



Between the Lines

Land of Oak & Iron Mapping Project Newsletter

October 2020

This month marks the start of the third year for the mapping project, our video meetings between core team members and key volunteers have continued and we are making progress towards publishing our maps (albeit somewhat slower than anticipated). In addition to the video meetings our Mills Team have completed a field trip and their report on findings provides a very informative read.

Mapping meetings

Video meetings are likely to be our main meeting forum for at least the remainder of 2020, and probably the early part of 2021. LOIT have secured a non-profit subscription to Microsoft 365 which will enable us to use the MS Teams platform for video conferencing. It will take a little time to configure the software to suit our needs and we will update on progress in next month's newsletter.

In search of old mills - A field trip up the Blaydon Burn

The Mills Sub-Group on the Mapping Project have been cataloguing Mills on the Team, Derwent and Devil's Water for about 2 years and now have about 150 places in the database. These are mostly watermills or infrastructure suggesting mills, such as millraces, mill ponds, weirs or mill dams.

However, when it came to correctly geo-locating these items we ran into some confusion with descriptions in source material. We are using diverse source material including: Boldon Book ⁽¹⁾ survey (1183), Greenwood's maps of [County Durham](#) (1820), [Winlaton Tithe Map](#) 1838), [Local estate maps](#) in the collections at Durham University, Ordnance Survey (OS) [maps 1850s to 1950s](#), [History of the Parish of Ryton](#), William Bourn, historian 1896, Tyne and Wear Sitelines website, Blaydon Burn [Nature Reserve leaflet](#) (Gateshead Council), various published academic Theses on Lead Mining and [water use](#) in County Durham and Northumberland.

These documents, written for different purposes and covering a long historical period, threw up anomalies which were most obvious in areas where there had been intensive industrial activity.

Those areas of dense industrial development included: the upper Derwent beyond the Derwent Reservoir where Lead Mining was prevalent, and the Lower Derwent from Winlaton Mill to Swalwell with Corn, Ironworking, Mine-water pumping and Paper production. However, the location with the most ambiguities was a 2 mile stretch of the Blaydon Burn starting near the village of Barlow, to the road bridge over the Blaydon Burn near the Black Bull at Blaydon.

To misquote Shakespeare "A Mill by any other name is still a Mill". If he'd been on our project team he may well have been tempted to word it that way having experienced our issues.

The first problem we needed to overcome was potential multiple counting of the same mill complex. Sometimes this was due to lack of accurate mapping evidence. The

Ordnance Survey mapping is of course highly accurate but the 1st edition survey took place around 1852 which meant that if a mill had closed and no surface remains existed, at the time of the OS survey, they weren't on the maps at all. The estate maps we had dating from the 1600s onwards and tithe maps of 1842 were drawn up for taxation or land ownership and accurate mapping of redundant mills wasn't a priority for the surveyors.

Secondly, by comparing the Bourn descriptions we identified multiple names for the same mills, generally due to changes of ownership or miller over the centuries, some millers moving from one location to another and naturally renaming his new mill with his own surname. This confusion is exacerbated by changes in use, e.g. corn milling, mine-water pumping, woodworking, clay production etc.

An excellent example of this was that some entries for the fully restored visitor-attraction Path Head Mill which is actually on the Stella Burn, being confused with another Path Head mill, anciently known as Hobby's or Hoplyh's which was directly on the Blaydon Burn. This mill was later known as Burn's in 1866 and described as Gibson's Mill by Bourn in his survey of 1896 and actually the only mill still working by that time.

Another similar case is Haggerstone's Mill, here mentioned in an article from the *Newcastle Chronicle* dated 1783:

'To be let on Tuesday 15th April next, and entered upon 12 May following....all that well known and well accustomed water corn mill, called by the name of [Haggerstone's Mill](#), in the Blaydon Burn...belonging to the Lords of Winlaton and now occupied by Robert Turnbull as a tenant...'

This particular mill, located opposite Summerhill, was named Haggerstone's, Rennison's and Pickering's over the course of its history. To make matters worse it was accidentally conjoined with another Haggerstone's Mill (also named Fenwick's Mill) which was located roughly between Valley Crescent, Blaydon and the Stargate Lockup Garage on Beweshill Lane. It can probably be speculated that the family Haggerstone must have owned several businesses which transferred the name as they moved premises.

