

# Mills in Westbury



## BITHAM MILL

(Image shows the Mill redevelopment)

In 1573 William Whitaker owned a mansion house with a large square court, and a large fulling mill with a loft which drew water from a nearby springhead. The next recording of this mill is not until 1753 when it had become part of the manor of Leigh and Ludbourne. A barn was used as an outhouse for making cloth – the land on which it stood also contained racks – these were known as the Bitham Racks.

A factory was built on the site in 1803 at a cost of over £3,000 and was used for scribbling, carding and spinning. In 1829 the factory was extended and a steam engine of nearly 70hp. was installed. In 1849 it was offered for sale and was said to be in 'full work'. The engine was the best in the country – installed to work at 60hp; it worked with some ease at 80, 12-15 could be depended on from the water wheel. Sixteen pairs of stocks were used to make 100 kerseymeres a week. In 1856 it was all sold to Abraham Laverton – who was already running Angel Mill – for £7,020. The deed of sale mentions machinery, including mules, power-looms, a scribbling machine with condenser, as well as old-fashioned items e.g.: billies. The factory was run together with Angel Mill until 1969.

The water factory of 1803 was built adjoining the mill on the west. In its original state it was a brick building of 5 storeys and 8 bays with stone string courses. Its windows with their usual segment-headed shape were simply set in brick without stone frames. After WWII the building was reduced to 3 storeys. At one end of this building a blocked window extended up 3 floors and was decorated with stone quoins – indicating the position of an engine house. The factory already had an engine before the larger one was fitted in 1829.

In 1829 extensions were built eastward of the fulling mill. The large engine house with its long round-headed windows adjoining the water factory – attached is a boiler-house with a tall square stack rising from it. A single storeyed building used to stand on the south side – which with its lighting provided only by skylight and circular ventilators in the roof – this provided a perfect example of a rack stove. On the east of the engine house lies a 2 storeyed range (also of 1829), and a 3 storeyed building typical of the 1860s.

On the opposite side of the yard a range – formerly of 4 storeys, now only of 2 – stands; it has 14 bays. Built of brick it has attractive stone window frames and string courses joining the heads. At one end stands the timekeepers house and the remains of a monumental arch, built in 1869.

At the end of the yard is a brick building of 3 storeys and a basement, with plain casement windows and a doorway decorated with a pediment and flanking columns. Although the style is typical of domestic buildings of about the 18th-19th century, there is no evidence of its existence until the 1820s. In the 1860/70s another range was added to this building at the back, with the usual wide windows of the period. Similar windows were placed at the ends of the original buildings, but the façade was left intact.

The beam engine of 1829 drove the factory until 1939. The original cylinder was 42`` by 7``. and made 17 strokes a minute. In 1858 a 48`` cylinder was added and the stroke lengthened from 7 to 8 feet. The engine then made 28 strokes a minute; the fly-wheel weighed 30 tonnes.

### **WESTBURY TOWN MILL**

Situated near the All Saints Church, just off Alfred Street, and was purchased by John and William Matravers, where they built a scribbling and spinning factory. It was supplied by the Bitham and Bereswell Springs. In 1861 it was burnt down, an event which led to the formation of the fire brigade. The mill was so under-insured that William Matravers was forced to sell his steam engine and retire from the business.

### **BROOK MILL**

This can be traced from the early 13th century. Until 1599 it was a fulling mill. In 1674, Edith Wilkins brought the mill and racks, cloth for £210, wool and yarn for £80. Her cloth-mark – half cup – came to £30. In 1856, James Cogswell occupied the mill in the cloth trade – it probably ceased work soon afterwards. Nothing remains of this mill today.

### **CHALFORD MILL**

This was around as early as 1623. It was, more than likely, a fulling mill, although it was sold in 1793 as a grist mill. It was empty by 1834, when it was used as a temporary isolation hospital during an outbreak of cholera. It stood on the west side of the road from Westbury to Warminster, on a site now within the grounds of Leighton House.

(Image shows Leighton House)



### **WELLHEAD MILL**

Wellhead Mill belonged to a clothier, and may have been used as a fulling mill. When it was offered for sale or let in 1787 it was used as a flour mill, and remained so until it was sold for £1,460 in 1802. They rebuilt it as a factory and it was advertised for sale in 1807. It had four storeys, 60ft by 22ft. and a waterwheel 16ft in diameter, supplied by a pond an acre in extent into which three large and many small springs flowed. It was sold to Matravers & Overbury in 1812. In 1837 Matravers & Co. added to the factory and installed a 20 hp. engine.

