

Daytripping the Golden Valley of Gloucestershire Textiles

Photos and text by Alan Cullen

In the spring edition of the HMG newsletter, I noticed the Stroud trip advert. This caught my imagination, so, after due consideration about such things as: is it too far considering where I live, and, can I fit it in at the busiest time for my garden machinery business, I gave John Silman a quick call and he fitted us in, just. My wife was not allowed a day off, so my brother was offered the outing instead. As he is retired I suggested it could be an early start and duly collected him at 5.30 a.m. and we set off for the 100 mile journey to Winchester. One and a half hours on the road got us to our first destination, Winchester Park and Ride. A short wait and along came the minibus which whisked us off to the Stroud Valley region. As all journeys go, there was plenty to see and listen to the remarks from other like-minded people. A brief comfort stop and on to Stroud.

We drove over one of only a handful of remaining manned level crossings on the rail network and into the site of St. Mary's Mill. A mill had stood here since 1338 and the current building houses a magnificent Tangye horizontal mill engine dating back to 1904, which even then was secondhand from a mill in Rochdale, Lancashire. This engine is well kept and looks superb. Outside we saw the building that, thanks to the ash and clinker being constantly emptied in front of it, is now one storey lower than when originally built – and seen in the early photographs. The allotted 45 minutes passed far too quickly and we all boarded the minibus for our next stop, which was to be Stanley Mill, fairly nearby in Stonehouse.



St Mary's Mill Chalford



Tangye Horizontal Mill Engine

Stanley Mill is a stupendous building, well not just a building more an absolutely superb piece of engineering. The main mill is five storeys high, brick built, and is iron framed with brick arched floors; all supported by cast iron columns. An amazing structure, it was built in 1812 and is an early fireproof mill.



Stanley Mill



Stanley Mill machinery for educational demonstrations



Cast iron arches at Stanley Mill



Egypt Mill

Egypt Mill was next on the list for lunch. An idyllic setting, whether inside or outside in the sunshine.

I opted out of lunch altogether so as to take a stroll around the town which had some very interesting buildings to be seen.

Along the road from Egypt, to the eastern end of Nailsworth, we went to Gig Mill, interestingly different. A little cramped, nevertheless some excellent demonstrations of weaving were given on old and new machinery.

With time ticking by, we were treated to a chance to see the largest working waterwheel in Gloucestershire; this being in the Dunkirk Mill. Previously, we were taught about the weaving process, this time we saw the processes of fulling, teasel knap-raising and cross cutting.

To round off an incredibly interesting day, we returned to Egypt Mill for a drink by the mill pond where we had a chance to reflect on a marvellous time and catch one's breath. Some wonderful scenery was enjoyed via Minchinhampton Common on our return journey.

Safely returned to Winchester, my brother and I motored homeward via the A272, with a quick stop in Midhurst for a good old English fish and chip supper which rounded the day off perfectly.

To the group's organisers: Thanks, we will be on the next trip. That day was nothing short of excellent.