

2. Coats and Clark The Binding Thread of Paisley's History Valerie Reilly

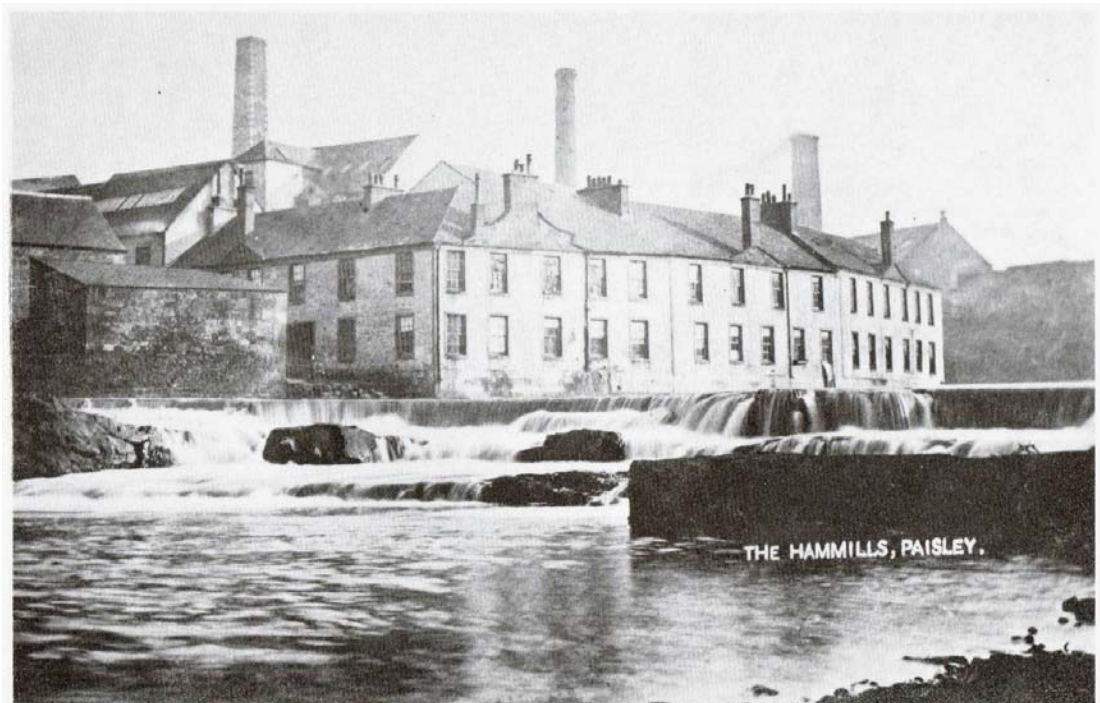
Introduction

This article looks at the built legacy of the Coats and Clark Families. Following a summary of the development of the family businesses, it covers their buildings and houses. As there are so many family members involved, they have been numbered for ease of reading.

The Clark Family

In the late eighteenth century two brothers, Peter (1) (sometimes known as Patrick) and James (2) Clark, both lived and worked in Paisley as weavers' furnishers providing items needed by the weaving population such as heddles, reeds and shuttles, as well as manufacturing the twine used to make the heddles¹.

Around 1806 the weaving business was hit by Napoleon's Berlin Decree which banned exports to Britain from the continent, greatly hampering the movement of the silk required to produce heddles. It seems to have been this situation that prompted Peter Clark to experiment with producing heddles of cotton rather than silk. He and his brother made a success of this venture and soon James Clark junior (3), who had been selling linen thread for domestic sewing purposes, began to recommend his father's cotton thread as a better product. Demand for the cotton thread soon increased and James (3) had the novel idea of selling the thread wound onto bobbins instead of in the original hanks. If the customer so desired, James would - for the price of a halfpenny - wind the thread onto a bobbin. The halfpenny was refundable if the bobbin was returned.



The Hammills and Seedhill c.1900

¹ Heddles: looped chords which separated the warp threads and allowed passage of the shuttle.

Around the year 1812 James Clark junior (3) bought land on the north bank of the River Cart at the bend known as the Hammills. Here his father James (2) erected a factory and engine house for the production of cotton thread. Other members of the large Clark family began to become interested in the thread trade and in 1817 John Clark Junior and Co. was established at the Mile End Mill in Glasgow. In 1819 the elder James (2) Clark, having reached the age of 72, decided to retire and his business was sold to his two sons James junior (3) and John (4). Together they formed the firm of J. & J. Clark, and worked hard for many years to build up their successful and profitable industry. They both retired in 1852 and the business was left in the hands of James Clark (5) of Ralston, the son of John (4). By this time the business was expanding so rapidly that he found himself unable to handle it alone and he brought in his brothers John (6) and Stewart (7) as partners. James (5) Clark of Ralston retired from active business in 1872.

