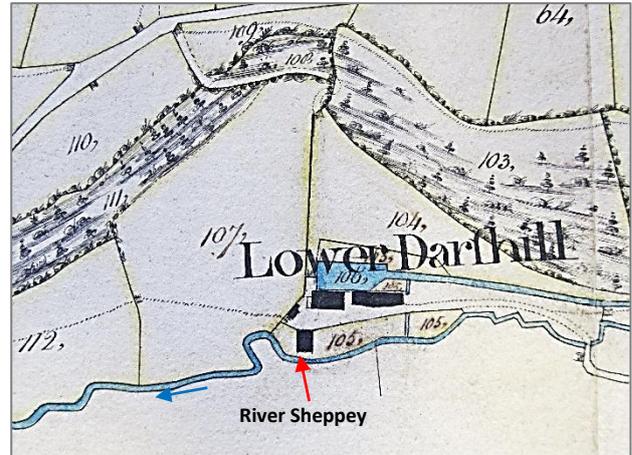


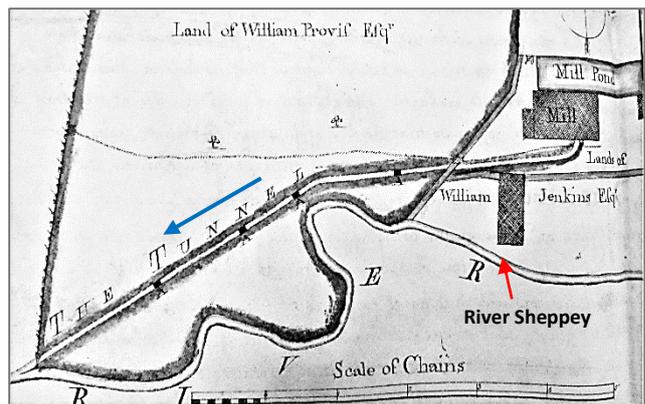
Lower Darshill Mill(s) and dwelling house, Wells Road, Lower Darshill (now demolished, also referred to as the Pilton Silk Mill)

Lower Darshill Mill(s) and dwelling house are situated on the northern banks of the River Sheppey about 0.4 mile west and downstream of Darshill Hamlet and about 0.6 miles east and upstream of Croscombe. The extensive mill complex was gutted by a large fire in 1843 and although the ruins remained standing it was never rebuilt. The dwelling house survived. In 1879 eighteen acres encompassing the site were sold to the Shepton Mallet Local Council for a sewage treatment works by the owner Mr Arthur Fownes Somerville. Only remnants of the old mill buildings were present in 1885 (see map below) but the house known locally as the White House lasted until the first decade of the 20th century before being demolished. There are several anecdotal references to there being a large stone monument erected on the site of the old mill which was removed in the 1890s during development of the sewage works.

The watermills at Lower Darshill were fed by a large millpond and a leat about 300 yards in length arising from the Sheppey River just below Darshill House (map top right). In 1795 the tailrace of the mill was culverted into a tunnel bypassing a meandering section of the river before emptying back into the faster flowing river downstream (see plan right). As the tail race was effectively underground it does not appear on maps of the mill after 1795.

