



Bowman's Mill, Ickleford, Herts.

Historic Building Recording and Analysis

Client: Hill Residential Ltd

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Executive Summary

Prospect Archaeology has been commissioned by Hill Residential Ltd undertake a programme of historic building recording at the former Bowman's Mill Ickleford prior to demolition in advance of residential development.

Ickleford is a large village situated on the northern outskirts of Hitchin close to the Bedfordshire border. The parish lies in the valley of the River Hiz, which forms its boundary on the east and its southern boundary with Hitchin partially follows the course of the River Oughton. Bowman's Mill lies at the south end of the village on the banks of the River Oughton on the west side of Arlesley Road.

Discussions with the Planning Officer and the Senior Historic Environment Advisor (Hertfordshire LEADS) established that the scope of work would comprise a programme of evaluation trenching and building recording. This report covers the building recording element of the scheme. A separate report for the archaeological evaluation will be undertaken after demolition of the mill buildings has been undertaken.

Bowman's Mill was the last of four water mills known to have existed in the village since the Domesday Survey of 1086. Three were situated on the River Oughton and one on the River Hiz. Since the first documentary records in the 17th century naming a miller in the village only three family dynasties were responsible for milling at this mill. The Bowmans were the last of these. James Bowman set up business in nearby Astwick, Beds. In 1857 and five generations of the family were involved in the milling business, three of whom ran the mills in Ickleford from 1897-2016.

The oldest surviving building in the complex was the steam-powered roller mill built in 1890 by Thomas Priest. Given the dangerous state of the all the buildings on the site, it was clear that safe internal access would not be possible. A photographic record of the exterior was undertaken by the author, and a drone survey was carried out by Reclaim Heritage Ltd. A full photographic external survey of other buildings on the site was undertaken but not reported on here.

The significance of milling in Ickleford is reflected in the pride with which the parish council sponsored the publication about the history of its mills together with the investigations undertaken at Hyde Mill. Continuous use of the Bowman's mill site since Domesday has resulted in adaptations and alterations that have removed evidence of all but the latest iteration of milling practice.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1.1 Prospect Archaeology has been commissioned The Hill Group undertake a programme of historic building recording at the former Bowman's Mill Ickleford prior to demolition in advance of residential development.
- 1.1.2 The works were undertaken in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (DCMS 2025). All works will be conducted in accordance with the ClfA's Code of Conduct (ClfA 2014a, revised 2025) and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Investigations and Recording of Standing Buildings and Structures* (ClfA 2014b updated 2020).

1.2 Site Location and Description

- 1.2.1 Ickleford is a large village situated on the northern outskirts of Hitchin close to the Bedfordshire border. The parish lies in the valley of the River Hiz, which forms its boundary on the east and its southern boundary with Hitchin partially follows the course of the River Oughton. Bowman's Mill lies at the south end of the village on the banks of the River Oughton on the west side of Arlesley Road (Fig. 1, Pls 1-2).
- 1.2.2 The development site extends over an area of approximately 3.3ha the southern part of which is open ground (Pl. 3). The mill complex occupies the area north of the River Oughton and extends over approximately 2.2ha (Pls 1-3). At the west end of the site are the most recently built offices, laboratory buildings and warehousing, some of which had been demolished prior to the site visit (Pl. 4). In the centre north end of the site were warehouse and production buildings dating from c.1990 (Pl. 5). At the core eastern half of the site lie the older buildings including the roller mill built in 1890 along with the manager's house of the same date (Pls 7-8) surrounded by silos and warehousing dating to period after World War II (Pls 8-10). The new mill that replaced the watermill and the blower and switch rooms in 1970 flank the old roller mill (Pl. 7)).
- 1.2.3 The solid geology consists of Gault Formation - Mudstone. Sedimentary Bedrock formed approximately 100 to 112 million years ago in the Cretaceous Period. No superficial deposits are recorded in this area (<http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html>). However, localised alluvial deposits along the banks of the River Oughton are likely to be present. The Site occupies an area of flat ground which lies at c.52.5m OD.

2.0 Planning Background

- 2.1.1 A Reserved matters application for appearance, landscaping, layout and scale in relation to erection of 55 dwellings and associated access, car parking, garages, landscaping and open space including demolition and removal of all existing structures, buildings and hardstanding pursuant to the outline planning permission 17/01955/1 which was approved in 2024. Conditions 25-27 of the outline permission specified the requirement for archaeological investigation and recording.
- 2.1.2 Discussions with the Planning Officer and the Senior Historic Environment Advisor (Hertfordshire LEADS) established that the scope of work would comprise a programme of evaluation trenching and Level 4 building recording. This report covers the building recording element of the scheme. A separate report for the archaeological evaluation will be undertaken after demolition of the mill buildings has been undertaken.

3.0 Scope of Works

- 3.1.1 Level 4, as defined in the Historic England guidance (2016) comprises a comprehensive analytical record and is appropriate for buildings of special importance or due for demolition, accompanied by drawings and photographs. It draws on the full range of other sources of information about the building and discuss its significance in terms of architectural, social, regional or economic history.
- 3.1.2 Given the dangerous state of the key building of interest, it was clear that safe access inside the buildings would not be possible. A photographic record of the exterior was undertaken by the author and a drone survey was carried out by Reclaim Heritage Ltd. A drawn record was not possible.

4.0 Background

- 4.1.1 The following background history has relied upon the story of the Bowman family published by Peter Bowman (Bowman 1997) and the publication on the mills of Ickleford produced by Ickleford Parish Council (Ickleford PC 2014). Peter Bowman stated that the reason for writing his book as follows:

“Being the recipient of all the family papers that have been put away over the years in boxes in the attic, I think they should be recorded. There are no longer many attics and family papers will soon disappear.”

- 4.1.2 It was hoped to add to the background information provided in the heritage assessment in 2017 (Field 2017) which had included archive research but no detailed information from the papers belonging to James Bowman & Sons was used. Approaches were made to the family, and companies that took over Bowman's, as well as the Mills Archive Trust, Hertfordshire Archives and Hitchin Museum. All attempts to locate the archive that Peter Bowman described and used in his book have ended in failure and his insightful prediction appears to have come true.

4.2 History

- 4.2.1 A fuller account of the archaeological and historical background to the area, not related to the history of the mill, can be found in the desk-based assessment prepared by Prospect Archaeology (Field 2017).
- 4.2.2 180 places are mentioned in the county of Hertfordshire in the Domesday Survey of 1086. Just over one third (63) had mills that were assessed for taxation. Over 6000 mills were recorded in England as a whole and 110.5 mills recorded in Hertfordshire. Until the mid-19th century, many villages had wind or watermills to grind flour for the community. There are still two 18th century watermills in Hertfordshire, at Hatfield and Redbournbury near St Alban's, that still produce flour using traditional methods.
- 4.2.3 Before Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in the mid-sixteenth century, most mills were owned either by the Church or by the Lord of the Manor. The law at that time required flour to be ground only at your Lord's mill - known as his "Right of Soke". The miller charged up to 10% of the grain, and the landlord frequently took a further cut.
- 4.2.4 Ickleford is not recorded in the survey as it was part of Pirton parish in the Hundred of Hitchin. (The manors of Ickleford and Ramerick were created from parts of Pirton Manor in the 12th century and the modern Ickleford parish includes the lands of both these medieval manors.) In 1086 the manor (estate) was held by Ralph de Lindsey and had four mills valued at a total of £3/13/2d. These would most certainly have been water mills with vertical wheels. While it is not possible to identify their location it is reasonable to expect that they would have been situated on or near to the sites of the later mills. The management of the water courses, development of mill ponds and enhancement of the riverbanks upstream of the mills would not have been wasted when earlier mills were replaced by larger buildings and more efficient machinery.

