

Dunfermline's Industrial History

David Brown's Westfield Dyeworks & Laundry, 58 Grieve Street, Dunfermline

This laundry business was founded in 1889 by David Brown, a native of Dunfermline and one of the best amateur cricketers of his day in Scotland. An all-rounder, but particularly formidable as a bowler, he played for the Dunfermline Club and for Scotland (See Note 1).

Mr Brown, in partnership with his brother John, had, whilst a young man, operated a yarn dye-works in Pilmuir Street before moving the concern to Grieve Street. In the late 1880s he decided to set up a laundry in a section of the Grieve Street works. It is thought to have been the first commercial laundry concern north of the Forth. Mr Brown installed the latest machinery for washing and finishing clothing, and he delivered the clean clothes in a one-horse van. His business developed rapidly and soon he had one of the best fleets of horse-drawn vans in the town.

An article in the Dunfermline Journal of 15th February, 1890 describes the early days of Brown's works thus:- *'Dunfermline is, it is true, an industrial city, but a weak point, since the collapse of the handloom weaving, has been the fact that the work for male hands has not been so plentiful as one would desire. An extensive linoleum work has frequently been spoken of, but the project has never got beyond the initial shape. Although linoleum proposals have come to nothing, however, it is so far satisfactory to notice that several new industries have sprung up in recent years, and the prospects of labour for men are brighter today than they have been since the army of Dunfermline labourers was forced, through the introduction of steam power, to throw down the shuttle.'*

One of the most successful industries has been dyeing, and instead of one work, as was the case ten years ago, there are now five flourishing works in the city. The most recent addition to the dye-works is that erected by Messrs D. Brown & Co., in Grieve Street, who lately purchased Messrs Wilson & Reid's warehouse, and the large building has been converted into one of the best dyeing and

laundry establishments in the country. The western division of the warehouse is set aside as a 'bundling' room, and the eastern division makes a spacious yarn dyeing house. A new erection at the back of the warehouse is confined almost entirely to indigo blue dyeing work, and at a point a little to the north of this building the drying stoves, boiler house and chimney have been erected. All the dyeing machinery and apparatus are on the most approved and advanced principles, and a fair idea of the little trouble the smoke from the chimney can give people in the district will be held when it is stated that the smoke passes through 250 feet of piping before it reaches the stalk. The laundry and household dyeing departments are conducted in a building which has just been erected a little to the east of the yarn dyeing premises. The washroom measures 48 feet by 22 feet, and here one of Summerscales 'Practical' washing and disinfecting machines has been fitted up.



Early belt driven washing machines at Westfield Laundry c. 1910

One of Messrs Bennet & Son's (a Dunfermline engineering firm based in Foundry Street) hydro extractors stands side by side with the washer, and the garments are turned out with the utmost despatch. In the finishing department, an enterprising firm of Nottingham engineers is about to fit up what is known as the 'Great Western' ironing machine. The 'Ironer' is a novel invention, and is admitted to be one of the most important acquisitions made in recent times in the laundries of Glasgow and

other large towns. Gas irons have been introduced, that is to say the irons are heated by what is known as the gas and air process – an ingenious invention which is known as ‘Ritchie’s patent gas iron and gas ironing machine’.



Early Steam Pressing Machines at Westfield Laundry



Early Finishing Section at Westfield Laundry c. 1920



Finishing Ladies at Westfield Laundry c. 1930

The main features of this patent are simplicity and cleanliness. There is not a spot of dirt about the ironing benches, and the process is so simply worked that the women engaged at dressing get along with comparative ease and comfort. A spacious receiving office adjoins

the dressing department and about half an acre of ground has been acquired for a bleaching green.

