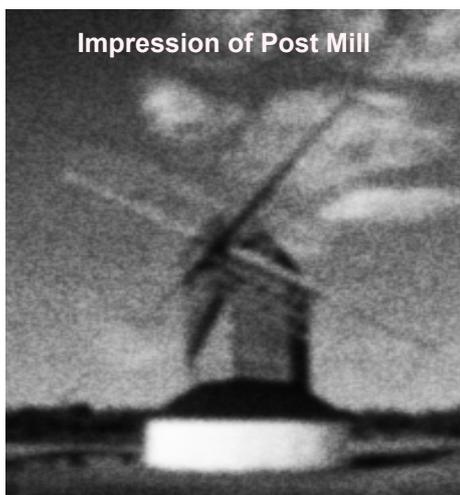




SPRING PARK FILM MAKERS

THE HISTORY OF SHIRLEY WINDMILL



Impression of Post Mill

The name Shirley, originally ‘Scyr-leasze’, is of Saxon origin. By the early Middle Ages the focal point of Shirley was the western end of Wickham Road where there were 7 hostleries, a forge, public watering places for horses and a village green. During the 17th and 18th centuries merchants and bankers began to move into the area.

The site of the mill was given to the inhabitants of Croydon under the Enclosure Act of 1801 (lot 975) creating legal property rights to land that was previously considered common land, but then the parish inhabitants sold the land to Thomas Meager of Croyham on 2nd November 1807, reserving the right of way to an adjoining cottage in occupation by a Thomas Hooker.

Croydon was famous for hunting and Thomas Meagre kept a pack of harriers at Croyham.

William Alwen, born on July 14th 1780 and baptised on 23rd July of that year, built a post mill there in 1808. He was a yeoman farmer of Chesham (a social class held by farmers who owned or leased their land with no restrictions on what they could grow or sell). William also held a lease on Lower House Farm in Addington until 1817.

William’s son, Richard Alwen born 1775, farmed on the site opposite the mill where Richard kept live stock. Today Coloma Convent School stands on this site, a school first founded in 1869 in Wellesly road.

In 1812 the mill and three roods of land (a rood being one quarter of an acre) together with the ‘lately erected’ mill, outhouses and miller’s house were leased to Richard Alwen for 40 years. However, in 1825 he bought the freehold.

During that year six acres of land immediately north of the mill were offered for sale as building plots, on which it was “recommended to any gentleman fond of field sports to set up a Cottage Residence or Hunting Box as the country around was abundantly stocked with game”. A map accompanying the sale notice included a small sketch of a post mill and places the site 70yds from the road beyond an outhouse. The leasehold miller’s cottage lay less than 100 yards to the north-west of the mill, enabling the miller to give constant attention to the mill.

UNVERIFIED STORIES

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A report from a resident of the area spoke of his visit on 26th September 1817 to a William Child (b.1848). He was the gardener at Shirley Vicarage. He was told that the old mill at Shirley had the biggest mill-post in the kingdom and that the sails only just cleared the ground being huge sweeps.

He spoke of a hole in the old mill from which it was difficult to get out if the sails were in motion. Some cadets from Addiscombe one day laid a wager with one of their number that he would not escape from this aperture without being caught by the sails. He made the attempt but was caught by the sails and knocked down.

The other cadets thought he was badly injured so decided to carry him to the village. When they arrived he suddenly rose up and said I will walk now and was asked “ar’nt you much hurt?” He replied “I thought it too hot and dusty”. He obviously had a bit of fun at their expense.
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WHAT TO SEE AT THE WINDMILL

- The Dust Floor is the highest working floor, and can be looked upon as the “engine room” of the mill. From high up inside the Cap, there is a good view of the machinery at this level.
- There are two sets of Millstones, each set comprises two stone.
- The Loading Door at first floor level is to save labour by allowing heavy sacks of flour to be slid out from it on a board, to load up a high wagon to be taken away, thus avoiding having to lift them up off the ground each time.
- The Ground Floor was probably used for storage, and possibly a workshop.



The Alwens were respected members of the Shirley community. William, who built the post mill, and was said to be almost the 'squire' of the village, died on 4th May, 1820 and buried at St. Mary's Church Addington.

Little is known of the first windmill beyond that it was a post mill with roundhouse and that the sails came within a few inches of the ground.

