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The Tragic Story of Edward Wiggin – Wilkes

by John Wiggin

At various times throughout their history a family will experience high points and low, success and failure, happiness and tragedy and in this respect the Wiggin-Wilkes were no different from any other family. Throughout their history they had their fair share of both the happy and the despairing times. In fact we have already seen how Thomas the elder along with his brothers and sisters were orphaned at an early age, thereafter being reliant mainly upon themselves to cope with life and all its trials and tribulations. It is somewhat unfortunate that the harder times are those that are more likely to be documented. If life progresses normally then there will be little recorded history. We tend to assume a happy state by perceiving no particular misfortune. By their very nature tragedies are always unexpected, often shattering the status quo of the whole family, their lives forever after revolving around the one event that disrupted life's normality. Often the trauma alters the perspective that the individual members of a family have on life, encouraging contemplation of their own mortality and the direction their future life will take. Such events are almost always documented giving us our recorded history. One such event occurred within the Wiggin-Wilkes family two years after the death of Mary Wilkes and took place against the backdrop of a deteriorating economic situation, much industrial unrest and the continuing and very desperate food shortages.

We know from documentary evidence that Edward Wiggin was a miller working in Eardington west of the river Severn in the parish of Quatford. But in order to move our story forward we must determine what type of miller he was.

All mills require power, and at the time that we are interested in virtually all were driven by wind sails or water wheels. Only a very few had been converted to steam. Eardington being close to the river Severn was blessed with two streams. One formed the northern boundary of the parish of Quatford and one the southern. All the power required in the parish was derived from these two streams turning water wheels. The shorter northern stream was fed by springs and consequently even in the driest of seasons never ceased to flow. For this reason the oldest of Eardington's mills, a grain mill, had been built at the lower part of the waterway some two hundred yards from its junction with the river where the necessary large holding pools could be constructed. When first built this mill was known as Donynges mill changing to Dunning's mill in the 17th century then Dunning's and finally Daniel's mill by the late 19th century. The miller operated on a jobbing basis as required by local farmers but at times he would buy grain from the farmer to convert into his own products which he would then sell at local markets. He was a vital link in the chain that progressed grain from field to consumer at a time when food was of major concern to all. Notwithstanding this importance the miller was regularly subjected to vociferous criticism from farmers who complained that the processed grain showed a substantial shortfall on that which they supplied, intimating that the miller often retained a portion for his own benefit. Whilst this may well have been true on occasion the mistrust was by no means one sided for the farmers determined to receive a better price regularly over estimated the quality and quantity of the grain that they supplied anyway. The relationship was one of wary mistrust. In the early twenty first century it is still in the ownership of a family that traces their occupancy back several hundred years and is enjoying a resurgence of trade. Benefiting from an increased demand from local bakeries for natural stone ground flour.

The southern boundary stream was known as Marlbrook, (later Hay Brook), and ran in a deep valley south of the village of Eardington. Its waters were collected from the land lying to the south east of Much Wenlock via Beacon hill brook and Mor brook which ran through the village of Morville. It had the benefit of a stronger water flow in season but was susceptible to a more erratic supply in dry seasons. This stream was utilised to drive several industrial mills amongst which was a very productive tinsplate forge on the banks of the Severn. For the forge sustainable power was imperative and a holding pool was formed by constructing a large brick dam on higher ground a little way removed from the Eardington to Chelmarsh road. The structure still stands, situated in a heavily wooded valley. One of the lesser known but more picturesque monuments to the industrial revolution. Some one half mile upstream from the forge pool was the site of a yarn mill, originally known as New Mill or Factory Mill and close by on the steep valley side were erected five mill workers cottages. These cottages were referred to locally as 'factory cottages' and though two have been lately converted to more affluent country homes (1990) locals still know them by that name. The mill structure built of stone and iron consisted of four floors, each being a room some sixty feet long by twenty eight feet wide containing machinery for the production of linen, hurden and worsted yarns. In 1796 the mill and adjacent Mill Farm were in the ownership of Mr. John Oakes.

It would seem most unlikely that a second grain mill would have been erected on this stream given the close proximity to

Dunnells mill and it's already well established clientele base and market outlets and we suggest therefore that Edward was a miller concerned not with grain but with the production of yarn which he produced at New Mill.

In 1801 after a surprisingly short four year period of operating New Mill Mr. Oakes was declared bankrupt and offered the mill for sale by auction. At the same sale but auctioned separately were the foundations and water courses for a much smaller mill situated upstream of the yarn mill and also Mill farm with it's thirty three acres of arable land.

Although Edward could have been working at New Mill before Mr Oakes's bankruptcy it is believed that he and his elder brother Thomas now formed a partnership to run the mill as a commercial venture in their own right and either purchased the mill outright at auction or leased it from a subsequent owner. Whether or not they owned the premises they ran the business for at least the next eleven years.

It is not known for what purpose the smaller mill was intended and appears unlikely that it was ever completed for there is now precious little to show for it's existence. New Mill on the other hand was a substantial structure crammed full of machinery to produce candlewick, hurden and worsted yarns. Machinery that in the brothers hands would prove to be worth it's weight in gold. However it must be remembered that this was still a developing industry employing relatively new technology. There had been and still was a considerable amount of ill feeling against those who employed machinery instead of traditional manpower to produce goods. This had become particularly apparent in the textile centres of the north in the 1860's and 70's when the introduction of wider spinning frames and power looms had thrown large numbers of skilled men and women out of work.. Vigilante groups had formed to smash machines and organise riots. The government had come down hard on such groups, many were jailed, some deported to Australia, a few were even hung. By 1812 the situation had become so bad in Lancashire that Luddites broke into a factory in Wigan smashed the machines, burnt the building and murdered the owner. They believed that this would safeguard their jobs!. Although they had been in the business for over a decade and become used to the steadily escalating violence Thomas and Edward must have viewed these developments with some alarm. They may even have given consideration of moving into other employment.

Nevertheless on the 25th of November 1812 Edward went about his business as usual and journeyed, as was his custom, to the extensive and very popular Wednesday market of Wolverhampton to sell products from the mill and purchase raw materials.

Wolverhampton is some twelve miles by road from Bridgnorth and a further one and a half miles from Eardington. When Edward had the need to sell produce in Wolverhampton he had the prospect of a round trip of some twenty eight miles or more. A journey that could take anything from two to three hours each way when driving a loaded cart. Add to this the influence of inclement weather, varying road conditions and the numerous hills to be negotiated it could take even longer. Particularly challenging was the infamous 'Hermitage' with it's long slow climb from the Severn valley floor. Additional horses would be harnessed at the bottom to assist in pulling loaded carts to the summit. Even so it was a hard slog. The horses dipping their heads at every step, breath pulsing from their nostrils like escaping steam, condensing in the crisp air of autumn. The road wound slowly upwards like an uncoiling serpent and then as if to test man and beast to the limit rose sharply through a one in twelve gradient before reaching the crest. Water and a well earned rest awaited the horses at the summit but it was not to long before they would be off again, trotting at an easier pace across the undulating lands towards Wolverhampton. Fortunately the greater part of the Wolverhampton, Bridgnorth road had been turnpiked by 1750 and it's surface improved considerably. This had made for shorter journey times between the two market towns but even so the day required an early start, it was no pleasure trip. The road eventually ran through the area we now know as Chapel Ash. The turnpike gate being situated at the lower end of Barns street which approximates to the route of the modern day Cleveland street.

Wolverhampton's market was renowned. It's charter had been granted by Henry III in 1258 following an extended period of illegal trading without licence during King John's reign. The townsfolk embraced their good fortune and developed their Wednesday market until it was considered the finest in the country. So renowned did it become for it's trade in sheep and wool that the prestigious wool staple was eventually transferred from Flanders to the town. Considerable fortunes were made during the wool years. By the late eighteenth century however the market had degenerated and become somewhat unwholesome, though nonetheless popular. It served a town of two thousand households and twelve thousand individuals, not to mention the villages both rural and industrial within a radius of twenty miles or so. It sprawled across High Green, the present Queen square, and pressed into Dudley street, Lichfield street, and all the alleyways and folds that gave onto them. Every conceivable corner was occupied by traders. Crockery stalls blocked the entrance to St. Peters churchyard obstructing funeral corteges. Movement along Dudley street was prevented by butchers and poulterers the majority of whom erected makeshift stalls in haphazard fashion. Fishmongers crowded the entrance to Dudley Street at it's junction with High Green and all manner of amateur performers sang, danced and cavorted in any convenient and inconvenient space available taking what benefit they could from the captive audience the market drew. The atmosphere to say the least was chaotic, colourful and lively but most importantly profitable, both for the tradespeople and the town in general. Even the local nere-do-wells prospered from the rich pickings of the many unguarded pockets.

A contemporary account describes the scene:-

"Amidst the throngs who are passing to and fro there are many stationary groups, and one of these is not infrequently occasioned by a circle having formed round a couple of colliers performing a dance. The attention of the groups is generally fixed upon some ballad singer or some fellow with news of the last execution outside Stafford gaol or some vendor of quack medicines to cure coughs, colds or broken limbs.... Great quantities of bad meat are sold in the market, particularly veal... The

stalls are lighted with candles so as to throw light upon the best joints or those that can be made to look the best, while the others are in the shade. Horse flesh is often sold for beef steaks... The fishmongers are few in number fish being rather a rarity. I shall only say that it is quite unnecessary to approach any of the fish stalls after dark within six or seven yards as you will know the condition and value of the whole stock at a greater distance than that."

