Darley Abbey

The settlement of Darley Abbey lies a little over 2 kilometres north of Derby City Centre. By the 17th century this small settlement had become established as an industrial hamlet near, but quite separate from, Derby. By the middle of the century there were two fulling mills and two corn mills and there may also have been a forge, Shrogg's forge. By the 1680s the fulling mills had grown to three and 30 years later a paper mill had been added. From c.1750 one of the more distinguished of these industrial tenants was William Duesbury, 1725-1786, the founder of the Derby Porcelain Factory, who had a flint mill here. In the early 1770s there were five separate water-powered mills; a paper mill, a corn mill, two flint mills and a leather mill.

It was to this well established industrial settlement that the Evans family added their cotton mill development in 1782 and subsequently their factory village.

The Boar's Head Mills

The cotton mill structures which survive in Darley Abbey are among the most complete of any of the early cotton factory sites and, in the context of the Derwent Valley, are comparable with Cromford in the degree to which both the principal and the ancillary buildings remain intact.

A detailed survey of the site is underway and the conclusions recorded here are subject to further evaluation.

Long Mill
1782-89 - Listed Grade I

The mill in its present form was re-built in 1789 after fire in December 1788 destroyed the earlier building of 1782. It is likely that the existing structure incorporates parts of the shell of the first mill but no detailed examination of the mill which could confirm the extent to which this may be true has been made. The five-storey plus attic mill is 38.4 metres long and 10.1 metres wide externally and has a masonry ground floor with brick above. Many of the exposed wooden structural members inside the mill are protected against fire by metal sheathing. It is not clear whether this is contemporary with the re-building. If it is an original feature of 1789, it is probably the earliest surviving example of fire-proofing in a textile mill.

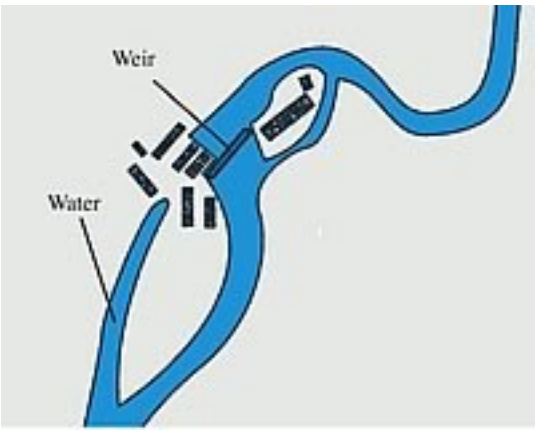
The roof is framed by wooden queen post trusses with metal cladding and the collars of the trusses are cambered to give a central headroom of over six feet. There are short side walls below the lower rank of purlins and these are also metal-sheeted while the roof slopes above the purlins are plastered on wooden lathes. There is a plaster partition with a panel door dividing off a section of the attic and this may be the Sunday School meeting room referred to in a letter of 1791 from Evans to the Royal Exchange Insurance Company. The attic was reputedly used as a schoolroom and its height and finish would allow such use. A similar use is known to have been made of the Belper North Mill roof space.

The attic floor is supported by a matrix of wooden beams, an arrangement quite different from any of the lower floors. The matrix is formed of transverse members every two bays (the tie-beams of the trusses) with four longitudinal members between and the beams are all clad in sheet metal. The irregularly spaced cast iron columns are secondary and thus this top floor was probably a clear space.

The floor below, in contrast, has a transverse beam each bay with a central rank of cruciform cast iron columns augmented by later round section cast iron columns. It is not clear that these columns are original, and taking into account the date of the reconstruction of the mill it is likely that they were added later. In July 1799 the Griffin Foundry in Chesterfield supplied 23 'iron pillars' but it is not clear which part of the mill these were for.

Among the external features of Long Mill are a number of different window designs. It is known that the structure was first equipped with opening casements which were later mostly replaced by sash windows. On the eastern elevation of the mill a number of wooden multi-paned windows with cast iron opening casements survive and it is likely that these are some of the original windows. Casements were still being purchased in 1793 from the Griffin Foundry in Chesterfield who also supplied iron sashes in 1798. Other iron casements came from Bassetts of Ashbourne.

A plan made by Benjamin Outram for the extension of the Derby Canal to Darley Abbey dated 1792 indicates that the mill was served by a cut from the river which ran to the east of the building. In 1798 work began to develop this cut in a new route through the Shroggs to take water from higher up the river and it is likely that it was in this period, 1796-1801 that the Middle Mill was constructed. Its lowest storey housed two water wheels, one of which is known to have been a flood wheel, that is to say a wheel set at a higher elevation so that it could be used when the river was running above its usual level.



This wheel, built of timber, together with its wheelhouse, cost £791 and was completed in 1797. A second new wheel was constructed in 1804-05.

West Mill and East Mill
1819-21 - Listed Grade I

It is known that the Evans extended their mill again in 1818 and finally in 1821. It would appear from the mill records that between 1819 and 1821 both the East new mill and the West new mill were under construction. In 1819 alone more than £3,000 was spent on the East Mill and nearly £4,700 on the West Mill. The building works continued into 1821 and a new waterwheel was purchased during the year at a cost of £1,750. It is not clear whether this wheel was for the West Mill or was a further replacement wheel for the Middle Mill to serve the new East Mill.

The West Mill is of particular interest. It is an L-shaped extension projecting from the middle five bays of Long Mill. Like Long Mill it is brick-built with a masonry ground floor but it is a storey lower and a passage leads from the fourth floor of Long Mill through a hip-slope to the roof space of West Mill.

The entire extension is fire-proof with brick jack arches running longitudinally in the link block and transversely in the return, thus maintaining a single alignment of vaulting. The cast iron skewbacks are supported by round cast iron columns three to each of the longitudinal beams in the link and one to each of the transverse beams of the return.

It is not known when the cut which supplied the two wheels housed in the West Mill wheelpits was constructed.

A detailed investigation of the East Mill has yet to be undertaken.

The Boar's Head Mills north of the road
From 1790 Listed Grade II

This part of the mill site has not been surveyed but it is clear from documentary and visual evidence that parts of it date from the 1790s and most of the remainder from the early years of the 19th century. A plan of 1846 confirms this impression. The buildings include an office block, managerial housing, stabling (1804-05), warehousing, gassing sheds and a mill which appears to have always derived its power from a steam engine. This structure may at one time have been used in part as a dye house and is thought to have been built in the 1820s.

The Kiosk-GatehouseBefore 1
846 - Listed Grade II

An octagonal kiosk stands at the entrance to the mill yard. It is similar (though smaller) to the gatehouse which has survived at Stanley Mills near Perth, and which served the same purpose. A gatehouse once stood inside the entrance to the Cromford Mills and also at Wedgwood's factory at Etruria. Indeed the gatehouse was as much part of the early factory as the factory bell.

In Darley Abbey the gatehouse has for so long served as a tollhouse that it has come to assume that name but its earlier function is clear from its location.