



## Dr Jim Arnold, MBE

STICK is very sorry to relay news of the recent death of Jim Arnold, who will be forever associated with New Lanark.

Jim Arnold outlasted even Robert Owen. He was Director of New Lanark Conservation Trust for 35 years, whereas Owen was only to direct New Lanark for 25 years. During that time Jim oversaw the revivification (his word) of the village to become the standard bearer for regeneration of industrial and social heritage in Scotland. Among many highlights UNESCO world heritage listing was achieved in 2001 after an initial push by Jim in 1986 and a second nomination in 2000, when a letter-writing campaign had mysteriously propelled New Lanark to the front of the queue in the UK tentative list!

Jim said that it was his “background and upbringing in a home with a series of staunch and immovable beliefs, such as the work ethic, dignity, respect for self and others and good old socialism, that meant he was practically born to become the first — and so far only — director of New Lanark Conservation Trust.” Jim described his arrival in 1974 as a “newly appointed naïve and young Village Manager” in which housing refurbishment was first priority for the New Lanark Association.<sup>ii</sup> His short work experience before then had been in the motor industry in Coventry. In New Lanark he harnessed Manpower Services Commission labour and SDA land reclamation grants that were then available. The early creation of independent industrial attractions always relied on creative use of streams of government and EU funding that were much more substantial than those dedicated to heritage, although Historic Scotland and later Heritage Lottery Funds were to play important roles.

Jim drove forward acquisition of the mills from a scrap metal extractions company in 1983, following a council-served Repairs Notice and collapse of the roof in the School. With an enormous amount of floorspace to fill, Jim was undaunted and saw through an ambitious tourist route, the Annie McLeod experience, putting a ski tow into service and installing a waterwheel and a steam engine that approximated to what had been there. Following a timely visit with the Scottish Industrial Heritage Society to Selkirk, he also acquired enough spinning machinery to set up a subsidiary business producing wool, as cotton would have not been economic, and this thrives to this day. New Lanark was never to be described as a museum.

One of the tenants of the mills in early days was Heritage Engineering. Jim Mitchell recalls:

*“I worked with him for a few years when I started Heritage Engineering at New Lanark, both as a volunteer then as a business. He certainly taught me that all you really need to make things happen is determination. He was challenging to work for but that’s how he got things done. Having pondered this, I probably owe him for learning that any project is possible... the waterwheel, weir, turbine and steam engine are testament to that. He found the money and I did the job! I remember a hydroelectric company wanting to rip out the old 1930’s turbine and fit a new one. He asked if I could fix up the old one, and I had to rise to the challenge just because I wouldn’t say ‘no’ to him!”*

Another branch of the operation was to be the New Lanark Mill Hotel, along with conference and leisure suites. This was a training hotel in collaboration with a local college, so it too had a social purpose. This came about against Jim's initial judgement that restoring three missing storeys to Mill 1 (removed in 1946) would simply add to the challenge of empty floorspace. But Historic Scotland would not fund half measures and stuck to its guns, and on that rare occasion Jim graciously gave way, and then made a good job of it.

Would, he was asked, Jim find it impossible to let go of the New Lanark reins completely when he finally stood down in March 2010? "No problem whatsoever! I'll be out of this seat like a shot; without a second thought!" he hotly insisted. (Carluke Gazette 18.09.2009)

Leaving what was now New Lanark Trust, and echoing Owen's move in 1827 to New Harmony in Indiana, USA, Jim retired in 2010 to front a project for a new town that would more fully develop Owen's ideas. This was to be Owenstown, in rural Lanarkshire, but planning permission has so far eluded that project.<sup>iii</sup>

Jim had a good relationship with his trustees and a succession of able chairs. His combats with officialdom, such as those representing the funding agencies, were always good-humoured, in the certain knowledge that New Lanark would outlast them all. New Lanark is on even keel, despite the alarms Jim would occasionally ring, and that is his monument.

Mark Watson, Historic Environment Scotland  
with a contribution by Jim Mitchell, Industrial Heritage Consulting Ltd

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<sup>i</sup> Carluke Gazette 18.09.2009 <https://www.carlukegazette.co.uk/news/new-lanark-director-jim-arnold-set-to-retire-1-376236>

<sup>ii</sup> Mays etc Ed, Visions of Scotland's Past (2000)

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.thenews.coop/46679/sector/new-garden-city-to-bring-robert-owens-co-operative-town-to-life/>