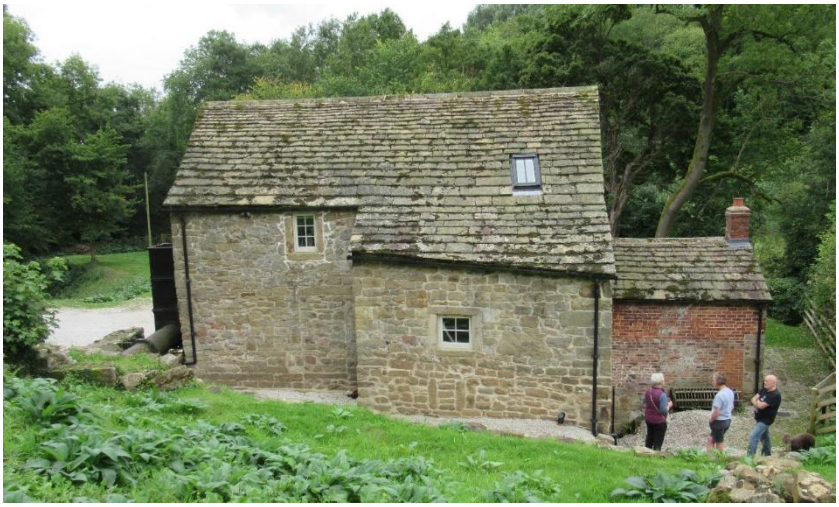
Fallgate Mill

Ruth and Keith Andrews

The buildings of Fallgate Mill (also known as Fall Mill) at SK 354623 probably date from the early 17th century and have been restored, with a lot of internal gearing still intact. There were two wheels at opposite ends of the main building, one of which has been 'restored'. The position of the other wheel is detectable from score marks on the mill wall and a filled-in aperture for the axle. Originally water was brought to the mill through a long leat from a weir on the River Amber about half a mile upstream. There was a mill pond, now filled in, above the site, and some water probably also came from a lead mine sough.



In 1918 the site was acquired by the Clay Cross Company who used the mill for grinding fluorspar. In 1925 a siding from the Ashover Light Railway was laid to run in front of the buildings. The mill continued to be used until the 1950s and then fell into disrepair. It was the last of seven that worked in the Amber Valley.

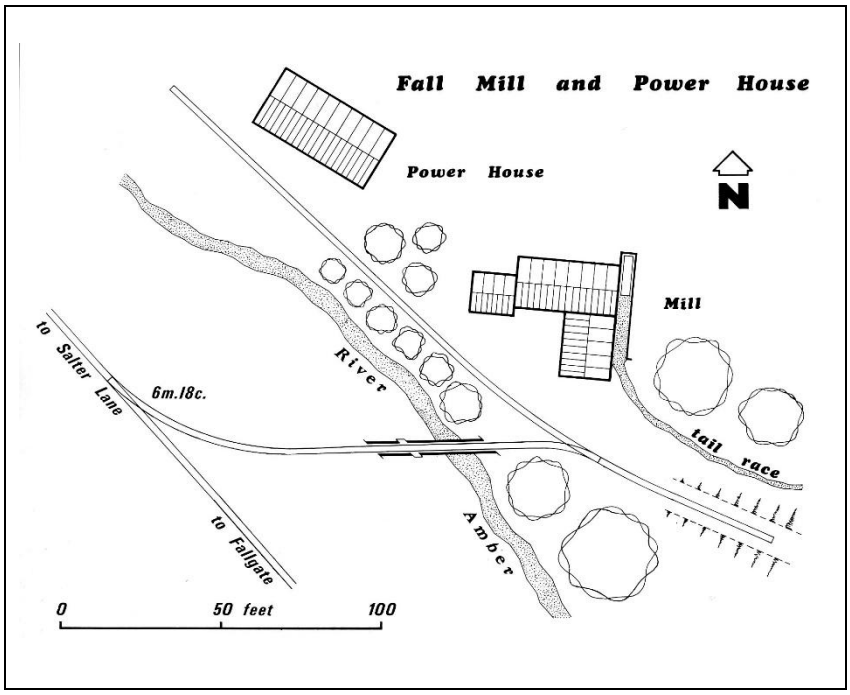
In 1985 the site was taken on by Ashover Parish Council and some restoration work was carried out; more work has been done recently prior to the conversion and sale of the building as a residence.

