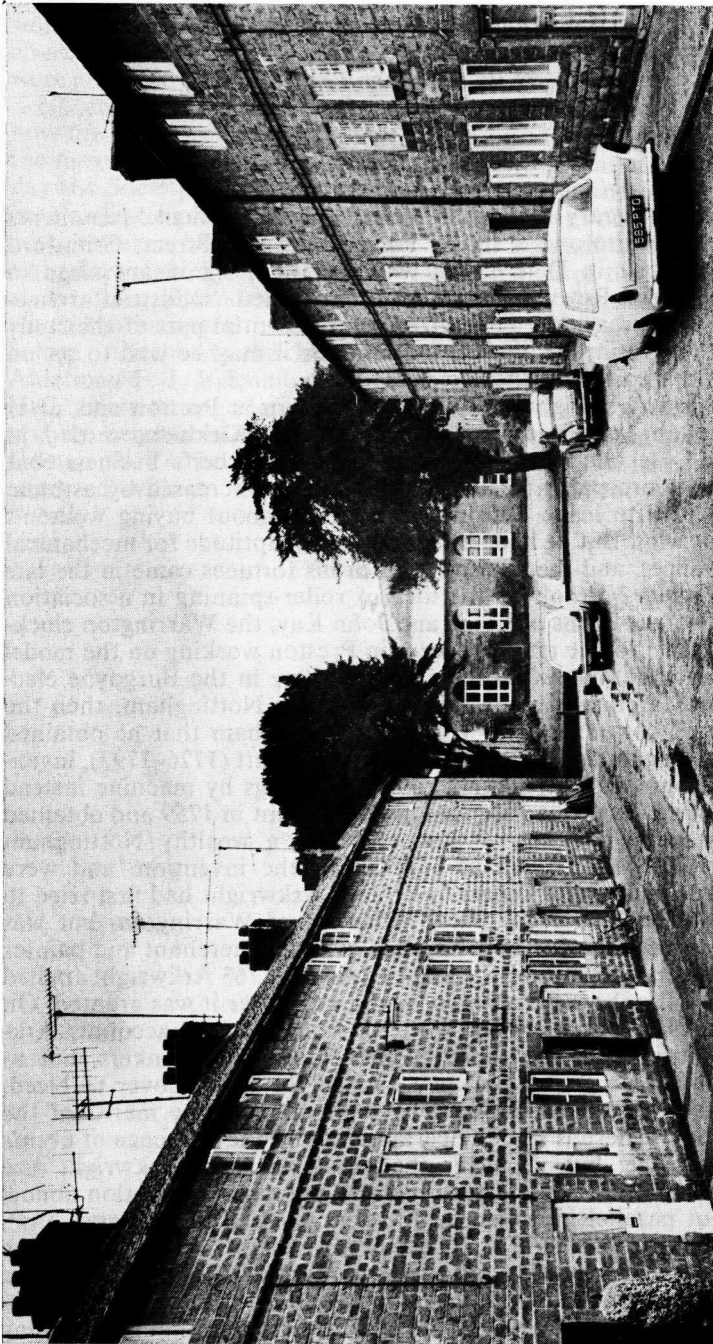


NORTH STREET, CROMFORD

by Ivor Bulmer-Thomas

From 2 January 1965 to 23 April 1974 the Ancient Monuments Society was the owner of six houses in North Street, Cromford near Matlock in Derbyshire, which mark a significant stage in the Industrial Revolution. In these days when "industrial archaeology" is increasingly recognized as an essential part of the study and conservation of ancient monuments it may be well to set on record this episode in the Society's history.

