

## Hampshire Mills Group – Midlands Trip 2015

### Andy Fish

Twelve H.M.G members set out from Chandlers Ford on a sunny Friday morning and travelled to the Midlands for our Annual trip. Our first stop was Charlecote Mill. Charlecote is not a museum, occasionally grinding flour as many water and windmills now are, but is a piece of living working history and one of only a small handful of surviving commercial working watermills. Producing traditionally stone-ground flours through French Burr Stones every weekday (when the water levels allow). The mill is a constant hive of activity but retains all the atmosphere and charm of a mill run in Victorian times.

We then moved on to The Forge Mill Needle Museum at Redditch where we were given a tour of the 18<sup>th</sup> century needle scouring mill and although the workers, men, women and children were relatively well paid, they worked hard in poor conditions. They also had a very short life expectancy due to dusty working conditions and lack of safety equipment.

After tea and cake we then traveled on to Churchill Forge water mill near Kidderminster. This water mill was one of the last working water powered forge mills in Britain, producing metal tools such as spades, shovels and ladles until the early 1970s. It lies in the valley of the Ganlow Brook which rises in the Clent Hills in North Worcestershire, and flows down to meet the River Stour, which itself is a tributary of the Severn.

The power for the forge is provided by two water wheels. The water to turn these wheels is stored in "Hammer Pond" - a pool, some two acres in extent and created by damming up Ganlow Brook. After looking around their extremely interesting Museum we went to our hotel for our first night's stop.

Saturday morning and our first stop was New Hall Mill Walmley. The Mill is a two and a half storey high building of the 18th century, although parts of the mill and cottage are from an earlier age and could have been part of the first mill on the site, probably around the 1500s. In 1899 a loaf of bread made from wheat that had been cut, threshed, milled and baked all on the same day was sent to Queen Victoria.

Since then, this feat has been repeated twice to commemorate the Silver and Golden Jubilees of Queen Elizabeth II. Walmley has a very unusual automatic stone dressing machine that was made in America in the late 1800s, thought to be the only one of this type that survives.

From Walmley we travelled north to Cheddleton Flint Mill, a fine example of a grade II\* listed water mill that ground flint for the pottery industry. The site features two water wheels, a small museum, a period cottage, the canal and many other exhibits. The Cheddleton Flint Mill Preservation Trust was formed in 1967 to preserve the unique mill complex and provide educational information concerning the historical development of pottery raw materials.

In 1972 the Trust widened its objectives to encompass more of Britain's Industrial Heritage and became the Cheddleton Flint Mill Industrial Heritage Trust.

We then travelled about 5 miles to see Brindley's Mill at Leek. This working water powered corn mill was built in 1752 by James Brindley, millwright and canal engineer, renowned as the pioneer of the canal system in Great Britain. The Mill is the only known corn mill attributable to James. It was restored from a derelict state by the Brindley Mill Preservation Trust in 1974.

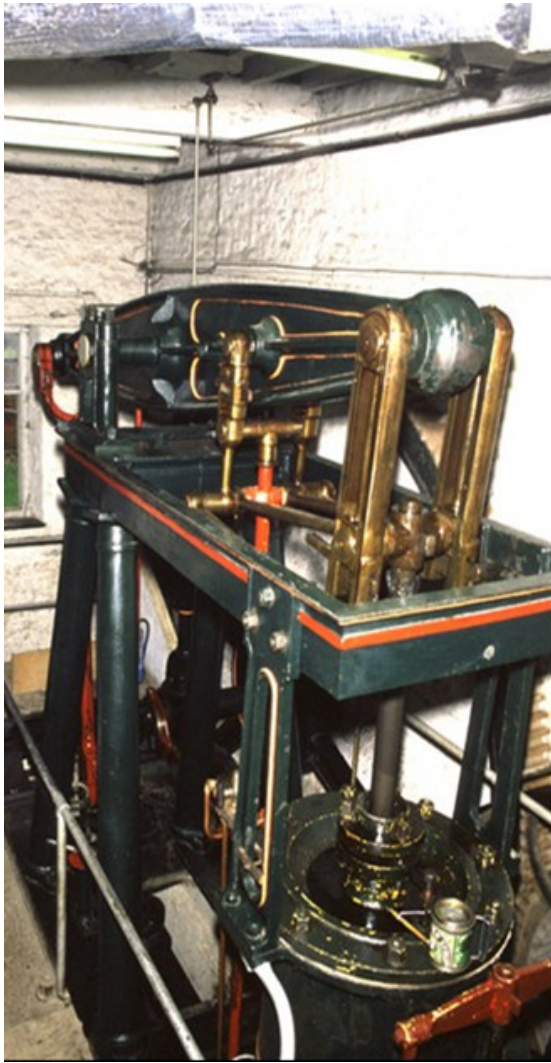
The Mill demonstrates Brindley's work both as an architect and a millwright. It is a designated Ancient Monument and listed by English Heritage as of historic importance.

After leaving Leek we travelled through the High Peaks to Caudwell's Mill, Rowsley, just south of Bakewell. In 1874, John Caudwell took a lease from the Duke of Rutland, demolished the existing two mills, which were then derelict, and built a huge flour and provender mill powered by two large breast shot water wheels. The flour mill had eight sets of millstones and the provender mill had three more. Eleven years later, following the International Milling Exhibition in London, Caudwell started to upgrade the mill by replacing some of the stones with newly developed roller mills.

After the installation of the roller mills, the water wheels did not provide enough power and water turbines replaced them. In all, the mill contains 22 pairs of roller mills. Two purifiers and the four plansifters ensured the flour was fine enough to be sold to bakers.

Visitors today can see a fine example on all four floors of an early water powered roller mill as a complete "machine", believed to be the only such mill left in Europe that can be visited. We then set off on the 100 mile journey back to our Hotel in Kidderminster.

Sunday Morning: after a hearty breakfast at a local greasy spoon, we set off towards Oxford to visit Combe Steam & Watermill belonging to the Blenheim Estate of the Duke of Marlborough. Fortunately the 1852 Beam engine was in steam, a treat to us all. The waterwheel however has lost its main water supply and is now fed by a 10inch pipe. We were also treated to a display of Morris Eights Series E, two pre-war and one post-war model.



**Beam Engine Coombe Mill (left)**

© copyright Chris Allen and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons Licence.



**Wheatley Windmill (right)**

© Copyright Mike Harris and licensed for reuse under this Creative Commons Licence.

final destination for the weekend was Wheatley Windmill. This mill is distinctly unusual; it is an octagonal shaped three storey 18th Century tower mill. There were originally four sails (which turned clockwise rather than the more usual anti-clock) but for a time the windmill operated on two sails only. Ochre was mined at Shotover and Wheatley until the early 20th Century.

The Windmill at Wheatley was adapted to grind the ochres which were used as raw pigment and they were also burned to form red ochre pigments that were used by Artists. The mill was last used in 1914 when the mill closed and fell into disrepair.

It was struck by lightning in 1939 and the cap and sails were destroyed. The Wheatley Windmill Restoration Society has been restoring the windmill since 1977 and it is open to the public. The last major item left to be restored is the Boulter and work will hopefully be carried out next winter. So far, just over £1500 has been raised with another £1500 to be found. Tea and cakes were consumed before our final drive down the A34 to Chandlers Ford.

