AN INDUSTRIAL SITE AT WOOKEY

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This site (ST 526458) is east of Wookey village near the settlement of Henley. It is west of the River Axe and lies north/south inside the prominent bend in the present line of the river. Until the 1980s it was attached to Wookey parish itself by a narrow strip of land some 15 yards wide, the land either side being part of Wells St Cuthbert Out parish.

It has been possible to identify a mill on the ground by survey and to establish one of its uses by examination of deposits. The mill can also be traced from documentary evidence from 1362 onwards. In that year the bishop of Bath and Wells granted to William and Walter Cammel a rent of 15s 8d 'from certain fulling mills and 4 acres of land which Margery once wife of Peter le Moners holds'.[1] Peter le Monier was a well-established Wells figure,[2] and there is little doubt that this property, like others, took his name. There may also be a link to a grant of 1354 when several properties in Wookey, not identified, were quitclaimed to 'Adam de Tettebourne called Monyers';[3] but this is not established. There are no earlier identifiable references to the site but there are references to a fulling mill at Lycchelegh in Wookey manor in 1302 and 1308/9.[4] There is no mention of Lycchelegh once the Moners name appears. The place name Lycchelegh has not yet been located in the parish, and any attempt to identify it with this site would be conjecture. The next reference to the present site is in 1461. William Cammel's land had returned to the bishop by escheat by 1447/8.[5] From 1461 to 1527 the reeve's accounts record that no rent was received from the fulling mill at 'Monerysmyll' because it had lain in decay for many years.[6] By 1544 Monarsmyle (3 acres) was part of the demesne and had been divided up and let out, presumably for agricultural use.[7]

By the 17th century there was an iron mill on the site. In 1603 and 1606 children whose parents were at the 'iron mill' were baptised in Wookey.[8] A manorial rental of 1640 refers to 'Tesell close also Manarsmill with all buildings for Iron milles'.[9] This probably also marks the end of the iron mill since the reference to the buildings is crossed out with a note that the property was then in the lord's hands and rented to the Merefield family. This family still held it in 1682 when it was called Teasell or Monarsmill.[10] By 1728 it was called Teazil Close or Iron Mill Close, and from that time to the tithe map of 1839 it was known as Iron Mill Close,[11] but without evidence of other than agricultural use. In 1917 the site was bought by Pirie, Wyatt, then owners of St Cuthbert's paper mill,[12] who also owned Henley House to the north and Henley mill, formerly a paper mill, on the east side of the river. It was split into its present parts, and after the Second World War was sold as agricultural land and as garden to Henley Mill house.

In 1991 some mole and other activity disturbed the ground at the south-west of the site

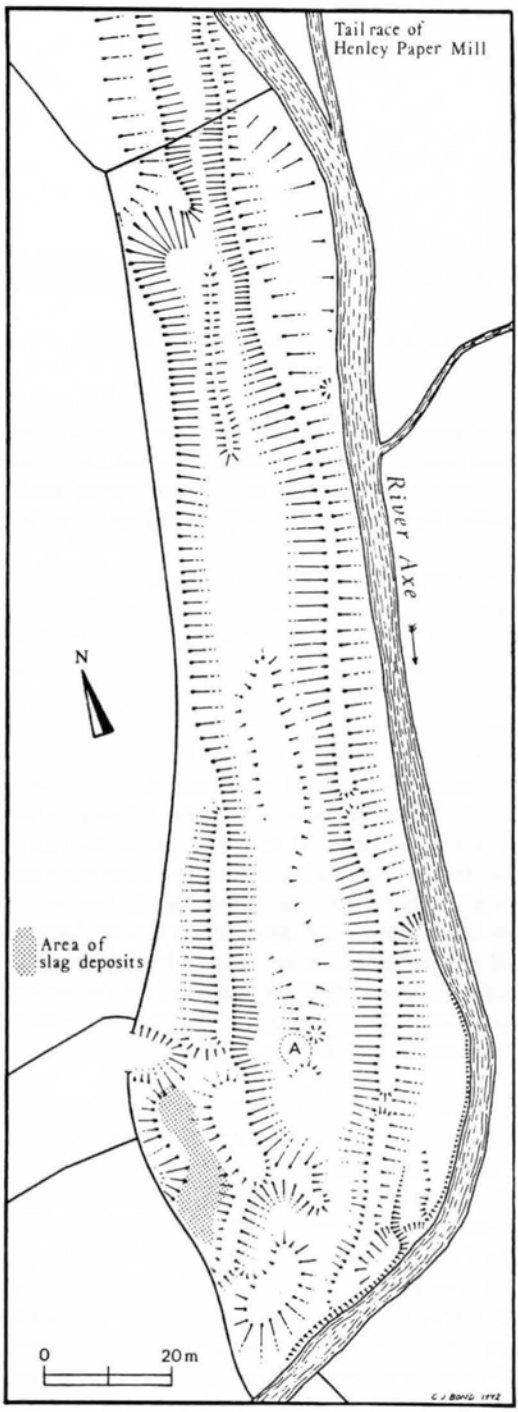

Fig. 1 Wookey iron mill (C.J. Bond).

