MILLING MEMORIES

J DAVIDSON

MILLING MEMORIES

Oatmeal milling is the oldest rural industry in Scotland. Charred oats and rotary querns have been found in the crannogs of Ayrshire dating back to about 100BC.

There is no record of the Romans cultivating any land in Scotland, although they had granaries and barns in Perthshire and near Falkirk.

The grain was probably transported from England where it grew in large quantities. Of course what tillage there was might have died out.

Irish exiles brought the vertical watermill with them to Iona when St Columba landed in 563, and were kiln-drying and grinding corn at that time.

When the Vikings colonised Ireland they were so impressed with the watermill that they introduced it to other lands – the Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland – around the year 800.

It is from the monastic records of Scotland that we find that up until the time of the Norman Conquest the land was very poorly cultivated. King David I, who constructed the magnificent Abbeys at Melrose, Dryburgh and Kelso spent much of his income from the feudal system on improving conditions in Scotland.

The monks brought their traditions of good farming to Scotland in 1136 when they came to Melrose from Yorkshire. During the next hundred years their customs spread to the rest of Scotland.

The lands of Kelso Abbey were yielding 21 bushels of oats per acre in 1285.

In our own area Towie Barclay Castle has a scroll high up on the walls bearing the words “Sir Valter Barclay founded Tollie Mills in 1210”.

The first water-wheel mills were built by the monks. These buildings passed to the King at the time of the Reformation and thence to his Barons, and were known as baronial mills. All tenants on an estate were restricted or thirled to a particular mill.

These old mills had only one grinding stone and after the oats had been put through once, they had to be taken out to the shilling hill where the wind blew away the husks. They were then taken back to the mill to be ground.

The mill charges or multures varied from place to place as did the amount of a ball, and could be from a $1/11^{th}$ to a $1/24^{th}$ of the grain. At a later date this charge was made on all oats produced on the farm apart from horse feed and seed.

The repair of the mill dam and lade and help in bringing home the new mill stones were all part of the services of tenants who had land near the mill. If the miller had a servant an extra multure was charged for him – a knaveship.

All this caused much ill-feeling and resulted in the miller being an extremely unpopular person.

Taking home the millstones must have been a formidable task. They were 14" thick and 4' in diameter and had to be trundled along on their edge all the way.

Many of the stones for this part of the country were quarried at Cobarty on the Aberdour Estate or at the Rocks of Pennan. The latter were considered to be the best in Britain. They were quarried at a great height then pushed on to the beach below. At high tide they were taken by sea to the Burn of Troup where they were landed. They were then shipped to the south and east of Scotland. Up to twenty men were employed between the 2 quarries and the price of one stone was about £3. By 1850 only Pennan Rock was worked. The price was £6 per stone and few men were employed.

Pennan Rock was a conglomerate or pudding-stone. French Burr began to be imported, this consisted of a composition of silicious rock and was made much harder.

Before the eighteenth century tenants were responsible for drying their own corn. They did this in a wooden kiln called a killogie. This was like a loft and had small, moveable lengths of wood placed across the floor joints. On top of this straw was hard-packed to form a floor where the grain was spread. Under this was a peat fire. Later mills began to build their own kilns, but as late as 1850 there were working mills which did not have kilns.

The greatest change in milling and agriculture started about 1740. Most of the credit for the advance in threshing and milling must go to the Meikle family of East Lothian, who were involved for generations as founders, millwrights and engineers.

John Meikle was the first person to introduce the art of iron founding in Scotland in 1686. It was a descendant of his, James Meikle, a trained millwright, who was sent by Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun to Holland in 1720 to study barley-dressing machines and fans for cleaning grains. After about 2 months in Holland he came home and assembled a barley mill and winnowing machine to clean grain. For many years the pot barley we use for broth was known as "Saltoun barley". Up to that time grain had been dressed by flail in an open-sided barn, and the husks taken off the barley by pounding the grains in the hollow of a stone.

Andrew Meikle, only surviving son of James Meikle, set up in business at Houston Mill as a miller and millwright. He had fitted up the machinery of the mill himself and was much in demand as a millwright.

From 1720 great strides forward were made in agriculture, the introduction of the turnip, long leases of farms, clearing the land of stones, enclosing fields and improving roads and bridges.

Such was the state of agriculture when Andrew Meikle patented his machine for dressing and cleaning corn in 1768.

