

Mills on Dowles Brook and its Tributaries TIM BOOTH

The first two sites, both on Baveney Brook, were early blast furnaces associated with the forges at Cleobury Mortimer. They appear to have been relatively short-lived, perhaps operating from c1575 until c1600. At the upper site, named Cleobury Park Furnace (1), are the remains of a dam across the brook and a mound of furnace slag. The second site is that known as Furnace Mill (2). By the mid-seventeenth century, this had probably been rebuilt as a corn mill and continued as such until about 1920. It was then converted into a house, all the machinery being removed, and further extended in the 1960s. Furnace Mill suffered very badly in the floods of 2007 although repairs have now been undertaken.



Furnace Mill Tim Booth

The next mill downstream was Cooper's Mill, on the Shropshire side of Dowles Brook. It was possibly the mill in the Stottesdon part of the Wyre Forest in 1278 (3). Curiously, it was marked as "Coventry Mill" on a 1785 map of land belonging to Edward Winnington (4). "Coventry's mill" is mentioned in a survey of the boundary of Cleobury Mortimer in 1581 (5), but the name has usually been associated with Knowles Mill, further downstream. Cooper's Mill was out of use by c1898 and finally demolished in 1967. Photographs show it to have been a small stone building with an external iron overshot waterwheel. After the mill was demolished,



Cooper's Mill from Tim Booth

the main gearing was left lying nearby and the ironwork still survives in the undergrowth. The records of George Turton, an ironfounder in Kidderminster (6), show that this was purchased in 1841 by John Bishton, described



Gearing, Cooper's Mill Neville Wilde

elsewhere as a miller and farmer living at Wharton's Farm. However, a sad loss is the ancient granite millstone once set up as a table close to the brook. It was smashed to pieces some years ago and much of it dumped in the water. Natural England have rescued what they could but whether it can be repaired remains to be seen.



Cooper's Mill Neville Wilde

Knowles Mill takes its name from the family which worked there from 1803 until the 1870s. It is marked as "Coventry Mill" on the first edition OS map of the area but the Knowles family certainly didn't give it that name. They usually just called it "the mill" or, more interestingly, "upper Town Mill". It is certainly in Bewdley and would have served the town. Its early history is a mystery, unless it was one of the two mills on Dowles Brook given to the town by Sir John Hibbotts "for the poor" (7). The land adjoining it certainly seems to have been let to a succession of millers before a mill here is specifically mentioned in 1757 (8). Knowles Mill continued working until 1891, no doubt when repairs were deemed no longer economic in the face of competition from the large town mills nearby. Unlike all the others, this mill retains much of its machinery, possibly dating from the late eighteenth century. However, the iron overshot waterwheel and iron gears will all date from the mid-nineteenth century. The National Trust has recently repaired the building, aided by a grant from the "Grow



with Wyre" project, and it will be accessible to the public at all reasonable times.

Town Mill would presumably have been on the site of one of the mills given to Bewdley by Sir John Hibbotts. Although the surviving building has the proportions of a mill, it appears to have only ever been a house. The last mill adjoined its southern end and was demolished many years ago. This was probably the mill for which the Bewdley Charity Commissioners bought a new 14ft. 6in. diameter waterwheel in 1862 (9). However, it was out of use by the early 1900s. Somewhat puzzling is that the property across the brook, long known as Town Mill House, is not only in a different parish but in a different county.

A mill stood near the foot of Dry Mill Lane, powered by the small stream which rises near "Beaucastle". It is marked on a seventeenth century map of the area (10) and Baugh's 1808 map of Shropshire, but not on the 1785 map drawn for Edward Winnington. The name suggests that a lack of water was sometimes a problem. However, it is possible that there was another mill further up the stream as "Cob" or "Cop mill" is mentioned in one or two leases of land there.

Dowles Mill took its water from Dowles Brook at a weir just upstream of the bridge by "Oak Cottage". The leat then ran on the north side of the brook until it crossed in front of the manor house to the mill. A mill at Dowles was mentioned in 1521 (11) and one was sold with the manor in 1819 (12). It seems to have been demolished shortly after this as it does not appear on later maps. The last mill is said to have had two waterwheels. Part way along the leat is the site of some clay mines and the remains of an animal powered mill for crushing clay. Its edge runner stone and circular iron base plate, survive in the undergrowth.

Last to use the water of Dowles Brook was Samuel Skey's works on the banks of the River Severn. Skey produced dyes, along with many other things, and probably had a water powered logwood mill with various machines to produce logwood chips or powder. Underwood's 1845 Map of Dowles shows the leat which brought water to the works to have been substantial so there may have been other uses for the power it provided. Part of the course of the leat can still just be traced today.

REFERENCES

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- (4) Berkeley Castle Muniments GC482 BCM/D/5/74/16 (I am grateful to David Poyner for this reference)
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- (6) Auchmuty S.F.F., "History of Cleobury Mortimer", 1911
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- (8) VCH Vol. 4, p.316
- (9) Bewdley Manorial Court Rolls 10/9/1757
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