



DERBYSHIRE'S WORLD HERITAGE SITE

*Ashley Franklin concludes his journey down
the world-changing Derwent Valley*



above St Matthew's Church, Darley Abbey, 'The Cathedral of the Derwent Valley'

IF YOU NEED convincing of the significance of Derbyshire's World Heritage Site, this final part of my journey down the Derwent Valley through Darley Abbey and Derby, couldn't be timelier: Derby Silk Mill, site of the world's first factory, recently secured £9.38 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund for its Museum of Making project. This effectively safeguards the future of a building that only four years ago was mothballed.

It is also welcome news for the whole Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site. I noted in my journey through Belper that the visitor experience at Strutt's North Mill deserves to be on the scale of Ironbridge or the Black Country Museum but that it 'would require a prodigious funding campaign.' Thus, the news about the Silk Mill offers great encouragement to Strutt's North Mill if it can start thinking big. Last month, Derbyshire Life heralded the remarkable conversion of the Darley Abbey Mills, so add to this the coming rejuvenation of the Silk Mill and our journey ends as positively as when it began with the regeneration of Cromford Mills. Add to that another exciting recent development, a dedicated cycle way from Cromford to Derby which will connect the whole 15-mile stretch of the Derwent Valley Mills.

DUFFIELD & ALLESTREE

Although the renowned mill owners Strutt and Evans harnessed the power of the Derwent at Milford and Darley Abbey respectively, the two villages in between – Duffield and Allestree – remained untouched. Duffield would have been a major heritage attraction had the 12th century castle not been razed. It was thought to be as large and impressive a castle as any in the kingdom. Now, thanks to the National Trust, there are stone steps up to a wooded walkway which take you to the castle site, offering glorious views across the valley. The Trust promises more improvements to Castle Hill, including ways of 'telling the story of this fascinating site.'

Duffield's Domesday name 'Duelle' means 'the place at the woodland clearing frequented by doves'. You may not see a dove these days but ▶

above Derby Silk Mill with the needle mast of Cathedral Green footbridge

right Supporters of Derwent Valley Cycleway in Eyes Meadow, Duffield. L to r: Jess Carter, Julie Carter, Rob Jeffery, Natalie Jeffery and Roger Carter





above Looking down on Darleys restaurant and the weir at Darley Abbey

if you wander around the 40-acre Millennium Meadow, you will find a wide variety of birds, insects and mammals. This thriving, award-winning natural history haven is also home to 3,000 wild flowers, 2,000 native trees and 17 types of grasses. 'It's a wonderful oasis of calm and beauty,' says Millennium Meadows' Chair Di Hancock.

The River Derwent is close by and there are plenty of walks hereabouts. At this time of year, the quietude is broken only by the crack of willow on leather on Eyes Meadow cricket ground, although recently the meadow became a joyous profusion of noise, colour and gaiety with the annual Duffield Carnival. This is surely one of the finest in Derbyshire, and certainly one of the few that still features a street parade with floats, marching bands, and villagers arrayed in costume.

The verdancy of the valley continues into Allestree which is blessed with a 260 acre park, described by resident Bill Grange as 'the most scenic park in Derby with its hilly topography, views to the Peak, extensive woodland, and lake.' The Park is also the largest designated Local Nature Reserve in Derbyshire and there is a picturesque golf course with tree-lined fairways.

The Friends of Allestree Park are currently working through a Five Year Plan which takes in everything from nest boxes to visitor centre.

Improvements can be seen everywhere, including tree planting, Himalayan balsam clearance, new paths, log-lining paths, as well as the planting and maintaining of the plant beds in front of Allestree Hall. The Friends are also working closely with the Earl of Harrington Fishing Club to improve the lakes. Although sadly they can do little about the City Council-owned Allestree Hall in the Park which has deteriorated over the years and is on the Heritage at Risk Register. Another building which could gainfully use its position in the World Heritage Site to apply for Heritage Lottery funding?

DARLEY ABBEY

Although Darley Abbey moves one closer still to the city of Derby, the village is like an oasis. In spite of being virtually hemmed in by suburbanism, this is a place where, as one resident told me: 'We live conveniently close to the city yet can be lulled to sleep by the sound of the river and awakened by the dawn chorus.' It's no wonder Arthur Mee in his *King's England: Derbyshire* called Darley Abbey 'too good to be true.'

Although modernism is apparent in the higher part of the village, the old Darley Abbey close to the Derwent is a well-preserved village of the early Industrial Revolution. If I'm walking there by the river on a sunshine day, I always think of Roy Christian's observation: 'It could be the



above The Hydrangea Collection in Darley Park



above Darley Abbey village

sea down there; and the tightly packed squares of colour-washed or long, brick cottages could be the homes of fishing families in one of those exquisite harbour villages north of Whitby.’