Many attempts had been made to construct a machine to thresh corn about this time, but without success.

In 1787 Meikle erected a mill at Kilbeggie in Clackmannanshire which was extremely efficient. By 1788 he had improved it so that it could be driven by water, wind or horse-power. He had this machine patented in the same year.

Windmills were used where there was not a water supply. Up to this time they were dangerous contraptions if there was a sudden gale or change in wind direction. Andrew Meikle improved them so that the sails could be controlled from inside the mill.

All these improvements, especially those to the riddles and fans made oatmeal milling more efficient. Most of the machinery in the mill was of wooden construction, with spur wheel and lantern pinions (male and female) and pulleys shaped to be driven by ropes.

There was an elevator driven in this way at Nethermill, which also had jockey pulleys to change the direction of the drive, up to the time the mill closed.

It was a pupil of Andrew Meikle, by name of John Rennie, who became one of the best engineers Scotland has ever produced. When Rennie was only 19 years old Meikle was sending him to install new machinery in mills. At the age of 23 years, although still attending college, he started up in business on his own account. He had the use of the workshop at Houston where he made his own machinery. When installing machinery at a mill in Edinburgh he used cast iron pinions for the first time. They reduced friction and were another step forward.

About 1786 James Watt was getting orders for his steam engines. When he got the order for the Albion Mills on the Thames he sent for Rennie to do the millwork. These mills were probably the best in the world. With their 150h.p. engines they could grind up to 20 quarters per hour – 4 tons of barley or wheat or 3 tons of oats. The credit was all due to John Rennie. He also designed and build may bridges including Waterloo Bridge.

The Grain

The first thing a miller had to learn was to know and buy good quality oats. They were bought by the quarter (3 cwts) or in 2 one and a half hundredweight sacks containing 4 bushels each.

Good grain weighed 42lbs per bushel or over.

The best milling oats were plump and well filled with thin husks. Varieties such as Sandy, Angus, Castleton and R30 were among the best, and after drying you could get 1½ balls (15st) or 210lbs of oatmeal from 1 quarter (336lbs) of oats.

The main reason why farmers stopped growing these varieties was that the yield was very poor – about 5 quarters per acre.

In the late 30's and early 40's grain seed breeders brought out many varieties which could double this yield per acre and more.

During the war, with the demand to produce more, thick-husked high-fibre oats were grown such as "yielder" which only gave about 12st per quarter. That was 3 stones less of oatmeal. This difference was the profit or loss to the miller.

Each term, May 28th and November 28th farmers and crofters sent their oats to the mill to be dried and ground. On a big farm, where there were 5 or more married men, 15-20 quarters of corn had to be milled. A crofter or small farmer would send 1-3 quarters.

Each farm servant got 3¼ balls (32½ st) every 6 months. The meal was kept in a girnal and it had to be tramped to keep out the moisture. This was usually done by one of the children who had to wash his or her feet before tramping the meal barefoot.

This meant that a household had 2½ lbs per day. ½-1lb would have been used to make porridge every morning, and a further 4-6lbs on oatcakes depending on the size of the household. They also made brose, skirlie and home-made mealie jimmies.

Kiln

The kiln was where the grain was dried prior to milling. It consisted of an area from 12' x 12' in a small mill to 30' x 30' in a large mill.

The floor was made up of small thin perforated steel plates about 11" square with holes ½" apart. They rested on steel scantlings, very narrow beams about 1" x 1½", which was again rested on narrow beams 4" deep x 1" wide, the ends of which were built into the walls.

The fire or furnace was directly below, varying in distance according to floor area, and shaped from the fire in a brickwork curve to the 4 walls at the kiln floor. In some mills where the grain had to be carried on to the kiln the miller had to be careful where he walked as the plates were easily broken. He had to make sure he walked on the scantlings.

Dressing and Setting the Millstones

The setting of the millstones was a very important part of the millers work. This had to be done twice a year, or oftener if very busy.

It also had to be done if they went off the true or during a dry spell when water was scarce.

The shelling stones were not very hard to dress and did not need doing very often. The lower one had grooves which had to be kept cut out to make sure the corn could be properly shelled, but as the stone was not very hard, this was easily done.

When I was learning the trade a process came into being of covering them with emery which lasted for years and did away with dressing for years and did away with dressing them so often. However, it was still necessary to check and grease round the shaft.

