

Protecting old mills and other historic water features

Why are they important?

Before modern industrialisation water was the main power source for industry in Scotland. Even small water courses were dammed to supply a head of water and lades to power mills could run for some distance. Though the mills may no longer operate, they are important for understanding how farms were managed and how the present landscape has been created. Though the mill dams may be broken down and mill wheels removed, the shape of the ponds and the line of the lades can still influence the landscape.

Threshing mills are also a common survival from farms working in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Where will I find these features?

Known mills and water features like mill dams and lades should form part your farm audit. Many water features have not been fully recorded by archaeologists and you may well have features that are not recorded. Early map evidence, as shown on the illustration on Rural Advice Note 2, may help identify where such mills operated.



Most mill ponds are no longer used but can still be important landscape and biodiversity features.



Because water power was so important, even a small burn could support a mill if there was sufficient space for damming water in a pond.

How should I manage them?

Land managers in receipt of the Basic Farm Payment should protect these features as part of their cross compliance conditions [GAEC 7 Retention of Landscape Features](#).

While it may not always be a practical or viable option to restore of mill ponds, mill wheels and lades, they can still be protected by retaining and enhancing them as visible features in the countryside. This means they should not be selected as areas of dumping or become obscured by modern tree planting and other nature conservation work. Minor repairs and remedial work will prevent erosion and restrict root damage to walls and banks. It may also help reduce health and safety risks from decaying structures by stabilising decay.

Mills may be suitable for building restoration and this should be done in sympathy with the original building. You can get advice from both your local conservation officer (within the local planning department) and from Historic Scotland as to what actions are appropriate - see Rural Advice Notes 4 and 22 for sources of information.

Much of Scotland's archaeological heritage lies in rural areas. This sheet is one of a series giving advice on some of the ways these important remains can be protected during normal rural land management.

GOOD PRACTICE

- Identify where these features survive on your land and what management is appropriate to preserve these for the future. Where you do not have a farm audit look at early maps to see if earlier mills and associated lades and ponds are recorded.
- Do not use mill ponds, lades and other waterways as dumping areas for farm rubbish, including building rubble.
- Remove intrusive vegetation growing over walls and inside buildings - however this must be balanced with biodiversity and visual concerns. Consult both your archaeological and environmental advisers if uncertain what action is appropriate.
- Timely repairs to mill structures, mill dams and the banks and walls of lades will prevent them disappearing as visible features
- Where a health and safety issue has been identified with a mill pond or other water course, do not automatically destroy the feature. It may be possible to preserve these as landscape features by judicious use of fencing or by timely repairs.

Further information -



Redundant mill with cut for lade in foreground.



Mill lade now partially silted up.

Archaeology Scotland | Suite 1a | Stuart House | Station Road |
Musselburgh | Edinburgh | EH21 7PB 0300 0129878 |
info@archaeologyscotland.org.uk | www.archaeologyscotland.org.uk
Company Registered in Scotland No. 262056 | Registered Scottish
Charity No. SC 001723

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