The Mill on the Exe public house is situated on an important historical site adjacent to the river Exe famous from the 12th century for the mills that harnessed the power of the river to drive the wheels and as the location for the first water plant that delivered fresh water to the citizens of Exeter.

(+illus Mill on the Exe pub with Backaller weir in the foreground)

(audio ‘river exe’ section of the St Davids Symphony of Sounds )

**Leats & weirs**

Leats or open watercourses and weirs were required to provide water for the mills. This area was serviced by the Higher leat and the Head and Blackaller Weirs. Although the leats have disappeared under roads or building developments the weirs remain and the Blackaller weir provides a great setting for the Mill on the Exe as do the Weare Cliffs, now a site of special scientific interest.

(+illus map of the river Exe, the 2 weirs and the leats)

(+illus the Weare cliffs)

(+ illlus of remaining open leat just off Bonhay road)

(+ very short story on SSI)

**Mills**

Exeter had a number of ‘grist’ mills grinding grain and later corn, malt, bone, snuff or driving bellows for leather tanning, dyeing etc. As the centre of the SW woollen trade woollen cloth was hammered and ‘rackfields’, where the wool was hung on wooden tenterhooks to dry, were a common sight.

(+ illus map of area showing rackfields)

(+ story on how the woollen serge was hammered, women collecting urine, dried and saying ‘on tenterhooks etc)

There was a fulling mill just below the Blackaller weir from the 16th century. Records show that in 1787 it was let for milling corn and in 1798 Edward Pim started making paper and by 1799 it was known as ‘Head Weir water paper mill’. A sale notice in the Flying Post in 1829 describes a large site but in 1882 the mill was damaged by fire and re-built in brick with a steam engine installed for when the River Exe’s flow was low. After WW1 the mill was acquired by E S & A Robinson a Bristol paper, printing and packaging company. It was producing 50 tons of paper per week for tickets, sugar paper and laminating before it closed in 1967.

(+ illus of sale notice of 1829 to put context to statement that it had grown into a large site)

Powhay was another group of mills further along Bonhay Road, (now Powhay Mills apartments), which operated until the early 20th century. Bodies were always being fished out of the leats but in 1879 the torso of a baby, Reginald Hyde, was found in the leat beneath Powhay Mills, with other body part found nearby. Annie Tooke was convicted and hung for his murder following a sensational trial.

(+illus of Powhay Mills\_

(+short story on the discovery of Reginald Hyde in the leat)

During the 19th century mill workers were drawn from Exe Street and other local streets, often passing down through generations. Trades allied to paper flourished in the surrounding area.

(+short story/snapshot on who was working in the mill and the allied trade taken from the 1851 census)

**Water engine**

Water had long been drawn from the Exe and delivered by water carriers but with the growth in population at the end of the 17th century required a better water supply. A water company was set up in 1693 and an engine (a large water wheel attached to a pump) installed. The engine house was at Engine Bridge at the corner of Exe Street and Bonhay Road taking power from a leat fed from the Head Weir. Water was pumped up to a lead lined holding tank ‘Back Grate’ at the rear of the Guild Hall which held 600 hodshead of water from where it was distributed around the city. In need of modernization, James Golsworthy bought the water company in 1822 and installed a more powerful pump and new metal pipes to reduce leakages but correspondence in the local paper continued to highlight the lack of water for domestic use and the prohibitive cost. The Corporation seemed incapable of resolving the situation and nothing was done until after an acute outbreak of cholera hit the city in 1832 killing 440 people. The next year the Exeter Water Company was established, new works set up at Pynes and a reservoir created at Danes Castle. The original engine house was converted to a grist mill and the Guildhall cistern became redundant.

(+illus of the site of Exeter Water Works at Engine Bridge c.1849)

(+illus of the Exeter water engine)

(+illus of the Pynes water plant and location)

(+story on the 1832 cholera outbreak)

**Mill on the Exe**

Many think the Mill on the Exe was a conversion of the Head Weir Mill but in fact the mill site was bought by Seamus O’Reilly and the mill demolished in 1982 to make way for the new pub which opened in 1983. The area around the Head and Blackaller weirs had been used for recreational swimming in the 19th century so the pub continued that tradition of recreational use. Hearsay has it that the planning process and building of the new pub did not always go smoothly! Proximity to the Exe and having a leat running under the pub had its drawbacks as it was often flooded. The new flood relief scheme helped and removable flood barriers were installed in the pub garden in 2017.

(+illus of Head Weir Mill being demolished)

(+illus of Head Weir bathing place)

(+illus of flooding of pub garden)

(+illus of flood gates)

(+possibly video of the river in flood by the Blackaller weir?)

(+ story on Head Weir bathing place)

The pub was bought by the St Austell brewery in 1994 who continue to enhance it and incorporated Head Weir House, the original mill house, in 20?? To create a pub with rooms.

(+illus of Head Weir House)

The milling history continues to be reflected in the Millers Crossing footbridge built in 2002 which has a counterweight in the form of a mill wheel.

(+illus of Millers Crossing bridge with the mill stone prominent)