

Penicuik Community Development Trust Ltd

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www.PenicuikCDT.org.uk

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20A John Street
Penicuik EH26 8AB
01968 672706

The Bank Mill Project

Penicuik Community Development Trust is establishing a Heritage Fund in order to purchase the Bank Mill, the adjacent Fish Farm and two associated houses as the basis of a long-term heritage and rejuvenation project

The project aims to

- restore the proud statement “Penicuik the Paper Making Town” by creating a **working** paper making heritage centre,
- create a nationally important tourist attraction celebrating Penicuik’s heritage
- generate electricity from water power, a clean renewable source
- create employment and bring in new light industry for water power technology
- enhance facilities for the long distance walk and cycle way along the River Esk
- create a garden park integrated with the Fish Farm and the Penicuik Food Project

Bringing in tourists and visitors will help support shops and businesses in Penicuik Town Centre. Increased footfall is badly needed to revive the local economy. The attached brochure explains aspects of the project in more detail.

Roger Hipkin,
Secretary

The Bank Mill Project

1 Penicuik the Paper Making Town

Penicuik was a pioneer in the Scottish industrial revolution, with almost 300 years of continuous paper production, Scotland's first cotton mill and probably its first mechanised flax mill.

By the mid 19th century Penicuik was one of the foremost papermaking centres in the world.

When local Scots built a paper mill in Quebec in 1856, they saw added prestige and a commercial premium in calling it Valleyfield. This emerging centre for Canada's industrial revolution became the city of Valleyfield.

When, in 1872, the Japanese Emperor sent a two-year technical and industrial fact-finding mission to North America, Britain and Europe, the mission chose to come to Penicuik to find out about the West's industrialised paper making.

Penicuik had six paper mills by the River Esk: Valleyfield Mill (built 1709); Bank Mill (converted to paper making in 1803 and source of paper for Bank of Scotland notes); Low Mill (built for wool processing 1708, converted to papermaking in 1746); Esk Mill (built in 1770 as Scotland's first cotton mill and converted to papermaking ~1790); Auchendinny Mill (built 1756), and Dalmore Mill (built 1820). There were five more paper mills, further down stream on the River Esk and a modern (1950s) Mill at Pomathorn.

All have now closed and, except Bank Mill, all other riverside mills have been demolished and the sites redeveloped for housing.

The Bank Mill Project is the last opportunity to revive Penicuik's paper making heritage

2 The Bank Mill Paper Making Heritage Centre

The Heritage Lottery Fund recently awarded a £60,000 grant to create an archive and public exhibition marking 300 years of paper making in Penicuik. Penicuik has no museum and this material has no permanent home.

The Bank Mill project will create a **working** papermaking heritage centre in the last building left from the Valleyfield Mill Complex of Alexander Cowan & Sons.

The Valleyfield Paper Mill owner Alexander Cowan was a nationally important social reformer and philanthropist: he helped to create a public library in 1799, building a school and social housing for his workers, piping in a clean public water supply from the Pentland Hills, and through his bequest, building the Cowan Institute, still a vital community centre for Penicuik.

In addition to documentary material, displayed partly in the former Cowan Institute and partly in Bank Mill, working paper making processes and equipment will be viewable by the public from a gallery walkway.

The project has been offered help and advice by two paper mills specialising in very high quality hand made paper. The Bank Mill project intends to have very high quality bespoke art paper made on site and sold commercially to specialist clients.

We note that Edinburgh has two prestigious Art Colleges and is home to the Edinburgh Printmakers Workshop. The latter currently sources hand made paper from a French paper mill.

High-value low-volume production will have very little environmental impact – the damaging acid and caustic processes used for producing wood-based paper pulp are not needed when using rags rather than wood.

The last local paper mill only closed in the last decade and, in addition to national and international support for the project, there are many local people skilled in aspects of the paper making industry who are ready to help and give advice.

The Jewel and Esk College used to run a course on papermaking – the college had demonstration equipment, including a beater, that might be salvaged.

3 The building

The main hall is the original stone-built structure and is aligned at right angles to the river. It has a covered workshop area at its northern end. It is fully serviced including three-phase power.

