

GUN'S MILLS, ABENHALL

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There is now incontrovertible proof that this site is named after William Gunn, the owner or occupier of this mill site in 1620.

Gun's Mills (SO 675159) is the most important charcoal blast furnace site remaining today in the Forest of Dean. It is described in the GSIA Journal 1974 pp 17-40. It was owned by that colourful personality Sir John Wintour and later by the Toley family. After 1742 it was a paper mill.

The Rev. H.G. Nicholls began a misleading explanation of the name 'Gun' in his classic work on the History of the Forest of Dean in 1858, when he wrote (p 219) -

"In 1621 Messrs. Chaloner and Harris ... we may presume, cast the 610 guns ordered by the Crown on behalf of the States General of Holland in 1629. The spot where they were made was, it would seem, ever after called Guns Mills. It certainly was so called as early as the year 1680, an explanation of the term which is confirmed by the discovery there of an ancient piece of ordnance. 'Guns Mill' was the place where they were afterwards shipped."

The present writer has been suspicious of this interpretation for some years. This suspicion was based on the following points:

- 1) It is the only ironworks in the area called 'mills'.
- 2) A perambulation of the manor of Abenhall dated circa 1640 states:

"to An Iron Works of Sir John Winter's knight anciently called Gunne's mille" (G.R.O. D 36 M17)

Another perambulation has now been located in G.R.O. D 36 M2 dated 27 April 1620. This states:

"and thence to a mill of Willm. Gunne's anciently called cune's mill"

A William Gunne gent. is mentioned in the Gloucestershire Men and Armour 1608 for Mitcheldean as being about 40 years old and tall in stature. Three named servants to Wm. Gunne also are mentioned.

The mill that William Gunne had was probably a corn mill. Possibly the ironworks was built by Sir John Wintour.

The similarity of the wording of the two perambulations made me look at the later version again. On re-examination of the D 36 M17 document, the letter G of the name Gunnes seems to be a correction and overwriting of the letter c. The meaning of the name 'cunes mill' is obscure. We can be sure that there is no known evidence which clearly links the site with gun manufacture.

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