

Life and times of watermills

NETLEY Mill is situated a short distance downstream from Gomshall Mill, but unlike its more prestigious neighbour, it appears that at times use of the mill was rather irregular.

There are several references to Netley Mill being disused and empty and not having worked for some time.

This undoubtedly is an ancient mill site as, in 1233, a mill here belonged to the Abbey of Netley, which was situated by Southampton Water, and hence it became known as Netley Mill.

Unlike the more distinguished watermills situated on the Tillingbourne, Netley Mill was certainly the exception in the architectural sense

with its square ruined tower and pointed arched windows, reminiscent of the Gothic period.

The "ruined" section of the upper part of the mill has all the external appearance of a folly, which it was when the extant mill building was erected here towards the end of the 18th Century.

The occupier of Netley House, a large building to the north of the mill, decided that the common features of a watermill should not be the first building to be seen in his view south. Therefore, it was for this reason that the unusual external features were incorporated into the construction of the mill.

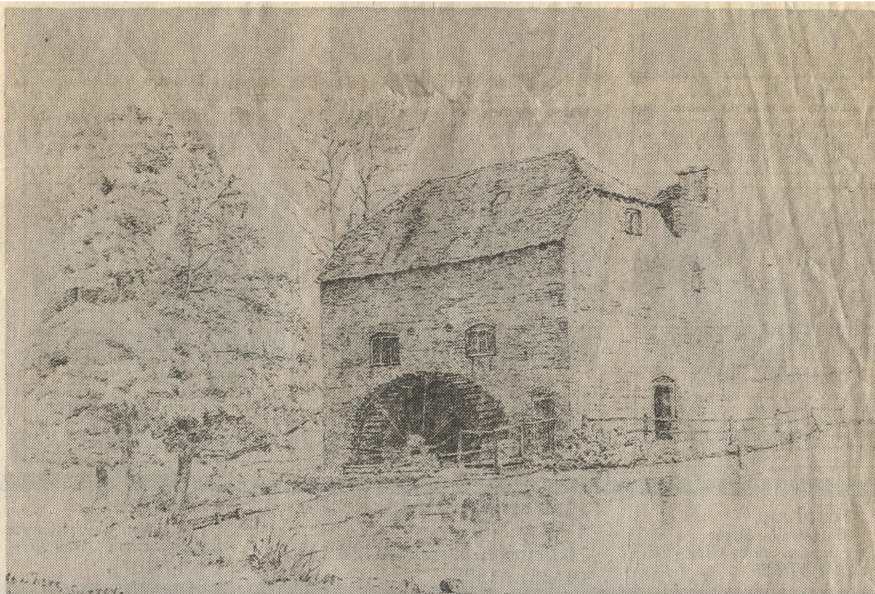
Today, tree growth around the mill has almost hidden it out of sight from the A25 which passes close to the site.

● This is an extract from the book *The Watermills of*

Surrey by Derek Stidder, which chronicles the history of more than 120 watermills, the people who worked them and their surviving machinery.

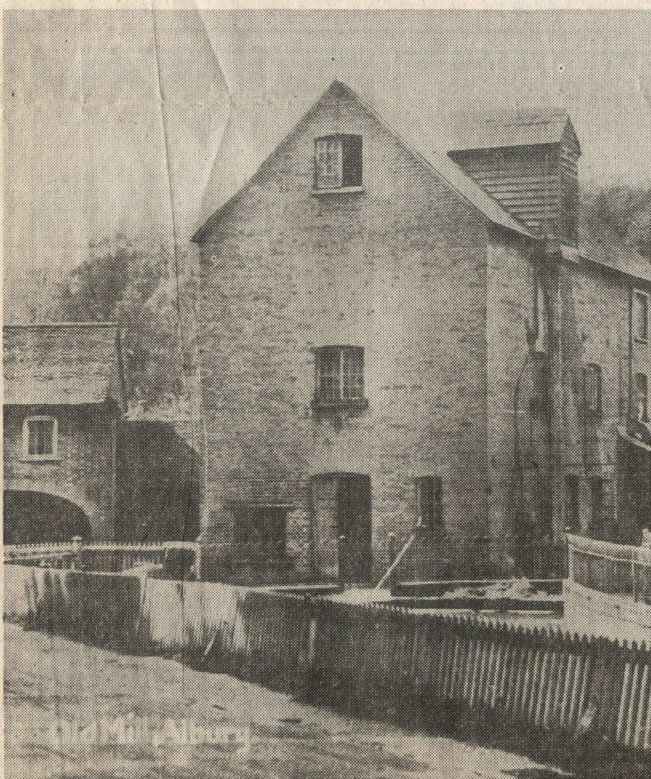
It is to be published initially as a limited edition of numbered copies available from the publisher only by prior reservation at £16.95 with no payment before publication. After publication the book will retail at £18.95. It will be a quality case-bound volume, gilt lettered and jacketed, with a concise text and about 120 photographs.

