

Hippies Mill

An electric history!



The Mill Pond and sluice to where the water wheel once stood.
Photo authors © Steve Hodges Collection

Corn and Electricity The Mill at Hippies Farm



Hippies Mill, Coleford Circa 2020 ¹

Mells stream to give it its official name ² runs through the bottom of the village was able to support 2 'corn' (*corn, is the term used for any grain used in mills , but more peculiarly applied to wheat*) mills to grind wheat, rye, oats and barley for bread and animal feed. Hippies Mill was built opposite Hippies Farm around 1788 to compete with the existing mill half a mile up stream.³

Hippies Mill, along with the nearby Magg's Wood, Goodeaves and Newbury were originally in the Parish of Babington and not part of Coleford that at the time of the mills construction was in the Parish of Kilmersdon.

Babington dates from medieval times and according to a deed dated Easter 1572 when the estate was sold by Thomas Mary Markham to Joan Elcode it also included a water mill.⁴ Whilst there are lakes, ponds and a small stream at the site of the Babington 'settlement' before the house was built, it is unlikely that there would have been enough water flow to enable a water mill to turn. That brings the mill back to Mells stream.

The Babington estate along with its buildings spread out over a couple of miles and passed through several hands before it was forfeited by The

¹ Hippies Mill Coleford, Photo taken by Author, Steve Hodges Collection.

² Mells Stream, Ordnance Survey Map 142 Shepton Mallet & Mendip Hills East, 1:25000, Edition B2 1998 (Southampton Ordnance Survey)

³ Hippies Mill, Coleford, Somerset HER, <https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/record/23310#> [accessed 19May2021]

⁴ Babington, Deserted Medieval Village, Babington. Stored at Somerset Historical Environment Records

Crown in 1593. Although the estate had been forfeited, the manor belonged to Thomas Pacey who left it to his sister, Margaret. She was married to a Bristol Alderman, William Crabb, who bequeathed the manor to their eldest daughter, Elizabeth, wife of Henry Mompesson of Corston, Wiltshire (1633-1715), Sheriff of Somerset (1698).⁵

Captain Charles Knatchbull (1747 - 1826), was eventually to inherit the mill via Mrs Elizabeth Long, a niece of the Mompessons.⁶

Captain Charles (Knatchbull) marries his first cousin, Frances Knatchbull, the daughter of Major Norton Knatchbull, but they did not have any children, however Babington continued to be owned by successive members of the Knatchbull family⁷

The 1822 map of the occupants and lands of the Babington estate⁸ show Hippiess Farm and Mill but no name of the miller or farmer.

So how does it become Hippiess Mill and Farm?

Research of the Wills stored in the National Archives shows that during 18th Century, John Hippiess was a miller and baker!

John Hippiess or Hippiess who was also known as Hippiess Baker of Coleford in the parish of Babington Somerset, ran the mill producing flour and baked the bread from his mill that became known as Hippiess Mill⁹

There are other documents referring to John Hippiess, (clothier) of Frome who in his will of September 25th 1717 leaves his mill, house and lands in the parishes of Babington and Kilmersdon to his father John Hippiess, (gent) of Frome. John's will of 1720 leave his mill, house and lands in the parishes of Babington and Kilmersdon to his wife Elizabeth. Connections are now lost of this family.¹⁰

⁵ Babington History, *Historic England*, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001137> [accessed 19 May 2021]

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid (3).

⁸ The 1822 map of Babington, *Somerset HER*, Estates of Charles Knatchbull 1822 Somerset Heritage T/PH/na/1

⁹ Hippiess, Baker of Babington Somerset, <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/D852549> [accessed 20 May 2021]

¹⁰ Will of John Hippiess, *PCC Wills of Testator's from Frome and near by 1700 - 1800*, <<http://www.gomezsmart.myzen.co.uk/wills/pccsum18.htm>> [accessed 20 May 2021]

By 1840, the Tithe Map¹¹ gives the following;

Field 127 in Babington parish, Name, 'Hippies Mill Stable and Sheds,' Owner 'Seagram John Esq, Occupier, 'James and Thomas Brice,' Acreage, '0a Or 7p' ¹²

However this does not include the farm as the tithe map gives a different owner occupier.

Field 128 in Babington parish, Name, 'Hippies Farmhouse Garden and Outbuildings,' Owner, 'Knatchbull William Francis Esq,' Occupier, 'Thomas Robbins,' Acreage, '0a Or 18p' ¹³

The names of the fields (land) adjoining the farm with the same owner occupiers is given in the tithe records as follows: 126 Mill Ham, 133 Sweet Mead, 125 Home Ground, 124 Yonder Mead, to the right of 97 Ash Hill and 122 & 123 Sticking Bridge¹⁴.



