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## **The River Twyver and the Fullbrook**

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# The River Twyver and the Fullbrook

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IT is strange that the River Twyver, a stream nowadays about six miles long, never seems to have attracted the notice it merits, especially as it has features which have not been without influence on the development of Gloucester. Except for a press article, written in 1889<sup>1</sup>, and a report to the local Urban Sanitary Authority in 1891, which is chiefly concerned with effluent discharging into the stream from farms and other buildings along its course,<sup>2</sup> there are only very occasional references to the river from the 13th and, indirectly, from the 11th century onwards.

The name Twyver derives from the Old English WEFER, 'a winding stream', Welsh *Dwfr*. The river is formed in the parish of Upton St. Leonards by the confluence of not less than eight streams which rise, for the most part between the 400- and 500-foot contours, between Spoonbed Hill and Pincott. Its natural outfall was into the Sudbrook at Saintbridge, but at some early unknown period it was diverted and canalized to follow its present course.

There are various traditions associated with this diversion. One is that the Romans made it for the purpose of floating down stone from the Cotswold quarries for the building of GLEVVM and for supplying water to the ditch of their town wall. The monks of the Benedictine abbey of St Peter are also said to have canalized the stream so that they could float down stone for the building of the abbey,<sup>3</sup> and Llanthony Priory is supposed to have been constructed of stone, quarried on Painswick Hill, and conveyed to Gloucester by canal.<sup>4</sup> According to yet another tradition, the mills along the river were built on the sites of weirs made to control water levels when stone was being floated down to Gloucester. There used to be no less than ten mills within a distance of approximately three miles. Their sites are known and some still exist as farms or houses. It may not be without significance that the part of the Twyver affected by diversion lay within the monastic manor of the Abbot's Barton.

<sup>1</sup> Powell, *Gloucestershire Extracts*, Vol. 1889, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Gloucester Corporation Minutes, 1891.

<sup>3</sup> Powell, *Gloucestershire Extracts*, Vol. 1889, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Trans. BGAS*, LXIII (1942), p. 4 and 1877-8, Part 2, p. 245.

## THE RIVER TWYVER AND THE FULLBROOK

Upton mill was the nearest to the sources of the river, and it was still being worked prior to 1925.<sup>1</sup> Next to it came Commeline's mill and then Elm Court and Upper Barnwood mills. Where the mill race of the last rejoined the main stream, the diversion and canalization began, but the line of the original course is still evident and can be followed on the Ordnance Survey Six Inch map.<sup>2</sup> It was described in 1889 as follows:

'There is still no difficulty in tracing the original course of the Twyver from a point above the new County Asylum, along the line of fences between the green fields of the common field of "Wheatridge" and then between the fields of Court Farm and Saintbridge Farm to the Sudbrook near Saintbridge or St Mary's Bridge.'<sup>3</sup>

Evidence of canalization is unmistakable where the Twyver flows past the sites of Barnwood, Court Farm, Fisher's and Wood's mills, a distance of about 1.378 miles. The channel runs athwart the slope of rising ground and there is a sharp fall from its south bank. Breaches of this bank occurred frequently in the past, the escaping water made its way into the Sudbrook and resulted in flooding in the Tredworth district. Nowadays there is a weir set in the south bank between Court Farm and Fisher's mill whereby, when the stream is running high, surplus water can be carried along a ditch to the Sudbrook which is less than 440 yards away. The last stretch of this ditch follows the original course of the Twyver.

At the time of the siege of Gloucester in 1643, the Royalist troops diverted the river, but where they did so is not known. The site of the weir would have been an effective place for doing this.<sup>4</sup> Sir Jacob Astley, one of the Royalist commanders, had his quarters at Wood's Mill.<sup>5</sup>

It may be noted here that on a map of the Hundreds of Dudston and King's Barton, dated 1624, the name Fulbrooke is applied to the whole course of the Twyver and that eight mills are shown on its banks;<sup>6</sup> also that the volume of water carried by the stream must have been very much greater than it is at present.

The river nowadays enters a built-up area immediately west of the site of Wood's Mill and it is culverted for most of the rest of its

<sup>1</sup> Bazeley (W), Notebook III, p. 506.

<sup>2</sup> *Gloucestershire S.W.* Revised 1920-1.

<sup>3</sup> Powell, *Gloucestershire Extracts*, Vol. 1889, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> 'and the stream that proceeds from the quarter of Upton St Leonards, then turning, as it now does, several corn mills, was diverted from its source, and most of the mills were burnt', *Bibliotheca Gloucestrensis*, ed. Jno. Washbourn Jnr. (1825), p. lv.