The unloading of produce and the bartering to secure a good price was a ritual Edward enjoyed. It was all part of the game, a game he had mastered as a young man and now looked forward to with some relish. His first concern though was for his horses. They were taken out of harness and glad to be free shook their heads vigorously rearranging their manes whilst whinnying their appreciation, in unison. At the public water trough they were soon lapping noisily before settling to munch their way through the contents of canvas nosebags. Edward was well known at market for he had been coming to Wolverhampton for many years. Those he knew shouted their good days. Those that recognised him at a distance nodded recognition. It was not long before he was in negotiation with business acquaintances with whom he would eventually retire to The Swan or Red Lion inn for lunch. The break from normal daily chores at the mill was welcome. It gave him time to catch up on the latest business news, meet old friends, trade gossip and hear recounted the latest ribald stories. Wolverhampton was much more urbane than Bridgnorth or Eardington. It had a faster pulse, it was more in tune with the times, there was even a theatre located behind the Swan inn, though on business trips Edward would probably have had little time to spend in there. Indeed it was not a venue that a gent was expected to frequent. A stroll around the market after lunch to get the feel of business and make sure all provisions and materials for the coming weeks were accounted for would precede the loading of the cart and the harnessing of the horses ready for home. It was important to make an early start. The crush of carriages and wagons down Cock Street and Hoblake as everyone headed out of town could be a nightmare, prolonging the homeward journey unnecessarily, no change their then!. He joined the queue which had already started to back up from the turnpike gate at the lower end of Barn Street and waited patiently. Despite the rigours of the outward journey the day had been profitable. All had gone well and Edward carried homewards somewhat more than fifty pounds. A substantial amount of money that equated to between two and three years pay for a labourer, he was understandably well pleased. Put into perspective he would by present day comparison have been carrying somewhere between thirty to forty thousand pounds!.

It was an already watery sun that cast it's thin cool light across Broad Meadow as he came slowly to the toll gate. To the right he could see clear up New Walk. The solid square tower of St. Peters standing on it's hill dominated the jumble of houses and shops that radiated from it's base to cascade downwards in all directions. Once onto the turnpike he was away, and the houses in Barn Street were soon left far behind as he and other travellers disappeared quietly into the twilight world of the countryside. Within the hour he had passed through Compton and Trescott and the air now chill with the damp of late autumn clung heavily to his clothes. Wood smoke from the occasional wayside cottage fire drifted low across the lane merging with the heavy grey blue gloom that seeped through the leafless heads of Smestow's willows. Away across the flat land lay a twisting shroud of grey mist that marked the snake like course of the brook that ran unseen towards Seisdon. The homeward journey he thought always seemed shorter. The horses, pulling a lighter load and eager to reach warm stabling had a livelier gait. By five o'clock the darkness was total broken only by the light and joviality that spilled from the few cottages and public houses dotted along the way. The lane twisted and turned as it skirted first one farm and then another. Passing over common lands covered with gorse and bracken browned and crisped by the first night frosts. Through rough grazing and waste lands where the poorer agricultural labourers removed from their lands by the enclosures acts had erected whatever wretched shelter they could against the deep cold that would inevitably come. At times in the darkness the horses had difficulty in finding safe footing and Edward had to be constantly encouraging them onwards. The high ground that skirted Rudge Heath bought him out of a thin veiling mist into the crisp blackness of a star studded night where the silence was broken only by a tawny owl proclaiming it's territorial rights from a distant Elm and the staccato scream of a dog fox seeking a vixen. The journey was certainly less direct than the one we would follow today though several landmarks would have been as familiar to Edward as they are to ourselves. The Wheel Inn at Wyken with it's busy smithy close by, the cluster of tiny cottages trapped in their gorge at Hilton and the numerous small farms that dotted the high ground along the way would have had a similarity to those that we see today. The road though was much narrower. A lane not even wide enough to allow the passage of two carts in places. The sweeping curves that we hardly notice today as we speed along in modern transport would have been angular, laid to negotiate field boundaries and farm buildings, following tracks once traversed only by drovers with their cattle and sheep.

Accounting for any dalliance he may have made at any one of the many inns along the way Bridgnorth would have been reached at around six thirty in the evening when the flickering light of candle lit rooms in High Town would appear as fireflies across the valley. With brake blocks pressed hard against creaking wheels the cart began it's slow, careful descent to the town below and was very soon clattering it's noisy passage across the cobbles of Low Town's main street. The sound reverberated back and forth from the stone walls of the small cottages on every side and here and there faces, inquisitive of the passing traveller, appeared at small paned windows. He coaxed the horses around the difficult corner onto the narrow bridge where the few homeward hurrying pedestrians quickly sort the safety of the refuge points on either side as the horses snorted past. Glancing sideways Edward could see from the dim reflections dancing across the surface that the river ran high and strong and mused how only a few years earlier, when he was still a boy, such waters had washed away the toll house structure that had clung so precariously to the western abutment. He could hear the torrent now, forcing it's turbulent passage between the stone piers pulling at the accumulated mass of branches and debris washed downstream and lodged helplessly against the stonework. In the darkness he could just pick out the dimly swinging masts of several trows as they bobbed and bumped at their nighttime moorings. Marooned until calmer waters allowed their journey upstream. Once safely across he turned left onto Underhill

street where the early evening revelries of boisterous bargemen singing and arguing in the drinking dens that lined the wharfage assailed his ears. To his left and a little higher were several crude dwellings carved into the towering cliff. The light of their dimly lit rooms enhanced and warmed by the distinctive rose tint of the sandstone walls. At the turnpike gates controlling the roads to Eardington and Cleobury he stopped, exchanged evening pleasantries with the toll keeper he had come to know well and then disappeared once more into the darkness descending the shallow incline that brought him close to the river's flood level. The lane although was still little more than a roughly stoned track, twisting and turning with the contours of the river bank as it passed between ash and oak that crowded in on either side. Sodden leaf litter choked the drainage gullies causing water to find alternative pathways between the stones and muddy ruts. With little over a mile to go, he reflected on the day. It had been long and tiring but well worth while, he would be home by seven thirty and his brother Thomas would be eager to learn of the day's trading. A bright flickering fire would be welcome relaxation once the horses were bedded. Only Knowle Sands Bank beyond Dunnel's Mill bridge left to climb and one to descend to Eardington mill and the comforts of home.

Unfortunately Edward never made that last climb. For two hundred yards before reaching the parish boundaries of Oldbury and Quatford at Dunnel's mill, he was accosted by a footpad lying in wait in the unlit narrow lane.

What ensued is best described by the Shropshire Journal which reported the following week on the 2nd of December as follows...

"Murder. On Wednesday last between 6 and 7 o'clock in the evening Mr. Wiggin Miller of Eardington about two miles from Bridgnorth was murdered between that place and his own house. He was on his return from Wolverhampton market and was met by a footpad about a mile from home. It is supposed that on his making a stout resistance the villain drew a pistol and shot him through the body. The ball passed in a direct line just below his heart. It seems however that the assassin was alarmed by Mr. Wiggin's cries for assistance as he made off without taking any of his property which consisted of between sixty and fifty pounds cash notes. It is conjecture that after being shot the unfortunate man pursued his murderer about one hundred yards and was found by some persons from a turnpike house who had heard his cries. Exhausted with loss of blood he was carried to the house where he expired in a short time. Pursuit was instantly made after the murderer and two suspicious persons are said to be in custody."

In similar vein the Wolverhampton Chronicle of the same date reported. .

"Murder of Mr. Wiggan, the following particulars of this dreadful assassination may be relied upon as correct. On Wednesday evening last at about seven o'clock, Mr. Edward Wiggan, late of the township of Eardington, near Bridgnorth, miller, on his return home from Wolverhampton market, soon after he had passed through the turnpike gate, on the road leading from Bridgnorth towards Eardington, was shot by a person whom Mr. Wiggan said he saw standing under a tree, on the side of the road; that immediately as he came opposite to the tree the man without speaking, fired at him, and ran away towards the turnpike which Mr. Wiggan had passed. The ball (which from the size of it must have been fired from a large pistol or gun) passed through Mr. Wiggan's coat sleeve near the left elbow, entered his side, passed near his heart, and lodged in the upper part of the right side. The report of the pistol or gun and Mr. Wiggan's cries, soon brought several persons to the spot; he was conveyed to the turnpike house, where he died in about an hour and a half after he was shot. — A Coroners inquest was held on Friday, and continued their investigations till Saturday morning, about six o'clock, when they gave a verdict of Wilful murder against some person or persons unknown— The murderer did not attempt to take Mr. Wiggan's property, — Every exertion is making to discover the perpetrator of this horrid deed."

Two weeks later in the Shropshire Journal, December 16th, 1812...

"We understand that two persons are in custody on suspicion of the murder of Mr. Wiggin Miller as stated in our paper of the 2nd inst."

We conclude that Edward, a man in his prime, though not necessarily big but one used to heavy labour would have had a relatively strong physique and therefore well able to give reasonable account of himself. Whether or not this is what happened the pistol then being discharged in panic by the assailant we can not say, though if a loaded pistol be carried it must be assumed that it was meant to be discharged. Without robbery actually taking place it must be questioned if this personal attack was a spin off from the troubles being experienced in the north. A disgruntled former employee maybe?

