

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME

The history of Cam Mills from 1522

by William J. Lucas

Corrietts Mill

“In the year of our Lord 1522, John Fynamore of Melksham Court, Stinchcombe, received from the Crown a lease of a Water Corn Mill at Cam to hold for his life and that of his wife Alice, John and Thomas Fynamore his sons and Agnes his former wife, and William Fynamore his son by Alice his present wife”.

Although this was not mentioned as present day Cam Mills, 10 years later when John Phillamore died, there is the first written record of Cam Mill, when in 1532, then known as ‘Corrietts Mill’, it was leased to John’s wife Alice, (former wife of the late John Tyndale) together with -

“oon [one] water grist myll and oon mill called a giggemill being to gether Under on roffe in Came... and a fulling mille being Under an other roffe With divers parcells of land for 21 years”.

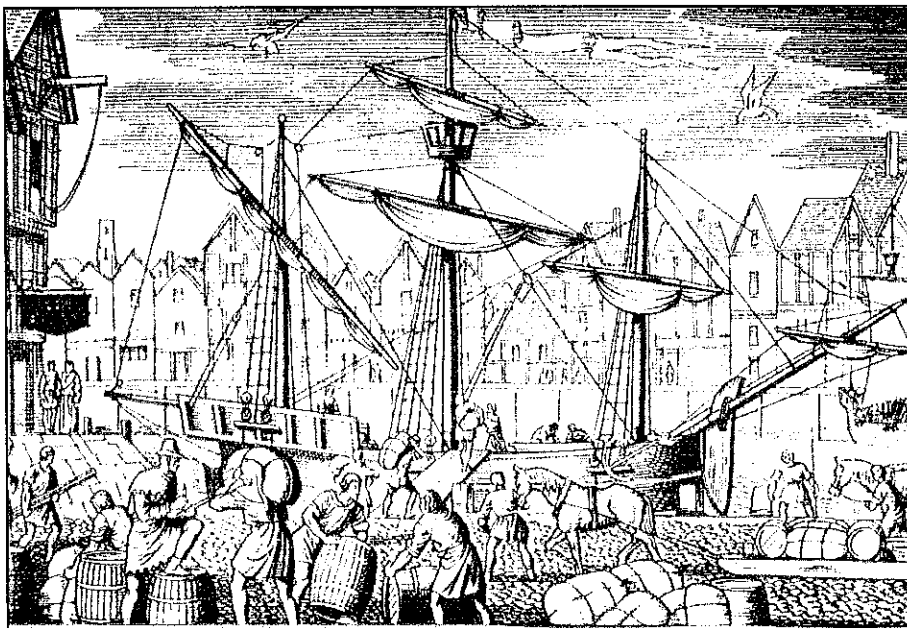
At that time Corrietts Mill owned 90 acres of land in Cam, and the ‘Corriett’ is a name still in use in Cam today, its location being only a stones throw from the present mill.

Alice Fynamore died in 1535 and her estate which would have included the Corrietts Mill passed to Edward Tyndale who held an office under Henry VII, and who resided at Hurst Manor, Slimbridge. Edward was the brother of William Tyndale, Bible translator and whose monument is at Nibley Knoll.

This property became the subject of a suit in Chancery during the lifetime of John Phillamore’s son, Thomas.

The next known record of ‘Corrietts Mill’ was in the year 1556 when Henry Berkley leased to Richard Tindall his -

“two mylles under one roffe that is to say a corn myll and a gygg myll with a fulling myll in Cam at a rent of 34 shillings”.



Wool being exported from Bristol in the mid 1500's. The Customs Officer in the foreground is keeping tally of the bales by making notches on a stick. At that time export of wool was the country's chief source of revenue, and West of England fleeces (especially Cotswolds) were regarded as setting the standard of high quality.

In 1600, Anne, Countess of Warwick demised a water grain mill and two fulling mills called Corrietts to Arnold Oldisworth.

