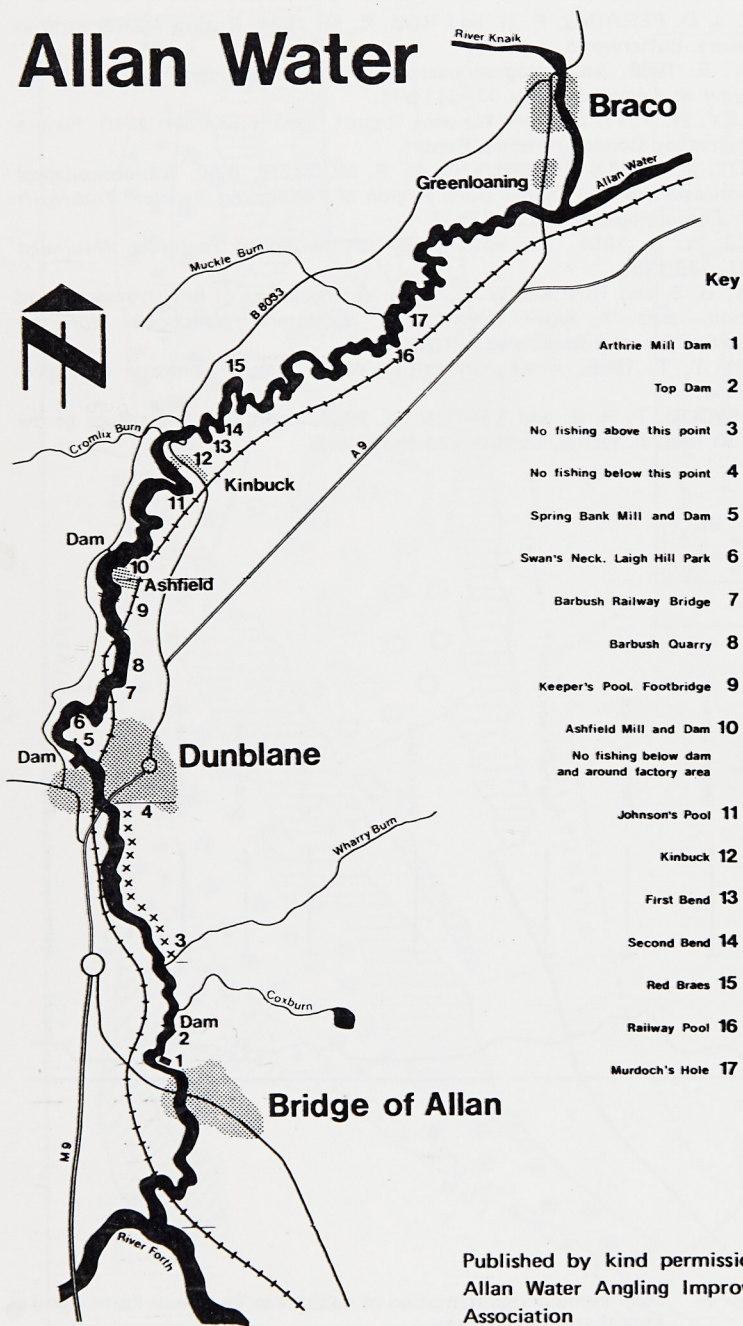


Allan Water



Key

- Arthrie Mill Dam 1
- Top Dam 2
- No fishing above this point 3
- No fishing below this point 4
- Spring Bank Mill and Dam 5
- Swan's Neck. Laigh Hill Park 6
- Barbush Railway Bridge 7
- Barbush Quarry 8
- Keeper's Pool. Footbridge 9
- Ashfield Mill and Dam 10
- No fishing below dam and around factory area
- Johnson's Pool 11
- Kinbuck 12
- First Bend 13
- Second Bend 14
- Red Braes 15
- Railway Pool 16
- Murdoch's Hole 17

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ASHFIELD
A FACTORY VILLAGE IN SOUTH PERTSHIRE

John D. Williams

The nineteenth century saw Britain transformed from an agricultural to an industrial nation, and the majority of its inhabitants become town dwellers. Yet most industrial developments in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century were in rural surroundings, particularly on the fringes of upland areas where fast running streams provided power for mills not only before the advent of steam, but in some cases well into the present century. Particularly in the textile industries where large quantities of water were required for washing processes as well as power, the availability of steampower was an additional factor in the production processes rather than an alternative to a riverside site.