Richard Arkwright (1732-1792) was born at Preston and, after serving an apprenticeship to a barber at Kirkham, settled in Bolton.¹ He added a public house to his barber's business, but it did not prosper, and his difficulties were increased by asthma. He decided to leave Bolton and travelled about buying women's hair for wigs. But he had already shown an aptitude for mechanical contrivances, and the decisive turn in his fortunes came in the late sixties when he took up the idea of roller-spinning in association with Thomas Highs of Leigh and John Kay, the Warrington clock-maker. In 1768 he and Kay were in Preston working on the model of a machine, but when their right to vote in the Burgoyne election in March was contested they left for Nottingham, then the centre of cotton hosiery. It was in Nottingham that he obtained the backing and partnership of Jedediah Strutt (1726-1797), inventor of a process for making ribbed stockings by machine instead of by hand. Strutt had secured his first patent in 1759 and obtained the financial backing of Samuel Need, a wealthy Nottingham hosier. They flourished as a result of the invention, and were prepared to look for others to exploit. Arkwright had first tried to get cash backing from Peter Atherton of Warrington, but was more successful with John Smalley, a liquor merchant and painter of Preston, who became his first partner. In 1768 Arkwright applied from Nottingham for a patent and a year later it was granted. On Smalley's resources giving out, according to one account, Arkwright turned to the Wrights, the Nottingham bankers, but as they found progress slow they handed the matter over to Need, who asked his partner Strutt to pronounce on the merits of the invention. There is some uncertainty about the sequence of events at this stage, but whatever the exact sequence Arkwright and Strutt had been brought together and began an association almost without parallel in industrial history. As R. S. Fitton and A. P. Wadsworth wrote in 1958, "They began business in cotton-spinning together, they parted, and then, as part of the changes in the modern cotton trade, the firms they founded came together sixty-one years ago (1897) under the same ownership, though retaining



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their titles. The continuity of W. G. and J. Strutt and of Sir Richard Arkwright and Company is unique in textile history. The picture stretches from the first successful cotton factory of 1769 (the earlier Paul-Wyatt factories were failures) to the great combine which embraces all the fibres, natural and man-made, of the 1950s."²

It was at Nottingham that the association began, but in 1771 the two men took a momentous decision which transferred production to Cromford. This was nothing less than a decision to use water power as the motive force in turning the machinery. The patent of 1769 had mentioned only horse power, and no more was attempted at Nottingham. True, the use of water power had often been thought about and even attempted in the previous decades. Twenty years earlier Lewis Paul, whose first machines at Birmingham had been turned by horses, had actually used water power for his primitive spinning factory at Northampton. Strutt as a silk manufacturer was familiar with Lombe's mill at Derby, which used water power and was being copied elsewhere.³ But the process was still rudimentary, and Strutt and Need were risking a good deal of capital by then standards in backing its application to Arkwright's invention. In retrospect they had no regrets, for this was one of the turning points in the development of the factory system.

But why Cromford? There was, it is true, plenty of water, tumbling down in streams from the surrounding hills as it still does today. The water for Arkwright's mill was supplied by a stream which issued from the local lead mines and joined the Derwent near Cromford bridge. The stream was reputed never to freeze, and the mill was built at its confluence with the Derwent. But there were many other places in that hilly country with water supplies just as good, and in 1771 Cromford had very poor communications with the ports from which its raw material came and the towns through which its products would have to be sold. It was fourteen miles from Derby, twenty-six from Nottingham and nearly forty-five from Manchester. The high ground around Cromford was unenclosed moorland and the roads near it were poor. The turnpike from the north of England to Derby and London ran some miles to the east, through Brassington, as shown by Burdett's county map of 1762-67;⁴ the direct road to Derby ran over the moors and the valley road, now A6, was not made until 1820.

Nevertheless it was Cromford that Strutt and Arkwright selected for their great adventure, and their first task was to recruit labour and build houses for the immigrants as their needs could not be satisfied locally. The first contemporary reference is the following advertisement in the *Derby Mercury* of 13 December, 1771.

'Cotton Mill, Cromford, 10 December, 1771

"WANTED immediately, two Journeymen Clock-makers, or others that understands Tooth and Pinion well; Also a Smith that

can forge and file.—Likewise two Wood Turners that have been accustomed to Wheel-making, Spole-turning, &c. Weavers residing at the Mill, may have good Work. There is Employment at the above Place, for Women, Children, &c. and good Wages.

“N.B. A Quantity of Box Wood is wanted: Any Persons whom the above may suit, will be treated with by Messrs. Arkwright and Co. at the Mill, or Mr. Strutt, in Derby.”

