

## MILLING ABOUT IN THE MARCHES PART 2

by Sheila Viner

The first two days of our tour around watermills throughout the Herefordshire and Shropshire borders were described in the winter edition of the newsletter. Here we pick up the tour on the morning of Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October.

The geography (and frequent rain) has created beautiful, verdant scenery which these days provides wonderful holiday respite for many of us, but this is so very different to how life used to be in this region. Advising us on lots of industrial history, much of it tying in with the mills, our host and guide Alan Stoyel, took us on a fascinating trip into an area of surprising and varied past industries which created towns for workforces in times of prosperity.

Our first port of call was **Court Noke Farm, Pembridge**. This was a very different setup to all the other watermills we were to see throughout our four day tour as the mill formed part of a brick built “model” farm with barns on either side, constructed in the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. We were allowed to wander beside the watercourse, threading through the grounds as a water garden, which was fed by a leat from the River Arrow and snaked around, through sluices, to power the watermill. Only one pair of stones was required here as the mill was generally used to produce winter feed for the Hereford herd of cattle; farm machinery including a chaff cutter and a root pulper were also operated, being belt driven by the wheel. Miles of Leominster (a company whose machinery cropped up time and again) had engineered the low-breast waterwheel and much complex iron gearing. The wheel and its housing are in a very sorry state now but the owners, Edward and Emma Bulmer, have plans to restore the mill and farm complex within the next year.



John inspecting the wheel at Staunton Mill

Just a little further along the river we were welcomed by Anne Brisbane, owner of **Staunton Mill**, which she enjoys maintaining for enthusiastic visitors. A complex system of irrigation channels feeding the mill and water meadows, downstream, were devised when the mill was originally constructed in 1665 as a cornmill. Few of the channels are now seen but the leat still continues beside the mill. Rebuilt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century of stone, this mill was both attractive

and intriguing to see outside but inside was like finding treasure trove.



Bill tries out the sack hoist at Staunton Mill

So much machinery was in situ, including the sack hoist, three of the original four pairs of stones, a bolter plus remnants of a wire-machine dresser or cleaner. The tentering arrangement is an unusual one being a lighter-staff tentering on all of the stones. There two cast iron overshot wheels, an internal one with iron buckets fitted to wooden shafts and the external one

originally with wooden buckets, but now just rims on their axle. A clover mill had once been installed on the top floor above the internal wheel end and it was there that we could admire the re-used 17<sup>th</sup> century roof trusses. Another set of crafts were seen there in the perfect form of vacated wasps nests! On the ground floor, Alan demonstrated a variation on the mill's stable



A brief stop at **The Leen Farm Wheel** where, half hidden in a hedgerow, on the opposite side of a farm entrance track to a large barn, we saw an iron wheel with a diameter measuring 14 feet by 4 feet wide. Made by a Hereford millwright, Thomas Bray in the 1860s, it was fed by a very long leat, again from the River Arrow, via one of two weirs at **Court of Noke**. It's believed that it was used to power a small corn mill and a leather dressing mill which were in the barn on the opposite side of the farm track and operation was by means of a long, rotary shaft passing beneath the track. Restored some twenty years ago by the farm owner, Tony Norman, the wheel is once again falling into disrepair. Nothing remains of any mill buildings or gearings.

Court of Noke Watermill



Arrow Mill, and showing the waterwheel

A very unusual building, boldly showing its “mixed parentage” down the centuries is **Arrow Mill** at Kingsland, but delightful in its quirkiness. Annabelle and Richard Hall, the owners, happily let us loose after an introduction to some of its history. Boasting several rare items such as the beaten earth meal floor, a complete clover mill in place and a half-timbered, vertical extension to accommodate a hop kiln, all within the same building, help to make this a very special mill. Alan confessed that out of all the mills on the tour, this was his favourite. He pointed out to us what he called “an eccentric arrangement of arms on the waterwheel” plus an eel trap in the by-pass channel.

Before leaving Kingsland, we paused to view **Waterloo Mill**. Thought to have once had three sets of stones driven by a lay-shaft (like the one we had seen at Aymestrey Mill the day before) this derelict mill was built in 1815 on the Pinsley Brook. Its 18ft diameter by 9ft wide low-breast waterwheel was another made, in 1861, by Miles of Leominster.

Alan next guided us to Leominster (yes, home of the machinery manufacturing firm, Miles!) but oddly, still with the Pinsley Brook. Originally supplying water to the Priory Mill the Brook was

filled in as part of the flood alleviation scheme in the early 1960s. Corn, oil and, lastly, leather was milled until its closure in 1850.