This terrible tragedy came to the family some two years after the death of Edward's mother Mary. Thomas now had the unenviable task of burying his thirty seven year old son alongside his wife in the grave originally intended as his own final resting place.

The entry in Alveley parish register reads:-

"Edward Wiggin aged 37 of the parish of Quatford, burial. Shot by a villain on his return from Wolverhampton market between Oldbury turnpike and the Tan House."

The gravestone inscription gives the date as 26th of November though all other evidence suggests that he only survived a few hours which would make his passing the late evening of the 25th. It is thought that his brother Thomas would have been sent for immediately and that he would therefore have reached Edward's side before he died.

On the 2nd of February 1813 Edward's father was executor of his son's estate when all monies and effects amounting to a little under six hundred pounds passed by tradition to the eldest surviving son, in this case Thomas junior. The transfer was witnessed by Thomas's good friends Ezekiel and William Darby of The Cleckers farm and mill, Alveley.

The event was of some concern to the neighbourhood and one that they would not readily forget. Although the report states that the ball lodged in Edward's side others suggest that it did in fact pass through his body and embedded itself in the trunk of an Oak tree on the river side of the lane.

The Oak tree and the area where Edward fell were later commemorated in verse penned by John Randall in 1882 in his book of collected anecdotes entitled 'The Severn Valley'. It goes....

As the road descends between high banks and Knowle Sands,

There is an Oak of stately growth
a field removed, no more
from where the silver Severn winds
along the shelving shore.
A weird wild legend hangs around
the spot whereon it grows,
of one whose spirit wanders round
and vainly seeks repose.
And though the sunshine smiles upon
that sweetly favoured spot,
the tale of Wiggin's haunted oak
will never be forgot.
The grass grows green on all around
save where the dead man lay
and there 'tis brown and waste, and bare
e'en to this very day

As in most verse a certain poetic licence has been used for we see that poor Edward was considered dead on the ground before being carried to the cottage where he eventually expired. Also the poet wishing to convey dramatic overtone suggests the possibility that the ground may in some way be cursed at this spot omitting to inform us that it would be unlikely to bear the sparsest of grasses being then as it is now a very poor grey clay. The oak tree itself survived until recent times, the hole where the ball lodged healing to a callous and circled by the locals with white paint. The tradition was carried on until at least the nineteen thirties for Joyce George the present owner of Daniel's Mill recalls the tree and the painted circle from her younger days.

The event is indicative of the real dangers that abounded for the more affluent of the time. A far greater disparity of income existed then between the haves and have nots. No social security eased the poverty of those unable to secure employment and even those having employment were often so poorly paid that they remained on the bread line for life. With no formal policing system and little hope of bringing criminals to justice, especially in rural areas, it is little wonder that the well off were considered fair game by the criminal element. So fearful were the affluent of felonies against their property and person that they formed themselves into societies. The purpose being to raise funds from which rewards could be paid to informants upon successful conviction of criminals acting against members of the society.

The rewards stipulated by one such society were as follows:

On conviction the informant will receive in the case of,	
Burglary, Highway or footpad robbery	£8.8.0
Stealing, maiming any horse or gelding	£6.6.0
Stealing, maiming any bull, cow, calf or sheep	£4.4.0
Stealing, maiming any pig or poultry	£2.2.0
Stealing coals, potatoes or turnips	£2.2.0

This gives us an insight into the relative values our ancestors placed upon their assets. After their own person the horse was obviously their most valuable and respected possession. For the farmer it provided power and transport. To some it would have been as valuable as their dwelling for without it they would have much reduced means of generating income. Interestingly cattle and sheep were more highly rated than the pig although the later provided more in the way of food. The turnip virtually unknown these days was a staple winter food for cattle whilst the potato held the same importance in human consumption. Coal was the main source of generating heat and industrial power and carried a high premium. It is of little surprise to see that

no mention was made of wives for in these distant times the wife was a mere chattel and it appears not a highly prized one at that.

The rewards for informants were high and consequently the system open to abuse for there have always been those who would shop their own granny and even the innocent to collect a share of the purse. Not only that the judicial system of the period left a little to be desired. Convicted felons were given the choice of the gallows or trial by water, in short they could die by strangulation, a long drawn out process or be trussed and thrown into the Severn. If they drowned they were considered innocent. If they resurfaced and survived they were considered guilty as charged had their right foot and hand removed and were banished from the parish, you can't say fairer than that!. Understandably few opted for the later option thereby confirming their guilt and were dispatched in Gallows field on the eastern side of the river where now stands the Star Aluminium factory.

The two 'suspicious persons' held at Bridgnorth were later discharged and released, no evidence being found of their committing or being involved in the crime. Failure to apprehend the criminal resulted in an approach being made to the Crown through the Prince Regent, formerly the Prince of Wales, to the effect :-

"No persons having being found and convicted of the murder His Majesty is asked to grant pardon to any accomplice willing to give evidence against the party committing the offence."

To further encourage the apprehension of any likely suspect a reward of two hundred guineas was offered by the bailiffs of Bridgnorth. This was a considerable sum of money, one that would have guaranteed a comfortable lifestyle for any informant and his dependants. Even so it was to no avail.

Sixty five years later on March 21st 1877 an article appertaining to, 'The Oak trees of Shropshire', again published in the Shropshire Journal, dwelt at length on Wiggin's oak and the terrible event it bore witness to. It had by then become part of Shropshire's rich folklore and continued to enjoy some notoriety. It's end however was to some extent as sad as Edward's for in the 1930's it was felled by mistake when the narrow lane was the subject of a road widening scheme. Despite local protests it's fate was sealed and Edward's story and the legend of Wiggin's Oak soon receded into the mists of time.

A note from John Wiggin

Edward Wiggin who's grave can be found in Alveley churchyard was not an Alveley born man, but his predecessors of at least four generations were.

Briefly, his great, great grandfather Francis Wiggon, as far as can be determined, lived in Alveley parish and fathered a son Francis baptised in Alveley in 1638. The son grew through the chaotic and sometimes dangerous years of civil war and religious turmoil and waited until some normality returned to life before marrying at age fifty. Despite his late marriage his bride Elizabeth Poutney being considerably younger was able to bear him seven children the fifth of whom was named Thomas at his Alveley baptism in 1698. It is at this time that the surname changed to Wiggin.

By the time that Thomas Wiggin was six years old his father Francis had died and by the time he was eight his mother had also passed away, leaving a very young family to cope with life as best they could. At age forty Thomas married a woman named Mary (surname unknown) at Alveley and produced an only child named Thomas. (Referred to as Thomas the younger in subsequent documentation).

In 1750 Thomas the younger moved to the neighbouring parish of Areley and took tenancy of The Brittles farm Witnells End, (now known as the Brettels). Where he lived with his partner Mary Wilkes, raising a family of five children there. The third of these children was named Edward. The chap whose gravestone appears in the newspaper cutting you kindly sent me.

To clarify the gravestones around Edward's.

On entering the churchyard through the main gate The first standing headstone on the right, behind the tree, marks the resting place of Thomas the younger d.1815 and his youngest son James d.1817.

Beyond this stone are two further standing stones. The left stone marks the resting place of William, Thomas's fourth son d.1852 (William had taken over the tenancy of the Brettels farm from 1815 until his own demise).

The right hand stone indicates the resting place of Mary Wilkes d.1810 Thomas's partner and Edward, Thomas and Mary's third son, the Miller shot by a villain in 1812.

Thomas the 'elder' and his wife Elizabeth are also buried at Alveley as is Thomas's parents but we have no indication as to where they may be.

Kindest regards, John

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The Wood Family of Alveley By Margaret Sheridan

“Wood” is a very well-known family name in Alveley. “Oh Yes ! ” I hear you cry.
 “They used to live at the Bell Inn ...they’ve lived in the village for donkey’s years !”

How many “Donkey’s years ” no-one seems to know, so I decided to try and turn the clock back and find out more-

The surname “Wood” appears in the Alveley Parish Registers in 1612, but the first mention of the Wood family that we know in Alveley today, is in 1759, when William Wood married Hannah Rogers.

William and Hannah had at least eight children between 1759 and 1775 - John, William, George, Hannah, Betty, Sarah, Benjamin and Mary

Their first born John, married Ann Binnian in 1785 and their fourth-born Hannah married John Binnian and it is these two people that generated the Wood family that we know today !

John Wood and his wife Ann Binnian had ten children between 1786 and 1804 - Sally(1786), Benjamin (1788),George (1791), Leticha (1793), William (1795), Sarah (1797), John (1798) , James (1800) , Jeffrey (1802) , and Ann (1804)

Hannah Wood and John Binnian had four children between 1786 and 1792 - Lucy, Henry, Benjamin and Harriet. John died during the summer of 1793 and Hannah married David Williams the following winter and had a further seven children between 1794 and 1809 – Hannah, Charlotte, Sybil, Matilda, Druscilla, Clarissa and David.

George (born 1791- son of John and Ann Wood) married Hannah Brewer at Alveley Church in July 1814 and had eight children- Ann, (1814) Leticha (1816), Elizabeth (1818), John (1820), George (1822) , Benjamin (1826) , Geoffrey (1827), and Sarah. (1833).

George was one of the first people in Alveley to be converted to Methodism and by 1830 was holding Methodist meetings at his home and along with other members of his family quickly established a vigorous Methodist movement within the area .

