

Blackpool Mill

Alison Stott

I spent Christmas in Wales, and visited this mill just afterwards. So here is a short paragraph about it; there was no booklet or leaflet about its history but there were lots of panels on the walls – so these notes are taken from photographing them (but not word for word of course!). No-one on the premises knew anything about the machinery.

If you head west along the M4 into Wales and then on to Pembrokeshire along the A40, as you get near to Haverfordwest there is a large area (500 acres) which is the *Bluestone National Park*. This is a holiday resort with lodges in the woodland, paths for walking and cycling, and all other amenities people expect. Within the 500 acres is Blackpool Mill.

Blackpool Mill, Grade 2 listed, and more than 200 years old, is situated on the eastern branch of the river Cleddau which is still tidal at that point. The large breastshot waterwheel was powered by diverting the water of the Cleddau into a leat or headrace to drive six pairs of stones producing grist and flour from locally grown crops.

However, in 1901 the mill was refitted by JJ Armfield & Co of Ringwood and the old waterwheel replaced by a modern 'British Empire' turbine. This was capable of 35hp and with a 14ft head of water was able to drive four large millstones, three of which were Derbyshire Peak producing animal feed and the fourth a French buhr stone for flour production.

This continued until 1954 when flooding damaged the leat walls. In 1968 extensive repairs were undertaken and the mill opened as a museum and tearoom which ran successfully for many years. At some point the mill building became unused and when I first saw it, probably about 15 years ago, it was derelict but all the machinery was still inside.

A very pleasant surprise was waiting when I again went there just after Christmas. The mill has been completely transformed and is now a restaurant/café and many millions must have been spent by Bluestones. The huge building has been repaired and rebuilt, and inside all the Armfield machinery is in place on the various floors. You can dine among the hoppers and chutes and everything is there to be seen. There are very good explanations of how it all worked in panels on the walls. .

The river bends sharply by the mill and ships came up the estuary as far as the mill; the water is deep and looks black – hence what was no doubt once the Black Pool .

The other interesting geographical point is that the Preseli Hills are just north of here, where the stones for Stonehenge came from, so I imagine the name 'Bluestone' has something to do with this.



Sketch of mill by Alison's son Gus