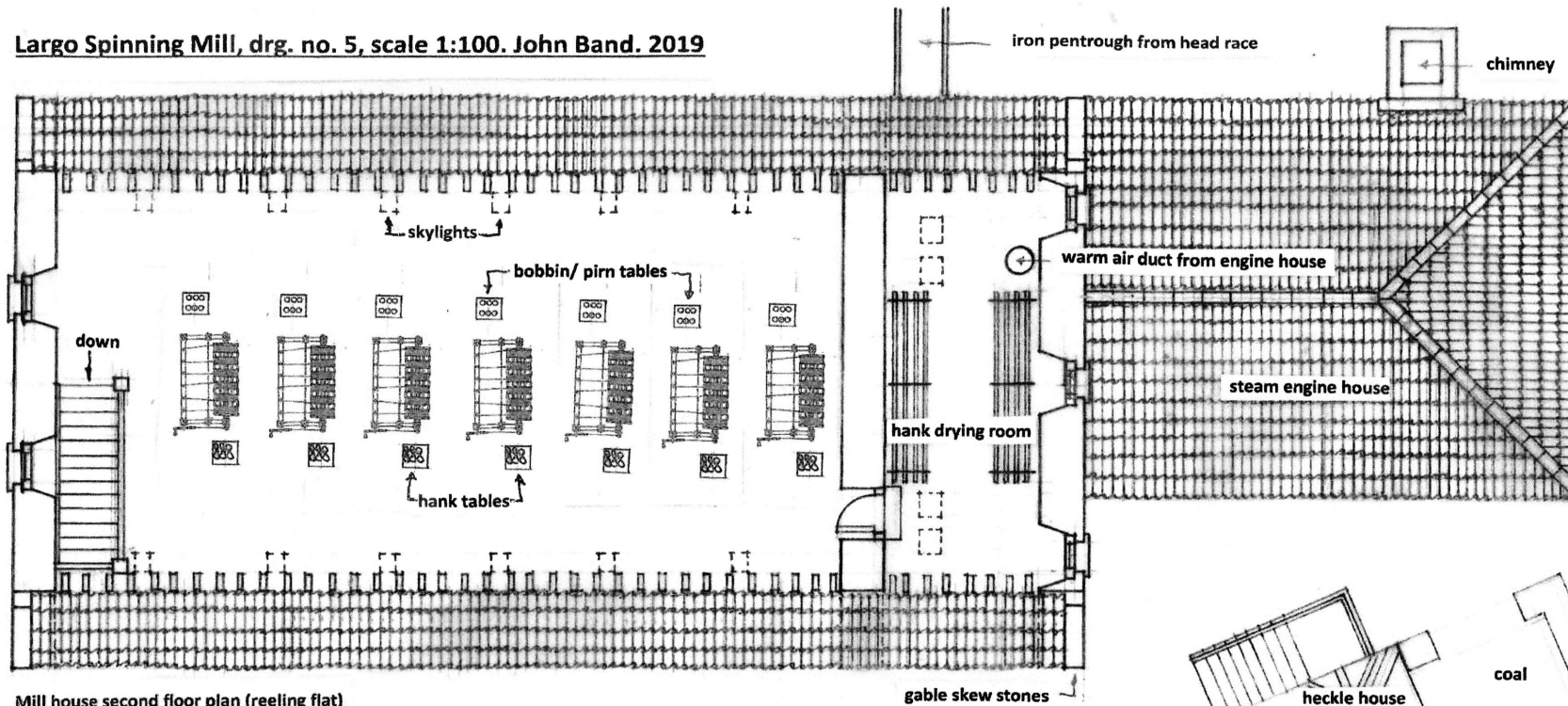


Largo Spinning Mill, drg. no. 5, scale 1:100. John Band. 2019



Mill house second floor plan (reeling flat)

(7). reeling or winding:- The spindles or bobbins of flax or tow yarns were taken from the spinning frame by the box full and carried up to the reeling room where they were placed upon a manually operated machine to be unwound into "hanks". The lowest denomination being the "lea" or "cut". The standard lea contains 300 yards (274.320m). The next highest denomination is the "hank", each containing 10 leas or 3,000 yards (2,743.200m); 20 hanks contain 60000 yards (58,864m) and these constitute 1 bundle. It is by a standard lea of 300 yards that the description of yarn is known. The 1851 census confirms at Largo Mill there were 17 yarn winders employed only two of whom were men.

