

Former Corn Mill
Mill Lane, Low Bradley, North Yorkshire:
Historic Building Appraisal and Impact Assessment



April 2009

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SUMMARY

The former corn mill in Low Bradley (NGR: SE 00434871) is largely 18th century with later additions, but contains some earlier building fabric, of unknown but possibly medieval date. Its conversion to a shippon in the early 20th century has left few internal fixtures intact, but these include the hurst, which is 19th century. The wheel-pit, enclosed within a wheel-house, is largely infilled. This report sets out the readily available evidence for the building's history and considers the potential impact of a scheme for the conversion of this grade 2 listed building.

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FORMER CORN MILL, MILL LANE, LOW BRADLEY, NORTH YORKSHIRE:

HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

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FORMER CORN MILL, MILL LANE, LOW BRADLEY, NORTH YORKSHIRE: HISTORIC BUILDING APPRAISAL AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report concerns the former water-powered corn mill at Low Bradley, near Skipton in North Yorkshire, and was commissioned by the executors of the former owner Mr Chester, via the architect John Wharton. It was carried out in April 2009 to inform an application to Craven District Council for listed building consent for the conversion of the building to a dwelling and workplace, at the request of the North Yorkshire County Council Heritage and Environment Section.
- 1.2 The former corn mill in its present form probably dates to the 18th century but probably occupies the site of an earlier, perhaps medieval mill. It has been extended and altered at various times and was converted to a shippon in the early 20th century.

2 Location and current use

- 2.1 The building stands 200m north-east of the centre of Low Bradley, at NGR: SE 00434871, about 3km south of Skipton. It stands on the north-west side of Mill Lane, adjacent to a public footpath, and is aligned with its long axis running from south-east to north-west (Figure 1).
- 2.2 The building is disused and has clearly been so for many years, following its last use as a shippon.

3 Planning background

- 3.1 Planning consent for the conversion of the building to a dwelling and workspace (application no: 11/2008/9172) was granted by Craven District Council on 2 March 2009. However, during the consultation period the building had been designated a grade 2 listed building, on 22 January 2009. Subsequently, an application was made on 23 January 2009 for listed building consent (11/2009/9374), in response to which the Heritage and Environment Section of North Yorkshire County Council requested that further information be made available, in order that the impact of the proposed scheme on the historic fabric of the building and site be considered. It is also worth noting that the site lies within the Low Bradley Conservation Area.

4 Previous investigations

- 4.1 The corn mill was investigated by Alison Armstrong of the Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group (YVBSG) in 1995, although her report on the site was not completed until 2008¹. This valuable study comprised an account of the present building and an interpretation of its development, as well as the associated landscape features, accompanied by sketch drawings and some historical information.
- 4.2 The account of the building provided for its designation as a listed building² is also useful and gives a fairly detailed account of its principal features, as well as some of its historical background, although much of this is derived from Armstrong's report.

5 Historical background

- 5.1 There are references to a mill at Bradleys Both (the collective name for Low and High Bradley) from the medieval period, for example from 1314 when repairs to it were recorded in the Bolton Priory Compotus account, and although it cannot be ascertained whether this mill was on the site of the present building, it is very commonly the case that investment in water management (in the form of dams, ponds and leats) resulted in the continuous occupation of mill sites, albeit with successive rebuilding. Manorial documents of the 17th century also refer to a corn mill³.
- 5.2 The earliest known depiction of the site on a historic map is from 1791 when the enclosure map shows a rectangular building named as "Corn Mill" on the site, served by a long narrow pond to the north (Figure 3). This no doubt represents the present building, although it may have changed in size since.
- 5.3 In the following 50 years, and by 1842 when the tithe map of Bradleys Both was surveyed, the water supply was altered and two separate ponds are evident (Figure 4). The mill building itself (still named "Corn Mill" on the map) was served by a head race running parallel to its north-east side, and appears to comprise three different parts. Its outline differs from the present one in the fact that the wheel-house does not appear to be as long at that time, perhaps suggesting that the wheel may have been centred further to the south-east than at a time later in the 19th century. However, it is possible that the map is schematic to some extent and should not be taken too literally (Figure 5). It is

