

# The Landmark Trust

## **BRINKBURN MILL, NR. ROTHBURY, NORTHUMBERLAND**

Brinkburn Mill stands within the ancient precincts of Brinkburn Priory. On the south side, part of the medieval Priory wall, now only a few feet high, runs between the mill and the river. The main gateway to the Priory, of which remains were discovered while the restoration of the mill was in progress, lies buried just to the east. The Augustinian canons of Brinkburn were endlessly pestered by Scottish raiders, and needed a stout wall and a strong gatehouse.

The present building dates mainly from around 1800, but probably stands on the site of a medieval mill. Monastic communities were supported by farming and, like any landowner, usually had a mill in which to grind their own and their tenants' corn. An inventory drawn up in 1536, when Brinkburn Priory was dissolved by Henry VIII, mentions both a 'water corn mill' and a tannery.

The arrangement of the Priory at Brinkburn was unusual, however. While most monasteries had an outer court containing farm buildings, this was usually to the west of the main dwelling next to the church; and also upstream of it, with the drain for the sewage and kitchen waste running downstream. At Brinkburn, it is now clear that the outer, farm court was both to the east and downstream. This must partly be because of the small amount of level ground available, and in this case, the western end of the site was also more secluded as the main approach to the Priory was from the east, along the track used by visitors to the Mill today. This ran off an old Roman road; just downstream are the foundations of a medieval or Roman bridge, where this road crossed the river.

From soon after the Dissolution until 1792, Brinkburn Priory belonged mostly to the Fenwicks. By 1700, the family's main house was Wallington, but the Priory was lived in by cousins, while growing increasingly derelict. The mill was mentioned in documents from time to time, and 18th century maps show a group of buildings where the present mill is, one of them with a water-wheel. In 1792, Brinkburn was sold to Joseph Hetherington. He left it to his niece, Mary, who married Major Richard Hodgson in 1809. They rebuilt Brinkburn House in 1810. At about the same time, or possibly a little earlier, the mill was rebuilt, as a low building running north-south. An advertisement for a miller was placed in the Newcastle Chronicle in January 1813. The mill building itself contained no accommodation, but there was a cottage near it.

One of the great millstones was renewed in 1825. Soon afterwards, the mill was painted by J.M.W. Turner, standing in the foreground of a view of the Priory painted about 1830-1 as one of a series of Picturesque Views of England and Wales. Turner may have exercised some artistic licence, but he showed the mill as a humble, rather tumbledown, building, with a thatched roof.

Around 1850-60, the Mill was enlarged. The older mill building was re-roofed at the same time, and given a new south gable and new windows. The addition, at the north end, consisted of two rooms, each with its own front door, and with no door between them and the mill proper. With their cornices and tall windows, and imposing porch reached by a tunnel from the main garden, it is thought that they were built as a summerhouse or fishing lodge. The smaller room seems always to have had a cooking range, and so must have been used to prepare food for the assembled company in the larger room. Curiously, this room had no fireplace to begin with.

The owner at this time was Cadogan Hodgson Cadogan, who in 1858-9 employed Thomas Austen, a Newcastle architect, to rebuild the Priory church and perhaps also remodel the Mill to act as an eye-catcher at the end of the garden. The west side, visible from the house, is more decorative than the east, with diamond-latticed windows and stone dormers.

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In 1896, Eleanor Fenwick inherited Brinkburn from her brother, Arthur Hodgson Cadogan. Eleanor was married to Hugh Fenwick, a distant cousin of the earlier owners, who had sold the Priory just over a hundred years before. By now, the north end of the Mill had been turned into a cottage. A new chimney and grate were added in today's sitting room and the outside door into it was blocked and a new door made in the dividing wall. The cottage was lived in by Mr Shell, the coachman. He and his wife brought up a large family in the two rooms.

By the 1920s, if not before, the mill had fallen out of use. In the 1930s, a generator was installed there, standing on concrete blocks that were removed in the recent restoration. This provided electricity for the house for ten years. The accumulator jars were kept in the present kitchen. In 1965 the Priory church and Brinkburn House were made over to the then Ministry of Public Buildings and Works (they are now in English Heritage's care), but the Mill remained part of the Fenwick estate. In 1989, to prevent it becoming a ruin, Mr Fenwick offered the Mill and its outbuildings to the Landmark Trust. The sale was completed a year later.

## RESTORATION

When the Landmark Trust bought Brinkburn Mill in 1990, it had been empty for over fifty years. Extensive repairs were needed as well as alterations to make the building habitable. Before work began on the Mill, the overgrown track leading to it had to be repaired. Then the roof had to be stripped and relaid, using the existing slates, rotten window lintels were replaced, copings to gables and dormers were rebbed or renewed. Fortunately some of the stones were found lying near the building, including one of the stone acorn finials.

In 1990, the lower, mill building was a single undivided space, although there had once been a room partitioned off at its northern end. The millstones and machinery were still there, on a platform at the southern end, where it can still be seen in the larder bedroom. There is no longer any connection between the stones and the cast iron undershot wheel outside, however. There was then no connection either between the mill and the two grander rooms at the north end. It was clear that a new door would have to be made to link the two parts of the building, but the floors in each were at completely different levels. The answer was to put a new floor inside the mill, a metre higher than the original, stone-paved, one. Although the new bedrooms and bathroom would be on this upper level, the outside door was still at the lower. A lobby and stair were inserted to link the two, and a new window inserted beside the door, to provide better light.

The little window in the smaller bedroom dates from the time when the mill was built, about 1800. It was blocked when the window above it was inserted, about 1850. The lower window was opened up again to give a view towards the Priory. The upper window still had fragments a diamond-latticed window. This turned out to be made of wood, not lead, and so the new casements were made to match. The smaller of the two north rooms had always been a kitchen, and this is how it is used again, with the larger room also continuing in its original function as a sitting room. The decoration of this room is what you might expect to find in a fishing lodge, one of its possible former uses. Electricity and running water also had to be introduced for the first time. The last job was to put the outbuildings and walls into good order. Finally, the Mill was furnished, and received its first visitors at the end of 1992. Instead of hiding in undergrowth, the building can now stand out proudly, as an ornament to the Priory garden. The architects who supervised the restoration were Stewart Tod & Partners of Edinburgh, and the work was carried out by J. & W. Lowry of Newcastle. A local archaeologist, Peter Ryder, kept a watch while the restoration was in progress, gathering new information about the history of the site, and the Priory itself.

*The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Brinkburn Mill sleeps up to 4 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please visit [www.landmarktrust.org.uk](http://www.landmarktrust.org.uk) or call 01628 825925*