Jeffrey Wood (born 1802) married his cousin Druscilla Williams (daughter of Hannah and David Williams) at Kingswinford in 1832. During the early 1830’s Jeffrey was persuaded by his elder brother George to attend Methodist meetings and Jeffrey soon became a very enthusiastic Methodist, resulting in him becoming a local Methodist Preacher by 1839.

The Wood family were related to many other household’s throughout the village and quickly encouraged many other local families to join them in the Methodist movement.

By the mid 1850’s several rich and influential Alveley people had also begun to attend the Methodist meeting’s at Jeffrey Wood’s cottage and with their help and financial backing, a Primitive Methodist Chapel was built in Alveley in 1862.

(For more information on the origins of Alveley Methodist movement and the early years of the Methodist Chapel see “Transactions of the Alveley Historical Society 1999”.)

The 1861 census shows Jeffrey and Druscilla living at a small dwelling next to the Bell Inn :

Jeffrey Wood	head of household	age 58	Quarry Master	born Alveley
Druscilla	wife	age 59		born Alveley
James	unmarried son	age 27	Quarry labourer	born Alveley

With his brother James , also a Quarrymaster, living just two doors down.

This must have been quite an embarrassment for the Parish priest at the time. Imagine having leaders of a “very unwelcome” religious movement living just a few short yards away from the church ! Bearing in mind that the Wood’s were literally persuading life-long members of the church congregation to leave and join their movement !

Which poses the question of whether there was ever an exchange of “strong words” between Reverend Considine and the Wood’s ?? – We will never know !!! Although it is known that certain members of the church congregation who did decide to leave in favour of the Methodist meetings at Jeffrey Wood’s house, were offered inducements to change their minds.

Jeffrey Wood died of a stroke aged 67 and was buried in Alveley Churchyard on June 9th 1869. The officiating minister at the burial was the Parish Priest Robert Augustus Considine. Nothing was written in the margin or against Jeffrey’s name in the burial register, the vicar perhaps had his mind on other matters at the time, as the next entry in the burial register was that of the vicar’s wife who was buried just a few days later.

Jeffrey’s widow Druscilla, remained in the village living at 3 Daddlebrook with her sister Sybil, and son James.

By this stage the Wood and Williams’ families had spread far and wide around the world and Druscilla even had a niece living in New Zealand.

Druscilla's and Jeffrey's eldest son James, (born Alveley 1833) married Elizabeth Birkin, (daughter of George Birkin) in 1871 and had six children. Their first born Jeffrey was baptised at Alveley Methodist Chapel in December 1871 but their other children; Ellen, Frances, Ann, Edwin and Hugh were all baptised at Alveley Parish Church.

Which raises the question, did the family leave the Methodist movement at some point in the early 1870's ?

On 26th February 1878 disaster struck the home at Daddlebrook when Druscilla, (then aged 75) accidentally burnt to death. An Inquest was held at "The Three Horse Shoes" two days later and Druscilla was buried in Alveley Churchyard on Saturday 2nd March 1878. It is unsure exactly how the accident happened, but in those days cottages were very dimly lit and full of hazards such as the open fire, candles, oil lamps etc, and accidents within the home were a very common occurrence.

George and Hannah's son, George (born 1822) followed in the family tradition by becoming a stone quarryman. He married Sarah Ann Kirkham (daughter of John and Lucy Kirkham) at Highley in September 1858 and they settled into a small dwelling at Potters Loade. Their many children included – Alice (1863), James (1865), John (1867), Geoffrey (1869), William Benjamin (1874), and Ada Henrietta Ethel (1878)

For those of us too young to remember Potters Loade cottages, they were small cottages situated near the water on the Alveley side of the Severn (now part of "The Severn Valley Country Park"). George died in 1883 and his widow Sarah married coalminer Benjamin Beddoes the following year. (for more information on the Kirkham family of Alveley see "Transactions of the Alveley Historical Society 2000")

Son John (born 1867) married Henrietta Hayes at Alveley Church in October 1895.

Like many local men of the time John was a miner employed by "The Highley Mining Company" and Henrietta ran a shop at 56 Alveley, selling a wide range of products including fresh bread, which the local children couldn't resist nibbling at on the way home. – many a loaf reached its destination with little chunks missing from the sides!

The village children were very fond of Henrietta and many knew her as Auntie Tettie - a kind old lady who gave away more sweets than she sold !

Another son James (born 1865) was also a coalminer. Unfortunately in 1912 James fell down the stairs and fractured his skull and later died. An inquest into his death was held at Elm Cottage on 8th March 1912.

Ada Henrietta Ethel (born about 1877) married Ernest Lloyd Evans at Alveley Church in April 1901. Ernest was a native of Ruthin, North Wales and came to Shropshire to assist in the sinking of Highley, Billingsley and Kinlet Pits. Ernest soon settled into village life and by 1906 was recorded as "Innkeeper of The Bell Inn Alveley" In later years the family lived at Elm Cottage, on the corner by the Village Green.

Ada and Ernest had at least seven children including; Geoffrey, Ada Henrietta, Sarah Alice, Hilda, Ellis, and Ida Minnie and Ivy Elizabeth.

Ida Minnie died within a few weeks of her birth in May 1906, and Ada Henrietta and Sarah Alice were twin girls born in 1907. Ada Henrietta went into nursing and became a Sister at Kidderminster Hospital, and in later years was joint proprietor at "The Village Shop" at 56 Alveley with her life-long friend Violet Wilmott.

William Benjamin (born 1874) married Ellen Jane Beddoe at Alveley Church in 1905 and took over at the "Bell Inn" in September 1913.

He and his brother Geoffrey were also Quarrymaster's and were recorded in the Shropshire Trade Directories of 1913 and 1917 as "Quarrymasters & Grindstone Manufacturers at Hall Close Quarries - where sandstone suitable for building and grinding purposes is quarried, giving employment to a number of local men"

The Public House closed down in the late 1930's but the family remained at the Inn converting it to a private dwelling. Their son John Gilbert, (or "Gillie" as he was known) married Marjorie Davies in 1952 and re-opened The Bell Inn in the early 1970's.

Locals and visitors once again enjoyed the warmth and charm of one of Shropshire's oldest public houses and many a village get-together was held in the Bell Room. Gillie and Marjorie died during the 1980's and the Bell Inn is now a private dwelling.

Many decades have now passed and the Alveley Wood family have spread far and wide around the country and to many other continents. Some descendants still visit Alveley from time to time and affectionately look around Daddlebrook, the Methodist Chapel, and stroll around the Severn Valley Country Park remembering the times when their ancestors would have lived and worked here and helped shape the village that we know today...

One such descendant is Professor Dennis Wood of Birmingham who has recently started to research his Alveley connections -

THE WOODS OF OLDBURY

[This article first appeared in an earlier form in the *Black Country Bugle*.]

"The past is a foreign country", as the saying goes, "they do things differently there". In the Oldbury I remember from my

childhood in the 1940s and 1950s they certainly did. Oldbury was rather like the film set of *Hobson's Choice*, a place of small shops, oily canals, railway branch lines and numerous factories whose sirens could be heard throughout the day. One of those small shops - and there were many, "Top" and "Bottom" - guests the fruiterers, for example, Moyle & Adams the grocers, Direct Sweet Supply (my favourite), Adams the clothiers, Marsh & Baxter, Walter Bates the butchers on the bridge where you could see the canal glinting through the floorboards - was a greengrocer's belonging to my grandmother Margaret Wood at 2 New Street.

I can still recall the earthy smell of potatoes as you entered her shop, the tiny living room behind it with its coal range and peg rug, and the underkitchen below opening onto a courtyard. There, with her husband Tom - and despite financial hardship - "Maggie" had raised a family of six, having lost at least three children in infancy and a daughter Margaret aged thirteen of mis-diagnosed appendicitis in 1929. The Woods were well known in the town, and particularly at the old St Francis Xavier's Roman Catholic church in Pinfold Street - all of the children attended the school and the services there. There was, however, a persistent story in the family that the Woods were not from Oldbury at all, but from Alveley in Shropshire, a picturesque village between Arley and Bridgnorth. And on further investigation it turns out that this oral tradition was accurate.

With the help of Alveley historian Margaret Sheridan, I have pieced together the story of Tom Wood's father, my great grandfather William Wood, known in Oldbury as "Little Billy Wood", whose photograph (taken in Highgate, Birmingham in the 1880s or 1890s) has miraculously survived. His life in many ways reflects the social history of nineteenth-century England. William was christened in St Mary's parish church, Alveley, in September 1832, the son of a stonecutter named William Wood (b. 1795, son of John Wood d. 1816) and his wife Ann (d. 1834), and was one of eight children. His father's job was a strenuous and dangerous one. (Other Woods were later to become quarrymasters, and stone from Alveley would be shipped down the Severn for the restoration of Worcester Cathedral during the 1850s). At some point - like so many others - he left the countryside for one of the growing mining and manufacturing towns of the Black Country, Oldbury, Worcestershire. According to my late father Bernard Wood, William was sent as a boy from Alveley to Oldbury to be apprenticed to a cordwainer named Moore who had a shop in Church Street. (There is indeed a boot dealer John Moore, aged 58, born in Wednesbury, at 16 Church Street, Oldbury in the 1881 census). My uncle, Thomas Wood, recorded in December 1974 and December 1980, said: "When William Wood came to Oldbury, he thought what a pretty village it was, with a brook crossing the High Street at the Perrott Arms. So pretty that he decided to stay there. He lodged with the Peters family opposite the [later] Palace cinema in Freeth Street - a well-to-do and rather military family, Oldbury stock with possibly Irish origins, who had prints of battles on the walls. They were Catholics, he was a Methodist lay preacher who toured the whole area. They argued a lot, and eventually William was converted. As soon as he did, he was dropped by all his former friends, and his business suffered greatly". The Woods who stayed behind in Alveley (and there are still descendants there today) were responsible for the building of Alveley Primitive Methodist chapel in 1862, and there was clearly a tradition in the family that the William had himself been a Methodist lay preacher - although, since he was later unable to sign his name on his marriage certificate, it is perhaps doubtful whether he could easily have read the Bible.

