

The Mills of Alveley and Romsley by David Poyner

In last years Transactions, an account was provided of Crow's Mill. This is now extended to include the remaining mills upstream on Paper Mill brook, as well as giving new information about Crow's Mill. The locations of the mills are shown in figure 1.

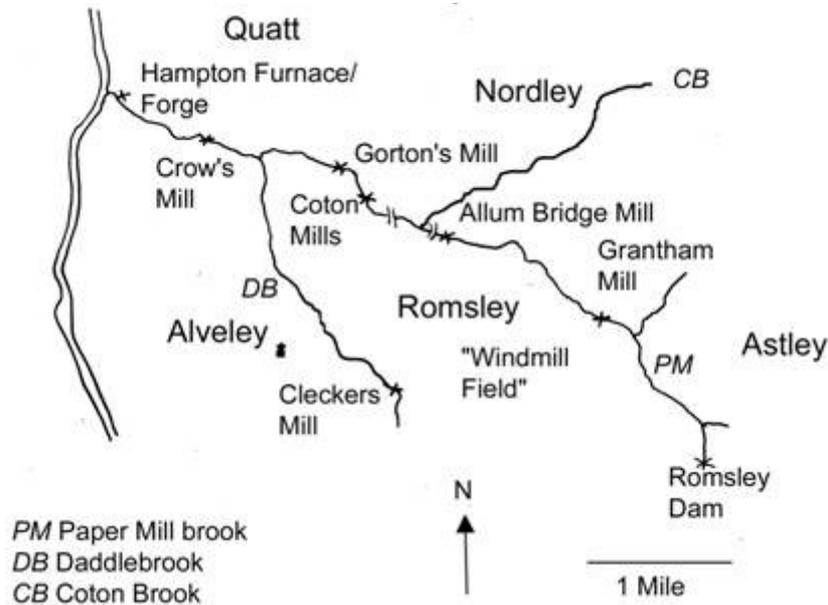


Figure 1. Mills in Alveley and Romsley

Introduction to water mills

Whilst the technology of water mills was dealt with in last year's article, a brief summary will be given here. Water was usually stored in ponds, behind dams and moved in channels called "leats" or "stanks". A head-race led the water to the wheel. If possible the water was allowed to fall on top of the wheel, to give an overshot wheel; this was more efficient at creating motion than relying on a current of water striking the bottom of the wheel (an undershot wheel). The medieval mills in Alveley were probably all undershot, as these predate the more elaborate overshot mills. At breastshot and pitchback wheels, the water struck the wheel half-way up. The water was returned to the brook by a leat called a tail-race. In old accounts a "mill" consisted of a wheel and associated gearing; if a single building housed two wheels then it was considered that there were two mills present. The most common use of mills was to grind corn. The typical arrangement of gears is shown in figure 2. However, the water power could be turned to any number of uses. Many corn mills incorporated a mill for crushing clover, to extract the seeds for resowing. Flax and other seeds could be crushed by vertically set grindstones ("edge-runners") to extract vegetable oil. Water power was used at several stages in leather processing, particularly to impregnate the leather with oil by pounding it with hammers driven by the water wheel. In paper manufacture, similar hammers were used to shred rags; the resulting pulp was then compressed on wire frames to give sheets of paper. All these processes took place in the local mills.

Crow's Mill (SO 755860).

The previous article on Crow's Mill demonstrated that before 1770 there were two mills on the site; a paper mill and a

leather mill. These came into the ownership of the Crow family in the middle of the 18th Century. It was suggested that this may have been the site of one of the earliest paper mills in Alveley, worked by John Fosbrook from 1705. The paper mill closed by 1832. The leather mill had been replaced by a corn mill by 1806; this itself closed c1900. On the ground it was possible to find evidence for two mills; Crow's Mill as marked on the OS maps and a lower mill just downstream, apparently fed by the tailrace from the upper mill. It was also noted that Moorehouse or Elliot's mill, working in the mid 17th Century, was almost certainly one or other of these mills and there was also a Brimford's Mill working somewhere in this part of Alveley at the end of the 15th Century[i]. It has now been possible to produce a much fuller account of the site, confirming the above suggestions.

The earliest reference to a mill in Alveley is in c1170, when Guy Le Strange, lord of Alveley with Margaret his wife gave his mills at Alveley to Haughmond Abbey. It seems that Strange owned an interest in 1½ mills at Alveley. In 1255 these were worth 10/- a year to the abbot and in 1342 they were to be leased to Andrew de Lalone and Joan his wife on the death of the then tenant, Walter de Hadley[ii], at 10/- rent pa. A particularly useful lease survives from 12th March 1494/5[iii]. Richard the abbot granted the mill "called Nexnonesmyll with a messuage and a noke of land in the lordship of Moorehouse, late in the tenure of Henry Brymford" to Henry and his heirs, for 80 years at a rent of 12/- pa. This provides the evidence to connect this medieval mill with Brimford's Mill and Elliot's/Moorehouse Mill. As Crow's Mill is next to land called Moorehouse Green in the 19th Century, there can be no doubt that it was on the same site as these earlier mills.

