

27 OCT 2008

Joe Traynor
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23rd October 2008

Dear Joe

Science and Technology Curator Post

I am pleased to be able to write this letter in support of your application to the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation.

To date, I have visited your museum and stores and evaluated your Singer Collection. The strengths of the collection are obvious – it's an encyclopaedic record of a major factory's activities, it relates to industrial products made by and for women which are rare, it charts changing tastes in domestic fashions in the twentieth century and it has a dual provenance with items from the company and from individual users. Importantly, it relates to Scotland's economic history and raises the theme of the geographical expansion of new towns.

The Singer Company's arrival in Bridgeton, Glasgow in 1867 signified the start of the firm's global expansion. When the factory was moved to a 46 acre site in Kilbowie, Clydebank in 1882, it became the world's largest factory. The floor area was nearly one million square feet and seven thousand workers were employed producing on average 13,000 machines a week. Mixed fortunes followed with the 1911 strike which resulted in 400 redundancies and the 1930 House of Commons debate, highlighted yet more unsavoury working practices. During the Second World War, the company produced an impressive array of munitions ranging from parts for Lancaster Bombers to bayonets, examples of which reside in your collections. This success was marred by the resultant bombings during the 1941 Clydebank Blitz. In 1960, Singer employed over sixteen thousand staff but rival firms reduced international sales to such an extent that the Clydebank factory was closed in 1980.

I conclude that the collections of West Dunbartonshire Council are nationally significant. They represent the dawn of globalisation and the impact of international companies on a Scottish workforce. The collection has enormous research potential as mentioned above, and with the current economic climate, many issues of contemporary relevance. The appointment of a curator could dramatically enhance West Dunbartonshire's offer and enable your service to tap into the many nationwide strategies for industrial heritage currently in prospect. The Scottish Government's 2009 Year of Homecoming initiative will provide the impetus for a reappraisal of Scotland's Industrial Past and many institutions are already promoting their industrial collections to this end.

I wish you every success with your application which I fully endorse.

Yours sincerely,



Rowan Brown

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