¹ YVBSG report by A C Armstrong, 2008, deposited at the North Yorkshire Historic Environment Record

² Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 22 Jan 2009: *Old Corn Mill, Low Bradley* (Listed building no: 505158)

³ Armstrong 2008, p3

worth noting that the tithe award lists enclosure 235 as “Corn Mill and two reservoirs”, owned by George Greenwood Esq, and occupied by Jonas Sugden⁴. The nearly contemporary 6” to the mile Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1850 gives no additional information, and is of too small a scale to allow accurate comparison.

- 5.4 The earliest detailed depiction of the building was made in 1889 (Figure 6). At this time the mill was almost certainly still working (it is named “Bradley Mill (Corn)”). The two ponds are still extant and the outline of the building is the same as at present, with the addition of an appendage on the north-east side, which is no longer present. During the following 18 years the buildings and water supply did not change (Figure 7), but the map of 1907 does not name the building, perhaps an indication that milling ceased during this time. By 1938 the buildings did not change except for the demolition of the north-east structure, but the ponds and leats were removed or filled, so it is clear that the building was no longer in use as a mill (Figure 8).
- 5.5 Two local histories of Bradley make anecdotal references to the former corn mill. One notes that the mill was used up to the end of the 19th century⁵, while the other (published in 1987) mentions local inhabitants who could remember it working, and that two or three horse wagons were in constant use transporting flour and grain to and fro. It also notes that when last working its owner was John George Mattock of Skipton, and that between the two world wars, the remains of the waterwheel could be seen lying around at the site⁶.

6 Appraisal of the present building and site

- 6.1 A site visit was made on 15 April 2009 by this author to investigate the building and site and assess their historical significance, using the existing records of the building, and survey drawings produced by Sterling Surveys Ltd. These drawings, and digital photographs, are used to illustrate the following account of the building. It should be noted that this is not intended as an archival record of the site and that the drawings are used to illustrate the points in the text, and may contain omissions or inaccuracies. At the time of writing it is however anticipated that this report will be deposited with the North Yorkshire Historic Environment Record, subject to the approval of the client.

The main building

- 6.2 The main building which forms the mill itself measures 16.2m long and 7.3m wide and is two storeys high. Its external walls are of flaggy sandstone which is

⁴ NYCRO MIC 1772/461-467

⁵ Green, J 1965 *History of Bradley*, p16

⁶ Throup, M 1987 *Bradley Long Since* p35

thought to be of 18th century date, but these appear to have been raised to their present height by around 1.8m or so in a later phase, with this heightening having been carried out in a less uniform style of more random rubble. It is most clear in the front (south-west) elevation (photos 1-3), but can also be discerned in the gables (where not obscured by vegetation), and in the north-east side, now within the later wheel-house. However, such a heightening of the mill implies that it was previously of a single storey, an arrangement which would not easily have accommodated the milling machinery, and an alternative explanation may need to be sought for this discrepancy in the walling styles, such as a rebuilding of the upper parts of the building, associated with a re-roofing.

- 6.3 The present arrangement of openings in the front elevation is clearly not original to the building: the principal entrance has been partly blocked to form a window and a new doorway inserted to the right, probably on conversion of the mill to a shippon in the early 20th century, and the first floor taking-in door, and the small ground floor window at the far right, both appear secondary. A significant feature is the lintel of the partly blocked doorway, which has two slots cut into it and has clearly been re-used from an earlier, unknown context (photo 4); an almost identical stone is used in the lintel of a doorway in the south-east side of the wheel-house (see below).
- 6.4 The south-east gable of the main building is much overgrown (photo 5) but the visible openings, including the wide, arched cart entrance, do appear to be original (and not inserted, as suggested by Armstrong). This entrance has a pair of 18th century harr-hung doors (one of them fallen) which is a significant survival (photo 6). A later wall within the building, again probably dating from the conversion to a shippon, means that this doorway could no longer be used for carts, but previously it would have allowed vehicular access into the mill.
- 6.5 The north-west gable is for the most part now within the later store (photo 7) where the stonework is of a rather different character, being largely of random rubble: this may indicate it is earlier than the other elevations, or perhaps was considered less important. However it clearly shows the same different building phases near the roof, as well as various openings, some of them blocked. They include a brick-lined, arched opening at ground floor level, no doubt of 19th century date, and a substantial beam end within the wall, which appears to be the end of the surviving hurst's longitudinal member (see below) (photo 8).
- 6.6 The main building's north-east wall, now facing into the wheel-house, is of flaggy sandstone similar to that used elsewhere, also with the change to a more random rubble near the top (photo 9). The principal feature in this wall is an opening now comprising a low, narrow doorway, but which formerly served as the bearing for the waterwheel axle (photo 10), but there is also a low recess at the north-west end of this wall at present ground level, which may be a former

