

The Snuff Mill near Bewdley

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Snuff Mill Dingle is a beautiful hidden valley close to Bewdley town below Tickenhill. It is rich in wildlife and the landscape provides clues to its industrial past. It contains a small watercourse and this water was used to power at least one mill in years gone by. There was mention of a corn mill in Bewdley Park in 1336, although in 1381 it was declared of little use as the stream frequently used to dry up. In 1608 it is documented as being owned by King James and the millers were Corbetts. Later it was used for grinding snuff and run by the Bennett family and then the Holders. The last snuff maker appears to have been James (Snuffy) Holder who ran it until 1870. The present day Old Snuff Mill Warehouse at the bottom of Park Lane in Bewdley may have been where Snuffy Holder used to store his produce. Post 1870 the mill was used for polishing horn combs and curry-combs. It was still active in 1920, but had fallen into disrepair by 1931.

Snuff is made by crushing tobacco leaves into a powder which is sometimes flavoured with herbs and spices. It is either sniffed from between 2 fingers, or shot up the nose using an artificial device, after which nicotine is absorbed through the nasal membranes. The habit started in America and became popular in Europe by the 17th Century. Tobacco used to be imported and landed at the Bewdley quay.

There are still three pools in Snuff Mill Dingle (see photo page 4), although there used to be more to pond back the water in the valley. In addition there used to be a large lake below this mill. Although this is now dry, the dam can still be seen along the hedgerow at the bottom of the field below the ruins. This water was



Snuff Mill ruins (photo supplied by Bewdley Museum)

used to feed a lower mill. The Snuff Mill is now in ruins, but it is still possible to see where the water wheel was placed. There used to be a sluice gate leading to an overflow channel which can still be seen running for about 300m down the valley.

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REFERENCES

Worcestershire Archaeology Newsletter No. 8 December 1971
A Survey of Bewdley in Worcestershire 1748 for Edward Winnington Esq. by John Ingram



The Snuff Mill and ponds, date unknown

(photo supplied by Bewdley Museum)