

# ESSEX WINDMILLS MILLERS & MILLWRIGHTS



VOLUME FIVE

*A Review by Parishes, S-Z*

Kenneth G. Farries

# Thaxted

- (1) Post mill. Stood on the east side of the Dunmow road about 100 yards south of the Bardfield road and roughly opposite Totman's Farm. TL 615306
- (2) Post mill. Stood at Mill End to the south of the town centre in the area behind the Rose and Crown public house. TL 613309
- (3) Post mill. Known as Newbiggin or Boyton End Mill. Stood immediately north east of the Fox and Hounds public house (now hotel) and south of the Sampford road. TL 611317 (□ 235)
- (4) Post mill. Stood immediately south of 'The Mill House' at Cutlers Green, on the west side of the Debden road approximately opposite the track to Millhill Farm. TL 592311
- (5) Post mill. Stood near Sibley's Green, 500 yards east of the Dunmow road and 120 yards south of 'Grace's Farm House', which stands at the exit of the former mill approach. The mill stood against the east side of the track. TL 617283
- (6) Tower mill. Lowe's Mill. Stands in restored condition 200 yards south west of the church. TL 609308 (□ 236; II 95-7)

WITH its majestic church, set in a bedrock of exquisite period architecture, Thaxted is an exciting discovery for those who, with the perception of a Wordsworth, are disposed to roam his 'mighty world of eye and ear'. All is intact and authentic, it would appear, even to the sturdy



brick windmill, which — odd omission! — was brought as an afterthought under the blanket preservation order over the ancient nucleus, following pressure from the Thaxted Society. And yet, one vitalising element of centuries' standing no longer obtains: the play of windmill sails. Greenwood, or his surveyors, in the years around 1820, could count four sets from south to north above the roof tops, and two more within the parish boundary, the highest number attained. Two or more windmills were in work here from the early days of their inception, cocking a snook at the infant Chelmer below. If the tower mill's sails are made to turn again, it will be no more than Thaxted's due.

#### (1) & (2) THE MILL END POST MILLS

A number of sale notices and other records relating to these mills occur in the period 1790-1830, which make it possible to trace broadly the sequence of owners and occupiers in each case, but the allocation of the two groupings to their rightful sites remains tentative.

The windmill described as near the Saracen's Head in 1790 and near the King's Arms in 1808, was probably that whose site lies close to the Rose and Crown of today (site (2)). Joseph Butcher insured in 1790 for £150 a windmill, timber built, 'with roundhouse under', near the first-mentioned inn, and in 1805 John Abbott entered as tenant on a lease expiring in 1811.<sup>1</sup> The freehold was to be put to auction by Thomas Butcher of Shalford, miller, in 1808, the post mill then being stated to contain one pair of stones, but was again offered by Butcher in 1814 and 1815.<sup>2</sup> Abraham Barnard succeeded, remaining until 1823, after which further changes occurred,<sup>3</sup> and there is no record to suggest that this mill survived after 1824. Like its close neighbour, it appeared both on Chapman and André (1777) and on Greenwood's map (surv. 1824). Both mills were described as post mills in the church rates.<sup>4</sup>