In 1670 there was a Commission to determine the privileges of the king's mills in Hitchin. Four mills were recorded in Ickleford- Oughtonhead mills, Lucas his mills (Ickleford Mill), Hyde mills and Cadwell mills. Three of these mills are clearly shown on the plan of the manorial estate undertaken in 1771 by T. Bateman for the Revd Thomas Whitehurst (Herts Archives DE/Ha/P1). Records for the Cadwell Mill are sparse and the mill ceased to exist beyond the 18th century and it is not shown on the 1771 map (see below).

The census returns of 1841 to 1911 show 5 to 15 people being employed by the other three mills until the end of the 19th century. The distance between West Mill located near the source of the river Oughton and Hyde mill, at the confluence of the Rivers Oughton and Hiz was only one mile (Ickleford PC 2014, 4).

- 4.2.5 The nineteenth century brought radical changes to milling practices across the country. Lifting tariffs on imported grain with the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, resulted in plentiful imports of American wheat. At about the same time, a more efficient milling process invented in Germany, and perfected in Hungary, was introduced where grain was crushed between two steel rollers, rather than between millstones, allowing for more efficient and increased rates of production. Many of the old mills could not survive the rise of mass production leading to fewer, but larger modern mills. By the beginning of the 20th century many small local mills were reduced to the grist milling of animal foodstuffs.

4.3 The Stone-ground Milling Process

- 4.3.1 Grain would arrive at the mill by horse and cart in sacks from the surrounding estate. As the miller unloaded sacks from the top of the cart straight into the first floor of the mill and the cart became emptier, the lower sacks would be unloaded into the ground floor. The sacks of grain had to be taken up to the top floor. This was done by the sack-hoist whose chain passed through each floor and could be operated from any level.
- 4.3.2 Once at the top of the building the grain was emptied into a bin for storage. As required the grain would be poured into hoppers on the second floor for feeding the grain to the millstones. The grain fell through chutes from the hopper into a smaller hopper on top of the stones on the first floor from where it would be guided into the centre of the stones by the slipper, a moveable wooden chute. The slipper was agitated constantly to ensure a smooth flow of grain into the stones. This was done by the damsel, a four-armed shaft projecting up from the centre of the stone.

- 4.3.3 The furrows (grooves) in millstones needed regular dressing as the grinding process would wear down the stone surfaces. This was a skilled job usually done by journeymen dressers travelling from mill to mill. Only the top stone, or runner-stone, rotates in any pair, with the bedstone being fixed to the floor. The runner-stone is balanced above the bedstone, hanging on the mace (or rynd) which is supported on the spindle. When the grain falls into the centre of the runner-stone it is forced outwards by the grooves on the surface of the stones and the action of centrifugal force. It is crushed between stones and falls from the edge of the stone as flour. The flour passes down a chute where it can be bagged on the ground floor as 100% wholemeal flour.



Image of a working watermill at Redbournbury near St Albans (© John Brandrick)

- 4.3.4 White flour was produced by passing the flour through a wire-machine or bolter where a series of sieves, made from increasingly finer meshes are used to separate the wholemeal flour into bran, semolina, and white flour.
- 4.3.5 All the power for the mill stones and auxiliary machinery was provided by the waterwheel. It was probably an overshot wheel which may have replaced an earlier breast-shot wheel. The advantage of an overshot wheel is that it is powered by the weight of the water falling over the top of the wheel into buckets attached to the wheel to propel it. In a breast-shot wheel the water enters the buckets level with the axle and the wheel produces only about one third of the power of an overshot wheel. The third type of waterwheel is an undershot, where the water passes under the wheel; it is the force of the water hitting the paddles that turns the wheel rather than the weight of water in buckets. However, it is

unlikely to have been the case on the River Oughton which would not have been powerful enough to drive an undershot wheel.

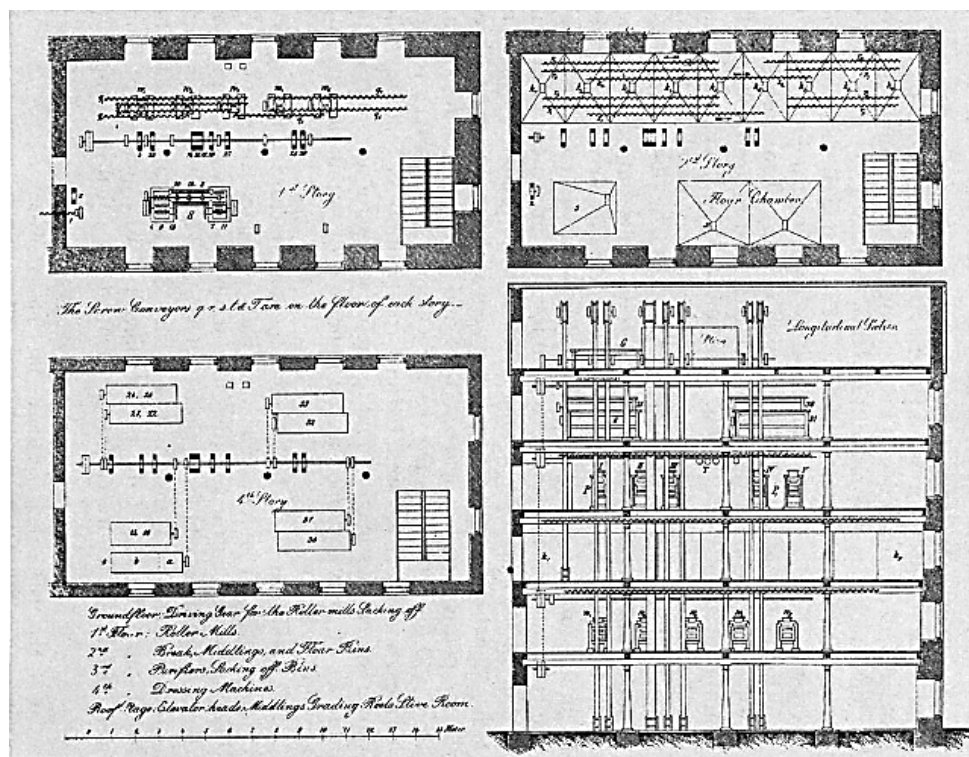
- 4.3.6 An overshot wheel needs a head of water which has to be provided by artificially raising the river. This required diversion of the river along the side of the valley, known as a leat until a sufficient height of water had been reached to work the waterwheel. This was a huge feat of engineering considering the mass of soil used to construct the river banks and the similar mass of clay and chalk used to waterproof the bed of the river
- 4.3.7 The water flow was controlled by sluices to stop the water flowing downstream. Water was directed into a launder (or pentrough) which was an open trough or tank to hold water, then direct it onto an overshot waterwheel. If the river course filled too much the sluices could be opened to release the water downstream without turning the wheel. The waterwheel rotates a horizontal shaft, which moves a gear called the pit wheel. This drives a smaller gear (wallower) on a main vertical shaft. The vertical shaft turns the top millstone (runner stone) above a stationary one (bed stone), grinding the grain. At Redbournbury, near St Albans, the only watermill in the county that is still used to grind flour, the gearing increases the speed of revolution from 10 r.p.m. at the wheel to about 120 r.p.m. at the runner-stone (<https://www.redbournburymill.co.uk/The-Mill/Milling>).