opening associated with the water supply (photo 11). In the internal face of this wall, earlier masonry of greater thickness is evident, on which the present wall is built. This has been postulated as perhaps medieval stonework, although there is nothing in its character to indicate any absolute date (photo 12).

- 6.7 Little visible evidence remains of the milling arrangements in the building, where they are confined to the northern corner of the room, in which the sturdy arrangement of overhead imported softwood beams, supported on four vertical cast iron posts, forms the hurst, or frame which would have held the millstones and associated gearing and shafts (photo 13). The main longitudinal beam has bolection-moulded arrises (photo 14) and a rounded south-eastern end, the other end passing through the north-west gable wall. A number of cross-beams are fixed to this at the same level, running between it and the north-east wall (photo 15), and a smaller, second longitudinal beam; some of these are in very poor condition, but enough probably survives to allow a more detailed interpretation of the milling arrangements than is given here. Some of the cross-beams have been given support by re-used iron rails (photo 16), indicating repairs likely to be of the late 19th century or later. Given the character of the timber of which the hurst is made and the bolection moulding, combined with the form of the cast iron posts, it can be said with reasonable certainty that the hurst is of 19th century date. There is too much debris on the floor to establish whether or not anything remains at ground level in this area, but the shippon's feeding passage is otherwise flagged, and it does seem likely that this area was re-floored after the cessation of milling.
- 6.8 The conversion of the main building to a shippon in the early 20th century means that there is little else on the ground floor which is of special interest. A row of cattle stalls, divided into pairs by softwood divisions or boskins, now runs the length of the main room, with a stone flagged manure channel along the south-west side, and a stone kerb forming the edge of concrete standings, while a timber rail divides the shippon from the wide feeding passage along the north-east side of the room (photo 17). The level of the first floor over this shippon was made lower when this conversion took place, so that the floor beams are now around 0.6m lower than previously, and in the north corner, rest directly on the hurst (see below).
- 6.9 The south-eastern bay of the main building is separated from the shippon by a wall of three phases, directly under a first floor beam which, intriguingly, does not continue to the north-west side of the building. The earliest part of this wall is a square stone pier, perhaps put in to support the beam. Subsequently, this was used as the corner of a small office, created by the insertion of two thin walls, of brick and stone. The office has a stove pipe in the south-east gable and a ceiling of stone flags (photo 18). At a later date, probably in the early 20th century when

the shippon was created, a thicker stone wall, incorporating a doorway, was built on the same alignment below the first floor beam.

- 6.10 The first floor was no doubt used as a hay loft once milling ceased, and is on three slightly different levels; it is now in very poor condition and no safe access is possible beyond the Jacob's ladder. The south-east bay remains at its original level, some 0.6m above the majority, and the blocked sockets for the other beams are clearly visible in the long walls; these four beams were dropped so as to allow the hurst to support the floor, whereas previously they were independent of it (photos 19, 20). In contrast to the hurst and roof, the floor beams are of oak and as they do not show signs of having been used in a different context previously, they may have been re-deployed from the 18th century mill's predecessor, when it was rebuilt.
- 6.11 The three roof trusses are of imported softwood and king post form with bolts, and evidently replaced an earlier roof structure, as disturbed masonry is visible around the tie-beam ends. They are not of special interest (photo 21). They carry a stone slate roof with stone ridge, in which are the remains of roof lights.

