THE STUBBINS VALE STORY

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EARLY DAYS

Picture the scene: you are standing in front of a timber framed farmhouse with a thatched roof. Pigs and poultry grub for tasty morsels in the farmyard, while a few cattle graze in the small hedged fields surrounding the farm. Beyond the fields, woodland stretches in all directions. Above the farmyard hubbub the sound of an axe chopping wood comes ringing through the trees, while a rising wisp of smoke marks the position of a neighbouring farm. This is what Stubbins Vale would have looked like had you visited it 700 years ago or so. Travel further back into the more remote past and the farm stead disappears leaving only acres and acres of woodland. But this was not an empty landscape because men have been living and working in the Stubbins area for more than 4000 years.

Each generation has left its mark on the area and, in the long centuries before written records began, the land itself served as the page on which history was written. In this way, layers of peat on Holcombe Moor have kept a record of the early landscape and of man's activities thousands of years ago. The secret lies in the hard outer shell of pollen grains preserved in the peat. This shell differs markedly in appearance according to the type of plant that produced the pollen. From analysis of the pollen grains in the peat, we know that the prehistoric forest which covered most of the locality (even up to the tops of the hills) consisted mainly of oak, alder, hazel, elm and birch. Some woodland was possibly cleared by Neolithic people (about 3000 BC) and again during the Bronze Age when a warm, dry climate made the uplands attractive to settlers. Clearances were made for settlement sites and to create pasture for cattle and sheep which were also grazed in the forest, helping to reduce woodland cover still further. As well as preserving pollen grains, the moor land peat also carries a few archaeological artifacts left by past generations. These include Neolithic flints and arrow heads on Bull Hill, towards the north end of Holcombe Moor, and Bronze Age stone axes on the lower slopes and in nearby valleys.

By the time the Romans arrived and during the Dark Ages (450 - 900 AD), the climate was wetter and colder. East Lancashire's hills were no longer so attractive to settlers. Some of the cleared land was abandoned and woodland returned, except to the highest ground where rough grass and peat bog held sway. There was then little human activity around Stubbins Vale until after the Norman Conquest. The area became part of the huge feudal estate called the Honor of Clitheroe and for more than two centuries after the Conquest, was chiefly used as a hunting preserve by the de Lacys, Earls of Lincoln.

The area was subject to a special jurisdiction called Forest Law and was run by officials similar to modern gamekeepers. They had to safeguard the deer at all times, especially during the 'fence month' (the fawning period which lasted from the fortnight before until the fortnight after Midsummer Day). They also had to protect the timber and undergrowth of the forest and look after the 'herbage' of areas set aside for grazing the cattle of the people living in or near the forest.
The operation of Forest Law did little to encourage settlement or the cultivation and improvement of the small parcels of land that were granted to individuals. People found their lives regulated and restricted in various ways. For example, pigs were allowed into the forest only during the 'pannage' season (September to mid-November) when acorns and nuts were falling from the trees. Farmers had to pay a 'pannage fee' for each pig and those who allowed their pigs to graze without paying found themselves in trouble. In October, 1323, for in stance, Robert de Horneclif (whose home was presumably just north of Edenfield) was fined 6d for allowing fourteen pigs into the hunting preserve without payment. In the following autumn, he was fined again (2s) for capturing or killing a sparrowhawk in the forest.

The records which tell us about Robert's misdemeanours also provide us with the earliest written reference to people actually living near Stubbins Vale. At Easter, 1324, John de Bukedene was fined 12d for 'respite of his homage'. (He had failed to turn up at the local manorial court to pay homage to the lord). 'Bukedene' has now become Buckden and there is still a farm there on the hill, just to the north of Stubbins Vale mill. In the list of names of people who had also respited their homage that year, there appears a John de Rideleghis. John's name is probably the old spelling of Red- lees,

another farm near Stubbins Vale which for hundreds of years was part of the Stubbins estate.

When John de Bukedene and John de Rideleghis and their contemporaries were getting into trouble for breaking the Forest Law, the forest itself was beginning to change. The feudal overlords found it increasingly profitable to use their hunting grounds either to establish cattle farms ('vaccaries') as happened in the Forest of Rossendale or to grant more licences to settlers to allow them to clear woodland and establish their own farms. This process was known as 'assarting' (from an old French word, essarter meaning to grub up woodland) with the resulting fields and their associated farm buildings known as an 'assart'. We know that the Stubbins farms (including the land which ultimately became the site of Stubbins Vale mill) began life as a medieval assart because they have telltale names which betray their origins. 'Stubbins' itself is Old English meaning 'land covered in tree stumps' or 'a place from which many trees have been cleared',

Similarly, the word 'hey' was often associated with the hedge planted around new assarts and is found in the farm name 'Ox Hey' just above Stubbins Vale.
The records of the manor of Tottington dating from the 16th century and later show that Stubbins belonged to a family called Warburton. A brief reference in an account of 1341 suggests that they may have been responsible for creating the original assart from which the entire estate grew. The entry notes that Thomas de Werberton paid 8d to the Lord of the Manor for '2 acres of waste newly improved there'. (Improved meant brought into cultivation). Gradually the Warburtons cleared more and more woodland and by the early 16th century their property stretched from Buckden dough in the north to Ox Hey dough in the south and from Holcombe Moor in the west to the River Irwell in the east. Unfortunately, the records which would have allowed us to trace the history of the estate through the 14th and 15th centuries have not survived. They were stored in Clitheroe Castle in a 'moistye' chamber 'where fyre is nott usuallye keept' and in 1580 were 'soe decayed & consumed' that they would not 'hould together to be opened & looked into'. Luckily the records from after 1504 are well preserved and tell us a great deal about Stubbins in the period before the Industrial Revolution.

