

Cowden Hall

A snapshot of the historic background to Cowden Hall

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(for [East Renfrewshire Designed Landscapes and Gardens Group](#))

The ruins of what was at one time known as Cowden Hall are the subject of a paper by Irene Hughson and Gordon McCrae (1). This was part of the barony of Cowden which passed in 1634 to a William Cochrane who built himself a new residence on the site. He was a wealthy and important man closely involved with the management of Glasgow University and in public affairs. He was an active Royalist and was made a peer by Charles I. He helped finance Charles II's return from exile and was created Earl of Dundonald in gratitude.

In 1790 part of the Barony of Cowden was sold to Orr and Company who founded the Crofthead Spinning Mill. A mansion called Crofthead House was built in 1830 on the land belonging to the mill by James Orr, then the mill owner, reputedly at a cost of £3000. Some decades later his nephew Robert Orr demolished this house and built a new one near the site(2). He must surely have been aware of the existence of the original Cowden Hall, by then in ruins, and may have taken the name of his new house from this as it was called variously Cowdon Hall, Cowdonhall and Cowden Hall. The whole estate was remodelled and trees imported from all over the world. It was a palatial mansion with croquet lawns, tennis courts, a bowling green and a boating pond with boathouse. The motto above the door read True to the End. There were substantial greenhouses and outhouses and a large conservatory connected to the main house by a bridge from an upper floor to the top of the cliff against which the house was sited.

When Robert Orr died, the house was taken over by the mill. It served as a convalescent home for British and Belgian soldiers in the First World War, as a Recreation Centre for mill workers between the wars, and by a dressmaking firm displaced from London by the bombings during the Second World War. It was subsequently converted into flats for key workers and was demolished in its entirety in 1962.

Remnants of the foundations of the house and its outbuildings remain, as do many beautiful trees and other signposts around the grounds of what was the Cowden Hall Estate where some of us live and now walk our dogs. We are trying, with the help of the current owners of the mill, local people and their childhood memories, and old ordnance survey maps, to piece together a picture of the house and its estates, including details of the greenhouses and conservatory, as they once were.

References

1. Hughson Irene, McCrae Gordon. *Cowden Hall*. Renfrewshire Local History Forum Journal, Vol 3, page 28, 1991.

2. Bobbins and Threads. *Memories of Neilston Mill*. Neilston: Bobbins and Threads, 2009.