

[TRACK 3]

TONY WRIGHT:

It's the 26th of March 2010, this is Tony Wright and I'm interviewing David Fletcher. Could we start by talking about Bridge Mill?

DAVID FLETCHER:

Yes, one of the loves of my life. Bridge Mill is a terrific building. It's the oldest building in Hebden Bridge by a long way. There is actually a written record of it having consent to impound the river. Sir John de Thornhill, Thornhill near Wakefield I imagine, was given consent by the Prior of Lewes, Sussex on behalf of the Lord of the Manor, to impound the river and construct a mill on the Wadsworth bank of the stream between the township of Wadsworth and the township of Heptonstall, and this is recorded in the city archives in Leeds and the date was 1314, you know, nearly two hundred years before the stone Hebden Bridge Bridge was built. There was a bridge in Hebden Bridge prior to the stone bridge there was a timber bridge and there are records of the timber bridge falling in to disrepair and a subscription fund was opened to build the stone bridge which is now having its five hundredth anniversary, but in four years' time Bridge Mill will have its seven hundredth anniversary; I think that's an excuse for a street party, at least. So how did we come to get involved with it?.....well I used to have Innovation Shop across the road in one of the little cottages over there, that's where it started in 1969 and occasionally I would sit there and gaze out at the square and you know, in the 1960's St George's Square in Hebden Bridge was quite a different place to what it is now and the outlook was pretty grim, and one of the grimmest parts of it was Bridge Mill, this smouldering black lump on the corner of the square. I realised myself then how old it was and how important it was in the history of the town, but I heard on the local grapevine, which as you know has always been very active in Hebden Bridge, that there was a proposal to knock it down and I thought 'that seems a shame, you know, it's a pretty old building and it's in a dreadful condition. You can stand in the street and look up through the broken windows and see daylight through the holes in the roof and you know it's pretty awful'. There were a couple of people camping out in it at ground floor level, moving their stuff about as the water came down different parts of the wall and so on as it rained. There was a discount carpet place in there; I'm not sure I would have wanted to buy carpets from it, given all the rot that there was in the building and might have infected the carpets, and then in the corner which is now Silly Billy's toy shop, there was a little boutique there, but....they were squatters really; the chap that owned the building said 'well they've just moved in, they don't pay me any rent or anything.' The building was owned at the time by Ronnie Greenwood, who was the owner at the time of a company called E. Greenwood and Son on Victoria Road, in fact his mill was just very recently demolished next to the kiddies' playground on Victoria Road....and at time he was producing clothing, he was one of Hebden Bridge's clothing manufacturers, you know in the days when Hebden Bridge was known as 'trouser town' – everyone was making trousers – and the company in Bridge Mill was a company called Greenwood and Pickles and according to the deeds they bought it from the Lord of the Manor's estate in 1895 and they ran it until 1956. They actually ran the water wheel. I remember when I was going to school in Hebden Bridge, if you stood outside Bridge Mill in the street you could hear [sound of swishing water] of the water wheel going round, and they ran the water wheel to generate direct

current electricity. It used to generate about 30 kilowatts, and they ran all their sewing machines on that right through the war up to 1956. 1956, like so many other mills, they got in to financial difficulties, they went in to liquidation, but E. Greenwood and Son bought them out according to Ronnie Greenwood for their label, i.e. for their mark, their name, and for their work force because it was difficult to get workers just for a short period round about then, and he took over the work force, took the sewing machines and anything that was of any use to him and installed it in Victoria Mill, and just forgot about the old Bridge Mill, he abandoned it – abandoned it to squatters and the weather, and local hooligans who went in and smashed the water wheel up to get the phosphor bronze out of the bearings, and generally played about, and so the place was an absolute disgrace. The then owners of the White Lion, it was a big...it might have been Whitbread's – some big company – wanted to improve the car parking in the White Lion you know, put two and two together; rubbish building, space, extra car parking on the river side – well, why not sort of thing, and Ronnie Greenwood, known locally as Jaunty, I mean there were so many Greenwoods around at that time that they all had nicknames. He wanted to retire, he wanted to move to Fort William to live near his son and that's what he was intending to do. Well I sat there looking at this old mill and pondered this. At the time as you'll know from our previous conversations, I was the Chairman of the local Civic Trust and we were anxious about the future of the building, and didn't really support the idea that it should be demolished because it was an important part of the heritage of the town. Until I'd bought it I didn't realise how old it was, but I went to see him and we actually met in the White Lion I think it was, and...he said 'well what's the problem?' and I said 'well it's the mill, and we regret the fact that you're possibly going to sell it for demolition purposes. It's very important in the history of the town'. 'come on' he said 'have you seen it? It's falling down, it's rubbish, it just wants getting rid of, it's old like me' he was then probably the age I am now, but he seemed old as everybody always does. He said 'it's just...it's not worth anything, it just wants getting rid of. I'm moving away, I'm retiring, I just want to get rid of the liability of it. I said 'oh surely there are other things you could do with it; it's a sturdy building. It could be repaired.' He said 'well what would you do with it?' 'Well' I said 'you want to turn it in to shopping or some sort of...it's not gonna be a manufacturing mill again but it's in the town centre – turn it in to town centre purposes – shopping, restaurant.' 'Come on' he said 'have you seen this town, 1969 – who wants shops? Half the shops we've got now are empty. No come on, get real – be commercial.' I continued to press him, he wagged his finger at me. 'you conservationists are a cheeky lot' he said 'you come in here, you're telling me what to do with my building and my money. What do you know about it? Are you in business?' Well you've to shuffle a bit at that point haven't you because it's not easy to answer those sort of questions, but he didn't stop there. He said 'you're telling me what to do with it. I don't think you've got a price, but if you want to do it – do it – put your money where your mouth is.' A favoured expression in Hebden Bridge....I said 'Me? I haven't got any money to put anywhere.' I said 'I've got a mortgage, I've got two kids.' I said 'money?' he said 'don't come that one' he said 'none of us have any money, not in Hebden Bridge. You've got to borrow it. Go to the bank – they've got plenty' in the days when they had; things might be different now. I said 'do you think they'll lend it to me – I doubt it.' 'well' he said 'go and ask them.' I said 'well they'll want it paying back' [laughing] I remember it so clearly. He said 'well of course they will' he said 'unless you're going to go in with a mask on and some pistols; they'll want it back. But you've just got to make it work a bit harder for

