

## Poltesco Upper Mill

*Andy Fish*

On a recent trip to the Lizard, I visited Poltesco Serpentine Works, which is situated in the small cove of Carleon, between Coverack and Cadgwith. I had visited previously a year ago with my granddaughter Patches Newell.

On the lane from Ruan Minor leading to the Serpentine works and just upstream from a road bridge is the grade 2 listed **Poltesco Upper Mill**, a small two storied corn mill, built of serpentine rubble which presumably was waste from the local quarries. Upper mill is the only survivor of at least 4 mills that are known to have existed in the valley over the centuries. The earliest reference to 'The mill of Poltuske' was in a document dated 1396.



Looking north 2023



Andy Fish

Looking east 2024

The Mill was powered by water from a mill pond fed from a high level leat on an embankment constructed of granite. It has a 17ft 6in diameter iron overshot waterwheel with cast iron shrouds and axle fitted with stout oak spokes and floats. (*Listed building documentation shows the mill has a 17ft 6in diameter water wheel, whilst the National Trust shows it being 17ft.*) It was manufactured in the foundry owned by Isaac Willey of Helston in 1907 to a hybrid design typical to this part of Cornwall.



Patches Newell 2023





Postcard – Andy Fish collection



Keith Andrews 2022

The present mill appears to have been built in the 18th century; there is evidence that it contains reclaimed materials from earlier buildings. The gabled roof dates from the 19th century and was originally thatched but was replaced by slurried slate; however the mill was reroofed once again with slates in 2013. Unfortunately, when I visited in July 2024 some of the abutment lead flashing had become detached and had slipped down the roof.

The mill is important, as although it was disused and neglected for a long period, its machinery is virtually intact and illustrates the mechanical development that took place in Cornwall from the mid-18th century to 1925. According to the listed building schedule dated 9 April 1975 the mill has 2 pairs of millstones and horizontal mill gearing. However, in the *West Briton & Cornwall Advertiser* dated 11 September 1919 there was a public notice giving Mr Rutherford D Duff, Auctioneer, instructions from the Executor of Mr Wm Wearne (deceased) to sell by public auction Poltesco Mill, Ruan Minor on Tuesday 23 September 1919 at 2 o'clock. Apart from the usual farm equipment and furniture, the mill for sale was described in the catalogue as 'A Barley Mill, with one pair of stones, with fixtures, a crushing machine, corn hatch, large pair of scales with weights, an endless chain elevator, and 2 large barrels.

In an article in *The Cornishman* in 1931 is written the following:

*Proceeding towards the Lizard we came to the beautiful Poltesco Valley, here we found Upper Mill, an old Mill where there is a representation of the Lord's crucifixion carved in the wall amongst the primitive machinery and probably sculptured by the previous miller.*

The mill is owned and managed by The National Trust. It was restored to working order in the 1970s and 80s by the then tenant Anthony Hitchens, an experienced millwright who repaired, used, and maintained the property.

During the later part of 2013 the mill was cocooned in scaffolding and tarpaulins to carry out major repairs to the roof. The roof was completely stripped, timbers repaired where rotten, then re-slatted. The work was carried out to a high standard using traditional techniques and materials. The temporary roof protected the building structure from inclement weather, this was also helpful in controlling the drying of the lime mortar, which is key part of the process.

See also

<https://heritagerecords.nationaltrust.org.uk/HBSMR/MonRecord.aspx?uid=MNA170292>