

# The Plewes' Mills of the Escarpment

BY GERALD HUNT

**T**he elevations, fresh water and waterfalls of the Niagara Escarpment have attracted industry since the early 1800s and are the reasons that so many mill structures exist there today. One family in particular is associated with many of the Escarpment's mills: the Plewes of England. ~Editor's note.



▲ The Speeton Mill on Boyne River near Hoggs Falls in Flesherton is now a beautiful private residence. The mill was formerly named the Little Mill and the Pepper Mill. It was owned by William Plewes who also owned the Kimberley Mill.



▲ Front row, second from right, is the gravestone for William Plewes, owner of Kimberley Grist Mill until his death in 1882. He is buried here in Vandaleur Pioneer Cemetery located between Kimberley and Markdale.



◀ This private residence in Terra Cotta was formerly a house owned by Plewes family members. Their Terra Cotta Mills on the Credit River was nearby. Now, only the millrace remains. The present village community centre used to be a Methodist Chapel established by the Plewes family. Simon Plewes of Catwick, Yorkshire, owned the mill until his death by drowning in the Credit River in 1876. He is interred in Acton Pioneer Cemetery. After his death, his younger brother David Plewes purchased the mill. In 1906 an electric power house was built on the site of the Plewes grist mill to power the nearby Terra Cotta Pressed Brick operation.

◀ This sign hangs on the former Speeton Mill in Flesherton.

The Plewes family of Yorkshire, England, had an expertise in the design, construction and operation of water-powered mills. By the middle of the 19th century coal was taking over as a power source in England and many of the water-powered mills in Yorkshire were being converted to steam. The abundance of water power in Ontario and lack of industrial development provided an opportunity to this enterprising family.

The Plewes family of millers left Yorkshire in the 1850s with money in their pockets and purchased water rights and existing mills in Ontario and beyond. They were likely financed by their Yorkshire cousins who continued to operate mills in England. So far there are records of 31 of their mills in Ontario, 21 of them along the Niagara Escarpment. About six of them still exist today.



The Kimberley Grist Mill on a tributary of the Beaver River that comes down from Old Baldy, is now a wine-making store. The mill pond forms part of a parkette. The mill was owned by William Plewes who was born in 1804. After his death in 1882, he was succeeded by his son John A. Plewes, who paid \$2,000 in 1886 to the estate of William Flesherton for The Speeton Mill. Descendants of William currently live in Kimberley.

## PLEWES' MILLS NEAR THE NIAGARA ESCARPMENT

The Plewes family is associated with the following water-powered mills in locations near the Escarpment from the Collingwood area in the north, to the Thorold area in the south. Some of these mills still stand, while others are mere ruins, or only have ponds or millraces still visible, or have disappeared entirely.

**COLLINGWOOD:** Kirkville Mill, Silver Creek. Dam and mill pond remain.

**KIMBERLEY:** in Beaver Valley on tributary of the Beaver River. See photo.

**MARKDALE:** Victor Mills on Armstrong Creek. Ruins, dam, mill pond remain.

**FLESHERTON:** Speeton Mill on Boyne River, 1.5 miles downstream, near Hogs Falls. See photo.

**CREEMORE:** Roller Mills and Electric Light Works. No sign of ruins, but a parkette exists on the other side of the Mad River, dedicated to earlier mills.

**GLEN HURON:** Grist Mill, downstream from Hamilton Mill. Owned by Angus Plewes of Markdale, who also owned the Victor Flour Mill.

**DUNEDIN:** Grist Mill on Noisy River. James Plewes drowned here 1877.

**MAPLE VALLEY:** Glandore Mills on Noisy River, 500 m upstream from Hwy 124, N of Shelburne. Ruins, dam. There were three mills at this site, Plewes Grist Mill, Reid Saw Mill and Stuart Planing Mill.

**NEAR MAPLE VALLEY:** Lavender Falls Mill, Noisy River, 1 mile downstream of Hwy 124, N of Shelburne. Now a beautiful private residence.

