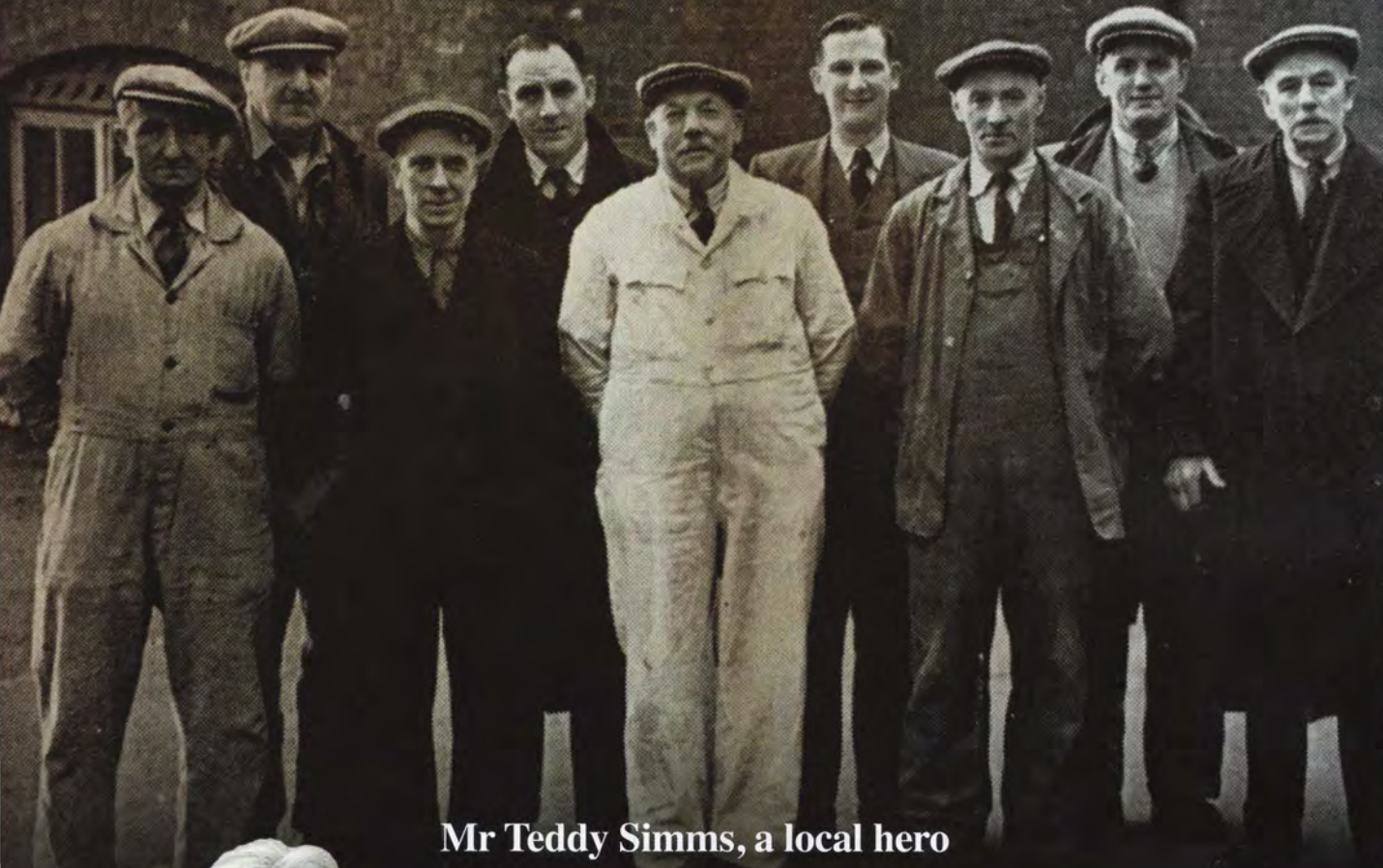


Nine men at the Abbey Mills whose combined service 300 years



Mr Teddy Simms, a local hero

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK



Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

As the miller at Mapledurham watermill near Reading for more than 30 years, my attention was naturally drawn to an account in Milling (February 18th, 1950) of a miller with an even longer connection to the town. Number six in the series of "Men in the Mill" articles recounts the story of "Teddy" Simms.

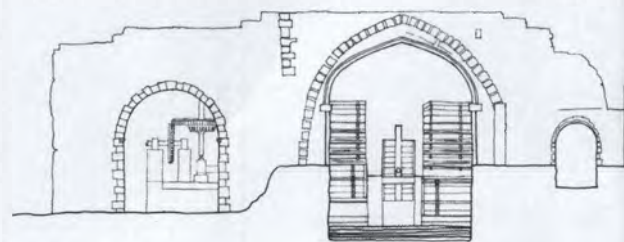
At the time of writing he had been a rollerman for more than 45 years with Messrs SM Soundy and Sons at their Abbey Mills in Reading. His story was used to reinforce a general point about a certain type of country mill, "You never hear of any labour trouble or anything of that sort at that mill". The management and the men knew and respected each other. They had grown up together, as it were, and "there are a good many case of this kind in the flour milling industry".

