

Note on Great Bridgeford Mill (nr Stafford)

Grid Ref: SJ 8836 2705 On R. Sow(e), tributary of R. Trent.

Do not confuse with Worston Mill, Gt Bridgeford, half a mile to the north-west at SJ 878278

1. When I first saw Gt Bridgeford Mill, on 25th Sept 1965, it was still standing, though I understood it had been gutted of machinery. I did not see inside. I have no picture of the mill. I see there is a picture on the Staffordshire Past Track website. That picture puzzles me because it doesn't show what I chiefly remember about the mill, which was that there was a way for a cart to go right through the mill. This was probably where the double doors are shown on the right hand side of the picture, and maybe another building was later built right up to it.
2. On the date of my visit I also met up with Charles Howell (1926-1993) who was then miller at Worston Mill, a short distance upstream. I understand that his family had at some time in the past been involved with the running of Gt Bridgeford Mill. He gave me some information about Gt Bridgeford Mill which I scribbled down on an SPAB watermill survey form, and which I reproduce below, with clarifications in square brackets. (I never sent the form in to SPAB):-
 - Owner of mill: R. Brown. Last miller: Shortall Bros, Stone. Date mill ceased work: c 1940. Gutted [of machinery] 1942.
 - Two waterwheels, both internal, abreast. Both undershot, made of bolted cast sections, one had straight wooden floats, the other had curved iron floats which Charles described as Poncelet and drew for me thus (traced from the form). Wheelshafts cast iron. One wheel was made by Massey Bros, Newport [Shropshire] 1860 [presumably the all-iron one. The note describes it as "one central wheel" – perhaps meaning the RH one looking at the mill from the south]
 - Gear wheels – Pit wheels and wallowers iron. One gt spur wheel was wooden, with wood teeth and the stone nuts meshing with it were all iron. The other gt spur wheel was wooden with cast iron teeth bolted on, its stone nuts being iron with wooden teeth. 2 crown wheels. Two round oak upright shafts 14ft long, 2ft dm.
 - Millstones – One pair peak, one pair [French] burr, on first floor, driven off one waterwheel. [no info given for other waterwheel].

Tentering by lightering irons [Charles seemed to use that expression for any tentering with a screw in it]. Disengagement by rack and screw [meaning rack and pinion with a handle??]

- 2 friction sack hoists
 - Flour dresser (wire machine) now [= at time of my visit] in Worston Mill.
 - Auxiliary power – Portable steam engine c. 1900
 - It was the one mill on the R. Sow with a roller plant (by Gardner of Gloucester) [presumably driven by the waterwheel for which Charles gave no information on the stones, or possibly by the engine. Any watermill with roller plant was a rarity in Staffordshire]
3. When I went back on 31st August 1967 the site was cleared and Charles Howell told me the mill had been demolished in the second week of May in that year. I noted (on the original SPAB form) that “water was [previously] diverted down millrace by sluicagate, (or just possibly sluicegates) right across R. Sow. The iron slots for a gate remains on one side only, 3 parallel slots in one fitting (why?). Presumably for iron gate.” See my photograph.
4. It appears from their online catalogue that Staffordshire record office have items on this mill.

John Bedington, 2021

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Photo of mine relevant to this note:

B/W photo: Taken in 1967 (apparently on 31st Aug) – ST53a, iron grooves for sluicagate across main stream (apparently just downstream of the headrace).