

**THE FIRST PAPER MILL IN WALES?
PERTHIR MILL ON THE RIVER MONNOW, 1700**

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Although paper-making started in England at the end of the fifteenth century, in a mill near Hertford,¹ its development was very slow and it could not be said that the industry was established until towards the end of the sixteenth century.² Shorter (see ref. 1) gives evidence of a number of paper mills in England in the seventeenth century, but hitherto the earliest recorded for Wales has been that at Halghton in Flintshire in 1706.³ The greatest part of the paper-making attributable to Wales in the eighteenth century took place in Monmouthshire, mainly in the valleys of the Mounton Brook where paper-making had started at latest by 1730,⁴ and of the White Brook where it started around 1760,⁵ although the earliest hitherto recorded was at Rullins Mill on the Monmouthshire side of the River Monnow which Shorter⁶ claims for 1722 using indirect evidence which I think is reliable, as explained below. The first positive evidence of Rullins Mill as a paper mill⁷ which I have found is a deed of 1729,⁸ which makes this mill contemporaneous in origin with some of those in the Mounton Valley. The location of the places mentioned is shown in Fig. 1.

I now want to put forward the claim of Perthir Mill on the River Monnow as the first paper mill in Wales and therefore also the first in Monmouthshire. An indenture of lease¹⁰ between Mrs. Mary Powell and Mr. Richard Roberts dated 19 May 1700 includes

“ all that Water Mill conteyning severale corne Mills and a paper Mill under one
Rooffe comonly called Perthires Mill.”

This seems very good evidence. It is hardly credible that the lawyer or clerk would have written “ paper ” in error, as paper mills were then extremely rare in England and absent in Wales; admittedly there had been a paper mill at Redbrook, 3 miles south-east of Monmouth, before 1691,⁹ but it had been converted to a copper works for a decade. Unfortunately there is no previous or subsequent record of the paper-mill at Perthir; some other references to the Perthir mill are as follows:—

- 1597¹¹ “ Water corne mill ”
- 1659¹² Marriage settlement made by John and Mary Powell includes “ Water grist mill called Perthire’s mill ”
- 1679¹³ Lease by Mary Powell widow, relict of Edward Powell, late of Perthire, gentleman, to Hugh Harris of Lanellen, gentleman, of “ all that capital messuage called Perthaire . . . and . . . one water grist mill . . . ” for £200.
- 1717¹⁴ A complicated transaction involving Bridgett, Catherine and Winifred Powell, spinsters, of Perthire and, *inter alia*, Thomas Evans of Llangattock-vibon, Abell who was also involved in Rullins Mill in the deed of 1729 (ref. 8)-transferring “ All those Water Corn Mills and Fulling Mills lying under the same roof comonly called Perthire Mills . . . ”

