



Millstone by mill stream in Meanwood Park, 2019 © RT

A Millside Meander

Industrial archaeology on the edge of Headingley

The Beck rises on the Chevin. Its changing name is taken from the places it passes, Breary Marsh, Adel, and as it enters the Mean Wood, it becomes Meanwood Beck. ('Mean Wood' means 'the Common Wood' in Old English.) **01** In addition to other activities (like quarries and tanneries), four mills were built on the Beck along Headingley's border, to take advantage of its water power. Two corn mills were built in Headingley's monastic era, Wood Mill and Headingley Mill. With the industrial revolution, these were redeveloped (as Meanwood Tannery and Grove Mill respectively), and joined by two more, Weetwood Mill and the Old Oil Mill. None of these now survive. But traces of the groundworks of all can be found in the landscape of the Meanwood Valley. (There were of course more mills both upstream and downstream.) The Millside Meander follows these groundworks.

The walk largely follows the route of the Meanwood Valley Trail (though in the opposite direction to the [Guide](#), downstream and downhill)

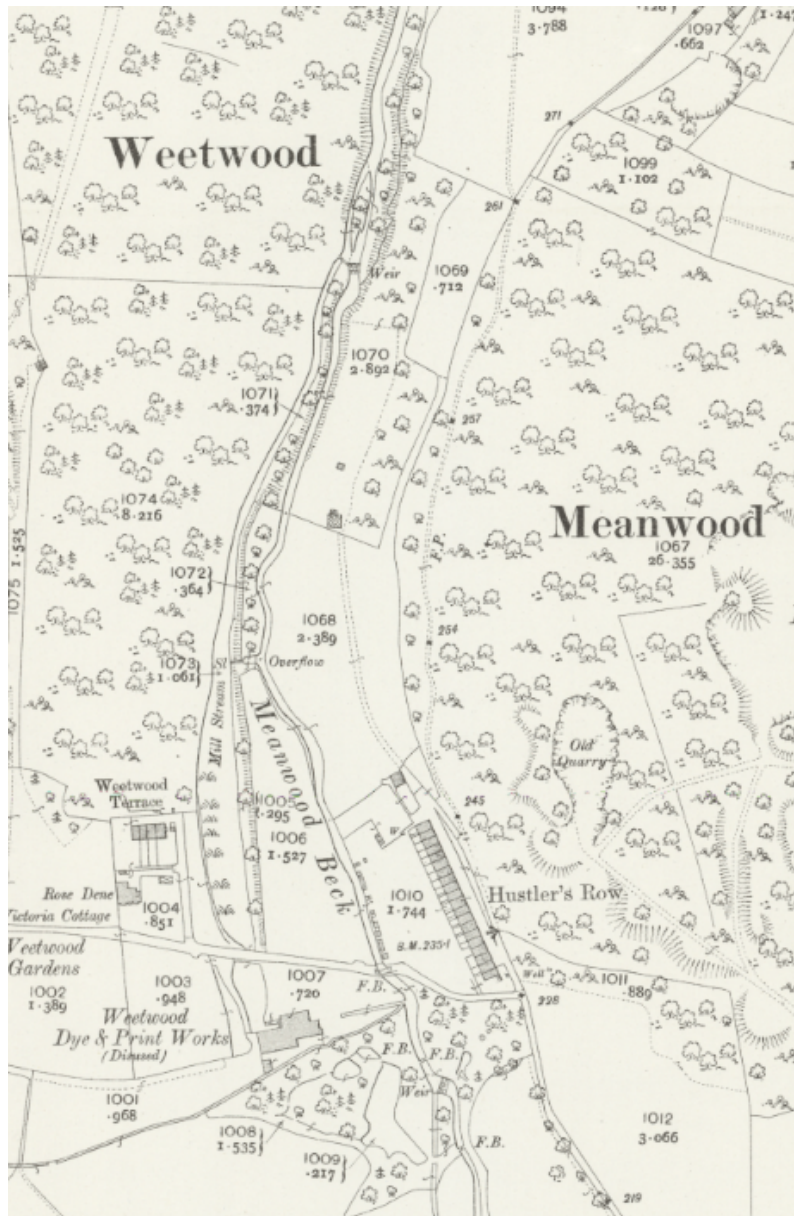
A Note at the end explains some terms related to water mills.