you than it works for them – that’s business. You live on the difference; the banks provide the money, you make it work hard, you give them back their due, you live on the difference. That’s business.’ Well I thought about this for a bit....’how much?’ I mean I can’t do not to respond to a challenge as various people have noted. ‘how much?’ ‘two thousand five hundred pounds’.....’oh, I haven’t got two thousand five hundred pounds. I mean at that time that probably was one and a half times an annual salary, you know, for a teacher, which is where I was at the time. I said ‘I haven’t got that sort of money.’ ‘well you’ll have to go and talk to the bank won’t you?’ Now this was said in public, in a pub. Conservation strategies were shot at. If you’re trying to tell somebody else what they’ve got to do, and this is still true of a lot of the conservation movements. A lot of the sort of eco group of people are still of that ilk, you know, they want to tell other people what they should do with their property and their money but put them on the spot and ask them to something, that is different, and I think, you know, that is the big hole in the eco argument. They are not funding it, I mean it’s applicable today to people wanting to build loads and loads of wind farms, for example they don’t particularly want them in their own front garden but they want the wind farms and it’s great isn’t it, it gives you a good feeling, you know, supporting alternative energy and all the rest of it. The Government says ‘we’ll make a regulation that says electricity suppliers have got to have so many percentage of green energy and you know wind farms. Well wind farms are.....relatively cheap to install for a big company and it gives the Government a good feeling, they can say ‘look what we’re doing, look how green we are’ and these things get put up all over the landscape and figures come out for how many houses they will support. They never mention how much industry they’ll support; industry uses the most electricity. How many houses they’ll support. They get it wrong. The average wind farm operates at about fifty per cent of the optimum level that’s quoted and some of those on land, not too far from here are operating at about ten per cent of the figures that’s been quoted

TW:

How do you know this?

DF:

Well there’s people documenting these things. I’m not personally, but the information is available. They’re very inefficient because they’re dependent upon a very irregular source of power – the wind. If there’s too much wind they stop, if there isn’t enough wind they stop. To get the optimum output we’ve got to have optimum wind every day, well, you know....everybody should eat peas and turn their backs on them, but they’re not reliable and you’ve got to have conventional power stations ticking over to stand in when they’re not operating, you know, you know, conservation should go in for it. It’s putting up the cost of electricity significantly, and if we were to go to anything like a reasonable percentage, you know, if you were going to say get twenty five per cent of electricity from wind farms, the price of electricity would be so high that big users of energy, like....British Steel or Corus or whoever it is these days would have to go. People manufacturing steel, aluminium, glass, anything that uses a lot of energy – these are the main users of energy – they would just have another big reason to go and locate off-shore, but you know, the eco group don’t take the realities of the financial situation into account, and I was the same in my approach to Bridge Mill, in a mini mini mini little way you know, so I went to the bank and they said ‘oh yes, we’ll lend you two and a half thousand

pounds, no problem and here's the terms for paying back' this that and the other. 'what's the security you're going to put up?' I said 'well the building, haven't got anything else to put up.' Well, old Mr Miles at Lloyds Bank, he nearly fell off his chair! He said 'security David, security. That place is a blooming liability! Don't touch it!' He wasn't wrong...so I had to make other arrangements and get a private loan and pay by instalments, and I took it on, and I went in to have a look at it. I'd never been inside it before, apart from the carpet baggers' place at the front. Well I went in to the back which is now the Innovation café, and there was fungus on a beam – big, thick timber beams, fourteen inch beams, and there was just a sort of white puffball type of thing on the side of it and I thought 'what's that?' I had a metal crowbar in my hand at the time, so I hit it to knock it off; it nearly fell on my nose and to my enormous surprise, with one swing of one arm I went straight through a fourteen inch timber beam as if it was soft butter, and it was just a veneer that looked like wood, and inside it was just like soggy sawdust with black tendrils – dry rot – and the north wall of the building was dry rot from side to side and ground floor, first floor, second floor, about half way up. The saving grace was that it hadn't got in to the roof timbers. If it had got in to the roof timbers that would have been it - curtains, very lucky that it hadn't, but it was all over. There was a fruiting body on the wall – the wall where there's an opening now alongside the café counter to go in to the back sections if you're going out on to the riverside terrace. It was a solid wall and like all the solid walls in the building, there was a double skin of soft rubble stonework and the bit in the middle was filled with all the small chips of stone and dust and so on. On that wall there was a fruiting body of dry rot three yards across; it was like a three yard circular Persian carpet, it was magnificent

TW:

You seem to be painting a picture of it

DF:

