

## **A MILL ON THE MONNOW: RUTHLIN – CORNMILL TO PAPERMILL**

**Philip Vaughan**

Once upon a time, Afon Mynwy, the Monnow, was a stream of working mills.

From its source on the slopes of Hay Bluff, the waters ran south, turning cornmills at Craswall, Pontynys (working till 1939) and Clodock (still in operation). At Alltyrynys, the Monnow is joined by the River Honddu to serve Trewyn Mill, a one-time fulling-mill; such a mill, called 'pandy' in Welsh, used water power for the fulling-stocks to pound the rags needed to make finished cloth. The river, now the England-Wales border, here bends sharply to the north-east. A few miles on, it brought power to the hammers of Llancillo Iron Forge, and then to the 17th-century Pontrilas Forge, just two miles downstream on the English bank.

Turning south by south-east, the Monnow continues to provide the historic boundary between Monmouthshire and Herefordshire, all the way to Monmouth. Gathering water from tributary streams along its way, the river turned cornmills at Grosmont, Skenfrith, Ruthlin and Perth-hir, as well as – on the Herefordshire side – Kentchurch, Garway and Tregett. Close to Monmouth, it activated Osbaston Mill, a cornmill dating back a thousand years, which became Monmouth Iron Forge; and in Monmouth itself the waters drove Monnow Mill (also known as Queen's Mill) and the older Priory Mill (also known as Castle Mill). While some of these sites are

meaningful only to researchers and archaeologists, others, like Cwm Mill at Craswall, Clodock, Ruthlin and Monnow Mill continue as 21st century dwellings.

We take up now the story of Ruthlin, on the Monnow, formerly in Rockfield parish in a detached portion of 217 acres which adjoined Skenfrith. These acres were transferred to Skenfrith parish by boundary changes in 1882. Mention must be made of two other Rockfield mills. Pentwyn (also called Rockfield) Mill SO 478 150 was a cornmill, later a fulling-mill, on the Monnow's tributary Nantygern Brook. Although marked on the 1841 tithe map, it was 'Tuck Mill (Disused)' on the 1886 OS 6-inch map. Perth-hir Mill SO 483 155 stood on the main river. Around 1700 Perth-hir was briefly both a papermill (as detailed later) and a cornmill, converted to a fulling-mill by 1717. Its subsequent operation through the 19th century ended when it burned down in 1890.

Apart from Ruthlin Mill SO 464 189, the Rockfield/Skenfrith enclave held few properties: the Woodside, the Sand House (on the Monnow's east bank), Tump Farm SO 461 193 (not the Tump Farm near Rockfield House), Orchard Cottage and Ruthlin Farm. Ruthlin Mill was close to a weir on the Monnow, from which a short leat delivered hydraulic power to its waterwheel. It was the only commercial enterprise in this rural community (the nearby small quarry was never exploited commercially). Erected in mediaeval times, its very first

written record<sup>1</sup> which survives, dated 1591, names it 'Rullings...a water grain mill'.

(An earlier document<sup>2</sup>, from 1541, does reveal an established place-name here, but fails to identify it as a mill; simply, it concerns the transfer of property at Hilston, an estate just over Coed Anghred Hill, by 'John William Vaughan of Irrillyn' i.e. Ruthlin, by an older name.) The 1591 deed introduces John Jones, who is otherwise unknown, releasing Ruthlin Mill to Hugh Evans; he was perhaps one of the eminent Evans family of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel, who were recorded as the mill's proprietors into the 18th century. They were major landowners in north Monmouthshire throughout the 17th-19th centuries; based at Llangattock Manor, they left some notable brass and stone memorials of the 17th and 18th centuries in St Cadoc's church.

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<sup>1</sup> Gwent Archives, D583, 26: 1591, June 6. 'Rullings Mill, a water grain mill', transferred to Hugh Evans by John Jones of Trostreii. Variants of the name include Irrillyn, Yrychlyn, le Rhilling, Rylling, Rughlen, Rutlynge and Ruthin.

<sup>2</sup> NLW, Milborne 443: 1541, Sept. 3. Monmouth Manorial Court Roll records the surrender of the moiety of a messuage and lands at 'Hilston, par. Seynt Moughan', by John William Vaughan of Irrillyn, to Philip Thomas of Hilston.

This is the earliest record of any Ruthlin property. J A Bradney in his 'History of Monmouthshire' noted on the margin: 'Now the Ruthlyn, on the...Monnow'.

The Vaughan connection with this area reappears<sup>3</sup> in 1606, when John James held lands ‘heretofore of Richard Vaughan, called the Ruthlin in Rockfield’. Also Thomas Jones ‘holdeth a parcel of lands heretofore belonging to a tenement called Ruthlin..., being Roger Vaughan's tenement’ and James Watkin held part of ‘a tenement called Ruthlin...’. The mentions of Richard and Roger Vaughan, perhaps brothers, begin to show a local cluster of this family; also, at this date William Vaughan and Charles his son held tenements in St Maughans. The exact origin of these Vaughans is unknown. However, the Vaughans of Courtfield pedigree in Bradney’s History of Monmouthshire shows ‘Richard Vaughan of Rylling’ as second son of John Vaughan of Llanrothal. The first son was William Vaughan of Llanrothal, whose 1588 will requested that he be buried in that church.

Llanrothal Court, the farmstead that was long a Vaughan family home, stands in Herefordshire but just a field away from the Monnow. The 1840s tithe map shows a meadow, ‘Bridge Ham’, between Court and river, which suggests the existence of a bridge to link the footpath that formerly led west from the Court and Llanrothal Church to the Monnow, thence continuing on the west bank past Orchard Cottage and Tump Farm. The OS 6” map of 1885-6 does mark a bridge, but the 6” map of 1904-5 omitted it. A bridge here (or, hypothetically, at Ruthlin Mill itself) would have served mill customers much more conveniently than the 2-mile detour south via Tregate Bridge; and it would have brought worshippers to St John’s at

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<sup>3</sup> History of Monmouthshire, J A Bradney: Transcription of 'Non-Heriotable Property in St Maughans, 1606'.