After taking off the hopper and removing the casing, a block and tackle (endless chain) was fixed on top of the upper floor joists above the grinding stone. Using mill picks the stone was levered up enough at one side to get the chain through the centre and out at the side. The tackle was then worked until the stone was up on its edge. Using 2 sacks of grain as a bed it was lowered so that it lay on the sacks with the grinding surface upwards. After brushing it clean the glazed parts of the stone showed. These shiny parts had to be chipped off to get a rough surface all over.

A 4" x 2" straight edge about 4' long was covered on one side with ink or black lead and straiked across the face of the stone. This showed up the places that had to be picked. This work was repeated on both stones until there was a close, rough and completely flat surface. This work took 2 or 3 days. To get the picks really sharp and to stand up to the hard stone it paid to go to a quarry smith or a tool smith. Not many blacksmiths could do this work.

The picks and the handles or shafts were completely separate. The handles were shaped like old wooden tattie chappers. They had a tapered hole in the thick part to receive the steel picks which were then easily changed.

Chisel picks were used to form grooves from about 6" from the centre to the outside. They let in air and helped to cut the groats and force them to the outside of the stone.

Most millers have black ticks on the backs of their hands or fingers from dressing millstones. You were called a cissy if you wore gloves.

Before replacing the upper millstone the lower stone was checked to make sure it was wedged level and that the shaft that drove the upper stone was plumb. This shaft passed down through the centre of the stationary lower one and rested in a solid brass cup with 4 flat sides. This cup sat in a big square recess with a bolt and a locknut on each side, so that the cup could be slid either way to get the shaft perpendicular. It had to fit fairly tightly

where it passed through the lower stone. As this was a wooden bush there was no way of oiling it after the stones were back in place. With a few pounds of suet from the butcher and some oil a grease-like substance was obtained by mixing it by hand.

It was then placed round the shaft and sloped up about 4" and allowed to spread on the floor 6"-7". Over this mass a piece of good sacking was placed with a hole of about 3" to go over the shaft and cover the suet.

The top of the sacking was tied round the shaft which had a groove for this purpose. A small, flat steel rung was then screwed on top to hold in the grease, and to stop it from getting into contact with the meal being ground.

To get the upper stone back in place and properly set was fairly skilled work. There were 3 recesses about 2"x4" cut into the grinding side from the centre opening which measured 10"x12" in diameter. Into these 3 chiselled out checks a 3-armed steel drive was fitted which had a pole to fit over the shaft. This was how the stone was driven. This was put in place while the stone was upright and was then tied until the stone and the drive over the shaft was set.

The weight of the upper stone rested on a heavy beam which could be raised or lowered by means of a lever at one end. Usually a threaded rod about 1" thick coming up from the beam through the floor where it had a wheel or handle to raise or lower the stone. After letting the top stone down until it was nearly touching the bottom one it was pushed round by hand and given a thumping downward pressure in line with each toe as it revolved. The pressure made the upper stone touch the lower one. When the same noise with the same amount of pressure was achieved all round the stones were properly set and any cut of oatmeal could be ground.

If the stone made a loud, grating noise at one part it had to be levered up in order to place a shim between the recess in the stone and the toe that went with it. The setting had to be so fine that a piece of paper, no thick than that on which I am writing, would have altered the setting.

I must mention that the pinions which drove the stones were steel and were driven by a large crown wheel which had wooden teeth called cogs (if all wood - a spur wheel).

Both stones were driven simultaneously, but either stone could be disengaged by lifting the teethed part of the steel pinion clear of the drive. This made it possible to shill, grind or set the millstones without having any other part of the machinery in gear.

Grinding

Present day oats off a combine would need to be cleaned before being dried. When I was milling, I tried to buy oats from farms with good threshing mills. This helped to make sure they were up to weight (42lbs).

After drying to the correct moisture content – 4%-5% - the grain passed over a "cocklar" which was a screen tyre of riddle which took out all the weed seeds and rubbish the threshing mill or farm had missed. Only the good grain of uniform size was allowed to go into the hopper above the shelling stone.

From the hopper there was a device on the housing of the stones which let the corn into the hole in the centre of the upper stone. This consisted of a shut on the hopper which opened to allow grain to come on to a tapered shoe. This was shaken from side to side by a flat bit of iron fixed to the housing at the top and to the drive of a driven shelling stone. This was called a damsel or a clapper.