More and more branches of the Clark family took an interest in the blossoming thread trade. George A. Clark (8), brother of James (5) and Stewart (7), with his brother-in-law Peter Kerr, established the firm of Kerr and Clark. They erected the Linside Mill, on a site close to the original Seedhill Mill. In 1854 James (9) and Robert (10) Clark, the sons of James Clark (3), established the business of J. & R. Clark. In 1859 they moved to the new Burnside Mill built on the south bank of the River Cart. However, these businesses were relatively short-lived, and both had amalgamated with the original Seedhill firm under the name of Clark and Co. by 1867.

It was probably between 1860 and 1880 that the Anchor Mills expanded the most rapidly. In 1860 the complex already had departments for twisting, winding, polishing, dyeing, bobbin-turning, spooling and ticketing, together with engine and boiler houses. New extensions in this period included the incorporation of a former 1840s shawl factory for use in the production of embroidery thread in 1872. In 1874 the Counting House and East Dyeworks were built, to be followed in 1878 by the Fire Station.

Also in this period came more amalgamations of small thread firms with Clark & Co. These included Carlile, Kerr and Co. of Underwood and John Clark junior of Well Street. The expansion of this period is clearly shown in the figures relating to the value of the fixed capital of Clark & Co. In 1869 the capital stood at £56,000, by 1880 it was estimated at over £320,000.

But, all other expansions of this period were overshadowed by the construction of the Atlantic Mill for spinning in 1872, followed by the Pacific Mill for Twisting in 1875 both on the large Anchor Mills site. Atlantic was designed to contain 71,000 spindles together with the necessary preparatory machinery. The power was provided by a pair of Bolton-made beam engines producing 1,600hp. Pacific Mill, the counterpart to Atlantic, contained 80,000 spindles. Here the engines could produce up to about 1,700hp.

By 1880 the Anchor Mills complex was running over 230,000 spindles and employing over 3,500 male and female workers. They were producing about 15 tons of finished cotton thread each day, a total of about 4,500 tons/annum. Large quantities of raw materials were needed to feed production on this scale, perhaps the most astonishing figure being that Anchor Mills required 130 tons of coal to keep its 30 boilers fired - every single day!

Arguably the most important building erected in the 1880s was the Domestic Finishing Mill, one of the most advanced industrial premises of its time. It was built as a five-flatted mill with engines on the first floor, and with a belt drive for the machinery

running through a central well to the upper floors. The first flat also had four dynamos producing electricity for lighting, making this one of the very first buildings in Paisley to be equipped with electric lights. The Mill also had a partial fire sprinkler system as early as 1889. Expansion continued for the remaining years of the nineteenth century. Glasgow's Mile End Mill was acquired in 1894 when John Clark Junior & Co. amalgamated with the Anchor firm.

The Coats Family

But of course this is only half the story of thread in nineteenth century Paisley. In 1802 James(A) Coats, having recently returned from a period of service in the south of England with the Ayrshire Fencibles, took up the weaving trade. Shortly afterwards he went into partnership with the shawl manufacturer James Whyte, and they produced some of the only Canton crepe shawls in Scotland. In order to learn about the process of yarn twisting - an integral part of the manufacture of Canton crepe, he took a sleeping partnership in the firm of Ross and Duncan in George Street, Paisley. The partnership expired in 1826, whereupon James (A) built a small thread factory of his own behind his house at Ferguslie. It was a very small-scale enterprise with a three-flatted building powered by a single 12hp engine.

In 1830 James (A) decided to retire, and the thread business was placed in the hands of his two eldest sons James (B) and Peter (C), under the name of J. & P. Coats. Shortly afterwards, a third brother, Thomas (D), was admitted to the partnership. It is interesting to note that they didn't get the business for nothing; they had to pay their father an annual rent of £500! By 1840, hard work had increased the trade of the firm and the size of the factory. New engines had to be installed which now gave an output of 50hp. Three-quarters of the Coats product at this time was exported to America, and so yet another brother, Andrew (E), was sent to the States to manage sales there.

