

CHAPTER 11 - THE MILL

First mentioned in 1267

A mill, whether it be water or wind driven, was an important part in the life of a village especially during the period of time when the resources of the parish were geared to supporting its inhabitants. The earliest mills were motivated by running water and were a source of much profit to their owners, hence the many entries relating to such in Domesday Book. With the mill went 'suit of mill' the obligation for all to take their grain there to be milled – at a price.

At what early date Stapleford could boast a mill we shall probably never know; there is no mention of one in the Domesday entry and when one realises that the population amounted to approximately 45 souls it is not surprising. We have to wait almost two hundred years before the records disclose the fact that a water-mill was present in Stapleford. The disclosure appears in the Inquisition Post Mortem held after the death of Richard Heriz, in the year 1267, and who had held "a moiety of the water mill, price 10 shillings yearly".¹ Richard's son, Hugh Heriz, in turn held the same moiety, together with a pond; when he died in 1297 it was still returned at the same yearly value.²

One moiety devolved on Robert Matley 1428

With one exception, of which I shall treat later, it is the middle of the 15th century before any more is heard of the water-mill, at which time depression and decay were widespread throughout the land; with a diminished population, due to repeated outbreaks of plague, and economic stagnation in both town and countryside, rents and values had slumped; Stapleford was no exception to the general rule.

Two Inquisitions Post Mortem, held on the 29th June 1454, reveal a little more about the mill, and the information contained therein is enlarged upon by two entries in the Fine Rolls for earlier years. It appears that the part of the Heriz estate which had devolved upon Robert Matley by 1428 contained one of the moieties of the water mill, an interest which was later owned by Robert's son, Thomas Matley.

Death of Thomas Matley 1439

This Thomas had died 20th November 1439 and had held of the King of his Honour of Peverel, 1 ruinous messuage, 11 bovates of land and 2 parts of a moiety of the watermill in Stapleford worth 30 shillings yearly as well as rents amounting to 5 shillings a year. All held by fealty and suit of court at Nottingham Castle every three weeks for all services. From the day of Thomas's death, the King had received the issues and profits from these premises and still did so at the time the Inquisition was

¹ IPM 5 Hen III

² IPM 25 Edw.I

taken. Thomas's heir was his daughter, Margaret, aged 17 years in 1454 and married to John Davenport.³

The King committed to William Babyngton and Hugh Teverey the keeping of the mill 1441

On 1st June 1441 the King committed to William Babyngton, esquire, and Hugh Teverey, gentleman, by mainprize of John Vavaseur and Charles Shaw, both of London, the keeping of a ruinous messuage, 8 bovates of land, two thirds if a moiety of a ruinous watermill, and a free rent of 4 shillings yearly, receivable at St. martin and Pentecost equally, from divers free tenants in Stapleford, all of which properties and rents Thomas Matley had held of the King. The commitment was for 12 years from Pentecost (4th June 1441) at a yearly farm of 34 shillings and 8 pence, with a clause touching the maintenance of the premises etc. but with a proviso that if any other person be willing, without fraud, to give more by way of increment for the said keeping, then William and Hugh would be bound to pay such larger sum if they would still have them;⁴ Plainly the king was out to get as much for the premises as he could. A discrepancy of 3 bovates of land and 1 shilling rent will be noted between the extent given in the IPM and that in the commitment.

Remainder one third of the moiety held in dower

Of course, the forgoing only appertains to two thirds of the moiety: clearly a suggestion that there is a further one third and that this remaining part will be a dowager's portion, a fact confirmed in the second Inquisition held that same day. This one refers to Elena Vernon who was the wife of Robert Matley and was later also the wife of William Herresse. She died 16th October 1442 on which day she was holding a dower of the inheritance of Margaret, daughter and heir of Thomas Matley son and heir of Robert, 2 messuages, 6 bovates of land 1 third of a moiety of a water mill, 1 third part of a rent of 5 shillings a year (at this rate Thomas Matley's IPM should have stated two thirds of rent of 5 shillings a year), all worth 17 shillings and 4 pence a year clear and held of the King on the same terms as set out in Thomas's Inquisition. From the day of Elena's death, the King has received all the issues and profits from these premises and still did so at the time of the IPM. Richard Vernon was Elena's next heir and (according to the IPM) was aged 28 and more. This would mean that he was born in 1426 and therefore conflicts with the record that suggests that Robert Matley was alive in 1428. However, anomalies do occur even in official records and can be noted many times over. (Richard Vernon may have been Elena's heir but it was Margaret who was Thomas Matley's heir).⁵

³ IPM 32 Hen VI.

⁴ Cal. FR 19 Hen VI

⁵ IPM 32 Hen VI

Commitment of dower share to Ralph Brydale 1445

On 9th June 1445 commitment was made to John Bydale, by mainprize of Thomas Bold and Ralph Brydale, gentlemen, of Derby, of that portion which had been in dower and which comprised 1 messuage, 4 bovates of land and 1 third part of 2 thirds of a water mill in Stapleford. (I cannot help thinking that this is an error and should have read simply “1 third part of a moiety of a water mill”), which Elena Vernon, late the wife of William Herresse, held on the day of her death in dower of the inheritance of Isabel (see, another divergence from the Inquisition) daughter and heir of Thomas Matley. The premises were to be held from Easter (28th March) 1445 for 10 years at a farm of 17 shillings and 4 pence yearly at Michaelmas and Easter equally. A proviso similar to that mentioned in the other commitment was also included⁶. Here again is a slight difference between the extent given in the Inquisition and that in the Commitment.