I've got one somewhere, I have! It was multi-coloured; it would have made a fabulous carpet and I thought 'I must get shut of that, so I got an axe and a garden spade and levered it off the wall and it was really thick and leathery, it was just like a big carpet on the floor and it was an inch or two thick in the middle, so it had that fungus type smell, I mean I can recognise dry rot at sort of fifty paces now. Well I tried to pick it up and take it outside and get rid of it – it must have weighed a hundredweight, I just couldn't move it. I'd to chop it up in to small pieces, take it out on the river bank and burn it with a lot of the old timbers that were lying about. I had a big bonfire and burnt this thing, and it did scream – it didn't like being burnt – all the air coming out of it and I thought 'well that's got rid of that.' Within a week it was back, well it wasn't back in its full sort of inches thick and so on but the whole three yards was covered in tufts of fungus growing out from between the stones, and I thought 'this is ridiculous – you can't live on stone' dry rot, you know, so I took a stone out of the wall and got in to the rubble that's down the middle of the wall and took a handful out and there were all these black bootlaces in it, and everywhere that I investigated the wall there was all this fungus, and it was just running through the rubble in the cavity between the two skins of the wall. I mean dry rot doesn't like fresh air but it loves something that's just the right kind of humidity, and of course there were no gutters on the roof. Water that fell on the roof, well some of fell through and some of it ran off and the bit that ran off ran down the wall and this is the north wall so it's not getting any sunshine, and millstone grit is a pretty porous sort of

stone, and the whole wall was saturated at the right kind of humidity, and the ends of all the beams that were stuck in to that wall were what the dry rot was feeding on, and so all the beams going in to that wall were infected and rotten, and those tendrils were running everywhere, and there were one or two other outbreaks in other parts of the building, but that was the major one on that back wall, I don't what it is - seventy or eighty feet long by three storeys high – big job. I thought 'what do I do about this?....Rentokil. They deal with dry rot.' So I made an appointment and the Rentokil man came and he took a look at the wall, and he kind of laughed slightly hysterically, and said 'do you want me to quote?' I said 'well why else would I bring you here?' he said 'well it's going to run in to tens of thousands, I can tell you that before I even start to work it out' so I laughed hysterically and threw him out, and then I went to see a good friend of mine who's still with us but not in very good health these days – Peter Crossley, somebody who – I think it's probably too late to talk to Peter now, I don't think he'd be able to talk

TW:

I've been told about him by a number of people, yes.

DF:

Yes a great guy, a real eccentric. I could tell you lots of stories about Peter – a real eccentric. He renovated the end house at Machpelah, the one with the many lighted mullioned windows on the gable. He used to live downstairs, the lower two stories, and then he moved up in to what used to be a fustian cutting workshop with all those mullioned windows and he made a superb place to live - a- a somewhat eccentric place to live, with an outside staircase to get to it and so on and it was a bit eccentric inside, but he'd done it all himself. He was a real craftsman was Peter and he knew everything there was to know about old mills, including how to fall off the roof and survive, in the case of.....oh I can't remember the name of the mill now, the one up Keighley Road at Mytholmroyd – he fell off the roof and in to the dam, so I said 'Peter, what do you do about dry rot?' 'creosote' he said 'creosote – I'll get you some' 'good, great stuff' 'and I'll lend you my compressor' he said 'and spray the wall, both surfaces of the wall, inside and outside, spray it liberally with the creosote' he said 'I'll get you a spray gun and a compressor, and then' he said 'you'll have to drill it at three foot centres and pump creosote in to that wall until it's leaking out of every crack and gap and bit of poor mortar and so on, but take the windows out first of all otherwise you'll suffocate, so I spent you know, hours and hours and hours in there, in fact for several years I worked a twenty-hour weekend in Bridge Mill because having borrowed money to buy it I couldn't afford to spend any more doing it up, so it had to be a DIY job, so I used to go in there sort of eight or nine o'clock Saturday morning, work through the day, same on Sunday, work through the day, and then of course I'd my day job on the other five days of the week, so it was quite hard going, and my two little girls used to come with me, and they've got their names written in the mortar in different parts of the building – still there today. This was... we started in 1973 to do it, and so this is '73, '74, '75 you know, we're going on doing this kind of thing, and yeah, I got that place so it was oozing creosote, and Peter, bless him, was absolutely right. There has not been a recurrence in all this time. He said to me 'Rentokil just charge you a fortune to do the job and then if they haven't done the job properly and it breaks out again, they can come back again because they give you this so-called insurance, but the insurance is you pay ten times as much you should so that if they've got to come back six times, they still make a

