

# The Legacy of Linen and Jute by Jack Searle

From 1800 to around 1950 the economic and social life of Dundee was dominated by the textile industry. For the city this had many results. Alongside the emergence of a small number of extremely rich individuals who owned and operated the works and mills, a very large number of workers, generally poorly paid, were attracted to swell Dundee's population. Indeed it can be said that one of the on-going legacies of this 150 year dominance of textile manufacture in the city is the social aftershock of that experience.

But, quite apart from its social effects upon the population, the production of textiles in Dundee left its mark upon the physical appearance of the city - the most obvious being the large number of buildings associated with this trade. But that was not the end of the matter. This article attempts to cover one particular part of the textile legacy, namely those buildings gifted to the city by the textile barons of Dundee.

The making of gifts to the city was not a common predilection of the owners of textile businesses, but a small number of them did. Through their gifts they left their mark upon our environment. The most significant of these benefactors were the Baxter, Caird, and Cox families.

## The Baxter Family

The roots of the Baxter company were put down when John Baxter came to the Dundee area as a weaver in 1728. In 1818 his grandson William Baxter leased a flax spinning mill at Glamis. This was successful and only four years later, in partnership with his eldest son Edward, he built his first mill in Dundee on the Dens Burn. In 1825, when Edward left the company, two younger sons were assumed as partners and the firm's name was changed to Baxter Brothers and Co.

The only one of William's sons to try their hand at something outwith the textile industry was David. Born in Dundee in February 1793 and educated locally, his first venture into commerce was as the manager of Dundee Sugar Refining Company. Whether due to his lack of managerial skills, inexperience, or market conditions, the company went broke in 1826.

David was fortunate in having another line to pursue and so joined his father William in the family business. In 1828 he endeavoured to introduce power looms but this did not work out. In 1830 he became a partner and in 1836 he again tried to introduce them. This time he was successful, thereby ensuring the rapid expansion of the company.

In 1845 a subscription fund was opened to build the Royal Arch to commemorate the 1844 visit to Dundee of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. This was to be a large triumphal arch flanked by two side arches. It was to be



Sir David Baxter

located between King William IV Dock and Earl Grey Dock at a cost of around £3,000. William Baxter personally donated £50 whilst the Baxter Brothers Co Ltd gave a further £50. Their donations were minor when compared to the biggest contributions, namely from Lord Panmure who gave £750 and the Harbour Trustees who contributed £500. It is interesting to note that David Baxter in his role as a trustee of the Harbour Board objected to any expenditure being made to the upkeep of the Royal Arch.



