**WATER MILLS OF MILLHOUSES PARK**

HUDCLIFFE WHEEL

This is a possible site for one of the Ecclesall or Beauchief lead-smelting mills, for a *‘Smelting House Field’* is marked on Gelley’s map dated 1725 which was situated across the river from the Hudcliffe Wheel. The field is where the southern end car park is today. There was also recorded on the 1840 Ordnance Survey Maps a *‘Smithy Wood’*, which is behind what was the Beuchief Hotel, on the opposite side of the River Sheaf.

An interesting deed has survived from the year 1649 between John Bright and a Nicholas Stones. The lease was for 28 years. The deed mentioned two old ‘*lead mills or Smelting houses’* let to Stones, one of them probably being the present day Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet and the other perhaps the Hutcliffe Wheel.

An isolated entry in the Norton Parish Register for 1695/6 to *‘Hudcliff Milne’* may fit the rent paid to the Peggs, the owners, in the 1670s by Robert Hudson for a corn mill and a paper mill. This information does not fit any other site. From 1748 there is a continuous flow of information. Biggin and Chowe were tenants at this time and were again named in 1761. In 1762 Aaron and Joseph Biggin, scythe-smiths, are named as tenants.

In 1769 Aaron and Joseph Biggins, together with William Chowe, took a 21 year lease from Peter Pegg at £20 rent. The tenants claimed that the water supply was poor, and the dam was enlarged by over an acre in 1774 at a cost of £195 to the owners. The cost was reflected in a rent increase of £15 10s from 1775. During 1779 Sampson Brookshaw took over William Chowe’s half and shared a new 10 year lease in 1791. The rent rose to £48 and in a subsequent 14 year lease to Sampson Brookshaw alone the rent was set at £52 10s, reflecting contemporary inflation. Samuel Brookshaw died before the lease had expired and he was succeeded by William Loukes who disappears from the rental records in 1816.

In 1821 Peter Pegg Burnell leased the eight-trough scythe grinding wheel to John and Samuel Hall of Bradway, at six month’s notice by either side. The rent was now £73 10s reflecting expenditure on the weir as well as additional property which is confirmed by a corresponding land tax increase. An advertisement dated 22nd January 1828 suggests that Samuel Hall may have become bankrupt, for *‘a stock of finished and unfinished scythes, and also Grinders tools’*  were for sale; yet John Hall continued to pay rent for one half of the wheel until 1842.

After his disappearance in 1843 information is sparse: Joseph Hopkinson paid a half yearly £18 17s 6d from 1845 to 1848, but had £63 arrears when the rental finishes in 1850. The lack of a succeeding rent-book leaves us without information until 1863, when the Midland Railway survey shows the Peggs and the Burnells as owners, and scythe makers Robert Linley, Joseph Bishop and John Stones as tenants.

The centre line of the railway ran close to the Hutcliffe dam, separating the dam from the River Sheaf. The close proximity to the cross valley road (Abbey Lane) made the wheel an obvious site for the Beauchief railway station. Today there is no trace of the wheel buildings, which lay under the former railway station, nor the weir which supplied water to the dam, or the dam itself. What is visible across the River Sheaf from the path near to the wooden bridge leading to Abbey Lane Dell, at the southern end of Millhouses Park, however, is an arched overflow, or tail goit.

Howard Stendall.