendix G and K.

the apprentices is a good indication of the general standard of nourishment. Milk pottage, with or without bread, made a sustaining breakfast and supper and in a mill of any standing was assumed. Ellis Needham's water porridge prepares us for that midday meal. Mr. Middleton tackled John Needham about the overtime, but the latter justified himself on the grounds that the apprentices had been unemployed for a month "in consequence of putting down a water wheel". A matter like this was difficult to follow up, because it was accepted that, in trades using water power, limited overtime was permissible after flooding or drought. In the visitors' reports there is a notable omission; no information is given as to the appearance of the apprentices. In a well conducted mill, such as Pleasley, there are references to "the remarkable healthful and clean appearance of the apprentices".<sup>87</sup> Blincoe's allegation that John Needham made preparations at Litton before the visitor arrived is probably true, but we would like to have known if, as he asserted, the apprentices were verminous and really wore pitch caps, if their faces, arms and legs bore the marks of thrashings and if their clothes were ragged.

In 1811 Ellis Needham was in financial difficulties; his position had been deteriorating for some time. His rich uncle had left him £700,<sup>88</sup> but that was not much to set against the debts he was accumulating. Impressed probably by parson Brown's success, but without the latter's business sense, he advanced loans to his friends: in 1811 he lost £1,700 by Joseph Lingard's bankruptcy, and £30. 8s. 8d. by John Baker's bankruptcy.<sup>89</sup> Mollie Baker of the Red Lion, Litton, had defaulted in the previous year, £50 in debt to Ellis Needham.

It was Joseph Lingard's bankruptcy which in the end ruined him. In May 1811 he raised a mortgage for £700, probably from Shaw and Cheek, the Tideswell attorneys, to pay off his debt to Messrs. Goodwin, bankers of Buxton, and, as the negotiations proceeded, we can watch his evasive tactics. He seems to have quarrelled with Shaw and Cheek, for in October 1812 he and his two sons, John and Ellis, junior, borrowed £628. 18s. 6d. at 5% from the Goodwins. The Needhams now behaved very foolishly. They repaid half the loan on the agreed date, quarrelled with George Goodwin, refused to pay back the two remaining instalments, lost the £319. 9s. 2d. they had already repaid and incurred the penalty of £1,258. On 3 January 1814 a double marriage took place at Ashbourne parish church between Ellis Needham, junior, and Ann Bass, and Sarah Needham and William Bass. Ashbourne parish church may have been selected by the Needhams as a snub to parson Brown, who had not supported the loans to his former patron. A warrant was served on Ellis and John Needham on 31 January 1815. From the bankruptcy accounts the truth came out; in 1812 he had mortgaged Hargate Wall for £10,000 to Mr.

<sup>87</sup> Lords papers (66), appendix C.

<sup>88</sup> Will, 14 October 1801, Lichfield.

<sup>89</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3563, 8, 22 March 1811; 3568, 11 May 1811; 11, 2 May-25 December 1811.

Fogg, he could not redeem the property, and in 1815 the family had to leave their home.<sup>90</sup> The main question concerns the fate of the apprentices; the sordid story is told in the settlement paper, quoted above.<sup>91</sup> "After the bankruptcy the mill in consequence was for a considerable time empty or unworked. The apprentices were left destitute of support other than from the Township (of Taddington) to the number of eighty and upwards. The magistrates of the district interfered and with great difficulty and exertions and at a very considerable expense, most of the apprentices were transferred to other Masters and the rest, being too debilitated for work, were obliged to be supported by the Township." The "too debilitated" — ten in number — died between 1816 and 1818.<sup>92</sup>

In March 1815 Robert, Ellis Needham's fourth son, tried to revive the family business: he only ran the mill for twenty-one months, but during that period there were two unpleasant incidents. Feeling in Taddington over the poor rates had been mounting and Mr. Knowlton, the duke of Devonshire's agent, had been approached with a view to cutting off the Needhams' extra water supply. Just before his bankruptcy Ellis Needham had seen the danger and had agreed that no more apprentices should be brought into the township, until Mr. Knowlton had considered the matter. But in the early summer, while Mr. Knowlton was still away, Robert Needham brought in parish apprentices from the Saffron Hill and Hatton Gardens workhouse. Then there was the case of Sarah Heeley. The girl was a cripple, in bad health and incapable of work, and Robert Needham tried to send her back to London, but the Saffron Hill authorities refused to receive her. After Robert Needham's death in December 1816 the Derbyshire magistrates took up the cudgels on behalf of Taddington and removed her by an order to Saffron Hill, "the magistrates from the crippled state and appearance of the Pauper considering it was a fraud upon the Township". Legal opinion was asked and the unfortunate child was sent back to Litton.<sup>93</sup>

On Robert Needham's death Lord Scarsdale cancelled the Needhams' lease of Litton mill and creditors seized the apprentice house.<sup>94</sup> According to the Manchester directory of 1817, John Needham established himself as a pattern maker. The father tried to re-enter the cotton trade, but he did not succeed and retired to Cromwell house, a Needham property in Chapel-en-le-Frith, where "Mesdames Needham" ran a "Seminary for young Ladies". He died at the end of December 1830, and his daughter, Hannah, when applying at Bakewell for letters of administration, valued his estate at under £100. He was not described as a "gentleman", because he no longer lived in a manner suited to a gentleman.

