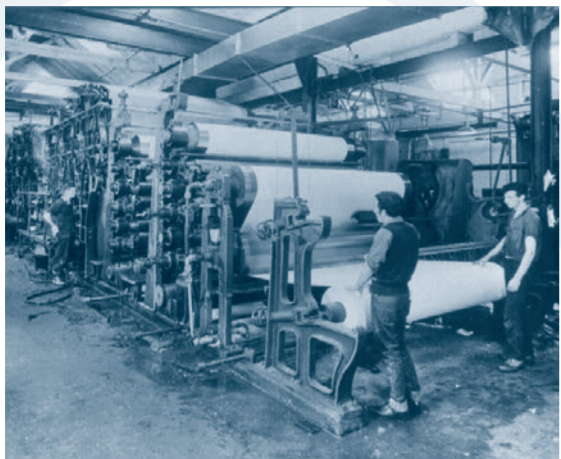


Bringing the Page to Life

Working Conditions



P People generally went to work in the mills straight from school. On the Water of Leith there were only two options locally for employment: the mills or working on the farms. Jobs were obtained through word of mouth and people simply went to the mills and asked if there were any vacancies.

“You didn’t need an interview, you just went and got a job. I mean your integrity was probably known through your family.”

Mills ran continuously on a 24 hour basis on a 3 shift system from Sunday night to Saturday lunchtime. Sunday would be used for maintenance and repairs. Woodhall mill did not stop at all and



ran constantly on a 4 shift continental system. This meant that machines were only stopped for essential maintenance.

Machine House and Cutter House

In the machine house, employees such as the papermaker, cutter men, machine men and broke boys worked in shifts from 6am to 2pm, 2pm to 10pm and 10pm to 6am. Breaks were taken at the machine when there was time. In general, there were no formal apprenticeship or training schemes, people



learnt on the job. Most men started as broke boys or assistants on the cutters or beaters and then worked their way through the mill processes. (Broke boys added ‘broke’ or recycled paper to the pulp.) However, by the 1950s people were beginning to be sponsored for night school courses in papermaking.

The Salle

While general patterns of work allowed men free mobility through the mills, women were usually confined to the salle / overhauling department. This was the women’s domain where they would check the paper for flaws before it went out and also count the paper into reams ready for export.

“I used to overhaul Galart which was for Vogue magazine. We would sometimes get the paper for the mint and overhaul that. You had a little space, everyone had a little space on the table. It was dumped and you pulled it off into a sort of box.”

For those who worked in the salle, the day started at 7am and finished at 5pm, with three quarters of an hour break for breakfast and lunch. Most people lived close enough to go home for their breaks.