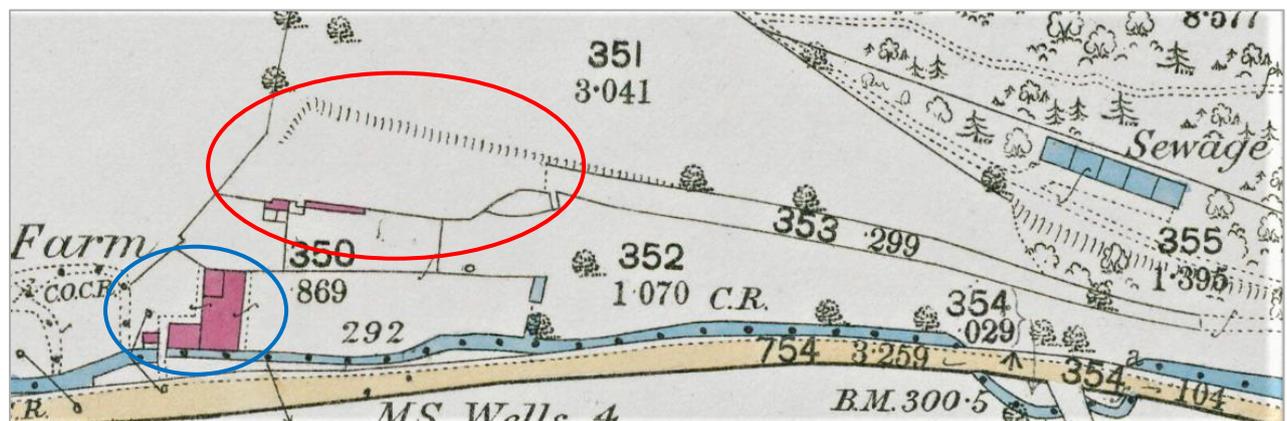


Above: 1809 Pilton Parish map



Above: 1795 Plan of tunnel carrying the tail race of the mill (blue arrow), Lower Darshill Mill, SHC DD/SVL/2/10/5

Below: 1885 OS map Lower Darshill, remnants of mill buildings and millpond circled in red, the White House circled in blue



Like Ham Mill, the Lower Darshill mill complex was built in Ham Tithing, a detached part of the parish of Pilton. In the early medieval period when the newly formed parishes of Shepton Mallet and Croscombe separated from the much larger Pilton, Ham Tithing was retained. This allowed Glastonbury Abbey the overlord of Pilton, more direct control of the valuable woodland in Ham as well as guaranteeing access to the River Doultling (Sheppey) a stream with much greater potential to drive grain and fulling mills than others in Pilton.

In the 1086 Domesday survey Pilton had two mills one of which may well have been situated in Ham at Lower Darshill¹. The 1189 survey of Pilton by Henry of Sully, Abbot of Glastonbury lists a member of the Abbot's household, Henry the "drugeman" (interpreter) who held a virgate of land in Ham for five shillings (5s) and two mills for 21s 4p as well as service to the Abbot's estates². So far, no further information for the medieval mills in Ham has been found. However, a Glastonbury Abbey survey of 1260 conducted by Abbot Roger of Ford records a lease dated 1259 of a mill at "Durkeshale near Shepton Mallet"³. This is highly likely to be the old mill on the site of Darshill House a few hundred yards upstream from Lower Darshill (see Middle Darshill Mill).

16th century-1705: The Seymours and Lord Bruce, owners of Lower Darshill Mills

In 1539 control of the Glastonbury Abbey estates including Pilton returned to the Crown and in 1547 Pilton was granted to Edward Seymour I, Duke of Somerset. It then descended through the Seymour line until it ran out of male heirs in 1671. Pilton was then inherited by Edward Seymour I's three times great grand daughter Elizabeth Seymour. In 1676 Elizabeth married Thomas Bruce, Lord of Ailesbury and Elgin who assumed joint ownership of her estates until she died in 1697 in premature childbirth. During 1705 Charles Bruce, Thomas' son and heir, with his two uncles sold most of the Tithing of Ham including the Lower Darshill Mill to its existing tenants.

1640s-1697 The Ames family, fullers, tenants

In the 17th century the Ames family were established yeoman farmers in north east Somerset. One branch headed by Roger Ames went on to become merchants in Shepton Mallet where they bought and rebuilt Charlton House in about 1668. Through connections with Bristol they became shipping merchants amassing substantial wealth through the triangular trade and slavery.

A further branch headed by Thomas Ames and his son John of Ham both fullers by trade became occupiers of the woollen mill at Lower Darshill. Thomas Ames was resident in Ham by 1641 (Protestation rolls)⁴ and his son John had taken over by at least 1674 when he is recorded in a bond of that date⁵. The copyhold property in Ham called Ames Tenement included a messuage (dwelling house), one water grist mill and one fulling mill with 5½ acres of pasture in a field called Snakesbury⁶. John Ames appears to have sub-let some of the property perhaps one of the mills to James Stokes in the late 17th century.

