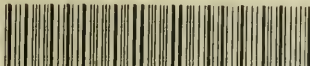


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WEAVER'S COTTAGE KILBARCHAN.

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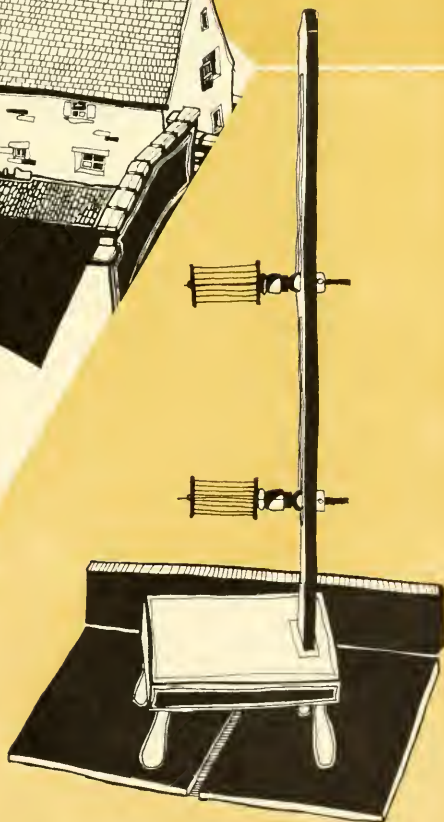
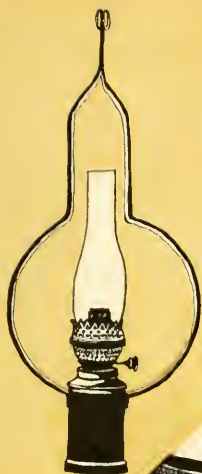




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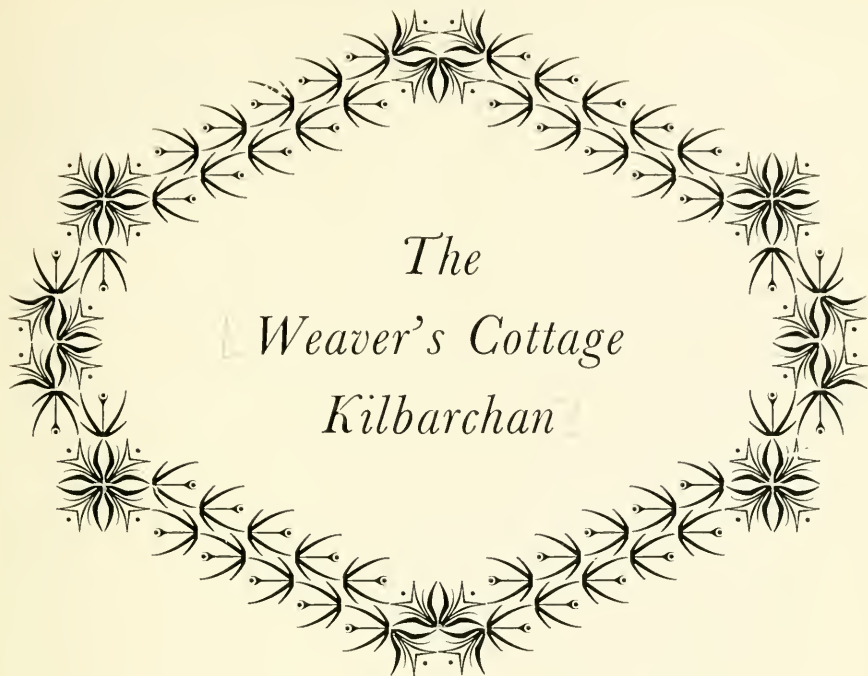
ALASTAIR BUCHANAN.

