

# M. Francois & Mme. Puteau Lace and thread manufacturer in Renfrew



## A FAMILY OF THREADS

## Lace and thread manufacture in Renfrewshire

In his *Essays on Trade, Manufactures and Fisheries of Scotland* from 1778, David Loch highlighted the importance of the production of *Threads, Lace and Silk* being carried on at Paisley.

Whilst appreciating that Lisle and lace threads could be manufactured in Scotland with great success, he also acknowledged current bad practice exercised by manufacturers in some aspects of production and trading. With regard to the length and sale of ounce and pound threads, he suggested that some intervention was required, and that it was within the province of the Board of Trustees to remedy the situation.

Referring to the state of the thread branch in 1775, he indicated that the probability of establishing the fabrication of thread and lace, on the 'Lisle' plan, had already been investigated 'by question and answer', resulting in the Board of Trustees appointing Monsieur Francois Puteau (a native of Lisle), and his wife as overseers of this new venture.

M. and Mme. Puteau relocated to the Renfrewshire area, and established themselves as both tutors and manufacturers of thread and lace making.

Discussing the rise and progress of the manufactures in Paisley, he stated that the number of looms employed showed a gradual progress and increase in linen manufacture from 1743 to 1747; and that the state of the silk and thread branches in 1777 meant that Paisley already had the advantage over Spittalfields, in the silk trade.

He also recommended to the Board of Trustees, that the 'ladies of Scotland' should be addressed as to the importance of establishing and promoting the branch of lace manufacture, by whatever means appropriate.

## From David Loch 1778 - Lace Manufacture in Paisley

*“With regard to the Lace manufacture, Paisley and that part of the country seems most likely for this branch to succeed, as it ought to go hand in hand with the Thread. This business, it is well known, gives bread to thousands in the county of Buckingham, &c. in South Britain.*

*The industrious poor in Scotland undoubtedly live at less expense, and, in general, work for less wages. It will not now be said that they are not as ingenious as their neighbours; the contrary is abundantly manifest. There is no country that exceeds us in variety of pattern, and neatness of figures, in those branches already established. The great demands for fancy goods from Scotland, is pretty sure evidence that this is the case. Is there not, then, a great probability that the Lace branch will flourish in such a soil if prosecuted with spirit? The advantages which will result from this manufacture are obvious:*

- *it will give encouragement to the manufacturing of fine Thread*
- *it will employ a vast number of poor girls, who may begin at eight years of age, at which time of life they are commonly strolling about until the age of twelve or fourteen, a burden to their parents, and numbers maintained by the public*
- *in short, it will save a considerable sum sent annually to England and France, and may, in time, be an additional article to our exports*

*It must be acknowledged, that many difficulties are to be surmounted by those who introduce a new branch. The prejudices of mankind in favour of their own plans of procedure, are hard to be overcome; but at this period of improvements in agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, these prejudices are greatly removed, at least among those who are conversant in business.*

*It must give pleasure to many of my readers to hear, that the directors of the Hospital at Glasgow, sent, about two years ago, twenty-three of their poor girls to be taught the working of Lace by Mrs Puteau, a native of Lille, now residing at Renfrew, who is found to be well qualified for that purpose. The consequences of this salutary measure, I hope, will soon be felt in that place where the work is carrying on, and will be an honour to those gentlemen who have set an example so worthy of imitation.”*

He goes on to suggest to the potential lace buyers that they should consider that the articles *'as you chuse to adorn your persons with'* should be manufactured in that country which *'affords them the means of holding such a rank in life, and prefer those to articles of the fame kind imported from rival nations.'* He urged them to remember, that by this means, they are supporting orphans and industrious poor in their own country, saving money to the nation, and setting examples to others to use our own manufactures.

He also indicated that they would find, upon trial, that the Lace made at Renfrew would be cheaper, and as good and as neat as any that is imported from Brussels, Lisle, or Antwerp, and hoped that the Board of Trustees would recognise the significance of *this 'infantile, but important branch of manufacture, and that they will offer any farther encouragement that might be necessary to establish it effectually.'*

He concluded that the trade carried on by the manufacturers in Paisley is considerable and important, and that the only reasons for its happy increase are, the cheapness of provisions, and the low price of labour, in conjunction with the industry and ingenuity of the people.

*"Every device, therefore, to raise the price of provisions, so fatal to the landed and trading interests, should be opposed with vigour and indignation; otherwise, the consequences would be, a decline of business in general, an increase of poor's rates, burdening the rich, while poverty and despondency would be the lot of the poor."*

## M. and Mme. Puteau in Renfrew

In 1776, as a result of consultation with, and support from, the Board of Trustees, Monsieur Francois Puteau and his wife, originally from Lisle, settled in Renfrew and established a lace and thread manufactory, employing young girls from the Glasgow Hospital. The Caledonian Mercury Newspaper of 12<sup>th</sup> August 1776, praised the venture:

***“It is with pleasure we hear, that the Directors of the town of Glasgow's Hospital have lately bound 23 of their poor girl apprentices to Mr Francis Poteau thread and French lace manufacturer at Renfrew.***