Oldisworth was one of Lord Berkeley's farmers. He became entangled in legal wrangles over land reclamation on the banks of the River Severn at Slimbridge and Frampton and ran up debts of over £4,000. Presumably to clear his debts, Oldisworth leased the Corriett Mill to William Harding.

Oldisworth was also an adventurer and became interested in the newly acquired colonies in America and bought a share in the recently formed Berkeley Company. In 1620 he sailed to Virginia on the 'Supply'. Oldisworth became elected to serve on the Council of the Colony of Virginia but in 1622 was killed in an Indian attack.

The new owner of the Corriett, William Harding, eventually passed the mill on to his son William who upon his death bequeathed the mills to William Purnell of Dursley.

In 1673 the mills were in the hands of Benjamin and Benedict Biddle. Fourteen years later in the year 1687 they were conveyed by lease and re-lease to Nicholas and Robert Webb of Wotton-under-Edge, clothiers.



A reproduction of a 17th century engraving showing "teasing" and shearing of broadcloth by hand.

The rise and fall

From 1690 to 1760 appears to have been the period of greatest prosperity amongst Gloucestershire clothiers, especially in Cam, judging by the numerous and decorative table tombs dedicated to the local clothiers of the district and their families that can be seen today in the local churchyard of St. George's parish church.

In those intervening years the little mill on the River Cam grew and prospered. Although corn milling continued for many years, cloth making became more important as the wars with France continued. In the early part of the eighteenth century a second fulling mill was added and the corn mill was converted into a dyehouse.

In January 1725 the mill was leased to Daniel Tyndale, together with lands at 'Brooklands' and 'Everlands' to "enjoy for a term of 500 years," - but the next records show that in 1737 the mills formed part of the settlement of the marriage of William Fowler and Elizabeth Phillimore. They were described as - "*all that millhouse with a grist mill and stock mill therin*"

In the year 1737 - One 'Pack' of wool made into a Broad Cloth cost:-

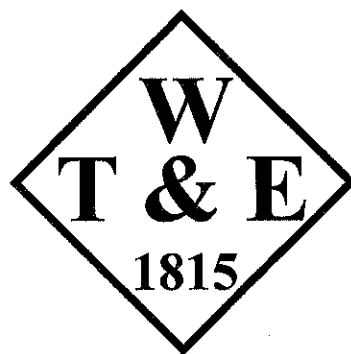
One man to sort and dry it	8s 0d	(40p)
Dying and Cleaning	£1 10s 0d	(£1-50p)
Four men and two boys to scribb it	£2 8s 0d	(£2-40p)
Thirty women and girls to card and spin it	£6 0s 0d	(£6-00p)
Four boys to spool and wind quills	10s 0d	(50p)
Four women to burle it	12s 0d	(60p)
Five women to scour, full, shear, rack & press it	£3 4s 0d	(£3-20p)
Eight men to weave it	£4 16s 0d	(£4-80p)
Total 58 persons employed for a week at:	£19 8s 0d	(£19-40p)

Writing of Cam in 1779, historian Rudder's account states that "There is no fish in the river except eels, on account of the great quantity of dye-stuff thrown into it by the local cloth mill", and "The poor of the village are employed in the cloth business".

At the turn of the century in 1800, there stood in the mill yard two stone cottages. A girl named Whittard lived in one with her parents and eventually married the Bishop of Durham. There was a right of way enjoyed by local people through the middle of the mill yard at this time and it continued to be so until recent times.

Before 1815 when Thomas and Elizabeth Williams acquired the property, the mill had a 'Stone', which was reputed to have ground corn at the same time it was a gig and fulling mill.

In 1818 Williams, who lived in a house where the old Cam National School now stands, employed '20 hands' and the buildings were substantially rebuilt, but fortunes changed and Williams, worried over unsatisfactory wool prices, committed suicide in 1819 aged 36, by taking poison in a near-by field overlooking the mill.



*Williams
Thomas & Elizabeth
1815*

The famous 'Diamond Stone' which was to be found originally on the west pine end of the old mill facing Norman Hill.