Information from Derbyshire Historic Environment Record
https://her.derbyshire.gov.uk/Monument/MDR5136

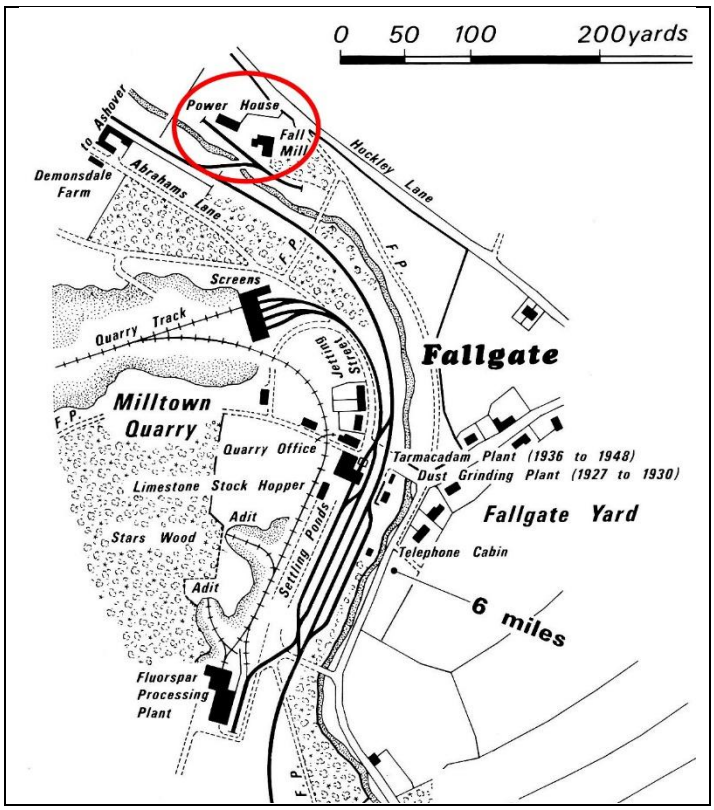
Fallgate Mill and the Clay Cross Company

The Clay Cross Company, founded (at Clay Cross! south of Chesterfield) in 1837 by George Stephenson, produced lime for roadstone, concrete, and so on.

In 1919 the Overton Estate near Ashover was purchased for its valuable mineral deposits, especially limestone and fluorspar, and a quarry was opened at Fallgate. The Ashover Light Railway was constructed to link the quarry to the Clay Cross works. A steam-powered electricity generating station ('power house') was built next to the mill in 1924 to provide power for the quarry. A siding from the railway served the mill and power house.



