

## **QUENINGTON CORN MILL AND ITS PERIPATETIC WATER WHEEL**

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with contributions from Lucy Abel Smith and Lionel Walrond

At the end of July 1969 the cast iron waterwheel from the former corn mill in the village of Quenington, eight miles east of Cirencester, was removed to Stroud Museum for preservation. In July 1998, not quite thirty years later, it was returned to Quenington village (although not to the mill itself) for display as a piece of village history.

This report summarises not only the story of the wanderings of the 12ft wheel, but also something of the history of the mill to which it belonged and access arrangements to see and enjoy the wheel in its new home in the future.

In compiling this report, the author acknowledges the considerable information gathered and made available from various sources, particularly by Lionel Walrond, formerly Curator of Stroud District Museum, and Lucy Abel Smith of the Old Rectory at Quenington, in whose grounds the wheel is now preserved and displayed.

### **Quenington and the River Coln**

Quenington is in the valley of the river Coln, which here follows a circuitous if picturesque route in a south-easterly direction between Bibury and Fairford. The village stands along but largely above the river on its western side.

The Victoria County History (1981) provides a brief summary of milling history on the river Coln in Quenington. Two mills are mentioned in the Domesday survey of 1086, presumably those occupying the site of a watermill and a fulling mill recorded in 1338. In the present day, these two sites are the former corn mill, now known as Old Mill House, at OS: SP 150042, and Knights Mill at OS: SP 148038. Both are now private houses.

### **The Corn Mill**

This mill is the upper of the two sites on the Coln, and is sited amongst other cottages and houses of the village alongside the river. The straight alignment of the mill leat can clearly be seen on the First Edition OS 1:2500 map of 1882, in sharp contrast to the winding course of the river (*fig one*).

The mill site consists of an L-shaped house and mill with a smaller mill cottage across the small yard. No date has yet been established for the surviving buildings, although they may be earlier than the 19th century date ascribed in VCH (p.125). They remain unlisted, presumably because of the comprehensive scale of rebuilding which was undertaken in 1969-71 (see below).

Other than the Domesday and 1338 references above, the next documentary reference is for 1507. The property was owned by Richard Morton early in the 18th century, by Richard

Aldridge in 1776, and was bought by Samuel Blackwell in 1783 to go with the manor. Pigot's Directory records Robert Avery as the miller in 1830 and 1842.

Thereafter, the directories of Morris & Co (1876) and Kelly's (1870-1939 passim) list the individuals involved. John Millin is "miller" in 1870 and one Emanuel Timbrell is a "mealman and grocer"; Mrs Mary Millin (?widow) has become the miller by 1876. In both these years, incidentally, there is a separate entry for the paper mill, where William Alfred West is listed as "paper manufacturer" (this reference does not re-appear subsequently).

In 1871, as part of an exchange, the corn mill was transferred to the Hatherop estate which had been purchased by Sir Thomas Bazley in 1867. Presumably as tenants, the Clifford family - firstly at Honeycombe Leaze Farm and later at Mawley Farm - appear as farmers and millers, Reuben Charles Clifford between 1879-97 and Ernest Clifford from 1906 through to 1939. Various millers in their turn are listed during this period : Geo. Timbrell (?son of Emanuel) in 1885, where he also ran the post office and grocer's shop; Philip Hall in 1889, who was also postmaster and corn merchant; and Lawrence Debney in 1894 and 1897.

A photograph of the mill house, seen from the lane, is included in a Hatherop Estate family album dating from c.1894, compiled for the Bazley family. A copy set of prints is deposited in the Cotswold Museums Service historical photograph archive at the Corinium Museum in Cirencester (accn.ref. 1989/124).

### **The Corn Mill waterwheel**

At an unrecorded date between 1871-81, Sir Thomas Bazley replaced the earlier wheel at the corn mill, with a new one made by (and still marked) **W.SAVORY & SONS GLOUCESTER**. This company had been established since 1851 as W & J Savory, Engineers, Millwrights and Machinists at High Orchard Works near Gloucester Docks. It already had other works in Painswick and Tewkesbury (*Gloucester Journal*, 16th August 1851, p.2). This business carried on until 1881, when it was taken over by T & W Summers, who set up new works in Madleaze Road just off the Bristol Road in 1889. Two years later, in a further transformation, this company became Summers & Scott.

The wheel has a 12 ft diameter, measures 4 ft across and weighs four tons. It is made of cast iron, and is a poncelet wheel, with curved blades rather than the more usual angular iron buckets. This type was described by one correspondent as "the most efficient type of under or breastshot wheel".

