

Overton Silk Mill Site

Ruth Andrews

Photos by Richard Waldram and Ruth Andrews

During October 2017 the Environment Agency/Natural England did some work landscaping and restoring the river bed at the Overton silk mill site. This involved damming the channel, and removing a small waterwheel, Armfield turbine, and associated brickwork.



In 1994 I had taken a photo (*left*) of the site which shows the installation at an earlier stage of its decay. The metalwork has now been hauled out of the river (*photos below*) and the associated brickwork removed. It powered a generator and pump, probably installed in about 1910 to supply water and electricity to Southington House.



We now know that it was situated in the wheelpit of the 1769 Overton Silk Mill, or a reused wheelpit on the same site. In the 16th and 17th centuries there were several mills in Overton, including a corn mill and a fulling mill. Richard Waldram contacted HMG because a

Community Volunteer Project managed by Overton Parish Council had been set up to examine the river bed while it was dry. Amongst the early finds were two pieces of millstone which he needed help to identify. This photo is of the newly excavated stones.

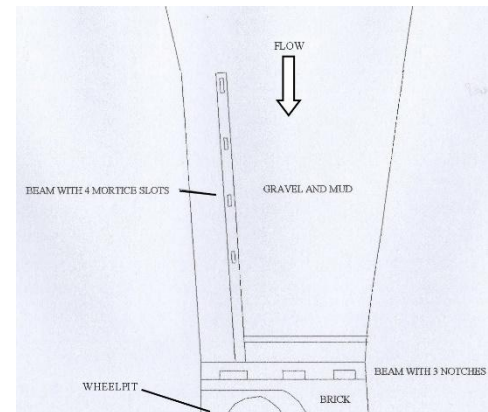


Now they have been on dry land for a couple of months they are obviously French burr stones but they are quite weathered and pitted, and had picked up a lot of loose mud and gravel during their time in the river, making them look disconcertingly like gritstone.

As the workforce cleared the accumulation of silt from the site, they also found several stout timbers in the river bed. Dendrochronology established that these were felled between 1760 and 1793, making it almost certain that they were associated with the silk mill, built in 1769.



They are situated just upstream of the wheelpit, and so may be part of the sluices and a training wall.



In addition, the curved stones of the silk mill's wheelpit were uncovered and removed.

Richard had the presence of mind to use one of the stones to establish the waterwheel's diameter, which was 217cm, about 7ft.



The river now flows in a unobstructed channel and all traces of the earlier works have gone, apart from a few patches of limescale on the brick edges.

A full report of the excavation and its findings is being prepared, and there has been a free public meeting to explain the project. Several HMG committee members attended this meeting and later examined the site.

Many thanks to the owners of Southington House for allowing us access and to Richard Waldram for arranging this visit.