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compiled by the late Brian Joyce.

History of Wheathampstead Mill

(a few notes on 1000 years)

by Mr. Titmuss, Landlord

There has been a Mill on this site in Wheathampstead for over 1000 years and for nearly all of that time it was producing food for the community from grain grown in the area. Wheathampstead is traditionally known as the home of wheat and Bury Farm is supposed to have been the place where wheat was first grown in this country.

Until the advent of the steam engine and later electricity, the water wheel was a very valuable asset to any community and vital to progress. The wheel and most of the ancillary equipment was removed from this building about 20 years ago.

Flour milling was one of our most ancient industries and changed very little until the middle of the last century after which the ground wheat was dressed through silk to separate the fibre. This was, and still is used as animal feed. At this time a new system for grinding the wheat was introduced, using grooved steel rollers in place of the traditional stones. This invention was a great step forward producing a cleaner and more hygienic flour at less cost.

It was at this time that my grandfather bought Batford Mill and installed a new roller plant, ceasing flour production at Wheathampstead. From then on it produced animal food and finally a seed cleaning and dressing plant were installed to produce agricultural seed.

Tradition has it that flour ground at this mill was at one period used to make bread for the Royal Household. A great many stories concerning the mill have been handed down and it is reported that an inscription on an ancient tombstone in Hertford Churchyard record the fact that the deceased when once 'being possessed of the Devil, fell through the water wheel at Wheathampstead and came out alive'. The old water wheel and all the gearings were made of wood but this was

practically all replaced by iron and steel equipment from Kilmarnock in about 1895.

There are many facing bricks with inscriptions both on the front of the mill and on the new mill house (now Busby's the Chemists). It appears that the bricklayers would inscribe on a brick one's initials and the date for 1/-. This coin they promised to cover with the brick. I am told that these shillings were soon removed and found their way across the road to the Bull a little later in the day where 1/- bought 6 pints of beer.

After considering the history of the mill going back 1000 years, it is refreshing to see the building put to good use and given a new lease of life. I hope that many more generations to come will benefit from all our efforts.

Some early Tenants

Prior to 1500 the Mill, along with the Manor House, belonged to the Abbot. From 1500, the properties belonged to the ecclesiastical commissioners. Some early tenants were –

1516 William Carter leased the Mill for £4/-/- per year

1561 George Carpenter leased the Mill for 21 years at eleven and a half quarters of wheat, reserving fishing rights.

1571 Lease to Thomas Carpenter of a Watermill at Wheathampstead, reserving the banks of the river and half the eels taken at the Mill for 11 years at twelve and a half quarters of wheat per annum.

1598 John Clark. Watermill, reserving fishing rights. At 10 quarters oats, half wheat, 2 oatmeal and 4 capons.

1613 John Clark. Watermill, except all fishing rights and half of the eels. 21 years and ten and half quarters, 2 oatmeal and 4 capons.

1634 Lease of Watermill, except fishing rights, for 3 lives at ten and a half wheat, 2 oats, t oatmeal and 4 capons.

1641 lease of Watermill on the same terms.

1723 Lease of Watermill to George Carpenter (terms unknown).

On the 28th July 1882 **George Titmuss** purchased the Mill from The Honourable Fredrick Edward Gould Lambart, commonly called

Viscount Kilcourseie. To the sum of £1,500. To this day, the property remains in the ownership of the Titmuss family.