1697-1723: William Webb and his son William, clothiers of Ham, tenants then owners

In 1697 the copyhold lease of Ames tenement was surrendered by the Ames family and granted to William Webb Snr a clothier of Ham⁷.

William was born in Pilton in 1662, the son of John Webb also a clothier. He moved to Shepton Mallet married his wife Elizabeth there and their daughter Elizabeth was born in 1684. The couple had settled in Ham by the time their son William Jnr was born in 1691 and moved to the mill house in Lower Darshill in 1697. In 1705 William Snr had the opportunity to buy the freehold of the mill complex, the five acres in Snakesbury and a further two acres of pasture called Millhams adjoining from the Bruce family for £94 4s.⁷ Soon afterwards he converted the water grist mill to another fulling mill⁷ but died in 1709. His son William took over the Lower

Darshill enterprise, mortgaged the property in 1712 and by the early 1720s was living in Shepton Mallet. In 1723 he sold the Lower Darshill property to his brother-in-law John Fisher of Shepton Mallet.

1723-1741: John Fisher, gentleman clothier of Shepton Mallet and the Fisher family, owners⁸

In 1704 John Fisher (1675-1728) had married Elizabeth Webb daughter of William Webb Snr and sister of the previous owner. He already had an established business in Shepton Mallet and it is unlikely that the family ever lived at Lower Darshill. Almost immediately after the purchase of the property William mortgaged it and either let the mills or installed an overseer to manage them. In 1728 he died in Shepton Mallet.

By 1730 Paul Fisher a Bristol linen draper and a member of the family, redeemed the mortgage and bought the Lower Darshill mills⁸. Like John Fisher he was a non-resident owner and unfortunately there is no information about the mill occupants. However, by 1741 he had conveyed the property to Henry Jones a clothier from Shepton Mallet.

1741-1764: The Jones brothers, clothiers, drapers and haberdashers of Shepton Mallet and London

The four Jones brothers John, Henry, Richard and William were born between 1711 and 1725 the sons of John Jones (1678-1769) a wealthy clothier of Shepton Mallet and his wife Elizabeth. The four entered the family business in Shepton Mallet but their trade later extended to London. In 1741⁹ Henry the second eldest of the Jones brothers, bought the Lower Darshill mills from Paul Fisher. However, in 1758 Henry now a woollen draper of London and his wife Ann conveyed the mills to his younger brother Richard Jones who had remained in Shepton Mallet with the family firm.

They remained in his possession until 1763 when he died at the age of 52 years unmarried and leaving over £23,000 in gifts to be distributed

between his one surviving sister and six nieces and nephews. The real estate was divided between his brothers Henry of London and William now also a haberdasher of London. In 1764 John Jones and his two brothers sold the Lower Darshill mills with its land and dwelling house as well as Richard Jones' dwelling house in Shepton Mallet to William Jenkins of Shepton Mallet for £2,100¹⁰.

1764-1812: William Jenkins, tobacconist of Bristol and clothier of Shepton Mallet¹⁰

The insurance policy taken out in 1764 by William Jenkins on the Lower Darshill Mill property is shown on the next page. The description of the buildings reflects the size and value of the site during the period of proprietorship by the Jones family as well as the value of the goods, stock and utensils of trade now invested by Jenkins in all amounting to £2,400¹¹. As well as the dwelling house there were two sets of workrooms, one workshop, a dyehouse and the fulling mill. Of interest is a further dwelling house on the site probably being rented by a cloth worker, Joseph West with a shop and tenement in which Jenkins has £150 of utensils and stock. This may have housed a further on-site cloth finishing process.

William Jenkins appears to have moved to Shepton Mallet from Bristol in the early 1750s. His family had accumulated wealth in the tobacco trade and William himself traded as a tobacconist prior to being involved in cloth manufacture in Somerset. A William Jenkins tobacconist prior to being involved in cloth possibly his uncle was the Master of several ships (the Molly, Williamsburg, Amelia and Dorsetshire) involved in slave transport between Africa, the West Indies and the tobacco ports of colonial Virginia and Georgia during the 1750s and 1760s¹².

