



Welcome! This short guide provides an introduction to the history of our Victorian weaving factory which is now a museum. It is designed to help schools to meet the requirements of the Curriculum for Wales 2022 and provide some guidance for planning a visit.

Introduction

Newtown Textile Museum Trust was established in 1964. At that time the character of Newtown was undergoing considerable change and there was a concern that much of the town's built heritage would be lost forever. The Museum opened in 1967 in the two top floors of an 1830s building.

For the first 23 years the Museum was run as a Trust by a band of volunteers. In 1990 the Museum passed into the hands of Powys County Council who ran it in conjunction with other Museums under their care. When the Council were unable to continue to run the Museum and keep it open to the public, it was closed until a group of Newtown volunteers took it over. It opened its door again on August 2016.

Since then, the Museum has continued to flourish with visitors coming from all parts of the UK, Europe and the wider world. We have also attracted media organisations, including BBC 1 and 2, Radio 4, Channel 4 and S4C, as well as a German TV company. We have a growing

following on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, maintain an informative webpage and send out a quarterly newsletter to around 300 supporters world-wide (details in the Links section at the end of this guide).

The Building



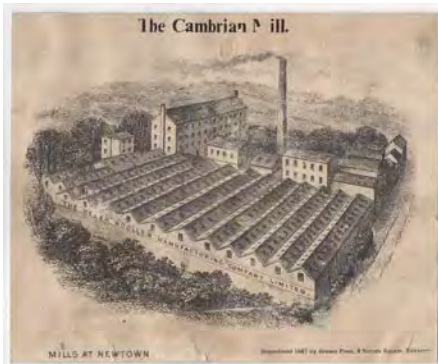
In 1827, the vicar and Churchwardens of Llanllwchaearn petitioned the local JP for permission to erect an ale house in Penygloddfa. We think this was The Grapes Inn on Commercial Street. It was probably shortly after this that our four-storey building was erected. Originally serving a dual purpose of domestic accommodation on the two lower floors and a workplace on the two upper floors, it was one of dozens of such buildings which were constructed in Newtown and Penygloddfa in the first forty years of the Nineteenth Century.

The contrast between the lower two and the top two floors is striking. From Commercial Street, three front doors give entrance into three single-room cottages. Above each is a single bedroom. If you go around to the back of the building into the cobbled Grapes Court, you will see another three doors. These are not the back doors of the same houses, but three more cottages with a single bedroom above each. It was here in these 'back-to-back' cottages, that as many as thirty or forty people were crammed. Conditions must have been awful: over crowded, often disease-ridden and insanitary. If that wasn't enough, there was the constant noise of the workers on the factory floors; the thud of wooden treadles hitting the bare oak floorboards and the 'clickety-clack' of the shuttles as weavers worked away, producing woollen flannel. Welsh flannel, would, by the end of the nineteenth century, become a global commodity.

Entrance to the factory floors was via an external staircase from Grapes Court. On entering the Loom floors, visitors

“The weavers, as compared to agricultural labourers, marry young and die young”

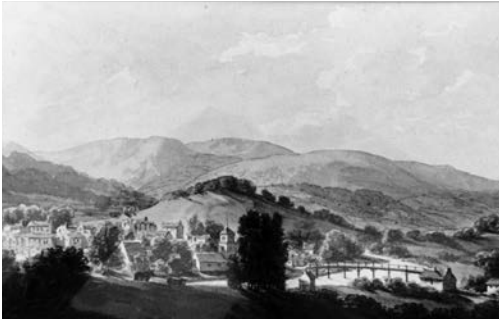
Mr T. Jones, Flannel Manufacturer, 1840



Are immediately struck by the light, open, airy space. But don't be fooled. These were equally unpleasant places. On each floor as many as twelve handlooms were situated, each positioned next to a large window to provide as much light as possible to aid the workers. In their heyday, the air in the loom floors was thick with the dust and fibres from the woollen yarn and the clatter of the busy looms. You might also have heard the creaking of the spinning wheels as spinners worked furiously to keep the weavers supplied with sufficient yarn. Time was money, and there wasn't a moment to be lost.

