

Yearsley Mill, Yorkshire

Tony Yoward

In 2013, John Harrison, the Yorkshire mill expert, phoned me and said "Have you a George Yoward in your ancestors?". I searched my records and told him I have two George Yowards in the 1700s. My family history goes back to 1504 in the Yorkshire Moors south of Helmsley until the 1800s.

The earliest mention of Yearsley Mill is when it was sold by the Yearsley landowner, Weldon, to Fairfax of Gillingham in 1559. In the Rental Records of Gillingham for 1711-12, a George Yoward was paying £3-3s-4d for the mill. So I had a miller in my family! GEORGE YOWARD was my great-great-great grandfather. A document dated 1748 talks about 'the ould mill'; presumably it had gone before then.

As part of a Heritage Lottery project 'Lime and Ice', the Yearsley Moor Archaeological Project brought together a group of volunteers to investigate the stone foundations of a building described as 'Medieval or later'.



The group led by Elizabeth Sanderson had been excavating more of the remains of the building and uncovered the edge of a millstone. The site of Yearsley Mill had been found.

Remains of mill buildings and runner stone on Yearsley Moor in 2012

The volunteers then formed the Yearsley Mill Research Project, excavating in the next three years the remains of the hearth, the kiln/oven, the flagstone floor, the remains of the mill wheel and cog-wheel and masses of pottery sherds. They applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund to do more documentary research.



Excavation of the cog-pit exposed cuts in the bed rock which supported the hurst frame and axle and further digging revealed support posts which carried the water to the top of the overshot water wheel. The buckets measured 20cm in width, 21cm in depth, and the overall external diameter of the wheel was estimated at 4.5m.



The Forestry Commission opened a display of the mill at the Visitors Centre in Dalby Forest in February 2018. I was invited to the launch and was able to meet some of the volunteers, who were thrilled to have been able to trace a descendant of the first known miller, living in the south of England, and with an interest in watermills.