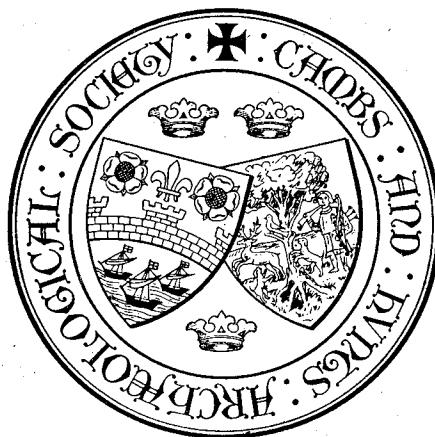


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VOLUME VI. PART I.

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HUNTINGDONSHIRE WINDMILLS

BY C. F. TEBBUTT.

(Continued).

TOWER MILLS.

The invention of the "tower" type of windmill represented a great advance on the post mill. Only the cap turned when the sails were brought to face the wind, and this revolved on a track round the top of the stationary tower. Once the idea of a fixed body was evolved great improvements followed. As the weight and size of the mill body were no longer limited by what a man could turn round by hand, mills were made higher, and sails larger; and by means of a central vertical driving shaft, stones could be driven on a number of floors. Greater storage space was now gained, and sometimes even a fireplace was built for the miller's comfort on winter nights.

During the 18th century Andrew Meikle, a Scottish millwright, made two outstanding improvements. In 1750 he invented the fantail. This was a small wheel with a number of vanes erected on staging at the back of the cap of a tower mill. The fantail was so set that it was only turned by the wind when the sails were not in a favourable position for working. The turning fantail was geared to work a cog on a toothed track round the curb of the mill cap. Thus the cap was automatically turned to keep the sails always facing the wind.

In 1775 Meikle invented the spring sail. This was a shutter device, like a venetian blind, regulated by springs that opened and spilled the wind when its pressure was too great.

Tower mills may be divided into three main types, the wooden smock mill, and the brick or stone tower with the earlier "boat-shaped," or later "ogee," cap.

SMOCK MILLS.

The Smock Mill is said to have been introduced from Holland in the 17th century. It is not, and probably never has been, a common type in Huntingdonshire. It is almost invariably eight-sided and covered by weather-boarding. I have records of three of these mills in the county; only one of which survives. They are:

LITTLE PAXTON. This mill was situated on the left bank of the Ouse beside the towing-path, and about 250 yards above St. Neots Paper Mill bridge. The one-storied cottage, once the house of the miller, still stands close to the mill site.

For many years this mill was run by members of the Ingle family, and ceased working after the death of John Ingle in 1864. It is recounted that the miller was also lock-keeper, and when barges wished to pass, he was summoned by a horn blast from the Paper Mill. At one time a sail was broken by striking a cow; the opposite sail was then removed for the sake of balance, and the mill run for a time by means of two sails only. Another story concerns a waggon and horses backing into the river, and the horses drowning.

John Ingle brought up a large family in the little one-story cottage and used to say that he had eleven children not one of whom was able to go upstairs!

SOMERSHAM MILL FARM. This smock mill, situated at Mill Farm in Somersham Fen, was, I believe, unique. It rose from a wooden base in the middle of a large corn barn at this remote fen farm; it could not have been of very great age, and was worked in fairly recent times.

All the machinery was of iron with the exception of the windshaft and the cogs on the spur wheel. Two pulleys, one on each side of this wheel, were used to drive a chaff-cutter and cake-crusher. No sack hoist was necessary, as all material to be ground could be barrowed up to the one pair of peak stones. The uprights of the tower were of pitch pine.

In 1932 the sails and fantail were gone, and the whole mill is now dismantled. It was last used by Mr. Samson, tenant of the farm.

SAWTRY. (Bannister's Mill). This mill is situated on the south side of the Steeple Gidding road.

It has a round base of undressed stone, which extends up to the level of the 1st floor. Above this it is octagonal in shape and has oak framing covered by tarred vertical deal boarding with cover strips. Each corner is spurred by oak posts as far up as the 2nd floor.

On the 1st floor there used to be three pairs of over-driven stones, of which only one pair remains. There were two pairs of burr stones for wheat and offals, and a pair of peak stones for barley. The spur wheel is of wood with iron cogs, and the nuts are of wood. On the top of the spur wheel is a set of cogs that used to engage a shaft connected with an auxiliary steam-engine. The central vertical shaft is of oak and is 18 inches square.

The 2nd and 3rd floors were used for storage, while on the 4th and top floor the all-wooden machinery still remains. The sack hoist was driven by the friction of a solid wooden wheel against the wallower. The double sails, fantail, and gallery are now all gone.