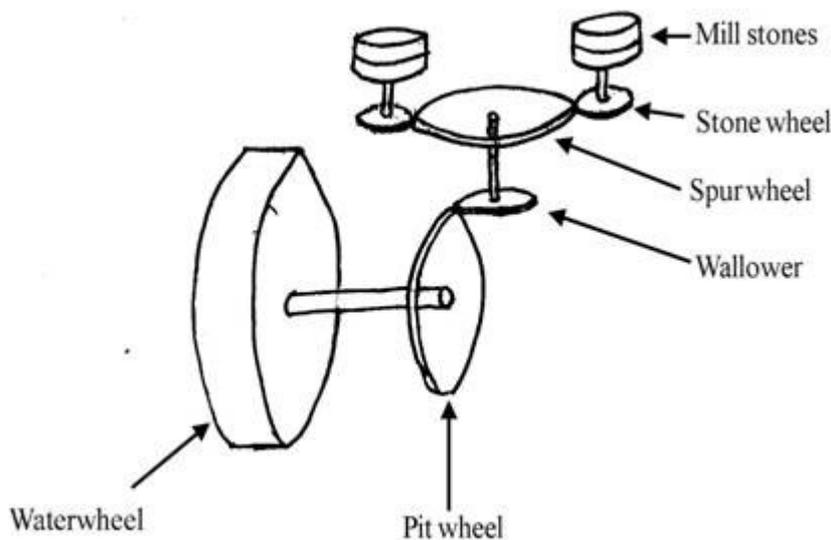


Figure 2. Arrangement of mill gearing in a typical corn mill.

The form of the two mills that existed in 1170 is unclear. A "mill" in early documents normally means a power unit consisting of a water wheel and associated grindstones. Thus there were two waterwheels. These may have been in two separate buildings or they may have formed a double mill, housed in just one structure. One of the mills had a co-owner who is not specified. A clue to his identity comes from a grant of 1350 from William de Hardwick, priest, to John of the Grene and Christiana his wife of "one dovecot at Trokenhull in Nordley, together with the reversion of half a water mill at Trokenhull.. which Walter de Hadley holds for the term of his life"[iv]. As Walter had a life interest in the 1½ mills owned by Haughmond in 1342, it may be that William de Hardwick was the owner of the other share. Although the later structures at Crow's Mill were in Alveley, the brook at this point forms the boundary between the two manors and in the 18th Century the estate associated with the mill included lands in Alveley and Nordley. Trokenhull has been considered to be an early form of Tuck Hill, in the far east of Nordley; however there is no proof of this and the Court Rolls for

Alveley from 1762 refer to “Tucknell Lane” between Lake House Green and Paper Mill brook, close to Crow’s Mill[v]

Crow’s Mill took its present name from the Crow family. In 1741 William Crow (senior) is recorded as tenant of a paper and a leather mill as well as holding a farm in Nordley and Alveley formerly occupied by John Fosbrook and then Mary his widow. This provides the evidence to show that Crow’s mill was the site of Fosbrook’s paper mill from at least 1705. Prior to this, William Attwell had a paper mill in Alveley but this was burnt down in 1686[vi]. Whilst the location of this mill is unknown, it is possible that it was at Crow’s Mill and was rebuilt by either Attwell or Fosbrook.

In 1770, William Crow junior was working a paper and a leather mill at Crow’s Mill. However, by 1789 his widow was in possession of a paper and corn mill[vii]. Presumably the leather mill was either converted into a corn mill or demolished and replaced. It is this corn mill that survived to be recorded by the OS in the late 19th Century. As an overshot mill served by a long leat, it seems unlikely that this was on the site of the medieval mills. By contrast, the ruined lower mill by the brookside would be a much better candidate for an early, undershot mill, albeit one that was later adopted to overshot working.

Gorton’s Mill (SO 762858)

About ¼ mile upstream of Crow’s Mill both the tithe map and the 1881/2 OS map show Gorton’s Mill, a water corn mill (Figure 3). Unfortunately its history is almost completely obscure. At the time of the tithe survey it was owned by one William Gill and the 1851 census records William Brown, a miller, living at the site. The mill was apparently still working in 1881/2. The Gorton family, from whom it must take its name, first appear in the Alveley registers at the start of the 18th Century with the arrival of Edward Gorton, a mason of Kingswinford and by the middle of the century there are references to a “Gorton’s” estate. However, the first note of the mill is not until the manor court of 1812, when Edward Gorton was ordered to fence the pool dam of Gorton pound[viii].

