

Lumsdale was a successful choice for the site of these mills

[History](#)



From the 17th century, right up to the start of the 20th century, the Lumsdale valley was a fairly large industrial site in the town of Matlock in Derbyshire. Several different industries such as bone-grinding for glue and fertiliser, cotton spinning after Richard Arkwright lost his patent of the water frame, bleaching, dyeing, barytes processing, paint making, lead smelting and sawing went on in the valley until all plots of land were auctioned off on 6 June 1929.

There was also a smithy. Throughout its functioning years, water power was used to drive the mills. The water would be held one of the three ponds in the valley, held in by a dam before being released on the opening/raising of a sluice gate. Once the water had been used for driving a mill, a sophisticated system of launders would carry it down the valley from mill to mill, except at mill one, where the tail race takes the water back into Bentley Brook.

The remains of the valley were purchased by local resident Marjorie Mills, who later sold the valley to what is now the Arkwright Society who stopped most of the remains from collapsing completely. One of the three ponds has been fully restored, along with a dam and overflow pipe and impressive remains of a spectacular wheel pit lie just below Pond three. Some of the original lead smelting works were converted into accommodation for the workers, then later turned into holiday homes and now exist as private residencies and houses have also been built next to Bentley Brook.

Today, the Lumsdale Valley lies modestly and obscurely next to the town of Matlock between two A-roads with plenty of ruined mills, sluice gates and

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wheel pits. The ruins already imply that the site wasn't the best place for the mills, though there is evidence to suggest otherwise, but it is certainly nowhere near as successful as Cromford where one of the mills only closed in 1993 and now exists as a shopping village and museum.

It is so obscure that even some of the local people don't know it exists, even if they have lived there for about 40 years! One of the bleaching factories was turned into a glass-blowing studio, which is now closed and the bleach works are now closed to the public since a storm in 1999 destroyed most of them and rendered them too dangerous. First of all, in the 17th century, Lumsdale was a good idea for the site of the mills. All the mills were driven by Bentley Brook, the local stream which ran all year round and was virtually free.

One of the three ponds has been restored by the Arkwright society. Water power was also the only efficient form of power so it was used to drive mills all over the country. Everybody used water power, therefore Lumsdale was as good as anywhere. However, years later, water power was starting to become largely superseded by steam power and even if a more efficient power source had been invented, it didn't benefit the Lumsdale valley as there was no coal in the valley and no easy way of transporting it to the valley.

A photograph of the valley, taken in 1907 shows a stream with laundries criss-crossing the stream carrying water from mill to mill and a mill in the background with a large wheel pit next to the mill. This is a useful piece of evidence because it shows that someone thought it was worth spending money on the valley. The remains of a wheel pit just below Pond three tell us

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there was water power there, and breast shot wheels were in use, so the owners of the mills obviously wanted to use the water as efficiently as possible. The physical evidence however is hard to interpret as most of it has vanished!

The tithe award map from 1847 shows that there was still bleaching, paint making and water power in the valley, this is a useful piece of evidence as it also tells us what sort of properties were owned and which sort of industries were going on. The sales leaflet from 1929 shows us the three ponds were still full of water when most of the valley's industries packed up, even though Cromford had already superseded Lumsdale long before this. This is a useful piece of evidence because it tells us how many industries had survived until the demise of the valley.

Initially, Lumsdale was an attractive place for industry as most of the raw materials needed for different things such as barytes for paint-making, gritstone, glass, chemicals etc. could be obtained locally for example lead came from mines on Masson Hill, chemicals probably came from Chesterfield and gritstone probably came from the nearby moors. However, later on things changed which meant the Lumsdale Valley had no advantages over, say, Cromford. The lead mines ran out in the 19th century so lead had to be sourced from elsewhere.

This was difficult as transportation had to be done by packhorse while if anything was needed in Cromford, the canal and railway network would help that to happen. As well as that, after Richard Arkwright lost his patent for the water frame, a cotton mill was set up but was declared bankrupt 20 years

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later. The photographs aren't very useful here, as they only tell us that the valley's industry hadn't declined completely by 1907. The sales leaflet from 1929 tells us the bleach works survived until 1929, when most of the other factories/mills had closed.

From this we can also deduce that some of the raw materials (in this case chemicals) were still available and useful for industry in the Lumsdale Valley. Remains of the bleach works (which were later turned into a glass blowing studio) tell us someone thought it was worth looking after the remains. The tithe award map also tells us bleaching carried on 'til at least 1847 so chemicals were available for a long time. In the 17th century, Lumsdale was no worse than anywhere because packhorses and wagons were used by everyone and there were no more sophisticated modes of transport, therefore no competition between different industrial sites.

