

The Barrow Steam Corn Mill, 1870-1972

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Prior to redevelopment of a large area adjoining Hindpool Road and Cornmill Crossing in Barrow-in-Furness, Greenlane Archaeology was commissioned to carry out a series of archaeological investigations. The largest element of this was the excavation of the entire remains of the former Barrow Steam Corn Mill, which was established in 1870 during a time of rapid growth for the town. Documentary study and the results of the excavation showed that the mill went through several stages of expansion and improvement, all of which reflected the changing nature of grain milling at the time, and many of which utilised the most advanced techniques and technology available. The expansion of the mill reflects the industrial growth of Barrow-in-Furness during the late nineteenth century, realised by the newly created dockyard, itself the product of the wealth and vision of a syndicate of local businessmen. At its peak the mill was part of an international trade in grain and flour and was at the forefront of both the local use of electricity and the national use of sprinkler systems. It remained in operation for almost 100 years, closing in 1967, subsequently being destroyed by fire in 1972.

THE proposed development area included six separate nineteenth-century industrial complexes (Greenlane Archaeology, 2006), the earliest of which was a patent slip established in 1847. This was the first to be established in the town and the precursor to the massive ship yards that have come to dominate the local economy ever since. The slip was subsequently buried, however, as the shoreline was consolidated to form part of the dock system, and the reclaimed ground was occupied by a ropewalk, iron and brass foundry, and the town's first gas works. The majority of these were established in the 1860s. During the investigations, various types of recording work were undertaken across the whole site, and seven standing buildings relating to the iron foundry were examined while a watching brief was maintained during their subsequent demolition (Greenlane Archaeology, 2007a). The largest single structure on the site, however, was a steam corn mill (Figure 2 and Figure 3), of which no physical evidence remained on the surface, although it had been located during an earlier watching brief (Greenlane Archaeology, 2007b). As the remediation work required all of the footings of the buildings to be removed, and the foundations of the corn mill were evidently quite well preserved, a full programme of excavation and recording was requested by the local planning authority.

The site is located on the south-west side of modern Barrow-in-Furness (Figure 1), on the north side of the system of docks that dominate this part of the town (centred on NGR SD 19496 69003). It is adjacent to Hindpool Road, the A5087, approximately 8m above sea level. This area saw considerable nineteenth century development and the subsequent decline in these traditional industries has paved the way for extensive modern improvement.