

## Great Bealings' Village Mills

By Peter Greene

It seems increasingly likely that two mills once stood in the parish of Great Bealings, one towards the eastern edge of the village centre (GR 6236 2485), the other to the north-west of the village and north of Boot Street (GR 6225 2493). The former shall be identified here as "Seckford Hall Mill" as she stood on copyhold land held in Seckford Hall's Court Rolls; the latter shall be identified here as "Great Bealings Hall Mill", as she seems likely to have been a copyhold property of this manor. Nothing remains of either mill.

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### Seckford Hall Mill (GR 6236 2485)

The mill was built, according to records kept by local Victorian diarist/archivist Canon Edward Moor, by Robert Merchant in 1810. She stood on a local high point called Hill Close, a curious, steep-sided promontory, overlooking the valley of the River Lark. By late 1810 the mill was up for sale, being in the occupation of Charles Todd (miller, rather than owner?). She was advertised as being situated "*on a very excellent eminence for wind*", and had one pair of stones. Erected on copyhold land from the Manor of Seckford Hall the Court Rolls show that in January of 1812 she was sold by William Field to William Cook for the very low price of £35. During Cook's ownership the mill was worked by Robert Barber. Mr. Cook sold it in 1823 to Samuel Wolton for £500. After working her for only 5 years Wolton sold the mill on to John Bartrum for £550. In 1841 Bartrum sold the property to Robert Harvey Orman Rivers for only £270, a relative Joseph Rivers working the mill. The final record of the windmill standing is found in the Seckford Hall Manorial records when Frederick William Catt bought it from Mr. Rivers in 1853 for just £200. Four years later, in 1857, the property passed to Daniel Charles de Medewe for £317-10-0, with the windmill described as having been "*taken down*"<sup>(2)</sup>.



Seckford Hall Mill being dismantled c1857  
by Canon Edward Moor (with kind permission Dr. Charles Dobree)  
*Possibly Martlesham Tower mill in background right horizon*

Milling during her lifetime was certainly challenging. She was built mid-way through the Napoleonic Wars. A substantial barracks had been built in Woodbridge (c.1803) to house some 5,000 soldiers, and major market for local mills. The soldiers left in 1815 after the defeat of Napoleon. She saw the post-war introduction of the Corn Laws in 1815 and the associated prosperity, but like so many of Suffolk's mills perhaps it was the repeal of these laws in 1846, and the importation of cheap American flour, that finally spelled her end. Perhaps she proved a more uneconomic mill than most, or maybe she was poorly constructed and inefficient; certainly Canon Moor (rector of Great Bealings) recorded that "*no one seems to have prospered in it*".

Seckford Hall Mill was twice struck by tragedy. On June 26<sup>th</sup> 1818, three-year-old William Sheming and his eight-year-old sister walked up the hill to buy some pollard (a cheap, fibre-rich by-product of the milling process, and used as an animal feed). As they were waiting for the miller, Robert Barber, to return with the pollard, William was struck on the head by the sails of the mill and died from his wounds three days later. Notably, at the inquest there was criticism, by the coroner, over the lack of protective railings or fencing<sup>(3)</sup>.

20 years later James Lycurgus Squire, owner and miller, had employed as his assistant a local 14-year-old boy, Robert Loom: it was not uncommon for young children to be given apprenticeships by the Parish. On August 24<sup>th</sup> 1838 Squire and Robert were at work grinding wheat. Robert was on the stone floor on the top floor of the mill and his master was below him on the first floor. Suddenly the shaft broke, Robert

cried out and Squires stopped the mill. The young lad was trapped and drawn in by the spar wheel and stone nut, and instantly crushed to death by the head wheel and wallower <sup>(4)</sup>.

