FROMEBRIDGE MILL,
FRAMPTON-ON-SEVERN,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

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SUMMARY

During the months of June, September, October, November 1998 and February 1999, Cotswold Archaeological Trust carried out a watching brief during conversion works at Fromebridge Mill and its adjacent cottages at Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire. The site has been subject to a number of surveys, including documentary and photographic, which highlighted the historic importance of the structures. The present work recorded the opening of new passageways within the building, and the groundworks associated with drainage, a new car park and access road. Post-medieval domestic refuse and industrial debris was encountered during works within the building. A post-medieval boundary ditch was observed during topsoil stripping for the new car park.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 In June 1998 Cotswold Archaeological Trust was commissioned by the Horner Allen Partnership, on behalf of The Old English Pub Company plc, to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Fromebridge Mill, Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire (Fig. 1). This work was a condition of planning permission granted for the conversion of the redundant mill and associated derelict cottages to a bar/restaurant with operational accommodation; and for the formation of a new car park and access road.

1.1.2 The watching brief was carried out in compliance with the 'Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs' (IFA, 1994) and a project design prepared by CAT and approved by Charles Parry, Senior Archaeological Officer at Gloucestershire County Council.

1.2 The study area

1.2.1 Fromebridge Mill comprises a complex of buildings which lie on the banks of the River Frome near the village of Frampton-on-Severn, Gloucestershire (NGR SO 7710 0740)(Fig. 1). It is bounded by fields to the north, east, and north-west, a property to the south-west and a lane over a bridge to the south. It occupies a relatively flat area of ground lying at approximately 15m OD. The natural substrate in the area is formed of the Lower Lias clays of the Jurassic period (Institute of Geological Sciences 1979).

1.3 Historical background

1.3.1 Extensive surveys, both documentary and photographic have been undertaken for the mill and its associated buildings. It is not the intention of this document
to detail these results, and readers are referred to the RCHME reports by Mills and by Ely.

1.3.2 In summary, the mill buildings appear to have been constructed in the 17th century when both corn milling and fulling was undertaken on-site. The mill passed through a number of owners before being bought in 1760 by Joseph Fairthorne with John and William Purnell. They formed the Fromebridge Company and converted the mill to wire making, which was continued until closure in 1809. The mill was particularly prosperous in the mid-late 18th century, which corresponds with the period of most alteration to the structure (Ely, 1995). Many of the original mill workings survived *in-situ* until the present day.

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 The objective of the watching brief was to identify any archaeological or structural remains revealed during the course of the construction works and to ensure the preservation by record of all such remains revealed.

1.4.2 Within the mill building CAT monitored the lowering of floor levels, unblocking of openings and the creation of new openings. The recording of the *in-situ* mill machinery was undertaken by the Horner Allen Partnership. Outside the mill the insertion of drainage, sewage tanks and the stripping of topsoil to form a new road and car park, was undertaken under archaeological supervision. All recording was undertaken in accordance with CAT Technical Manual: Field Recording Manual (1996).

1.4.3 The site archive and finds will be deposited with Stroud District Museum, Stroud, Gloucestershire.

2. RESULTS
2.1.1 Inside the mill, the 3rd floor was inspected and all the exposed beams photographed. On the ground floor, flagstones were removed reducing the ground level approximately 0.15m. In the centre of the room a small trench was dug measuring 2.20m x 2.20m, down to a depth of approximately 0.75m. This exposed layers of industrial waste such as charcoal, ash and cinders in its sections and a possible earlier floor at its base. A short section of foundation wall made up of red brick, approximately 0.25m high, was also exposed running west into the section. This butted onto another brick wall surrounding a rectangular granite plinth measuring 1.75m x 1.25m, immediately visible below the flagstones. A wooden truss exposed in the room included a date of 1831 inscribed on it.

2.1.2 The groundworks consisted of the mechanical stripping of the clay-silt topsoil down to a depth of approximately 0.15m for a new access road running from the west side of the roundabout on the A38, across a field to the east of the mill where a car park has been built (Fig. 2). No archaeological features were revealed. The field immediately to the north-east of the mill, adjacent to the river Frome, was also stripped of topsoil down to a depth of approximately 0.2m for the formation of a car park. In this area a ditch was revealed bisecting the field from north to south (Fig. 2). However, a section dug across the ditch revealed its shallow depth of approximately 0.2m and post-medieval building material in its clay-silt fill.

2.1.3 Trenches for drainage runs were also dug to a maximum depth of 1.20m, to the north and east of the mill building. The trenches to the east revealed a large build-up of industrial waste (cinder, ash) related to the industrial processing at the site during the post-medieval period. The trenches to the north of the building revealed a clay-silt horizon containing a high quantity of domestic refuse (bottles, glass fragments, animal bone, china) which overlies the natural clays (Fig. 2). A service trench was also dug from the south-west corner of the mill building, across the bridge over the river Frome and up the lane towards the road to the south-west of the mill (Fig.2). The shallow depth of the service trench (0.75m-0.80m) only revealed a sandy-clay horizon at its base which
contained post-medieval building material and numerous lenses of industrial waste such as slag, cinder, ash and coal. This was sealed by a thick layer up to 0.45m which consisted of the modern tarmac and its sandy-gravel base.

2.1.4 A trench measuring 5m x 5m, 3m deep was also dug in the field to the north of the mill to house a sewage tank. No archaeological layers or features were encountered during the excavation, the deep trench only exposing the natural Liassic clay (Fig. 2).

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Even though a desk-based assessment undertaken in 1993 highlighted the historic and archaeological interest in the mill and surrounding area, no further structural or archaeological remains were revealed during the course of the construction works. The various groundworks carried out only exposed deposits of post-medieval refuse and waste material related to industrial processing at the site during the post-medieval period.

4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cotswold Archaeological Trust would like to thank Mr David Hunt of Horner Allen Partnership and Mr Steven Veal (site foreman) of Severn Vale Cottages Ltd. for their assistance at various stages throughout the project. We would also like to thank Mr Charles Parry, Archaeology Officer for Gloucestershire County Council. The watching brief was carried out by Cliff Bateman, Laurent Coleman, David Kenyon, Richard Morton and Franco Vartuca. This report was compiled by Franco Vartuca, with illustrations by Richard Morton.
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Figure 1. Location plan
Figure 2. Location of groundworks
Fig. 2 Location of groundworks