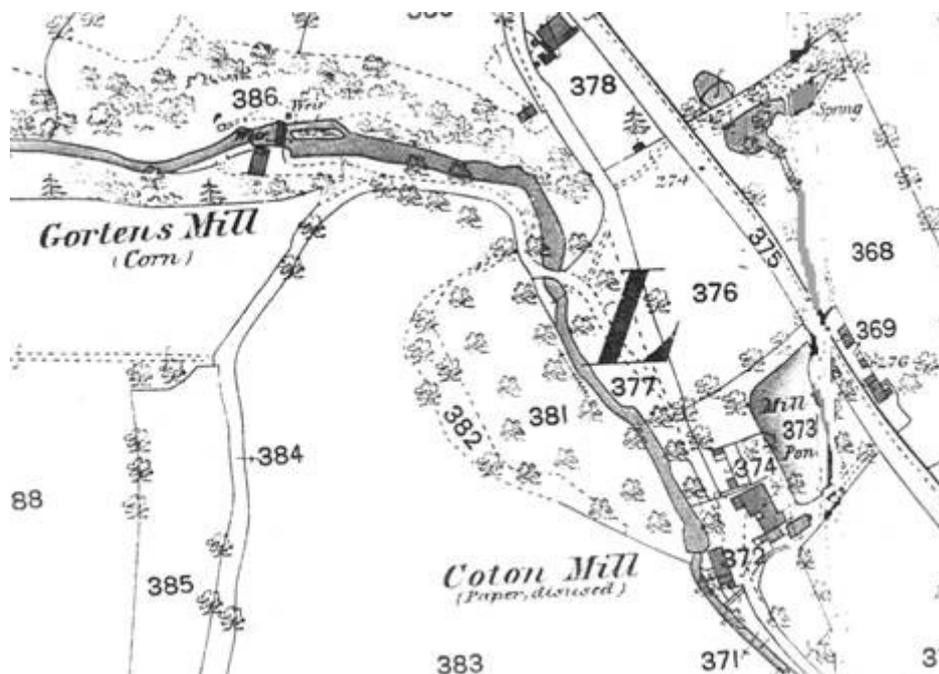


Figure 3. Gorton’s Mill and Coton Mill, 1881/2 OS map.

In 1622, Thomas Grove of the Stonehouse Mill was entitled to a fee farm in Alveley[ix]. There are scattered references to a Stonehouse in Alveley, but its location is unknown. At this date, of the known mill sites, the best contender would be Gorton’s mill, but there it is no independent evidence to show that the mill was even in existence at this date. Thus

the origins of the mill remain unknown.

Although the mill must have been demolished for over a century, the site is well preserved (Figure 4). The dam is intact with the remains of the cast iron pipe that fed the waterwheel. In the bottom of the wheel pit the remains of the iron wheel are still to be found; the width appears to be 3'8" and the diameter must have been about 12'. Adjacent to the wheel pit there are the foundations of a single room, 14' x 15'; there are traces of a further room, 10' x 14' beyond this. A series of photographs exist that have been attributed to Allum Bridge Mill [x]. However, this is incorrect as they show a mill next to a dam with an external wheel whereas the wheel at Allum Bridge is internal. If the mill is in Alveley, it could only be Gorton's mill and the view of the dam strongly supports this supposition. It shows stone structure, extending perhaps two floors over the level of the wheel with a loft. Unfortunately the pictures give no clues about dating the mill.

