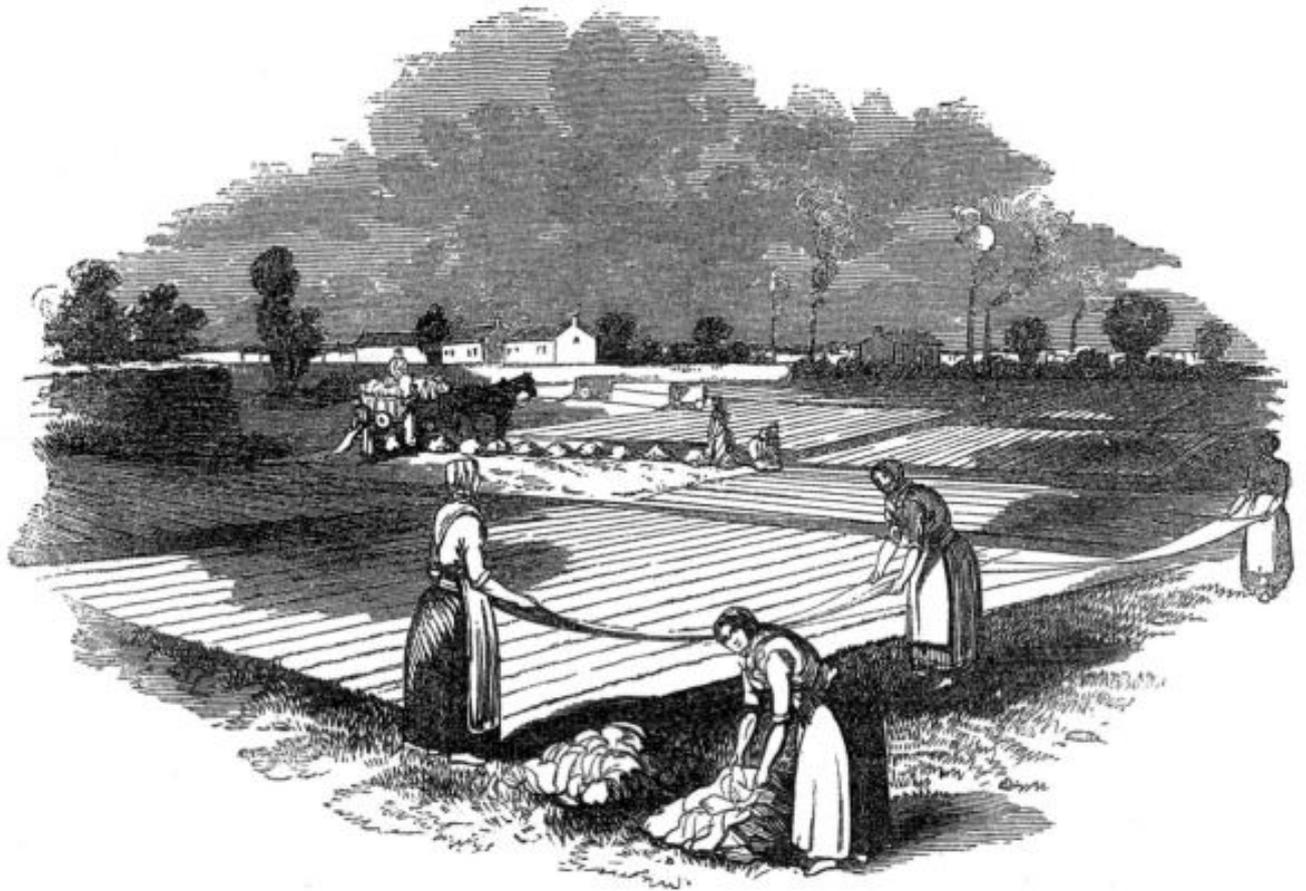


# Renfrewshire Bleachfields in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century



## A FAMILY OF THREADS



## Renfrewshire Bleachfields

Throughout the eighteenth century, bleachfields were a common sight across the west of Scotland, and the owners advertised their services widely.

The advertisements they placed in local and national newspapers provided potential customers with detailed information about the services available, including pricing, bleaching methods, hand-in and collection points and dates, along with any other terms and conditions.

The following two adverts for the **Fereneze Bleachfield**, the first from 1771 and the second from 1797, show that (apart from the prices) nothing much about the process had changed much in over 25 years.