FARMS AND FIELDS

The 16th century Stubbins estate was made up of several farms. The main or 'demesne' farm was centred on 'Stubbyns Halle', part of which may still stand in Stubbins Street. There were also farms at Strongstry (spelt 'Strongstidde' in 1558), whose site is occupied by North View, and at Red Lees (probably modern day Lower Red Lees). The main branch of the Warburton family who owned the estate lived at Little Clegg, near Littleborough, but some members of the family came to live at Stubbins. Stubbins Hall, for example, may have been used as a sort of dower house since in 1559, Ann, relict (widow) of Francis Warburton, was living there. Warburtons were also farming at Red Lees in 1539 and Strongstry in 1558. These were probably younger sons of the family who would not inherit property of their own at Little Clegg, but who could rent one of the Stubbins farms so that they could make a living, get married and set up their own households.
As the years went by, the three main farms at Stubbins, Strongstry and Red Lees were divided to create new farms, not only for members of the Warburton family, but also for other people who became rent paying tenant farmers. In 1558, for in stance, sixteen acres of land were taken from one of the farms (probably Red Lees). By 1588, a farmhouse and farm buildings had been added to the land. Similarly, by the early 17th century, Strongstry had been divided into at least three farms

Strongstry itself, Higher Strongstry (now Buckden Cottage) and a farm called the 'Greene' which is now Gibbon Green. This process of dividing farms continued into the 19th century and in 1815, Thomas Wood, landlord of the Shoulder of Mutton in Holcombe, bought a small piece of land which was part of Higher Red Lees. It lay beside the new turnpike road from Holcombe to Helmshore and on it he built the house now called Middle Red Lees. By 1838, where there had once been three farms at Stubbins, Strongstry and Red Lees, there were twelve as well as a number of cottages.

Dividing up farms was not the only way the Stubbins estate changed. In the early 17th century, a great deal of former common land was added to the estate in one of the most important changes to take place since the initial clearing of wood land in the Middle Ages. It came about because the King, James I, was short of money.

By the early l600s, the manor of Tottington had passed to the Crown, making James the Lord of the Manor as well as King. He decided that one way to raise money was to tell the people living in his East Lancashire manors that the titles to their property were not secure and that they would have to pay to have them made good. Naturally, people whose families had owned a particular farm for generations objected and a long legal dispute ensued. As might be expected, the locals had eventually to capitulate and agreed to pay so that their titles could be confirmed by Decree and Act of Parliament. They did not come away totally empty- handed, however, because they were allowed to divide up part of the manorial commons (including Holcombe Moor) . Commissioners met at Bolton and decided how much common land could be spared. It was then shared out between people who al ready owned farms near the moor and had common rights on it. These people included the Warburtons as owners of the Stubbins farms.

Between 1621 and 1630, Thomas Warburton and his son, Francis, received about 176 acres of Holcombe Moor common. Some of this land remained open and unenclosed, as it still is today. In contrast, the lower lying parts of the eastern flank of the moor were taken in and surrounded with stone walls. Today there is nothing to distinguish these 'new' fields from their much older neighbours, but a map of 1838 which records field- names betrays their secret. Nearly all of the fields enclosed from the common in the early 17th century have names like 'close' (meaning an enclosure) or 'copy' (indicating that while the land in question was once common it was now belonged to an individual and was held by 'copy of court roll' or copyhold. In other words, it could be bought and sold and the resulting transaction entered on the manorial court roll).

The enclosures from Holcombe Moor allowed the Warburtons to add another farm to those they already owned. When Thomas Warburton died in 1634, one of his parcels of former common land included ' house lately erected thereon' This farmhouse stood on the lower side of the old moor road, opposite Chatterton Close farm and was known as Orrett's. It took its name from Alice Orrett who rented it in 1637. She agreed to pay 3s 4d a year for a farm of about five acres and said she would not 'nor gett turves nor breake anie Soile nor make anie wast [of the same without her landlord's permission. Orrett's survived until the mid-l9th century, but had been demolished by the l890s. A few hummocks in a field are all that remain of the farm today.

HOUSE AND HOME

Until the end of the 18th century, the only buildings on the Stubbins estate were farmhouses and cottages and the barns, stables, shippons, 'turf houses' (used for storing peat cut from Holcombe Moor) and such like that went with them. Some of the farmhouses, especially the so called 'Great House' where the Warburtons lived, were quite substantial dwellings. There were others, however, that were small affairs with only two or three rooms. Originally, all of the houses, great or small, would have been built of timber cut from the nearby woods. But, by the late 16th century, timber reserves had been depleted to such an extent that people began to use local stone, an excellent and durable building material. In some cases, timberframed dwellings were simply encased in stone, while in others completely new stone houses replaced the old wooden ones. Most of the farmhouses standing around Stubbins and Strongstry today date from the 18th and 19th centuries, but in Stubbins Street there is an earlier survival. Two cottages numbered 52 and 54 are solidly built from local sand stone and have splendid mullioned windows. They began life as a single farmhouse in the 17th century and indeed could be all that is left of the Warburton family's 'Great House'.