The upper and lower stones had to be set the correct distance apart, just close enough to take off the husks. The oats along with the husks and the dust came out at the outside of the stone to a space between the casing and the upper stone. On the steel band which ran round the stone a scraper was fixed. This turned with the stone and took this mixture round to where it dropped down a spout to a dust harp. This was a very fine mesh tray or riddle which hung on wooden springs made of ash. It was driven from the centre and had to have the right shaking movement to take out the dust.

After this the shelled oats and the husks passed through a fan to blow away the husks. Only then did the kernels or groats pass into the hopper for grinding.

The working of the grinding stones was much the same as for shelling. The upper stone, the driven one, could be raised or lowered by a lever to suit whatever grade of oatmeal was being ground.

The ground kernels then passed through another fan to take out the sids (small husks) and then into a sifter. This was a rectangular box about 3'x6' hung from the joists by ropes or leather straps, which ran in a small circular movement. If the grain was not properly dried the riddler would clog up. Any grains which were too big for the cut of the oatmeal were fed back by a small spout into the centre of the stone, not into the hopper, which would have caused erratic running speed.

From the sifter the oatmeal was bagged and weighed in balls (10st). Oatmeal had to be weighed 2-3lbs short. Meal when it came off the sifter was hot and weighed less than it did a few days later when it had cooled.

The sacks had to be shaken and thumped until nearly bursting at the seams and sewn tightly with a sack needle. A label was attached with the grade of the oatmeal – fine, medium or

pinhead – before being wheeled to the store where they were stacked in rows of 1 ton or 1½ tons. Millers were very funny about the way sacks of grain or oatmeal were placed. They had to be very straight so that only a slight pull was required to get them on to the sack barrow. Almost always 2 sacks were wheeled at one time.

In this “Address to the Unco Guid” Robert Burns tells us that groats (shilled oats) were fed into the grinding stone at that time just as they are in the country mills that still exist today.

LOOK IT UP YERSEL!

OUR LOCAL MILLS

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Summary

Old charters confirm the existence of mills at Mill of Schivas, Mill of Ythsie, Mill of Tolquhon, Nethermill of Tillyhilt and Mill of Fochel from the 1500s although it is likely that there were mills on these sites long before then.

The 1696 Poll Book denotes mills at:-

Mill of Achedlie
Mill of Shithen
Nethermill of Tillyhilt
Mill of Tillicairnie
Waulk Milne of Rakstoune
Mill of Ythsie
Mill of Tolquhon
Milltoun of Fuchell
Mill of Shives
Old Mill of Shives
Old Mill of Shives This is listed twice
Milne of Tilegowie
Milne of Cairnbrogie

The mills at this time were very inefficient. This meant that a large number were needed to ensure a steady supply of oatmeal in the economy where it paid the rent and fed the family. Many of the above mentioned mills were probably working in 1695 when the poll was taken.

The Waulk Mill of Rakstoune although likely to have been originally a corn mill was by this time employing a waker and was no longer grinding corn.

Thomsons map of the Buchan Area published in 1826 is much more definitive with mills marked at:-

Mill of Schivas
Mill of Auchedly
Mill of Ythsie
Mill of Tolquhon (2)
Walk Milne of Rakstoune
Uppermill
Nethermill
Mill of Keithfield
Mill of Fochel

These mills were probably all working in the late 1700s and early 1800s. It was a period of great prosperity for the mills. Yields had increased because of agricultural improvements, and the blockade of the ports due to the French wars also helped the mills.

By the time of the 1841 Census mills had become more efficient and people had developed a taste for bread made with Canadian flour in preference to oatmeal. The mills were doomed.

The Census reveals millers only at Uppermill, Nethermill and Mill of Fochel. Uppermill closed its doors in 1937/1938. Nethermill and Mill of Fochel continued to operate until 1962/1963 when both finally shut down.

When the water-wheels stopped turning a picturesque part of our heritage was lost forever.

Thirlage

The ancient law of thirlage astricted tenants on an estate to a particular mill. In many cases it was an extremely inconvenient and frustrating law. Tenants were not always thirled to the nearest mill.

In "Methlick, Haddo House, Gight and the Valley of the Ythan" James Simpson tells us that the farmer at Hillbrae had to travel to the Mill of Kelly a distance of 6 miles, although the mill at Fochel was only a short distance away.

The tenants, or suckeners as they were called, were also required to give the miller a percentage of their grain in payment. These payments were known as multures.

