

Industrial Lyme: Paper 15 - The Lim Valley Mill Trail

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This Trail starts at the Museum and ends at Uplyme, where a 31 bus can be caught back to Lyme Regis hourly (Sundays two hourly) from the bus shelter below the Talbot Arms, just hail the driver (check times on Traveline 0871 200 22 33). The Talbot Arms does lunch most days, not Mondays: book for Sunday lunch carvery (01272 443136). There is a village shop at the filling station just down the main road. Full details on these industries, including more detailed mini-trails can be found in Paper 1: Woollen Cloth, 2: Silk and 8: Flax & Hemp. Click on research at www.lymeregismuseum.co.uk

Distance: 1½miles each way (2.5km) **Time:** one hour each way **Grade:** Easy

Introduction

Since 1750 there have been seven watermills in the Lim Valley, and one steam cloth drying stove. Before the Civil War there may have been other mills. One of the watermills was augmented with steam power, but burned down soon afterward. Most mills had a chequered history, with different products at different times as their owners fought to run viable businesses against large-scale factory competition from outside.

The main products and uses have been woollen cloth, silk thread, linseed oil, oil cake, twine, rope, nets, trawls, flour, starch, leather, electric light bulb filaments and hydro-electricity. Services have included blacksmithing, laundry, auction rooms and store rooms and housing.

The textile mills were early examples of the factory system and the industrial revolution.

There are substantial buildings in good condition at four mills, whilst two others have all but disappeared. Current products and activities in The Town Mill are corn milling, pottery, brewing, art gallery, café, cheese shop, mill shop and hydroelectricity. Three other mills are used as houses or flats.

What you need

After wet weather the path beyond the Old Mill (9 on map) can be very muddy, so stout shoes or boots are necessary, but after long, dry spells, no special footwear is needed. Pathfinder Ordnance Survey Map No 116 Bridport & Lyme Regis and a dog would be helpful. Do keep the dog under close control on the one meadow which you will cross.

The Trail

Leaving the **Museum (M)** turn left and proceed up **Coombe Street** by Rainbow

Stores. The neighbouring alleys (*drangs*) and courts along Coombe Street housed most of the cloth & silk factory workers. Turn left opposite Lyme's Fish Bar into **Mill Lane** and drop down to the **River Lim**. For most of your way so far the river has been hidden under buildings, but now it is open to the sky. This is a steep, fast flowing river – hence the number of mills – and you may well see a **kingfisher** flash by, a **dipper** looking like a black and white blackbird standing on the rocks or walking under water, **trout**, or an **American signal crayfish**, but any otter you think you see may be a mink – trout, crayfish and mink have been farmed in the valley.

STOP before the Town Mill (1 on map) and admire the building. There has probably been a corn mill here since before the Domesday Book. Edward III licensed a mill here in 1340, and the Mill has been owned by the Borough, hence its name, for most of its history, except when it was sold to William Wallis in 1838 for £305 and until bought back in 1929, to be the Council's depot. Flour and starch were the main products. More recently the Town Mill Trust acquired and restored the building and machinery from dereliction and it is now milling organic wheat.

Water power was abandoned in the 1920s when an oil engine and a roller mill were installed. It was used by the Borough to generate electricity from 1936 to 1943 from a turbine installed in place of some of the mill machinery. Come back later if you want to see the mill working, have a meal, buy a pot, see the gallery or the brewery, because now you've got some serious walking to do!

Take the narrow path on the right hand side of the Town Mill. Walk past humming 8kW hydro-electric generator. The leat (mill race or water channel) serves both

this and the *overshot* water wheel inside the building, which you may hear turning and grinding wheat.

Continue over footbridge over the *leat* (mill water channel) and onto the *Lynch*, a narrow path between the Town Mill Leat on your right and the river, many feet below on your left. Take care and hang on to young children: there is no fence. Walk past the Leper's Well on the left (it's just a spring) to Gosling Bridge (2), an ancient stone arch with brick faces.

STOP on Gosling Bridge (2). While standing on the bridge, minding the traffic, look up to the **STEAM DRYING STOVE OR ROUND HOUSE (3)** on your right. This circular building was built some before 1801 to dry fleeces around a central iron stove. Lymites always thought that this was a patent steam fulling mill, but recent work has shown similar drying stoves in Gloucestershire. It survived the great Lyme fires of 1803 and 1844, and another which destroyed the part of the Old Factory that you will see next. As the 1801 insurance schedule said "no wool or cotton to be dried", it must have then been used for storage by the clothiers.

Whilst still on the bridge look upstream to the creamy buff - painted mill building, **it may be obscured by vegetation in the summer** – this is the newest mill building, re-built on a different footprint after the 1841 fire at the Old Factory (4). It worked wool until 1847 and was a silk throwing mill (ie, made silk thread) from 1854 to 1871-5. By its side were *hatches* (sluices) that held up a section of the river which fed the *breastshot* wheel in the centre of the building. The building has since been Radford's auction rooms, but is now flats.