In trying to evaluate the *Memoir* as a historical record, we are faced with two opposing interpretations: acceptance, with the corollary that

<sup>90</sup> Cheek papers, deeds and letters relating to Ellis Needham's bankruptcy, D.B.L.

<sup>91</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3560, 23 February 1816.

<sup>92</sup> Tideswell burial register.

<sup>93</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3560, 7 June 1819.

<sup>94</sup> *Manchester Mercury*, 9 December 1817.

Ellis Needham was a monster, or rejection of the Blincoe story, with the corollary elaborated by Dr. Chapman that Ellis Needham was a reputable character. He emerges from an examination of such independent evidence as exists, not as a monster, but as a very limited person and a bad business man. Plausible in success, irascible in failure, preoccupied with mean and petty economies, he could not approach the problems of his mill objectively. When in 1784 he flooded a small area of land on the Taddington side of the river, he contracted to pay the owner £1. 1s. od. a year. From time to time he acknowledged this debt, but for twenty-seven years he evaded payment. The strongest single piece of evidence in his favour is that William Newton was third partner in the company for about ten years, and that in the settlement papers there are accounts of two adult workers, who were prepared to live in the Taddington apprentice house for a wage of 4s. or 5s. a week with "Meat, Drink, Washing and Lodging".<sup>95</sup> William Newton left Tideswell about 1800 and would not have known that, when his former master had to rely on his own judgment, conditions deteriorated and deaths among apprentices increased.

Blincoe blamed the committees of the London workhouses for not taking responsibility for the well-being of their children. Where no inspectors were sent out, this criticism is valid, but well regulated workhouses and orphanages sent out inspectors regularly and required exact reports.

Blincoe's allegations against Ellis Needham appear to be — food insufficient in quantity and deficient in quality, excessively long working-hours, generally dirty conditions, daily beatings, disgusting and sadistic teasing of the apprentices, indifference to the number of deaths, because the mill could easily be restocked from the London workhouses. The visitors' reports confirm the bad food and long hours. In common with his Tideswell friends, Ellis Needham's attitude to parish apprentices was callous, but he did not understand that, though he might despise these children off the London streets, they could not be alert and efficient machine-minders on a diet lacking in iron. When Samuel Oldknow in 1804 was faced with a 50% increase in the cost of food, he maintained the excellent board and reduced the number of apprentices.<sup>96</sup> The visitors twice reported that the premises were clean: cleanliness may have been one of Ellis Needham's virtues, or these reports may have been achieved by a quick scrub up before inspection. In either case no light is thrown on the cooking and the state of the apprentices' clothes. Professor Pollard has pointed out that there were three ways of maintaining discipline in a mill — by the stick, by the carrot or by an attempt to create a new ethos.<sup>97</sup> There is no corroboratory evidence of daily beatings at Litton, but it is reasonable to assume that Ellis Needham relied on the stick and a few small carrots in the shape of halfpence for the apprentices who

<sup>95</sup> Derbyshire deeds, D.B.L., MSS. 3541, 1 February 1809; 3560, 3 June 1819.

<sup>96</sup> G. Unwin & others, *Samuel Oldknow and the Arkwrights*, 1924, 173.

<sup>97</sup> S. Pollard, "Factory discipline in the Industrial Revolution", *Economic History*, 2nd series, XVI (1963), 260.

would clean the machines during the dinner hour. It is a mistake to idealize these children: they were rootless and could behave very badly. The Black Book of the Foundlings Hospital is depressing reading, and probably most orphanages could have produced a similar record. What was needed was not the stick, but a positive policy of kindness tempered with firmness and, when the manager was prepared to take this trouble, parish apprentices could become a useful labour force. It is instructive to compare the hungry, overworked apprentices at Litton, who complained to Mr. Middleton in April 1811, with the well-fed children he found at Cressbrook, who "appeared perfectly satisfied with their situation". Cressbrook had re-opened eleven months earlier with William Newton as manager. There is no independent proof of the disgusting tricks, alleged to have been played on the apprentices, but, if John Needham and his brothers were allowed to tease the children, the overseers would suit. In discussing the number of deaths, Blincoe, always ready to exaggerate, has missed the point. It could never have been to the master's interest to have deaths, because, on the completion of the servitude, the workhouse paid the master the amount of the premium still owing — £2, £3 or more according to the agreement. It is entirely credible that, when apprentices broke down, Ellis Needham called in the doctor, who restored them to health with "kitchen physic", i.e. a reasonable diet, and then returned them to the mill. In the best ordered establishments some apprentices would die from epidemics, the effects of the carding room and the like. If the ten "too debilitated" at the time of the bankruptcy are left out of the calculation, because conditions were abnormal, parish registers show that between 1796 and 1814 there were twenty-eight deaths and that the majority survived: Blincoe survived. It was a cold-blooded policy, but presumably it satisfied Ellis Needham, who always mistook calculated meanness for thrift and duplicity for business acumen.