Llanrothal more quickly than to Skenfrith, St Maughans or Rockfield churches.

In 1614 Ruthlin Mill passed<sup>4</sup> by inheritance to John Evans. But while the Vaughans were not the mill's owners, they remained its tenants, as revealed by records<sup>5</sup> of 1621, 1627, 1647/8, 1657

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<sup>4</sup> Gwent Archives, D361, E 103, 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> NLW, Milborne 2434: 1621, Dec. 24. Letter, 'W. Patshull to Geo. Mylborne' refers to an action in Goodrich Court between the recipient and 'Mrs Vaughan of Rughlen'. NLW, Badminton 1 (Manorial 2), Part 2. No. 2,462: 1627, June 22. Through his attorneys 'Thomas Powell, Monmouth, and Thomas Williams, Langattocke Clingodee, gent's', John Vaughan, 'formerly of Rutlynge, gent., one of the sons of Richard Vaughan of Rutlynge, gent., dec.', surrendered his part in all messuages, etc. in Rockfield and St Maughans, to the use of John Vaughan, Courtfield, esq., and Watkin Harry of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel, for a fine of 12d. NLW, Milborne 574: 1647/8, March 10. 'Richard Vaughan of the Ruthlyn, p. Rockfield, gent., and Alce, his wife, grant to John Wm. Saunders of Langua, yeoman', a mortgage of £20 on a 99 year lease of an orchard and land in Rockfield. NLW, Milborne 255: 1657. Thomas Barry, Skenfreth, and Richard Barry, Tregett HEF, gents., two sons of William Barry, gent., dec'd, released an Equity of Redemption to William Evans of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel and Richard Pearle of the Hay Wood HEF, gents. and to Richard Vaughan the younger of the Rutlin gent. and Susan, his wife, one of the daughters of William Dobyne, clerk. The Release, in consideration of Richard's marriage to Susan, related to lands defined in a record of 15.2.1648. A pencil note on the back of this document – in a different, later, hand – reads 'Ruthing lands'.

and more. A deed<sup>6</sup> of 1667 supplies further proof of continuing Evans ownership. It is unclear whether the Vaughans lived at Ruthlin Mill rather than the nearby Ruthlin Farm. The first man we meet designated as 'miller' is discovered in Rockfield register<sup>7</sup>: one John Williams, 'formerly millar of ye Ruthlin Mill', was buried in 1705 – not a Vaughan, but perhaps an employee.

More Vaughans 'of Ruthlin' (but not specifically of the mill) appear in records of 1710-1720; one states that William, son of Joseph Vaughan deceased, 'of the Rylling', surrendered 40 acres in Rockfield to Thomas Evans junior, in a deed<sup>8</sup> of 1720 witnessed by Thomas Evans senior, Seneschal of the Manorial Court.

William Vaughan, named above as Joseph's son, was probably the man who determined the next incarnation of Ruthlin Mill

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<sup>6</sup> Gwent Archives, NPT 4112: 1667. 'Rullyn Mill' transferred from Walter Evans to Herbert Evans and Thomas Powell.

<sup>7</sup> Rockfield PReg: 1705. 'John Williams formerly millar of ye Ruthlin Mill was buried the 25th Sept. 1705'.

<sup>8</sup> NLW, Badminton 1 (Manorial 3), No. 1696: 'Hopkins Lands' are surrendered by 'William Vaughan of the Rythlin, son and heir of Joseph Vaughan deceased, formerly of the Rylling', to Thomas Evans jun. The land was 40 acres, bounded by the River Monnow and the King's Highway from Coed Bychan to Skenfrith, formerly in the possession of Wm. Davies, Thomas Vaughan and Ed[ward?] White, yeoman. Signed by Thomas Vaughan and Thomas Evans sen., Seneschal.

– in 1722, as a papermill. The record<sup>9</sup> is clear: ‘William Vaughan, papermaker’, takes Jeremy Wyett as apprentice (the name Wyett/Wyatt is unknown in local parishes). Why the decision to divert from grinding wheat, barley or oats to the manufacture of paper? The sound, weather-proof buildings vital to a papermill were already available, as was an adequate supply of clean water (for washing the rags before their pulping by the water-powered machinery). Whose was this decision, probably aimed at maximising profitability? We cannot tell if it was Evans, the owner, or Vaughan, the operator, who took this step; but a document<sup>10</sup> of 1723 confirms that Ruthlin Mill's owner was still Thomas Evans.

Perhaps some experience gained at Perth-hir Mill<sup>11</sup> was relevant to Ruthlin's change of direction; this cornmill had switched to paper around 1700, making it arguably the first papermill<sup>12</sup> in Monmouthshire. However, its paper-making

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<sup>9</sup> TNA, IR/1/47, f. 191: 1722. William Vaughan, papermaker, Rockfield, was the master who took an apprentice, Jerrey Wyett, at a premium of £5.

<sup>10</sup> Gloucestershire Archives, GA ROL E5/FOD, An Industrial History of Monmouth, Percy Harries: At a meeting of 5.5.1723, Henry Probert of Penalt and Thomas Evans Esq. of Llangattock Manor, landowner of the Rullin Paper Mill, Rockfield, represented Monmouthshire magistrates.

<sup>11</sup> Gwent Archives, D.361, 35-4 & 5 shows that that the mill at Perth-hir was making paper earlier, about 1700.

<sup>12</sup> *Archaeologica Cambrensis* Vol. 102 [1953] carries an interesting article by A H Shorter, ‘*Paper Mills in Monmouthshire*’. Shorter's

years lasted less than a decade: maybe it failed to turn a profit, or the persons with expertise died or moved away. Perth-hir reverted to milling corn. Certain NLW wills might have given us clues: in 1709 one Robert Williams was ‘millward’, followed by millers Edward Richards, in 1742, and John Prosser, in 1771. Their burials at Rockfield are recorded, but nothing tell us if they had plied their craft at Perth-hir, Ruthlin, or Pentwyn – or even, if they were disposed to walk to adjoining parishes, at Skenfrith, or Little Mill (Llanfaenor).

