

## Cynefin – Fulling Mill

Fulling is a wet process to clean and thicken woven woollen textiles before they are made into garments. It is one of many finishing processes textile manufacturers used for a variety of types cloth for different purposes. The name may have come from the use of fullers earth (an impure hydrous aluminium silicate) in the middle ages as a cleansing agent. Earlier, stale urine was used as a source of ammonium salts. The fulling process also involves pounding the woollen cloth which matted the wool fibres together thickening (called ‘felting’) and waterproofing the cloth, which would be very important for a rural hill farming environment.

Before the use of machinery the fulling process, also known as ‘tucking’ and ‘waulking’ (in Scotland), the cloth was pounded by hand or stamped on by foot or pounded with a club. With the advent of machinery in the 1700’s and when water, wind and mule driven mills were used for grinding grain, it was an obvious extension to use mills for the fulling process.

There seems to have been only one fulling mill in Dwygyfylchi, on the Afon Gyrach, upstream of Hen Felin in an area known as the Nant (now Capelulo) towards the Fairy Glen. Fulling mills are known as ‘pandy’ in Welsh and this appears in many place names, but not in this case. Because many different processes are used to produce cloth; washing, carding, spinning, weaving, fulling, etc. it was common to combine many of these processes in one building making use of the source of water power to drive the machines. For this reason it may be that Welsh textile mills may have been referred to as ‘fatri’ (meaning factory ?). The fulling mill in Dwygyfylchi is mentioned on maps and in documents as ‘Y Fatri’.

The fulling mill machine comprises a curved wooden vat that contains the cloth, water and cleaning agents, a set of hammers that continuously pound and move the cloth around, and a tappit wheel which operates the hammers in a regular pounding action (see the diagram).

A large working fulling mill has been reconstructed at St. Fagan’s museum (see photo).