

Stone Mills

Rob Arkell: Trowbridge Archaeology Group



Stone Mills Main Building 2013

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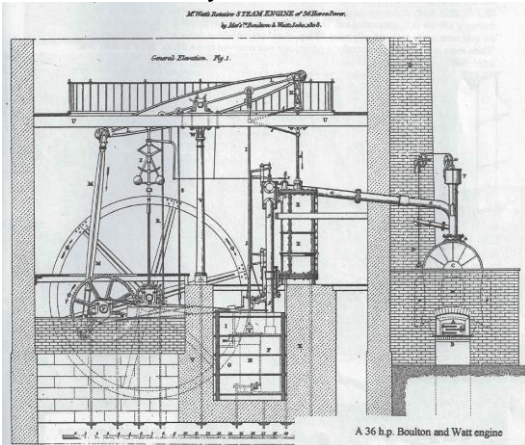
A mill linked to Trowbridge Castle stood on the site of Stone Mills as far back as 1331 and the site was acquired by Alexander Langford in 1544. He had been described by Leland, Henry VIII's archivist, as 'a great clothier in the town' in 1538. In 1602 '2 water grist mills called Castell Mills' were transferred from the Langfords to William Reade and in 1742 a grist mill and fulling mill were leased to John Wreat, a fuller. In 1758 Stone Mills was described as a fulling and scouring (braying) mill. Braying was a similar process to fulling but was less energy intensive as the stocks were mounted so that they were operating nearer the vertical. In 1785 the freehold was sold to John Clark, another clothier, who built the eight bay section of the current building nearest the river in the late 18thC. From this time the mill was referred to as a braying mill. Power at this time came from a water wheel which is believed to have been in a separate building which abutted the Main Building. It was occupied by Peter Anstie, a dyer, between 1805 and 1817. The freehold then passed to Clark's niece who sold it in 1817 to Webber and Strang, dyers, who had built the Brick Factory nearby in 1814 in which they had installed a 14 HP Boulton and Watt engine.



Main Building and Engine House 1980's from West.

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Webber and Strang added another 4 bays to Stone Mills in 1817 which were higher and wider to enable them to install a steam engine here as well and create a factory.



Boulton and Watt 36 h.p Steam Engine

The only remaining evidence of the engine is an arc of holes on a wall where a cast iron 'barring rack' was mounted. Barring was necessary because a single crank engine can sometimes come to rest at 'bottom dead centre' where it is impossible to restart. The engine then had to be manually barred to a position where it could be started. A long metal bar was used to lever the flywheel round by levering it against a spoke and was moved to each hole in turn until the next spoke was on the rack.



Arc where barring plate was mounted

© Jon Giles



Engine House 1980's

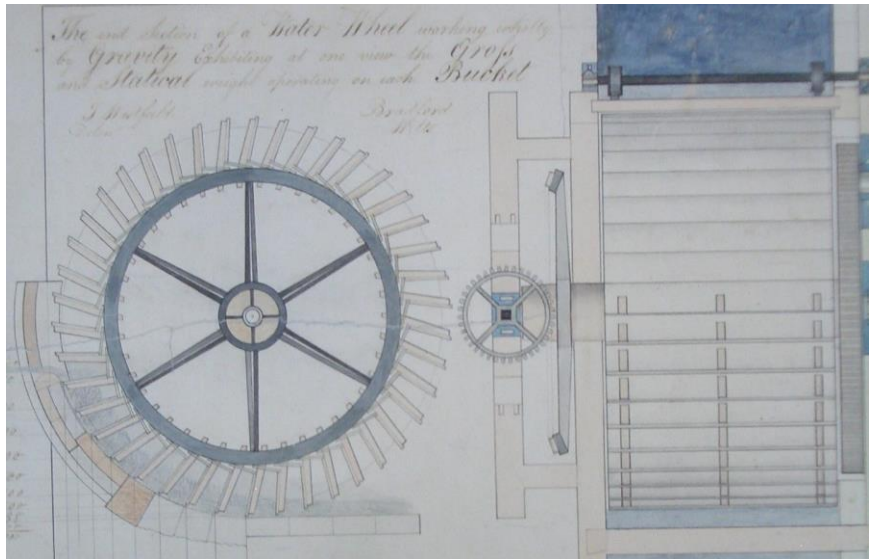
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Webber and Strang did not run the whole factory themselves but let out machinery powered by water or steam and supplied power to other companies to run their own machinery within the factory. An agreement made between 1832 and 1843 shows J&T Clark, who ran the adjacent Studley Mills, receiving power to drive seven broad gigs, four narrow gigs and two washers. In addition Clarks rented two broad gigs. They occupied part of the 'New Stone Factory', a 'New Building' and had 'the entire use of the Steaming House, Braying Shop and Handle House'. In 1838 Strang and Webber still employed around 10 people at the mill whilst in the 1840s only Clarks and Salters were in occupation. In 1849 Clarks took the whole factory on a 21 year lease. A Trowbridge map of 1850 shows the mill head and the building thought to house the waterwheel.