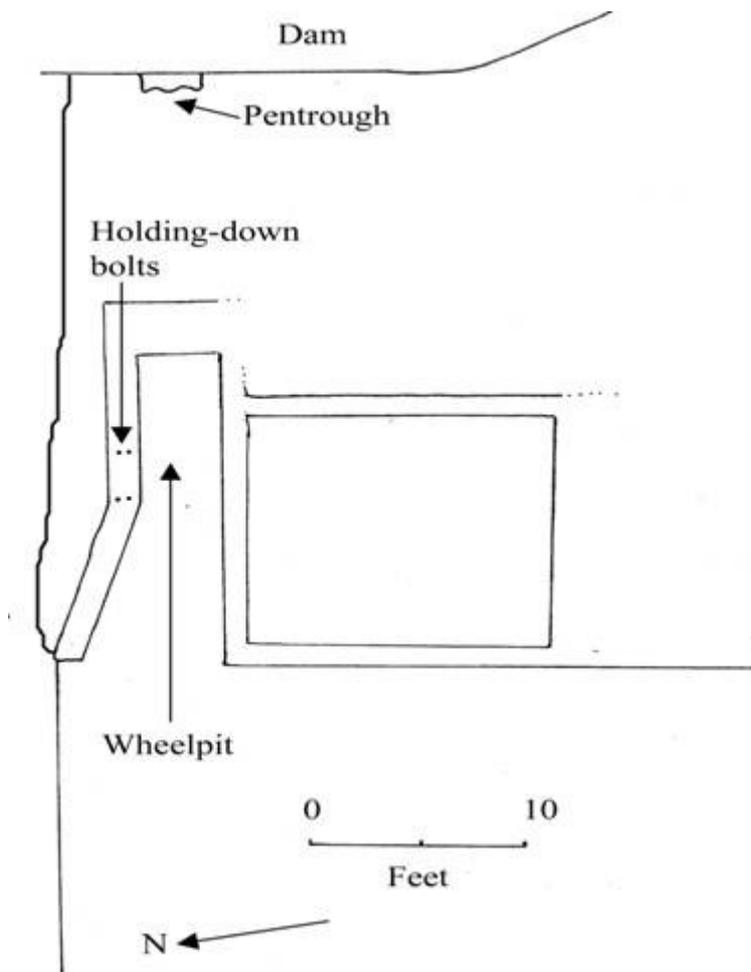


Figure 4. Gorton's Mill, current remains.

Coton Mills (SO 760850)

There are two distinct mills at Coton (in Nordley); a mill directly on Paper Mill brook and a second powered by Coton Spring (Figure 5).

The documented history of Coton Spring mill can be traced back to 1741. At that time there was a "capital message

called the New House alias the Mill House and one water corn mill adjoining in Nordley Regis, in the possession of Richard Gill afterwards Dovey Wollaston or his undertenants and since in the tenure of John Bache”[\[xi\]](#). New House farm, in spite of its name, occupied a medieval (?) moated site[\[xii\]](#) fed by Coton Spring. Richard Gill was a farmer living in Alveley from 1702. By 1761 the corn mill had been converted to an oil mill. The 1770 survey shows the mill and adjoining house as an L-shaped building, fed by the moat which acted as a pond to store the waters from the spring. At that date it was untenanted. New House farm was still let to John Bache but the house itself was unoccupied and was eventually demolished. In 1781 the mill was held by Thomas Steward and Richard Clark[\[xiii\]](#). In 1785 Harry Lee leased it to Richard Windle of Claverley, with leave to convert it to a paper mill[\[xiv\]](#). Windle must have converted Coton Spring mill to a paper mill but in 1788 he was presented before the Nordley manor court for erecting a paper mill on waste in the manor[\[xv\]](#). This probably refers to the construction of the second mill, directly on Paper Mill brook. There is some ambiguity over the date of this building as it incorporates a stone marked “ELL 1766”. There is no documentary evidence for the construction of any structure on the site in 1766. Furthermore, ELL would appear to refer to Eldred Lancelot Lee; however he had been dead for over 30 years by 1766 and the building is not shown on a 1770 survey of the Lee property[\[xvi\]](#). The stone may have been reused from another site although it is not impossible Windle incorporated an existing building into his new mill. It is likely that Windle worked both the old and new mills together.

Windle purchased the leasehold of the Coton Mills from Lee in 1796 together with “Bache’s Mill”, near Allum Bridge (Allum Bridge Mill, see below) and the next year let it to William Hardman, a paper maker[\[xvii\]](#). Hardman agreed to purchase the leasehold from the Windle family in 1810 although for various reasons the full money was not paid until 1819 by which time Hardman was dead and the mills had passed into the possession of Francis Hayward, an Alveley farmer and John Stockall, his partner. The operation of the paper mills were continued by the Hardman family through these changes of ownership but Thomas James is said to have been paper maker in 1839. James also worked Hurcott paper mill in Kidderminster. In the 1841 census the mills seemed to have employed 9 individuals but they had closed by 1846. By 1865 the site was leased by Benjamin Webb and used as a sawmill; it is said that it remained in use as a water-powered saw mill until the First World War, in the hands of the Harley family[\[xviii\]](#).

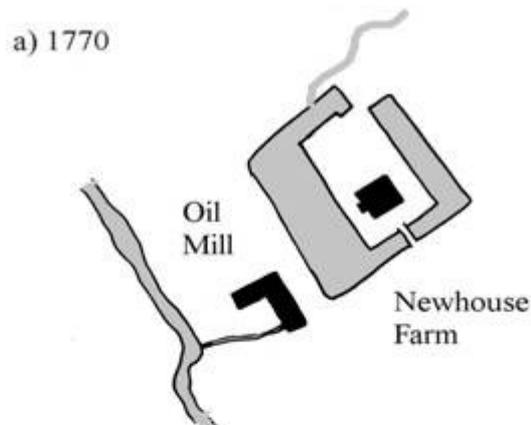


Figure 5. Coton Mills (a) 1770 map. (b) 1881/2 OS Map.

