

MILLS OF THE UPPER CHEW

Martin Bodman

INTRODUCTION

Since 1986 I have been researching and collating information on watermill sites in old North Somerset - roughly the area covered by Woodspring, Wansdyke, and Mendip. My original intention was to publish a gazetteer, and I am still working towards this end.

It is anticipated that publication in this Journal of a first section may lead to criticisms and comments which will improve the information gathered, and this I would welcome.

FORD MILL, CHEWTON MENDIP

O.S. Grid Ref. ST 591537 (Circa)

Chewton Mendip had five mills in 1086. They were then worth 30 shillings, less 5 pence, which averages nearly 6 shillings a mill⁽¹⁾.

This location at Ford Farm may or may not have been a Domesday Mill. Present evidence is slight, consisting merely of a level access road running from the River Chew (which falls steeply here) towards Ford Farm. However the Tithe Map of 1840 appears to show a weir and leat at this location. A field immediately to the north was then known as Mill Close. Whilst no mention of a mill at Ford is made in the Tithe Apportionment or Map, it is clear that one existed here in the 17th or 18th Century. The Farm was owned by Earl Waldegrave in 1840⁽²⁾.

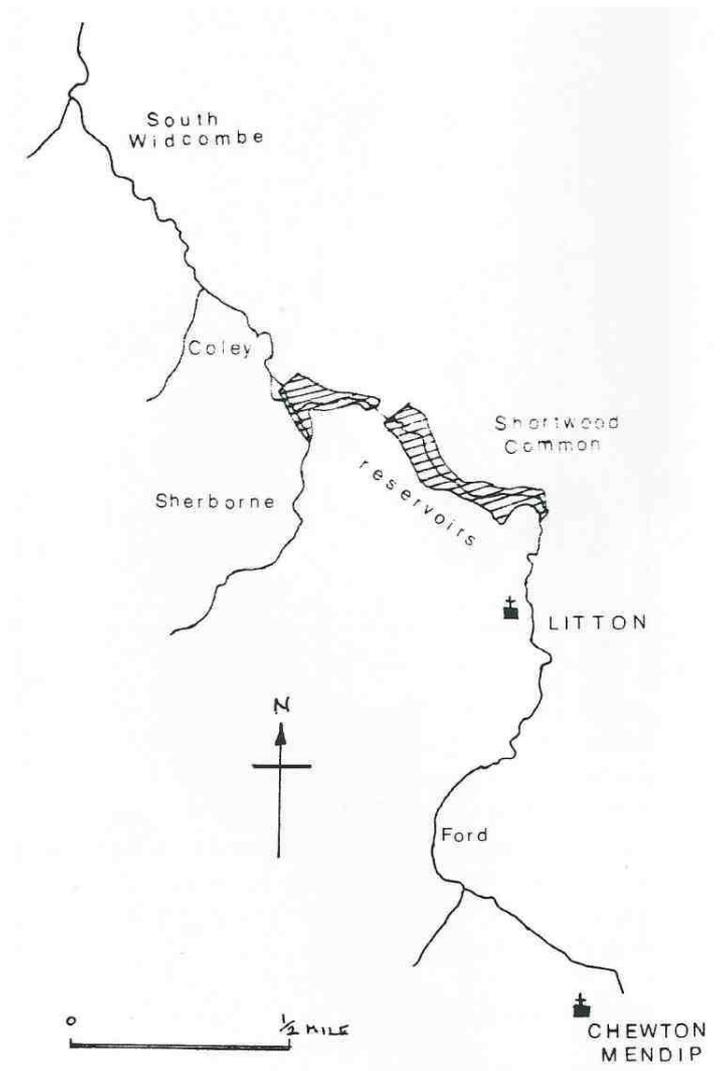
From Ford it is only a short drive up Prinmerfield Lane, past Lily Combe, to Bell Farm (O.S. ST 580533) which was built in the 18th Century as the Bell Inn and where, no doubt, horses were changed on the old coaching route from South Widcombe to Odd Down Inn. This route was Turnpiked in 1793, some 50 years after the Bell Inn was built.

Sources

1. Domesday Book. Somerset. Caroline and Frank Thorn. Phillimore, Chichester, 1980.

2. Chewton Mendip Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1840. Somerset Record Office D/D/Rt 119 & 119a

3. Somerset Roads, the Legacy of the Turnpikes, Phase 2 - Eastern Somerset J.B. Bentley & B. Murless. Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society, 1987.