William Vaughan of ‘The Rollins’ was still there<sup>13</sup> in 1724; a 1729 lease<sup>14</sup> confirms that Thomas Evans remained owner at

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definitive survey of local paper-making was extracted from Excise records of the Duty on Paper paid from 1712 to 1852. He notes that 18th/19th century provincial papermills were generally small, with only one or two vats, and used water-powered machinery [exactly as at Ruthlin Mill]. He deemed Ruthlin to be the earliest papermill in Monmouthshire; however, Perth-hir’s claim to precedence is argued fully by D G Tucker in *The Monmouthshire Antiquary*, Vol 3, 1972, ‘*The First Paper Mill in Wales? Perthir Mill on the River Monnow, 1700*’. Other papermills in the county were at Mounton [from at least 1730] and Whitebrook [1760 or earlier].

<sup>13</sup> NLW, Welsh Wills: 17.9.1724. James Phillips, vicar of Skenfrith, mentions £5 debt due to him from ‘William Vaughan of the Rollins, p. Rockfield’.

<sup>14</sup> NLW, Penpont 1517: 1729, June 1. Thomas Evans the elder of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel, now of Monmouth town, esq., and Thomas Evans the younger, esq., eldest son and heir apparent, agree a 1-year lease, to John Howells and John Hopkins both of Lincolns Inn, MDX, gents. The properties listed were: the manor of Croyse

that date. The lease included the ‘water corn grist mill called Rullins Mill lately converted to a paper mill’, and much other property in half-a-dozen nearby parishes. It was part of an extensive and detailed marriage settlement<sup>15</sup> for the proposed marriage of Thomas Evans the younger to Sybill, daughter of Penry Williams, owner of a large estate at Penpont BRE.

Some oblique evidence reveals that William Vaughan was indeed living at Ruthlin Mill, rather than Ruthlin Farm: the 1741 will<sup>16</sup> of a Mrs Frances White bequeaths ‘the leasehold of

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Bychan in Llangattock-Vibon-Avel, Llangattock-Vibon-Avel rectory, two thirds of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel and St. Maughans tithes, ‘a water corn grist mill called Rullins Mill lately converted to a paper mill’, a house in Llangattock-Vibon-Avel and others in Llantillio Crossenny, Grosmont, Rockfield, Llanvihangel Crucorney, Llangattock-Vibon-Avel, St. Maughans, and Llantillio Pertholey.

<sup>15</sup> NLW, Doc. 2255: 1729, June 2. Thomas Evans the elder, late of Llangattock-Vibon-Avel, now of Monmouth and Thomas Evans the younger, eldest son, agree a Settlement with John Howells and John Hopkins, late of Lincolns Inn, gents., also William Gwyn Vaughan of Trebarried BRE, esq., Robert Hughes of Trostrey, MON, esq., Rev. Phillip Sheppard of Hampton GLS, Thomas Sheppard of London, merchant, Penry Williams of Penpont, Llanspiddid BRE and Sybill Williams, spinster, his eldest daughter.

<sup>16</sup> NLW, Welsh Wills: 1.12.1741. Will of Frances White, widow, ‘very weak in body’ ... leaves all personal effects, value £12, also the leasehold of Ruthlin House ‘where I now reside’, and the well, orchards and gardens to my daughter Frances White, executrix. Signed with her ‘X’. Proved 4.5.1742. There is no mention of

Ruthlin House, where I now reside' to her daughter. Ruthlin House would have been the alternative name of Ruthlin Farm, not the mill. St Maughans parish register supplies some White family details, in recording the burials of Edward White (see note<sup>8</sup> for man of this name) in October 1741, and Frances White just three days later. The Evans marriage settlement of 1729 had included property in Rockfield occupied by Edward White – probably the man buried at St Maughans in 1741.

Confirming William Vaughan's position as the Ruthlin Mill papermaker is a little-known source<sup>17</sup> that tells the fascinating story of 'the Navigation that never was'. In 1751 an ambitious plan was mooted to make the Monnow a fully navigable waterway. In those times, only wagons, packhorses and mules were the means of transporting the produce of farms, mills and forges to market via Monmouth. The routes, over rough tracks and byways, were often impassable for many weeks; the era of turnpike roads was yet to reach Monmouthshire.

William Pytt, a local man with some surveying experience, set forth an ambitious project for a 'Monnow River Navigation'. He proposed to improve the river, with locks controlling its depth and flow. From Corras Ford SO 419 251 (between Kentchurch and Grosmont) the Navigation would run south

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Ruthlin Mill.

<sup>17</sup> Hereford Archives, F35/RC/IV/PP/6: 1751. Proposals [by William Pytt] for making the River Monnow navigable from the Monnow mouth to Grosmont. Filed with this is the manuscript of a Monnow River Survey 1751, by Thomas Bridge which lists consecutively the properties and/or their owners/occupiers.

to Monmouth, enabling river trade to pass freely up and down to the Wye at Monmouth, and so via the Severn Estuary and Bristol to the wider world. Most of the riparian landowners welcomed the plan; in September 1751 eight local gentlemen sent a petition to the Duke of Beaufort, the chief landowner on the Monnow's western banks, seeking his support. But the Duke ignored Pytt's project; or at least refrained from encouraging it. Thus enthusiasm for the idea melted away, and when William Pytt died in 1752, the Monnow River Navigation project slipped into oblivion.

The 'William Vaughan' among the petitioners was the Ruthlin papermaker. This is established by the 1751 'Survey' that accompanied Pytt's proposals. It clearly shows 'Mr William Vaughan, papermill' on the Welsh bank of the Monnow at a position in the northern part of Rockfield, with St Maughans parish next to the south. Vaughan was tenant, and the mill was still owned by Thomas Evans, but Evans' name was not in the petition.

The Survey listed 'Widdow Vaughan' at a property to the north of William's. We cannot prove relationship between the 'Widdow' and the papermaker – except that of next-door neighbours. She was probably Ann, nee Price, widow of Joseph Vaughan, yeoman of Rockfield who had died in 1749. Joseph Vaughan 1739-1824, one of their children, is mentioned below as owner of the nearby Tump Farm in 1798. (Perhaps, less likely, the 'Widdow' was Susanna, relict of one James Vaughan, whose St Maughans gravestone shows her death in 1759 ; but that James is not the papermaker, James Vaughan 1723-1800, who will come to notice shortly.)

