

SOUTH AFRICA'S FIRST WOOLLEN MILL BUILT BY SAMUEL BRADSHAW OF CAM

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Introduction

When, in 1820, Samuel Bradshaw, a bachelor and a weaver, led a party of men, women and children from Dursley and Cam to become Settlers in South Africa, it is probable that even before departure he had considered the possibility of cloth production in the new land. The mill that he was to build in conjunction with his brother Richard, also a weaver, has a structural design that has much in common with the mill remains on Mill Farm on the outskirts of Dursley, and was a grist and fulling mill. While several Settlers built early corn mills on their land, the Bradshaw Mill was the only one capable of fulling. While the remains of the building still stand today, its operational life as a woollen mill was of limited duration.

Their 'Party' was one in a number of Parties who emigrated as part of a Government sponsored scheme initiated by Lord Charles Somerset, son of the Duke of Beaufort, who was at that time Governor of the Cape of Good Hope. The Scheme was intended to colonise the Eastern Cape with Agriculturists who would present a community that would prevent Bantu tribes moving into the area. The British Government supported Lord Charles' suggestion as the depression following the end of the Napoleonic wars led to unemployment, reduced wages and unrest in the population. They also supported the scheme as it was believed that it would reduce the number of soldiers needed to keep the peace at the Frontier. The Gloucestershire cloth industry was hard hit as it had provided much of the cloth for uniforms and there was considerable poverty among workers in the woollen industry. Miles records a fall in wages in 1839 compared with the earlier part of the century (1).

Returns of intending Settlers had to be sent to the Colonial Office, and deposits had to be paid: these would be refunded in instalments after arrival in the Colony. The deposit was £10 for a single man or a family with two children under fourteen, with an additional £2 10s (£2.50) for extra children under eighteen. Single men and women (on their own) paid £5 (2). Many of the Bradshaw party were sponsored by the Parish and had their deposits paid for them. We do not know why Samuel Bradshaw came to be chosen to lead a parish party. In the last of the Returns he submitted to the Colonial Office, he described himself as having a Freehold in Cam, a single man and recommended by the parish of Cam.(3); but when complications arose Bransby Cooper, who had married the Dursley heiress Ann Purnell, had to use his influence as an MP to ensure the Party were allowed to emigrate (4).

In the Public Record Office there are four Returns for the Bradshaw party which were all slightly different (5). The original list contained the names of three men described as weavers, all of whom subsequently sailed, Samuel Bradshaw, Thomas Baker and Samuel Bennett. However the three King brothers who were original applicants and described as labourers were also weavers. They had become dependent on Parish Relief in 1818, and are there recorded as weavers (6). An analysis of the successive Returns submitted shows that about half the men putting their names forward were weavers. Many of the men who initially applied to sail subsequently withdrew their applications. Eight men were under obligation to give Samuel fifteen acres of their hundred acres when they obtained their grant. It may be that Samuel paid their deposit as at least four of them are known to have had experience as weavers. Although he does not appear on any of the lists Samuel Birt, who sailed with the Party and subsequently obtained land as an "Original Settler", was described in his death notice as a millwright.(7).

The Party sailed from Bristol on the Kennersley Castle in January 1820 narrowly missing a severe gale in the Bristol Channel which, at the time, saw the loss of ships in the area. There were five Parties on the boat including a Party of artisans from Bristol lead by William Holder. They were to call their location New Bristol, and were situated next to the Bradshaw location. Thomas Phillips, a Welsh landowner, also sailed on the Kennersley Castle, and was located initially near the Bradshaw Party. Phillips was one of the pioneers of sheep breeding in the area. The Government had proposed an allowance of 100 acres for each man who stayed on the land and cultivated it for four years. This must have seemed very attractive to people living in England where such an acreage would have provided a good income. Unfortunately the pastoral Afrikaner farmers needed 4,000 acres to farm profitably.

Early Days

The Party settled on their location, a deserted Afrikaner farmstead, which they called New Gloucester, and started to build houses and cultivate the land. Because cultivating the land proved to be more difficult than the Settlers had expected many turned to following their trades off the location, either in the nearby military town of Grahamstown, or the newly created villages of Bathurst and Port Frances.

