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This is one of a series of walks leaflets prepared by members of Colinton Local History Society.



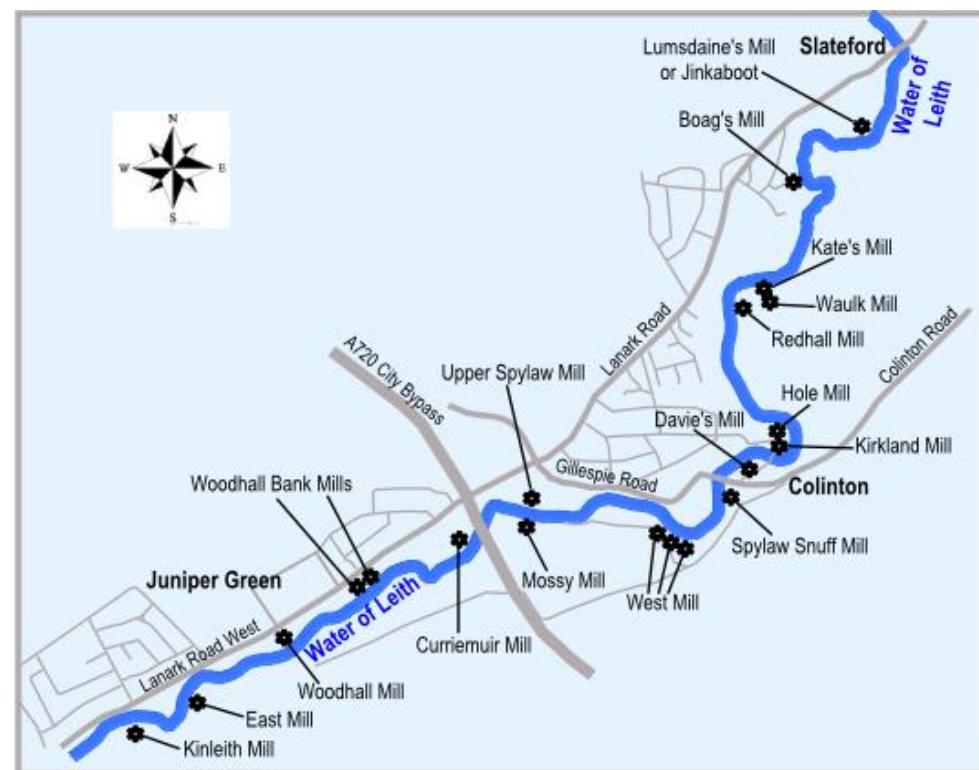
If you would like to find out more about the Society or about how to become a member, please contact us either via the contacts page of our website, [www.colintonhistory.org.uk](http://www.colintonhistory.org.uk) or by email to [enquiries@colintonhistory.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@colintonhistory.org.uk) or ask for up-to-date contact details at Colinton Public Library.

# COLINTON LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETY



## Walks around the parish of Colinton

### Walk 2: The Mills of Colinton

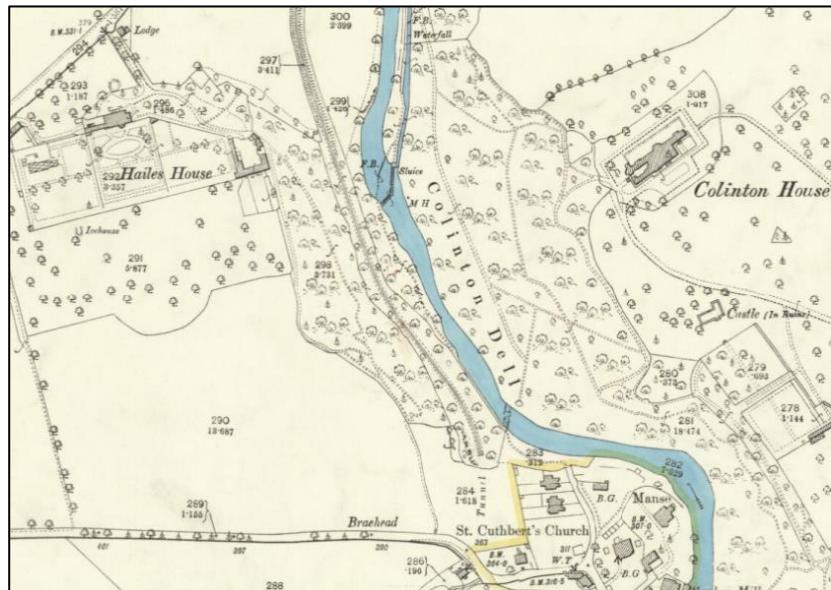


Boag's Mill was originally known as Vernour's Mill in 1598 when it was used for waulking. In 1691 it ground corn and in 1717 it was leased to **Nicol Lithgow** for papermaking. In 1735 it made special paper for the Bank of Scotland and is accredited in producing paper for their 20 shilling notes. For security reasons, the Bank officials lived in accommodation at **Millbank House** a short distance away. John Balfour mentioned earlier also owned this fine old coaching Inn.

