



## RAVENSDALE COTTAGES – A BIT OF HISTORY

A little bit of background about the cottages. You will have seen the imposing building of Cressbrook Mill at the end of Cressbrook Dale (the dales that the cottages are in) and Monsal Dale. Although it has now been converted into rather nice apartments Cressbrook Mill was once at the forefront of the cotton-spinning industry.

The original Cressbrook Mill was built around 1786 by John Baker, a hosier and entrepreneur. The mill was fed by the water from Cressbrook Dale leading to a millpond and waterwheel. The millpond still exists at the bottom of Cressbrook Dale (peak over the wall or locked gate across the road from the Mill). The original mill was used as a distillery for peppermint, lavender and other aromatic herbs, which were grown or found locally.

The mill burnt down only a year after (1787) it was built and a new mill was built by Sir Richard Arkwright, the famous inventor of water-powered machinery, including the water-frame spinning machine, and the mass-production of textiles. In 1815 the mill was vastly extended with its impressive 12-bay Georgian building by William Newton on behalf of John Leigh Phillips and Brother (Francis).

Getting back to Ravensdale Cottages.... William Newton was an agent of Richard Arkwright but he was dismissed in 1790. William Newton was a poet, known as the “Minstrel of the Peak” and when he became owner of Cressbrook Mill he provided better living conditions for his apprentices and provided cottages and a village school. William Newton had a son, again called William, who was the real power behind the success of Cressbrook Mill and increasing production. Much of his focus though was on the workers, both adult and juvenile (who came from orphanages and workhouses as far as London). Whilst treatment of the young workers (some reported to be as young as nine years old) was sometimes very harsh it was in 1823 that William Newton, Jnr recognized the need for better housing for the adult/family workers. He asked Francis Phillips to build six workers’ cottages, but they were not prepared to do this. So, the Newton’s themselves arranged for the construction of Ravensdale Cottages, known for generations later as “Newton’s Folly” as they were considered less attractive than the new building being built in Cressbrook for the mill. The cottages are also known locally today as “The Wick”, which is taken from Berry-me-wick – or “Berewick”, being a “small manorial settlement, an outlier of a manor” or “a detached portion of farmland that belonged to a mediaeval manor”. William Newton (Snr) and his wife died in 1830 and the eldest son carried on as manager until 1835, when he moved on to Litton Mill on the sale of Cressbrook Estate to Henry McConnell.

So, let’s race forward and introduce the Matty family. In 1964 Allen Matty (snr) was temporarily working as a marine biologist in St. Andrews, Scotland, where they had a house in a village called Strathkinnes (where twin sons were born, John & Allen, to add to the other 3 children, Howard, Sarah and Anna). On return to Nottingham/Birmingham this house was kept and was visited regularly for holidays etc. In 1980 the regular travel to Scotland was becoming a bit much and an advert was seen in the Guardian newspaper for a cottage in Derbyshire. 71 Ravensdale was purchased. When Dad passed away in 2004 the cottage was passed to the 5 children to look after, under the watchful eye of Mum. Very little was changed at the cottage since then and after Mum passed away in November 2021 John arranged to buy out his siblings to ensure the cottage stayed within the family. In mid-2022 John began the renovation to what we see today.