Numbers in **bold** refer to the images in the gallery accompanying the walk.

Maps are from the 25-inch Ordnance Survey of 1908.

Start

From Headingley Centre, take Bus Service 28 north up Otley Road and then Weetwood Lane. Alight at Foxhill Avenue, and follow the Lane to Leeds Outer Ring Road. Turn right, and follow the Ring Road for a quarter-mile, passing an entrance to The Hollies, to Parkside Road. Turn right into the Road, passing Valley Farm on the left (which used to be Smithy Mill), and cross the bridge over Meanwood Beck. After 150 yards, turn right into Meanwood Grove at a Meanwood Valley Trail sign, and follow the track beside the Beck, on your right. After a quarter-mile, enter Meanwood Park woods through a gateway in a stone wall. Fifty yards on, turn right down seven steps, to a wooden footbridge over the Beck [waypoint 1].



Weetwood Mill and groundworks



Weetwood Mill and mill pond, 1888 © University of Leeds

Weetwood Mill

A quarter-mile down the Beck into Weetwood, a weir provides a head of water for the mill stream for Weetwood Mill **02-03**. The raised mill stream follows the Beck closely on its right bank **04-05** to the mill pond, at the foot of Weetwood Mill Lane **06**. **Weetwood Mill** was built below the pond **07** in the late eighteenth century. Its tail-race flows back into the Beck downstream **08**, between two footbridges. The mill was used by William Martin and his son Thomas to make particularly fine paper. It was bought by Edward Oates (owner of the Meanwood Estate) in 1858, and leased as a bleach works and then a dye works. Edward's son Charles (uncle of Captain Oates) bought out the latter (to protect the local wildlife), and by the end of the century, the mill was derelict. In the mid-twentieth century the site became a market garden, but it is now quite overgrown. All trace of the mill is now gone.

From the footbridge over the weir [waypoint 1], turn left and follow the path beside the mill stream. In due course, the path drops away left from the stream, down to the Beck. Continue with the Beck on your left until you reach a footpath T-junction. Turn right up Weetwood Mill Lane for a hundred yards, to see a small mill pond on the right, in the grounds of a private house, Rose Garth; a large mill pond is behind a wall to the left, now filled in, with the market garden on the resulting platform (the mill was beyond this pond). Back at the junction, turn left, cross a wooden footbridge, and turn immediately right, through a stone arch. Follow the left bank of the Beck to a stone footbridge by a Meanwood Valley Trail sign [waypoint 2].



Meanwood Tannery and groundworks

Wood Mill or Meanwood Tannery

A few yards downstream from Weetwood Mill is another weir, Whalley's Dam, providing a head of water for the mill stream for Wood Mill (later, Meanwood Tannery) **09-10**. The stream diverges from the Beck (a few yards from the weir, the stream is in fact blocked, and water is supplied from a spring via an ornamental pond). It forms what is now the western boundary of Meanwood Park **11**. About a half-mile downstream **12**, the stream fills a large millpond **13**, whence a head race runs (beneath a drain cover) through the remains of a wheel-house **14**. The tail race emerges below the present mill buildings **15-16**, and rejoins the Beck.

Wood Mill (named after Mean Wood) was acquired by Kirkstall Abbey in 1230 along with the Meanwood estate. The Whalley family farmed the estate in monastic times, and rented the mill. After the Dissolution, the mill was bought by the Marshall family, but in the seventeenth century, it spent twenty years 'in Chancery' as its inheritance was disputed by 24 possible beneficiaries! The mill then passed through the hands of absentee landlords, until it was burned down in the eighteenth century. Rebuilt, with an enlarged pond, the mill was leased by Thomas Martin for paper-making, where he was succeeded by his son James (whose brother William leased Weetwood Mill for the same purpose).



