

MILL CLOSURE WILL HIT VILLAGE

Half of Harbertonford affected

NEARLY half the families in Harbertonford, where 500 people live, will have their income affected by the closing, early in March, of the factory which dominates their village.

The cost of bringing the old, six-storey woollen mill up to date, which would be necessary for it to compete in the modern blanket and wool cloth trade, has brought this about.

Few of the 30 men and 45 women and girls now employed there have yet made definite plans for the future, but the mill owners, John Churchward and Sons, Ltd., believe that those who want work will find it in the Totnes district.

Most of them have only a few minutes' walk to their homes after clocking out opposite Harbertonford churchyard. Only a dozen live in Totnes.

Typical of the people who have spent their working lives at the mill is Mr. William Bragg, who follows the steps of his father and grandfather. He started 44 years ago at the age of 14.

Will retire

His father and grandfather learnt their trade in the Yorkshire mills. With the closing of the Harbertonford mill the family's century of experience will come to an end, for William Bragg is seeking a change of work.

Looking after two weaving looms is Mrs. Edith Slocombe, aged 60,



Another veteran worker, Mr. Bill Bragg, with 44-years service, is seen at work in the dye shed.

who started at the mill when she was 13 and began feeding shuttles three years later. For a year she did similar work in the United States.

Her husband is also a weaver at Harbertonford. He is looking for another job but Mrs. Slocombe will retire.

At other wool mills in South Devon there is shift work, which does not appeal to her.

The record of 51 years is claimed by Mr. William Palmer, 65, who started spinning when he left school.

Uneconomic

Typical of the young workpeople, Miss Etta Syms, 23, said she was sorry the mill was closing. In eight years she had become used to the constant crash of the looms work-

many tons as the floors will stand, badly need modernising.

They work at speeds much faster than the ones they replaced, but not as economically as their modern rivals.

This situation means that the last Churchward's Devon blanket, 100 per cent. pure wool, will soon have been manufactured.

"It is bad for the village and we regret having to close," said Mr. George Hall, one of the firm's three-directors.

The drawback

"Our position at Harbertonford acts against us," he continued. "Our drawback is distance.

"The wool manufacturing trade is getting into much bigger units. It is a sad trend and one that is appearing in all sorts of industries.

"They unite and make something standard."

The only times when Harbertonford mill made anything rigidly standard were the two world wars. Then the looms turned out serge to be dyed blue for the Royal Navy.

One constant product has been a thick, hard-wearing serge that is used to line riding saddles and horse collars. It is still exported all over the world.

To remain

Another is the woven felt, dyed a bright green, for the underside of piano keys. More attractive are the pastel shades of the wool cloth that will go into such garments as children's coats and rompers.

The raw wool for all these things is mostly imported from Australia and New Zealand. Little or none is produced in Devon.

A trade mark in the corner of each blanket depicts Buckfastleigh Church, for it was at Buckfastleigh that John Churchward traded in wool and agricultural seeds.

This side of the business, which he founded about 1825, is to continue in the same town and there is no intention of altering it in any way.

Nearly a century

Mr. W. H. Lane, who manages it in buildings around an inn courtyard, said the firm's old spinning mill at Buckfastleigh was burned down many years ago.

The decision to close down at Harbertonford is confined to the latest of the firm's Devon manufacturing interests.

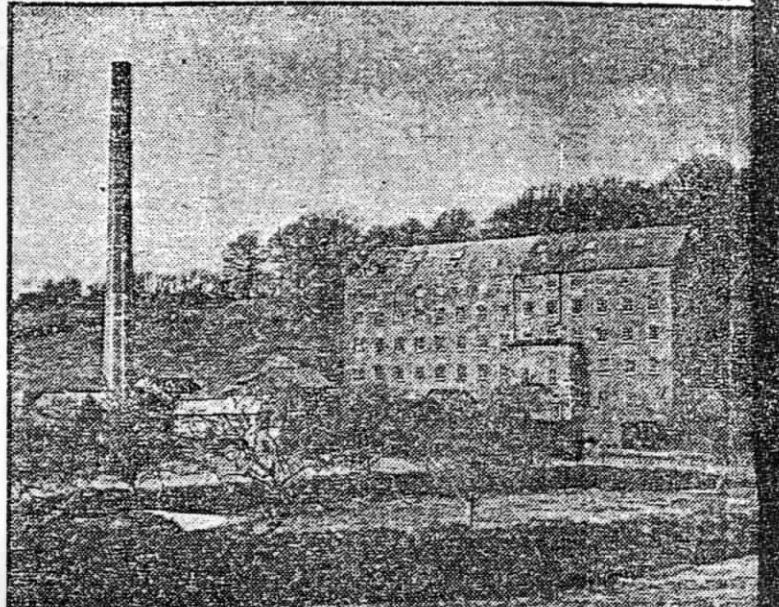
It has been operating there for nearly 100 years. When John Churchward took over it was merely a grist mill, with a wheel in the Harborne stream.

Today there are two turbines harnessing the water when its level is high enough. Other power for the looms come from diesel engines and the electricity grid.

