

Hopwood Millers House Excavation – Historical Background

The Water powered corn mill and mill house were originally part of the Hopwood Estate and are now within the grounds of Hopwood Hall College.

The mill and mill house are about 50 metres apart in the densely wooded valley of the Trub Brook and 350 metres South-East of Hopwood Hall



Location of Millers House

Hopwood Hall – A Brief History

The earliest records of the Hopwood family of Hopwood date to the 13th century. Originally a moated site the present house dates to the 17th and 18th centuries but still retains some features from a medieval open hall of the 15th or early 16th century.

The Hopwood family left the hall in 1923. The Hall was utilised by the Lancashire Cotton Corporation during World War II and in 1946 it was purchased by the De La Salle Brothers for use as a training college. This led the erection of new buildings within the grounds. During this period the hall was maintained in a good condition. Unfortunately the college had to close and was sold to Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council (RMBC) in the 1990's.

The college was expanded and renamed as Hopwood Hall College. The hall, a Grade II* listed building, was abandoned and was allowed to become dilapidated through neglect, theft and vandalism.

In 2017 Hopwood DePree an American descendant of the Hopwood family accepted an offer from RMBC to take over Hopwood Hall and restore it. Work was started in 2018 and it now seems possible that an important part of Middleton's heritage will be preserved for future generations.



Hopwood Hall June 2018

Hopwood Corn Mill

There is a tradition that there a mill once stood at Hopwood in the early 14th century based only on what at one time had been thought to be the earliest reference to the de Hopwood family. The earliest secure reference dates to an inquisition post-mortem of 1570 in which a water-mill is listed.

It is possible that the surviving pitwheel pit was originally constructed as a wheel pit in the late 16th or 17th centuries but the body of the mill dates to the 18th century.

In the early 19th century the wheel pit was widened and two wings built. The North-West wing being a corn drying kiln and the East wing a granary.

It is not known exactly when the mill closed but census returns suggest that the last miller left between 1871 and 1881.

The wings were demolished at the end of the 19th century, presumably following the closure of the mill, to make way for the landscaping project. The main building was still roofed until the mid 20th century and the area around the mill and mill pond had been landscaped and planted to form a picturesque extension to the hall gardens. The remains of the mill and mill pond still exist but are not maintained and continue to deteriorate.



Hopwood Corn Mill November 2018

Millers House

The earliest reference to the mill house is in a 1781-2 survey of Hopwood when it is described as being a building consisting of “two bays”. At this time the mill and building, mill house and four fields were leased by John Whittaker.

Parish Register entries from 1611 to 1731 imply that the miller resided near to the mill. It is therefore possible that a millers house had existed on or close to the same site from at least as early as 1611. The occupation may not have been continuous over this period. For a time in the 1740's there is evidence that the miller lived away from the mill site.