The miller was required by his "tack" or lease to make known to the laird the value of each tenants multure, and rents were increased if yields were good. The miller was generally regarded as the "Lairds man", and was unpopular with his peers.

As well as paying multures the tenants had to render services. They were required to clean the mill dam and lade, repair the mill-house and bring home the mill stones. Much resentment ensued if the call from the miller coincided with the need for cultivation of their own fields.

The miller also demanded that his customers paid a quantity of grain to his servants. This was known as Knaveship.

The baron courts were inundated with controversial cases concerning thirlage, and eventually the law became so unpopular that the government was forced to act. The "Thirlage Act" of 1799 was passed which stated that multures and services could be commuted to a cash payment.

The Lairds were quick to realise that their mills were worth no more to them than any other rented building and refused to maintain them. Many mills disappeared at this time.

Thereafter the system gradually declined although Mr Jon Davidson remembers Mr Alexander of Greenmyre telling him in the 1950s that his lease still required him to pay thrilage to the Laird of Meldrum for the Mill of Forresterhill.

Ancient Mills

In ancient times mills would have littered the countryside. A burn of any size would have had 2 or 3 along its banks. They were an essential element in an economy where meal paid the rent and fed the family.

These rudely constructed mills quickly became ruinous and were either rebuilt, moved to a better site or abandoned altogether.

Their proliferation is accounted for by their inefficiency. Even as late as 1757 William Alexander in "Northern Rural Life" tells us that "the season being one of scarcity the Aberdeenshire country gentlemen appointed a committee to consider the victual and what improvements might be made in the corn mills and the manufacture of grain to make it yield more and of a better quality".

To quote Mr Alexander again "an idea of the limited power of the mills may be gathered from the statistics of the actual numbers. Thus in the large central Parish of Fyvie there were in the latter part of the last century (the 17th) 13 corn mills. In the neighbouring Parish of Auchterless there were 10 mills and in the King Edward Parish 7".

Mr Alexander also tells us that up to the beginning of the 19th century farmers did not sell their corn. The crop, except for seed corn, had to go to the mill to be ground before being sold. The amount of thirlage due could thus be accurately calculated.

Early charters confirm that the mills have been with and us since ancient times. In "Illustrations of the Topography and Antiquities of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff" volume 3, we learn that on the death of Malcolm, 4th Laird of Tolquhon, in 1503 his widow was declared "to have the terce of the Mains of Tolquhon, the lands of Meikel Ethsy, Little Ethsy and the miln …. The Kirktown of Fouchile, Fortre, the Mill of Fouchile …"

When the 10th Laird of Tolquhon (he rescued Charles II at the Battle of Worcester in 1651) died he was succeeded by his nephew William. This William was "served heir" on 19th October 1705. His special service read "… nearest heir of his father Mr Thomas Forbes of Tolquhon in the lands and barony of Tolquhon comprehending the dominical lands, manor place, tower fort of Tolquhon, mill thereof, mill lands …."

In 1681 Andrew Grey was served heir to his father James Gray of Shives "in the dominical lands commonly called the mains of Shives, the touns and lands of Culcauks, Oldtown Leyes, Newseat, the Old Mill of Shives, the New Mill of Shives, the mill lands of the same".

And in 1550 when the estate of Tilliet belonged to the Abbey of Arbroath the Pope confirmed a grant to George Gordon “lawful and second born son of George, Count of Huntlie, of the lands of Coulle, Cairnfechill, Pitrechy, Miln of Fechie, Braky, Becklaw, Churchlands of Tarves, Tullicartin, Tillyhilt, Miln of Tillyhilt…”

These old mills were known as baronial mills. They stood on lands conferred by the King on his barons at the time of the reformation.

A baronial mill, in contrast to a farm mill, which was a later construction, always stood apart from other farm buildings.

A fine example of a baronial mill is the Mill of Forresterhill, now a private home it still stands proudly with water wheel and jenny intact.

