

New Lanark - an introduction

The village of New Lanark was founded in 1785 by David Dale as a completely new industrial settlement. Cotton-spinning mills, powered by water from the River Clyde, and tenement style housing for the workforce were built from local sandstone. By 1820, the population of the village was around 2,500, and it was at that time the largest cotton-manufacturing centre in the country. It is now a popular tourist attraction.

Under the enlightened management of David Dale's son-in-law, Robert Owen, from 1800 - 1825, New Lanark became famous as a model community. Owen set about improving and expanding the business, and he used the profits to finance a series of social and educational reforms designed to improve the quality of life for his workers. He did not allow young children to work in the cotton-mills: he established progressive schools for the village in a building known as the Institute for the Formation of Character, including the first infant school in the world, and evening classes too. There was great emphasis on musical activities, art, nature study, history and geography, as well as reading, writing and arithmetic; no punishment was allowed. In addition, the villagers had free medical care, a sickness fund and a savings bank, the hours of work were reduced, and the Village Store provided food and household goods cheaply.

The cotton-mills continued in production until 1968. In response to changes in technology, the water wheels which drove the machinery were gradually replaced by water turbines, and the mills produced their own hydro-electricity from 1898. The village, founded during the Industrial Revolution, survived with few physical changes; it is now designated as an Outstanding Conservation Area, and is in the care of an independent charity, New Lanark Trust. The village still has a resident population of about 180 people who live in the beautifully restored Georgian buildings. These have been modernised internally, but retain their historic character. In December 2001, New Lanark was inscribed on UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites.

The New Lanark Trust has also created award-winning exhibition areas and visitor facilities in several of the village buildings. Visitors can see a restored Millworkers' House, which shows the living conditions of the 1820s and the 1930s. The Village Store has an exhibition about Robert Owen's original store, and a 1920s period-style shop. In Robert Owen's House, visitors can enjoy an exhibition about the famous mill-owner's life-style and his work as a social reformer, while in the main Visitor Centre, there are working textile machines, and a fascinating audio-visual ride called The Annie McLeod Experience. The ride is enhanced by special effects, produced by innovative audio-visual technology. Your guide is the ghost of a young millworker named Annie McLeod who takes visitors on a journey back to 19th century New Lanark. Discover what life was like in the village in the 1820s under Robert Owen's management. Visitors can hear the commentary for this ride in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish or Japanese, on request. In Robert Owen's School for Children, restored in 2001, visitors can see a reconstruction of a New Lanark classroom of the 1820s, an exhibition called "Saving New Lanark" about the restoration of New Lanark, and a memorable show for the new Millennium - Harmony, a time-traveller from the year 2200 highlights the issues that were important to Robert Owen, and which are still relevant to the citizens of the world in the 21st century. This show is also available in French, German, Italian, Spanish or Japanese, on request. Owen's School for Children also houses the innovative Interactive Gallery of light, sound and colour, where visitors are invited to explore and experiment in a multi-sensory environment.

Visitors to New Lanark can also enjoy the beautiful riverside setting of the village, and pleasant walks through the dramatic Clyde gorge, now the Falls of Clyde Wildlife Reserve. There are several other attractions in the village, for example the Scottish Wildlife Trust Visitor Centre, as well as a café, The Mill Pantry, and opportunities to buy craft products, books, gifts and souvenirs. One of the millworkers' rows has become a comfortable Youth Hostel, and the 18th century Mill No.1 overlooking the River Clyde, has been imaginatively restored and converted as a comfortable 38 bedroom hotel, the New Lanark Mill Hotel. Self-catering accommodation is also available in the Waterhouses, attractively situated on the riverbank close to the Hotel. Finally, don't forget to visit our beautiful Roof Garden for a spectacular bird's eye view of the village. Access via the Textile Machinery exhibition area, Mill 3, level 4. The Hotel and Visitor Centre are open all year round. Group visits are welcome, and the village offers a wide-ranging and award-winning education programme.

For more information on this unique village, please contact the New Lanark Trust
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