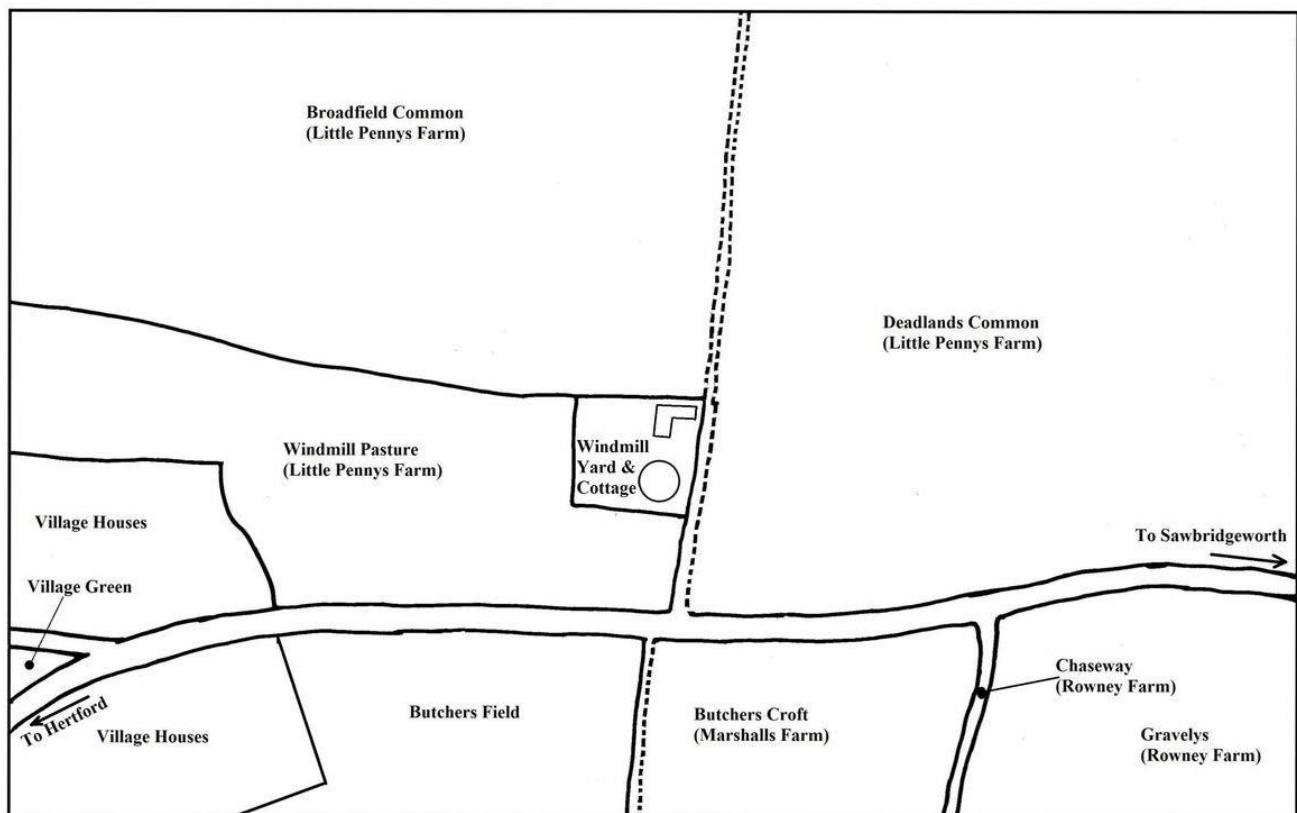


High Wych History: High Wych Windmill

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In 2016 Hugh Howes authored a book on Hertfordshire windmills: *Wind, Water and Steam*. For me it brought to mind our own High Wych windmill. For those who didn't know: a windmill did indeed once stand on the corner of Broadfields and High Wych Road.

High Wych mill was a 'post mill', the earliest type of European windmill. Its defining feature is that the whole body of the mill, the part that houses the machinery, is mounted on a single vertical post, around which it can be turned to bring the sails into the wind. Its base, the roundhouse, was octagonal. There were four common sails and the body of the mill (or buck) was horizontally boarded with a mansard roof. The mill was most probably manually turned to the wind by way of a tailpole. Cyril Moore reported that the principal timber for the mill had been cut from one large oak tree.