Records of Mills in the "List of Pollable Persons 1696" for the Parish of Tarves

Mill of Achedlie	Alexander Peirie, tennent
Mill of Slithin	James, Keith, gentleman
Nethermill of Tilleilt	Alexander Johnstoun is lyeable for his tax £2.10
Mill of Tilliecairns Overmill of Tileilt	John Charles, tennent
Walk Milne of Rakstoune	John Milne, waker
Mill of Ythsie	Robert Forbes, he classing himself a gentleman
Mill of Tolquhon	Alexander Milne, tennent
Milltoun of Fuchell	John Gavin, tennent James Dickson, miller
Mill of Shives	Thomas Gray, tennent Gavin Hardie, miller
Old Mill of Shives	Thomas Strachan, tennent
Old Mill of Shives	John Walker, ther
Milne of Tilegonie	James Leg
Milne of Cairnbrogie	John Leith

NB Tennent refers to tenancy of a farm on which a mill is situated.

Corn Mills in 1696

The preceeding pages are copied from the "List of Pollable Persons 1696". This is a list of persons liable for a poll levied to pay for William III's wars with France.

From the place-names in this invaluable document we learn the locations of the mills in 1695. It is surprising to find that in the Parish of Tarves there were millers only at Mill of Shives and Milltoun of Fuchell, whereas in the neighbouring Parish of Udny, which was only slightly larger, there were 9 mills all boasting millers.

In the "Records of the Presbytery of Ellon" we learn that the miller at this time (1700) "was generally the principal tenant on the land and held a considerable farm besides the mill". Can we assume then that those farmers who called themselves "gentlemen" or "tennents" were also millers and were working the mills on their land?

Alexander Johnstoun in Nethermill of Tilleilt was "lyeable for his stock £2.10". Was this the stock of the mill? He also had a son who was a wright. It seems likely that Nethermill of Tilleilt was a working mill. Assuming that those who chose to class themselves in a higher category than tradesmen were also millers, the mills at Mill of Achedlie, Old Mill of Shives, Mill of Shithin, Mill of Ythsie, Mill of Tolquhon and Mill of Tilliecairns may have been working when the poll was taken in 1695.

As millers are listed at Mill of Shives and Mill of Fuchell it is fairly certain that they were working mills. James Leg at Milne of Tilegonie, John Leith at the Milne of Cairnbrogie and John Walker at one of the Old Mills of Shives are not listed as "tennents". It is probable that these mills were lying idle. Milne of Tilegonie later became Mill of Keithfield. No mention is made in the Poll Book of the Old Mill of Fochel, but as this was a poll of persons perhaps no one was living there on polling day.

Waulk Mills usually had their origins as corn mills. This was probably true of the Waulk Milne of Rakstoune, but by 1695 John Milne was working there as a waker.

James Leg is listed at Mill of Tilliecairnie and at Overmill of Tileilt. The mill was probably known by both names, later it became Uppermill.

Corn Mills 1826-1841

There are few official records for this time. My main source of information was Thomson's "Map of the Buchan Area of Aberdeenshire" published in 1826.

The map shows mills at Mill of Schivas, Mill of Auchedly , Mill of Ythsie, Mill of Tolquhon (2), Uppermill, Nethermill, Mill of Keithfield, Mill of Fochel and Waulk Milne of Rakstoune. These mills must have been in a reasonable state of repair to justify inclusion on the map, and were probably working at some time in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Certainly Mr Duncan of Boghouse in his interview with Mr J Duthie-Webster, a typescript of which is in the Heritage Room, recalls working mills at Ythsie, Tolquhon, Nethermill and Uppermill about the 1820s. We have further proof of a working mill at Mill of Tolquhon in Mr W S Porters book "Brutal Inheritance". He tells us that one of his ancestors, Mr George Porter, tenant of the farm of Mill of Tolquhon, had fallen behind with his rent. He owed Lord Aberdeen £19.14.10 in rent, which should have been paid at the previous Martinmas and Whit Sunday, together with equal portions of 33 balls and 2 pecks of meal payable betwixt Christmas and Candlemas at a rate of 8st 4lbs weight per ball. (Mr Jon Davidson thinks that this large amount of meal must have been included, the meal belonging to Mr Porter's customers due to be paid to Haddo House).

Lord Aberdeen resorted to the courts to bring Mr Porter's tenancy to an end. The hearing was held on 7th January 1796. Five months later another court hearing revealed that George Porter had found caution for the rent and the threat to the tenancy was postponed. Fortunately for George Porter, Lord Aberdeen died in 1801, and 6 years later the Dowager Countess of Aberdeen granted him a new lease not only for the Milltown of Tolquhon, but also of the meal mill, multures and services and the small farm of Upper Boghouse.