profit' so I said 'I don't know about that Peter', but anyway I borrowed his long ladder and I set about it. First of all I went up on to the first floor with a chain saw, you know, the sort of thing you cut trees down with – a forestry chain saw – and I just put the chain saw through the floorboards and went right across the floor, through the floorboards, through the beams, making sure you stand on the right side of it, and I cut it back about a yard beyond where the dry rot had got to and let it collapse, went up to the second floor, did the same and let it all collapse, dragged it all out on to the river bank and burnt it and got rid of all the dry rot, took quite a few window frames out that the dry rot had got in to as well, and as I say there were one or two other outbreaks, then I did the creosoting job you know, I'd got a blank back wall and the floorboards hanging in a space behind me, and just a cast iron column in the middle of the floor and the other side, so...up this big ladder right up to the roof sort of in this big space inside and got rid of it. That's when you start thinking 'what are we going to do now?' Well I'd got to get some matching joists so that's a matter of going round to other mills in the area that were being demolished, get some timbers that match, get them cut to the right length so they can be spliced on to the ends of the ones that I'd sawn through, then and I stood them up vertically in a couple of heavy duty polythene bags and filled the polythene bags up to the top with creosote, so they were absolutely saturated with creosote and then I put them in to the holes in the wall with the polythene bags still round the end of them, so there was a couple of good heavy duty membranes between them and the wall, and trimmed them off, and they're still good and the building's standing. I'd then got to start replacing the floors and so on, and...alongside this, the roof needed attention. The roof is made of grey slate – Yorkshire grey slate – big slabs of stone – tons and tons and tons of it, and they were all slipping because they were just fastened on in the old-fashioned way. There was a little hole at the top of the slate, an oak peg through the hole, tucked behind a lath, nailed across the roof timber but the laths had all gone rotten and the stone pegs had mostly fallen out and so the slates were loose and they were all slipping down, and so it's a matter of getting up there and trying to nail bits of laths on and put some oak pegs in, or put some nails in to hold the slates in. Well I didn't put nails in; I got a big rubber hammer, I used to go up on the roof, I took one of the skylights out and put it on a hinge so I could get out on to the roof top without having to go up a huge ladder – I don't like ladders – and went out on the roof. Don't like being on roofs really but you know, needs must, and with a, you know...like a polo hammer really, long handle and rubber end on it, just tapping all these slates up, and they would stay up for a while but every time there's a thunder storm or anything that causes vibration – every time a jet plane comes over a bit low I used to curse it – up on my roof, tap my slates up – it was a long job until I could eventually get little Walter to get up there and start doing it properly, you know, there's a limit to where you can get with DIY, but, you know, once I'd got part of the roof waterproofed I could then start getting some tenants in, and I did the end nearest the White Lion first, the bit that was in the best condition, that was over where the offices were and things like that. The offices were where John the barber operates at the moment, and so I...the little boutique was still in there so we got a little bit of rent from the boutique. Ted's taxis, wherever they are now, moved in to what had been the offices, where John the barber is, and right up on the top floor I had...can't remember the name of the lad now, but he was doing hand loom weaving, and he set up a big hand loom up there and was doing hand loom weaving and selling sort of woven fabrics and things, so I'd got a kind of vertical slice of the mill coming into use, you know, so I'd got a bit of rent. Now when I'd got that bit of rent coming in, I could go to the bank and borrow some

more money on the strength of the rent, and in fact that's what I've done with the building right up to the present day. I do some jobs that need doing, borrow the money to do them, and then when I've paid that back I can borrow some more money and do another job, and keep moving through the building

TW:

One step ahead

DF:

Yeah it's just a bit of a time you know, it's the old thing. If you've got a big job and it's frightening you, and it was very frightening, you know, I was terrified when I bought the building – terrified. I thought it might fall down in the street and I'd get sued you know, for millions of pounds or something. It was quite anxious-making, but you know, so if you've got a big problem, the only way to deal with it is to break it down in to a lot of little problems, and then close your mind to all the others and focus on one, so I got one end going, then I'd to start looking at the other areas and it was the back part of the mill where I'd cured the dry rot and so on that I focused on first, and gradually got the rest of the roofing and then a chap turned up, another Mr Greenwood, anyway he wanted to open a restaurant. His wife was called Dianne....I can't remember his first name, but he opened Bridge Mill Restaurant on the first floor where Il Mulino's is now and so he was sort of the first tenant in there, the first owner of a restaurant in the building, and he paid a modest rent – not very much because he entered it when it was in its raw state, and he and I put the floor down together, and he and I ripped all the lath and plaster ceiling down and put up the timber ceiling that's at present in there, and I remember spending Saturday afternoons humping chipboard up there and laying a totally new floor for that restaurant. Every time I walk across it and it wobbles a bit, I think 'oh crumbs'.....and it was quite funny in a way, I'd been looking round for some chip flooring, some chipboard, and I'd found some in Manchester at quite an attractive price and they said they'd deliver it and the got lost, they couldn't find Hebden Bridge from Manchester – these two Irish guys with this wagon – I don't know where they got the chipboard from, I didn't ask, and eventually at about four o'clock in the afternoon, Sunday afternoon, they rang me up and said 'we're in somewhere called Todmorden, how do we find you?' and so this wagon arrived, and we'd to offload it there and then and carry all this chipboard up that outside staircase in to where the restaurant is now, and it was pretty exhausting work and it was a hot day, and I remember at the end of the day, me and the two Irish men finished up lying out full length on the pavement outside Bridge Mill with bottles of Guinness in our hands – they'd come with a crate of Guinness, they felt entitled to it and they thought I should have some as well. I hate Guinness but I was so thirsty and it was so hot, I thought 'it doesn't matter'...but the populous of Hebden Bridge looked askance at us lying about on the ground, not perhaps as coherent as we might have been, swilling Guinness, but they hadn't been there all day, so lots of nice memories of doing the thing up, so that was getting in there and....the hand loom weaver on the top floor took a bigger space, the ground floor remained a shambles because that was my material store and everything. The ground floor was the bit I did last 'cos I needed that as a base to do everything from, and then I got on to the front part as well, and the roof on the front part, there was a problem. Right up on the top floor there was a band saw for cutting cloth, a big, huge cast iron band saw that's still there because I can't get it out of the building, it's so big I can't carry it down the stairs – it weighs tons. Peter Crossley and myself managed to get it on some scaffold