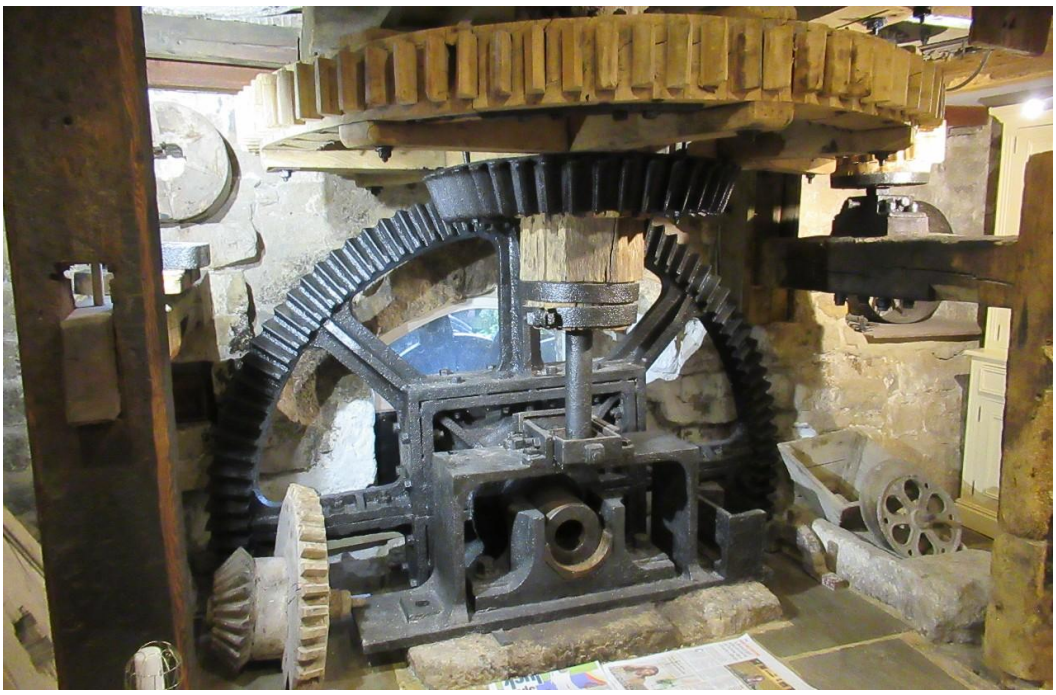
Fluorspar, composed of calcium and fluorine (CaF_2), is used in a wide variety of chemical, metallurgical, and ceramic processes. and was generally ground at a large plant south of the quarry (*see map*). Some customers required it more finely ground, and this was done at Fallgate Mill. It was dried by a gas-fired kiln (which replaced a coke-fired one) in the red pantiled front part of the mill, and then ground using the water-powered millstones, and loaded into wagons on the siding to be shipped out. At least one of these millstones is embedded in the kitchen floor.



The power house, built with materials from demolished buildings on the same site, with large cast iron windows.

Information from The Ashover Light Railway *by R Gratton and S R Band (Wild Swan, 1989)*

So here are some interior details.



(*Above*) Details of wear on the teeth of the great spur wheel and wallower

(*Right*) The kitchen floor has recently been relaid using worn out millstones. The nearer one must have been used for grinding fluorspar.

(*Above left*) At first glance, this is a bedstone, but it is actually an upside down runner stone, which at present is letting a cold draught into the living room upstairs.

(*Centre and right*) The restored stone spindle looks OK, but the stones above it are clearly not a matching pair. Also the layshaft and the crown wheel have been heavily 'restored' and fossilised by being cemented into the wall.

So much restoration work has been carried out a various times that it is hard to see what the stones were like when they were in use.

At the other end of the building the missing waterwheel drove an upright shaft, which is still in place along with its wallower. This is the only part of the machinery remaining on that side of the mill.

Externally there are also interesting features, and quite a lot of work to be done.

The cosmetically restored waterwheel needs some remedial work. At present the penstock is not attached to either its supports (which appear to be railway track) or the building, and has a lot of wood in its construction. Also, the new wooden bucket boards are too short, and the sole plate is completely missing, although its bolts are clearly visible.

The easiest immediate task will be to fit a new guard rail around the wheel pit.

There are various other interesting artefacts around like this wire machine, which is on the site of the other wheel pit (note the axle hole); also outside are a number of millstones and part of an axle bearing.

I'm sure several people reading this are already dreaming of a work party! Ruth and Michael bravely said anyone is welcome to visit; you can contact them through me. Finally I am very grateful to them for freely giving us access to their new home and spending so long showing us round – while they should really have been continuing to move in and doing more unpacking!