4.4 The Roller Mill

- 4.4.1 Stone-ground flour production was small-scale and flour was transported by horse and cart to local markets. The population explosion in urban centres drove the need for increased supplies of food. The free entry of wheat after the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1849 provided the supply of grain and to take advantage of these imports new steam driven mills equipped with roller mills rather than stones were built at ports of London, Liverpool Hull and Bristol.
- 4.4.2 From its invention in 1873, the roller mill triumphed rapidly over millstones, such that by the turn of the century the revolution was essentially complete. Henry Simon (1835-1899) was the leading engineer in the transformation of British milling. Born in Silesia (now part of Poland) he studied in Switzerland and gaining engineering experience in Germany, Russia, and France. He settled in Manchester in 1860 and took out British citizenship. His contribution to milling technology consisted of patents, publications, and, above all, a greater number of roller mill installations than any other British engineer. The first new mills were installed at coastal locations close to where imported grain arrived such as

Manchester, Southampton and London. He built the first completely automatic roller mill in the world for McDougall Brothers in Manchester in 1881. The roller mill at Ickleford, installed only nine years later. The improved efficiency of the mills serviced the increasing demands caused by the population explosion in the industrial areas of the country.

- 4.4.3 At its core, a roller mill uses cylindrical rollers to crush and grind grain into a finer consistency. The rollers rotate at high speeds and apply pressure to the grain, breaking it down into smaller pieces without overheating it, which helps preserve the nutritional quality of the flour.



Plans and section of English roller mill on the Simon system (F. Kick Flour Manufacture 2nd ed. Supp. London 1888 plate 2) published in Tann and Jones 1996.

- 4.4.4 Before it enters the mill floor, wheat is cleaned and then conditioned; after which, it passes through two cast steel "break" rollers which are set slightly apart from each other. The top roller runs at a slightly faster rate to the lower roller, and when wheat passes through it creates a shearing action, opening up the wheat grain. Opening the grain, rather than pulverising it, gives better access to the endosperm particles within
- <https://www.ukflourmillers.org/flour-milling/the-milling-process>.

5.0 The Other Ickleford Mills

5.1.1 Cadwell Mill was situated on the River Hiz, the other three were all on the River Oughton. Both rivers formed boundaries with adjacent parishes, and in the case of the Hiz the boundary between Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, along part of its course. All the mills were at one time situated in other parishes and known by a variety of names, the same name Ickleford Mill being applied at various times to different mills. This has made for some difficulty in tracing the history of the individual mills but fortunately, much of the research was undertaken as part of a community project funded by Ickleford Parish Council that culminated in an excavation at the site of the Hyde Mill and their publication *The Mills of Ickleford* (Ickleford PC 2014). All three mills on the River Oughton passed through the hands of the Bowman family at some point in their history.

Cadwell Mill

5.1.2 Cadwell Mill was situated on the banks of the River Hiz but there are no physical remains left. The earliest reference is from the 1670 commission to determine the privileges of the King's mills in Hitchen (National Archives ref. E134.22 Chas. 2/24). The mill is referred to as 'Cadwell Mill in the parish of Holewell' which suggests that the mill was situated on the east bank of the river which was formerly in the county of Bedfordshire but later was incorporated into the parish of Ickleford. A mill is shown on the 1750 map of Hertfordshire, part of the series of maps drawn between 1749 and 1761 for *The Large English Atlas* but not evident on Bateman's map of 1771, although a building is shown on the presumed site. It may already have ceased to operate by that date (Ickleford PC 2014, 66).

West Mill

5.1.3 West Mill was situated 1400m downstream from the source of the River Oughton at the crossing of the Hitchen Road. It was referred to by many names over the centuries including Alton, Awton, Orton, Horton and Horton Head Mill. Although now within the parish of Ickleford it lay within the boundaries of Pirton or Shillington in previous centuries and lies right on the edge of the parish.

5.1.4 In 1913 Hertfordshire County Council bought West Mill farm including the house, mill cottages and other buildings from Arthur Whitehead and others. West Mill House the mill and associated buildings were the subjects of a separate rental agreement in between

1913 and 1982 there were four different tenants. In addition, Bowmans rented the mill during the early part of the 20th century, but milling activities ceased by 1922.

- 5.1.5 During World War II much of the mill machinery was dismantled for the War Effort to reuse iron and the mill wheelhouse burnt down in 1959. By 1982 the County Council had sold the house and buildings and in 1997 the properties were sold on to a developer who converted them into residences (Ickleford PC 2014, 9).

Hyde Mill

- 5.1.6 Hyde mill was situated at the confluence of the River Hiz and the River Oughton just 250 metres downstream of Ickleford Mill. The mill house and part of the mill were on the Ickleford bank with the larger part of the mill and associated barns on the Hitchin bank. As with the other mills in the parish, it has been known by various other names over the centuries including Hyde Mill, Rowley's Mill and Ickleford Mill. The earliest reference naming Hyde mill is to be found in the cartulary of Wymondley Priory when the income from the mill was granted to the priory by the lord of the manor Richard de Argentine, who had founded the priory at some time before 1207.
- 5.1.7 The mill has a complex history of ownership. Following the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538 Hyde Mill was granted by Henry VIII to James Needham in 1543, who was surveyor general and Clerk of the King's Works. The Hyde mill ultimately was bought by the Ansel family who were lords of the manor and the mill remained as part of the manor until 1775 when the estate was divided and sold. However, the sale of the mill to a local miller and farmer William Mullein had been agreed a few months earlier. Unfortunately, he died before the transaction could be completed and when probate was granted in 1776 his daughter Beata Mason inherited from her father and when she died her estate passed via her daughter Elizabeth, to her husband, Revd Robert Stevens who became dean of Rochester cathedral. Her brother-in-law John Rowley occupied the mill and thereafter the mill became known as Rowleys Mill. On his wife's death in 1838 John's brother James took over as miller. The Reverend Henry Stevens who was a vicar in Kent inherited Hyde mill in 1870 but sold it to Thomas Priest in 1874, never having lived in Ickleford. Thomas Priest had leased the mill since at least September 1861 when he installed a new water wheel and millstones. At the time of his death in 1914 he was considered the largest landowner and the wealthiest person in the village.

