

Childhood at Alport Mill



I was born into the Johnson milling family; millers since the late 1700s in Derbyshire. I was brought up by my grandparents in Alport, near Bakewell; a pretty village straddling the River Lathkill whose waters, and the mill pond, were full of trout lazily swimming in crystal clear water.



*Grandpa Alfred
Johnson*

Grandfather Alfred ran the mill at Alport producing rolled oats and rolled barley feed for local farmers, including the nearby Stanton Estate. The mill, as well as the village, was part of the Duke of Rutland's Haddon Estate and was leased from the Estate by the Johnson family firm.

The mill provided an idyllic location in which to play, but I was also expected to assist my grandfather when occasion arose, and I remember being sent out on to the drying room floor, walking with hot feet on the steel plates suspended over a coke fired furnace. The combined steam and coke fumes caused me to cough and splutter, but grandfather said that my light weight placed less strain on the floor. I was always glad when I had pushed the last of the dry grain down the chute to the sack room.

The grain sacks were used more than once; having been filled with dry grain they were hoisted on an outside winch to the top floor where grain was put into the hoppers which fed the rolling mills. I can probably still tie the quick-release knots we used to attach the sacks to the hoist cable.



Alport Mill in winter

Grandfather had been wounded in France during WW1 and I dreaded rainy nights when, armed with a torch, he would limp off into the darkness to open the sluices on the mill pond, fearing that one night he would fail to return. As



Grandpa Johnson after retirement

a child I was warned daily about the danger of going near the pond and the sluices. However, the River Lathkill and the surrounding countryside were wonderful places to roam, and remain largely unchanged in 2018.

Grandfather retired in the mid 1960s and the mill property returned to the Haddon Estate. No more milling took place but the proximity of the mill to the Lathkill and the profusion of trout led the Estate to use the mill buildings as a commercial trout farm for many years.

Recently the mill tail race was restored and the water flow now runs a small hydroelectric plant, discreetly disguised so as not to spoil the lovely view of the well-maintained original mill. The breast shot wheel is still in place, although no longer in use, and Alport Mill is a much visited place for tourists to Derbyshire. Photographs of the mill pond appear regularly in glossy magazines. What a privilege to have been part of it all.

Bridget Johnson