It was substantially restored in 1924 when a prosperous local sheep farmer, Mr Ernest Clifford, rented the mill and extensive farm land locally. Lionel Walrond's site survey and field notes recorded a date of **Nov. 21 1924** and the initials **AB** and **RW** cut into one end of the main beam supporting the two pairs of mill stones. The evidence of refurbishment also revealed that the wheel had replaced an earlier wheel which was 13ft 10ins in diameter.

Although the date when the mill ceased milling is not recorded, it remained in use at least until the late 1930's and possibly into the war years. It also retained its name locally as Clifford's mill. Mr Raymond Bailey was working there milling both corn and animal feed up

until 1937, when Mr Eddolls took over as foreman for the Williamstrip Estate. Other villagers could take their grain to the mill in nearby Coln, operated by Percy Mustoe.

### **Removing the wheel to Stroud**

In 1969 the then owner of the mill, Miss Patricia Cole of Ampney St. Peter, converted the disused building into living accommodation. The planning applications and accompanying drawings were submitted in June and August 1969 and are preserved in the archives of Cotswold District Council (as application number CT.4006). Cirencester builders Evans & Kibble undertook the building conversion.

The conversion process necessitated the removal of the wheel and associated machinery and equipment. These were all generously donated to the Stroud Museum, and duly removed into store there, the museum having previously checked that there was no interest in acquisition by the more local museums at Cirencester and Bibury. The removal was an interesting operation, spread over two days on 5th/6th August. The wheel was lifted out through the roof of the building, which had been removed as required for the purpose (*plate one*). This process of lifting-out took four hours overall. The mill was measured in section and in plan, with field notes and photographic recording of the process of removal.

The items were accessioned into the Stroud museum collections as:

- \* 1969/161 : water wheel and corn milling machinery
- \* 1969/162 : a grindstone in a cast iron frame
- \* 1969/163 : a bean crusher

Both grindstone and crusher were driven by water powered belt-drive at the mill. Earlier in the year a hand-operated chaff cutter, converted to water power, had also been collected.

A summary account of this activity is given in Walrond (1969), from which it is clear that the acquisition formed part of the then current proposal for a county-wide museum of folk life and industry for Gloucestershire, based upon the collections of Stroud Museum and to be sited in a suitable building in the Stroud Valleys. This proposal was a principal preoccupation at the time of the then still young Gloucestershire Society for Industrial Archaeology (GSIA), which is reflected in the earlier issues of this Journal's predecessor, the *Newsletter* (eg number 11 for February 1968).

Alas, this plan came to nothing, and the Quenington donation remained in store for nearly thirty years, latterly at Kimmins mill at Dudbridge. Museums are often criticised for keeping objects in store and not showing them. In this case, as preservation in situ was out of the question, the options were either destruction of the wheel at the time or rescue and recovery in the hope of better things to come at some time in the future.

It could well be argued that indeed this is what has happened, over two decades later and far removed from the original thinking which had justifiably led to the initial recovery (albeit a rather lonely affair, as Lionel Walrond laments in his summary), and the long-term care which followed.

### **On the move again**

In recent years, the requirements of the Museums & Galleries Commission nationwide Registration Scheme for museums (introduced for Gloucestershire from 1990) have involved a re-assessment of collecting policies by local museums in the public sector. This has frequently, as at Stroud, also stimulated a review of previous collecting arrangements and of existing holdings of objects, large and small.

On 12th July 1996, Cowle Museum Trustees (as object owners) in partnership with Stroud District Council gave approval for the disposal of a range of objects from the collections of the then Stroud District Museum, in accordance with the stringent requirements of the Registration process. Amongst other factors, objects for disposal have to be advertised as available to other museums within the Registration network, and the wishes taken into account not only of original donors or their descendants but also where applicable of the communities whence objects were derived in the first place.

Amongst the schedule of objects for such consideration was the Quenington waterwheel, on grounds of its size and state of preservation, the lack of appropriate storage, and the unlikely prospect of it being suitably displayed as part of the museum's own development plans. A further factor was an acknowledgement that collecting areas, as now defined, recognised Quenington as outside the Stroud District Museum collecting area for and on behalf of Stroud District Council, and since 1974 within Cotswold District Council's collecting area for its own museums service.

An appropriate notice appeared in the September 1996 issue of *Museums Journal*. Although this produced no positive response, the consultation process did produce expressions of interest from two other sources, one local and one further afield.

