

Glory Mill

Do you know Glory Mill, down in Wooburn? May be you worked there, know someone who did, or have just enjoyed the name. Now it means a place to live, a pub or a fitness centre. But for hundreds of years it was a paper mill, one of many along the river Wye. Mills tended to specialise, for example, in blotting paper, cigarette paper, bible paper or millboard; after World War I Glory Mill made photographic paper and small amounts of other speciality papers.

Norman Brown and Jack Darvill, who both live in Flackwell Heath, told me about their lives and work with the firm. Norman joined from school, aged 17, on December 5th 1932 (yes, he's 90, though you wouldn't think so to meet him), and stayed until retirement. The only break was his war service as a pilot in the RAF. He started in the Glory Mill laboratory, then moved on to production. Photographic paper has to be made to very high specifications. It used to be made from rags, which came in bales from Egypt. (Later, wood pulp with a high alpha-cellulose content was used.) Norman worked for a time preparing the rags, which had to be picked over, boiled, bleached, shredded and beaten into pulp with water - a pretty unpleasant job at times. Paper-making needs a lot of water; Glory Mill in its prime used as much water as a town the size of Marlow. It drew the water from its own artesian wells, hundreds of feet deep. The waste water was cleaned and run into the sewage system (not the River Wye). Transport of raw material and finished goods was by the railway from Bourne End until the 1950s, after that by road.

Norman then moved on to be foreman on a paper machine. One of these could run at 210ft per minute, producing paper 90inches wide. In 1949 Norman transferred to Sales, becoming Sales Manager in 1962, and then going to Head Office in 1970 before retiring in 1980.

Jack Darvill started at Glory Mill on 8th April 1940, also in the laboratory. Before that he had been articled to an architect/surveyor who was called away to Crown Service. In 1941, Jack went into the Army, serving as a wireless operator/driver in the Tank Regiment. After the war, he returned to Glory, first back in the lab, then in the mill, then Manager in the Finishing Dept. Later, he was a sales representative and by the time he retired in 1987 he was Sales Representative in Europe, including the Iron Curtain countries.

Both Norman and Jack 'went through the mill' and gained great expertise in their field. Even now, Norman can finger a piece of card and tell what grade it is. It was common for people to

spend all their working lives at Glory Mill, some doing a succession of jobs and some holding the same job for many years. There was a strong tradition of family employment, often over generations. In 1988, the mill employed nearly 500 people, many on shift. There was an active social life, with sports teams, Christmas parties and horticultural shows.

The firm made a small range of high specification products for a small number of (potential) customers. In 1974 it received the Queen's Award for Technological Innovation for a process applying polythene coatings to photographic paper for coloured photographs. The firm struggled in the 70s and 80s, with several reorganisations and takeovers. In the 90's, the parent firm was sold. The machines, and some of the expertise, were sent to Germany and China, and the last reel of paper was made on 22nd October 1999.

And the name 'Glory Mill'? It comes from John de la Gloria who held the manor of Wooburn in the 13th century.

Acknowledgements to Norman, Jack and Alan Mead's book 'Days of Glory', pub. 1999. Available from the Flackwell Heath Library.

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