

Peckforton Mill

Peac ford tun: 'farm by a ford near the Peak'

In 2018, I finally confirmed the existence of a 14th century watermill on the R.Gowy at Hockenhull. The field-name Millfield on the tithe 1839 map was the starting point as it was for Peckforton. The tithe survey was the first such record since Domesday in 1068.

For such a small river, the Gowy sustained a surprising number of mills. Those at Stamford, Trafford, Bunbury and Huxley are well-documented though others have gone completely. The frequency of millfield suggested hundreds of mills once stood on small streams and rivers such as the Gowy.

Tracing the source of the Gowy produced a real surprise – the remains of Peckforton Mill. A survey by Norris (1965-66) recorded 'a site with small remains of wheel position'; in reality there were a good deal more. Another by Bott gives a 1363 place-name record and map evidence for 1775 through to the 1846 tithe. Might there have been a 14th century mill or an even earlier one?

There were 264 settlements in Domesday Cheshire yet only 18 mills were recorded. Four on the Gowy at Stapleford, Christleton, Great and Little Barrow (2). Peckforton is recorded but no water or windmill.

Wulfric, a free man, held it. 1 hide paying tax.

Land for 2 ploughs. 1 villager with 1 plough.

The value was 8s; now it pays 20s.

Today, there are remains of a watermill and a windmill field is also shown on the tithe map (see below)

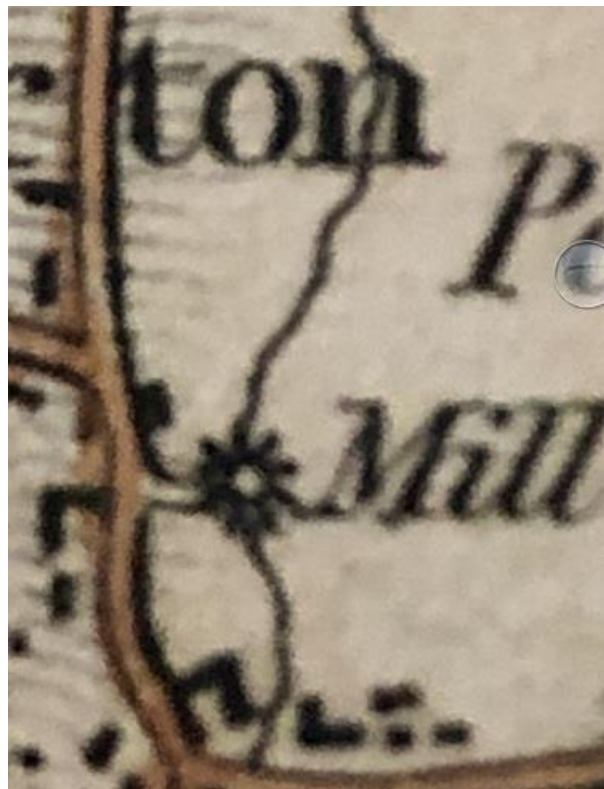


Bott also gives a watermill, on Horsley Lane and two more at Beeston. To support three mills on the Gowy so close to its source points to a more powerful river. Nearby were mills at Bickerton, Bulkeley, Bunbury and Spurstow, and some windmills too. The early maps of Speed 1610 and Morden 1772 show a windmill on the Peckforton Hills on a hill next to Broxton.



Apparently, the windmill at Peckforton was moved to Luddington Hill, north of Tarporley above the A49.

Bott's major survey was based on documentary and map evidence rather than fieldwork. One map, Bryant's 1831, provides the most accurate location of Peckforton Mill. Notice the Gowy flowing north-eastwards.



Continues in Part 2

Peckforton Mill: 2

The following research does not include any reference to the Tollemache estate papers held at Chester Record. Rather it is the result of map interpretation and fieldwork.



This inscription on the left wall of the mill, after a consensus of views, is for 1698. No mill or miller is recorded in the 1857 Post Office Directory. Spurstow and Beeston had one but not in 1875. All other Gowy mills are mentioned, in Kelly's, from 1857 onwards. In 1890, the Peckforton Estate bought Bunbury Mill. This date and others offer clues to the demise of Peckforton Mill and will be considered in Part 3.

The mill is contemporary to the earliest dwellings in the village. A small mill driven by a mill-pool would have been

familiar on the Gowy in the 17th century. It was built of local sandstone (and brick) by an estate worker or even a mason.



The site of the mill is rather odd. It sits in a hollow with a level field behind and slopes away ahead of it; the mill-pool has gone. No appreciable break in the gradient exists to power water to the mill. Either the Gowy was more powerful or the mill-pool was deep enough to provide a strong head of water. With such a small population it may have been producing animal feed rather than bread.