- 5.1.8 In 1897 the land on which Hyde Mill was situated was transferred to Ickleford parish when it became known as Ickleford Mill. In 1900 both Hyde Mill and Ickleford mill to the west were conveyed from Thomas Priest to his relative George Perowne Roberts on an agreement that Priest would receive an income of £400 per annum during his lifetime. Priest died in 1914 and George Perowne Roberts sold both the Hyde Mill and Ickleford Mill to James Bowman & Sons (see below).
- 5.1.9 In 1936 a provender mill (a mill that produced animal feed) was added to Bowman's Station Mills in Hitchin, originally constructed from surplus machinery from the flour mill at that site. This resulted in the closure of Hyde Mill which was still using millstones to grind barley meal for animal feed.
- 5.1.10 In 1939 the site was sold back to George Perowne Roberts by James Bowman & Sons for £25. In 1961 Mrs Dorothy Parker née Roberts inherited the land from her father George and the land on the Hitchin bank of the River Oughton was sold back to James Bowman & Sons. The land on the Ickleford bank was given by her to Ickleford Parish Council in 2010.
- 5.1.11 A community project to excavate the buried remains of the Hyde Mill was undertaken between 2010 and 2012 was supported by the parish council, the results of which are included in the book published by the council on the history of all the mills in the parish (Ickleford PC 2014). The remains were covered over after recording and the site on the Ickleford side of the river is now a Conservation Area. There is an information board at the entrance to the site.

6.0 The Bowman Connection

6.1 History

- 6.1.1 The Bowman family, who acquired the mills in Ickleford came from Stotfold in Bedfordshire and in 1857 Samuel Bowman bought a mill in nearby Astwick for his second and third sons James and George. George left the business but was replaced by his younger brother Walter. James had eight children four of whom joined the business. The opening of the Great Northern Railway from London to Peterborough transformed the Bowman business because flour could be sent easily to London. Flour was carted to Arlesley near the mainline and stored in the firm's barn (which later moved to Ickleford). By 1900 the mill at Astwick had reached capacity production, and James Bowman built a brand new mill at Hitchin near to the railway, which became known as Station Mills.

- 6.1.2 The mill now referred as Ickleford or Bowman's Mill is 1300m downstream from the site of West Mill and 250m upstream from the site of Hyde Mill. It has been known by various names over the centuries including Shitlington Mill, Shillington Mill and Bowman's Mill. the land on which it stands was a detached part of Shillington parish until 1897, hence its former names. In that year the land was transferred from Shillington parish to Ickleford.
- 6.1.3 In 1670 the Exchequer proceedings referred to above describes four mills in Ickleford including a mill run by Edward Lucas which is identified as the mill that became known as Bowman's mill. A lease of 1698/8 refers to a John Love of Ickleford, miller, who had been commissioned to build a new watermill near Hitchin Priory. Three generations of the Love family would be millers at this mill until 1751. The mill then passed through the female line, first via Mary Love, sister of George Love Jr to Andrew Cooper and via their daughter Sarah to a John Crouch Priest in 1782. The Priest family ran the mill for another 100 years. John Crouch Priest's grandson Thomas ran the mill from at least 1851 and was responsible for modernising the mill. A new watermill building was constructed in 1857 (Pl. 9) and by 1892 he had built roller mills powered by steam next to the watermill (Fig. 2 no.12 and Pl. 10). This was far sighted innovation by Priest who clearly understood that the old technology would be unable to keep up with increasing demand.
- 6.1.4 In 1900 Thomas Priest invited his younger relative George Perowne Roberts to learn milling and farming. Both Ickleford Mill and Hyde Mill were conveyed to him in an agreement that he would pay a combined rent of £400 per annum to Thomas Priest during his lifetime. Following Thomas Priest's death in 1914 Roberts inherited the whole estate and in that year an agreement for the sale of both Ickleford Mill and Hyde Mill was made between Roberts and James Bowman & Sons Ltd. The amount agreed upon was £7000 @ 4.5% interest for a term of 14 years, provided that at least £3000 was paid off within 7 years. Payment was completed by 1922.
- 6.1.5 Money was tight during the First World War and into the interwar years so little by way of modernisation took place until the mid-1930s when the steam engine, installed in 1892 to power the roller mills, was replaced with a semi-diesel oil engine. The roller mills were still running on this engine in 1970 (Bowman 1997, 38).
- 6.1.6 During the Second World War the government took control of the milling industry taking over the running costs while leaving the assets in the hands of the owners. This meant that investment in new facilities was minimal. Financial control was only handed back to

the milling industry in 1953. Although Bowman's ran three mills in Ickleford as well as others in Hitchin and Astwick only Ickleford Mill had spare land capacity for expansion. In 1956 a silo was built for £25,000 at the mill (Fig. 2 no. 4, Pl. 11). A second silo holding 3200 tonnes was erected there in 1960 (Fig. 2 no.5). there was still not enough storage to cover three months flour sales so further capacity was added in 1964 a flat store was selected for this purpose at a cost of 22,600 lbs to hold 5000 tonnes. The flat store was ultimately converted to a flour warehouse for the new mills on the site. In 1970 the old watermill was demolished and replaced with the new pneumatic mill. This allowed for pneumatic conveyors to be used with just a ground floor and another main floor above instead of the traditional three-floor arrangement (Bowman, 1997,79-81; Fig. 2 nos 13 and 14). Removal of the watermill revealed the blind south elevation of the roller mill showing windows on the top (third) floor only (Pl. 12).

- 6.1.7 As the flour trade increased more storage was provided in specialised steel bins, two 1500 tonne bins being built in 1980 (Fig. 2 no. 33, Pl. 13). Additional land was purchased on the north side of the site for £8000 an acre land to allow for further expansion (Fig. 2 nos 18-19).
- 6.1.8 In 2016 James Bowman & Sons Ltd withdrew from the milling market to concentrate on ingredients. Whitworth Bros bought out Bowman's and redeveloped their mill at Whitley Bridge in S. Yorkshire. (*British Baker* June 20th, 2016). The mill at Ickleford was closed although the company's head office and research centre continued to operate from the site. In 1990 the mill at Hitchin was purposed to create coatings such as breadcrumbs leading to the establishment of Bowman Ingredients which was absorbed by the international company Solina in 2020. The youngest son of Peter Bowman, who published the history of the Bowman family in 1997, retired from the business.

6.2 Mill Description

- 6.2.1 The dangerous state of the buildings has severely limited the range of recording possible. A structural report on the mill buildings was received on November 19th, 2025, which advised that many of the buildings on the site are unsafe and should be demolished immediately (Superstructures 2025). An internal inspection was made of these buildings in November 2016. The remainder of the site was inspected externally only, augmented by the drone survey undertaken by Reclaim Heritage. A 3-D model is attached here <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/ickleford-mill-a1b524be4a57464381c33bc588d3e275>

6.2.2 The oldest buildings on the site consist of the roller mill built in 1892 see Fig. 2 (12), the contemporary Mill House (1) and the East Lodge to the north of the mill which lies outside the redline boundary. The roller mill replaced two buildings on the north side of the 1857 water mill that was also constructed in brick (Pl. 9). It is a tall narrow building of four storeys with a low-pitched roof (Pls 15-16). All sides of the roof are topped with later metal guard rails, indicating that there was access up to the roof presumably for maintenance purposes. At the time of inspection much of the south-facing side of the roof had collapsed into the building and there were holes in the north side (Pls 17-18).

