

Cricklepit Mill: a guide

Historic mill and home of Devon Wildlife Trust



Devon



Funded by

Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future

Introduction

This short stroll round Cricklepit and its immediate surroundings will introduce you to the history and operation of the Mill.

The walk is about 1/4 mile or 0.4km long and includes some steep steps and rough ground. It is possible to leave out these steps and still see the whole site.

Much of Cricklepit Mill's working mill machinery is housed in what is known as the Southern Mill. This area is only accessible via the Mill's reception. Please ask a receptionist for entry.

About the Devon Wildlife Trust

The Devon Wildlife Trust has a vision of a Devon in which:

- **Wildlife is plentiful, varied and widespread**
- **The future of wildlife is secure**
- **The benefits of wildlife are valued and enjoyed**

It is the only independent organisation exclusively concerned with all aspects of wildlife conservation in Devon.

The Devon Wildlife Trust is part of a national network of county Wildlife Trusts – a unique combination of local strength and national unity.

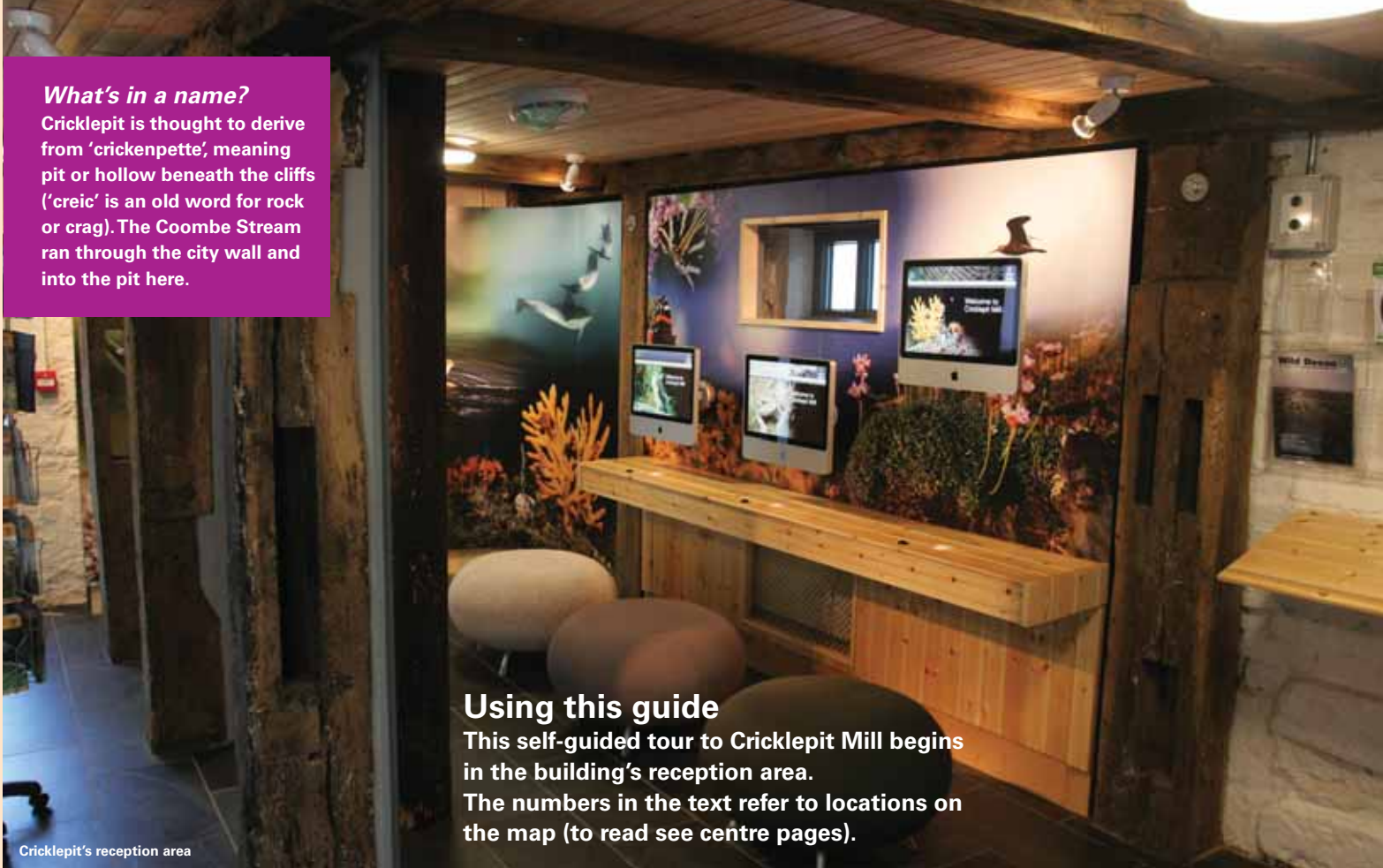
Could you help Devon's wildlife?