Also, every time I drive down into Darley Abbey from the Palm Court roundabout, I take in the splendidly imposing Church of St Matthew. The church at Tideswell is famously called ‘The Cathedral of the Peak.’ For me, this is the Cathedral of the Derwent Valley.

The church is also the first sign of the benefaction of Thomas Evans who in the early 19th century built his first cotton mill here and transformed a hamlet of 16 houses to an industrial village of nearly 1,200 inhabitants.

As documented in last month’s Derbyshire Life, there has been a further transformation in Darley Abbey with the mills being rescued from decay and dereliction. The regeneration of the buildings as a business centre – with 70 companies filling all available spaces by this year end – is one of the remarkable success stories of this World Heritage Site.

A quieter transformation in Darley Abbey has been the growth of a thriving Darley and Nutwood Nature Reserve, a 25-acre idyll of mature woodland, wetland, grassland, scrub and stream containing over 160 species of flower including the rare bee-orchid and 77 spikes of pyramidal orchid. The last time I mentioned the reserve in these pages – writing about Darley Abbey seven years ago – there were just over 50 bird species recorded. There are now 97.

Enhancing Darley Abbey’s rural aspect on the city side of the industrious mills are the 80 acres of Darley Park which notably houses the largest collection of hydrangeas in Britain and the third largest in the world. Along with its 430 types

of hydrangea species, the park has 30 different tree species, including Purple Japanese Maple and Tibetan Cherry. There are three tours of the National Collection of hydrangeas on Sunday 9th August.

The park is also distinguished by a fine Terrace Café, while those with a thirst for ale can seek out the Abbey Inn, the only surviving building from the 12th century abbey founded here.

If any of the mills’ business clients need wining and dining, it is a short stroll to the award-winning Darleys Restaurant, renowned not only for the quality of its food and extensive wine selection but also its coveted window tables overlooking the sweep of the weir along with the terrace for fair-weather aperitifs and coffee. Darleys has been run for 12 years by Jonathan and Kathryn Hobson. ‘We fell in love with this place the moment we saw it,’ says Kathryn; ‘the view, history, character and location.’ The rural location is a special lure for Derby businesses who don’t want to drive too far into the countryside, though Darleys is also a draw for those who savour classic cuisine, which Kathryn describes as ‘modern British well presented, tasty and simple with as much local produce as possible.’

DERBY

The end of my journey is essentially the start of the story of the Derwent Valley Mills. The Silk Mill was the world’s first factory, its manufacturing processes providing a prototype for Richard Arkwright’s mill at Cromford. This journey

ends on a high with the recent award of Heritage Lottery funding which, together with other funding, will see over £16 million invested in the Silk Mill’s Museum of Making project, due ▶

“It could be the sea down there; and the tightly packed squares of colour-washed or long, brick cottages could be the homes of fishing families in one of those exquisite harbour villages north of Whitby”



above Roy Hartle leading a history walk around Darley Abbey as part of Discovery Days which this year will take place from 24th October to 1st November



above Madeleine and Reuben Fahey of Belper enjoying Darley Park

for completion in 2020.

There are three core strands to the project which will literally open up the whole of the Silk Mill. The first strand – Inspired by the Makers of the Past – will tell the stories of the museum’s Made in Derby collections, some of which are in storage or open only by appointment or through special events. This includes the fascinating Midland Railway Study Centre which, I discovered during a recent Discovery Days visit, is the UK’s largest pre-nationalisation railway archive.

The second strand – Made by the Makers of Today – points to the project’s strong community involvement. Paying my first visit to the Silk Mill in three years, I was introduced on the ground floor to displays, furniture and shop and café fittings, all of which had been manufactured by over 200 community volunteers as part of a project called Re:make. Indeed, this community engagement was a strong factor in the Silk Mill’s successful Lottery bid, as the Silk Mill Project Director Hannah Fox explains:

‘The Heritage Lottery Fund saw that we were taking a new and innovative approach to creating a museum with the people of Derby. The Made by the Makers of Today part of the project will bring manufacture back to this site and we mean this literally. Over the next five years, everyone has the opportunity to be directly involved in the design, curation and manufacturing of the museum displays alongside professionals. We can’t say in detail what the result will be but that’s the exciting part: it will evolve and develop in response to the people’s ideas and needs. In this way, we will create a place that has true ownership of the people of Derby.’

The third strand of the project – Empowering the Makers of the Future – will see education programmes in partnership with local industry



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which will see a host of activities and events for families, schools and community groups in the fields of science, technology, engineering, arts and maths. How does a jet engine work, for example? That’s just one anticipated aspect of the Museum of Making as Rolls-Royce has pledged a Trent engine to the new Museum. It will also form the centrepiece of the entrance.