The mill village thus became a common form of settlement during the nineteenth century, often becoming absorbed into nearby towns as these grew, or becoming the nucleus of larger settlements where mills were in close proximity to one another. Except in the west, however, the population densities of Scotland and the restricted size of most mill sites have left many of these villages relatively untouched by subsequent development. Because the power available from a river is dependent on the head of water between the dam and the river below the mill, there is a natural limit to the expansion likely on a given site, and therefore such waterpowered mills are less likely to be expanded and rebuilt just because they are successful, thus destroying the original layout.

Interest in these factory villages has naturally focused on the earliest examples, and on the most influential. Robert Owen's New Lanark, and the Buchanan brothers' Deanston are well known, but little research has been done on the scores of less notable examples that not only transformed the British economy and created a new form of community, but in many cases were successful enough to continue unchanged for over a century. A number of such villages exist in the Forth valley, attracting attention to themselves only when the mill closes, as did Ashfield by Dunblane in 1976, after 110 years of operation. Unless local historians investigate such important surviving relics of the industrial revolution now, whilst not only the buildings, but the people who lived and worked in them are still able to tell us of their function, an invaluable source for the social and technological history of Scotland will be lost.

This paper on Ashfield is presented therefore, not because this particular factory village was of great importance except to those

88 who lived there, but because it may well have been more typical than more famous contemporary developments, and because too often in history we are told only of the exceptional, as no one bothers to record the ordinary. Yet with the growing interest of many people in the history of their immediate locality, this paper, based on just one visit to a local solicitor and one interview with a family resident in the village, and one evening reading all references to Ashfield in the *Stirling Journal and Advertiser* using the University of Stirling's invaluable *Local Index* to that newspaper (Volume 2, 1979) is the type of project that can be carried out by any amateur historian, yet which could be of great benefit as source material for historians in the future.

It was in 1865 that the lands of Mill Ash or Wester Ashfold, situated in a loop of the Allan Water three kilometres north of Dunblane, and adjacent to the Scottish Central Railway, was sold by John Stirling of Kippendavie to Messrs. J. & J. Pullar & Company, Manufacturers Bleachers and Dyers, of Keirfield, Bridge of Allan. (John Pullar and his son were related to their famous namesakes at Perth, but the Bridge of Allan company was a separate commercial entity). The feu disposition specifically included land and 'the water power of the River Allan connected with the piece of land.' For reasons that are not completely clear, although most of the site was sold outright to Pullars, the northern tip was only leased. It was a condition of the sale that 'within the space of eighteen months...to erect and build upon the ground hereby disposed Dwellinghouses or Manufacturies, Factories or workshops or other buildings of the value of not less than One thousand two hundred and fifty pounds Sterling with all necessary Engines and Machinery, and that upon any of the sites shown upon the said Plan...which plan has now been approved by me. ...Provided always that no building except the Buildings shewn upon the said Plan...shall be erected...and that the ground unbuilt upon shall be used exclusively for garden or planting, or as pleasure grounds, or for ordinary agricultural purposes, or for bleaching and dyeing...except in such cases as the deviation may be specifically authorised by the Superior for the time being.'

A brief comparison of this plan (Figure 1), with the plan (Figure 2) attached to a disposition of 1909 when the land only leased in 1865 was finally purchased by Pullars, shows that the village actually built was considerably more ambitious than the plan agreed between the parties in 1865. The factory was built exactly as shown in the original feu disposition, although it was subsequently extended. That the factory shape and size were correctly anticipated, but that five straight rows of cottages distributed at odd angles all over the

site should by the next year become a formal 'square' at the furthest end of the site from the factory, would suggest that although Pullar had planned the factory, he had not really thought about the housing requirements in 1865, but was able to produce a 'model village' in 1866. Obviously an architect was commissioned for this work, but the point is that Pullar was willing to engage a good professional architect to build an attractive village for what was after all only a small branch factory.

