

# Early Mashamshire Mills

## EARLY HISTORY OF MASHAMSHIRE

Prior to the Norman conquest in the late eleventh century, lands around Masham were settled by a succession of people, each group being succeeded by others and a turbulent history is indicated.

After the Bronze Age and then the early Britons with their Druids, the Romans had a presence here with a fort at Roomer, a road to Kilgram Bridge and another over a ford to the possible camp at Aldborough. After the Romans left, the first permanent Saxon settlers were not fond of towns. They abandoned the Roman streets and developed small “hams” such as “Maesses Ham” (thought either to be of a person ‘Massea’ or of the holy place of ‘Mass’) and ‘leys’ such as Healey. Certainly the Saxons, through Paulinus, brought Christianity to the area. The base of an old Saxon Cross stands outside the present Church door. This period small hamlets developed around farms or ‘tons’ - Ellington, Swinton, Sutton, Ilton.

Around 900AD, Norsemen invaded the region, burning and laying waste to the Church and causing great suffering in Masham. Eventually they settled and found their own farms or ‘by’ like Fearby (“four farms”). They also introduced sheep farming to the area before once again the land and livelihoods were destroyed in warfare—this time by the Normans.

## The reckoning of the Domesday Book

What is evident from the Domesday Book (1086) is the depth of destruction the whole area suffered during the conquest.

*“the whole manor, value in King Edward’s time six pounds, now sixteen shillings”*

Unlike most places, there were no mentions of milling or mills in the entry for Masham. As milling would be so central to farming life, particularly in an area with ample rivers, grain and sheep, it would seem unlikely that there were none before this date. It is more likely that the local mills were all destroyed in the preceding wars.

## The first known Mills

*“Roger de Mowbray to all his men French and English future and present Greeting, Know ye that I have given and by this charter confirmed to John, son of Drin, **Burton** with all its appurtenances and Comon of Pasture in the Forest of Massham and in the Province of Massham. I grant to him to make a mill and to fasten the stagnum or mill poole. I also grant to him the pavnage of his hogs quit in the Forest of Massham and building wood and fyre wood doing the service of the tenth pt of one knight's fee. I also grant unto him hare and wulf. These being Witnesses ete”*

*“To all the Sons of Holy Mother Church present and to come. Roger de Mowbray greeting, Know ye that I for the salvation of the soul of mine, and my wife, and my children ,and my father, and my mother, and all my relatives, have given in alms to the Monks of St Mary of Fountains Aldeburgh as a grange free and quit from all services and whatsoever appertains thereto on that side of the river Yore in wood and plain and fields and meadows and waters as my father Nigel de Albini formerly gave the same to the monks of Pontiniac Ponthieu and common of pasture on the other side of the water in **Swinton and Rumore and Nutewith** and on the same side the soil of their pool to construct a mill.*

At this time we know that Fountains also had a Mill at **Healey** and at **Swinton**. The Masham historian Fisher (1865) suggest the **Burton Mill** appears by another document to have fallen into decay as early as the year 1352.

## The Milling Monks

In the 12th century, Cistercian monks developed water-powered mills for beating (fulling) cloth, a job previously done by human feet. The mill wheel powered huge oak trip-hammers which would fall in turn over the cloth, beating the fibres together to make a soft, compact material.

Sir Richard de Wax wid (or Waxwand) knight gives his moiety to the Ilton Mill, and thus to the monks of Fountains but not without condition. He stipulates that his freeholders should perform the same services to the mill and help to repair it, as they had for him. He also reserves the right of himself and his heirs to grind his corn, and also extracts the promise that no any other mill would be erected or used in his territory. These mills added considerably to the great wealth of the Fountains estate.



In the year 1392 there were two other corn mills in Mashamshire, which are described as being worth £10 per year — a very large sum when, at the time, land was valued between fourpence and eightpence per acre.

## Millers in the Courts

It was not long though before we have records of **two mills in Swinton**, one in **Ellingstring**, one in **Healey**, and one in **Masham**. For the first time we also have record of a local mill for fibres and fabric.

In the medieval period we also have references to a **cotton mill at Healey** and a **hemp mill in the Marfield**.