weaver's cottage
KILBARCHAN

1794



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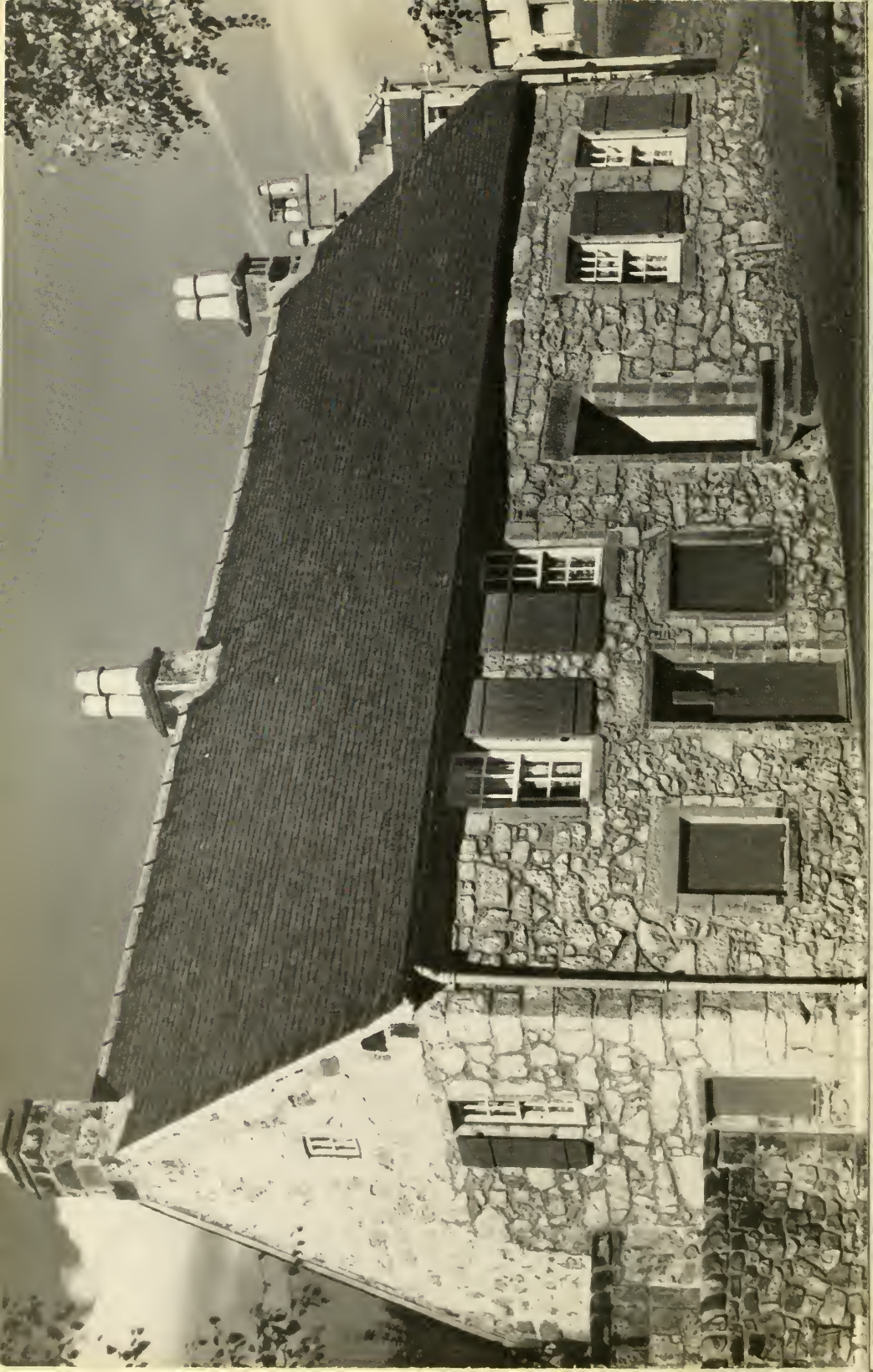


The
Weaver's Cottage
Kilbarchan

by

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The Cottage

The Weaver's Cottage at the Barngreen is one of the original houses of Kilbarchan, having been built in 1723 by Andrew, John and Jenet Bryden, whose names appear on the lintel over the front door. (Another lintel, re-used from an older building, bears the names of Robert King and Grizel Marshall, who were married in 1656.) The charter of land dates from 1650.

In 1798 Margaret and another Jenet Brydein sold the cottage to William Bridie or Brodie, who in turn sold it in 1801 to William Christie, whose descendants lived and wove in it until 1940. His great, great grandchildren Miss Simpson and Mr. Simpson offered it to the National Trust for Scotland, who accepted it in 1954, and it was opened in 1957 as a memorial museum of the local weaving industry.

The building itself has a number of interesting features. The northern half is of "cruck" structure, of which few examples remain in this part of Scotland, though it was a common method of building where timber was plentiful. With the cruck system the weight of the roof was carried, not by walls, but by a framework made of pairs of trusses formed of split, curved tree trunks, linked by purlins. (It was thus an anticipation of the modern steel-framed building, in which the roof is similarly carried on steel girders instead of on the walls.) Part of the ground floor ceiling of the cottage has been cut away to show the cruck structure, and also the original roof construction of twigs covered with peat and thatch. The walls were built



from round boulders taken from the field, and cemented together with lime mortar, the exterior being lime washed.

In one room the wall has been cutaway to allow the occupant of a box bed to stretch his legs, while in another room there is a stone bed head. In the garden are some interesting specimens of stone craft—a bee bole in the wall to take three skeps, a head locally known as “the Idol”, possibly part of an 18th-century tomb figure, a knocking stane, and other pieces.