By concentrating the village at the narrow end of the site they were able to both create a spacious setting for the manager's house, and to give over the larger part of the ground to stables, cowsheds and agricultural buildings. The purpose of these was not only to provide dairy produce for the village, but more particularly to provide the horses for transport of cloth to and from Bridge of Allan. Although the plan of 1909 shows the village to have its own railway siding, only coal and chemicals arrived by rail. All cloth for processing came by horsedrawn cart from Keirfield, seven kilometres away, and the finished cloth returned by the same method of transport for cutting and dispatch. This system of using horses continued until the mid nineteen-thirties, when Pullars purchased their first petrol lorry.

The factory was built for the printing (especially roller printing) and beetling of cotton cloth. Messrs. Pullar of Bridge of Allan were famous for their waistcoat linings, and the new rotary machine for printing stripes installed at Ashfield was obviously of great advantage. The beatling process, whereby a high finish was obtained by the cloth having heavy beech blocks hammered up and down on it for forty-eight hours, was obviously extravagant in space and power. Although necessary for the most expensive of their linings, it was an obvious candidate for removal to Ashfield where power was plentiful — the river provided approximately 800-900 horsepower by its natural fall whilst sweeping round the factory; it was not even necessary to build a lade. Water turbines were still the main power source for the factory until its closure in 1976, but heat and steam were required in the dyeing and drying of the cloth, so the tall chimney which was the first sight one had of Ashfield as the road approached from Dunblane was also an original feature, making sense of the mill's location between the river and the railway. This chimney was demolished in 1979. Coal and dyestuffs were delivered to Ashfield siding, but the subordinate nature of the factory to Keirfield, the main Bridge of Allan factory, and its relatively low output, made horsedrawn transport more economic for the cloth. Steam also provided auxiliary power in summer when the river was low.

The Allan Water is relatively slow moving above Ashfield, and a shallow weir to the north of the village with only a short lade drove a waterpump that raised good drinkingwater from a spring in the railway embankment to the reservoir beside the factory. The large weir at the mill would obviously be the site of the old Mill of Ashie mentioned in the title deed of 1865, and would presumably have been at least rapids, if not a waterfall, prior to that. Pullars' Keirfield Mill at Bridge of Allan was the furthest downstream of all the mills along the Allan before it joined the Forth. Many more mills, for corn, paper, wool and timber sawing were distributed between a point just to the north of Dunblane, where the Allan moves into a deep gorge and drops rapidly, and the Keirfield Mill. Ashfield was therefore not only located on a powerful river convenient to the railway only seven kilometres distant from the main factory, it was also upstream of most of the other industrial users, whereas Kierfield was downstream of them all. Since it was the most expensive linings that were to be produced at the new factory, the purity of the water supply would be an important factor, and a bleacher and dyer owning the furthest downstream of some twenty mills in seven kilometres would have known exactly his requirements in this respect. Site location would therefore seem to have been carried out with considerable care in this instance.

The one remaining question, of why this perfect site had not been developed previously, is answered in the 1865 feu disposition. All the estates owned by John Stirling of Kippendavie were entailed, and it was only the Acts of Parliament allowing the sale of such land in certain circumstances of 1852, and Stirling's subsequent petition to the Lords of Council of 1858, that cleared the legal barriers to the sale of this land. It could therefore not have been developed except by Stirling himself prior to 1858, so when due time is allowed for negotiations, 1865 is not an unreasonable date for the first industrial use of a comparatively remote site, despite its considerable advantages in all but one respect.

Ashfield offered space, power, communications and easy transport, and plentiful clean water for bleaching, dyeing and h... an consumption. One factor only was missing — labour. The nearest village, Kinbuck, is a small agricultural community with a woollen mill and school, but would not have had the surplus labour nor housing to provide for an additional workforce of about two hundred people. The need to provide housing was therefore implicit once the site was chosen, although this was a new situation for Pullars, as their Bridge of Allan factory was on the edge of a thriving Spa town that lacked only sufficient industrial employment. They did own a terrace of four small cottages at Bridge of Allan, but it is of interest that

only after the building of Ashfield village did they build more houses for their workers at Bridge of Allan, eventually owning fourteen cottages by 1880.

