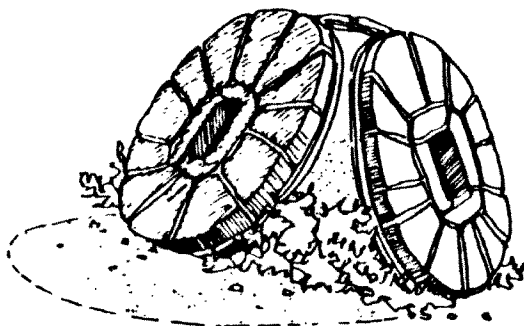


DEAN VILLAGE NEWS

No 119 Spring 1998



BELL'S MILLS IN 1944

From a letter written by Mrs Enid Wailes to her husband, Rex Wailes, an engineer who was a leading authority on windmills and watermills.

I walked down Palmerston Place and suddenly it wasn't a town at all, but a little bit of country spanned by the brand new concrete bridge¹ And down in the steep little valley with grass and trees along the bank, ran the black strip of water and an old working water mill, looking permanent and undisturbed by its surroundings, with a fine smell of sawdust coming from it.

I walked on over the bridge and down a steep little turning that wound back down to the river and reached the mill-yard. The door was open, so I went in and watched it at work. It's a big place — two mills together actually — and had a very black and crumbled coat of arms² over the door. Seeing nobody about, I went outside again and looked around until I saw a white figure talking to some boys. I found he was a delightful real country-type mill assistant, a Mr Law, and asked him if he'd show me round. He thawed as soon as I started asking him about the kind of

stones he used, and took me all round. It's a sawdust mill. They grind for wood flour³. . . . On the left as we went in were two pairs of Derbyshire and emery stones at work from a small turbine that had replaced a previous water wheel, and then we went right through and down a ladder to the pit wheel which drives from the 14ft.⁴ diameter water wheel to a pair of Derbyshire stones above.

We inspected the water wheel, which wasn't the original one, of course, as the mill — he said — is three or four hundred years old. But about this he was a little vague and I'm sure it wasn't. The present owner is a Mr Walker⁵. . . . Mr Law said that there used to be about 80 mills at work up the 30 miles length of the Leith, of which there are now less than 20 at work and only one between here and Leith: mostly corn mills and some paper ones.

I asked him about the dressing⁶ of the stones, which he does himself. . . .

I came away feeling completely refreshed and with my best new coat (and my hat) covered with white sawdust. He said "Wait a minute" and obligingly got a large broom head, with which he

swept me down, literally from top to toe.

Another five minutes and I was back in the hotel. . . . It was just like walking in and out of a dream. . . . This evening the unmoved permanency⁷ of the place was like suddenly throwing open the door of a fuggy room and letting in the sunlight, and I could have embraced him for being what he is in the midst of this town life.

I am grateful to Mrs Anthea de Barton-Walker, daughter of Mr and Mrs Rex Wailes, for sending me a copy of that letter. She writes that her father virtually invented Industrial Archaeology in the late 1950s. He was a Life Consultant to the National Trust and was responsible for implementing the restoration of Preston Mill in East Lothian. He visited Bell's Mills more than once in later years, to learn about the milling of sawdust into wood flour.

¹ No. It was built of stone in the 1880s.

² The coat of arms of Sir Henry Nisbet of Dean (c. 1692), transferred from an earlier building. The mills had "from time immemorial been an appurtenance of the Dean estate". (John Geddie)

³ Lawrence Walker, the last miller, says it was 18 feet in diameter.

⁴ Wood flour has industrial uses.

⁵ Lawrence Walker's father, Alan.

⁶ The process of renewing the grooves in the stones with a mill-pick.

⁷ In 1971 Bell's Mills were destroyed by an explosion. Margaret Law tells me that her father Jimmie died in 1970.

A FORGE

Ian Cunningham's garage in Belford Mews used to be a shoeing forge. Johnnie Nicholson, who seems to have been born well before 1900, told Ian that when he was a lad, helping his father in his grocery shop (52? Belford Road), his first job each morning was to take a quart of whisky and a firkin of beer (nine gallons) round to the forge. Every man who brought a horse to be shod got a nip and a pint.

Between at least 1890 and 1912 the forge belonged to Professor Colin Baird, a veterinary surgeon who presumably specialised in horses. The flat above was occupied by George Duff, farrier.

DOGS

New measures have been proposed for the control of dog fouling on Council property. Dogs would be banned from certain parks, including Princes Street Gardens. (They are already excluded from cemeteries, sports pitches, and children's play areas.) In certain other recreational areas, including the Water of Leith Walkway, new "management rules" would require those in charge of dogs to remove their faeces. The management rules would be enforced by the Park Patrol and the Dog Warden Service.