Kilbarchan

Kilbarchan in mediaeval times was a village of perhaps 40 families, engaged in agriculture. It was associated with the Chapel of St. Katrine, and still earlier with St. Barchan, one of the 6th-century Irish missionaries who came to Renfrewshire. Its former reputation for wells and springs survives in such names as Spring Grove and Wellstrand. By 1695 the population had risen to 977, and some weaving was already being done. The village sent 50 able-bodied Militia to oppose the '45 Rising, and by 1774 there were 122 thatched and 20 slated houses occupied by 304 families. It was during this period that Kilbarchan Steeple was built, the tower and part of the other structure in 1755, and the remainder in 1782. A bell rang at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., and again at 10 p.m. On the ground floor was a mealmarket for the sale and exchange of meal ground in the neighbouring mills, and until recently it housed the local fire engine, purchased in London in 1765 and brought all the way to Kilbarchan

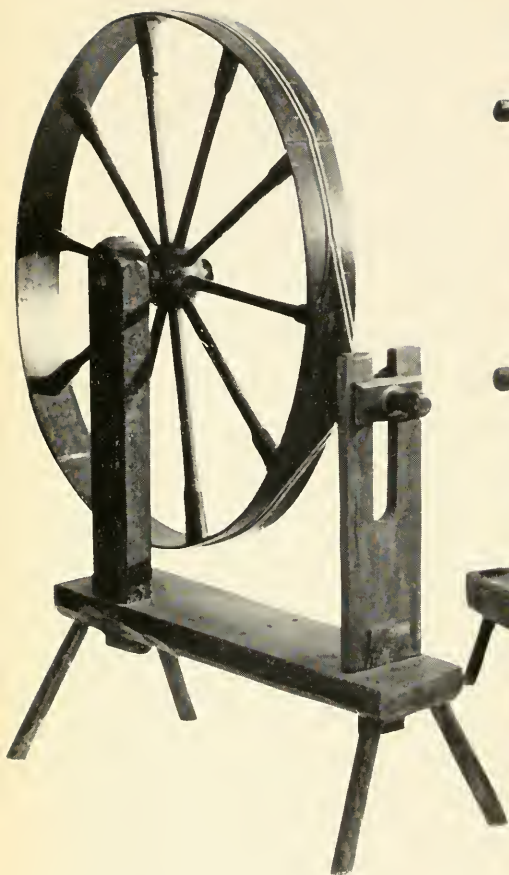


on its own wheels. A strong room was probably used to store unsold meal overnight. A school-house built in 1755 was enlarged in 1782, the two periods being distinguishable in the chimney heads, of which the detail is better in the earlier ones. On the north side of the Steeple is a niche containing a bronze statue of Habbie Simpson, piper of Kilbarchan, who lived from 1550-1620, and immortalised by Robert Semple of Beltrees in his "Elegy on the Death of Habbie Simson". The steeple block was built by James Milliken of Milliken, who made it over in 1757 to John Warner, Minister of Kilbarchan, and the Kirk Session. After subsequent changes of ownership the buildings are now vested in the County Council of Renfrewshire. By the generosity of the late Mrs. Cuninghame of Craighends, and other local donors, they were recently thoroughly restored after a period of decay, and now preserve something of the old character of the village.

In the 18th and 19th centuries weaving was the main industry of Kilbarchan, bleaching being later added. By 1939 the population had risen to 2312.

Weaving in Kilbarchan

The history of weaving in Kilbarchan forms an interesting contrast to that in the neighbouring town of Paisley. In both cases a few score weavers were already operating in 1695. Both expanded rapidly after the middle of the 18th century, and made muslins and ginghams (to which Paisley added silks). At the beginning of the 19th century, however, Paisley con-



A Pinn Winder;



Windlass or Windles;