(8). Drying:- The drying of the hanks of wet spun yarn is carried out in lofts (at Largo this was possibly done in the room adjacent to the reeling room) heated by steam up to 90 deg. F. or by exposure to the open air on painted wooden poles to protect the yarn against damage from splinters. The reason I suspect the room at Largo was for drying is that it was close to the steam engine in order to duct heat and there was a change in the roof construction ie there were no horizontal upper "collars" or "ties" between the rafters at ceiling height, the rafters being supported mid span by "purlins" spanning between the original 1798 gable and the new gable adjacent to the steam engine house. The formation of this clear headroom would have allowed the yarn hanks on the poles to have been raised on ropes & pulleys to provide more space. On completion of the drying process the yarn was ready for sale either to local handloom weavers in Largo or to the large power loom factories in Dundee, Kirkcaldy etc.

Line flax & tow yarns:- Yarn produced from the finer line flax is used for the weaving fine linens to be made into, for example items of clothing, bed sheets, pillow cases & sowing thread. Tow yarn is generally weaker & has a hairy finish, this is generally used for the manufacture of sacking, rope, twine, fishing nets, carpet backing or coarse linens.

Thread:- Thread in its technical sense, is the compound cord produced by doubling and twisting two or more single lines of yarn.

Artificial lighting:- Until the 2nd half of the 18th century work was generally an activity confined to the hours of daylight, due to the poor quality of artificial lighting. The invention of the Argand lamp in 1790 was the first significant advance in lighting technology for millennia. The lamp used a hollow cylindrical wick to aerate the flame and produced light equivalent to 6 candles. Oil & candles were expensive and due to the amount of dust & fibres on the machinery & floors of a spinning mill along with the machinery lubricating oil candles & oil lamps created a huge fire risk. The insurance industry at one point paying out more in claims than they were receiving in premiums due to the amount of mill fires. The worlds first practical gas lighting plants were installed in the cotton mills of Salford in 1806. A gas plant was built & gas lighting installed at Largo Mill circa 1835.

Security:- The security of a mill was essential as the theft of finished yarn was common, with the materials being sold on the black market to hand loom weavers. At Largo in 1842 a Lurcher dog is recorded as being chained to the front wall of the mill house to provide security and an alarm against prowling intruders.

Caledonian Mercury 1801 (edited):- Lease of spinning mill, Fifeshire. The remainder of the lease for 999 years from Martinmas 1789 of Largo Mills & grounds. Consisting of about 4 acres of ground, with a constant supply of water, fall of 24 feet. There is at present a mill house 40 feet long (besides staircase & wheel shade) by 38 feet wide, lately occupied in spinning flax & tow yarns. The waterwheel is an overshot 18ft. in diameter & 3 1/2 ft. wide. Lying shafts & wheels, cast metal. On the 1st floor there are 4 carding engines of a new construction, lint & tow preparing frames, turning lathe, rest benches & C. On the 2nd floor 12 spinning frames of 36 spindles each & in the attic storey, reels sufficient for the business. There is also a malt mill & thirlage belonging thereto, a wauk or plash mill, wareroom, heckle house, wrights shop, stable & byre. Also a dwelling house fit for a manager at Drummochy with the household furniture therein, in whole or part as may be required at valuation. The mill & machinery were erected about 2 1/2 years ago upon the most approved principals, are in excellent order, being little worse than new and as the premises lie within 100 yards of the harbour of Largo & at a similar distance from the manufacturing villages of Largo, Drummochy & Lundin Mill where work people are always to be had at an easy rate, and the greater part of the old experienced hands may be obtained. A more desirable situation for such a business is hardly to be met with.

Pigot & Co, directory 1837:- David Leslie, flax spinner, Largo. The mill employs 85 hands, working 12 hours per day, 6 days per week for 9 shillings.

New Statistical Account 1845:- Largo, water & steam mill for flax spinning, employing 85 hands. They work 12 hours per diem, 9 on Saturday. They afford a fair remuneration & are not considered particularly prejudicial to health or morals.

Fifeshire Journal 1854:- To sell or let, entry Martinmas 1854. The lax spinning mill at Lower Largo, containing 918 spindles for flax & tow spinning, requisite preparing machinery, with water & steam power & C, as now occupied by Messrs Swan & about 4 acres of land, held under a 999 year lease. The property is close to the harbour at Largo & the East Of Fife Railway when carried out must pass through or near to it. The situation is well adapted if desired for a woollen, farina, flour or meal mill, paper mill, bleachfield or foundry. Apply to Mr Greig, Schoolmaster, Largo. Messrs Drummond & Mitchell, Cupar or Mr Leslie, Civil Engineer, 72 George Street, Edinburgh.