poles to use as rollers and we rolled it to the side of the building, and we positioned it very carefully above the cast iron girders so that it's on something solid enough and it's not going to fall through the floor, which we were frightened it might do, and put it to one side, but then we'd to tackle the roof, and if you look at the front of Bridge Mill, it's the most peculiar shape, and the roof is extremely odd and you've got sections. One section where there was a thirty foot beam from the apexes with different points and things, it's an indescribable shape is that roof, I mean it amused me quite a bit when we were having all the arguments about Garden Street and the so-called wonky buildings on Garden Street and people said 'they look like'.....I said to quite a number of people, whilst we're sitting inside Bridge Mill and the café, I said 'well it's interesting you say that. Just tell me what's the shape of the roof on Bridge Mill?' Nobody could tell me. Nobody looks at it, so I said 'well if you don't know what shape this is and it's been here seven hundred years, why are you worrying about the shape of those other buildings?'

TW:

I've seen the roof of Bridge Mill from the Council Offices because you go up a few flights, and it is...it is an odd shape. Why do you think it was built like that? Was that an original shape?

DF:

Well the mill was built in pieces. I've worked out the sequence of events in the mill, and they just kept adding bits on, and you know, one of the things I had to do when I first got it was to survey it and try and draw it all out, draw the floor plans and so on, so what do you do? You measure all the walls and you draw the lengths on a plan and...'oh we've got a gap'....so then you go back and you measure the diagonals, and you quickly find out that none of the walls meet at right angles, none of the floors are level, there isn't a right angle in the building. It's the Mill That Jack Built, and clearly it's all been built by what they call in Hebden Bridge t'rack of th'eye which is another way of saying rule of thumb, you know, they didn't measure anything, you know, they'd get a load of stone and build a wall. I mean if you sit in the café now, the latest extension is the one at the rear of the building that you go through to get out on to the terrace, and one wall of that, where it joins the existing mill, it joins it where there's a window, so you sit in the café and you look out, and you can see the butt end of the wall coming to the window, and clearly they started building the wall at the far end and when they got near to the mill they thought 'oops' but they'd done too much then to make it worthwhile pulling it down and doing it again, so they didn't care, and it's a very eccentric building and it's great fun to sort of sit there and cogitate, you know speculate how it was built.

TW:

When it was first built what was it used for?

DF:

It was a corn mill. It was built by Sir John de Thornhill, probably not be him personally, but at his direction in 1314 and sadly, he only lived a year to enjoy it. He died a year after building and his wife sold it to somebody called Steven, Steven the miller, who presumably was the sitting tenant. When I say sold it, they didn't actually own it; they got permission to build it but it was still owned by the Lord of the Manor, so it was kind of built on.....I don't know what they'd have in those days – some sort

of leasehold terms and so you've got the leaseholder who sold it to the tenant eventually, and so Steven the miller. I've got somebody who's doing research on the building at the moment and they've recently turned this up, but they're going to have to go to Nottingham to the Lord of the Manor's archives to get more information. I don't have a lot of information really between 1315 and 1895, when deeds start and I'm hoping that I'm going to get a lot more information in due course, but the building clearly was put together in different pieces. The early bit.....is now what is the café area, that's the oldest bit and then that was extended further towards the river, so the two or two and a half yards nearest the river was added on. The original mill was a square bit where the café is, not including the kitchen of the café, just that main body of the café minus the row of tables nearest the river, that section, that was added afterwards. They built an extension and didn't bother to put any linking stones in, it was just a butt end between the two, because when I made a doorway and went through where this butt end is and half the mill fell on my head, or very nearly, I discovered this extension. I also discovered that there was a chimney up the middle of the wall that I didn't know about before because where the shop is, had in previous times been a smithy and horses had been shod there and so on, and then....so it was a square building and the water wheel at that time would have been totally external, outside the mill as they usually are, you know, on the outside of the building and open to the weather and turning away, so it obviously then had been extended at the other end as well and they'd extended over the top of the water wheel and turned it what had been an external water wheel into an internal water wheel, so that wheel pit is also seven hundred years old and the weir is seven hundred years old. It's been raised but the original part of it is seven hundred years old, and all the sluice works and the goits – the main goit comes from the weir straight in to the building. The tail goit, I mean it's a breast undershot wheel, the water hits it half way up and the stone is curved and it's an absolutely accurate water circle of curved stone. The wheel skims it to within millimetres and the water disappears down a tunnel and comes out at the main road bridge at West End, you can see it coming out there, and to get there it has to go right under the town, so it goes underneath the arches at the front of Bridge Mill, underneath the terrace in front of the pub next door, underneath the launderette, under Café Cali and it goes underneath the third arch of the old bridge, which explains why it's got an arch apparently on dry land, because when it was built there would be an open channel there with water flowing down it, and of course they didn't worry about compensation water in those days, they just put the whole flow of water through the water wheel if they needed it, and there was twice as much water in the river in those days.

TW:

It dates the goit being a lot older than the bridge doesn't it?

