

## Living National Treasure

### Wool-spinner

Photograph by  
Kirstin Gault

**K**NOCKANDO WOOLMILL owes its longevity to its remote location above the River Spey, near Aberlour in Aberdeenshire. Mainland Britain's only surviving district woollen mill has been producing textiles for more than 230 years and Toby Tottle, who came here as a craft fellow in 2016, has learnt skills that have been passed down through several generations.

He's pictured here at the spinning mule—made in 1870, it's the oldest in operation—which turns loose 'rovings' of wool into yarn by twisting and winding them onto spindles. 'The trick is to get the right cone shape so that the yarn will come off nice and smoothly at the loom,' explains Mr Tottle.

The mill embraces the entire traditional process of textile production, from carding scoured fleeces on a Victorian carding set to weaving blankets and kilting on a shuttle loom. Mr Tottle even does some dyeing using plants grown here, although this is mostly now done off-site, together with 'raising' (finishing) the woven cloth.

Reconfigured in the 19th century, the mill complex includes the waterwheel that powered its machinery, an 18th-century cottage (now a museum), the miller's house (now an office/design studio), the original shop and a byre converted to a cafe and shop. It opened to the public in 2012.

The Knockando Woolmill Trust, established in 2000, has restored the A-listed buildings and some machinery and is now fundraising to sustain the whole site, repair the 1899 Dobercross loom and take on another craft fellow to whom Mr Tottle can pass on his skills.

*Mary Miers*

*For more details, visit [www.kwc.co.uk](http://www.kwc.co.uk)*

