

Pann Mill Times

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Pann Mill Times gives news of the restoration of this commill, a project of the High Wycombe Society. The site, only three minutes walk from the High Street, is owned by Wycombe District Council.

PROJECT LEADER'S JOTTINGS

After years of work on Pann Mill we are close to achieving our aim, for now it has the appearance of a working mill. During August the two bedstones were set in their final positions allowing us to adjust the stone spindle and stone nut of the operating pair of French burrstones. Having assembled the horizontal drive shaft holding the pulley and spur wheels, the next job will be to fit the 4S wooden teeth to the spur wheel. The tentering wheel has been securely fixed in place to enable the stone spindle to be raised and lowered - which will delight young visitors on Open Day.

An unusually high rainfall in April has been a blessing. The river flow, now in late August, is still strong, auguring well for the September Open Day. It has meant spending more time than ever before controlling the water flows on the site. This was a small price to pay for being able to turn the waterwheel on National Mills Day last May.

Over the Winter and Spring we have been in close liaison with Nuttalls, contractors for Thames Water, who completed their modernisation programme of Pann Mill Pumping Station in August. Four enormous green water tanks are now visible from Abbey Way, and new railings are to be seen on the west perimeter boundary of the Mill garden. From the start the company and staff - John Vahey in particular - were friendly and helpful, being mindful of any inconvenience they may have caused the project team. John kindly took interested members of the High Wycombe Society on a tour of the site. He brought his family to see the waterwheel turning and to join in the celebrations on National Mills Day. On display were Thames Water's presentation boards explaining their modernisation work.

Cathy Kraft continues to come down from London to help when she is able - meticulously re-puttying and painting windows. The large workshop, now fourteen years old, has been a boon for the storage of artefacts and materials as well as for the convenience of working in the dry. We accepted the offer of a set of kitchen units which have been installed by Ian Barratt. This improvement will make life much easier for the tea ladies when they serve refreshments on Open Days.

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE - EVEN INSIDE THE MILL

No, not Pann Mill - but Charlecote Mill near Stratford-on-Avon. The mill stopped milling com by waterpower in 1939 but John Bedington repaired it in 1983, and has made flour there ever since. He has cause to remember 10th April 1998, Good Friday, when the mill was brought to a halt as a result of rainstorms which swept through the Midlands. Evidence of serious flooding by the swollen River Avon was flotsam in the form of dead plant material, wood and plastic bottles, which could be seen trapped up to waist-high in the hedgerows. The mill and mill house must have appeared to be an island. Both waterwheels were damaged and the flood water had even risen to knee-high inside the mill.

John was thankful that a month later sixteen mill enthusiasts turned up for a week-end of hands-on experience, some to help with waterwheel repair! For the fourth year running, members of our Pann Mill working party gained experience running and maintaining the mill.

Charlecote Mill in Hampton Lucy, built about 1740, adjoins the National Trust's gracious Elizabethan house. The mill featured in the BBC's first film of George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, a novel which ends with a tragic flood. Architecturally the mill building is in the very first rank of surviving watermills. Contrast this with Pann Mill where the house was called a 'hovel' in the 17th and 18th centuries!

John of our Pann Mill working party, at Charlecote for the first time, exercised his woodworking skills in the vital task of repairing waterwheel paddles, each being of solid oak, measuring 4 feet wide, 17 inches deep, 1½ inches thick. Bolting a paddle to the wooden start meant perching on a narrow beam across the sluice in a much confined space - no easy task. John was often seen climbing out from the gloomy wheelhouse, and across the sluice - quite entertaining to watch. Myra too had climbing jobs; over the water to pollard willows and over machinery where she greased and oiled bearings, her cap and complexion! Much less exciting, but with feet firmly on the ground was Margaret's gardening and Peter's millstone dressing.

On Sunday while some maintenance work continued, one of the giant 18 foot diameter waterwheels was set in motion and the working party then ran the mill - under constant supervision, of course. John, the miller, made sure that everybody experienced adjusting the waterflow, the grain flow, and the stones, sacking the flour, and hoisting sacks to the top floor. Visitors were welcomed, shown around, and were sold bags of flour and booklets.

Learning to run a mill was the aim of the week-end, and the Pann Mill team learn more each year. They returned to High Wycombe with flour in their hair, increased inspiration to get on restoring the mill, and the urge to help out at Charlecote Mill again next year if not before.

WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE - BUT LUCKILY UNDER WYCOMBE

Wycombe stands on a vast lake of water some 200 feet below ground, and since 1932, water has been pumped from the Pann Mill Pumping Station through two pipes which can be seen today bridging the river on the mill site. One pipe takes water to the Bowerdean reservoir and the other to the reservoir off Amersham Hill. After Nuttalls' year-long refurbishment of the pumping station, water now passes through four huge green tanks before leaving the site. Local water for local people.

Water was being pumped from underground in Wycombe in the middle of the last century by Messrs. Wheeler and Company's Brewery of Easton Street, who also supplied water to a few property owners. High Wycombe Water Works, Baths and Washhouses Company Limited purchased Wheelers' private water supply in 1874, when Wheelers planned to discontinue supplying private customers with water.

Wycombe Corporation took over the Water Works Company in 1900; however, in 1960, Parliament agreed a Bucks Water Board take over of the Borough's undertaking. An illustrated brochure was produced commemorating sixty years of Municipal ownership, providing a brief history of the High Wycombe Water Undertaking.

In 1910 a 16-inch borehole was sunk at Pann Mill with pumps actuated by suction gas engines on land purchased by the Corporation in 1899. In 1932 and 1943 Pann Mill Pumping Station was enlarged and updated such that in 1960 it was recorded that one borehole 268 ft. deep included a pump at 80 ft. from the surface and another borehole 218 ft. deep included a pump 26 ft. from the surface.

The original two boreholes are still in use, but the 1998 pumping system is of course automatically controlled - by Thames Water at Bourne End.

The abundant and high quality water available underground was probably one reason which led to Wycombe enjoying a flourishing drinks industry for many years in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The firms of Wheeler and Lucas dominated the town's brewery industry in the nineteenth century. In about 1825 Richard Lucas took over the Frogmoor Brewery, which itself was taken over by Wheelers in 1898. In the latter years of the last century local drinks firms advertised aerated waters such as soda, seltzer and potash as well as lemonade and ginger beer. The industry declined after 1929 when Wheelers was taken over by Ashby's of Staines.

The low flow of the River Wye due to droughts and high extraction levels makes one realise that if the Wycombe drinks industry had continued to this day, its future would be in some doubt.

References and further reading which are in the High Wycombe Reference Library:

P. DIXON, *Brewers, Pubs and Temperance Societies in High Wycombe. 1812-1929* (1985) *The High Wycombe Water Undertaking 1874-1960* (Pamphlet). (1960)

PANN MILL, ONE OF SIX WYCOMBE MILLS IN 1086AD

The Victoria History of the County of Buckingham (VCH) published in 1905 was the result of research carried out by the foremost students of the day, in science, history and archaeology. At Domesday, six mills were recorded in Wycombe. The positions of five were identified by the VCH researchers, namely Bridge, Wycombe Marsh, Pann, Bassetsbury and Temple (Bowdery); the sixth was probably Bowden Mill. In order, coming downstream, they were Temple (Bowdery), Bridge, Pann, Bassetsbury, Bowden and Wycombe Marsh. It is noticeable that the mills are a similar distance apart.

The following extracts from VCH volume 3, page 128 include interesting Pann Mill history.

'The mills in Wycombe have always been numerous and important. At Domesday there were six water corn-mills attached to the manor, which were worth 75s. yearly. Of these six one was subsequently attached to Angotes Fee and was known as the **Bridge Mill**.

A second formed part of Gynaunts Fee and its position at **Wycombe Marsh** can also be identified.

A third of the Domesday mills was known as Pannells or Pann Mill, which name is still borne by a mill on the north-west of the Rye. It probably belonged to a family in this parish called Pinel, mentioned in 1185, when the widows of Roger and David Pinel held half a hide in dower in Wycombe. In 1235 Richard of Croydene held this mill, and in 1344 Adam de Martham granted 'two water-mills under one roof called la Pennell in Wycombe' to Sir Hugh de Neweton. It appears to have been attached to Temple Wycombe Manor, for it is given among the possessions of the Hospitallers at the Dissolution. '

Of the remaining water-mills one was granted by Mabel daughter of Siward, c. 1200 to the Abbess of Godstow, who five years later alienated it to William son of Hervey, who held the '**Burne Mills**' here in 1235.

A fifth water-mill was attached to the demesne of **Bassets Bury** Manor.

The sixth and last mill mentioned in 1086 appears to have been attached to **Temple** Wycombe Manor.'

Excavations at Pann Mill in 1993 and again in 1995, revealed the extensive history of the site. On current evidence two chalk floors, and timbers standing over 1m., are thought to date to the earlier fourteenth century, identifying the position on the site of the 1344 Adam de Martham mill.

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