The mill was largely burned again in 1852, but bought and rebuilt in 1856 by Samuel Smith as **Meanwood Tannery**, one of the largest in the country. By the end of the century, Samuel's son, another Samuel, inherited the family's brewery and moved to Tadcaster, leasing the building, as a tannery, then as a piggery, and finally as a fellmongers (preparing sheepskins for tanning, click [here](#)) to William

Gibson. The building was then known as Highbury Works. It was bought in 1920 and continued in use as a fellmongery, first by Robert Jowitt, and then by Robert Baker. Finally, in 1994, the building was listed Grade II (as 'Highbury Works') and the site was redeveloped for housing as Tannery Park, and the main building converted to Stone Mill Court apartments. Leeds Civic Trust put up a blue plaque there in 1999.

Cross the stone footbridge [waypoint 2] and turn left along the path between the mill stream and an ornamental duck pond (the bridge and the pond were built by Edward Oates, grandfather of Capt Oates as part of an 'American Garden'). Follow the path to an oak avenue (marked by an information panel) commemorating the Meanwood Men who fell in the First World War. Go down the avenue (which may be muddy), with the mill stream on the edge of the Park to the right (alternatively, the parallel path to the left follows the Beck). Emerge at another path [turn left for Meanwood Park café], and turn right along this path, cross the mill stream by a millstone, and leave the Park onto Hollin Drive. Turn left, and follow the road, with the mill stream behind a wall on the left. When the road bends right by Hollin Lane Farm, continue straight ahead along a track, past the former Highbury cricket ground. Carry on along the track between a smallholding on the left and Hollin Lane allotments on the right. At the end, at a footpath crossroads, turn left, passing the entrance to the mill pond on the left after 25 yards. Arriving at Tannery Park, the remains of the wheel house are to the left (with a small display on the history of the site), a path ahead goes into the Park, and another leads right, in front of the old mill buildings. Follow this, with the tail race on the left behind railings, to a wooden footbridge over the Beck [waypoint 3].



The Old Oil Mill and groundworks

Little of the groundworks for the Old Oil Mill remains. But their sites can still be identified. Fifty yards below the Tannery tailrace, the Beck takes a double bend, and between these two bends, a weir was built, now demolished **17**. Thence, the mill stream ran to the west, through what is now a builder's yard, between Highbury Lane and the Beck. The stream continued (across Monk Bridge Road), beside the footpath which now fronts Brookfield Terrace **18**, for a quarter-mile, leading to a mill pond over Grove Lane **19-20**. Stream and pond are now filled in, the latter forming an elevated platform among the trees **21**. Beyond the pond, the mill was built **22-24**, but all that remains is part of a wall beside the Beck **25**. However, a little further on, a stone arch survives **26**, from which the tailrace channel runs down to the Beck.



