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NORTH WEST MILLS GROUP CIRCULAR NO 74A (1992)

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HELSINGTON LAITHES SNUFF MILL,

by Don Paterson

Helsington Laithes Snuff Mill lies at NGR : SD 514 904 and is powered by the River Kent. The resident miller, Mr Alan Powley, had the mill open and working for us, on 17 May 1988, by kind permission of Gawith Hoggarth & Co. Ltd., and showed us the process in some detail. The mill is fully operational and powered by a small wooden undershot wheel (11ft 6 inches diameter by 3ft 6 inches wide) which is six-armed on a wooden shaft, with an iron shell and extension bearing. The gearing is of iron and the pit wheel end drive is under the floor with a small line shaft and bevel gears to a central vertical shaft driving two long lay shafts to either end of the mill. These overhead layshafts drive the two ball mills via belting, 4 single pestles, 1 triple pestle and 1 mixer and seives.

The four single pestles are overdriven from a spur wheel via spur rim gears and cranks in wooden mortars. It is thought that these 4 mortars derived from a gun powder mill in 1882 when the form took over this small mill. At the opposite end are a triple pestle and a single arm mixer in an iron mortar and an iron bowl. The triple pestle is no longer used. The tobaccos currently used are Canadian, Brazilian, Indian, Malawian & Zambian, which are variously blended and united with oils, such as lemon, carnation etc., in a nearby shed. Some chewing tobacco and rolling tobacco is also produced. This is an important historical and technical site - it would be a great loss to discontinue this water-driven enterprise where power costs are negligible and heritage is paramount. The enclosed ball mills are used for dry powdery tobaccos and the open mortars for wet snuff - the aroma was overpowering but pleasant.

The final processing and packing is at the firms Lowther Street Mill in Kendal.

The leat or head race derives from a weir across the River Kent about 200 yards upstream and was probably built by Messrs. Webster & Holmes about 1800 to drive their adjacent, but larger, marble milling business. In 1895 it was taken over by Chaplour's Engineering works providing water power and light. The water wheel at this works is no longer extant.

Don Paterson ... 30 September 1988, revised 1 June 1992

References :

- Paterson, D.S. 1988. Daytour 17th May 1988. (NWMG Pre-AGM).
- NWMG Newsletter No 8, July-August-September 1988, pp4-7.