Same names

The two floors of the grist mill were extended to six when it changed to wool. In 1906 the tall chimney was built and the mill lengthened. A row of tile-hung cottages was incorporated.

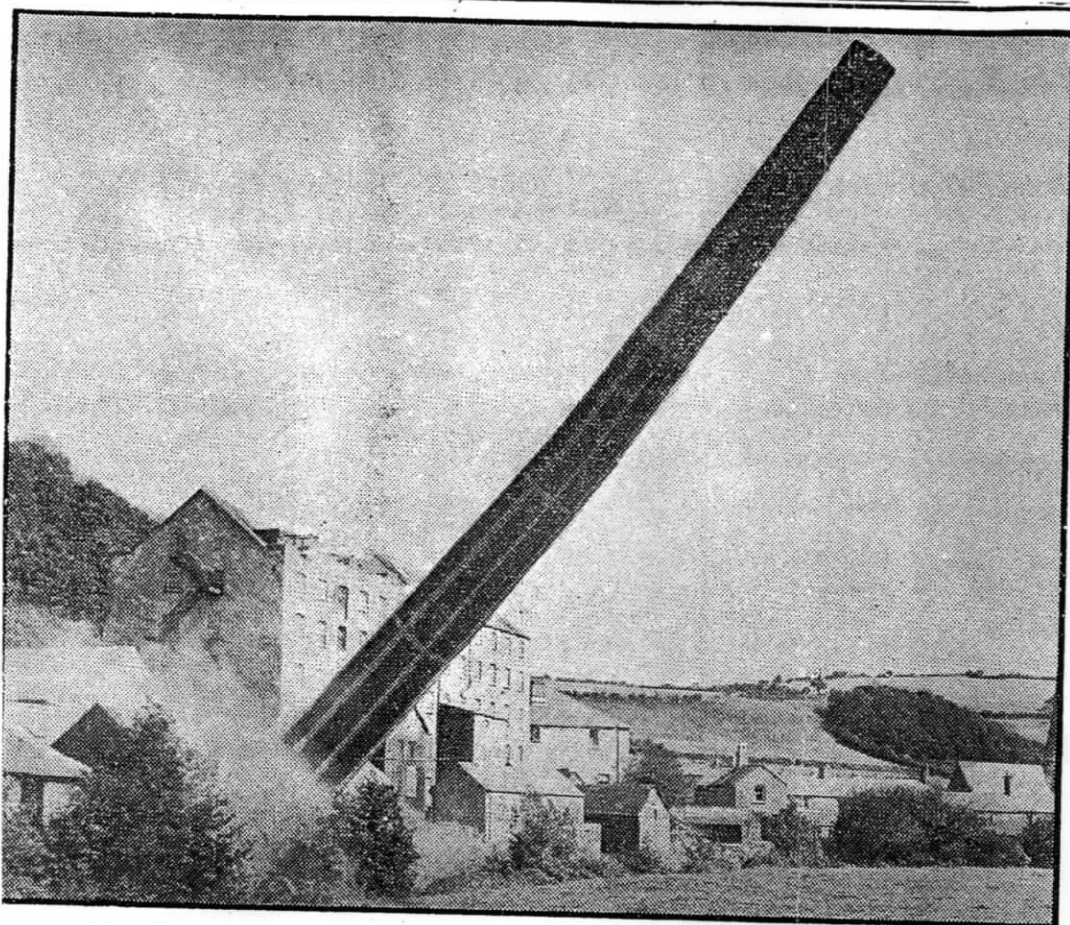
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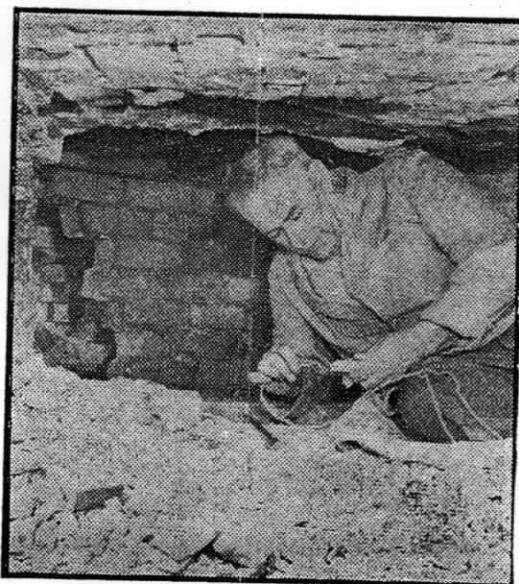
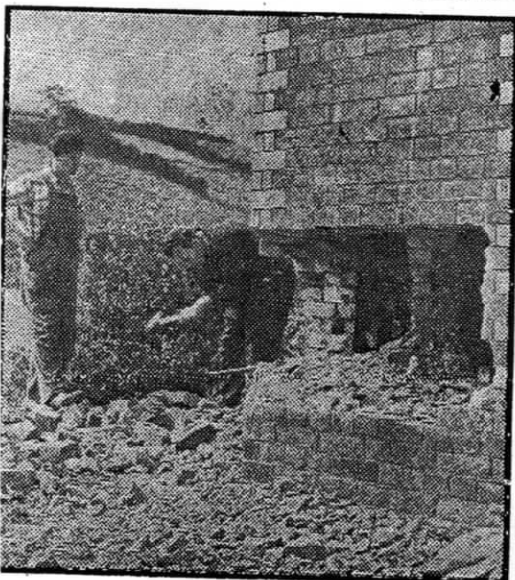
The woollen mill at Harbertonford which is to close down. Below, Mrs. Edith Slocombe worked there for 51 years, and (right) 60-year-old Mrs. Edith Slocombe mill when she was 13.



