

Bradwell Fustian

On page 42 of *Bradwell Ancient and Modern* its author Seth Evans refers to the cotton spinning and weaving trades that were carried on in Bradwell in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He also tells us that Brook Building was once a silk mill. The mill was probably using shuttles supplied by Samuel Fox's father William. Seth Evans also refers to a 'Bump Mill' that was operating at that time 'at the brookside near Edentree' (close to where the Black Bridge now crosses the Brook near the Bowls Club). The mill was in the hands of brothers Hugh and Isaac Hill. The word bump refers to the tangled coarse cotton being prepared by processes known as 'carding' (straightening the fibres) and 'slubbing' (removal of fat globules) for spinning and weaving. In his 1973 article published in *Textile History Vol 4* Pp 94-99 D W Shimwell describes what he refers to as the fustian business carried on by the Hill brothers from towards the end of the 18th century until 1810. In this context fustian refers to coarse cloth used to make for example working men's clothes. The processes of spinning and weaving the fustian would depend on a supply of carded cotton from a bump mill. Shimwell traces the path leading to the establishment of the Hill brothers' business in Bradwell and the story he tells says quite a lot about how this cottage industry was carried on in Bradwell and elsewhere.

The Hills were an established Bradwell family of farmers and shopkeepers – a Michael Hill is listed as paying hearth tax in Bradwell in the middle of the 16th century. In 1784 Hugh Hill was apprenticed to John Moorhouse 'to learn the art, trade or occupation of fustian weaver and also the art of warping fustian and the spinning of cotton'. The documentation of the 3½ years of his indentures appears not to have survived but it must have been successful because in 1795 Hugh and his brother Isaac were in partnership in the fustian business and they were now in the position to employ Hugh's teacher John Moorhouse at an annual salary of £50. Shimwell traces how the brothers came to be set up making fustian. Hugh's grandfather, also Hugh, owned or rented several small parcels of land in the fields of Bradwell. On his death these passed to his wife Sarah who in 1798 left the house and outbuildings consisting of a 'bakehouse, barns, stables, warehouses, cowhouse and gardens situated at Smithy Hill' to her son Robert. In turn the various parcels of land and farm stock came to Robert's sons Hugh and Isaac. They sold the latter for £182. 18s. 10d but kept the land which together with the land owned by Hugh's wife Ann Arabella (née Bramall) came to some 5 acres. This gave the family a small but soundly based income which allowed for the expansion of their developing fustian making interests. Between 1799 and 1801 they erected the carding (bump) mill on land they leased on 'either side of Bradwell Brook'. The lease also included rights to the Brook itself with the purpose of working the mill 'for spinning or carding by water'. The carding mill was completed by August 1801 at a total cost of £359 (in today's money this is equal to about £18,000) including the machinery. In an insurance application made in March 1803 the mill can be seen to have been a two storey building with dimensions 30 x 24ft (9.1x7.3 m).

The original spinning Jenny workshops and warehouses of the Hill family remained in a complex of buildings on Smithy Hill. In September 1801 Robert Hill bought 2 dwelling houses and a cold store (an ice house?) at a price of £43, which by 1803 had been converted into additional workshops. The main two storey building measured 40 x 19 ft (12.7x5.8 m) and housed 8 spinning Jennies (4 on each floor). It seems that 8 spinners and 5 weavers were employed by the Hill Brothers and with the operators of the carding engine(s) and apprentices the total number of employees probably came to about 20. Robert Hill died in 1807 and left his shop and bakehouse to Isaac who then dropped out of partnership with his brother. Hugh

continued to run the firm until 1810. By that time he must have been suffering like many of the owners of similar small businesses from the combined effects of the Napoleonic blockade, the decreasing market for fustian (locally this might have been affected by the decline in lead mining) and the unsuitability of the equipment to meet the growing demand for fine cotton. Hugh wound up the business in 1810 and became a shop keeper until his death in 1824 at the age of 54. The mill at Edentree together with ‘all wheels, gear and other utensils’ was leased for 9 years at 16 guineas a year by Francis Cockayne of Bradwell, a manufacturer of flax. Thereafter it is possible that the mill was operated by Benjamin Pearson of Brough who had run a similar mill at Brough since 1794 (indeed it seems likely that the design of the Hill brothers’ mill was based on the one at Brough). All carding operations at Edentree seem to have ended by the early 1830s. Hugh’s son Robert was still living in Bradwell in 1841.

Money spent in building bump mill (1801)

| | £. | s. | d. |
|--|------------|-----------|----------|
| <i>Materials and carriage</i> | | | |
| Getting and loading stone (5 men) | 12 | 15 | 5 |
| Hope Stud, bill for sowmettle [†] | 29 | 19 | 11 |
| Iron, screw and nail bills (3) | 12 | 0 | 0½ |
| Wood and plank (3 bills) | 6 | 19 | 5 |
| Carriage of wood | 4 | 1 | 4 |
| Mr Richard White for stone lead | 12 | 15 | 8½ |
| Robert Hall, lime | | | |
| Robert Andrew, lime | 3 | 4 | 3 |
| William Fox, shuttles and Kirks for carriage | 2 | 13 | 0 |
| Miscellaneous small items (6 bills) | 6 | 3 | 9 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| | 90 | 12 | 10 |
| <i>Construction</i> | | | |
| Ambrose Marsden & Co., masons | 27 | 13 | 1 |
| George Middleton, mason | 13 | 13 | 0 |
| William Eyre, bill for woodwork | 49 | 6 | 8 |
| Elijah Eyre, bill for Wheel etc | 53 | 16 | 5 |
| Samuel Hayward’s bill, glazing | 9 | 15 | 6 |
| George Barber, slating | 6 | 16 | 5 |
| John Broadbent, paving etc | 1 | 19 | 6 |
| George Walker & Co. goat* cutting | 12 | 9 | 6 |
| Edward Darneley, for a road | 1 | 14 | 0 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| | 177 | 4 | 1 |
| <i>Machinery (no details)</i> | 91 | 13 | 6 |
| | <hr/> | <hr/> | <hr/> |
| Total | 359 | 10 | 5 |

[†]This appears to have been an early name for pig iron.

* A goat is an old word for millstream which in this case appears to have been about 3½ chains (77 yards, 70 metres) in length.