Although most of the 16th and 17th century houses at Stubbins are long gone, we have various contemporary documents to open a window on them and the lives of the men and women who made their home in them. Above all there are probate inventories. These were required by ecclesiastical law before a will could be proved and are lists of possessions belonging to the deceased. Several of these fascinating documents have survived for Stubbins and two of them, dated 1733 and 1747, are particularly interesting because they list the contents of the houses room by room. They tell us that

each house (one at Strongstry and the other at Stubbins) consisted of one main room usually referred to as the 'house'. At one end of it was a smaller, private room (the parlour). George Hargreaves who died at Stubbins in 1747 had both a Great Parlour and a Little Parlour, the latter probably being upstairs. At the opposite end of the house from the parlour were the socalled 'service' rooms (the kitchen and buttery) and, in George Hargreaves's case, a 'milkhouse' or dairy. On the first floor were the bedrooms or 'chambers' as they were usually known, each taking its name from the room beneath it ('Chamber Over Great Par lour' or 'Chamber Over House', for instance).

Apart from the probate inventories, other documents contain clues about the layout of the houses. For example, an entry in the manorial records in 1690 tells us that the 'Little House' at Stubbins (now demolished) had an 'house of office' in other words an outside lavatory.
Using the details given in the probate inventories, we can almost take a guided tour of the houses at Stubbins over 200 years ago. Entering through the front door, you immediately found yourself in the 'house'. In the smaller farmhouses it may have been the only room with a fireplace and so it was here that food was cooked and eaten. In Thomas Rothwell's house at Strongstry in 1733, there was a 'chimley', tongs, a spit, a bakstone and a bagbread, while George Hargreaves had a fire iron, tongs, fender, briggs and rackon, a spit, racks and tin vessels as well as a frying pan and a chafing dish. By chimley and fire iron the people who took the inventories meant the firegrate itself. Bakstones (flat iron plates hung over an open fire) and bagbreads (boards on which dough was kneaded) were both used in the preparation and cooking of oatcakes, a staple part of the diet of Lancashire people until well into the 19th century. Iron pots and kettles were hung over the fire using rakons (vertical iron bars with hoos) or briggs (iron cranes). Somewhat more sophisticated than all these traditional cooking implements was George Hargreaves's chafing dish, a small enclosed brazier used to warm either food or drink.

Once prepared, meals were usually eaten in the same room as the fireplace so it is here that we find tables and chairs of various kinds. In 1634, James Warburton of Red Lees had '2 tables with forms' as well as chairs and stools, while his neighbour, Francis Warburton, who died in 1636, had 'chairs, stools & cushions' valued at 2s. These 17th century tables consisted of tops with carved edges resting on trestles which were also elaborately carved. By the 18th century, they had been joined by others of different design. George Hargreaves had round and oval tables, while Thomas Rothwell had something described as a 'fall board', which seems to have been a kind of gateleg table.

There were different kinds of seats in the 18th century too. Of course, the old forms, stools and settles were still around, but we also find back stools (wooden chairs without arms), 'ceiled' chairs which had panelled backs and 'thrown' chairs made from turned posts and spindles. Thomas Booth who died at Stubbins in 1733 also had two 'coach chairs' as did Thomas Rothwell and George Hargreaves. These were day beds or couches.
Apart from tables and chairs, many rooms contained cupboards and chests. Dressers or 'dishboards' appear in several inventories and Richard Booth (died 1733) also had a press (a large cupboard containing clothes or linen) and two bookcases. Chests or 'arks' (as they were usually known) and boxes were used for storing a variety of things, including oatmeal, malt, spices, salt and mustard.

It may seem strange today, but beds were not confined to bedrooms. George Hargreaves's Little Parlour, for instance, was clearly used as a bedroom because its contents, apart from four chairs and a press, were a bedstead with hangings, a bolster, blankets, a cadow (a rough woollen cover) and a mattress stuffed with chaff. Beds came in three kinds. The oldest was the standing bed made of panelled boards at the head and foot and four rails joined to the posts at the corners. Strong cords were drawn through holes in the rails and pulled tight to form a net on which the mattress was placed. Somewhat similar were halfheaded beds whose headboards were taller, but had no canopies over them. Sealed beds or fourposters had hangings to keep out draughts and give the occupants greater privacy. Mattresses, bolsters and pillows could be stuffed with chaff or feathers and were covered with linen sheets, woollen covers and quilts.
The remaining entries in the Stubbins inventories list a miscellany of utensils and vessels made

from wood, iron, brass, pewter, copper and earthenware. They include pots and pans of various kinds, copper kettles, pestles and mortars and, in the case of the 1733 inventory of Richard Booth, a mustard ball. This was a leaden ball used for crushing mustard seed for sauces. Plates and dishes were usually pewter, but Thomas Rothwell also had eighteen trenchers (flat wooden plates). The household laundry was done in oval or oblong tubs called flaskets and then hung out to dry on a nearby hedge. When two small cottages were built at Strongstry in the 1790s, it was actually specified that their occupants had the right to 'lay cloaths on the usual hedge.' Dry clothes and linen were ironed using flat irons or box irons before being put away. Household lighting came from candles standing in either candlesticks or lanthorns'.

Many pieces of furniture must have been looked on as family heirlooms, handed on from generation to generation. By the 18th century, however, the old familiar tables and chairs, beds and dressers had been joined by luxury items as people began to make their homes more comfortable. Thomas Rothwell, for example, had curtains hanging at the windows of his house and both he and his neighbours, George Hargreaves and Richard Booth, had clocks ticking away in a corner of the main living room. These were long case clocks that are familiarly known today as grandfather clocks. Probate inventories were not only concerned with the furnishings of a house. They also listed any farm animals and implements an individual owned and can, therefore, tell us a great deal about how people made a living.