William Jenkins and his wife Mary Ann married in the late 1740s probably in Bristol. Either or both were Protestant dissenters and their four children were baptised at the Lewin's Mead

1764 Insurance policy of William Jenkins¹¹

<i>His dwelling house, part tiled and part thatched</i>	£400
<i>Household goods , furniture, utensils and stock therein</i>	£300
<i>His stable, dyehouse, workrooms adjoining each other near the dwelling house stone and tiled</i>	£150
<i>Utensils and stock therein</i>	£150
<i>His workrooms adjoining each other and near the dwelling house, thatched</i>	£150
<i>Utensils and stock therein</i>	£350
<i>His fulling mill and tenement adjoining, thatched</i>	£100
<i>Utensils and stock therein</i>	£200
<i>His utensils and stock in the dwelling house, shop and tenement adjoining of Joseph West, clothworker, thatched</i>	£450
<i>His utensils and stock in the workshop in the garden near the dwelling house</i>	£150
In all	£2,400

Meeting House in Bristol; Mary Ann (1749), Elizabeth (1750), William (1751) and Samuel Hunt Jenkins (1752). The strong Protestant ethic present in the 18th century clothiers in Shepton Mallet as well as their financial success may have influenced William Jenkins to invest there.

William's sons took different career paths. William Jnr (see next page) worked with his father and took over Lower Darshill Mills when the latter died in 1781. He is listed as a Shepton Mallet clothier in Bailey's Directory of 1784. In contrast, by the 1770s Samuel Hunt Jenkins (1752-1822) his younger brother, had become a wealthy merchant in the expanding colonial trading port of Savannah, Georgia. His business was probably exporting cotton and tobacco although involvement with slavery cannot be ruled out. Between 1778 and 1779 Savannah was caught up in the American Revolutionary War.

The battles for Savannah and the subsequent siege laid waste to the Jenkins' business and in 1781 Samuel applied for compensation from the British Government for his ruined storehouses. When the British withdrew in 1783, Jenkins' remaining property was confiscated and he returned to England where in 1787 he laid further claims for Loyalist compensation¹³. Samuel Hunt Jenkins Esq retired to Bath and died in 1822 leaving his estate to his niece, Elizabeth Hill of Yatton.

1781-1812: William Jenkins Jnr and Thomas Green Esquires, clothiers of Shepton Mallet

When purchased by William Jenkins Snr, the Lower Darshill mills and dwelling house were relatively unchanged from those described in the early 1700s. On his death in 1781¹⁴, William Snr left all his real estate to his wife Mary Anne for her life and then to their surviving children to be divided equally. With family agreement William Jnr (1751-1837) initiated a major rebuild of the mills and after his mother's death his brother Samuel, sister Betty and her husband John Hill of Shepton Mallet agreed to sell their shares to him¹⁴.

In 1791 William married Sarah Wathan (1768-1824) the second daughter of Joseph Wathan (c1723-1786) and his second wife Anne Iles. Joseph, one of the most successful clothiers in Gloucestershire owned the Thrupp Mill on the River Frome near Brimscombe. The family lived close by at their mansion New House and were acquaintances and devout followers of John Wesley. Joseph was also one of the founders of the Stroud Bank, later the Gloucestershire Banking Company and a stockholder in the Stroudwater Canal Project which opened a navigable waterway from Stroud to the Severn River in 1779. William and Sarah Jenkins settled in Leg St, Shepton Mallet. Their only child Marianne was born in 1795 in Bath.

Investment in the Lower Darshill development

escalated during the 1790s when William entered partnership with Thomas Green Esq (1751-1817) a successful clothier and financier of Shepton Mallet and part of the circle of clothiers supporting the Cowl Street Chapel. In 1806 Thomas bought Bowlish House from Abraham Brodribb's estate and lived there until his death in 1817 (see Bowlish House).

