



AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2024



Northern Lights over the Mill – courtesy Mark Taylor – thank you!

Hello and a very warm welcome to our latest newsletter...

I can imagine it must feel at times as though nothing is going on regarding the future of the Belper Mills. Like you, every time I drive by, I see first-hand the continued degradation of the building, windows falling out and tree life taking hold in the roof.

However, the summary of a crucial report, undertaken by Amion Consulting, has now been published. It throws fresh light on the current plans and thoughts on a way forward.

In February 2023 Derbyshire County Council, on behalf of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site (DVMWHS) Partnership, commissioned Amion Consulting to develop, and examine, alternative uses for the North and East Mills site in Belper. This project also considered the funding that would be needed to secure its long-term future as a key site at the heart of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site. The study was funded through a grant from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, with match funding from Historic England, Derbyshire County Council and the DVMWHS Partnership.

We have a section in this newsletter which gives some details of the key considerations and findings, and a link to more information, which I'd urge you to read.

Needless to say, there's still a long way to go and much now rests on the outcome of the pending planning application currently being considered by Amber Valley Borough Council. This sort of detailed report is all part of a process towards finding a solution and so I remain optimistic that despite the state of the building, we are getting closer to a time when our Belper Mills are brought back to life.

Hope you enjoy the newsletter and please do encourage your family and friends to sign up.

Roger Moors, Chair – OBM

PS...A date for your diary. Our AGM will be incorporated into our OBM WINTER CONFERENCE event, taking place on Sunday 8th December at The Nailers conference centre. Watch out for more details in the coming weeks.

Header image Northern Lights and the Mill..

Thanks to Mark Taylor for permission to publish his photo capturing the mill, during a rare appearance from the Northern Lights (aurora borealis) in May, due to one of the strongest geomagnetic storms for years hitting Earth. A rare solar storm warning was issued by the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration which stated that there was an increased chance of seeing the lights in more areas.

Northern Lights happen as a result of charged particles from the sun hitting gases in the Earth's atmosphere and mainly consist of colours such as pink, green and scarlet and appear as bright, swirling curtains of light.

The situation right now –NEW information published...

OBM is recognised as the means of representing the public voice.

As mentioned previously, OBM is part of the steering group currently working on an alternative sustainable, viable and costed plan.

We promised to continue to keep you updated, so here is the latest from the recently published consultant's report.

The Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site (DVMWHS) Partnership is concerned about the deteriorating condition of the highly significant historic buildings on the North and East Mills site.

The overarching aim is to:

Create a deliverable, sustainable and appropriate long-term future for the Belper Mills to:

- Protect the important buildings, setting of the mills and World Heritage Site status
- Be financially viable to restore and operate sustainably into the future
- Meet the needs of local communities as well as regional and national needs.

The report commissioned by DVMWHS has highlighted possible structures to take forward for the Belper Mills site. Key considerations are:

- It is unlikely that any re-purposing option for the North and East Mills buildings is likely to be delivered by the private sector alone
- The DVMWHS Partnership has concerns over the appropriateness of the planning and listed building consent applications from the owner currently being considered by Amber Valley Borough Council. It believes these proposals will not be viable without significant public funding. This is backed up by the findings of the study.
- The consultants have suggested that, due to the level of conservation deficit, the best option is for a partnership between the public sector, or a not-for-profit organisation, working with one or more private sector partners. A future partnership or joint venture, which could include the current owner, should be explored once a decision has been reached on the current planning and listed building application.

The public were invited to comment on five original scenarios which have been refined to three;

Residential, Multi-generational Living/Working & Commercial/Mixed Use (which includes a hotel element)

To read the full details of the options for possible development in the summary (August 2024), following the public consultation at the end of last year, please visit www.derwentvalleymills.org/belper-mills-future/

We will continue to keep you updated with any further news.

Planning application latest

Planning permission remains undetermined, with no firm decision date in place. Records show an amendment (10/7/23) to the current application, with the original proposals now being the plans under consideration.

<https://www.ambervalley.gov.uk/planning/development-management/view-a-planning-application/>

Mills around the world...

Sunny Bank was originally built in 1829 by a group of local clothiers who bought the land and built it as a woollen scribbling and fulling mill known as The Farsley Club Mill.

John Gaunt was appointed as one of the trustees. In 1882 Edwin Woodhouse became the outright owner, expanded the mills and commenced worsted spinning and weaving.

In 1912 it passed onto Ives and Co and then in 1917 to William C. Gaunt (see photo).

Gaunt was a wool tycoon who rapidly expanded his empire during the Great War and owned mills throughout the world.



During the Great Depression he lost the mill to Inland Revenue but after his death during the Second World War his son was able to regain control. The following two decades saw the mill prosper and gain its reputation as one of the finest cloth producers in the world, and the 1970s saw it reinvesting in weaving. Sadly, it was another war that was to lead to its demise, the Gulf War which affected trade, and it never recovered. Production ceased in 2008 after contributing to the world of textiles for 180 years.



