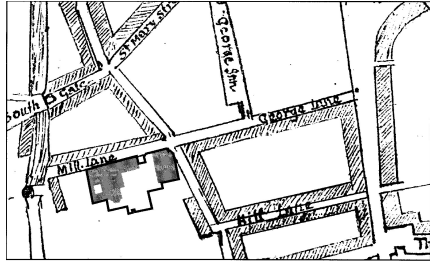


The site of the Town Mill is at the end of Blake Street (once known as Mill Lane), next door to the Blake Museum.



*Location of the Mill at the left hand end of Mill Lane about 1740*

The early history of the mill (then known as the Little Mill, goes back to the early middle ages, for it was recorded in the Domesday book and it was originally used for grinding corn.



*A water carrier*

Until the end of the 17th century Bridgwater obtained its water from local streams, from wells, and from stored rainwater. It was carried round the town by hawkers, who filled their carts at places like Horsepond Lane, which in 1680 had been fitted out to allow the inhabitants to obtain water directly from the Durleigh Brook.

Fire was an ever present fear then, with timber-framed buildings and thatched roofs.



*A fire at Tiverton, 1598*

In 1694 an agreement was drawn up by Bridgwater Corporation allowing Richard Lowbridge, an ironmonger of Stourbridge, Wores., to dig up the streets and lay water pipes from the old Town Mill to a cistern constructed in the roof space over the High Cross on Cornhill. Lowbridge had recently purchased the mill from John Smith of Barnstaple.

Both Lowbridge and Dunnell were partners in the waterworks at Exeter and Barnstaple, where among their fellow directors was Ambrose Crowley I the Quaker ironmaster of Stourbridge. Lowbridge was also a Quaker and by 1700 was an elder of the Exeter Meeting. Since Dunnell was a carpenter it is likely he was the engineering specialist, building the wooden waterwheel and machinery.

The Durleigh Brook discharges into the River Parrett at what today is known as St Saviour's Clyse, which can be seen on the west bank of the river near Blake Bridge. The building is quite small; no information has been found about the machinery at the mill, but it is likely that the breast-shot waterwheel of about 15 ft diameter rotated at approximately 15 rpm and drove through gearing a number of forcing pumps which drew the water from the stream and pumped it to the cistern on Cornhill through wooden pipes trenched into the roadway. It is possible that a corn mill was attached to the plant, so that water could be pumped during the miller's slack times.



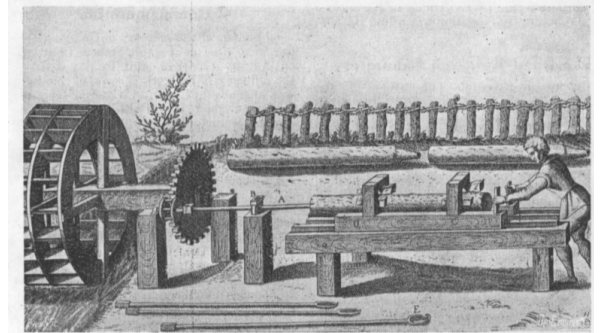
*The High Cross on Cornhill about 1800*

Numbers of wooden waterpipes were dug up from the streets of Bridgwater over the years: in 1795 when the stone town bridge was replaced by the iron one; in the 1830's when the gas mains were laid; and in the 1870's when the Water Company's pipes were laid. In 1917 more than 60 yards of elm water pipes were found in the bed of the Durleigh Brook in the garden of Ivy House, Friar Street. A complete section of a large-bore wooden water pipe has recently been recovered from the bed of the brook next to the Town Mill. Just why pipes were sunk in

is something of a mystery, but may be to do with drawing purer water from upstream, away from the pollution of the town.

Little more information has been found about this water service. None of the tourists' guidebooks published at the end of the 18th century mentioned the waterworks. Joshua Gilthis way is something of a pin, the American paper-maker who toured industrial Britain between 1795-1805 recording manufacturing processes, noted in his diary on May 12 1796 that the town obtained its water from the cistern under the High Cross, which was supplied from a nearby stream, so it is clear that the plant was still operational then. The High Cross and the cistern were demolished around 1800, and for the next eighty years, during which the population grew three-fold, and there were frequent severe epidemics, the town depended entirely on rainwater butts and cisterns, wells and what water was drawn from the Durleigh Brook.

The pipes were usually made of elm or alder. The hole was bored by a succession of hand-operated long augers, increasing in size, but larger water companies used mechanical boring machines, worked by horses or water.



*A machine for boring water pipes*

The ownership, operation and finances of the Bridgwater service during the 18th century is not known. Water carriers would have taken the supply round the streets drawn from the cistern and it is probable that some large properties would have had an independent piped supply as well. The water was piped to Eastover over the stone bridge then and it is possible there was a second cistern there somewhere, but no evidence of this has so far been found. Virtually all buildings would have used water-butts or cisterns to collect rain water for non-drinking use

and for fire fighting. Underground water cisterns for rainwater storage were sometimes constructed in larger house properties, from which the water could be pumped. The building may have reverted to a corn mill early in the 19th century, and by 1858 had a steam engine to drive the stones. By 1886 was used as a saw mill, then became disused and was used as a food store. By the end of the of the 20th century was a builder's store. It came on the market in 1987 and was purchased with a view of incorporating it into the Museum. The upper floor was destroyed by arson in 1995, and in 2009 the site was included in the property transferred to the Town Council along with the Museum.

Blake Museum is run by Bridgwater Town Council and managed by volunteers from The Friends of Blake Museum (Registered Charity 1099815)

As well as material about Bridgwater, it covers the villages in the area extending from just south of Burnham and Highbridge in the north, to Thurloxton in the south, and from Ashcott in the east to Nether Stowey in the west.

The Museum has collections relating to archaeology, local history, Robert Blake, The Duke of Monmouth and the Battle of Sedgemoor, the local merchant and artist John Chubb (1746-1818). There is an large photographic collection. The museum does extensive educational outreach work in local schools, and is the base for the Bridgwater Garrison – a reneactment group.

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Email: [info@bridgwatmuseum.org](mailto:info@bridgwatmuseum.org)  
Website [www.bridgwatmuseum.org](http://www.bridgwatmuseum.org)  
Opening hours Tuesday – Saturday 10.00  
am – 4.00pm  
The museum is closed during the winter  
months  
Nearest bus stop: High Street or Bus and  
Coach Station  
Railway Station: Saint John Street  
Nearest car park: Dampiet Street.

## BLAKE MUSEUM, BRIDGWATER

### *THE TOWN MILL - a short history*



*Photograph by courtesy of Rod Fitzhugh*

The mill about 1930