The original factory was then driven by an iron wheel 25ft in diameter and 8ft wide, which developed 15hp. Attached to it was a building of five floors 80ft by 28ft. driven by a 25hp. Boulton and Watt Engine, arranged so that it could drive the old factory as well. There were also new counting houses, weaving shops and warehouses, and a gas manufacturing plant.

No more is known of this factory. It was gone by 1884, and only the site of the pond, now overgrown with trees, marks the site.

### **BULLS MILL** (in Westbury Leigh)

This was a corn mill and was built around 1838. It had five storeys – each 64ft by 22ft. and was water-powered with a good supply from its own extensive pond. In 1846 it was put up for sale as a grist mill. In 1905 it was owned by Boulton Bros. (glove manufacturers) and was used until it was demolished in 1969. It was a brick building with 4 storeys and 7 bays. The central 3 bays were crowned by a prominent pediment with a circular opening. The windows were segment-headed but didn't have the usual stone frames. Only the mill pond can be seen today.

### **EDEN VALE MILL**

This was a dye house. It was owned by Thomas Napier and James Gordon – cloth dyers. The building later became a private house. The building had to be pulled down as it was deemed unsafe – the ground floor windows could no longer be seen as the foundations gave way and the house gradually 'sank' into the ground.

### **DILTON UPPER MILL**

John Waldron built this spinning factory just above Dilton Chapel – the site was the highest on the River Biss. Nothing more is known of the appearance of the mill, but from the tithe map the size seems about 60ft by 20ft. In 1823 it was empty and by 1847 it had been converted into a saw mill.

### **BOYERS MILL** (in Dilton Marsh)

Until his death in 1722, Paul Phipps held a lease to this mill. In his probate inventory is mentioned a shear shop, a scribbling loft, a braying mill, a stove, a dye-house and various workhouses.

In 1830, we find out it was powered by a cast-iron wheel which developed 15hp. from a 12ft fall. By 1846 the 'cloth or fulling mill' was being powered by an overshot iron wheel (12ft diameter by 8ft wide) which was rated at 10hp. This wheel drove two broad gigs, two stocks, a washer, two 40in. scribbling engines, two 30in. carding engines, two billies, six jennies, three Mile's cutters, two Lewis's cutters and a brusher. Although steam power was not used, there was a stove rack with its own boiler, as well as two broad racks and a kersey rack. Also on the premises of Boyers Mill there was a second substantial cloth mill and nine cottages. When Boyers Mill was put up for sale in 1853 - it included 2 narrow Lewis cutters, 3 carding engines, 3 scribbling engines (42in, 40in, 36in), a tucker, 3 billies and a brusher.

The mill was built by a very unpopular man called Joseph Harrop and his brother James. In 1863 Joseph summoned 19 striking power loom weavers. They had gone on strike due to the fact that an 11-year-old boy acted as timekeeper. The weavers were fined and Joseph left the court '*amid a volley of groans, hooting, hissing, yelling and discordant noises.*'

In 1901 the factory was converted into a tannery. The two factories dated 1797 and 1799 were still standing until the late 1990s. Both were brick-built. One of the factories had six bays and four storeys, with flat-headed windows set in stone. The second factory had seven bays and four storeys, the segment-headed windows were set in simple brick openings.

This site has now been turned into a housing estate, only one of the barns survived (due to bats roosting there).

### **DILTON LOWER MILL**

All that is known about this mill is that it was a fulling mill and a spinning factory. It adjoined the present Dilton Vale Farm, and, according to the tithe map, appears to have been only about 40ft by 15ft.

### **LEIGH MILL**

In 1713, Sir George Wheeler let a fulling mill at Leigh to Anthony Wilkins. It also contained wool lofts with scribbling benches in them, a press house where raising and shearing were carried out, and a dye-house. In 1847 it was converted to a corn mill.

Only the mill house now remains, but an 1870's photo shows a brick building of 3 storeys with wooden-framed windows of three lights, which could well be a small machinery mill.