Was this the end for Sunny Bank Mills? Far from it! This was just the start of an exciting new chapter for the mills that are still owned by the Gaunt family, cousins John and William who are the sixth generation of the family to be involved with the textile mills. An inspirational pair, they set about repurposing the mills and what a vision they have created. It is now a vibrant hub for business, arts, culture and heritage providing space for more than 70 businesses and home to a combined workforce of around 350 people.

Exhibition space, gallery, heritage centre and museum, leisure facilities, creative courses and workshops using restored working looms all feature in what they have to offer. The photo features William Gaunt at one of the 10 working looms.

The revitalisation has been a multi-million pound project which started in 2010 and was cemented with a masterplan agreed with Leeds City Council in 2015. It continues to add new spaces to its offering with its impressive masterplan (see image) managing buildings and woodland over a 10 acre site. It is well worth taking a look at their website at sunnybankmills.co.uk and it provides hope that such a vision could be seen at Belper Mills.



Research and image sources:

<https://sunnybankmills.co.uk>

<https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/heritage-and-retro/heritage/the-remarkable-family-story-behind-this-landmark-yorkshire-mill-that-is-still-weaving-a-yarn-2998531>

<https://www.thebusinessdesk.com/yorkshire/news/2016386-monday-interview-john-william-gaunt-owners-sunny-bank-mills>

Mill Memories...

Whenever we start chatting to people, more often than not, there's a story!

The Mills are so much more than buildings, architecture, history, heritage and currently, challenges. They are about local people. Generations of families who worked there or are connected in some way. We'd love to hear your stories and receive any photos (images of the interior working mill are particularly of interest), so that we can create an archive of Mill Memories before the stories are lost forever. If possible, we will try to feature some of them in future newsletters, so do let us know yours! Please contact us at ourbelpermills@gmail.co.uk and we'll get back to you.

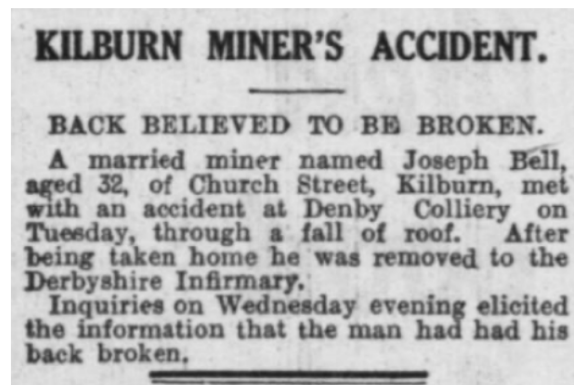
Mary Bell

Memories shared by Madeline Ward in conversation with Rachel Hodgkinson

Madeline (aka Maddy) Ward first shared a bit about her mother, Mary Bell, in our Facebook group. We loved hearing about her story and asked Madeline if we could feature her in our newsletter. She kindly agreed and this article is a compilation of Madeline's memories of her along with some added research about Mary's family life.

Mary was born on 2nd December 1925. Her parents, Joseph and Harriet (nee Burgoyne), both came from coal mining families working at Denby Colliery. Joseph's family lived on Church Street in Kilburn and he and Harriet continued to live there when they married in 1918.

When Mary was three years old her father was injured at the mine when part of the roof collapsed on top of him, breaking his back. He spent the next four years at home unable to move and taking increasingly higher doses of morphine to ease his pain. He died in 1933 leaving Harriet, then 29, with three young children – Mary and her older siblings Leslie and Annie. Mary was just seven years old. Two years later Harriet married Joseph's older brother Abraham.



Mary probably went to work at Belper Mill straight after leaving school in 1938 aged 13 and worked there until the very early 1950s when Madeline was born.



Madeline believes she worked on either the fifth or sixth floor of East Mill and was always told that she was a “clicker” although some documents she indicate that Mary was employed as a “clearer-winder” and very experienced. The photo left shows her at work.

She enjoyed what she did and there was great camaraderie within the workforce. The Mill Girls were a lively bunch. She met Edith (Edie) Bradshaw from Clay Cross whilst working at the mill and they became lifelong friends. In 1948 Edie married Mary's brother, Leslie. In 1949 Mary married Edie's brother Ernest, Madeline's dad.

Mary's mother and step-father ran a “General Store” from a small shed on Horsley Road in Kilburn. In 1945 Abraham became seriously ill and it naturally fell to the family to give support. However, Mary's brother was serving in India in the RAF and her sister had recently given birth so neither could be called upon for help. Her half-sister Margaret (Abraham's daughter) was only eleven and still at school. An application was made for Mary, now aged 19, to have time away from work to help in the shop and support the family. Unfortunately, during wartime there was little time for sentimentality, especially for Essential Work and the request was refused on 9th June 1945. Mary was seen as an experienced and valued worker and unable to be spared. Sadly, Abraham died less than two weeks after the refusal, on 22nd June 1945.

