



Windmills of Nantucket, USA

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The following article is taken from a typescript in the Rex Wailes collection.

“One does not usually associate windmills with mountainous Wales, nevertheless, the Island of Anglesey at one time must have equalled East Anglia in the number of windmills per square mile which it possessed. A recent tour in Anglesey disclosed no less than 35 in this island which is only about 22 miles long from North to South and 28 miles long from East to West, of these however 25 are roofless shells.

All these mills are very similar to one another in outward appearance. The towers are of rough undressed stone either cemented all over or on the windward side only, and often white-washed; they have four or five floors, and vary in internal diameter from 18 to 25 feet at the base and from 11 to 18ft at the top. The caps are boat shaped, and have horizontal weatherboarding laid over the framing.

The number of stones contained in the mill is three or four pairs, the position being on the first or second floor, according to the size of the mill. In all cases there is one pair of French stones; the other stones are of very coarse grain; they are of a mottled brown colour and are said to be Welsh. From one to three wire dressing machines are to be found on the ground floor; groat machines, which in the past were used for making oats for porridge are also found. The oats were first roasted in a kiln adjoining the mill, they were then passed through a pair of stones set at a constant distance apart, this being the length of the average oat, and the husk was split off the oat.

From the stones they passed to an inclined wire reel in the top of the groat machine, and here the dust formed when the oats were roasted was brushed out. As the oats and husks tailed out of the cylinder where they, together with the dust, were exposed to a draught of air from a fan, the husks and dust being light were blown into a chamber beyond the machine known as the ‘husk-cupboard,’ while the ‘groats,’ as they were now termed, fell down into two spouts, the lighter and poorer grouts being carried to the spout furthest from the fan.

Of all the Anglesey windmills, Melin y Bont, Bryndu, is by far the most interesting. It is situated halfway up the side of a small valley and spans a mill stream fed from a pool in front of the mill and owing to the slope of the ground there are two ground floors. An ingenious and quite unique method of gearing allows the mill to be driven by the wind or by a waterwheel.

At Kingsland mill, on either side of the main door on the ground floor are two “toll cupboards” or “kests”; these were used for the reception of payment in kind, or ‘toll’, for grinding, and a share-out was made between the last owner to work the mill and her sons at the end of each week.

As is well known, the old-time miller was popularly supposed to extract more than his legal toll from his customers on the sly.”