Successive generations of weavers continued to work on the loom floors for as much as fifty years. In the 1860s steam-power was introduced into the industry. This resulted in the building of huge flannel factories, like the Cambrian Mill, which is now no more, and the Cymric, which can still be seen on Canal Road. Some of the old handloom factories converted to steam, but ours didn't. Even in the late Nineteenth Century flannel worked on handlooms was prized for its fine quality, so some work remained for the handloom weaver. However, gradually these floors fell into disuse or were used as attic spaces or a place to hang the washing for the people still inhabiting the cottages below. At some time in the early twentieth century the six cottages were knocked into three and they continued to be lived in even after the museum opened. When the Museum was transferred to Powys, the cottage rooms were opened up as additional museum spaces and a new, internal, staircase was installed, so that for the first time the building was an integrated whole. Despite these changes, it is not too difficult to get a sense of what it was like to live and work in Newtown at the dawn of the Victorian era.

Flannel Town



View of Newtown, about 1800

It was the flannel industry which was responsible for Newtown's sudden growth in the first half of the nineteenth century. Although the origins of the town can be traced back to the thirteenth century, in 1801, there were just over 1,500 people living in the two parishes of Newtown and Llanllwchaiarn. In fact, Newtown struggled to define itself as a town at all. As its most famous son, Robert Owen, conceded, it was a "neat, clean, beautifully situated country village rather than a town". But by mid century the population had risen close to 7000 as families from the rural hinterland of Montgomeryshire and further afield were lured by the prospect of work in the burgeoning flannel trade.

Flannel had been produced in the farms of Mid Wales for centuries, but the growth of mechanisation was making it difficult for it to remain a domestic occupation. Old corn mills, or purpose-built 'manufactories' were required to house the water-powered machines which brought mechanisation to the industry. Newtown had a river and existing corn mills, such as the Milford Mill on the western edge of town, or the Byander Mill opposite St Mary's Church. These were expanded to serve the carding and spinning machines to convert raw wool into yarn and to work the fulling hammers to 'finish' the woven cloth. So, even though weaving, the central part of the cloth making process, remained a manual activity it made sense to bring all the parts of flannel making together in the town. Very quickly Newtown became an important centre of the flannel industry, so much so that it acquired the epithet of 'The Leeds of Wales'.

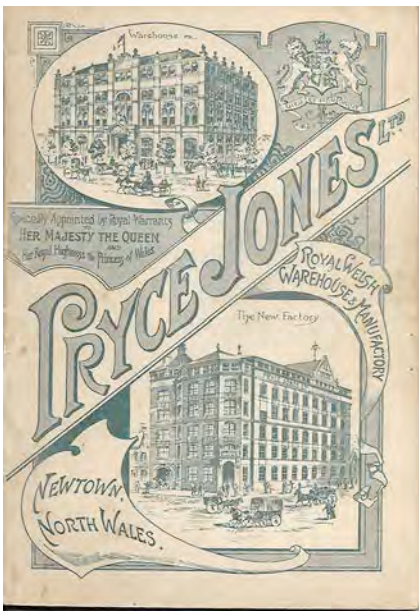


The Longbridge, completed in 1827, replaced an earlier wooden toll bridge that had restricted the growth of Newtown

A growing population and an increasing demand for factory space, provoked a building boom. Many of the old half-timbered dwellings in the town were replaced by brick warehouses to store wool, factories for looms and housing for the woollen workers - sorters, carders, oilers, slubbers, spinners, winders, weavers, fullers. But space in the town was limited and so, following the building of the Longbridge in 1827, an industrial suburb grew up on the

northern bank of the river. Penygloddfa, centred around Crescent Street, Commercial Street, Bryn Street and a maze of enclosed 'courts' was characterised by three-story terraced housing (the top floors reserved for a weaving loom or two), dual-purpose housing/factory units or bespoke factory spaces (like the Clock Factory in Bryn Street). A Parliamentary report of 1840 reveals that there were 74 flannel manufacturers in the town, employing nearly 700 weavers. The 1841 census for Penygloddfa alone shows that almost half of the occupations recorded were related to the flannel industry.

Weavers had always opposed the introduction of mechanisation. In 1836 an attempt had been made by a local entrepreneur, William Pugh, to introduce steam power into the process but it ended in failure. But by 1860, the weavers could no longer resist the inevitable. This led to the building of three huge factories which integrated the whole process of flannel making - the Kymric (or Commercial), the Cambrian and the Severn Valley Mills. This marked the beginning of the end for handloom weaving, although some of the weavers clung to their old ways until the end of the century. Unfortunately, the late adoption of full mechanisation meant that Newtown was always playing catchup to areas such as West Yorkshire which had embraced the technology a generation earlier.



