

THE HISTORY OF TRAGO MILLS

Trago Mills started life as a gunpowder and explosives mill in Trago Woods, tucked into the Glynn Valley between Liskeard and Bodmin. Official records show that it was developed in the mid 1800s to supply the local mines at Herodsfoot, near Liskeard, and also to provide munitions to the fleet based in Devonport. It is entirely possible that the history of the site dates back considerably further than this for the production of charcoal, but there are no official records available. Trago Mills was ideally located, close to the River Fowey for driving waterwheels to power the factory and there was plenty of Coppice Oak nearby, the main ingredient of black powder. The operation was successively run by number of owners, including the Burrows family, who traded as Burrowite Explosives and were famous for their safety fuse – and finally by ICI, who closed down the works in the early 1960s.

The origin of the name ‘Trago’ is unclear but there are several properties in this lovely part of the Glynn Valley that incorporate Trago into their name. Additionally, ‘Trago’ is a common word in the Spanish language (meaning ‘drink’ or ‘draught’) and so speculation is that there may be a connection to a survivor washed ashore from the ill-fated Spanish Armada.

It was in the early 1960s that Mike Robertson and his wife, Pam, spotted the potential of the old gunpowder works and ponds and put in an application to the local planners to develop the site as a freshwater fishing resort. The application was refused and so Mike began trading, buying in job lots for cash and selling them on. His eye for a deal led to a rapidly expanding range of products and the need for the site - still, at this point, a series of sheds and outbuildings - to be developed into a more substantial retail enterprise. Over the ensuing years, the site developed into the landmark building that we know today – a white fronted, castle-like retail outlet boasting 38 departments and offering over 180,000 products. It also incorporates a riverside walk, restaurant and tea room.

In the mid 1960s, Mike Robertson purchased another substantial plot of land, just off the A38 near Newton Abbot and trading started out of a collection of huts and an army mess tent. Today, this 110 acre site, with stunning views towards Dartmoor, boasts a massive retail complex - complete with the famous Trago towers - a Family Fun Park, steam railway and, in 2009, the opening of The Garden Park, one of the UK’s largest garden centres. This was swiftly followed, in 2012, with the opening of a brand new restaurant complex, the latter two projects being an investment in excess of £12 million.

The trio of Trago stores was completed in the mid 1970s with the purchase of Taylor’s garage on Arwenack Street in Falmouth. Plans for a West Cornwall store had been underway for some time by then, with an initial site at Wendron, followed by an in-town site in Helston, before the move to Falmouth. Sitting proudly on the harbour front, it may be the smallest of the three stores but it still the largest retail outlet in the town, boasting an impressive 100,000 plus product range. In 2015, for the official 50th birthday of Trago, it opened up previous warehousing space on the fourth floor, to create additional retail space and the Crow’s Nest Coffee Bar.

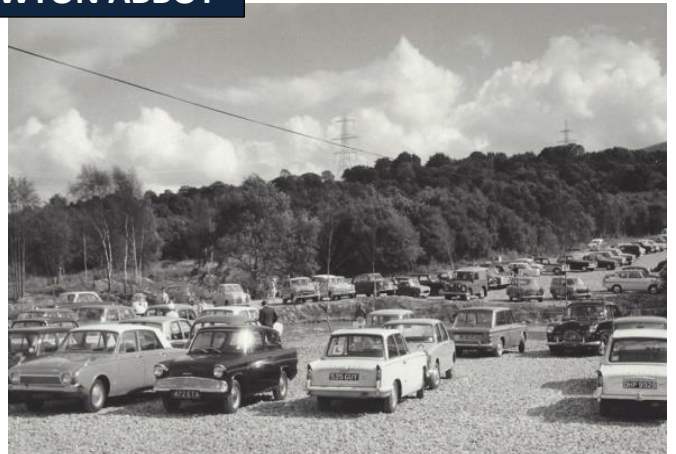
Although handing the reins over to his son Bruce in the late 1980s, Mike Robertson still played an active role in the company until his retirement to Ireland in the 90s. He passed away in November 2001.

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TRAGO NEWTON ABBOT



TRAGO FALMOUTH



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TRAGO LISKEARD



TRAGO NEWTON ABBOT



TRAGO FALMOUTH