In 1845 James (B) died, leaving the firm in the hands of Peter (C) and Thomas (D). That same year they acquired a further three acres of ground at Ferguslie, bounded by the Candren Burn and the Canal, where they built their second mill. Much expansion took place at Ferguslie in the period up to 1860. Mills 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 were added in an L-shape to the original No.1 Mill, the Clock and Bell Tower was built, and the Counting House was erected close to the canal towpath.



Ferguslie Mills c.1850s

The year 1887 was important for the Ferguslie complex with the erection of a three-flatted Glazing and Polishing building behind the original No.1 Mill and the opening of the Half-Timers School. But even more significant was the completion of the No.1

Spinning Mill. This was a huge building measuring 400 feet long, 130 feet wide and 90 feet tall housing all the processes involved in the spinning of yarn from the raw cotton. The machinery was powered by two compound tandem engines producing 2,000hp.

In the 1880s and 1890s a difficult situation was developing. Both firms, Clarks and Coats, had now grown so large that competition for a limited market grew very fierce. This resulted in each firm announcing large price reductions in order to attract custom. However, in 1889 an amicable agreement was reached between the Paisley firms, and an office was rented in St. Mirren St., Paisley where their representatives could meet to discuss matters affecting their joint interests. The agreement was formalised in 1890 with the establishment of The Central Agency representing, Clark & Co., J. & P. Coats and the English firm of Jonas Brook & Bros. of Huddersfield. A piece of ground was purchased in Bothwell St., Glasgow and there offices for The Central Agency, large enough to accommodate a staff of 300 clerks, were built and opened in 1893.

Another outward sign of the success of J. & P. Coats was the fact that they went public in 1890. The prospectus issued when the firm was to be converted into a limited liability company declared a capital of £5,750,000, the largest ever known at that date for such a company. The Central Agency had worked so well for the companies, that it was taken a stage further in April 1896 when it was announced that Clark & Co. and J. & P. Coats Ltd. were to amalgamate under the Coats' name.

In 1898, at the opposite end of the Anchor site from the Domestic Finishing Mill. The company built a magnificent new mill which they called the Mile End Mill, not because it was a mile from the other end of the complex but as a tribute to the mill in Glasgow which they had acquired some years before. It was a six-storey building complete with its own boiler and engine houses and its purpose was to house the Twisting processes. Workers from their Burnside Mill were transferred into this new Mill and the old building was sold off. Ferguslie was also expanding with a new dyeing department opened in 1901 and a fully equipped joiners' shop in 1902. By 1904 a total of 10,000 men and women were employed in the Paisley Mills.

Anchor had now reached the limit of its possibilities for expansion without crossing the River Cart, and covered some 28 acres. At Ferguslie, expansion was still possible, and in 1913 the No. 2 Spinning Mill was built.

After WWI business accelerated, bringing with it the need for yet more premises. A small factory in George Street was acquired in 1919 and used as part of the Research department. This closed in 1945, and the building later went to form part of the Technical College. At Ferguslie a Central Power Station was completed in 1924 housing six water-tube boilers and four turbines. At the time it was the largest privately owned power station of its kind in the country. Over the next three years Ferguslie's mills were gradually converted to electric power, and the old boilers and engines scrapped. At Anchor the first buildings on the south side of the river, a bleachworks and the Anchor Recreation Club, were completed.

Research was always an important function of both factories, with endeavours improving the efficiency of existing thread-making processes, and devising new processes and developing new products. In the mid 1930s the two separate research departments were amalgamated at Anchor and serviced not only the Paisley Mills, but other UK divisions and all overseas units.

Notable events of the 1930s included the opening of a Production Standards department. This was a comparatively new concept in industry at the time, being the first steps towards a scientific approach to the study and assessment of working practices. Manufacturing was reorganised at Ferguslie with new machinery introduced. The Polishing Department was now producing almost a million miles of thread in each working week.

During the War years, like almost every other manufacturing industry, the output of the Paisley Mills was primarily geared towards the war effort. The outstanding memory of the employees of the time was of khaki, as they produced a huge amount of thread for uniform clothing. A great deal of overtime was worked, and during tea breaks the workers were given tea and two buns.

Business boomed after the war and it began to be necessary for some manufacturing processes to be dispersed to subsidiary factories including Irvine, Banton (Kilsyth), Glasgow, Broxburn and Hillington. Ferguslie needed new catering facilities which opened at the West Canteen in 1949. It was fitted with the very latest equipment and could provide 1,000 meals at one sitting. It was attractively decorated and had a platform at one end that could be used for the staging of concerts and drama club shows.