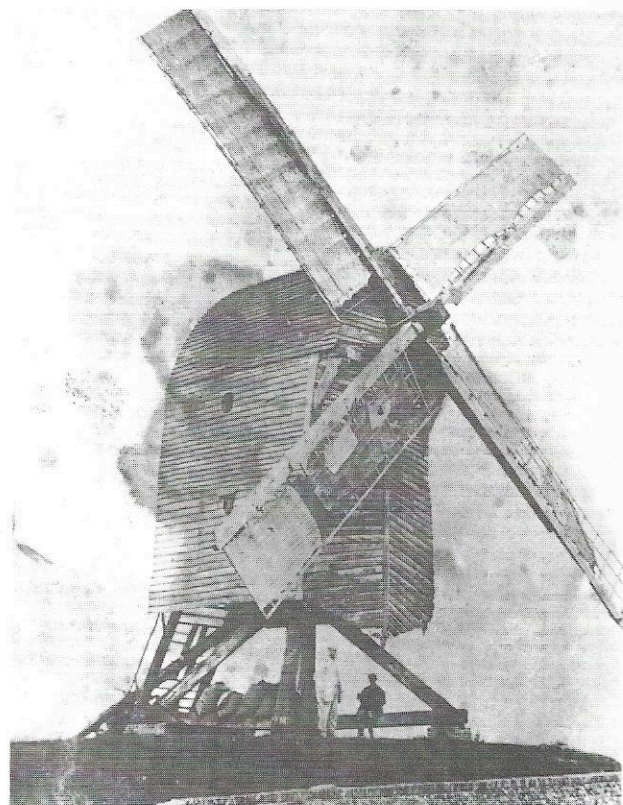
A mill at site (1), south of the Bardfield road, was evidently that mentioned in 1584 in the Quarter Sessions rolls, when it was recorded that Christopher Kents of Thaxted 'for lack of a bridge laying over a brook near Ryc(h)monds Grene, doth annoy the footway to church, market and mill'.<sup>5</sup> Continued occupation is indicated by Ogilby's *Britannia* (1675) and by Warburton, Bland and Smyth (c1724). The windmill is likely to have been that 'known as Old Mill' insured by Samuel Clift in 1778, and stated to have a roundhouse. The cover was doubled to £100 three years later.<sup>6</sup> Samuel Root insured what may further be presumed to have been the south mill in 1795; the figure of £200 on the timber structure and roundhouse points to substantial repairs or a total replacement.<sup>7</sup> From Root's widow in 1802, the tenancy at least of the mill was conveyed to James Camp, who, on his death in 1821, passed the freehold to Kezia, his wife.<sup>8</sup> In May, 1829, was offered at the Rose and Crown by Franklin and Glascock, auctioneers, a capital post windmill with two pairs of stones, 'standing in a superior

position for wind and trade near Mill End in the town of Thaxted'.<sup>9</sup> This must have been the mill held by Kezia Kempton in 1830, who was given under Town Street in the land tax returns. George Cowell was recorded as in occupation 1826-30, but in 1831 we have 'land, late Camp's mill' in the church rate lists.

The tithe apportionment (1844) lists Mill Pasture and Mill Field opposite Totman's Farm, whence the ground slopes away to north, south, and west. There is no hint of the former position of the north mill.

#### (3) NEWBIGGIN OR BOYTON END MILL, BY THE FOX AND HOUNDS

This does not appear to have been the site of the north mill or the church mill of the 14th century,<sup>10</sup> though it is still plainly marked by the substantial remains of a mound 10-12ft. high, with a ditch on the northern side. In 1623 the abutments of a pasture in Thaxted make reference to 'Reades Lane near the new mill' and to 'Damerics Mead'.<sup>11</sup> Damary's Mead on the first O.S. 6in. map shows the 'new mill' to have been at site (3), but it is unwise to assume unreservedly that we have come across the initiation of a milling operation. A mill replacement is possible, and 'new' as a name element can live to a ripe old age: the mill at site (3) under Stebbing serves as an illustration. Ogilby's *Britannia* (1675) and Warburton, Bland and Smyth (c1724) record the



235 Thaxted: Fox and Hounds Mill. Probably gone by 1893



Boyton End mill, which is not shown on the revised second O.S. 1in. (1893) or on the second 6in. (1896), though said to have been demolished in 1897.<sup>12</sup> Two surviving photographs give the impression of a long enduring mill which retained primitive features to the end.

In 1796 the mill, with contents, was insured for £200.<sup>13</sup> It was bequeathed in 1817 by James Guyver, previously in his own occupation, to his son James, who was returned as miller at Boyton End in 1830.<sup>14</sup> There was then no mention of the inn adjacent, but on the death of the second James in 1835 was offered the lease of the free public house called the Fox and Hounds, with brew-house and premises, in addition to the windmill driving one pair of French stones.<sup>15</sup> In 1844, Daniel Britton was tenant under Richard and William Randall, brewers, of Dunmow.<sup>16</sup> Further millers and also victuallers were John Belsham (1848) and Thomas Belsham (1878); in 1880 the brewers Randall advertised the tenancy with pinch-penny economy:<sup>17</sup>

Fox and Hounds Public-House and Flour-Mill, Thaxted. This well-known property to be let; it has been in the same family for upwards of 50 years. — Apply personally to R. and W. Randall, Brewery, Great Dunmow.

