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CONSERVATION & PLANNING

Heritage Statement

The Mill
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20th February 2018

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The Mill, Ashwell

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(Photographs taken by the author on the 20th November 2015 unless otherwise stated).

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This Heritage Statement has been written to support planning and listed building consent applications for alterations and extension to The Mill, Ashwell. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by the proposal, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance (paragraph 128).

1.2 This Statement provides an appraisal of the heritage assets affected (The Mill and the Ashwell Conservation Area) and assesses significance in accordance with the policies contained in the NPPF. The impact of the proposed works on the significance of the heritage asset is then described and considered.

2.0 LEGISLATION & PLANNING GUIDANCE

2.1 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 states that in considering applications for development which affects a heritage asset or its setting, local planning authorities shall have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting (paragraph 66.1). Special attention shall also be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a conservation area in the exercise of any powers under the planning Acts (paragraph 72).

2.2 The NPPF expands on the 1990 Act. It identifies protection and enhancement of the historic environment as an important element of sustainable development and establishes a presumption in favour of sustainable development in the planning system (paragraphs 6, 7 and 14). The NPPF also states that the significance of listed buildings and conservation areas can be harmed or lost by alteration to them or by development in their setting (paragraph 132) and that the conservation of heritage assets is a core principle of the planning system (paragraph 17). Furthermore, paragraph 137 states that proposals which preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to, or better reveal the significance of the heritage assets should be treated favourably.

2.3 The policies of the NPPF relevant to this proposal are as follows:

- Paragraph128. “In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets’ importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.”

- Paragraph129. “Local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this assessment into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise conflict between the heritage asset’s conservation and any aspect of the proposal.”

- Paragraph131. In determining planning applications, local planning authorities should take account of the desirability of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets.

- Paragraph132. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. Significance can be harmed or lost through alteration or destruction of the heritage asset or development within its setting. As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building, park or garden should be exceptional.

- Paragraph 133. Where a proposed development will lead to substantial harm to or total loss of significance of a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent, unless it can be demonstrated that the substantial harm or loss is necessary to achieve substantial public benefits that outweigh that harm or loss.

- Paragraph134. Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use.

- Paragraph137. "Local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas…and within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to or better reveal the significance of the asset should be treated favourably."

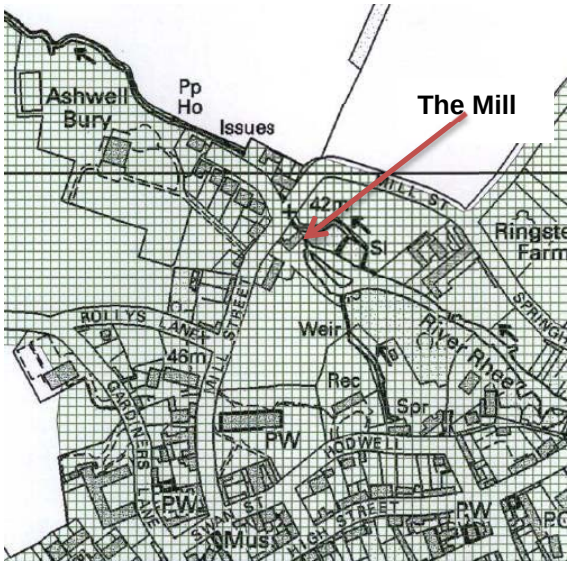
2.4 Local planning policies also seek to protect the historic environment and heritage assets, to encourage sustainability and to reinforce local distinctiveness.

3.0 THE HERITAGE ASSETS

3.1 The Mill was listed, grade II on the 27th May 1968. The list description reads as follows:

"Mill and mill house, now one house. C17, altered and extended c.1973. Original mill house is at S end: timber frame with late C19 roughcast casing and fenestration, plain tile roof. House extension at N over mill race: red brick, slate roof. 2 storeys and attics. S elevation has gable end with glazing bar casements, the lintels with bracketed hoods. Walls with cement pattern of studwork. 1 storey and attic extension towards road with tile-hung gable and small C19 stack. C19-20 small weatherboarded shed attached. The mill wheel at the N end brought from Fordham Brewery".

3.2 The Mill lies within Ashwell Conservation Area, designated on the 19th June 1968 with boundary amendments made in June 1978 and December 1986.



Ashwell Conservation Area (hatched)

3.3 In terms of the NPPF, the listed Mill and the Ashwell Conservation Area are considered to be 'designated heritage assets'.

