

5. The Mills of Mathernock

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Background

Interest in mill sites on the Gryfe Water in Kilmacolm Parish arose when the Royal Commission asked for volunteers to take part in the 'Scotland's Rural Past' project. The farm at High Mathernock outside Kilmacolm seemed to have potential for research and survey, not least because the farmer was known to the authors.

Mathernock farm goes back to at least the mid sixteenth century and the name is thought to be possibly Celtic (Murray, 1898).

History

Pont and Roy's surveys have charted Mathernock in various forms, including a reference to a waulk mill. Pont's survey notes Macharnoch, Macharnay and a waulk mill. According to the Records of the Parliaments of 1672, Mathernock with its waulk and corn mills was transferred in 1670 to Sir Patrick Maxwell of Newark. In 1695 the Poll Tax records a miller living at Mathernock and the eighteenth century parish records show a 'dyster in waukmill', and a miller and a weaver working at Mathernock. By the eighteenth century, Semple's History of Renfrewshire, mentions a waulk mill and an 'ancient' corn mill.

The Site

The first edition Ordnance Survey map indicates, a probable diversion of the river for milling purposes (NS 325 708). This was sought along the water course south east of Mathernock Bridge. After some scrabbling about in the thicket, evidence was found of water management and some wall footings (Figure 11).

This sketch of the mill site was made with some difficulty because of the rough and overgrown nature of the ground which is much disturbed by cattle. A line of pylons crossing the site interferes with GPS readings.

The drawing shows the water course for the waulk mill, the position of some walls and possible ponds and a very old patch of sloes. It is possible that these may be a remnant of the process, as it is understood that the leaves of sloes were used in the dyeing process.

Corn Mill

In addition to the waulk mill, local folk memory suggests that the corn mill, indicated in the documentary sources, was further upstream from the bridge. Unfortunately the river was straightened in the nineteenth century as part of improvement drainage. Little remains, apart from a corner of a possible building right on the edge of the water. This seems to agree with the local tradition and could be the remains of the corn mill mentioned by Semple.

Threshing Mill

A third more modern mill was added nearby, at Mathernock farm in the nineteenth century. The present farm was rebuilt on the present site in the 1830s and 40s. Initially its threshing mill was powered by a horse gin. It then changed to water power, collected from a pond fed by a larger reservoir. In more recent times the mill was driven by an internal combustion engine.

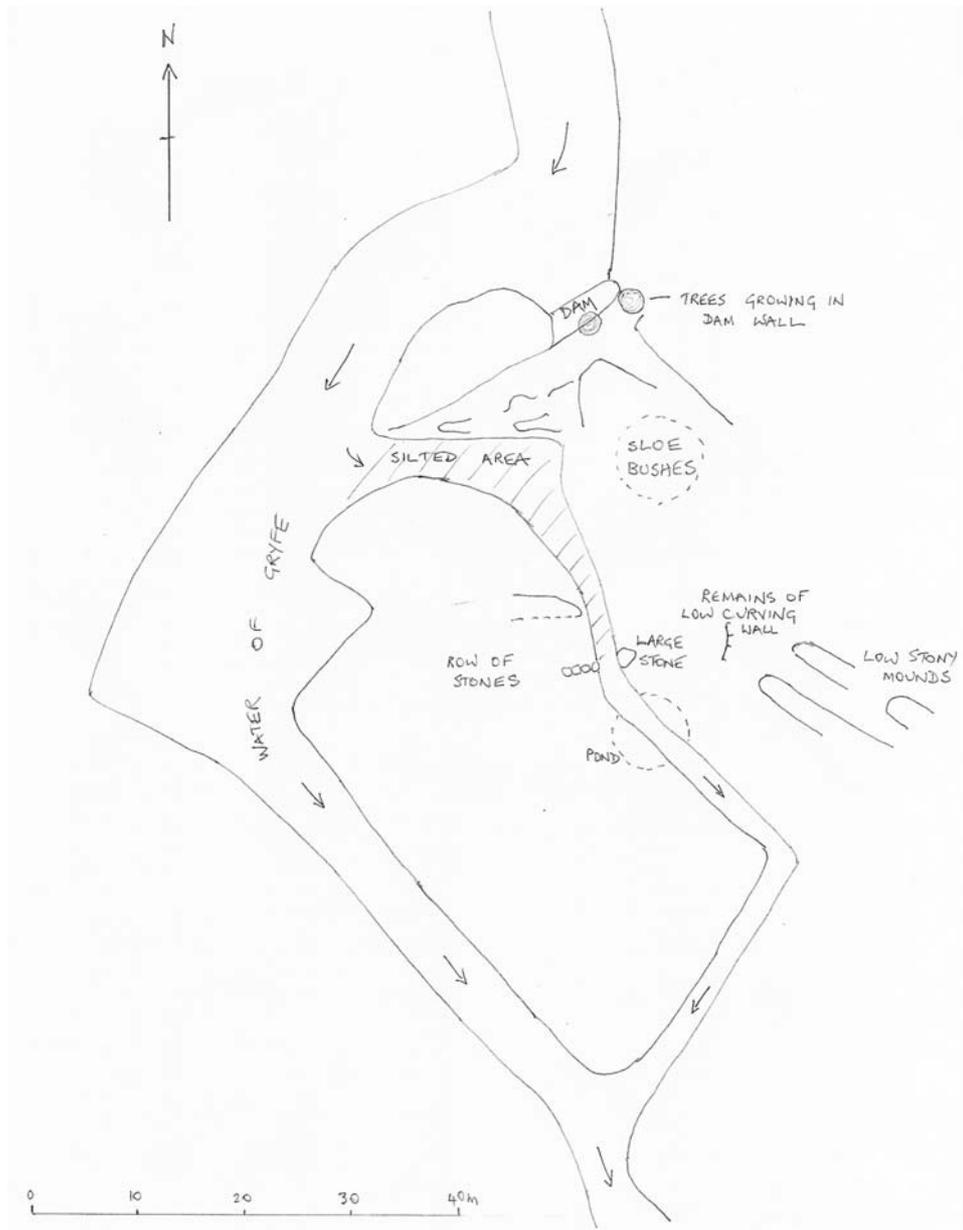


Figure 11: Sketch Plan of Matherdock Waulk Mill site

Some remnants of milling remain in the mainly unaltered steading, the nineteenth century reservoir, and the original lade, which has become the farm sewer.

Research on this site is ongoing and we hope to find more to add to the already rich fund of knowledge about Renfrewshire mills.

References

- Semple, W., *The History of the Shire of Renfrew* (Alexander Weir, 1782).
- Murray, J., *Kilmacollm, A Parish History* (Alexander Gardner, 1898).
- Records of the Parliaments of Scotland (1672).
- Pont and Roy maps (National Library of Scotland).
- Poll Tax Record for Renfrewshire (1695).
- Kilmacollm Old Parish Records.