

MILLS AROUND NEWENT

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with contributions from Steph Gillett, David McDougall,
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Introduction

The research for this article was undertaken as part of a detailed study into the history of Cleeve Mill at Newent, which retains much of its working mill equipment (Viner, Mills, Viner 2005). Whilst that report remains as yet unavailable for wider publication, the supporting gazetteer data on a dozen other mills in the Newent area was considered suitable for separate publication. Albeit largely based upon earlier work and not necessarily inclusive of all local mill sites, this gazetteer is nevertheless a useful assemblage of information, encouraging further research in the long-standing tradition of the Society's *Journals*. It also marks forty years since the publication in the *GSIA Newsletter* of a similar gazetteer gathered by an enthusiastic researcher, upon which this work has drawn in some detail (Davies 1966).

There are other milestones worth noting too in addition to the work of Gwladys Davies on local mills. The publication in 2003 of the compilation volume *Chapters in Newent's History* brought together some considerable amount of research, notably the work of Derek Pearce. However it is the late David Bick's work on the local history of Newent and district which stands out in this context as one of the greatest contributions, and so it is especially fitting, in this Society's *Journal*, that his work should be acknowledged by this small additional contribution dedicated to his memory (see obituary *GSIA Journal* 2005, 2-3).

For lists of mills, see Bick 2003, Mills & Riemer 1989, and Davies 1966 (the latter gives four mills for Newent: Tucks, Cleeve, Okle Pitcher and Brass). Documents in Gloucestershire Archives (formerly Gloucestershire Record Office) are listed as GA.

It should be noted that not all the statements as to state of survival or condition of buildings given in 1966 have been checked on the ground today, although the 2003 studies provide a guide.

The map (Fig. 1) includes each mill site and also the line of the Hereford & Gloucester Canal, the history of which is irretrievably linked to the water courses in the Newent area. This was another of David Bick's core areas of interest, reflected in Bick 1979 (& 2003) to which readers are referred for any more detailed study of the relationship between the history of the canal and the watermills.

On the Ell Brook:

Hill House Mill (SO 698263?)

A former grist mill demolished before 1780 (Bick 2003, 163). GA D1882.

Crookes Mill (SO 706265)

Demolished before 1900, but traces remain; some or all of the millrace exists (Bick 2003, 163).

Furnace Mill (SO 719265)

The ironworks later occupied the site (Bick 2003, 163); now farm buildings (Pearce 2003, 24).

At the end of Furnace Lane on the north side of the town is the site of the Newent ironworks (also known as Elmbridge, Ellbridge or Oxenhall). The Foley papers record a corn mill on the site in 1624 which was converted to ironworking between 1639 and 1645 by Francis Frith. By 1660 Frith had sold his interests to Thomas Foley, an ironmaster from Stourbridge. The furnace was in operation from c1640 to at least 1751, but had apparently reverted to agricultural use from the mid-18th century onwards.

There is some uncertainty about the original functions of the remaining structures, in particular the location of the blast furnace which one would have expected to be nearer the substantial charcoal store than suggested by David Bick. Further evidence may be revealed during proposed redevelopment of parts of the site for domestic use.

See also Bick 2003, 153-8 and Mills & Riemer 1989, 90. GA D2184/1: c1668-1823 Foley family of the Forest of Dean, Abstract of title of manors, messuages and lands ... Newent and Oxenhall with the furnace, steelworks and mill in Oxenhall, from 1688 ... with counsel's opinion on title, 1823, etc. A list in GA (EL 148) details the Foley Records deposit in Herefordshire Records Office.

Cleeve Mill (SO 732262) (Figs2-4)

Operating until the 1950s/early 1960s; buildings survive, some or all of the millrace exists and much of the machinery survives, including an iron waterwheel visible from the road. The site is reputedly Saxon (Bick 2003, 163).

In 1615 the Foley Estate papers describe Cleeve Mill as “ancient”. The mill was originally thatched, and in November 1666 Isaac Moore, the new tenant, complained that the house belonging to the mill and the outhouses needed thatching. In 1685 John Poyke, the miller, rented Cleeve Mill for 21 years at £33 a year. By 1725 the mill was known as Poyke’s Mill and was advertised in the Gloucester Journal as “a grist mill with three pair of stones”.

There has been a mill on this site since at least 1291, and Mr Lawrence, the miller in the 20th century, claimed that the foundations dated from before the Norman Conquest. Mrs Maud Florence Jones was the owner in 1927 and it remained in operation until the 1950s (Pearce 2003, 33 and Penney 2003, 52).

See also Davies 1966, 41 and Mills & Riemer 1989, 89-90 and David Bick, 1991: Looking Back: Why change a good old name? *Gloucester Citizen* (Newent Edition) for 05.09.1991. The recent survey was reported in Viner, Mills, Viner (2005).

Okle Pitcher Mill (SO 737258) (Figs5-6)

‘Alongside the canal and later, the railway line, this historic name has recently been replaced by a concocted title “Oakelbrook Mill”. Buildings survive’ (Bick 2003, 163).

A map of 1824 records it as Leather Mill (possibly associated with a tannery in Newent). Also recorded as Okle Clifford Mill. A mineral spring at the mill encouraged the idea of extracting salt from it, and salt ovens were put in. ‘These ovens were to be seen at the mill until about 20 years ago (written in 1953) but apparently the salt extraction was not a successful venture’

(Davies 1966, 41-2; see also Mills & Riemer 1989, 89). For most of its working life it was operated as a corn mill, Richard Phillips being recorded in the 1860s as the miller.

In 1966 this was a private house, a large red brick, late Georgian building, possibly replacing an earlier building (the surrounding stables are half-timbered). The wheel and machinery were removed in the 1930s.

Brass Mill (SO 742256) (Figs 7-8)

This was once called Okeley Mill. In 1646 it had lately been converted into a brass hammer-mill; hence its present name. Buildings survive; some or all of the millrace exists (Bick 2003, 163). Brass Mill was converted from a corn mill in 1646 (Pearce 2003, 36), and reputedly used for the manufacture of brass pins.

Converted in 1930s to a private residence with the mill adjoining the original dwelling. The wheel was a massive affair with floats so closely overlapping that it was more like a drum than a wheel. During WW2 it was sold for scrap. The dam is of very solid masonry about 15ft high, with a long narrow pool. The last miller here was a Fawkes who claimed to be a descendant of Guy Fawkes (Davies 1966, 42; see also Mills & Riemer 1989, 89).

Malswick Mill (SO 756247) (Figs 9-11)

The house and mill are separate, close to the B4215 road. Buildings survive, some or all of the millrace exists (Bick 2003, 163).

Detached mill house of early Georgian brick. The mill itself is of old brick with an older portion of grey shaly stone. Iron half-breast wheel still in position as is the machinery. There is a millstone bedded in the floor near the entrance door. In deeds in GA (D922/T2 and T10) it is called Orley or Okeley Mill in Malswick (Davies 1966, 42; see also Mills & Riemer 1989, 89).

A number of millers are known: in the 1880s and 90s it was worked by Francis William Giles; by 1914, this was James Faulks. Between 1927 up to WW2 the mill was worked by William George Perry, and its last fully operational use was in 1952.

On the Watery Lane Brook:

Common Fields Mill (SO 715253?)

This must have stood opposite Bradford's Lane. The mill race is shown on old Ordnance Survey maps running ENE from Common Fields House, and a breached earthen dam upstream was presumably for a millpond. Below the mill site, the stream down Watery Lane was culverted and lost to view within living memory (Bick 2003, 164).

On Peacock's Brook:

Bouldsdon Mill (SO 714245)

In a valley east of Great Bouldsdon, all that remains is a well-defined millrace and a nearby ground called "Mill Field" on the tithe map. Some or all of the millrace exists (Bick 2003, 164).

Tannery Mill (SO 721257)

This was demolished in recent years to make way for a new development, but some of the old tannery buildings have been sympathetically converted (Bick 2003, 164). The tithe map preserved in the Market House at Newent marks the upper, lower and middle races, indicative of the presumed mill pond sites.

Mill (name unknown) (SO 727262)

Near a footbridge, some masonry work still survives in the bed of the brook which was diverted to form a millrace. Some or all of the millrace exists (Bick 2003, 164).

The Tuckmill [no grid reference]

“The Tuckmill, recorded from 1482, existed to the east of the present lake, where the bypass now runs, but this had been demolished and is not shown on the canal plan of 1791. The Tuckmill Pool is listed in the 1840 Tithe Assessment as being over 2 acres in area, and was sited by the bend of the canal. It was probably filled in when the railway was built in the 19th century” (Pearce 2003, 33). There is a record of death by drowning in Tuckmill Pool in May 1739 (Pearce 2003, 70). This Pool is shown on the original tithe map of 1840.

Davies (1966, 41) thought that the mill was ‘demolished about 1888 when the railway was constructed. It must have stood just below the present dairy by the bridge taking the Dymock road over the Ell Brook, and was probably one of the four original Norman mills. The mill pool was the monks’ fishpond when a priory existed at Newent. [filled in when railway built; in 1966 only a small area of pond left in New Court Coppice]’. The dairy of 1966 has today become a plant hire depot.

Additional sites

David Bick investigated 2 other mill sites on the Ell Brook in the early 1980s and concluded that both had significant remains but did not further research the history of either. Highest on the Ell Brook is the remains of a dam and ponds at *Woodsfield Farm, Aston Crews* (SO 677232). There is some suggestion from local sources that this was connected with water storage for the Newent ironworks. Further downstream at *Little Gorsley* on Mill Lane is the clear site of a mill with a visible mill race in Mill Meadow near to Mill Villa (SO 689245), which was probably a corn mill. Both these are outside the area shown on the map (Fig One).

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Acknowledgements

This brief study is a compilation from the work of various specialists. Stephen Mills undertook a detailed analysis of Cleeve Mill, with Linda Viner undertaking historical research. Steph Gillett contributed the benefit of his separate study of Furnace Mill (awaiting publication) to expand the gazetteer entry here. David McDougall did further research and photography on the mill sites listed here, provided the map, and investigated slides, photographs and records amongst the papers and archives of the late David Bick. Permission has kindly been granted for reproduction here. The authors are also grateful to the Hereford & Gloucester Canal Trust for permission to reproduce material.

On behalf of the present day owners of those mill sites which are now private homes, the authors ask readers to respect privacy and use only public rights of way when examining sites, and they note that Malswick Mill offers Bed & Breakfast, an excellent opportunity to examine one surviving site as a base for visiting the area (www.malswickmill.co.uk). Our greatest debt is to the owners of Cleeve Mill who provided the first opportunity to undertake this particular piece of research.

Gwladys Davies' research papers, originally deposited in the Gloucestershire Collection, now form an archive in Gloucestershire Archives (ref. DP/2/48535.95).

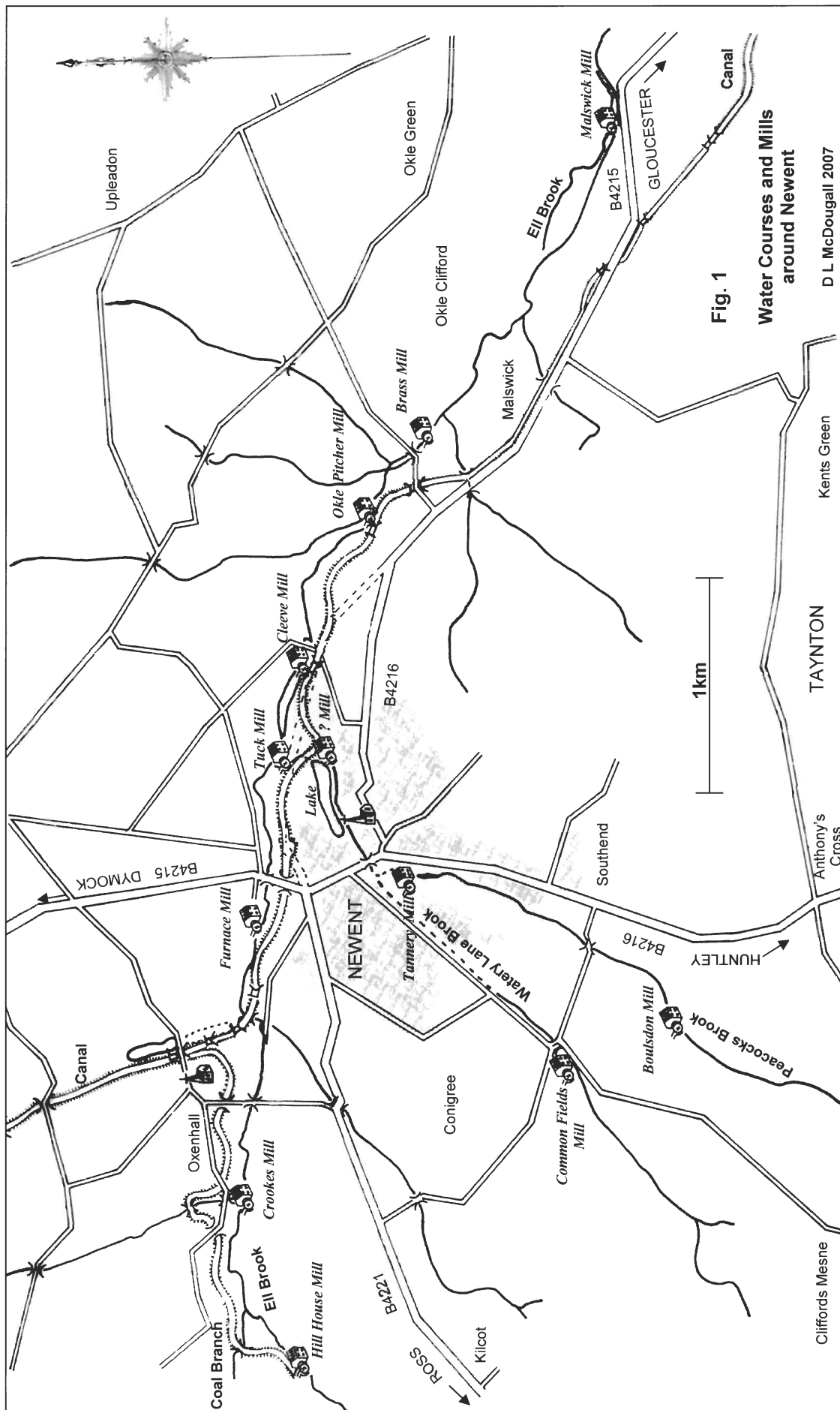


Fig. 1
Water Courses and Mills
around Newent

D L McDougall 2007



Fig 2. Cleeve Mill in January 2005 (photo author).

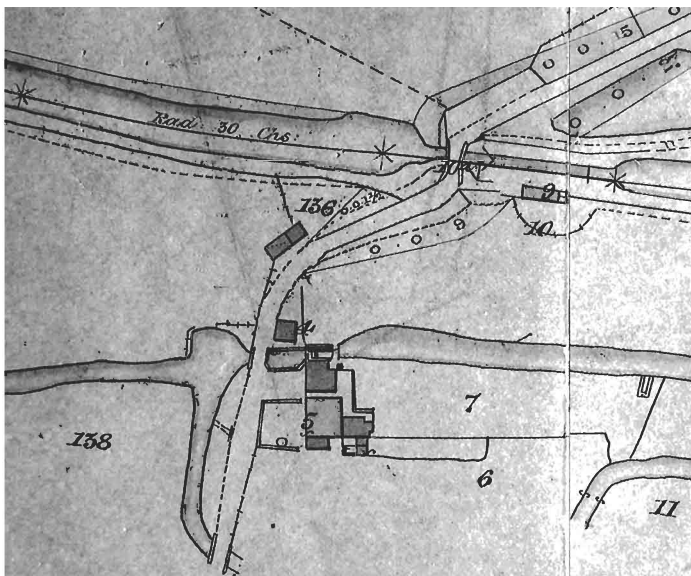


Fig 3. Plan of Cleeve Mill from the Newent Railway Plan dated 1873 (donated by David Bick to the Hereford & Gloucester Canal Trust for deposit in GA, and reproduced with the Trust's kind permission; copy David McDougall).

Fig 4. The south gable end of Cleeve Mill, showing the water wheel and wooden launder, January 2005 (photo author). For an earlier view see Mills 1989, 98.

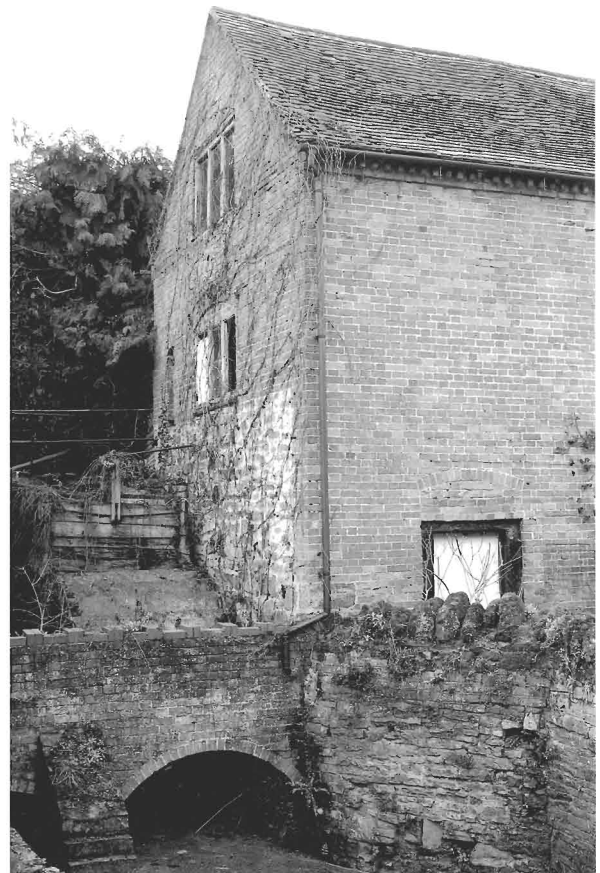




Fig 5. Okle Pitcher Mill in June 1974 from a photograph by David Bick, reproduced with permission.