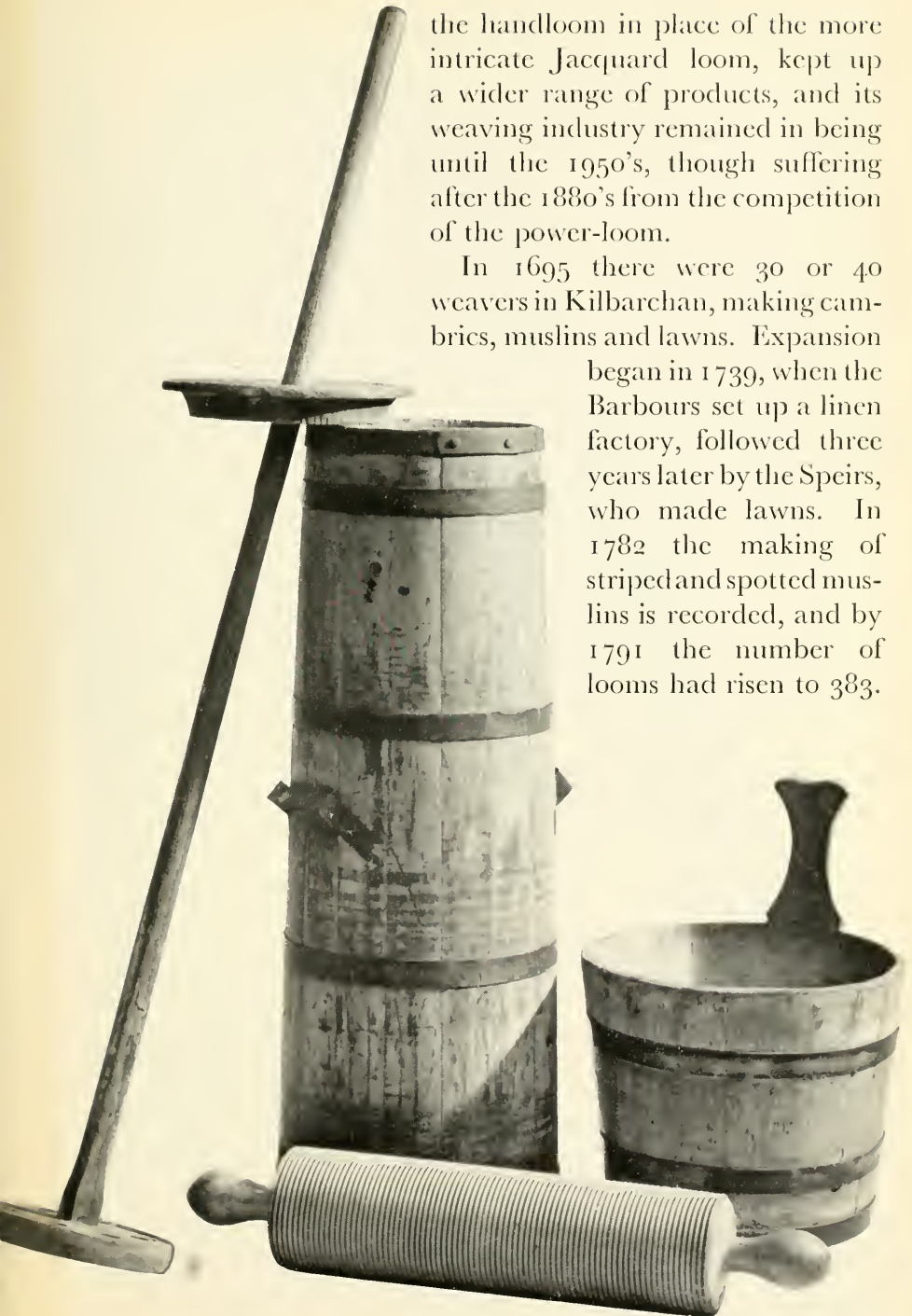
Weaver's Chair.

centrated mainly on its well-known shawls, transformed its industry from a cottage to a factory basis until it was working six times as many looms as Kilbarchan, and maintained a high rate of production until the 1870's. Then it paid the penalty for over-specialisation, when a change in women's fashions extinguished the demand for shawls. Kilbarchan, which had remained on a cottage basis, with

the handloom in place of the more intricate Jacquard loom, kept up a wider range of products, and its weaving industry remained in being until the 1950's, though suffering after the 1880's from the competition of the power-loom.

In 1695 there were 30 or 40 weavers in Kilbarchan, making cambrics, muslins and lawns. Expansion

