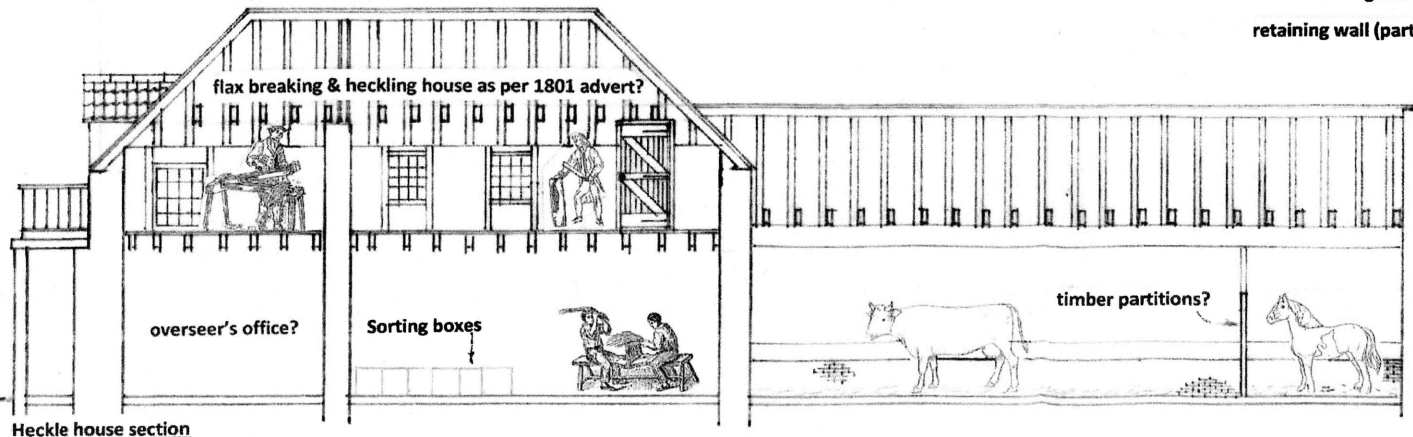
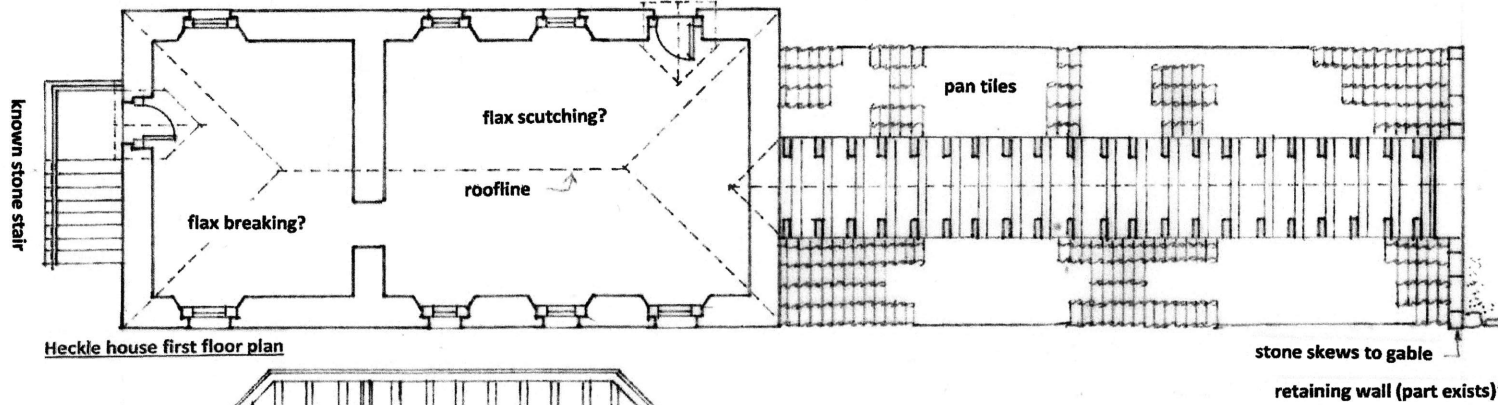
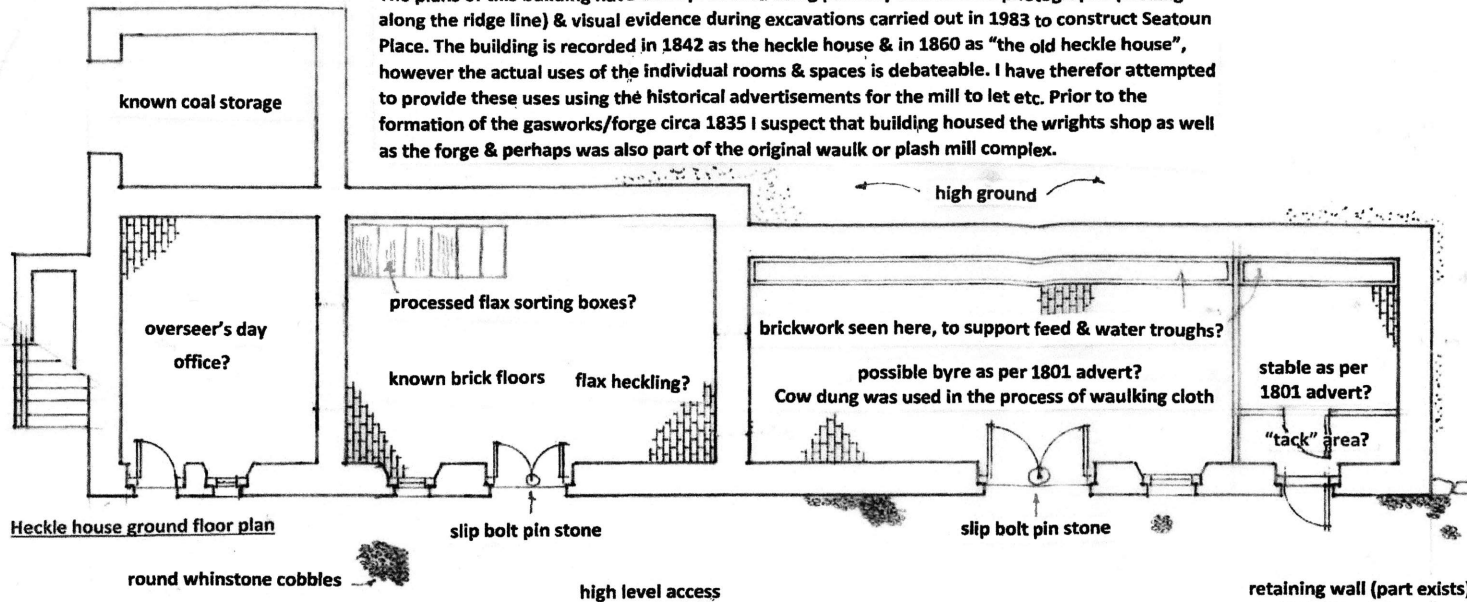