Teddy was born on October 18th, 1888 and had lived in the same house all his life. He started work at the age of 13 at Messrs Huntley and Palmers in Reading. His wages were 5/6d

per week, of which he gave his mother 5/3d, reserving for himself just 3d a week for pocket money. On June 10th, 1904 he entered the service of Messrs SM Soundy & Son as a mill boy at a wage of eight shillings a week, this time giving his mother 7/6d a week, retaining 6d for himself.

In 1908 he became a screensman and in 1911 a flour packer and

Architect's drawing of the arches and wheels



THE ABBEY MILLS READING

Handed to Simms by J. South, Esq. 2nd. Ed. 11.11.1888 April 1888



A Soundy steam wagon



Abbey Mills during demolition in 1964

relief purifierman. In 1917 he was called up in the Royal Marines and discharged for disablement reasons in November 1918. He returned to Soundy's service in December of that year, became a purifierman in 1919 and went on to become a rollerman.

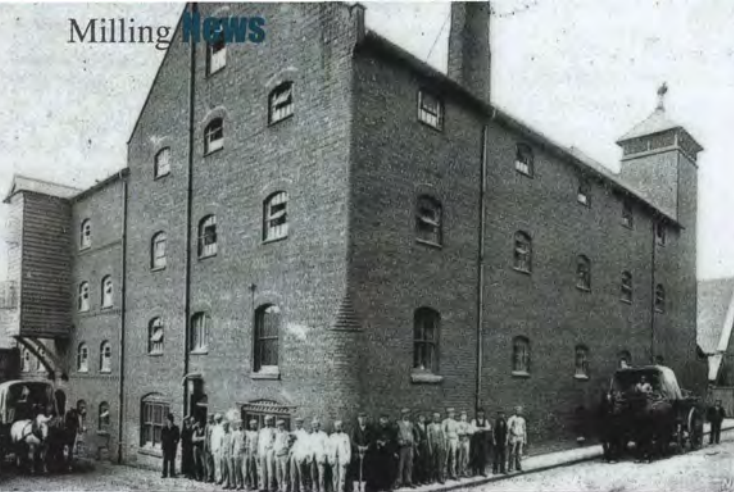
Teddy saw many changes in the mill, such as the changeover from water and steam to electric power and the replacement of horse transport by mechanically driven vehicles. His worst experience was in 1908, when one of his workmates fell into the waterwheel and he had to assist in extricating him.

His best times were when the mill was running smoothly, and he was satisfied that he was making a really good sack of flour. In fact, he looked upon the mill as his second home and the reporter commented that he should have to take a long day's march to find a man more cheerful and contented than Teddy, remarking that it

was beyond him to state whether that had anything to do with the further fact that he was a bachelor! He was very happy and had no wish to work anywhere else.

Teddy was a trade union member for 30 years and served on the branch committee as secretary of the mill works committee. The article concluded that there was no question of split loyalties; at the Abbey Mills management and the men wished to work together harmoniously, and it was an axiom that if you wish hard enough for a thing, you are on a good way to obtaining it. The Journal concluded "If the friendly spirit that is characteristic of this and other country mills were animate throughout the industrial life of Great Britain, there would be no need to worry about the dollar gap or any other economic difficulties".

The Mills Archive is conveniently situated in Reading, less than



SM Soundy and Son's Abbey Mills in Reading Berkshire

five minutes walk far from where Abbey Mills stood. It is also close to Huntley & Palmers where the flour from the mill went to make the famous biscuits. In consequence, the Archive has quite a substantial amount of documentary and photographic material, some from the Soundy family, on Abbey Mills. These include an image from a photograph in Reading Central Library of the demolition of the site in 1964, showing the medieval arches and the two exposed waterwheels that once provided power to the mill. We are fortunate at the Archive to have architects' plans of how the old mill and a photograph of the steam wagon used by Soundy's.

All that remains today is one of the Abbey's Norman arches through which the Holy Brook flowed to turn the waterwheels and machinery in the mill. Abbey Mills before the new mill with roller plant was put in was milling by millstones with the
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Teddy Simms on the roller floor

usual bevel gears driving vertical shafts from the waterwheels. In 1878, the Nagel & Kaemp roller system was introduced. One of the large waterwheels, 7ft x 12ft wide still powered three sets of stones for wheat and barley, while the other, even larger waterwheel of 10ft x 12ft, worked as an auxiliary to the steam engine which operated the roller plant.

I intend to write about more mill people (not all men!) so I would be pleased to have any suggestions of suitable candidates; email me at mills@millsarchive.org



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