6.2.3 The height of the building to the ridge is 14.40m and to the eaves 12.12m. It is 8.52m and two window bays wide and 22.38m and 8 window bays long. Construction is very plain, in a local yellow brick in English Bond with decorative features limited to the stone window sills that project slightly from the wall face. The four-centred arch window lintels comprise two rows of common brick headers. The windows themselves were divided into 4, the lower two lights being casement windows subdivided into 4 panes of glass; the upper two lights being fixed with two panes of glass. There is an oculus window at the apex of each gable, 0.98m in diameter.

East Gable

6.2.4 The east gable is the only completely exposed elevation. The oculus window has six wedge shaped panes around a small circular with a semi-circular brick hood mould above. The opening is surrounded by two rows of common headers (Pl. 19). This window gave extra light to the third floor which also had a pair of windows below. An identical pair sits below, lighting the second floor. At first floor level the south window is the same as those above but at the north side there was a taking-in door. The opening had been altered/repared with new brick in lower sections of both jambs and the threshold appears to be timber rather than stone. The lintel is made up of three rows of header bricks, and the opening is wider than the windows, so there is no doubt that this opening was never a window (Pl. 20). At ground floor level there is an entrance below the taking-in door and a window below the others on the south side (Pl. 20).

North Elevation

6.2.5 Early photographs show that there were eight windows on all four storeys of this elevation (Pl. 14). The north elevation was partly obscured by an extension constructed in 1970 for the blower room, switch room and transformers (Fig. 2 nos. 7,8,9). It appears to

have replaced an earlier lean-to which is shown on the 1956 photo (Pl. 11). Those on the ground and first floors were blocked in 1970. The top storey windows were blocked at an unknown date and some were replaced with vents (Pls 15-16, 21). A blocked ground floor door was recorded at the north-west corner of this elevation allowing access from the mill into this extension (Pl. 22).

West Gable

- 6.2.6 Only the ground floor and the lower part of the first floor was visible at the time of inspection because a large building clad in corrugated metal had been added, with the vehicular access below (Pls 23-24). A string course comprising three rows of corbelled brickwork at the junction of the ground and first floor is present on this elevation. It is not clear whether this was a decorative or structural feature (Pl. 24). At first-floor level there is evidence for a blocked window the north side of this elevation.
- 6.2.7 There does not appear to have been an original opening at ground level but a hole had recently been knocked through the wall to gain access, and a hole had been dug inside the building, presumably to inspect the foundations (Pl. 25). The wall thickness at this level was some 18 inches. The exposed southwest corner of the building is completely blind (Pls 26-27).

South Elevation

This side of the building was built against the watermill constructed in 1857. A photograph taken during demolition of this mill building in 1969 to make way for the new mill shows there were no features on the lower storeys but windows at third floor level were of the same style and spacing as seen on the north elevation (Pl. 12). After the new mill B was built in 1970 the windows were blocked and the whole elevation was concealed (Pl. 17).

Interior

- 6.2.8 It was only possible to make a very cursory inspection of the interior because of the state of the building a couple of internal photographs were taken just inside the door of the South Gable showing the stairs up to the first floor. Photographs taken in 2017 provide a limited basis for describing the interior. Further photographs were taken in 2023 and posted on the 28 Days Later website by "KPUrban" <https://www.28dayslater.co.uk/threads/ickleford-flour-mill-bowmans-hitchin-2023.137452/>

- 6.2.9 There is no information about the equipment that was originally installed in 1892 at Ickleford except that it was a Simon's roller but a description of a nearby contemporary mill being built in Maldon Essex gives an idea of the machinery and the processes involved on each floor.

Maldon Rayleigh Roller mills. Essex Four break rolls and eight reduction smooth rolls on first floor. Purifiers on second floor. Rotary sifters on third floor together with eight centrifugals, dressing machines and dust collector. Top floor/attic: inter-elevator dressing reels, a bran centrifugal and a separating sieve purifier, plus a sack hoist. Horizontal tandem condensing steam engine of 30hp with Lancashire boiler *Chelmsford Chronicle* February 1896

- 6.2.10 The machinery that was present in the mill in 2016 was modern and electrically powered, part of an integrated milling complex on the site. None of the 19th century machinery was identified in 2016 and by 2026 the whole of the interior had been vandalised.

7.0 Conclusion

- 7.1.1 The closure of Bowmans Mill in 2016 marked the end of nearly 1000 years of milling in the parish. Since the first documentary records in the 17th century only three family dynasties were responsible for milling at Bowman's mill, and two other mills in the village. The Bowmans were the last of these. James Bowman set up business in 1857 and five generations of the family were involved in the milling business, three of whom ran the mills in Ickleford from 1897. The significance of milling is reflected in the pride with which the parish council sponsored the publication about the history of its mills together with the investigations undertaken at Hyde Mill. Continuous use of the mill site since Domesday has resulted in adaptations and alterations that have removed evidence of all but the latest iteration of milling practice.

