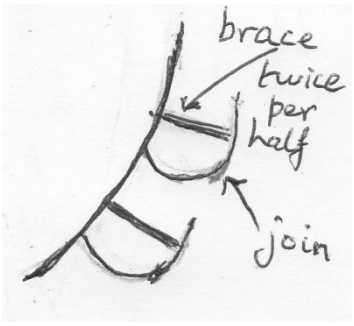
Note on **Bonehill Mill**, Fazeley, Staffs (nr Tamworth)

Bourne Brook, trib of R. Tame (which runs into R. Trent)

1. This mill was on the N side of Watling Street at SK 1993 0211, and had been powered, like the bleaching works close by by a cut made by Sir Robert Peel from Bourne Brook. It may have used spring water as well, or maybe that had just been used in the bleaching process at the works. I think the mill may have been built as a textile mill.
2. This is the interpreted contents of my site notes, from my visit on 10th April 1968 –

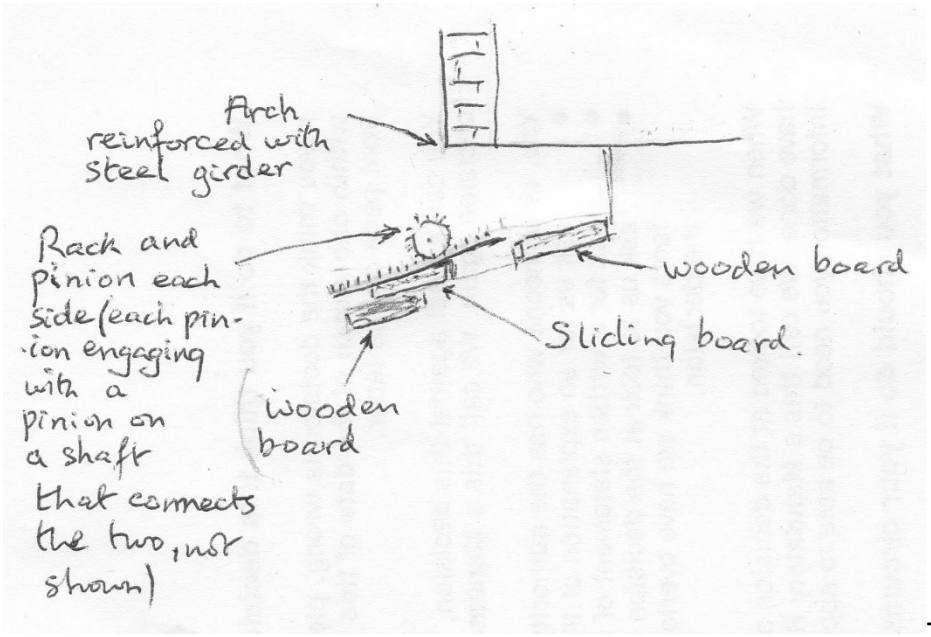
   Building. 4 storeys [3 plus attic would be more accurate] built of (non-shiny) red brick, large windows, some partially bricked in.

   Waterwheel. [This was wide and chunky. Charles Howell (1926-93) of Worston Mill told me that at the time of my visit it was the widest waterwheel remaining in Staffordshire (though not as wide as the one that had been in Alrewas Mill)]. Internal, 12ft overall dm, 10ft dm across sole plate, 14ft 3in wide. Iron buckets [these can be seen on one of the interior pictures of the mill (ST61h)] and sole, 6 radial iron arms of rectangular cross-section each side and in the middle, bolted to the hubs with 1.5 in dm bolts and to rims with 1in dm bolts. Wheelshaft, iron, round, 1ft 9in dm, on the outer end at least having a gudgeon 6.5in dm and a square for jacking. The edge of each bucket was braced with bolts to the sole in four places (see sketch and the photo of inside of the mill mentioned above.)