There are surviving remains which can be associated with both Coton Spring mill and mill on the brook. The dam of the latter is breached but much masonry is still present. A photograph[xix] taken when the mill was derelict shows it as a roofless, three storey, brick building. It remained derelict until about 1960 when it was converted to a bungalow; however significant features of the older building still remain. Nothing can be seen of the water in-take, but there was an internal wheel as an arch survives in what is now the basement of the bungalow to mark the out-flow.

Coton Spring mill has been demolished but the site is marked by a few retaining walls and faint traces of foundations, consistent with the evidence from the 1770 and later maps. When New House Farm was demolished, the moat was enlarged to create a large pool and this survives. This supplied an overshot wheel which was said to have been scrapped in 1936. A modern overshot wheel is worked by water from the pool. This may be in the position of the original wheel. There was also said to be an undershot wheel, although its location at either Coton Spring mill or the former corn mill is unclear[xx]. A large grindstone, almost certainly quarried in Alveley, is close to the mill; this may have been used by the oil mill. There are still three cottages by the pool that were built to house workers at the paper mill, as well as a larger house, probably built for the mill manager.

Whilst the documentation cannot take the history of this site back beyond 1741, there are suggestions of earlier activity. In 1588, the brook immediately downstream of Allum Bridge was called "Millhais brook"[xxi], suggesting there may have been a mill on the site at that date. It may be significant that in 1770 New House Farm was also known as Mill House Farm. There are several enigmatic references to mills in the 13th and 14th Centuries in Nordley. Roger of the mill owned land in Nordley in c1220[xxii]. In 1268 a man of that name (perhaps his son) sued John de Astley in John's own manor court of Nordley for two mills[xxiii]. Robert of the mill, c1300, may also be of the same family[xxiv]. In 1316 John de Astley obtained from Walter de Hadley of Nordley the reversion of Newfield, Nalshe Mill and a "staking" of land enclosed in Merefield on the death of Walter. Of course Walter was the tenant of Haugmond Abbey at Crow's Mill but it seems unlikely that he would be in a position to offer the mill to Astley after his death; that right belonged to Haughmond. Indeed, in the 1340s they exercised this right with no suggestion that John de Astley had any claims. Merefield was probably close to Coton Spring and it may be that Hadley also had a mill here, the forerunner of the 1741 corn mill[xxv].

Allum Bridge Mill (SO 770853)

Allum Bridge or Bowell's Mill first appears in the records in 1635, when Francis Baskerville gave to his sister Margaret Pountney the unexpired residue of his lease of a half share in the water corn mill called "New Mill"[xxvi]. It is unclear from this how new the mill was in 1635, but it was probably not more than a century old. It is possible to trace the ownership of the mill to the Nicholls family and then to the Lees. By the end of the 18th Century it was worked by the Bache family[xxvii]. As noted above, the leasehold passed to Richard Windle in 1796. By the middle of the Century the mill was worked by the Cox family, followed by William Hinton, with the Clarke family taking it on well into the 20th Century. The mill remained intact until the 1960s when it was converted into a hotel, although the wheel was retained[xxviii].

The development of the mill is shown in figure 6.

In 1770 the mill had one wheel and two sets of stones and was housed in small, square building. A building next to the pool must have been a house for the miller. By 1864[xxix] this had been extended. An estimate for repairs of about this time[xxx] mentions a stable, cowhouse, garner (ie a barn) and pigsty, all probably part of the extension. The same

source suggests the mill itself was about 15' square. Before 1881/2 there were major extensions to the mill. A photograph of about 1900 shows it as a large, stone building which also served as a shop and warehouse for Robert Clarke who was miller, grocer, baker and flour merchant in the early 20th Century [xxxix].

The mill was surveyed in 1967 just before it was converted to a hotel [xxxix]. As with the Gorton's mill, the pool was directly on the brook with the mill located underneath the dam. The cast iron overshot wheel was 13' diameter by 4' wide attached to a wooden polygonal shaft. The gear was of conventional form (figure 2), cast iron and drove two pairs of 4' mill stones. However an additional pair of 4'4" stones were driven by an extra set of gears from the pit wheel. All stones were on the first floor of the mill. Only the 4'4" stones were still complete and in working order. Towards the end of its life, a 1947 Ferguson tractor provided auxiliary power for the mill.