The papermill was important enough to be included in Isaac Taylor's printed map<sup>18</sup> of Herefordshire, 1754; records of its actual operation are scanty, perhaps it worked only intermittently. One clue to its continued existence is the rating for 'Ruthlin Mill, £6' in Rockfield Parish Vestry accounts, 1762. The death of the mill's operator, William Vaughan, has left no trace, unless he was the man of that name buried at Skenfrith in 1770.

Then, in 1775, we meet William Phillips, papermaker of Rockfield, whose marriage was entered in Rockfield parish register<sup>19</sup>. We may safely infer that his employment was actually at Ruthlin Mill – the only known papermill in the area. His description 'papermaker' might simply define his trade; had he acquired ownership, surely some documentary record would have survived. Then in 1781 we have the transaction<sup>20</sup> in which 'James Vaughan, papermaker of Rockfield' bought the mill from Thomas Evans. Wide-ranging research has not

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<sup>18</sup> Taylor's Map of Herefordshire: 1754. The 'Paper Mill' appears clearly. It is also on the Map's 1786 edition.

<sup>19</sup> NLW, Marriage Licence, 23.5.1775, confirmed by Rockfield PReg: 1775. William Phillips, bachelor, papermaker of Rockfield, to marry Mary Baker at Rockfield.

<sup>20</sup> Gwent Archives, E.0306: 1781. 'Water mill or paper mill... called Rutlings Mill' sold by Thomas Evans to James Vaughan, papermaker of Rockfield. [The record actually refers to the property as in Skenfrith, not Rockfield, which must be a clerical error; Skenfrith indeed had a mill, but it never produced paper, nor was it called 'Rutlings Mill'.]

discovered any link between William Vaughan and this James; it remains possible that he was a son or nephew.

Moving on to 1785, we find this James Vaughan's family connected to some residents in the county town. James and his second wife Ann assigned the lease<sup>21</sup> of Great House Farm, Rockfield to Rev John Harding of Monmouth. James had probably come to own (or previously lease) this farm through his wife, daughter of Mary, widow of Francis Evans of Monmouth, butcher. The 'Paper Mill' appears again in the 1786 edition of Taylor's Map of Herefordshire. In 1789, an entry in St Maughans' parish register throws a sidelight on a possible employee at the mill, with the christening of twin children of William Parry, papermaker.

The Ruthlin picture changed radically in 1796, when James Vaughan, now in his seventies, decided to withdraw from business. By a conveyance<sup>22</sup> of 1796, Ruthlin Mill was acquired by a new entrepreneur, Francis Lewis, papermaker of Rockfield. The 1798 tax records<sup>23</sup> have 'Mr Frances Lewis,

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<sup>21</sup> Gwent Archives: 1785. James Vaughan of Rockfield, papermaker, and his wife Ann [daughter and executrix of the late Mary Evans of Monmouth, butcher] also Jemima Evans of Lidney GLS, widow and executrix of the late Francis Evans the younger of Monmouth, butcher, only son of Francis Evans the elder, jointly assign Great House Farm, Rockfield, to Rev John Harding of Monmouth town.

<sup>22</sup> Gwent Archives, E.0306: 1796. James Vaughan conveyed Ruthlin Mill to Francis Lewis, papermaker of Rockfield, on £600 mortgage.

<sup>23</sup> Rockfield Land Tax, 1798.

Proprietor' rated at £2.0.0., registered also as occupier of 'The Paper Mill, Rockfield'.

James Vaughan and Ann his wife retired to Monmouth, no doubt for the county town's greater comforts. His retirement did not last long: in October 1800 the Hereford Journal announced<sup>24</sup> the death of 'Mr. James Vaughan, for many years a Paper-Maker, and Proprietor of Ruthlin Mill'. He was buried at St Maughans, where his gravestone tells his age, '77 years' .

Francis Lewis had already made a mark in the area: Skenfrith's register<sup>25</sup> has his marriage there in 1794, and their children's double christening in 1797. It was perhaps under his pressure that Rockfield parish vestry moved to improve access to the mill; the roadworks were duly effected<sup>26</sup> in 1797. In the same year Lewis acted promptly<sup>27</sup> to take an apprentice, James Davis. Lewis was also briefly a local hero, as recounted in 1798 by the Hereford newspaper<sup>28</sup> in its report on a Monmouthshire house-breaking gang: 'It would be an act of injustice not to mention the public-spirited conduct of Mr F Lewis, papermaker, and Mr James Vaughan, both of Llanrothal...for

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<sup>24</sup> Hereford Journal, 15.10.1800.

<sup>25</sup> Skenfrith PReg, 12.2.1794 and 18.6.1797.

<sup>26</sup> NLW, Leonard Twiston Davies 54: 1797. Assessment for repair of highways near the papermill, at 6d in the £.

<sup>27</sup> Country Apprentices 1710-1808, Wales: 1797. Francis Lewis, papermaker, 'master'; James Davis, apprentice.

<sup>28</sup> Hereford Journal, 28.3.1798.

it is entirely owing to their intrepidity that the principals have been secured'. (The two gentlemen had roles as Constables for the parish – the unpaid 'arm of the law' at that date.)

The 1798 Land Tax Assessment<sup>29</sup> gives Frances Lewis as Ruthlin mill's Owner and Occupier, recording also that William Farr occupied (not owned) 'Ruthlin' – presumably the Farm – while Joseph Vaughan owned Tump Farm, occupied by Mr Moyle. This new Joseph Vaughan 1739-1824<sup>30</sup> was perhaps kin to the papermaker, James Vaughan, possibly a cousin? This might be verifiable with further research.

In early Victorian years it was mainly Vaughans and Farris (often simply identified as 'of Ruthlin') who held one or other of the Ruthlin properties. It is time to examine these Owners and Occupiers, property by property, and explore the final century of Ruthlin Mill.

