

FOUNTAINS FACT SHEET



**National
Trust**

FOUNTAINS ABBEY MILL

Fountains Abbey Mill is the only 12th century Cistercian cornmill in Britain and one of a few surviving in Europe. It was built originally as a huge monastic watermill and granary, but in its time has also been a sawmill, a stone masons' workshop and even a generating station for electricity.

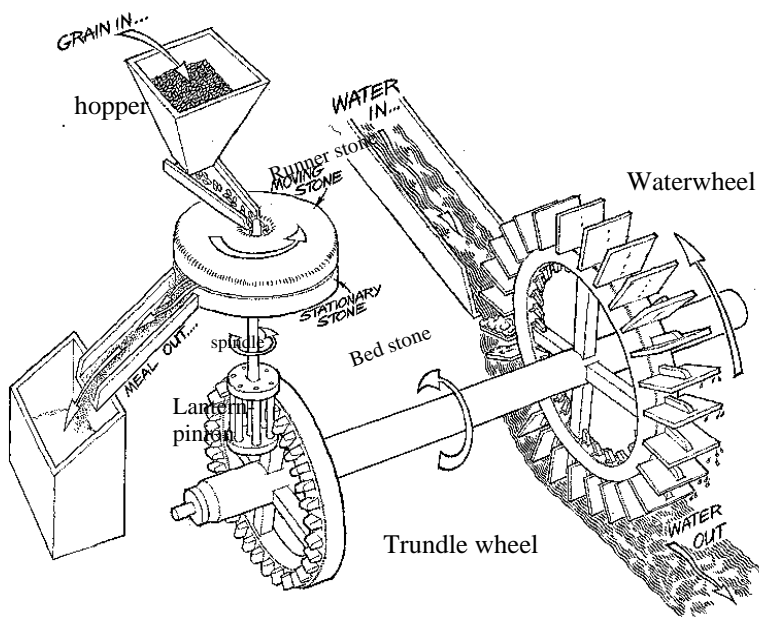
The building, which has been in continuous use for over 850 years, measures 110 feet in length and has three storeys. Throughout its existence the mill has remained in the same ownership as Fountains Abbey. It was spared at the Dissolution of the abbey in 1539 because it was able to generate an income for the estate, of £3 per year!

A Monastic Flour Mill

The medieval mill would have ground wheat, oats and barley to feed the whole abbey community - the Abbot, monks, lay-brothers, servants, visitors and the needy. The monks' diet was simple but wholesome with bread, with vegetable broth, being the basis of every meal.

In the middle of the building two parallel undershot wheels turned, each powering a pair of grindstones. The grain was stored above in huge granary spaces.

The mill continued to grind corn until 1927: however no original corn-milling machinery survives today. This diagram shows how the medieval mill machinery would have worked.



Drawing courtesy of Martin Watts

A Saw Mill

In the 1840s an external wheelhouse was built to house a new waterwheel. This provided power for the sawmill. Whilst corn milling continued at one end of the building, the other was used as a sawmill from the 1840s until the 1930s. The waterwheel which powered the saws still exists today. It measures 17 feet in diameter. It powered both a circular and reciprocating saw. Trees from the estate were sawn into planks and timbers for new buildings, repairs, fence posts and rails. There are few records of the work done here, but some people can remember watching as tree trunks, loaded onto trolleys, were fed into the mill on rails.

Electricity Generating Station

The first water turbine was installed before 1901.

It was used to power cooling equipment when part of the site was being used as a dairy.

The second, larger generator was put in in 1928 to provide electric lighting for nearby Fountains Hall. When the water level dropped or leaves slowed down the flow, there was less power, so lighting was rather unreliable!

The turbine still exists and has been restored to help power the display lighting in the mill today.

It has had many other uses:

After saw milling ceased the building continued to be used in a number of ways:

- The mill was used as a dairy operation in the early part of the 20th century.
- During the Second World War it housed refugees.

- In 1953 the top floor of the building was used to celebrate the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II.
- After the war the mill was used for storage and in 1966 the stone masons moved in and used it as a stone masons' workshop called a bankers shop.

The Restoration

A major conservation project, jointly funded by the National Trust and English Heritage, began in 1993. The National Trust owns and manages the Mill whilst English Heritage, as guardian, repairs and maintains the fabric of the building.

The walls were repointed, decaying wooden lintels were replaced and steel ties were inserted to stabilise the leaning wall at the north end. The millpond was cleared out, a new generator was installed and the old turbine restored so electricity can be generated again. The 19th century waterwheel was restored on site.

The mill today is an exciting hands-on museum and interactive centre, which looks at milling, stonemasonry, and the part the mill has played in the life of the estate over the centuries.



The Mill during restoration work.