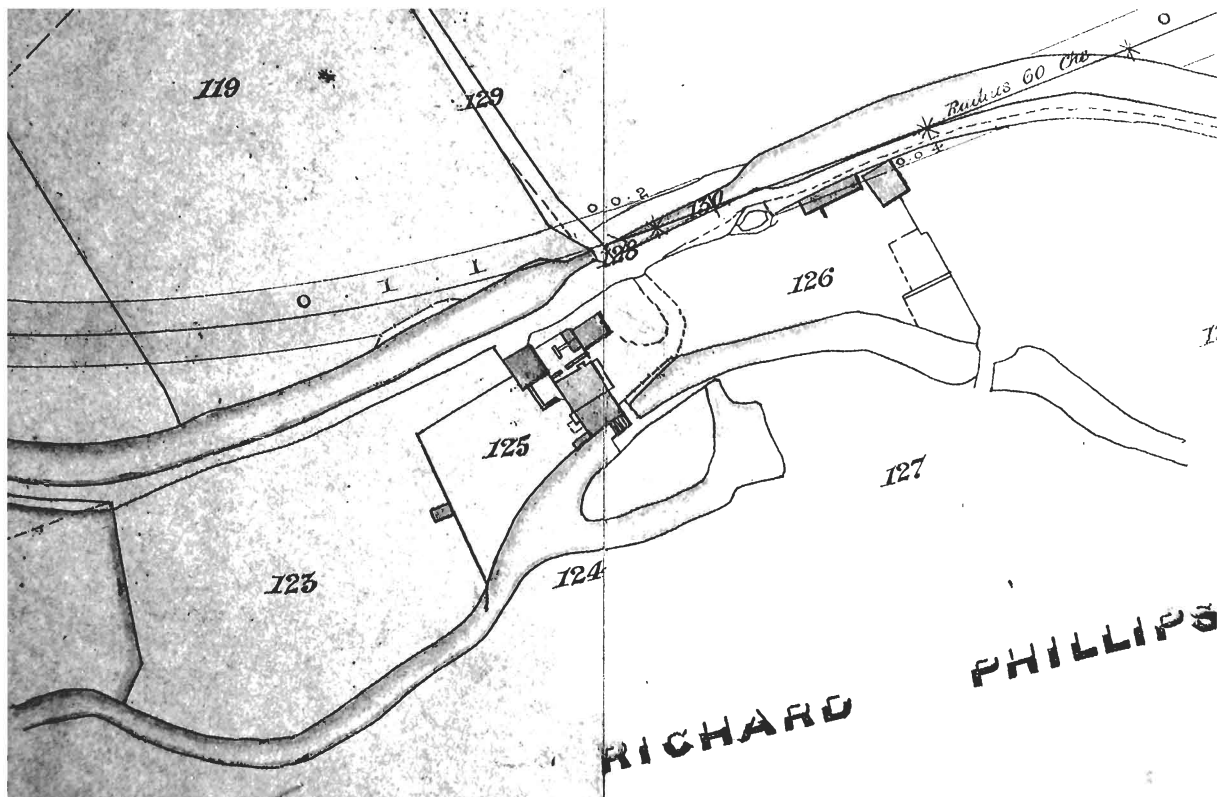


Fig 6. Plan of Okle Pitcher Mill from the Newent Railway Plan dated 1873 (donated by David Bick to the Hereford & Gloucester Canal Trust for deposit in GA, and reproduced with the Trust's kind permission; copy David McDougall)



Fig 7. Brass Mill in August 1985 from a photograph by David Bick, reproduced with permission.



Fig 8. Brass Mill in the 1980's (photo courtesy Stephen Mills & Pierce Riemer).



Fig 9.

Malswick Mill in the 1980s (photo courtesy Stephen Mills & Pierce Riemer).



Fig 10.

Malswick Mill as it looks today (photo David McDougall).



Fig 11.

Pressure on the sluice at Malswick Mill, the result of the heavy rains of summer 2007 (photo David McDougall).