Members are vital to the work of Devon Wildlife Trust. If you value Devon's wildlife and want to ensure its protection for the future please consider joining. Rates begin at as little as £2 per month. At the back of this leaflet you will find a membership form or join at www.devonwildlifetrust.org

Devon Wildlife Trust's Cricklepit Mill has been supported by: Exeter Historic Buildings Trust, Exeter Canal & Quay Trust, Exeter City Council, Garfield Weston Foundation, Heritage Lottery Fund, South West of England Regional Development Agency, Viridor Credits Environmental Company, Wales & West Utilities.

What's in a name?

Cricklepit is thought to derive from 'crickenpette', meaning pit or hollow beneath the cliffs ('creic' is an old word for rock or crag). The Coombe Stream ran through the city wall and into the pit here.



Cricklepit's reception area

Using this guide

This self-guided tour to Cricklepit Mill begins in the building's reception area.

The numbers in the text refer to locations on the map (to read see centre pages).



Cricklepit's Southern Mill

Reception area (1)

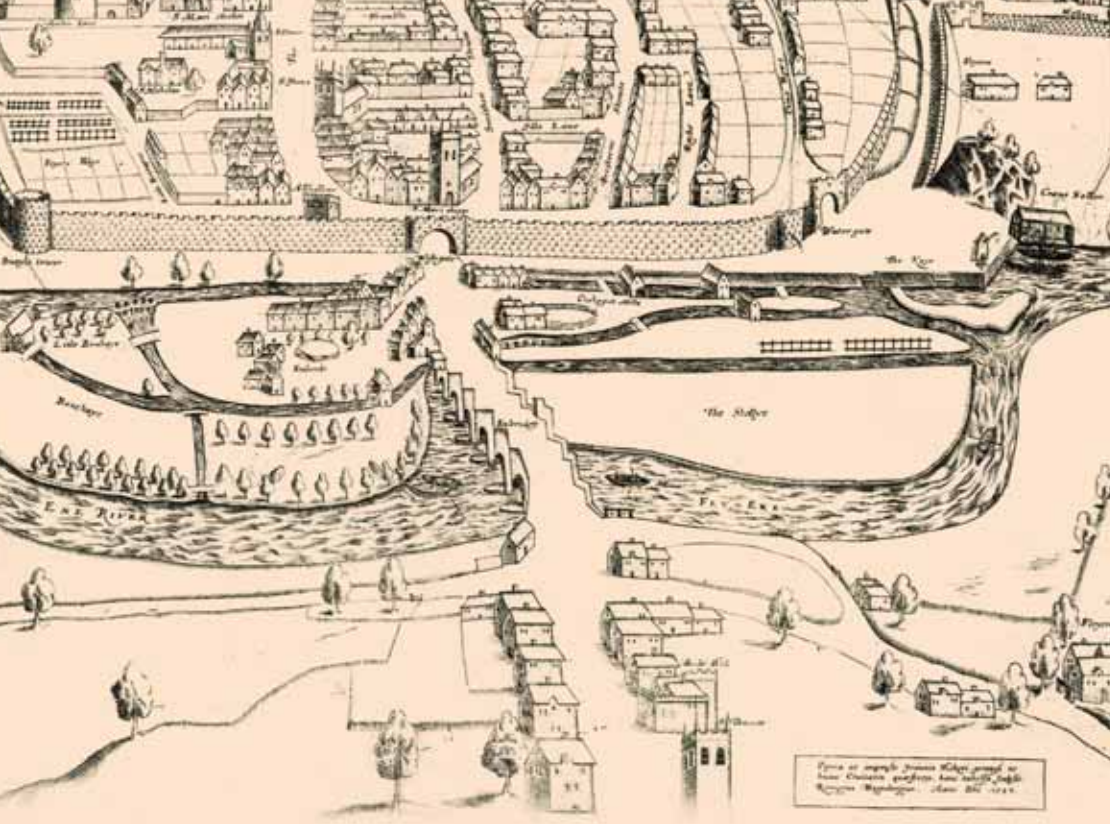
This room used to house what is known as a hurst frame. The remains of this can be seen in the vertical posts around the room. The frame supported the mill machinery and stones. It is possible to see a fully restored hurst frame and working mill machinery by visiting the Southern Mill. Ask at reception for entry.