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<sup>29</sup> Rockfield Land Tax, 1798.

<sup>30</sup> Skenfrith PReg, 22.7.1739. He was buried at Llanrothal HEF on 31.1.1824. This branch of the Vaughans have very early records linking them to Llanrothal; the earliest is a letter of 19.12.1459 [NLW, Milborne 1869] which confirms William ap Howell Vaghan [sic] and Matilda, his wife, in possession of 'Llanrothal lands'.

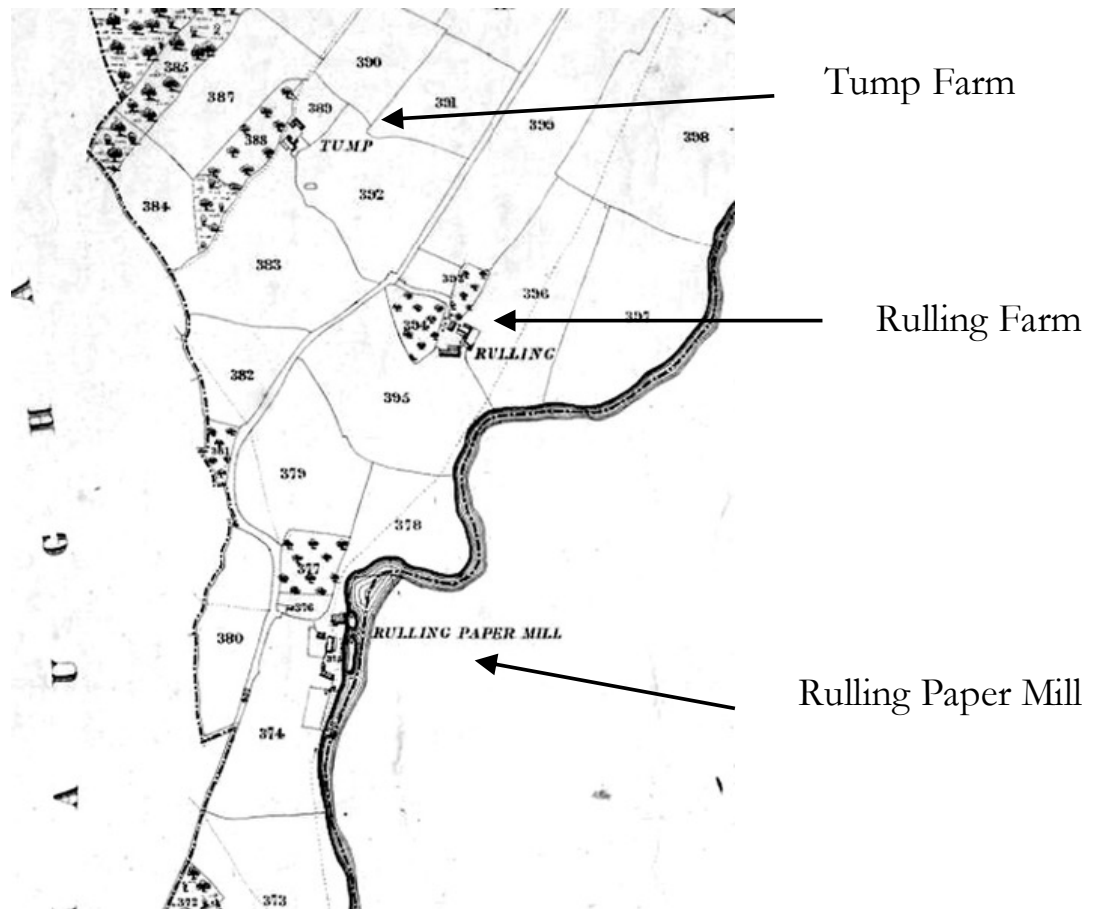


Figure 1 Part of the detached portion of Rockfield parish (later transferred to Skenfrith), from the Tithe Map of 1843

Note: The marked buildings were in exactly the same locations in the 18th century.

### **Tump Farm SO 461 194**

(For the avoidance of doubt, this is not the other Tump Farm, closer to Rockfield village at SO 492 156.)

We remarked above that Joseph Vaughan (probable relative of James the papermaker) owned/occupied Tump Farm in 1798; on marrying at Rockfield<sup>31</sup> he had been described as 'farmer'. The Assessment of 1804 shows Mr Joseph Vaughan assessed for Land Tax at 'the Tumpt' (sic), with 'himself' as Occupier. The record is misleading: despite being Owner, Joseph was actually farming elsewhere. Various references in the

NLW, J A Bradney Collection and the Hereford Journal place him at Trebella Farm, Skenfrith, in 1806, 1809 and 1811; at Caerwendy, St Weonard HEF, in 1815 and 1817; then at Twyford HEF, where he died in 1824. The Land Tax Assessments of 1825-7 and 1830 listed 'Joseph Vaughan' as Owner taxable for Tump Farm, but this liability probably refers to Joseph<sup>32</sup>, his younger son (of whom nothing more is known). The 1824 will of Joseph, the father, clearly leaves Tump Farm to his elder son, Thomas Vaughan 1796-1879, with William Farr its tenant. Assessments of 1825-7 confirm that Thomas was Proprietor of the Tump, with Farr's son Edward Farr as Occupier; the 1830 Assessment has William Adams as Occupier. Adams remained at Tump Farm (per 1841 census), and the 1843 Tithe Award shows him as Occupier (with Thomas Vaughan as Owner).

Like his father, Thomas never occupied the Tump. His 'freehold house and land' in Rockfield (which must be the

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<sup>31</sup> Rockfield PReg, 20.5.1777.

<sup>32</sup> Herefordshire Archive & Record Centre [HARC]: Will of Joseph Vaughan of Callow, proved 31.3.1824.

Tump) qualified him for Monmouthshire Electoral Rolls, 1835 to 1849. In 1849 Adams still occupied Tump Farm when it went for auction<sup>33</sup>, a freehold property of 46 acres, 'capable of great improvement'. The auction must have succeeded; in 1850 the owner, Thomas Vaughan, and his large family, left for Australia.

