



# Between the Lines

Land of Oak & Iron Mapping Project Newsletter

July 2019

This month we are delighted to feature an article prepared by CG, of the mills topic team, explaining the methods, challenges and progress of their study. There is also news about the recently established Land of Oak & Iron Portal, a new essay about the role our area played in the "Industrial Revolution" and an update on the mine workings aps.

## Volunteer meeting July 2019

With just one meeting per month during the summer period there has been a great deal of catching up to do during the meeting. We are pleased to see that some of the topic teams have supplemented the arranged meetings with more informal get-togethers, where updating the findings of investigation and formulating future plans can be progressed. We will be back to having two volunteer group meetings each month from September and would be delighted for the informal arrangements to continue in parallel. We have a small room available to Land of Oak & Iron for volunteer activities each Monday morning at the Newcastle Building Society branch office on Whickham Front Street. Currently there are some weeks when the room is not in use and could be used by the mapping teams. Please contact us to discuss availability.

[Winlaton and District Local History Society](http://www.landof oak and iron local history portal.org.uk/index.asp) provides a local history resources information service (portal) for Land of Oak & Iron. The site is maintained by members of the society and can be accessed at <http://www.landof oak and iron local history portal.org.uk/index.asp>. As you enter the site and scroll down the page there is an index on the left hand side where links to further pages will be found. The content is wide ranging and includes information about the places, people and activities of our area. Many of the pages contain additional links to pertinent resources. If you would like to propose items for inclusion in these pages there is a feedback page where details may be supplied. We, the Mapping Sub-group have our own page; look for [MAPPING PROJECT](#) in the index, where you will find previous copies of Between the Lines and many links to sites where maps and related information may be found. In due course we will be adding selected items from your work on the project and enriching the information in what we hope will be an easily accessible form.

Dr. Bill Lancaster, the respected social and economic historian, who retired from an impressive academic career and who now works as a historical consultant and author, has written an essay explaining the significance of the Derwent Valley in industrial and social history. Knowledge of this had been lost to all but a few

academics and local historians.

Entitled THE LOWER DERWENT VALLEY AND THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD the essay explains the evolutionary processes which led from a society largely based on agriculture to one which was dominated by industrial organisation. How the concept of a rapid change -The Industrial Revolution - which most of us were taught in school, was challenged. The replacement concept, in recent thinking, by a gradual change over centuries is illustrated.

By reference to academic studies, starting from the 1920s, the significance of the early coal and iron industry of the lower Derwent Valley is explained. The ancestry of modern commercial capitalism, social structures, even the rise of the City of London as a financial centre, and climate change, are traced to the activities that started in our area in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Many of the innovations that allowed these changes to proceed are discussed along with the roles of local people.

This essay makes a very informative and thought-provoking read, and may be accessed from the link on the portal home page ([Industrial Revolution](#)).

Following the good news from The Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers in Newcastle, reported last month, there are some further developments we can share. Jennifer Hillyard (of the Institute) and retired mining surveyor Ian Robertson will be joining us, with a selection of the underground mine workings maps, at the meeting in The Lodge in Consett on 24 September 2019. There have been some expressions of interest in forming a coal topic team and further members to support this activity would be most welcome.

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### Portal:

<http://www.landof oak and iron local history portal.org.uk/index.asp>

## Mapping the Mills – the engines of Land of Oak & Iron

The Mills sub-group was created within our Mapping Project in order to document and map the watermills and windmills that lie within the mapping area. Since February 2019 the four members of this group have been collating data on mills using sources as diverse as The Boldon Book, Ordnance Survey, older hand-drawn maps, Beamish Museum archives, North East Mills research project, Hodgson's County History of Northumberland and Historic England, to name but a few.

The research has so far resulted in a database containing around 150 mills across the three rivers and seeks to document the names, locations, functions, power source, key dates and reference sources. The database has been created as a model which can be applied to further research for the Mapping Project.

### Where are mills to be found?

Mills require a ready supply of water or wind so generally we find windmills on hillsides and watermills along the riversides, though by damming streams and cleverly engineering mill races these can be away from the main river frontages.

### What were mills used for?

Across the Roman empire water mills were used as a method of mechanising ore grinding and sawing of wood and stone so it is extremely likely that some of our later Anglo-Saxon and Medieval mills were sited on earlier Roman sites. Many mills in post-Roman times would be Corn Mills as they are related to the agricultural landscape in the lower valleys but the mechanical technology would be easily applied to other industries.

Our research has identified that our mills had many functions through their life from corn, fulling, sawing, metal working, ore extraction, pumping water and in the case of Pockerley on the Beamish Burn, grinding Flints (for the Sunderland potter industry). Flint is not naturally found in the North East but was used as ballast in returning colliers. One imagines that the opportunity to resell the ballast locally to the emerging pottery industries would be readily acted upon. This ballast would previously have been discarded.

Threshing and grinding corn to make flour is generally understood, but Fulling has been used since Biblical times to bleach (using urine into the middle-ages, and later Fuller's earth) and process cloth by pounding it to make it easier to turn into garments. One example of a Fulling Mill is the mill for Winlaton located at Huntley's Haugh (Winlaton Mill) which in 1591 is described as a Fulling Mill and Corn Mill. This mill is probably several centuries older and may be mentioned in the Boldon Book entry for Winlaton in 1183.

The fast flowing Derwent at Shotley Bridge and at Lintzford powered impressive paper mills. The Annandale Mill at Shotley providing paper for Her Majesty's Stationery Office. At Ebchester the river drove three mills. These were used for fulling woollens, grinding corn, producing wood products and in particular the poss sticks used by housewives to agitate clothes being washed in poss-tubs prior to washing machines.

Grinding-mills for sword making were established at Shotley Bridge 1685, coinciding with the iron forges at Allensford, Blackhall Mill and Derwentcote. But the most technologically advanced iron works of its time was established at Winlaton Mill, around 1697, by Sir Ambrose Crowley. Sir Ambrose also created Britain's first planned village to support the workforce. This village included secure walled settlements, a 'Police Force' and a self-funded medical support and pension system for workers.

In the extreme west of our area modern smelt mills emerged on the Devil's Water, perhaps the most well documented being Dukesfield Mill near Whitley Chapel, opened by Sir Walter Blackett in 1666. It was producing 3,000 tons of lead annually by the 1780s but closed in 1835. The mill is well-preserved and worth visiting.

### What next for the Mills Project?

Research into the history of the mills will intensify as further provenance for dates and historical references is documented through sources such as Tithe Maps and manorial records at Durham and Northumberland Records Offices. In the meantime the mills now have unique identifiers as names have changed over time. These will be digitally mapped and provided with 'pop out' boxes containing interesting information. The database will be made available for use by academic researchers and it is hoped it will enable PhD students to expand the history of our region.

### Coming up in August/September:

Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2019, [The Lodge](#), Laburnum Avenue, Blackhill, Consett, DH8 5TA

Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2019, [The Winlaton Centre](#), North Street NE21 6BY (in Winlaton village)

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2019 [The Lodge](#), Laburnum Avenue, Blackhill, Consett, DH8 5TA

**Please register to attend using the links above.**