Pryce Jones's mail order catalogues revolutionised shopping, introducing the concept of "shopping in the comfort of your home"

A new lease of life was offered to the industry by a young enterprising draper named Pryce Jones, who quickly realised the potential of two of the greatest Victorian achievements - the creation of a national rail network and the introduction of the penny post. Along with an undoubted talent for self promotion, he rebranded his modest draper's shop in Broad Street, as 'The Royal Welsh Warehouse', began sending swatches of Welsh flannel to his customers by post and sending his orders out by train. The swatches were soon replaced by illustrated catalogues and his Broad Street store was exchanged for an impressive 'state of the art' Royal Welsh Warehouse, strategically for effective logistics next to the railway station.

Pryce Jones (or Sir Pryce Pryce-Jones, as he later became) could count some of the most influential figures amongst his customers, including Queen Victoria, the Empress of Austria and the Tsarina of Russia. In the process, he converted Newtown-made 'Welsh Flannel' into a global commodity and sold it using the strap-line 'Shopping in the comfort of your own home'. What he had actually done was to revolutionise the idea of shopping. Pryce had invented mail-order!

However, the good days did not last too long. Even before the turning of the century decline had set. Newtown's three steam mills could not keep up with demand. Pryce Jones was forced to buy 'Welsh Flannel' from the more efficient mills of Huddersfield. A series of disastrous fires in the Cambrian and Commercial Mills in the immediate years before World War One signalled the end. There was some upturn in the industry with the coming of war and the increased demand for military uniforms and blankets, but with the return of peace and the bleak post-war economic climate the writing was on the wall.

By the beginning of World War Two all production had ceased. Many of the flannel factories were abandoned, others, like the Oversevern Mill converted to an armaments store (partially destroyed in an explosion in 1944), or others, like the huge Severn Valley Mills converted into temporary military billets. Thus, by the 1960s, so many of these monuments to a once-flourishing industry had become eye-sores and began to be demolished. Some, like the Commercial Mill or the factory buildings in Commercial Street escaped to be converted later into flats. Only our Museum has survived to the present in a condition similar to its original form. For that reason, we think we have a rather unique memorial to Newtown's industrial heritage.



Abandoned flannel flannel mill

Floor by Floor



No. 6 Commercial Street

From reception (No. 5 Commercial Street)

Room 1 (No. 6 Commercial Street) - A re-creation of the family's only downstairs room, laid out in a style to show how the room was furnished in the 1840s. The sampler on the wall was made by a member of Robert Owen's family. As many as ten people may have lived in each of the two-roomed houses.

Room 2 (No. 2 Grapes Court) - Panels show the growth of Newtown in the area north of the River Severn including the building you are in. The population of the town trebled in the 50 years to 1850. The room contains a large model of the Museum - the building has remained essentially as it was built.

Go out into the cobbled yard. Take time to look up at the building to see the back three cottages and the top two floors running across the tops of the back-to-back houses. You will also see (replica) stone steps in the yard by which weavers reached the loom floors, and also the old buildings which were the only "privies" for all six houses.

Enter the second building by the door signposted past the passageway (No. 3 Grapes Court). Directly in front of you is another period room from around the 1840s (No. 7 Commercial Street). This room contains a wall clock ("Sheep's Head Clock) and a "Great Wheel" spinning wheel.

Go up the stairs

There is a period bedroom on the 1st floor (**bedroom of No. 7 Commercial Street**) showing the upstairs sleeping room; remember how many people might be sleeping there?

Room 3 (bedroom of No. 2 Grapes Court) - The panels and pictures pick up the theme of the growth of Newtown and the advent of the weaving factories. The experience of living in Grapes Court is illustrated by the Clayton family who lived here in 1841. The large watercolour painting is an impression of Newtown in the 1870s.

Room 4 (Bedroom of No. 6 Commercial Street)- Contains the story of the rise and fall of the woollen industry in Newtown, the difficult working conditions of

the time and the story of Pryce Jones. The video display shows a short presentation of the development of nineteenth century Newtown and lasts five minutes.

Go back to the staircase and up to the next floor - the Loom Floor

This room extends across the back-to-backs and is laid out to show the journey of wool from the sheep, to the finished cloth. These are highlighted by the explanatory panels and real examples of various wool types, spinning wheels and hand carding equipment. There would have been one weaving loom to each window; we have examples of very early large looms together with more modern and domestic size looms.