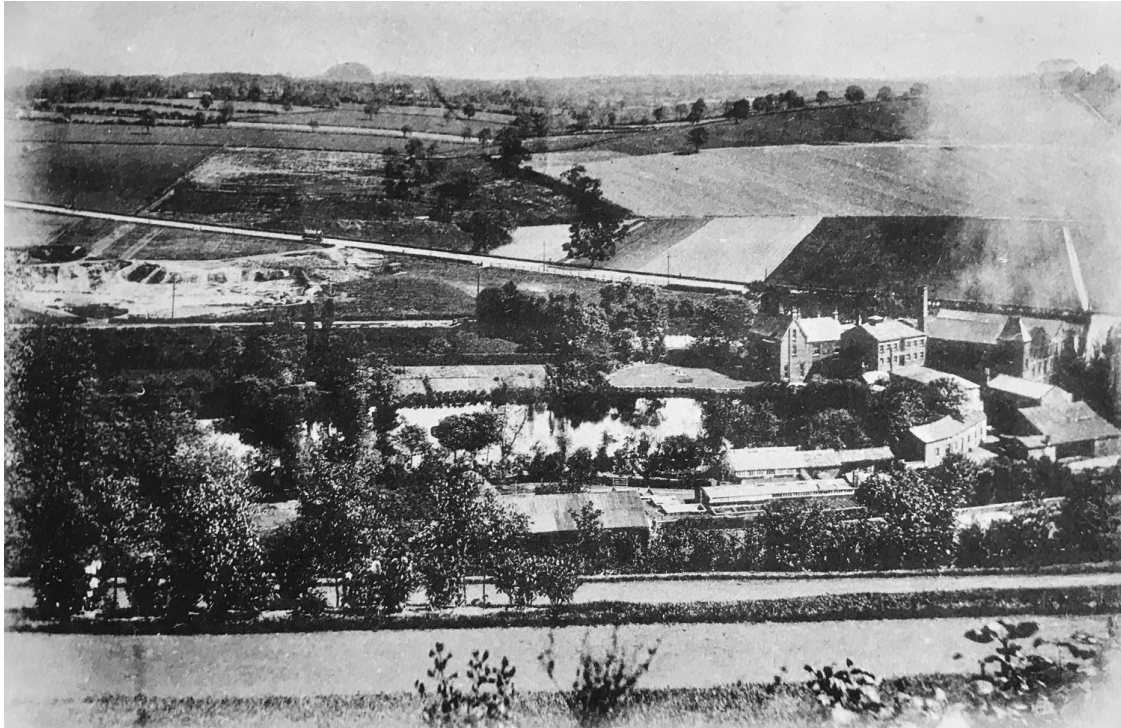
Woodland Dye Works, formerly Old Oil Mill, c1890 © Thoresby Society

An **oil mill** (crushing linseed) was evidently established at this site by 1792, when it was rented from Lord Cardigan by Benjamin Pullan. It was continued as an oil mill by Thomas Wood and his son Jacob. Then in 1865, the mill was leased by Benjamin Rowley, who introduced steam power to crush ganister, a type of sandstone (for sand, to be used in bricks for furnaces). By the end of the century, Edward Crowther had established the Woodland Dye Works there, which his family continued until the Second World War. After the war, the cottages were occupied until 1973, and Jack Morton bred pigs in a smallholding [click [here](#) for reminiscences]. But the properties fell into disrepair, and the site was bought by Leeds Corporation in 1974, the buildings were demolished and the mill pond filled in.

From the footbridge over the Beck [waypoint 3], follow the path across Monk Bridge Green to Mill Pond Lane, and turn right to Monk Bridge Road. Cross the Road by the zebra crossing, and turn right, over Monk Bridge. After fifty yards, turn left into a ginnel marked by a Meanwood Valley Trail sign. Follow the footpath along the front of Brookfield Terrace to Grove Lane. Across the Lane, the path forks: take the left fork, between the Vale Stables (a small garden centre) and the former mill pond, and follow the track to a footpath crossroads [waypoint 4]. Go straight ahead, between the Beck and the tail race, to where the race flows into the Beck.