So now we have one commitment due to expire before the holding of the Inquisitions and one approximately a year later. One in the hands of William Babyngton and Hugh Teverey, and the other in the hands of John Brydale. Combined, these still only represent one of the moieties.

There is some ground for believing that perhaps William Babyngton later became possessed of the whole of this moiety. Sir John Babyngton of Chilwell died in 1561 and certain premises and lands in Stapleford passed to his sister Ethelinda Delfes/Elizabeth Eltonhead (take your pick from the records!) and eventually to her daughter Elena, wife of Sir Robert Sheffield, and then from generation to generation until we find their great-great-grandson, Edmund, Lord Sheffield, selling land and property in Stapleford to Francis Hollingworth in 1591 - property which included a moiety of the water mill.⁷

I think that the forgoing can be reasonably construed to refer entirely to the Heriz moiety. It would be satisfying to know the names of the holders of the other moiety who were contemporaneous with that family. One may assume that it would be logical for their solid-sub-feudatories, the Stapleford, to fit this position, but it had been seen already that the Inquisition Post Mortem relating to this family makes no mention whatsoever of a water mill; and we must continue in ignorance of the facts.

William de Gray grants a moiety to Thomas de Bewicke 1356

In 1356 William de Gray of Sandiacre (claimed by Thoroton to be uncle to Nicholas de Stapleford) granted to Thomas de Bewicke-miller-a moiety of the water mill of Stapleford for a term of 15 years at a rent of 5 shillings a year. BM Lansdown 671. This of course could well be the moiety which has already been mentioned but I think it more than likely to be the elusive half.

⁶ Cal.FR 23 Hen VI

⁷ DP 51/3

A moiety held by John Dampard 1507

Much, much later there is an Inquisition Post Mortem held upon the death of a John Dampard of Stapleford who died 16th May 1507 and who held here a messuage, 5 cottages 18 bovates of land, 18 acres of meadow and a moiety of the water mill, all worth £6:13:4 and held of the King of the Honour of Peverel. John's heir was his sister Margery, aged 23, wife of someone the Inquisition unfortunately does not record.⁸

Held by the Hollingworth family 1587

At some later point in its history this second moiety came into the possession of the Hollingworth family for in 1587 Katherine Hollingworth sold quite a bit of property and land in Stapleford, including a moiety of the water mill, to her son Francis, who, as has just been stated was to buy 4 years later the other moiety from Lord Sheffield.⁹ The rent charge on this property imposed upon Francis by his mother is dealt with in the chapter on the Hollingworths.

Both moieties held by one family

Even though the whole of the watermill was now in the hands of one man the two moieties continued as separate entities remaining as parts of and appurtenant to the parcels purchased separately by Francis Hollingworth. We know that Luke Fawkener, by marrying the widow of George Storer, had become possessed of "Storers Farm". In his will he speaks of his "miller"-so perforce he must have had a mill; we know from subsequent mortgages that a moiety of the water mill was included with Storer's Farm although not specifically described as part of that farm and I suggest that this moiety is the one purchased of Edmund Sheffield.

The other moiety went along with the house of Henry and Elizabeth Wilde; Elizabeth, we must remember, was Luke's daughter and widow of John Hollingworth. What more natural that this moiety should be the one which accompanied the family homestead sold by Katherine to Francis along with other properties?

