

# Clifford Mill Corner





The spur of land which stretches the parish of Bramham to the old flax mill , the mill wheel and the cottages on the eastern side of the Beck continues over the fields through Low Mills Farm [ see the section on farms ] to the river Wharfe . Thus the Wharfe forms part of Bramham parish , albeit a very small part ! It is thus also true that a few yards of the Ebor Way pass through the parish of Bramham .

#### CLIFFORD WATER W.

— The historic Clifford water wheel is to remain standing in Windmill Lane, although the old mill building that housed it has been demolished. The mill dated back as far as the Domesday Book. It was owned for many years by the Grimston family which played a big part in the development of the village of Clifford and of Roman Catholicism in the area. The Grimstons were responsible for the building of St. Edward's Church, Clifford.

The 30 foot wheel now stands on open ground as a monument to the development of the village.



A RELIC OF THE PAST. — In unfamiliar daylight is the 30-foot water wheel at Clifford which has been left as a monument, although the mill that housed it has recently been demolished.

from Clifford's 'Outlook' village magazine. April 2001.

FROM OUTLOOK 1976 continuing the Silver Jubilee series of articles

## THE OLD MILL WHEEL

During OUTLOOK'S first year of publication, the future of the mill wheel was a matter of local interest as the following article from the May 1976 issue shows.

### THE LEGACY OF THE MILL WHEEL — Editor.

We all know from articles recently in the press that there is concern about the future of the mill wheel, but the precise facts of the matter are not all that widely known. We have therefore approached the owner, Mr. George Lane Fox, to find out the exact situation. It seems that in fact the wheel is not as unique as may have been thought, and it is unlikely that any museum would be sufficiently interested in it to remove it from its present site. And of course, there are those who would prefer to see it remain in the village. As part of the history of the village, it is of value to Clifford, and its preservation is of considerable importance. After all, the flax mill, in its original state, was a significant part of Clifford and because of it a large number of Irish settled here, who helped to determine the character of Clifford. The mill was last used as a saw mill, and the wheel stopped in 1952. Only recently has it been exposed to the double risk of damage from rust and damage by vandals.

The situation at present is that the wheel belongs not on the land where a new house is now for sale, but on the adjacent plot, where planning permission has been approved, but which has not yet been sold by Mr. Lane Fox. Both Mr. Lane Fox and the Director of Planning intend that the question of the preservation of the wheel will be raised with any future developer of the land, and the responsibility for the wheel's maintenance will belong with the purchaser of the land. Maintenance of the wheel will presumably involve guarding and protective coating to prevent further rusting.

Residents will remember that a lovely photograph of Old Mill Lane featuring the mill wheel was chosen for the cover of the Clifford Millennium calendar. This reflected the wheel's importance as a symbol of the history of the village. An article on the wheel appeared in the issue of OUTLOOK for December 1999 as the first of the series to accompany the photographs in the calendar. In that article, it was described as a 'high breastshot water wheel, a type developed in Yorkshire in the 17th century for use where there was not a sufficient fall of water for an overshot system'. The writer confesses to trotting out those words without fully understanding them!

However, the current occupier of Mill Wheel House and, therefore, owner of the wheel explains that it carried a series of buckets which filled with water as it turned. So the drive was provided by the *weight* of the water rather than the force of water against vanes as is the more common system. It is still possible to see the U shaped flanges on the inside of the wheel into which the buckets fitted.

In the event, the hopes for preservation expressed 25 years ago have not been realised and we all know that it has much deteriorated. Local knowledge has it that the bearings of the wheel were stolen many years ago and it now rests on the ground. The metal buckets have largely disintegrated and the cost of replacing these would be prohibitive. However, the wheel is still an important part of the property in which it stands and the owner has indicated that he wishes to retain it as an attractive feature of the garden. The main parts of the wheel are still intact and it should still be around for many years to come. Whatever its future, there are some wonderful photographs of it in its heyday as unearthed by Mr Benson for his soon to be published history of Clifford.

## The Old Mill Wheel

### How the saw mill worked : a recollection by Harry Tindall

On leaving school , in 1930 / 1 , being reluctant to sit poring over dull ledgers in an office environment , I obtained a situation as an apprentice joiner for Bramham Park Estate .

The workshop and saw mill were in what had been the flax mill close to Clifford village , but in the parish of Bramham , next to the dividing line , the Beck. The Estate , extensive in area , owned many farms and village properties right through from Walton to Scarcroft, and therefore needed to employ numerous tradesmen and labourers.

Hardwoods were used extensively -- oak , ash , beech , elm , and sometimes walnut -- all of which came from the Estate woods . Having been felled , they were brought by the woodman to the saw mill , which was a separate building from the joiners ' shop.

When a supply of these timbers was to be sawn into various sizes , according to need , an experienced eye was cast over the dam to see if it was full to overflowing , for the work was done by water power. On approaching the mill from Bramham over Windmill Hill , a cottage now called Willowgarth stands on its own. I would go there from the saw mill on my bike with a metal turning handle . Beside the cottage was a sluice in the Beck which , despite a thick tree branch nearby [ I later cut it down ] , had to be opened by raising the metal boards . This diverted the water from the Beck through a channel in the garden into the deep ditch which runs alongside the road , and onwards to the dam , as a backup for the water taken out when sawing.

In front of the saw mill stands an iron tank with part of the wheel showing , on which there were buckets and over which was a leather apron. Over the wall , across the road , was another sluice . It was my job to climb over the wall and open this sluice , thus letting the water

surge under the road and fill the tank . Going over the wall to the dam side could be fraught with danger for there were swans in resident numbers . You invaded their territory at your peril , especially if it was nesting time . In my early days I often beat a hasty retreat !

The trees , clean of all branches , perhaps in 20 foot lengths , would in turn be taken to a steel saw bench , low to the floor , on a row of small wheels , the timber “ dogged “ to the bench with hooks .

When all was ready , I would go to a lever , release a catch , and wind up the leather apron , allowing the weight of water to press on the buckets of the wheel. Spray flew everywhere , and the noise was deafening. With the sawyer George Stockdale , joiner and wheelwright , in charge , a number of levers activated the huge circular saw , the bench moving forward then returning as required. Owing to the noise , sign language was the order of the day.

The water , having spent its energy , vanished by way of an underground culvert , rejoining the Beck further on in what was at that time the field of Mr. Beevors , tenant of an Estate farm. This culvert had to be inspected for blockage from any fallen stones , an unpleasant job made worse by the presence of rats.

I was always pleased when the backup from the Beck was insufficient and sawing had to cease !

Harry Tindall

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