

Bringing the Page to Life

Location of the Mills



Papermills using the power and resources of the river had been a major feature of the landscape of the Water of Leith since the mid-sixteenth century. The mills relied on waterpower and a plentiful supply of water for many of the papermaking processes. The Water of Leith was the perfect location for this blossoming industry; the proximity of the river to Granton and Leith harbours was ideal for shipping in raw materials and exporting paper products. Edinburgh was also a ready market for paper goods and a consistent source of the raw material, rags.



The advent of the Balerno Branch railway in 1874 linked the Water of Leith to the centre of Edinburgh. The line left the main Edinburgh to Carstairs line near Dalmahoy. It travelled past Balerno and reached the river just above Newmills and then rejoined the mainline at Slateford. For most of its run the line ran directly along the Water of Leith and consequently just past the door of many of the mills. Many mills, including Kinleith Mill and Kate's Mill, had railway sidings directly into the mill and bought their own railway carriages, aiding the import of fuel and raw materials and the export of goods.



“You had the river on one side, the railway on the other side. To be honest, looking back now, it was a somewhat stupid place to build a papermill. But I would imagine in the very early days, you know in the 1800s, it would be ideal.”

Many of the modern mills including Kinleith Mill, Balerno Bank and Woodhall were built on the site of seventeenth-century mills. By the 1950s modern machinery and methods of production meant that the existing buildings were too small but the sites had little or no room for expansion. They were hemmed in by the river on one side and the railway on the other. The expansion of Woodhall Mill forced it to overhang the river as this was the only space available for growth. The provision of steam power and mainlined water and electricity meant industrial dependence on the river decreased and many companies began to look for alternative sites for production.