*Kelly's* directory of 1882 gives Frederick Charles Heath at the Fox and Hounds, but makes no mention of milling.

No details of the mill's interior are to hand, but its salient external features are enough to show that it would have made a fascinating contrast to its sophisticated counterpart by the church, had it been spared another century. The substructure stood exposed, with the down-curved crosstrees supported just over ground level, providing a convenient seat and a platform for sacks. Winding was by tail pole. The body was clearly of small capacity, and must have worked a single pair of stones to the last. There were small elliptical portholes in the centre sides of stone and spout floors. The weather beam was carried forward of the front corner posts with externally provided diagonals to support its ends, and the roof boards ran forward above to give cover. The windshaft was of wood, and was mortised for four common sails turning clockwise, all spread with canvas in the photograph, the motley and threadbare patchwork in one sail advertising the dire poverty, extreme thrift, or disillusionment of the licensee. The weatherboarding on the prow progressed downwards through horizontal lines to a pronounced herringbone pattern, with moulded pendants to discharge the drips.

#### (4) CUTLERS GREEN MILL

Barely more than sixty years were granted to this post mill. It was to be auctioned at the Sun Inn, Thaxted, in November, 1815, when described as follows<sup>18</sup>:

A substantial and eminently situated post windmill, built within seven years, with one pair of good French

stones and going gears, also 16 rods of leasehold ground, 92 years of which are unexpired; together with a freehold messuage . . . and half an acre of garden ground . . . situated at Cutler's Green.

Less than two years later it was for sale by private contract as a 'four-post windmill' in the occupation of John Harvey,<sup>19</sup> who was returned by *Pigot's* directory as miller in 1823, but replaced by John Brown in 1826. In 1830 it was held by the executors of Thomas Woodham Francis,<sup>20</sup> and in 1844 by Thomas Francis junior, under Robert Sackville. Later, it was in the hands of the Giblin family: William (1859) and Elizabeth (1863), and was still in their possession when its career ended violently:

*Essex Weekly News*, 14th January, 1870. 'Thaxted. The Late Gale. About twelve (noon on the previous Saturday) a post windmill was blown down on Cutlers Green, belonging to Mr E. Gibling, whose brother-in-law had left the mill only about ten minutes. The body of the mill was broken, but only one sail was injured.'

Today, the mill plot, adjoining the mill house, still preserves the outline as drawn on the tithe map of 1844.

#### (5) SIBLEYS GREEN MILL

Here was the case of a mill taken to the corn when confidence in the future of wind was running at a high level. The site is flat and featureless, though open enough to take all winds sent, but its comparative remoteness must have proved a factor in the windmill's premature demise. The mill is said to have come into the hands of the Barnard family, farmers, from the Watkinsons by marriage; first Robert, then his son Abraham ran the business.<sup>21</sup> The windmill was insured by Abraham Barnard in September, 1806, for £300, and the stock in trade for a further £100<sup>22</sup>. This is the first known reference.

Abraham was listed as miller by *Pigot* in 1823, and by his will, proved in 1841, empowered trustees to auction the freehold post mill, farmstead, and 33 acres of land.<sup>23</sup> The mill had one pair of patent sails and two pairs of French stones, undertaking a fair proportion of grist work. A miller's cottage was provided. The whole was bought by William Barnard junior of Stebbing for £1,350.<sup>24</sup> There were Barnards, also, at Folly Mill Farm in Thaxted, and a Samuel Barnard, son of the late Abraham Barnard, in possession of a mill at Finchingfield.

Directories enter James Pettit as miller in 1845 and Samuel Pettit in 1848 and in 1859; Charles Ketley was miller and farmer, partnered by Brock, in 1866, 74. In 1862, 63, Charles Wicks was given in *Kelly's* and *White's*, probably as the working miller under Ketley.