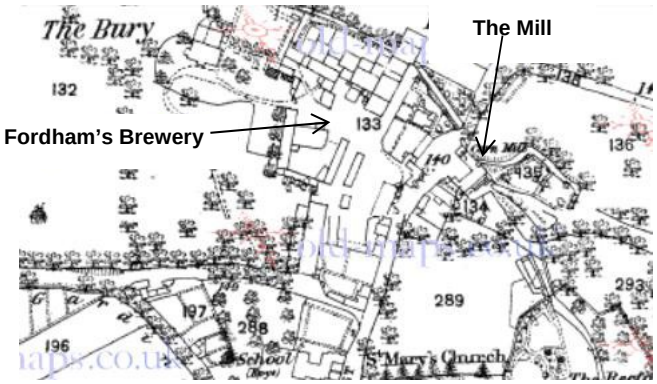
3.4 The site lies close to the historic core of the village, but is not within Area of Archaeological Significance (no.142), which includes the medieval settlement and borough of Ashwell. The *Extensive Urban Survey* for Ashwell notes that Ashwell may have been a Roman religious site, associated with the springs[1].

[1] Turner (2014) p.1

4.0 HISTORY & SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 A mill has been recorded in Ashwell since the eleventh century and the present water mill site is probably that mentioned in early extents of the manor which was held by the abbot of Westminster. Two mills are mentioned in the Domesday Book as part of the manor, one held by the abbot in demesne and one held of him by Peter de Valognes. Westminster Abbey seems to have retained hold of the mills for over 500 years until its dissolution in 1539, when its manor in Ashwell passed eventually to the Bishop of London. Accounts of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries contain frequent references to a water mill and a horse mill (or windmill) in Ashwell and the necessity for their repair. In 1198 we hear of a man and a woman being 'drowned in the pool of the mill of Ashwell.'[2]

4.2 In an old catalogue of 1796 the Mill Street mill is said to be in good repair, and subject to a yearly rent of 220 quarters of malt, and a yearly payment of £1.6.8d. to Pembroke College, Cambridge[3]. From 1825 George Fordham and his son Edward George began building a new brewery across the road from the mill. This complex eventually included a malthouse and bottling plant and remained with the Fordham family until 1952 and it is possible that the mill formed part of their holding. The 1877 map below shows the extent of the brewery complex at that time.



4.3 During the 1890s, the mill was occupied by Thomas Allen Fitton, described as a miller (steam & water) and farmer[4]. He was still there in 1895[5] but at the time of the mill closure, he had been replaced by Frederick W. Wahlock, who was the last miller.[6] The mill had ceased milling, closing in 1898. The house was leased and the timber mill buildings became the premises of Aston Ayres, an engineer, who built cinemas in Baldock and Stevenage.

[2] VCH pp.199-209
[3] Ashwell Museum (http://www.ashwellmuseum.org.uk)
[4] Kelly 1890-1895
[5] Kelly 1895 p.18
[6] Kelly 1899 p.25

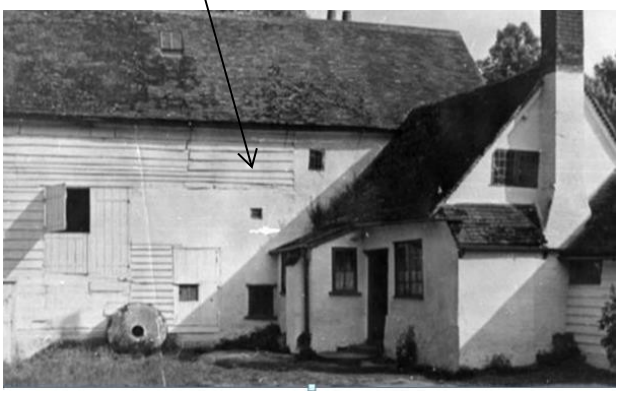
4.4 A photograph of around 1940 shows the timber mill in a somewhat ramshackle state to the north of the mill house beside the River Rhee. The photograph shows the mill house on the right and a timber clad granary on the left with a series of nesting boxes fixed to its wall above a sign advertising Mr Ayres' engineering business.





4.5 A photograph taken in 1947 shows a brewery building on the right and the mill on the left with the church rising behind it. A small timber roadside building is shown, probably a waggon shed. But the main mill building stood to the rear, as shown in the photograph taken in the 1960s, clad with white weatherboarding.





