

Interesting facts – by Tom Hine (17 April 2001)

During my recent 6 years of indexing water, wind and steam millers, I have found another raft of interesting facts running alongside the main 16,000 name index. Many items jump out at the reader which again I have listed, not in any chronological order so please excuse whilst I write some down at random.

Apart from the many types of water wheel and windmill sails ("sweeps" if you hail from Sussex and Kent) and milling machinery technicalities, there are some interesting topics such as, say, FIRES.— 5/11/1874. Squire Wilson FRANCE deliberately burned down "GREAT ECCLESTON SMOCK MILL" in Lancs as part of the Nov 5th. celebrations! The miller Thomas CROOK was compensated.

The Windmill on Windmill Hill, Gravesend, Kent was burned down during Mafeking night celebrations in 1902.

NEWHAM SMOCK MILL in Kent was deliberately set alight by revellers on Guy Fawkes night 5/11/1876.

HIGH SALVINGTON POST MILL in Sussex was the first mill to be insured against fire by "Royal Exchange Insurance" Policy no. 33161 dated 21/1/1757, and thus the first insured miller was Edmund DREWITT.

To finish off this particular theme a miller by the name of COOK was shot to death by Alan GRAY (a farmhand) who then burned down "OLD ALBANY MILL" Surrey C1800. His was the last execution in Great Britain for arson.

Then for some FIRSTS.

Earliest known written record of a windmill was at WEEDLY in Yorkshire in 1185– mill to "let" at 8 shillings p.a.!..

Earliest windmill in France, shown on a deed dated C1180, and in Holland a century later at HAARLEM in 1274 (although another report does give 1299).

From a newspaper article July 1984, "First Windmill built in England for 100 years at Windmill Hill Business Park, Swindon, Wilts. (The brick tower was dismantled at nearby CHISLEDON where it was working in 1823). Removed and rebuilt at a cost of £100,000"

Another "first" John STEDMAN (1773–1846) Miller and Millwright of Medway, Kent was the first to use the screw propeller to drive a boat on the river Medway in 1829. He conceived the idea from windmill sails driven by air, then reversed this concept to achieve propulsion through water.

"Blotting paper" said to have been accidentally first discovered at EAST HAGBOURNE PAPER MILL in Berks. (I don't have a date for this)

Mr RANK of "Rank of Hull" fame set up the first Roller Mills at the dockside so that incoming grain could be unloaded straight from the ship into the mill. (This was the death knell of inland wind and water millers who were faced not only by transport problems and costs to and from their mills, but by the fact a roller mill could produce 16 times more per day than the traditional stone grinding).

Some RANDOM FACTS

There were 23 Tide Mills known to have been in existence at different times around the coastline between Cornwall along to Woodbridge in Suffolk.

MAPLEDURHAM WATER MILL is the last working mill on the River Thames and also, unusually, with a lady Miller. (Is Mildred our only lady miller?) James ANDREWS, Miller, born Upton Lovell in Wilts held Farm, Inn and Tide mill at WOOTTON CREEK I.O.W. during the 19th. Century. He lost all in a bet on a Cockfight. He went off to Australia.

In 1824 grinding corn by hand querns was forbidden under Scottish law. The law stated "all must go to the Miller"

Millstone makers rarely lived beyond the age of 45 years due to the frequency of accidents.

Alexander CHALMERS, Millwright and wife Margaret had 11 children all born in Aberdeenshire between 1835 and 1862. The last child Eliza was born 7 years after child number ten when Margaret was 54 years of age.

So often our older corn windmills were erected at cross roads. The reason being that they were able to serve customers from 3 or more directions and a mill was one of the basic reasons for the formation of a hamlet. After the mill there followed the inn, and then came the cottages.

Edward LLOYD a Paper Mill owner during 1860's–70's at both BOW PAPER MILL on the river Lea, and also at SITTINGBOURNE PAPER MILL IN Kent had a newspaper which bore his name, hence "LLOYDS LIST".

A new act of Parliament in 1826/7 forbade the erection of a windmill within 200 yards of any road for fear that the shadows cast by the working mill sails might startle the horses at work with carts and farm implements. Many such tragic accidents had occurred.

A special 3–month licence was granted to import millstones from France in 1809 even though at that time Britain and France were at war!

During 1876 three millers throughout England were elected Mayors.

They were Mr. JOHNSON for Chester, Mr R.BATES FOR Godmanchester and Mr. SISLEY for Godalming .

Prior to this Mr MONKHOUSE–TATE was sent out by the British Government to seek out good grain areas in Canada which could supply the British troops in North America during the American Civil War times.

In the 1890's millstreams started to slowly dry up as Water Boards began extracting more and more water for the new water closet.

The portion taken by the miller for his milling services was called the "Knaveship" – usually between one

thirty second to one sixteenth of the ground flour. The measure was taken in a "Toll-dish" and sadly none of these survive. (This statement may unearth one!?).

Henry LIDDINGTON was probably the last corn miller to have been charged and convicted of taking excessive toll in the 1880's. This offence took place in Herts at GOLDFIELD Windmill near Tring.

Two former millstones from MEOPHAM GREEN SMOCK MILL in KENT. Now rest in the forecourt of the Bank of England. They were placed there by Sir Herbert BAKER., the architect of the Bank who happened to live near the mill.

John IRELAND the composer lived in a Windmill overlooking Chanctonbury Ring in Sussex, so this was most likely to have been ROCKMILL, Washington, Sussex. Staying with music for the moment at SNAPE POST MILL the roundhouse formed part of a dwelling where between 1937-47 Benjamin Britten resided. Whilst in residence he composed the operas " Peter Grimes", " The Rape of Lucretia", and "Albert Herring".

Another oddity revolved around a mysterious fraternity that once existed, known as "FERGUSON'S GANG". They were elected by secret ballot and bore such colourful pseudonyms as " Sister Agatha", " The Nark", " Bill Stickers" and "Bloody Bishop". 15 members were dedicated to the preservation of The English countryside. Since 1930 they conferred great benefits to the National Trust by both cash and kind. In 1931 they repaired and endowed SHALFORD MILL in Surrey where subsequently their secret meetings were sometimes held. Members preserved strict anonymity.

Some millers had the skill needed to periodically recut and sharpen their mill stones. But for those that didn't they relied on the itinerant " stonedresser" who would call on the miller at mutually agreed intervals to carry out this service. He could usually find a bed for the night at the mill and a meal provided by the miller and his wife. One such individual was Billy PARSONS, Stonedresser, a gentleman "on the tramp" (You see he regularly tramped from mill to mill in the course of his following, but as the trade died out the description of " tramp" remained) So back to Billy PARSONS who plied his trade on a circuit around LEICS. and LINCS. He was conspicuous because he wore a concertina type top hat whilst at work. He had obviously come into contact with a low beam in a mill just once too often!

If a miller didn't know or recognise a Stonedresser who turned up at a mill unexpectedly just at a time the miller could use his services, the miller would ask the stranger to "show us your metal" or "show us your steel". This was so that on the Stonedresser rolling up his sleeves it would expose where the years of small particles of the "mill bill" steel breaking off as sparks would embed themselves in the skin of his hands and forearms and remain there for years emphasising the mans experience , or not, as the case may be.

Lastly to close, some poetic words from the " Charm of the English Village" 1908 featuring EAST HENDRED MILL in Berkshire close to where I live. "The mill still stands, but it is a ruin, picturesque in its decay. The overshot wheel is still and lifeless with rotting timbers unhidden by penthouse or roof!.."

This article is only a sample of what gems I have recorded, next I will write about mills that have featured in films etc.

Tom Mann Hine