8.0 References

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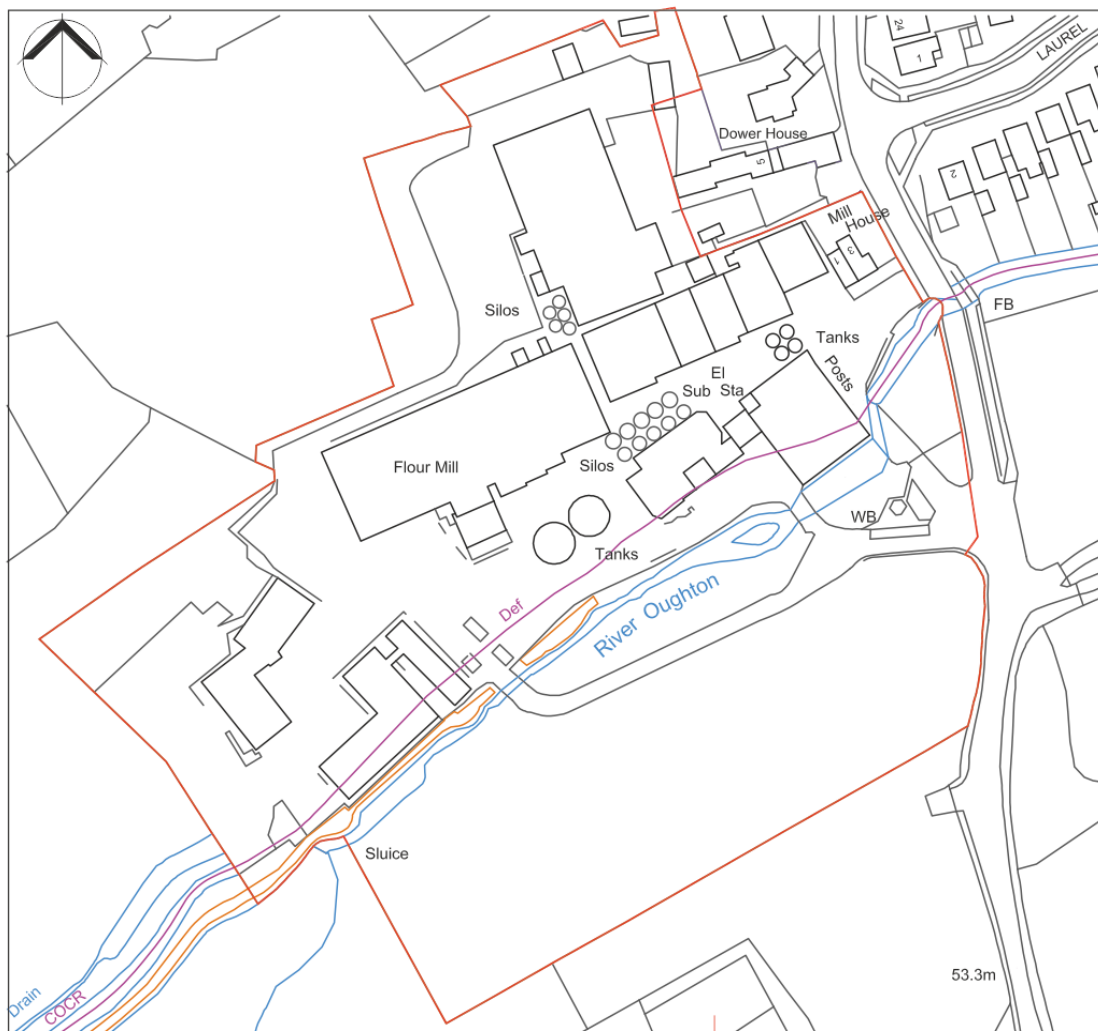
<https://www.redbournburymill.co.uk/> Website of the Redbournbury working watermill, near St Albans.

Cartographic Reference

Herts Archives DE/Ha/P1 *A Plan of the Manor and Parish of Ickleford and other Lands in the adjoining Parishes of Hitchin and Pirton in the County of Hertford and also of Several*

*Parcels of Land in the Parishes of Holwell and Shitlington in the County of Bedford.
Belonging to The Rev'd Thomas Whitehurst. Surveyed by T Bateman, 1771.*

9.0 Figures



20

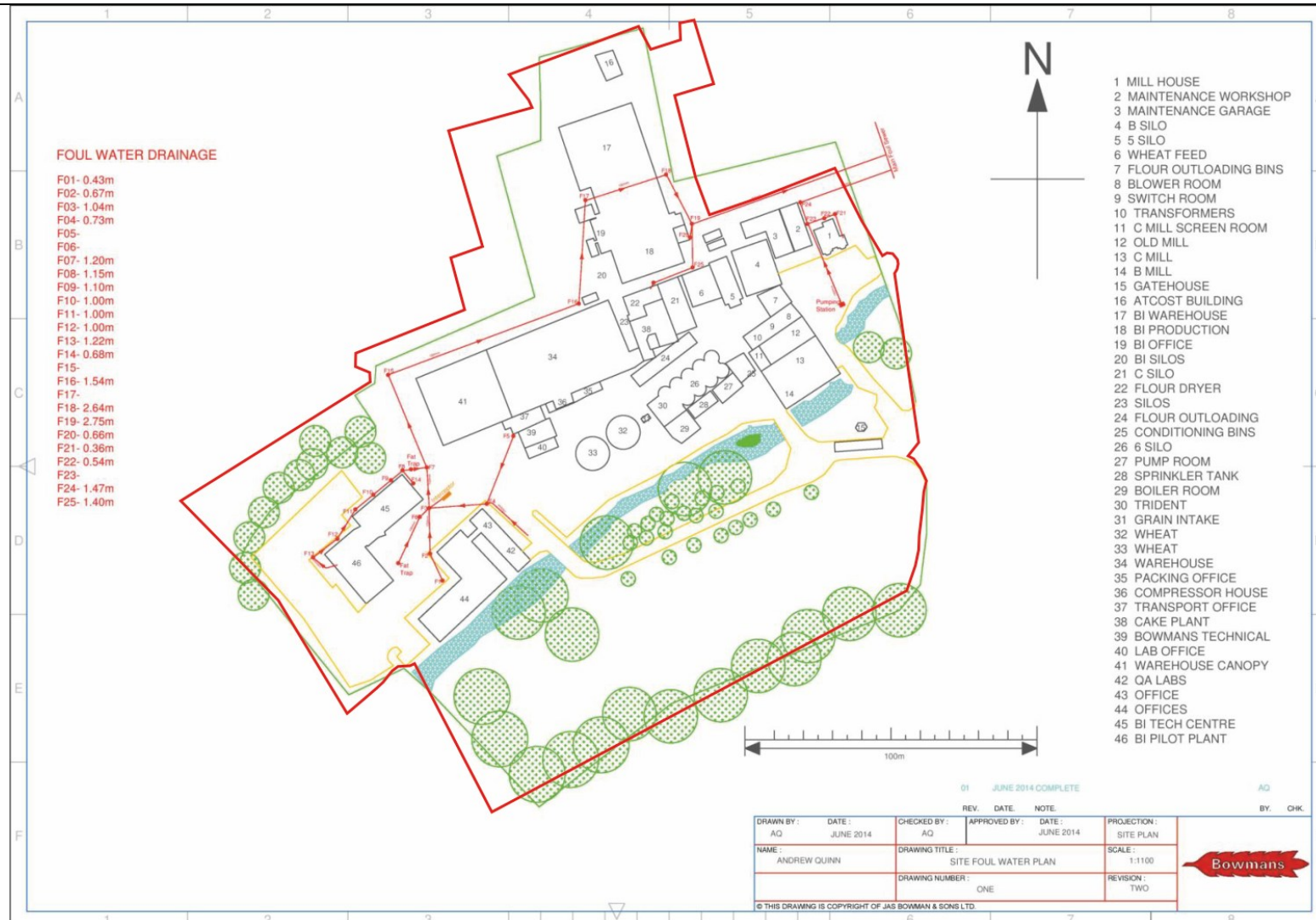


Fig. 2 Bowman's Mill, Ickleford. Layout and description of buildings 2014

10.0 Plates



Pl. 1 Bowman's Mill, aerial view looking west (Reclaim Heritage)



Pl. 2 Bowman's Mill, aerial view, looking north-west (Reclaim Heritage)



Pl. 3 Bowmans Mill general view looking north



Pl. 4 Bowmans Mill looking east, with modern BI Pilot plant centre in foreground with warehouse centre rear and silos to right behind lab and office buildings



Pl. 5 BI warehouse (left) looking south towards the warehouse with silos to the rear.