Grove Mill and groundworks



Grove Mill and Pond, c1890

Headingley Mill or Grove Mill

A quarter-mile downstream, the fields north of the Beck seem to have been the site of Kirkstall Abbey's **Headingley Mill**, but by the Dissolution, the mill was no longer in use. However, in 1797, a new cloth mill was built there by John Waddington, and this is doubtless when the surviving groundworks were built. Beside the Vale Stables, a weir in the Beck provides a head of water for a goit **27** which runs eastward, in a straight channel **28**, originally to feed one of the mill ponds at the new mill; but it is now dry. Further down the Beck (just below the outflow of the tail race from Woodlands Dye Works), a second weir **29** provides the water for a mill stream **30** which once filled another pond at the mill. Further down still, a pack horse bridge over the Beck (listed Grade II in 1996) led to the mill **31**. During the nineteenth century, the site was shared by a yarn works and a dye works, and it became the most developed of those along the Beck, with three mill ponds altogether and a complex of buildings, known as **Grove Mill 32-33**. It was occupied by Alderman William Boothroyd (Mayor of Leeds, 1891-2). Following the First World War, the yarn works was occupied by a company which became Yorkshire Switchgear & Engineering Co Ltd [click [here](#) for reminiscences] and the dye works by Bullus & Co Ltd. Both continued in occupation until the end of the century, but in 2000, the site was developed as the Boothroyd housing estate – and all trace of the mills and ponds was lost. Only the goit, the mill stream and the bridge now point towards the location.

Return to the footpath crossroads [waypoint 4]. First, return back (north-east) along the track to the Vale Stables, beside which is a weir on the Beck, and the opening of the Goit to Grove Mill. Next, from the crossroads, turn left (north-west) over the footbridge, for fifty yards, to a second footbridge over the course of the dry Goit. Finally, from the crossroads again, go ahead (south-west) again, down to the Beck and a second weir, and the opening on the opposite bank of a mill stream to Grove Mill.



Meanwood Beck, 1889 © Thoresby Society

The Beck departs down Meanwood Valley **34**. It changes its name again at Sheepscar, before joining the River Aire (by Crown Point Bridge). The silt it deposited in the Aire long ago provided a fording place for a small community – which grew into the town of Leeds.

Finish

*Back at the crossroads [waypoint 4], turn right (south-east) up the hill for a few yards, to a second footpath cross roads [waypoint 5]. The path to the left leads back to the Beck. Go ahead to Woodhouse Ridge and the pack horse bridge. Turn right, up the track to the right of Cardboard Hill (formerly known as Piggy Hill, after the smallholding below) **24**. The unsurfaced track becomes a road, which in a half-mile leads back to Headingley Centre; this was originally called Oil Mill Lane, as it led to the mill at the end, but in the 1870s it was renamed Wood Lane.*

Detour to the Pack Horse Bridge: *from the crossroads [waypoint 5] go ahead past the stone squeeze stile, and bear left up the concrete path, past a Woodhouse Ridge information panel. After the fourteenth step, turn left into a path beside a mesh fence. Follow the path (with care) with the fence on your left, back down towards the Beck. Eventually, at a footpath T-junction, turn left and follow the path past a pond and an old air-raid shelter, on your left, and another information panel. Go down 21 steps to a footbridge over the Beck, from where the pack horse bridge is just visible some fifty yards upstream (in private grounds) **31**.*

For my friend Martyn Thomas, longtime Chair of Weetwood Residents Association
Richard Tyler, 2019 revised February 2021

Note on Water Mills

The water mills built along Meanwood Beck used **overshot** water wheels, the type best suited to hilly country. The wheels were vertical (rotating round a horizontal axle), powered by the weight of water falling from above. To attain the height (or **head**) of water required, a **weir** was built upstream, to dam and raise the level of the stream (which then flowed over the top of the weir). From this head of water, a watercourse (or **mill stream**) was built, with a shallow drop, running to a reservoir or **mill pond**, above the mill. (A **goit** was such a stream in a straight channel.) The level of the pond now being considerably higher than the level of the natural stream, a **head race** carried the water to the top of the wheel, causing it to turn. And a **tail race** below carried the water away, back to the stream. Water mills were used for milling corn for flour, pulping wood for paper, crushing linseed for oil, grinding stone for sand, and so on. ([Thwaite Mill](#) is a working water mill on the River Aire.)

There is further information on the Meanwood Beck mills in the chapter on 'Industry in the Valley' in Frederic P Casperson and W Arthur Hopwood, *Meanwood: Village, Valley, Industry and People*, Meanwood Village Association, 1986, reprinted 2004.