Wheel-house

- 6.12 The long narrow wheel-house appears to have been added to the north-east side of the mill, at the same time as, or after, that building was raised to its present height; it is therefore likely to be of 19th century date (photo 22). It has good squared gritstone quoins but the main walling is of more random rubble, although much of the exterior of the building is presently hidden by trees. It is shorter than the main building at both ends, but has been extended to the south-east. As well as the different masonry styles, butt joints indicate that it is later than the main structure.
- 6.13 The 1842 tithe map suggests that the wheelhouse was then shorter than at present and has been extended to the north-west since, but no evidence for this was observed in the building.
- 6.14 Openings in the outer walls of the wheel-house include a window and blocked doorway in the north-east side, the latter on the line of the axle, but there is no readily visible evidence of the former adjoining building which is shown on the maps of 1889 and 1907. The north-west end of the wheel-house adjoins the banking of the former dam, but there is no indication of the former sluice or launder which would have fed the wheel (photo 23).
- 6.15 The wheel-house also has a doorway in its south-east end, now within the later addition, and with its threshold disturbed; the tail race would have run through below this opening before it was filled in (photo 24). The doorway's lintel is very

similar to the slotted stone used in the doorway in the front elevation, suggesting re-use of materials from an earlier structure, and many of the stones in its jambs are marked with the letter "I", probably the mark of the mason who cut them. The wheel-pit is also filled in but a step in the north-east side close to present ground level is no doubt its edge (photo 25) and a large stone block with at least two embedded fastening bolts (its purpose unclear), marks its north-west end (photo 26). Over this end of the wheel-house is a large stone block and a number of timber beams (the latter in poor condition), which appear to have been used to stabilise the structure (photo 27). There is no clear indication of the position of the head race or any sluice in the end wall, but the relative positions of the wheel and dam suggest the wheel was breast or undershot. A more thorough investigation of this area, once cleared of materials and with good lighting, would no doubt yield additional information.

North-west store

- 6.16 The small addition at the north-west end of the range is two bays long and two storeys high, although nothing remains of the upper floor. The masonry is distinct from the main building so it is clearly later, but the historic maps do not allow an accurate date for its construction other than to indicate that it was present by 1842. The present wide doorway with steel lintel has been inserted and it is likely that there was only a pedestrian doorway here originally. Two small windows light the first floor and there are blocked openings in the north-west and north-east elevations at that level, which now are close to ground level because of the height of the adjacent dam (photos 28 & 29). The interior is unremarkable except for the pegged king post truss, at least partly of oak, and probably 18th century (photo 30). This small building is likely to have been a store associated with the mill, perhaps also used as an office, stable, or for some ancillary processing function.

South-east store

- 6.17 An addition has also been made in the angle between the wheel-house and the main building, its position meaning that the tail-race must have run through a culvert beneath it (photos 31 & 32). It is shown on the 1842 map. It is of two storeys and seems to have been a store or workshop, with an upper floor accessible through a trap door opening. Its outer door remains in place (photo 33) and is of 18th or early 19th century date, which is the only significant fixture apart from the surviving window frames.

The surrounding site

- 6.18 Clearly the mill was formerly part of a wider site, in which water management features (ponds and sluices etc) were crucial components, but these appear to

survive only as earthworks or buried remains. The present proposed development site is confined to the building footprint itself and the small forecourts to the south-east and south-west, which are vegetated but may have been surfaced originally. For the most part these are not thought to contain significant remains, although a very short length of culvert may survive between the building and the road, and a piece of stone with a slot in its side is used as part of a stile at the west corner of the building (photo 34). The trough against the boundary wall is also a feature of interest.

Summary

- 6.19 There is a strong suggestion that the mill has earlier origins than the present 18th century and later buildings would suggest, but the surviving, fragmentary milling arrangements are of 19th century date. Despite the loss of most of the internal fixtures, including the waterwheel and much else, the shell of the building survives largely unaltered by subsequent use and disuse and contains complex and at present partly obscured evidence for the history and development of the mill, as well as the manner in which it functioned.