These measures have not yet been adopted. A consultation paper will be sent to Community Councils etc. and be available in libraries.

TAXI!

In November 1971, the Association began to pay for a taxi to take pensioners up to the West End on two days a week. In recent years this was reduced to once a week, for illness and (alas!) death had reduced the number of passengers. The service is now suspended but not finally abandoned. Let Peggy Valentine know if you would like to see it re-started. The day and time could be arranged to suit the users.

In the 1970s the old people could not only collect their pensions but do all their shopping between Hope Street and Queensferry Street, for there were two or three grocers, two butchers and Rankin's large fruit and vegetable shop, as well as bakeries and the fish shop which survives.

When it became impossible to get everything from local shops, the Association began a new service: Several members who have cars take turns to drive pensioners to **Safeways and back on Friday mornings. The car leaves from 31 Belford Road at 9.45 and from West Mill at 10.00.**

Pensioners who have not yet used this service are welcome to do so, regularly or occasionally. On the return trip, they can be taken right home with their loads, to Sunbury for example. Will you let Peggy Valentine know if you want to use this service?

New drivers would be welcome too. They will be asked to take a turn only every five or six weeks.

A NEW GUIDE

Malcolm Cant has published a revised version of his *Villages of Edinburgh (Vol. 1)* which covers villages in "the northern hemisphere of the city", from Cramond to Duddingston. It reflects changes since 1968 and new discoveries, including the Roman lioness found at Cramond.

The sub-title is now *An Illustrated Guide*, for the text has been re-arranged so as to suggest a route through each village. There are useful maps and more illustrations. New photographs by Jenni Wood are particularly good, but we still have the *Scotman* photograph of Basil Skinner in wig and gown presiding over "the Feeding of the Baxters" in 1975.

The chapter on the Dean is up to date and accurate. An extended walk takes one as far as the Dean Cemetery, the Gallery of Modern Art and the future Dean Gallery.

The Dean Bridge is the downstream limit for this chapter; St George's and St Bernard's Wells are in the chapter on Stockbridge. That has an interesting section on establishments for the teaching of the deaf — from Dumbiedykes to Donaldson's College — clarifying the relationship to the latter of the Institution for the Education of Deaf and Dumb Children in Henderson Row (disguised in 1968 as "The Marcia Blaine School for Girls").

You will no doubt make many other discoveries in this attractive book, which is published by the author at £9.95.

WELL COURT HALL

At the opening of the Hall in 1885, John Ritchie Findlay explained his intentions for its use. He proposed there should be one **short** religious service on Sundays.

Mr DICKSON: *I speak for the majority of the tenants when I say this is one thing that they are entirely against.*

Findlay's idea was that for the most part the hall should be used as a club-room or reading-room, although there might be concerts or lectures, or amusing entertainments for the children; but the adults wanted entertainments too:

Mr BUIST: *There are no end to the resources of Well Court, for we have no fewer than three fiddlers and a number of singers and dancers. . .* He proposed the election of a committee, on which there might be some ladies.

Mr FINDLAY: *. . . I must say that I meant the hall mainly and generally for the male population. . . I should be a little afraid of the hall being open at all times to a mixed company. I think the ladies should have certain privileges and hours of access; but I would very much doubt the propriety of having a mixed association in the first instance.*

As long as the Findlays owned Well Court and Dean Path Buildings, the hall was used as a reading room, for social functions, for a Sunday-school mission, for meetings of the Women's Co-operative Guild, for wedding receptions etc. But during the First World War. . . . See below: "Reminiscences".

In 1945 it was occupied by Packeted Foods Limited. In 1947 Golden Wonder Crisps began to be made there. (I have heard that fumes from the fat clogged the works of the clock.)

The document which gives an outline history of the Hall next lists:

1948: Mutrie 1950: Fraser Neal.

According to an article by Elma Munro in DVN 72, Fraser Neal had taken over Mutrie's wig-hiring firm in 1934, and brought the expanding business to the Village in 1951, taking up residence in Well Court Hall (which he bought in 1954). In 1957 fire destroyed Mutrie's premises in Miller Row, with all the stock of theatrical costumes etc. Fraser Neal did not recover from the disaster and died within a year.

1959: Alastair Park, painter, lived in the Hall. He sold it in 1963 to Mrs Phillipa Malchewska, an architect, who went to Canada.

In 1964 Roland Wedgwood acquired the Hall for the architectural practice which he carried on there until 1996, when it was taken over by Jonathan Speirs & Associates, lighting designers.