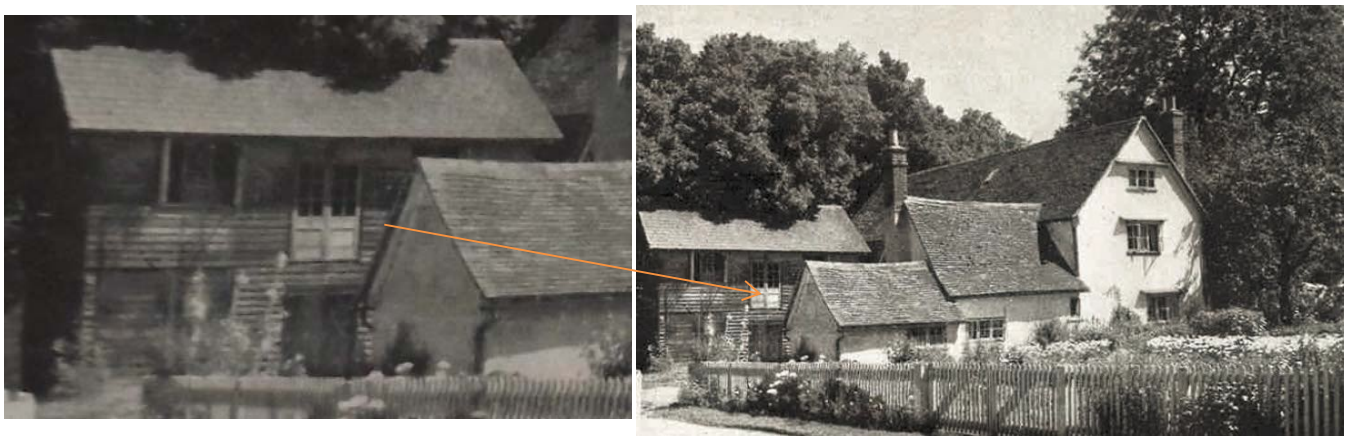
1947 1960s

(Photographs from Ashwell Museum online catalogue[7]

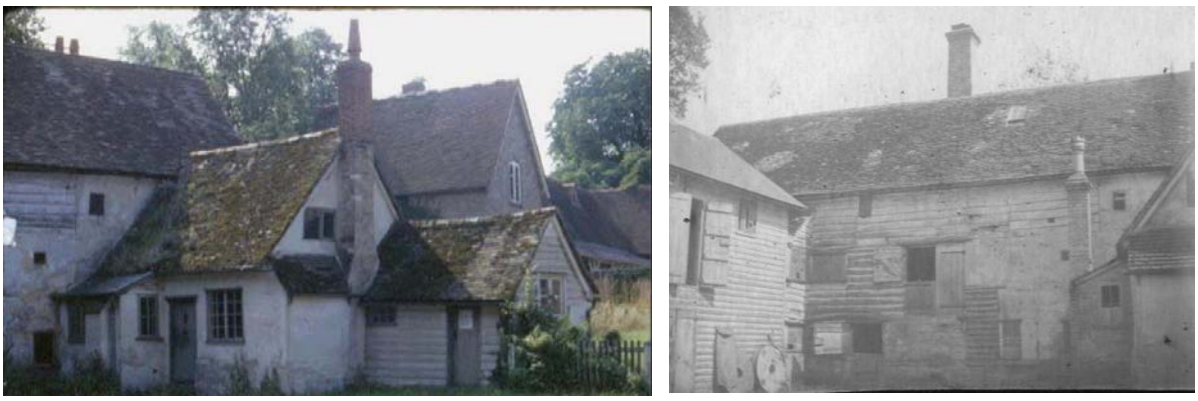
4.6 Fordham's Brewery was sold in 1952 to J. W. Green of the Phoenix Brewery in Luton and ceased to brew. In 1954, the company was merged with Flowers Brewery and later in 1962 with Whitbread and was used as a bottling plant and finally closed in 1965[8]. The brewery was eventually sold and most of it was demolished in 1973, with the land being used for housing (Fordham Close).

[7] http://www.catalogue.ashwellmuseum.org.uk/items/show/17310 and 15777 (accessed 24/11/2015)
[8] Richmond & Turton 1990 p.145

4.7 The mill, pictured in Country Life in 1947[9], continued to deteriorate. The nesting boxes and Mr Ayres' advertisement had been removed and a new door inserted in place of the hoist door. But this alteration seems to have been abandoned and the mill house was declared unfit for habitation, subject to a closing order.



4.8 The mill and its mill house were acquired in 1969 by Peter S. Boston, partner in the architectural practice 'Saunders Boston'. He acquired the mill to convert it to his personal residence and planning permission' was granted on the 28th January 1970. The work involved the 'refurbishment' and upgrading of the mill house and the total demolition of the timber mill buildings, which were to be replaced with an imaginative modern extension to the house.



ca.1970

(Photographs from Ashwell Museum online catalogue[10]

4.9 In March 1971 a home improvement grant was awarded by Hitchin Rural District Council for the mill house refurbishment and work on the extension was close to completion when it was awarded a Europa Architectural Year Civic Trust Award in 1975.