(continued overleaf)

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The Solution

So how could we clarify the situation? The Mills sub-group holds a weekly virtual meeting during the current health crisis. Trying to compare various maps in different scales and textual descriptions in a Zoom meeting was proving very problematic. The answer was precipitated by the impending escalation in Covid-19 restrictions. We realised that a site survey might help us to visualise the landscape through the eyes of earlier historians and now was the time before outdoor meetings became restricted.

We urgently agreed a date for the site survey, printed off Tithe Maps, several different era OS Maps, the Bourn and Winlaton History Society descriptions, packed our masks, donned boots and met at the Summerhill carpark near the bottom of Summerhill.

We had established that within the [William Bourn 1896](#) description he mentioned some places that are very well documented and still clearly visible on the ground. His description is a walk from top to bottom with some very rough distances. We decided to do his walk in reverse as he describes Massey's Forge which [Winlaton History Society](#) covers very comprehensively on their excellent website. They include pictures of the 4 metre high 'Horseshoe Dam' wall before and during a 1982 archaeological dig. This unmissable piece of masonry (now partly reburied to protect the site) was to form a good datum point to work backwards through Bourn's narrative.

He helpfully describes the Massey's Forge section:

'...a few minutes' walk brings the visitor to Massey's Forge, which are in ruins. The water passed from the dam through large pipes on to the wheel, by which it was set in motion. The building was afterwards used as a foundry by Messrs. Smith, Patterson & Co. of Blaydon.... Another mill, known as Haggerston's Mill, stood below the site of the old forge in 1775, but all traces of it are gone. At the bottom of the burn stand the brickworks, No. 2, of Messrs. Joseph Cowen & Co.'

This gave us a good start and reversing Bourn's romantic description took us upstream from Massey's Forge to his next marker:

'...A pleasant walk down a footpath with delightful scenery on the east side, brings you to another mill, which was formerly used by Messrs. Joseph Cowen & Co. for grinding clay. The water-wheel is hidden by a picturesque little cottage standing by the side of the path; the wheel is silent, and only the murmuring of the stream is heard as it proceeds in its course down the valley a few minutes' walk brings the visitor to Massey's Forge, which are in ruins. ...'

We progressed up stream with diversions to examine evidence of industrial remnants. It wasn't always immediately obvious what we were looking at but by cross referencing the different sources as we went,

annotating maps and being able to discuss each site as a group we made excellent progress. Being able to physically see what Bourn meant by 'a pleasant walk' or 'a few minutes' walk' in combination with the other sources and accurate location plotting made all the difference. Being able to see how physically close things are on the ground enabled us to make some geographical sense of descriptions such as this one by William Bourn:

'After passing a small pit... the remains of Wintrip's Flour Mill are on the left of the waggonway. The mill race is now filled up and the arms of the water wheel are at rest. The miller's house is still standing'.

The miller's house is long gone but the locational information helped us identify which mill we were looking in relation to the shape of the ground and relationship to the waggonway etc.

From start to finish we recorded our walk on the free Strava mobile phone app which measures distance, time, elevation gain and precise location using GPS (Global Positioning System). This uploads the walk and the resultant map shows where we paused to examine mill races, weirs and piles of ruins.

Afterwards we collated our notes and an annotated map was produced and used as an aid which resulted in eliminating four duplicated entries. Our final confirmed list of mills looks like this running down the burn from South to North. You can see some of the name changes over the life of the mills:

- [Blaydon Burn Saw Mill](#)
- [Foster's Mill](#)
- [Belt's Corn Mill](#)
- [Robinson's Mill](#)
- [High Mill/Wintrip's Mill](#)
- [Haggerstone's/Fenwick's Mill](#)
- [Hoplyh's/Path Head/Burn's/Gibson's Mill](#)
- [Low Mill/Cowen Mill](#)
- [Haggerstone/Rennison's/Pickering's Mill](#)
- [Clay Mill \(20thC\)](#)

In conclusion then, this exercise, and previous field trips to Redlead Mill & Dilston Mill, in Northumberland prove the value of 'boots on the ground' and examining the lay of the land for orientation against maps, dips in the ground, piles of stones and comparison with contemporary descriptions. Also in this case our team was able to overcome the interpersonal constraints of teleconferencing, have fun and enjoy the outdoors.

(CG)

Notes:

1. A free e-book copy of the 1852 translation of the Boldon Buke (Book), by William Greenwell, may be downloaded from Google Play [here](#).



Coming up:

Physical meetings are suspended until further notice.