At its southern end, it meets curved structures pointing towards the bridge under the A701 originally carrying a Cowan railway siding. This structure used to house three wagon loading bays, the first constructed in 1862 when the railway came and production facilities for the three component mills of the Valleyfield complex were integrated. Further towards the river is a more modern structure not in the same ownership.

The Mill was originally larger, with a wing parallel to the river at the north end of the present buildings. This is now marked by a raised platform, on which there are temporary PortaCabins, and an open yard. At the end of this yard facing the extant buildings, the part of the end wall of the original Bank Mill building remains as a retaining wall against the A701, reaching some 10 m up to street level.

The intention is to construct a three story building to the north of the site, the uppermost floor presenting a low frontage onto Bridge Street but creating a high visibility feature to attract passers-by and to provide a pedestrian access. This block would include a lift and give access to a gallery level within the main mill machine hall.

4 Water power

There are government supported incentives for micro-hydropower schemes, with generating companies encouraged to buy from small electricity producers using renewable energy sources. The River Esk has a three hundred year history of extracting industrial power from water wheels and is one of the best placed sites in southern Scotland to take advantage of this opportunity.

Working water wheels with a traditional appearance will create spectacular tourist attractions and transform the smelly overgrown stretches of the Esk Mill lade into a clean gently flowing attraction.

An initial investigation suggests three sites for water wheels in Penicuik: the largest below the Esk Mill site; another associated with Bank Mill and a small pilot project exploiting the Black Burn. We also anticipate collaboration with organisations in Roslin and Lasswade for an integrated River Esk micro-hydropower project.

5 Water wheel manufacture

Research shows that small modifications to a traditional wheel give it essentially the same efficiency as modern turbines if working with a water head of less than 5 m. We believe that the only current manufacturer is a French company. In Penicuik and western Midlothian, there are local engineering firms specialising in marine shaft bearings, in machinery control and velocity sensors. Penicuik Estate's Forestry section produces a variety of heavy wood products. We envisage using the workshop space formerly

occupied by Loanhead Engineering, the present owners of Bank Mill, to create a facility for constructing bespoke waterwheels in collaboration with local industry. These would initially be for our own local projects but ultimately would meet a future demand, rising when it is seen how well we can combine micro-hydropower generation with creating a tourist attraction.

6 Esk Valley Way – walkers and cyclists

A cycle and walkway runs from Musselburgh on the Firth of Forth to Penicuik, currently stopping outside Bank Mill but scheduled to continue through the wooded parkland of the Penicuik Estate and on to Carlops to join rambling routes on the Pentland Hills. The track from Carlops leads to the North Esk Reservoir, built by the paper mill owners to control the river flow. The path goes on to complete a circular walk way by leading to the Water of Leith and thence along another attractive river valley and past former mills in Balerno, Collinton, Dalry, Canonmills and Portobello.

The Mill site will provide an information point and a centre for bike hire and repair.

The development of the Bank Mill site will provide an attractive visitor incentive.

7 Esk Valley Way – tourist accommodation

The Fish Farm site includes two modern houses. One or both will form the nucleus of ‘Gite d’étape’ style accommodation to provide affordable lodging for cyclists, walkers and other tourists. It is anticipated that there would be minimal on-site catering and lodgers would use commercial facilities in the region around Penicuik High Street. Winter use would involve residential courses.