William made a first marriage - I have so far been unable to trace his wife's name - and she appears to have died in about 1863. He then married in 1864 Matilda Wright, daughter of West Bromwich shoemaker William Wright (b. 1809), at All Saints Anglican church, West Bromwich. William Wood and all his family attended St Francis Xavier's church, Oldbury, built in 1865 in Pinfold Street as an offshoot of St Michael's, West Bromwich (1832). The Woods lived in conditions little short of poverty in the area of courtyards and back-to-back houses known as "Back Lane" - the area is now occupied by the car park off Albert Street and Wesley Street, Oldbury. Matilda (b. 1845) had at least ten children, some of whom did not survive long enough to be recorded in the 1881 census. Those who did survive to adulthood - Will (nailcutter in 1881, later glassblower), Fred (nailcutter in 1881, later carpenter), Lucy (later kept a general store in Spon Lane), Frank (bootmaker in Churchbridge), Anne (shopkeeper in Clent), Tom (rivetter), Beatrice (caretaker of St Francis's church), Jack (glassblower) - married and produced a large number of descendants alive today. (The Wood family tree I've traced so far runs to over forty pages). In "Kelly's Worcestershire Directory" for 1878 there is an entry: "Wood William, boot & shoe maker, Albert Street". Later editions specify "31 Albert Street". In the 1891 census the family is resident at 31 Albert Street, in a house of just four rooms. William seems to have been in business until his death on 4 February 1898. The 1901 census records that his widow and children were trying to carry on the business, but in all probability in vain. "Little Billy Wood" (as he was known in Oldbury) was short in stature - like the rest of the Alveley Wood family, I've learned - as the surviving photograph shows.

Life was to prove no less precarious for the children than it had been for the parents. Working as glassblowers may have shortened the lives of Will and Jack, and my grandfather Tom Wood, who had once made pocket money from holding the reins of carriage horses while the well-to-do went into Lloyd's Bank, Oldbury, later lost his left eye at work when a hot rivet entered it point first. He had to wait for the tram to take him to West Bromwich hospital where his eye was subsequently removed. Thereafter he wore a glass one. He received, he said, "£15 and the sack" from his employer. Tom was never employed again and assisted his wife Margaret - Maggie - at the greengrocer's shop at 2, New Street which they moved into between 1904 and 1908 and rented. (She was the daughter of Dennis McCormick, an Irishman from Queen's County, who had died aged 37, another victim, perhaps, of the glassmaking process). As well as fruit and vegetables, they also sold rabbits and kept the skins below the shop for sale later in Birmingham. In the period 1900-1920 their sons Tom and Frank had to go to a field in High Town, Oldbury, or near Pinfold Street each morning to round up the often reluctant family pony Pasha which their father used for his deliveries, and bring it down to the shop. Despite having only one eye, Tom became an enthusiastic reader of Dickens:

"Read Dickens, and he'll tell you what you are", was his saying, and he was well known across the road in the Perrott Arms, always with his " billycock " (bowler hat). His children were exceptionally fond of music and some of them became keen concert-goers. There was a piano which several members of the family could play, a central table, a window with potted plants and a coal-fired cooking range with a Dutch oven. The floors were mostly bare boards. A winding staircase led up to the bedrooms which the children shared, and where lighting was by candle, and another led down to the underkitchen where coal was stored and where there was a window behind the sink looking onto a typical Victorian court. A sloping entrance under an archway beside the shop led down from New Street into the courtyard where the communal lavatory was situated.

I was told many anecdotes about Oldbury in the 1900s by my late uncles Tom and Frank, some aspects of which seem more reminiscent of the Wild West than of an Edwardian town : there was, for example, a man who would come into one of the pubs with a sack full of rats : he would release them and then set his dog on them, which would proceed to kill every one, to the admiration of the drinkers... I believe there was also a rather lively music hall called The Birdcage. In the 1920s a familiar sight at the lower end of Oldbury town was Jack Judge, famous for writing " It's a long way to Tipperary ". My grandfather Tom Wood died in 1949, Margaret in 1953, and New Street itself eventually disappeared under a new Magistrates Court. The first generation of the family – Tom (d. 1988), Frank (d. 1990), my father Bernard (d. 2000), Mary and Denis - lived not far from Oldbury, with the exception of John (d. 1964), who became a Catholic missionary priest and worked in Africa and the United States. The second generation has tended to move further away. Nevertheless there are still plenty of descendents of William and Matilda Wood throughout the Black Country and Birmingham. With the spread of education many have done better, of course, than the cordwainer from Alveley could have dreamed of, and have become property consultants, market researchers, journalists, computer-assisted designers, teachers, lecturers and so on. But I'm sure that many Woods are as yet unknown to me. I'd be very happy to hear from them at <d.m.wood@bham.ac.uk> or 12, Selly Wick Drive, Selly Park, Birmingham B29 7JH.

FAMILY TREE OF DENNIS WOOD

William Wood b. Alveley 1832, died Oldbury, Worcs, 4 February 1898

married

(1) Unknown first wife ;

(2) Matilda Wright (1845 - after 1901) on 28 November 1864 at All Saints Anglican parish church, West Bromwich :

-- children :

- William Wood, b. about 1863, Oldbury ;
- Frederick Wood, b. about 1864, Oldbury ;
- Sarah Anne Wood, b. 1866, Oldbury ;
- Mary Wood, b. August 1867, Oldbury ;
- Lucy Wood, b. 30 March 1869, Oldbury ;
- Francis Xavier Wood, b. 17 December 1870 ;
- Agnes Teresa Wood, b. 1872, Oldbury ;
- Ann Wood, b. 5 January 1875, Oldbury ;
- *Thomas Wood, b. 13 July 1877, Oldbury, d. 3 April 1949, Oldbury ;
- Beatrice Wood, b. 29 July 1880, Oldbury ;
- John Wood, b. 21 November 1881.

--- Thomas Wood (1877-1949) married Margaret McCormick (1878- 1953) at St Francis Xavier R C church, Oldbury, on 21 April 1902 :

children :

- Rev. John Wood b. 1st June 1901, Oldbury, died 17 March 1964, Stroud, Glos. ;
- Thomas Wood b. 15 December 1904, Oldbury, died 16 February 1988, West Bromwich ;
- Twins William and Patrick Wood, born and died about 1906, Oldbury ;
- Denis Wood, born and died about 1907, Oldbury ;
- Francis Xavier Wood, b. 26 July 1908, Oldbury, died 2 January 1991, West Bromwich ;
- Mary Matilda Wood, b. 1911, Oldbury ;
- Margaret Helena Wood, b. 1916, Oldbury, died 23 September 1929, Oldbury ;
- *Bernard Wood, b. 24 March 1919, Oldbury, died 11 April 2000, Oldbury ;
- Denis William Wood, b. 1921, Oldbury.

Bernard Wood (1919-2000) married Hilda Brown (1920-) at St Francis Xavier R C church, Oldbury, on 24 June 1944 :

children :

- *Dennis Michael Wood, b. 1947, West Bromwich ;

- Christopher Richard Terence Wood, b. 1960, Rowley Regis.

Dennis Wood, b. 1947, West Bromwich, married Katherine Anne Scholey (1947-) at St Augustine's R C church, Stamford, Lincolnshire, on 9 August 1969 :

children :

Orlando Benedict Wood, b. 1974, Birmingham ;

Francis Alexander Wood, b. 1978, Birmingham.

Alveley Chancery Cases – Alan Nicholls

The following is a transcript of a legal cases brought between Longmore and Lancelot Lee at the Court of Exchequer in London in 1624 and 1653. The original document comprises of many sheets of parchments written in Medieval English and consists of depositions by various parties about the cases. The document reference at the Public Record Office is E134/22Jas1/Hil18.

Humfrey Longmore, the complainant, sets out his complaint:-

Your orator, Humfrey Longmore of Romsley Cross, gent, says that whereas Thomas Whorewood, late of Compton in the county of Stafford, esq., deceased, held a messuage, farm or tenement and certain lands, meadows and pastures in Romsley and did demise the said premises to John Burroughs, late of Romsley, deceased, for sixty one years at the yearly rent of twenty one shillings and eight pence, and two capons.

This Thomas Whorwood and John Burroughs and Margery his wife conveyed the said estate unto John Longmore your orator's great grandfather for the remainder of the term. John Longmore being so possessed of the premises did about 1604 assign the premises unto Humfry Longmore, your orator's grandfather, and shortly after died.

Humfry Longmore, for a valuable consideration, purchased the premises from Sir Thomas Whorwood and Dame Magdalen his wife, esq. son and heir apparent of the said Sir Thomas Whorwood and Anne aforesaid. Humfry made his will about 18th December 1644 and demised the said premises to your orator, Humfrey Longmore.