DF:

Yes it does, and before they built all the reservoirs there was a lot more water in that river, so all that...bit at the front which is the shop, that was added later and there almost certainly was a steam engine in there, well they've found evidence of it and there's a chimney on the end of the building. If you go to the bar area of the restaurant, the ceiling is arched; it's a brick arched ceiling so that would be a fire precaution against having a steam engine, so it possibly was a vertical steam engine that took up the full space of two floors, and certainly the floor of the bar is supported on big timber beams that you can see. If you go in to the shop and look up at the

ceiling, there's the most incredible selection of beams, with big beams resting on big beams resting on other big beams, and then there's a wooden prop holding them all up, but then they didn't quite get the beams long enough so there's a bit of metal stuck underneath one of them between the prop and the beam, and this bit of metal sticks out a foot or two to one side, and there's another beam sitting on it, so it's just sort of counter-balanced... I mean it's just amazing, the structure of it, it really is, the Mill That Jack Built. Going back to this timber on the roof – thirty foot timber beam cracked and sagging with all this weight of stonework on top of it. I took a friend of mine up there, an architect, to see if he could advise me what to do. He took one look at it and said 'help! How do I get out of this building!' [laughing] so I took Peter up there. Peter looked at it very calmly. Peter was never worried about getting under anything 'hmmm' he said 'we'll have to prop it. I'll fetch a jack.' And so he fetched a jack that would lift a fully laden heavy goods vehicle, you know, so it would lift twenty tons or whatever, and there was all this tons and tons of stone on the roof, and he just gets this jack underneath it, and he lifted it about a foot, and then he says 'I need a prop.' Well it was left like that for weeks until he found a suitable prop which happened to be a tree trunk [laughing] – it wasn't even straight, it was an old oak tree I think, and it was suitably wiggly. He just put that under it and he put a big piece of wood on the floor to spread the load, so you've got the tree trunk and a piece of wood spreading the load, sitting on a cast iron girder above the brick arched ceiling of the bar, so all these people sitting in the bar, they don't realise what's on their head up above, but you see Peter did that round about 1975 and so thirty-five years on it's still there, it hasn't moved. He's a very very useful chap to have as a friend and a sort of... supporter, very good. I can't speak too highly of Peter. It's a pity there are more like him around. He's a bit older than me; he was at school the same time as me but he's a bit older than me and it's a pity he's not wearing so well, so we put a roof on the works and we started dividing it up and people started appearing. I've never really had to chase people – the building attracts people, it's surprising. I mean it's totally fully let and I've got other people – I mean recently somebody came along, they're so keen to get in to the building, they want the space and they want to bring their business. I say 'it's full – I can't just throw people out and make space for you to come in. There's the roof space up above.....the original part of the building that's above the café and the water wheel. There is actually a fourth floor there. In the war they lifted the roof. You can see the roof timbers have been modified; instead of being an A-shaped truss they've taken out the bottom beams to the truss and put a piece in that's not quite vertical, on a slope, and then you've got the A piece above that, so there's headroom up there and there are skylights in the roof and there are windows in the gables at the end; it could be made quite nice but it's not gonna be cheap' so I said 'I'll rent it to you in its raw state, like for a song, I'll give you twelve months free so you can get it sorted out and then rent it to you at a knock-down price if you want to do it, but at the moment I don't have the money to put in to it because I've got another project that's gonna cost me a lot' so we went up and we had a look at it and currently they're thinking about it, but I mean people are so keen to get in to the building, it's absolutely amazing. The timbers on the roof are second-hand as well. The roof trusses are obviously second-hand because they're too long, so do you know what they did? They've obviously bought second-hand roof trusses and they're just a bit too long, so what's the obvious solution? You put them in diagonally [laughing] isn't it wonderful? I love that building, and so you know I pieced together the order in which it was built and there's still part of the original wall in there. We made an opening between the shop and the café; we opened a three foot doorway in to

a twelve foot space so people could more easily pass through, and we took that section of wall out and as we were taking it to pieces, I mean the wall was typical rubble skin and the rest of it, but about a yard above floor level it got a lot fatter, and that fat bit at the bottom was made of river stones – rounded river stones with the face just hacked off and some old-fashioned mortar stuck in there

TW:

Must be very original then

DF:

Yes, so I think that was the original plinth on which probably a timber mill stood and it was built in the river bed of river stones, they were just piled up river stones cos, ... cos I went right down to floor level and I went below floor level, and I got river stone that weren't hacked off at one side, and I went down an arm's length and the whole filled with water because I got down to the river [laughing]

TW:

You don't get flooded then?

DF:

Well it has been known, but it's built on no foundations which is why the window frames have to be custom made if you replace them because they're not square either, they're a sort of...trapezoid you know, they're like a rectangle but it's a rectangle that's shifted at one side, and it's just over seven hundred years, I mean it's settled down, so what was a timber single storey mill on no foundations is now a three or four storey stone mill building on no foundations on the river bed in the middle of Hebden Bridge! But you know that's history isn't it and that's the way it is, so...we moved our shop in to the mill in 1976, three years after I'd bought it, because I left the ground floor till last, and you know how we've got sort of two archways the sort of link through in to a kind of arcade, well one of those is original and it just had big wooden doors and an archway and when it was a smithy they could take the horses in and out there, and presumable when the steam engine was in there, they could back a wagon load of coal in there and so on. The other arch is one that I put in with Maurice Nicholl; he used to be a joiner in Mytholmroyd, again Maurice is no longer with us, sadly. He was another friend who put a lot of time and energy into that building along with me. He and his wife were partners in the shop initially but then they wanted to do other things and they eventually went off to live in Scotland, so we bought them out and so...we wondered what to do with the archway the one that existed, the one that faces across to where Tribal is now. I don't like to see an archway with just a piece of plate glass in it – sort of an archway is meant for going through and it looks a bit naff if you just put a little stone wall across it with a big piece of glass and so on, I don't think it works. You could set it back and that looks better, but I thought 'why not put another archway in that wall' because where the other archway is, there was just a door in to the building and a window at the side of it and a bright red telephone box, so...I thought 'well if we take that door out, take the window out...where can I get a stone archway from?' Well, when they decided to build the Catholic church in Mytholmroyd, they actually built it, sadly in some ways, on a very old track, a very old roadway. The road from Sowerby to Mytholmroyd came down past Scout Rocks, past Mytholmroyd Farm. It came down towards the pub there, the Shoulder of Mutton, across the road and then it went across the river in

a ford, I mean I remember that ford. There were stepping stones so you could walk across it without getting your feet wet