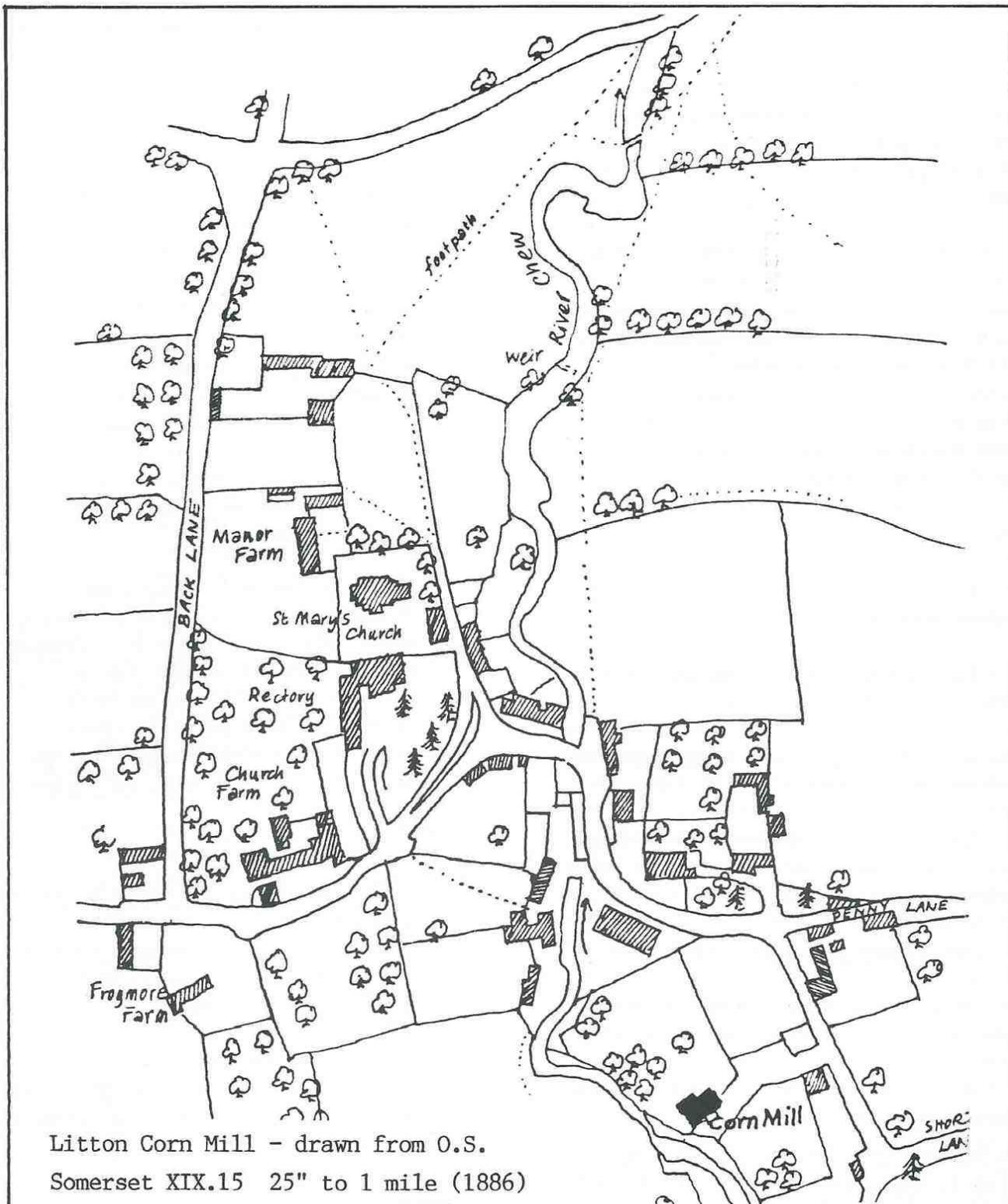


LITTON CORN MILL.

The Manor of Litton appears to have been owned by Wells Cathedral in 1812. In that year George Salvidge held a Copyhold estate from the Steward of the Manor, Mr Witherell - a solicitor in Wells. Salvidge had become bankrupt and his estate was put up for sale by auction, Lot 1 being described as -

"A Capital & well-accustomed new built Water Grist Mill, well supplied with water, working two pair of excellent French Stones; together with a new built Dwelling House, and a small garden, adjoining the same."⁽¹⁾

possibly it's building may have caused Salvidge his downfall.



Litton Corn Mill - drawn from O.S.
Somerset XIX.15 25" to 1 mile (1886)

The mill, still part of the Manor of Litton and held by Copy of Court Rolls, was offered for sale by private contract or, if not sold, to let in 1820. It was still described as 'newly erected' and since 1812 a bakehouse appears to have been built on site. ⁽²⁾

Listed as entry 240 on the Litton Tithe of 1839 the mill was then occupied by John Carter, and owned by Henry White. In practice Henry White probably still only held a Copyhold title. The Tithe Map shows the Chew dammed, creating a millpond. ⁽³⁾

In the 1840's Mary Flower was associated with Litton Mill, she was a Master Miller and retail seller of beer, who came to Litton from Cloud Hill Mill, Clutton; by 1848 she was an insolvent debtor. ⁽⁴⁾

Joseph Banwell was miller and baker at Litton in 1861 ⁽⁵⁾, it may be that he was at Sherborne Lower Mill, as Edwin Banwell (Tenant at Will from his mother Mrs. Sarah Banwell) was at Sherborne, in Litton, in 1882. ⁽⁶⁾
Litton Mill appears to have survived until the 1920's - it may have been adversely by construction of the Litton by-pass road in 1921-25 ⁽⁸⁾. Little, if anything, remains on site.