Cross Gosling Bridge and bear right up Mill Green.

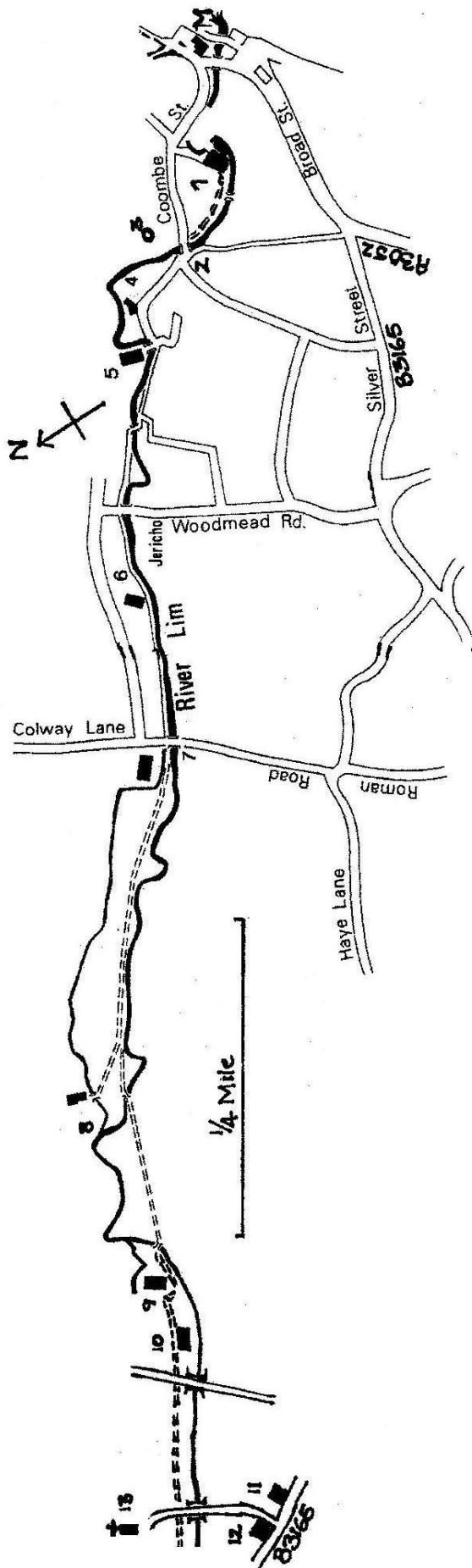
STOP (4) at the bend in the road by Silk Mill Cottage. This is the site of **The Old Factory**. A large building, four stories high, with a chimney at the river end ran down to the river. This was burned down in 1803, rebuilt, surviving the 1841 and 1844 fires, but it was lost some time before 1888, apart from parts of some of

its walls, the last remains of which you can see holding up Silk Mill Cottage.

Both parts of the Old Factory formed an integrated woollen mill from before 1769, when it was leased by Samuel Coade, uncle of Mrs Eleanor Coade, the stone manufacturer. Coade, later Stanton & Boon and then Glyde & Co produced high quality coat cloths. Weaving was probably done in the worker's cottages, of which the Mill Green group form a fine group of about two dozen, built between 1803 and 1824, after the great fire of 1803 swept through the area. No. 10 Mill Green, on your left, was the factory house, the house of the owner and manager, William Glyde, who went bankrupt with his firm in 1847 after accepting a loan of £3,000 but failing to guarantee 20 Tory votes in the 1847 election, much against his Reformist principles. The leases, machinery and his life policy were taken as security by election-fixer Mr Attwood, MP for Harwich and sold. Glyde, a broken man, died in Chard in the following year, aged 64. Attwood was prosecuted for bribery and lost his fortune.

From 1854 to c1875 this was Lawton's silk throwstery, set up by Samuel Lawton from Churchstanton, later run by Mark Lawton, his brother and some 60 workers, mainly women & children, some as young as 8. Mark, like Samuel, was born in Congleton, Cheshire. No 1-3 Dolphin Cottages, next door to No.10, became the Dolphin Inn after the cloth mill closed. When silk was no longer profitable, the Lawtons became bakers and publicans at the Angel Inn, at the foot of Mill Green. More recently electric light bulb filaments and trawl nets have been made here, before the new houses were built.

Walk on along Mill Green and **STOP** at the ford (5). Opposite the large cream-painted mill was Stanton's and until, 1847 Glyde & Co's **New Factory**. Later it was a part of Lawton's silk factory and from 1903 to 1939 it was the White Rose Steam Laundry, when it became army barracks. It was used by GIs preparing for D-Day, but is now Jordan Flats. The waterwheel, *overshot*, stood at the far end. If you lean over the river bank carefully, you will see



The Mill Trail

Start at **M** (Museum) and follow the numbers on the map.