In 1829 the mill came under the ownership of the village's namesake, one Joseph Tippets Cam, a renown Dursley clothier.

It was normal practice at this time to employ child labour, and in the Upper Cam parish burial register there is a short description of a tragedy that occurred at the mill 'James Hill, buried 24th September 1828, whose death was occasioned by his having accidentally fallen against a wheel at the clothing factory of Mr.J.T.Cam'.

James Hill was only 9 years old !

Joseph's son William took over the factory from his father and eventually sold it by auction in 1848.

Until the factory system existed, weaving was done at home in local cottages that can still be seen today in the village.

The art of weaving was handed down from father to son, and a narrow loom cost about £5. They could weave a piece, (about 60 yards of cloth) in a fortnight and they would get paid about 30 shillings.

The revival

When power looms arrived, the old weavers refused to be troubled with this new-fangled machinery and it was largely women who took them up.

At Cam the opposition to power looms was so great that the local overseers, fearing riots, had requested, and got a troop of cavalry. The 12th Lancers arrived in December 1823 followed by the Queen's Bays, the 4th Royal Irish and finally the 3rd Dragoon Guards who were all stationed at nearby Dursley until things had cooled down.

At this time the mill boasted three overshot water wheels and later a turbine.

In 1840 the wool trade collapsed and the "Hungry Forties" put many Cam weavers out of work. Many emigrated to the old colonies of Australia, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand, while others looked for a new life in America, all taking their knowledge and skills of the cloth trade with them.

The population of Cam almost halved within a few years.

About 1850 the mill was owned by a Mr. Turner, who's real name was Holloway, but took the name Turner with an inherited fortune.

In 1857 Thomas Hunt came. Apparently he did not own the mill but came to assist Turner, and the factory became known as Turner and Hunt, but became deeply in debt.

In 1855 "20 to 30 hands" were employed and about 250 yards of cloth were produced per week, with women helping with pressing.

1857 Cam Mills came under the ownership of Mr. Hunt, who was deeply in debt to Mr. Winterbotham of the Bank in Stroud.

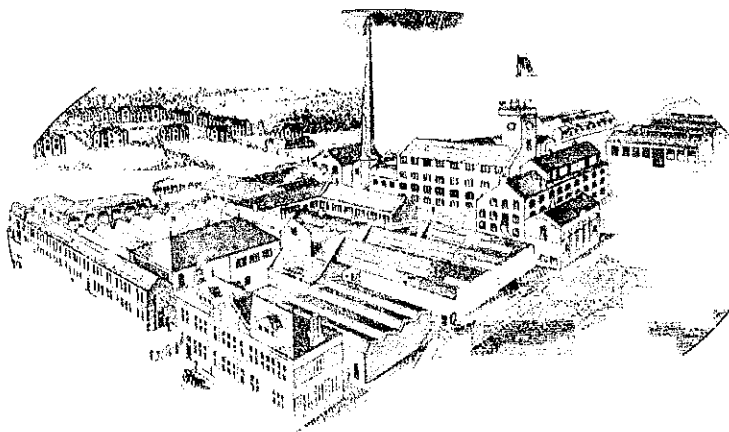
To safeguard his interests, Mr. Winterbotham sent his son, Arthur to Cam to take charge and eventually a partnership was formed and the famous "Hunt and Winterbotham" was born.

Later to be converted into a Limited Company in 1887.

At this time the mill employed 250 hands and made 63 "ends" per week.

1880 saw the first Worsted cloth made at Cam, which was made into fine suits.

Under the direction of Arthur Winterbotham and his two sons Arthur and Herbert, who succeeded him on his death in 1892, the mills were almost completely rebuilt and re-equipped. New products were developed and new markets secured.



Cam Mills, c.1900. One of the largest and longest – lived cloth mills in the region. This extensive mill produced a wide range of woollen cloth types and like so many others in the area, grew piecemeal over many years. At the turn of the century, Hunt & Winterbotham were employing over 400 hands and were engaged in the manufacturer of the highest grade woollen cloth. The mill was almost entirely self-sufficient and highly automated.