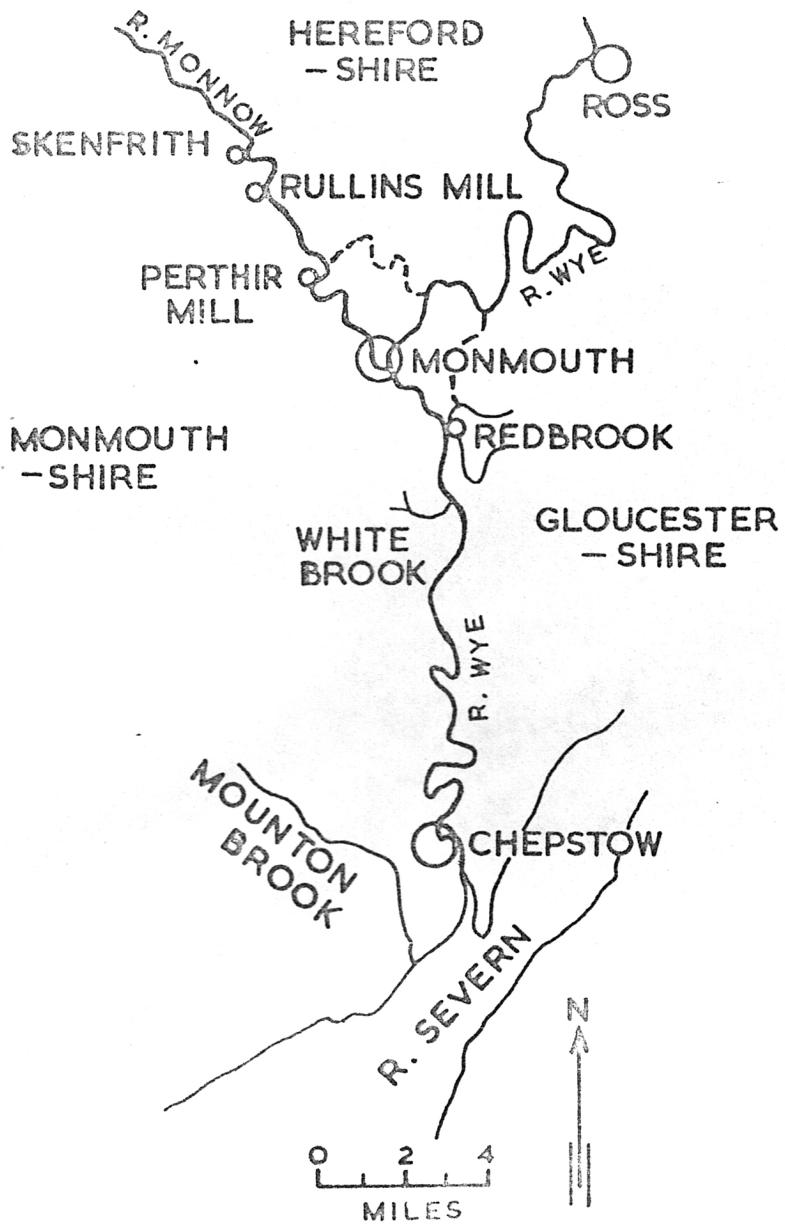


Fig. 1 Map of eastern Monmouthshire showing locations mentioned in text. The Monmouthshire boundary is, starting at the north, the R. Monnow, then the broken line to the R. Wye north of Monmouth, then the broken line to the northern stream at Redbrook, then the R. Wye and the Severn estuary.

1742¹⁵ Lease by Bridgett and Winifred Powell, spinsters of Perthire to William Richards of same parish, miller, of "All that Corne or Water Grist mill commonly called or known by the name of Perthire's mill . . ."

The apparent conversion of the paper mill to a fulling mill (or mills) by 1717 is interesting, as is also the apparent reversion to a plain corn mill by 1742. Evidently the lessees of Perthir Mill were not very successful in their excursions into manufacturing industry. It was still a corn mill on the 6-inch O.S. map of 1886 (see fig. 2) but was not shown on later editions.

We can now return to Shorter's claim of a date as early as 1722 for Rullins Mill. It is necessary to note that both Perthir Mill and Rullins Mill are in the parish of Rockfield. Shorter's evidence is:—

" 1722. William Vaughan, paper maker, of Rockfield, took an apprentice, Jeremy Wyett. (Rolling Mill was in the parish of Rockfield.) "

Since Perthir Mill had apparently abandoned its paper-making activities before 1717, it is not unreasonable to allow Shorter's attribution of this evidence to Rullins Mill to stand.

In accepting the date of 1700 as the earliest for which there is evidence of paper-making in Wales (or Monmouthshire) we must take note of the comment made above that there was a paper mill at Redbrook before 1691. The evidence for this is good¹⁶; the question is, was the mill in Gloucestershire or Monmouthshire? It was undoubtedly at Upper Redbrook, for it was a transfer from Benedict Hall to John Coster.¹⁷ The boundary between Gloucestershire and Monmouthshire (and hence between England and Wales) lies on the course of the brook at Upper Redbrook, and it is almost certain that the mill concerned was situated on this brook — but on which side is unknown. Thus doubt must remain.

Acknowledgment

The assistance of the staff at the Monmouthshire County Record Office is gratefully acknowledged.