The electric light has been introduced into every department of the works. Two arc lamps are in operation in the large dyeing house, and the light is so satisfactory that the work goes on in the early morning and at night as briskly as if the sun was at its height. Upwards of sixty glow lamps have been introduced about the works, and one of the greatest conveniences of the light is the fact that it can be turned on at any time without applying to the match box. The motive power for the whole of the machinery is obtained from an engine of 30 horse power, and the steam is supplied by an improved Galloway tubular boiler. At present upwards of 50 hands are employed; but as the work of extensions goes on, the number will be added to. The works have been christened ‘The Westfield Dyeing and Laundry Works’. The outlay on buildings and fittings has been very considerable, but it is apparent from the fittings and the scale on which work has been begun that the proprietors mean business. They have launched a big undertaking and the lines adopted in every department are based on the latest and most recent improvements in the trade, and this and the energy common to Dunfermline’s sons are a guarantee that the concern will be a genuine success. The electric light was fitted up by Mr Gilbert Rae, Dunfermline’.

The electrical installation referred to above by Gilbert Rae of the Baldrige Aerated Water Works in Goldrum Street, was the second such installation to a business in Dunfermline, the first being to Gilbert Rae’s own premises. This was direct current supplied by a generator on the premises. It would be into the early 1900s before grid electricity was available to the town from Townhill Power Station.

A lover of animals and very proud of his stable of van-horses, David Brown won many prizes at the local agricultural shows. This did not blind him to the advantages which motor vans had over the horse-drawn vehicles, and he was among the first of the Dunfermline businessmen to put a motor van on the road. It was an Albion, manufactured at Scotstoun, in Glasgow, and the time was around 1910.

The driver, Jim Paterson, was a noted Scottish boxer (welter-weight champion of Scotland for a number of years), who had been with Mr Brown as a horse van-man. Jim Paterson later left Brown's employment to tour the country with a fair-ground boxing booth.



At rather wary Jim Paterson at the wheel of the new Alion c. 1910—a big change from the horse and cart



A line up of early delivery vans with Westfield Works in the Background c.1920

In 1906 the dye-works side of the business was acquired by the British Cotton & Wool Dyers Association, 22 Cumberland Street, Manchester, and in 1919 the Association also took over the laundry. The dye-works production slowed with the decline of the linen industry in the town and was closed down in 1926.

David Brown, who continued to run the laundry on behalf of the British Cotton & Wool Dyers Association, died in 1928. By that time Mr James Inglis had taken over as manager of the works, a position he would hold until his retirement in 1940. The every-day running of the business then fell to Willie Brown, a nephew of David Brown, who had started work at Westfield on leaving Dunfermline High School as a 14 year old, in 1912. Willie Brown had served in the army during the latter part of the

First World War and, on his return to the Laundry, was appointed assistant manager to Mr Inglis



Collar Starching Department c. 1930

Willie Brown's interest in the industry was not confined to the Westfield Laundry. For two years he was chairman of the Scottish District of the Institute of Launderers and was also Scottish representative on the national council of the Institute of Launderers. He also held a position on the wages council of the industry for a good number of years.



Linen Finishing Department c. 1949



Carpet Cleaning Machine c. 1920

The laundry business continued to expand and by the 1950s the laundry buildings covered a greater area than the original dye-works and laundry. Some 90 personnel were

employed around this time. Dry cleaning was by now in vogue and Brown's boasted of having the latest equipment in this field, most of it automatic. This department was expanded around 1955 with a £4,000 development programme.



Finishing Departments at Westfield Laundry c.1930

The Dunfermline & West Fife Journal of 4th May, 1949, carried a feature article on Westfield Laundry, commenting thus:- *"The majority of workers at the Westfield Laundry are girls hailing not only from Dunfermline, but from the districts of Cowdenbeath, Crossgates and Kelty. They are employed in a variety of jobs such as sorters, pressers, collar dressers, machine and hand ironers and packers.*

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of the work handled by these girls is clean and only slightly damp. Most of the hard and unpleasant work of bygone years has been eliminated by the introduction of modern machinery and methods. In addition the general impression that a laundry is a damp and unhealthy working place is also out of date; the only wet work is done in an enclosed apparatus in the washing department.

Employees at the Westfield Laundry have a five-minute break for tea in the forenoon and again in the afternoon, while canteen facilities, providing meals at reasonable cost, are available for those who cannot get home during the lunch-hour.