The large screen video showing real demonstrations of carding, spinning and weaving from early days to a modern wool factory. The whole video lasts 15 minutes.

Top Loom Floor

Originally another 'factory' of hand looms. It now houses our temporary exhibition space (to your left), two recreated shops and a display of items related to Pryce Jones's Royal Welsh Warehouse, Victorian costume and Newtown Tannery.



Amelia Ray's Crown Shop

The **reconstructed shops** contain original Victorian shop fronts rescued from demolished buildings in Newtown.

Drapers' shops were common in Newtown, capitalising on the town's importance in the flannel industry, but selling a far wider range of items. Our shop is based on that of Amelia Ray who operated her business from the Crown Shop on High Street (now Greggs) from the 1860s. Like Pryce Jones, she quickly realised the potential of the new penny post and the arrival of the steam locomotive as a means of widening her customer base. The museum has approximately 1,500 letters, invoices and orders which documents the working life of this remarkable lady.

The Clog shop is based on another Newtown business. Clogs were an essential item for all workers and children. The entire contents originally came from a clog shop in Severn Street.

The Museum's Wider Collection

The museum display areas show only a fraction of our total collection. The temporary display area provides us with an opportunity to put some of our stored items on display.

Photographic collection consisting of some of the earliest photographs taken of Newtown and portraits of Victorian Newtonians by pioneering photographer John Owen and others. Later photographs show Broad Street throughout the twentieth century, early Newtown carnival scenes and a series of photographs charting the changes in the town in the 1970s and the flood prevention scheme.

Pryce Jones Collection: in addition to the items on display we have a collection of Pryce Jones catalogues ranging from 1895 to 1955. We also have Victorian and early twentieth century invoices of the Royal Welsh Warehouse, family portraits and memorabilia, commemorative souvenirs of his knighthood and items related to the Royal Welsh Warehouse Sports and Recreation Society.



Victorian alert: Newtown are drawing with Wexham, and down to ten men!

Newtown FC wins the Welsh Cup for the first time 1895: a collection of three telegrams charting the progress of the match against Wrexham - the equivalent of the modern text message! Newtown won 3-2 with ten men!

Textile collection: a range of woollen textiles and costume from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s

The Museum, Teachers and Learners

We welcome any queries from schools about our collection and how we can assist with supporting curriculum development. We have to stress that the museum is entirely volunteer-run and that none of us are practising teachers, although we can count on some ex-teachers amongst our ranks.

We are also very happy to host educational visits, from the primary, secondary or tertiary sectors. Please pay particular attention to the **Planning an Educational Visit** section of this guide.

In the past, we have been able to offer work experience placements for students interested in a career in the areas of museum/archive work or textiles/costume history. We are keen to continue to offer this facility. Please see the **Links** section at the end of this guide.

The Museum and the Curriculum for Wales 2022

The new Curriculum for Wales emphasises the freedom for teachers to plan their curriculum with their learners and their community at the centre. The Six Areas of Learning also allow teachers to decide when the curriculum should move from a blended approach to learning to a more discreet, subject specific approach. Overleaf, we have identified potential learning opportunities within the Six Areas of Learning which might be supported by a visit to our museum. It is not aimed at any particular phase of education as teachers will determine when their learners are ready to experience a particular aspect of learning.



Expressive Arts

- Exploring pattern/fabric
- Role play & performance based on museum characters
- Artistic studies of museum objects using variety of materials & resources
- Create your own 'sampler' style poster with an inspirational verse & decorative borders
- Musical composition based on weaving & living sounds from weaving era

Health & Well Being

- Compare modern home environment with weavers' cottages - which do you prefer and why?
- Raising questions: consider how relationships would have affected well-being in museum context - how did they cope with the hardships?
- Hygiene: what was health care like in Victorian Penylgloddfa? What is available now?

A Visit to Newtown Textile Museum

Humanities

Plan and carry out enquiries such as:

- What was life like for a child in Newtown in Victorian times compared with now?
- What kind of clothes did people wear in Victorian Newtown?
- How were clothes made in Victorian Newtown?
- How did people shop in Victorian Newtown?
- How do we get to the museum?
- Where does wool come from?
- Where do our clothes come from?
- What are conditions like for textile workers today?