Tithe Map of Hippies Farm area in the parish of Babington 1840¹⁵

¹¹ Tithe Map 1840, Somerset HER ; <https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/record/21678#> [Accessed 30 July 2022]

¹² Ibid 11

¹³ Ibid 11

¹⁴ Ibid 11

¹⁵ Ibid 11

The next connection to the mill is from Kelly's directory of Somerset of 1883 that lists Alfred Bryant, 1889 James Harding and 1897 Edward John Spear, as farmers at Hippiess Farm¹⁶

During the early 1900's near by 'Coleford House' was being built for Phillip Theodosius Jones (1868-1943) MRCS Eng. LRCP Lon. Surgeon and Medical Officer to No.6 District Frome Union. (Coleford's Doctor).¹⁷

Whilst the village did not have mains electricity at the time (see section when electricity comes to Coleford), did Dr Jones or Dr Terry (who marries Dr Jones's wife after his death), lease Hippiess mill and have a water powered generator installed to provide electricity for his home?

In the book 'Ah-Yes An Introspective Retrospect' by Rev. Peter Ralph Bowman,¹⁸ (son of H.F. Ralph Bowman vicar of Holy Trinity Church Coleford 1927 - 1946) he refers to the village doctor generating electricity at an old water mill long before the village had an electricity supply.

Ivor Harris of Tweed Farm stated that Wat (Walter) Cosh once said that he could remember electricity being produced at Hippiess Mill for Coleford House.¹⁹

Today there is possible evidence of an old electricity supply. Support brackets for the insulators on the actual mill building and on and under the river bridge near the Kings Head Inn.

I can also remember circa 1960's seeing rusty iron support brackets with the brown porcelain insulators on top between the bridge at the Kings Head and Hippiess Mill leat. Today they have been swept away by the river and there is no evidence of their existence.

¹⁶ Babington Parish, *Kelly's Directory of Somersetshire 1889*,
<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4/id/124187> [accessed 20 May 2021]

¹⁷ Coleford, *Kelly's Directory of Somerset 1902* p210
<http://specialcollections.le.ac.uk/digital/collection/p16445coll4/id/278602/> [accessed 17 June 2021]

¹⁸ Peter Ralph-Bowman, *Ah-Yes An Introspective Retrospective*, (Herefordshire Gracewing 1999), pp51-52

¹⁹ Conversation with Ivor Harris and author (Steve Hodges) Summer 2020.

Brackets on River Bridge by Kings head, (Coleford House side), right, brackets on the wall of Hippies Mill.²⁰



By 1902 Kelly's Directory of Somerset²¹ gives Edwin Spear Jnr. as farmer and he remains there in the 1914 and 1919 editions. The 1914 and 1919 editions also lists him as farmer at Goodeaves Farm and in 1919 he is also a butcher in Highbury, but this was about to change.

In 1920 Mrs Knatchbull issued instructions for the sale of *"Outlying portions of the Babington Estate situate in the Parishes of Babington, and Kilmersdon, and elsewhere which will take place on Wednesday, the 23rd of June, 1920 at 2:30 o'clock precisely, at the George Hotel, Frome."*

Lots 25 to 27 - The Hippies Farm and adjoining lands were offered in one lot and withdrawn at £2,650. They were then offered separately but only one lot was sold. Mr. S. Gilson purchasing the disused mill with 1 1/2 acres of land for £115, he also purchased Lot 32 - Cook's Wood Quarry and lands containing 31.5 acres for £1,000. (Lot 16 - Goodeaves Farm and woodland situated at Highbury and containing 66 acres - Mr. E. C. Bissex £2,500.)²²

Currently, The Somerset Historic Environment Record (South West Heritage Trust) refers to the mill as disused with some gearing intact and being used as a 'pig shed'²³

²⁰ Wall Brackets for electrical cables Photos Author, Steve Hodges Collection.

²¹ Ibid 14.

²² Sale of parts of the Babington Estate *The Somerset Standard* 25th June 1920, <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/search/results/1920-06-25?NewspaperTitle=Somerset%2BStandard&IssueId=BL%2F0002679%2F19200625%2F&County=Somerset%2C%20England> [accessed 18 June 2021]

²³ Hippey's Mill Coleford, Somerset HER, <https://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/record/23310#> [Accessed 18 June 2021]

Now, after extensive renovation it is now a dwelling house that has appeared on BBC's 'Escape to the Country'.

As for Hippiess Farm it was purchased sometime during the 1950's by the late Patrick Love. At that time Hippiess Farm and mill were still part of the Parish of Babington, and it was not until 1953 that the parish boundaries changed when The Green, Hippiess Farm and The Mill became part of the parish of Coleford.

By 2021 it is now successfully run by his son Victor and wife Andrea who have also diversified into pigmy goats and luxury holiday accommodation by converting the existing farm buildings.

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All photographs taken by Author Steve Hodges Collection

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