The Tump Farm plot thickens when the 1851 census<sup>34</sup> places there another Thomas Vaughan, 31, farmer, the son of one Daniel Vaughan. The Rockfield 1841 census<sup>35</sup> had listed them, father and son, in an unnamed cottage at Maypole. (Later, we discover this Thomas in 1861 at Ruthlin Mill House.) The Tump fails to appear in the 1861 census; in 1871 and 1881 it is listed as 'uninhabited'. Nowadays it is again a working farmhouse, still standing with its 17-18th century buildings on

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<sup>33</sup> Monmouthshire Merlin, 15.9.1849.

<sup>34</sup> Rockfield Census, 1851: Tump Farm, Thomas Vaughan, age 31, farmer 45 acres, employing 1 man, born Rockfield, wife Ann, 27, born Didmore HEF, children: Sarah, 3, born Llangattock MON, Tom, 1, born Llangattock MON. Also a farm labourer, 16, and house servant, 15. Later children of this family were baptised at Skenfrith: Ann 4.7.1852, Elizabeth 28.1.1855, Martha 13.5.1857, William 4.12.1859.

<sup>35</sup> Clodock PReg, 26.12.1795: Baptised, Delila, daughter of William and Elizabeth Farr of Longtown HEF. [She was probably related to William Farr of Ruthlin, but Farr families are numerous in the Clodock/Longtown area]. Delila married John [of another branch of Vaughans] at St Nicholas, Hereford, on 29.1.1816.

Coed Anghred's eastern slope, above the road that winds north to Skenfrith.



PLATE 1 Ruthlin Watermill, Rockfield, from an undated (Victorian) photograph

## Ruthlin Farm SO 464 192

We now turn to the farm neighbouring the Tump, beside the Monnow. In 1798 William Farr was renting<sup>36</sup> 'Ruthlin' (Farm, presumably). He was still occupier when another Vaughan, 'Thomas Vaughan of Llanrothal' bought<sup>37</sup> the 39 acres farm in 1802. The 1804 Land Tax Assessment confirms Farr occupying 'The Ruthlin', with Thomas Vaughan, Owner; Thomas continued to own 'Ruthlin' from 1805 to 1820.

While the Farris remained at the farm, perhaps at the same time they held tenancy of the mill (the family was large). Farr's daughter Ann was 'of Writchlyn' in Skenfrith register<sup>38</sup> in 1815 when her illegitimate son John was baptised; later that year she

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<sup>36</sup> Rockfield Census, 1841: Daniel Vaughan, 40, agricultural labourer, born MON, Thomas Vaughan, 20, agricultural labourer, born MON, Elizabeth Vaughan, 60, 'chairwoman', born MON.

<sup>37</sup> Gwent Archives, Vizard Deeds, D1110-0132: The document, of 24/25.12.1802, refers to 'Rhillin, 39 acres, with messuage adjoining and messuage and garden near the Paper Mill, in occupation of Wm. Farr'. It further says that Thomas Vaughan, Llanrothal, gent. contracted to buy 'the Rhillin property' for £840. Thomas Vaughan of Llanrothal 1746-1820 was some undefined member [cousin? uncle?] of the family of the papermaker, James Vaughan 1723-1800; significantly, James made this Thomas Vaughan of Llanrothal a trustee of his will, as did James's wife Ann, in 1817.

<sup>38</sup> Skenfrith PReg, 9.1.1815: Baptised, John, son of Ann Farr, spinster.

is termed 'of Ruthlyn' at her marriage<sup>39</sup> in Rockfield. The 'Mrs Farr' named as Occupier of Ruthlin Farm, 36 acres, in an 1829 announcement<sup>40</sup> of an auction of Rockfield tithes, was probably William Farr's widow, Sarah. The 1843 Land Tax Assessment shows Edward Farr, William's son, renting 'Ruthlin' (no exact property details are given). The 1851 census has Thomas Herbert, farm labourer at 'Ruthlands', while a farmer, George Woodward, and family occupied 'Rullings Farm'. The next census enumerates Thomas Jeffreys, agricultural labourer, and his wife at 'Ruthlins Farm'. Today, after conversion, the property serves a modern purpose as Ruthlin Barn holiday complex.

### **Ruthlin Mill SO 464 188**

Here we revert to the mill's history from about 1800, where we left it earlier, taking it through its role as a working papermill to its ultimate close-down. Plate 1 gives a photograph of the mill, but date unknown.

After Francis Lewis's brief ownership, in 1800 William Farr bought<sup>41</sup> the freehold. We have no proof that it was then an active mill; the Farris may have used it, with its garden land and orchard, simply as a farm dwelling. An 1801 record<sup>42</sup> orders

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<sup>39</sup> Rockfield PReg, 22.9.1815.

<sup>40</sup> Monmouthshire Merlin, 22.8.1829.

<sup>41</sup> Gwent Archives, E.0306.

<sup>42</sup> NLW, Leonard Twiston Davies 77, 78-9. Removals were the normal process by which paupers or unemployed were sent back to

that 'Richard Davies, papermaker' was to be removed from Rockfield to his native Llangattock-Vibon-Avel (next parish to the west). Davies had probably plied his trade at Ruthlin Mill (there was then no other papermill in the parish where he could have worked); had he been discharged because the mill was inactive, or did Farr, the new owner, not need him?

The 1804 Land Tax Assessment for Rockfield confirms William Farr as Proprietor of the papermill, with 'Mr Williams' as Occupier. (The same tax document lists John Powell Lorymer<sup>43</sup>, Proprietor, with Occupier 'Mr James Vaughan, for the mill'; however this is a reference to Perth-hir Mill.) 'Mr Williams' named in the 1804 assessment was probably Edward Williams, a papermaker who had brought together some partners apparently intending to continue, or revive, the papermaking. However, their interest in Ruthlin Mill was short-lived; in 1806 the partnership foundered<sup>44</sup>.

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their previous parish, to avoid becoming a charge on the Poor Rates.