8 The Fish Farm and Penicuik Food Project

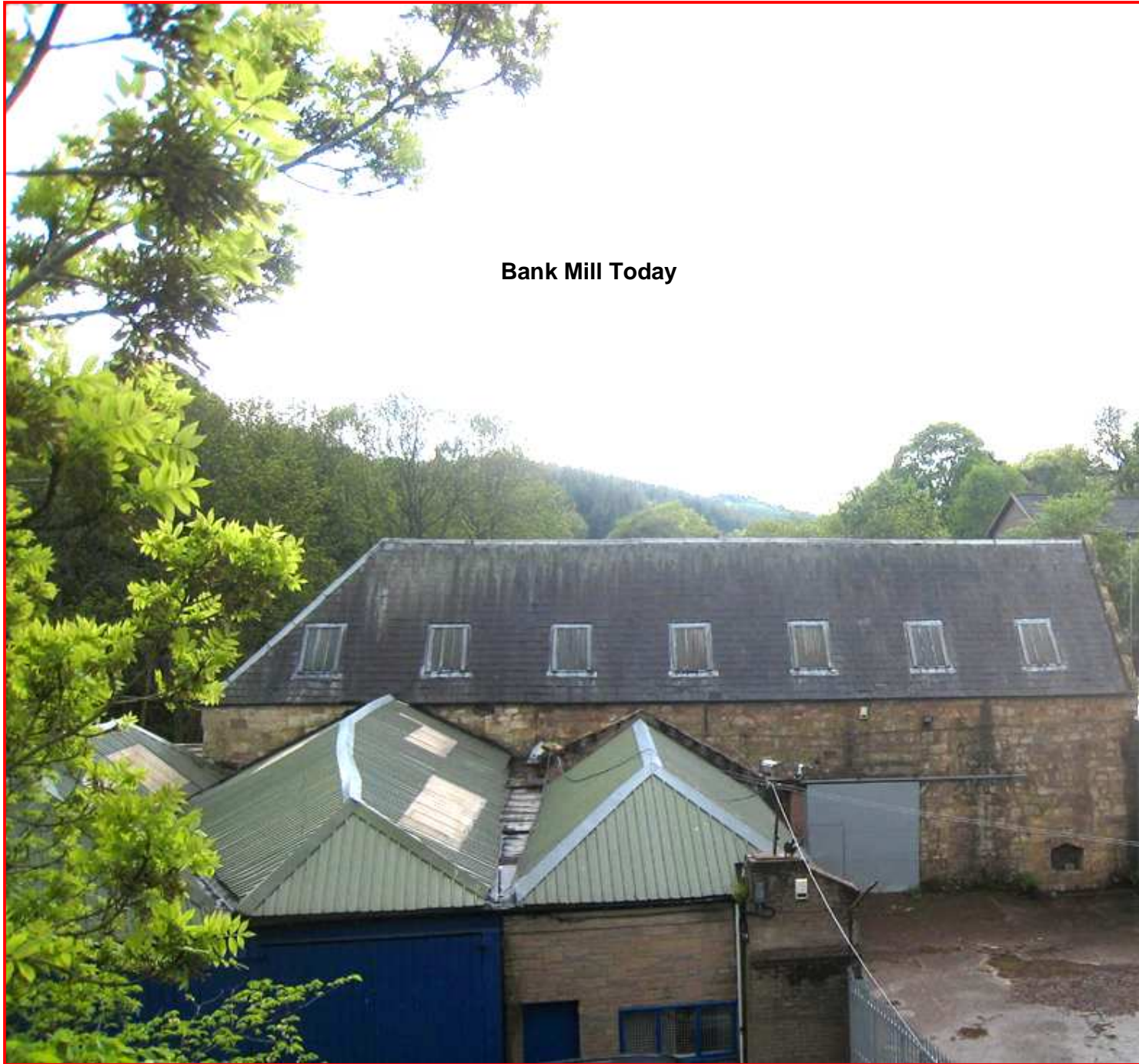
Penicuik Community Development Trust is about to sign the lease for the Upper Walled Garden of Penicuik Estate as part of their Penicuik Food Project. Continuing the farming of fish on the site is entirely consistent with this aim of producing locally high quality contaminant-free food for local consumption. A smokery would be an easily added asset to create higher value products. It would make good commercial sense to have a retail point for both fish and fresh vegetables on the site.

