The Industrial Heritage of Hardcastle Crags is known to date back to at least the Bronze Age. There is evidence of significant human activity throughout the Hebden Valley, including medieval iron smelts and charcoal hearths.

In 1762, the manor house known as Greenwood Lee was sold to Abraham Gibson. According to local legend Abraham Gibson was drunk at the auction and was surprised to learn the following morning that he was the owner of the house. He immediately set about selling timber from the estate to reclaim some of the money spent on the property.

In 1764, at the start of the industrial revolution, James Hargreaves invented the Spinning Jenny. With this new technology Abraham Gibson installed a cottage cotton industry in Greenwood Lee. Part of the upper floor of the house was cut away. This allowed the creation of a water wheel which drove the newly installed Spinning Jennies. The Gibson family had started cotton spinning.

By the start of the 1800s the textile industry in England was booming. It was becoming factory based and moving away from the cottage industry that it used to be. Demand was increasing throughout the world and entrepreneurs such as Abraham Gibson were ready to meet the challenge.

In 1800 the second Abraham Gibson built the Lord Holme Mill, known today as Gibson Mill. The Spinning Jennies were transferred down from Greenwood Lee, which in turn returned to being the family home.
In 1833 the Factories Inquiries Commission visited Lord Holme Mill, and other premises within Calderdale, to review conditions. Child labour was normal. Their agility meant they could get into difficult areas of the machinery. The average working week consisted of six 12 hour days. Breaks for rest were rare and serious injuries caused by trapped limbs common. The commissioners were met by a group of mill owners who collectively invented a description of favourable working conditions at their premises.

Throughout the period of the Factory Inquiries Commission the Gaukroger family rented and operated Lord Holme Mill. They also managed a second mill owned by Abraham Gibson II, the New Bridge Mill which was located at the entrance to Hardcastle Crags, on the far side of the river.

In 1860, the Gaukroger lease for the mill ran out and it returned to the Gibson family. The mill was managed by William Gibson the second eldest son of Abraham Gibson II. Abraham Gibson III, the eldest son of Abraham Gibson II, died aged only 24 after falling from his horse.

For the first time, in 1861, a West Riding Directory lists Gibson Bros. as cotton and worsted manufacturers at Lord Holme Mill. They undertook a major programme of expansion at the mill installing the latest technology. The weaving shed and engine house were added to the existing building to give it its modern appearance. The increase in power enabled the Gibson family to fit the looms to produce cotton cloth.
However, the distance of the mill from the Rochdale canal was a problem. The cost of bringing the raw cotton to the mill, plus the coal to power the steam turbine was pushing up the cost of the final product. Economic pressures were bringing the Lord Holme Mill to a grinding halt. Added to this, the American Civil War in 1862 drastically reduced the amount of cotton entering England.

By 1894 the ownership and running of Lord Holme Mill was in the hands of Abraham Gibson IV. He was an entrepreneur and fought the closure of the Lord Holme Mill, a fate that most mills in the valley suffered.

Abraham Gibson deposited title deeds for the Lord Holme Mill as securities in order to secure a loan from the Halifax Commercial Banking Company Limited. By 1897 he was still listed in Kelly’s Directory of the West Riding of Yorkshire as “weaver, Gibson Wood and New Bridge Mills”.

In 1902, with production ceased, a mortgage was taken out to the amount of £4,260 on Greenwood Lee, Lord Holme Mill and any buildings belonging to those properties. In March of that year the Hebden Bridge Times and Gazette stated that the buildings were about to be transformed into an elaborate dining saloon. The entertainment era at the mill had arrived.
None of the developments at Lord Holme Mill would have been possible without one major development of the industrial revolution, the canals. In this case the Rochdale Canal, built in 1799, which linked Hebden Bridge to the city of Liverpool.

Liverpool was the main port for the importation of raw cotton and the exportation of finished products. The canal link ensured the flow of raw materials and finished products, many of which were sold in all corners of the British Empire.

The raw cotton was brought via pack horse over the top of Heptonstall and down to the mill. The packhorse trails passing through this area formed part of an extensive network of trading routes linking Ireland and Europe.

Expanding centres of industry and population brought greater demands for reliable water supplies. Steep sided Pennine valleys with plentiful rainfall were ideal locations for reservoirs.

The local reservoirs at Gorple, Widdop and Walshaw were built by teams of Irish Navvies. With a price round their neck, teams would wait at Halifax market to be hired as manual labourers. Fit and strong, they worked long hours, building the service railways and the reservoirs by hand.

Evidence of the railway still exists at Blake Dean, where a series of stone stanchions were constructed to support a trestle bridge spanning the valley.
Today’s Journey

- Industry began at Hardcastle Crags in the Bronze Age.
- The Gibson family began cotton spinning in their house and took out part of the upper storey for a water wheel.
- Gibson Mill was built in 1800 and cotton spinning moved there from the house.
- The American Civil War in 1862 prevented the import of cotton and many local mills closed.
- In 1902 Gibson Mill was transformed into an entertainment emporium for the local people.

Information
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The Science and Tourism Project
University of Leeds
Leeds LS2 9JT
e scienceandtourism@leeds.ac.uk
w www.see.leeds.ac.uk/scienceandtourism

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