Sources

1. Bristol Mirror, 28 March 1812, Bristol Reference Library.
2. Felix Farley's Bristol Journal, 15 April 1820, Bristol Reference Library.
3. Litton Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1839, Somerset Record Office, D/D/Rt 250 & 250a
4. London Gazette, 28 April 1848, Simmons Collection - Somerset Watermills, Science Museum Library, London.
5. Kelly's Directory, Somerset, 1861.
6. Bristol Waterworks Company archives - 'Sherborne Mill'. Bedminster Down, Bristol.
7. 'Watermills of the Chew Valley' A.J. Spence, unpublished paper, 1983.
8. Somerset Roads. The Legacy of the Turnpikes - Phase 2, Eastern Somerset, J.B. Bentley & B.J. Murless, Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society, 1987.

LITTON COAL WORKS.

O.S. ST 595550 (?)

A small Colliery appears to have been started late in the 18th Century, close to the River Chew and close to the Litton - Hinton Blewett Parish boundary and therefore isolated from, and well to the South of, other known workings in the Bishop Sutton area. The only positive reference so far traced is a notice of sale by auction in 1807, indicating a suprising amount of development work, presumably of uneconomic return.

"Somerset. To be sold by auction. On the premises. By Mr Samuel Oliver. On Tuesday 9 June 1807.

All the Materials belonging to LITTON COAL WORKS including the lease of the premises, with a considerable quantity of iron shides, a LARGE WATER WHEEL and Drum House, with it's Appendages, pulley wheels, Smith's bellows and toolsof which catalogues will be distributed and may be had ten days preceeding the sale, by applying to Mr Hipplesley, Chewton Mendip; Mr James Salvidge, Lillycomb; Mr Joseph Tucker of Henton-Bluet; Mr Giles Selway, Writhlington near Radstock; at the Kings Arms Inn, Litton, of the Auctioneer, Widcomb.

At the same time will be sold a small freehold estate, consisting of two dwelling houses, smith's shop, garden etc. containing One Acre, more or less, with right on Shortwood Common, Mill-head and hatches complete. The above houses are situate in the parish of Henton-Bluet, one mile from Chewton Mendip, six miles from Wells, and fourteen from Bristol.

N.B. a level of about 600 fathoms is brought up to the works, two pits are sunk, 32 fathoms each; at 19 fathoms below which the coal has been bored six feet in depth. to be sold without reserve... " ⁽¹⁾

These works have now long since disappeared, probably beneath the Bristol Waterworks Upper Compensation Reservoir and it's canalised approach channel

Source

The Mirror, late Bristol Journal, 16 May 1807.

SHERBOURNE UPPER MILL, LITTON.

O.S. ST 586552

In addition to Litton Corn Mill, also set out in the 1812 auction sale of George Salvidge's Copyhold estate in the Litton Manor was-

"Lot 2. A Close of Rich Arable Land, about half a mile from Lot 1, exceedingly well calculated for the creation of a white Paper Mill, being well supplied with a constant stream of water which rises on or near the spot The premises are situate at Litton in the said County about 1 mile from Chewton Mendip, 6 from Wells ..."⁽¹⁾

Sherborne is about ½ mile from Litton, and is within the Parish. We also know that a powerful spring rises there.

A paper mill existed at Sherborne in the 19th Century. It was an ideal spot with guaranteed pure water. John King was the first paper maker here, listed in Bath Excise Duty Collection Records for 1823. In 1825 King had been succeeded by Thomas Gilling. Walton Fussell was papermaker in 1833, he came from Stoke St. Michael. Thomas Gilling moved to Stoke Bottom and was there circa 1830 - members of the Gilling family were also papermakers at Cheddar in the early years of the century. John King appears to have been in partnership of the paper mill at Compton Martin in 1822 ⁽²⁾⁽³⁾⁽⁴⁾.

Thus it would appear that a 'White Paper Mill' was indeed built at Sherborne following Salvidge's bankruptcy. Brian Attwood, A.J. Spence and myself have all puzzled about how the Upper Mill was powered, or even if it was a mill ⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾. This puzzle has been solved by the Litton Tithe Map of 1839; this shows that the small two-storey building, which today survives as a barn, to have been part of a larger complex. Two other blocks adjoined the surviving building which was then probably the paper maker's house. This explains why no wheel pits or sites for mill gear remain today. The large residence above the mill served as Mill House for the Lower Mill.

The large scale Ordnance Survey map of 1886 further clarifies the layout and shows a short leat branching off from the much longer leat that ran into the millpond serving the Lower Mill. By 1886 some of the Upper Mill buildings appear to have been demolished ⁽⁷⁾.

In 1839 Upper Sherborne Mill was entered as No.373 on the Tithe Map and described as 'House, Mill and garden'. It was then owned and occupied by John and Willian Flint - it is not known whether they were papermakers ⁽⁸⁾

The mill was later used for horn button manufacture and appears to have worked in association with the two shirt factories at Cheddar, both also converted from disused paper mills. ⁽⁶⁾ it was clearly disused as a water mill by the time Bristol Waterworks Company tapped Sherborne Spring in 1885.