In 1793 Jenkins and Green insured the premises at Darshill including the fulling mill for £2000 only slightly more than the valuation of £1900 given to the family in 1791¹⁵. This suggests that the improvements were still ongoing. The new mill complex at the end of the 1790s was described as a fulling and machinery mill with two wheels (one of nearly 30ft, the other of 20ft) and a factory attached. There was a large millpond with a 23ft fall of water on the north and six workers cottages attached to the factory. All had been enclosed and built on the 5½ acre field called Snakesbury. A further six cottages had been built on the field called Millhams¹⁴. This layout stayed much the same through its later conversion to silk production starting in 1812 with the exception of changes in the workrooms and the number of cottages (see 1839 plan later). In 1795 Jenkins and Green constructed the tunnel previously mentioned to carry the tail race from the mill through the adjoining field owned by Mr William Provis and into the river downstream. He then leased the tunnel from Provis for 1s per year.

The 1790s was a risky time to build a mechanised factory due to serious opposition from the local workforce fearing for their jobs (see Mill Introduction). In 1799 there was an arson attack on newly constructed buildings at the Lower Darshill Factory necessitating military protection for the site¹⁶. Even so Jenkins and Green managed to equip it with 24 Spinning Jennies, 14 scribbling and carding engines and seven slubbing billies¹⁷.

However, the days of woollen cloth production were numbered in the Shepton Mallet area and in 1811-12 both William Jenkins and Thomas Green

retired from the business aged 60 years.

William and Sarah Jenkins continued to live in Leg Street, Shepton Mallet with their daughter Marianne (1795-1865) who in 1819 married Edward Francis Colston (1795/6-1847), gentleman of Filkins Hall Oxford. After an extended European tour, Edward rebuilt Roundway Park a grand residence outside Devizes for Marianne and their four children.

Sarah and William Jenkins died in Shepton Mallet in 1824 and 1837 respectively and were buried in the Wathen family vault in Bisley, Gloucestershire. William's last will¹⁸ was more than 20 pages long and he spread his wealth liberally among his friends and Shepton Mallet; a final testament to the wealth that had been in the wool industry. Marianne received a gift of £23,000 and all his real estate.

The Lower Darshill mill and factory complex was sold in January 1812 for £4,500 to Francis Nalder Esq of Cheapside with his older brother Thomas Nalder Esq of Hackney and William Bell of Cheapside, London as Trustees¹⁵. There was no mention of the old dwelling house which may have been demolished.

Large Mill and Factory, Somerset.
TO be SOLD by PRIVATE CONTRACT,—
A capital MILL and FACTORY, desirably situated at Darsehill, within a mile of the large and populous town of Shepton Mallet, and about three miles from the city of Wells, in the occupation of Messrs. Jenkins and Green, who are declining business;—possessing every convenience for carrying on the Silk, Cotton, or Woollen Manufactory on an extensive scale, and having very great power of water capable of driving any quantity of machinery, the fall being nearly twenty-three feet, and the present water-wheel nearly thirty feet in diameter, besides an over-shot wheel twenty feet in diameter; together with twelve COTTAGES near thereto, and various other buildings, and several acres of meadow and pasture land adjoining.—The whole Freehold; and the buildings and factory in excellent repair.
For further particulars, apply to Messrs. Hyatt and Maskell, solicitors, Shepton Mallet.
N. B.—If the premises are not Sold, they will be Lett.
[1338

Above: 1811, July 8th, Lower Darshill Mill and Factory for sale, Salisbury & Winchester J

1812-1829: Francis, Thomas and Isaac Nalder Esqs, brothers and silk manufacturers

Francis (1771-1882) and Thomas (1761-1827) Nalder made the initial investment in the mill and factory at Lower Darshill but they were both based in the family silk and gloving business in Cheapside, London¹⁵. Their youngest brother Isaac (1778-1834) took on and probably oversaw the conversion of the Darshill premises to silk production and its subsequent management.