***The laudable endeavours of those gentlemen, to alleviate, by a well-timed and humane benevolence, the sorrows of the indigent and needy; the anxiety to promote industry, and their unwearied attention to the management of that hospital, merits the highest esteem of the public, and cannot fail to establish such order and economy as to render it one of the best regulated hospitals in Scotland.***

***On Monday last, the poor girls were conveyed in a boat down the river Clyde to Renfrew, accompanied with several of the Directors and other gentlemen from Glasgow. It was truly affecting to observe, how these young orphans, in unaffected tears, discovered the strong affection with which their hearts glowed when parting with their kind guardians, under whose immediate care they had been maintained and educated. The prudence and humanity of the gentlemen who accompanied them, and the agreeable prospect which their change of circumstances afforded them, so much alleviated their grief, and cheered their spirits, that they joined in concert, and sang hymns, anthems, and other pieces of music, both entertaining and agreeable to all who heard them.***

***Mr Poteau had made due preparation for the reception of his 'apprentices,' and had everything in the neatest order for their accommodation. It is hoped, that this new thread and lace manufactory will be encouraged, and carried on in such a manner as will now contribute both to the honour and interest of this country.”***

***02<sup>nd</sup> August 1776***

It is with pleasure we hear, that the Directors of the town of Glasgow's Hospital have lately bound 23 of their poor girls apprentices to Mr Francis Poteau thread and French lace manufacturer at Renfrew.—The laudable endeavours of those gentlemen, to alleviate, by a well-timed and humane benevolence, the sorrows of the indigent and needy; the anxiety to promote industry, and their unwearied attention to the management of that hospital, merits the highest esteem of the public, and cannot fail to establish such order and œconomy as to render it one of the best regulated hospitals in Scotland.—On Monday last, the poor girls were conveyed in a boat down the river Clyde to Renfrew, accompanied with several of the Directors and other gentlemen from Glasgow. It was truly affecting to observe, how these young orphans, in unaffected tears, discovered the strong affection with which their hearts glowed when parting with their kind guardians, under whose immediate care they had been maintained and educated. The prudence and humanity of the gentlemen who accompanied them, and the agreeable prospect which their change of circumstances afforded them, so much alleviated their grief, and cheered their spirits, that they joined in concert, and sung hymns, anthems, and other pieces of music, both entertaining and agreeable to all who heard them.—Mr Poteau had made due preparation for the reception of his apprentices, and had every thing in the neatest order for their accommodation. It is hoped, that this new thread and lace manufactory will be encouraged, and carried on in such a manner as will now contribute both to the honour and interest of this country.

Caledonian Mercury - Friday 02 August 1776

Mrs Bury Palliser also refers to these events in her 1875 publication 'The History of Lace'.

The "Weekly Magazine" of 177? strongly recommends the art of Lace-making as one calculated to flourish in Scotland; young girls beginning to learn at eight years of age adding: "The directors of the hospital of Glasgow have already sent twenty-three girls to be taught by Madame Puteau, a native of Lisle, now residing at Renfrew; you will find the lace of Renfrew cheaper, as good and as neat as those imported from Brussels, Lisle, and Antwerp." David Loch also mentions the success of the young Glasgow lace-makers, who made lace, he says, from 10d. to 4s. 6d. per yard. He adds: " It is a pleasure to see them at work. I saw them ten days ago." He recommends the managers of the workhouse of the Canongate to adopt the same plan: adding, they need not send to Glasgow for teachers, as there are plenty at the orphan hospital at Edinburgh capable of undertaking the office.

## Fire Sun Insurance Records

The Sun Fire Insurance Records from 1782, shows that M. Poteau was still at that time registered as a 'thread and lace manufacturer' in Renfrew, with a value of £600 placed on his business.

<b>Unique Project ID</b>	94233
<b>Register Date/ Company/ Reference</b>	1782 sun 1 302 14\08\78 jt
<b>Policy Number</b>	462147
<b>Insured Value in £s</b>	600
<b>Forename</b>	francis
<b>Surname</b>	poteau
<b>Occupation/Status</b>	Thread & lace manufacturer
<b>Address Type</b>	unspecified place
<b>Place Name 1</b>	renfrew

## Legal Records

The National Records of Scotland also holds information on three separate legal cases involving M. Francis Poteau and two others.

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
<a href="#">CS271/8726</a>	Francis <b>Poteau</b> v Daniel Stewart	1791
<a href="#">CS271/15512</a>	Francis <b>Poteau</b> v Mary McGrigor	1777
<a href="#">CS271/39598</a>	Francis <b>Poteau</b> v Daniel Stewart	1791

Information from these records still has to be researched, and hopefully will provide further information as to the exact location of M.Poteau's premises and about his manufacture, business dealings and contacts.

## References

Bury-Palliser, F., History of Lace  
[https://archive.org/stream/historyoflace1875pall/historyoflace1875pall\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/historyoflace1875pall/historyoflace1875pall_djvu.txt)

Loch, David (1778) Essays on the Trade, Commerce, Manufactures, and Fisheries of Scotland. W & T Ruddiman

London Lives - Fire Insurance Policy Registers, 1777- 1786 (FIR)  
<https://www.londonlives.org/static/AHDSFIR.jsp>





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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