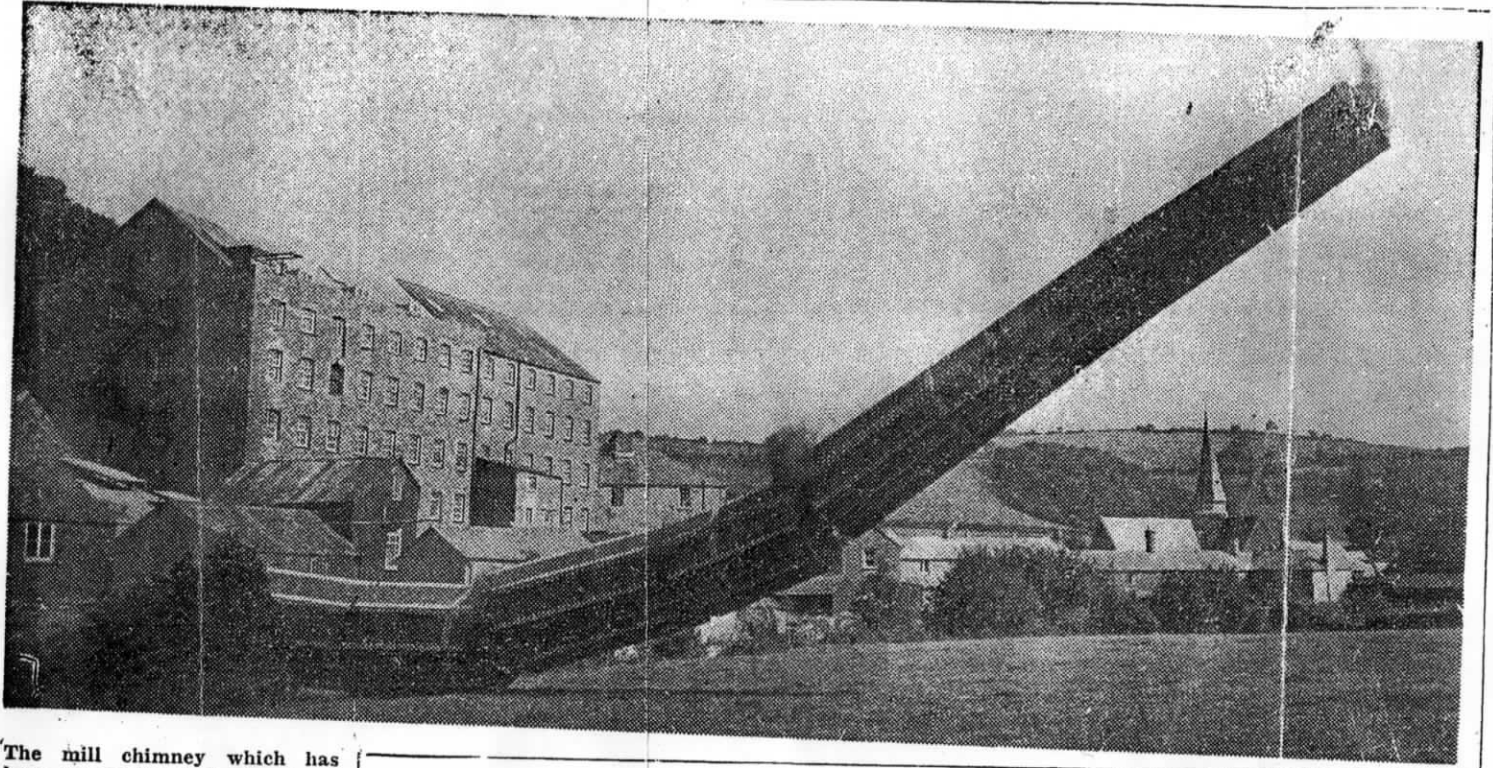
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 1959.



The 120ft.-high chimney of a former woollen mill at Harbertonford, near Totnes, falls gracefully to the ground when it was demolished yesterday. Below (left), workmen cutting out the base of the chimney in readiness for Mr. Harry Dawson (right) to place his charges of gelignite in position.



THE END OF S. DEVON VILLAGE MILL CHIMNEY



The mill chimney which has been a prominent landmark of the village of Harbertonford between Kingsbridge and Totnes comes crashing down—just as the steeplejacks planned.

The mill itself was closed down as it was uneconomic and is to be used for an agricultural purpose.

The bricks will be used to build a house.