

Note on Kings Bromley Mill (the corn mill) (nr Lichfield)

Grid ref SK 1192 1711

On R. Trent.

1. I went to see this mill and the nearby saw mill on 29<sup>th</sup> March 1967 and was “shown round” by a lad called Martin Osborne who was I suppose about three years younger than me and who had been left mildly crippled by the polio epidemic that had hit babies in the early 1950’s. I think the F.H.Osborne who owned the mill was his father, but he might have been his uncle. I didn’t get to see inside the mill. Presumably I was told it was too dangerous, but I did see a certain amount through a window or windows. The highlight of the visit was meeting the last miller Mrs Hitchenor, who was still living close by (the only lady miller I met in Staffordshire, though I did meet Miss Nock at Sambrook Mill, just over the border into Shropshire and I am aware that there was a lady miller some years ago at Prescott Mill, also in east Shropshire).
2. I made rather untidy notes of what I could see of the mill and its machinery, and of what Mrs Hitchenor had told me, on SPAB watermill survey questionnaire forms, along with pieces of information about the saw mill. The information about the corn mill is as follows, with clarifications in square brackets:-

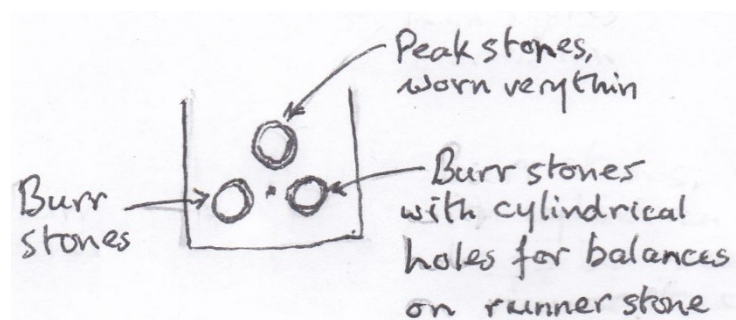
- Owner- Mr F.H.Osborne, 56, Alrewas Rd, Kings Bromley. A previous owner who let the mill to the Hitchenors, was a Mr Dumford. I was shown [I think by Martin Osborne’s mother] a copy of a sale catalogue of Kings Bromley Manor Estate 1927 which included (along with the sawmill), in lot 14 “Brick and tiled THREE STOREY GRIST MILL, fitted with two pairs of stones worked by a waterwheel. The grist mill is let to Mr Hitchenor, who has given notice to quit expiring March 25<sup>th</sup> 1927. Tithe 12s 7½d.” [evidently the notice to quit was withdrawn]
- It is over 50 years since flour [as opposed to animal feed] was last ground at the mill. Mr Edwin Hitchenor came to the mill in 1882 or 3 and worked it until 1918. He had been a man at Alrewas Mill. His son William Hitchenor (of Church Farm in those days) continued

working it from 1918 to 1954, though Mrs Hitchenor [his wife, the lady I met] did most of the milling 1944 – 1954 since Mr H had another job (with the river board)]. Only one pair of stones could be worked at one time. There was not enough power, said Mrs H, to drive two pairs together. One pair was used until it ran blunt, then the other pair was used while waiting for the millwright to come and dress the others. Mrs Hitchenor used to charge 8d per cwt for grinding. Candles were used at night [in spite of electricity being made by the saw mill turbine a stone's throw away!]. The mill closed in 1954 because of difficulty of maintenance after Mr Hitchenor's death in that year and unprofitability. After his death farmers had to bring their own corn [presumably he had done the transport]. In the last 6 months of running the mill, Mrs Hitchenor made only £14 net profit. An uncle of Martin Osborne's offered to let Mrs Hitchenor continue to run the mill under his control. When Mrs H asked how much she would be paid, he said "30 shillings a week". So Mrs H declined the offer, and the mill has not worked since.

- Bill Howell then of Town Mill, Stafford, used to dress the stones. He charged £5 or 5 guineas a pair. He bought (but never paid for) the tools, sacks, etc from the mill when it closed (£55 worth). Mrs Hitchenor cannot remember any repairs being done except floats on the waterwheel being replaced, which her husband did.
- Date 1668 carved on wooden tablet on side of exterior of mill. [However, as the industrial archaeologist Robert Sherlock pointed out to me, the building is evidently not as old as that, though built in an old style with the windows in fancy masonry]
- No mill pond. Weir to divert water down millrace. Complicated arrangement of sluiceways. Channel up to mill. Sloping sluiceway (25 degrees) before waterwheel wound up by chain on a wooden drum. Weir at Netherton [about a mile upstream] broken since 1954, diverted a lot of water down R. Blithe [so there was not as much water in 1967 as when the mill was working].
- Waterwheel gone, removed by Martin Osborne's uncle. In a wheelhouse. Low breast shot [In view of low head and no backs to the buckets could equally be described as undershot as Charles

Howell, son of Bill Howell mentioned above, did in a list of Staffs watermills he gave me]. 12ft dm x 7ft wide [from my measurements of the pit, which was 7ft 3in wide. Other info on the wheel from Mrs H] The wheel had iron arms and rims; no backing to the floats, you could see right through it. The floats were about a foot apart. Originally they were iron L-shaped floats, riveted on, but since about the 1930's they were replaced as necessary, a few each year, by wooden floats. Iron shaft. Mrs H does not recall there being any inscription on the wheel. No auxiliary power was used at the mill.