Both Anchor and Ferguslie were reorganised in the 1950s with some departments moving to newly-constructed units. This was partly due to subsidence which prevented the Atlantic and Pacific Mills from housing the heavy machinery required. They were subsequently demolished in 1972. By 1956 all Spinning operations had been transferred to the Modern No. 3 Mill at Ferguslie, which was regarded as a showpiece in the world of textile manufacture, with excellent facilities both for the manufacture of the product, and for the welfare of the employees.

The beginning of the 1960s saw the formation of Coats Paton's through a merger with Patons & Baldwins. The employees of the new group totalled about 60,000 of whom about 50% were employed in the UK. In 1966 the wooden spools were made obsolete and replaced by a new plastic version. This led to the closure of the Turning Department and the establishment of a Plastic Moulding department at Anchor instead. By the late 1960s the finishing of all industrial threads was concentrated at the Mile End Mill, retitled the Industrial Finishing Mill, and what had previously been known as the Spooling Mill was renamed the Domestic Finishing Mill since all domestic goods went through their finishing processes there.

The early 1970s saw the establishment of a central office section at Anchor and the introduction of the first computers. The very first was used, from 1970, only for the payroll, but it was followed by computerised recipe prediction for the dyeworks in 1973. By 1979 Anchor had been connected by computer to many of the dispersed departments for control of stock and the filling of customer orders. The 1970s also saw the beginnings of "slimming down" with the closure of some of the older factories around Britain and the selling off of all units north of the canal at Ferguslie.

The year 1980 marked the 150th anniversary of the formation of J. & P. Coats. It was celebrated throughout the company, but particularly here in Paisley Museum with a large exhibition, as well as a visit from Prince Charles. But the 1980s also saw the beginning of the end for Coats in its hometown. During that decade Ferguslie Mills were closed down and largely demolished, and manufacturing at Anchor Mills concentrated at the Mile End Mill. Even worse was to follow in the 1990s when the company finally made the commercial decision to finish operations in the antiquated buildings at Anchor and moved out of the town to more up-to-date manufacturing

centres elsewhere in Britain and abroad. An association that had lasted almost two hundred years came to an abrupt end.

Local Benefactors

The bare bones of the company history are not the whole story. Industrial history is as much about people as it is about facts and figures. It is also about the owners of the company and the people that worked for them. The wealth of the various members of the Coats family as a result of the thread industry is common knowledge. An article in the Paisley Daily Express in 1922 tells how seven members of the Coats family had died over the previous ten years, each leaving more than £1million pounds in their wills. They were:-

Name	Year	£
Mr James Coats Jnr. (brother)	1912	£2m
Sir James Coats, Bart. (cousin)	1913	£1.75m
Mr Peter Coats (cousin)	1913	£2.5m
Lord Glentanar (brother)	1918	£4.25m
Mr Daniel Coats (cousin)	1920	£1.25m
Sir Thomas Glen-Coats, Bart.	1922	£1.5m
(Figures are rounded up or down to nearest £0.1M)		

A lot of this money was ploughed back into the town. From almost the earliest days of the companies we are told that they were concerned about the fate of their fellow citizens. During the crippling depression in the Shawl industry between 1841 and 1843, generous donations were made to funds for the alleviation of distress amongst the weaving community. In 1853 the Coats saved Paisley's West End Reading Room - a place where workers could have access to books, newspapers and periodicals - from imminent closure. Some of the generosity was religious in nature. For example, Thomas Coats was a strong supporter of the local Baptist community, and it is said that very few Scottish Baptist churches did not receive some sort of aid from him in the last thirty years of his life. It was Thomas also who purchased the Hope Temple Gardens in 1866 and, at an estimated cost of £20,000, transformed them into the Fountain Gardens which were opened to the people of Paisley in May 1868. He even gave the Council a £5,000 endowment towards the upkeep and maintenance of the gardens. After the establishment of Paisley Museum in 1871, the Coats were among its strongest supporters. Various items were donated to collections of the Free Library and Museum, the most important of which were perhaps the Arbuthnott MSS, the fine volumes of Audubon's 'Birds of America' and numerous Egyptian antiquities. Other donations from the family members included; antiquities, costume, natural history specimens, ship models, ephemera and ethnographical material.