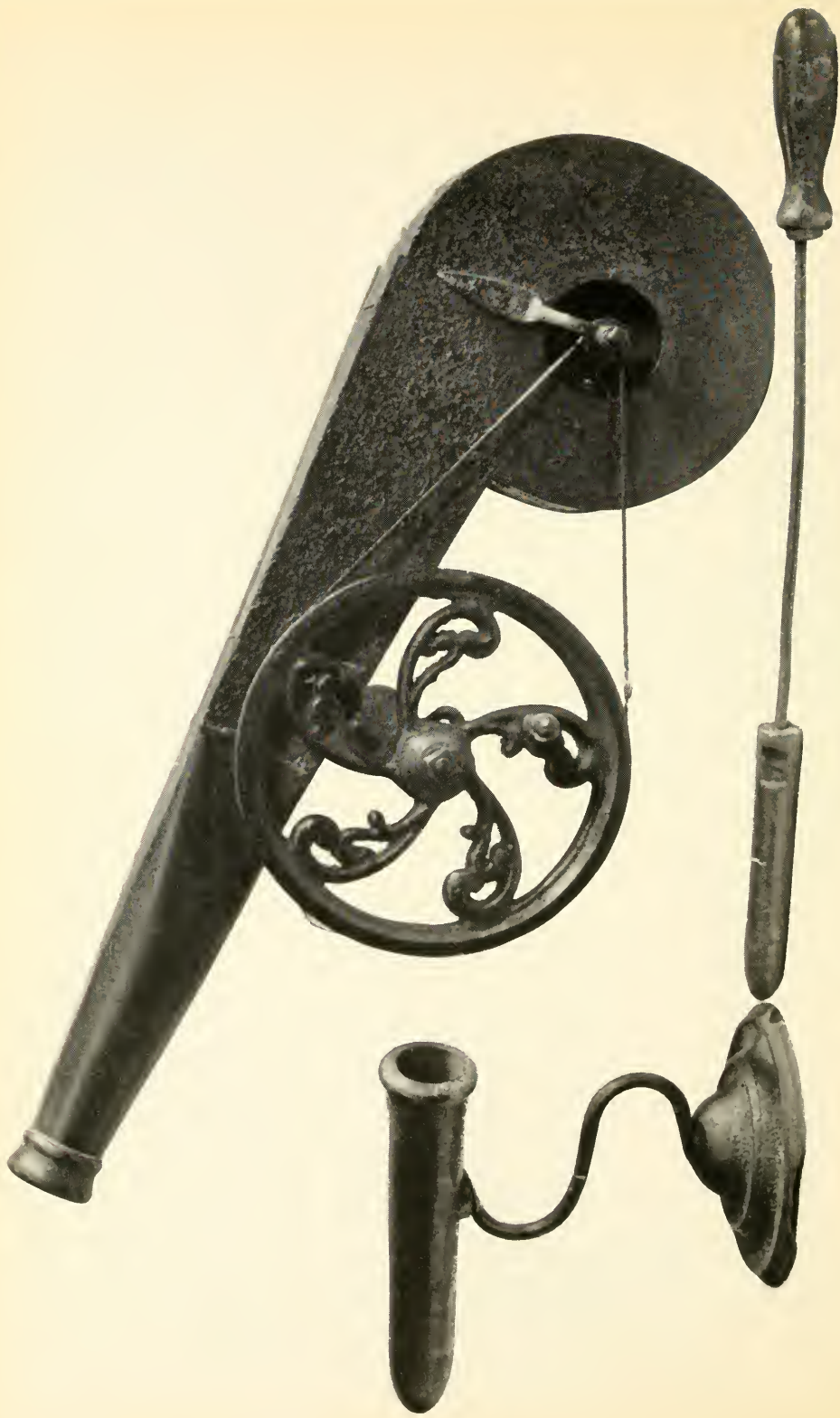
began in 1739, when the Barbours set up a linen factory, followed three years later by the Speirs, who made lawns. In 1782 the making of striped and spotted muslins is recorded, and by 1791 the number of looms had risen to 383.



Churn;

Oatcake Roller;

Milk Luggie.

