

BRUND MILL

by Garrett Evans

The old mill's a ruin, probably 19th century, perhaps earlier. It's in the valley of the Dove and Manifold Rivers near the village of Longnor. That part of Derbyshire is open, beautiful countryside with big green fields and dry stone walls - it resembles parts of Wales; it looks like Roman Britain as much as anything.

The trips from the University at grim Nottingham to that valley became a weekly ritual. I was so poor at that point, I couldn't keep a cat much less a dog or a car, and was in fact reduced to looking out for girls with decent motors. In this way Jenny was discovered. She had only a Mini but she was a splendid girl with dark hair, good eyes and a winning smile. She had a good bone structure and probably is even better looking now than she was then. The Mini was light brown and almost new.

So usually every weekend we were off to the village of Longnor. There were plenty of scrappy little trout for the creel, and grayling too. And in the winters there were snipe, hares and ducks. Whether fishing or shooting we'd often start in at the old mill. There was the sound of running water on stone, and different coloured pebbles caught by sunbeams on the bed of the running moorland streams. Brund Mill was upstream from the farm of a Mr Wood. With him we had many conversations and he came to think of us as part of his farm: "Well, you've seen this farm in all different seasons and conditions..." Suddenly I'd been there for years and the hours were passing, passing. There were orchards and the sound of church bells from the village, and foxes called up on the hills in the early bright.

Though the settings of that great magician and poet, the Welshman Dylan Thomas, were further to the west, his lines catch it all rather perfectly:

And green and golden, I was huntsman and herdsman, the Calves sang to my horn, the foxes on the hills barked clear and cold.

And the sabbath rang slowly

In the pebbles of the holy streams.

(Fern Hill, ll, 6-9)

Is it surprising that Thomas, and that man who carried his mantle, that man with the marvellous voice, and a face like an unmade bed, the actor Richard Burton; is it surprising that both men ultimately should have returned to such roots?

They returned after all the restless wandering, the glitter, the fast women and the nonsense "to the farm forever fled from the childless land".

The stream still runs through the farms and by the mill ruin. The seasons turn. What a fine book could be made of one year in that mill ruin's life; the owls, sparrows and swallows that live in its crumbling walls; the trout that live round it; and the may flies rising in sunlit columns. And all of it among the soft browns and greens of that isolated valley. It's nice to know while along other streams, that it's all still there.