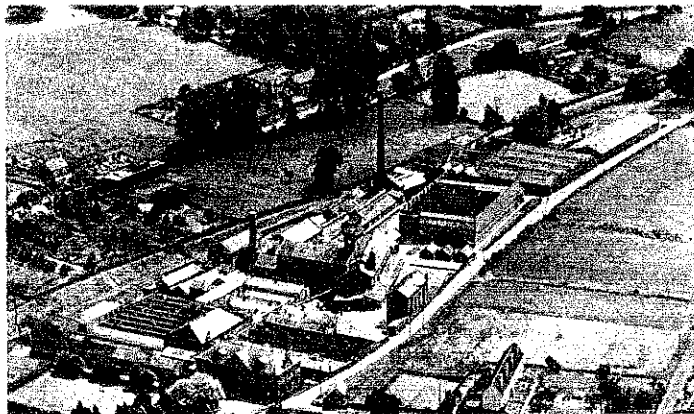
The 20th Century

In 1906 Cam Mills was described as one of the largest mills in the district, the site covering around eight acres and employing up to 400 workers.

By 1909 they employed 350 hands and made 169 ends per week, boasting three chimney stacks (at that time a prestige symbol), the oldest of which was sited by the “pine end of the old mill”. The company also boasted of offices in London.

In 1920 the company was financially associated with the neighbouring firms of Strachan & Co. of Stroud and William Playne & Co. of Minchinhampton, thus bringing into one organisation the three firms of Winterbotham, Strachan & Playne and preserving the old West of England tradition of fine quality and fine finished cloth renown throughout the world.

From this time the mill manufactured Scarlets (Guard's Uniform), Navals, Billiard Cloth, Worsted Suitings, Piano Felt, Printing Felt, Flannels & 'Saxonies', Casino Cloth and 'Lanide' – P.V.C. Backed Felt.



Cam Mills circa 1939

During the Second World War, Cam manufactured large amounts of Felt for ammunition (shell tips), also Pipe, Tank and Filter Cloth and it was only in the early 1990's that the 'Blackout Curtains' that protected the mill from being seen by German bombers was finally taken down from the skylight windows of the Wool Warehouse.

During the late 1960's the three firms became part of the large textile firm of Illingworth Morris Group.

In 1990 William Playne's closed and in June of that year the two remaining companies at Cam and Stroud were acquired by Milliken & Co., an illustrious American company based in South Carolina and so began a huge investment in both plant and people into building WSP into a world class textile operation. In 1967 Cam employed 130 people.

In 2011 the company reverted back to UK ownership and continues to trade as WSP Textiles Ltd.

As Cam goes into the 21st Century it carries on a textile tradition of 500 years and processes raw wool into woven cloth. The cloth is then transferred to the Lodgemore Plant at Stroud for dyeing and finishing.

At the turn of the century, Cam employed just over 100 people and produces a number of cloths including Tennis Ball Felt, Billiard Cloth, Pool, Casino and Worsted Cloth.

Cam Mill

Owners and Proprietors from 1522

1522	John Fynamore
1532	Alice Fillamore
1535	Edward Tyndale
1540	Henry, Lord Berkeley
1556	Richard Tindall
1580	Anne, Countess of Warwick
1600	Arnold Oldisworth
1620	William Harding Sr.
1640	William Harding Jr.
1666	William Purnell
1673	Benjamin & Benedict Biddle
1687	Nicholas & Robert Webb
1725	Daniel Tyndale
1734	William & Elizabeth Fowler
1815	Thomas & Elizabeth Williams
1820	Joseph Tippets Cam
1848	William Cam
1850	Samuel Turner
1856	Turner & Hunt
1857	Hunt & Winterbotham
1920	Winterbotham, Strachan & Playne
1968	Illingworth Morris Group
1990	Milliken & Company
2011	WSP Textiles Limited