**HONEYWOOD:** Black Bank Creek Mill, E of Redickville on Sideroad 21, N of Shelburne. Dam remains.

**SHELburne:** Roller Mills on the Boyne River. Ruins built over. Mill burned down around 1935.

**MANSFIELD:** Boyne River Mill on a different Boyne River, W of Airport Rd., N of Hwy 89. Now a private residence.

**HORNINGS MILLS:** William Airth Mill on Pine River. Cast iron penstock, or large pipe for conveying water to the water wheel, and mill pond remains. Parts of old mill concrete structure can be seen. See photo.

**ERIN:** McMillan Grist and Flour Mills, West Credit River. destroyed by fire in 2013. Former mill ponds remain. See photo.

**TERRA COTTA:** Terra Cotta Mills, Credit River. Millrace ruins. Nearby, a private residence was formerly a Plewes House. See photo.

**EVERTON:** Hortop Mill, Eramosa River. Destroyed by fire in 2017. Plewes Cottage is now a private residence. There were two mills, one on each side of the river. Mill channels and cast-iron penstock remain.

**ACTON:** Acton Mill, Black Creek. 19th century penstock, millrace and mill pond remain. Currently a modern mill. See photo.

**CAMPBELLVILLE:** Campbellville Grist and Flour Mill, 16 Mile Creek. Mill pond remains.

**MILTON:** Martin Mill, 16 Mile Creek. Part of the former mill pond is now a parkette.

**LOWVILLE:** Lowville Mill, Bronte Creek, Guelph Line S of Campbellville. See photo.

**THOROLD:** Overholt Mill, 12 Mile Creek



▲ Charlotte "Lottie" Plewes was born in the Lowville Mill House in 1858. Charlotte married the Rev William George McAlister, in Brantford, in 1885. A suffragette and published author, she died in 1936. PHOTO: SFU DIGITIZED COLLECTION, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY.

▲ Close-up of sign on the former Kimberley Grist Mill.



▲ A gravestone for Simon Plewes is in the Acton Pioneer Cemetery. Carved on it are the words: IN/ MEMORY OF/ SIMON PLEWES/ DIED AT SALMONVILLE/ MAY 23 1876/ AGED 45 YEARS/ Born at Catwick/ YORKSHIRE ENGLAND/ ALSO OF/ MARY/ HIS DAUGHTER/ Died May 17 1877/ AGED 4 YEARS/ ALSO/ GEORGE C./ HIS SON/ Died JULY 28 1879/ AGED 4 YEARS

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▲ McMillan Grist and Flour Mills in Erin were leased in 1908 to Simon Plewes of Kimberley, 1875-1934. The West Credit River flows under Main St. and there are former mill ponds accessible from a walking trail. In 2013 the Mundells' historic planning mill burned to the ground.



▲ Lowville Mill on Bronte Creek at Guelph Line south of Campbellville is now a beautiful private residence and City of Burlington Heritage House. It was built in 1836 for James Cleaver, father-in-law and partner of David Plewes. David was the brother of Simon, and was the most successful of the Plewes millers. He was the owner or partner of mills in Lowville, Milton, Oakville and Brantford. He died in 1905 and is interred in Mount Pleasant Cemetery, Toronto.

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▲ Ruins of Glandore Mills on the Noisy River in Melancthon Township are upstream of County Road 124, Maple Valley. There is a footbridge going over the top of the structure at the millpond. This dam supported a grist mill and a saw mill, owned by the same William Plewes who owned the Kimberley Mill, and his son-in-law, William Walker Reid. William was married to Sarah Foxton Plewes. Sarah died at Horning Mills in 1909.