It is not necessary to pursue the story of cotton manufacture at Cromford, and, indeed, hardly any records of the Arkwright mills have survived. Although Richard Arkwright established mills in many other places, it was Cromford that he regarded as his home, and there in 1790, having bought most of the land around, he built Willersley Castle, which still testifies to his independent and arrogant spirit. By that time Arkwright was a wealthy man and on his own. When Need died in 1781, the partnership with Strutt had been dissolved.

Enough has been said to show how North Street, Cromford came to be built. In 1776, when a second mill was begun, about 500 workmen and children were given a feast. Arkwright and Strutt frequently advertised for more labour in those years. In the absence of documentary evidence it is not possible to say when exactly this street with terraced stone houses on both sides was built, but it was probably in 1771 and certainly by 1780. The houses remained in the ownership of the Arkwright family until 1924 (see Appendix 1.)

The walls facing the street are substantial. The houses were planned as “one room deep dwellings” on three floors. A report made by the Society’s Honorary Architect, Dr. T. Marsden, in December 1972 conjectures that “the upper floors were formerly used as workrooms and provided with continuous mullioned windows, giving light from two sides of the building”. Dr. Marsden added in his report: “The plan arrangement and elevational character show the influence of symmetry; reflected pairs of houses have doors to the fronts planned on either side of the dividing wall between units. The staircases are deep and fit into a small floor area.”

Nos. 4-9 came into the possession of the Ancient Monuments Society in this way. In 1961 the Matlock Urban District Council bought them with the intention of demolishing them and building on the site an old people’s home. In view of their interest as monuments of the Industrial Revolution, the Derbyshire County Council placed a Building Preservation Order on the properties under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947. Being unable to carry out its intention, the Matlock U.D.C. sought to divest itself of the ownership and offered the houses to the Ancient Monuments Society; and after some debate the Society’s Council agreed to buy them at the District Valuer’s valuation of £400. The tenants were all paying low rents and were then all rent protected.

It was realized that the roofs needed overhauling, and that modernization was desirable, particularly the provision of new bathroom and toilet accommodation at the rear. Although such work would have attracted improvement grants, and the rents could have been raised to meet the expenditure, it would have meant the immediate injection of capital which the Society at that time was in no position to provide. Accordingly, although the most necessary repairs were always executed punctiliously, the Society was never able to carry out desirable improvements. The houses were always in demand as vacancies occurred, but the Society is not equipped for owning and maintaining property at such a distance from its headquarters, and in due course it was decided to seek to divest the Society of the ownership, subject to assurances about the future preservation of the houses and the security of the tenants. An approach was first made to the National Trust, and the Trust would have been interested if it could have been given the whole of the street. (It is, indeed, desirable that the street as a whole should be preserved, including the Church school which was built at one end in the nineteenth century and provides a charming architectural stop to it, as well as keeping it as a *cul-de-sac*.) In the meantime our Honorary Life Fellow, Mr. John Smith, had taken the generous and far-sighted step of founding the Landmark Trust, and he was asked if the Trust would be willing to acquire the property. It so happened that the Trust was being simultaneously approached to see if it would accept houses at the other end of the street, and an agreement was soon reached. As the houses had not been acquired for an investment but for the purposes of the charity, i.e. the Society, the consent of the Charity Commissioners had to be obtained. The Commissioners in accordance with their practice required a valuation by a surveyor acting solely on behalf of the Society to be made, and in due course made an order authorizing the sale to the Landmark Trust for not less than £3,000—a measure of the increase in property values in recent years. The conveyance to the Landmark Trust was concluded on 23 April, 1974.

The Society can look back with a measure of pride on this episode for we played our part in ensuring the preservation of these interesting monuments of the Industrial Revolution, we proved ourselves good landlords, and we have now handed over the houses to a body which is better equipped than the Society is for carrying out our original intention in acquiring them.

