

Mills and Dales

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Photos by Ruth and Keith Andrews

Four weeks after our visit to the Forest of Dean we went to **Swaledale** for a week and were much more successful, although most of the mills we found were in **Wensleydale**.



A corn mill was in existence at **Little Crakehall** near Bedale on Crakehall or Bedale Beck from the 17th century, and it has miraculously survived. It is open on Sundays once a month, and has a website which invites casual visitors at other times.

It is owned and worked by Lionel Green and Alison Barnes who bought it in 2004, intending to develop the mill house for B&B accommodation. They knew nothing about milling but, having contacted SPAB for advice and assistance, they somehow ended up running it commercially full-time. They now mill spelt and wheat (Crusoe) which used to be grown locally but is now bought in from County Durham.

The building was derelict for some 40 years after milling ceased in about 1930, but it was bought and restored in 1977, and at this time the mill and mill house were listed grade 2. This listing was acquired just in time to stop it being demolished for housing. It restarted milling in 1980, before closing for a second time in 2002-10.. After this, the present owner carried out further extensive repairs, assisted by Martin Watts, and then opened and began commercial milling. The 2010 repair work was filmed for BBC2 in conjunction with the establishment of Bedale Community Bakery, and it appeared in Countryfile in 2011.

There were originally four sets of stones, but now just two; both are French buhr. The photos below give some impressions of the machinery.





The low breastshot water wheel has cast iron shrouds and timber boards, which have been very recently replaced; the old ones are still in a pile outside. You can see them in the picture of the mill, under the palettes.

The 'mill pond' is a 100m reservoir stream, alongside the drive to the mill. It is controlled by a sluice in the retaining wall of the beck, on the other side of the main road.

No ancillary machinery has survived, but there is a winnower and a sifter/mixer kept on the stones floor, which both came from nearby farms.

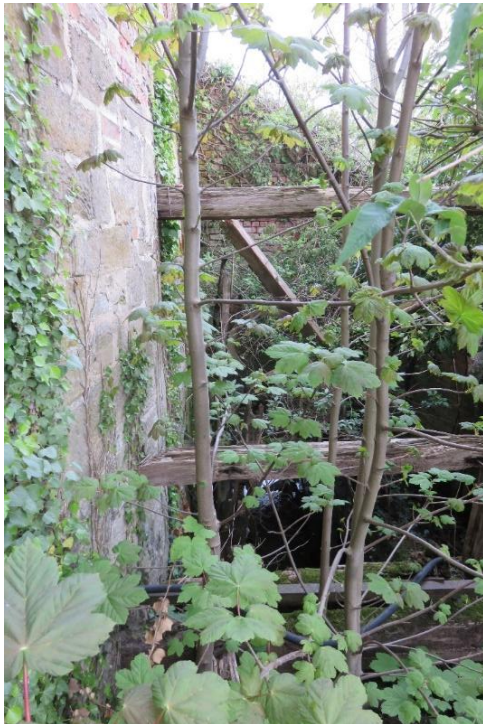


The words read
GARDNERS PATENT
RAPID SIFTER & MIXER,
GARDNER & SONS,
ENGINEERS, GLOUCESTER





Our second mill, **Aiskew Mill**, was in Bedale itself, also on Bedale Beck. Sadly the building is closed up and neglected, and the external wheelpit is full of vegetation, which gives some idea of how long it has been out of use. We only found it because it was marked on the map. It is reputed to have been built in the late 18th century, and to have a full set of surviving machinery. In 1982 it was grade 2* listed and sold to David and Carol Clark, who gradually restored it, with the intention of opening it as a working museum. In 2001, they proposed to fund the remainder of the restoration by building housing on neighbouring land, but this was rejected by a planning inspector. In 2010 the mill reputedly reopened as a community bakery. The Bedale Community Bakery is now situated in modern industrial premises alongside.



This is what happens to a pair of French buhr stones after they have been left out in the weather for many years.

There are very few visible parts of the waterwheel left in the wheelpit, but it looks to have had metal hubs with radial spokes.

Bainbridge Low Mill is a now a guest house, but the late 18th-century stone-built cornmill still has extensive machinery all throughout the building, including the remains of 4 sets of millstones. It faces on to the village green and backs on to the river Bain, a tributary of the Ure. For pictures of the inside, look at the mill's entry on Tripadvisor.



Also in Bainbridge, upstream there is a modern hydro installation with an Archimedes screw, which was working at an incredible rate in the almost flood conditions that you can see in the pictures here.



At **Askrigg** (*left*) on Mill Beck which feeds into the Ure, West Mill is a grade 2 listed early-mid-19th century mill, labelled 'Flax Mill', which is now an outdoor centre. It was formerly a corn mill and latterly a sawmill, specialising in the manufacture of hay rakes.

This is a similar story to **Gayle Mill** (*right*) on Gayle Beck, also feeding into the Ure, which we featured in newsletter 135 (winter 2021); it is a very early corn mill, then cotton mill, then sawmill, and has a very prominent leat which starts at the weir in the foreground of this picture.



At **West Burton** the main attraction is Cauldron Falls (right) on Walden Beck, again feeding into the Ure. On the right of picture in the foreground, notice the remains of the leat which supplied a corn mill downstream (*below*).



The mill, which originally had a waterwheel and supplied provender for cattle, had a turbine installed in 1913. This generated West Burton's electricity, not always efficiently. Autumn leaves often jammed the turbine. In winter, when electricity demand was highest, the supply allowed only very dim street and house lighting. Independent generation of electricity from the mill ceased in 1948 when the National Grid reached the village.

Once again, notice the flood state of the beck, and the brown peat-stained water.



Finally, on the River Ure (or Yore) itself, which gives its name to Uredale, the alternative name of Wensleydale, is **Yore Mill** at Aysgarth Falls. This is the largest mill of them all. It was built in 1854 and is on the site of a medieval fulling mill, next to the river crossing of Yore Bridge, just below the famous falls. It replaced a late 18th century cotton mill that burnt down in 1853. This was a combined corn and woollen mill. By the late 19th century it was used only as a corn mill, making it one of the largest in the dale.



Information from the websites of the various mills, Upper Wharfedale Field Society, and Historic England.