2015 Approximate location of Millers House

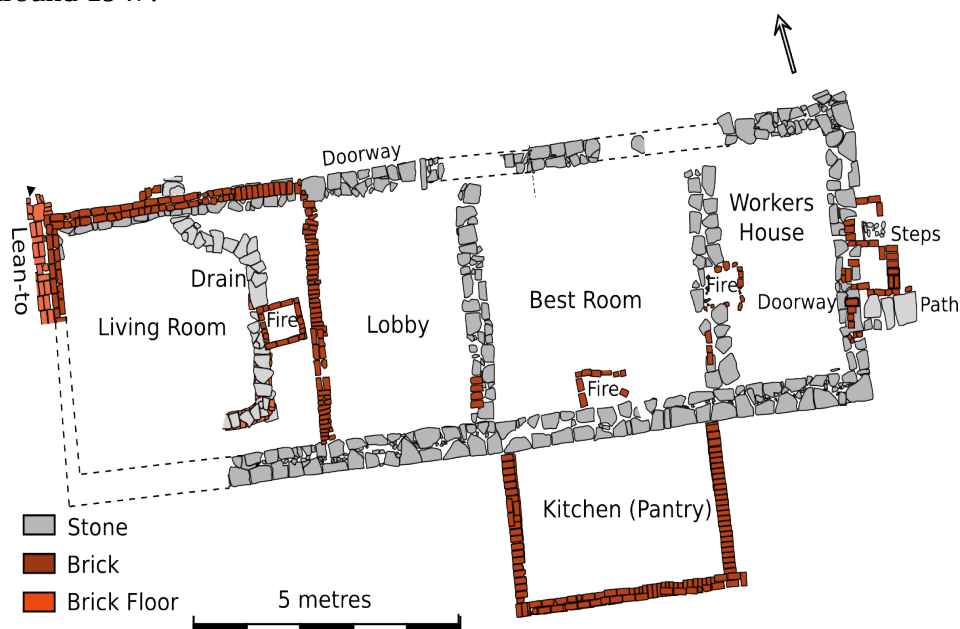
Census returns have revealed that the millers house was occupied by the miller from 1841 until 1871. The house is not however recorded in 1881, therefore suggesting that by this date the mill had closed and the miller had departed. By 1891 the Millers House is occupied by gardeners and by 1911 had been renamed as the Gardeners Cottage. It is quite possible that during this time the gardeners were employed to landscape the area around the mill and mill pond. By the time of the 1939 census the house had been renamed the Bothy Cottage and was occupied by Harold Bailey, a general labourer and his family. The house continued to be lived in by the Bailey's until it was demolished in 1947. This followed the purchase of the hall by the De La Salle Brothers who had also partially demolished the mill as a result of it having become unsafe.

Excavation

In 2015 Middleton Archaeology Society started an excavation at the site of the millers house. The principal objectives of the excavation were to record the remains of the house, investigate the development of the building since the 18th century and to establish the origins of the house.

The excavation was originally intended to last 2 seasons. We have now completed our 4th season and intend to return in 2019.

Excavation of the 19th century house was completed with the investigation of the South-East corner of the 19th century extension in the Spring of 2018. Some areas are inaccessible due to trees which had grown above the remains but approximately 90% of the area has been investigated. From the information gathered we are able to produce a ground plan of the house as it was prior to its demolition around 1947.



The Millers House is often described as a “cottage” in the 20th century. It was in fact a large building of two storeys, 15 metres long and 4.6 metres deep (about 49 feet by 15 feet). Against the south wall of the building an extension measuring 4.2 metres wide by 2.8 metres deep (about 14 feet by 9 feet). Constructed entirely from machine made brick in the late 19th century the extension was used as a kitchen.

The earlier part of the house was constructed on a stone foundation. The south wall is thought to have been built entirely in stone whilst the other walls were of hand made brick dating to the late 18th or early 19th centuries.

Internally the main building was divided into 4 rooms. The principal rooms were the Living Room and Best Room which were both of similar size and separated by a lobby. At the east end was workers house.

Photograph of Millers House

The house stood until 1947 and it seemed likely that it would have been photographed. Although there were several candidates none of them could be definitively identified as being of the millers house.

In 2017 we had a ground plan of the house including the location of doors and chimney stacks. By comparing the archaeology with the photographs we were able to identify the photograph below as the millers house.



The photograph shows the North side of the house. It shows a double fronted house with the workers house at the East end (left hand side).

The building appears to be in neglected condition and in a poor state of repair. It is probable that the photograph dates to about 1880 but prior to the refurbishment which took place at around the same time.

In 2015 we were fortunate in having Marian Butterworth (nee Bailey) visit the site. Marian had lived in the house as a child and was able to describe the house and the function of most of the rooms.

Marian's childhood memories have provided us with a deeper understanding of the house. It has enabled us to correlate our archaeological findings with her memories and has provided details of life in the house which cannot be revealed by archaeology.

A more detailed description of the late 19th century house will be provided in the next update.