Cricklepit Mill also holds regular milling days where you can see wheat being ground into flour the traditional way. Milling dates are listed on our website or alternatively enquire at reception, where you can also purchase a

bag of our stone ground wholemeal flour, milled at Cricklepit by our volunteer millers, sure to make a tasty loaf!

Cricklepit Mill stands on Exe Island which was created when two water channels, known as Upper and Lower Leat, (2) were dug around a thousand years ago.

The leats were constructed in the late Anglo-Saxon period in order to drain the surrounding marshland and provide a source of power. The word leat derives from the Old English word – 'wætergelæt' which means 'water channel'.

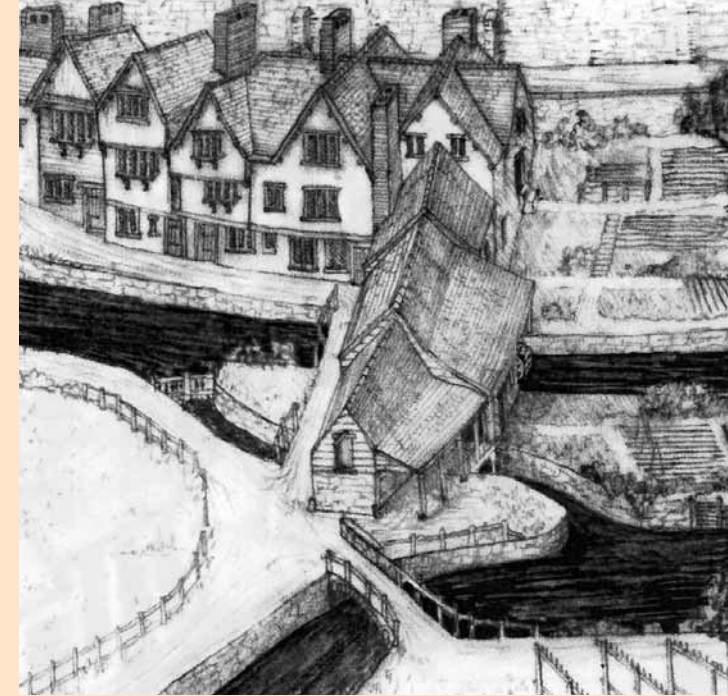


A 19th century copy of John Hooker's map of Exeter (1587), showing the city wall and the original course of the Exe

The first known mill at Cricklepit was built in about 1220 when Nicholas Gervase, a wealthy merchant, was granted the site. With his son Walter, he also built the first stone bridge over the River Exe. Parts of this bridge still stand 250m to the north of Cricklepit Mill.

Before the Industrial Revolution, Exeter was the fourth largest English city outside London and stood at the heart of the Westcountry's trade in woollen cloth. Many of the city's mills were fulling mills whose purpose was to finish the cloth, which was then loaded onto ships at the nearby Quay for export.

By 1757 the Cricklepit Mill complex contained five waterwheels. These drove several sets of mill mechanisms, including three grist mills, grinding grain for flour and animal feeds, and two fulling mills, finishing woollen cloth.