Now John Longmore, son and heir apparent of the said Humfry Longmore, the grandfather, after being in great displeasure with his father the said Humfry who was abroad, broke open a chest of his fathers wherein all the deeds , surrenders and writings were contained, took them and absented himself out of the country with the said deeds.

One Lancelot Lee of Alveley having bought rents and services of the said manors of Alveley and Romsley from Gerrard Whorwood esq., son of the said Sir Thomas Whorwood, deceased, some five years ago demanded a yearly rent of two shillings and four hens, supposing the same to be due out of a parcel of land called the Hookes, now in the possession of your orator. And Lee understanding that your said orator, for want of the deeds of purchase, could not defend any action at the Common Court, sued your said orator for cutting of wood in a parcel of land called the Hooke and a verdict was passed against your said orator at the last assizes at Salop, whereas in truth the said parcel of land hath been in the possession of your said orator's family for four score years without payments of any such rent and the same was never demanded and no claim was ever made to the title of the said land called the Hooke. And the said Lancelot Lee doth well know, and he has many Court Rolls and writings whereby it will appear that no such rent is payable to him.

And also that heretofore there was a common field in Alveley and Romsley called Hooke Field which has been inclosed and made into pasture land now in several men's possession which still retain the name of the Hookes. And that this parcel of land that Lancelot Lee doth claim was called by the name of Lande acre and not by the name of the Hooke, neither was the said acre in the possession of William Dudright or any of the Burtons which the said Lancelot Lee doth pretend to claim.

..... Lancelot Lee should be compelled to deliver to the court what writings and evidences he may have touching the premises and that he may set down on oath when he first entered of this land now in question, and when he first made any claim or whether he made any claim all the lifetime of the said Humfrey Longmore your orator's grandfather.....

and why Lancelot hath not heard that this parcel of land by him called the Hooke hath been anciently called The Land Acre and that there are several other parcels of land called by the name Hooke in Romsley and Alveley.

The Answer of Lancelot Lee esq. defendant to the Bill of Complaint of Humfrey Longmore

Lee believes that Sir Thomas Whorwood, knt., and Gerard Whorwood esq. were once seized of the manor or Lordship of Alveley and of diverse messuages, lands, tenements etc. in Alveley. And also that Sir Thomas Whorwood did lease the messuage and several parcels of land in Alveley and Romsley unto John Burroughs in the year 1577 for a term of sixty one years and that the lease was afterwards assigned to John Longmore the complainant's great grandfather and that the same afterwards came to Humfrey Longmore the plaintiff's grandfather. But the defendant doth not know or believe that the said Sir Thomas Whorwood did demise the land in the Bill mentioned called by the name of the Hooke unto the said John Burroughs as by the Bill of complaint is pretended but that the land called the Hooke was demised by Whorwood unto John Burton by indenture bearing date 10th March 1596 for a term of 99 years if the said John, Elizabeth his wife or Alice their daughter shall so long live at the yearly rent of £2 and a couple of hens. Which lease this defendant hath lately heard is expired by the death of all the said Burtons in the lease named. And that the interest of the said last mentioned lease came by assignment to the said grandfather Humfrey Longmore who held the said lands called the Hooke under the said lease made to the Burtons and by no other title.

And Lee believes that Whorwood did convey unto Humfrey Longmore the grandfather and his heirs the reversion and inheritance of the said messuage and the lands demised unto the said John Burroughs for the same yearly rent of twenty one shillings and eight pence and a couple of capons.

And the defendant says that in 1622 Whorwood did convey the manor of Alveley, with all messuages, lands etc. to the defendant and his heirs including the Hooke which was demised to the said Burton as aforesaid. And that this defendant hadn't heard of the expiration of the lease until after the action at law against the now complainant for taking away timber growing on the Hooke and a verdict passed for the defendant. And he says that he has received several rents due from the lands called the Hooke until 1604. And in regard to the said counterpart, it do belong to this defendant not to the said complainant and are evidence of this defendant's title to the reversion of the said rent of 21s 8d and a couple of capons and the said rent of 2s. and a couple of hens in the case of the lease to Burton be not expired.....

William Bendy deposes on 9th June 1656 and says that He hath from time to time received the rent of 21s. 8d. and two capons for the said Burrough's tenement from the said complainant's grandfather .

In November 1653 Humphrey Longmore brought another case to court:-

To the Right Honourable the Lords Commons of the Great Seal of England. Humphrey Longmore of Romsley Cross in the parish of Alveley, gent. says that the parish of Alveley is within the peculiar jurisdiction of the reputed Chantry? of Bridgnorth where the officials there have Episcopal jurisdiction both for probate of wills and all other ecclesiastical jurisdiction. And that the said parish of Alveley doth consist of about one hundred and fifty families whereof most of them are ancient messuages and habitations and the owners and inhabitants of all or most of the said ancient messuages for all the time whereof the memory of man is not to the contrary have had and used to have in the parish church of Alveley aforesaid, peculiar seats and kneelings as appurtants or belongings to their respective houses. And that Humphrey Longmore, deceased, your orator's grandfather, being seized of and in one ancient messuage, or farm, with several lands, tenements, hereditaments and appurtances thereunto belonging, and all those whose estate be had and claimed in the said messuage, were seized of one seat, pew or kneeling place in the body of the said parish church of Alveley for himself, his wife and children and kneelings for his servants in a place there called St Mary's Chauncell as appurtants belonging to the said ancient messuage and did used to sit and kneel there as occasion did require. And that the said Humphrey Longmore, your orator's grandfather, having some difference with one George Potter, a neighbour of the said parish that had likewise a seat or kneeling in the same pew or seat concerning the priority of place thereupon, the difference was heard by George Singe, then official of the said peculiar of Bridgnorth and afterwards Bishop of Claynes in Ireland, who did order on 10th May 1630 that the said pews should be divided and made as two pews. And the minister, church wardens and the major part of the parishioners did thereunto consent whereupon your said orator's grandfather did divide the said pew and did possess one part thereof for his own and proper use for all the time of his life and did pay his part and share for the repair of the said church and all other church duties to as great a proportion as any except four or five of the said parishioners. And the said Humphrey Longmore by his will bearing date about 18th December 1645 did give the messuage and appurtances of the seat or pew to your said orator and shortly after died, after which your said orator did enter upon the messuage and premises and have ever since quietly held the said messuage or pew and hath from time to time disbursed great sums of money for repairing the said church and chauncell called St Mary's chauncell belonging to the owner of the tythe of the said parish. And your said orator, in the year 1650 did, at his own charge, travel one hundred miles to the city of London and Westminster to attend to obtain means and maintenance for an able minister for the said parish church and did himself agree to be contributory for the maintenance of a minister. And your said orator ought, bot in equity and justice, to have the benefit of the said pew or seat in the said church and also kneelings for his servants. But Lancelot Lee, being an inhabitant of the said parish, practicing and combining with Richard Grove, George Jordan and

Thomas Jordan, being also parishioners, together with diverse persons, about four months last past did enter into the said pew or seat upon the Lords's day and did keep your said orator, his wife and children, out of the same and did disturb your said orator's long and quiet possession thereof. And afterwards, about the month of August last past they, knowing your orator hath no other seat or pew for himself or his family, did in the dead time of the night when all other people were asleep, enter into the said church upon a pretence of to ring, and did lock themselves into the said church and then and there in the night-time did pull down your said orator's pew and did cut the same all in pieces and did then ring the bell in rejoicing manner at their foul and unlawful action and to drown the noise of the cutting and spoiling of your said orator's pew. And that several of your orator's witnesses are dead lately and that others are aged, impotent and not able to travel and like to die whereby your said orator is like to lose their testimony unless presented by the power of this honourable court. And that they the said Lancelot Lee, Richard Grove, George Jordan and Thomas Jordan knowing that the customs and ancient orders concerning the said parish were kept in a Register book commonly kept in the vestry by the church wardens which they have gotten into their hands, by colour of which do and prevent him enjoying of the liberty of kneeling or sitting in the said chauncell. And the said Lancelot Lee doth now pretend that the said chauncell doth belong to himself and do erect new seats therein. In tender consideration whereof and in regard that your said orator hath had a long and quiet possession which ought to be protected against violence and disorder by the jurisdiction of this court until a good title can be made out against it and in regards that your said orator and his family are forced by reason of the said disturbance to trespass upon neighbouring parishes would it please your lordships to grant a writ of subpoena to be directed to the said Lancelot Lee, Richard Grove, George Jordan and Thomas Jordan commanding them to appear before your lordships in the High Court of Chancery to answer the charges.

