

## COOMBEND BONE MILL, ELKSTONE

A NOTE

by JOHN GARRETT

The revised six inch map of Gloucestershire, sheet XLIII NW, of 1903, shows a site south of Coombend Manor in the parish of Elkstone, marked as Bone Mill (Disused). This is at Grid reference SO 983110, and is on private land. With the landowner's permission, a visit to the site was made in the spring of 1986, some photographs taken and simple observations made. The surviving buildings consist of a roofed barn or storage shed, approximately 38 x 18 ft., and the ruined and roofless mill building approximately 45 x 34 ft, with an overshot iron water-wheel of approximately 28 ft. diameter still in place. There are also four gear wheels, including a bevel gear and vertical and horizontal shafting to be seen. Water was supplied from a pond further up the valley by a leat some 75 yards long.

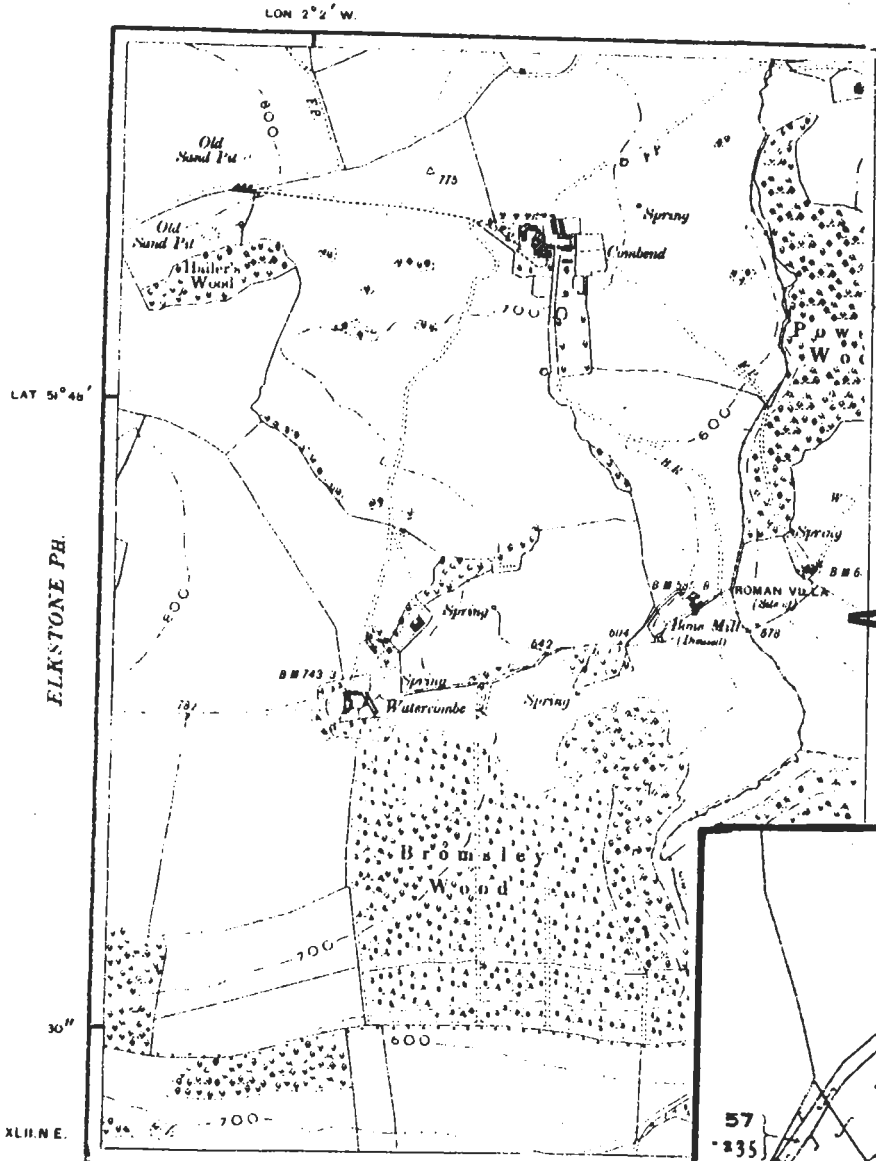
While collecting material for a life of Charles Baker, nineteenth century surveyor, civil engineer and architect of Painswick, some interesting information was obtained relating to this mill. One of the last turnpike roads to be proposed in Gloucestershire was the Upton St. Leonards, Birdlip & Brimpsfield Turnpike Road, for which an Act was obtained in 1853 (16,17 Vic. cap 126), but which was never built. Charles Baker and his son proposed a route up the Cotswold scarp to Prinknash by moderate gradients. In June 1853 a House of Commons Select Committee heard evidence concerning this road, and this is preserved in the House of Lords Record Office.

One of the principal witnesses was Peter Mathews, the tenant of Coombend farm, who stated that for fourteen years he had had a bone mill there and that bone dust was very useful as a fertiliser for local farms. He collected the bones from Gloucester Docks where they arrived from Belgium and other places. He often had great difficulty in getting a load of two tons up Birdlip Hill with a team of six horses, owing to the badness of the road, largely due to its use by the quarry on the hill. He said the new road would enable the loads to be got up with only three horses, and would enable wheat to be sent to, and coal obtained from, Gloucester.

Further investigation has shown that this mill played an important part in the development of agriculture in the Cotswolds in the early part of the nineteenth century. Evidence for this comes from the article on Farming in Gloucestershire by J Bravender in the Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England for 1850. He stated that bone dust was often more beneficial than farmyard manure in the Cotswolds. Bones had been used for many years in Yorkshire and elsewhere, and were eventually introduced into Gloucestershire.

"Mr. Peter Mathews, a spirited farmer, erected a bone mill on his farm at Coombend and very soon his excellent turnip crops attracted attention. The use (of bones) ... has now become general."

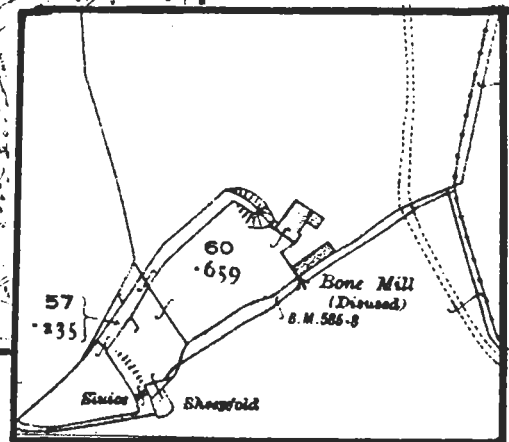
It is interesting that there still remains evidence of the great enterprise of Peter Mathews in starting up his bone mill



Coombend Bone Mill  
Elkstone

Gloucestershire  
six inch map,  
sheet XLIII NW  
1903

Inset from 25 in  
map of 1822.  
(Both scales reduced)



References

- Map of the Upton St. Leonards, Birdlip & Brimpsfield road,  
GRO D2216 Box 2.
- House of Commons Select Committees on Private Bills, Group S: 2 June  
1853, Upton St Leonards, Birdlip & Brimpsfield Road Bill.
- House of Lords Record Office: Minutes of evidence and plans.
- Bravender J; Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England  
1850 25, 116.
- Gloucester City Library, Glos. Collection J 10.4.

A note on James Savory. Jas. Savory appears in Slater's Directory  
of Gloucestershire for 1852-53 as - Engineer, Millwright, and Mach-  
ine Maker of High Street, Tewkesbury. The name continued to appear  
until the 1889 edition of Kelly's Directory.