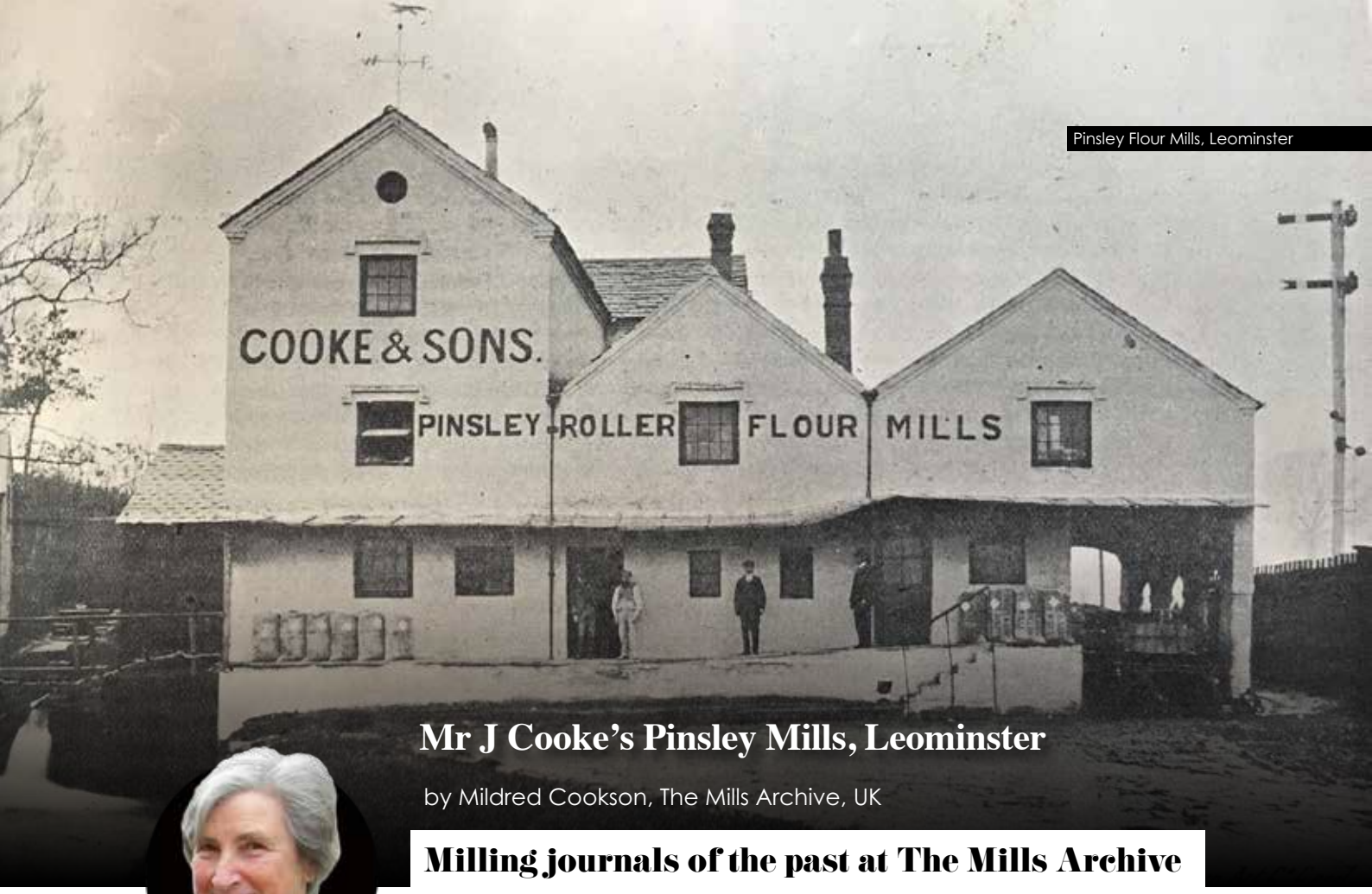


Pinsley Flour Mills, Leominster

Mr J Cooke's Pinsley Mills, Leominster

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK

Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

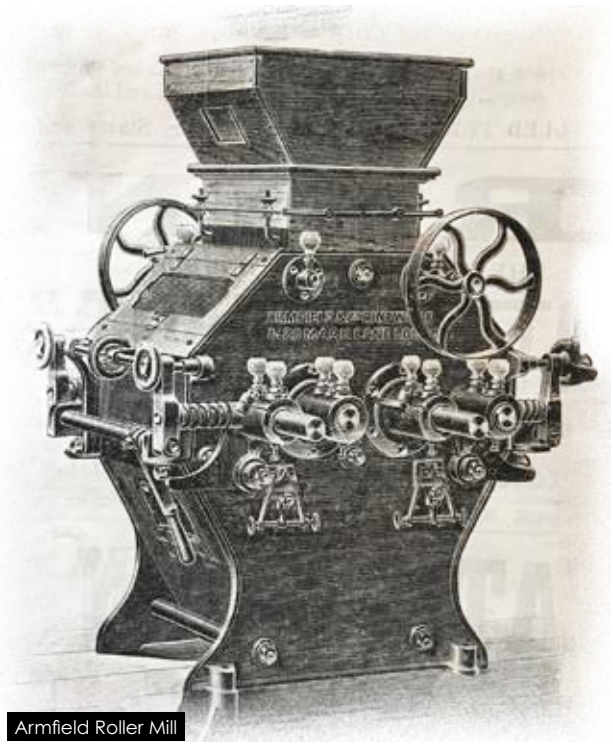
The edition of MILLING published Dec 23rd 1899 points out that the mills at Pinsley had a history almost as old as the town which claimed them as one of its most honoured industries. The town of Leominster (pronounced Lemster) takes its name from a monastery which existed there from 638AD.

Founded by the King of Mercia, in 1125 the monastery became a cell to the Benedictine Abbey at Reading in Berkshire. Leominster is between Shrewsbury and Gloucester, with three rivers running through its boundaries, the Lugg, the Arrow and the Pinsley on which the mill was situated.

The corn mill had carried on until sometime between 1744 and 1748, when the mill was then owned by Daniel Bourn who successfully operated it as a cotton mill. In 1754 it was destroyed by fire and was then rebuilt and returned to its original function as a corn mill.

The mill had a joint line belonging to the Great Western Railway and the London and Northwestern Railway Companies. As can be seen in the illustration a railway siding to the mill existed, but in 1899 it was not in use as the railway companies had demanded an increase in the rent for its use to a sum far greater than the cost of simply carting the grain from the goods station, which was only 100 yards away.

There was a Great Western branch to Worcester, as well as a branch line to nearby Kington, which meant that the lines heading north, south, east and west from Leominster, made it a good centre for distribution and collection from a rich agricultural district.


Armfield Roller Mill

Turning it into a good business

It was surmised that a waterfall at Pinsley Mills was an artificial one built by the monks, as the tail race was partly formed of large stones, probably from part of the monastery. The foundations of the mill up to the first floor were of old rough-hewn stone, the same as

those in the tail race, taken as evidence of a mill existing there over 500 years ago.