The Ebley Meadows Trust, a recently-formed environmental group, conceived of the water wheel providing a feature (whether static or moving) within its proposed Energy 21 renewable energy park. In Cumbria a similar "environmental inspiration centre" based upon Blennerhasset Mill near Carlisle, proposed a similar solution, attracted by the relevant size of the Quenington mill to its own building.

### **Return to Quenington**

In fact this same consultation process also led to the development of the idea of returning the wheel to Quenington for preservation and display. Whilst it was accepted that the wheel would probably not be able to work again, a scheme was prepared for it to be placed on exhibition.

The same restrictions on space which had forced the original removal determined that the wheel could not return to the Old Mill House (as it had become). A siting on the village green in Quenington was proposed, very much as a static exhibit, but this was not universally welcomed.

An alternative proposal was made to locate the wheel alongside the bridge at the confluence of the mill stream and the River Coln, which spot now forms part of the extensive gardens and grounds surrounding The Old Rectory, the property of Lucy & David Abel Smith. In this

context, the wheel would not only once again be associated with water flow (although not part of it), but would also be visually accessible from the nearby roadway at the foot of Rag Hill, and by arrangement be accessible from within the Old Rectory property.

It was this site and presentation which in due course attracted the support and approval of the Cowle Museum Trustees on behalf of Stroud District Council, and was implemented.

Positioned on its base against the bridge wall, the wheel would be presented almost as a form of public art in the locality, and its physical separation from its original home at the mill and from the water flowing close by would be offset by its symbolic representation of the theme of water power and its part in Quenington's village history.

The plan envisaged the wheel remaining as it was, neither restored nor repainted. One option was that it be set on its original housing supported either on wooden posts or stone plinth walls, to support the axle housing in such a way that the wheel could still turn. In fact it is shown as a static exhibit.

Public support was gathered, particularly from the Quenington Society, an amenity group claiming support from at least half the village. A vote at its AGM in October 1997 was unanimously in favour. The village Institute committee gave its support and so too the Parish Council, which agreed in November 1997 to submit any planning applications which may be required. This latter was duly done, more perhaps as a precautionary measure than one of legal requirement. The proposed site is in the Quenington conservation area and falls within the curtilage of a Grade II listed building.

Permission was granted by Cotswold District Council's relevant planning committee in May 1998 (ref. CT.1143), and the wheel was collected from Stroud and installed on 13th July (*plate two*). The contractor responsible for the operation was Malcolm Cooper of Carom Water Crafts at Melksham, Wiltshire. The two pairs of millstones were returned to Old Mill House for preservation. One of these stones bears no less than four maker's plates : **Barron & Son Ltd, Makers, Gloucester**, a company founded in Gloucester c.1905 (Tucker 1973).

The project cost was over £1,000, with the principal single funding source being a 50% grant (maximum £500) from the Community Projects Fund of Cotswold District Council (one of the first such grants from this source specifically for a local history project). Local contributions included the Ernest Cook Trust, Godwin Pumps and local residents. The Village Institute made a donation of £200 in memory of (and from the legacy of) Bill Cuss, a local builder. To achieve a moving wheel would have cost up to £5,000, a sum felt to be unrealistic.

#### Future Access

Permission to view the wheel from other than the roadway on the bridge over the River Coln may be obtained on prior application from Lucy or David Abel Smith at the Old Rectory, Quenington (phone 01285-750358). Legal ownership has been transferred from Stroud Museum to the Quenington Society, along with various requirements attached to long-term

care and maintenance of the wheel. A report on the removal of the wheel, together with notes on the history of the mill will also be available as part of The Quenington Society's village archive. Meanwhile, Old Mill House remains private property.

### **Knights Mill**

Although outside the terms of this article, the other mill in Quenington mentioned in Domesday deserves a brief reference. Its existence as a fulling mill in 1338 has already been noted. Its main claim to fame is as a paper mill, and it is shown as such on Isaac Taylor's Map of Gloucestershire, 1777. There are references to the production of paper there until at least 1876. Notes on its history are provided in Shorter (1952), Harris (1976) and Trinder (1998).

Like the corn mill, it too came into the ownership of the Bazley family, and in 1893 (GRO: D540.E48, Bazley Estate papers) Sir Thomas Bazley ordered a new wheel from the successor company to Savory & Sons in Gloucester, Summers & Scott, which included the production of water wheels amongst its various specialisations. This was mounted by the local firm of W.J Godwin of Quenington, then a local builder and contractor's business which subsequently became well-established as a manufacturer of pumps and pumping equipment (Trinder 1998).

Made of steel, this wheel was 14ft in diameter with 36 wrought iron brackets. By early this century the mill was defunct, and its chimney was demolished in the 1930's. It is now a private house, and a grade II listed building. It is known as Knights Mill after its owner/occupier in the middle years of the 19th century.