TW:

I've seen photographs of it

DF:

Then a child sadly got drowned there and they decided to wall it up at both ends and put a bridge there instead, so you know, all the historic features had gone. Well across the road from the Shoulder of Mutton the road continued up the hillside towards Sowerby. There were some old cottages on one side of it and a barn, and a farmhouse on the other side called Royal Fold. Now you might have seen pictures of them.

T:

I have.

DF:

They were all demolished and the Catholic church built there. The barn, when they were knocking it down, I went past there one day and they'd taken the roof off and were starting knocking stones off the top and there was a stone arch standing up. I thought 'I must have it – that's just about the right size.' I measured it up 'it's just about the right size' and I went up to the chap who was doing the demolition – can't remember who it was now and I said 'can I buy that?' 'Tha'll have to get it out thysen...forty pound' he said 'but you'll have to get it out yoursen.' Well how do you get a stone arch out? You'd take one stone out and the rest would fall on your head. I said 'can I borrow your digger?' He'd got a caterpillar thing, you know, with a bucket at the front. 'aye I suppose so' he said. 'what you're gonna do? I said 'I'll be back. Don't let anybody else have it; I'll be back.' I went down to Russell Dean's and said 'Russell, can I have all the cushions – seating cushions off all these old settees that you take in part exchange and throw away, burn on the canal bank and things, so I got – I don't know what I got – a dozen or more, and I went and spread them all out on the ground, behind this archway, and then I got in this tractor thing which didn't have a steering wheel which was a bit of a surprise to begin with. It just had two levers to operate the caterpillar tracks. To begin with I found myself spinning round in circles with one caterpillar track going one way, anyway it was a lesson driving this thing, so eventually I found out how to use it myself one sort of lunch time, and got the bucket up in front and just got this thing moving very very slowly, and lifted the bucket until the bucket was just resting on this archway you know, and then I just gave it a nudge and it all fell down; how else do you get it down? And I mean it was a risk, and I just lost one piece of stone about the size of my fist on the corner of one of the stones. You can still see it; if you look under the archway you can see it

TW:

I'll have a look next time I go

DF:

And so...you know, I got it, and I got these stones in the back of my car a few at a time, took them to the mill, put them on the floor in the shape they were supposed to

be. Maurice made a timber to that size and then we made an opening in the wall, put the timber up, and then just sat all these stones on timber, you know, and then we took the acro props away, took the timber away and hoped for the best! [laughing] They all just settled nicely together and it's there, and that's it. So we'd got the walls done now, we'd got the little arcade then we could put the shop front in. there was another slight problem in the back room which is now the café. The tables in the window, there were six Hoffman presses there with pipes going through the wall, because I remember Bridge Mill when big jets of steam used to gush out over the river which was usually running pink or brown or something from Crimsworth Dye Works, and you see Hoffman presses are big and they're jolly heavy. I didn't know what to do with them, I mean I couldn't move them, so I got a scrap metal dealer to come and look at them and he said 'aye, I'll have 'em but you'll have to get 'em out' he says 'I can't come in here and pick 'em up with my wagon. You'll have to get 'em out in the street.' I thought 'how on earth do I do this?' Well at the time I had a little Renault 5, a little blue Renault 5 of some vintage and it would go through the archway at the front of the shop in a fashion, and we'd made this gap between the shop and the café so I could get my car in to the café, so I had my car in the café, and I jacked up each of the Hoffman presses sufficient to get a scaffold pole underneath, tied a rope on to it, dragged it forwards until it was sort of balancing on the scaffold pole, another scaffold pole in front of it, dragged it off until it fell off the back one, picked up the back one and put it to the front. I dragged six Hoffman presses out in to the street and then got this guy to come and pick them up. He came with a skip, you know, one of these wagons with a skip with a lifting thing, he took the skip off and he used thing to pick the Hoffman presses up and put them in the skip two at a time, take them away and then come back...I'm sure what I got for them in scrap didn't pay for the effort, but at least I got rid of them! And then had the shop done, and when the shop opened, the café at the back, that was still the glory hole where all the tools and all the materials were and one thing and another, and in Innovation shop at the moment there's a big timber table in front of the windows against St George's bridge, but it's a fairly low table, it's only about as high as this coffee table. Somebody at some time has sawn the bottom of the legs off for some reason or purpose I don't know why, but they probably used to put bales of cloth on it to cut or whatever, or perhaps they used it for the packing up of trousers – sit them on the table wrap them all up in brown paper and send them off and things, so I had this table in the back, in the glory hole. There was a lovely timber ceiling in where the café is now, but the...building control people made me cover it up - you know, 'it's a fire risk is that; you've got a restaurant upstairs, there might be eighty people upstairs. We want double plasterboard there.' You plasterboard it and then you plasterboard it again with plasterboard over the gaps, so that you've got an hour's fire resistance then. 'no, there's no way round it – it must be done. You can't have these timber beams – you've got to cover them up with plasterboard so the beams won't' I mean nowadays the fourteen inch beam would give you an hour's fire resistance easily, but at that time they made me cover them all up, so I had this table in the back there and standing on this table it was just high enough to balance a sheet of plasterboard on my head and hold it up against the ceiling with the plasterboard nails in my mouth and a hammer, a nail at a time – get a nail in each corner, hope it would stay up while I got the rest of the nails in and so I plaster boarded all that, and then I plaster boarded it a second time, sealed the joints with tape, painted it; it was a long job, so the shop moved in in '76 and the café opened gradually after that. We didn't intend to have a café, but the customers sometimes wanted a drink so we made them a cup of coffee, so we got a