The plan of 1865 would suggest that the Pullars were not far advanced in their planning of Ashfield village at that time, yet its completion in 1866 was to an attractive layout with single storey dwellings in blocks of three along both long sides of The Square and across the north end, and small blocks of privies, coalsheds and wash-houses between each terrace. The south side of the square was a two storied block, with the ground floor houses entered from the square, and the upper houses entered by external stairs to the rear. The eastern half of this block as shown on the 1909 plan is not part of the original design, but is an extension of 1898 disturbing the original symmetry of the Square.

The most southerly of the single storey terraces on the Square was actually built earlier than the rest of the village and was of a different construction. This block had been built by the Scottish Central Railway Company for their workers when constructing the railway cutting beside the village. Tradition in the village is that there was originally a tunnel which was converted to a cutting when it partially collapsed. This block, demolished in 1976, was inferior to the rest, being built on the common close principle from poured concrete, unlike the sandstone of the rest of the village. One of my informants was brought up as a member of a family of six girls and one boy living in one room and a kitchen in 'the Concrete', so knew the building well, yet did not regret its demolition.

The Manager's house (Ash Cottage) was comprised of six rooms, kitchen and bathroom, and stood beside the factory at the southern end of the site. This and the farm and steadings, all of 1866, were well spread out over the central section of the site. On 13th May, 1898, however, the *Stirling Journal* reported that 'in order to provide additional accommodation for their increasing staff of workers ... (Messrs. Pullar) ... are presently erecting light new dwellinghouses there'. These new blocks were mainly two storied terraces, and increased the capacity of the village by nearly one hundred percent, but since acceptable population densities were falling at this time, it is by no means certain that either employment at the factory or village population really increased to this extent. Between one and two hundred people were employed in the factory throughout its history, as the printing and dyeing processes were by no means labour intensive. In the 1871 Census John Pullar junior claimed to employ 283 people, but this was at both the Ashfield and Kierfield factories. My contemporary informants described Ashfield as always having employed about 130, so it seems unlikely that the

92 expansion of housing at the turn of the century was because of major expansion in employment.

One hundred and ten years of Ashfield attracted little attention from the world outside — the building of both factory and village square in 1866; the village expansion of 1898; some additional agricultural land purchased and the building of a new housing block, the Clachan, for agricultural workers just before the First World War; the selling of both factories and the village by Pullars at the close of the Second World War, with the continuation of the Ashfield printworks and village under new ownership for the next thirty years, now printing on synthetic fabrics instead of cotton. Not until the British Silk Dyeing Company in its turn closed the factory, and sold it and the village in 1976 to a local builder, did Ashfield reach the front page of even the local newspaper. Perhaps because it just quietly and successfully fulfilled the functions for which it was intended by its owners and residents, was neither a first, last, biggest or best industrial village, it has never attracted the attention of a historian.

The factory is now owned by a company making equipment for the oil industry, and most of the houses have been restored and let to people working elsewhere, so the tightknit community around the mill is no more. What was it like to live in such a village? Fortunately a few people who lived and worked there before the Second World War are still amongst its residents, and their evidence together with a few news items in the local newspapers together allow us to reconstruct a picture of life in the village.

Ashfield was a real and distinctive community, with its Angling Club, Band of Hope, Boys Brigade, Cycling Club, Orchestral Society and Quoiting Club all periodically submitting their news to the *Stirling Journal*. Its identity was created by its geographical isolation and shared employment, as all the village housing was owned by the factory. It had no school — children walked to Kinbuck, no Church, and no shop — although the village hallkeeper did sell sweets and cigarettes. The parish church at Dunblane set up a Sunday School in the village hall, which most of the village children attended. The factory manager seems to have been Sunday School Superintendent throughout the period of Pullars' ownership, a coincidence noted in many other factory villages.

Attempts by the other necessary Dunblane institution to gain a foothold in the village were less successful. The largest retailing organisation in Dunblane was the Co-operative Society; and the Pullars, who were active supporters of the Liberal Party — renaming Ashfield Square as Gladstone Square early in the present century —

refused permission for the Co-op to open a shop in the village. However one of the factory's carts did go to the Co-op in Dunblane every Thursday afternoon to collect the grocery orders for the entire village!