Richard his son, who lived in the miller's house, was also a noted character in his day. He ran the mill until his death on 25th March 1850 aged 75 and is also buried at St. Mary's Church in Addington. Richard Alwen left his estate, in his will dated 1846, to his son Richard Alwen and others.

Richard, grandson of William Alwen, born 1817, took over the business in 1850 and milled the post mill until October 1854, when fire destroyed the mill, possibly causing the death of a mill employee called King.

At that time the rateable value of land and mill was around £40.00 Richard then built the Tower mill we see today and, with the growth of Croydon, demand for grain was high.

The initials RA and 1854 are just visible on a brick near the door to the loading bay on the first floor.

The mill may have been brought from Stratford and re-erected. Whether this was Stratford in east London or Stratford on Avon we do not know. The machinery in the mill shows it to have been a worthy product of the millwrighting of its day.

A discovery in 1927 when restorations were in progress found the date 1740 on a beam in the windmill and is evidence of re-use of materials from elsewhere.

There is still some confusion as to whether the Stratford parts were bought for the original post mill and somehow survived the fire to be reused in the tower mill or were purchased specially by Richard Alwen in 1854. There are no records at West Ham Public Library or at Essex Record Office of a mill being demolished either at 1809 or 1845/6.

The fantail was patented in 1745, cast iron was not introduced into millwork until 1769 and other important parts of the machinery were not in general use until the early 19th century.

In 1861 Frederick Lloyd, a parasol maker, came to Shirley and built the Ferns, a large house south of the mill. Renamed Heath Court in 1906, it eventually became known as the Windmill House.

By 1872 the house was occupied by George Noble Wilkinson and four years later by LW Lamotte. Lewis Lamotte renamed the residence Heath Court in 1905 and it was still called this in 1910 when his widow was head of the household. However, it was renamed Windmill House by 1920.



The laundress Sarah Sampson lived in one of the mill cottages built by Richard Alwen and the governor of the Sandrock Hotel, James Thomas Owen whose widow was still running the hotel in 1886.

The tower mill worked well for many years with the services of three employees dusty Bob Robinson, his brother Jack and William Yewens, who was descended from an old Croydon family.

In the 1881 census, Richard's occupation was shown as Miller and Farmer. He died unmarried in January 1884 at the age of 67 leaving in his will an amount of £1,330.15.6d. and the mill passed to his sister Elizabeth Thrale.

The Alwen's grave stones are still readable at St. Mary's Church Addington.

Elizabeth installed a manager, Thomas Dives, born 16th January 1836 in Hartfield Sussex. The 19th century census returns describe Thomas variously as a 'commercial traveller', 'miller', 'miller traveller', and as a 'flour salesman'. In his various roles he would have helped out at various mills being employed on a casual basis when the need arose at peak times, illness, and other periods when locum relief was required.

Richard Alwen as mentioned died, unmarried, in January 1884 followed in July of the same year by the death of his sister, Elizabeth Thrale who lived opposite Shirley windmill at Shirley Hyrst. It was probably Thomas's links with the milling fraternity in Croydon that prompted the surviving Thrale family members to employ Thomas Dives as manager of Shirley windmill.

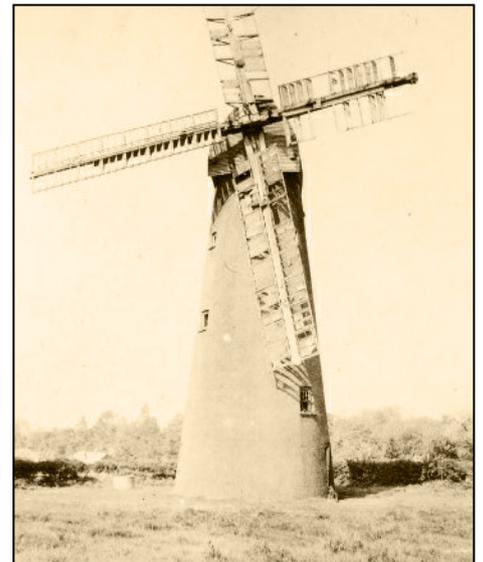
UNVERIFIED STORIES

The Croydon Advertiser of 1930 made the statement "that King died as a result of some misadventure is certain and that he was employed by the miller was also true."

