

JOHN WINNING, NEW LANARK ARTIST



View of New Lanark by John Winning c1818, commissioned by Robert Owen (New Lanark Trust)

John Winning was born on 28 Jan 1780 in New Kilpatrick, West Dunbartonshire, Scotland and married Christina Gray on 5th August 1798 in New Lanark. He was employed by Robert Owen as an art teacher in the village school and Cash Book records show he was paid considerably more than other teachers at that time, possibly because of the talent he displayed.

Following the completion of the long-awaited Institute and School, Owen commissioned Winning to produce a series of illustrations of New Lanark and these were used as export labels, pasted onto each package of cotton yarn. By this time New Lanark had become one of the largest cotton manufacturing centres in the country with an international reputation. By 1813 the value of the mills had risen to £114,000 (from £60,000 in 1799) and enough cotton was produced in a week to go around the world 2.5 times!

John Winning's artistic work is considered extraordinary as it combines meticulous accuracy and minute detail together with energy and life. As opposed to the village being quiet and sedate as in previous illustrations, it is lively with varied activity as it would have been in reality.

The image reproduced here, one of several angles on the village in 1818, also shows New Lanark in its beautiful landscape setting, something Owen (and David Dale before him) found inspiring as did the owners of Corehouse and Bonnington Houses seen in the distance to right and left of Corra Linn fall whose finely landscaped estates adjacent to the natural wonders of the Falls of Clyde drew attention of visitors from far and near.

Owen's fame was spreading abroad, and two of Winning's paintings illustrated the French edition of Henry Grey McNab's "Examen impartial des nouvelles vues de Mr. Robert Owen et ses établissements a New Lanark en Ecosse" Paris 1821.

John and his wife Christiana, who was born in New Lanark on 17th March 1776, lived in New Buildings in the village and had eight children. During conservation work in 1977 workers in New Buildings uncovered a letter dated from 1835 in which one of these, John B. Winning, writes to his parents, John and Christina in New Lanark. The letter has been preserved by the Trust in excellent condition, with no trace of damp, mould or decay, something of a tribute to the standard of building at New Lanark.

John Winning died on 31st December, 1839 and is buried in St Kentigerns Cemetery in Lanark where a gravestone was erected by another son, William, to the memory of his father and the aforementioned brother John B. Winning who died in Illinois, USA.