- Gear wheels. [The main gears that remained were visible through a window, so I was able to estimate (and to a point reach in and measure) their size] Pit wheel- gone, between 6ft and 6ft 6in dm. Wallower – iron, single casting, solid teeth, estimated 3 ft dm. Gt spur wheel-, wooden, 4 clasp arms, estimated 6ft dm. No teeth remaining, appear to have been cast segments of teeth at one time, [presumably removed for scrap]. Stone nuts gone, 1ft 8" dm (measured from bridge tree with ruler [at least, the one nearest the window]. Crown wheel - gone, square on top of upright shaft for it. [The foregoing were my observations. However, Mrs Hitchenor, whom I met at her house in Manor Rd, Kings Bromley, not at the mill, said the mill stones were driven from above, and the spur wheel was iron with iron teeth; it seems to me she must have misunderstood my question and confused the spur wheel with the crown wheel. My picture of the top of upright shaft etc shows no obvious fixing for the top of a quant, and the eye of the millstone looks too small for the usual quant fixing.]
- Upright shaft – wooden, about 1ft 2in dm, and 1ft 2in across flats [of the squares for gear wheels].
- Millstones: Two pairs  
French burr stones  
4ft dm, underdriven  
[Mrs H indicated they were driven from above, but that



seems certainly wrong]; one pair peak, 4ft dm, worn very thin.  
[Arranged as per rough sketch plan redrawn from notes, above ]  
No balances visible on the other stones.

Mrs H tells me that [the thin peak] pair was not used and never was connected to the waterwheel. Certainly there is no bridge tree for them. In Mrs H's time they were on edge in mill, now they are flat as if in use.

Tentering by the bridge trees being raised/lowered. (2 bridge trees, no sign of any more)

[Charles Howell (1926-93), a son of Bill Howell mentioned above, told me in on 14<sup>th</sup> Sept 1968 (recorded in a scribbled note of a conversation with him about numerous mills) that this mill had had three pairs of stones, one pair being driven by a (horizontal) layshaft from the pit wheel – no sign of that remaining]

- Stone fittings had gone, but info from Mrs H – round casings [tuns] for both pairs of stones (I noticed one left [detached] in the mill on 1<sup>st</sup> floor (saw through window)). Feedshoes controlled by strings, square cone hoppers, square horses. One pair of stones had a bell alarm.
- Sack hoist. Beam and catch type, with ropes, top floor, where there were 3 big garners; driven from crown wheel.
- 3. The mill remained derelict for several more years after my visit, photos taken in 1982 showing the machinery even more smashed up. Some time since then the mill has been converted to a house. An appraisal of the Kings Bromley Conservation Area published in 2008 and posted on the internet says “To the north-west of the village, where the River Trent passes by, is an interesting converted building which is the old brick corn mill, dated 1668 but more likely to be of the nineteenth century...”
- 4. I see that Staffordshire Record Office have items on this mill.
- 5. Mills Archive mention E. Hitchenor on their mills people database, and the mill apparently figures on the list of mills mentioned in the Staffordshire Advertiser (compiled by Betty Fox) that they hold. See also my transcripts of emails from Elizabeth Trout of Mills Archive regarding research done by her.

John Bedington, 2021

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See also my other items: -

*B/W photos:* Taken 29<sup>th</sup> March 1967 – ST49a, Back of mill and the side with the wheelhouse; ST49b Front of mill, with the side opposite the wheelhouse; ST49c, sluiceway in the headrace; ST49d, bridge tree, upright shaft, wallower, seen through window in the front of the mill. ST49e, first floor, top of upright shaft and a pair of millstones, seen through a window in the front of the mill. Taken apparently in 1982 – ST49f, Mill and by-pass weir.

*Colour slides:* Taken 29<sup>th</sup> March 1967 - STn1, front of mill, with end opposite from wheelhouse. Taken in June 1982 by my father, HK Bedington – ST n 2, remains of machinery in the mill; ST n 3, remains of machinery including upright shaft in the mill.

*Transcript of emails* from Elizabeth Trout (*Word document*) 8<sup>th</sup> & 15<sup>th</sup> January 2019.