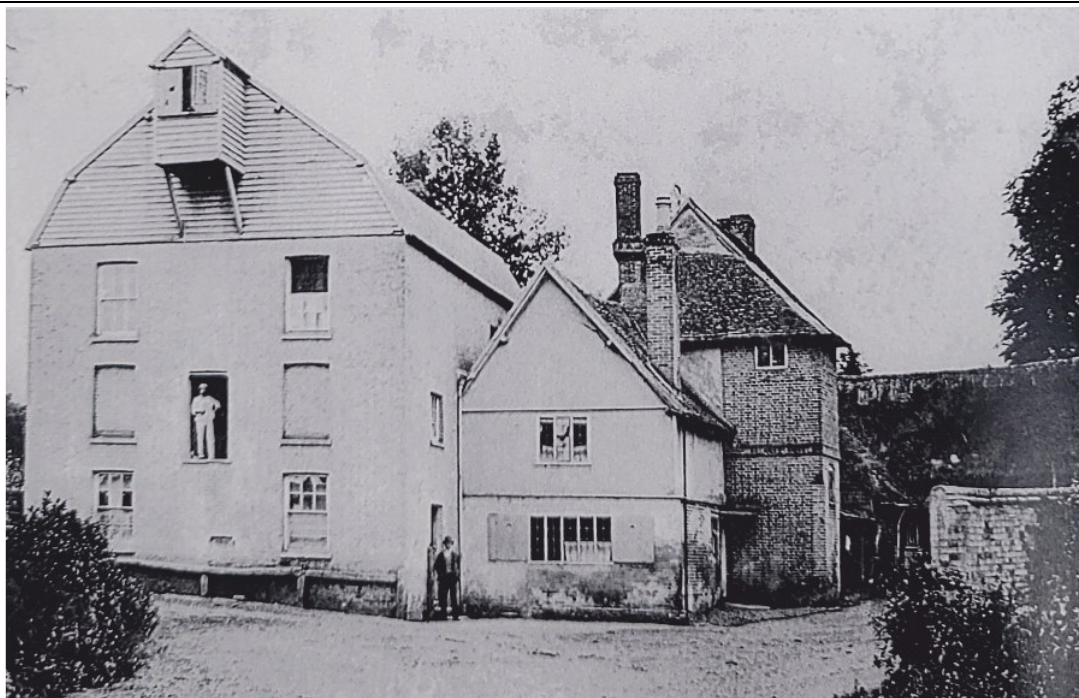
Pl. 6 B Mill (left), roller mill centre and blower room right, looking west



Pl. 7 General view across yard towards the warehouse



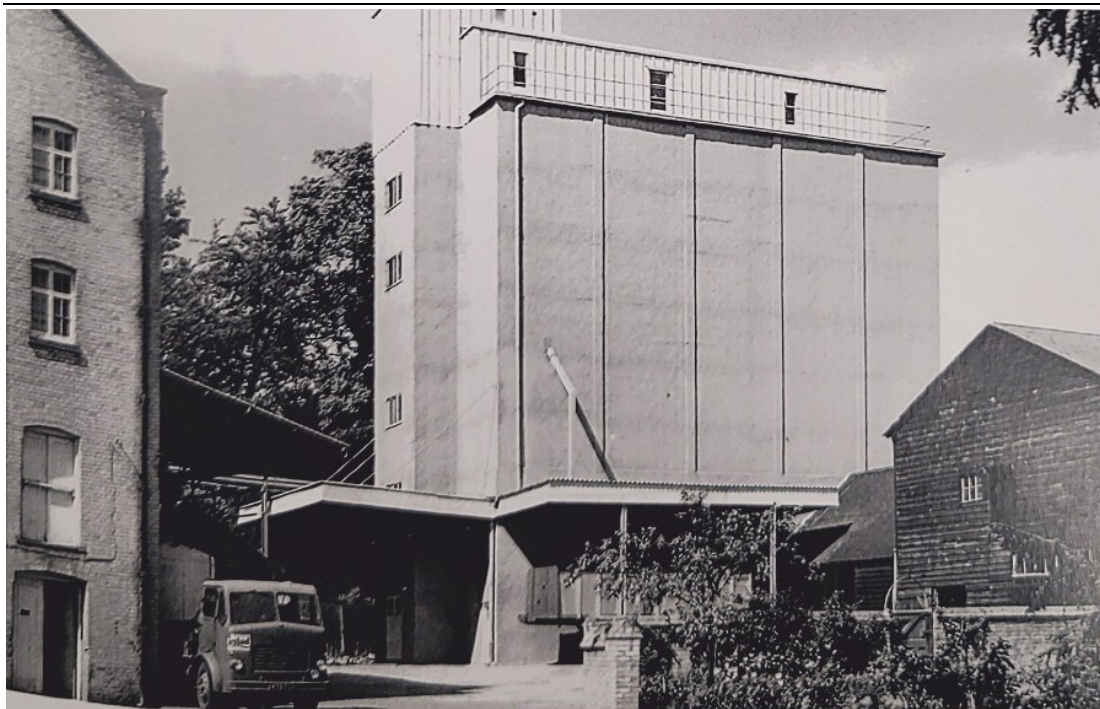
Pl. 8 Mill House, former manager's house, later used as offices, with two workshops to the left



Pl. 9 Ickleford Mill c. 1870 showing the water mill built 1857 and buildings on its north side of unknown function (Bowman 1997)



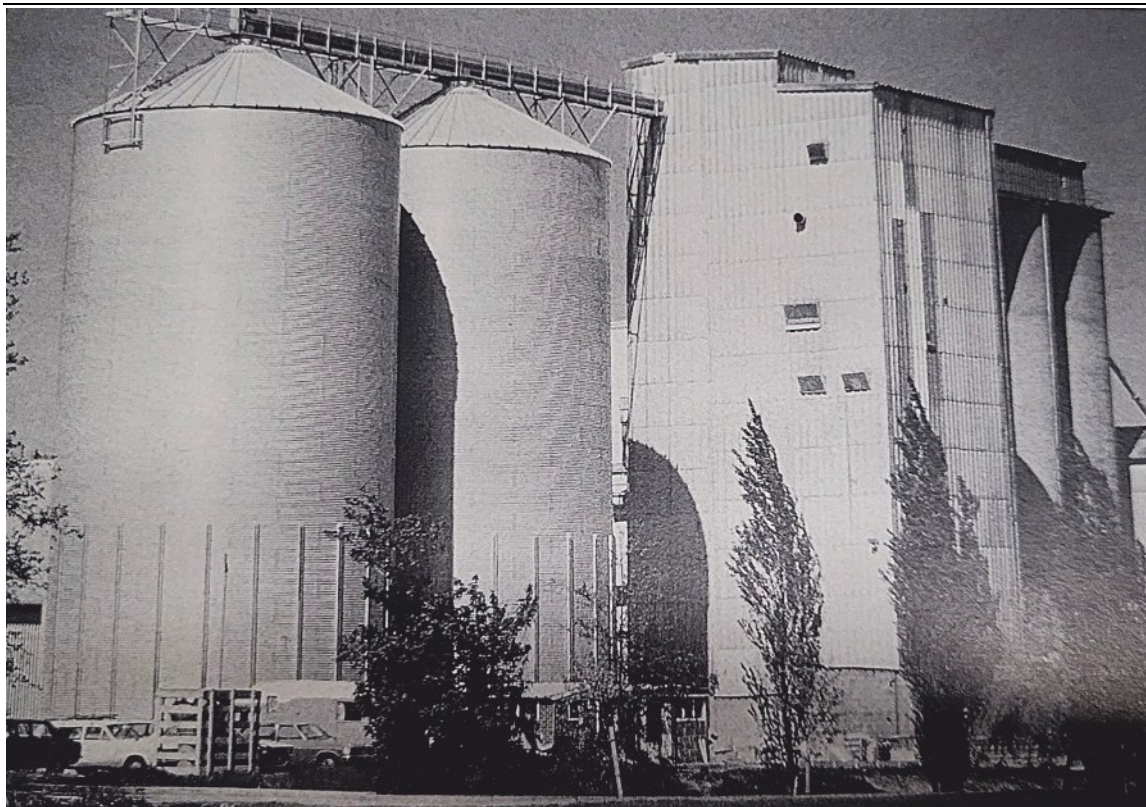
Pl. 10 Ickleford Mill 1914 showing the Water mill and its replacement roller mills to the right, built 1892 (Bowman 1997)