The Bradshaws appear to have been planning for a mill by November 1820 when they mentioned their project to a visiting preacher (8). Neither Thomas Bennett nor Thomas Baker appear to have had any interest in the Mill that the Bradshaws proposed building. There are unfortunately no records of the Mill other than those contained in the letters the Bradshaws wrote to Colonial Administrators, and so we have no evidence as to whether Baker or Bennett did assist later in the weaving process. Similarly we do not know whether Samuel Birt, the millwright, was employed by the Bradshaws. Of the three King brothers, Philip became a trader, and Joseph migrated to Port Frances. By August 1821 the Bradshaws, together with Isaac Wiggle, a carpenter and wheelwright, had obtained a free grant of land in Bathurst. Isaac, who came from Painswick, and paid his own deposit, possibly joined the party because of his interests in milling. The mill was stated to be for the purpose of "... *grinding corn, and manufacturing coarse clothes, blankets etc*". Work started in August 1821, but Wiggle and the Bradshaws soon fell out and after three weeks Wiggle departed taking seventy five cogs and a ladder. Wiggle was subsequently to build a windmill and a water mill in Grahamstown. At the same time Jeremiah Goldswain, of Hyam's Party was employed as a sawyer. His wages were £2 5s 0d (£2.25) a month with board and lodging. He worked for several months, but "cash was so scarce that it was almost impossible to be paid for your work in money". He had to take exchange goods and finding this impractical, "pay was in things which were sometimes quite worthless to you", in May 1822 he left and went to Grahamstown (9).

In April 1823, the Bradshaws petitioned to establish themselves in a business '... weaving and preparing clothes, blankets, serges and flannels using colonial wool ...' and in September 1824 the Bradshaws were confirmed in the grant. The land was described as close to the village of Bathurst in a thicket. They needed land on both sides of the stream to secure the mill dam and head and other works; together with a strip of two acres of the open ground at the edge of the thicket. Commissioner Hayward was doubtful that the Bradshaws would succeed in their undertaking; it would be difficult and costly work. But as they had commenced the work and pleaded eloquently for the grant he had recommended it. He said that they intended to apply the machinery not only to grinding corn, but additionally in the manufacture of coarse woollens (10).

Financial Problems

In November 1824 the Bradshaws applied for the first of the loans that were to give them so much trouble in the future. This was a loan for twelve hundred rix dollars. The loan was

needed to complete the design and to erect a mill “to grind corn and to full and work woollen cloth.” In this they were supported by the Llandrost (Magistrate) and several of the more influential residents of Bathurst (11). In February 1825 William Holder petitioning to build a Mill on his land commented “Bradshaw’s at Bathurst is not in any state of forwardness and cannot be fit for use this year and a half thereby making Settlers to carry corn on their backs for miles to small steel mills (12).

However, in March 1825, the Llandrost commenting that the Mill was “judiciously planned and very well constructed” recommended an increased loan of fifteen hundred rix dollars. He also proposed that they should be given sixty rix dollars from the Treasury towards the cost of a road leading from the Mill (13). In the same year, hopeful of obtaining more assistance from another assisted emigration scheme, Samuel Bradshaw petitioned for a Miller, seven boys and seven girls. There is no record that this request was granted (14). Unfortunately although the loan was agreed, the money had still not been advanced after two years (15). In the interval the Bradshaws had run up debts which included non-payment of “hands to assist in the work of the mill”. In 1827 they sold their locations for seven saddles, seven bridles and an undertaking by the purchaser to repay the storm loan they had taken out (16).

Mill Construction

The primary mill they built was three stories high, and was built into the side of the valley so that there was direct exterior access to the top and bottom floors. The Mill was “three stories high by forty feet clear of the walls, forty five feet from the bottom of the wheel race to the ridge pole. The wheel race was fifteen feet deep and six foot wide and twenty six feet long.” It was an overshot wheel, and it’s diameter was twenty eight feet six inches. The wheel race for the Mill was built during the period 1825-6 (17).