At this point turn left and climb the slope up a tarred road, passing under the old railway bridge.

On the right hand side you will come to the rear of Millbank House with its red pantiled roof. This was an old coaching inn. Turn left at the T-junction here. There are now two options: those who wish can catch a bus close by on the main Lanark Road; or continue the walk by going diagonally to the right across the playing field towards Lanark Road. This expanse of grass was once **Redhall Quarry** which produced stone to build houses in the New Town. On reaching Lanark Road, continue uphill to Hailes Avenue.

Turn left into Hailes Avenue. On the right is a sign 'Apex Hotels'. This fine Georgian mansion is Hailes House, dating from 1765, with its 3 acres of grounds. Reaching this site, one has to look diagonally at the attractive old stable block, now a private house and garden, with the trees of the Dell behind. Some historians believe that this may have been the original site of Halis Church when Prince Ethelred founded it in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. One reason is that it would have sat on a hilltop with fine open views of Edinburgh to the east and Dunfermline Abbey to its north-west. Interestingly, if your stand behind this old stable block in the trees on the morning of the winter solstice in December and gaze at the Pentland Hills, there is a notch on the horizon where as the sun rises, a bolt of sunlight shines on the trees where you are standing!



Return to the junction with Lanark Road, turn left and continue until just past the junction with Hailes Grove. Then turn up the lane known as "The Turlies", cross over Hailes Gardens and continue along the lane to Spylaw Bank Road. Turn right here, then first left into Pentland Road and then left into Pentland Avenue, admiring the grand houses en route. Turn right down a narrow lane ("The Shoot") back to Gillespie Road just at the end of the bridge.

## **WALK OF THE MILLS AROUND COLINTON**

Start at Gillespie Road at the corner of Spylaw Avenue. There is a bus stop almost opposite, on Gillespie Road. Cross over Gillespie Road just after the bus stop and walk southwest down the dirt track towards the old railway track and river. Turn right at the path junction to join the Water of Leith Walkway and after a few yards you will see the dwelling house, **Upper Spylaw Mill**, now a private dwelling. In 1682 it became one of the earliest paper mills in Scotland. It had a 16 feet water wheel operating the machinery.

It is referred to in a court action when James Lithgow and his partner, Nicholas Delchamps (or Nicolas de Champs) were jointly charged with violating Peter Bruis's licence for manufacturing playing cards and enticing workmen away. They were also charged with 'abstracting hair cloths from another man, which was a felt used for absorbing water from newly formed sheets of paper.

In 1765 it was under the ownership of a William Reid who stated to the Lords in Council that his mill made a special type of snuff. It had been entered by excise men and a constable on the pretext of searching for smuggled goods. These men were accompanied by two other men under the employ of **James Gillespie**, a snuff miller who lived a short distance away. Nothing was found but a decade later, the excise men returned and found hidden in the roof space, 16 chests and 20 bags containing over a ton of Bohea tea and three barrels of brandy, clearly contraband.

Walking a short distance westwards on the railway line, go under the footpath via a small tunnel to a metal bridge and cross the river. As you approach the newly built flats, you pass the site of the former mill owned by the **Mosie Brothers, Mossy Mill**.

The mill was converted in 1838 when it was taken over by the McWhirter family who had bleachfields at their other mill at Inglis Green, Slatford village.

It started life in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a **waulk** mill (coarse woollen and linen cloths) changing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to making paper. It had three wheels, 18, 14 and 12 feet in diameter. It had no tail lade and left the building at 90 degrees returning the water to the river. This was an unusual feature. Mossy Mill closed in 1972.

Walk eastwards and come out at West Mill Road where you will find a few old stone houses. Turn back on to the Walkway.

Just after joining the surfaced road, on the right hand side you will see a building a few storeys high behind a metal gate. This was part of the West Mill site, also known as King's Mill, after the family name. There were three mills here in 1688, one for waulking, one for making flax and one for grain processing. In 1791, 300 people worked here. In 1850 West Mill had a 12 feet wheel, and King's had two 17 feet wheels.

In 1909, papermaking ceased here and the mill was taken over by A and R Scott, who made the original Scott's Porage Oats. (Note their distinctive spelling.)

