

PRESS RELEASE

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Utopian mills added to World Heritage List

New Lanark, one of Scotland's top tourist attractions, has become a World Heritage Site

The cotton mill village of New Lanark in Scotland was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the 25th annual session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee in Helsinki on 13 December 2001.

New Lanark Mills were founded over 200 years ago, in a dramatic gorge in Southern Scotland, close to the famous Falls of Clyde. Once famous as a model community under the enlightened management of Robert Owen, the village is now beautifully restored as a living community with an award-winning Visitor Centre and Hotel, which welcome over 400,000 visitors from all over the world every year.

New Lanark is the first industrial site in Scotland to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. The cotton-spinning community joins over 700 sites across the world, which are valued for their 'outstanding universal value'. Originally nominated back in 1986, New Lanark was re-nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List by the UK government in June 2000. The First Minister for Scotland, the late Donald Dewar MSP, signed the nomination. At their meeting in Helsinki the World Heritage Committee considered a total of 41 submissions, made by 28 states from as far afield as China, Cuba and Madagascar. In 2001 the UK government nominated four sites for consideration. New Lanark was the only site to be nominated from Scotland.

The justification for New Lanark's inclusion rests on a unique combination of cultural, built, and natural heritage, and most notably, the international influence of Robert Owen. In Owen the spirit of enterprise was allied to a passionate belief that the key to a better and fairer society was education. In an age characterised by cruel mill managers and 'dark, satanic mills', he provided decent homes, fair wages, free health care and an enlightened education system in New Lanark. Not noted for his modesty, he later described his work as *"the most important experiment for the happiness of the human race at any time in any part of the world"*, and it is true that his work inspired progressive education, factory reform, humane working practices, co-operation, and garden cities. Back in 1816, he looked forward to the new Millennium with optimism and confidence:

"What ideas individuals may attach to the term "Millennium" I know not; but I know that society may be formed so as to exist without crime, without poverty, with health greatly improved, with little, if any misery, and with intelligence and happiness increased a hundredfold; and no obstacle whatsoever intervenes at this moment except ignorance to prevent such a state of society from becoming universal."

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The New Lanark cotton mills continued in production until 1968. Closure of the mills created a crisis, and the village came close to at least partial demolition. In 1974, the New Lanark Conservation Trust was formed as an independent charity dedicated to the restoration of New Lanark as a living working community, and an outstanding example of an early industrial settlement. The village is now a living community with a resident population of 180 people living in beautifully restored sandstone tenements, and a successful tourist attraction, with award-winning exhibitions including a dark ride called the *New Millennium Experience* and a new audio-visual show called *Annie McLeod's Story*.

Bucking recent downward trends in Scottish tourism following the ill effects of Foot & Mouth Disease and the terrorist attacks of September 11, the village has enjoyed a very successful season throughout 2001 and 2002, and has a growing reputation as a must-see attraction for residents and tourists in Scotland. This year the hotel achieved record occupancy levels though the summer and autumn, and over 15,000 visitors attended New Lanark's famous festive event last November and December, the *New Christmas Experience*.

Further information is available from Richard Evans tel. +44 (0)1555 661345 development@newlanark.org

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Notes for Editors:

Mr. Harry Smith MBE, Chairman of New Lanark Conservation Trust since its inception in 1974 said: *“Although inscription on the World Heritage List carries no direct financial reward, it does bring enormous prestige which we believe will help attract even more visitors to this beautiful village in the future. We are honoured to receive such recognition, and grateful to UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee for underlining the international significance of New Lanark. By doing so they help the Trust in its work to protect the village as a lasting monument to Robert Owen and David Dale, and help ensure it will be enjoyed by generations of visitors to come.”*

Mr. John Smith, resident in New Lanark from 1965 to 1999, village shopkeeper for over 20 years, and now working in New Lanark Visitor Centre said: *“The village just fell apart after the mills closed in '68. Most folk left to find work elsewhere, and the mills were taken over by a scrap metal company. In those days this place was a real slum. You’d see bits of aeroplanes lying around and hardly any of the buildings had roofs. I’m proud we’re getting this award, because I think it’s amazing what’s been done here since the 70s. When you look at the village now with the houses restored and one of the mills converted into a hotel, it’s easy to forget that it would have all fallen into the River Clyde and been forgotten if some far-sighted individuals hadn’t stepped in.”*

Ian Donnachie, Senior Lecturer in History at the Open University, and author of *Historic New Lanark* as well as a recent biography of Robert Owen said: *“I am particularly proud of this achievement for the sake of all the people that lived and worked here in the past, and for those that still do. New Lanark is of international importance, not just for Dale and Owen, but for those who made and make the place day by day. I think everyone associated with New Lanark will regard World Heritage recognition with pride. It puts the place, and Lanark for that matter, on the global map. It helped to make the modern world.”*

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Additional information:

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. 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. In addition, the villagers had free medical care, the hours of work were reduced, and the Village Store provided food and household goods cheaply.

Today visitors to New Lanark can still see the buildings and landscape Owen would recognise. The village is in the care of an independent charity, New Lanark Conservation Trust, which has pioneered a radical approach to heritage management and created an award-winning Visitor Centre and Hotel in the village. Visitors can see a restored Millworkers' House, which shows the living conditions of the 1820s and the 1930s. The Village Store has also been refurbished, with an exhibition about Robert Owen's original store, and a period-style shop. In Robert Owen's House, visitors can enjoy an exhibition about the famous mill-owner's life-style, while in the main Visitor Centre, there are working textile machines, and a fascinating ride called The New Millennium Experience. The ride is enhanced by special effects, produced by innovative audio-visual technology. The latest attraction is the newly restored Robert Owen's School for Children where, in a dramatic audio-visual presentation, the "ghost" of Annie McLeod, a 10 year old mill girl, tells of her life in New Lanark in 1820. In the Saving New Lanark gallery, the story of the award-winning restoration programme is chronicled, while in another of the beautiful spacious rooms, where one of the original Musicians' Galleries can be seen, one of the classrooms in Owen's school as been recreated, based on the extensive documentary evidence available. In complete contrast an innovative experience of changing light, colours and sound, interprets Owen's view of child education, with its emphasis on music and exploration of the environment, in contemporary style.

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