In April, 1877, Franklin & Son, auctioneers, announced the sale of the entire structure, including two pairs of French stones, stating that the mill had been taken down and that excellent pieces of oak fit for church repairs were to be had.<sup>25</sup> The first O.S. 1:2,500 (1876) indicates that there was no roundhouse.





236 *Thaxted Mill in working order, probably in the early 1900s*

#### (6) THE TOWER MILL

The ace of Thaxted's windmills is said to have been composed of locally won or fabricated materials: timber from the Park and Borough farms and bricks prepared close by.<sup>26</sup> It was commissioned by John Webb in 1804, as an inscription on the mill exterior testifies, and the stones ran dry at the last around 1910. The rock-like stability of the tower, four feet thick at the base, was paralleled by the constancy of the millers: one Lowe was milling for Webb in 1837 and Harry Lowe ground doggedly on until the last turn of the sails.

The 1837 reference was to an assault and robbery, in which Lowe, on leaving the mill premises in the darkness of a winter's evening, was waylaid by three men and relieved of two to three pounds of silver belonging to his master.<sup>27</sup> A Webb, always John, is recorded as miller in earlier directories, as in *Pigot's* (1823), *White's* (1848), *Post Office* (1850). The Webb of 1853 was an extensive property owner in the town.<sup>28</sup> There was a reference to Laurence Webb, miller, of Thaxted, in 1794.<sup>29</sup>

In 1907 a forlorn attempt was made to sell the freehold of the mill, when Harry Lowe, the then yearly tenant, was paying an annual rent of £35. The notice outlined the salient features: four floors, two double and two single patent sails and three pairs of French stones of 4ft. 3in., 4ft. 6in. and 5ft. diameter. Space adjoining was hopefully offered for the erection of a steam mill, but a buyer did not come forward.<sup>30</sup> The mill stood unattended for more than twenty years until the Thaxted Civic Trust did essential repairs, making the lower floors available to scouts and youth groups, and waterproofing the cap. From the Trust the mill passed to the parish council in the mid-1950s, since when the Thaxted Society, formed in 1964, have taken strenuous action to restore the structure.<sup>31</sup>

A full technical account of this mill will be found in Volume II; a brief outline is here added.

The mill stands 54ft. to the top of the cap internally, and the inside dimensions of the tower are 24ft. at the base and about 15ft. at the curb. The floors in order of



descent were dust, bin, stone, spout and ground, but the dust-floor level has been altered. Of the three pairs of overdrift stones, two occupied the original positions, the third was added. Both the windshaft and the upright shaft were of iron and in two parts coupled together. All the main, heavy, components down to the stones have been preserved, partly, no doubt, because there were two capacious floors below, adequate for later, non-milling, uses. Exterior photographs of the mill in working order show sails corresponding to the 1907 sale notice; also visible is a stage at first-floor level and a gallery around the domed cap, behind which was a fantail with eight blades. The windmill and the church seen from afar make an arresting composition.

#### Addenda

1595: John Tytterell versus Richard Cofylde and wife Joan. One windmill & ½ acre of land in Thaxted. (Per Dr F. G. Emmison, extracted from *Feet of Fines*). The first party in a Fine is normally the purchaser, the second party the vendor.

Lawrence Webb of Thaxted, miller, in 1798 charged with stealing flour worth 4d from the mill of Samuel Choppin. Webb claimed it was taken only as a sample. (E.R.O. Q/SBb 371).