*At a Court held the 4th of May 1635*

*Christopher Lodge of Masham was presented for not paying his church rates of “Swinton corne milne” and at the same court John Lucas of “Massham for the cloth mill in Swinton”*

*At a Court held the 2nd December 1635*

*Thomas Askwith, Thomas Foster, James Gleadston of Ellingstring, Lambert Wayd and Humphrey Toller of Healey Christopher Lodge of Massam for the Corne milne of Swinton Jo Lucas of Massam for the cloth mill in Swinton and John Clarke for not paying their sessments*

*At a Court held in Massam Church on the 12th of April 1636 before Edward Watkinson LL D*

*Christopher Lodge of Massam for not paying his sessment of Swinton Corn mill John Lucas of Massam for the Walke mill at Swinton*

*Last day of February 1638 before Henry Feme MA*

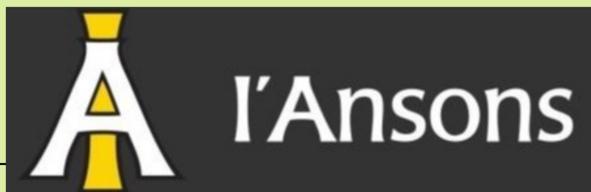
*John Marshall churchwarden of the parish of Massam for profaning the Sabbath day in time of divine service and suffering his servants to the mill for corn upon Candlemas day Dismissed John Lofthouse for grinding of corn upon Candlemas day last John Lofthouse for not paying his sessment being 4s 10d for Swinton mill Excommunicated John Lucas for not paying his sessment being 2s 5d for the Walk mill (another name for Fulling Mill) Excommunicated*

*4th of May 1639*

*Christopher Lodge of Masham was presented for not paying his church rate for the “corne mille” of Swinton John Lucas of Massam for the cloth mill in Swinton*

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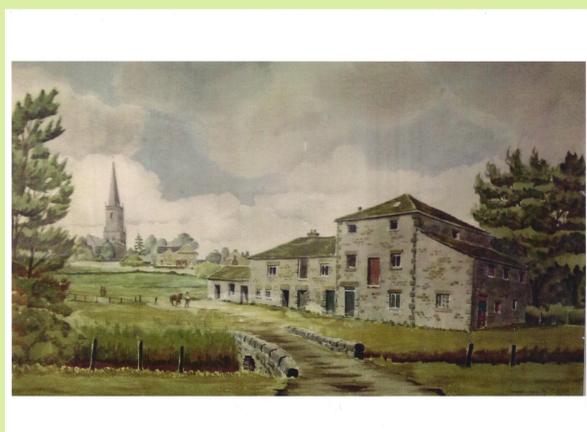


# Mashamshire Mills in the 19th Century

## Masham Mill and Mill House

It is thought that the **Mill House**, as it currently stands, was built in the 1600s, as are parts of the current mill building.

The size of the Mill and Mill House at Masham demonstrate the dominating and central role played by the miller within medieval society; he was at the centre of a system set up by the Normans to prevent civil disobedience.



Local peasants (serfs) were expected to work for three days each week on the land designated to the lord of the manor. They also had to make certain payments, sometimes in money but more often in grain, honey, eggs, or other produce. When the peasant ground the wheat he was obliged to use the lord's mill, which was operated by the miller, and to pay the customary charge. These fees were called 'banalities'. A feudal lord imposed banalities on his serfs for the use of his mill, ovens and similar facilities.

## Milling on an industrial scale in Mashamshire

By 1823 Thomas Prest appears in trade directories as a flax spinner of Burton House. Thomas develops a milling business at the site of the old **Burton watermill** — on the east bank of the Ure above the bridge — and early on faces a major setback that becomes an opportunity.

*“the total destruction by fire of the mill at Burton which had existed there as a corn mill a worsted mill and a flax mill from the time of Roger de Mowbray.*

*This untoward event occurred on Friday the 1st of December 1820 the fire which was accidental having been first discovered about three o'clock that afternoon The effect of this fire was to throw a great number of hands out of work and for awhile to affect the trade of the place.*

*The mill however was shortly afterwards rebuilt upon a more extensive scale and afforded employment for a great number of workmen for many years viz until about the year 1841 or 1842 when it ceased to be worked and was shortly afterwards pulled down to the ground”*

Fisher 1865



The rebuilt and bigger mill soon becomes a key employer (about 100 men, women and children) and presence in the area.

