WATER MILLS ON THE DYLE

FROM ROTSELAAR TO LEUVEN

For many centuries, a number of water mills along the Dyle provided economic activity in the area.

What follows is a description, the historical background and current function of those mills that still play their role in people's daily lives today.

1. Rotselaar mill (11 Km from LEUVEN)

This water mill on the river Dyle is located near Leuven and its story is centuries old.

HISTORY

The oldest mention goes back to 1217. The Rotselaar Mill has always been one of the largest water mills in the Low Countries and also one of the mills on the Dyle, which still fulfils a function today, although in a partially different perspective.

The Rotselaar Mill bears witness to a history of at least 800 years and was always used as a corn mill.

Later, it came into the possession of the dukes of Aarschot, the De Croÿ family until 1612 and later of the Arenberg family. The latter had a miller's house built in 1573.

During the Reformation wars, the mill was destroyed but rebuilt by the Duke de Croÿ in 1664.

After the construction of the Leuven-Dyle Canal, the mill was supplied with grain by horses. To this end, the mill was extended with stables in 1777. During the following years, it was rebuilt several times and barns were also added.

The mill finally stopped working in 1968, due to too much competition from industrial mills. The mill was no longer occupied from 1973 and fell into disrepair. Finally, on 22 June 1983, the mill received protection as an industrial archaeological monument.

In the during May 1985, the Rotselaar mill was bought by a Leuven non-profit association, consisting of a group of committed students, active in progressive green circles who were also involved with the

Dyle mills. They started the restoration.

The waterwheel has been producing green electricity since 1995 and has been owned by Ecopower since 2004. Ecopower is a citizens' cooperative that invests in renewable energy. The turbine has a capacity of 75 kW and produces about 500,000 kWh per year.

The residential part is owned by private owners.

NOW

Today, the Rotselaar Mill is a protected monument because of its industrial-archaeological value. The complex was restored into a fascinating multifaceted whole.

It is now a versatile and sustainable project on a historic site. There is a hydropower plant generating green energy. It is now a cohousing project with nine households. An organic vegetable grower sells and grows mill vegetables and other organic goodies. The site's bakers fire the old baking oven every Friday and bake delicious bread. Attention is also paid to the water quality of the Dyle and the fish ladder allows fish to migrate freely.

Idyllic living close to a city like Leuven is almost inconceivable. Along the shared, two-hectare garden of the mill house, the Dyle River flows by. Via a small hydropower plant, it supplies 140 households with electricity in an environmentally friendly way.

2. Sluice mill (LEUVEN)

History.

The first (wooden) Sluice mill is said to have been built around the year 1100. It was not until the creation of the Duchy of Brabant that it became a seigneurial mill. In 1451, the Sluice mill was rebuilt under Philips the Good.

As a seigneurial mill ((was a mill where neighbouring farmers were obliged to have their grain ground), the Sluice mill consisted of a rye and a wheat mill, each driven by a water wheel. It was one of 39 mills that Leuven counted within its second city walls before 1400.

After damage caused by floods in 1500 and 1532, reconstruction of the sluice followed in 1537, this was during Charles V's reign.

In the 17th century, the mill functioned as a malt mill.

During the French occupation, the mill was sold publicly. Prosper Lodewijk van Arenberg got it returned in 1842. A thorough renovation followed in the late 19th century and the wooden wheels were replaced by iron ones in the early 20th century. In 1925, the family donated the estate with the mill to the university of Leuven.

The two rather identical mill buildings with stepped facades were well preserved until around 1945, but in 1957 the roof collapsed. Today, the sluice of the former Sluice mill still fulfils an important regulating function regarding the water control of the Dyle and the water supply of the Leuven canal. Some wall sections and the old sluice gates still remain of the mill itself.

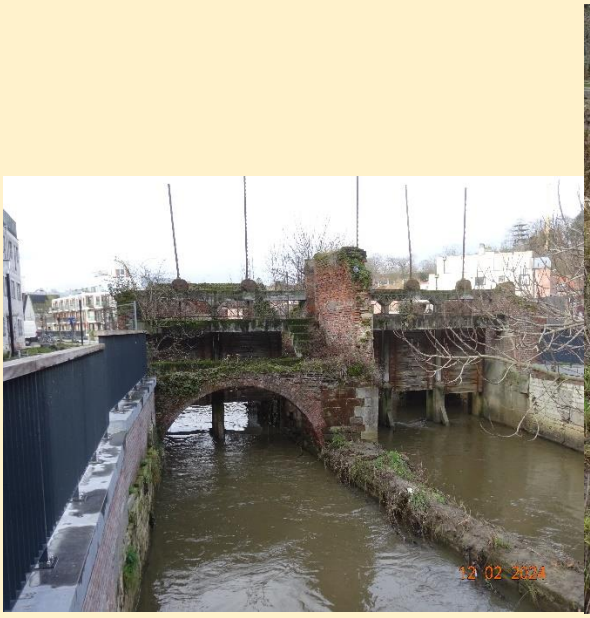
A beautiful neighbourhood park was added next to and around the former mill. The new Sluicepark includes a playing meadow, a neighbourhood square, a walnut orchard and a water playground.