MAKING A LIVING

The Stubbins farmers in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries concentrated on cattle rearing. Their Lancashire longhorns pro vided fresh milk in the summer, either for immediate consumption or to be made into butter and cheese. The 17th century records tell us only a little about the number of cows an individual farmer had. For example, Robert Warburton's inventory of 1617 simply lists three 'kine' valued at £9. Those inventories that survive from after 1700, however, paint a clearer picture. In 1733, for instance, Richard Booth had a great cow, an old cow, one little red cow, one cow stakeheaded, two stirks [one and two years old], 'Brownnose' and two calves. His contemporary, Thomas Rothwell, had cattle which were described as 'twinters'. This meant that they were two winters old. Most of the butter and cheese produced would have been intended for consumption by the household, but it is clear that Richard Booth was supplying local markets as well. He had thirty cheeses standing on special boards to mature, five stone of butter, a churn and various tubs and barrels.

Of course, cattle could be slaughtered to provide beef, but meat usually came from pigs, hens and geese. Sheep too might provide the occasional joint of mutton, but they were principally kept for their wool. The 17th century flocks were quite small (thirteen in 1617 and fourteen in 1643), but Richard Booth had a more substantial flock in 1733. It consisted of twelve ewes, sixteen weathers [rams] and seven lambs.
Oxen and horses were also found on the Stubbins farms. Oxen were generally used until the end of the 17th century for ploughing, harrowing and to pull carts, wains and sleds. Gradually they were replaced by horses which previously had been used only for carrying people or small loads in pack saddles or panniers. Looking around the green fields of East Lancashire today, it might seem surprising that the Stubbins farmers had any need for animals which could pull ploughs. However, until the end of the 18th century, most local farms had some arable land and grew mainly oats. Barley was also grown and the more sheltered farms like Strongstry could pro duce wheat. Potatoes made an appearance in the 18th century too. In 1786, one of the Stubbins farms was leased for fifteen years and the tenant agreed not to grow more that six strikes [bushels] of potatoes per acre in the last three years of the lease.

Following haymaking or harvesting, the land had to be fertilised and this could be done in three ways. Farmers could use farmyard manure either by turning animals loose on the harvested fields or by spreading muck from the back of a cart. In the 16th and 17th centuries in particular, they also used marl, as fieldnames like 'niarled earth' which occurs in 1639 show. By the 18th century, lime was more popular as the sweetener of the acid soil. The 1786 lease actually stipulated that each year the tenant had to spread twenty loads of lime and that in the last three years of the lease it was not to be ploughed in.

As well as using the land around their farms, the Stubbins farmers had common rights on Holcombe Moor. Primarily the moor was used for grazing animals, as it still is today. Sometimes leases stated how many animals a tenant could graze on the moor. When the farm that is now called Buckden Cottage was let to Henry Booth in 1645, for instance, he found that he could graze one horse on the common. The moor was also useful as a source of fuel. In the summer, peat was cut in certain places, especially Bull Hill and near Pilgrims' Cross, stacked to dry and brought down along recognised tracks called 'turfways'.

As well as listing farm stock and implements, the inventories also tell us about the other most important way in which Stubbins people made a living. This was cloth making. In nearly all the inventories there are handlooms, spinning wheels, cards (used to prepare raw wool before spinning), combs (for the preparation of long staple wool before it was spun into worsted yarn) as well as stocks of raw wool, yarn, and finished pieces of cloth. Until the 18th century, people produced either pure woollens such as kerseys, or bays (made from a worsted warp and woollen weft).

Generally as much time was devoted to farming as to cloth production, but some individuals started to make their living entirely from textile manufacturing. William Rothwell, a younger son of Thomas Rothwell of Strongstry, who died only a few years after his father, was one such man. He had no farm animals or implements, only three pairs of looms, wool, yarn, and one piece of cloth. He was probably an independent weaver who bought his own supplies of wool and yarn and sold his pieces of cloth when finished. Like many of his contemporaries, he had dealings with Rochdale, an important textile market at the time. Among the people who were indebted to him was a Merchant Holt of Rochdale who owed £3 10s, probably for cloth bought from him. As the 18th century wore on, men like William Rothwell whose livelihood depended entirely on textile making became more and more common and, with the quickening pace of the Industrial Revolution, Stubbins took its first step into a new age.

STUBBINS IN THE INDUSTRIAL AGE

By the third quarter of the 18th century, the core of the old Warburton family's estate consisted of two parts. One was centred on the 'Great House' and the other around the 'Little House' and the farm at Strongstry. In 1785, the first part was leased to a man called Charles Leigh and it was he who began the transformation of the Stubbins area. The property he leased included a good site to build a small calico printworks. There was enough flat land at the foot of Ox Hey Clough for the mill buildings and pure water from the stream which ran down from the hills above could be used in the printing process.

The year in which Charles Leigh began in business at Stubbins was also the year in which the printing trade was revolutionised by the introduction of the cylinder printing machine. This machine increased the rate of production enormously and ushered in a period of intense activity in the industry. However, in the words of the historian of calico printing, 'enthusiasm for the new method in many cases overstepped the prudence of the speculators'. Charles Leigh was one of the casualties of this enthusiasm. In February, 1788, he was advertising for journeymen calico printers; by February of the following year he had gone bankrupt. His successors at Stubbins, John and Charles Johnson, fared little better; they too went bankrupt in 1792.

