

Stooper Mill in Pembrokeshire: 'Mormon' meeting place in the 19th century

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Stooper Mill¹ was one of four mills along Brandy Brook between Hayscastle and Roch Bridge, using water power to grind corn. The only one of the four now remaining is Roch Mill, which has been fully restored, and Stooper Mill was about three miles further up the valley on what is now Brandy Brook Caravan and Camp Site. It was demolished by the site owners in the late twentieth century as the building was in disrepair and considered hazardous.



Photograph: Stooper Mill in the 1970s. Ron Dennis

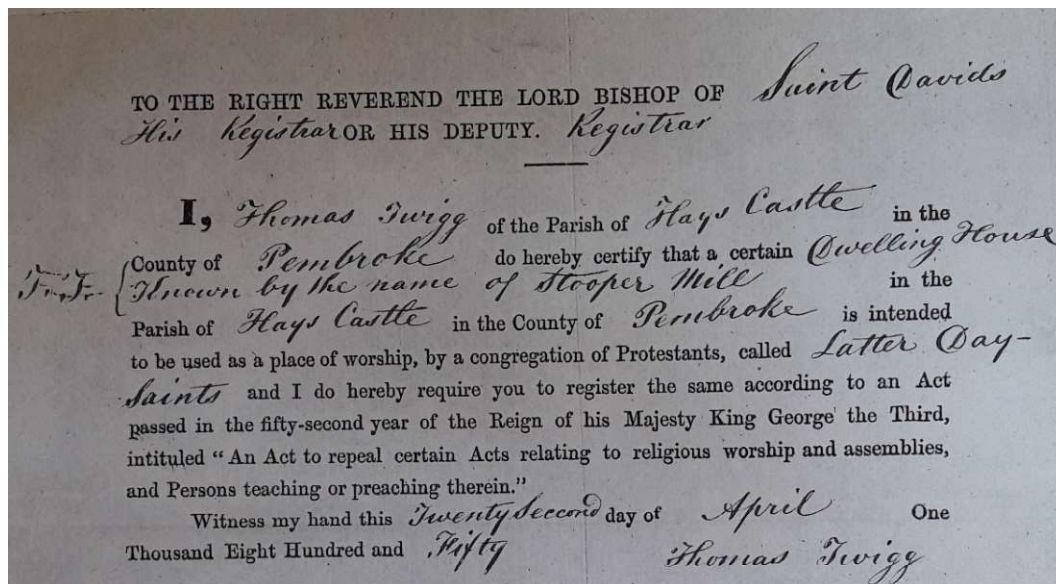
As this photograph shows, the mill was a stone building of some size, although the original roof was of slate. The barns for storing corn still stand, and have been converted into the site shop and laundry. The millstones have also been preserved on-site. This second photograph shows the location where the mill formerly stood, just below the present car park. Water from the brook was diverted to power the mill wheel.

¹ GPS: 51°52'25.5"N 5°04'32.6"W



Photograph: Location of now demolished Stoper Mill. Ian Govier

But in the mid-nineteenth century, Stoper Mill was registered for use as a meeting house for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (often referred to as the LDS or ‘Mormon’ church).² Thomas Twigg, who was the miller at the time, registered the building for worship in 1850 as then required by law for protestants or ‘dissenters’ (i.e. dissenters from the Established Church).



Document courtesy of the National Library of Wales

² Official name: *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*. The term ‘Mormon’ derives from the *Book of Mormon*, a companion book of scripture to the *Holy Bible* for members of the Church.

The Twigg family are listed at Stooper Mill on the 1841 census: Thomas (age 60), Martha his wife (60), and two of their children, Jane (20) and John (25). A widowed Thomas Twigg is still living there in 1851 with his son John and daughter-in-law Martha. On May 15 1852 travelling 'Mormon' missionary Daniel Williams noted in his journal that he and John Price slept the night at '*Stooper Mill (John Twigg's house) on the way from Haverfordwest and Castle Kedin for the Northern conference.*'³

The 'Mormon' congregation which met at the mill was known as Cuffern Mountain (or Mynydd Cyffern) branch. Records held in the LDS Church History Library in Salt Lake City (Utah) show that the branch existed from at least 1849 to 1876. John Twigg was listed in 1851 as the local ecclesiastical leader, or Branch President, having previously been local Treasurer for the Perpetual Emigration Fund (PEF). Early converts to the LDS church were encouraged to emigrate to Utah Territory, and the PEF was set up by the church to enable this to happen through loans to those who didn't have the means to travel that far. Loans were to be repaid as and when the individual could afford it, and funds would then be available for others to use in the same way. After Thomas Twigg's death the Cuffern Mountain branch met at the home of one James Thomas. Early LDS congregations in rural areas often consisted of just one or two families, so a house could be used as a meeting place. But these small congregation sometimes disappeared entirely due to emigration.

According to John Twigg's biography⁴, his father Thomas had intended to emigrate to America, but changed his mind. This could have been the result of John's brother William dying in January 1854, but Thomas himself died in 1855 and may not have been well enough to travel. John and his wife Martha (*nee* Reed) did emigrate, together with William's widow Mary (who was Martha's sister) and her six children. The two families sailed from Liverpool on the *Clara Wheeler* in

³ See: <http://welshmormon.byu.edu> for the missionary journal of Daniel Williams

⁴ See: <http://welshmormon.byu.edu> for the biography of John Twigg, son of Thomas, and the missionary journal of Daniel Williams

November 1854 in a group of some 400 new converts to Mormonism from across Britain.

Before the families could cross the plains to Utah Territory however, Mary and four of the children had died of cholera – a very common occurrence at the time. So John and Martha, who had no children of their own, took Mary's two remaining children – Emma and Thomas - and brought them up. They all settled in the Salt Lake valley where they established a farm and brewery. In 1868 Emma married and settled in nearby Sugar House. Sadly, only ten years later, she died of pneumonia, and her husband John Gabbott wrote in his journal,

As her spirit was leaving her body I kissed her cold lips and bid her good-bye until we should meet again. And at that very moment I received the assurance as though her spirit whispered to mine that it was all well with her and know if I am faithful we shall meet again never more to part... May I prove faithful and true to my God that I may be worthy to meet her in that world where sin and death can never come."

John Gabbott remarried, but kept in touch with Emma's family. Ten years later, in 1888 he again recorded in his journal:

"my first wife's uncle and foster father [John Twigg] had not enjoyed good health for 20 years. His wife survives him. It was their habit, while my (second) wife was sick to come over in the evening and stay til bed time. The evening of his death they stayed till 9:15. Went home apparently in his usual health, although not feeling well, was taken with pain in his side, supposed to be his heart and died before his wife realized that death was so near."

Martha Twigg, pictured here, survived her husband by 16 years and died in Salt Lake City August 11, 1904.

[Photograph: familysearch.org]



What a distance for the Twigg family between their home in verdant rural Pembrokeshire and the desert climate of Utah, leaving loved ones behind and also along the way. But this family's history has retained a modern link to Stooper Mill. In 2017 when this site was being researched and documented, it

came to light that several families from the Swansea congregation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints owned holiday caravans at the Brandy Brook site. Some had owned their caravans for more than 20 years and their children had played among the ruins of the mill before it was demolished. All of them had enjoyed the quiet of this secluded site, without any notion that it had links to their church's history. Their closest Mormon congregation is a half-hour's drive away in Johnston, with a modern purpose-built meeting house. But in a sense history has turned full circle, as a small group of 'Mormon' families again congregates on Brandy Brook in fellowship and faith, as they did in Thomas Twigg's day.