<sup>5</sup> *Idem.*, p. clviii.

<sup>6</sup> G. S. Blakeway, *The City of Gloucester, its Royal Charters of Liberties and Varying Fortunes* (1934), Map opp. p. 48.

course. Just after passing under the railway line from Bristol to Cheltenham was Kermerdin's Mill. It is so called in the Cartulary of St Peter's abbey.<sup>1</sup> About 660 yards further west was Morin's Mill. Its site is now occupied by sidings immediately south-east of the Eastgate railway station, and both the Gloucester Corporation Records and the *Historia et Cartularium* of the abbey contain references to it. It must have been in existence at least as early as A.D. 1224.<sup>2</sup>

The river divided into two channels immediately west of this mill and there appear to have been not only several diversions of its further course, but the name of the south channel to have been both Wever and Fulbrok. A lane called Brok street (later Mill street, now Station road) led from Morin's Mill to the Almesham Postern which was situated at the north-east corner of both the Roman and medieval town wall. It ran beside the south channel which turned north-west at this point to rejoin the other and main channel near the Outer North Gate. The latter ran under the present railway sidings on the north side of Station road and then under what is now a bus centre (formerly cattle market).<sup>3</sup>

Henry I either granted (or confirmed an earlier grant by William I) to the abbey the right to lead and draw the water called Fulbrok which ran close to it for use in its domestic offices.<sup>4</sup> This stream led off from the southern channel of the Twyver where the latter turned north-west outside the Almesham Postern and went parallel to St Aldate street, across Northgate street, to the abbey precincts. Tradition, however, lends support to the possibility of its having followed the course of the ditch outside the Roman town wall for the filling of which it might have been utilized by the Romans. In this event, a diversion for monastic uses could well have been made on the north side of the North Gate. Another possibility is that the monks used the stream in the first instance, for the carriage of building stone from the Cotswolds and, subsequently, diverted the water for domestic uses.

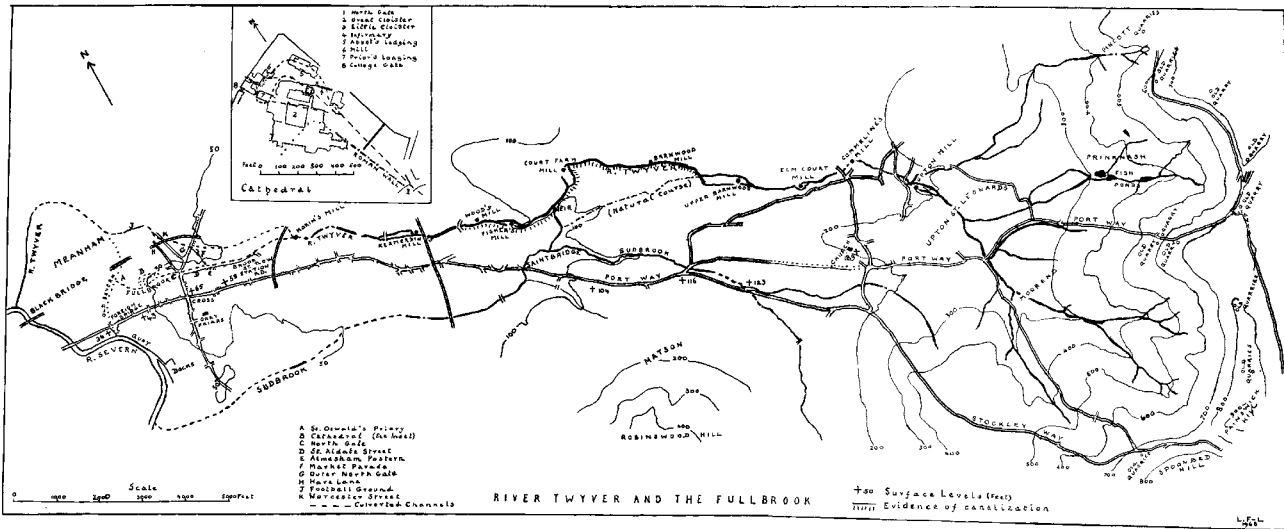
Gloucester abbey had, like Canterbury and other religious houses, two water supplies, one for drinking, washing and general domestic

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Hart (ed.), *Hist. et Cart. S. Petri. Glouc. 1863-7*, III, p. 151. Six mills: Budel's, Morin's, Savage's, Kermerdin's, Levieth's and Constable's are named in the Extent of the Abbot's Barton manor. The sites of Morin's and Kermerdin's only are identifiable at present.