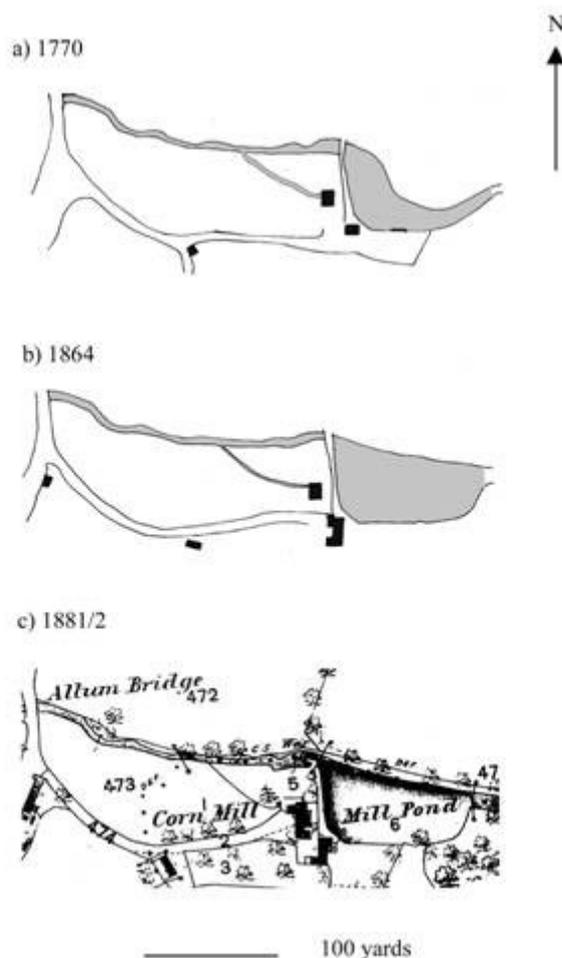


Figure 6. Allum Bridge Mill. (a) 1770 map. (b) 1864 map. (c) 1881/2 OS Map

Grantham's Mill (SO 781849)

Grantham's Mill is in Astley. It may be the same as the Domesday mill of Astley; a small unit valued at just 2/-. In 1291 John de Astley granted to Hugh Solrugg, clerk and Aveline his wife for their lives at a rent of 14/- "that mill called Grantham Hulme and its proper water called Grantham brook with customary easements to the said hulme and stank there lying". A "hulme" can mean an island but the word is derived from old Norse and is usually confined to areas of the country settled by the Danes. Its occurrence here in Shropshire is something of a puzzle. "Grantham" presumably comes from a former miller; a John de Grantham held land in Astley before 1339 [xxxix]. The ownership of the mill passed by inheritance from the de Astleys to the Filliodes and thence to Richard Blyke in 1492, when it was described

as ruinous. By 1565 the mill appears to have been leased by the Elcock family from the Blakes. The last documentary reference is in 1587, when George Blake gave evidence about the lease of the mill by his father to John Elcock and its subsequent sale[xxxiv].

Despite vanishing from the written record before the 17th Century, the location of the mill was marked by a series of field names on the 1770 survey of Alveley, allowing its location to be identified (Figure 7). The mill was served by a lane that is still a public footpath. The dam was probably of clay and lay directly across Paper Mill brook; little is left. However, the leat is well preserved and extends south for about 100 yards to where there are faint traces of the foundations and retaining walls of the mill. The leat fed an overshot or breastshot wheel, in excess of 10' diameter. The mill building is marked by a scatter of either brick or tile fragments and mortar; a late 17th Century clay pipe was noted by the leat close to the dam. Unfortunately this was not in a stratified deposit and provides no real clue as to the date of the abandonment of the mill. Just downstream of the mill, the brook has been straightened; the old channel is clearly visible, creating an island. It is tempting to associate this with the "hulme" or island of the 1291 mill. This is the arrangement that might be expected for a early undershot mill, with one channel to divert water onto the mill wheel and the other to act as an overflow channel. If this is correct, then in the later medieval period the mill must have been rebuilt with an overshot wheel at its later site.