We also learned that a hat factory, also powered by water, had been sited nearby. A short, but welcomed walk, took us to **Pinsley Mill** associated with Leominster Priory. This mill had a chequered life as a corn mill, conversion to a cotton spinning mill destroyed by fire, to be rebuilt as a corn mill. **John Arkwright** (son of the famous Richard) lived nearby and bought the mill in 1833, not to work himself, but leasing it to several consecutive millers\*. In 1890 great modernising changes were made as tenant, Joseph Cooke, replaced the waterwheel with an Armfield “British Empire” 2ft 6” diameter turbine producing 49 horse-power; this was boosted by a gas engine with associated coal-gas plant 2½ to 3 sack roller plant using just two pairs of millstones. In 1907 Mr Cooke purchased the mill and sold it on three years later. Milling ceased during the Second World War.

\*The entrepreneurial Mr Arkwright owned another mill close by in Etnam Street but the digging of a deep channel leading directly from the tailrace to Pinsley Mill helped to put this one out of business in 1864.

Leominster is not without humour as witnessed in the park - a grass giant was rolling the lawns and proved an excellent poseur. A fine iron bridge bearing the legend “Worcester Foundry 1844” bore our footpath over the River Lugg. The Rivers Arrow and Lugg travel around either side of Leominster, coming together just below the town to continue on as the River Lugg until it meets with the River Wye at Hereford. Back to the tour bus and on to meet our next mill owners.



John and Rosemary Verity, who once lived at Petersfield while John was stationed at HMS Mercury, welcomed us to **Croward's Mill at Eyton** where they have enjoyed living for the past seven years. The site of this ancient corn mill is recorded in 1327 but the current building has seen changes through the centuries. It stopped being used to mill corn in 1948 but, it's believed, continued to power a circular saw via a belt drive for some time afterwards. In 1976 planning permission was granted for residential use and the building converted into two dwellings. At this point an internal waterwheel and its machinery was removed but, fortunately, the Veritys recognised the value of retaining as much machinery in situ as possible and have found a way of living around it.

Crowards Mill

For instance, the crown wheel above the tuns is in action as a very functional wine rack! The small area of the stones floor is in service as a snug cum study. In the passageway linking the kitchen to reception rooms a glass door in the wall reveals the gearing, tools and unusual tentering arrangement which powered two pairs of stones on the ground floor (in what is now the dining room) where the 18th century hurst frame is still evident. Outside, the iron low-breast

waterwheel, cast by Charles O. Phillips of Gloucester and Newport, is still in reasonable order. It measures 11 ft diameter x 3 ft 4 ½ ins and is of an unusual design having circular apertures in the shrouds.

John Arkwright puts in another appearance, here in this mill's history, as he attempted to acquire it in 1849 by offering the owner, Lord Bateman of Shobdon £1,800. The offer, however, was spurned.

The last two mills of the day, still in Kingsland, were viewed only briefly as the daylight was fading. Although little could be seen, both sported unusual features and were linked by the irrigation of the water meadows. **Lugg Mill** at Kingsland boasted flying buttresses over two wheel races whilst the 15ft diameter **Day House Farm Wheel** stood stranded in splendid isolation beside an Iron aqueduct which had supplied water by means of a bypass sluice from **Lugg Mill's** pond and leat. These became in-filled and levelled some time ago. The **Lugg Mill** building had had two waterwheels, one each on the north and the south sides and this is where the flying buttresses were sited over each wheel-race.

Up until the early 1940s, the **Day House Farm Wheel** drove farm machinery and a threshing machine. A barn originally stood alongside and again much of the watercourse has been filled in and levelled off belying the fact that water travelled approximately three miles in the channels to and from the River Lugg.

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> October. The final day and just three mills to visit before a farewell feast at a good pub. First up was **Westbrook Manor Farm, Clifford** and, as its name implies, a different little watercourse, the West Brook. Here was another example of a farm mill whose wheel was on one side of a road with a very long shaft connecting from it to the machinery in a barn on the other side. We learned that the shaft had not been removed but was now truncated where it entered the barn wall. As the barn walls were surrounded by scaffolding due to it undergoing extensive building works for conversion to dwellings, Alan helped us to imagine the sitting of the gearing and mill machinery. It is understood that the waterwheel will be preserved.



**Home Farm, Dulas** was built as a model farm on the Dulas Court Estate in 1865 and the mill building was integral to the barns around the farmyard. This small, all brick watermill last worked in 1965 and the last miller, along with the farm owners Maddy and Will Bradley, was present to meet us and explain the workings. The frame that held the sluices controlling the mill race/culvert from the nearby Dulas Brook is still evident but the sluices themselves need restoring. This part of the brook also lent itself well to use as a sheep wash.

Home Farm, Dulas. John presents flour to owners Mandy and Will

Despite most of the other farm buildings being converted for such diverse uses as holiday cottages and the farm machinery dispensed with, the mill happily retains its primary gearings and French burr stones. The stones were connected to the waterwheel by means of arms from the wheel attached to a ring gear, and a short layshaft leading to another pair of gears (and thence to the stones). Belt drives hitched to further layshafts into the barn drove the farm

machinery for threshing, chaff cutting and animal fodder preparation. Will and Maddy Bradley are keen to eventually get the wheel working again.