7 Archaeological potential of the site

- 7.1 The above appraisal of the former corn mill site demonstrates that in the proposed development area there is significant archaeological potential, although this is almost entirely confined to the building itself. The mill building appears to be principally of 18th century date although there are indications of an earlier building (this evidence arising from the presence of wider footings of the wall between the mill and wheel-pit), and was extended on three occasions by the additions of the stores and wheel-house. Its conversion to farming use means however that much of the evidence relating to the milling function has been lost.
- 7.2 Although a more detailed study of the building in general would result in a better understanding of its history and development, there are two localised areas within it which are particularly significant: the wheel-pit and wheel-house, and the hurst. Investigation and analysis of these features have the potential to provide a more complete picture of the functioning of the waterwheel, its relationship to the head race and tail race, and the milling arrangement itself. Investigation of the wheel-pit could take place with or without intrusive work, ie. whether or not any excavation of material takes place within it as part of the development.

8 Potential impact of the proposed development

- 8.1 The proposed conversion of the mill to a dwelling and workspace offers a realistic possibility to ensure the survival of this vulnerable historic building,

which has been disused for many years, and the condition of which continues to deteriorate. The present scheme, while generally respecting the historic fabric, does include a number of interventions which are undesirable as they would have a detrimental effect on key parts of the structure, and it is recommended that a small number of amendments are made to the design. These are detailed below, with reference to the drawings by the architect John Wharton, on his sheet 2138.2B. Figure 13 in this report also identifies those proposals which are thought to have the most detrimental impact.

Front elevation (“West”)

- 8.2 No new openings are proposed for the south-west elevation and only minor alterations to joinery. Minimal impact on the historic fabric.

Rear elevation (“East”)

- 8.3 It is proposed to remove the roof over the north-west end of the wheel-house, and lower the outer wall, to create a small open garden in the wheel-pit, presumably as a means of allowing light into the rear elevation of the main building via an associated new window. This would detract from the integrity of the wheel-house structure, possibly also leading to the loss of significant fabric relating to the water supply, and is undesirable. The other, minor proposals for this elevation are not considered to be detrimental.

South-east gable (“South”)

- 8.4 No new openings are proposed and only minor alterations to joinery, including a new part-glazed screen for the arched opening. It is recommended that the existing doors to this entrance be repaired and retained, rather than replaced (as is proposed). The same applies to the door to the adjacent store, which is proposed for housing bins.

North-west gable (“North”)

- 8.5 The only alteration proposed is the removal of part of the wheel-house roof, noted, and objected to, above.

North-east wall, between mill and wheel-house (Inset “East”)

- 8.6 A total of three new openings are proposed within this wall, in addition to the enlargement of the existing central ground floor doorway. The most significant of these is that at the north-west end, which would allow light into the building via the open garden, but which would involve the removal of some of what may be the earliest fabric in the mill, perhaps of medieval date. Because of the presence

of this masonry, the new window in the living room is undesirable. The other two openings would give lower and upper access to the staircase proposed for the south-east end of the wheel-pit. Although essentially undesirable, they are in an archaeologically less sensitive area and therefore considered an acceptable and necessary intervention.

- 8.7 The present instability of part of this wall would also require remedial work. The preferred option would be to tie the existing fabric, rather than rebuild it.

Ground floor plan

- 8.8 One other aspect which is undesirable from an archaeological point of view is the arrangement at the south-east end of the mill, where an entrance lobby, flanked by WC and utility room, is proposed. This would involve the insertion of a new central doorway, the removal of the existing wall enclosing the present office, and the blocking of the present doorway into the mill. It would be preferable if this existing arrangement could be retained, for example by using the present office as a utility room, and accessing the WC via the existing doorway from the proposed kitchen.
- 8.9 The retention of the hurst which is noted on the plan is welcomed, although the poor condition of some of its members does mean that repair or removal of elements is inevitable. It would also be desirable to retain the Jacob's ladder within the building if an appropriate function and location for it can be devised.

