

## CHADDESSEN WATERMILL NO.3 – BEAUMONT ACRE

Some time ago in the National Archives I came across a document dated 1293 in Medieval Latin sent from William le Herbejur of Chaddesden to King Edward I (Hammer of the Scots) requesting permission to take water from the River Derwent to his mill in Chaddesden, and to build a dam across the river.

It took a long time before I got around to having the document (reference C 143/19/20) translated by Dr Matt Tompkins of Leicester University's 'Mapping the Medieval Countryside Project', but this was the result, which makes fascinating reading:

**The writ:** *Edward, by the grace of God king of England, lord of Ireland and duke of Aquitaine, to the sheriff of Derby, greetings. We command you to inquire diligently by the oaths of honest and lawful men of your county by whom the truth of the matter may be best known whether or not it would be to our or anyone else's damage or prejudice if we grant to our beloved and faithful William le Herbejur of Chaddesden that he might make a certain ditch 40 perches in length and two perches in width of the land in his own ground at Chaddesden from the river of Derwent to his mill in the same township, and a certain weir of stone and wood across the river to retain in part the water there and to direct a certain flow of the same water through the ditch to his aforesaid mill, and that he might hold the ditch and weir so made to him and his heirs forever. And if it be to our or anyone else's damage or prejudice, then to what damage and what prejudice of us or others, and of whom and how and in what manner. And you should send the inquisition thereof clearly and plainly made to us without delay under your seal and the seals of those by whom it shall be made, together with this writ. As witness myself at Westminster, 9 November, in the 21st year of our reign [1293].*

*By petition of Council.\**

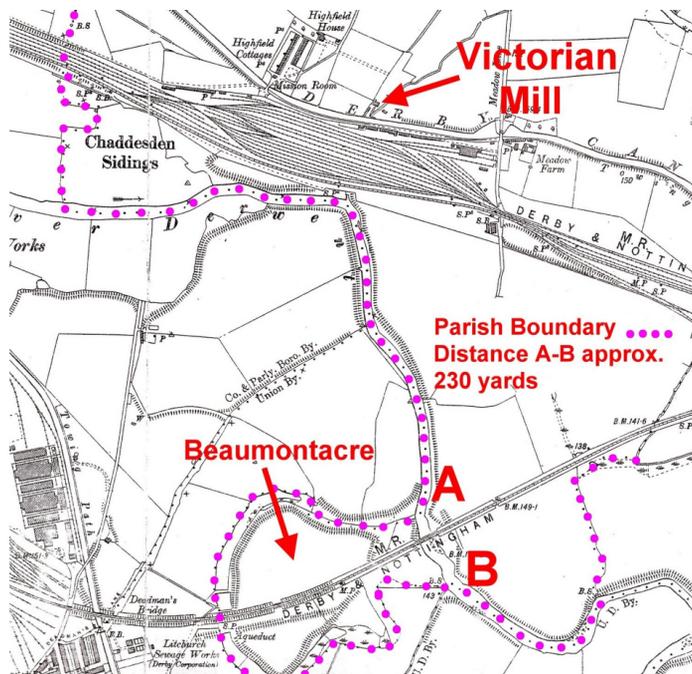
\* This endorsement records the fact that the writ was issued pursuant to an order from the king's Council in response to a petition, probably submitted to Parliament, requesting that a wrong be remedied (see G. Dodd, *Justice and Grace: Private Petitioning and the English Parliament in the Late Middle Ages*, Oxford, 2007, ch 3.2).