Problems arose with the contractors responsible for the machinery for the Mill. The first installation was faulty and had to be taken out and new machinery installed. This compounded their financial problems. A drought, at the time that the Mill was finished, reduced the water supply, and they were unable to grind corn in sufficient quantities to meet demand (18). They also built a second corn mill, about which we have no information except that in 1830 a letter from the Bradshaws is from “Bathurst Mills” (19). Members of the Lower Albany Historical Society are investigating the possible existence of the second mill.

Cloth Production

By December 1829, the Bradshaws were able to send to the Governor “the first pair of Blanketts made in this Colony of Colonial Produce.” It was also the first pair of blankets that they had ever made “ being accustomed to the manufacturing of the finest Spanish and Saxon cloths in England.”(20). In 1830 the Bradshaws were having great difficulty repaying the loan on the Mill. English financial notation was now in force and the loan stood at £112.10s (£112-50). They petitioned the Governor to be allowed to defer repayments. “*Your Memorialists humbly pray Your Excellency will be pleased to interfere with the Supreme Court in our behalf that we may be allowed title September next viz. we will pay £15... on or before 16th day of May and the remainder before 25th September next. Your Excellency are acquainted with our exertions in this Colony also the Mills having cost a large sum in the erection of them and if it should be sold it will be attended with ruin to us. Bathurst Mills 15th April 1830*” (21).

The reply came in November 1830. “*I am directed by His Excellency the Governor to acquaint you that having the most convincing proofs of the Industry of the Memorialists he approves of the respite prayed for being granted*” (22).

Although the South African Directory for 1831 stated that thirty pairs of blankets had been completed and a quantity of kersey, in their letter to the Governor the Bradshaws stated that they doubted whether they could continue manufacture due to want of machinery and a shortage of capital (23). The Directory also recorded that some of the problems arising were due to the "difficulty of procuring hands to prepare the raw material for the looms". It is likely that the Bradshaws abandoned production at about this time, as by 1832 they were both working on building projects concerned with the Anglican church and the Wesleyan chapel.

In their recommendations to the Governor when they sent the first blankets they commented "*We hope your Excellency will be pleased to excuse all imperfections that may be in them, as they can easily be prevented in future. The nap being short on the Blankets is occasionally through the fineness of the wool. The coarser the wool the longer the nap, the wools in general are too fine for common blankets. It wants to be sorted and the first sample sent to England and the coarser worked up into blankets duffels and coarse cloths in this Colony which would leave a profit to the Manufacturer and not a bad one if there was machinery to work it up with. We earnestly hope that some person or persons will commence in the trade, any part that could be instructive to them we should be happy to assist. As for manufacturing of fine cloths it is our opinion that they will not pay, the processes are too great. If the sheep was attended to and the wool properly sorted a very large quantity of wool might be annually exported to the Mother Country which if a war should occur with Spain it is our humble opinion would be of great importance to England*".

Loss of the Mill

Over the years there had been several skirmishes with the indigenous population, often concerned with cattle thefts. In 1835 the "Sixth Kaffir War" erupted, and the indigenous local African population forced the Settlers into leaving outlying farms and habitations to seek refuge in Bathurst and Grahamstown. The Bradshaw Mill was burnt down. A wall fell into the wheel race which filled up with stone.. The mill was not restored by the Bradshaws (24). At the time the Mill was burnt down, the loan on the mill was stated to be £112 (25).

In 1836 the Bradshaws, in company with many other Settlers, filed their claim for war reparations. The Mill House with water wheel and two cog wheels was valued at £425. Included in the contents of the mill were a fulling stock, weaving looms & spinning wheels (see Appendix).

Conclusion

It seems likely that Samuel Bradshaw, in deciding to emigrate, had aspirations to develop cloth production in South Africa. In an early letter to the Colonial Office he had enquired as to whether an allocation of agricultural tools could be taken to the Colony (26). It is probable that he included equipment for a mill in this category. As he employed others to make the mill machinery he may have also taken out plans.

Although the Bradshaws undoubtedly understood the processes of cloth making, one of their principal problems appears to have been the lack of skilled labour; but also they probably lacked the necessary business experience. The Bradshaws gave their occupation as weavers; but in Gloucestershire at the time they emigrated, it was customary for clothiers to organise all the processes beyond the actual weaving of the cloth. The Bradshaws must have had insufficient working capital for their project and this led to reliance on loans. They then had difficulty in regular repayments.