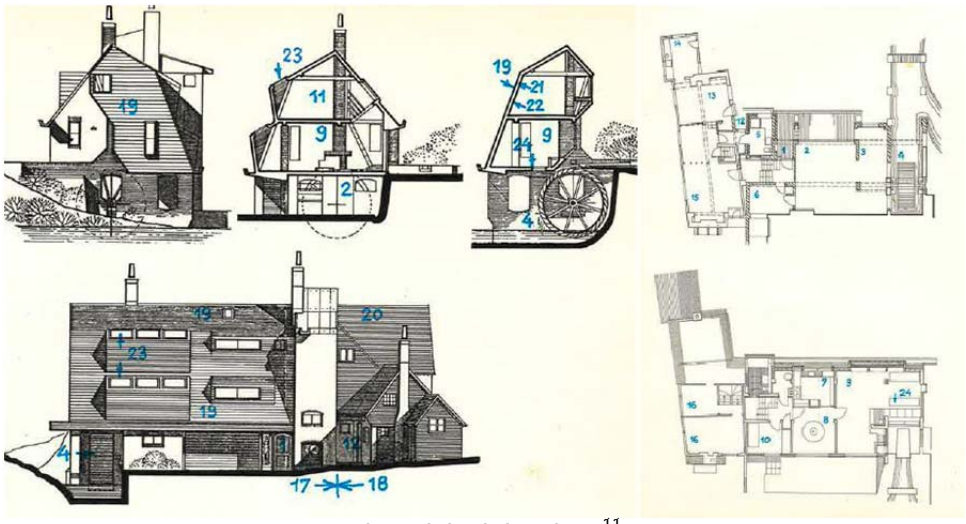
[9] Hussey (1947) p.561

[10] http://www.catalogue.ashwellmuseum.org.uk/items/show/17647 and 16675 (accessed 24/11/2015)

4.10 The result is startling, a bespoke design giving an impression of a modern industrial building attached to a small miller's cottage.



November 2015



The original drawings[11]

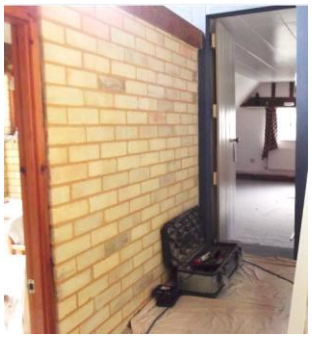


Close to completion in 1975 (asbestos 'slate' tiling on right)[12]

[11] Saunders Boston(1978) p.25
[12] Ibid.

4.11 It was partly self-built with the help of various builders using materials popular in the mid twentieth century, including asbestos slate and a collection of salvaged materials, including a cast iron water wheel, acquired from Fordham's brewery and flooring in the kitchen from a pathology laboratory in Cambridge. The appearance was "…given a typically mill-like sculpture form with plenty of overhangs and excrescences."[13] The junction between old and new is represented by a tower containing the plumbing (with kitchen below bathrooms below tank room) and the staircase.

4.12 The internal finishes in an open plan layout are of fair faced brick and diagonal boarding. Large aluminium framed picture windows on both floors give fine views down the mill race.





Significance

4.13 Significance may be assessed on a scale from very high to none depending on the values society places on a particular historic asset. English Heritage considers that these values may be 'evidential' (from past activities or remains), historical, aesthetic, communal (commemorative or symbolic, cultural, social or spiritual) or natural[14]. Understanding such values can help in deciding the most efficient and effective way of managing the heritage asset so as to sustain its overall value to society. In assessing significance, the importance of the setting of the heritage asset should also be considered.

4.14 Clearly the two designated heritage assets, the mill house and the Conservation Area, are of high significance. The original timber framed section of the mill house is of particular significance, as are the associated mill streams and races at its rear.

4.15 The 1975 extension which replaced the original mill buildings has some, albeit limited, significance as an example of an architect designed bespoke house of stark late twentieth century style.

[13] Saunders Boston op.cit.
[14] English Heritage 2008 pp. 27-40

4.16 However, its significance is less than that of the remainder of the building. The setting of the mill has evolved over time and the conversion of the mill buildings to residential use has changed both its appearance and relationship to surrounding buildings. Indeed the character and appearance of the Conservation Area has evolved too. No longer is the mill part of an industrial complex at the north end of Mill lane, it now forms part of a residential area.

4.17 There are significant views from the mill to the parish church, a grade I listed building, though the mill is only glimpsed from the churchyard, and when trees are in leaf it would be barely visible. The stables situated to the south of the mill, which are not listed but are buildings of local interest, are more visible from the churchyard and to some extent hide the mill from view.









The mill from the churchyard

4.18 The application site in Mill Lane lies north of an Area of Archaeological Significance, which includes the core of the medieval settlement and borough.[1]

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