In the yard is a nearly new (but faulty) peak stone, found when putting down the bed for the present engine. On it

is cut the date 1778. On the 3rd floor of the mill is an inscription recording that the mill "remained safe in a terrible storm Jan. 6, 1817."

I think it possible that this mill may date from as early as 1778, as it can be seen that the cap, fantail, and gallery, have been added since its original construction. Its early history is unknown. In 1864 it was bought by Mr. Bannister from Stephen Hart, and remained in his hands until his death about 1905. It was then bought by the present owner, Mr. Robert Turnhill of Sawtry. At that time the sails were on and it had an auxiliary steami-engine. About 1908 the sails were taken off and a paraffin engine installed. The mill machinery is not now used, but the body is used as a silo for the new mill adjoining it.

TOWER MILLS WITH BOAT-SHAPED CAPS.

This type of tower mill is presumably the earlier form of the brick tower, and in this county was built at the beginning of last century. It is rather short and stumpy, and sometimes tapers rapidly from the bottom. The cap (which resembles an upturned clinker-built boat), is made of tarred weather boards, it seldom has a fantail, but was luffed by tail poles.

BLUNTISHAM WOODEND MILL. This mill was built between 1824 and 1835, close to Higham Farm on the south side of Bluntisham Heath road. In 1844 it was run by James Freeman, and in 1850 by William Smith; in 1899 it belonged to John Butterworth, but, according to the Rate Book of that date, was then disused. It was demolished in 1926.

BUCKDEN MILL. The remains of this mill stand near the Great North Road in the south-west angle of the Perry Road. The top storey has been taken off, an addition put on the back and the whole converted into a cottage.

As a windmill it was worked until about 1888, for some years after this an auxiliary steam-engine was used, and about 1893 it was dismantled and made into a cottage.

Mr. Thompson of Buckden, the present owner, worked it for about 15 years, previously a Mr. Sharp had it for 20 years, and before that Mr. Barton. During Barton's time a man was killed in attempting to go out by a door across which the sails were turning.

During Mr. Thompson's occupation a man is said to have asked to be allowed to view Huntingdon Races. He placed himself head downwards on a sail, and the miller let it up to the top. From this post of vantage he declared he could distinguish the jockeys' colours on Portholme 4 miles away!

Some of the trees still growing near the mill are said to have been part of a windscreen deliberately planted by an unfriendly neighbour. Until fairly recently "The Windmill" Public House on the west side of the street in Buckden, nearby, displayed a picture of this mill on its sign.

In this mill were two pairs of stones (peak and burr) and a dressing machine.

WARBOYS. RAMSEY ROAD MILL. This derelict mill stands a little distance out of Warboys on the north side of the Ramsey road. A raised causeway leads up to it from the main road.

It has three floors with two pairs of underdriven burr stones on the 1st floor. All the shafting and machinery are of wood. The sack hoist was driven from the wallower.

Inscriptions are "S.F., "H.M. W." and "E. Noble." The present owner is Mr. John Noble of Warboys, but it was once worked by members of the Warboys milling family of Behagg. It has not been used "since before the War."

WARBOYS. MILLGREEN MILL. This mill is of interest in being built as an octagon up to the first floor and, above that, round. There are three floors. There was a winch and chain to pull the tail pole round. The present owner and last miller, Mr. Brand, thinks it was built about a hundred years ago.

On the first floor are three pairs of overdriven stones, one large burr, one peak, and one small burr (used for maize). Two pairs of stones share a governor, the other has one to itself; both driven from below. A spur wheel was used to drive the sack hoist and dressing machine on the 2nd floor. The curb is dead, and the rollers are horizontal ones inside the mill.

Mr. Brand ran the mill until a sail blew off during the War; he only ground offals.

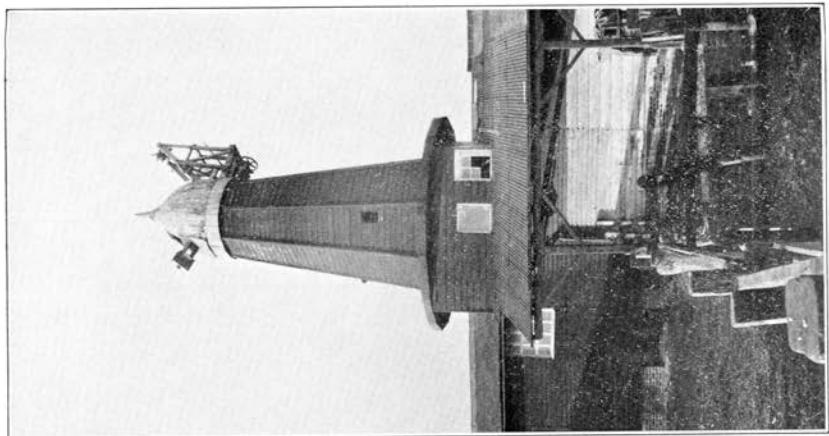
There is a tradition that this mill was moved from a field at the end of Mill Lane, Warboys. However, on Jeffrey's Map of Huntingdonshire of 1768, a mill is shown on both these sites.