<sup>43</sup> John Powell Lorimer of Perth-hir, or Perthyr, belonged to a long-established Roman Catholic family. His estate included Perth-hir Mill, near Rockfield village. From about 1804 Perth-hir Mill was let to Mr James Vaughan 1766-1834 of Pentwyn, Rockfield, a brother of Thomas Vaughan of Llanrothal. Lorimer died unmarried in 1811.

<sup>44</sup> London Gazette, 29.4.1806: 'The Partnership between Edward Williams, papermaker of Shirenewton, Joseph Morris, Chepstow, shopkeeper, and Richard Morris of Chepstow, accomptant, is hereby dissolved from 1st day of May next'. The partners had carried on business as papermakers at Pandy Mill in the parish of

Through these several management changes, it is uncertain that the papermill remained a viable business. But potentially exciting developments were afoot for the Monnow Valley. In 1813 an application<sup>45</sup> was made to Parliament to permit construction of a railway or tram-road, from May-Hill to Crossway turnpike. Despite its potential for radically changing the face of industry in the area – not least Ruthlin Papermill – the rail project disappeared without trace. The FARRS, the VAUGHANS and a handful of others lived on in their traditional way. Working their fields beside the Monnow, they reared sheep, cattle, pigs and poultry, and tended the extensive orchards of cider-apples to be crushed at home by a ‘farm-mill’, or sent to some commercially-operating grist-mill. The stones at Ruthlin Mill might have done this community service; without evidence, we can only guess.

FARR's mill activities are evident again in an 1815 mortgage document<sup>46</sup> for a Penallt property, calling him ‘papermaker, of Rockfield’. In 1816 a record<sup>47</sup> of Customs & Excise (collectors

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Ilton [MON] and at 'the Rolling-Mill in the parish of Rockfield.' The mill at 'Ilton' [properly spelled Itton] was one of a cluster of papermills on the Moun-ton Brook. Williams's career did not flourish; in 1813, 'Edward Williams, formerly of Itton MON, paper-manufacturer', was in debt [London Gazette, 18.11.1813]. His later life and career are unknown.

<sup>45</sup> London Gazette, 25.9.1813.

<sup>46</sup> NLW, Leonard Twiston Davies, GB 0210.

<sup>47</sup> *Papermills in Monmouthshire*, A H Shorter, Arch. Cambrensis, Vol.

of the duty on paper), confirms his role; it lists 'Rolling Mill, No. 125 occupied by Wm. Farr, papermaker'. ('Rolling', like 'Writchlyn', was a contemporary transmogrification of 'Ruthlin'.) The type of paper produced, or the scale of the operation, are unknown, but this official listing implies that Ruthlin was probably still a viable mill even if not actually working. (In 1823 Rockfield Parish Meeting minuted that the road by the papermill should be repaired to a width of 20 feet at the substantial cost of £60; this might suggest that the mill still had significant custom.)

Possibly Farr didn't run the work single-handedly; in 1818 Skenfrith register refers<sup>48</sup> to his son-in-law John Phillips as 'paper-maker of Paper-Mill'. Another mill-worker, 'James Williams, Papermaker, Rockfield' witnessed William Farr's will<sup>49</sup> in 1824. The will specifies the 'mill house, lands &

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102, 1953. The duty was firmly enforced: The Cambrian, 24.2.1821 reported that J. Morris, papermaker, Monmouth [probably the man named in Note 43] was fined £2,000, a huge sum at that date, for failing to label each ream of paper properly, and not charging duty on his products.

<sup>48</sup> Skenfrith PReg, 8.11.1818: Christening of Ann, daughter of John and Ann Phillips. However, the christening of their son John on 16.6.1816 at Rockfield had described him as 'labourer', of that parish.

<sup>49</sup> TNA, PCC PROB 11/1703/251: William Farr left investments to his daughters Sarah [Mrs Walter Meredith], Elizabeth [Mrs William Williams], Mary [Mrs Philip Jones] and Catherine [Mrs James Phillips].

premises called 'The Rulling' as occupied by Farr and a son-in-law, William Williams.

We regain firm ground respecting Ruthlin Mill as an industrial enterprise after William's death<sup>50</sup>. In 1825 Edward Johnson, papermaker, became the occupant<sup>51</sup>, and he still worked the mill<sup>52</sup> around 1830-31. Farr's family continued<sup>53</sup> its connection with the mill around 1830. Then, after Johnson moved to the Whitebrook area in 1838, a poster<sup>54</sup> appeared, advertising the sale of 'a messuage with paper mill adjoining, called Rutling Mill', and other property. By 1841 Johnson was installed, with his papermaking skills, in Penallt parish<sup>55</sup>, south of Monmouth.

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<sup>50</sup> Skenfrith PReg, 10.2.1825: Burial of William Farr, age 74.

<sup>51</sup> *Papermills in Monmouthshire*, A H Shorter, Arch. Cambrensis, Vol. 102, 1953: 4.11.1825, Edward Johnson, papermaker, occupies 'Rolling Mill'.

<sup>52</sup> Pigot's Directory, 1830-31: Edward Johnson, Papermaker at 'Rullings Mills near Skenfrith'; also at Whitebrook.

<sup>53</sup> Skenfrith PReg, 24.10.1830: baptism of Joseph, son of 'Catherine Phillips, widow, The Paper-Mill, Rockfield'.

<sup>54</sup> NLW, Sir Leonard Twiston Davies Collection, 3780.

<sup>55</sup> Penallt Census, 1841: Edward Johnson, 60, papermaker, wife, children and two papermakers – presumably lodgers.

Monmouthshire Merlin, 21.12.1844 shows him as tenant of Whitebrook MON papermill, being advertised for sale. The tithe map and assessment of 1846-7 names him as co-owner [with the

The papermill building continued to be a local landmark. It figures as 'Rehlan' on Greenwood's Map of Monmouthshire 1830, and on Walker's Map of 1834. By some confusion with its original Welsh name Bryant's Map of 1835 names it 'Yrychlyn Paper Mills'. The 'Hereford & Gloucester' OS Map (1839 edition) shows no mill, just Ruthlin Farm and the Tump.

