

HARTEST WINDMILLS

By Peter Dolman

In the 19th century there were two mills at Hartest; one on top of Hartest Hill (TL837520) was apparently built in 1834 by Ling Robinson, the Ballingdon millwright. A post mill with fantail, roundhouse and two pairs of stones, it was presumably moved here from elsewhere at this late date. It also had a bakehouse and does not seem to have lasted long, John Case being the last recorded miller (in White's 1844 directory).

The other mill stood on what may have been one of the oldest mill sites in the county. In 1251 permission to erect a windmill was granted by the Bishop of Ely to the lord of the manor and by 1256 it was in existence. The mill gave its name to the open field to the south-west of the village. In more recent times Hodkinson's map of 1782 is the first to record the mill at its known site (TL825520) and it was advertised in the Ipswich Journal of May 11th 1793 as "an exceedingly good Post Windmill" occupied by James King. It was again advertised in May 1809 when it was stated "no other mill being in the vicinity" (which is stretching credulity, there being several within three miles). The purchaser was presumably "Mr. Frost", who decided to raise the mill, for the Ipswich Journal of August 18th 1810 recorded the unfortunate collapse of the mill on Friday 10th August while millwrights were working on it. One man was inside the mill and escaped unscathed; another underneath was only bruised but an onlooker was injured, breaking his thigh and leg. The mill was rebuilt and the Bury & Norwich Post for 18th March 1818 advertised it as being a "New-erected" mill, in the occupation of Mr. Frost, the proprietor.

By 1839 it was owned and occupied by William Bray. It carried the date 1844 and this is perhaps when the brick roundhouse was built. At some point new steps and fantail were added and it is highly likely that these were from another mill, although as the tramway was of concrete this could have been much later.

William Bray rebuilt the mill house, dated "WB 1858" and also erected a chimney, dated "WB 1854", which may have served a bakehouse originally as the steam mill carries the datestone "SGT 1866". Bray is last recorded in 1858; in 1864 Richard Barrell is listed as miller, and in 1868 J.G. Taylor, who as noted above built the steam mill in 1866. By 1874 William Bateman Harvey was in possession and he continued until at least 1885 (having gone bankrupt in late 1881 on the way). A curious anomaly concerns him for *The Miller* of January 6th 1890 records that a post mill "in the neighbourhood of Bury St. Edmunds" in his occupation was burned down on Sunday December 15th 1889. As it was clearly not Hartest mill he obviously had taken another mill nearer to Bury; at present it is not clear which one. The mill was bought by George King who is listed from 1888 to 1900. In 1904-12 Mrs. Kate King (his widow) is listed and later directories do not list a miller. Around this time the property was sold to the lord of the manor, Mr. J.G. Weller-Poley (a descendent of the lord of the manor that first built the mill in the 1250's) although King's son continued to work the mill farm and the last miller was George Johnson, in about 1926. The steam mill carried on until at least the late 1930's. After 1926 the windmill was not maintained, quickly losing its fantail, and had its millstones removed for use elsewhere. It stood in reasonably complete state until about 1960 when it was burnt down, reputedly to prevent any attempt at preservation. In 1977 little remained but the broken down walls and piers of the roundhouse, with the concrete tramway.

Hartest mill was a simple and fairly small post mill, the buck being about 9ft x 15ft in plan. Power came from two common and two spring sails, which used half elliptic springs. The sails ran clockwise and spanned about 70 feet. The windshaft was wooden, turned circular, 18ins square at the brakewheel and 14ins square at the tailwheel. The iron poll-end had a lifting boss formed on it and was fixed to the shaft in the unusual method found in the Bury area with a cap fitting over the shaft and four long bolts back into the wood shaft to captive nuts (Stanton mill has this and similar fixings can be seen on the upright shaft at Thelnetham and elsewhere).

The brakewheel (9ft) and tailwheel (6ft) were both clasp-arm timber construction but the tailwheel had been enlarged by bolting on a further ring of cants. Both drove a pair of stones direct and had iron tooth rings. The stones had been removed by the time the mill was examined in the 1930's. The brake was mostly of iron,

with wooden shoes at the top. There were corn bins either side of the windshaft, with virtually no floor as such. There was a flour dresser, and the sack hoist was driven by belt from the front of the brakewheel in the usual way.

Both bridgetrees pivoted on the crowntree on hangers and had brayers pivoting on the right side (facing forwards). The head governor was in the left corner of the mill and the tail governor was ahead of the stone spindle on the centre line, both being belt driven from the stone spindles. The post was turned circular within the buck. The spout floor virtually touched the tops of the quarter bars and there were large blind mortices below the tops of the quarter bars in the side of the post, probably for temporary support during erection although Rex Wailes speculates that the post was re-used from another mill. I doubt it myself. An unusual feature within the trestle was that 'knees' were fitted between the crosstrees and the post.

The roundhouse was painted white, and had a tarred boarded roof. The ladder was from elsewhere, as new door posts had been inserted to take it. The tailpole had been removed so iron rods braced it to the corners of the buck. The six-bladed fantail drove onto one wheel of the carriage, this being fitted with strakes.

It was a small post mill of the type to be found in south west Suffolk and down into Essex. While not particularly remarkable, it was beautifully situated and it is particularly unfortunate that it should have been deliberately destroyed to thwart preservation attempts which had begun in the late 1950's.