in the area shown stippled on the plan (Fig. 1). This disturbance produced two types of slag-like material. Specimens of both were examined microscopically by Ian Standing of the Dean Heritage Museum Trust. The first type, from the south of the area, comprised typical slag flows from making iron blooms, and the second, from the north, evidently consisted of furnace bottoms from the same process. Samples of both slags have been deposited in Wells Museum. Ore for iron making was readily available in the form of yellow haematite deposits at sites such as Iron Pit Bottom on top of Mendip, within the then parish of Wookey.

In May 1992, James Bond led members of the Wookey Local History Group in a survey of the site using a 30 m grid. The results are shown on the plan and the following description comes mainly from James Bond's report.

It is clear that the course of the river has been interfered with here and the alterations certainly ante-date the 19th century paper mill at Henley. For some 125 m on the east of the Iron Mill plot, the river follows a straight canalised course incised into the eastern side of the valley which contrasts sharply with the meanders below. It has been moved out of its natural bed to create space for a long narrow pond and carried surplus water from the north end of that pond. The bed of the pond is separated from the river by an unbroken earth bank. To the north, a feeder leat can be traced, possibly following the line of the original river course. The western flank of the pond is marked by a pronounced step up to the level of the adjoining field. Towards its south end the pond side is reinforced by a bank which is broken opposite the gateway into the site. This breach may be the result of the passage of farm vehicles or could, given the ditch running west and nearby field names of 'waterleat way', be the position of a relief sluice to the pond. The bank then curves round eastwards to form a short dam. A further breach separating the dam from the riverside bank may mark the site of a sluice or the head race to the mill. There are no clear traces of a mill building or of substantial burnt clay deposits from which the (temporary) furnaces would have been made, but there are some rather confused earthworks on the south side of the site. Both east and west banks appear to continue south of the dam on either side of a mound, and it is possible that this is the position of a mill wheel or wheels needed for bellows and for beating iron into blooms. The bed of the pond is lower than the surrounding ground but it is not completely flat; there is a slight but persistent wide median bank down the southern half of the pond's length which can also be traced as a narrower bank at the north end. This is probably a relict feature from the original rivercourse, perhaps a levee. At point A on the plan (Fig. 1) a patch of blackened soil, probably the result of recent activity, was observed.

It is well known that the name 'iron mills' may indicate a site for iron making, forging or toolmaking. In this case the slag samples and the careful description of another mill nearby as one for making tools indicate iron production. We conclude that this plot was the site of a fulling mill which fell into disuse. The site was evidently revived and possibly re-engineered as a bloomery near the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century, and survived for perhaps some 50 years.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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3. *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells*, **1** (HMC, 1907), 371.
4. PRO, SC6 1131/3 (1302); SC6 1131/4 (1308/9).
5. Manorial account quoted in D[evon] R[ecord] O[ffice], 96M box 7B, 51.
6. Reeve's accounts dated 1461 (Lambeth Palace Library, ED 1133 and Thomas Scott Holmes, *The History of the Parish and Manor of Wookey* (1886), 43); 1491 (PRO, SC H7/593); 1503 (SRO, DD/SAS BA3); 1510 (SRO, DD/BR/SU 27); and 1527 (SRO, DD/SAS BA4).
7. DRO, 96M box 4/5 (survey of 1557, with dates of leases).
8. SRO, D/P/wook 2/1/1. The names were not those of Wookey families.
9. DRO, 96M box 4/7B.
10. DRO, 96M box 102/2 (survey of 1692, with dates of leases).
11. DRO, 96M box 102/2 (1728); SRO D/P/wook 23/21 (1769); SRO, DD/FS, map of Wookey (1829); SRO, D/D/Rt, Wookey tithe map and apportionment (1839/41).
12. St Cuthbert's Mill archive, receiver's report 12 March 1931.

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