There is evidence, that even before the mill was burnt, the Bradshaws were already undertaking building jobs as one of the contractors for both the Anglican church and the Methodist chapel. Had it not been for the War, and the reparations claim, the Bradshaws would undoubtedly have defaulted on the loan and become bankrupt.

Appendix: Extract from Reparation Claim for Mill Losses

In 1835 when the Bradshaws claimed for their losses in the 1834 Kaffir War, included in the claim were:-

Mill House with water wheel and two cog wheels	£425	
Large Brush for dressing cloth and blankett	8/-	(40p)
A fulling stock commonly called Fullers Mill	£30	
Two weaving looms compleat	£20	
Four extra steel stays	£1.5.0	(£1.25)
Extra Harness with shaft/eddles<ill>	£1.10.0	(£1.50)
Eight spinning weels and stands compleat	£7.08.0	(£7.40)
Three scribbling horses or stools	£1.07.0	(£1.35)
Warping bar scarm spool and stand	£5	
Frame for hanging and dressing "cloath" or blanketts	£3	
Eight pair of scribbling cards	£1.18.0	(£1.90)
Beating hurdle rods and stand for dressing wool	£1.16.0	(£1.80)
Set of card makers tools viz. dubler crooker shears pinkers	£3.15.0	(£3.75)
Damage done to timber neck	£1.06.0	(£1.30)
Sheep's Wool 80 lbs	£2.13.4	(£2.67)

This would indicate that the Bradshaws had the equipment for preparing blankets and cloth.

As the inventory also included turkey stones and milling bill hooks for dressing mill stones they also had the capacity to grind corn.

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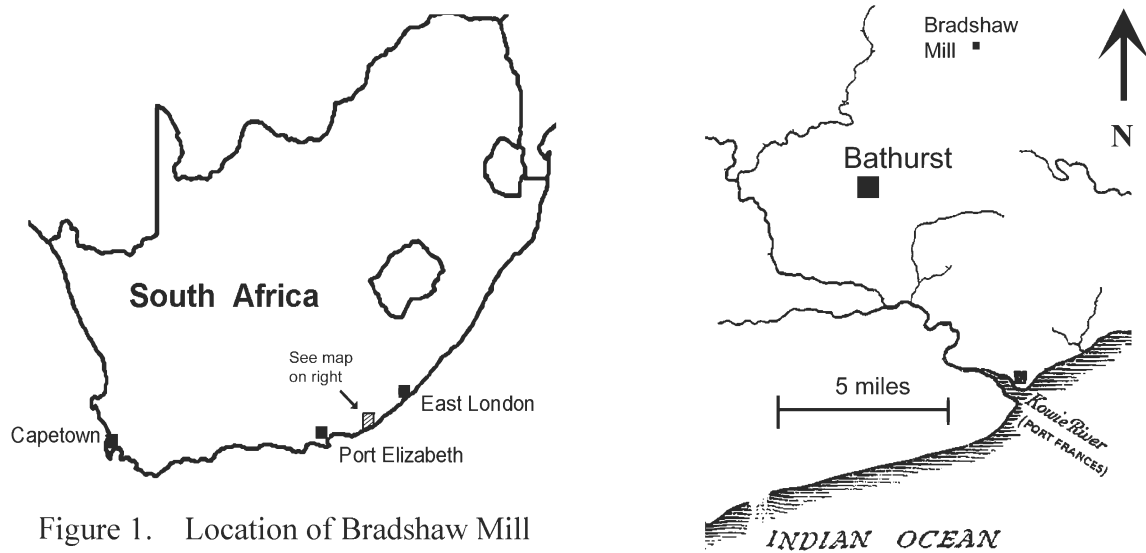


Figure 1. Location of Bradshaw Mill



Figure 2. Bradshaw Mill in ruins c.1955



Figure 3. Bradshaw Mill, Bathurst, Eastern Cape, South Africa



Figure 4. Dursley Mill, Mill Farm, Dursley, Gloucestershire