

YEARSLEY MILL RESEARCH PROJECT

Newsletter No 2

December 2014

It's been a very busy year since our last newsletter with, generally, very positive results. Initially we were disappointed that our application for Heritage Lottery Funding was turned down, but we have still been able to afford to excavate thanks to Helmsley Archaeological and Historical Society's generous donation. Excavations have also been possible due to the kindness of Jon Kenny, who has directed the work, given advice, loans of equipment and moral support. Especially, too, thanks must go to our great band of volunteers, without whom, we would literally still be scratching the surface, and also Steve Young and his North York Moors Apprentices who were a huge help in September.

John Harrison, author of 'Eight Centuries of Milling in North East Yorkshire' and Peter Morgan, also a watermill expert, gave us a very useful and interesting workshop before our excavations started in early May. We learned about the history of watermills and what we might expect to find at Yearsley watermill. Their continuing support and shared knowledge is very much appreciated.

We held an AGM in July at which it was agreed that AGMs should continue but that the Constitution should be amended so that the accounts will be presented annually but not audited. There was also a display of finds from the excavation in May and a display of photographs from the site by John Illingworth, for which we were very grateful.

The weather has been remarkably kind to us for both sessions of excavations

in May and September/October and so we were able to work in the wheelpit without it constantly filling with water. In May our trench reached bedrock in the bottom of the cogpit where some pieces of timber rested, one of which was decorated. (See Fig 1)



Figure 1: Cogpit

We also found a fireplace with an oven or kiln beside it. (See Fig 2)



Figure 2: Hearth created from broken millstones

The second phase of excavations in September revealed more of the floor of the building (see Fig 3) and more of the cogpit and wheelpit. (see Fig 4)



Figure 3: Flagged floor



Figure 4: Wheelpit looking from the tail race

The wheelpit and tail race contained well preserved wood and leather, in addition to the usual large quantities of pottery. The wood may have been from the roof of the building or, possibly, the waterwheel. A large amount of bracken or grass was found with the wood which may have been thatch or animal bedding. There were a number of shoe soles and heels as well as unidentified pieces of leather.

In the cogpit we found a large piece of wood, almost a metre long, which we believe was part of the waterwheel. See Figure 5.



Figure 5: Possible waterwheel fragment

We excavated large quantities of metalwork including two keys, one of which may be associated with the rusted remains of a possible lock, a knife, hammer head, possible pick for dressing the millstones, lead from windows, two spoons, a pistol ball and a circular lead object which may have been a whirligig child's toy. Other finds included fragments of millstones, bearings to hold the shafts of the mill, bottle and window glass, pipe stems and animal teeth. By far the largest group of finds, however, was pottery and particularly the local Ryedale Ware which may have been made nearby. The local Yearsley potters in the 17th and early 18th Centuries were called Wedgwood, relatives of the famous Staffordshire family, and we hope to find evidence that they did indeed have a pottery kiln nearby.

We will be excavating again in 2015 and if you would like to take part, do contact Geoff or Elizabeth. In the meantime, we wish you a happy and prosperous 2015.