



THE OLD WRAXALL MILL

PENNANT REPRINTS N^o 12

WRAXALL

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Previously published February 2003 by Nailsea & District Local History Society

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Quite a few years ago Wilfred and I spent a day at Trowbridge Record Office looking through the "Calley Papers". Among these was an Indenture dated 10th September 1709, between John Codrington (of Wraxall Lodge later Court) and Joseph Emery, which contained a lease of premises.

"Granted by late wife Elizabeth (Codrington) before her inter-marriage, by her then name of Elizabeth Gorges of Wraxall, unto Thomas Emery, his executors, administrators and aforesigns for the term of fourscore and nineteen years, determinable on the several draughts of the said Thomas Emery and Mary his wife and Jane Emery his daughter, who are still living. As in consideration of the rents, heriots, covenants for building and other reservations and agreements herein after received and contained on the part of the said Joseph Emery, his executors and administrators to be paid, observed and performed and for diverse and other considerations, the said John Codrington---- to Joseph Emery all that water Grist Mill commonly called or known by the

name of Wraxhall's Mill, situate and lying and being in the parish of Wraxall aforesaid, and also the dwelling house thereunto, now or lately belonging on the (loft?) or plate where the same lately stood. The same dwelling house having been lately burnt down and consumed by accidental fire. And all ways paths, passages, water courses, ponds, ffloud gates, (stanks?), banks, commons and all other appurtenances to the said Mill and premises belonging --- For fourscore and nineteen years to the aforesaid Joseph Emery, Elizabeth his wife and Thomas their son now aged about two years, ---- yearly and every year the sum of eight shillings of lawful money of Great Britain, on the twenty ninth day of September and twenty fifth of March in every years by equal portions. And also by paying to John Codrington, his heirs etc and upon the decease of them Joseph Emery, Elizabeth and son Thomas, the sum of sixteen shillings like money, for and in the name of an herriott. If they shall be behind with either or both by the space of twenty one days, they shall become one and ought to be paid as aforesaid, being lawfully demanded, and no other distress to be had or taken on the premises, sufficient for the levying thereof. Then and in such case it shall and may be lawful for the said John Codrington ---- to re-enter the same and re-possess to his former estate. Anything herein contained to the contrary thereof, in anywise, notwithstanding. Joseph Emery doth covenant, promise and grant to John Codrington to pay from time to time the rents etc also to rebuild the said late dwelling house, or erect and build a new dwelling house in the room and stead thereof, with such outhousings and conveniences as he shall think proper. And complete in a firm and substantial and workmanlike manner and roof with tile and not with thatch, straw or helms, and keep all buildings tiled and not suffer to be thatched and keep all buildings, banks etc. in good and sufficient repair".

This intrigued us, so we decided to try to find where this mill had been. We studied old maps and found that the marked

river did not correspond with the present day one. We walked the field on the east side of Wraxall House because we remembered from our childhood that there were two small stone bridges in the middle of a field, seemingly with no real purpose. In fact the bridges are over an old dried out river bed. We traced this back to the present river, found where the old one had been blocked and a new bed created. This is raised several feet above the original floor of the field to the south. Presumably, when the mill was built at the side of Wraxall House, this new raised bed gave enough power in the flow of the water for the overshot wheel which powered the mill.

There is of course the possibility that the new mill cottage was built on the site of the one that was burnt prior to the lease of 1709, and the mill buildings moved to this site which would account for the river diversion.

Further back in the river bank is a flood hatch and some of the water still runs into a channel which flows to the boundary of Wraxall House and continues through. At a time when the house was unoccupied but was being prepared for use as a residential school for mentally handicapped young people, Wilfred and I were given permission to go to the bottom of the grounds where the river runs. Here we found two pieces of machinery that had controlled the sluice for the water flow. There is an ornamental lake nearby which could have been a mill pond, also a bridge over the end of the lake and where the leat begins. This bridge leads from the House grounds to a field and also to various out-buildings. From these buildings there was a large, high wooden door leading onto the main road. The door has been replaced by a smaller one and a metal gate. This older mill would almost certainly have had an undershot wheel. Near the House are at least two old mill stones but from which mill they came from, we do not know.

We made a second visit to the site taking Margaret Thomas with us. She and Wilfred measured the leat, took photos of the remains of the controls and estimated the size of the wheel by what seemed to be a bearing in the bank, using this as the approximate centre of the wheel and measuring to the bed of the leat.

With reference to the maps that we had studied. It seems that Day and Masters shows the old river bed. Greenwood 1822 shows the new bed, and the Wraxall Tithe 1837 shows both. It could be presumed by this that the new mill may have been built somewhere between, say, 1780 and 1820. We have wondered if the reason for the flood hatch being built into the river bank was to allow both mills to run in conjunction for a while or only to provide water for the lake once the old mill had ceased to be worked. There is a photo by William Ravenhill Stock of the lake which would date from the mid 1800's.

As a matter of interest, the Wraxall Churchwardens Accounts mention occasions when the bridge by the mill was repaired, one date being 1726, and in 1764 "Paid Godwin Stanbury making two bridges below the Mill £4-11s-2d" There was also a Mill Lane mentioned when Chas Bull was paid in 1727 for mending fallen banks by order of Colonel Codrington.

Mr Bodman refers to some of the millers. The Emery family definitely ran the older mill and probably William Curtis did as well. William Vowles and John Day would have been at the new mill. Two more millers can be named. According to the Wraxall parish registers, in April 1656 John Wallis of Wraxall, miller married Ann Jones, and in March 1693 "old King Cable of the mill" was buried. Incidentally it was Mrs Griffin and not Mrs Griffiths who sold sweets and tobacco from the mill cottage.