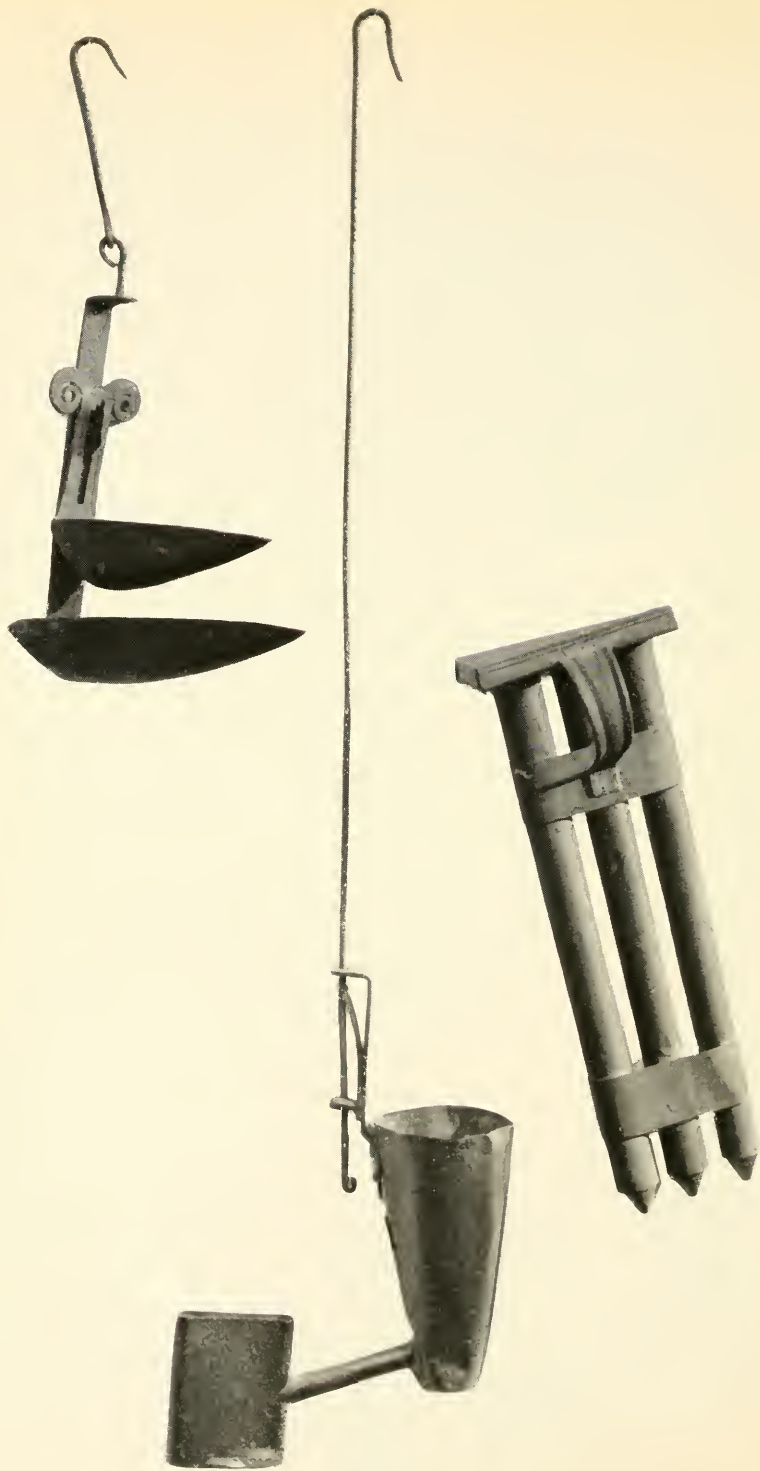


Goffering Iron and Stand;

Fire Blower.

Peak production was reached in the 1830's, when about 800 looms were in use. The bulk of these were handlooms, of the kind shown in the basement room. There were, however, a few drawlooms and Jacquards, and a number of the Kilbarchan weavers worked for Paisley firms. A typical "pine pattern" shawl, said to have been made locally is on view in the weaving history room of the cottage. Silk fabrics were the main item of production, together with some cotton fabrics for Glasgow and Paisley agents. Scarves and shoulder shawls, including tartan and repp varieties, figure among the products. At the beginning of the century a good weaver could earn up to 10/- a day, but this rate had fallen considerably by the 1840's. Trade fluctuations were severe: in the 1826 depression nearly half the local looms were idle.

Later in the century, especially with the arrival of the powerloom in the 1880's, handloom weaving declined, until by 1900 only 200 looms still operated, and by 1950 only 4. To meet competition, Kilbarchan varied its products. Tartans always remained a staple item, as being especially suited to the handloom, but to meet an American demand the narrow muslin looms were widened to produce "Holey Ponchos"—square shawls with a hole in the centre to drop over the head. Striped repp shawls were another item of this period, following the American Civil War. Later in the century ponchos were made for Egypt as well as South America, the pattern changing from floral to striped. Druggets were also made. In the early 20th century another



Cruise;

Oil Lamp;

Candle Mould.