Lumsdale was a good choice at first, but later on, as Cromford rose, Lumsdale fell after being largely superseded. When turnpike routes were invented, Arkwright would have been able to use them straight away to get the output of his Cromford factories across the country as a turnpike route ran close to Cromford and there was no need to transport any goods long distances up steep hills by packhorse. The Cromford canal was built in 1794 and Cromford's mills could benefit enormously from this because it was a cheap way to transport goods and no expensive methods such as packhorses would be necessary at all.

Lumsdale, on the other hand did not benefit from the canal at all, packhorses were still necessary if the valley was to make any money by selling its

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products. The new innovations are just the start of the huge decline of the once-prosperous valley. 1831 marked the start of a huge boost for Cromford with the opening of the Cromford and High Peak railway line, with a station a very short distance away from the mill, which meant no end to the size of the market which the cotton could reach.

However, for the Lumsdale valley, it still meant a back-breaking, expensive trip down the steep valley by packhorse if the valley's output was to reach anywhere beyond Matlock. The physical evidence shows there were packhorse routes through the valley and that the valley was, and still is very steep so there was no easy way of getting things in and out of the valley. The width of the valley also means bad news for Lumsdale, only a small number of packhorses could get up to the mills at one time while taking the spun cotton from Cromford mill didn't need so much effort.

The sales leaflet tells us that in the valley's latter years, most of the industry was associated with bleaching, dyeing, barytes processing and paint making. From the aforementioned point, we can deduce that one of the few, maybe the only advantages Lumsdale had over Cromford was a bleaching industry was active in Lumsdale, so the cotton produced in Cromford could be bleached and dyed in Lumsdale, which would mean extra money for Cromford's mill owners.

The Ordnance Survey map shows us that the quarry where the gritstone is likely to have come from has now packed up and now only bone-grinding, paint making and bleaching are still active in the valley. Though it also shows that a turnpike routes is nearby, only a railway station or canal nearby would

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give the valley a chance to be as good, maybe better than Cromford but the steepness and narrowness of the valley just doesn't allow that to happen.

The 1847 map tells us that bleaching and dyeing are among the few remaining industries, presumably because other industries e. g. cotton spinning were very big in Cromford because of the railways and canals. In the 17th century, Lumsdale was no worse than anywhere because packhorses and wagons were used by everyone and there were no more sophisticated modes of transport, therefore no competition between different industrial sites. Lumsdale was a good choice at first, but later on, as Cromford rose, Lumsdale fell after being largely superseded.

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When the valley was first known to have been functioning in the 1600's, it was no worse or better than anywhere else so people decided to live near the valley so they could work there. Though Lumsdale was never as successful as Cromford, because of the many disadvantages it had under Cromford, a large house was built in the bottom of the valley which tells us someone made a lot of money from the industry in the valley.

However, as the industries declined, Lumsdale was becoming a less and less attractive place to work, especially as it is a very narrow valley, therefore not many houses can easily fit into the valley. The ordnance survey map from 1880 shows us very few industries were active, and census records from the following year show us that only 96 people lived in the valley, so approximately the right number of people to sustain the few businesses still functioning in the valley.

The physical state of the valley tells us it was demanding having to trek up a steep valley to get to work in the morning while in Cromford, all the land was flat and you were given a house on North Street with a small garden outside so you could grow crops. The 1847 tithe award map tells us there was still a variety of industry in the valley and census records for 1851 tell us a great 121 people lived in the valley. The sales leaflet from 1929 tells us many houses were empty so people will have moved away to Cromford.

Census record also show that in 1881 there was a 15% fall in newcomers into the valley, that 15% will have decided to work in Cromford because of better prospects. On the whole, I think Lumsdale wasn't a successful choice for the site of these mills. Although it started off as good as anywhere, the rapid

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superseding of the valley's industrial methods show that there are more reasons as to why the valley was not a good choice for an industrial site.

The evidence, however, is not all good: the censuses are hard to read, have limited information and can be inaccurate; the photographs are unclear and show only the good points of the valley so they are slightly biased; the physical evidence has all but been completely demolished and we can't infer much from it. Had it been available, other evidence such as rent books, better, more detailed photos and financial records would be useful in finding out more about the valley.