First floor plan

- 8.10 No objections are made, other than those previously made, relating to the wheel-house.

Summary

- 8.11 The main area of concern regarding the current proposals is the removal of part of the wheel-house roof and walls, and the partial excavation of the wheel-pit. If possible an alternative should be sought which would allow the integrity of this element of the building to be retained, and one option might be to glaze part of its roof, to provide a means of lighting. It would also be preferable to avoid disturbance of the wheel-pit fill as much as possible, by laying a new floor over the existing surface, rather than excavating in order to accommodate a small, north-facing garden. The proposed new window between this area and the living room is also undesirable.

9 Recommended mitigation strategies

- 9.1 If listed building consent is granted for the proposed scheme it is recommended that a condition be attached, requiring an appropriate level of archaeological recording. The scope of this recording would depend on the exact nature of the approved design but should include as a minimum a programme of building recording and analysis, to be carried out when better access to the building is possible (ie. when the present debris, and adjacent vegetation, has been removed). This should include the production of accurate measured drawings (including details of the hurst), photography and a written account, in line with national standards.
- 9.2 In the event that excavation within the wheel-pit is to take place, a watching brief in that area would be appropriate to record any features or finds, such as the remains of a sluice, the water-wheel or associated gearing or shafting. It is not considered that a watching brief would be appropriate elsewhere in the building, or for the proposed works to the forecourt area..