**At Fereneze Bleachfield,**

Five miles south-west from Glasgow, for the year 1771.

**P**ATRICK ADAIR bleaches at the following prices, in the Irish manner: All plain linen, yard broad or under, wrought in a reed 900, and all below at 2 d. per yard; 1000, 1100, and 1200 at 2½ d. 1300, 1400, and 1500 at 3 d. all above 1500 at 3½ d. Tweelings, and diapers at 3 d. Long lawns and cambricks at 2½ d. not exceeding yard broad; all above yard broad in proportion.

Cloth is taken in at Edinburgh by John Craig, Reed-maker in the Castle-wynd; and by William M'Gill, Weaver in Shoemaker's close, Canongate; At Leith, by William M'Gill, at the head of Broad-wynd; at Falkirk, by James Buchanan Merchant; at Glasgow, by Andrew Baird Merchant above the Cross, and by John Pollock, Reed-maker in Trongate, opposite to the Royal Exchange; at Paisley, by John Gardner Merchant; and by George Pollock Stamp-master; at Beith, by William Wyllie Merchant; at Ayr, by John Caldwell, Merchant; at Kilmarnock, by Hugh Wyllie Merchant; at Dumfreck, by George Good Merchant; at Sorn, by John Fallow Merchant; at Mauchlin, by George Mortland Merchant; at Kirktonholm, Kilbride, by John Matchin; and at the field by Patrick Adair; at all which places receipts will be given.

N. B. No cloth given in after the first of August is to be expected white this year. The owners may depend on having all cloth soon returned before that time. Likewise, it is desired, that the owners names should be put in the end of each piece with thread.

☞ No cloth taken in above 30 yards in one piece, and will be returned at the same place where given in, stamped and lapped, for paying 3 d. each piece.

**FERENEZE BLEACHFIELD.**

**J**OHNS ADAIR has now wet Cloth for the year 1797.—  
The Prices this Season (per yard) are as follow:  
Plain Linen, yard-broad or under, wrought in a reed, and all below, 2½ d. Tweelings, Diapers, Satinets 1000 and 1100, 3 d. Long Lawns, not exceeding yard-wide, at 3½ d. 1200 and 1300, 3½ d. 1400 and 1500, 4 d. And all above yard-wide in proportion. 1600 and 1700, 4½ d. And all above in proportion.

*Cloth is taken in for this field, at*

Edinburgh, by Meff Craig and Butler, reed-makers, Grassmarket; James Scollay, flackey-maker, Pleasance; Andrew Naim, weaver, opposite the Chapel of Ease, Crossmylewey; Alex. Home, weaver, Lauriston-street; James Gow, weaver, Abbey—Leith, James Robertson, weaver, North Leith—Dunkeith, John Clyde Adair, weaver—Kirkcaldon, Hugh Gilchrist, weaver—Falkirk, James Buchanan, merchant—Kirkintilloch, William Fergus, merchant—Glasgow, Andrew Baird, merchant, High-street—Paisley, James Gardner, merchant—Kilbarchan, Mrs Stevenson, merchant—Greenock, Thomas McAlpine, merchant—Port-Glasgow, Alexander Buchanan, tetcher—Saltrears, Robert Cawoybell, fadoler—Stewarton, Thomas Brown, merchant, & John Blackwood, weaver—Beith, William Wyllie, merchant, & Andrew Kirkwood—Ayr, Robert Tenant, weaver—Mauchline, Robert Paterson, merchant, & William Templeton, merchant—Kilbride, James Thomson, weaver, Kirkcubbinholm—  
And, at the field, by John Adair, at all which places receipts will be given.

Cloth given in after the first of September, is not to be expected white this year.

The owners may depend on having all Cloth well done and soon returned. It is desired, that the Owner's name be put on the end of each piece, with thread.

N. B.—No Cloth taken in above thirty yards in one piece, and the Cloth will be returned, stamped and lapped, at the place where given in, by paying three pence each.

## The Paisley Protecting Society

The nature of bleaching operations meant that the necessary long-term exposure of goods on the bleachfields, and lack of adequate supervision, often led to substantial losses from theft.

Rather than involve themselves in expensive prosecutions, the bleach Masters often allowed the crimes to go unchallenged and, therefore, unpunished.

