

A WALK UP THE WASHBROOK

by CHRISTOPHER COX

For some 30 years the writer's parents lived in the village of Edge near Painswick, and so there was ample opportunity to get to know the valley of the Washbrook, that small tributary to the main Painswick stream, and about whose cloth mills Mrs Haine has written so fully in this issue of the Journal.

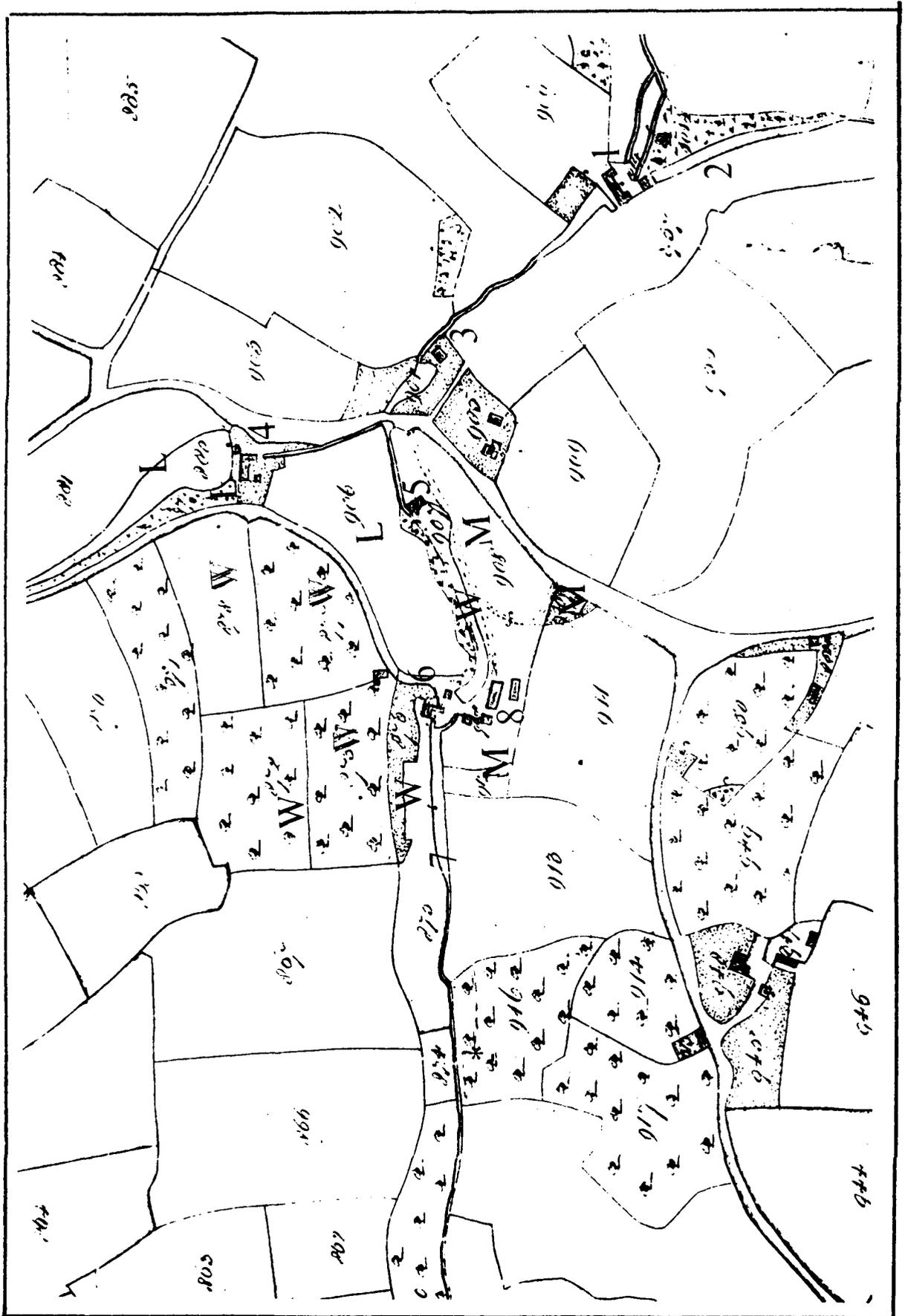
The valley itself is a geomorphological gem. Like so many - perhaps most - of the watercourses in the Stroudwater valleys, this little brook is a 'misfit', that is, it is inadequate in its present form to have been wholly responsible for the present shape of its valley. There are several changes of slope (from mini-plain to quasi-ravine), and the response of the brook to the different levels in its downward course does much to explain the siting of the various mills. Upper Doreys mill, for example, was able to pond up its water behind a constriction (probably due to landslip) in the valley sides; further downstream, the Washbrook mill is sited just above the point where the Washbrook cuts ever more deeply into the hillside before joining the main stream of the Painswick valley.