It’s also anticipated that the new Museum will tell the 300 year story of the Silk Mill building itself and highlight the significance of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site.

The Silk Mill’s regeneration will add to the attraction of the Derby Cathedral Quarter as a historic, high quality retail, leisure and cultural destination, known for its niche shops, thriving restaurant scene and café culture. The Silk Mill’s own setting is now much more attractive, thanks to the work that has made Cathedral Green both a pleasant place to relax and a performance space. The erection of the footbridge, whose form is cannily derived from tailor’s shears or scissors, is another thematic and eye-catching connection with the Silk Mill.

The final link to the World Heritage Site is the Joseph Wright Gallery at Derby Museum. Wright’s portraits of Richard Arkwright and Jedidiah Strutt connect the artist with this landmark period in the history of Derbyshire and the world, helping to tell its story in his portraits, landscapes and scenes of industry in the valley.

My recent visit to the Museum took in the resplendent new Nature Gallery teeming with rocks, minerals, fossils, shells, birds, insects and mammals plus the 125,000 year-old remains of a prehistoric hippopotamus which once cooled its blood in the glorious mud at Allenton. Many of the artefacts, especially the butterflies and



above Allestree Hall

top Darley Park



Above Steam train model in Derby Silk Mill

left A youngster enjoying a workshop session at the Silk Mill



Jan Gough, Collections Access Assistant at Derby Museums in the Nature Gallery in front of the Allenton Hippo

beetles, have been cleverly displayed to appear like works of art in their own right.

In the adjacent gallery, I paused to take in the ten metre-long Bronze Age log boat unearthed at Shardlow, before moving to the main art gallery to behold more boats, as painted by Derby-educated John Stobart, probably the world's finest maritime artist. You have until 6th September to see his canvases of clippers, liners and tall ships, all rippling with detail, drama, authenticity and atmosphere.

DERWENT VALLEY CYCLEWAY

In 2003, two years after the awarding of World Heritage Site status, the Derwent Valley Heritage Way opened up the entire 55 miles of the valley for walkers. Another exciting development is now planned for a bicycle route to traverse the 15-mile stretch of the valley that sits in the World Heritage Site. The inspiration for the Derwent Valley Cycleway came when retired architect Derek Latham and his friend Ian Scott pedalled down a dedicated cycle route along the River Danube. 'We realised there was no equivalent in Derbyshire, despite the beauty of the Derwent Valley,' says Derek, 'so we thought "let's create one".'

Whilst the Danube cycleway is mainly for sightseers, the splendid thinking behind the vision for the Derwent cycleway is that it will both encourage visitors to explore our heritage and act as a commuter route for cyclists who live and work in the valley. An easy level route for cyclists of all abilities, too, as the plan is to keep the cycleway on the valley floor to avoid hills and keep close to the river. As such, it could take up to £4 million to realise because new bridges might be needed. However, the rise in environmental awareness and the popularity of cycling make it a highly fund-worthy project. Indeed, funding has already started to come in.

As Derek reveals: 'We have already had emails from people saying that although they do not cycle into Derby or up the valley, they would use this facility were it to exist. Many have also said it would give them the confidence to take their

children out on a family outing which currently they do not feel would be a safe activity.'

The cycleway is also to be 'wherever possible' multi-user, allowing pedestrians, disabled people and those on horseback to use it. Forward planning also includes cycle hire provision at the Park Bikeworks in Derby, at Cromford Mill and possibly at the old Wireworks at Ambergate and the station in Matlock.

THE FUTURE

All these exciting plans and development may never have been proposed were it not for World Heritage Site status. When I moved to Milford 37 years ago I certainly wasn't aware of the profound significance of the Derwent Valley Mills. Now, I shout about it from the rooftops of my Strutt workers' cottage and am immensely proud of where I live. My recent explorations have excited me more than any project I've been involved in and have also resulted in a forthcoming photo-book, 'The Valley that Changed the World'.

Adrian Farmer, Heritage Co-ordinator for Derwent Valley Mills, states: 'What's exciting at present is that sense of momentum, of moving forward, at all the mill sites. And beyond, too. Just look at the fantastic archival work going on with the collections at John Smedley and the Heritage Lottery funded DerwentWISE project. This is a large and complex World Heritage Site. There's still much to be done and it will take several decades to achieve. Some big projects can progress over a long time so it's easy to miss the many changes and developments that are taking place. But believe me... this is an exciting time for the Derwent Valley Mills.' ♦

bottom Jonathan Wallis, Head of Museums at Derby Museum & Art Gallery giving a talk about Joseph Wright as part of Discovery Days, which runs from 24th October to 1st November this year

below Daniel Martin, Curator of Making, Derby Silk Mill

