Caudwells' Mill, Rowsley, Derbyshire.

An exciting preservation project.

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On 1st January 1978 Caudwells' Mill, Rowsley, stopped working and thereby brought to an end 103 years of a family milling business. This short article describes the mill and the processes whereby its preservation and protection are to be assured.

Caudwells' Mill, Rowsley, lies just inside the Peak District National Park on the River Wye shortly before its confluence with the River Derwent. The mill and mill yard stand on a little lane which leads off the A6 road near the centre of the village. The mill building is three storeys high with an attic and a basement gear space. To the south of this, across the mill stream, there stands a large corrugated-iron cart shed, grain silos and stone-built stables and piggeries. On the north side there is the small green-painted office and behind that further garages and lorry sheds.

The main building was built by John Caudwell in 1874. This lies in an approximately north - south direction with the main area of the mill to the north of the mill stream. The building is built of the silvery grey local stone and was originally very neatly conceived with the delivery and despatch lucam on the north gable and with access doors at each floor level. Subsequent alterations have added various roofs and buildings which obscure the neat original lines. By 1912 the lucam had been extended to enclose each level and its opening, and it discharged at ground level through a corrugated-iron lean-to roof which covered the carts being loaded or unloaded.

The River Wye has been embanked for a considerable distance above the mill and the main stream now escapes, when the mill is not taking any of the water, to the south of the mill, forming a lush island around the mill. The east end of this island, before the river crosses under the road from Rowsley to Stanton, is partially obscured and the original two wheel arches cannot be seen. The north waterwheel was replaced by a turbine in 1887 and the south waterwheel by a second turbine in 1898. The turbine installed at the south end in 1898 is a 33-inch "Little Giant" of some 50 h.p. fitted by S. Howes of London. In 1914 the turbine in the north wheel space was replaced by a Francis twin turbine developing 76 h.p. which is still in place.

The plant at the mill is what is now described as a roller plant and in its present form goes back to the remodelling of the mill in 1914 when the firm of Amme Giesecke and Konegen of Braunschweig were the millwrights. The "Ageka" plansifters date from this firm's commission in 1914. In describing the plant it is usual to follow the flow of grain through the mill until it becomes saleable meal, grist or flour.

On delivery, the grain was passed by elevators to the top floor of the mill. There it was delivered according to type to the various silos which stretch up through the building. The grains were mixed according to the particular flours which were required and then taken back to the top floor where the grain was conditioned and cleaned. The grain passed over a reel which removed any foreign bodies, weed seeds and soil. The storage bins on the top floor are also accompanied by the conditioner plant. The dry grain, usually wheat, had to be moistened to the right level before the wheat was passed through a scourer machine which removed all the outer waste matter from the grain. The wastes were blown through the ventilated dust room to be disposed of.

The grain returned to the ground floor of the mill to pass through the first grinding stages. The first rolls which the grain passed were the break rolls. Here fluted steel rolls broke the grain and separated the bran from the flour. After each passage through the rolls the meal rose to bins on an upper floor and then descended to pass through a sifter which removed the first grades and returned the

meal to be ground in the further rolls in the series. These are all identified by the letters painted on the casings of the machines. The plansifters on the second floor consist of square wooden trays carrying sieves which were shaken by cams attached to the drive machinery so that the flours were shaken through the sieves. Some of the flour was thus recovered and the meal passed to further rolls as required. From the rollers the meal passed to the purifiers on the first floor. These are wooden-cased machines in which the meal was further sieved and the fine flours were drawn off and the tailings passed on for further processing.

The provender, or grist, mill to the south of the wheel spaces, took much of the material from the flour mill which had no further use in the production of flour and mixed this with other products to be sold as animal food. The machinery here was used for rolling barley or oats and produced cracked grains for the animals. the silos also contained grain for mixing for direct supply to farmers for their animals.

What is the significance of Caudwells' Mill? It is basically a corn, flour and meal mill dating from the beginning of the 20th century. It was established at a time when the port mills were beginning to grow in importance and size. At the time when the Caudwells' business was formed the farmer had to make a journey with a horse and cart to the mill or to market, and the trading miller had to do the same, that is, go with a cart to deliver to outlying farms having received orders at the market. At the end of its life the mill was competing with the port mills and their distribution systems. A farmer needed to do no more than telephone to the port mill and he could have his order of meal or cattle food delivered in bulk in the course of a day or two. The port mill, while in itself a large unit, has lower overheads for production and so could easily outbid the local mill. Caudwells' had countered this competition by the provision of a personal service and by careful family management.

Caudwells' mill has a place in the history of food production because it comes at a point between the demise of the waterwheel driven corn mill, in which the grain was ground between millstones, and the great port roller mills driven by electricity with their enormous capacity. Caudwells' mill was capable of dealing with 100 tons of grain per week and out of this 45 tons of flour were produced; the remainder passing through as animal feedstuffs.

The problem of the preservation of this unit lies in its scale and the practicalities of the protection of the plant. The mill is situated off the main A6 road at the entrance to the Peak National Park and is therefore readily accessible to a large number of people who are either touring or just having a day out. It is not a question of finding visitors to the mill after its preservation has been completed, but of the practicality of the project.

The mill is owned by the Duke of Rutland and the trustee body would lease the mill and its surrounding land from him. the water rights are well established and therefore there should be no difficulty in the right management of the water to power the two turbines to drive the mill. The machinery has all been cleaned down by personnel supplied by the Manpower Services Commission. There are still workpeople of Caudwells' in Rowsley who can supply the expertise necessary to run the mill, either as volunteers or as "museum" staff. The information services of the Peak Park Planning Board are available to provide notices and to incorporate the mill in any publicity for tourists in the area. The mill has, therefore, been made ready for an active life as a mill museum. Grain could be ground so that the public could see how the mill worked as a complete unit in which the grain entered at one end and, after passing up and down through the many machines, emerged at the other end to be loaded into lorries as meal, flour or animal food.