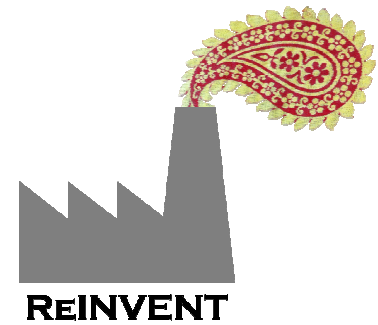


Textile Production, Power & the Public
ReINVENT Workshop 3
Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life
27 September 2013



The third Workshop in the ReINVENT series was held at Summerlee on 27 September 2013. Focusing on textile production, power and the public the event included four presentations throughout the day as well as a lively and thought provoking discussion session in the afternoon. Delegates were also treated to a tour of Summerlee from Curator Justin Parkes.

Elsa Davidson, Curator of Technology at the National Museum of Scotland, turned the topic of power for textile manufacture on its head for the first presentation of the day with an introduction to textiles that generate power. Smart textiles are textiles that can sense electrical, thermal, chemical, magnetic or other stimuli in the environment and adapt or respond to them, using functionalities integrated in the textile structure. From jumpers incorporating piezoelectric fibres that could recharge your smart phone, to a twitter dress, smart textiles offer an interesting medium in which to explore contemporary technology and its relevance for museum audiences. The complexity associated with making curatorial decisions about emerging technology for collection was investigated throughout. Smart textiles are continually evolving and while the technology improves and the number of applications continues to grow there will be increased opportunity for museums to collect and engage with related material. Questions surrounding long-term conservation of such material and public engagement with nano-scale developments were also raised.

The location for the third Workshop was Summerlee Museum of Scottish Industrial Life in Coatbridge. A tour of the galleries, wider site and storage from Curator Justin Parkes held much of relevance for the interpretation and display of textile heritage. Although Summerlee was an iron works and not directly associated with the textile industry the museum faces similar challenges such as interpreting a complex industrial site effectively for the public and issues surrounding the care of large scale open-air exhibits and working machinery. A visit to the stores punctuated the power of experiencing an object in an unexpected context, in this case a large carpet cleaner. This led to discussion surrounding its social context and long term conservation. Experiential exhibits across the site include room settings from different periods, a mine which people can access and a range of working machinery. Such displays were of particular relevance to discussion throughout the day exploring dynamic exhibits and the power of sight, sound, touch and smell in interpreting textile heritage.

From hand powered machinery to large scale engine houses, the third presentation from Professor John Hume provided a fascinating overview of the development of

power for the machines in Scottish textile mills. Accompanied by photographs and drawings of sites across the country, Professor Hume's presentation really helped in contextualising power sources within the textile trades as well as highlighting the scale of related industrial complexes. Stressing that innovation associated with power technologies and their adoption was complex, questions were posed which explored the challenges associated with presenting an accurate and engaging portrayal of textile heritage in Scotland. As with many other industrial artefacts, the challenge to contextualise power sources for the textile industry out with their original context on the gallery floor can be hard. By displaying such material alongside power transmission technology, such as lines shafts with belt drives, audio visual footage and personal accounts can help in creating a dynamic exhibit. Professor Hume concluded by noting that the level of this material now left in situ is low, efforts should be made to promote the historical significance of such material to the public and preserve it as far as possible.

An excellent example of encouraging engagement with Scotland's industrial heritage came from David Harvie in the form of *The River Leven Heritage Trail*. Published by West Dumbartonshire Council, the booklet guides its readers on a 2 ½ hour tour along the River Leven promoting sites of textiles heritage along the route. Travelling from Dumbarton to Balloch the trail explores the textile industry which dominated this stretch of the river for more than 200 years and at one stage employed 7000 people. A vibrant and easy to follow guide, the heritage trail is aimed at reviving knowledge of the textile heritage in the area where little physical evidence has survived since the demise of the industry in the 1960s. Delegates were delighted to receive a copy of the trail from David and many will be following the banks of the Leven soon.

The final speaker of the day was Dr Ben Marsden, Senior Lecturer in History of Science and Technology at the University of Aberdeen. Listening to presentations and contributing to discussion throughout the day, Ben summarised Workshop 3 and highlighted areas for possible future research including: the framework for curatorial decision making in the acquisition and display of material relating to Scotland's textile heritage; investigating reasons behind the survival of particular technologies/industries and any patterns that emerge; the importance of promoting the skills evident in the industry and the power of skills demonstration in public engagement; and notions of the textile industry as highly experimental and providing an environment conducive to innovation.

As in previous workshops the group had a dedicated discussion session in the afternoon which gave the opportunity to explore the topics introduced throughout the day in greater depth. Issues surrounding collection for preservation and display, charting technological development and public engagement came to the fore.

Some of the key points include:

- As in Workshop 2, it was identified that there was work to be done in establishing which aspects of power and contemporary material should be collected. It is hoped that the ReINVENT network will continue to support curatorial decision making through increased awareness of, and access to, experts and related collections.
- Suggested areas for further research in relation to contemporary material include: exploring links between contemporary and historic material; whether historical innovators foresaw the extent of product application; and the implications of products such as smart textiles for Scotland's current textile industry.
- The technological development of power for textile mills is complex. Exploring the reasons behind the adoption of a particular technology could help in communicating related heritage. Factors such as costs, resources, changing materials, societal choice and the impact of transformative technology were highlighted.
- Throughout the discussion session the importance of fashion as a determining factor in the textile industry was underlined. Behavioural science in relation to fashion and its relationship with personal or group identity and culture was explored. The engagement potential of this area is considerable.
- It was acknowledged that un-contextualised material relating to Scotland's textile heritage, such as that available on the internet, makes for a complicated understanding of the past. Through the upcoming ReINVENT public event and future knowledge sharing it is hoped that a wider picture of related collections and expertise will emerge in order to create a focal point for textile heritage.
- The importance of preserving knowledge and working practices was promoted as in previous Workshops.
- A multi-layered approach to display was popular. Starting with a recognisable product and building from there in relation to materials, production techniques, social structure and wider context.

- Dynamic displays were universally praised for their public engagement potential and opportunities for sight, sound, smell and touch within related exhibits promoted. Oral history was noted for its interpretive potential and the importance of working machinery stressed throughout. The ability to build flexibility into future displays should be encouraged to bring different areas of textile heritage into focus and respond to contemporary developments.

Throughout the ReINVENT Workshop series practitioners from a variety of disciplines have come together to explore Scotland's textile heritage and to open up new opportunities for preservation, research and public engagement. The next stage of this unique cross-disciplinary project will be to share the Workshop findings at a public event which will be held at Maryhill Burgh Halls, Glasgow on 7th December. Aimed at local history societies, independent researchers, students and the general public it is hoped that this interactive event will promote knowledge sharing and discussion in relation to textile heritage throughout Scotland.

Thank you to everyone who made Workshop 3 such a success, in particular to our speakers Professor John Hume, Justin Parkes, David Harvie and Dr Ben Marsden.

Elsa Davidson, National Museum of Scotland
ReINVENT Workshop 3 Chair