

WINDMILLS

The development of windmill power commenced in the twelfth century, which allowed better distribution than its antecedent, the watermill, in meeting local need. Whilst the earliest record of mills in Toft go no further back in history than the late C18 it is clear from the better preserved records of neighbouring villages of Bourn and Haslingfield, that manorial windmills were in existence locally from late C13 onwards. In later history Toft had two windmills, one in West Field (Miller's Lane) whose earliest documentation is from 1815 up to 1896. There is no information regarding its eventual demolition. The site of the mill is indicated on the Enclosure Maps of 1812 and 1845. Like its counterpart on the Comberton Road, between Toft and Comberton, the sites would have included besides the mill structure, associated land, cottages and barns. The recycling point on Comberton Road today marks the location of the second mill. The earliest record of the 'Comberton' Mill is from 1773 and its eventual demise is again unknown. The mill was blown down in 1854, but subsequently restored and was still in existence until at least 1883.

There are no illustrations of either of these, but they were thought to both be Post Mills - so named because of the large upright post on which the main structure (the body, or buck) is balanced. By mounting the body this way the sails may be rotated to face directly into the wind. The nearby mill on the Caxton Road at Bourn, dating back before 1636, is a preserved example of such a windmill. With its single pair of milling stones, it is smaller in scale than the Toft mills with their 2 pairs of stones. Bourn Mill bears a clear resemblance to historical depictions of mills before the C17.

The windmill replaced animal power (probably by horses) in grinding of grain, although in the early medieval period it was customary for many peasant households to grind grain for their own needs by hand. A mill could grind up to six bushels of grain per hour if the wind was steady (a bushel of wheat weighs 62lbs). During the medieval period mills were erected by the lord of the manor, who maintained a monopoly over milling. The mills would be operated by a sokeman (a particular form of tenure). Tenants of the manor were obliged to grind their corn at the lord's mill at a fixed rate of toll in kind, usually 1/16th of the corn ground (the grist). As substantial landowners the Church was similarly involved in windmilling.

From the C19 windmills were replaced by mechanically operated milling. Expanding trade in cheap foreign wheat led to development of large mills at ports, and the growth of the railway network enabled flour to be distributed cheaply to most towns and villages in the country. These changes accompanied the shift of population and the economy from rural areas to the expanding townships. Many small mills kept going by offering a local service to farmers for animal feed, but the growth of small mechanically powered milling machines, not reliant on weather conditions and without the high relative costs of maintaining wind-driven mills, eroded the market. The instalment of the Excelsior Corn Mill at the Mount, in the centre of the village, exemplified this transition.

MILLS AND MILLERS

The mill in West Field

1815

The windmill and premises were owned by John Bowyer of Offord D'Arcy, Huntingdonshire, and recorded in his last Will & Testament of 25 April 1815.

1833 (12 Dec.)

Joseph Stanford accepted mortgage from John Hart

1835 (19 December)

Richard Duce of Caldecote is listed as a miller. John Hart is listed as a resident at Toft. Mention is made on papers of 161 acres and 4 poles at Mill Hill Toft.

1825 (19 December)

Lease of mill - John Finch and Richard Duce to John Hart. Windmill at Mill Hill, wind grist or corn mill, all stones, sails and links and spindles, forming part of the land and estate belonging to Mrs Anne Baron, William Harradine and Daniel Waite. ☒

1837 (6 January)

Mortgage in fee of a freehold estate in Toft, for securing £80 and Interest, John Hart and Others to James Hunt.

1856 (19 April)

Conveyance of premises in Toft, James Hunt & Another to Thomas Danes.

1857 (10 June)

Mortgage for premises in Toft, for securing £40 and interest. Thomas Danes to Edmund Foster.

1860 (8 December)

Conveyance of Windmill and land at Toft. Thomas Danes and his mortgage to Joseph Mustill.

1860 (10 December)

Mortgage of windmill and land at Toft. Joseph Mustill to Ephraim Wayman.