Largo Spinning Mill, drg. no 2, scale 1:100. John Band. 2019

The plans of this building have been produced using partially demolished photographs (looking along the ridge line) & visual evidence during excavations carried out in 1983 to construct Seatoun Place. The building is recorded in 1842 as the heckle house & in 1860 as "the old heckle house", however the actual uses of the individual rooms & spaces is debateable. I have therefor attempted to provide these uses using the historical advertisements for the mill to let etc. Prior to the formation of the gasworks/forge circa 1835 I suspect that building housed the wrights shop as well as the forge & perhaps was also part of the original wauk or plash mill complex.



Flax spinning process:- (1). Breaking & scutching, (2). Heckling, (3). Sorting, (4). Carding, (5). Spreading, drawing & roving, (6). Spinning, (7). Reeling, (8). Drying. Note. Stages 1-5 all classed as "preparing"

With regards to the following processes I have described & indicated the methods used as "by hand", this is due to the fact that the heckle house at Largo was situated in such a position as connecting to the waterwheel & steam engine for machine power appears to have been awkward. Also the mechanisation of these processes did not really supersede manual efficiently until the mid. 19th century ie the last days of flax processing & spinning at Largo.

(1). Breaking & scutching:- This is the first process to be carried out at the mill after the raw flax has been successfully "retted" and thoroughly dried. The breaking of flax was required to remove the woody core or "boon". A hand breaker consisted of a set of intersecting wooden blades, 2 blades in a frame facing down and a separate set of three blades facing up. Both sets connected at one end by a hinge, the top set having a handle for the operative. The flax is placed between the open breaker, the operative forces the top blades down which causes the flax to break over the "W" shape. The boon falls from the stalk to the ground. In order to remove the finer parts of the boon the flax is then scutched by the operative holding the handful of flax over a vertical timber board and drawing down a wooden scutching knife to rub off the remaining boon.

(2) heckling:- The object of this process is to split the filaments of flax into their finest fibres and arrange them into parallel order. This is achieved by the operative "thashing & drawing" a handful of the flax through varying sizes of tapered iron pins on a board which itself is fixed to a bench, this was a highly skilled job which required much experience in order to attain dexterity. The small pieces of flax "tow" were caught on the heckle pins and removed regularly. Prior to the development of machinery which could spin tow into a useful yarn it was often sold as "tinder" for fire lighting or used in early guns for igniting the powder. Hecklers were highly paid for their skills, being paid by the weight of flax processed, however they could also be penalised if they produced too much tow. The mill manager or overseer paid particular attention to the processes in the heckle house of the mill. Early machine heckling produced more waste and hand processing remained the preferred method for a long period after the machine's invention. The common phrase "to heckle" a speaker is thought to have its derivation in the early mills in Dundee. Hecklers having a reputation as the most radical & belligerent element of the mill workforce. The manager each morning reading out the daily instructions to the accompaniment of interruption & often furious debate from the hecklers. Heckling was normally carried out in a separate building within a mill complex (as at Largo) as the process produced large amounts of dust causing "flax dressers disease" caused by the inhalation of the dust. The average life expectancy of a heckler was at one time 46. Generally only 1 in 5,000 flax mill employees reached the age of 70.

(3). Sorting:- Once heckled the flax was sorted into boxes according to fineness. This was done by weight, touch and eye. The tow likewise kept separate from the "line" flax.