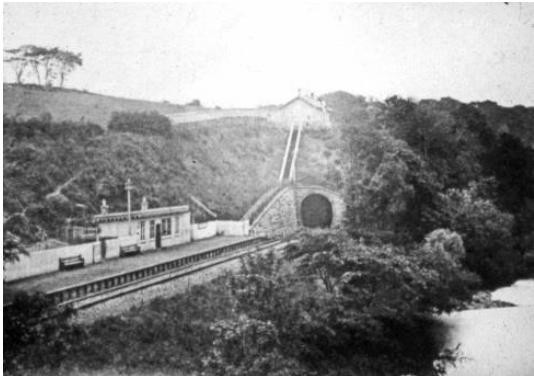


The tall building was occupied by Globespan Travel until recently. The lade is traceable at the end of West Mill Road behind the stone houses. Leaving the surfaced road, you pass Spylaw Park on the south side of the track. Enter the park through the gap in the wall and take a few moments to examine the notice board erected in the summer of 2011. Admire the fine stone building of Spylaw House. The part of the building facing the river is considerably older than the façade that you see and would have formed part of the Snuff Mill. Gillespie lived in the house which was added in 1759 to the original mill of 1650.

Gillespie went on to bequeath money to build the workers houses in Spylaw Street and a hospital in Bruntsfield Crescent.

Look across at the fine stone bridge over Gillespie Road, built in 1873. It has been strengthened since then to take modern day traffic.

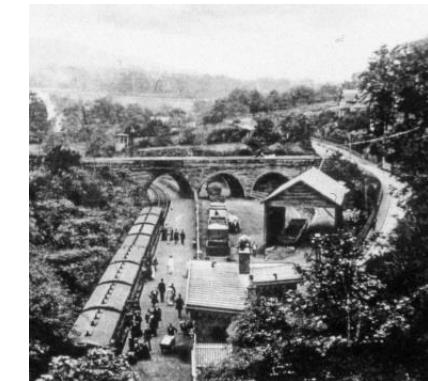
Pass in front of Gillespie's house and turn left behind a stone storage building to climb a flight of steps which bring you under the road bridge to a car park. In the area of the car park stood **Colinton Station**. Rejoin the Walkway here. High above was the Station Master's house in Station or Kirk Brae.



There were steps cut into the hillside and it was here that the master would walk up and down 'Jacob's Ladder' as it was known to meet the stopping trains. After about 150 yards you enter the railway tunnel cut through a rocky hillside. As you leave the tunnel look across the river to the bottom of Spylaw Street. **Davie's Mill** was built near that site in 1509 with access and mill houses beside the original Colinton Bridge.



Although the site cannot be easily identified from this point, there was an important mill at one time beside the Church. **Kirkland Mill** was a lint or flax mill in 1777, then became a meal mill in 1829. After that in 1846 it became known as **Richardson's Mill** producing snuff. In the late 19th century it produced cardboard for bookbinding. It had a huge, tall chimney which looked out of place in such a rural setting. It finally burned down in 1916 and the new graveyard was built on the land.



Again the site is difficult to determine, but **Hole Mill** stood on the south bank behind the Church in 1226. It was referred to also as Hailes Mill and was owned by Thomas De Lastalrig (Restalrig). A mill worked here until 1880.

Continuing on the walkway and passing the weir below on the right, when you see a signpost for "Walkway route via the Dells" turn right down some steps to the wooden bridge beside the weir. It is said that on the south bank, when Redhall mansion was being used by the Inglis family, an ice-box was cut into the ground and was refrigerated by the cooling water.



Cross the bridge, follow the lade alongside the path and look for it disappearing into the garden of **Redhall Mill**. Climb the steps until you reach the entrance to Redhall Mill. Bear in mind this is now private property and the houses are occupied, but in 1718 this was a paper mill which later, in 1769, made paper for banknotes, similar to Boag's Mill nearby..

A stone suggests it was reconstructed in 1803. This mill had two 16 feet wheels.

In 1902 the Walker family (of Bell's Mill at Dean) worked here making wood flour for linoleum. It was turbine driven by that time.

This site remains attractive with its group of cottages. The tail lade continues to our next site, Kate's Mill (follow the signed route towards Slateford).

**Kate's Mill** was developed on a former waulk mill site. In 1787 it was converted into paper making and was reputedly named after Kate Cant, wife of John Balfour who lived then at Bog's (Boag's) Mill. It employed many people and children. After the day's work, the children were schooled in some form of education. Remains of the perimeter wall may be seen today but the return lade is clearly visible from the wooden bridge nearby.



Boag's Mill in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

Turn left to cross the footbridge and walk over a pleasant grassy clearing, climb the gentle slope and then down to where you will see a large, fairly modern house. This was the site of Boag's Mill.

Look for a long indentation in the grass running from the pathway towards the house. This was the original lade to the mill which ran two large waterwheels, one undershot, the other a breast wheel.