It is interesting to note the locations of the mills at Tolquhon. One apparently stood beside the bridge where the Old Aberdeen Road crosses the Yowlie Burn. The other seems to have been situated somewhere below the now ruinous farmhouse of Mill of Tolquhon.

Mill of Shithin and Milne of Cairnbrogie, which were recorded in the Poll Book have both disappeared by this time. It is a pity that the Rev. Thomas Mitchell when he was writing the First Statistical Account did not tell us how many meal mills there were in the Parish in the 1790s.

In Methlick, according to the Rev. Alexander Knolls, there were 6 meal mills and 2 ferry boats. In Fyvie the Rev. William Moir counted no fewer than 13 corn mills, 2 fulling mills, a barley mill and a lint mill.

The first Ordnance Suryey map published in 1871 provides yet more evidence that the mills were working in the early 1800s. Corn mills are denoted at Mill of Auchedly, Mill of Tolquhon, Nethermill and Mill of Fochel and although we know from the census reports that all the mills except those at Uppermill, Nethermill and Mill of Fochel had ceased working by 1841, their structures must have been reasonably sound when the survey was taken.

Corn Mills 1841-1963

These 3 corn mills at Uppermill, Nethermill and Mill of Fochel continued to work for over a century.

Uppermill

The census reports for 1841-1891 all record a miller in residence at Uppermill. The valuation rolls for 1900/01 to 1915/16 list the Marr family as tenants of Uppermill with a cottage occupied by a miller. In 1916/17 when Mr James Durno became tenant of Uppermill the Northern Agricultural Company Ltd took over the operation of the mill and continued to do so until the mill ceased to operate in 1936/37.

Nethermill

The census reports for 1841 to 1891 all record a miller residing at Nethermill. The tenancy of the mill at Nethermill belonged to the Massie family from 1900 to 1963 when Mr Harold Massie died. At this time, too, Mr Jon Davidson, the miller, rouped out and the mill became defunct.

Mill of Fochel

The census reports 1841-1891 all record millers in residence at Mill of Fochel. The Valuation Rolls 1900/01 to 1905/06 list James Milne as tenant, but do not record a miller occupying the mill cottage. From 1906/07 to 1919/20 the Northern Agricultural Company Ltd ran the mill as tenants until 1920/21 when they became the proprietors. The Valuation Rolls 1922/23 to 1926/27 do not record a miller in residence. In 1927/28 Valuation Roll the mill is described as “under construction”. It is likely, as was frequently the case, that during the years 1900-1906 and 1922-1928 when no miller was recorded that the mill was being rebuilt after a fire. From 1928/29 the mill continued under the ownership of the Northern Agricultural Company Ltd (later the Aberdeen Lime Co and the Northern Agricultural and Lime Co) until it ceased production in 1963/64.

The demise of the mills was the result of changed eating habits. By the 1960s cornflakes had replaced porridge for breakfast. The millers attempted to survive by diversifying into the dressing and grading of corn and mixing of animal feed, but the days of the country corn mills were over.

The waterwheels were stilled and a picturesque part of our heritage was lost forever.

Conclusion

At the time of writing the site of Mill of Ythsie is up for sale. The mill building is not quite ruinous having been repaired when it was used by Mr McNaughton to generate the first hydro-electric power in the district.

The Mill at Nethermill has been gutted and is now incorporated in the farm buildings.

Mill of Fochel, although still recognisable as a mill, has been surrounded by other buildings and has lost its identity.

There is no evidence, as far as I can see, of Mills at Tolquohon.

The other sites I have not inspected as they are not easily accessible. Perhaps this could be another project.

Tenants of the mills and millers taken from the census reports 1841-1891 and the Valuation Rolls 1900/01-1963/64.

Uppermill

(Census Reports)		
1841	Alex Legg (44 yrs)	(M)
1851	Robert Forsyth (25 yrs)	(M)
1861	James Watson (44 yrs)	(M)
	Son, apprentice miller (21 yrs)	
1871	James Watson	(M)
	Alex Watson	(M)
1881	James Watson	(M)
	Alex Watson	(M)
1891	Alex Watson	(M)
(Valuation Rolls)		
1900/01-1903/04	William Marr	(T)
	Alex Watson	(M)
1904/05	Representatives of William Marr	(T)
	Alex Watson	(M)
1905/06-1910/11	John Marr	(T)
	Alex Watson	(M)
1911/12-1913/14	John Marr	(T)
	James Watson	(M)
1914/15	John Marr	(T)
	Representatives of James Watson	(M)
1915/16	Representatives of John Marr	(T)
	Northern Agricultural Co Ltd	(O)
	George Scott	(M)
1916/17-1919/20	James Durno	(T)
	N.A. Co Ltd	(O)
	George Scott	(M)
1920/21-1921/22	James Durno	(T)
	N.A. Co Ltd	(O)
	Robert Grant	(M)