Mill backwall showing two small floor joint holes

When the mill ceased the mill-pool gradually became a marsh and a refuse dump then infilled. A good deal of the sandstone blocks has been removed from the mill. What remains suggests the mill stood some 7m high and 6m wide with curving embanking stone walls on either side adding a further 6m. Behind the mill a 3m wide sandstone dam wall separated a large mill-pool and gave access to the upper floor of the mill. The mill may have looked like this:

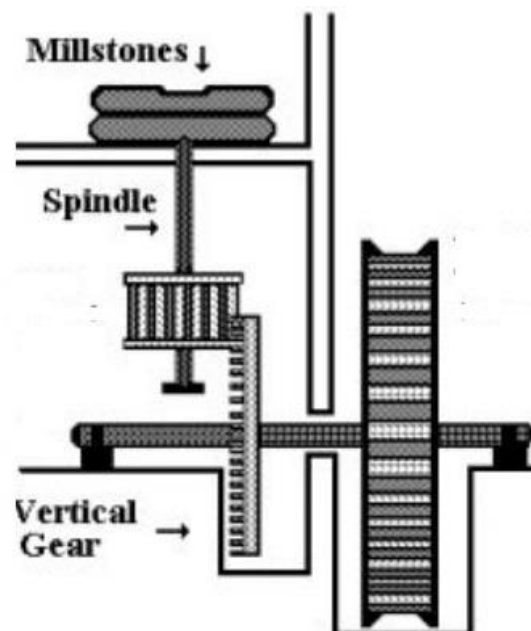


Most of the building used large dressed sandstone blocks though not of the best quality. The roof may have sloped more acutely than illustrated; rather like a lean-to.

Two half-buried millstones were a surprising find. These are possibly of coarse rock such as Millstone Grit. Without expert opinion the best guess is they originated in the Peak District.



The stones are over a metre across, 14 cm thick with a large centre hole and extremely heavy, and would sit on the upper floor of the mill.



During the medieval period France provided the best stones for milling grain. These 'burr' stones measured up to 2m in diameter, weighed close to a tonne and only the manorial lord could afford them. Millstones of the 19th century, however, were both less costly and smaller like those at Peckforton when Lord Crewe owned it in 1846.

Whether a windmill was still functioning at this time is unlikely as the one at Spurstow (see plots:293 and 411 Tithe map) had gone. The two parishes had both types of mill and it is possible the milling at the watermills took over as the windmills ceased. It is thought 'auxiliary' windmills supported watermills at times of low summer water levels or if the river froze in winter as happen at various mills on the Gowy.

In Part 3: The changing Gowy through map interpretation and fieldwork



Mill wheel and sluice 1911



Cross section of semi circular feature

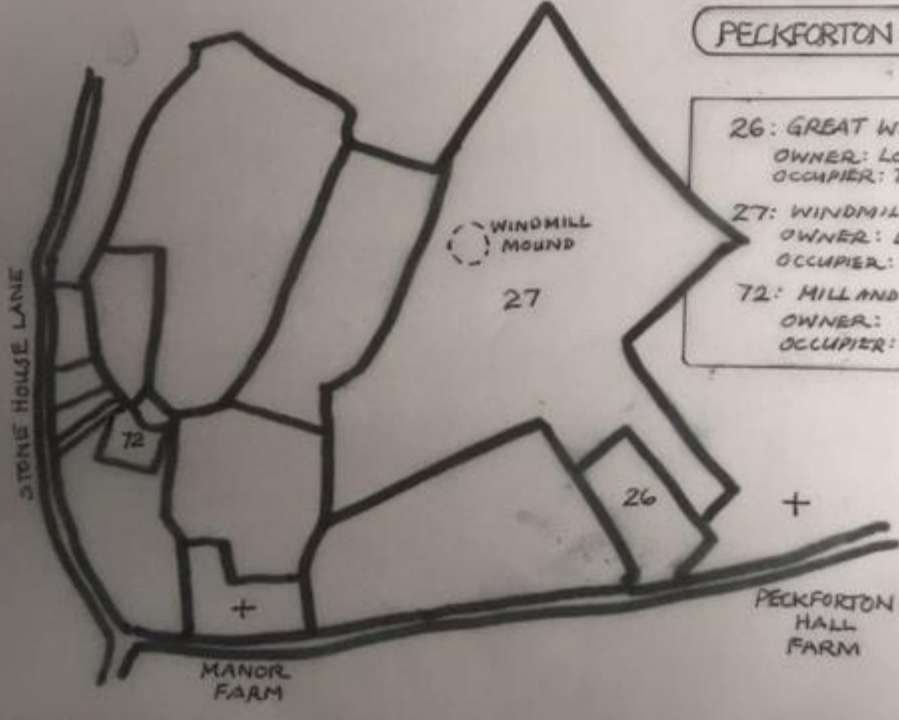


Millwheel axel socket



Sycamore in dam wall

PECKFORTON: MILLS TITHE MAP 1846



26: GREAT WINDMILL CROFT
OWNER: LORD CREWE
OCCUPIER: THOMAS NIELD

27: WINDMILL FIELD AND CROFT
OWNER: LORD CREWE
OCCUPIER: THOMAS NIELD

72: MILL AND MILL POND
OWNER: LORD CREWE
OCCUPIER: THOMAS NIELD