Reminiscences

In October 1985 several of our older members met in the Hall to record their memories. They recalled what the Hall had meant for children:

Sundays: *On a Sunday morning, at about the same time as the average*

church went in — about 11 — for at least an hour we had the Hall and with a Mr Drummond — he was a minister really — we had a kind of cross between a children's church and a Sunday School, Then we left the Hall at about half past twelve and we went up to Bedford Church, Dean Church, or to the Mission* for Sunday School. And then on the Sunday evenings, in the winter especially, we had a screen, and a Mr Haddow came (we used to call him Haddie) and we had about an hour of hymn singing and on the screen were pictures, other verses of the hymns, . . . a sort of magic lantern.

Treats: Then at Christmas time, they gave us a treat, the Drummonds and Haddow combined, and in the summer they gave us what we called the "strawberry feast". We came up for a few minutes and we had quite a big bowl of strawberries and cream, but we didn't have any entertainment at that; it was just a case of "come up and get your strawberries and cream" and a bit of talking among ourselves.

And then at Christmas time also, the Finlays laid on a Christmas treat for their own tenants. Again we had the magic lantern, but moving pictures this time and more often than not it was just the one show: It was a family gathering and they were having a sing-song round the piano and all sorts of funny things happened — suddenly a lion appeared at the open window, and things like that. And children and adults alike got an orange and an apple or something when we went out.

In World War I the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps were billeted up in Learmonth Terrace and roundabout there, and they made the Hall into a kind of canteen for them. That didn't last very long. Towards the end, maybe 1916/17, they changed that: they brought this sphagnum moss and once a week we came up here to pick the moss to take the straws and things out of it. And ladies came — the West End gentry, you know — and sewed the sphagnum moss into dressings, some no bigger than your hand and some nearly as big as pillows.

*The Water of Leith Mission, attached to St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, occupied Baxters' Tolbooth (13 and 15 Bell's Brae) until about 1975.

FOR WELL COURT

We would like to see one deciduous light-leaved tree on the eastern side of the courtyard. The Association will endeavour to achieve this, in cooperation with the proprietors. From The Dean Village 1980, a report published by the Dean Village Association.

I am afraid that we did not really "endeavour". Should we do so now? What do you think? A birch tree perhaps?

. . . and for the Playground

That report also suggested a bench in the playground, so that mothers could sit while their children played.

We **did** endeavour to achieve that, and are still trying, seventeen years on.

MARY BOYD, sculptor, 1910 - 1997

We would like to know more about her work. (DVN 118) Sadly, it was only after Mary Boyd's death on October 30 that we discovered more about her.

She was a daughter of Dr Francis Boyd, who became Professor of Clinical Medicine in the University of Edinburgh. Her mother was Irish.

At Edinburgh College of Art she studied sculpture and wood carving in particular. Life classes were compulsory but she did her best to avoid them, preferring to draw animals. She had to be dissuaded from bringing animals into the College, including a pig, which she said had a friendly disposition.

She went on to study in Paris and travelled in Scandinavia and Germany in the early thirties. Her journals of this period are now in the library of the Gallery of Modern Art.

In 1934 she settled at 14 Belford Mews, where she spent the remaining sixty-three years of her life. A fine photograph of her at work in the 1930s shows that she was then using the stable as her studio. The stable survives intact, perhaps the last in the city. (Will the next owner have the imagination to adapt it for his use without destroying the four stalls and the loose-box with their hay-racks and water troughs, the tack-room with its fittings?)

That photograph accompanied the obituary in *The Scotsman* of November 8th. The issue of January 2nd had a long article by Nick Thorpe: "The sculptor's house that is frozen in time". As well as the stable, he described the upstairs

room in which she worked in later years. He gave an account of her life and quoted her candid friends:

"She was a very complex lady and even the doctor was frightened of her — but as long as you gave as good as you got it was fine." "She didn't really like people much — either that or she was terribly shy. She was certainly very rude to them." "She was an old rascalion, but she had a heart."

Most of the carvings which Mary Boyd exhibited at the RSA were of animals or birds of prey. The National Gallery of Modern Art has a bronze cat and a kestrel carved in wood, which are likely to be displayed soon.

In DVN 118 I mentioned the dog on Tom Ranken's gravestone in the Dean Cemetery. One of her own Labradors was the model. To find it, go straight ahead from the Main Gate. At the circle with holly trees bear left, and left again at the next fork, heading towards the Dean Orphanage/Gallery. You will come to Tom Ranken's grave on your right, just past the Greek temple.

However, Mary's first commission was for the Stations of the Cross for a Catholic group, the Grail. These are now in the Netherlands, but other religious works can be seen in St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, to which they were transferred when St Margaret's Church in Corstorphine was closed. In a chapel in the north transept there is a carved oak font, and two angels, also in oak, have been rather awkwardly mounted on either side of an arch near by.