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Stevenson, *Calendar of the Records of the Corporation of Gloucester* (1893), No. 147, p. 98; *Hist. et Cart. S. Petri. Glouc.*, I, pp. 99, 186; II, pp. 29, 30, 195; III, p. 151.

<sup>3</sup> The course of both channels is shown on Hall & Pinnell's Plan of Gloucester, 1780.

<sup>4</sup> *Hist. et Cart. S. Petri. Glouc.*, I, p. 78, 'Rex Henricus senior concessit at carta sua confirmavit monachis Sancti Petri Gloucestriae aquam quae vocatur Fulbrok, quae currit juxta abbatiam suam, ut vertant et disponant eam et trahant per officinas suas secundum voluntatem suam'. See also I, pp. 154-5; II, p. 186.



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uses, the other for keeping the drains clear and for turning the mill.<sup>1</sup> The first came from a conduit in the cloister garth, made by Helias of Hereford, the sacrist, who died in 1237. This was fed by a pipe-line from Breresclyft or 'Breresclowe' at Matson.<sup>2</sup> The Fullbrook was the second. It was divided into two channels within the precincts, one of which led under the Dorter to the *lavatorium* in the Great Cloister; the other was split into two just east of the Infirmary under which one channel passed, then supplied the Abott's Lodging, and, afterwards, fed the abbey mill. The other channel went to the Little Cloister,<sup>3</sup> then past the Cellarer's Checker and thère forked, one arm going to the mill, and the other by the kitchen to the Prior's Lodging where it was joined by the water from the Great Cloister and next, close to the Inner Gate by that from the mill. The re-united stream left the abbey precincts just north of the Great or College Gate and flowed to St Oswald's Priory the monks of which were granted by the abbey in 1263-4 the right to take the latter's surplus water.<sup>4</sup> Finally the Fullbrook discharged into Little or Old Severn, a now non-existent channel of the Severn which flowed 'from Longford Ham down Tweendike, round the east side of Meanham, skirting St Oswald's Priory, where once was a quay, and proceeding to the Foreign Bridge into the present channel at the Quay'.<sup>5</sup> Both Hall and Pinnell's plan of 1780 and that of G. Cole, 1805, show this.

The channel of the Twyver which turned north-west at the site of the Almsham Postern cannot always have followed the line of Market Parade, as it does at present, to the site of the Outer North Gate in Northgate street, but it must have swung west at the foot of the slight incline a short distance north of the postern. When excavations were being made by a Mr Reuben Cooke from his malthouse in St Aldate street, abutting on Northgate street, the bed of the old Twyver was found, and an oak landing-stage.<sup>6</sup> It was also found during sewerage operations in 1854 at the junction of Northgate and Worcester streets.<sup>7</sup> This diversion may have been made when the Outer North Gate was

<sup>1</sup> *Records of Gloucester Cathedral*, III, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Records of Gloucester Corporation*, No. 962, pp. 350-1; No. 966, p. 352; also *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Twelfth Report*, Appendix, Part IX, pp. 413-14.

The Grey Friars drew water from the same source by another pipe-line and, in 1438, they granted the Community of Gloucester the right to run pipes from the Convent garden to the High Cross and other places in the town.—*Corporation Records*, No. 1112, pp. 391-2.

<sup>3</sup> Water still flows here at a depth of about 14 feet (see plan).

<sup>4</sup> *Records of Gloucester Cathedral, 1885-97*, III, pp. 18-30 and plan opp. p. 100 and *Hist. et Cart. S. Petri. Glouc.*, I, pp. 171-2.

<sup>5</sup> T. Rudge, *History and Antiquities of Gloucester* (1811), p. 124.

<sup>6</sup> Powell, *Gloucestershire Extracts* (1889), p. 14, and *Proc. CNFC*, VI (1877), p. 171.

<sup>7</sup> 'the ground was boggy and lower than the present course of the Northgate brooks, both upper and lower, evidently showing that the River Twyver formerly flowed in that direction, and that it was diverted for defensive purposes', *Gloucester Journal*, 26th. Aug. 1854.

built. The date of this is unknown. The public washing place, recorded in the minutes of the Common Council of the town of the 9 December 1500, must have been at or close to the site of sewerage operations:—

‘Item that non person or persons wasse non podynge, guttes, nor innewardes of bestes att the wesshyng place without the inner norgate, nor cast non felth, nor make non gouttes (channels, drains) into the seide wesshyng place, in forfetour of XLd. as ofte as they be fauty’.<sup>1</sup>