What type of work does the laundry handle? First and foremost there are hundreds of bundles of sheets, towels, shirts, collars and other items of household linen and wearing apparel collected from West Fife homes week

in and week out. Work on Admiralty contracts is an important part of the business, and here it is worthwhile noting that during the recent war the Westfield Laundry successfully completed a contract to launder the clothing for the W.R.N.S in Fife.

A more 'colourful' feature of the firm's work is done for the theatrical costuming firm of William Moultrie, Edinburgh, which supplies costumes and outfits to theatrical shows throughout Scotland. Whether it is the breath-taking evening dress of a leading lady or the toy-soldier uniform of a chorus girl, each, after being used in a production, is sent to the Westfield Laundry for cleaning before being hired out for another show.

But let us find out what happens to the more mundane collar and shirt when they arrive at the laundry.

The unwashed bundles when they are brought into the laundry first go to the checking room where the articles are checked with the customer's own list. They are then examined for the customer's own laundry mark and where no such mark exists one is stamped on the article. These laundry marks incidentally, are put on not solely for the purpose of assisting the police in checking the identity of an unknown murder victim according to our mystery novels, but merely to help the laundry firm in determining the items belonging to each individual customer.



Willie Smith and Willie Bryce empty one of the modern washing machines at Westfield Laundry in 1949

Afterwards the various articles are sorted out before going to the washing department- such items as sheets, bath towels and table cloths being washed separately.

Next stage is the washing department where the articles go into the vast washing machines, an average load of 'whites' getting seven different changes of water during the process.

After being washed, the articles are put in a hydro extractor which takes out all surplus water, leaving them ready for the finishing process. Most articles are finished in the damp state, but woollen goods and bath towels are completely dried in a continuous dryer.

The ironing and finishing of all personal goods is under the supervision of Mrs Bryce, while Miss A. Doig is in charge of the calendar department where all the 'flat' items such as sheets are drawn through a series of rollers.



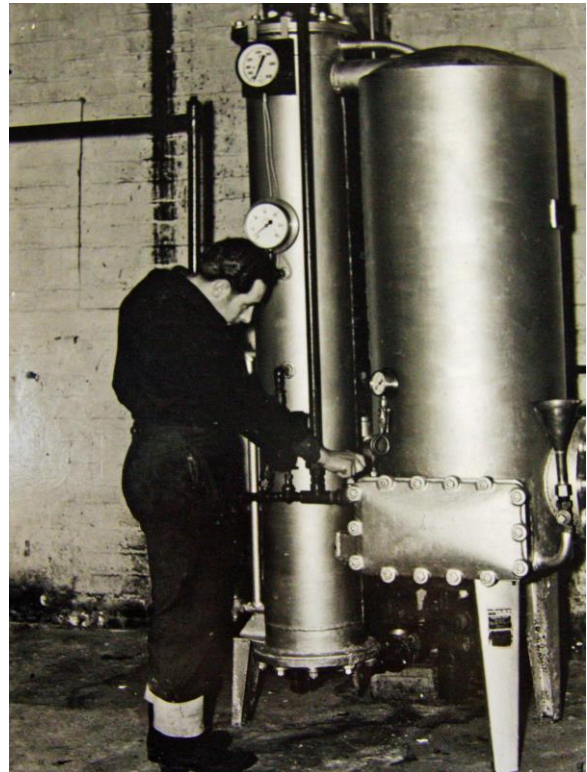
Girls at work in the calendar department. Jenny Stenhouse and Mary Doig are seen feeding a sheet into the machine whilst the girls facing the camera are Isa Fox and Moira Wilkie - 1949.

Male readers may be interested to note that their collars go through eight different processes before being finished – washing machine, hydro, starching machine, then back to the hydro extractor, ironing, polishing and finally two machines which 'round' the collar off and give the neat creases at the edge.

Finally the articles, now pressed and finished, go to the packing department where they are collected according to each customer's laundry mark before being parcelled up and made ready for delivery.