After the 1830s, many British papermills became unable to compete with more mechanised mills in more accessible locations. The old methods, with a 'vatman' making the pulp, and a 'coucher' laying the wet pulp on boards for drying out, were superseded by the Fourdrinier machine (a French invention, but manufactured in England). By 1860 the Fourdrinier produced over 90% of paper made in Britain<sup>56</sup>. Such mechanisation spelled the end for papermakers unable to raise the capital to modernise, and many bankruptcies ensued. This was probably Ruthlin's fate, although there are no records of any formal bankruptcy here.

When Edward Johnson left Ruthlin Mill (sometime after 1830), it was perhaps a sleeping asset, if not still working. An 1840 document<sup>57</sup> refers to 'The Paper Mill, late in the

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Duke of Beaufort] of Sunnyside papermill at Whitebrook, though not its occupier.

<sup>56</sup> *The British Paper Industry 1495-1860*, D C Coleman.

<sup>57</sup> Gwent Archives, D361. E/1.3- 0021. John Day, under-tenant, is probably John Day of Blackmoor Farm, St Maughans, in Monmouthshire Electoral Registers, 1838 and 1840; the 1851 census has him there, 'farmer'.

occupation of William Farr and now John Day or his under-tenants', but the 1841 census shows 'Papermill, building, uninhabited'. The 1843 Tithe Map details 'Rulling Paper Mill, lot 375, 20 acres', comprising several buildings and garden, owned by James Jenkins Esq.' and occupied by Edward Farr (William's son). We know Jenkins, the new landowner, from his claim<sup>58</sup> to the 'messuage, mill and lands called Rutling Mill, in the parish of Rockfield'. 'Jenkins' being a fairly common name, we cannot identify anyone claiming the property by marriage<sup>59</sup>, inheritance or purchase. Pigot's Directory, 1835, listed James Jenkins Esq. in Bridge Street – the only person so named in Chepstow.

In 1844, the property came on the market again with the auction<sup>60</sup> of 'The Rulling Farm, comprising a messuage and

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<sup>58</sup> Gwent Archives, Evans & Evill Records [Schedule 1.2.1781-9.1.1824], No. 0306: This document is an undated draft from the papers of Jenkins' Chepstow solicitors. However, it is catalogued as part of a schedule from 1781-1824; these dates must be an error in cataloguing, or perhaps the draft was an attachment to some earlier document.

<sup>59</sup> Monmouth St Mary's PReg, 19.6.1766 has a marriage, James Jenkins of this parish to Elizabeth Vaughan of Dixton; both signed the register. Grosmont PReg, 21.4.1836, has a marriage, James Jenkins of Cwmyoy to Mary Farr of Grosmont; James signed only with 'X'. Neither bride can positively be linked to the Ruthlin Vaughan or Farr families.

<sup>60</sup> The Gazette, 18 June 1844. Also, June and July 1844 issues of the Hereford Journal and the Monmouthshire Merlin advertised

papermill adjoining, situate on the Monnow, a never-failing stream of water, machinery, drying-house, and excellent garden belonging thereto'. The sale followed litigation in the case of Meredith v. Farr. As a legal journal<sup>61</sup> reported, this case stemmed from William Farr's complex will, which had occasioned conflicting claims from the illegitimate children of Farr's daughters Mary (Jones) and Catherine (Phillips) against Walter Meredith, son of his eldest daughter Sarah; the case rumbled on for some years.

Rockfield census of 1851 entirely omits Ruthlin Mill. It had presumably ceased operation before this date, as it fails to show in a comprehensive list<sup>62</sup> of over 500 papermills in the United Kingdom, published in 1853. However, the location is again on record in 1861 – now the home of Thomas Vaughan and family (whom we saw at Tump Farm ten years before); the enumerator set down their address<sup>63</sup> as Ruthlin Mill House. In

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'Rulling Farm, messuage, papermill, 25 acres and cottage adjoining' as one of five freehold estates for auction.

<sup>61</sup> The Jurist, Volume 7, Part 1, 1844. The litigant Walter Meredith claimed the £300 which William Farr had bequeathed in 1825 to his eldest child, Sarah, and her eventual children, who included Walter, born c.1819.

<sup>62</sup> *List of Papermills in England, Scotland and Ireland*, 1853. This publication, of which a copy is held at The Mills Archive, includes the names and locations of a handful of Welsh papermills under its 'England' heading, but there are none in Monmouthshire.

<sup>63</sup> Rockfield Census, 1861: At Ruthlin Mill House, Thomas Vaughan,

a final burst of commercial enterprise, a new role looked to have emerged: in recording the baptism (30.4.1861) of Daniel William Vaughan, son of Thomas Vaughan, Skenfrith parish register described the father as 'Brewer'. However, all other mention of brewing in this building is lacking, and the 1871 census simply shows Paper Mill House as uninhabited.

After its grist-mill origins centuries before, and rebirth as a papermill in the 18th century, Ruthlin Mill had become a simple dwelling-house, well and truly devoid of any milling activity. The principal mill building still stands, refurbished and modernised during its 'retirement'. An undateable millstone<sup>64</sup> leans picturesquely against the house frontage (not a composite burr-stone but a monolithic stone of millstone grit, hewn probably from the quarries at Whitebrook, ten miles to the south). The mill's machinery is altogether gone, its waterwheel no longer lends it quaint embellishment, and the leat that once fed it has given way to landscaped grounds. Ruthlin's industrial history is no more than a memory.

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head, 41, farmer 68 acres, employing 1 man; wife Ann, 37; children: Sarah, 13, Thomas, 11, Ann, 8, Elizabeth, 6, Martha, 3 and Daniel 3 wks.

<sup>64</sup> This stone was found by the present owner in garden ground a few yards from the house; it is a heavily used runner, with approximate sizes: 46 inches diameter, 7 inches thick with a 7-inch eye.

## Notes and Sources

As well as primary source material and contemporary newspapers, as detailed below, the text draws largely on *Watermills of the Monnow and the Trothy*, Coates & Tucker, 1978, and *The River Running By*, Joan Fleming-Yates, 2005.

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