coffee machine in and started making cups of coffee, and then at one stage I had about half a dozen ladies making home-made cakes and I would pay them for the cakes, they could work at home, and then Health and Safety stopped me doing that 'oh you can't have that, we can't go and inspect all their kitchens. They might have a dog, they might have children who put their sticky fingers in' you know, I'd got a cottage industry going making cakes, and then they stopped me. It is very irritating, some of the regulations are ridiculous, but you know, we gradually and we got this building pretty much as it is. It's full of tenants, and so I keep borrowing some money against the rent and improving the place, you know.

TW:

What will be your next improvement then?

DF:

Well I've put toilets in which people have noticed. I wish the population of Hebden Bridge and District were house-trained. We get some funny people – I won't go in to the sort of things that happen, but...it's a lot worse in the ladies than it is in the gents. Some of the things that get written on the wall and some of the things that get smeared on the wall, I mean I'm not joking – you name it, it happens. And I've improved the toilet areas for the tenants and I keep putting bits of floorboards down and tidying, and I'm getting to the point now where I've more or less done all the jobs, so for the millennium there was this hole in the middle of the building with water running through it – the wheel pit – the water wasn't running at all, just a big hole, so I got the water wheel rebuilt by a couple of engineers from Elland, again a couple of the right kind of guys you know, they'd got hands that could do things, and we made it in the old way – cast iron. They made a pattern and they put it in sand, put molten metal in it and they made the pieces. Each one weighs the best part of two hundredweight and it were all carried in, and we fastened it all together. They even made nuts that were square because you couldn't buy square nuts and they said 'well it would have had square nuts on – we're not having modern hexagonal nuts, we've got to have square' so they made their own nuts, and we cast their names in to it – it's a good quiz question, I won't tell you what they were called, you know, I say to people 'what were the names of the people who made that water wheel, and who put in?' and it's narrower, much narrower than the original wheel was because I've floored across and put more tables in there, and I've got to pay for it somehow – it cost me thirty thousand pounds [**£30,000**] to do that bit, so you know, borrow it, do it, finish it, well I've paid that off now so now I can start thinking about the next one you see – the seven hundredth birthday. Like the millennium one, I got the millennium one finished in 1998 so it would be ready, well I want to get this one.... I'm going to go alternative power – carbon free, sustainable, back to basics as someone once said. The mill started on water power and it's gonna go back to water power

TW:

Very interesting.

DF:

I've got the water wheel up already and I've had an assessment of the amount of power output it would give. The answer is not a lot, perhaps one and a half, perhaps two kilowatts, I mean it used to develop a lot more than that but that's when it was the full width and that's when they weren't as fussy whether you dried the river up or not by putting all the water through the wheel which they used to do. Somewhere there's a beautiful water colour of Bridge Mill and the river was nearly dry when they did it.

It used to hang in the Committee Room in Hebden Royd Town Council Offices on the wall behind where the Chairman sat, and at Local Government Reorganisation it disappeared. I'd love to know who's got it – I'd love to have that painting, and nobody seems to know where it went.

TW:

Well Calderdale you would have thought, but maybe Bankfield Museum because the two old oil paintings on the stairs going up to the Council Offices now – they're actually owned by – looked after by Bankfield Museum

DF:

Well they might be now. They stayed, they didn't get thrown away, but when Calderdale came in to the Council Offices in Hebden Bridge, they went in there, they went up to the attic and they parked a lorry outside in the street and they just threw everything out. That map I have on the wall in Innovation café, a map of Hebden Bridge 1888, that literally came off the back of a wagon. They threw it out the window, it landed on the back of the wagon, it rolled off in to the street, and it's now on the wall in Innovation; it would have been in landfill if I hadn't picked it up, so don't Calderdale come back and tell me they want it back! So we're going to use the water wheel but it will be limited effectiveness. To give us a better boost, I've just had a meeting this afternoon, I've just got a copy of the plans what we're going to do. We're going to have a ten kilowatt Archimedes screw turbine on the edge of the wheel – this is all subject to planning – I haven't applied for planning permission consent yet, but fingers crossed, so ten kilowatt, and we'll have that on view behind a metal grill so that children can't fall in to it or anything but they'll be able to see how it works, and that's going to generate ten kilowatts of electricity. In the goit we're going to put a heat exchanger and heat pump for space heating the building, so we'll have electric power to run the kitchen and things like that, and we'll have space heating by taking low grade heat out of the river water, just the odd degree or so as it flows past, and that will be pumped up to keep the building at an appropriate temperature, and panels on the roof, subject to planning for hot water for the kitchen and toilets

TW:

Solar panels?

DF:

Solar panels, yes.

[END OF TRACK 3]