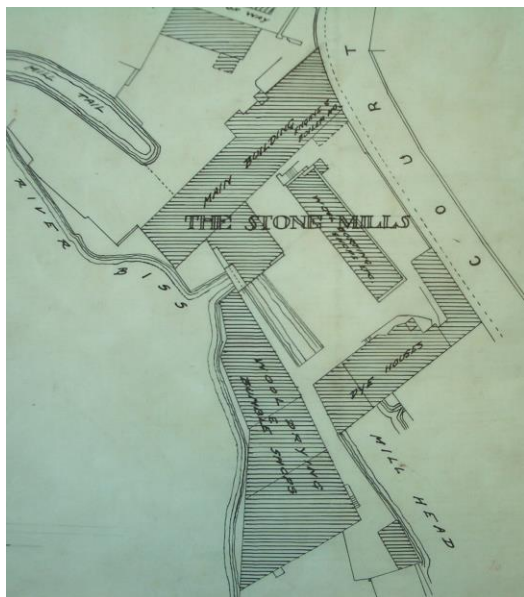


The 'Stone Factory' 1850 © Trowbridge Museum

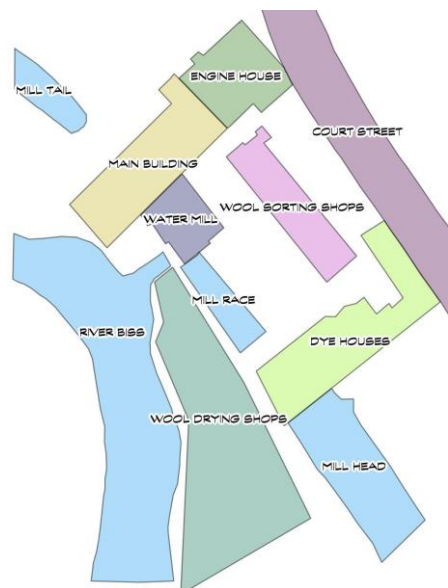
The factory then lay idle for 3 years until it was bought by Joseph and William Walker in 1873. A witness at the Water Bill enquiry in 1872 said that the water mill had been stopped for years and the Walkers claimed that the remaking of the culvert from the water wheel in 1857 had reduced the power of the wheel so that they had to use more coal. They ran the Stone Mill and Yerbury Street mills as one business. William Walker was the sole owner from 1884 to 1906 when the business closed and the machinery was sold. The buildings comprising the main building of 5 floors, wool sorting and wool scouring shops, tucking shops, dye houses with vats and wool drying sheds when they were put up for sale in 1912. A boiler house, 30 h.p steam engine and main shafting were also included together with a breast-shot water wheel and water rights.



Breast-shot Water Wheel, 1813 designed by John Wastfield in Bradford-on-Avon © Wiltshire and Swindon Archive



Stone Mills 1913 © Wiltshire and Swindon Archive



Schematic of Stone Mills 1913



Wool Drying Shops 1980's from West

© Wiltshire Buildings Record

Ownership of Stone Mills then passed to Samuel Salter and Co. who combined it with the adjacent Home Mills with much of the Stone Mills site being for storage until 1968 when machinery was installed again. The accident books from the 1920s reveal the risks involved in working in a cloth factory with dermatitis from contact with the wool and chemicals and chrome poisoning from the dyes in addition to the risk of being hit on the head by an escaped shuttle or injured by machinery. The Enfield Cycle Co, who ran a wartime underground factory in Westwood making gun control equipment, occupied parts in 1946 and may have stored military motorcycles which were being refurbished for civilian use. HJ Knee bought part in 1950, when the Main Building is described as a Cloth Warehouse, the Wool Sorting Shops have been extended for use as a Slaughterhouse, and part of the Wool Drying Shops has become a Hide & Skin Warehouse. The Mill Head is still shown between the Dye House and the Wool Drying Shops.

In 1971 Salters established a retail outlet in the main building under the name of the Upton Lovell Manufacturing Co and this continued until 1982. The main building and engine house, together with the Dye shops and most of the Wool Drying and Bumble Shops, survived when the Shires Centre was developed in 1991. Redevelopment of Stone Mills included the removal of the chimney for the beam engine boiler and the lift shaft. Change of use was obtained to restaurant, retail and office uses. A new footbridge and canopy provided access from the Shires Centre. In 2001 plans were approved for a Public House and a Market Hall. The planned public house never actually opened for business as, nearing the peak of the property boom in 2005, it was sold to an investment company which subsequently went into liquidation. In 2011 it was bought by its current owners, Giles UK Ltd and is now houses a gym and fitness centre together with other businesses.



Wool Drying and Bumble Shops 2013

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Engine House 2013

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Sources

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WSA 9/8/16 Purchase by William Reade from Alexander and Edward Langford

WSA 927/70 Agreement between J&T Clark and John Todhunter

WSA 1387/1585 Accident Book Home and Stone Mills

WSA 926/48 J.Walker & Co. – Pieces brayed milled tentered and pressed.

WSA 926/59 Sale Particulars of Home and Stone Mills

WSA 1911/24 HC Layout of Home and Stone Mills

WSA 1325/81PC Water Wheel and 4 pairs fulling stocks

WSA 1387/1602 Sale of part of Stone Mills to H.J.Knee

www.stonemilltrowbridge.co.uk