

From The Ashes: The Selby Flour Mills, Yorkshire

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Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive



The story behind the construction of the Selby Flour Mills was detailed in *The Miller* of June 2, 1879. In fact, the story started two years earlier and 10 miles north at Naburn.

In the July 1877 edition of *The Miller* the destruction by fire of Naburn Mill, near York, owned by Dobby & Wright was recorded as follows:

“The fire, of a destructive nature, so far as the premises in which it originated, broke out on the morning of 21st ult, in the upper storey of the Naburn Corn Mills near York in the occupation of Messrs. Dobby & Co, of Elvington.

“Mounted messengers were dispatched to York, whence a strong body of the fire brigade police were sent as quickly as possible to the scene of the disaster, but before their arrival the roof of the building was entirely destroyed.

“Though unable to save the mill, the efforts of the brigade were successful in saving the house of the managing partner, Mr. Wright, which stood immediately adjoining, and a considerable portion of machinery.

“The mill was three storeys in height, and consisted of eight pairs of stones with the wheat cleaning and flour dressing machinery, worked by a turbine waterwheel, the loss being variously estimated from £2500 to £3000 (US\$3541 to US\$4250).

“The cause of the fire is unknown, but originated while the mill was closed down.”

A time of revolutionary changes in milling

Since the fire a new mill had been built for the firm at Selby, by Mr George Woods. The site of the mill was on the river Ouse, eleven miles nearer to the important town of Hull than Naburn. The river was navigable up to that point, making it a convenient route for taking the raw materials to the mill, and for conveying the finished products to Hull.

This was a time of revolutionary changes in milling, when the

minds of millers were having to decide when building a new mill, or reconstructing an old one, whether they should follow the old traditions or take a new departure.

A miller, turning a deaf ear to all he heard from the charmers of change was indeed thought to be distinctive in deciding to proceed as if no such person existed.

The journal asked “how was poor a miller to decide?” He was likened to the boy on the brink of the stream who, in dread of the shiver, hesitates to take the plunge! He faced a ‘Gordian knot’ that cannot be untied and he was afraid to cut.

Key questions he faced included:

What about the “New Process” that was said to be enriching the millers of the United States and smothering the English trade in multitudinous barrels and bags of flour?

Shall it be the high milling of Hungary and Austria which, according to some say would produce flour of the highest quality from even the poorest wheat?

Shall it be rollers or millstones? If the latter are to be discarded as not sufficiently scientific for this enlightened age, are the rollers to be of porcelain or chilled iron?

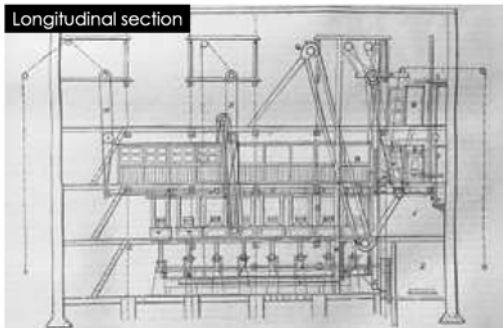
Then there was the ‘Carr-Toufflin’ system, the Nagel and Kaemp, and the Daverio systems, each making more or less loud demands for recognition, and all promising the grandest possible results.

A thoroughly English mill

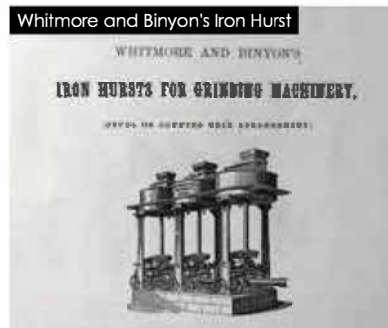
Mr. Woods decided in the end on a thoroughly English mill and, as seen in the engraving, he created a building of compact form. Work was started on May 1, 1878 and the mill was completed and turning out flour before Christmas of that year. The engineers were Whitmore & Binyon, Engineers and Millwrights of 28 Mark Lane London and of the Iron Works at Wicken Market, Suffolk.

The mill proper is shown on the right hand of the engraving, the portion on the left corner was the wheat-cleaning department, divided from the mill by a wall which is shown projecting through the roof, and through which communication was through iron doors.

Longitudinal section



Whitmore and Binyon's Iron Hurst



the bedstone. The power for driving the other machinery was given off at the engine end of the mill where the lay shaft was of greater diameter and strength and was transmitted to the horizontal shaft on the stone floor by means of a cross belt.

The engraving shows that the stive chamber was discretely arranged immediately above the engine room. This provided

Attached to the mill was the lucum, where the grain was elevated from the barges on the river. The mill was 66 feet long by 33 feet wide and the height was 50 feet. It was interesting as the flour mill was the only one driven by steam power in the district. The engine was the horizontal condensing type of 30hp.

The general arrangement of the machinery was as shown in the longitudinal section drawing of the mill. The Hurst carried eight pairs of stones, the two on the left were reserved for semolina and for barley.

Other features shown and labelled in the original include, the meal conveyor, the meal elevator to the dressing silks, the flour silks, the offal elevator, exhaust spouts and trunk, exhaust fan and the discharge spout from the fan.

The wheat cleaning machinery was driven by pulleys arranged on an upright shaft getting its power through a pair of bevel wheels shown at the right of the engraving over the exhaust chamber.

The stone Hursts were secured to a solid piece of masonry so as to prevent any oscillation of the framework or vibration from

what most millers desired: the prevention of condensation of the hot moisture from the stones until it had passed into a room provided for the purpose; it also was a serviceable way of utilising the heat from the engine room.

Whitmore and Binyon's iron Hursts were publicised at the time as being "of very simple, strong and compact form, and can be fitted for any number of pairs of stones, of any diameter, and the height can be varied to suit the requirements of any mill, at the pleasure of the purchaser. The independent form of construction renders them suitable for exportation.

They are made adapted for grinding corn, rice, cement or coprolite." The engineers and millwrights were based in Suffolk and the mention of coprolite (fossilised dinosaur dung) is an echo of when that important source of fertiliser was discovered nearby in 1846.

