



**Property in Care (PIC) ID:** PIC283

**Designations:** Scheduled Monument (SM90076)

**Taken into State care:** 1933 (Guardianship)

**Last reviewed:** 2004

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

# CLICK MILL, DOUNBY



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Any enquiries regarding this document should be sent to us at:

Historic Environment Scotland

Longmore House

Salisbury Place

Edinburgh

EH9 1SH

+44 (0) 131 668 8600

[www.historicenvironment.scot](http://www.historicenvironment.scot)

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# CLICK MILL, DOUNBY

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## BRIEF DESCRIPTION

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The monument comprises a restored, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century horizontal watermill and its associated structures, last worked in the 1880s. The mill, built for processing oats and bere (a kind of barley), is a rectangular structure of drystone construction (about 4.5m by 2m) standing on the east bank of a stream. Its low-pitched roof is covered with flagstones and turf. The mill machinery is in working order. Remains of the stone-lined lade survive to the north-east. A stone causeway with a lintelled bridge crosses the stream to the north-west.

Horizontal mills are sometimes referred to as click or clack mills because of the distinctive sound they made when operating.

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## CHARACTER OF THE MONUMENT

### Historical Overview

- Built in about 1822-4 by John Spence, the Click Mill replaced an older mill at Millbrig that had become ruinous.
- Mid 1880s was the last time that the mill was reported to have been working.
- The Orkney Antiquarian Society undertook a range of conservation works to the site before it came into state care.
- 1933 Mill comes into state care.
- Reinstatement of the original mill dam was considered in the 1930s, but it was recognised that the stream bed has been considerably altered by quarrying in the 1920s. Land improvements and drainage has resulted in further changes. As a result of this the decision was taken to pipe water to the mill.

### Archaeological Overview

- This site has never been subject to any archaeological investigation, but it can be assumed that sub-surface evidence for the construction and use of the mill may survive in the near vicinity.

### Artistic/Architectural Overview

- The mill contains its full complement of internal machinery in full working order, the only horizontal mill in Orkney to do so. This includes a horizontal paddle wheel, grindstones, cawling, hopper and meal bin.
- The tirl (waterwheel) is of an unusual form: two rows of six blades, one set above the other. This is presumably to get maximum force from the sluggish waterflow.

- Such mills could make the best of a low head and volume of water and so are well adapted to the local topography. Their machinery is simple, compact and efficient. As such they represent an ingenious technology that has a long history and wide distribution throughout the world.
- Little is known about the details of the early conservation history of the mill, but we can see that the works were not totally sympathetic on conservation grounds and that the appearance and authenticity of the building has been compromised.
- The mill comes towards the end of a tradition of horizontal water mills in northern and western Scotland which certainly dates back to Norse times (they are often referred to as Norse mills), quite probably the early medieval period (there is evidence for early medieval horizontal watermills in Ireland, but to date the only possible evidence for these in Scotland is the millpond at the Pictish monastery of Portmahomack near Tain and a wooden paddle found in Dumfries and Galloway).
- Despite later ground disturbance, visitors to the mill can get some impression of the scale of landscape and water management involved in setting up even a small mill.

#### Social Overview

- The construction, operation and control of mills has been an important part of Orkney's social and economic history for centuries.
- To judge from the interest taken in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by the local antiquarian society, the representative value of this monument as an important, rare, distinctively local survival was fully appreciated.
- Not assessed for modern Orcadians.

#### Spiritual Overview

- Not assessed.

#### Aesthetic Overview

- The mill is tucked away beside a stream in an upland area and is not prominent in the local landscape (in the Western Isles they were sometimes deliberately hidden to avoid payments to landlords). Once discovered by the visitor, the charming qualities of its traditional, vernacular form are only too evident. This location is in large measure due to the availability of a suitable watercourse.
- Appreciation of the how the mill worked is considerably enhanced by the fact that its interior is full of its original machinery.

#### What are the major gaps in understanding of the property?

- Our knowledge of early conservation works to this monument and its surrounding waterworks is poor.

- There may be more that can be gleaned from Orkney Archives, etc about the history and social role of milling in Orkney through time.
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- More research is required to better understand the setting and local context of this mill. For instance, how many other mills were there in this area/along this burn, etc.
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## ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Key points

- This is the only working horizontal watermill in Orkney and one of few to survive in Scotland with its machinery intact.
- The Click Mill is one of the best surviving examples of a type of simple yet effective technology more commonly represented in the Shetlands and Faeroes and, to a lesser extent, Western Isles and Ireland, but also found elsewhere in the world.
- The mill is representative of the end of a long tradition of horizontal mills in Scotland that goes back to the Norse period, if not the early medieval period.
- The construction, operation and control of mills has been an important part of Orkney's social and economic history for centuries.
- A horizontal mill such as this can be readily contrasted on Orkney with much larger vertical grain mills that were in use around the same time.
- The mill has a particularly unusual feature in the form of its waterwheel.

### Associated Properties

Earliest evidence for a horizontal mill in Orkney has been found through archaeological excavation at the Norse site of Orphir (this is visible from **Bu of Orphir**).

**Tormiston Mill** and Boardhouse Mill are examples of large, 19<sup>th</sup>-century, Orcadian *vertical* watermills. There are several working click mills on Fair Isle and Shetland (Clumlie burn, South Voe Croft Museum, Huxter) and Western Isles (Shawbost). Examples of abandoned horizontal mills can also be found throughout the countryside in appropriate parts of northern and western Scotland.

Historic Scotland's estate also includes **New Abbey Corn Mill**, Dumfries and Galloway.

Keywords horizontal mill, Norse mill, mill machinery, 19<sup>th</sup> century, water management, Orkney.