Sources

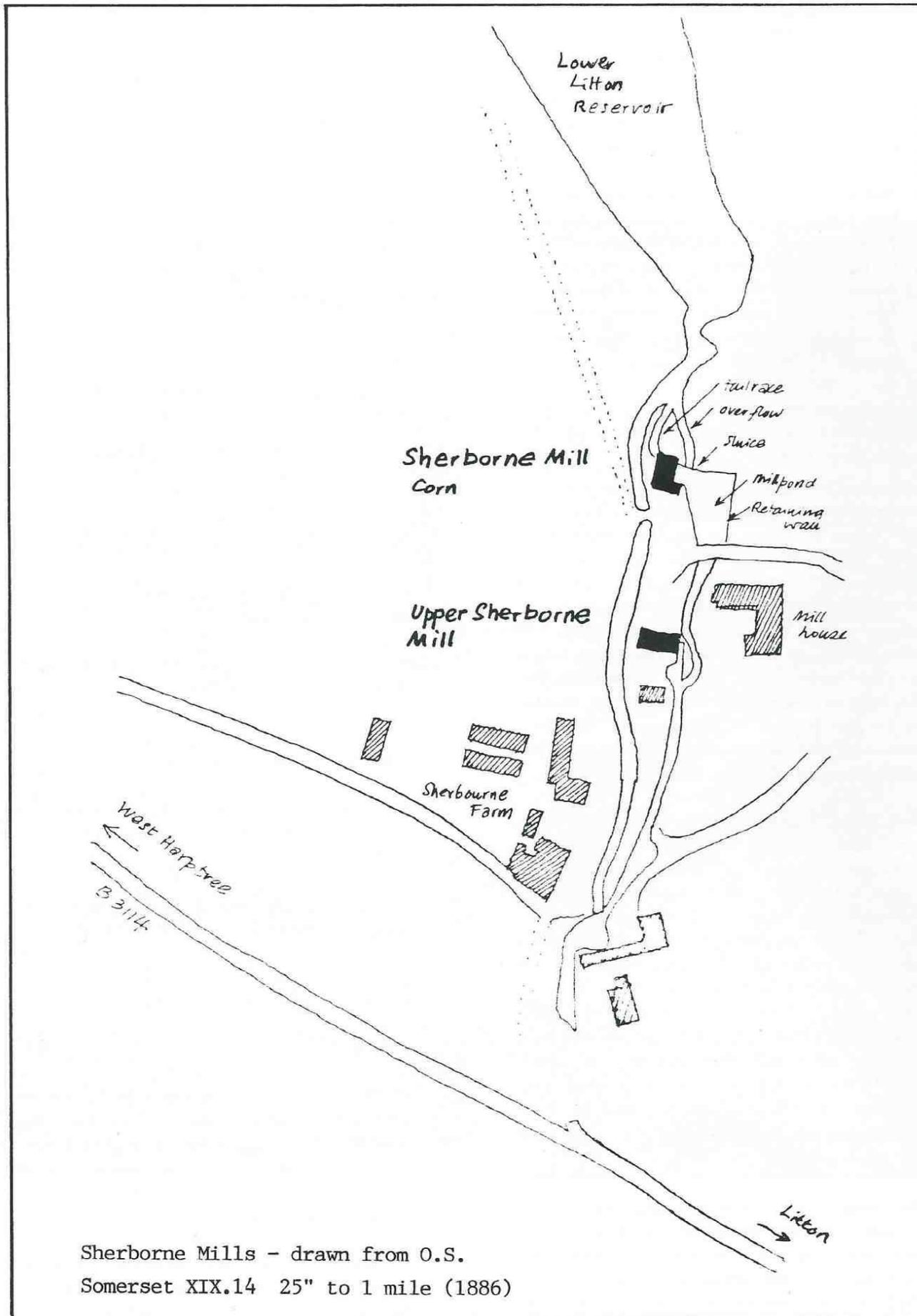
1. Bristol Mirror, 28 March 1812, Bristol Reference Library
2. 'Paper and Board Mills in Somerset', Alfred H. Shorter, Somerset & Dorset Notes & Queries, Vol. 25, 1947-50.
3. Old Mendip, Robin Atthill, Frome, 1984.
4. Bristol Mirror, 10 May 1823. Bristol Reference Library.
5. 'The BIAS Paper Mills Survey', Brian Attwood, BIAS Journal Vol.3, 1970.
6. 'Watermills of the Chew Valley', A.J. Spence, unpublished paper, 1983.
7. Ordnance Survey Map, Scale 25 inches to one mile, Somerset sheet No. 19.14, First Edition 1886,
8. Litton Tithe Map & Apportionment, 1839, Somerset Record Office, D/D/Rt 250 & 250a.

SHERBORNE (LOWER) MILL, LITTON.

O.S. ST 585551

Of earlier date than the Upper Mill, both were powered by a small tributary of the River Chew, augmented here by the copious Sherborne Spring which until 1885, when it was tapped by Bristol Waterworks, delivered an average daily flow of 1½ million gallons. ⁽¹⁾

In the 17th and 18th Centuries Lower Mill appears to have been run as a fulling mill. In the angle created by the confluence of the Sherborne Stream and the River Chew is field No.