APPENDIX I

Recent changes in ownership, from the title deeds

- 25 July, 1924 Richard Alleyne Arkwright, son of Frederick Charles Arkwright of Willersley Castle, of Willersley House, conveyed the property to Tom Wilson Austin and James Austin.
- 13 August, 1928 James Austin sold the property to Silvester Britland and Martha Ann Britland.
- 9 March, 1946 Miss Martha Ann Britland sold the property to Mrs. Harriet Annie Walker.
- 15 June, 1961 Mrs. Harriet Annie Walker conveyed the property to the Matlock Urban District Council.
- 2 January, 1965 Matlock Urban District Council conveyed the property to Ivor Bulmer-Thomas, Raymond Richards and Lionel Milner Angus-Butterworth as Trustees for the Ancient Monuments Society. (N.B. Raymond Richards retired as a Trustee on 29 December, 1966 and was succeeded by Leslie Phenix Beckley, who died 9 September, 1973.)
- 23 April, 1974 Ivor Bulmer-Thomas and Lionel Milner Angus-Butterworth, the surviving Trustees for the Ancient Monuments Society, conveyed the property to the Landmark Trust.

APPENDIX II

Sealed 28th March 1974

$$\frac{444}{74}$$

General) – Ancient Monuments Society
Charity)

$$\frac{A}{209,605 A/1.}$$

Authority to sell real estate.

CHARITY COMMISSION

In the matter of the Charity called the Ancient Monuments Society; and
In the matter of the Charities Act, 1960.

THE CHARITY COMMISSIONERS FOR ENGLAND AND WALES, being satisfied that it is expedient in the interests of the above-mentioned Charity that the property described in the schedule hereto and belonging to the Charity should be sold upon the terms mentioned below, HEREBY ORDER that:

The Trustees of the Charity may sell the said property to the Charity called The Landmark Trust for not less than £3,000 subject to the condition that the sale shall be completed within one year from the date of this Order.

SCHEDULE

4 to 9 (consecutive) North Street, Cromford, in the County of Derby.

Sealed by Order of the Commissioners this 28th day of March, 1974.

L.S.

413-19-3-74JH

APPENDIX III

A letter from the Hon. Secretary of the Ancient Monuments Society to the tenants of Nos. 4-9 North Street, Cromford

33 Ladbrooke Square,
London W11
18 April, 1974

Dear Tenant,

The houses in North Street are historically important as having been built by Richard Arkwright in conjunction with Jedediah Strutt in 1771 to house workmen for the first cotton mill to use water power. When they were offered to the Society by the Matlock Urban District Council in 1964 we therefore felt bound to accept them, and we have held them for nearly ten years. We believe that the tenants feel that we have been good landlords. But the Society is not equipped to administer property at such a distance from its headquarters, nor have we the resources to bring the amenities of the houses up to current standards. Since the houses were acquired the Landmark Trust has been formed by our Honorary Life Fellow, Mr. John Smith, and this Trust has both the ex-

perience and the resources for dealing with such property. We accordingly inquired whether the Trust would be willing to buy the property from us, and we are glad to say that the Trust has agreed to do so. This will ensure the preservation of the houses and their modernization more effectively than we could do, and I am sure the tenants will find the Landmark Trust to be as good landlords as we have been.

Tenants pay rent fortnightly in arrears (with a free fortnight at Christmas) and the last rent will be collected for the Ancient Monuments Society on 23 April. Thereafter the rents will be collected for the Landmark Trust.

We send our best wishes to the tenants, confident that your relationship with the Trust will be as happy as it has been with the Society.

Yours sincerely,

IVOR BULMER-THOMAS

Notes

¹ The information about Richard Arkwright, Jedediah Strutt and the Cromford mill in this paper is derived from R. S. Fitton and A. P. Wadsworth, *The Strutts and the Arkwrights* (Manchester University Press, 1958), to which I wish to express my deep indebtedness.

² The English Cotton Corporation.

³ A. P. Wadsworth and J. de L. Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Lancashire, 1600-1780* (Manchester, 1931), chapter xxi.

⁴ Reproduced from the revision of 1791 as an end paper in Fitton and Wadsworth, *op. cit.*