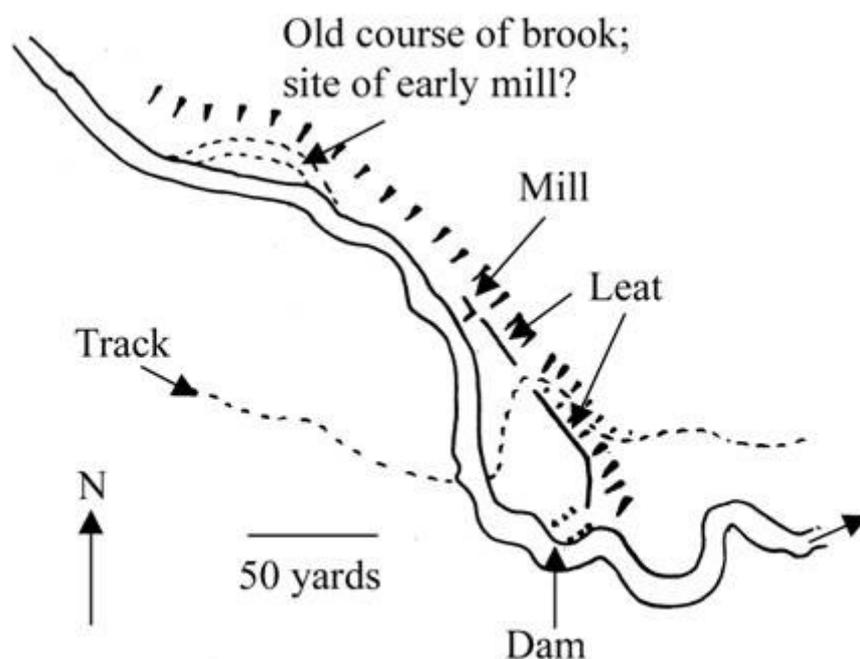


Figure 7. Grantham's Mill, current remains.

Cleckars Mill (SO 767843)

Daddlebrook is the main tributary of Paper Mill brook that rises in Alveley. Close to its source it feeds a complex of a medieval moat and fish ponds at Pool Hall. It then flows past the Cleckars estate. In spite of being not much more than a trickle at this point, it fed a mill. In 1302 Simon de Alveley was named as tenant of Cleckar. In 1316 he settled a mill in Alveley on himself[xxxv]. The simplest conclusion is that this was Cleckars. The mill is first explicitly mentioned in the parish registers in 1673 when Richard Merris was "slain by a millstone at ye Cleckers". In 1690 it was owned by Humphrey Grove of Pool Hall and this association between Pool Hall and the mill may have been long-standing since the fish ponds there must have formed a crucial part of the water storage arrangements for the mill [xxxvi]. In 1780 the mill was the scene of another fatality when 14 year old Richard Powell, normally employed to shovel clover, was "greasing the cogs between the cog wheels and the timber wheel" when he was caught and crushed in the

machinery[xxxvii]. The main work of the mill was probably grinding corn. It was apparently still in use in 1881/2 (Figure 8). The pool was formed with a clay dam; a cast iron pipe took the water to an overshoot or breastshot wheel. The mill was dismantled early in the 20th Century[xxxviii].

Other Mills

Two documents, of 1667 and 1693, refer to Windmill or Winmill field in Romsley[xxxix]. The precise location is now lost, but it seems to have been close to the later Cross farm, on a ridge of high ground between Daddlebrook and Paper Mill brook. There are no explicit references to a windmill ever being here, but the location is plausible. Windmills were particularly common in the Middle Ages but were often abandoned after new watermills were constructed.

Upstream from Grantham's Mill, close to Cross and Lower House Farms, there is a substantial clay dam across Paper Mill brook (SO 787834), very close to its source. This was originally noted as a fish pond but more recently has been interpreted as a mill site; the field evidence is equivocal. It may be connected with the channel dug in Romsley in 1259 by Lyonsius, parson of Kinver, much to the disgust of John de Astley[xl], although the straight channel at the island at Grantham Mill is technically also in Romsley.

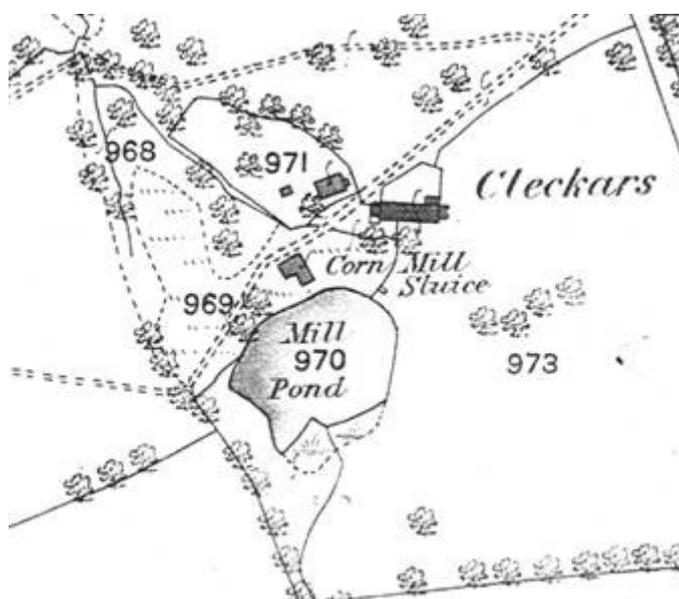


Figure 8. Cleckar's Mill, 1881/2 OS Map.