Sherborne Mills - drawn from O.S.
Somerset XIX.14 25" to 1 mile (1886)

379 as shown on the Litton Tithe Map of 1839. This field of a little over 2 acres was then known as 'Rack Close'. A larger field, just over 7 acres, numbered 385 on the Tithe Map is also called 'Rack Close', situated at the Sherborne end of Whitehouse Lane. Across the stream in East Harptree parish, next to the road that is now the B3114, was 'Rack Close Orchard'. In these fields timber racks were once set up with tenter-hooks where the long Broadcloths and Medleys were stretched after fulling.

A small field of 1 acre, opposite the Church at Litton and fronting Back Lane, was also known as 'Rack Close' and suggests that Litton may have possessed a second fulling mill in the village in the 17th and possibly the 18th Centuries.⁽²⁾ An Act of Parliament of 1727 was passed to ensure Medleys were inspected at the fulling mills and checked for length. Litton was one of the villages listed for the Western Division of Somerset, and it appears fulling continued in the Chew valley at least until 1770.⁽³⁾

By 1839 Lower Mill had been converted to a grist mill, and was then owned and occupied by James Savage who lived in the nearby Mill House, which although considerably rebuilt, remains today.⁽²⁾

Milling continued at Lower Sherborne until 1883. The Mill was then owned by Mrs. Sarah Banwell and run by her son Edwin Banwell - he received £300 compensation for loss of water rights from Bristol Waterworks Company.⁽⁴⁾⁽⁵⁾

Lower Sherborne Mill has since been demolished, although the retaining walls of the millpond remain. The pond was served by a leat which also served the Upper Mill and began at a weir below Sherborne Farm.⁽⁵⁾ Traces of this leat, partially filled with rubbish, can still be found to the South of the site of the Upper Mill. It may well be that the millpond was constructed when the Upper Mill was built, to ensure water supplies to the Lower Mill. The

Sources

1. Bristol's Water Supply and it's Story, Frederick C. Jones, St. Stephen's Press, Bristol, 1951.
2. Litton and East Harptree Tithe Maps and Apportionments, 1839, Somerset Record Office, D/D/Rt 250 and 250a; 65, and 65a.

3. Warp and Weft. The Story of the Somerset and Wilts. Woollen Industry, Kenneth H. Rogers, Barracuda Books, Buckingham, 1986.

4. Bristol Waterworks Company Archives, Bedminster Down, Bristol.

5. Ordnance Survey Map, Scale 25 inches to 1 mile, Somerset Sheet No.19.14, First Edition, 1886.

6. Converation with Austin Wookey of Coley. also Old Mendip, Robin Atthill, Bran's Head Books, Frome, 1984.

COLEY MILL, EAST HARP TREE.

O.S. ST 583557

Today East Harptree is a compact parish, bounded on the North West by the Molly Brook and the North East by the River Chew. At the time of the Domesday Survey the parish was split into two manors, each of which had a water mill. Both mills were valued at 5 shillings per annum. One, probably, was located on the Molly Brook within a short walk of the village, the other was almost certainly on the Chew. Coley is the most probable site, although South Widcombe is an alternative to consider.⁽¹⁾

The first definite reference to mills at Coley is dated 1675 :-

"uno molendo aquatilo, granatiro, uno molndi fullesuto ... gardinis ... pomard ... pasturo, viginti acris"

Clearly, Coley then had a water corn mill and, it would appear, a seperate fulling mill.⁽²⁾