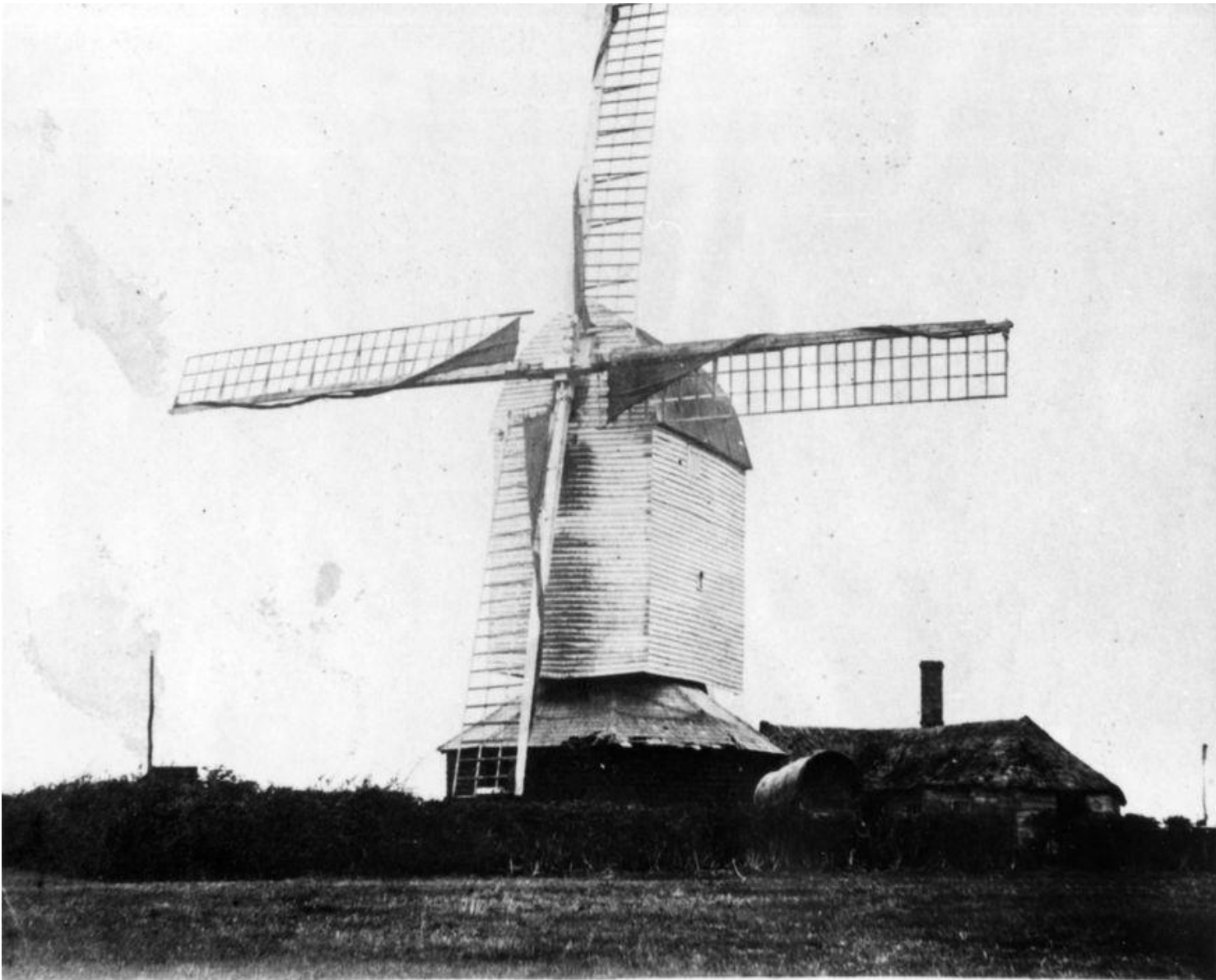


The above map (made by Andrew Elsdon) is based on the 1839 tithe map. It shows the local area around that time.