1922/23	Representatives of James Durno	(T)
	N.A. Co Ltd	(O)
	Robert Grant	(M)
1923/24	James Durno, Crichie, Inverurie and Leslie Durno	(T)
	N.A. Co Ltd	(O)
	Robert Grant	(M)
1924/25-1935/36	James Durno, Crichie, Inverurie and Leslie Durno	(T)
	N.A. Co Ltd	(O)
	William Grieve	(M)
1936/37	James Durno, Crichie, Inverurie	(T)
	N.A. Co Ltd	(O)
	Andrew Gauld	(M)
1937/38	Mill not mentioned	

<u>Nethermill</u>

(Census Reports)

1841	Arch. Noughton	(M)
1851	Duncan Forsyth (22 yrs)	(M)
1861	George Allan (40 yrs)	(M)
1871	Alex. Milne (58 yrs)	(M)
1881	Jas. McLean (34 yrs)	(M)
1891	Adam Black	(M)
	James Chesser	(M)

(Valuation Rolls)

1900/01-1907/08	John Massie	(T)
	Wm. Grant	(M)
1908/09-1933/34	John Massie	(T)
	Alex. Davidson	(M)
1934/35-1937/38	Mary Massie (widow)	(T)
	Alex. Davidson	(M)
1938/39	Mary Massie	(T)
	Wm. Paterson	(M)
1939/40-1943/44	Representatives of Mary Massie	(T)
	Wm. Paterson	(M)

1944/45	Representatives of Mary Massie	(T)
	Duncan McRae	(M)
1945/46-1947/48	Harold Massie	(T)
	Duncan McRae	(M)
1948/49-1951/52	Harold Massie	(T)
	Norman Taylor	(M)
1952/53-1962/62	Harold Massie	(T)
	Jon Davidson	(M)

Mill of Fochel

(Census Reports)

1841	Jas. Milne (50 yrs)	(M)
	Alex. Milne (son, 25 yrs)	(M)
1851	Jas. Milne (Miller and farmer of 12 acres)	
	Alex. Milne (36 yrs)	(M)
	Wm. Milne (app miller, 16 yrs)	
1861	Wm. Milne (26 yrs)	(M)
	Jas. Milne (25 yrs)	(M)
1871	Jas. Milne (44 yrs)	(M)
1881	Jas. Cheyne (26 yrs)	(M)
	Jas. Calder (app miller)	
1891	Wm. Milne (64 yrs)	(M)
	Wm. Ross (27 yrs)	(M)
	Wm. Gilmore (18yrs)	(M)

(Valuation Rolls)

1900/01-1904/05	Jas. Milne	(T)
	Jas. Milne	(O)
	No mention of a miller	
1905/06	Representatives of Jas. Milne	(T)
	No inhabitant occupier	
1906/07-1919/20	Northern Agricultural Co Ltd	(T)
	Adam Black	(M)
1920/21-1921/22	N.A. Co Ltd	(P)
	Geo. Scott	(M)
1922/23-1925/26	N.A. Co Ltd	(P)
	No miller	

1926/27	N.A. Co Ltd	(P)
	Geo. Scott	(T)
	Geo. Scott listed as tenant not miller.	
1927/28	N.A. Co Ltd	(P)
	Valuation Roll says “mill under construction”	
1928/29-1932/33	N.A. Co Ltd	(P)
	Robt. McIntosh	(M)
1933/34-1935/36	N.A. Co Ltd	(P)
	Wm Grieve	(M)
1936/37	N.A. Co Ltd	(P)
	Jas. Smith	(M)
1937/38-1943/44	Aberdeen Lime Co	(P)
	Jas. Smith	(M)
1944/45-1963/64	Northern Agricultural and Lime Co	(P)
	Jas. Smith	(M)

NB

(T) Tenant of farm on which mill stood

(O) Occupier

(M) Miller

(P) Proprietor

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