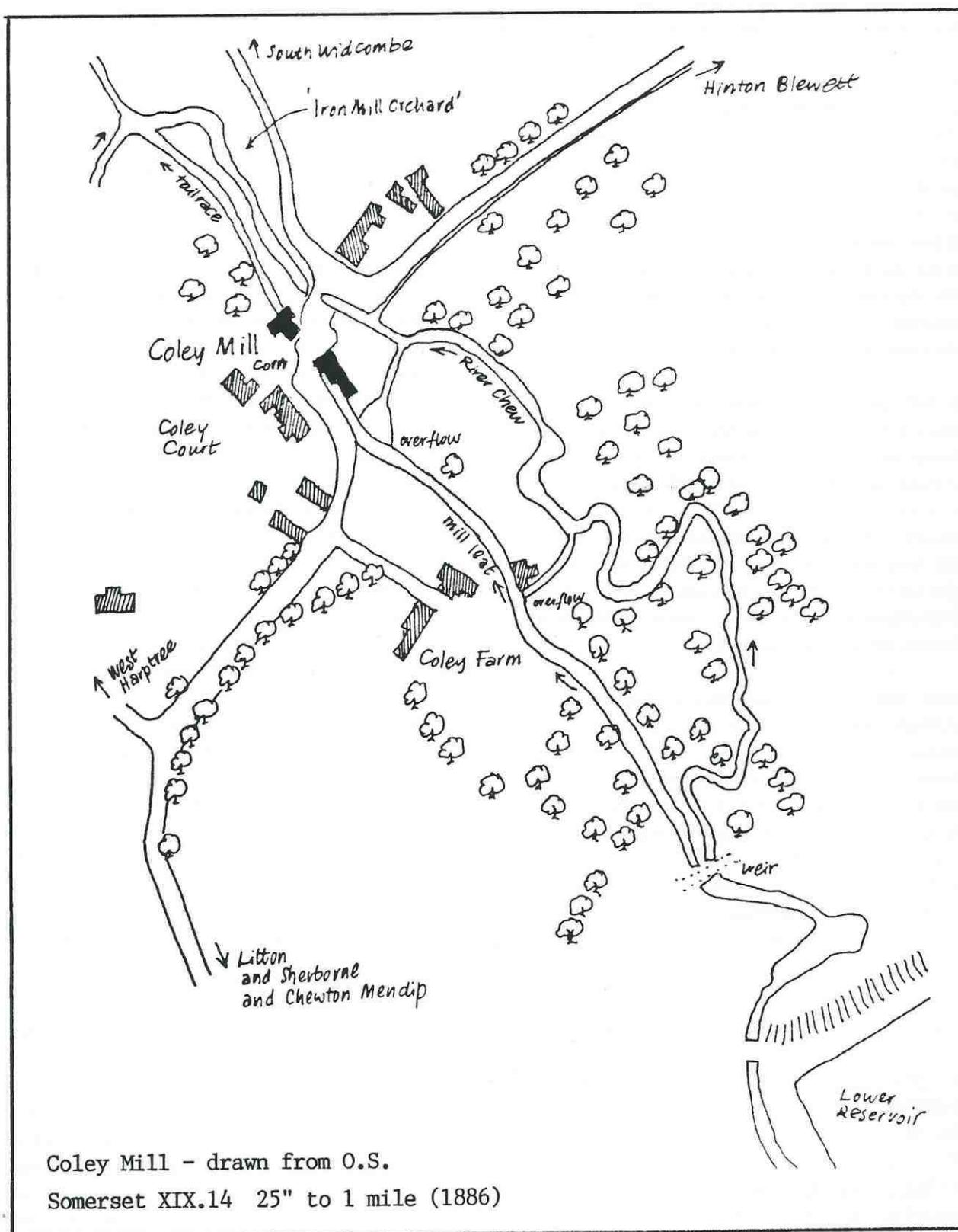
Collinson, writing in 1791, referred to both a grist mill and a fulling mill operating at Coley.⁽³⁾

The Tithe Map Apportionment of 1839 states that it was then occupied by James Wookey and owned by Francis Boucher Wright. The fulling mill had gone - indeed it is not known where it's site is. This Apportionment raises other questions in as much as it draws attention to 'Iron Mill Orchard' which lay between the river and the tail race of the grist mill. Downstream on the West bank was 'Iron Mill Ground', a field of 8 acres 3 rods and 6 perches (8.79 acres). Further downstream again, the large scale Ordnance Survey Map of 1886 (and more modern editions) show the East Harptree parish boundary meandering away on a short loop from the river