An important addition to the Westfield Laundry recently has been a new dry-cleaning department, where under the supervision of Mr Harry Cant, soiled suits and other items of outer wear are given a 'new look' ready to give

the owner service for another year or two.



Harry Cant adjusting the controls of the apparatus which re-distilled the spirit used in the dry-cleaning process - 1949



Annie Harley and Isa Macpherson pressing suits in the dry-cleaning department - 1949



Lunchtime in the Westfield Laundry canteen - 1949

In addition to laundering the theatre costumes of Messrs Moultrie, Westfield Laundry also had long standing contracts with the Ministry of Defence at Rosyth Dockyard and with Butlin's Holiday Camp at Ayr, the latter having all their bed linen, towels, etc. laundered at Dunfermline. Interviewed in 2010, John Forker (see below) recalled the weekly drive to Ayr and back, during the holiday season, delivering fresh laundry to Butlin's and returning with a van-load of sheets, etc. for washing.

In July, 1963, Willie Brown retired after serving Westfield Laundry for 51 years. He was succeeded in the management role by George Moyes, who had started as a van boy many years earlier. At this same time Harry Cant, another long standing employee, was appointed assistant manager. Harry continued to specialise in the dry-cleaning side of the business.

Around this time the Edinburgh based Mac-Nab Group, who owned Inglis Green Laundry in Edinburgh, bought the Dunfermline business. George Moyes remained in charge at Dunfermline, with another long standing employee, John Forker, as his assistant.

The firm continued for another 10 years until early 1973, when Mr R. D. (Gary) Low, a Dunfermline man who had attended St. Leonard's Primary and Dunfermline High Schools, but who was then managing director of the Mac-Nab Group, announced that, because of ever increasing costs, Westfield Laundry would close its doors for the last time on 16th March, 1973. By that time the work-force had been reduced to less than 30, with a few being promised jobs at the firm's Edinburgh base. Thus ended what was probably the largest laundry in Dunfermline for many years. The laundry buildings in Grieve Street are now occupied by the firm of Magnet Kitchens Ltd.

Note 1 – David Brown was born on 24th December, 1849, at Bruce Street, Dunfermline, the son of John Brown, a shoemaker. He remained single all his life and died on 13th September, 1928, aged 78 years, at his home, 60 Grieve Street, Dunfermline.

Although a prominent businessman in Dunfermline, Mr Brown is probably best remembered in the town for his sporting abilities, especially in the realms of football and cricket. Along with his three brothers he is prominently identified with the birth of these popular sports in the town. Whilst rugby football had been played in Dunfermline for many years the Association game was not known in the town until 1874. In the winter of that year Mr Brown witnessed a Queens Park match in Glasgow. He was so fascinated by the game that he forthwith purchased a football, perhaps the first that had been seen in Dunfermline. Gathering his companions around him, he instituted the Dunfermline Football Club, which was the first in Fife, and probably the pioneer of Association Football north of the Forth. As a centre forward, David Brown played many fine games for his side, and in the days of the Edinburgh Football Association, he had the honour of being selected to play in representative matches in the capital.

His connection with cricket locally extends to a period even further back than the advent of football in the town. Not only did he make a name for himself in Dunfermline, but his prowess, with both bat and ball, was known throughout a wide area, and it was one of his proudest recollections that back in the early 1880s he was selected to play for the gentlemen of Scotland against Murdoch's redoubtable Colonials (Australia) at Raeburn Place, Edinburgh. On each of the two days of the match he took a wicket, having the second highest average. Mr Brown was also a member of the Dunfermline team which, in the season 1875, went through the entire list of engagements without losing a single match. In those games, which were against such formidable rivals as Drumpellier Academicals, Clackmannan County, and Perthshire, he captured 75 wickets at a cost of 3.44 runs per wicket. It was largely through the instrumentality of Mr Brown and his brother John, that a desire on the part of the late Mr John McKane, an Amer-

ican millionaire, to do something for sport locally, materialised in the purchase by Mr McKane, and his presentation to the club, of the cricket field, originally known as Lady's Mill, and re-named McKane Park in honour of its generous donor. Until just before his death Mr Brown retained his keen interest in cricket, and especially in the Dunfermline Club, several of whose matches he motored to McKane Park to witness. It was always a source of gratification to him that the finest traditions of the game were being worthily upheld by his old club, and that his nephews were playing an important part in keeping the old club to the fore-front of Scottish cricket.