*Dr. Chapman's references to Joseph Lancaster and John Farey*

I have postponed comment on Dr. Chapman's attempt to justify the whitewashing of Ellis Needham by reference to Joseph Lancaster and John Farey, because the treatment of the evidence requires examination in some detail.

In *The Early Factory Masters* (p. 203) Dr. Chapman writes: "Cruel punishments to children were not unusual in the eighteenth century, and two of those described in such horrific detail in the *Memoir* were, in fact, advocated by progressive educationalists — notably Lancaster — at the beginning of the last century." The two measures referred to were the wearing of punishment weights at work and the suspension of children, who moved too slowly, from a crossbar over quickly moving machinery, which bruised their shins, unless they kept on raising their legs with great alacrity. We have seen that we cannot prove or disprove a number of Blincoe's statements, but these two allegations cannot so easily be set aside, because in his evidence before the Factory Inquiry Commission of 1833 he confirmed that these punishments were in force at Litton mill. Dr. Chapman suggests that Ellis Needham was following Joseph Lancaster's example. The latter's views on punishment are clearly explained in his



books. (In this note references are to: J. Lancaster, *Improvements in Education*, 1805.) Lancaster was a quaker and prohibited the use of corporal punishment. The older boys taught the younger pupils orally, for he had no money, no teachers and no books. The children enjoyed their lessons, for learning was presented to them as an orderly game, with opponents to beat and prizes to win. The chief problems were talking and inattention. The authority of the monitors had to be maintained and, to this end, Lancaster devised a series of shock tactics, practical and dramatic, so that the lesson could proceed. The first way of dealing with a talker was by the "pillory" or log; this was a piece of wood weighing from 4-6 lbs., which the monitor tied to the offender's neck. "The neck is not pinched or closely confined," Lancaster explained, "it is chiefly burthensome by the manner in which it encumbers the neck, when the delinquent turns to the right or left . . ." (p. 101). Blincoe had to work with vices, each weighing 1 lb., screwed into the lobes of his ears and a 28-lb. weight hanging down his back. Dr. Chapman invites us to believe that Blincoe's weights derived from Lancaster's log, but the use of punishment weights was a common practice in contemporary institutions, such as mills and workhouses, in which parish apprentices had to be controlled and in which the discipline was crude.

Lancaster removed complusive talkers from the lesson; however, they were sent not to the corner but to the ceiling. "Occasionally boys are put in a sack, or in a basket, suspended to the roof of the school, in the sight of all the pupils, who frequently smile at the 'birds in the cage'. This punishment is one of the most terrible that can be inflicted on boys of sense and abilities" (p. 102). They suffered no physical pain, so it is difficult to understand how Dr. Chapman can suggest a comparison between the "birds in the cage" and the children at Litton, tied by their wrists to the cross-beam.

References to Joseph Lancaster are irrelevant in connection with Litton mill, but there are points of contact between John Farey and Ellis Needham. Farey visited Ellis Needham twice; the first time between 1807 and 1809, when he was collecting material for volume I of his *Agriculture in Derbyshire*, and the second time, probably about 1811, when he was working on volume II. Ellis Needham's name appeared in the lists of acknowledgements and in volume II (p. 27) he was again singled out for commendation as one of four manufacturers, who could "rank among distinguished agricultural Improvers". He had made a good impression on Farey and, as Dr. Chapman points out, Farey's opinions must be treated with respect, though we cannot help wondering if the stock fared better than the apprentices. In volume III, written 1815-16 and published in 1817, Farey explained in the section, "Advantages and otherwise of manufactures" (pp. 500 to 509) why he regretted the spread of cotton mills in agricultural districts, but he conceded that, as far as he could find out, mills and apprentice houses were well run. Dr. Chapman wishes to extend this certificate of good conduct to Ellis Needham. Here we should remind ourselves that we have no evidence that Farey's visits to Hargate Wall included visits to Litton mill, but we have the evidence of the visitors in 1807 and 1811 that the mill was very badly run. Finally, Dr. Chapman's attempt to present Farey as "the only responsible outsider to visit the scene of Blincoe's apprenticeship" (p. 208) and, by implication, as a more discerning inspector than the visitors, cannot be accepted.



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