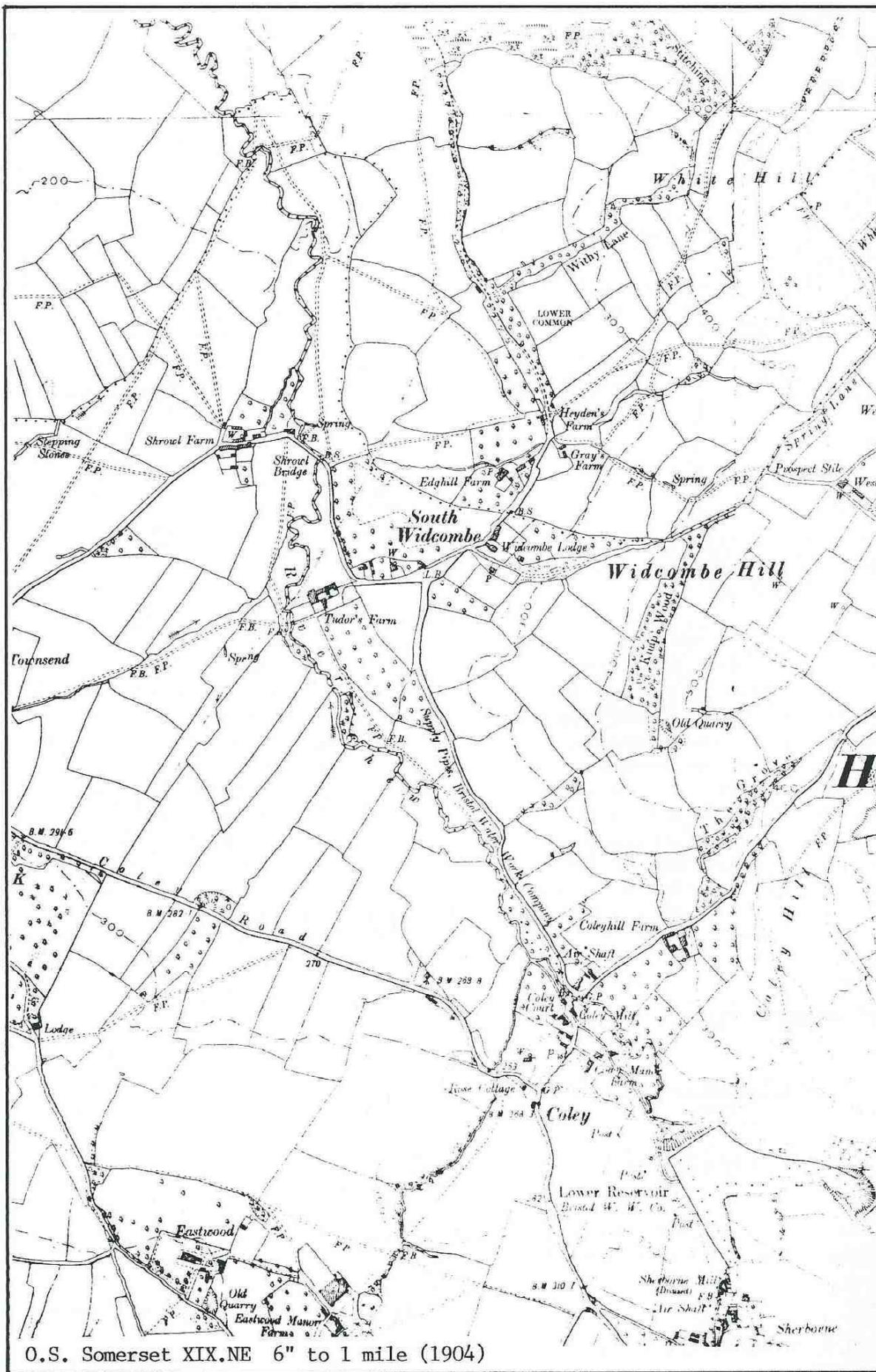
channel indicating a diversion of it's original course. A nearby pasture is called 'Cull Mills' on the Tithe Map. Do these provide clues to the site of the erstwhile fulling mill? Was the fulling mill converted to manufacture of Edge Tools for a brief period, as occurred at other mills on the Chew? For the present the mystery remains.⁽⁴⁾

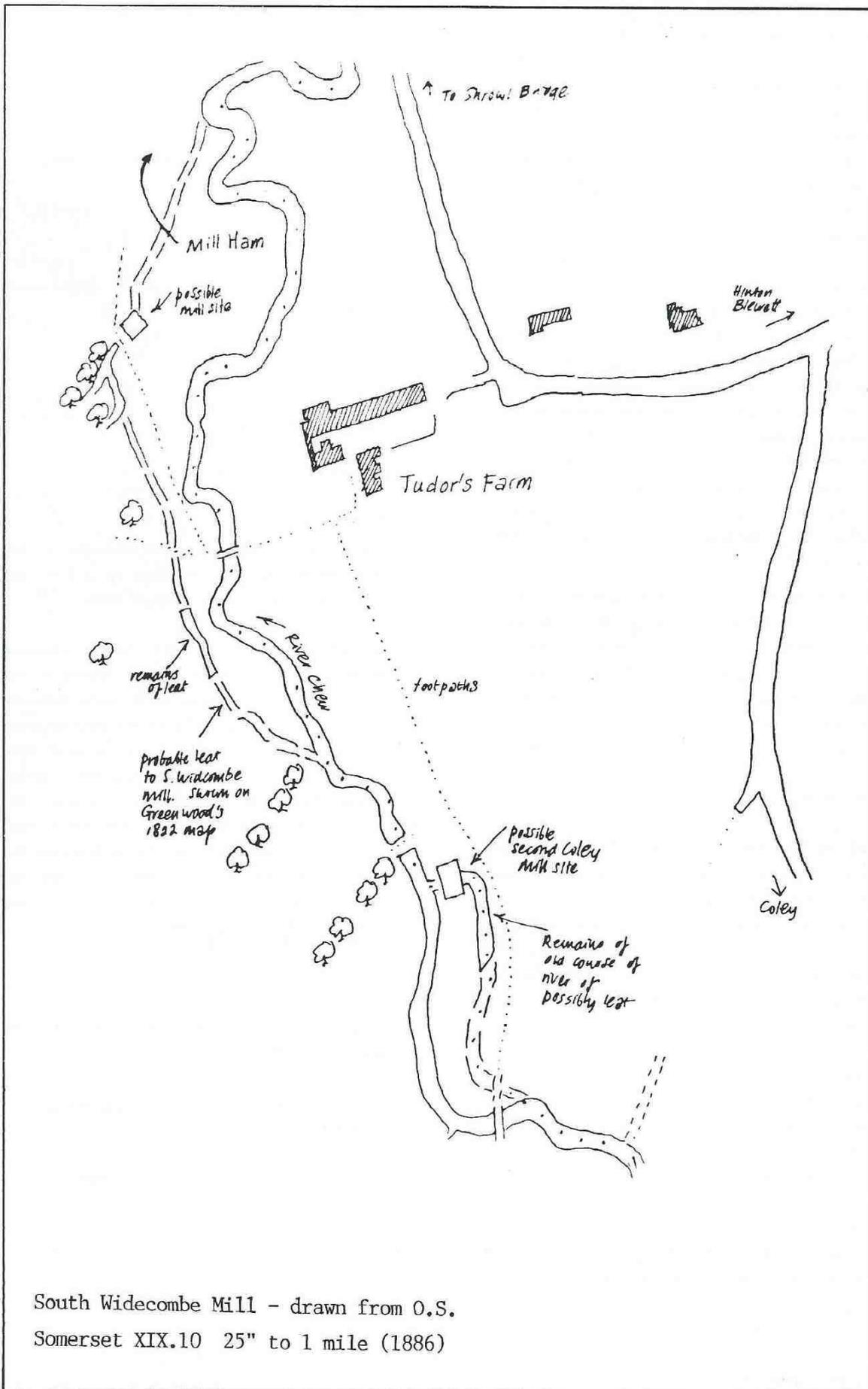
Benjamin Gadd was farmer and corn miller at Coley in 1861. In 1889 the mill was run by Joseph and John Alsop. In the present century William Edward Masters was miller here. A William Masters ran Postbridge Mill on the Winford Brook from 1889-1926 as miller and baker but appears to have been a different individual.

