

Dalry/Murrayfield Mills

The first paper mill in Scotland

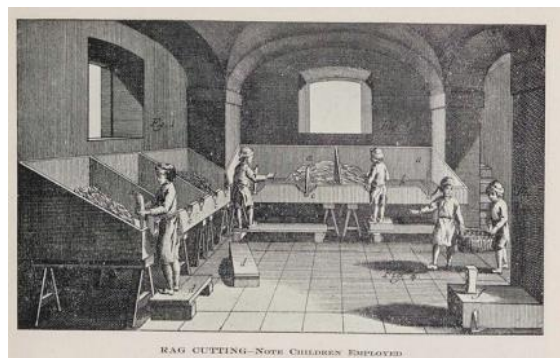
Mungo Russell, a rich Edinburgh merchant, owned grain mills in the Roseburn area, that were powered by a lade running via Gorgie Mills upstream. He and his son Gideon contracted with two German paper-makers, Peter Groot Haere and Michael Keysar, to convert one of the mills to paper-making in 1590. The Register of the Privy Seal under date 5th December 1590 states that a monopoly was granted to Haere and Keysar, appointing them as paper makers to King James VI for nineteen years.

Mungo Russell was a man of substance, who was twice Treasurer of the City of Edinburgh in 1575/6 and 1582/3. He died in 1591 and his son Gideon took over, renewing the lease with the German paper makers – among other provisions they were not to construct any other paper mills and the upper part of the Russell's adjacent mansion house was to be converted into drying rooms.



Lofts for drying paper

Paper making was a rural industry, requiring a good water supply for washing and treating the fibres, and also depended on water power. Linen or cotton rags were chopped up and broken down in water to form a pulp, which was scooped out of a vat and shaken, then pressed and dried. It was skilled work, and also physically taxing. Children were employed to cut rags.



Rag cutting



This print shows a water wheel driving the shaft which lifts and drop the stampers for macerating the rags in the pulping troughs. To the right are bundles of rags undergoing the fermenting or retting process. The vatman is extracting the pulp to shake out the water, and beside him the press man lays the sheets between woollen felts and squeezes out the surplus water in the screw lever press. Above them sheets of paper are hanging up to dry.

The paper mill was still going in 1655. Later on the mill was grinding snuff, wheat and oatmeal and in 1771 the celebrated engineer [John Smeaton](#) advised on renovations, giving a memorandum to the then owner, John Russell. He advised an overshot wheel of 11 feet in diameter for grinding the wheat, and the oat mill and snuff mill using a separate wheel.

By 1854 there were only two wheels, both 16 x 6 feet, for flour, corn and barley. In 1876 the mill won a medal at the first World Fair in the USA for its oatmeal. Water power seems to have ended around 1900 when the lade was cut off. The mill is now demolished.

The site of the Dalry/Murrayfield mills is the cluster of houses on the north side of the stadium gates in Roseburn Street. The relief lade, which bypassed water into the Water of Leith when the mill was not operating, runs down at the stadium gates to the north, just before the houses, and along the line of trees in Roseburn Park. This was probably the “burn” in the name of Roseburn.

Dalry Mills appears as Murrayfield Mills on [Chronological Map of Edinburgh Showing Expansion of the City from Earliest Days to the Present \(1919\), J.G Bartholomew](#)

Sources:-

[The Water Mills of the Water of Leith by Graham Priestley](#)

The Book of the Old Edinburgh Club History Volume 25 *Early Paper Making Near Edinburgh* pp46-70

<http://www.ouldedinburghclub.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BOEC-OS/Volume-25.pdf>

[Reports of the Late John Smeaton Volume 2](#)