**The inquisition:** *An inquisition made before Philip de Paunton, sheriff of Derby, on Wednesday next after the feast of St Valentine in the 22nd year of the reign of king Edward [17 Feb. 1294], by the oaths of Martin de Wermundesworth, Herbert de Riseleye, Richard de Morle, William Pouger, Nicholas de Findern, Hugh de Haregreue, William de Stanleie, Michael de Brydiston, Henry de Stone, Geoffrey de Sandiakre, Robert de Cerdoyl, and Hugh Pouger, jurors, into whether or not it would be to the damage or prejudice of the lord king or anyone else if the lord king should grant to William le Herbejur of Chaddesden that he might make a certain ditch 40 perches in length and two perches in width of the land in his own ground at Chaddesden from the river of Derwent to his mill in the same township, and a certain weir of stone and wood across the river to retain in part the water there and to direct a certain flow of the same water through the ditch to his aforesaid mill, and that he might hold the ditch and weir so made to him and his heirs forever. And if it be to damage or prejudice of the lord king or anyone else, then to what damage and what prejudice of the lord king or others, and of whom, and how and in what manner. Who say that the ditch is not to the lord king's damage or prejudice, but it is to the damage and prejudice of those who have common of pasture in the open time\*\* to the value of 2d. each year. And they say that the weir if it be made across the aforesaid river is not to the damage or prejudice of the lord king because the water of Trent is obstructed at Nottingham by the lord king's mill and the water of Derwent is obstructed at Wilne by the bishop of Chester and the same water is obstructed at Burgh [Borrowash] by the abbot of la Dale. And if the said water should be thus obstructed it is not to the damage or prejudice of the lord king, but it is to the damage and prejudice of the abbot of la Dale who has a fishery in the water of Derwent to the value of 2½d. each year. They do not find other damage or prejudice. And they say that if the aforesaid mill of Chaddesden is able to stand thus that it will be to the benefit and advantage of the whole country. And in witness of the premises the aforesaid jurors of the present inquisition have affixed their seals.*

\*\* The 'open time' refers to the season after the hay had been lifted from the river-side meadows, when they would be thrown open for grazing by the livestock of the whole community.

After a discussion with Matt and Peter Cholerton, we came to the conclusion that the mill discussed could not be the other mill known as Chaddesden Mill because it was too far from the river and they would never have got the water to flow uphill. Matt made the observation that Chaddesden Mill derived its water power from the stream which flowed down past Chaddesden village to the Derwent, and was located on the stream about 250 yards above the Derwent. The mill leat which the inquisition permitted ran from the Derwent to the mill and was 40 perches long (220 yards). A leat running from the Derwent straight uphill (slightly) to the 19th-century mill's location would have been useless, and so I think the 13th-century mill must have been right on the banks of the Derwent with its 220-yard leat running parallel to the Derwent, taking water from the river above the mill and bringing it downhill to the mill, then back to the river. Regarding the location of the medieval mill, the short length of its leat made Matt wonder whether, rather than running parallel to a straight-ish stretch of the Derwent (like a longbow and its bow-string), the leat might instead have crossed the neck of an ox-bow bend in the river. The modern maps don't show any such bend within Chaddesden parish/chapelry, but he noticed that the parish/chapelry includes an odd projection on the south side of the Derwent which might have been once the interior of a southwards-projecting ox-bow bend. Could the present course of the Derwent, straight across the projection's neck, be the course of the mill leat? The location involved was a piece of land immediately south of the railway bridge near the nature reserve near Pride Park, in Derby.

Peter Cholerton supplied the following information: 'The attached map of c.1890-ish shows the parish boundary down by the River Derwent. Notice how the boundary follows the course of the river and then veers off around a largish area of ground in Chaddesden parish called Beaumontacre. Until the (early) 18th century the river followed the more convoluted course around Beaumontacre, but eventually took the line of least resistance and cut across the neck of the ox-bow, leaving a small part of Chaddesden on the wrong side of the river. Most interestingly, the distance I have marked A - B on the map across the neck of the ox-bow measures approximately 230 yards or nearly 40 perches!'



**Part of an early Ordnance Survey map showing Beaumont Acre in relation to the Chaddesden parish boundary and the River Derwent. The 13th-century mill was probably situated between points A and B.**

