

Note on horizontal waterwheel at Wigmore, West Bromwich, West Midlands
(formerly Staffordshire)

Grid Ref: roughly SP 021 938

On R. Tame, or a small tributary of it. R. Tame runs into R. Trent.

1. Many years ago, probably in the 1970's, Clyde Riley of Birmingham, a well-known mill enthusiast (born 1911, died 2004), told me that there had been a mill with a horizontal waterwheel in West Bromwich. I am not sure now whether he had ever seen the wheel himself -his interest in mills went back to at least the 1930's if not 1920's- but he had certainly met a man who had seen it. Clyde had shown the man a picture of a horizontal waterwheel and the man had said yes, that is what it was like.
2. After Tim Booth (1946-2022, another mill enthusiast, who had also known Clyde Riley) died I found amongst his papers the note reproduced below. He had evidently investigated the mysterious horizontal wheel further. From what the note says I estimate the grid reference was as above, though some things do not seem to fit very well when one looks at the 1892-1914 25" OS map. In particular no building is marked at that spot. One might expect it to be at Wigmore Farm, e.g at SP 0214 9364 (there is a sluice marked at SP 02167 93632). However that does not fit well with what Mr Woodward said; in particular Wigmore Farm appears to be still standing, and surely he would have referred to the farm buildings if the wheel had been there.
3. What was the horizontal wheel? I have sometimes wondered whether it was in fact a water turbine, but two things militate against that interpretation (a) The statement by the man Clyde met (who may or may not have been Mr Woodward) that the wheel looked just like the image of a horizontal wheel that Clyde showed him and (b) apparently the wheel was only on a small watercourse (evidently fed from or running into R. Teme) which would not have justified a turbine, especially if it was only being used to drive a chaff-cutter (which would probably need less than 1horse power). My own guess is that it was a home-made wheel rigged up by a farmer, perhaps in a shed, to drive the chaff cutter, presumably mainly for his own use.

John Bedington, 2023

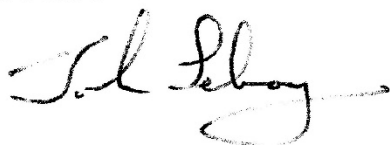
NOTES ON HORIZONTAL WATERWHEEL IN WEST BROMWICH

This note has been prepared to assist the Midland Wind & Water Mills Group in recording the existence of a horizontal waterwheel near the junction of Charlemont Road and Wigmore Lane, West Bromwich.

Between 1958 and 1962 I worked for West Bromwich Corporation at their Ray Hall Sewage Works in Ray Hall Lane, Great Barr. Around 1960 I received a telephone request regarding the existence of a horizontal waterwheel in the valley adjoining the works. I had never heard of a horizontal waterwheel before but took the query seriously and began questioning a number of older employees who had lived in the area for many years. The person telephoning rang back some 2 weeks later and I was able to pass on to him the information which I have given below. I do not recall the man's name but he was obviously very interested in waterwheels.

One of our employees was a Mr Frederick Woodward who lived in a semi-detached house at the corner of Charlemont Road and Wigmore Lane. Mr Woodward worked as a labourer for the Sewage Works but had worked on local farms for many years before. He confirmed the existence of such a waterwheel and took me to a point in Charlemont Road on the eastern side of its junction with Wigmore Lane and pointed out a position some 200 yards from the former. All I could see was the remains of some sluice gates which had obviously been used to regulate one of a number of small streams that pass through this area. The point indicated was also some 100 yards to the east of Wigmore Lane, therefore equal distance between the two roads from their junction, the actual site being pointed out to Mr Tim Booth of your organisation.

I believe Mr Woodward to have been born before 1900 and whilst he could not give me a date I believe the waterwheel had been last used perhaps in the 1920s. The wheel apparently was used for driving a chaff cutter and, from what I understand, had been driven by a horizontal shaft extending from the axis of the horizontal waterwheel. It was not clear to me where the chaff cutter was located and I failed to ask Mr Woodward where it was. From my memory of the site there were a number of small streams crossing this particular field and I could not indicate on which of these streams was located the waterwheel.



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