There are also two hydraulic rams still in situ along Paper Mill brook. (A hydraulic ram is a type of pump that uses the flow of a large current of water to pump a small volume to a reservoir, usually for domestic use). A small ram is on the opposite bank to Gorton's mill. This is shown on the 1881/2 OS map. A much larger one is further downstream (SO 759859). Between it and Gorton's mill there are also the remains of 5 concrete dams for fish pools.

Conclusions

The potential of Paper Mill brook was recognised in Saxon times as witnessed by the Domesday Mill and by c1500 it seems there must have been about five mills at work. These were probably all corn mills. The next 300 years marked a period of both expansion, with probably six new mills being constructed, but also diversification as water power was applied to iron and paper manufacture as well as the processing of timber, leather, clover and oil. Indeed at the end of the 18th Century, corn mills were in a minority on the brook and it is unlikely that there were ever more than five working at any one time. However, they proved more resilient than the other mills and by 1880, four out of the five

mills then operating were grinding corn. The development of milling to some extent reflects the agricultural prosperity of the land around Alveley but also illustrates the penetration of industrial activity in the 17th and 18th Centuries into the rural heartland of the West Midlands.

Many questions remain about the history of the mills in Alveley. The majority of the sites appear to have suffered little disturbance and so show good archaeological potential. Even limited investigation could provide important evidence on the origins, development and working arrangements on sites dating from the 11th to 19th Centuries.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Tim Booth for commenting on an earlier draft of this article and providing much useful information and encouragement, Mr Pitt and other landowners for allowing me access to Paper Mill brook, and Tim White for administrative help.

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- [iv] "*The History of Alveley*", A.J. Nicholls, 1994, 102.
- [v] Alveley Manor Court roll 1762, reproduced in *Trans Alveley His Soc*, (ed Alan Nicholls), 1996, 80.
- [vi] For papermaking in Alveley, see: "Paper making in Shropshire", L.C.Lloyd, *Trans. Shrops. Arch. Soc.*, **49** (1937-8), 121-187; The excise numbers of paper mills in Shropshire, A.H. Shortes, *Trans. Shrop. Arch. Soc.*, **53**, (1949/50) 145-162 (and following article by Lloyd) and "*The Industrial Archaeology of Shropshire*", B. Trinder, Phillimore Press (Chichester), 1996, pp18-19, 237.
- [vii] Staffordshire Record Office (StRO) D695/1/12/68; Berrow's Worcester Journal, September 1st 1806; Lloyd, *op.cit.*, Shortes, *op. cit.*
- [viii] Alveley Manor Court roll 1812, *Trans Alveley His Soc*, 1997, 129.
- [ix] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 115.
- [x] D.T.N. Booth collection; "*Images of Alveley*", Alveley Historical Society, 1999, 32
- [xi] StRO D695/1/12/68.
- [xii] Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record (SSMR) 9497.
- [xiii] *ibid*
- [xiv] StRO D695/1/12/72.
- [xv] Lloyd, *op. cit.*; Shortes, *op. cit.*
- [xvi] SA 57/1
- [xvii] StRO D695/1/12/72.

- [xviii] StRO D695/1/12/72; Lloyd, *op. cit.*; Shortes, *op. cit.*; SA 1396/69; Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 116-7.
- [xix] “*Images of Alveley*”, 108.
- [xx] Shortes, *op. cit.*
- [xxi] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 46
- [xxii] SA 3950/2.
- [xxiii] Eyton, *op. cit.*, 148.
- [xxiv] SA 3950/3.
- [xxv] It is also possible that Nalshe Mill was at a long-abandoned site, perhaps on Coton brook.
- [xxvi] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 99.
- [xxvii] *ibid*, 100, plate opposite 117.
- [xxviii] Kelly’s Directories, various years.
- [xxix] SA 1396/59.
- [xxx] SA 1396/ 88.
- [xxxi] “*Images of Alveley*”, 29
- [xxxii] Watermill survey, John Bedington, 12-2-67.
- [xxxiii] SA 2029/4. It may be that the Grantham family came from Grantham or its surroundings, where “hulme” would be in more common use and brought the word with them.
- [xxxiv] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 68, 72; SA 1/63.
- [xxxv] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 32, 39.
- [xxxvi] SA 1496/23.
- [xxxvii] SA Quarter Sessions, Inquest 10th January 1780.
- [xxxviii] Nicholls, *op. cit.*, 39, 117.
- [xxxix] SA 1373/20: Public Record Office C10/257/8.
- [xl] SSMR 1307, 1642 & 3442; “*The Antiquities of Shropshire*”, R.W. Eyton, 1856-9, **3**, 201.