

Village Echoes

In earlier centuries, rivers not only powered some of the mills involved in the production of food, but similarly served the cloth-making and iron-working industries which flourished in our area. The Teise and the Bewl, two tributaries of the River Medway which flow through the combined parishes of Goudhurst and Kilndown, were therefore vital to the local economy.

The Teise begins in Dunorlan Park in Tunbridge Wells, then flows eastwards past Bayham Abbey and through Lamberhurst, and is joined at Finchcocks by the Bewl which has passed under the A21 by Scotney Castle. Further on, the Teise divides 1¼ miles south west of Marden into the Lesser Teise, which joins the River Beult at Hunton, and the Greater Teise, joining the Medway at Twyford Bridge, upstream of Yalding. Both rivers were subject to land drainage schemes during the 1950s and this affected their depth, flow and route so that it is not always clear nowadays how they would have looked in earlier times. We do know, however, that plenty of mills were constructed along the course of the rivers: clues to their locations are often shown in the names of places and fields in the vicinity.

As regards iron workings, a steady supply of river water enabled Chingley forge and furnace on the Bewl to operate from about 1574 to 1724, but nowadays only the names of Furnace Field and Old Forge Farm survive as evidence of this activity. Further towards Goudhurst, Bedgebury Forge, owned by Sir Alexander Culpepper in 1574, was also active at much the same period and produced guns for use against the Spanish Armada of 1588. This forge was discontinued at some point before 1664 but resurrected to produce armaments for the Peninsular War in 1808.

Probably the most common use of mills was to grind corn and, until relatively modern times, the place in the community of the miller and the mill cannot be overstated, since bread was the staple diet of most people. While windmills were often used for grinding corn (there were two in Goudhurst and Kilndown), watermills were in fact more common around here. In Goudhurst, the watermill we are most familiar with is Hope Mill, at the bottom of Goudhurst Hill, by the Green Cross Inn. Now a private house, it was once a corn mill and in earlier centuries may possibly have served as a fulling mill for cloth-making. In its later years it had two waterwheels: both were vertically mounted, and rotated by the force of falling water striking buckets near the centre of the wheel's edge, or just above it. Further information about Hope Mill can be found on the Local History Society's website under "Trades".

Near the present-day village school, Triggs Mill is thought once to have stood in Sheep Wash Field. Certainly a stream rises to the northwest of the homestead, but it may not have been strong enough to serve a mill. A likelier watercourse south of the farm runs towards Glassenbury where there was also a mill, now also lost. Evidence of iron workings has been found at Glassenbury, where a mill might have been converted to a corn mill when the iron industry in this area collapsed. Another site of which little is known is Paley Mill, part of the Paley estate in Cranbrook.

Several written recollections within living memory confirm that an ancient watermill once stood on the site of Stream Farmhouse, its location beside the Goudhurst – Marden road

being an added bonus. An archaeological survey states that part of the building was certainly in existence in the 1500s, and a reference to “Totinghole mill in the den of Goudhurst” in the British Library dated to 1333 also relates to this.

Finally, one of the most interesting mills in our parish was Goudhurst Paper Mill, and if you would like to learn more, it will be featured in the meeting of the Goudhurst and Kilndown Local History Society at the Church Rooms on 4th October.

Local History Society
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