   Water feed to wheel came via an iron, wood and concrete launder, on iron stilts, to the wheel at 1ft 3in (measured vertically) below the top of the wheel (i.e, high breast or pitchback). A sliding shut, with a rack and

pinion on each side of the pentrough dropped water on to the buckets (see photograph (ST61k), and sketch



– the two pinions meshing with the racks also each meshed with another pinion, those two pinions being on the same shaft, which presumably was turned somehow from within the mill). Before the water got to this it was possible to shut the water off with a vertical wooden sluicegate across the launder (about 6ft back). That gate had a rack at each side and one in the middle, with pinions on a shaft extending across the trough and having a lever at each end. There was a trash grid too. An old grindstone was lying in the pentrough.

There was also a second feed to the wheel which came in below the one mentioned above at about 6in below the centre of the wheel (i.e, level breast). This feed had a trash grid and one could see there had been two sluicegates on it, one, sloping back, just before the waterwheel and another which had been vertical. I speculated that this feed channel had been to collect drips from the other launder/pentrough above (sounds a bit improbable) and noted also that it probably also had been fed by "another little stream round the garden of the house."

Gears. The interior machinery seemed to have been all stripped out with the exception of the pit wheel and a sack hoist. The pit wheel was a spur gear, not a bevel, 5ft 6 in radius, two castings 8 radial arms, approx. 160 solid teeth. The wall was partly cut away for it.

Millstones The site note says “Stones (described as spare [presumably by someone I met at the site]) 4ft 5in burr runner,4’4” burr runner, 4’4” burr (bed?)”, I recall no stones left inside the mill, so that presumably refers to the stones I photographed outside. Also a note “4ft 4in stone apparently a runner had had 3-arm rynd apparently” – might refer to the right-hand stone in that picture. If so, I’m not now convinced the notches had been for a rynd!

Sack hoist The note says ”A sack hoist directly over (2-storey) archway for lorries etc”.

Information from local man, a market gardener whom I met at or near the mill when I visited. He said - the millpools for the bleach works and Bonehill Mill together extended to 11 acres and had been built by Sir Robert Peel. The waterwheel weighed 90tons [surely a big exaggeration. Apart from anything else the person making this estimate probably assumed the shaft was solid whereas it was almost certainly hollow with walls an inch or two thick]. The mill had stopped using waterpower three or four years previously and had been completely closed for 18 months. The last millers were Ashbys [see below].

A notice board outside the mill read
“J.L.Ashby & Son
Cattle Pig and Poultry Feeds”

3. Several years after my visit, probably about 1984, when I was tenant of Charlecote Mill, someone drew my attention to an advert for some equipment for sale from a mill in Foleshill Road (or maybe Longford Rd, which is an extension of Foleshill Rd), Coventry, which had been run by a firm called Ashbys and had closed. I went there and found that it had been a motor-driven mill in the back yard of a pet food (and I think fishermen’s requisites) shop, which was continuing in business. I bought a couple of spouts, which I put up in Charlecote mill, and a couple of other small things. I asked the two elderly Ashby brothers who sold me

the stuff whether they were connected with Bonehill Mill. “Yes”, one of them said, “it was our father’s. To tell you the truth, he was just like you, the mill was a bit of a hobby of his!” I was in my thirties and it seemed weird to be compared with the father of two old men!

4. I see the statutory listing of the mill gives the wheel as undershot, which is inaccurate.
5. Staffs record office seem to have one item on this mill.
6. The book “Industrial Archaeology of Staffordshire” by Robert Sherlock has more information about this mill including the fact that it had had 3 pairs of stones.

John Bedington, 2019

My photos relating to this note:

B/W photos: Taken 10th April 1968 – ST61a, Front of mill, from road; ST61b, back and west end of mill; ST61c,east end of mill; ST61d, back of mill and pentrough; ST61e, tailrace (front of mill); St61f, inside mill, showing part of pit wheel (blurred); ST61g, the millstones outside the mill (bit blurred); ST61h, interior, part of the waterwheel (tail side); ST61i, waterwheel arms; ST61j, rack and pinion on the vertical sluicegate in the pentrough; ST61k, rack and pinion at the end of the pentrough, over the waterwheel.

Colour slides: Taken 10th April 1968 - STw1, Back (head side) of mill, waterwheel end; STw2, the pentrough; STw3, arms of the waterwheel.