Artist's impression of the Mill in 1670.
Illustration: Richard Parker

Watercolour of the Mill painted in 1791

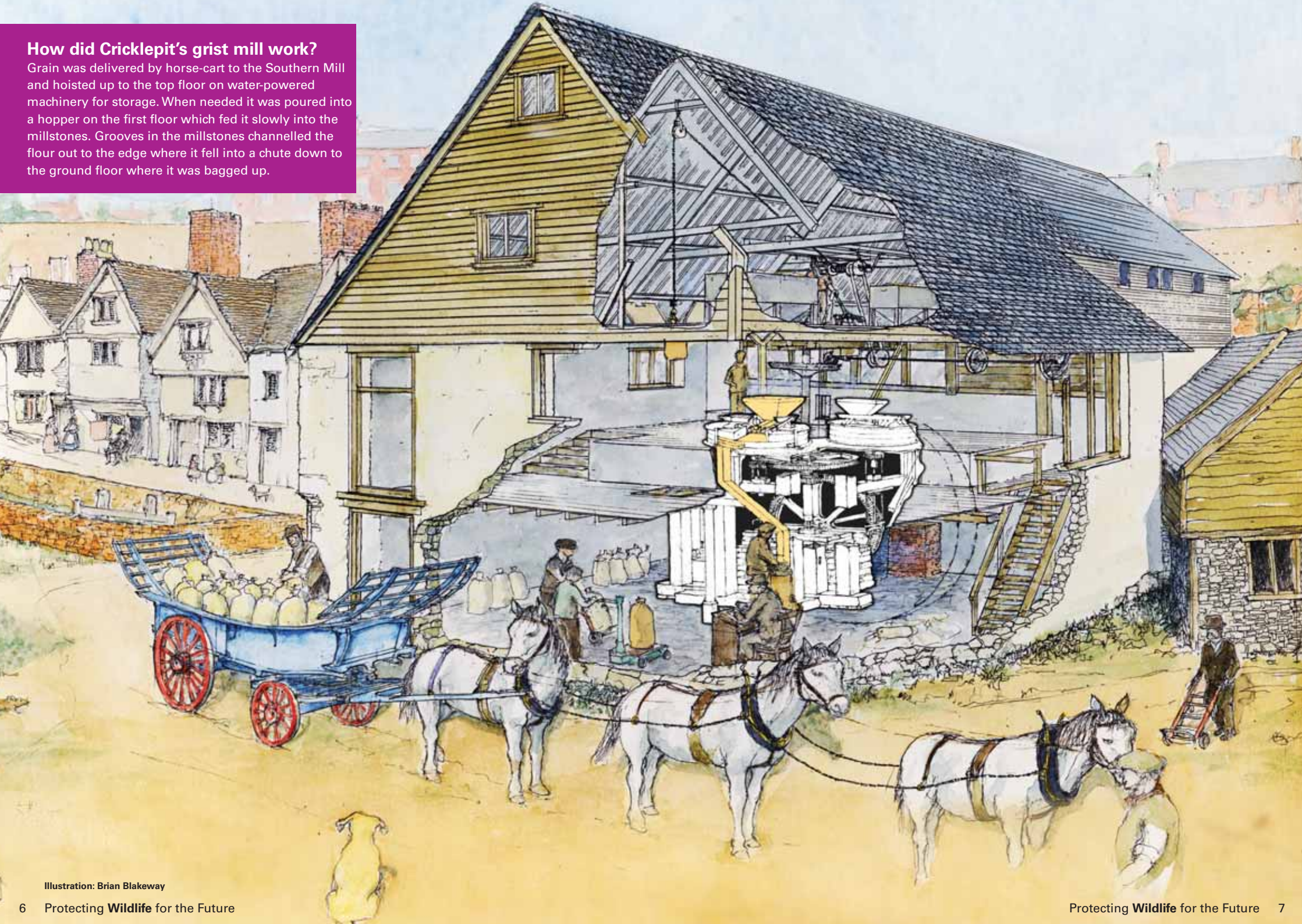


The mediaeval Exe Bridge today
4 Protecting **Wildlife** for the Future

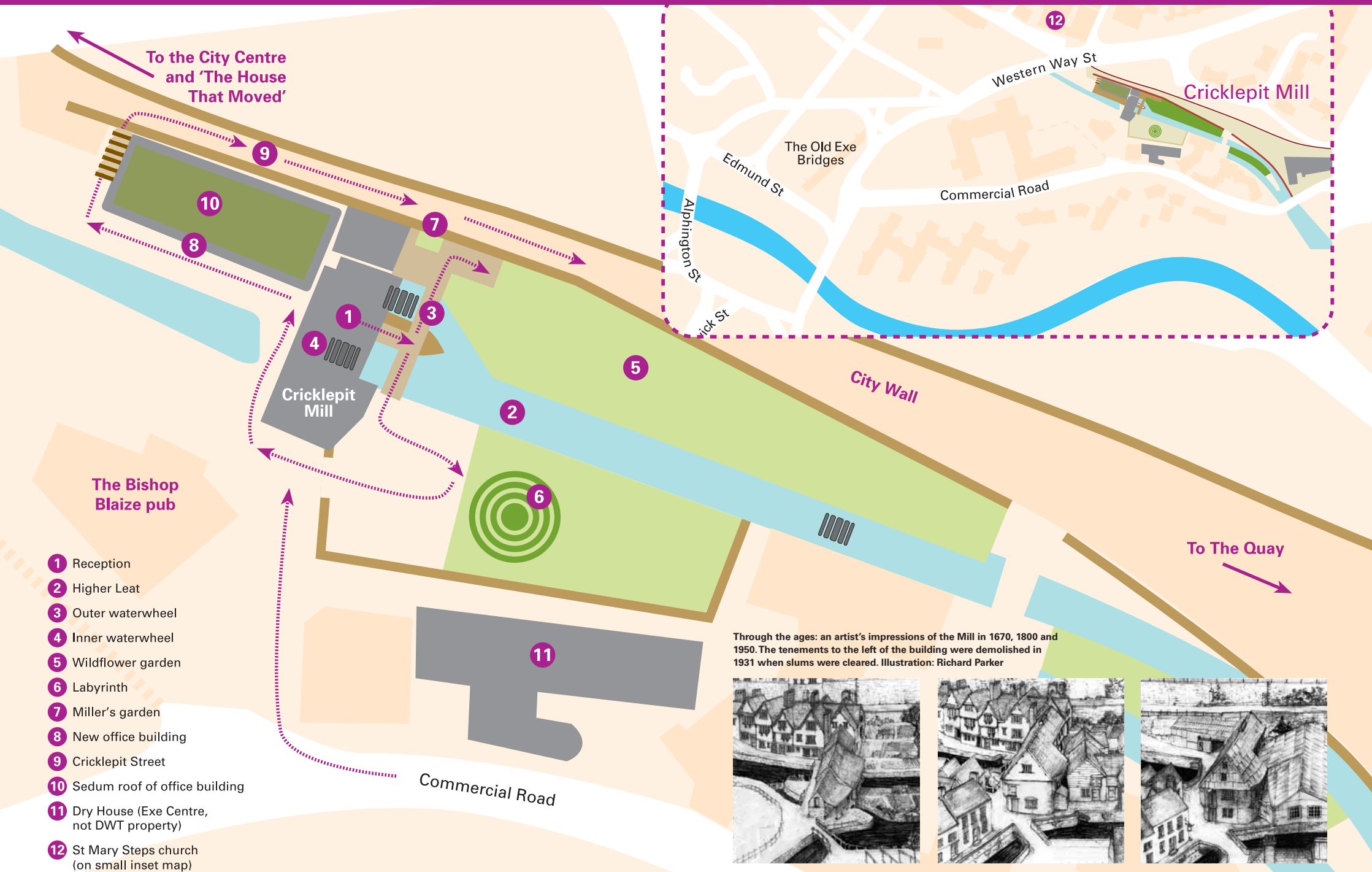


How did Cricklepit's grist mill work?

Grain was delivered by horse-cart to the Southern Mill and hoisted up to the top floor on water-powered machinery for storage. When needed it was poured into a hopper on the first floor which fed it slowly into the millstones. Grooves in the millstones channelled the flour out to the edge where it fell into a chute down to the ground floor where it was bagged up.



Cricklepit Mill: home of Devon Wildlife Trust





Map showing Cricklepit Mill in 1876

The ending of Exeter's wool trade at the time of the Napoleonic Wars (1799-1815) coincided with the rise of steam-powered machinery to send the city's fulling mills into a period of steady decline.

By the twentieth century Cricklepit Mill was mainly producing animal feeds. It was tenanted by WG Shears & Sons. George Shears bought Cricklepit Mill in 1957 after which production continued using diesel-powered machinery. Milling ended in the 1970s and the mill was sold in 1985.

By the 1990s the building was being used as furniture showrooms. In 1999 a fire destroyed the Mill's roof and its top floor. All of the flooring and roof beams were destroyed. However the Southern Mill's oak upright shaft – which transfers the power of the waterwheel to the millstones – though charred by the fire, remained intact. Today it is this shaft which drives the restored machinery.

Devon Wildlife Trust bought the Mill in 2004 and its restoration began in 2006. In August 2007 Cricklepit Mill was reopened as a visitor centre and DWT's headquarters.

Spooky goings-on

During the 1990s Cricklepit Mill was used as a furniture shop and its wheel machinery was left derelict. One day, with no warning, it suddenly began to turn, driving all of the gearing in the building, and causing the owner's hair to stand on end!



Top to bottom: the Mill as a furniture shop and the surviving Southern Mill oak shaft with refurbished machinery

Leave the building through the east door onto the decking.

Decking and outer waterwheel

Cricklepit Mill's outer waterwheel (3) was made in 1895. A date stamp is still visible on the wheel's inner surface. It was constructed in the Taylor & Bodley engineering works in nearby Bonhay Road. Weighing six tons, it was transported here in two pieces, presumably by horse-drawn transport, and assembled on site. The wheel's floats are modern replacements and are made from Douglas fir. The originals would have been of elm.

Looking back towards the Cricklepit Mill building a further waterwheel is visible (4). This internal wheel dates from around the middle of the nineteenth century. The ironwork of the wheel is signed Bodley Brothers, Exeter.

Originally there would have been a second wheel sitting alongside the inner wheel. This would have driven mill machinery in what is now the reception area. Today a small water turbine in the leat provides most of Cricklepit Mill's energy.

Leave the decking by the steps and go into the Mill's garden. You can stroll around the garden and picnic at its tables.



Cricklepit's inner waterwheel

The garden (5)

The area of garden underneath the City Wall has been planted with traditional meadow and arable plants including cornflowers, poppies, blue corncocks and ox eye daisies. This part of the garden has also been re-colonised by plants whose seeds had remained dormant while restoration of the site took place. A botanist recently identified 94 different species of plant growing in the garden.

A labyrinth lies at the far side of the leat (6). This was created by Devon Wildlife Trust staff member John Hayward. It is based on a traditional design. Labyrinths have been popular features of Western European gardens since mediaeval times. However, the earliest examples probably come in the form of precise symbols carved in rock and on the decorated pottery of Neolithic and Bronze Age people. The labyrinth here is planted with rye grass.

The water channel that you can see is called Upper Leat (2). It is fed by the River Exe and starts a kilometre upstream by the Mill on the Exe pub. It rejoins the river 200 metres further downstream at The Quay. A second leat, named Lower Leat, also runs close to Cricklepit Mill. This is now covered from view.

The raised area at the end of the decking beneath the city wall was once the miller's garden (7). This supplied vegetables to the miller's house, a three storey building that stood on the spot now occupied by the grey, zinc clad tower of Devon Wildlife Trust's new office. The miller's house was one of a row of tenements that occupied ground on the far side of Cricklepit Mill. These tenements were demolished during slum clearances in 1931.

Double back across the decking to leave the garden via the large decorated gates, walk past the front of the Mill building and turn right following its wall towards the new offices.



The next section of the tour involves steep steps and uneven surfaces. At the far end of Cricklepit Mill's new offices, walk up the first set of steps and turn right onto the cobbled surface of Cricklepit Street.

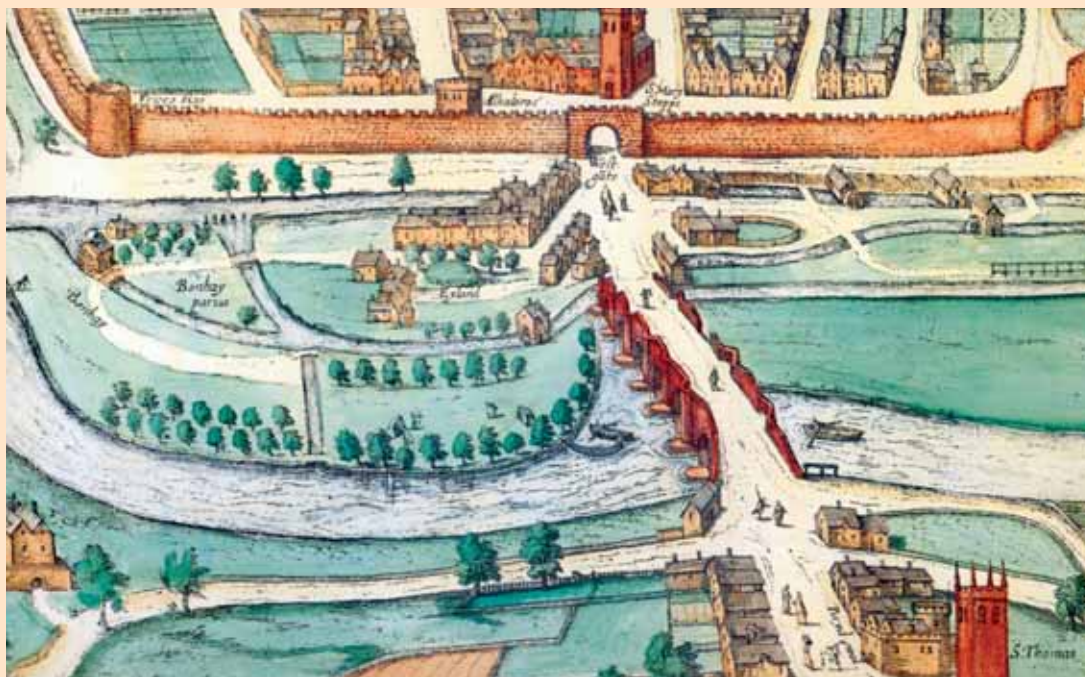
New offices

Devon Wildlife Trust's new offices (8) were designed by Gillespie Yunnice Architects and opened in 2007. One of the greatest threats to wildlife is climate change, and DWT is committed to reducing its own carbon footprint. The building incorporates many sustainable features including a timber frame, wooden window shutters which control heat and light, and toilets that use 'grey water' from the leat. Where possible, its materials have been sourced locally, such as the Welsh slate flooring in the reception area. The insulation exceeds current building requirements and the building uses low energy lighting which automatically turns off when not in use. Much of the Mill's electricity is sourced from a water turbine in the nearby leat.

Cricklepit Street (9) was a busy mediaeval thoroughfare, following the line of the City Wall and connecting Exeter's Quay to the City via its West Gate. This gate no longer exists but occupied the spot where 'The House That Moved' stands today.

From Cricklepit Street you can look down on the green roof (10) that covers DWT's new offices. This roof is made from plants from the sedum family. Sedums make an ideal roof as they can exist in a thin, light soil and are able to survive the climatic extremes of cold, hot, wet and dry.

The green roof gives excellent insulation, while it also acts as a sponge, reducing the amount of run-off water produced from the building. In times of heavy and prolonged rainfall run-off places a considerable burden on sewerage systems and also washes pollutants into local water courses.





18th century Cricklepit Mill showing the Dry House (top of picture). Illustration: Richard Parker



Map showing Cricklepit Mill in 1750

Walk further along Cricklepit Street to look down into Cricklepit Mill's garden.

Originally there were five mills on this stretch of the leat. These included fulling mills where newly-woven woollen cloth was scoured and pounded with hammers (called stocks) to thicken its fibres and shrink the cloth, making it suitable for clothing and furnishing. The building at the far side of the leat beyond the garden labyrinth was a dry house (11). As you can see from the illustration above, the building originally had no side walls. This allowed the wind to dry the woollen cloth after it had been full. The cloth was stretched on frames called tenters, held in place by tenterhooks.

Downstream from Cricklepit Mill and visible in the leat are the partially restored remains of a further waterwheel. This site was known as Lower Mills. The first written record referring to the Mill dates from the early nineteenth century when it was fulling woollen cloth. Later that century production was switched to the production of flour. The Mill suffered two damaging fires, the last being in 1934, but continued to operate commercially until 1970.

Continue down Cricklepit Street until reaching the Quay. To return to Cricklepit Mill turn right along Commercial Road, turning right again on reaching The Bishop Blaize pub. This completes the self-guided tour of Cricklepit Mill.

A home for wildlife

Cricklepit Mill is home to a wide variety of wildlife. The building itself is old, with many nooks and crannies. This offers a home to insects and spiders. Wood mice and feral pigeons have also used the Mill as a shelter on occasion, while otters regularly leave their territorial marks by Cricklepit's internal waterwheel.

The Mill's garden combines meadow and wilder woodland areas and provides a place for 94 plant species. Together with the new building's green sedum roof many of these plants offer a vital nectar source for butterflies, moths, bees and hoverflies in the centre of the city.

The leat provides a damp place for mosses and liverworts to grow, while the water itself is used as a feeding place and/or transport network for fish including eels, dragon and damselflies, and birds such as mute swans, moorhens, kingfishers, grey wagtails, herons and little egrets.

Cricklepit Mill's garden contains birdfeeders which attract a range of common garden birds including greenfinches, goldfinches, blue tits, great tits and robins. Every now and again a patrolling sparrowhawk will also pass through, starting panic amongst the smaller birds.



Top: Jersey tiger moth (photo: C. Root)
Above: Wren (photo: R. Wiltshire)
This picture: Otter



Five plants to find at Cricklepit Mill

In 2008 a survey by DWT volunteer Jeremy Ison recorded 94 species of plant in the gardens of Cricklepit Mill. See if you can spot the following:

Red valerian ►

This vibrant plant grows on walls, buildings and sea cliffs. It is a non-native species and is often deliberately removed. However, its long-blooming flowers offer a nectar source for butterflies and moths.

▼ Tansy

This vigorous plant grows to 90cm tall and flowers in late summer. It is sometimes used as an insect repellent.



Common fleabane ▼

This member of the daisy family was once used to treat dysentery. Its common name suggests another use: to repel fleas.





Photo: David Kilbey

Common poppy ▲

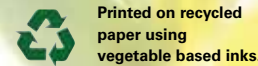
Primrose ▼

This plant was once a common sight in the arable fields of England. Here it enjoys the disturbed ground of Cricklepit Mill's garden.

This early flowering plant is part of the primula family whose other species include cowslips and oxslips.

Contact us at:
Devon Wildlife Trust, Cricklepit Mill, Commercial Road, Exeter, Devon EX2 4AB
Tel: 01392 279244 Fax: 01392 433221
Email: contactus@devonwildlifetrust.org

To join or to find out more information on the work of Devon Wildlife Trust visit **www.devonwildlifetrust.org**
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Yes, I'll join the Devon Wildlife Trust today

I would like to help protect and restore Devon's wildlife and wild places by joining DWT today.
Most of our members give around £5 per month by Direct Debit - but please give whatever you feel comfortable with (our minimum rates entitling you to membership are also shown).

Please indicate whether you would like to give monthly or annually.

- ☐ I would like to give £.... per month / per year to help wildlife in Devon
- ☐ Individual membership (from just £2.25 per month / £27 per year)
- ☐ Joint membership (from just £2.50 per month / £30 per year)
- ☐ Family membership (from just £3 per month / £36 per year)
- ☐ Life membership (£500)

Title First name

Family name

Address

.....

Postcode

Daytime telephone

I am happy to be contacted by email. My email address is:

Additional members in your household

Second person DOB.....

Title..... Name

Relationship to the 1st person

Third person DOB.....

Title..... Name

Relationship to the 1st person

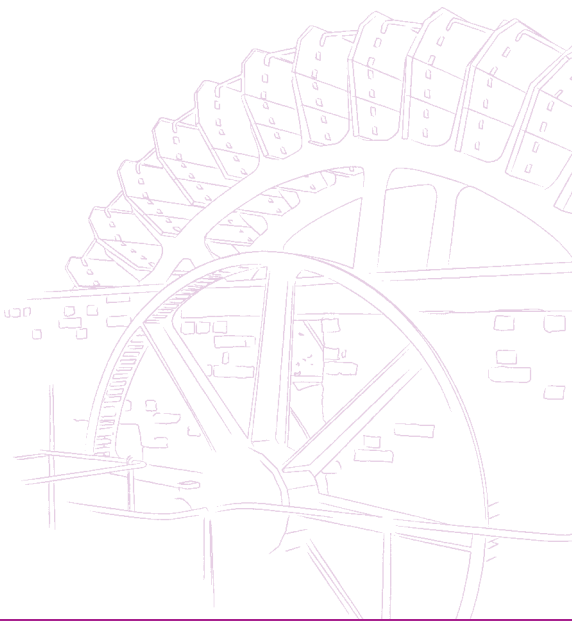
Fourth person

DOB.....

Title..... Name

Relationship to the 1st person

Cheques should be made payable to 'Devon Wildlife Trust', but to cut our administration costs and ensure even more of your donation goes directly to conservation work, **please use the Direct Debit form overleaf.**



You can also join online at **www.devonwildlifetrust.org**

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Completing a Gift Aid declaration ensures that we can make the most of your contribution.

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We will keep the information you provide on a database to service your membership, plan future work and keep you informed of our charitable work and campaigns. We occasionally allow other organisations whose aims are in keeping with our own to write to our supporters.

If you do not wish to hear from them, please tick this box ☐

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Name and full postal address of your Bank or Boulding society
To: The Manager Bank/Building Society

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Originator's Identification Number

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Please pay Devon Wildlife Trust Ltd, Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with Devon Wildlife Trust and if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank/Building Society.

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Date

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