(5)









South Widecombe Mill - drawn from O.S.
Somerset XIX.10 25" to 1 mile (1886)

We are fortunate that the history of Coley Mill can be fleshed out by Austin Wookey who worked here before the 2nd World War. His photograph of the Mill shows it to have been three stories high, with three roof gables. Millsacks could be wheeled straight out onto carts and easily loaded or unloaded; the waterwheel was breast-shot. Water supply was controlled from the Compensation Reservoir at Litton, and Masters was paid £1 per day in compensation for loss of water by Bristol Waterworks Company. Henry Tite was Water Bailiff at the Reservoir - at 6.00p.m. each evening he would shut off the water to the mills, and the flood hatches at Coley would be lifted at night so that any excess water could run through the overspill which had a 12 feet drop. Masters was not entirely satisfied with this arrangement so installed a horizontal steam engine, and built a tall brick chimney for it, in order to augment water power.⁽⁶⁾ The Water Rights at Coley Mill were sold to Bristol Waterworks by William Wildman Kettleman in 1881 for £375.⁽⁸⁾

In 1906 Masters used a Foden Steam Lorry to transport corn imported through Avonmouth Docks to be ground at Coley. This lorry was known as the 'Western Triumph'.⁽⁷⁾ Austin Wookey believes that the Steam Wagon used in his day was built at the nearby Chewton Mendip Motorworks. He recalls that Charlie Dowling, a cousin of his mother, drove a wagon and horses also in the employ of Masters.⁽⁶⁾

Masters used Derbyshire Peak Stones to grind the corn. These were softer than the French Burr Stones and wore down faster. The dust that the stones so produced in the ground corn meal contained calcium and, according to Austin, made the pigs grow faster and the bread moister. Bread made from Coley flour was looked on as the best in the valley; it was brown of course.

Today a Derbyshire Peak Millstone remains in Austin Wookey's garden on the B3111. It was cut by him and Austin retains a mill pick from Coley. William Masters died in 1930 and Coley Mill was subsequently demolished.

Sources

1. Domesday Book, Somerset. Caroline and Frank Thorn, Phillimore, Chichester, 1980
2. Somerset Record Office. DD/BR hck C/719-18
3. The History and Antiquities of Somerset. John Collinson, 1791

4. East Harptree Tithe Map and Apportionment, 1839, Somerset Record Office, D/D/Rt 65 and 65a.
5. Kelly's Directories, Somerset, 1861, 1889, 1910.
6. Discussions with Austin Wookey of Coley.
7. Mendip, a New Study. editor Robin Atthill, David & Charles, Newton Abbot, 1971.
8. 'Watermills of the Chew Valley', unpublished paper, A.J. Spence.

SOUTH WIDCOMBE MILL.

0 S ST 577566 (Circa)

A grist mill existed at South Widcombe in the 18th Century. Collinson mentions it in 1791, and it is indicated on Donn's Map of 1769.⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾

By 1822 the mill had gone but the leat remained as shown on Greenwood's map.⁽³⁾ Traces of the leat still appear on the large scale Ordnance Survey Map of 1886,⁽⁴⁾ and indeed some evidence remains today West of Tudor Farm, although here the leat was augmented by a spring and a stream coming down from East Harptree village. The Mill's history is not known, the field name 'Cull Mills' appearing near the beginning of the leat on the 1839 East Harptree Tithe Map may relate either to South Widcombe Mill or to one of the Coley mills (see above).

Sources

1. The History and Antiquities of Somerset, John Collinson, 1791.
2. Map of 11 miles round the City of Bristol, Benjamin Don, 1769.
3. Christopher Greenwood's Map of Somerset, 1822.
4. Ordnance Survey Map, Scale 25 inches to 1 mile, Somerset sheet no. 19.10, First Edition 1886.