

## New Mills Industrial Landscape

***Ruth Andrews***

In 2016 Keith and I visited New Mills near Manchester. The name was first used in 1391 and referred to a corn mill on the river Goyt. Despite having grown up 30 or so miles north of it, and vaguely knowing the area, I was interested to discover its amazing collection of mills.

The rivers Goyt and Sett have carved out a spectacular 30m deep sandstone gorge called The Torrs, which virtually cuts the town in half. It is spanned by Church Road bridge built in 1835 to carry the turnpike road and the railway bridge of 1860; then in 1884 the imposing 29m high Union Road bridge was constructed across the centre of the gorge, and is now its most outstanding feature (*right*).



From the 1780s onwards a series of cotton mills were constructed alongside the river. Most are now derelict or converted to residential use, although one former mill makes 'Swizzels' love heart sweets.

The shell of Torr Mill, which burnt down in 1912 and was not rebuilt, provides a setting for the Torrs Hydro (*top and middle*). This is a reverse Archimedean screw, which generates electricity for the Co-op store in New Mills, any surplus being sold to the National Grid. The hydro started to produce electricity in 2008 and was the first community-owned and -funded scheme in the country.

We had heard distant thunder as we started to walk down into the gorge, but then heavy rain forced us to take shelter for a while under Church Road bridge with its distinctive reinforcing arches (*middle*), and watch as the river became a raging muddy torrent, and the railway bridge developed an entertaining waterfall, leaking through the parapets (*bottom*)!



When the rain ceased, we finished our walk by traversing the Millennium Walkway which allows passage across the face of the railway embankments through the narrowest part of the gorge, opposite the unused and crumbling Torr Vale Mill. This mill dates from the 1780s and operated as a textile mill until 2000 – claimed to be the longest continuously operating cotton mill in England. It was quite scary walking on the narrow footway, especially with the swollen river rushing just below.

The walkway and Torr Vale mill (*top*) with the muddy river after the storm, and a view from above the railway (*bottom*) before the rain started.