The mill workers' cottages can still be seen on the road left after the bridge.

## The Singing Miller

William Jackson was born in 1815 at **Masham Mill**. He was the son of John Jackson, miller of **Tanfield Mill**. At a young age he was a chorister at Masham Church and was intrigued by the workings of the old barrel organ, so much so that he built his own organ at home. In 1828 he went to the Grand Music Festival in York. He and his mother walked from Tanfield to York and back again. He was inspired by the music and began to write his own pieces. In 1829, at just, 14 he became the conductor of a newly formed military band at Masham. He would walk to practice sessions twice a week from Tanfield.



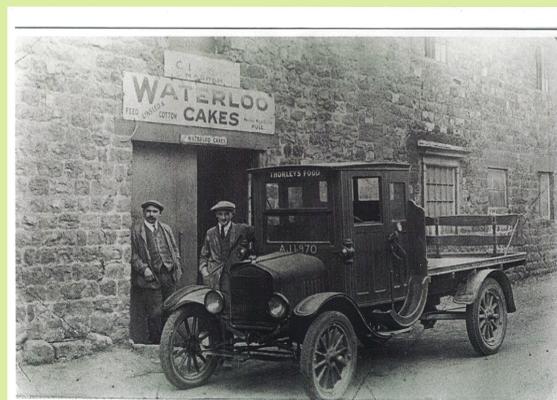
*“Mr Danby proposed to present a finger organ to the church if any person could be found in the neighbourhood to play it. William Jackson (aged 17) was mentioned to Mr Danby and he was invited to go over to Swinton Park to be tried over. Mr Danby who was himself a gentleman of fine taste and a skilful performer on the violoncello put the young musician through his facings and was much pleased with his performance. It was resolved however that he should take some lessons from an organ master before entering on the duties of organist at Masham. So he went over to Ripon twice a week during the winter until the organ was completed. In the meantime he was acting as journeyman miller at Masham at a wage of 3s 6d a week Eliza Cook's Journal 1850*

In 1839 Mr Ascough, a tallow chandler in Masham, offered William a partnership in his business. William accepted and moved to Masham. Also in this year he published his first musical piece, an anthem called “For Joy Let Fertile Valleys Sing”. He carried on composing, performing, conducting and teaching music whilst still milling in Masham.

## STREET MILL

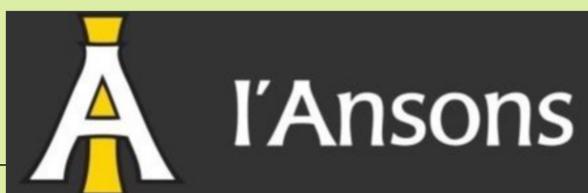
The Carters owned a number of businesses in Masham; a drapers, the local bank, and the grocers, dealing in pretty much any commodity you could imagine. At the turn of the twentieth century Mr Carter started to sell off elements of his business to his most trusted employees. Carter's drapery became Lawson's. The grocery business became Peacock's (latterly Peacock and Verity), and the banking, warehousing and agricultural dealings he sold to Christopher I'Anson.

Christopher's three sons Kit, Basil and Hugh, and his daughter Nancy, joined the business at Carter's old warehouse on Church Street, which was transformed to a mill and became “**Street Mill**”.



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# Mashamshire Mills in the 20th Century

## FAMILY BUSINESS



In 1913, Austin Gregg moved into **Healey Mill** with his mother and lived there until he died in 1946. Whilst living at the mill, Austin married his housekeeper and had 7 children. Austin's wife and eldest son died before him and according to locals, when Austin died his remaining children put out all their possessions into the field, ready to move on. Lady Masham, who was passing by, asked what they were doing, and when they told her they were moving because they couldn't afford to stay she ordered them back inside and kindly reduced their rent.

## POWER AND LIGHT

**Masham Mill** ground corn right up to the First World War. In 1914 two Bradford men leased the mill and formed the **Masham Electricity Corporation**, using the water wheel to bring electricity to Masham far in advance of many other local areas. Masham already had its own gasworks on The Avenue, built in 1858 through a local £5 share scheme.

The turbine was bought by the Masham Electric Corporation from Gilkes in Kendal in 1915; it had an output of 18.6kW (25hp), Net Head of 4m, Flow of 2m<sup>3</sup>/sec and a Shaft Speed of 70 RPM



## NAY BOTHER LADS, WE'LL BE GRAND



Masham's water supply, gasworks, hospital and fire service were the reason the area was not absorbed into Bedale during local council re-organisations in 1929. Masham's district council remained independent as Yorkshire's smallest council until the major local government reorganisations of 1974.

In 1926 Masham Urban District Council held an "electricity exhibition" in the Town Hall Council Chamber to encourage locals to connect to the local grid.

The electricity corporation was later sold to the Urban District Council, who in turn sold it to the Cleveland and Durham Electricity Company in 1929. The national grid arrived in town in 1933, but it was 1938 before electricity reached the villages outside Masham.

The Mill remained still for 7 years.

## CHANGING TIMES

I'Anson's business at the **Street Mill** was growing. With the coming war, extra milling capacity was required. The family firm signed the tenancy agreement for the old **Masham Watermill** on 26th November 1940 for £26 per year (about £1,000 now).



Corn would be ground in the Street Mill then taken down to the watermill to be mixed into rations. Grain would be brought from the farm in 12-stone sacks, ground and rebagged, and taken back to the farm the following week.



## NEW MILLS FOR MASHAMSHIRE

I'Anson's sales continued to grow and the two old mills couldn't meet demand. In 1959 a large new mill was built for £13,000 (around £1.25m today) and the watermill was finally closed.

The mile backed on to Town End Lane, which was commonly known as "ham and egg lane" due to the many pigs and chickens kept on Town End Fields. This livestock benefited from the whey disposed from Rowntree's dairy and cheese factory on Quaker Terrace. Kit, Hugh and Nancy I'Anson kept Welsh Blackspots in the piggeries at the back of the field, and so the new **I'Anson's Mill** was erected on the roadside (Badger Lane/Thorpe Road).

Good old Yorkshire thrift remained the name of the game—most of the equipment came from a mill in Manchester and some from the old mill. The molasses tank had been a water tank on the wartime airfield at Yeadon (now Leeds Bradford Airport)

The name sign over the door, which is still there today, was made by Derek I'Anson with a scaled up set of letters from the Sunday papers! The best ever production from the old mill was 10 tons a day, but by 1964 the new mill produced 70 tons every week. The mill today can produce 20 tons an hour!



## Jameson's Mill

Jameson's was established in 1930 by Eddie Jameson, selling seeds to local farmers and through a shop on Park Square. The business soon developed into the sale of other farming essentials such as fertiliser and animal feeds.

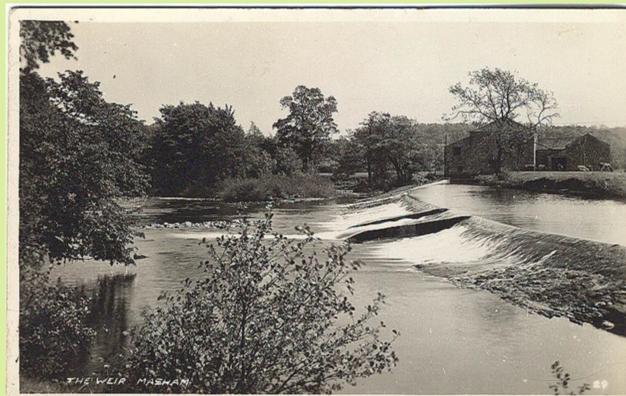
In 1970 the company built a **feed mill** at Foxholme Lane in Masham and a further site on Leyburn Road. Now Masham was as famous for the wagons from its two feed mills as those from its two breweries!

Today, Jameson's is a leading supplier of feeds, seeds and fertilisers to farms throughout the north of England, as well as expanding the Foxholme site and opening a new country store.

## The fate of the Masham Weir

John Hill recalled walking over the weir as a child. The depth of the water could change quickly if the turbine was stopped.

Local legend has it that the weir was arbitrarily blown up in the 1930s by Edward Burrill, who was tired of it causing the river to flood his fields on the west side of the river. However, the weir was still running after the war, when it was converted for a Sherman tank engine to run the mill. We believe it was blown up by the Royal Engineers, perhaps in the early 1950s. Do you know the fate of the weir? Please let us know!



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