The three brothers were sons of Thomas Nalder (1738-1804) and his wife Mary Webb (1738-1813) silk manufacturers of Shoreditch, East London during the later 18th century. In the early 1790s Thomas and Mary left their sons Thomas and Francis to manage the London premises and moved with their younger children to Thursley Heath, Surrey where Thomas converted a former water powered iron works to drive silk production¹⁹. A row of cottages built at that time still retain the name of "Silk Mills". The Surrey enterprise ended in about 1812¹⁹ which coincides with the purchase of Lower Darhill.

Isaac Nalder was an apprentice with Mr John Dutch a Glastonbury silk thowster in 1796²⁰ and had already moved to Shepton Mallet by 1812 when the Lower Darshill premises was purchased. In the same year he married Mary Ann Overington (1790-1825) in Haslemere near Thursley, returning to live in Bowlsh where their first son was born in 1814. The conversion of the mill and factory at Lower Darshill was accompanied by the rebuilding of the large dwelling house on the site which would come to be known as the White House .

By 1815 the factory was producing crape for the market and the Nalders' second son Frank Isaac was born in the master's residence at Lower Darshill. Their other two surviving children George William and Ann Nalder, were born at Darshill in 1817 and 1820 respectively.

In 1822 Francis Nalder of Hackney died and his

brothers Isaac and Thomas Nalder were listed as silk manufacturers at Croscombe although there is no doubt this refers to Lower Darshill. Thomas the eldest of the brothers died in 1827 dividing his property between his three sons and his son-in-law Joseph Nalder, the son of his deceased brother Francis. Thomas' son, Francis Nalder of Cheapside entered partnership in the Lower Darshill premises with his uncle Isaac but in 1829 the partnership was dissolved and the premises was divided with Isaac retaining the house, garden and factory while Francis acquired the mill and the Darshill land¹⁵.

1829-1843: Nalder and Hardisty, silk crape manufacturers

In 1829 a new partnership was formed between the Nalders and William Hardisty which took in the management of the four mills in the Darshill area (Lower, Middle, and the two mills at Upper Darshill) as well as the Coombe Lane Mill. William Hardisty (1783-1855) was already working the Upper Darshill mills. Prior to entering the Nalder and Hardisty partnership, two silk manufacturing partnerships in which William was involved were dissolved; Hardisty, Howgate and Braden and W. Hardisty and Co, both of Darshill²¹.

William Hardisty and his wife Sarah were born in Yorkshire and married in Halifax in 1806. Their children Mary, Sarah, William and John were born in Halifax between 1807 and 1813 and in their baptismal records, William Snr is referred to as "the book keeper" suggesting he was working in that capacity for one of the textile mills. The family moved to Shepton Mallet after 1813 and William invested in the newly converted silk mills. By 1830 he had bought the Kilver Street Mills which were thereafter managed by his sons William and John while William Snr focussed on Upper Darshill where he was residing.

In 1834 Isaac Nalder died at Lower Darshill leaving the house, garden and factory to his

son²² Frank Isaac Nalder (1815-1887) who was now in training as a solicitor. The other partner Francis Nalder was fully occupied by his crape silk, glove and silk ribbon business in Cheapside. Management of the factory and the mill naturally devolved to the experienced William Hardisty. The Lower Darshill factory was primarily powered by its two water wheels which generated 17 horse power. In addition, there was a 10 horse power steam engine to provide power when water levels fell during the Summer. At its height the mill and factory employed 177 workers mostly women and children²³. The plan of the Lower Darshill site in 1839 is illustrated below.

In 1841 the partnership between the Nalders and William Hardisty was dissolved²⁴. However, William leased the premises from them through his company W. Hardisty and Co. The 1841 census records that the White House at Lower Darshill was occupied by Edward Hardisty a young member of the extended family and the factory continued production as before.