Though lacking sails this mill is in good repair, and is used to store corn. It still contains all the working tools.

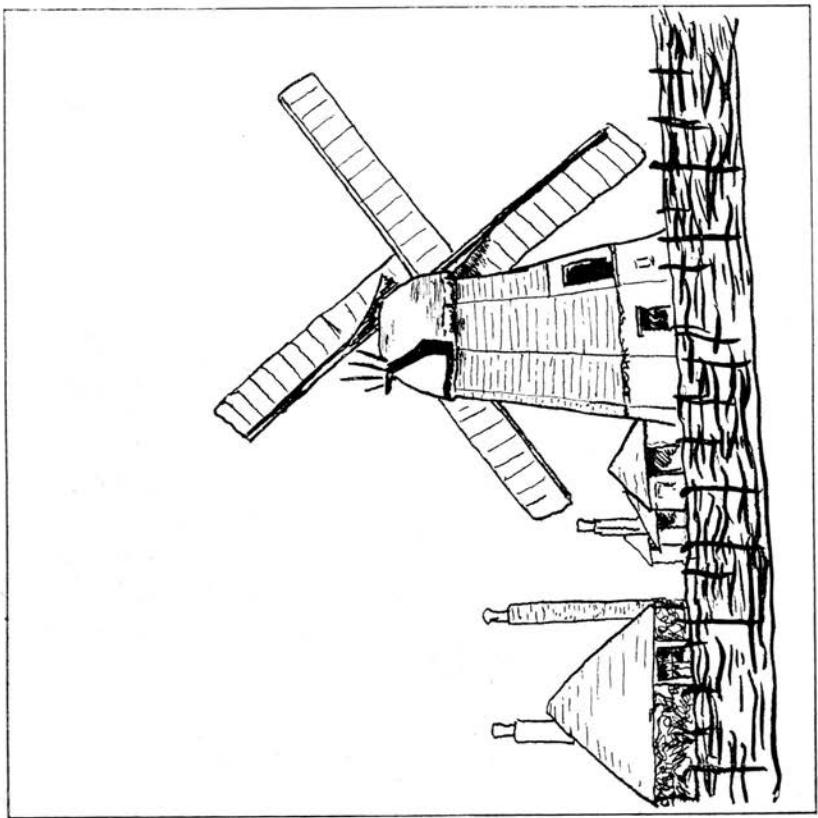
YAXLEY BLACK MILL. This mill stood beside a low, single-storey thatched cottage on the south side of the road from Norman Cross to Yaxley. It was pulled down in 1935, having been disused for many years.

There is little doubt that it stood on the foundations of a post mill of rare type, which had all or part of the round house below ground level. This type is said to occur in Sweden, but is uncommon in England.

SOMERSHAM MILL, FARM MILL, 1932.



LITTLE PAXTON MILL, FROM AN OLD PHOTOGRAPH.





SAWTRY MILL., BEFORE 1908.



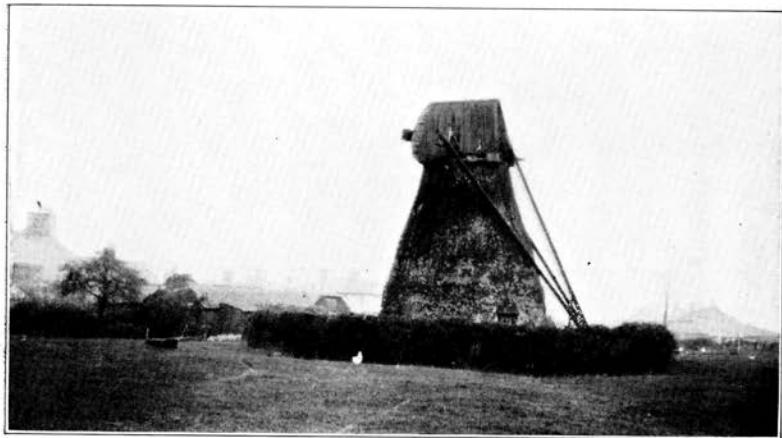
BUCKDEN MILL, 1938.