Further evidence of this channel, to the west of Worcester street, is forthcoming in an Inquisition held by the Bailiffs of Gloucester in 1273 when the Abbot of Gloucester was accused of diverting the Twyver behind the house (*tenementum*) of Robert the Cornishman ‘to the prejudice of the King and the Community’.<sup>2</sup> It is known that this property was in Hare Lane.<sup>3</sup>

The channel that ran down what is now Market Parade passed outside the Outer North Gate.<sup>4</sup> It still crosses Northgate Street and passes through the yard of the Black Dog inn to Worcester street where it goes under the railway bridge, crosses the road, and forms the southern boundary of the Kingsholm Rugby Football ground. It then passed under Deansway and formerly discharged into Little or Old Severn. Nowadays it follows a channel across Meanham and joins the Severn a short distance above the Black bridge.

Mention has been made of the traditions regarding the diversion and canalization of the Twyver. At present it is impossible to state what substance there may be in them. A further reason for the diversion may have been the need to augment the water supply of the medieval town. This was very dependent on wells. It is significant that both the abbey and the Grey Friars found it necessary to pipe water from the Robinswood Hill area, that the monks of St Oswald’s priory readily took any surplus water from the abbey, also that the town authorities obtained the right to take three quarters of the amount received by the Grey Friars for distribution in the Southgate street area. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries, the Corporation continued for many years to draw water from this source which, as in the case of the abbey, appears to have been principally used for drinking purposes.

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Stevenson, *Historical Manuscripts Commission, Twelfth Report*, Appendix, Part IX, p. 434.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.* p. 412.

<sup>3</sup> *Records of Gloucester Corporation*, No. 735 (A.D. 1295), p. 287; No. 823 (A.D. 1317), p. 312. This channel also appears to be the brook mentioned in R. Cole’s *Rental of all the Houses in Gloucester, A.D. 1455*. Ed. W. H. Stevenson (1890), p. 92.

<sup>4</sup> ‘extra dictam portam borealem forinsecam et cursum aquae ibidem uocatae “Wever”. *Rental of 1455*, p. 102.

## THE RIVER TWYVER AND THE FULLBROOK

'In the South-gate Street stands an old conduit with a small, but not inelegant building over it in the *Gothic* taste. This conduit, with one at the Cross, both supplied with water from a spring at Robin Hood's Hill, were, till lately, almost the only places from whence the inhabitants of this part of the town could be supplied with good spring water'.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever may have been the reasons for diversion, it would appear that this and the consequent canalization must have taken place before A.D. 1220 because there are references to Morin's mill at that time in the Calendar of the Records of the Corporation of Gloucester<sup>2</sup> and in the Abbey Cartulary.<sup>3</sup> This mill would not have existed without water power to turn it and this applies to the mills between it and Barnwood mill, all of which were below the point of canalization. Assuming the Llanthony priory tradition to be correct the canalization must be put back to A.D. 1137 when the priory was dedicated.

If water had to be brought to Gloucester by artificial means, the choice lay between utilization of the Twyver or the Sudbrook, and the former offered advantages over the latter. Practically the whole of the Roman *colonia* and the medieval town were situated on or just above the 50-foot contour (see plan), and the Sudbrook, as it approaches Gloucester, not only falls below this level, but used to flow through swampy ground.<sup>4</sup> The course chosen for the canalized Twyver follows a low ridge that never falls below the 50-foot contour all the way to the cathedral, the former abbey. Furthermore, the Portway, a very ancient road, ran parallel with and nowhere at any great distance from it. It was easy of access for mills. Such roads as there used to be near the Sudbrook were very few and they all crossed it at right angles.

That diversion and canalization were of Roman origin is a practical possibility, and proof of it may be forthcoming some day, say, when a landing stage is found, such as that uncovered close to St Aldate street in 1889 and, at the time, of discovery, stated to have been 'probably British', though no evidence in support of this assertion was given.

<sup>1</sup> B. Martin, *Natural History of England, 1759-63*, I, pp. 332-63.

Canon Furney stated that the conduit, octagonal in shape, was built by Alderman John Scriven in 1631.

<sup>2</sup> This privilege has been continued from that year (1438) to the present date, the water being conveyed for a distance of two miles through wooden and subsequently iron pipes.—G. T. Robinson, *Picturesque Antiquities of Gloucester* (1849), p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> No. 147, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. 2, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> L. E. W. O. Fullbrook-Leggatt, *Roman Gloucester* (1950), pp. 9, 44.

TRANSACTIONS FOR THE YEAR 1964

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