One of the abiding interests of Thomas Coats was education, and he served as Chairman of the Paisley School Board from its inception in 1872 until his death over a decade later. He personally paid for the land allocated, and for the buildings erected, and for each of the first four Board Schools to be half as big again as the regulations demanded, believing that children needed space and air to learn effectively. Shortly before his death he donated a site for a building and playing field for the fifth Board School to be erected at Ferguslie. Continuing with the educational theme, in 1873 four bursaries were established at Glasgow University with a £20,000 bequest from George A. Clark, and in 1882 the Coats' company donated the site of their former dyeworks in George Street, together with an endowment of £3000, to assist in the formation of a Technical College for Paisley. In 1896 a bequest from John Clark provided a new dining room, gymnasium and swimming bath for the Industrial School in Albion Street. At the turn of the century, one of the most eccentric

of the members of either family, James Coats Jnr., was involved in the donation of schoolbags to children all over Scotland as well as the provision of books to schools, lighthouse keepers and rural communities. In fact, it is known that he provided some 4000 entire libraries in purpose-made double-fronted bookcases to communities that had none of their own, which cost him about £150,000. It seems he was endeavouring to reach communities in remoter parts that could not benefit from the generosity Carnegie had shown to urban areas. As an afterthought, James Coats also sent out spectacles to allow people to avail themselves of the books!

Most of the family members were regular church goers leading to a number of benefactions to the religious community. We have already noted Thomas Coats' generosity to the Baptists. On another side of both family and religious fences we find that in 1873 William Clark built a Sunday School for the Oakshaw Free Church in memory of his wife and, one year later, James Clark gifted an organ to St George's Church. In the 1880s Sir Peter Coats provided Presbyterian Churches at both Minishant, Ayrshire (close to his new home at Auchendrane) and in Algiers where he spent the winter months of his later years. At the same period John Clark spent £30,000 on a new United Presbyterian Church at Largs, which was completed in 1892. Five magnificent stained glass windows were installed in the new church; one donated by Peter Coats and the other four by various members of the extended Clark family. Into the twentieth century Sir Thomas Glen Coats funded the construction of Paisley's YMCA building, as well as making generous donations to Quarrier's Homes.

Health was another of the interests of the family members. In the 1880s Peter Coats established and maintained the 'Wallneuk Home' at Largs for Paisley children in need of sea air, at the same time as John Clark was bearing the entire cost of providing a hospital for Largs and establishing a Convalescent Home for Paisley people in West Kilbride. In 1885, Archibald Coats bought Gleniffer Home at Meikleriggs on the Braes behind Paisley and had it adapted as a home for the victims of incurable diseases. At the end of the century, as the town began the task of updating its hospital facilities, each of the families donated huge sums of money to enable the building of light, airy pavilions at each end of the main building. Additionally, Peter Coats donated money to provide on-site living accommodation for the nurses who were to work at the new RAI and James Coats gave £1000 to provide electric lighting for the new establishment. At the same time, William Hodge Coats was clearing the debts of the Royal Victoria Eye Infirmary, and some ten years later James did the same for the RAI in order to give the Directors a fresh start financially. One of the last major donations to the town, in 1934, was also health-related. The Peesweep Sanatorium, formerly exclusively reserved for tuberculosis sufferers in the employ of the mills, was gifted to the Town Council so that all the Paisley inhabitants could benefit from a 'fresh air home'.

As well as these examples of philanthropy that can be grouped into the themes of education, religion and health, there were occasions when one-off donations could be of a more varied nature. For example, in 1880 the Philosophical Institution expressed an interest in astronomical studies. Thomas Coats immediately bought them an astronomical telescope and then decided to build a fully functioning observatory to house it – with further buildings and equipment being added by his son James in 1884, 1892 and 1898. In 1900, William Hodge Coats handed his majority shareholding in the Coffee Rooms at Paisley Cross to the Town Council in order that all Paisley people could enjoy its facilities. At the end of the century James Coats was sending elderly Paisley folk to seaside locations such as Arran, for a month at a time, with board and travel paid. In winter he supplied boots, shoes and stockings to Paisley's poorer children. In 1902 those same children received a rare treat of chocolate from him, in commemoration of Edward VII's coronation. Between

1901 and 1903 he donated £3000 to Gourrock Yacht Club, the cost of building their clubhouse. In 1906 he gave a donation of £15,000 to part-finance W.S. Bruce's expedition to Antarctica. As a result of this, a section of the southern continent was named "Coats' Land" in his honour. During the years of WWI, George Coats donated some £50,000 to the Prince of Wales National Relief Fund. In 1918, Daniel Coats donated a sum of money to the Committee of Paisley Museum to fund a western extension, although the money was not actually destined to be utilised until the 1970s! One last donation to the town came in the 1930s when the last two Misses Coats moved out of Ferguslie House and gave the house and lands to the Town Council who turned them into the pleasant public park today known as Ferguslie Gardens.

More importantly, we have to take into consideration the fact that perhaps the threadworkers were better treated than most employees were in the nineteenth century. By 1896 the Paisley mills had educational facilities in the form of the Half-Timers school, fire-fighting facilities, dining halls, baths, reading rooms, a gym, bowling greens, tennis courts, cricket and other sports grounds, model cottages for some of their employees and a hostel for single girls living away from home. Health matters were taken care of with sanatoria and medical centres which not only included the services of doctors and nurses, but dentists and chiropodists as well. In the 1920s, after an outbreak of smallpox, the workers were encouraged to have vaccinations, and given a bounty of £1 if they did! Also in the 1920s Coats became one of the earliest industrial concerns to offer pensions to their female workers. The scheme was known as The Woman Thread Worker's Benefit Fund, and those who chose to join it could look forward to a pension of 30/- per week at the age of 56, or 40/- per week if they stayed on to retire at 60. A sickness benefit was also included giving 10/- per week if the employee was off sick. In 1946 the company established a Welfare Department which looked after such matters as recreation and visiting sick employees. In addition, from the early twentieth century the company gradually reduced the numbers of hours that the employees were required to work each week. From a working week of 55 hours spread over five and a half days in 1906, there had been a reduction to a 45-hour, five-day week by 1946 and a straight 40 hours by 1966.



The Half Timers School

Leisure and Sport

The company also sponsored an amazing variety of societies and sports clubs. Music was one of the earliest interests to be catered for. In 1856 The Ferguslie Brass and Reed Band was established, with Thomas Glen-Coats as its first Honorary President. The pastime was taken seriously by the band members and they entertained at company concerts and soirees. The band continued with only a break for the Second World War until its final demise in 1972, when the instruments were gifted to various local bands. In the same vein a Male Voice Choir was formed at Ferguslie in the 1880s, performing at concerts and entering music festivals and winning the Greenock festival in the early 1930s. The 1920s saw the formation of the Anchor Mills Pipe Band with a uniform of Hunting McPherson tartan worn with grey doublets. They were well known in competitive circles, even taking part in the World Championships. Like the Ferguslie Band they finally broke up in the mid-1970s. The company also sponsored an Amateur Dramatic Society which, although fairly short-lived, enjoyed success in the plays staged both for competitions and for other employees. Hobbies were catered for with a Photographic Club inaugurated in the late 1940s, as well as a Car Club and a Philatelic Society. Some members of the latter are still active in the field today. Additionally, beyond the formal clubs and societies there was a feeling of community within the mills which led to good working relations and the organisation of social gatherings and outings.

Younger employees had the opportunity to join the Scouts or Guides. Both Anchor and Ferguslie had troops by 1921. In 1924 the Ferguslie scouts wanted to attend a Jamboree at the Empire Exhibition for which they needed kilts. With great enterprise they sold bars of soap and boxes of soap powder to family and friends, raising enough for each of them to buy an ex-army kilt (some of which were so long they were slung from the boys' shoulders on braces!).

Sports of various kinds were well catered for. One of the earliest facilities to be offered was the Ferguslie Bowling Greens, opened in 1883. An Anchor Bowling Club followed in 1896 and was noted for its charitable activities. For example, in 1902 they played a benefit match for the Ibrox Stadium Disaster Fund. The next sport to be supported was tennis with the opening of Ferguslie Tennis Club in 1883. Badminton was also played at Ferguslie from the beginning of the twentieth century and at Anchor from 1931. In the early 1900s a former stables building at Knox Street was converted for use as a Gymnasium and indoor sports hall. It was also used for evening classes, wartime Voluntary Aid Detachment meetings and by the Scouts group, as well as an A.R.P. rest centre during the war.

Cricket was very important in Paisley, which is perhaps unusual for Scotland. The Ferguslie Cricket Club was formed in 1887, playing at the Meikleriggs Sports Ground. It proved very popular with the male employees and in the early twentieth century the company even employed cricket professionals as player/coaches for the team - including at one time an Indian international. The Anchor Cricket Club was one of the first to use the new Anchor Recreation Clubhouse and grounds in 1923. Later, in 1954, they were founder members of the Glasgow District League and finished as runners-up in the first season. Football was equally popular with the Ferguslie team forming in 1887, and Anchor in 1923, eventually the two merging in 1974. Swimming Clubs for both mills started up in the early 1900s, naturally enough holding their meetings at Storie Street baths. A Ferguslie Girls' Hockey Club was formed in 1912, followed by a Men's Club in 1921, and Anchor Girls' and Men's teams in 1923. One of the last sports to be provided for was golf, with a few keen golfers getting together at Anchor in 1952. The group drew members from both Anchor and Ferguslie and was very well supported. It is a measure of the strength of the Paisley people's

support for these initiatives that many of the sports clubs have long survived the demise of the parent company, and still exist as independent organisations.

The stories of the various family members are also of great interest. Firms like Clarks and Coats can not be considered in isolation - the influence of the early owners would make or break them. In the case of the Clark family, William, the father of the original James Clark, died when James was only six years old. His mother brought him and his five siblings from their farm at Dykebar into Paisley where he and his brother were eventually to go into business together. Perhaps his unfortunate start in life spurred him on to the success he achieved? His counterpart, James Coats, served in the Ayrshire Fencibles during the Napoleonic Wars. His regiment was disbanded in London in 1796. Each man was given only 2/6d on discharge and James had to make his own way home to Paisley - he walked all the way! Again adversity seems to have encouraged his determination to succeed. In later life he became highly involved in the affairs of the town. In the 1820s he served on the jury at the trial of the men who had been involved in the Radical War, and seems to have been influential in achieving their acquittal. In the early 1830s he was again active, this time in the agitation for Parliamentary Reform.

The Mansions

But what about 'the houses', the original subject of this paper? It has actually proved quite difficult to find information and pictures of the various homes inhabited by the members of the Coats and Clark families, but we can end our survey of the influence of these two dynasties with a look at just a few. The two elder statesmen of the Clark family, James and John, spent the majority of their lives in Paisley. James made his home at Chapel House in Ardgowan Street, close to the banks of the canal, and seems to have spent most of his life there. In contrast, his brother John moved out of his Paisley home at Gateside, and took up residence in Largs. His home there was the splendidly imposing Curling Hall. Curling Hall was built in 1812, by John Cairnie, one of the driving forces of the sport in nineteenth century Scotland. It was probably the love of yachting rather than the ice-borne sport that took John Clark to Largs, but as we have seen from his generosity to the town that he certainly made himself at home there after buying Curling Hall – even to the extent of becoming Provost of Largs. After John's death Curling Hall passed into the hands of William Clark. In the immediate post-war years the mansion was converted into The Marine and Curling Hall Hotel and, as such, served as one of the social centres of Largs before being demolished in the 1980s to make way for a new housing development.

Stewart Clark, in his early years as a young entrepreneur, lived at Oakshawhead, immediately behind the Museum, but in 1873 he bought himself a new home virtually at the gates of the Anchor Mills complex. Kilinside House had been built in the 1820s by one Joseph Whitehead, but Stewart Clark was keen to extend and improve his new property. Descriptions of the house during his period of ownership tell us that there was a very large conservatory filled with a splendid collection of rare exotics and that the interior was noted for its stained glass. One room is said to have had a series of full-length classical figures grouped in panels. As the Anchor complex expanded, Kilinside perhaps became *too* close to the factory for the family's comfort, and in 1910 it was actually incorporated into the complex, having been converted into a canteen capable of seating 800 workers at a time. The company eventually sold the building in the 1980s but its life as a snooker hall was cut short by a fire and it was demolished in the mid-1990s. Modern flats now stand on its site.

On the Coats side, the home established by the founder of the firm, James Coats, still stands today at the corner of Maxwellton Road, then known as Back Row, Ferguslie. It was behind this house that the first small Coats' thread factory was

established, and it was this house that nurtured the next generation who would build the company into one of the world's first multinationals. But more well-known to the Paisley townspeople are the homes of two of James Coats' sons, plus the home of one of his grandsons.

The name of Thomas Coats will forever be associated with Ferguslie House, but the Ferguslie Estate had a long and chequered history before coming into his hands. The lands of Ferguslie had originally belonged to Paisley Abbey, passing into the hands of the Hamilton family at the time of the Reformation. In the early seventeenth century the owner was Margaret Hamilton who was married to one of the Wallaces of Elderslie. She was known as the "Guidwife of Ferguslie" and was the object of a campaign of harassment by the Paisley Presbytery for her non-appearance at public worship. She seems to have adopted a strategy of feigning illness to excuse her from church whilst secretly continuing to practise her Catholic religion. The next owners of Ferguslie were the Cochranes who are said to have built a "very pleasant and convenient dwelling". Eventually, in 1747, the estate was purchased by Paisley Town Council who subsequently sold it to one Thomas Bissland. He is said to have altered and extended the mansion house. When Bissland went bankrupt the estate was sold off in two portions. The southern half was acquired by Miss Maxwell of Williamwood and then was bought from her by Mr Lorrain Wilson, merchant of Paisley. Thomas Coats bought Ferguslie from Wilson's son John. As well as maintaining a fine mansion, which reputedly even included a personal gymnasium, Thomas' love for the natural world was shown in the grounds, where beautiful landscape gardens surrounded an artificial lake. The glasshouses beside the house were noted in the 1880s as being "profusely furnished with rare and valuable plants". It was also in the gardens where Thomas pursued his interest in meteorology, running his own personal weather station from the mid-1850s with meticulously-kept records that we still continue to this day at the Observatory that bears his name. A report in the Paisley Advertiser dated 26th August 1854 shows that Thomas was prepared to share his gardens on occasion. The article tells us that 300 children from the Sabbath School of the Storie Street Baptist Church – the church Thomas himself attended – were taken on an outing to the gardens of Ferguslie House. The day's proceedings began with a hymn before the children were freed to wander around the grounds at their leisure. Later they partook of refreshments provided by Mr Coats before indulging in games and amusements. The day ended with a vote of thanks given by the Superintendent Teacher. The article ends by saying that "Mr Coats was later able to say that not a single piece of damage had been done!" After Thomas' death the house was lived in by his eldest son James, before descending through the family until 1930 when, as we have seen, the two remaining Misses Coats donated the house and gardens to the town. The house was demolished and the gardens opened to the public.

A lot of confusion arises in Paisley over the fact that there seem to have been two "Ferguslie Houses"; both lived in by a Thomas Coats. But they can be easily distinguished. We need to think back to that time in the early nineteenth century when the Ferguslie estate was divided into two. We have seen the fate of the southern portion, but what happened to the northern half? At the division it had been sold to a Mr John Campbell of Edinburgh and by the 1840s it was physically separated from the southern section by the construction of the railway line to Ayrshire along the border between. In the 1880s Thomas Coats was able to reunite the estate with the purchase of the northern sector. This part of the estate had been the location of the ancient Ferguslie tower house and its site was chosen for the erection of a new mansion – Ferguslie Park House - destined to become the home of Thomas's son Thomas Glen Coats. After the election campaign of 1920 which saw Paisley send H. H. Asquith to Westminster as its M.P., a celebration was held at Ferguslie Park

House. It was attended not only by the Asquiths but also by Lloyd George, his daughter Megan and Lady Bonham-Carter. Asquith described the house as “a typical millionaire’s villa with some Corots, a Sir Joshua Reynolds and a Hoppner intermixed with family photographs and some sentimental mezzotints.” From 1934 the house functioned as an auxiliary hospital, eventually being surrounded by the mid-twentieth century Ferguslie Park housing scheme. The building went out of use as a hospital in 1972 and, after suffering repeatedly from vandalism, was eventually demolished some ten years later.

The third major Coats house in Paisley was that known as Woodside. The estate may take its name from its proximity to Darskayt Wood which can be found mentioned in early charters. In 1205 the land in that area was granted to the monks of Paisley by Walter Fitzallan. The Abbot feued the land in 1445 to one John Stewart, and it remained in the Stewart family until 1680 when it was sold to Ezekiel Montgomerie, then Sheriff-Depute of Renfrewshire. Thereafter, various owners are listed until Woodside was acquired by Peter Coats in 1846. It was Peter Coats who built the mansion house, only leaving it in 1877 after the death of his beloved wife Gloranna. He removed himself to Auchendrane House close to the Ayrshire village of Minishant, which later became a favoured venue for the millgirls’ Sma’ Shot Day outings. Woodside was to become the home of his son, Archibald Coats. The name Woodside is of course synonymous both with Paisley’s worst WWII disaster - when a German aircraft managed to drop a landmine onto an ARP post killing more than 90 people - and with the cemetery (and later crematorium) established there from the 1840s.

Conclusion

Although the history of the Coats and Clark firms cannot be considered without the individuals behind them, it is equally the case that the history of Paisley in the nineteenth century is inextricably bound up with these two extraordinarily successful Paisley families.