

The Landmark Trust

TANGY MILL

The Mill that we see today seems to have been erected in about 1820, but it probably replaces an earlier mill in a similar position. It was built to serve the big arable farms of the region. The L-shaped building is constructed of whinstone rubble laid in coarse lime mortar, and the dressings are of pinkish brown sandstone quarried from Kilkivan. The roof is of slate secured to 12" wide wooden sarking boards by wooden pegs known as 'dolls'.

The Mill was principally used for grinding oats. Because of the wet climate, this grain had to be dried before grinding and this took place in the two storey kiln with its big revolving ventilator, known as a 'granny', on its roof. Here the oats were spread six inches deep on a perforated iron floor. The fire below in the furnace chamber incorporates a central kiln surrounded by a brick vault which provided a void beneath the drying floor for the circulation of the hot air thus providing the heat to dry the grain - the granny ensured a steady draught.

The main block, consisting of three storeys of 'lofts' was where the oats were ground. The machinery was driven by the backshot waterwheel alongside the east gable, which was fed from a small dam at the head of a waterfall just above the Mill, while the main reservoir, Tangy Loch, lies a little further upstream. Two sluices controlled the flow.

The bottom loft contains the gear-cupboard, provided access to the kiln and was otherwise kept clear for the sack-hoist, which lifted the sacks of grain to the upper floors.

The middle loft served as the stones floor, containing two pairs of stones. Beside them stands a crane used to lift the upper stones when they required re-dressing. The larger pair of stones to the south are made of a softer, probably a Peak stone, and was used for the initial grinding of the grain and for cattle meal. The north pair is a French burr stone and was used for the second and finer grinding. Each stone is enclosed in a timber casing or 'tun' which retained the meal as it emerged from the outer edge of the stones. A scraper or 'tag' on the upper 'runner' stone swept the grain through a hole in the floor to a spout below.

A door in the south wall opens onto the drying floor of the kiln. The west portion of this floor contains the sack hoist and a threshing machine. The openings of the hoist are fitted with double flaps which closed automatically when a sack had passed through.

The top loft or bin floor is wholly within the roof space and contains the hoppers that fed the stones below. A small shute at the base of the south wall allowed grain to be fed into the kiln. The top loft houses the sack-hoist and the remainder of the space was used for storing sacks of grain prior to drying in the kiln or grinding.

The east portion of the furnace chamber is partitioned off and contains an intermediate floor, level with that of the lower loft in the main block. This room is known as the 'seed house' and formerly housed a winnowing machine.

The Mill was originally used for grinding oats for both human consumption and cattle feed, but latterly cattle meal alone was produced. Tangy Mill finally ceased operations in 1961, not least because the last miller, Mr Neil McConnachie had the nasty experience of falling through the rusting kiln drying floor into the furnace chamber.

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RESTORATION OF TANGY MILL

The Landmark Trust acquired Tangy Mill in 1973 from Mr McConnachie although it was not until the summer of 1979 that work began.

Although the Mill had been disused for so many years, all the machinery described overleaf was still there, and so, as much as possible, we have tried to leave it as it was, with the accommodation and furniture fitted amongst it all. The outside of the building is unchanged except for one new window to light the bathroom. The south front door had rotted beyond repair, but the hinges are original. The stone lintel above it had to be replaced, as had several others. Fortunately, the Kilkivan quarry, near Machrihanish, from which the stone for the original quoins and lintels came, was still in use and so the new stone came from there.

Inside the walls are plastered and were originally. The wooden posts are original, still with the burn marks from where lanterns were hung on them. The floor is pine, like the old one, but new.

To left of the door, as you enter, was a small office with the fire in it. The fire is as it was, except the original lining of lime mortar and cow dung, a traditional method in this area, had to be replaced. The stairs had been put in in 1913, but the hand rail, glazed fire door and panelled enclosure are new, as of course is the partition with the kitchen fittings.

The bedroom on the drying floor of the kiln has a door that had been used as a ramp for wheelbarrows. You can see where they have worn it away in the middle, and it has had to be strengthened. There used to be a board across the door to keep in the grain, and the slots that held it are still there. The shute above the door is where the oats poured in. The perforated cast iron floor is the original that Mr McConnachie fell through into the fire with his barrow of oats. He managed to get out by pushing up the iron panels which were fortunately not fixed. It was a narrow escape!

The 'granny' is a replacement, and the original would have been open at one side, but this would have made the room too cold and so the new one is closed in. The shaft used to be wood but was too noisy and so it was replaced with a steel one. The windows are as they were with original sliding wood panels. The other bedroom on the middle loft contains the threshing machine. This was moved three feet to make more room for the beds, and it is the only piece of machinery in the Mill that was shifted. By the door there is an old repair where the barrows came in. The bathroom was partitioned out of the rest of the middle loft.

The top loft with its two further beds has been lined with insulation board and some of the rafters needed reinforcement. The window frames are new. The roof was in a bad way and new coping stones were put on the west gable. The slates all had to be relaid. Finally, in May 1981, the walls were re-harled and painted in limewash as they had been originally.

The Landmark Trust is a building preservation charity that rescues historic buildings at risk and lets them for holidays. Tangy Mill sleeps up to 6 people. To book the building or any other Landmark property for a holiday, please contact us.