

Mordiford Mill Watercourses

As part of the restoration of the watermill in Mordiford, I wanted to research its history.

A long hunt through the county records office revealed an interesting past. In Norman times there were two mills in Mordiford which were given by the lord of the manor in Fownhope, Robert de Chandos, to Llanthoy Priory in Gloucester, with land and timber to repair the mills from his grove (de Nemore) most likely Grove Wood above Sufton Park.

The second mill called Ree Weir Mill came as a total surprise. Further investigation revealed details of three leases on these mills in the early 1500's during Henry VIII's reign. These indicated the mills shared the same watercourse. Ree Mill was the upper mill, located on or close to the current weir on the Pentaloe Brook, just above Pentaloe Close. It would have been a small wooden structure and has long since disappeared.

This was exciting as it showed that the mill leat running from the weir was much older than I originally thought. The leat is an essential part of the mill infrastructure. The weir diverts the water which is then carried by the leat all the way to the millpond.

One lease in 1503 described the miller William Lawson and his wife Alice, who leased the mill for 8 shillings a year. They were required to "scour the watercourses and otherwise maintain the property, especially the common way called Les Botte". This is where the leat crosses the Woolhope road.

The leat is next to the Mordiford Loop footpath at this point and I have repaired it with an open half round channel, fenced it with oak posts and a round rail, and exposed the old mediaeval stone work on its west side.

Many passing walkers have commented that the leat appears to slope the wrong way at this point. I began to have doubts myself while struggling to lay the channel at the correct gradient. However I quickly discovered that the leat does silt up and concluded I had repaired it correctly and that I was just another miller (in a long line of millers stretching over at least five hundred years), cursing the original builders for not selecting a route with a steeper gradient.

By Spring 2014, I had completed the leat by laying a pipe all the way up to the weir. On a sunny May morning, with brimstone butterflies doing circuits along the edge of the wood, I opened the sluice at the weir, and let the water flow all the way down to the millpond. It hadn't done this since the 1950's when it was used to power the hydraulic ram supplying water to houses in the village (before mains water arrived).

The mill stopped grinding flour in 1935 when the miller, Hubert Williams, gave up, unable to make it pay. Many other water mills suffered in the same way during the period between the two world wars.

I am now repairing the water wheel and hope to start installing new buckets soon.

The mill will be open to the public on the National Mills weekend, May 9th and May 10th 2015. Many other mills in the county will also be open on these dates.



Andy Tatchell.