### **Acknowledgments**

Thanks are due not only to Lionel Walrond and Lucy Abel Smith for their support in the provision of information during the compilation of this account, but also to Susan Hayward, the present Curator of the Stroud District Museum for access to files and much helpful information. The Quenington Society were prime movers in supporting the project throughout, and have created a village archive.

Ray Wilson, secretary of GSIA, gathered in additional details, and Hugh Conway-Jones provided an historical summary of Savory and successor companies in Gloucester. Ged Cassell, Community Liaison Officer, and Mike Hill, Conservation Architect at Cotswold District Council, provided information on the successful grant application to the Council and listed building details respectively. Mr Tony Foster kindly showed me round Old Mill House, adding more detail; Mr R.W. Eddolls of Fairford recalled his father's work at the mill, and Mr John Moaby, Chairman of Quenington Parish Council, pursued various other details.

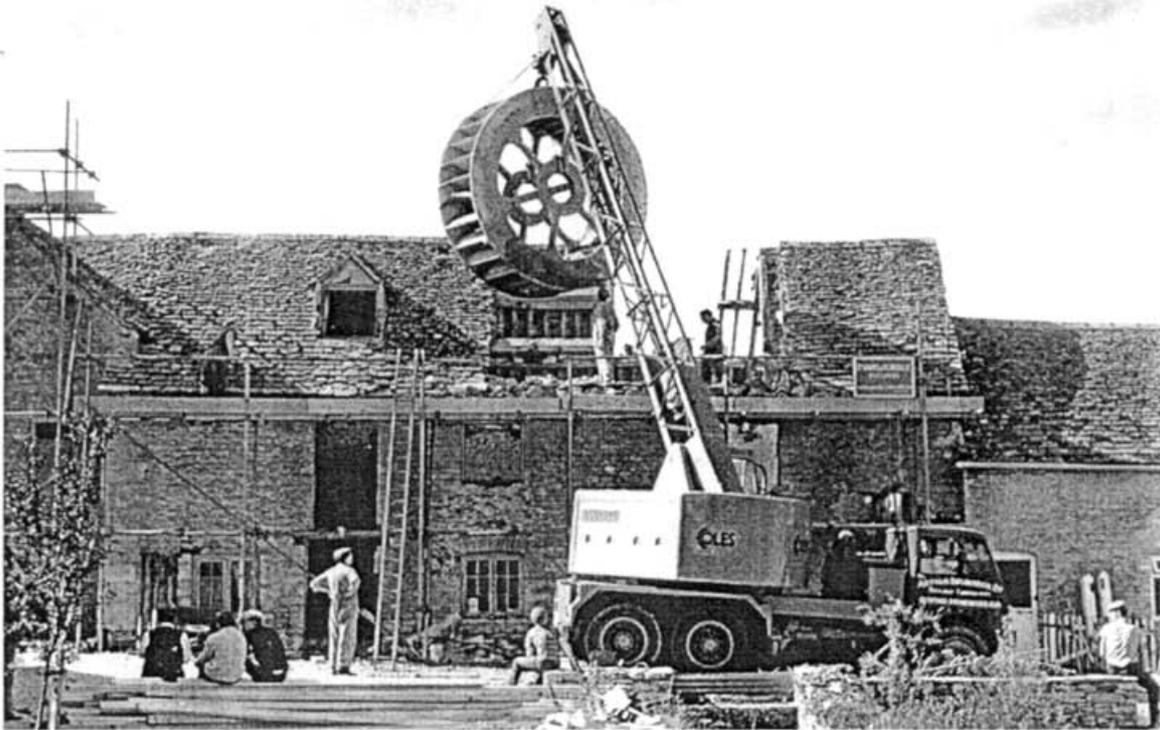
The collections and facilities of the Gloucestershire Record Office and the Bingham Library, Cirencester are acknowledged once again with appreciation. Any additional information on the mill at Quenington, especially photographic records, would be much appreciated by the author at 8, Tower Street, Cirencester, Glos GL7 1EF.

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Figure 1 Quenington corn mill, shown on the first edition OS 1:2500 map. The leats to both the (upper) corn mill and the (lower) paper mill contrast clearly with the perambulations of the river.



Top Plate 1

Removal of the Wheel in 1969  
through the roof of the building  
(from a photograph by J.D. & B.B.  
Bailey kindly loaned by W.A. Foster)



Left Plate 2

Return of the wheel in 1998.  
(Quenington Society and Lucy Abel  
Smith)