Name and Address of Employer (i.e. at the time application was made.)
THE ENGLISH SEWING COTTON COMPANY, LIMITED, Belper, Derbyshire.

1. Decision of National Service Officer.
 Refused permission to leave the employ of Messrs. English Sewing Cotton Company, Belper, Derbyshire.

2. Grounds of Application for ^{*Permission to *Leave/Discharge}
~~*Withdrawal of Direction //~~
 Father too ill to carry on business.

3. *Employer's/Worker's observations on the application.
 We are exceedingly anxious to retain the services of Miss Bell as we have only this week lost one of our most experienced Clearer-Winders. As you can see from the period of her employment Miss Bell too is an experienced Clearer-Winder. We suggest that this application requires investigation as no medical certificate has been received to substantiate Miss Bell's statement and we were not previously aware of any illness in the family.

4. Grounds of Appeal.
 Mother requires me to help her with business as father is too ill to carry on.

5. National Service Officer's Statement.
 It is understood the business is a small General Stores and that the Mother's age is 45 years. In the circumstances it is thought the business does not warrant the additional help especially as applicant is a skilled Cotton Operative and very efficient.

Madeline shared a couple of photos of her mum's work colleagues and believes the young woman on the left may have been called Iris and the older woman fondly known as "Auntie" Nancy. Does anyone recognise them?



All images have been used with Madeline's kind permission with the exception of the newspaper article taken from The Belper News dated 16th August 1929 (source: findmypast.co.uk).

WE NEED YOU!!! We are always looking for stories and connections to the mills that we can feature in our newsletter. Please contact us at ourbelpermills@gmail.com

Mill Support!



July saw the men's England football team reach the Euro 24 final against Spain. Despite some moments of hope, the superior Spanish performance resulted in a late goal which meant that the years of hurt continue for our men's side. (Thank goodness for the Lionesses!) Following some serious criticism from fans, pundits and football legends along the way, the support rallied for the final and a very enthusiastic crowd cheered the team on in a magnificent Berlin stadium. A DE56 flag was on show somewhere in the midst, but Belper had its own way of showing support and hope for a good result....

Many thanks to the wonderful Jim Bell for capturing this and for his kind permission to share.

We love to feature great images of the mill, so please do get in touch if you have any interesting images to share! You can email us at ourbelpermills@gmail.com

Competition winner!



Congratulations to Judith Grey for correctly answering our recent mill competition.

We asked how many red Accrington bricks were ordered to build the East Mill. (See our Fascinating Fact item, for the answer!)

Judith wins a copy of a wonderful book inspired by Belper, 'The Butterflies of Meadow Hill Manor', by Stefanie Parks.

Stefanie currently lives in New Zealand but stays connected to Derbyshire through her family and the photographs they send her.

OBM supporter Stefanie hopes to showcase more of Belper in the second book and is set to include the mill, St John's Chapel and The Chevin. The book is available in our lovely library.

Poetry inspired by the Mill...

During May, Belper hosted the annual Arts Trail around the town. The very popular 'Poet-Trees' (literally poems on trees) was once again a major part of the event, with the poems also on view at the Belper Goes Green eco festival in June, followed by a display in the stunning Belper library.

The poems were based on the theme of climate or the environment. With kind permission and thanks to Chris Lewis-Jones, here's one featuring the Mill.

Fleet
arts
Create. Participate. Connect



Mill town
By Chris Lewis-Jones

The small town nestles neatly
On the steep slopes of the valley
The valley
That cradles this town
Cradled that revolution
With its knitting frames and cotton looms
Powered by the fast-flowing Derwent
And the lifeblood of its workers

The mills stand
Still now
Picturesque reminders of a picaresque past
Made palatable by the patina of heritage

Their chimneys pierce the sky
Like fingers pointing hopefully to heaven

And was Jerusalem builded here?
Amongst these dark satanic mills!



Belper
Town Council

OBM milling about;

Belper Goes Green...



OBM joined in with the brilliant annual Belper Goes Green weekend events in June. The weather was glorious and the cricket ground was full of stalls, food outlets, a real ale and cider tent, bar, music stages and a fabulous play area for the children. Here's our Chair, Roger Moors actually wearing our OBM leaflet for the day, which was certainly a talking point!

Belper Women's Group...

OBM Chair, Roger Moors was invited to speak at the July meeting of Belper Women's Group at Strutts Community Centre. The lively audience produced a variety of interesting questions and very kindly gave a generous donation to our funds. The enjoyable event once again demonstrated the genuine and widespread support there is for the preservation of the mills and the work that OBM is doing.