Language, Literacy & Communication

- Learn & use Welsh & English words for each museum setting and the language of wool and weaving
- Monologue & dialogue (between now and then)
- Different forms of writing - dialogue script, diary, descriptive, story, poetry, letter- based on museum character or setting.
- Produce audio guide for a room in the museum
- Discuss, plan and present an aspect of the museum

Science & Technology

- Stimulus : compare clothing textiles of today and the early 19th c in terms of processes and materials - beginning with "What are you wearing? & Where did it come from?"
- Design & make quilt or flannel inspired fabric
- Explore twisting as means of strengthening fibres & consider modern applications
- Investigate modern use of wool as a biodegradable, waterproof, insulating fabric
- Dyeing: plant & mineral dyes - colour chemistry
- Can some waste materials be transformed through weaving into new reusable materials?
- Investigate types of sheep and the properties of their wool

Mathematics & Numeracy

- Use & understand the dates of weaving era events and relate them to present day
- Explore quilt/flannel inspired patterns using properties of 2D shapes and ICT modelling programmes
- Calculate quantity, measurements of resources needed to create quilt style fabric
- Analyse census data to investigate population/professions/mobility during weaving era
- Employ numerical calculations about weft/warp/thread length when producing something hand woven

Planning an Educational Visit

In order to maximise the educational advantage for your learners, we strongly urge you to make a pre-visit.

If you contact us beforehand, we can arrange for a host to be on hand to discuss your needs and to help familiarise yourself with the building and its contents

Space in the building, particularly on the lower floors, is limited. Therefore we cannot accept educational groups without receiving a booking confirmation from us. We will restrict any group to a maximum of 30 pupils, but large groups would need to be split and work in different parts of the museum.



James Jones's Arithmetic book,
1847

The museum is open from the beginning of May until the end of September on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Opening times are from 12.00 - 16.00 on each of these days. Again, because of space, we cannot offer access to groups during these times, but we can arrange a special opening outside of these times and days for pre-booked groups. Similarly, we can open up at other times of the year, although the museum has no heating and it becomes extremely cold in the winter months. For this reason, we have to safely store some of our more vulnerable display items. We would advise, therefore, to arrange visits between the beginning of April and the end of October.

Supervision

Teachers, group leaders and accompanying adults are responsible for the behaviour and general health and safety of their group whilst at the Museum. They should remain with their groups at all times for their health and safety, and must accompany them in case of evacuation.

Cost for Educational Visits

We appreciate that schools do not always have the funds to pay for external visits and we do not want to stop anyone from coming for financial reasons. But the Museum is run entirely by volunteers and is dependent on donations to survive. If a school is able to make a donation we suggest a contribution of 50p - £1 per pupil and a minimum of £20.

Parking: there is limited parking outside the Museum (restricted to 1 hour), although drop off would be possible. The nearest car park is the main car park (approximately ten minutes walk across the bridge)

Access

The museum is housed in a Grade 2 listed building. This currently limits our ability to provide equal access to the building and facilities for all visitors, although this is constantly under review given improvements in modern lift technology and funding possibilities.

Wheelchair users and those who find it difficult to use stairs can enter using step-free access at the rear of the building which leads through to the reception area and some displays, as well as an inter-active, virtual tour of the museum and its collections on the ground floor.

A toilet, including an accessible toilet, is at ground floor level.

Adult helpers

Please bring at least one adult for every six Foundation Phase pupils and Phase 2 pupils or one adult for every 15 Key Stage 3 pupils. Pupils should be supervised at all times throughout your visit including visits to the toilet.

Eating at the museum

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a space for eating and we would ask that no eating or drinking is allowed during your visit.

Bags

We have limited storage space so please do not bring bags unless it is absolutely necessary. If you do have bags, please notify the hosts on arrival and they will provide an area in which the bags can be stored until your departure.

Photography

Photography, for personal or educational use, is permitted within the museum



Penygloddfa School, 1902

Links

Our phone number is 01686 622024. However it is only answered when the Museum is open. Initial contact is best made by email. A personal phone number will be given to you at that point.

For queries about our collection, please contact curator@newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk

For queries about aspects of textiles/weaving, please contact weaver@newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk

To arrange a pre-visit and to arrange a group visit please contact admin@newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk

For work experience placements, please contact committe01@newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk

If you would like to be added to our mailing list to receive our newsletter please contact news@newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk

Our website is:
<https://www.newtowntextilemuseum.co.uk/>

Our Facebook page is:
<https://www.facebook.com/newtowntextilemuseum>

Our Twitter account is:
<https://twitter.com/NewtownTextile>