The mill was in the news again in 1842 when local brickmakers Henry Button, his son Abraham, and a Robert Benny, a cooper, were charged with breaking into the mill and stealing fifteen stone of flour and a ham from Mr. James Rivers <sup>(5)</sup>. Henry Button was discharged from Woodbridge Gaol, though his son and Robert Benny were committed to Ipswich Gaol. Benny was acquitted, but Button was found guilty and sentenced in Ipswich to 7 years transportation <sup>(6)</sup>. In November he was placed on the “John Renwick”, along with 160 other male transportees and sent to Van Dieman’s Land (Tasmania, Australia). Abraham Button never arrived, dieing onboard the ship in January 1843 <sup>(7)</sup>.

Not a great deal is known about this mill from a technical point of view. She started, c.1810, with only one pair of stones. From the Inquest Post Mortem of Robert Loom it appears she had a cast iron shaft, and that she was running three pairs of French stones, almost certainly two in the head and one in the tail (pre-1837), and was fitted with an inclined oscillating sieve, or jumper (1841). She was an open-trestled mill with the cross-trees sitting on brick piers, and was driven by a pair of spring sails and a pair of common sails.

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### **Great Bealings Hall Mill (GR 6225 2493)**

Built pre-1803 in the middle-western edge of a field called Mill Hill “Great Bealings Hall Mill” was most probably an open-trestled post mill too. A “drift” or common-way, since gone, provided access to Grundisburgh, and Playford and the Bealings. The earliest, and only, map showing this mill dates from 1806; it shows an estate owned by Thomas Smith, with the mill in the occupation of Samuel Worledge <sup>(1)</sup>. A broken line around the mill suggests she was fenced off to protect people from her sails.

In 1810 Joesph Rist took out a fire insurance policy with Royal Exchange Fire Insurance (Policy No. 251815), the timber-built mill and gearing being valued at £80 and £35 respectively <sup>(2)</sup>, eight years earlier he had insured his mill, with the mill valued at £90, and “*gears, millstones, wire-machines and dreffing mills*” were valued at £30 (Policy No. 204167) <sup>(3)</sup>.

In 1811 the mill was advertised for sale in the Ipswich Journal. A map of the area, dated 1823, shows Mill Hill but does not show a mill. There are no later records that mention the mill, so it can be assumed that she was dismantled or demolished between 1811 and 1823, possibly as a consequence of the closure of Woodbridge Barracks in 1815, or the trading of Seckford Hall Mill in 1810. Mill Hill field was sold to a local miller, James Nichols, in 1841, but the manorial records make no mention of a mill.

At present it is still unclear what type of windmill she was, though being “timber built” she was either a smock mill or mostly probably open-trestled post mill (1803 – 1810). She had 2 pairs of stones (1811). She employed both bolting clothes and “*wire-machines*” for sifting and “*dreffing*” the flour, the pollard and the bran from the meal.

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### **“Mill Pitch” (GR XXXX XXXX exact location unknown)**

Finally, Hubert Simmons, a well known windmill historian, recorded that a field about 1 ½ miles east of Church, close to Seckford Hall is a field called Mill Pitch. There is no evidence that a windmill close here other than the obvious association with the field’s name. This could equally have been the location of a horse mill, common up to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and generally used to produce animal feed.

#### Seckford Hall Windmill

1. Notes accompanying a watercolour by Canon Edward Moor of Great Bealings.
2. Seckford Hall Manorial Records (Ipswich Record Office).
3. Inquest into death of William Sheming (Ipswich Record Office).
4. Inquest into death of Robert Loom (Ipswich Record Office).
5. Woodbridge Gaol Records (Ipswich Record Office)
6. Ipswich Gaol Records (Ipswich Record Office)
7. "Transportees from Suffolk to Australia, 1787-1867", Richard Deeks, Seven Sparrows Publishing, 2000.

#### Great Bealings Hall Windmill

1. Great Bealings Maps (Ipswich Record Office).
2. Royal Exchange Fire Insurance (MS7253-63) Guildhall Hall, London.
3. Royal Exchange Fire Insurance (MS7253-50) Guildhall Hall, London.

#### Mill Pitch

1. HES Simmons Archive (Imperial College Science Museum Library)

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