Grid references

Perthir Mill	SO 484 154
Rullins Mill	SO 464 193
Mill at Redbrook	SO 536 102 (presumed location)

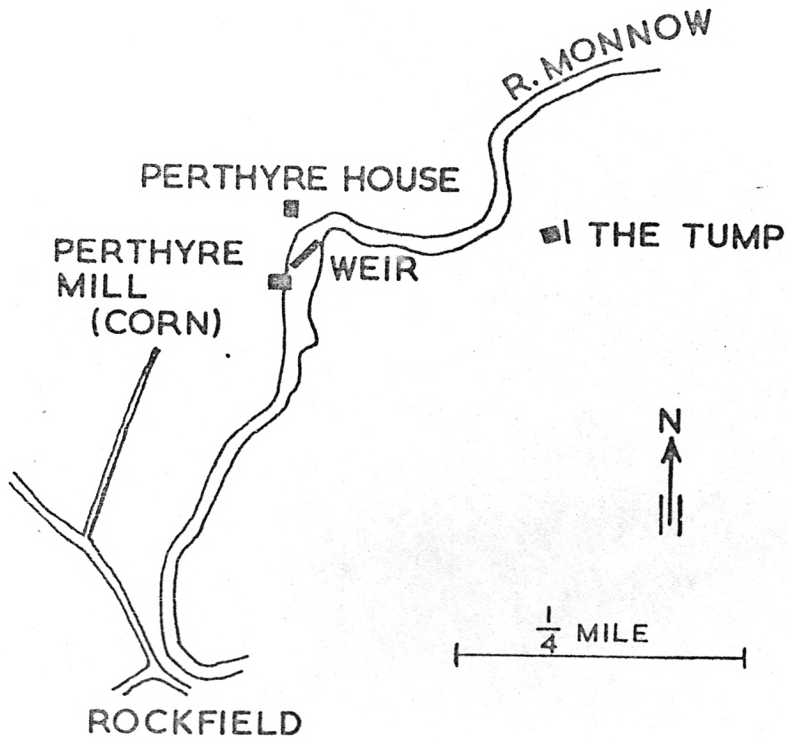


Fig. 2 Detail respecting Perthir Mill from 6-inch O.S. map of 1886. The spelling "Perthyre" is as given on the map.

REFERENCES

- ¹ A. H. Shorter, "Paper Mills and Paper Makers in England, 1495-1800," Paper Publications Soc., Hilversum, Holland, 1957, p. 27.
- ² Rhys Jenkins, "Observations on the rise and progress of manufacturing industry in England." *Trans. Newcomen Soc.*, 7, 1926-7, pp. 1-16, especially p. 9.
- ³ As ref. 1, p. 257; also noted in A. E. Davies, "Paper-mills and paper-makers in Wales, 1700-1900, *Nat. Lib. Wales J.*, 15, No. 1, 1967, pp. 1-30.
- ⁴ Ivor Waters, "Chepstow Miscellany," *Chepstow Soc.*, 1958, pp. 27-41.
- ⁵ D. G. Tucker, "The paper mills of Whitebrook, Monmouthshire," *Arch Cambrensis*, 121, 1972, pp. 80-96.
- ⁶ As ref. 1, p. 216. Also A. H. Shorter, "Paper-mills in Monmouthshire," *Arch Cambrensis*, 102, 1953, pp. 83-88.
- ⁷ The history of Rullins Mill, which has numerous spellings, is being separately published by H. W. Paar and D. G. Tucker.
- ⁸ Monmouthshire County Record Office, D361 E/1, 101.0002.
- ⁹ See D. G. Tucker, "The embanked ponds of the Penallt-Whitebrook-Redbrook area and their industrial uses," *Severn and Wye Review*, 1, 1971, pp. 50-58, espec. p. 55.
- ¹⁰ Mon. C.R.O., D.361.35 - 4 & 5.
- ¹¹ Mon. C.R.O., D.384.0003.
- ¹² Mon. C.R.O., D.361 E/1, 35.0002.
- ¹³ Mon. C.R.O., D.384.0009.
- ¹⁴ Mon. C.R.O., D.384.0018.
- ¹⁵ Mon. C.R.O., D.384.0028.
- ¹⁶ Gloucestershire County Record Office, D1677 GG1352-7. This deed of 1709 recites a lease of 16 July 1691 referring to "All that Mill then formerly used or Employed as a Paper Mill now converted into a copper works."
- ¹⁷ C. E. Hart, "The Industrial History of Dean," David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1971, discusses the development of the copper industry at Redbrook, and shows that John Coster operated only at Upper Redbrook.