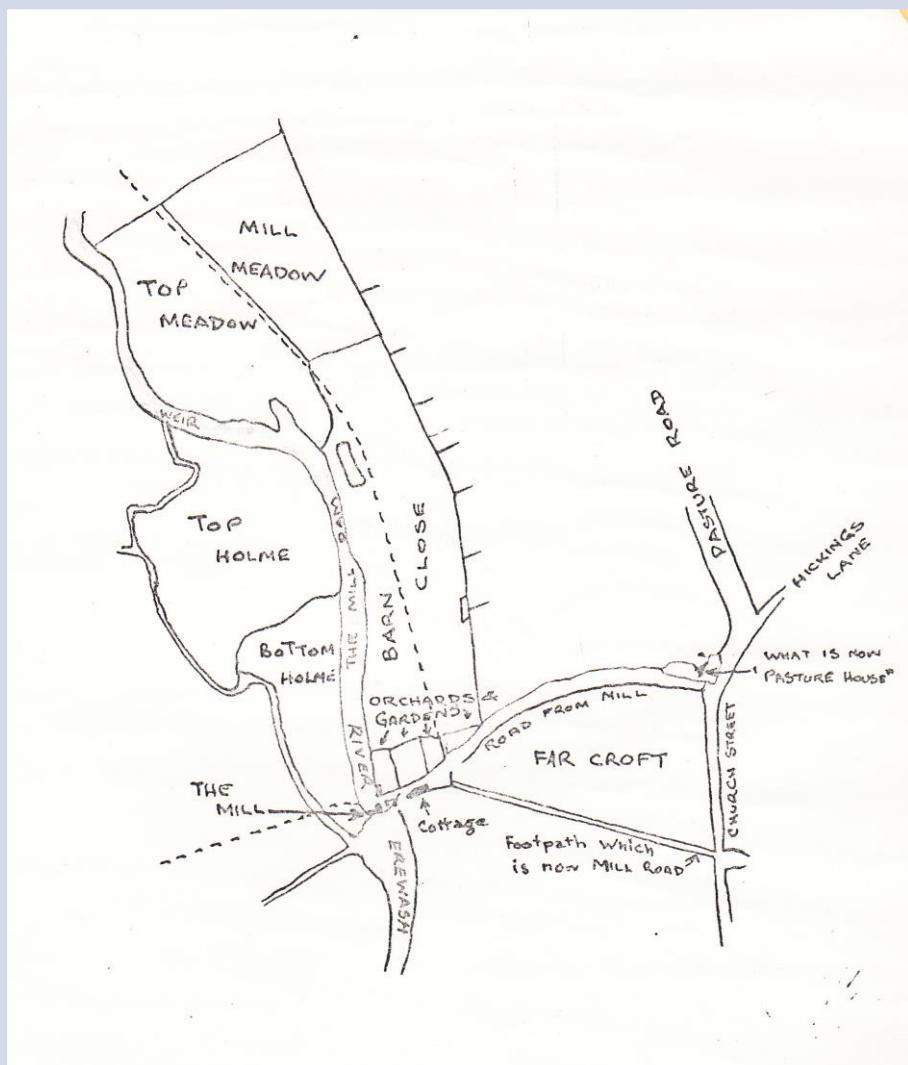
Mill passes into the hands of William Chambers 1686

The mill remained with the Hollingworths until the death of John in 1686 after which time it appears to have passed into the Chambers family of Derby for a William Chambers of that time brought other properties which had belonged to the Hollingworths. At the time of the Enclosure Act of 1771 William Chambers D.D. (probably grandson of the forgoing WC) was its owner with Francis Hooley as miller.

⁸ IPN 24 Hen VII

⁹ DP 51/1

It later became the Warren estate, and was eventually sold, in lots, by auction on 7th October 1856. At this time the miller was Peter Kent and the cottage to the east of the mill (once Lazenby's shop) was the mill cottage. Along with the mill went certain adjacent gardens and orchards, and lands known by the names of Top Meadow, Mill meadow, Barn Close, Top Holme, Bottom Holme (there was also a Top and Bottom Holme south of the mill) and the Mill Dam. From the waste weir to the mill; (this latter is now devoid of water and is merely a depression in the ground). These lands lay due north of the mill and in addition there was the Far Croft which comprised all the land from what is now Pasture House to Mill Road (Manor Avenue sprawls over it) together with the road which ran from the mill to, again, Pasture House following that part of the Sick Dyke after it leaves Pasture Road/Church Street on its way to join the Erewash. (Mill road was then not much more than a footpath.)¹⁰



Peter Kent miller

Peter Kent was born in Risley in Derbyshire and was later followed as miller by his son, Peter whose first wife died in 1866 and the gravestone in the church yard erected

¹⁰ NCRO E92/3.

to her memory is one of the few that “re-organization” and “betterment” have miraculously allowed to remain. Part of the inscription reads “Sarah, wife of Peter Kent of Stapleford Mill” – a simple statement but one that conjures up a picture of a long-lost rural Stapleford, so vastly different to the built-up area of today. Peter Kent later moved to Breaston, where he was miller, his place being taken in Stapleford by William Gamble who hailed from Market Overton in Rutland. The history of the mill is not all extents and deeds: in 1783 when Gervase Wheeldon (d.1814) was the miller, a Joseph Raynor of Stapleford was committed to the House of Correction at Nottingham for three years and was ordered to be twice privately whipped for Breaking into and entering the mill and taking from thence a strike of wheat valued at 10 pence.¹¹

It is not without its tragedies either. In 1844 John Hart, a collier lad aged 14 was killed whilst fishing from the wheel. The miller had set in motion the machinery and was unaware of the boy’s presence.¹²

Today the old mill no longer performs its intended duty; the water which turned its great wheel has been diverted away leaving the old watercourse dry except in time of flood; the building is now used as a social club but how long before the “planners” cast a malevolent eye upon it?

The millers of Stapleford

Some of the Millers of Stapleford.

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|---|---------------------|------|---|
| * | Thomas de Bewicke | 1356 | * |
| | Robert Masset | 1640 | |
| | John Thornealy | 1663 | * |
| | John Bigge | 1671 | |
| | Richard Ingleton | 1718 | * |
| | Francis Hooley | 1771 | * |
| | Gervase Wheeldon | 1783 | * |
| | Peter Kent, father, | 1851 | * |
| | Peter Kent, son | 1866 | * |
| | William Gamble | 1871 | |

Asterisks denote that these men are known to be water-corn-millers.

¹¹ NQS 1783.

¹² Par. Reg.