

REPLACING MILLSTONES AT FELIN GANOL

2009-2010

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When we arrived at Felin Ganol in 2006 the mill had one pair of 3'6" French burr stones and a 4'6" pair of Anglesey stones; the source for the latter is suggested by a fleck of feldspar in the conglomerate. This arrangement had probably been in place since the 1850s when it seems likely that the French burrs were added. The earlier configuration of a single central set of stones may also have been changed to the spur wheel design with two stone nuts at this time. An old grit stone set into the floor of the mill basement has a dress pattern for a clockwise rotation which is what would have been the case before the gearing was introduced. Our current stones have an anti-clockwise rotation.

The Anglesey stones which were probably mainly used for oats and animal feed after the advent of the burr stones were not in a very good state and it was evident that major work would be needed to the hurst frame and to the stones if they were to be of any practical use. The stones had been inverted so the cone shaped runner which had worn very thin was now acting as a bedstone and the milling surface of the other was badly holed. Instead of a conventional hanging or fixed rynd the stones had an interesting gimbal mechanism which I have not seen elsewhere. We would welcome any information on the intended advantages of this design.



PLATE 1 Original Anglesey stone, now outside Felin Ganol

After redressing and balancing, our small French stones were producing very good wheat flour and by 2009 there was a steady local demand for it. However, we felt that another set of burr stones would make for much more resilient and efficient milling allowing us to work on one set of stones whilst milling on the other or using different stones for different grains. Finding a set however, was not quite so easy, despite making pointed comments about unused burr stones during WMS mill visits. Eventually we discovered a set at Felin Dyffryn, Llanilar (1), a mill which was being converted into a house. The burr stones and grit stones were destined to become garden ornaments but after some persuasion the owner was happy to see the burrs going back to a working mill.

The family of the man who built Felin Dyffryn in 1851 still live locally and his granddaughters are still alive; naturally they were also delighted to see the stones being reused. Other items of mill machinery which were purchased at the same time included a stone crane and various cogs and bearing blocks.

The Felin Dyffryn stones had not benefitted from a few years in the open air and the joints between the blocks had lost a good deal of cement in places. Fortunately the iron retaining bands were in reasonable condition. To help prevent disintegration of the stones during transit we applied Plaster of Paris to the worst gaps a few days before they were moved by trailer to Felin Ganol.

The stones were larger (4'6") than our existing set and also had a very good depth which may point to an easy life, careful milling, or both. They would have had about 90 years of use before the mill ceased working in 1940 but they had only lost an inch or two of their original depth. The mill was finally rendered inoperable when the weir was destroyed by floods in the 1960s. It was interesting to note that the makers plate (Kay & Hilton Liverpool) is identical to that on our existing French burrs. Since we have a date of 1851 for the construction of Felin Dyffryn it is tempting to conjecture that perhaps that was the year that both sets of stones travelled to Aberystwyth or Llanrhystud by boat from Liverpool.