1861 (30 December)

Transfer of mortgage to E Wayman, (by direction of Joseph Mustill) to John Bowyer.

1868 (9 April)

Auction held at The Red Lion in Toft for Sale of Post Windmill, sheds and cottages.

Sold at auction on behalf of George and William Bowyer, the appointed Executors of John Bowyer. The mortgages sold to Valentine Beldam of Royston, the owner of the surrounding land and resident at Toft Manor from 1900 to 1911. The price was £100, suggesting that this was not a going concern.

1883

Marritt Chas. miller (wind) and corn merchant, resident of Toft.

1896

Creek Elisa A. Mrs, grocer, draper, boot & shoe dealer, miller (steam) & farmer) resident in Toft.

Comberton Road windmill

As far as is known, there were no windmills in Comberton parish. It has been assumed that millers recorded as resident in Comberton, would have used the windmill in Toft parish.

1773 (6 June)

To be sold. Post mill, commonly known as the Comberton mill; in good repair and capable of doing a great deal of benefit.

1808 (11 June)

TOFT. Bakers/Millers to be let. Windmill on the road between Toft and Comberton.

1812

Recorded as then being in the possession of Mary Holder

1812 (28 February)

(1) To be sold by auction on Saturday 7 March 1812, windmill in the occupation (miller) of Thomas Papworth.

(2) 8 May 1812 to be let or sold, windmill in the occupation of Thomas Papworth.

1854 (28 January)

On Friday last, the windmill was blown down. The miller, William Webb, was in the mill at the time and was considerably hurt and great hopes are entertained for his recovery.

1883

Beldam Robert, miller (wind). Resident in Comberton.

1896

Beldam William, miller (steam) Resident in Comberton.

Subject researched by Michael Quenby

Sources:

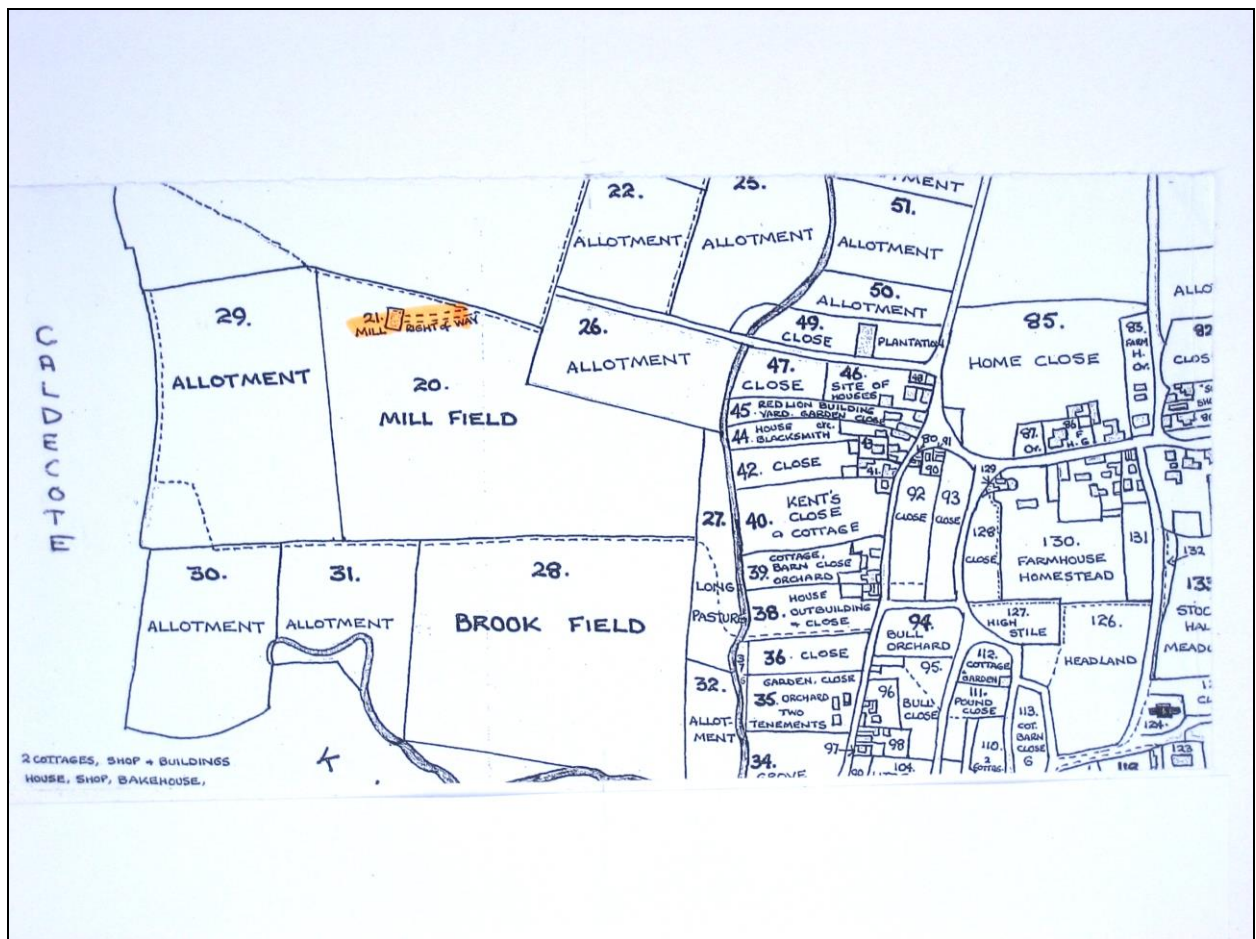
Cambridgeshire Collection

Cambridgeshire Windmills, Allan Lloyd, Vintage Spirit magazine January 2009

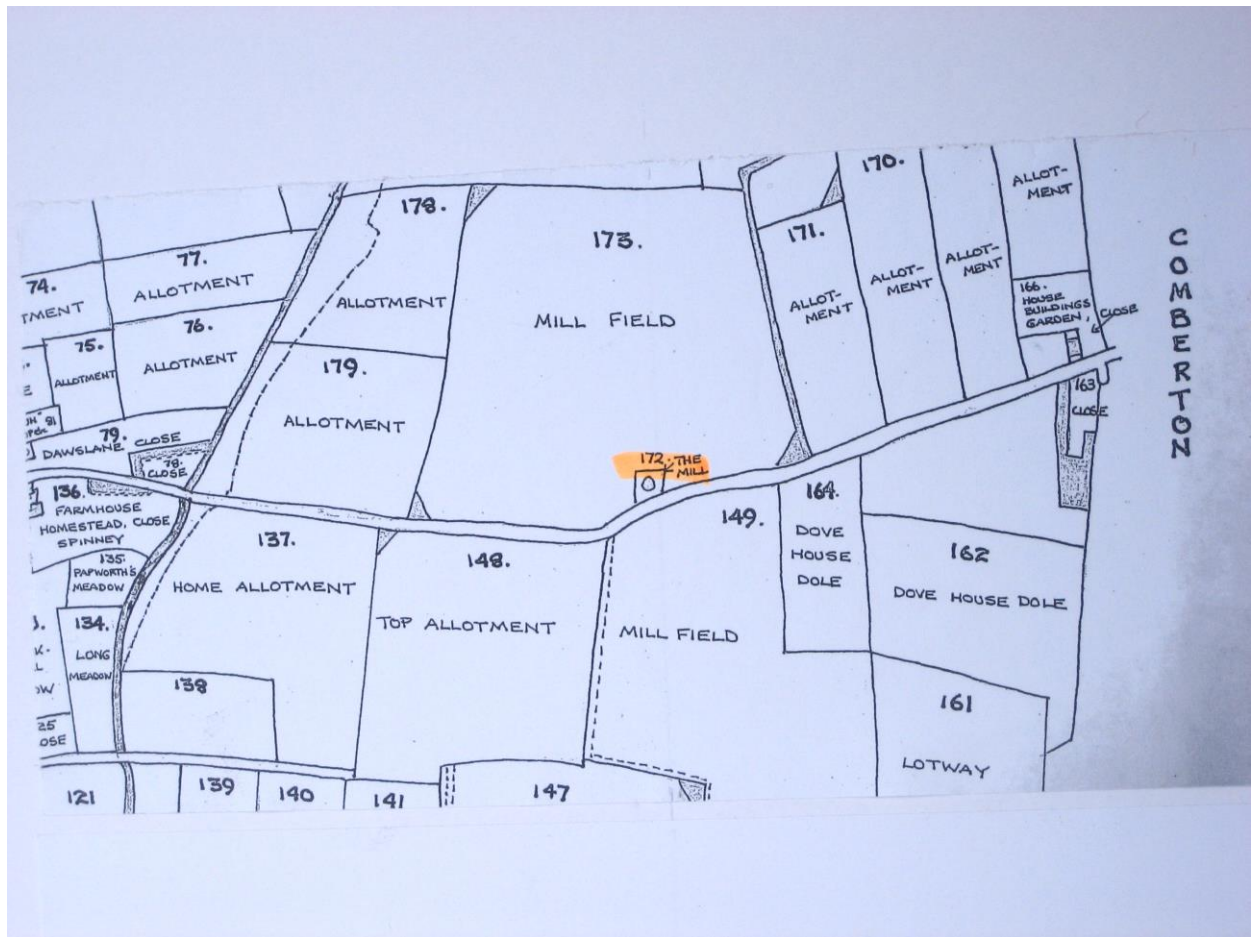
Medieval Bourn, David Baxter, 2008

Haslingfield - An Ordinary Village , H Stringer and M Coles, 2009

Kelly's Directory



Toft, West Field Mill



Comberton Mill

TO be SOLD by AUCTION,
 (if not previously disposed of by private contract, of which notice will be given,) at the *Sun Inn*, in *Cambridge*, between the hours of 5 and 7 in the afternoon of **SATURDAY** the 7th day of March next:

All that **FREEHOLD POST WINDMILL**, with the going gears, and two pair of stones, situate at **TOFT**, in the county of *Cambridge*, in the occupation of **Thomas Papworth**.

The above Mill will be sold either with or without the **Piece or Plot** of Ground whereon it stands, containing about **Two Roods**, more or less.

For further particulars enquire of **Mr. COE**, attorney at law, **Cambridge**.

28 FEBRUARY 1812

Toft Mill sale poster 1812

**FREEHOLD MILL,
BETWEEN COMBERTON AND TOFT.
TO be SOLD by AUCTION,
By ELLIOT SMITH,**