Pl. 11 Ickleford Mill new silo 1956 (Bowman 1997)



Pl. 12 Construction of the new mill 1969-70 showing the south elevation of the roller mill, looking north-east (Bowman 1997).



Pl. 13 Ickleford Mill new silos 1980 (Bowman 1997)



Pl. 14 Ickleford Mill 1950 (Bowman 1997)



Pl. 15 General view looking south-west showing north elevation of the roller mill above the blower house



Pl. 16 North and west elevations of the roller mill looking south-east



Pl. 17 View across the roof looking north-west



Pl. 18 The roof looking south



Pl. 19 East gable apex looking west.



Pl. 20 East gable taking in door and entrance.



Pl. 21 North elevation showing blocked windows and vents looking south-east



Pl. 22 Blocked door at north end of north elevation of roller mill



Pl. 23 West gable looking south-east



Pl. 24 West gable looking east



Pl. 25 Interior of the roller mill showing recent excavation to inspect foundations



Pl. 26 South west corner of the roller mill masked by adjacent conditioning bins (left) and C Mill (right)



Pl. 27 The south-west corner of the building at roof height showing the low parapet capped with flat concrete slabs (Reclaim Heritage)



Pl. 28 Inside the east entrance to the mill, stair access to first floor, looking west 2026 (N. Field)



Pl. 29 View up stairs to the first floor 2026 (N. Field)



Pl. 30 First floor looking west 2026 (Peter Bull)



Pl. 31 B Mill 2017 (N. Field)



Pl. 32 View into Mill B from the roller mill looking south-west 2026 (N. Field)



Pl. 33 Roller mill ground floor external south elevation 2026 looking west (Reclaim Heritage drone image)



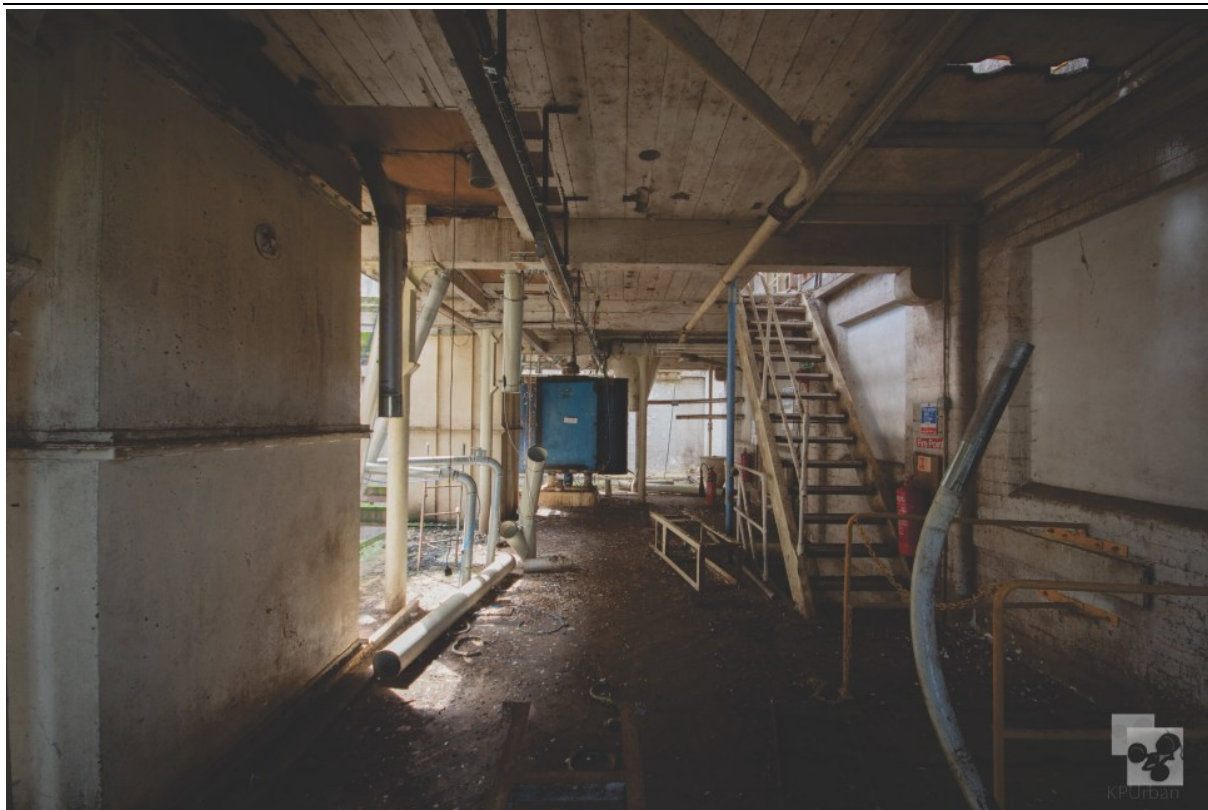
Pl. 34 Roller mill ground floor interior south side 2026 looking west (Reclaim Heritage drone image)



Pl. 35 First floor 2017 (N. Field)



Pl. 36 First-floor column 2017 (N. Field)



Pl. 37 First floor north side looking west with trapdoor in ceiling and stair to 2nd floor 2023
(28 Days Later)



Pl. 38 Second floor trapdoor with stair to third floor behind, looking west 2017 (N. Field)



Pl. 39 Second floor blocked window and corbel supporting ceiling joist on north wall. 2017 (N. Field)



Pl. 40 Second floor looking west 2023 (28 Days Later)



Pl. 41 Second floor looking south-east 2026 (Peter Bull)



Pl. 42 Second floor looking south-west 2026 (Peter Bull)



Pl. 43 Third floor looking west 2017 (N. Field)



Pl. 44 Third floor looking west 2023 (28 Days Later)