1. Town Mill
2. Gosling Bridge
3. Steam Drying Stove
4. Old Factory
5. New Factory (Jordan Flats)
6. Colway Mill (Higher Mill Flats)
7. Horn Bridge, ex Horn Tavern Mill
8. Middle Mill Farm & Weir
9. The Old (Thatched) Mill
10. Waterside Mill
11. Uplyme Post Office
12. Talbot Arms/Bus Stop
13. SS Peter & Paul Church, Uplyme

the *tail race* entering the water. It was built sometime between 1806 and 1824.

Walk along the raised path by the joint longest ford in England and you can see the level line of the leat running to the waterwheel pit. The leat led back to the weir at Jericho, by the much newer Woodmead Road Bridge.

Carry on along Windsor Terrace to Colway Mill, The Oil Mill or Higher Mill, now Higher Mill Flats (6). This multi-product mill has been an oil and oil cake mill to the 1820s, derelict in 1831, a cloth fulling mill to 1847, a twine, rope and sailcloth mill from 1857-1860, Lyme's first electricity generator from 1909 to 1929, a builder's depot after WWII and is now flats. The *overshot* water wheel was at the end against the hillside, with a small millpond behind and a miller's cottage along the roadside in front. The *tail race* and overflow tunnel from the millpond can still be seen when vegetation permits.

Walk up to the ancient **Horn Bridge (7)**, noting the leat to Colway Mill on your right. In the opposite corner across Roman Road is Horn, an Edwardian house standing on the site of the **Horn Tavern Mill**, a fulling mill, which went out of use in the 1820s, replaced by Colway Mill after 1831 and has now disappeared. It used to draw cloth for finishing from a wide hinterland before its export to France and Spain from the Cobb.

Continue straight on up the tarmac lane. The leat to Colway Mill can be seen through the bushes in the garden of Horn, with two little footbridges over it: the leat accepted the overflow from the high-level millpond behind Horn. Please do not intrude into the garden. Carry on to the fork, and take the narrow gravelled path straight on. Hereabouts was the failed 1903 attempt to drill for the phantom of coal, without geological advice. The drill reached 1,300 feet below the surface, still in the red mudstone you can see at Branscombe, as amused geologists soon pointed out.

The Horn/Colway leats lead to the weir **(8)** at **Middle Mill Farm**, which you will pass roaring away on your right after crossing a footbridge. Middle Mill was never a mill, at least not in the last 300 years, just a farm *between* mills.

Go through the gate straight across the meadow (known locally as Bumpy Field) and cross the wooden footbridge at the end into Devon and Uplyme. Turn left and walk past the **Thatched Mill (9)** in front of you, going toward the waterwheel. Notice the recently cleared leat, only the wooden launder is missing. This is **Gundry's Corn Mill** or the **Old Mill**. It is famous from an illustration by Beatrix Potter in *Little Pig Robinson*. There has been a corn mill in Uplyme since the at least the 14thC, probably here. Glastonbury Abbey manorial papers duty tenants to clear the mill leat, but the Domesday Book of 1086 does not mention a mill.

Back over the bridge, the steeply uphill path goes to the Black Dog Tea Room (not Weds) **OR** continue along the ancient pack-horse trail, once the only inland route up the valley. Before the thatched Honeysuckle Cottage see the remains of the weir for the Old Mill in the river bed. Carry on to the fork in the lane, past Millstream, another weaver's cottage. Bear right. In the fork lay **Waterside Cloth Factory (10)**, almost totally destroyed by fire after the installation of a steam engine in 1866; the house called Pit White more or less stands on the site. This was run by the Boon family and produced top-coat cloth, not blankets. This type of cloth was called "blanket": duffel is a familiar type of coat cloth! Take the lane straight on, around Pit White, ignoring the left fork, where the footbridge is now closed. Continue past the new thatch cottage, Brook Cottage (originally Brookside), a rebuild of another weaver's cottage.

Cross over Springhead Road to the track ahead. The leat ran on the right, crossing under the path after 100 yard, when it becomes obvious against the wall of the now built up garden of Uplyme's former rectory/Devon Hotel, now Rohaise Court. Follow the track to Church Street noticing that the house on the left by the road gate is fitted into the acute angle between the leat and Church Street. The leat runs on, drawing water from all three combs of the Lim Valley above Uplyme, but you must choose. Turn **right** to see Uplyme Church and its ancient yew, turn **left** for the pub or straight on for bus stop and village shop, **or** around to walk back down the valley.

The map has been modified from John Fowles' Lyme Regis: *Three Town Walks* published by Lyme Regis Museum, available from the Museum shop.