In addition, the Dyle was largely opened up and integrated into the design. More space was given to the water and the Dyle was made accessible with wide steps along which one can descend to the water.

An estimated 25 fish species are found in the Dyle. To reproduce, many of these species migrate upstream into the river in spring.

Near the Sluicepark, the sluice dam ensures that water in the Dyle is high enough to feed the canal. This creates a level difference of more than one and a half metres between the water level upstream and downstream of the dam. This prevents fish from swimming further upstream. This bottleneck is overcome by building a fish ladder around the weir. This fish ladder splits the unbridgeable height difference so that the fish can swim up.

Both the city of Leuven and a property developer own the Sluicepark.



3. Dyle Mills (LEUVEN)

The Dyle mills also have a rich history of hundreds of years as a grain mill.

HISTORY

The first records of these Dyle mills date back to 1282.

Where the Dyle mills are now, there used to be two water mills: on one bank the Graetmolen and on the other the Schorsmolen. Both mills were often rebuilt and burnt down completely in 1818 and then again in 1884. It took until 1830 before mill activity could be re-established.

The current mill complex probably dates from 1935-1940 and produced the very finest baker's flour. Production was maintained until 1979.

Now

Afterwards, In the 1980s, the industrial site was rebuilt into a residential, working and living community, a co-housing project avant la lettre.

Here, the association operating the Rotselaar mill came back to the forefront.

The turbines and the water wheel of the Dyle mills and the sluice mill in Leuven are owned by the citizens' cooperative Ecopower from Rotselaar.

All living and working units are now owned by private individuals.

4. The fulling mill in LEUVEN

A fulling mill is an industrial mill used for fulling wool.

History

This ‘Volmolen’ was a water-powered fulling mill located where the Dyle flows into Leuven. It was built on the ‘De Grote Spui’ sluice complex, one of the two water gates of the 14th-century city walls. It is the only remaining structure of this seven-kilometre long city wall.

The sluice complex was built in 1365.

Its original function was wool fulling, with the aim of reviving Leuven's cloth industry. In the 16th century, a water wheel was suspended in the arches of the sluice complex. The mill was constructed in 1559 on the first arcade of the Grote Spui. Something that never really succeeded. There was a brief interruption in the 16th century, during which the mill served as a paper mill. Then it produced wool felt again until 1813. From 1837, the building was part of a large grain mill complex.

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The huge iron wheel on the outer wall was powered by the flow of the Dyle river. The mill was demolished in 1957 for the construction of the city ring road around Leuven and the widening of the bridge over the Dyle.

The city of Leuven owns the mill.

5. Arenberg water mill (LEUVEN -HEVERLEE)

The Arenberg watermill is an old, protected watermill on the Hyle river, located on the grounds of Arenberg castle in Heverlee.

A ban mill or seigneurial mill was a mill where neighbouring farmers were obliged to have their grain ground. Often these mills were owened by the local lord or another higer authority, such as an abbey, who had been granted the wind or water right for the mill.

History

The oldest mention of the water mill dates from 1286, making it one of the oldest mills in Flanders. Originally, it was a double mill, there was a mill on both bankd of the Dyle. These were connected by a bridge. The mill on the left bank was a sawmill, the one on the right bank a corn mill.

A sluice was installed between the mills for smaller boats. The right-hand mill later disappeared, after which the two functions were combined into one new mill, probably in the late 16th century. The current mill dates from that time. Charles III of Croy died childless in 1612, after which the castle and mill passed into the hands of the dukes of Arenberg.

NOW

Anno 2017, the mill was returned to poor condition and restoration works were imminent. The costs was estimated at €400.000. Half of that was paid by the university. For the remaining €200.000, KU Leuven`s Heritage Fund initiated a crowdfunding campaign in early October 2017. The restoration work has now been completed. The restoration in purley aesthetic. The mill will no longer be able to perate as a water mill, because this would require adjustments to the flow of the Dyle, which could have harmful effects on the Doode Bemde natue reserve, among others.

The water mill was protected 1999, together with the sluice work and the two water wheels, because of its historical and industrial-archaeological value.

Since 1925, the mill has been owened by the Leuven University.