It is likely there was a windmill in High Wych as early as 1770. The militia lists of the time show a steady increase in the number of millers from 1765 onwards. One of the names mentioned was a James Barker. The earliest map to show High Wych mill was an Ordnance Survey one published around 1842. The earliest reference to the mill itself was in 1799, when William Sharp of Sawbridgeworth insured a mill and roundhouse for £240. William Sharp worked at High Wych for close on 35 years and must have been quite a wealthy man. The 1839 tithe map shows Sharp as the owner of, not only Windmill Yard and Cottage, but 10 other properties, amongst which was the William IV public house in Sawbridgeworth. That same map also shows him as owning Sheering mill, as well as owning and living in a house in Knight Street. Our mill was at that point worked by William Edwards, a tenant or employee of Sharp.

Edwards stayed for five years and was followed by Timothy Puckle, who stayed until 1850, even though he was already 70 when he took over! That name, Puckle, is best known locally for his widow Elizabeth, who lived to the ripe old age of 105. James Dorkins was the miller from 1850 until 1855, when he was followed by John Stewart and his son, another John. The Stewarts carried on working the mill until 1871. They did not, however, live at the Windmill Cottage, but in Bakers Lane. For the next few years ,after the Stewarts, High Wych mill was worked by John Ward.

Those that followed Sharp, the first recorded miller, were probably tenants rather than owners. We already saw that Sharp had built up quite an empire, and by the 1850s William Sharp Jr. had followed his father in the family business. Not much later, the Tyser family moved into the village. They became owners of the Rising Sun beer house and bakery and remained here until the First World War. Even until the early 1930s, they still maintained ownership of the land on which the windmill had stood. The Tysers were a family of bakers and millers. It is possible that at least Windmill Cottage and Yard was sold directly by the Sharps to a member of the Tyser family.



High Wych Windmill around 1870.

In 1875 a great change came to the mill, which caused it to be dismantled and moved to Little Dunmow, where it became known as Throws Mill. At the time, as Hugh Howes noted from the above photograph, it was in a good condition and in good use. A covered wagon was standing in front of it, obviously in business. So why was it moved?

Three factors played a role. Firstly, the repeal of the corn laws opened up British markets to foreign grown corn, which was much cheaper than the home-grown stuff, and often even of better quality. High Wych mill was of course a corn mill, and foreign grown corn was mostly ground near the ports where it was unloaded. Secondly, in the early to mid-1870s there were a number of particularly bad harvests. Thirdly, Sawbridgeworth mill, then owned by the Barnards, was about to be rebuilt and converted to steam, a much more reliable provider of energy.



Throws Mill in Little Dunmow around 1912,

High Wych mill was bought by a Mr. Robert Hasler, a well-known miller, who had it re-erected at, and refurbished in, Little Dunmow. Local legend has it that it was moved on a low loader pulled by six horses. Patent sails and a fantail were fitted and the old oak windshaft, the poll head, tail wheel, and the four common sails, were discarded. It was the last post mill to be built in Essex. The mill stayed in operation in Little Dunmow until 1913, when it was pulled down and sold to a building firm. Its seasoned oak was used, so Kenneth Farries tells us, 'in a millionaire's mansion in the North of England', Yorkshire in fact. The octagonal roundhouse however stayed, and even today is used as a dwelling, although of course it has been very much altered.

The miller's cottage was already in a bad state of repair in 1875. It seemed to have been left there with nobody claiming ownership. As a result, it was squatted in by a number of land workers' families after they had been thrown out of their tied cottages. At the time of the 1881 census, William Maskell and his two sons lived there. In 1901 it was the Clements family. In 1911 Charles and Mary Brown lived in it, with their three children. They were followed by Martin Kempthorne, and Lilian, his wife. Three of their children, Fred, Len and Stan, were born there. In the 1920s, a Clements family once again resided in it, most probably a different one from the one in 1901. They were very likely it's last residents. When Mike and Nina Elsdon moved into the bungalow built on the site in 1947, the mill cottage was in ruins. Nina Elsdon noted that cobblestones from the cottage were visible until the 1980s. When in the 1950s husband Mike dug the foundations for a garage, he came across the remainder of the base of the mill.

Sources, were, and help came from, Andrew Elsdon, Kenneth Farries, Essex Windmills, Millers and Millwrights, Hugh Howes, *Wind, Water and Steam*, The Lee and Stort website, www.leeandstot.co.uk, the Mills Archive website, <https://new.millsarchive.org>, Cyril Moore's book *Hertfordshire Windmills and Windmillers*, Gary Thorpe, Janet van de Bilt, www.ancestry.co.uk and, as always, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies.