

MILLEND MILL, EASTINGTON - THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

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Introduction

The history of Millend Mill, was in many ways, analogous with a large number of other mills throughout the Stroud valleys, and like many others, it is a story of change, adaptation, growth and ultimately, decline. In many ways it mirrors the events taking place in the region, passing through periods of prosperity and slump in the woollen cloth trade, followed by a succession of new uses, some of which proved more successful than others. Now seems an opportune time to review its lengthy history as yet another change seems imminent, one that is likely to finally close its doors on its industrial past yet at the same time, open a new one in the shape of conversion to apartments. This is likely to come at some cost to the site as various add-on structures are likely to be demolished. However, if the current state of affairs continues, the already semi-derelict building faces an even bleaker future.

Early Days

First recorded as a Domesday corn mill, it was later incorporated into the growing local woollen cloth trade, initially through its conversion to a “humble fulling mill”. During the first quarter of the 19th century, when a tremendous amount of mill building and rebuilding was taking place in and around Stroud, it was completely rebuilt, becoming a fully equipped factory mill. Raw wool was taken in at one end and fully finished cloth was despatched from the other.

Thus, Millend is an old mill site, which at the time of Domesday, belonged to the Manor of Alkrintone (Alkerton), one of the two manors making up the parish of Eastington. At this time, it was doubtless a modest affair, probably powered by a single wooden undershot water wheel, technology contemporary with the period. Exactly how long Millend functioned solely as a corn mill is not known; however at some point in its early history, there are references to its use as a fulling mill. Certainly, by the 1550s, a fulling mill is mentioned, this possibly co-existing alongside the corn mill. If so, both functions are likely to have been accommodated under the same roof, much as its immediate neighbour, Churchend Mill, was from the 14th century. For several centuries the Millend area of Eastington formed a detached part of Leonard Stanley and by 1456, the mill was in the hands of the Leonard Stanley Priory. Millend was destined to remain part of Leonard Stanley until the 19th century until boundary changes finally incorporated it into Eastington.

During the first part of the 16th century, the mill had several owners before being sold by John Sandford to the Clutterbuck family, one long steeped in the local cloth trade. Their earliest known connection with Millend comes in 1524 with John Clutterbuck. His branch of the family retained ownership of Millend Mill for many years, doubtless fulling cloth woven by many of his relatives (many of whom were hand loom weavers) amongst others, up to the 1780s. By 1785, the owner was William Fryer of Wheatenhurst (Whitminster). He had married Richard Clutterbuck's widow in May 1782, a “lady to the possession of a large fortune”, perhaps confirming that fulling cloth for third parties was a lucrative employment. Richard was the last of a succession of Clutterbucks to operate the Millend fulling mill. Fryer

also owned land and property in other parts of the village, including Cress Green. In the same year he leased Millend Mill for a period of 21 years to the partnership of Henry Hicks and Edward Sheppard. Whereas the Hicks family would come to dominate the life of Eastington for several generations, Sheppard would eventually settle his attentions on Uley. During the period of the lease, Millend Mill was run in conjunction with another cloth mill in Uley. This was the fulling mill belonging to Henry Holbrow that in 1789, Hicks & Sheppard took a 10 year lease on. When the Millend lease expired in 1806, Hicks appears to have bought the Millend site and continued to work it alone whereas Sheppard concentrated on his operations in Uley.

Up to the 1790s, the road from Alkerton to Churchend passed through the River Frome in front of the mill via some form of ford that had presumably existed for centuries; however it was not until 1779 that the Parish authorities assumed some responsibility for it and in that year authorised funds for “makeing ye ford through Millend Brook. £25.10.7.”, as well as fords through the nearby Trilly Brook and the other arm of the Frome near Churchend Mill. These improvements had the unfortunate effect of attracting considerable amounts of traffic en route from Stroud to Bristol to such an extent that in 1780, a toll house was built to regulate the flow. A decade later, the Millend ford was replaced with a 3-arched stone bridge, still there beneath later works. This was not without its problems and in 1845, as a loaded cloth waggon belonging to Budd & Co. was passing the mill, one arch collapsed, toppling the waggon and team of horses into the water. The owners claimed damages of the Parish and a lengthy law suit ensued, the outcome of which is not known.

Growth and Expansion

As the mill grew in size and complexity, the site was added to on a number of occasions, until the entire Millend area around the Frome was crammed with buildings. Some were linked and others were separated from the main site by the Alkerton-Churchend lane. The peculiar topography and layout of the Millend area precluded development in anything but such a piecemeal fashion, not an uncommon occurrence at many Stroud mill sites. The focus of the enlarged site became a substantial stone-built mill built by Henry Hicks in 1818 that effectively swept away all traces of the previous fulling mill. Unusually, the mill's builder is known, being a Mr Blackwell of Brimscombe. The stone for the mill was sourced from the Brimscombe quarry and brought to the Eastington stone wharf on the Stroudwater Canal. From here, it was carted to Millend. The new mill was of five storeys, each floor being approximately 70 ft x 37 ft. Stone stairs ran from the ground floor to the upper floors, a sensible fire precaution, and one that was to prove its worth in later years. The attic space was lit by a range of dormers running the full length of the roof (although it is possible that these were added at a later date) and the roof clad with Welsh slates, also brought via the canal. Floors and internal structures were constructed in the traditional manner using timber.

Whether Hicks underestimated the space needed in the new mill is not known; however within a few years of its construction, a series of additional buildings began to be added to it. The constraints caused by the topography and layout of the site meant that these had to be squeezed into less than convenient areas. The first additions appear to have been the two long wings that flanked the mill race. The one was only around 20 ft wide and was squeezed between the race and what was then the lane that connected Millend with Cress Green and beyond. The wing was built using local Frampton-on-Severn bricks and it seems that originally it may have been of two storeys, rebuilt as a single storey later in the mill's life. The

Tithe Map shows a longer building with a section at right angles at the outer end. The latter was demolished and the building seems to have been reduced in height, two walls being rebuilt in later (Stonehouse?) brick, although the structure does not appear to have been significantly altered before 1872. It is known that substantial work was carried to the mill at some stage during the 1870s, following its sale (in 1872) to George Ford of Ryeford. He purchased the site from Catherine Hicks, widow of Henry Purnell Hicks, Henry Hicks' son. Ford converted the mill from a cloth mill to a corn mill.

From some point in its career, part of the wing incorporated the mill's engine house. In 1821, only a few years after the new mill had been completed, Henry Hicks & Sons had installed a Boulton & Watt steam engine fed by two boilers; this had a stroke of 3 ft and was rated at 14hp. Precisely where this was situated is not clear although there are indications that it may have been located on the opposite side of the mill in some form of add-on structure, adjacent to one of the water wheel pits. The remains of the present engine house and its rectangular brick-built stack appears to date from the 1870s rebuild. In its original form, the engine house was of two stories as there are references to the existence of a drying room on the upper floor, now long gone.

The Hand Loom Shop

The large brick-built wing on the opposite side of the mill race was also built probably in the 1830s, and was almost certainly built to house hand looms. One of the main reasons behind its construction may well have been as a consequence of the widespread weavers strikes of the 1820s. Local clothiers, realizing that they were vulnerable to further future stoppages, responded by building weaving shops adjacent to their existing mills. The old system whereby the outdoor master weaver worked independently and hired his own journeymen was soon to disappear. Weavers were the last workers in the cloth making chain to be brought into the mills. For centuries, the clack of the broad loom had been heard in every corner of the Parish, numerous cottages and small weaving sheds housing one or two looms. Gradually, the various stages of manufacture were brought under one roof and usually, the command of one man, until only the weavers were left as outdoor workers. Eventually, loom shops became an integral part of the cloth mill: this had the advantage of direct control by the mill owner, but the disadvantage of requiring a considerable amount of well-lit floor space and clothiers of the period commented ruefully that each broad loom took up as much working space as that needed for six shearmen. Eventually, the hand looms at Millend were replaced with a smaller number of power looms, although there is no indication of the number. Not surprisingly, power looms were not greeted with enthusiasm by the hand loom weavers, as each one installed effectively meant unemployment for more of their number.

By the 1830s, operation of Millend Mill had passed from the Hicks family to Charles Hooper, formerly their company manager. He also operated the other Parish mills and at the time, Hooper's mills were employing around 300 hands although he was still reliant on the services of around 200 outdoor weavers, operating looms in their cottages and a few loom sheds dotted around the village. By 1839, Hooper was recorded as having 59 hand looms (split between Churchend and Millend Mills) at work, a clear indication that additional building had taken place. The move to power looms in the Stroud region was a gradual one. Although the power loom had been successfully turned to cotton for many years, technical problems hindered its adoption by the woollen trade. Occasional examples began to appear in the district from the 1830s and the first power loom shed was constructed at Staffords Mill, Stroud, in 1831. Their numbers gradually increased as the technical drawbacks were overcome although initially,

only the coarser types of cloth were produced. As refinements continued, by the early 1840s, power looms around Stroud were successfully producing the superfine type for which that the area was famous.

Generally, Millend Mill prospered although in an era characterized by the woollen industry's increasing centralization into fewer, more highly mechanised mills, it was clearly at some disadvantage. The Hoopers' attempt to compete with this trend was not to build a new highly integrated mill, but to specialise their five local mills in such a way that each carried out certain specific stages in the chain of manufacture. Thus, Churchend Mill in Eastington was used exclusively for spinning, Meadow Mill (Eastington) and Bonds Mill (in Stonehouse) were used for weaving, Beards Mill in Leonard Stanley became the centre for cloth mending and dyeing, and Millend Mill became specialise in the fulling, drying and bleaching of cloth. Remarkably, all five mills were linked by a network of footpaths, along which, cloth was carried from stage to stage in the manufacturing process. Many of the footpaths were made up using ash from the mills' respective boilers and local legend has it that their width was based on that of two women carrying a basket between them!

Following Charles Hooper's death in 1869, his son, Charles Henry Hooper, took over the running of the family business. The decision was taken to dispose of Millend Mill and on the 9th September of the same year, it was put up for auction. The sale particulars give an indication of the extensive nature of the site, one that had been added to again and again, and describe:

“Millend Cloth Mills - an excellent building with stables, shops sheds, etc ... Boulton & Watt steam engine, three water wheels and their associated equipment, plus a suite of counting houses, wool stores, shops for sorting, picking, spinning, burling, weaving, packing, pressing and measuring rooms, dyeing and drying sheds, and a drying room over the engine house, etc”.

Also included in the sale were 2 acres of racking ground, a number of cottages, plus Millend House and its associated buildings, the Hoopers' family residence for many years. This was originally an Elizabethan timber-framed house, built by clothier Richard Clutterbuck *c.* 1552, substantially remodeled around 1791. Before the Hoopers' occupancy, it had also served as the Hicks family home. As with the local mills under their management, the Hoopers only leased the house during their stay there, ultimately moving to the more modest Eastington Lodge nearby.

A Change of Direction

Millend Mill was offered for sale in 1869, then again in 1872; presumably there had been no takers at the first attempt. At a time when the cloth trade was contracting, old cloth mills did not command much of a premium especially those in areas relatively remote from urban conurbations. At the second attempt, the mill (plus the estate and Millend House) was bought by George Ford, who promptly set about gutting it of its cloth making machinery and converting it into a sizable corn and saw mill. By 1876, he was trading as a miller and corn dealer of Eastington Flour Mills. The conversion resulted in the installation of a new steam engine and the reduction in the number of water wheels from three to two. The new engine replaced the aged Boulton & Watt unit and was of 20hp, coming complete with a high pressure single flue Cornish boiler (of 70-78 psi) with “Galloway, fittings, etc”. Despite the heavy investment involved, Ford did not keep the mill for long for in 1883, it was recorded as “disused” and in the same year, he sold it to Samuel and William Bridge of

Bristol. Ford was clearly in financial difficulties for in 1887, he was declared bankrupt. At the time, he also lost Millbottom Mill, in the Horsely Valley, which he had been using as a saw mill. The Bridges appear to have continued to work Millend but by 1887, it was up for sale again. Times were becoming increasingly difficult for rural corn mills, even those of Millend's size, as they battled against the competition from large steam-powered mills in and around Gloucester Docks and Healings Mill at Tewkesbury; these mills benefitted from relatively low transport costs as access to both river and canal transport was easy. Clearly, Millend was not in the same favoured position. By now, all of the Dock mills were relying on more efficient roller milling systems, as opposed to Millend's traditional mill stones and the mill was not to find another commercial application until its subsequent conversion to a maltings. The extent of the earlier conversion becomes clear from the details of the 1887 sales particulars. These describe not only the mill, but also warehouses, lofts, waterpower, dwelling house, outbuildings, 16 cottages, withy beds, and adjacent land. In addition, there was a dwelling house with large bake ovens adjacent to the mill. It goes on to describe the main mill in greater detail, referring to both its steam and water power:

“2 powerful wheels, each driving 4 pairs of mill stones laid in metal with bevel gears, elevators, & c; or one wheel driving the saws in the saw shed and the other turning lathes, & c. as required ...The stone floor is fitted with 7 pairs of first class new French mill stones. Adjoining the rear are extensive warehouses, stores, lofts, etc, 2 and 3 floor, upwards of 200 ft in length and 20 ft wide, a sawing shed of nearly 100 ft in length, etc.”

Also offered were various pieces of grain and flour cleaning machinery including a Child's aspirator and separator, Smith's purifier, Throop's brush and finishing machine, and a Child's polisher.

Following Ford's departure, Millend once again saw a change of use and after standing idle for around 8 years, c. 1895 was converted to a maltings. Malt is artificially germinated grain, usually barley with germination arrested at the critical point. Malt is the prime ingredient in beer and is used in foods such as biscuits and breakfast cereals. There were and still are two methods of producing malt, the traditional English method known as floor malting and the method favoured on the continent, pneumatic malting. In both the barley is soaked in steeping cisterns and then germinated and finally kilned where germination is arrested, but in floor malting germination takes place on large open floors, whereas in pneumatic malting, germination is carried out in drums or boxes. During germination the growing barley had to be turned. On the floors it was turned by men using large flat bladed wooden shovels. In the drums or boxes and grain was turned by mechanical means. Germination resulted in the growth of rootlets. After growing the green malt is moved to the drying kiln where germination is arrested and colour and flavour are given. After kilning the malt is dressed and the rootlets are removed.

The Mechanical Malting Company who came to operate the maltings, and its successor, the Automatic Malting Company, operated from Millend from c 1895 up to the early 1930s. Whether these companies lived up to their name and operated the maltings as pneumatic maltings is not known. The main change was the addition of the brick built malt kiln on the corner. It still survives in the year 2000 but does not look much like a kiln now as it has lost the typical pyramidal roof structure. It does retain one important feature which perhaps reflects the companies' names and that is a double floor (to the kiln). Double floored kilns are unusual, although there were at least two others in Gloucestershire, and they were not usually very successful in England, although they were used on the continent. The lattice of ironwork to support the perforated tiles still survives, as do some of the tiles, albeit having been used to

block the windows! No other evidence of the building's use as a maltings now survives, except memories.

Millend employed a number of local men for the important stages, as well as boys from the Parish. One onerous task, recounted ruefully by an old resident, given to the latter was to clear out the innumerable holes in the ceramic floor tiles that comprised the malting floor, using a "stick with a nail banged through the end" – an unenviable task for a few pence a day!

Certainly, for much of this later period it was run by the Sleeman Brothers, John and Oliver, although the latter was killed during the First World War. The Sleemans had a long history of milling and various family members had been millers in and around Portishead and Taunton. At one time, they also worked Kimmins Mill at Dudbridge, now part of the Sainsbury's site.

As well as operating as a maltings, and supplying the nearby breweries with malt, Millend for a time also produced malted biscuits (not very successfully, by all accounts!) as well as cattle cake. This was made from pear and apple residues supplied by local perry and cider makers, poor corn, plus the rootlets from the malting process. For a time, bird seed was also sold.

In 1922, Millend suffered its first major fire since 1861. Although the machinery employed in the mill had changed significantly since its time as a cloth mill, the legacy of timber floors, heavily impregnated with oils, etc. ensured that the 1818 mill and the brick additions at the front were effectively gutted. It lost its floors and all of the roof structure in the blaze but despite the considerable damage, the mill was eventually repaired, the upper section and roof structure of the brick sections being altered in the process. Business resumed, John Sleeman still running the operation. He, in a more modest fashion, carried on the paternalistic attitude adopted towards the Parish in earlier days by the Hicks and Hoopers, for in 1926, he paid for the repair of the church clock. However, it seems that by now, business was in decline, for in 1927:

“New and powerful machinery [has been] added to the works at Millend Mills, to meet requirements of the new branch of work being done at these mills”.

It seems that Millend had, once again, seen a change of use, reverting to a corn mill. Unlike earlier days, millstones were no longer used, improvements in technology dictating that the newer, more efficient roller mill system was employed. Millend's third steam engine was now used to drive the new machinery.

John Sleeman now disappears from the scene, operations being taken over by F C Martin & Sons, Millers of Millend, a company that also operated from Tewkesbury. The corn mill carried on at least up to 1939. Precisely what happened during the Second World War period is not clear; however, by the early 1950s grain drying was being carried out at the mill. In later years, it was relegated to storage and subsequently, the restoration and shipment of antiques, mainly destined for the United States. The Author still recalls massive articulated lorries struggling to negotiate the two narrow bridges at Churchend, en route for Millend, and the countless times that the parapets and railings were demolished in the process!

Finale

At the time of writing (2000), several proposals have been made for the redevelopment of the mill into apartments. A decade of disuse plus many more of little maintenance has resulted in severe decay to the main structures to the extent that parts of the mill's structural integrity must be in some doubt. Realistically, such a conversion appears to offer the only hope for the future as no application for commercial or industrial re-use has emerged since the antique business finally closed its doors over a decade ago. Earlier conversion proposals were rejected on various grounds such as flooding risks and increased traffic flow to this awkward site and negotiations are still on-going. It remains to be seen whether a suitable compromise can be achieved between developer and planners.

The most recent proposals suggest the demolition of a number of utilitarian extensions added to the mill, probably during the 1950s, plus the conversion and extension of the hand loom shop to four apartments overlooking the mill race. Earlier plans called for the demolition of the surviving malt kiln, although more recently, these proposals have been changed to allow for its conversion into two apartments. Almost inevitably, some new building would be associated with the mill's proposed conversion, with new housing being built on the unused adjacent plot of land. At the time of writing (April 2001) the latest proposals have been rejected by local planners and it remains to be seen what the eventual outcome for this historic site will be.

References

The main sources of information were:

Various trade directories and related publications held in the Gloucestershire Collection, Stroud Library and in private hands.

Extracts from the Eastington Magazine, published from the latter part of the 19th century, largely by the local Temperance Society.

Several sets of Sales Particulars held in Gloucestershire Records Office (1869 and 1872) and in private hands.

Drawings from The Boulton & Watt Collection, held by Birmingham Library Services. The Eastington Tithe Map and several estate maps referring to the sale of Millend. Several extracts from The History of Eastington (A E Keys), 1953.

Similarly, several useful extracts from The Cloth Industry in the West of England from 1640 to 1880 (1987 ed) by J. de L. Mann.

Information on the Sleemans was kindly supplied by Mr and Mrs S Rendell of Weston-Super-Mare who are currently researching the history of this interesting family.

Information was also gleaned from the recollections of older villagers and former employees of the mill. The Author is indebted to their long memories.