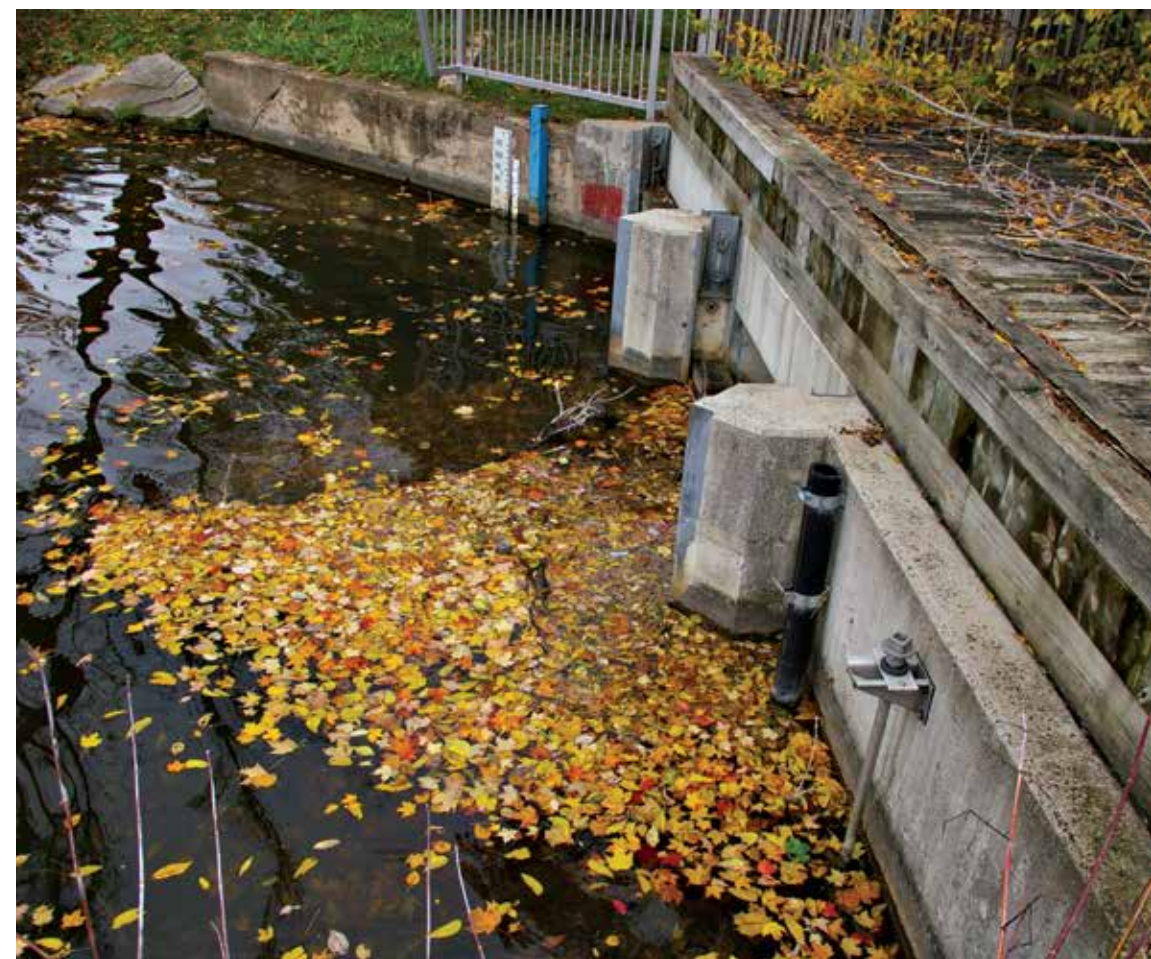
▲ The mill stone from the mill in Erin remains in the open, having survived the fire.



◀ Isaac Warcup Plewes was the proprietor of the Grist and Flour Mill on 16 Mile Creek in present-day Campbellville when the mill burned down in 1857 or 1858. Isaac was the son of James Plewes of Yorkshire. With his brother-in-law David Plewes, Isaac also owned the Martin Mill in Milton and the Chisholm Mill in Oakville until 1870. He died in 1924. While none of the Martin mill remains, part of the former mill pond is now in a parkette. PHOTO: SWANSONS 162, ANCESTRY, PUBLIC TREE 2016.



▲ William Airth Mill at Horning Mills was leased by John A. Plewes of Kimberley in 1867. The penstock can still be seen on the far side of the Pine River, about 150 m downstream from the mill pond dam.



*Gerald Hunt of Georgetown was born in Great Britain and raised in Yorkshire. He is related to John Plewes, who was born in 1796 and died in 1851 in Acton. NEV*

▲ John Plewes of Speeton, Yorkshire, owned a mill on Black Creek in Acton until his drowning in the millrace in 1851. John is buried in Acton Pioneer Cemetery. His sons Alfred, David and Simon operated the mill after his death. A modern flour mill exists at the same place today. The mill pond is in Fairy Lake Park.

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