Mr Jos Cooke took over the mills in 1892, previously owned by Mr Edwin Blundell who had worked them for the previous 30 years. The mill at that time had four pairs of millstones and was driven by a breast shot waterwheel. Mr Cooke and his sons took over the mill that had been idle for a while and immediately set to work to turn it into a good business.

The first step was to put in a roller plant. The system most favoured was that of Messrs. Jos J Armfield, the principal partner of which was an old friend of Mr Cooke. The mill first ran on a three sack per hour system and Mr. Armfield had quite a task before him to put a more advantageous plant in so little a space.

Yet he managed it, together with ease of access for the operators. The line of rolls was surrounded by a glass partition which kept the dust from the provender mill away from the rolls.

A happy dispatch

Five of Armfield's new patent double mills were used, all 18inch x 6inch belt driven; two for the breaks and three for the six reductions. The first and second brakes were scalped on Armfield's double rotary sieve, the third break preferred a reel and the fourth had an Armfield centrifugal to give its products a happy dispatch.

The break meal from the first three breaks went to a three-sheet reel followed then by two double dustless Armfield's patent 80inch x 20inch purifiers. The six centrifugals, worked with six smooth reductions, and it was claimed that it transformed the reduced semolina and middlings into flour as white as driven snow.

Armfield's System Roller Flour Plants

Armfield's standard centrifugal price from £15

Types of British Empire Turbines

Resting only on Sundays

The provender section of the mill contained two pairs of Peak millstones, driven by belt, the belt also drove oat rollers and bean splitters. The millstones were said to get no rest, except on Sundays.

The motive power was from an Armfield turbine assisted, when necessary, by a gas engine. The turbine itself was one of Armfield's latest design, a 'British Empire' with double wheels that gave it the highest efficiency at half gate, and nearly as high as full gate.

At the time a great many of these turbines were being installed throughout the country, demonstrating their worth.

The mill was rebuilt and returned to its original function as a corn mill, remaining in use until the Second World War. The mill was vandalised and set alight several times in 2010 – 2013, before it was eventually demolished in 2014.