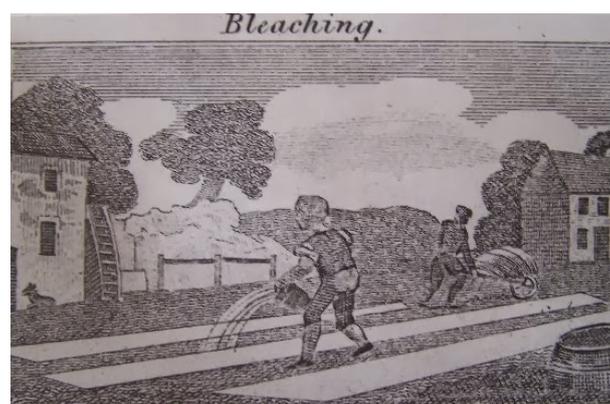
Fed up with this state of affairs, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1791, a group of local gentlemen '*concerned in the bleach industry*' resolved to form themselves into a society, named **The Paisley Protecting Society**. Chaired by William Carlile, the society agreed that each member should contribute an initial amount of one guinea, and further amounts annually, depending on the number of their employees.

These funds were then used to,

***“discover, apprehend and bring to justice all such persons as steal, reset, or forcibly take away in an illegal manner, the property of any of the members – being part of the goods, utensils, bleaching stuffs or materials belonging to his, or their, bleachfields.”***

A handsome reward was to be given for relevant information; utmost secrecy would be preserved, and the name of the informer would remain concealed!

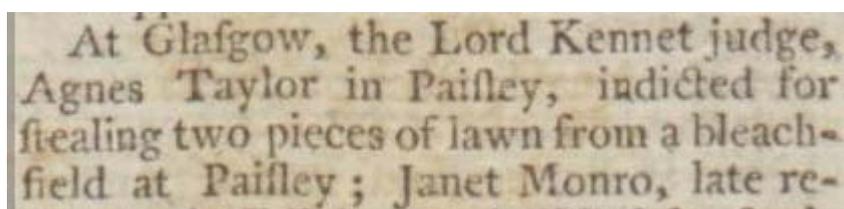
The members included: William Carlile, Paisley (Chairman); William King, Loanend; James Burns, Renfrew; James Carlile, Paisley; Hugh Cochran, Glanderston; James Imrie, Nethercommon; John King, Greenlaw and Nathaniel Gibson, Paisley (Treasurer).



## Punishment for Theft of Textile Goods

Bleaching of cloth was a time-consuming business and involved a relatively large up-front financial commitment from the bleachfield owners. The bleaching process could take six to eight months, and its success or failure was not only dependant on the weather, and access to an adequate and reliable water supply, but also on the quality and effectiveness of the various chemicals and techniques used. Customers placed their trust in the knowledge, skills and experience of the bleachers, and fully expected their cloth to be returned – unfortunately, some of them would have been sorely disappointed.

There are many accounts of the theft of goods from bleachfields. In July 1770, Agnes Taylor was indicted for stealing two pieces of lawn from a bleachfield at Paisley.



At Glasgow, in May 1777, Janet Clerk, James Dyker and William Ralston were found guilty of *"theft, and reset of theft, of silk yarn from the silk manufactories of Paisley."*

The sentence was pronounced, ordering that they should be;

*"pilloried for an hour at Paisley, the 29<sup>th</sup> inst, with their hands tied behind their backs, bare headed, a hank of silk-yarn about their necks, with these words thereon, in capital letters, 'FOR RESETTING STOLEN GOODS', and thereafter, banished Scotland for life."*

Punishment for the theft of cloth goods could be severe, and seemingly disproportionate to the crime. In 1795, one John Campbell was accused of stealing a piece of muslin from the Bleachfield of William Gillespie & Co., at Woodside on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1794, and petitioned for punishment. The Court's sentence was:

*"Banishment from Scotland for seven years, with liberty for him to enter into His Majesty's Service by sea or land, and in the case of him being found in Scotland within the said seven years, unless in His Majesty's Service, ordaining him to be whipped through the streets of that City, and to be again banished".*



A Family of Threads was a project run during the 2017 Year of History, Heritage & Archaeology. Over the year the museum investigated the origins of linen thread making in Paisley and Renfrewshire, its impact on Scotland and the local area. This booklet is part of a series published at the end of the project.

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