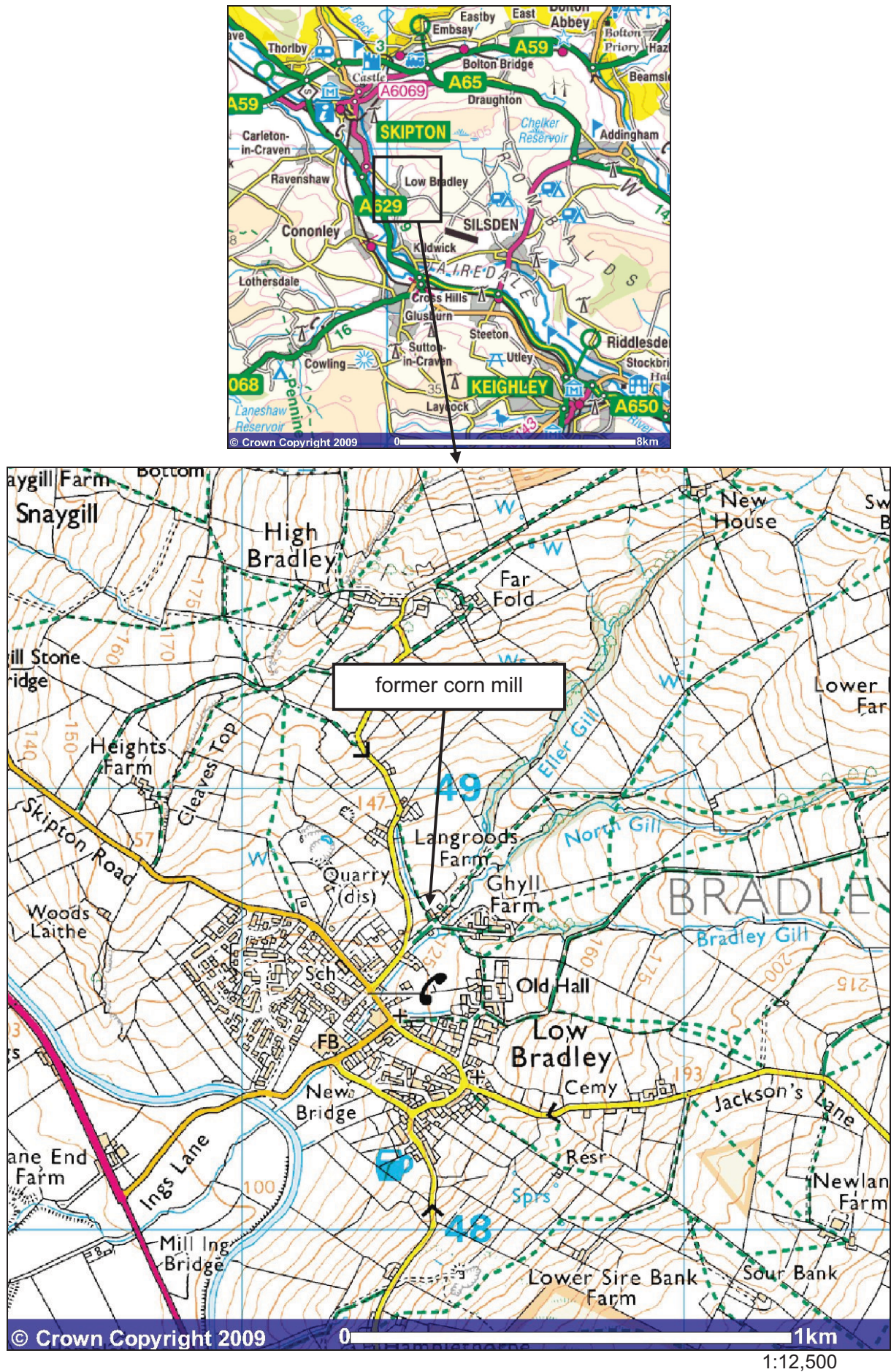


Figure 1: Location maps

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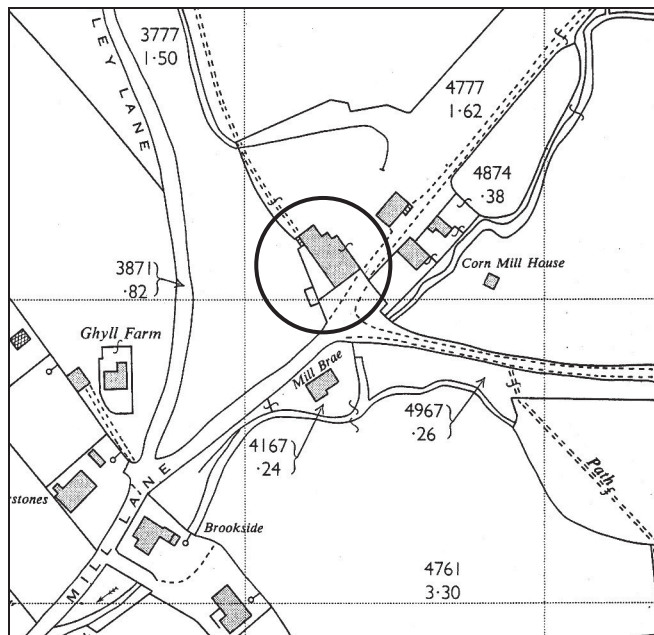


Figure 2: Detailed location map (1:2500)

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Map sheet: SE0048/0148, published 1965

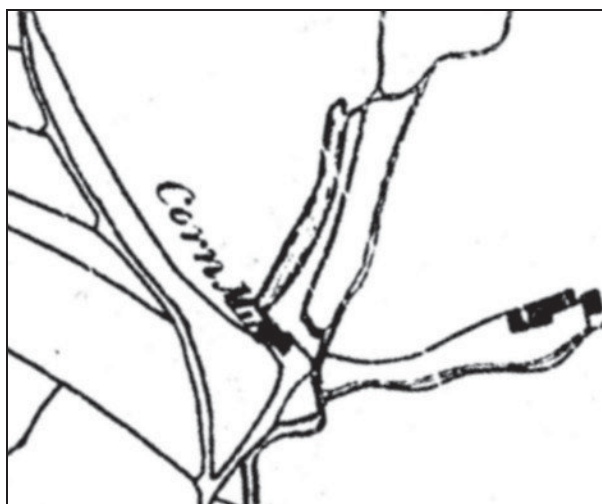


Figure 3: Extract from the 1791 enclosure map of Bradley (NYCRO MIC 604)
Shows a rectangular building with long pond running to the north