The defendant Lancelot Lee and other defendants gave answer the following:-

..... That they do not know whether the reputed Deanes of Bridgnorth had rightful power or authority to dispose of seats in the parish churches within their peculiar or whether it were not belonging to the officers of the said parish. And they do not know what art or deed under the said seal of office of George Singe was made unto the complainant's grandfather. Nor do the defendants know or believe that the churchwardens and major part of the parishioners of the said parish did consent to ye setting up of ye seat or pew whereof ye complainant's Bill maketh frequent mention. But most of ye defendants do very well remember the time when the said seat was first set up in being about twenty years since in a broad alley in the upper part of the body of the church wherein anciently were accustomed to be a chest, benches or moveable seats for the servants of ye defendant Lee and of other inhabitants in the parish. And these defendants do deny that the complainant's grandfather had, time out of memory, a pew near the upper part of ye said parish church of Alveley or that a place in the chauncell belonging to the said message. The chauncell was a vacant or open space without seats or kneelings and did have til late only one stone bench about the outside of the chancel and one or two seats belonging to the ancient house of Astley which has, time out of mind, borne ye armes of ye said house of Astley. And ye said defendant Lee and his ancestors are owners of a certain ancient house within ye said parish of Alveley called Coten where ye said defendant Lee now dwelleth and have together with the said house called Astley enjoyed to them a burial place and places within the said St Mary Chauncell for ye interring of corpses brought from ye said two ancient houses of Astley and Coten to be interred or buried. And no other inhabitants of the parish of Alveley have used or claimed such privilage or liberty of burial in the chancel without the consent of one or both of the said houses of Astley and Coten. And the defendant Lee sayeth that he hath given way even though his ancestors would not suffer it that certain seats should be set up in the said St Mary Chauncell for the convenience of diverse inhabitants upon the condition or agreement that whensoever any corpse from either of ye said two houses of Coten and Astley are brought to burial the said new erected seats should be taken up. And so of late years the new seats have been taken up and after the funeral fixed again without prejudice to the said burial place..... And none do make complaint except the complainant who dwelleth at Romsley within the said parish of Alveley. And there was anciently a church or chapel in Romsley which the inhabitants of Romsley did usually resort to divine service, but when the said church or chapel grew into decay and fall into ruin few of the inhabitants of Romsley had any seats within the parish church of Alveley until of latter years. The said inhabitants of Romsley consented to pay such payments and duties as others and they gained and obtained to themselves seats in the chancel of the parish church and other parts thereof as they could conveniently get and many of these inhabitants of Romsley did sit in the Alleys and in the great chancel belonging to the impropiator of the tythes of the said parish. If consent were obtained by the grandfather of the complainant to set up the seat about eight and twenty years ago by straightening of the said Alley and divided in two parts the defendants do believe that the parishioners might have hindered him if they could so that the seat, which the complainant used to sit with his wife, for that the inhabitants are incomodated thereby and put to get places less convenient for hearing and seeing and farther off from the pulpit. But not content therewith the complainant, out of high-mindedness as these defendants hath heard, hath about eight or nine years since, raised and set up on top of the half seat, a certain rail with high banisters very unsuitable to the rest of the seats. Which being raised up so much higher than the other seats doth hinder ye prospect, sight and attention of many inhabitants within the parish and are an offence to almost all the inhabitants of the said parish..... And the defendant Richard Grove, servant to Lancelot Lee esquire, says that he, knowing the distaste and offence that ye complainant gave by depriving him and other manservants and by sitting of a woman there amongst the mens seats, did by himself alone, and none other being present, in a private manner without noise in the daytime upon a Saturday about the month of August last did cause the said pew to be reduced to what it was before and made uniform by taking off the rails and banisters and left it so. And he this defendant Richard Grove doth deny that any ringing of bells in way of rejoicing an that occasion or any foul or unlawful act occurred. Formerly he was not opposed until of late the complainant refused to pay his Lewnes? and taxations as others of the inhabitants of Alveley do pay theirs. And Thomas Jordan for himself doth deny utterly that he did know or hear of ye taking down of ye rails before ye act was done and

which he afterwards heard was one of the defendants.

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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.

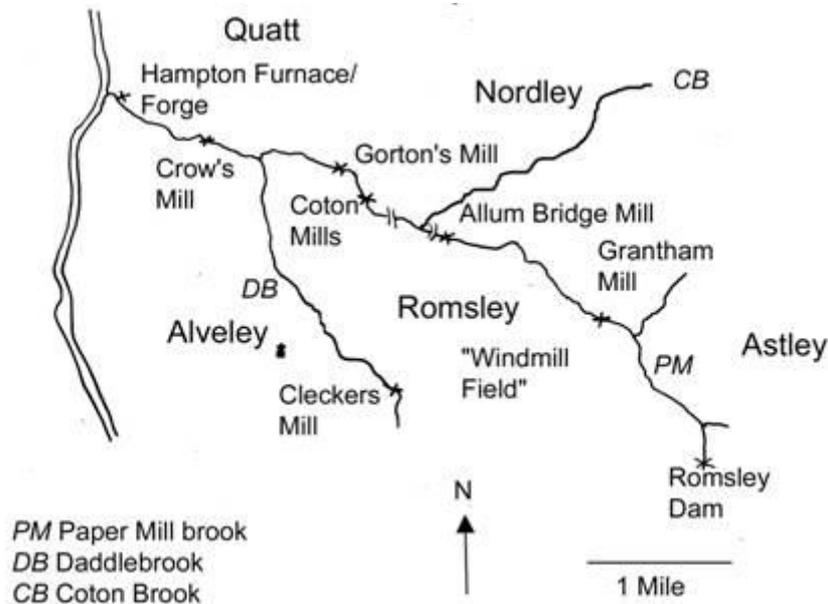


Figure 1. Mills in Alveley and Romsley

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.

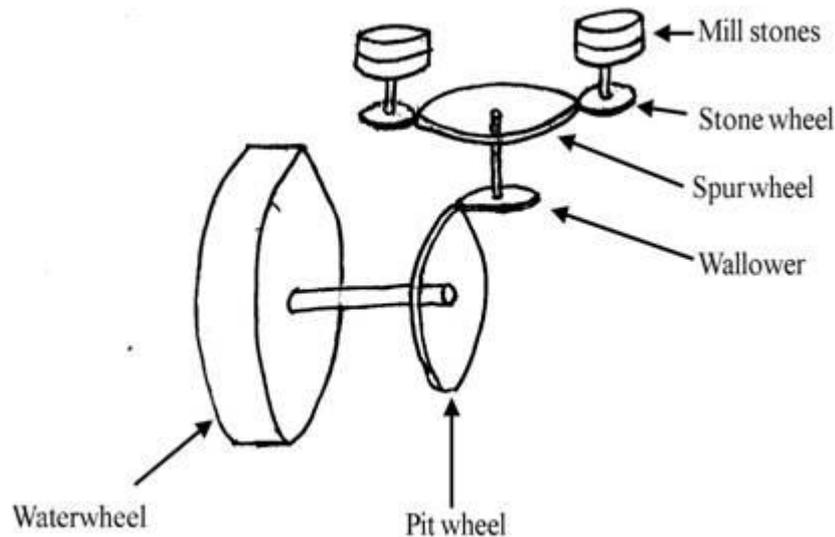


Figure 2. Arrangement of mill gearing in a typical corn mill.

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 [\[viii\]](#).

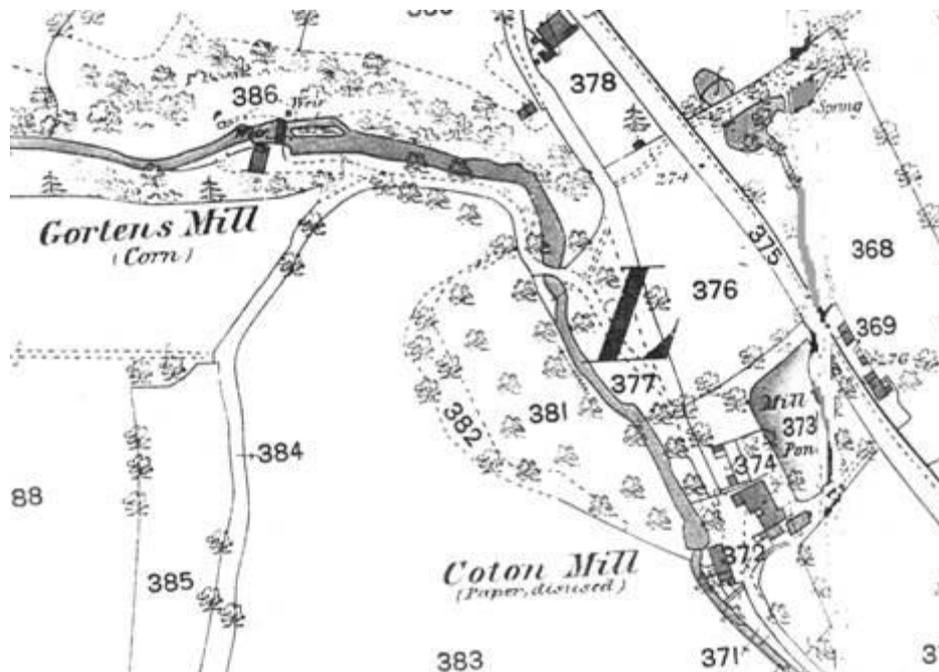


Figure 3. Gorton's Mill and Coton Mill, 1881/2 OS map.

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.