Note 2 – John Brown was born 18th February, 1852, the son of John Brown, Shoemaker, and his wife Eliza. John remained single and spent most of his life working in tandem with his brother David. The 1901 census shows David, John and sister Janet, along with their 92 year old Aunt Christina, residing at 97a Grieve Street, Dunfermline, this being the house they built on the west side of Westfield Laundry. John's occupation in the census is given as 'clerk', and it appears that he looked after the administration side of the laundry business. John died, aged 78, on 28th January, 1931, at his home in Grieve Street. Like his brother he had been a stalwart at Dunfermline Cricket Club for most of his life.

An feature article in the Dunfermline Journal of 9th October, 1886, on 'The Athletes of West Fife' describes John thus:- *Mr John Brown has never perhaps been the most brilliant player of cricket or football, but we make the bold statement that there is no gentleman in the district who takes a warmer and more practical interest in our manly sports than Mr Brown – it is positively in his blood. He began his cricket career, like all the Dunfermline enthusiasts, among the junior clubs, and in 1870 he had attained such proficiency in the game that his name was enrolled among the members of Dunfermline Cricket Club. After a couple of good seasons playing he removed to Leslie, and here he was identified for two years with the Rothes, a club which at one time bid fair to become a foeman worthy of the steel of Dunfermline. On returning to Dunfermline, he identified himself with his old friends, and in 1876 we find him credited with the best bowling average for the club – this splendid record showing 4.5 runs per wicket.*

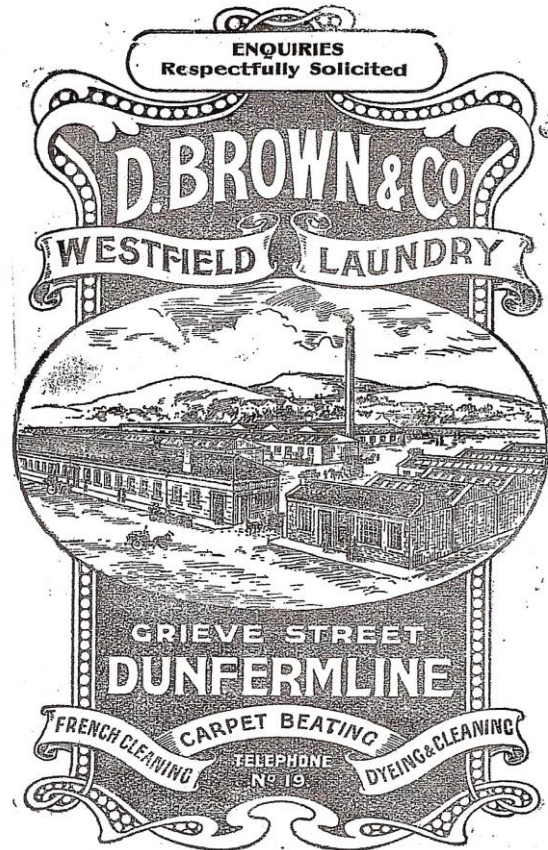
From his return from Leslie he has been one of the members of the team, and although we do not overlook the service he has rendered in the field, yet it is in connection with the internal workings of the club we will have most to say of Mr Brown. A club which has made a name for itself like that of Dunfermline, needs men of business capacity for the 'inner circle' and as a committee man, as one of the management of matters affecting the internal welfare of the club, Mr Brown has rendered invaluable service. He was appointed a member of committee in 1880, and in April 1881 he undertook the duties of secretary. During the seasons 1882-83 Mr Brown fulfilled the duties of treasurer with much acceptance to all concerned, and in 1884 we again find him working hard for the club as member of committee. How much his services in every connection were appreciated will be apparent when it is stated that in 1885 he was selected as captain of the club. The best certificate it is possible to produce as to Mr Brown's services as captain in 1885, is the fact that in 1986 the pressure for him to remain in office was so great that he again accepted the post. Here is a compliment which is handed us by one of the most enthusiastic cricketers Dunfermline ever had:- "Mr Brown is a most energetic and hard working member; makes a splendid captain; and owing to extensive experience, genuine knowledge of the game of cricket and business qualifications makes a capital member of the committee, and his advice is oftentimes invaluable." Mr Brown has not entered much into the football warfare in recent years, but he worked hard for game at first, and did a good deal to arouse the enthusiasm which is now displayed in the national game in West Fife. He steadily maintains his connection with the Dunfermline club, and in 1883 and 1884 acted as treasurer for the institution. He was one of the players who advocated the founding of the Football Association for the 'kingdom', an association which bids fair to raise football playing to a higher platform in the county than it has yet attained. At all the matches played in the district Mr Brown is an enthusiastic spectator, and is a great admirer of the 'passing game' in preference to the single handed big kick policy adopted by some of the forwards in Fife. Mr Brown's connection with the manly sports of the district does not end with cricket and football. From the commencement he has been a most zealous official of the Carnegie Swimming Club. He