Pride in Belper...



A fabulous early August turnout (nearly 12,000 people!) for the annual Pride event – as colourful as ever! OBM supported the celebrations, taking our familiar spot outside the Railway pub on King Street. Thanks to our volunteers and to all who stopped by to say hello! Thanks again to the wonderful Jim Bell for his kind permission to share his brilliant photo of the happy crowd!

Belper Summer Food Festival...

September weather contributed to a slow start but eventually the sun came out and so did a lot of people! OBM shared space with Ashley Franklin's stall outside the Ritz and a great spot outside the Railway and chatted to many residents and visitors throughout the day.



News from our friends at Belper North Mill Trust and Volunteers Association...

New Strategy and Action Plan:

Belper North Mill Trust and its Volunteer Association has continued to operate since the closure of the North Mill Museum in September 2022.

It maintains its long-term aim to return a Heritage Centre to Belper and in the short to medium term support the Volunteers Association to 'tell Belper's story' through its programme of mill site tours, heritage walks, talks, educational services and other events. Thanks to all the hard work from our volunteers, our customer support has been amazing. This has been reflected in the receipt of the Trip Advisor Travellers Choice Award for 2023 and 2024.

The Trust and Volunteers Association is committed to working together and in partnership with all those organisations and groups within the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site (DVMWHS) and beyond. This is demonstrated by our close working relationship with the DVMWHS Coordination Team, Amber Valley Borough Council, Derbyshire County Council, Belper Historical Society, 'Our Belper Mills' and the support and grant funding we have received from Belper Town Council, and all our other friends and partners.

Our relationship with the Arkwright Society, as a key partner, has been reviewed. We believe that the new co-operation and collaboration agreement between the two organisations is the way forward.

This new strategy and action plan, has continuity with the past aims of the Trust to deliver, at some future date, a Heritage Centre in Belper. This would, ideally be within the regenerated Belper Mills site. It correlates with the DVMWHS Management Plan, particularly in respect of the Belper Mills and the local community.

The short to medium actions in our strategy include:

- Making the most of what we have got – human and financial resources.
- Appointment of our own volunteer coordinator
- Set up a stories and activities working group to develop our Belper story telling - joining up with all Belper's heritage 'custodians'
- Developing and implementing new marketing and volunteer recruitment plans
- Signing off a cooperation agreement with the Arkwright Society
- Developing group and bespoke bookings in Belper and across the World Heritage Site
- Returning home important pieces of the Belper Collection
- Accessing the North Mill for one-off events
- Preparing for the 250th anniversary of the Belper Mills site and the 300th anniversary of Jedediah Strutt's birthday in 2025.

For further information, to see our strategy and action plan in full or to offer support please contact us via our website - www.belpernorthmill.org.uk

Fascinating Fact...

We contacted Belper historian Adrian Farmer for a fact we could use as the question for our recent book competition. We got several! Recorded in the Belper News at the time (and repeated in Adrian's 'Spirit of Belper' book) it states that for the building of the East Mill they ordered 180 steel beams, four million red Accrington bricks, 22,600 bolts, 3,000 tons of cinders for between the floors, 110,000 floor tiles and nearly 30,000 roof slates. It also states the tower is 130 feet high and the project cost £80,000.

Upcoming events;

- Belper Winter Food Fayre and Christmas Lights Switch On - Sunday 24th November
- Don't miss the OBM Winter Conference! A panel comprising Claire Ward – Mayor, East Midlands Combined Authority, Ian Hill – Chair BNMT, Georgina Greaves - Assistant Coordinator Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Site, Pauline Latham – Chair DVMWHS Belper Mills Group, Roger Moors – Chair – OBM, who will be ready to take questions on the future of the mills.

There will also be stalls with mill themed items for sale and several displays on show.

PLUS, taking on the brand new role of OBM Ambassador, we'll be delighted to announce an exciting, high profile guest speaker. Stay tuned!

During the event, there will be a short time dedicated to annual AGM business

Sunday afternoon, 8th December at Nailers Conference Centre, more details coming soon!

For other talks, tours & treats, visit;



[Belper North Mills](#)



[Belper Historical
Society](#)



[Cromford Mills](#)



[Derwent Valley Mills](#)

And finally,

Something for our younger supporters

With such a lot of flags on show recently - Football, Wimbledon, Olympics, Pride etc., why not make your own?! [DOWNLOAD & PRINT PDF TO COLOUR IN!](#)

Thanks for reading!

Newsletter comments or contributions are all welcome at ourbelpermills@gmail.com

Newsletter produced with grateful acknowledgement to Phoebe McMillan, Carol Brewer, Jill Walden, Rachel Hodgkinson, Belper North Mill Trust and all our contributors.

www.ourbelpermills.co.uk

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