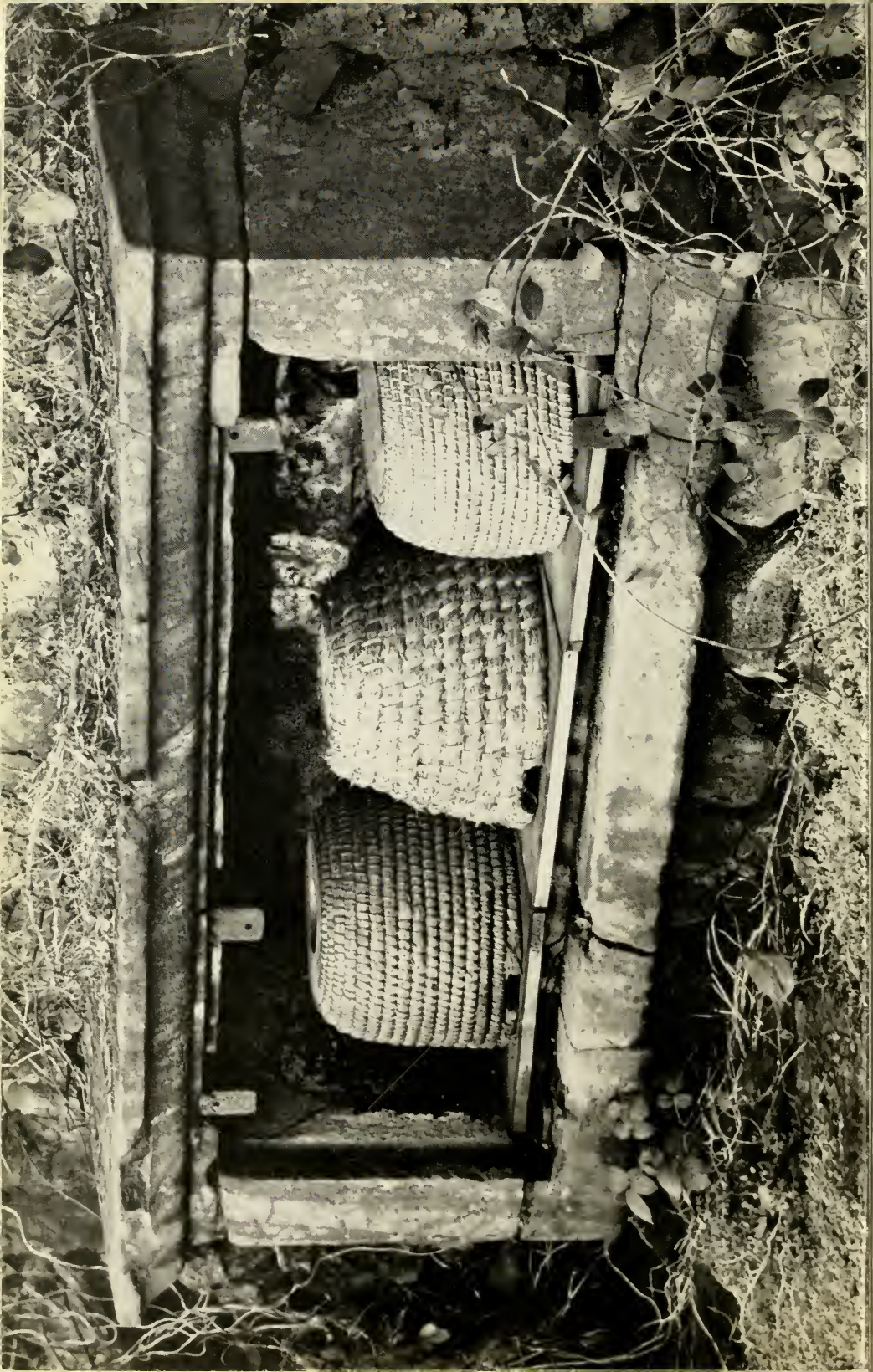
product was shirt patterns, woven on Kilbarchan handlooms to be transferred for mass production on the powerlooms of Glasgow and Kirkintilloch. Products of the last stages of the industry were tartans, scarves and druggets.

Among the names of the last surviving weavers those of Willie Meikle, Johnny Houston, Francis Stewart, Joe Meikle and Tom Adam may perhaps be mentioned.

The Cottage Exhibits

Entering from the street, the visitor will find on his right the former living room, and on his left two small rooms which were once bedrooms. Of these the farther is now devoted to the history of Kilbarchan weaving, and the nearer to pictures and portraits of weavers. All three rooms contained box beds, which have been restored as such. Downstairs in the basement was a weaving shop, and under the roof was an attic with more box beds. When taken over by the National Trust for Scotland, much of the woodwork was badly decayed, and considerable restoration had to be carried out.

In the living room an attempt has been made at preserving something of the original atmosphere and character by suitable furnishing. Through the generous co-operation of Kilbarchan residents, many items of woodwork, pottery and metalwork with local associations have been obtained for the room. The original stone-flagged floor has been uncovered, and the use of the space under the box-bed for storing the winter's supply of potatoes sug-



gested. Besides appropriate fireside equipment, including the steel fender, other metalwork by-gones include a peat oven, an oatcake toaster, and a set of copper water-stoups. Wooden utensils include two cheese presses, an oatcake roller, and bellows. The old rocking cradle may also be noted. Several large and colourful cheese dishes figure among the pottery, and the name of a former owner of the cottage, Mrs. W. Christie, forms part of the decoration of a teapot. Some typical pieces of pewter and glassware are on the shelves.

Passing from the living room to the first room across the entrance passage the visitor will find portraits of some of the last weavers of Kilbarchan, including Willie Meikle, Johnny Houston and Francis Stewart. Views of the steeple, the cottage, and other aspects of Kilbarchan itself may also be seen.

The farther room forms a brief history of the local weaving industry. One showcase contains specimens of the tools used—shuttles, carders for combing out the wool fibres, the fan used for drying the paste dressing applied to the warp while on the loom, a weaver's pocket glass for counting the number of "shots" (threads) per inch of fabric, and some photographs of weaving shops and equipment. By the box bed are samples of local fabrics, including one of the shirt patterns mentioned earlier, and a few of the innumerable tartans woven by local weavers. (Others may be seen on request.) The third case has some locally woven shawls, among them a red tartan woven about 1870-80 by George Anderson, and a "Paisley" type shawl by the same weaver,

together with three shoulder shawls woven by the Misses Wilkie in 1880-90. Other locally woven shawls will be found in use as bed covers on the various box-beds in the cottage. On the wall between the windows a painting by Miss Alice Ramsay will give the visitor a very clear impression of how the interior of a Kilbarchan weaving shop appeared, with its looms, pirn-wheels, and other equipment.