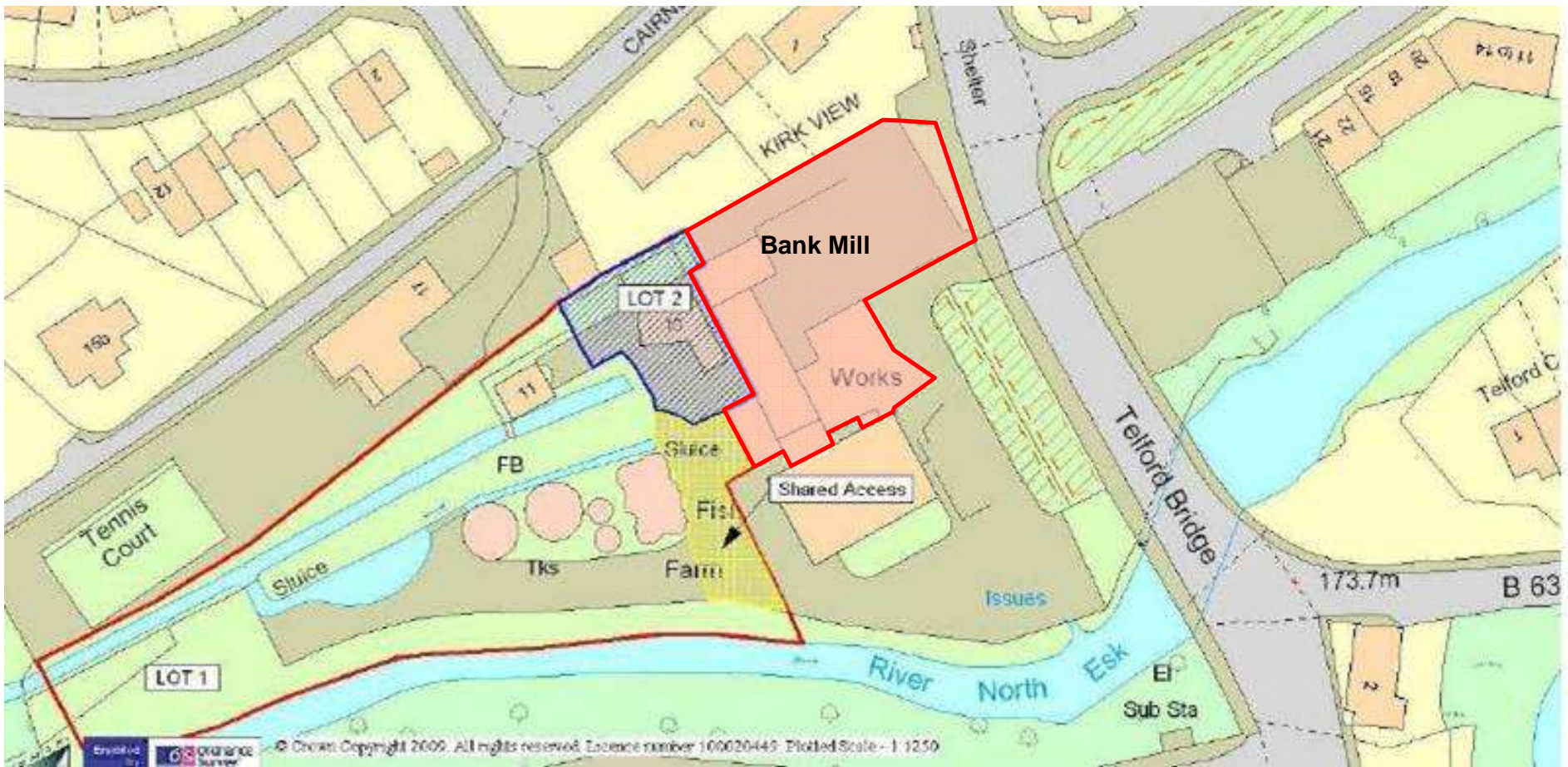
8 The Bank Mill Park and Bridge

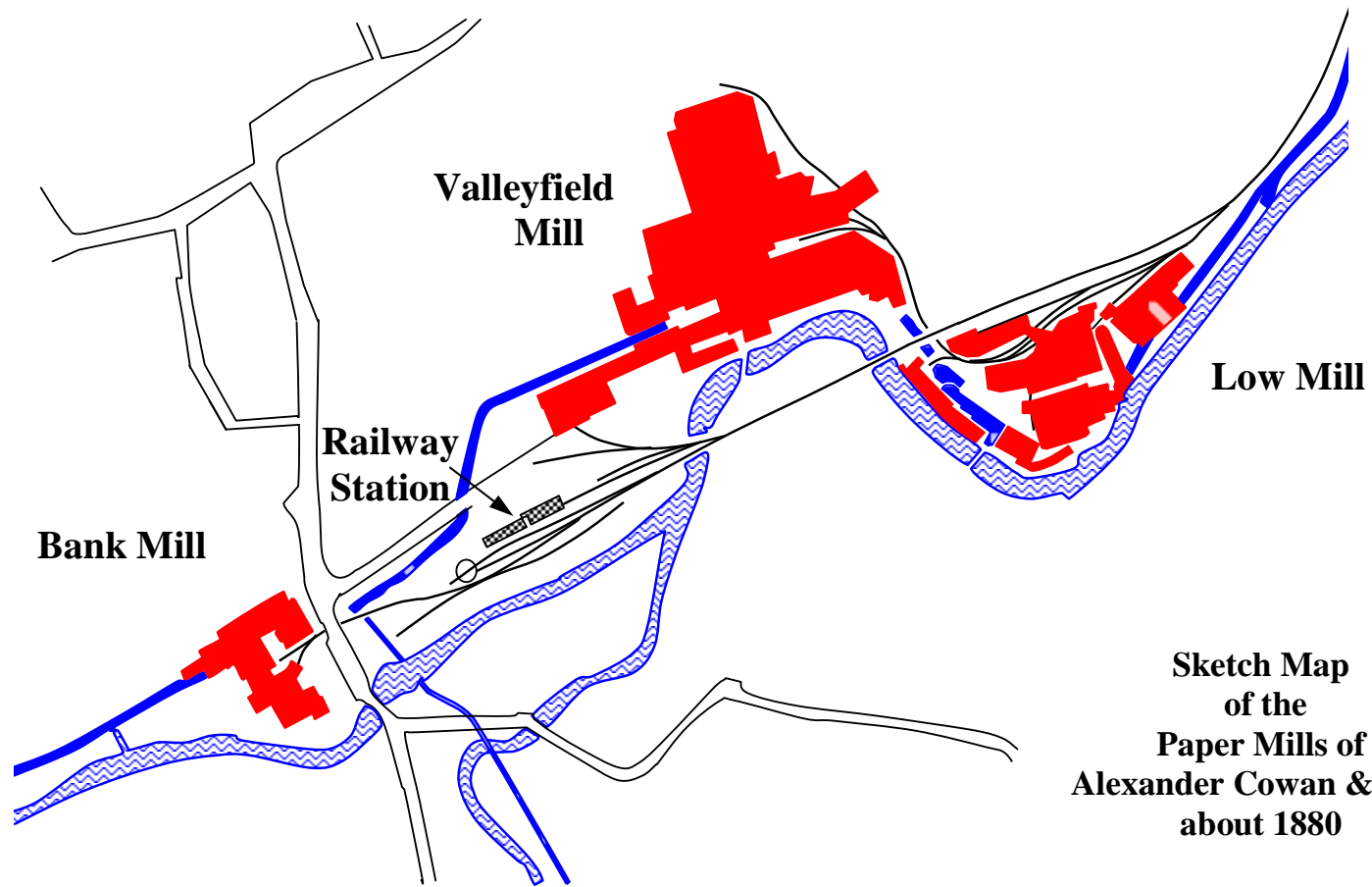
In the 18th century grounds of Valleyfield Mill, the Penicuik Pleasure Gardens included a ‘temple’ and a spectacular fountain, and became known internationally. Penicuik’s Public Park is now solely a sports field so Penicuik no longer has any quiet gardens for contemplative rest. Small parts of the area behind the Bank Mill, now only partially occupied by the fish farm, are lush and green and tucked beside the river: they are ideal for such use.

Towards the up-stream end, a footbridge will be constructed so that the Musselburgh to Penicuik walk way can pass through the Bank Mill site and join the right bank path already constructed by Penicuik Estate. The second bridge, now partly constructed, is being built by Penicuik Estates to link this to the riverside path through Penicuik Estates and eventually on to Carlops and the Pentland Hills.

Bank Mill Today







Bank Mill

Valleyfield Mill

Low Mill

Railway Station

**Sketch Map
of the
Paper Mills of
Alexander Cowan & Sons
about 1880**

The main Valleyfield Mill site and its redevelopment
Mid 1960s view from south and today's view from north west

Bank Mill



More about the Bank Mill project at www.makers.org.uk/penicuik/bankmill and at www.penicuikcdt.org.uk