At the DOLPHIN INN, Trumpington-street Cambridge,
on SATURDAY the 23d day of April, 1814, between
4 and 5 in the afternoon, (subject to such conditions
of sale as shall be produced ;)

All that very desirable and particularly well-ac-
customed POST WINDMILL, called *Comberton
Mill*, situated in the parish of TOFT, with the Geers
and appurtenances thereunto belonging, as now in
the occupation of ——— Holder, who will give
immediate possession.

For further particulars enquire of ELLIOT SMITH,
Cambridge.

15 APRIL 1814

Comberton Mill sale poster 1814

By direction of the Mortgagees, with power of Sale,
AT THE RED LION, TOFT,
On THURSDAY, April the 9th, 1868
AT FIVE FOR SIX O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING.
A POST WINDMILL, driving ^{two} One Pair
of Stones, with Brick and Tile Outbuildings, now in
hand. Also a range of Brick and Slate COTTAGES,
occupied by FREESTONE, COLLET, and ROGERS; and
small Piece of Land.---FREEHOLD.

EARLY POSSESSION OF THE MILL MAY BE HAD.

For further particulars apply to M. HUNNYBUN, Esq., Solicitor, Huntingdon, or to the AUCTIONEER, Cambridge.

Toft Mill sale poster 1868



Bourn Windmill