The printworks fell empty and it seemed for a time that Stubbins and industry were to have a short relationship. How ever, a fresh start was made in 1795 when new tenants took over. They were Samuel Milner of Manchester and Thomas Sandiford from Witton, near Blackburn. They leased the printworks for twentyone years and got 'to cut such sluices, drains and reservoirs as may be needful and necessary for the further, better and more advantageous use and occupation of the said premises. The partners also negotiated with John Hargreaves who owned the Little House and Strongstry part of the estate. From him they received rights to the various streams flowing through his property and were allowed ' make and cut canals and sluices ... to convey the streams to the reservoir in Rev. R. Dean's estate. The changes which Samuel Milner and Thomas Sandiford made at Stubbins are still visible in the landscape today. A weir was put across the stream in Buckden clough and the water diverted into a lodge or reservoir on the hillside to the south of the clough. This supplied water to a bowk house or small bleachworks whose site is now part of the garden belonging to The Cliffe. From here the water was carried along the hillside in an

open goit (now covered over) to another small lodge above Stubbins Street and then to the reservoirs behind Stubbins printworks itself.

The printworks partnership went through several changes until Thomas Sandiford assumed sole control of the business and bought the works and the surrounding land. His son carried on for a short time after his death, but soon leased the works to other firms. In the 1840s, it was occupied by John Losh & Co. who produced low quality printed cloth for furniture, both by hand and by machine. At this time it was described as 'a small, old place', but this changed in the second half of the 19th century when William Rumney & Co. took over. The Rumneys stayed at Stubbins until 1903 and had a profound influence on the development not only of the printworks, but also of the village as a whole. In the meantime, however, a change in the ownership of the Little House and Strongstry part of the old Warburton family property heralded a new age in the history of Stubbins Vale.

THE PORRITT FAMILY

The new owners of the estate were the firm of Porritt Brothers & Austin who, as J. & J. Porritt, were in business at Dearden Clough mill across the valley in Edenfield. The Porritts had been textile manufacturers for generations, first in their native Yorkshire and then in Lancashire. In the late 18th century, Joseph Porritt, a clothier in Birkenshaw, near Bradford, had decided to cross the Pennines, settling first near Rochdale and then in Bury. Following his death, his son, also called Joseph, continued the business in partnership with Isaac Chadwick. This arrangement continued until 1825 when Joseph died and was succeeded by his son, a third Joseph Porritt.
In 1829, the Porritt-Chadwick partnership was dissolved and Joseph was joined by his younger brother, James, to establish the firm of J.& J. Porritt. Until this date, the Porritts had been producing woollen cloths of various kinds, but conditions were changing. The brothers now turned their attention to the manufacture of fabrics which were required as an integral part of machinery used in various industries. These included specially made felts to protect paper as it was dried around steam heated cylinders. Felts were also used in calico printing, while flannel and other cloths were needed for sizing frames and during the process of carding cotton.

Production of these industrial felts began in Stanley Street, Bury (now part of The Rock), but soon the premises there were too small. The Porritts looked around for an empty mill of a suitable size which they could rent. Eventually, they found one at Dearden Clough in Edenfield and moved there in 1837. Dearden Clough Mill dated back to the l760s when it had been built as a woollen fulling mill. The Porritts leased it for fourteen years from 1st May, 1837, along with two warehouses, three cottages, a stable, a shippon and a house with a brewhouse, garden and orchard. The annual rent was £220 us with an additional rent of £7 l0s for every £100 which the owner laid out in erecting a new waterwheel. (The mill already had a wheel and a steam engine).

Based at Dearden Clough, the business quickly grew so that the value of the firm's equipment and stocks of wool and manufactured goods which stood at £2700 18s in 1838 had more than doubled three years later. Expansion continued and in 1845, Springwood mill, Ramsbottom was leased in addition to the one at Edenfield. There were changes too in the partnership the youngest Porritt brother, Samuel, joined in 1838 and James Porritt's brother-in-law, John Austin, in 1842. The name of the firm, however, remained unaltered as J. & J. Porritt.
As the business continued to prosper and grow, it became clear that even the combined capacity of Dearden Clough and Springwood mills would be insufficient. In addition, there was the question of the lease of Dearden Clough mill which was due for renewal in 1851. The partners felt that they might not be able to renegotiate the lease on suitable terms and so they decided that they must become millowners themselves. They had not far to look for a suitable property and site for their new mill. They bought the Stubbins Vale site for £3000 in the summer of 1850 and immediately building work was begun. By the end of the following year, Dearden Clough had been left behind and the firm, now styled Porritt Brothers & Austin, were established in their own mill with assets valued at £21,000.