Gas lighting from the Dunblane gasworks was used both in the factory and for street lights on the Square from the beginning, but gas was not available in the houses, and oil lamps and candles were the only source of domestic lighting in Ashfield until the North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board brought electricity to the village in 1948. Yet with good working conditions and low rents, e.g. 1s 6d (7½p) per week for two rooms in 1946, it seems to have been a contented community. 'Pullars wouldn't employ anyone without a collar and tie', I was informed. But it was different with the new owners after the Second World War, 'Anyone from Barlinnie could come here then.' I asked what happened if there was a dispute between neighbours during the Pullars' period of ownership, did not the fact that neighbours worked together, and landlords were also employers, make for difficulties? 'You just went straight to Mr Muir' (the factory manager in the 20's and 30's) I was told, 'Their word was law.' Why, I asked, did he say 'their' of Mr Muir's decisions — did the Pullars involve themselves too? 'No, they left everything to Mr Muir'. Yet clearly in the minds of my informants, Mr Muir was identified absolutely with the company and the owners.

Work discipline and social control figure prominently in the development of our industrial society — in small factory villages like Ashfield they are clearly mutually reinforcing. Where houses and community go with the job in modern eyes much of the individual's freedom is lost. Yet my informants spoke warmly of their community, and showed me proudly a book each employee was given in 1901, and which had been handed down in the family since. It was a memorial tribute to Frederick Pullar, whose death in a skating accident on Airthrey Loch had robbed the Keirfield factory of an able manager, and Laurence Pullar, the then owner, of his only son. The *Stirling Journal* (22nd February, 1901; 5th July, 1901) relates how all the staff of both Keirfield and Ashfield attended the funeral. Now we have no means of knowing whether this was because of love, respect, curiosity, or compulsion: their lives were too tied to their employers' for full freedom of action to exist. Yet there is some evidence that these bonds were recognised as mutual, the interdependence of both owners and employees, for after the funeral Laurence Pullar gave every employee not only the book listing his dead son's achievements, but also the sum of ten pounds. This gift, to about three hundred employees, on the death of his only son,

94 gives the term 'paternalism' a rather fuller meaning than we usually attribute to it.

A village of 51 houses stands ten kilometres to the north of Stirling, surrounded by green fields. It is at present being restored by a local builder, and at the end of the village is a factory making equipment for the North Sea oil industry. Why is it there, between a river too shallow to navigate and a railway line in too deep a cutting ever to have had a station? There are scores of similar settlements all over Scotland with little or no written history, attracting no attention from the world outside in their heyday, and with few to lament their passing unless they possess exceptional visual charm. Yet if we do not before the memories are dead record the little that is known about such places, they might one day become as inexplicable as the brochs. But if we do try to gather such records together we will be able to generalise about the industrial transformation of Britain with greater confidence, and occasionally gain new insights into a very distinctive type of settlement in the highland margins of eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain, the Factory Village.