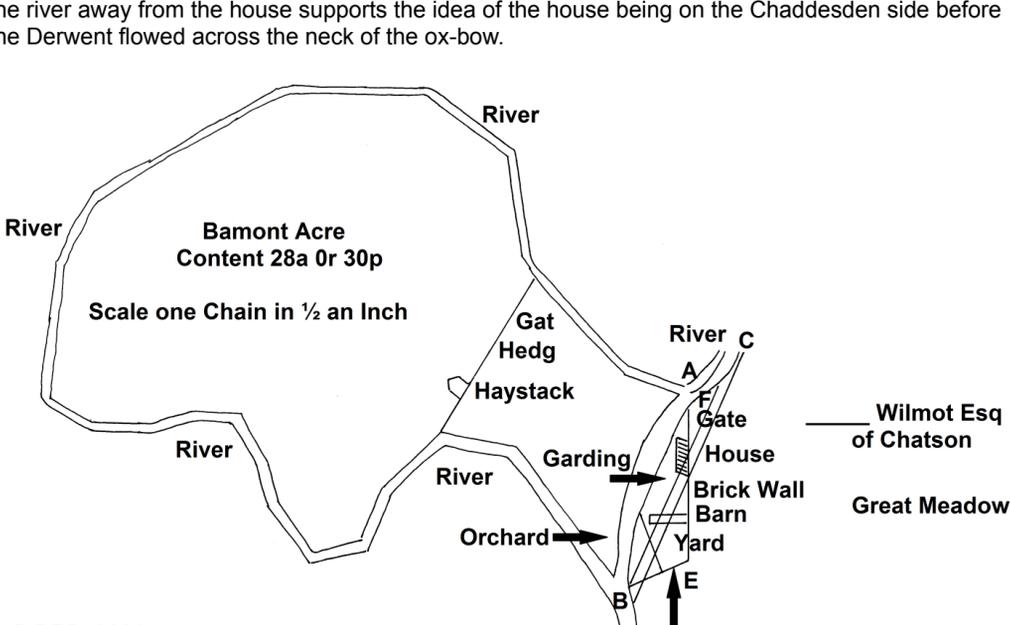
In the Derbyshire Record Office I subsequently came across another document (D3155/C/4853-4854) dated 1770 from Robert Garner, surveyor to Sir Robert Wilmot of Osmaston Hall, who owned the land at the time, which was the result of a survey of Beaumont Acre and shows the detail of a dam which could possibly be related to the mill leat referred to in the Herbejur document. This details a conversation about dams and making good some stonework which already existed in Beaumontacre.

The part of the document which is of interest reads (in plain English) 'I have sent you a survey of Beaumont Acre with this account of the Cut, if it was to be a cut – I thought Beaumont Acre had been more land but the man is a very good surveyor and he sees it is no more but if your honour has a mind to have it tried over again I will get someone else to give me a survey of it.

The water work of this side and a place (alongside) the rushpits in Beaumont Acre would take £150 in materials and workmanship to put it in repair. I think it would be the best thing that ever your honour could do to have it cut – there is a deal of stone belonging to the house which would be very good to make the sides of the new Cut and then it would be done for ever.

The navigators say the few inches of fall there is in going round is of no significance, for there is the same body of water below as there was before and it will not draw the water off any faster – then if it was to be cut there should be made a dam at the bottom of the nether field and let the back water come up and in time it would fill up the old current'.

Peter very kindly drew this copy of the survey which shows the area of brickwork involved between B and C on the plan. The house might also have been built on the site of a much earlier building - maybe the original mill? He also agreed with me that the orchard being situated on the other side of the river away from the house supports the idea of the house being on the Chaddesden side before the Derwent flowed across the neck of the ox-bow.



**Redrawn copy of the 1770 plan of Beaumont Acre showing key details. This version has been rotated so as to align it with the map reproduced above. The labels have also been rotated and replaced with printed text for clarity because the original is extremely difficult to read in places. The original spellings (e.g. 'Bamont' for Beaumont, 'hedg' for hedge, 'gat' for gate, 'garding' for garden, etc) have been retained.**

According to the Wilmot-Horton archives Beaumont Acre itself belonged to Christopher Beaumont of Gray's Inn in 1593 when he assigned land to Henry Beaumont along with the Rectory, Tythes and Tythe barn of Chaddesden for a term of 60 years. In 1758 William, Duke of Devonshire released land at Beaumontacre to Sir Robert Wilmot of Osmaston and Sir John Eardley Wilmot of Gray's Inn.

Now there's a thought. Beaumont Acre would have been an ideal situation for the Chaddesden Tithed Barn, close to a water mill and also the river for transport – QED the search goes on!

My thanks to the National Archives at Kew and the Derbyshire Record Office for supplying copies of the relevant documents, and to Matthew Tompkins and Peter Cholerton for their valuable input.

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