Figure 4: Extract from the 1842 tithe map of Bradleys Both, by Sam Swire (NYCRO MIC 1772/461-467)
Shows a more irregular building, with the head race apparently leading to a shorter wheel-house, and two separate ponds



Figure 5: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 6" to the mile map, surveyed 1850, published 1854
(Yorkshire, sheet 168) (here enlarged)
Shows essentially the same arrangement, but in less detail than the tithe map

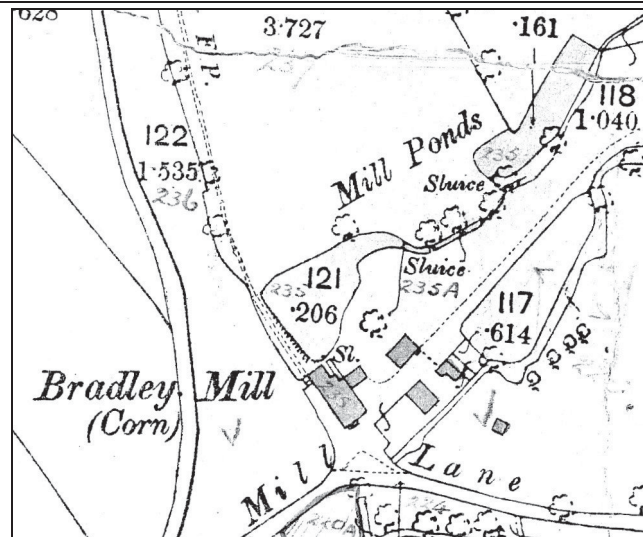


Figure 6: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 1st edition 1:2500 map, surveyed 1889, published 1891 (Yorkshire, sheet 168.13)

Shows a slightly shorter head race and longer wheel-house, possibly attributable to the larger scale. Also note the building on the north-east side which is no longer extant.

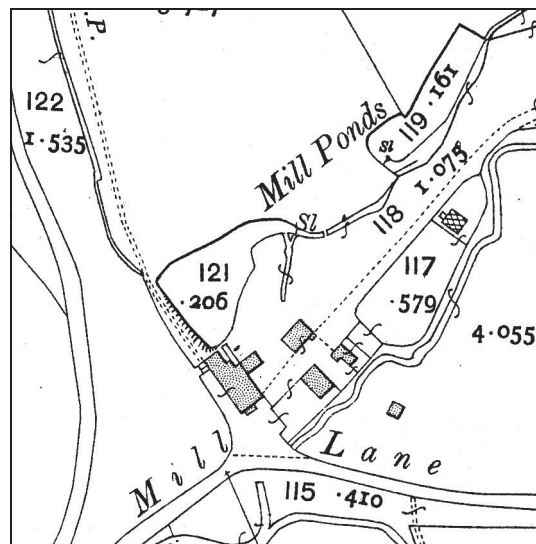


Figure 7: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, revised 1907, published 1909 (Yorkshire, sheet 168.13)

The map shows no significant changes except the absence of a name for the building, possibly suggesting it had fallen out of use.

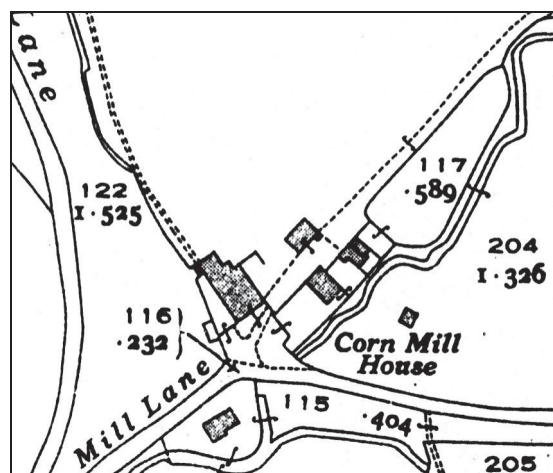


Figure 8: Extract from the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map, revised and published 1938 (Yorkshire, sheet 168.13)

By this date the ponds and head race were no longer present and the north-east building demolished. The mill was evidently no longer in use at this time.