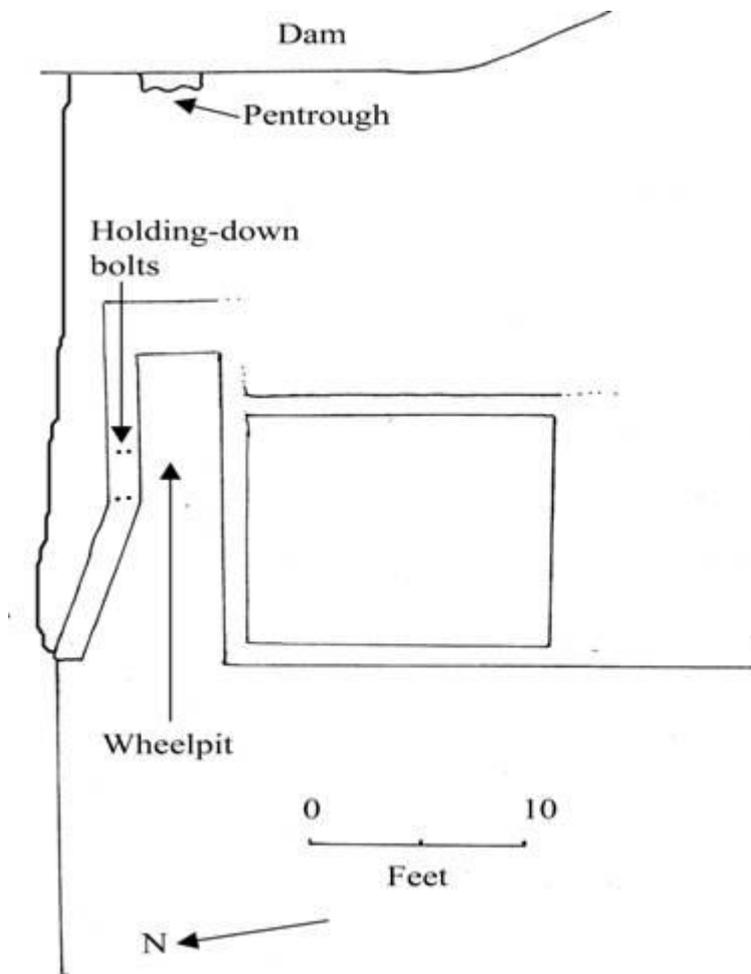


Figure 4. Gorton's Mill, current remains.

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 messuage 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].

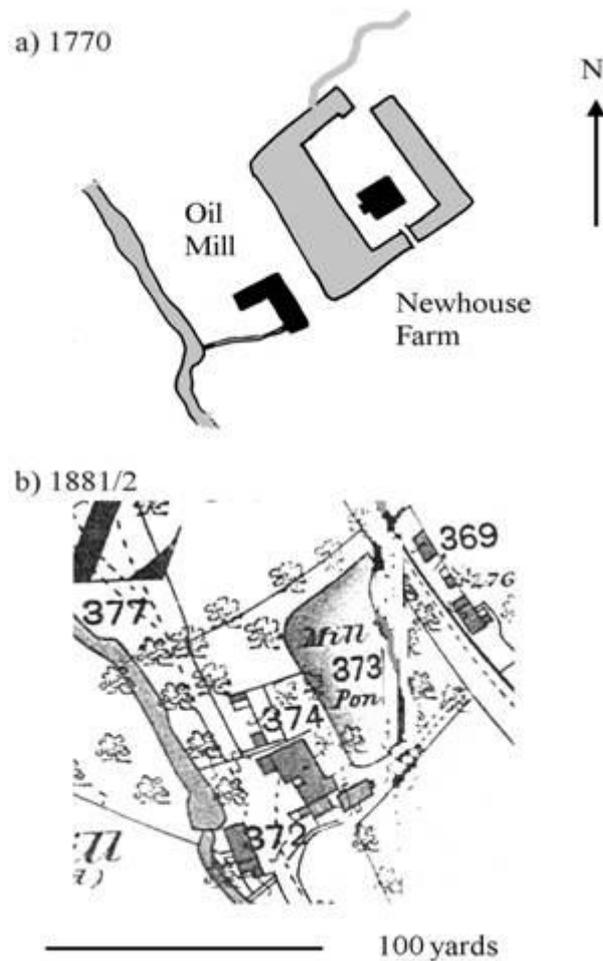


Figure 5. Coton Mills (a) 1770 map. (b) 1881/2 OS Map.

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 Haugmond. 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^[xxxi].

The mill was surveyed in 1967 just before it was converted to a hotel^[xxxii]. 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.

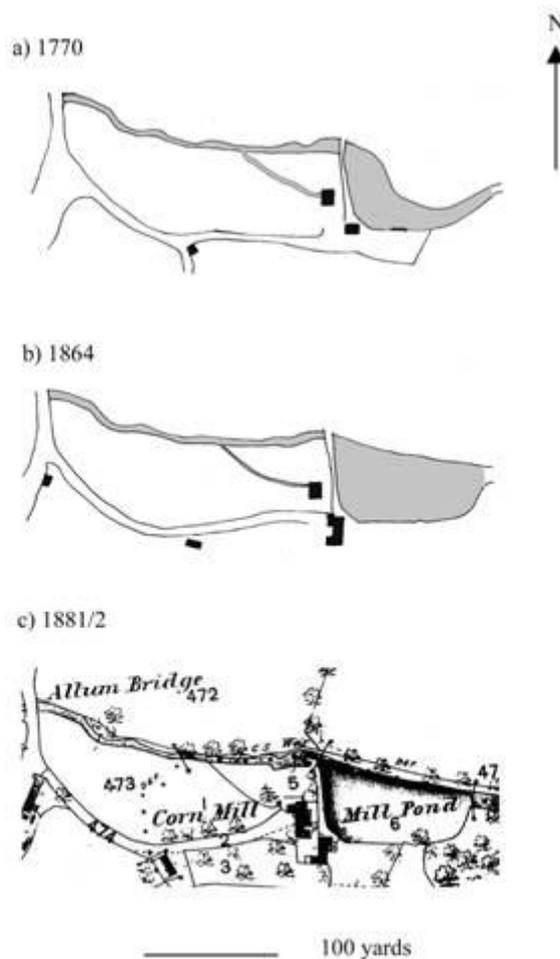


Figure 6. Allum Bridge Mill. (a) 1770 map. (b) 1864 map. (c) 1881/2 OS Map

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^[xxxiii]. 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.

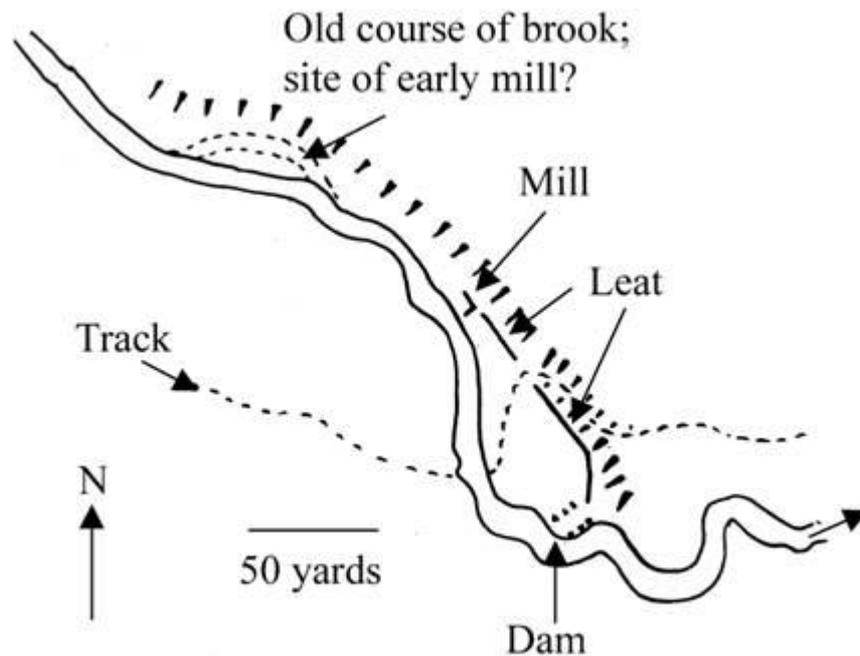


Figure 7. Grantham's Mill, current remains.

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 overshot 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.

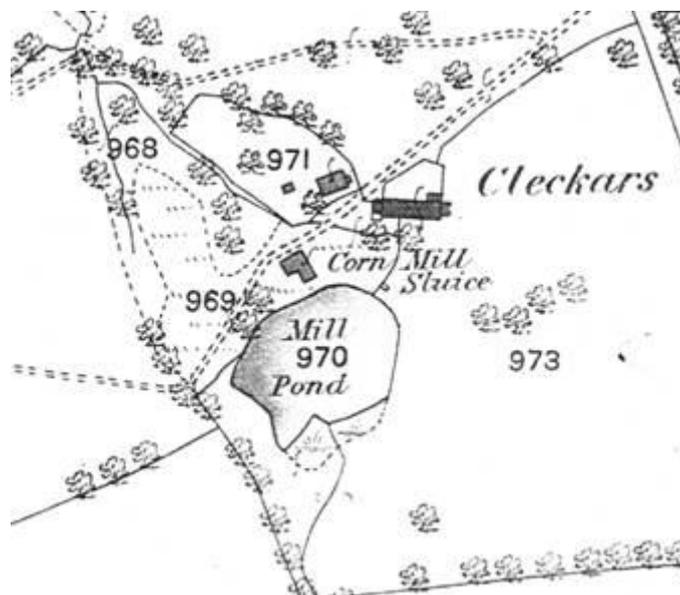


Figure 8. Cleckar's Mill, 1881/2 OS Map.

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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- [ii] "The cartulary of Haughmond Abbey", U. Rees (ed), Shrops. Arch. Soc., 1985, 24-5.
- [iii] Shropshire Archives (SA) 3950/26
- [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.