

# Turkey Red in the Vale of Leven

## Introduction

Turkey Red differed from other red dyes in that it was permanent and could stand the bleaching and finishing process. Costs could be kept down if the cotton yarn could be woven and dyed red, although in the eighteenth century manufacturers had to weave checked cloth with yarn that was already dyed and then put the woven cloth through the finishing process. Patterns were added when customers took their fabrics to a shop or dye-field where they selected patterns from the pattern books. Designs were printed using carved wooden blocks with a different block for each colour, later engraved copper plates were used. In 1783 Thomas Bell of Glasgow invented a process that printed continuous lengths of cloth but this was not widely used until the nineteenth century.



At this time, only cotton made into yarn could be dyed, the reason for this is that the oil (mordant) used to bind the yarn and the dye had to be applied evenly, woven material could only be dyed after 1810 when there were improvements in the process. The yarn was taken to the dyeworks by cotton manufacturers, dyed and then returned to their factories.

The introduction of Turkey red to Scotland was through George Mackintosh who invited Pierre Jacques Papillon, a chemist from Rouen to Scotland to show him how to produce the cloth.



## George Mackintosh

Mackintosh was a successful manufacture of another dyestuff, cudbear which was only suitable for dyeing silk and wool, neither of which were major Glasgow industries. The cotton industry in Glasgow was developing swiftly. His partner, David Dale also came from the same successful manufacturing background. Papillon became a partner in their company and they opened a new dye factory at Dalmarnock in 1785. Dale and Mackintosh sold their factory at Dalmarnock to Henry Monteith, Bogle and Company in 1805 and it was renamed Barrowfield.

## Henry Monteith

Monteith had factories in Bridgton and Blantyre by 1789 where he was dyeing Turkey Red, the purchase of Dalmarnock was the next step and by the 1820s he was the most powerful dyer in the Turkey Red trade. In 1815 a process was invented to bleach white spots for bandannas and handkerchiefs automatically and by 1823 Monteith's could produce 224 handkerchiefs in 10 minutes. His monopoly only ended in the 1830s when he died.





## William Stirling

In 1769, S Turnbull, Arthur and Company moved to Croftengea. Stirling followed, moving to the Vale of Leven from Glasgow due to the cleaner air and pure water from Loch Lomond. Cloth had to be dried outside as it wasn't until the 1830s that a method of cloth drying inside was invented. They started Turkey Red dyeing at Dalquhurn and printed calico at Cordale. In 1876, Stirling sold his factory and it became the property of the Wylie brothers. In 1886, they employed 7,000 people, dyed and printed 150 million metres of cloth.



## The Orr Ewings

In the mid 19th century, the industry was dominated by two brothers, Archibald and John Orr Ewing. They bought Croftengea in 1835 and ten years later, John Orr Ewing sold his share to retire. Archibald formed his own company and bought the Levenbank works from John Stewart. He already owned the Milton works, which he bought in 1850. He continued until 1860 when he offered the company back to his brother who amalgamated Croftengea and Levenbank under the name Alexandria Works, although it was known locally at *The Craft*.

In the mid 19th century, Stirling and Orr were the major players in Turkey Red and the industry was almost a Vale monopoly. By the end of the 19th century cotton, calico and velvet were being produced and the Vale had developed into a specialised industry.

Most cloth from the Vale of Leven was exported to markets in India, the Far East, some Pacific islands, West Africa and South America. India was the main buyer. There were different pattern requirements from each market: the Muslims in India would allow no print of the human figure, while the Lady print was very popular among the Hindus. The peacock pattern was universal.

At the end of the century the reliance on exports became very clear when India decided to try and make her own textile industry more established by imposing tariffs. In response William Stirling, Alexander Reid and the two Orr Ewing brothers united to form the United Turkey Red Company (UTR) in October 1897. But synthetic colours were being produced cheaper and faster. In 1961 UTR was taken over and closed, ending 250 years of textile industry in the Vale.