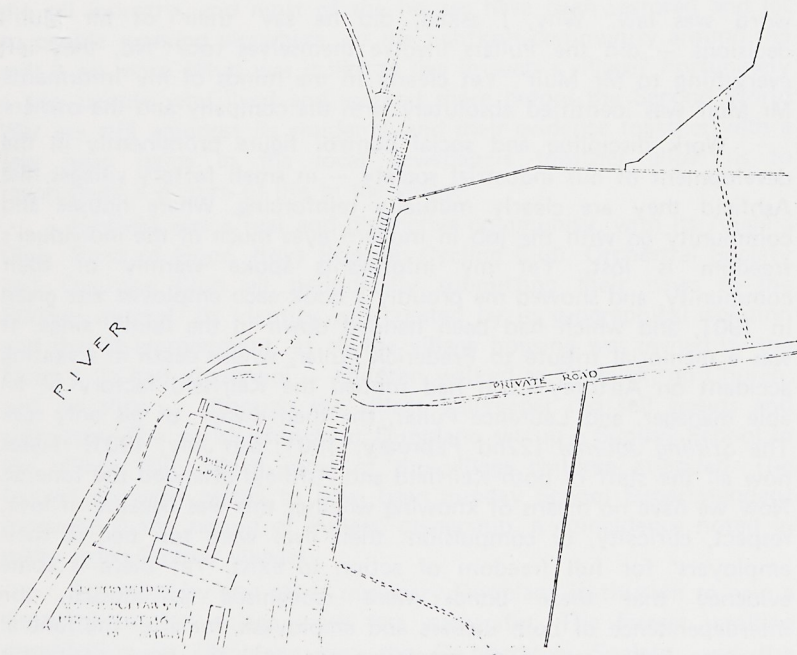


Figure 2. The 1909 disposition showing the 'square' development plan for property 2.089

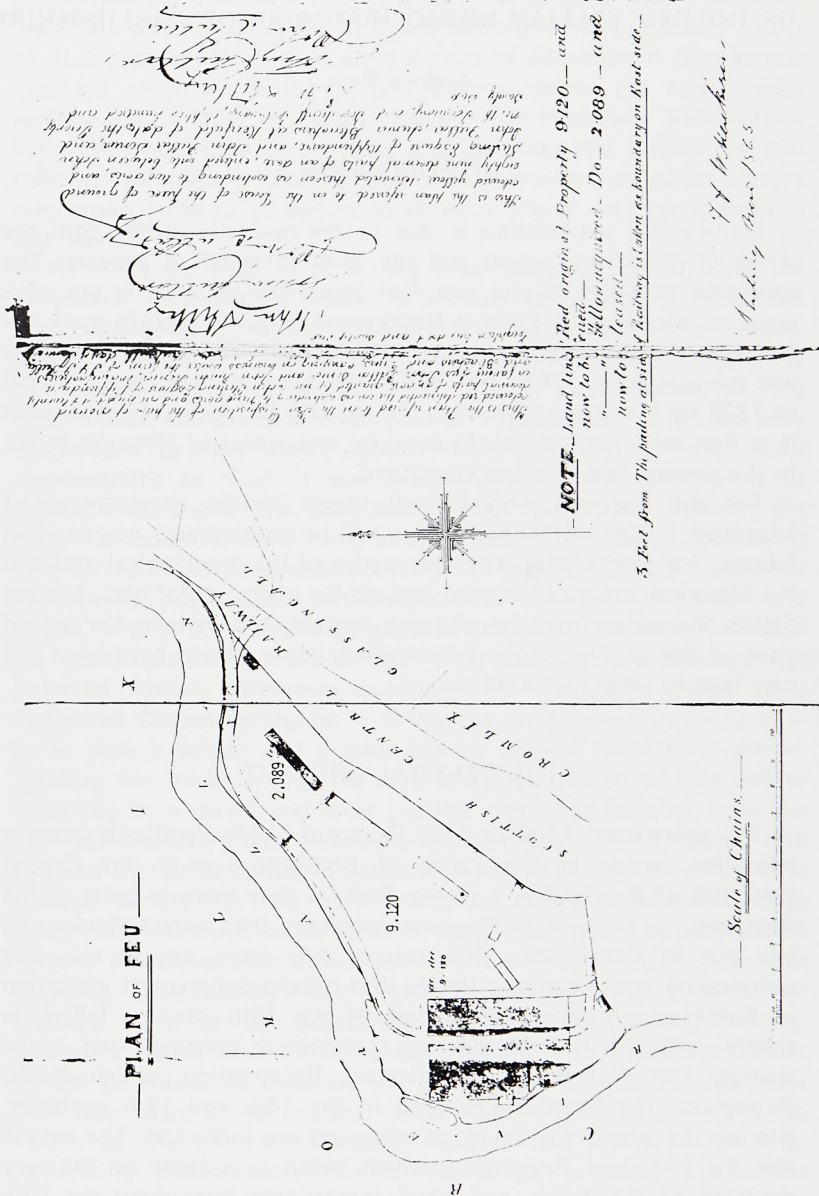


Figure 1 The 1865 disposition — showing the leased northern part 2,089, and the main feued area 9,120