1843: The fire and the end of Lower Darshill Silk Mill and Factory

In the evening of January 10th 1843, a fire started

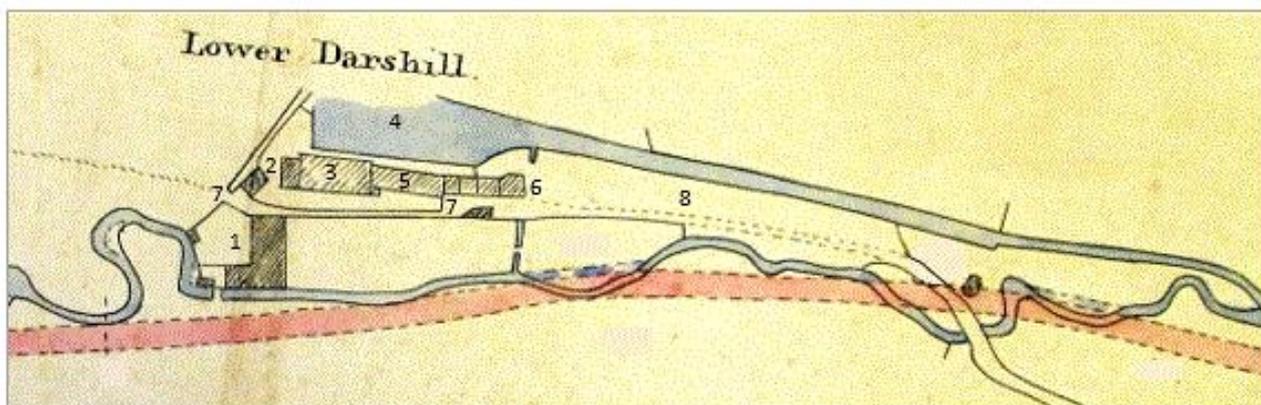
in the heating flue of the factory which spread upwards through the five storeys. The workforce including the small children on the fifth floor were evacuated without loss of life. However, the resulting blaze gutted the factory and mill leaving the two gables and the walls standing. An eye witness Mr Thomas Pratt recalled the event in great detail 50 years later in a Letter to the Editor of the Shepton Mallet Journal. In particular he reported the distress of William Hardisty as he stood watching the destruction²⁵.

Just over two weeks later the site was sold by Francis Nalder of Cheapside with Frank Nalder acting as his agent to the Rev'd William Provis Wickham of Wells (1767-1843) the owner of the surrounding Ham Estate, for £1,700¹⁴. The decision was made not to rebuild and W. Hardisty and Co leased a silk factory at Frome almost immediately to make up the loss (see new extracts next page). A year later William Hardisty and his sons had increased recruitment of workers and production at both Upper Darshill and the Kilver Street mills to the relief of those that had lost jobs at Lower Darshill.

Below: Plan of the Lower Darshill Mill and Factory in 1839 superimposed on 1852 Map Wells Turnpike Trust (SHC D/R/WEL/89)

KEY to numbers below:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Dwelling house + garden | 5. Slip engine room + crimping room over |
| 2. Engine house + counting house with boilers under | 6. Four cottages |
| 3. Factory, five floors, wheelhouse ground floor | 7. Factory gates, from Croscombe + Shepton |
| 4. Mill pond | 8. Yard |



SHEPTON MALLET.—We are informed that the large silk factory of Messrs. W. Hardisty and Co., at Darshill, near this town, which was destroyed by fire on Tuesday evening, the 10th ult., will not be rebuilt, as the ruins, together with the lands, and Mr. Hardisty's dwelling-house with the cottages, lodge, and offices adjoining, have been purchased by T. Wickham, Esq., of Dinder, whose estates and plantations are immediately adjoining. Messrs. Hardisty and Co. have taken a factory at Prome for their present use.

Above: 1843, outcome of the fire at Lower Darshill, Mill, Jan 13th, Bath Chronicle

HURRICANE.—On Monday and Tuesday last we were visited with a perfect hurricane—the wind being so violent that at some exposed situations it was utterly impossible to stand against it. Trees, chimneys, and tiles were blown down in all directions, but we have not heard of any persons being injured by their fall. One of the walls and the chimney of the Lower Darshill factory, which have been standing since the fire took place there about seventeen years ago, were blown down with a tremendous crash, and it seems very probable that another such a wind will have the effect of levelling the remaining wall.

Above: 1860, further ruin of Lower Darshill Mill by hurricane, SMJ

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