Another delightful surprise and totally different milling setup was the very last mill of our four day tour as we were welcomed by owners, Martin and Jill Cook, to **Clodock Mill, at Longtown &**



**Clodock** They related the tale of the long access track being flooded a foot deep only a week before which began to threaten their mill house dwelling and caused consternation regarding our intended visit. The River Monnow, flowing in parallel to the drive and with a brief leat to the mill wheel, was the broadest we encountered on this trip measuring some twelve feet across and fast flowing. This small, traditional corn mill captivated everybody as its history, both in the telling and in the seeing, unfolded. Martin and Jill are undertaking painstaking conservation and restoration work to have everything in full working order.

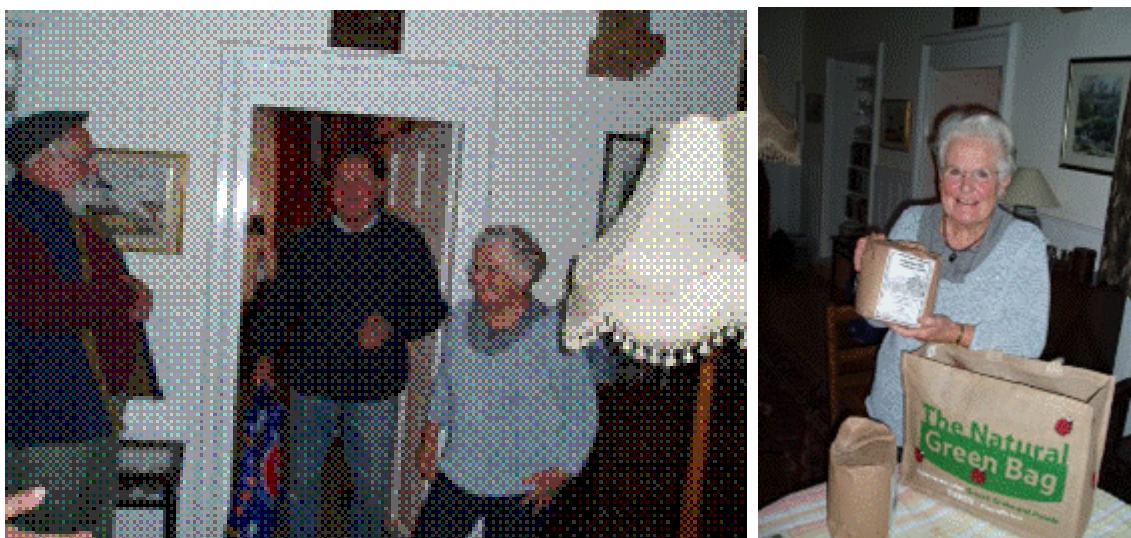
Clodock Mill



They told us that there is documentary evidence for a mill at Clodock dating from AD1241, when it was in the lordship of the de Lacy family but there may well have been one in existence prior to them building Longtown Castle close by. The existing stone buildings date from the 17<sup>th</sup> with later additions through the following centuries. 1954 saw the mills last working days, but it is hoped that leat running through a tunnel under the road and into the headrace will soon be powering the massive 18ft breastshot wheel.

18' by 5' waterwheel at Clodock Mill

Miles of Leominster made this in their foundry in 1868 when it replaced a smaller, undershot wooden wheel. The spokes, buckets and shaft are all receiving restoration attention. The wheel seems surprisingly large for the amount of water flow and is only required to power two sets of stones; one each of Peak and French Burr. Inside, all the gearings and machinery remain including a dressing machine and a saw bench. Offset to the buildings, on the riverbank, a small turbine is housed and this provided electricity until mains supply was installed in 1968. The Cooks are intending to install a modern, micro hydroelectric scheme eventually. One speciality at this mill is the roost of Lesser Horseshoe Bats which return each spring to raise their new families.



Mick with our hosts Alan and Critchell, and Critchell with her bag of Longbridge flour

Over lunch at the village pub we reflected over our twenty or so mills, isolated waterwheels, and all the considerate people who had allowed access to make this trip so memorable, not least of whom was Alan Stoyel who organised the whole venture and gave us, not only his time, an immense amount of knowledge of this lovely area's industrial heritage. Mick Edgeworth, our Chairman, presented Alan, and his delightful partner, Critchell, with several bottles of wine. Wherever we met mill owners or custodians, John Silman proudly presented a 2kg bag of Longbridge Stoneground Wholemeal Flour which Hampshire Mills Group members had milled. So, Critchell was also given a few bags of flour to replenish her larder as we had made short work of the cakes she had made and supplied with many pots of tea.

More detailed descriptions of the mills appear in an illustrated handbook available from Andy Fish.

The maps used for this trip were: OS Landranger 137 Ludlow, Wenlock Edge; 148 Presteigne & Hay-on-Wye; and 149 Hereford, Leominster and surrounding areas.