Within a short stretch of this valley, as the extract from the Painswick Tithe (Edge Tithing) map shows, the aspiring archaeologist will find an excellent introduction to an investigation into the remains of an industry based on water power - all at one time in the cloth trade. So with Mrs Haine's account to hand, and using the footpaths (!) it is possible to observe the sites, and scanty remains, of a one-time rural industry. And all too clearly it can be seen how quickly buildings, mill-ponds and dams can disappear: and how too manufactories which have lost their function can either vanish - or be changed to alternative use. What happened so recently to industrial sites is now, of course, also happening to farms, and this area can provide many examples of that change of function too.

The numbers on the Tithe map extract refer of course to the Award Book - owner, occupier, area, use etc. This, and the map itself, can be seen in the Gloucestershire Records Office.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR?

- 1 The Washbrook mill. The siting of the mill, and the outline of the mill pond. Note the carving over the doorway, for which see Mrs Haine's article on this mill.
- 2 The "reserve" pond. This is hardly shown on the 6 in. Ordnance map of the 1950s, but appears both on the Tithe map and on Bryant's map. First seen by the writer in company with Lionel Walrond of the Stroud Museum, it still retained water. As it had been fed by the rill below the Edgemoor Inn (formerly the Gloucester House) on the Stroud-Gloucester road, which had been diverted towards the mill, the resumption of that rill's natural course prevented the pond from silting up like the other mill ponds in this valley.



3 The Little or Upper mill. In the 1960s it was still in use as a cowshed. Inside one could make out the water entry, the wheel marks on the wall, and various bits of machinery. Of three floors, the 1st floor bore a good stone fireplace: the floors themselves had disappeared. Outside, hillside soil-creep had all but covered the hillside window. The mill-pond was outlined by a few willows; part of the stone sluice gate was still there. (See photo). The building has now been enlarged/rebuilt, and is a dwelling house.

4 Little's mill. Just up the Painswick road, reached over a stile on the left-hand side. All that remained was the low mound of the dam, and the level stretch of the silted-up mill-pond. As with the Washbrook "reserve" pond, the rill that fed this pond was very small indeed. Nothing besides remains ...

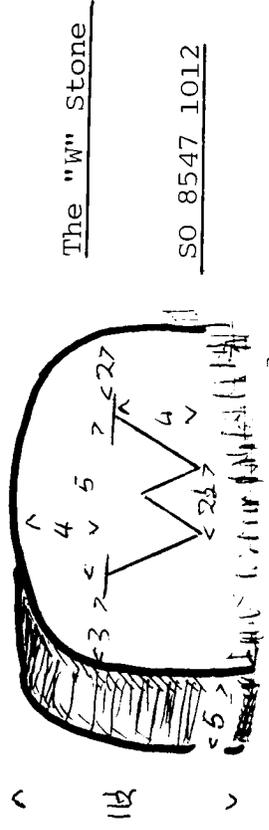
5 Lower Doreys mill. Just above the road bridge, the low mound of the dam can still be seen together with some stonework (see photo). No trace of the buildings can be seen, and the pond too is almost undetectable. But on one occasion, a small fish was seen lurking in the brook, outlasting the works of man.

6 Upper Doreys mill. Part of the mill building survives, though derelict (or was when last seen). The former access road can be made out. Little remains of the dam itself

(see Mrs Haine's account), but the buildings on the other side of the brook are still there, now dwellings. These appear in the background of the photo of Lower Doreys.

9 Upper Doreys mill-pond. Not much can be seen of this now, though the flat silted area, as with Little's mill, indicated its size and position. We may note that the Washbrook is busily cutting itself a new course through the silt that now fills the former pond.

This leads us to a small puzzle. Miss Faith Gray (now Mrs Hale of Brookthorpe) pointed out to the writer a round-headed stone at the corner of a narrow enclosure by the stream at the head of the pond, which bore the letter W. 19th century maps show that a good deal of field rearrangement took place, and this particular field & hedge does not appear on the Tithe map. A reasonable conjecture is that it marked a water right of Sam Wood, perhaps against possible infringement by the Marling firm (see J Tann's book on Gloucestershire Woollen Mills). Two similar stones were seen 20 years ago on the leat and stream above Upton mill - but a recent visit showed that the leat there, and one stone had gone (the other was not visited).



The "W" Stone

SO 8547 1012

Note: there is no public footpath leading to this site.

There is another puzzle higher up the brook. This one is approachable by a footpath, leading down the former road from Podgwell Barn past Edge Farm across the valley. Just where this path crosses the Washbrook, is the remains of a pond and two stone pillars of a narrow gateway. The Tithe map shows a building on the downstream side of the path, and the Award Book has "cottage" here. The writer was told in the 1960s by a local inhabitant that an old lady was used to hump her sack of grain down the slope to be ground here. This may however be a confusion with one of the other grist mills, as no habitation appears on later maps, and Mrs Haine has found no indication whatsoever of a mill building having stood here. However, there clearly was some sort of water-pound here, but at present its purpose remains unknown ... Unless anyone knows better?

Christopher Cox

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WASHBROOK MILLS in 1961

The Little/Upper mill from road bridge: willow stumps show edge of former pond.

Lower Doreys site looking upstream. Dam and stonework shown. In background, workshops of Upper Doreys.

Sluice of the Little/Upper mill.

