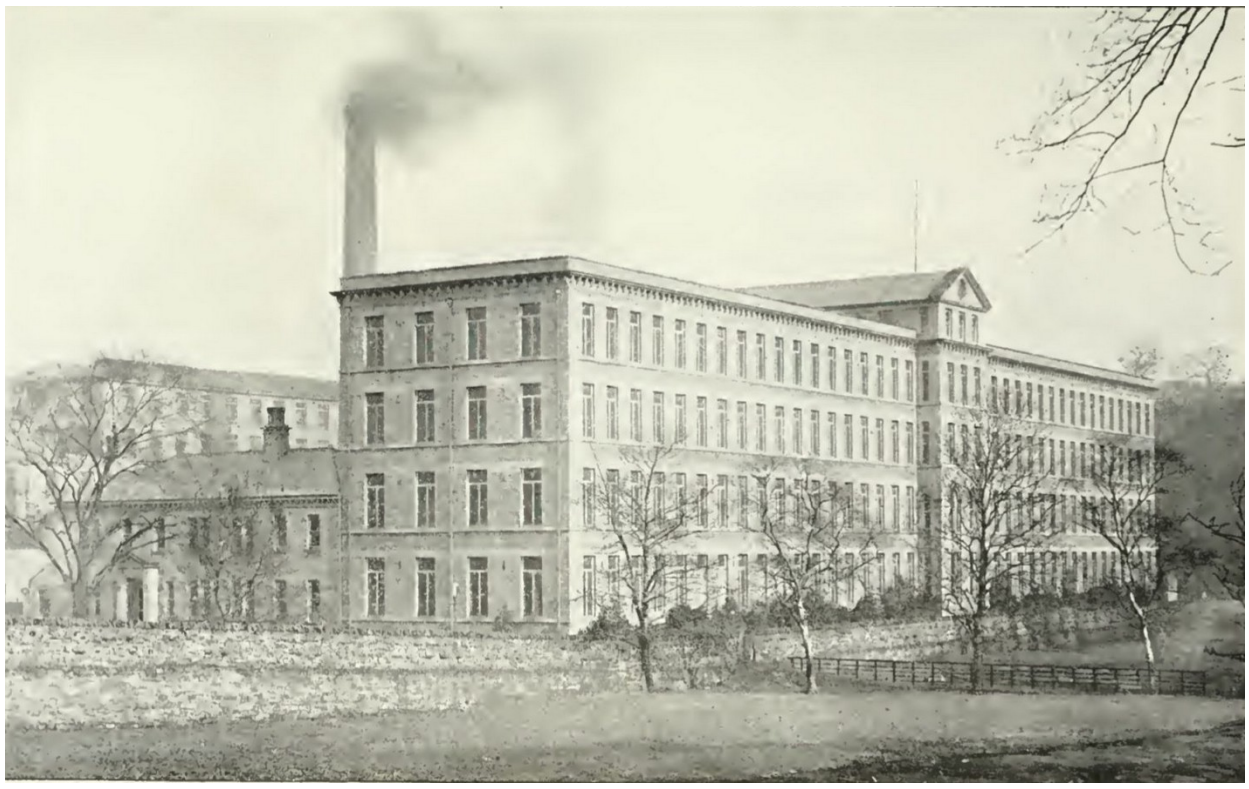
Friends of Brighouse Station



Woodvale Silk Mill

The Silk Industry in Brighouse

Although being in almost the centre of the Yorkshire Woollen District, Brighouse's Mills were in fact largely dedicated to Silk spinning and not wool. Indeed for much of the 19th and into the 20th centuries, Brighouse was the recognised centre of the UK's silk industry with some 15 silk mills in and around the town.

The exact date of the start of the industry in Brighouse is a little unclear. It seems that two mills, Victoria and Noble's, were built around 1838 and may have been in operation as silk mills from that year.

However, the real expansion of the industry began with the arrival in Brighouse, from Lancaster, of Robert Newton and James Burrow who, in 1843, set up in business in Little John Mill later moving to Victoria Mill. The partnership only lasted 2 years after which Robert Newton continued in business in Victoria Mill.

James Burrow, however, subsequently went into partnership with a Mr Monk from Macclesfield (another important centre for the silk industry) setting up Burrow and Monk in Victoria Mill. Some sources suggest that this was in 1848, others 1850. In 1872 the business was taken over by Charles & Hanson Omeroyd and John Cheetham, becoming Omeroyd Brothers in 1881 when John Cheetham left them to start his own business. Omeroyds went on to build the Alexandra and Prince of Wales mills, and ultimately became one of the largest silk spinning companies in England.

In 1880 Richard Kershaw completed Woodvale Silk Mill, which was the largest mill in the district with up to 700 employees running 40,000 spindles.

Following a major fire at Alexandra Mill in 1903, Omeroyd Brothers bought Woodvale Mill from Richard Kershaw and continued to operate there until the business closed in 1984. The building was demolished in 1986 after a major fire.

++++++