#### NOTES

- 1 R.E. Pol. No. 116681 30.6.1790; E.R.O. D/P 16/11/1-3.
- 2 C.C. 18.11.1808, 15.7.1814, 6.1.1815.
- 3 E.R.O. D/P 16/11/1-3 (poor rate); land tax and church rate.
- 4 E.R.O. D/P 16/5/14 per R. Hawksley.
- 5 *Essex Journal*, Vol. 8, p. 121.
- 6 R.E. Pol. Nos. 73665 27.8.1778 & 81531 27.8.1781.
- 7 R.E. Pol. No. 145752 24.6.1795.
- 8 Root's (or Roote's) will, proved 1798: E.R.O. D/A BR 29, p. 163; Camp's will: E.R.O. D/A BR 32, p. 109, which, with *Pigot's* directory (1826), points to Thos. Everitt (Town Street) as then practising miller.
- 9 C.C. 8.5.1829.
- 10 *Thaxted in the Fourteenth Century*, K. C. Newton, E.R.O. Publications No. 33, 1960.
- 11 E.R.O. D/DYq 5 per R. Hawksley.
- 12 *The Thaxted Bulletin*, No. 4, Autumn, 1969, p. 17.
- 13 R.E. Pol. No. 151352 10.6.1796.
- 14 E.R.O. D/A BR 31, p. 327 & land tax returns.
- 15 C.C. 10.4.1835 per H. E. S. Simmons.
- 16 E.R.O. D/CT 348A.
- 17 E.W.N. 20.8.1880.
- 18 C.C. 20.10.1815.
- 19 C.C. 13.6.1817.
- 20 E.R.O.: land tax returns.
- 21 Per G. W. Martin from private correspondence.
- 22 R.E. Pol. No. 225371 29.9.1806.
- 23 E.R.O. D/A BR 35, p. 35.
- 24 E.S. 10 & 24.6.1842.
- 25 E.W.N. 13.4.1877.
- 26 *English Windmills*, Vol. 2, Donald Smith, 1932, p. 81.
- 27 E.S. 10.2.1837.
- 28 *The Thaxted Bulletin*, No. 6, Autumn, 1970, pp. 8, 9.

29 C.C. 16.5.1794.

30 E.R.O. B1051.

31 As note 12 above, pp. 5, 6.

## Thorpe-le-Soken

- (1) Post mill. At Far Thorpe Green near 'Old Mill Cottage', part of which stood derelict in 1971 in the acute angle between the Weeley road and the lane to Barnard's Farm. Approximately TM 164226
- (2) A pair of post mills. The surviving base of the westerly mill stands 280 yards south of the village centre off Mill Lane. The other mill stood 120 yards to the south east, in a field. TM 178223 and 179223 (□ 237a, b; I 20)
- (3) Mill of unknown type. Marked on the map by Warburton, Bland and Smyth (c1724) in the area between Whitehall and Bradley Hall on Whitehall Lane leading north from Thorpe Green, where was also Mill Hill Field on the tithe map east of T-junction. Probably the 'Thorpe Great Mill' mentioned in manor court records, 1752, 58 (ERO D/DBm M220). No further information. Approximately TM 162232

### (1) FAR THORPE GREEN MILL

The mills at Thorpe Green and at Thorpe Street or village were held copyhold of the manor of Thorpe, and the surviving court rolls therefore throw some light on their 18th-century history.<sup>1</sup> Robert Stone was admitted in 1700 on the death of Richard Stone to the windmill and land known as Heath, Richard having been admitted the previous year. Other field or place names associated with the site: Moses, Eight Acres, Taylors and Rush Green, enable it to be traced through to the 19th century.

The mill was mortgaged by Richard Barnard in 1723, shortly after which it failed to appear on the map by Warburton, Bland and Smyth (c1724). In 1759 one John Barnard was replaced by another, and on 26th July, 1794, William Barnard surrendered his copyhold messuage and windmill then in the occupation of Ann Drake, widow, to Thomas Annis of Kelvedon, miller. The windmill, which appears on Chapman and André (1777), stood on a small parcel of waste, part of Rush Green, belonging to the manor, and contiguous with Barnard's holding by the name of Taylor's, but the precise site and the dates of building of successive mills are unknown. Annis, on entry, mortgaged to William Barnard for £250 at 5% interest, and insured the mill, 'brick and timber built', near his dwelling house, for £290.<sup>2</sup> In default of payment by Annis, Barnard was readmitted in July, 1799, conveying in 1801 to Porter Everitt, the occupier then being William Goodrich.