At her funeral the minister said: We remember her as a unique character whose imprint on life or people was anything but bland, a very private person, whose loneliness was self-imposed. We remember her gruff, forthright and gloriously cantankerous demeanour, her deep affection for her beloved dogs, the sense of fun that lurked beneath the gravelly exterior . . .
It lurked deep: I am told that the local boys were scared of her! D.L.F.

THE FEEING OF THE BAXTERS

August 30 1975

The afternoon started with a procession down Bell's Brae. To tuck of drum and merry piping and to the sound of bells jingling at the knees of the Morris Men, the Town Crier, the Bailie and the Minister made their way to the pulpit outside the Baxters' Building. Here the Bailie [Basil Skinner] gave his message: *Good Baxters and Millers of Dean, I bring you the greetings of the Town Council and people of the Burgh of Edinburgh. For a long time now we have looked to you and to your efforts for our daily bread. Since that time long ago when our good King David the First (of blessed memory) first thirled the mills at the Dean, your meal ground from Lothian grain has kept our bellies full. And the skilly hands of the Baxters of the Auld Toun have melded it into pancakes and tattie scones and plum-duff pies and such-like goodies. . . . So with the greatest goodwill, and on behalf of the Burgh of Edinburgh, I wish you all a successful feeing.*

The Town Crier [Graeme Cruickshank] read the following proclamation:

Hear ye, hear ye. . . The Incorporation of Baxters of the City of Edinburgh, being assembled together with the Millers of Dean and Bell's Mills, have ordainit that the feeing of the said Baxters and Millers for the comng year will be Sixty Pounds Scots.

. . . Guid folk of the Village of Dean, and all weel-intended friends: considering that it be three hundred years since the building of this, oor tolbooth in the Dean, formerly known as the Village of the Water of Leith. . . . we are assembled here to-day to give thanks for its preservation and for the continued goodwill of this and coming generations. . . . and it is further ordainit that to-day being the feeing day, the Incorporation of Baxters proclaim a general holiday and fair, so gang yer gait. God Save Her Majesty!

Dean Village Association News No 48.

TROUBLOUS TIMES

A correction

In May 1640 the kirk session of St Cuthbert's met at the Water of Leith, in the tolbooth thereof. In the source which I used, this last word was printed at 'yairoff' That 'y' is due to a misreading of the way 'th' was written in early documents. (People never really said 'ye olde': they said 'the old' just as we do.)

I thank the two learned readers who corrected me and apologise to all whom I misled.

WHEELIE BINS

Do you dread the prospect of their being introduced into our area? Where could we store them? Who would wheel them out to the street? Who would keep them from smelling? Don't worry! They will normally be in the street and will be cleaned and maintained by the Council.

They will be introduced gradually, the first trial being in a shopping street, Causewayside. The existing street bins will be removed and the new, much larger ones will be used both by residents for their domestic refuse and by passers-by for their litter.

For residential streets, there will be consultation about the design of bins and their location.

The Stockbridge Community Council has organised

**a public meeting
to discuss wheelie bins
at Stockbridge Library
on Wednesday, March 18, at 6.30.**

THE VILLAGE FOOTBRIDGE

It has been completely refurbished, repainted and given a non-slip surface, making it perhaps even better than when R. Peddie & Co erected it some time between 1977 and 1891 (judging by maps), perhaps at about the same time as Well Court, 1884. It is often referred to as "the iron footbridge", but an engineer member insists that it is steel.

DEAN VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

Chairman: Mrs Peggy Valentine,
31/2 Belford Road (225 8942)
Secretary: Miss Dorothy Forrester,
13 Belford Road (226 5843)
Treasurer: Mrs Sylvia Bradley,
22 Lynedoch Place (225 2639)

Subscriptions

Life: £30 single, £45 double.

Annual: £4 single, £6 double.

Concessions: £2.

(pensioners, students, unemployed).

DIARY

Our meetings take place in the rooms of the Edinburgh Society of Musicians in **Drumsheugh Toll, 3 Belford Road.**

Tuesday February 17th at 7.30:

Helen Rowbotham,

Countryside Ranger, British Waterways:

OUR LOWLAND CANALS

— INTO THE 21st CENTURY

illustrated by slides.

Tuesday March 31st at 7.30:

Doug Edgar

returns to give us an account of
a two-person expedition to remote

MOUNTAINS of ASIA,

illustrated by slides.

Tuesday April 21st at 7.30

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday morning May 3rd

ANNUAL CLEAN-UP

of the river and its banks.