held the position of treasurer for five years, and is presently one of the most active members of committee in the club. At all the galas he is with us doing what he can to bring off the display with credit to the Swimming Club and all interested in the success of the baths. For athletic institutions of all kinds an enthusiastic worker in committee is as indispensable as the most active playing member, and we hope Mr Brown will continue to labour in the future as he has done in the past.

Note 3 – William Brown was born on 6th May, 1898 at Castleblair Park, Dunfermline, the son of William Brown, a Brewer's Traveller, and brother of David. He married Isabella Mason Motion. Willie died on 6th June, 1970, aged 72 years, at Milesmark Hospital. His residence at that time was 39 Victoria Terrace, Dunfermline. He was predeceased by his wife. Having been born into one of Scotland's most notable cricketing families, it was no surprise that Willie would develop into a first-class cricketer. A member of Dunfermline Cricket Club for more than half a century, he initially played for the club and then was an official of the club for 36 years. He was for 21 years secretary of the club and held the position of president for 8 years, being made a life member on his retirement from that post in 1961. He also held the position of district representative on the Scottish Cricket Union and was a member of the selection committee of the Union.

Note 3 – Check for any connection with James Brown, Brewer, in High Street. Also check out John Brown and other brothers. Also confirm date of birth.

Note 4 – Two photographs in DP 100 Years of News 1957 show photographs of Dunfermline Cricket Team of 1939 which includes Willie Brown. Check if there is a photograph of the 1875 team including David Brown.



Drop us a Post Card and the Van will call.
Goods collected and delivered Free.

Early Westfield Laundry Advert. with a little bit of artistic licence regarding the size of the works.



Circa 1930 photo of some of Brown's staff with manager Charlie Inglis (centre front row) and Willie Brown to his left. The van men and van boys are wearing the white topped caps.

Note 6 – Jenny Harvey (ms Hoey), who was born in 1921 and left Crossgates School in 1935, aged 14, started work the following Monday in Brown's Laundry. Jenny, interviewed in 1911, says she got the job as a result of being recommended by a friend, Mary Dall, who already worked at the laundry. Her first job was 'shaking the water' from the wet sheets received from the washing machines, before putting them through the calendar machines for drying. She then moved on to the collar section where the newly washed shirt collars were brushed with starch before going through two machines which dried and pressed them.

Jenny was with Browns until she left to get married in 1942. She started out at 3d an hour and worked from 6 in the morning to 6 at night when ships were in at Rosyth Dockyard and the sailors laundry had to be turned round in double quick time. She recalled waiting on a Friday evening to see if there was any Saturday morning (6 am to 12 noon) overtime going. Jenny, at that time, stayed in Mossgreen and had to run each morning to the Cross in Crossgates to catch a tramcar into Dunfermline.

Willie Brown was the laundry manager during the time Jenny worked at Browns.