Copies can be ordered at the Guildford Tourist Board office at 72a High Street Guildford and at the Guildford Muniment Rooms near Castle Arch, or direct from the publishers, Barracuda Books Ltd., Meadows House, Well Street, Buckingham MK18 1EW, telephone 0280 814441.



An impression of Netley Mill as it was around 1890.

Moving story of the mills of Albury



An old photograph of the corn mill in modern Albury, now occupied by Albury Laboratories.

THE recent closure of Bottings' corn mill on the Tillingbourne between the villages of Albury and Chilworth prompts the question: "Where was Albury Mill?"

The situation is confused because the original village of Albury was near the old church and mansion house in what is now known as Albury Park. The terraced gardens of the house were laid out in 1667 by John Evelyn, the diarist, and created a head of water which was used for a new corn mill called Albury Mill.

This was destroyed in 1727 when gunpowder being stored there exploded. It was rebuilt and in 1790 converted into a paper mill. The papermaker was Charles Ball who made banknote paper, including paper used by members of the French royal family to forge assignats, paper notes issued by the revolutionary government and aimed at undermining the French currency.

By this time the owners of the manor were harassing the villagers and many of them moved a mile or so downstream to the neighbouring village of Weston Street. This process continued and Ball himself left in 1810. The mill was later rebuilt as the laundry of Henry Drummond's new mansion house and has the mock Tudor chimneys so characteristic of the buildings Pugin built for Drummond at Albury. The building has been converted into a house and was recently refurbished.

By about 1830 the former village in the park was deserted and Weston Street took over the name Albury. In particular the corn mill at Weston Street became Albury Mill. This was the mill set on fire in 1831 by James Warner, who then tried to shoot the miller, who was overseer of the poor.

Warner was executed for attempted murder. The rebuilt mill is now occupied by Albury Laboratories.

When he left the mill in Albury Park, Ball retired but built two new paper mills for his sons at Paynes Pond, now known as Waterloo Pond, and Postford Pond, both to the west of Albury. These ponds were used in the 17th Century to power the seven waterwheels of the Upper Works of the Chilworth gunpowder mills. However, by the end of the century the powder-maker, Sir Polycarpus Wharton, was in a debtors' prison and the site appears to have been unused during the 18th Century.

By Alan Crocker

The two new mills became known as Postford Upper Mill at Waterloo Pond in Albury and Postford Lower Mill at Postford Pond in Chilworth. Ball's sons, Charles and Edmund, made banknote paper at the mills and this led to William Cobbett's celebrated remark about the iniquities of paper and gunpowder making at Chilworth. It is important to note, however, that he was not referring to Chilworth paper mills which were located a mile farther west, where Blacksmith Lane crosses the Tillingbourne.

Following the Napoleonic Wars many banks failed and Charles and Edmund Ball became bankrupt. The mills then quickly passed through several hands before being taken over by the Magnay family who extended the Lower Mill and closed the Upper Mill.

By the 1840s the mill was the largest paper mill in Surrey and supplied paper for *The Times*.

In 1871 Postford Mill was taken over by a Frenchman, Eugene Pavy, to make a patent felted fabric which he had invented.

Meanwhile the Botting family had become the millers at the corn mill in the new Albury village. They clearly flourished, as in 1909 they moved to the larger vacant site at Postford Mill and built a new corn mill. Unfortunately they called this Albury Mill in spite of the fact that it lies in Chilworth.

By this time most mills had installed water turbines which were far more efficient than the traditional waterwheels. Bottings selected a Gilkes "Twin Lunedale" turbine made at Kendal in Cumbria and the casing of this remains at the entrance to the modern trout farm.

In addition, most corn mills were then equipped with roller milling machinery rather than the traditional mill stones and the new Albury Mill was no exception. It is remarkable that this equipment remains at the mill after 80 years. There are many restored corn mills in the country with pairs of mill stones but not many remain with early 20th-century roller mills. It is fortunate therefore that in 1989 the Surrey Industrial History Group recorded on video the final phase of flour milling at Bottings' mill.

So the name Albury has been used at different times for three distinct mills, one in Albury Park, one in Weston Street (now Albury) and one in Chilworth.

● Alan Crocker is chairman of the Surrey Industrial History Group and author of the book *Paper Mills of the Tillingbourne*. His wife Glenys is author of the booklet *A Guide to the Chilworth Gunpowder Mills*, which has recently been reprinted.