STUBBINS VALE MILL

Stubbins Vale mill was built from stone taken from a quarry in the hillside behind the site and was designed by James Porritt, the middle of the three brothers. As the building rose from its foundations, James carefully oversaw the work, climbing the scaffolding every day and on one occasion

scrambling to the top of the chimney to make a careful examination. As well as the mill, the Porritts built houses, both for themselves and for their workpeople. Stubbins Vale House, which James built for himself, was nearest to the mill, standing on the left of the road from Stubbins. His brother, Samuel, had The Cliffe, which was built on the hillside above the mill with a wide prospect of the Irwell valley. The third house, Greenmount, Joseph Porritt's home, stood overlooking the old farm at Strongstry. The total cost of building the three dwellings was £5650. The first millworkers' houses were built in East Street at the same time as the mill. In 1854, they were joined by fourteen cottages and a shop in North Street, Strongstry, and in the 1860s by cottages at North View and West View, Strongstry. Stubbins Vale Terrace was added in 1871 and South Terrace three years later.
The new mill allowed the firm to extend its range of products. Machinery was installed for cotton spinning and new powerlooms bought to weave cotton and linen fabrics. Soon a whole host of different fabrics was being produced for the paper-making, calico printing and sugar-refining industries. A second mill was added to the first in 1862, the central shed built in 1869 and the Fireproof mill in 1874. Another weaving shed went up on the north side of the mills in the same year, to be followed shortly by a sud house and pits, store shed and cooling room, and a dyehouse. In 1866, the Wet House or Tentering Tower was built on the hillside above the mill. It still stands there today and is often regarded as a folly, but it was built to house long lengths of wet woollen cloth which were taken out and hung on tenterhooks to dry in the field be hind. The Porritts also gave some thought to the welfare of their workers and built dining and reading rooms on land between the railway and the entrance to the mills. By 1877, total expenditure at Stubbins Vale had reached nearly £17,000.

CHANGES AT STUBBINS VALE

Although Stubbins Vale was prospering by the 1870s, there had been two major upheavals in the firm. In 1858, Joseph Porritt, the senior partner, withdrew from the business. His decision was prompted by concern for his three sons and their future at Stubbins Vale. There had been an acrimonious dispute about the position in the firm of William John Porritt, Joseph's eldest son, who had been dismissed from his post in the mill. Joseph could see that the future of his other sons in the firm would never be settled in a way that could satisfy him. Taking his share of the assets of Porritt Brothers & Austin with him (partly in cash and partly in goods and equipment), he established Joseph Porritt & Sons, first at Ramsbottom and then at Helmshore.

While the Helmshore mill was being built, further changes were taking place at Stubbins Vale. Samuel Porritt had five sons and he too became concerned about their future in the business. In 1866, he followed in his brother's footsteps by withdrawing from Stubbins Vale, taking £30,000 as his share and setting up on his own account at Bamford. Stubbins Vale weathered this setback and by 1870, the firm, now known as Porritt Brother & Austin, had assets of greater value than when Samuel left.

Shortly after Samuel's departure, James Porritt's sons, Richard Millett and John Austin Porritt, joined the partnership. New machinery had been bought after Joseph had taken some with him to Ramsbottom in 1858, and this continued until the early 1870s. From 1877, however, an axe came down on spending on machinery and on buildings and purchasing property. Nevertheless, James and his sons kept the company on an even keel and by the time James died in 1896 the firm's assets were valued at £250,000. Shortly before his death, a local clergyman referred to the work carried out by James and his sons at Stubbins Vale, saying that they had ' so much by their model works, elegant residences, and ludicious planting of trees, not only to advance the industrial prosperity, but also to enhance the amenity and beauty, of this portion of the valley.

James Porritt's efforts had not been devoted entirely to the mill and his family. During the Cotton Famine of the early l860s, he had acted as chairman of the Edenfield Relief Committee and employed about thirty extra men to tend his gardens rather than see them have no work at all. He was also a key figure in the building of Stubbins Congregational church and school on a prominent site between Edenfield and Stubbins. The Porritts had been a Nonconformist family for generations and had attended Park Congregational chapel. Following the move to Stubbins Vale, they began to feel that there should be a day school, Sunday school and church nearby. In 1861, a large room in the mill was opened as a Sunday school and place of worship. It continued to be used until 1866

when a new school was opened, followed by the church in 1867. Like Stubbins Vale mill, Stubbins Congregational church and school were built with stone from the quarry on the estate.
Within a few years of James Porritt's death, the business was being run by Richard Millett Porritt and his son, Austin Townsend Porritt. (John Austin Porritt retired in 1899). They soon set about repairing old machinery and buying new, including what were then the largest looms in the world made by Robert Hall & Sons of Bury. They also made considerable additions to Greenmount and The Cliffe. A visitor to a Conservative garden party in the grounds of the two houses at the turn of the century left this description

The Cliffe stands at a heavy rise from the roadway, but the advent of the motorcar has overcome this slight disadvantage and at the same time emphasised the natural advantageousness of such an elevation. The grounds are being steadily cultivated, and in the course of time they will embrace all the appurtenances befitting this charming country estate. There is an orchard in the dell on the left; and nearer the house a tennis court is being laid out. The lawn to The Cliffe is emblematic of a motor-wheel, and is bedded with over a thousand plants, the border to this plot being of blue lobelia. Standard roses circle the edge of the lawn. The main sweep of gravel leading to each residence is avenued with beeches, copper beeches, and silver birches in rare profusion. Altogether, it was a delightful retreat to wander into, and the visitors were permitted to inspect the gardens and green houses at their will... The flowering plants and shrubs looked refreshed and diffused the most acceptable perfumes after the rain, and the appearance of a gentle sunshine drew forth the full glory of the flowers.

Richard Porritt died in 1906, leaving his son in full control of the mills and estate. He was just thirty one years old. He continued the programme of modernisation started by his father, building a new weaving shed in 1907 and installing electric lighting throughout the mill in 1908. He also made the firm into a limited liability company and was forward looking enough to include some fifty employees in the list of shareholders.

PORRITTS AND SPENCER LIMITED AND THE FIRST WORLD WAR

By the early years of the 20th century, competition for markets both at home and abroad was becoming more and more fierce. Arthur Porritt, who was in charge of the mills at Barnford, contacted Oliver William Porritt at Helmshore and Austin Townsend Porritt at Stubbins Vale as well as the sons of J.H. Spencer (a former Porritt manager who had set up his own business at Mossfield mill, Bury in 1903). It was suggested that a new company be formed to control the four constituent firms, Porritt Brother & Austin, Joseph Porritt & Sons, Samuel Porritt & Sons and J.H. Spencer & Sons. This new company commenced business on 31st January, 1914, under the title of Porritts and Spencer Ltd. Immediately a start was made on reorganising production at the four mills so as to avoid duplication. Stubbins Vale took over the entire production of white washers, worsted warps and card cloth for weaving, and shared with Helmshore and Bamford the production of steaming blankets, grey washers, winders' listing, linen warps and sizing cloth.

Changes at the mills were incomplete when war came in August, 1914, and plans had to be shelved as production was geared to the war effort. Austin Porritt, who had been an enthusiastic Territorial officer, was made commander of the 2/5th battalion of the East Lancashire Regiment. Meanwhile, Stubbins Vale House was recruited to help the war in another way. The house had stood empty for some years and shortly after war was declared was offered to the military authorities as a convalescent hospital for wounded soldiers. It opened in October, 1914, with ten beds occupied by Belgians. Gradually more beds were added and in 1917 the total reached fifty when the vinery and potting shed were converted into an extra ward and bathroom. Local people were generous in their support of the hospital, providing gifts of food and clothing throughout the war and putting on concerts nearly every week. By the time the hospital closed in February, 1919, nearly six hundred wounded soldiers had received treatment there.

THE INTER-WAR YEARS

Taking advantage of the short postwar boom, Porritts and Spencer were soon exporting their products to many European countries as well as the United States, South America, India, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, China and Japan. The firm also successfully weathered the slump of the early 'twenties, continuing the pre-war reorganisation of the mills. By 1921, Stubbins Vale had

become the cotton centre of the company, concentrating on cotton dry felts. To make room for the additional machinery, the mills had to be enlarged. The buildings between the road and the railway which had housed the reading and dining rooms were demolished and rebuilt three storeys high and a new weaving shed erected over one of the old lodges. Soon demand for the 'Arrow Dryers', as these felts were known, was so great that there had to be further extensions. At the beginning of May, 1926, a start was made on a new building known as the Cotton Warehouse; but it was a good deal more than a warehouse, for in it were installed Vickers drying cylinders and many new looms to supplement those al ready operating on the other side of the roadway. The filter cloths department was also growing and by the end of the 1920s Stubbins Vale was weaving fabrics for customers whose products included sugar, dyestuffs, essences, edible oils, soaps and china clay.

The Depression in the 1930s was not without is problems for Porritts and Spencer: in 1930 and 1931 there was a general reduction in wages, while profits fell by twelve per cent from the 1928-29 figure of £130,000. Profits fell again in the late 'thirties and some departments had to go on short time. In spite of these difficulties, expansion continued. The woollen department was overhauled and twenty new looms installed in 1934. Two years later, a new cotton picking room was built, followed in 1937 by the south end of the cotton weaving shed (later to become the cotton doubling room).

The inter-war years were busy times for the workpeople of Stubbins Vale in other ways. The mill had always been more than simply a place of work. People met their future marriage partners there and many spare time activities were arranged through the mill. In the 1880s and l890s these had included an annual flower and vegetable show open only to Porritt Brother & Austin's tenants. Following the First World War, a Sports Club was set up and fielded a football team (who played in the Bury and District Woollen Mills League) and a bowls team. In 1932, the first annual trip was organised and saw nearly three hundred people travel by train to Blackpool to see the Illuminations.

Two years later, Stubbins Vale Silver Prize Band celebrated its Diamond Jubilee. The band had been formed in July, 1874, at the suggestion of Richard Millett Porritt. The first instruments were bought by the company and rehearsals were held in a room in the mill or in the millyard during the summer. Each Christmas Eve up to the First World War, the band assembled near Edenfield parish church as midnight approached. When Musbury church clock at Helmshore was heard to strike twelve, the band set off to play around the neighbourhood, although there were times when it was so cold that the valves of their instruments froze. The band also played at two Preston Guilds and for more than eighty years headed the Whitsuntide procession of Stubbins Congregational church.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The outbreak of war in September, 1939, brought new problems, not least a shortage of raw materials and manpower which made it impossible to maintain full production. The woollen piece goods section at Stubbins Vale was closed down, but the finishing section was kept open to handle goods from the other mills. Papermakers' felt continued to be in great demand and the company made a special contribution to the war effort by making felt to protect aircraft tanks by sealing holes made by enemy bullets. A canteen was opened at the mill and employees found that holidays with pay became one of the normal conditions of employment. Throughout the war, special allowances were granted to the dependants of employees who were serving with the Armed Forces.

Greenmount, one of the old Porritt houses, was taken over by the military and in 1943 a newly commissioned, very nervous officer was billeted there. His name was Dirk Bogarde. Recalling his time at Stubbins he was later to write ' the terrace of the house, grimed with soot and wind, one looked down into a grey, fogged landscape of endless slate-roofed “back-to-backers” and soaring mills throbbing with trundling looms, glittering with acres of lighted windows (dark in the black out after 3.30 in the afternoon) and huge chimneys trailing and belching smoke endlessly into the curdled air, which loitered out over the spoiled valleys until, eventually, it was dispersed across the distant moors. Not a very attractive vista. I have known better views from happier terraces. It was sad, cobbled, drab, poor.'
In May, 1940, an irreparable loss was suffered by the Porritt family and Stubbins Vale when Austin Porritt's only son, Richard Whittaker Porritt, was killed during the retreat of the B.E.F. to Dunkirk. Richard Porritt had joined Porritt Brother & Austin in 1936, after spending some months working at

Stubbins Vale to gain practical experience in the mill. He took a keen interest in the economic depression in Britain and in the welfare of the Lancashire cotton workers. Eventually, eager to improve conditions for the working classes, he stood for parliament in 1935 and was elected M.P. for the Heywood and Radcliffe Division. On the outbreak of the war he had joined up and was just thirty years old when he lost his life.

A year after Richard Porritt's death, the war came very close to Stubbins when the village was bombed. On 3rd May, 1941, two heavy explosives were dropped, one falling in the River Irwell, the other in a garden at Ox Hey. An ARP warden who witnessed the bombing described what happened: 'I was on duty when I heard the bomb coming. I shouted to some pals a little further along the road who were on duty as firewatchers at a bleach works, 'Eh lads, there is a bomb coming down.' I took cover, flinging myself flat on the pavement against a wall with my head resting between my hands. There was then a terrific explosion, and water and stones from the river were scattered all round about. Immediately afterwards I heard a second bomb drop about a quarter of a mile away. I continued to lie prostrate for a minute or two, and then on hearing a thud, which I considered was some distance away, I got up. All I could see then for some moments was what appeared to be an atmosphere of blackness, as black as coal and this blackness then seemed to disappear along the river as though it were a cloud He added that a weird sort of scream went up from the village immediately the explosion occurred.
A total of 286 houses were damaged, one of the most extensively being a bungalow whose roof fell on to a couple and their daughter, pinning them in their beds until rescue arrived. In one house the heads of a bunch of daffodils were cut clean off, leaving the stalks and vase undamaged. At a neighbouring house a dressing-table with a revolving mirror was jerked away from the wall by the explosion. The mirror turned round and the dressing-table was flung back again flush with the wall. Stubbins Vale House was badly damaged by the blast, while at the mill almost every window was blown out. Nevertheless, work continued as normal the following morning. In credibly, nobody suffered serious injuries, the only fatalities being a flock of hens roosting in a shed near the river.

PEACETIME PRODUCTION

For some time after the war, shortage of manpower and raw materials continued to be a problem. However, Porritts and Spencer soon began exporting papermakers' felts to those markets which had been closed in the war and this led to further expansions at Stubbins Vale. A new weaving shed was erected and eighty Northrop looms installed in 1947/48, followed by a further fourteen looms in the late 1950s. In addition, spacious new offices were built in 1951 to mark the centenary of the mill. The stone came from the demolished Stubbins Vale House. It was also during the 'fifties that the company began to use synthetic fibres (nylon and terylene) side by side with the traditional cotton and wool, not only in felts, but also in filter cloths for the laundry industry. Terylene blankets made at Stubbins Vale even found their way to the Antarctic when they were used by an expedition led by Vivian Fuchs.

While these new developments were taking place, a link with the old days was broken by the death of Austin Townsend Porritt in 1956. For several decades, Colonel Porritt had been a leading figure both in the mill and in the Stubbins area in general. For fourteen years between the wars he had represented Ramsbottom on Lancashire County Council and in 1932 was chosen as High Sheriff of the county. He was the first vice-chairman of Porritts and Spencer and served on the board until 1948 when he retired to Grange-Over-Sands. He was a generous benefactor to the Stubbins and Ramsbottom area, his gifts including Nuttall Park and the Chatterton Playing Fields. In 1943, he gave eight farms and 435 acres of land above the mill to the National Trust in memory of his son.

By the mid-l960s, despite all the changes which had taken place over the years, papermakers' felts were still the most important product manufactured by Porritts and Spencer. Stubbins Vale concentrated on making dryer felts from cotton, synthetics and a mixture of the two as well as woollen wet felts, woollen piece goods (such as roller cloths) and woollen and synthetic yarn for all of the company's mills. When J.L. McArthur, chairman of the company, wrote his annual report in March, 1968, he was able to announce another important change in the history of the firm. Merger terms had been agreed with the Scapa Group Ltd. and two years later the new company became Scapa Porritt Ltd. Meanwhile, Stubbins Vale continued growing and in October, 1970, a new single storey building was opened by Ronald Bray, M.P. for Rossendale. This extension was to house

machinery for the manufacture of synthetic wires and fabrics for paper machines, the whole project costing in the region of £250,000.

A few years later, as part of the continued reorganisation of the Scapa Group mills, production of yarn was moved from Stubbins Vale to Mossfield mill, Bury. This sounded the death knell for James Porritt's magnificent five-storeyed mills which were not suitable for housing modern machinery for wire manufacture.

The buildings stood empty for twelve months before demolition began on 1st September, 1978. The 180-foot chimney was the last to go, and was felled on a bitterly cold day in April, 1979, when more than 200 people gathered on the nearby hillside to watch the giant felled. Many of them had worked at the mill and one local resident commented "It's like losing a relative." The only buildings to remain from the oldest part of the mills were the single storey offices and gatehouse which once flanked the entrance to the railyard.
The demolition of the old mill did not mean the end of Stubbins Vale's links with the textile industry. The newer buildings became the base for Scapa Synthoform Ltd. (now Unaform Ltd.) which manufactures papermachine forming fabrics.