

Milling derived phrases still used today

"Take your turn". To "take your turn" is to be the next person to have corn or wheat ground by the turning of the millstones.

"Milling around". The time spent waiting on the grinding process to be completed.

"I am just a cog in the wheel". One of the many required to complete a process.

"Grist to the mill". Work to be done, material requiring processing.

"first come first served". This was the law for millers, because it could take days for a farmer to have his crop ground. The law was designed to prevent impatient customers from queue jumping.

"The daily grind". The repetitive nature of milling led to the concept of "the daily (same old) grind".

"Keep your nose to the grindstone". If a pair of millstones were incorrectly set they could grind too hot and the flour would become cooked, emitting a burning smell. Occasionally flour would burst into flames. The miller "kept his nose to the grindstone" to detect the temperature and condition of the meal, because most mills were constructed with timber floors, roofs and sometimes walls, they could, and frequently did burn to the ground in a matter of minutes. The phrase today can mean to just keep working hard.

"Come to a grinding halt". If the millstones ground too close and the power was inadequate or the water ran dry the mill would "come to a grinding halt".

"Rule of Thumb". To test the quality and grind of the flour the miller would take a pinch of it between his thumb and finger. If too coarse the flour would be reground after adjusting the gap between the stones.

"Fair to middling". The quality of ground meal would be fair, middling or fine. To be "fair to middling" is to be below ones best (average).

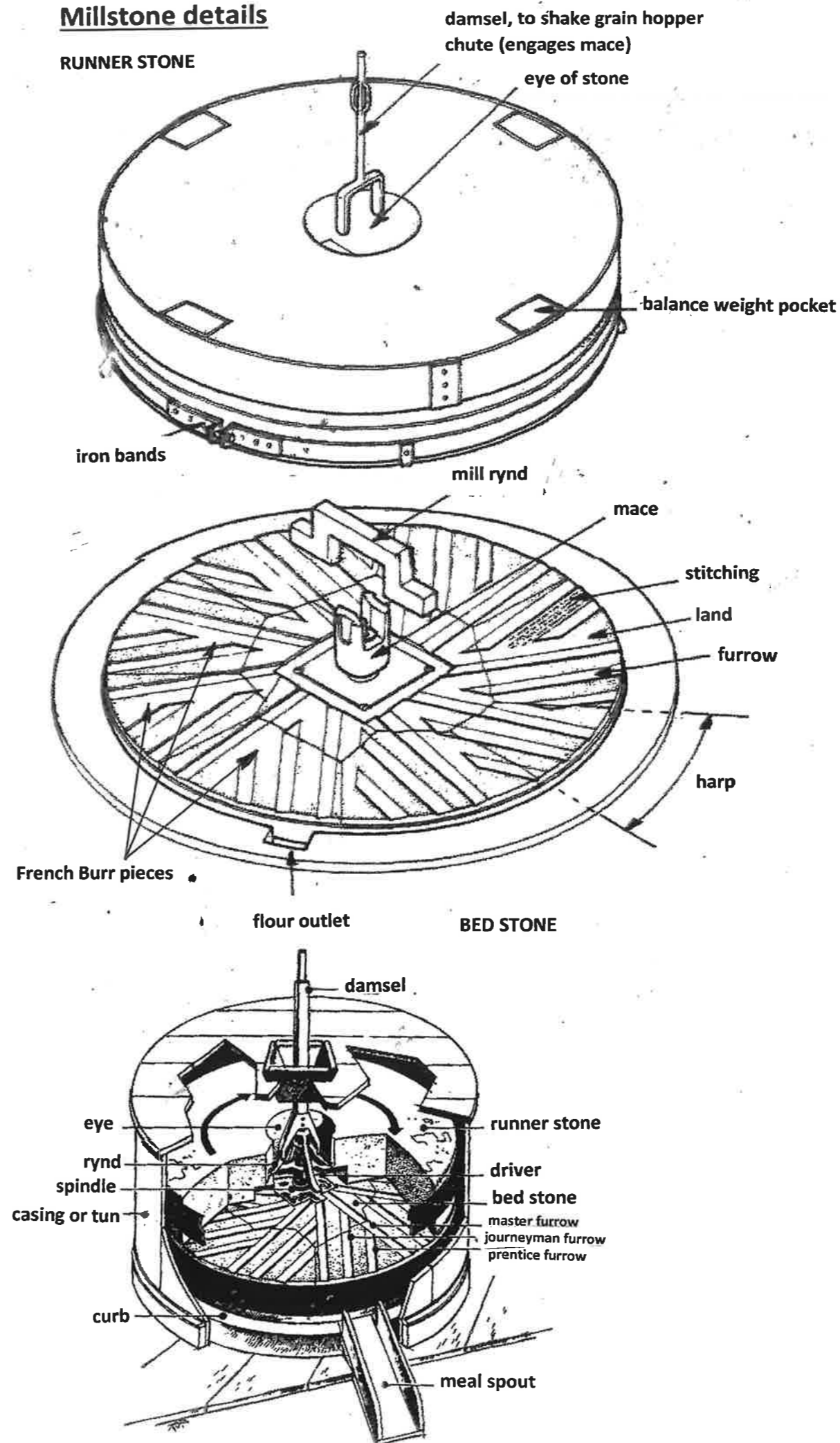
"Millstone round your neck". Millstones are very heavy and a "millstone around your neck" is a problem that prevents you from doing your best ie a financial burden.

"Put through the mill". To be put through an uncomfortable ordeal, as corn is ground between stones.

"Show us your metal". A millers way of proving a millwright could dress French Burr stones. Due to their hardness bits of metal would break off the tip of the dressing pick or bill and become embedded in the back of the millwrights hand, thus proving he had experience in the trade.

"The millers sow is aye well fed". Derives from the days of thirlage whereby a tenant had to take his corn to the estate mill, the miller was paid with a proportion of the crop. However an unscrupulous miller often stole more than his entitlement.

Millstone details



Dressing millstones

The preparing & dressing of millstones was one of the most important aspects of routine maintenance carried out in a mill. A poorly maintained set of stones being of no use to anyone. Dressing being required every 200-500 milling hours.

After the basic stone had been prepared, the surfaces are smoothed and a pattern of grooves cut into them. It is these "furrows" that do the work. As the stones are used the furrows became worn and had to be refreshed or "dressed", often by the miller himself or by travelling stone dressers. Ten harp shaped segments of furrows which can be dated back to Roman times were cut & secondary furrows called "stitching" in Burr stones.

When dressing French Burr stones, the hardness of the stone would often break the tip off the mill bill or pick, flakes of metal becoming embedded in the back of the millwright's hand. These scars would indicate the millwright's dressing experience, hence the phrase "show us your metal mate".

Properly dressed & adjusted stones should provide a gap at the "eye" the thickness of brown paper, the gap at the "skirt", the thickness of tissue paper.

For shelling (or groating) purposes (the pre grinding process) an old worn set of stones which could no longer be dressed for grinding would be used as they were only required to "crack" the husk & free the kernel.

Dressing tools

mill picks or bills