The cottage itself originally had a weaving shop in the basement room, with the usual depression in the floor to take the foot of the frame. This has been restored with the help of most of the contents of Willie Meikle's shop, including his loom. The latter is in full working order, with its complement of reeds, shuttles, lamp, spinning and pirn-wheels, plumb-line and other accessories, and tartans have been woven on it in the museum. A showcase of personal relics of Willie Meikle contains his tartan trousers and waistcoat, and other items. The second loom in the cottage was given to the Trust by Tom Adam.

The kindness of local residents and the welcome co-operation of visitors has resulted in the museum acquiring a larger collection of weaving and local by-gones than can be shown at any one time. The stored items can be seen on request. The collections are still growing, and it is particularly hoped that it will be possible to build up the series of locally-woven fabrics, so as to illustrate all the known types of Kilbarchan products.

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*Cover drawing by Alastair Buchanan
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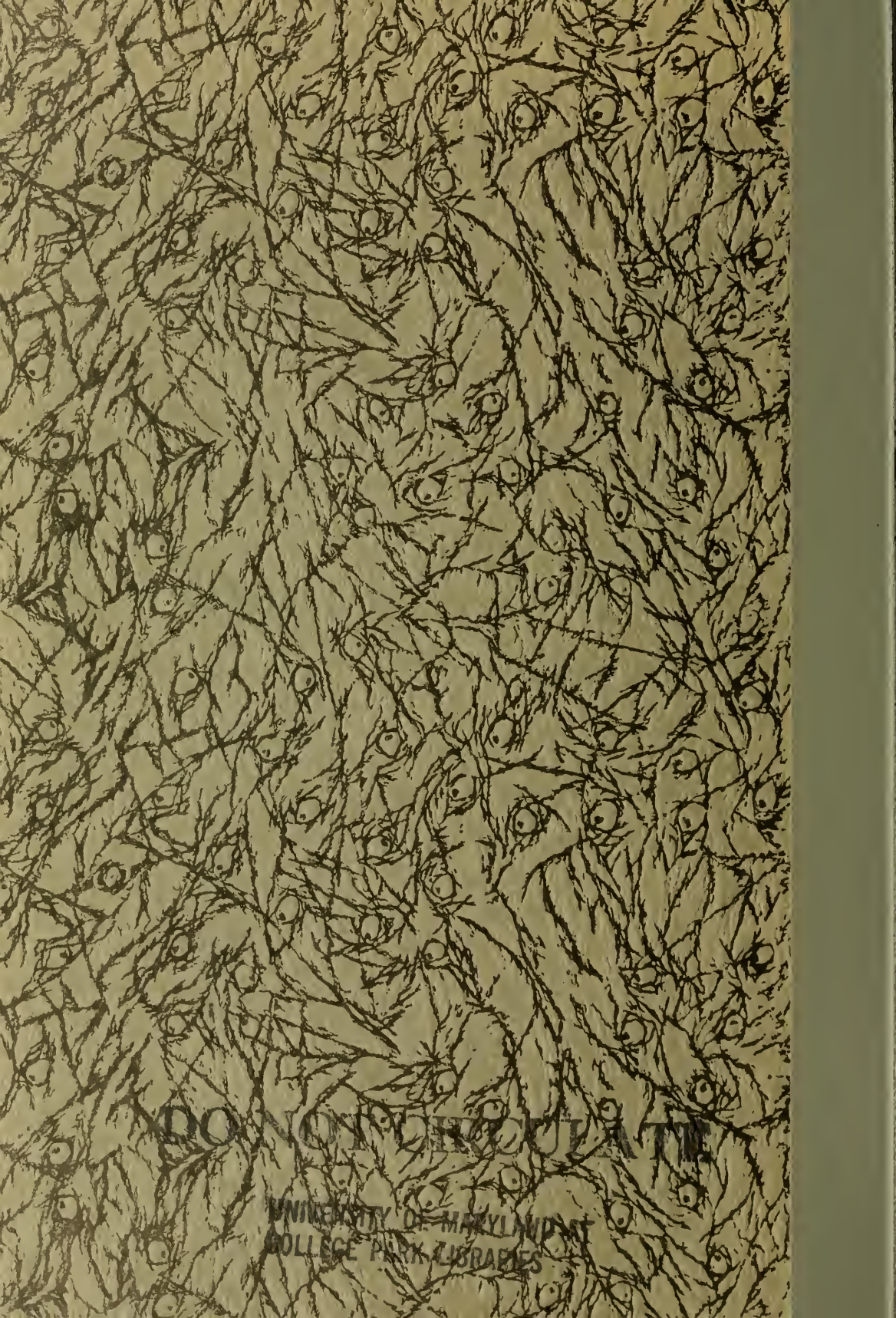
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