Croydon had no really local paper in the time of the Crimean War (October 1853 – February 1856), so that a permanent and reliable record of many local happenings was unfortunately not kept.

The story of how the tower mill arrived, probably the last windmill to be erected in Surrey, was supposedly recounted by an old Shirley inhabitant who claimed to have witnessed the building of the mill.

He told how a Croydon bricklayer named Broughton ceremonially laid the first brick of the circular foundation, and how the mill was brought from Stratford and re-erected for £2,000.



The deeds of the windmill may have been in the name of Richard Alwen Thrale her youngest son. who lived in the house opposite the mill, Shirley Hyrst. This was built by his father Peter Thrale, ironmonger and veterinary forge. who died on 23rd May 1890.

Once the site of a brewery Shirley Hyrst was built by Peter Thrale in 1878.

Eventually Shirley Hyrst became Shirley Court. The 1886 rate book shows the Thrales owning land in Shirley.

The rate book for 1887 gives Thrale as owner of the mill and Alwen owner of another house occupied by Thomas Dives.

In 1890 the mill was sold to Alfred Rayson and became unprofitable and difficult to run. He eventually moved away and ended up in Bedfordshire and died in 1902. Whether Thomas continued working at Shirley windmill is not known. By 1901 Thomas was in lodgings in Cuthbert Road and the census of that year recorded his occupation as a rate collector. He died on 6th april 1905 aged 69. His wife Mary Ann had died some several years earlier in July 1890 aged 52.

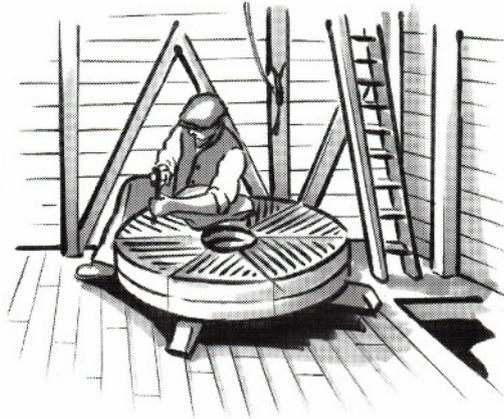
Shirley Mill would have been experiencing competition from the power mills and there was a declining market for stone ground flour. It went out of use around the 1890's.

Oaks Road had become at this time thickly wooded and may have screened the mill from the prevailing south westerly winds, causing further problems for Shirley.

Meal produced by stone grinding contains the wheat germ and the bran. Bran discoloured the flour. Demand for fine quality flour had led to many methods of bran removal, initially using wool, cloth and silks to sieve the meal, and from the early 19th century the development of the wire dresser. Now that reduced the weight of the miller's sellable meal by up to 25% but even so nothing could remove the minute fragments of bran produced by stone grinding.

Flour with wheat germ has a limited storage life. While the mill and the baker were close together this was not a problem but with the changing needs of the market during the 19th century, merchant millers who sold the flour began to demand a consistent whiteness that was beyond the capability of the village miller.

Once the new steam-driven roller mills were widely introduced in the 1860s, the days of stone grinding windmills were numbered.



The windmill was struck by lightning in 1899 and again in April 1906, when a sail was set on fire, but prompt action by the local fire brigade managed to save the mill. Two of the four sweeps were reduced to half their length and the fantail fly was destroyed.

In general, after the First World War flour began to be imported from other parts of the world signalling the death knell of the windmill. Before its closure Shirley Windmill milled only animal feed. After Alfred Rayson's departure the mill stood empty for some years.

During the first world war the windmill was used to store linen.

Heath Court had become Windmill House and four years later it was purchased by a David Bernhard. This was advertised as an attractive long leasehold residence with stabling, motor house, groom's rooms and gardeners cottage together with tennis and croquet lawns, kitchen and fruit gardens, paddock and woodland in around five acres. In 1934 it became 105 Upper Shirley Road.

By 1919 Shirley Hyrst had become Shirley Court and was occupied by George Given, head of a famous linen firm, who bought the mill to save it from demolition and tried to prevent the creeping suburban expansion development in the area.

He bought the large area of woodland skirting Shirley Church Road and land west of Upper Shirley Road.

In 1927 he paid for the restoration of the derelict mill by Mr.T.Nunwick, an engineer of Purley Way, costing the family around £2000. This included the replacement of the sweeps and the fly with skeleton frames which matched the original shape but would never catch the wind.