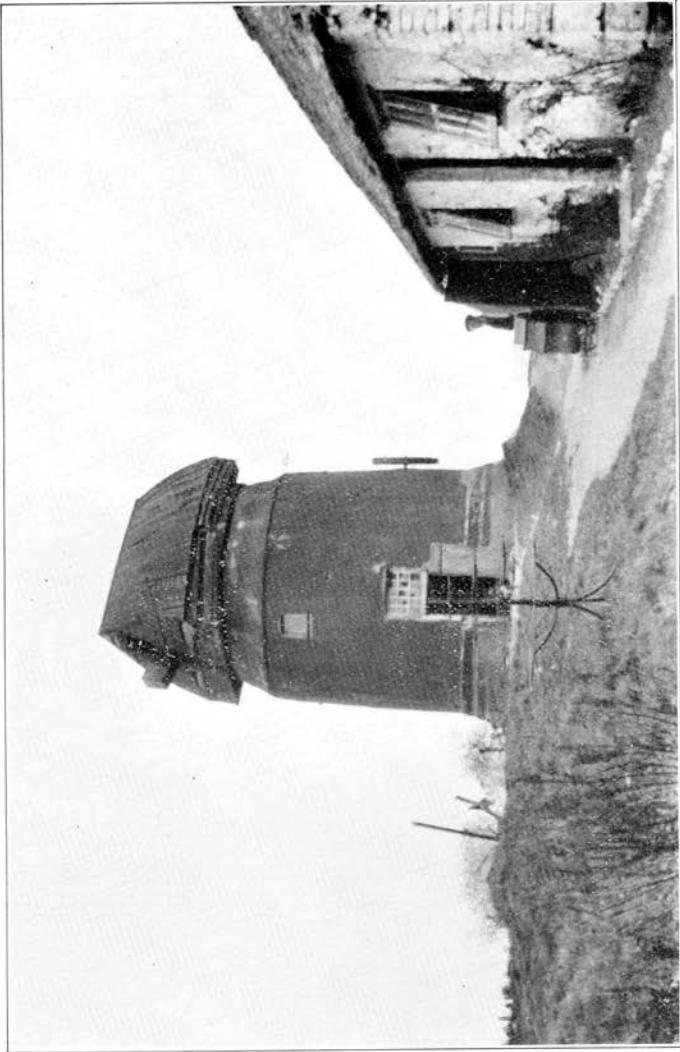
BLUNTISHAM, WOOD END MILL, PULLED DOWN 1926.



WARBOYS, RAMSEY ROAD MILL, 1932.



WARBOYS, MILL GREEN MILL, 1933.



YAXLEY BLACK MILL (THE STONE MILL), 1933. PULLED DOWN 1935.

A trap door in the ground floor (which was of wood) led down stone steps to a shallow cellar with walls of stone, the same shape and width as the mill. Against the walls of this cellar were four equally spaced stone piers. In the last stage of the mill these piers were quite functionless, but they appeared to have once supported the cross-trees of a post mill.

The dressed stone walls of the cellar continued above ground to the height of about five feet, forming the base of the mill tower, and they included three courses of moulded plinths. Above the stonework the walls were of stone rubble, rough-cast on the outside, and merging into brick at the top.

Inside the building on the ground floor level there was cut on the stonework "M.W. 1671." On the doorway was cut "Daniel Loweth 1839"; and on the plinth "R.L. 1853."

Until about 1926 the mill was being worked by means of a tractor standing outside, and driving a pulley and shaft through the wall. It is many years since the single sails were taken off. Mr. Shepherd was the last miller, but at one time it was run by members of the Loweth family who also had the other mill in Yaxley village.

The cap used to be turned by a tail pole with a winch and ring of stumps. There had been one dressing machine on the ground floor. The sack hoist was driven by the friction of a solid elm wheel on the underside of the wallower. There were two pairs of stones, peak and burr, on the 1st floor. The windshaft, spur wheel and nuts were of iron, the wallower of wood bound with iron, and the vertical shaft of square oak. There were two storeys above ground level. The cap was of two layers of boarding, one horizontal and the other vertical.

There is the common local tradition (usually only connected with ancient buildings) of underground passages leading from this mill to Norman Cross and Yaxley Church. The cellar, however, showed no sign of an underground exit.

Bowers map of Huntingdonshire of 1700 and that of Jeffrey of 1768, both show mills on this site, and it may well be that the foundations of this mill were part of the Yaxley stone mill of the old rhyme:-

"Glatton round hill,

"Yaxley stone mill,

"And Whittlesey Mere,

"Are the three wouders of Huntingdonshire."

I am greatly indebted to Miss M. J. Eldridge for sketching Lt. Paxton Mill from a faded photograph; and to Mr. P. Slater for his photograph of Sawtry Mill.