Both Givan and Bernhard died in 1930 leaving their widows in an ever changing Shirley. Further restorations to the mill were carried out by Annie Givan.

In a gale late in 1935 one of the restored sweeps was blown off and soon after this renovations were carried out by a Colonel Osborne.

A new great spur wheel was fitted by Messrs Lister Bros, of Woolwich, and new sails were fitted by Thomas Hunt the Soham millwright.

There was a Court case following the renovations, in which it was stated the windmill was "almost in working order".



MODERN HISTORY

The windmill, which remained tucked away with no public access, was listed in 1951 as a building of special architectural and historic interest, being one of 22 buildings in Croydon listed by the Minister of Local Government and Planning and through the offices of The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. However, shortly following this the mill and land were acquired under a compulsory purchase order by the Croydon Corporation. Mrs. Given claimed to have spent £1,400 on the upkeep of the mill.

Threatened with demolition when the new John Ruskin School was built, the mill was protected by its listed status and with the warmth of local feeling and a benevolent attitude from the architects of the John Ruskin School, the structure was saved from demolition. When the school opened, their magazine then bore the title *'The Windmill'*. Richard Alwen's windmill cottage and the Windmill House were however, demolished.

A Lincolnshire millwright was employed when needed and since 1960 a new sail and fantail stage have been fitted, and so with strong public interest became part of the school scene.

An inspection of the structure found that it was in generally good condition and commented on the large amount of pitch pine which was also in good condition. The main defects in the structure proved to be the softness of the inside face of the brickwork and the fact that much of its surface was badly spalled. It was recommended that the first floor doorway be unblocked to allow better circulation of air to prevent rot.

During excavations for the foundations of the new school, workmen unearthed two trade tokens relating to a smock mill at Appledore, Kent. One side showed a man carrying a sack to a galleried smock windmill together with the inscription *'The Union of Appledore Kent'* and the date 1794. On the reverse side was a lion and a lamb lying in standing corn. Here the inscription *'Peace Innocence and Plenty'* was printed.

Such tokens were falling out of circulation, for two-penny and penny pieces had been minted in 1797 and the shortage of copper coinage which had encouraged the use of tokens had already been alleviated.

The Union of Appledore was a group of farmers in East Kent who combined to oppose lawlessness; they erected a large smock mill which they used for their own grinding, and worked for the public at fixed rates.

With thanks to The Friends of Shirley Windmill; Croydon Local History Department for use of their archives and to Raymond Wheeler, author of 'Shirley & Addington' in the Images of England series published by the History Press.

On 1 April 1971, the mill was advertised for sale in The Times as an April fool's Day joke by pupils at the school. The headmaster received four telephone calls as a result of the prank.

From around 1977 the local press began to carry articles about the possibility of an agricultural museum at the windmill. Pressure on this front was led by Councillor Paul Saunders, Chair of the Education Committee. And eventually it was agreed that they were in a position to open the mill to the public with a purpose-built visitor centre.

In 1990 John Ruskin School was demolished and some of the land was sold by Croydon Council to a property developer which resulted in the construction of Postmill Close and the houses. This sale helped to pay for the restorations and by 1996 a strategy had been developed for the site as a heritage site.

In August 1996, it was announced that the London Borough of Croydon was to receive a grant of over £200,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to turn the mill into a museum.

September 2004, Croydon Borough Council agreed to fund external repairs to the windmill, the work being scheduled for the following spring.

In October 2008 it was reported that the sails of the mill were being damaged by rose-ringed parakeets. The birds had also damaged the spire of the nearby St. John's Church. The sails were repaired at a cost of £45,000 by millwright J. Hole. Restoration was completed in May 2011.



Today the mill relies on the good will and interest of the local community to work closely with the council to ensure the best use of our heritage.

The mill is cared for by the Friends of Shirley Windmill.



The Friends of Shirley Windmill was formed in 1995 and a working committee was set up to arrange the first public opening of the mill on National Mills Day 1995. That first opening on 14 May was a baptism of fire, as about 1000 people arrived to tour the mill! The huge numbers demonstrated the great degree of local interest in this most interesting historic asset that had been inaccessible to the public for so long. The original content and sequence of the guided tours devised for that day has been maintained ever since, and has worked very well.