



William Simmons Leighton Buzzard Mills, Bedfordshire

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In 1874 Frederick Simmons bought the Leighton Buzzard Flour Mills, extended them and made vast alterations. They had only contained a few pairs of millstones driven by the water of the River Ousel, a tributary of the Bedford Ouse. In around 1880, he ordered his first roller mill plant from Henry Simon and claimed to be one of the first country millers to introduce the roller system.

In addition he had a smaller mill at Eaton Bray and, like many more country millers, was a successful farmer, with farms at Billington, Hockliffs, and 30 acres at the Leighton mill, where he kept a “bachelor’s hall”.

After his death the mills were run by his son, William, who was at the time of an article in *The Miller* (October 7th, 1912) working the mills assisted by his nephew, Arthur Buckmaster, the mill manager.

Early in 1911, Henry Simon had remodelled the mill and brought it up to date. A new fireproof screen room was built, equipped with modern washer, emery scourer etc. However, on August 2nd, 1911, just after the improvements had been made, a fire completely destroyed the mill. The new screen room was the only part that was saved. Nothing daunted, even after such a great loss, the mill was rebuilt under the auspices of Henry Simon who designed the new buildings and supplied and installed the new roller mill, plant, silos, etc., on their latest system.



Simon's Reform purifier



The Reform pressure filter dust collector



The Purifier Floor



The Roller Floor

The new mill buildings comprised a silo house, provender mill, warehouse, and engine room fronting onto the road, with the screen house and the new roller mill behind. Each was divided from the other buildings by fireproof walls and connected by outside fireproof gangways.

The mill and screen house stood one on either side of the stream flowing to a turbine. The turbine transmitted water power to the main line shaft by means of a belt. At the other end of the building an oil engine provided supplementary power driving on to the same line, or roller shaft. This was a newly installed 100hp diesel engine that ran at 200rpm and transmitted its power by means of four cotton ropes.

The silo house contained nine dirty wheat bins; each had a capacity of nearly 100qrs. Wheat measurers were placed under each hopper to ensure correct proportions of each wheat variety needed for the chosen wheat mixture. The mixture of wheats was chiefly Manitoba Springs, Karachi and English. The mill often ground a mild mixture of nearly all English wheat which did just as well.

A large intake elevator lifted the wheat to the top of the building where it passed through an Avery automatic weigher, and then an intake reel with a powerful exhaust to extract rough impurities, dust etc. Another elevator then carried the grain to the silo bins. The provender mill contained two pairs of Peak stones mounted on a neat, strong double hursting built of H girders.

A Simon roller mill that escaped damage in the fire had been installed there for oat crushing. One of Simon's Reform grinders, which also escaped the fire, was in this building and was used to grind screenings etc. The stones and other machinery in this department were all thoroughly exhausted by a fan, which discharged into a cyclone dust catcher placed outside the building.

From here across a gangway you could enter the wheat cleaning rooms. They contained on the top floor a Simon wheat washer, stoner and whizzer, also a pressure filter dust collector of the Reform type which connected with the emery scourer on the floor below. The head of the wheat drier was on the top floor, so the wheat from the whizzer fell directly into it.



William Simmons



Arthur Buckmaster

Other machines in the screen room were a double Reform milling separator, emery wheat scourer, wheat brush, cockle cylinders, barley cylinders and six wheat conditioning bins each had an Exact-brand wheat measurer under it and the necessary conveyors. The cleaned mixture was again elevated to the top of the building to run down an iron spout across into the mill proper.

The mill was four storeys high. In the lofty ground floor a row of columns along the centre supported the floor above and carried the line shaft from which the rolls were driven. The roller floor contained a double row of roller mills, the third and fourth break, all the reduction rolls and the bran flattening rolls. These were all the latest Reform mills with double feed rolls that delivered right into the nip of the grinding rolls.

The breaks were on the roll-scalper system; the first break rolls on the top floor, and the second break rolls on the purifier floor, so that the broken wheat could fall directly from one break to the next. The roll scalpings were said to work well, thoroughly extracting all the semolina, middlings, dust and break flour, while the exhaust

eliminated small branny particles to such a degree that the stock was going to the purifiers already half purified.

The second floor contained the germ and bran sieves, the second break rolls and a line of MQ double sieve purifiers. The whole line was exhausted by one powerful fan, which discharged into a Reform pressure sleeve filter dust collector.

On the top floor was a two-high row of Simon three-sheet centrifugals, two being double ended and used for dusting of various stocks. The first break rolls were accompanied by a Reform JN double plansifter. The massive iron pedestal, which contained the driving spindle, crank and balance, spread out at the base in the form of an equilateral triangle, and on each point a load-bearing strut supported the sifter, ensuring that whatever the sort of floor on which it was sited, the machine would run true. This perfect balancing ensured there was no vibration.

When William Simmons died in 1929, the business passed to Arthur Buckmaster and another nephew, F Tooley. They continued to trade as William Simmons until the 1950s when the name Snowwis was registered. Shortly afterwards, they set up a new bakery plant and began producing bread and cakes for local shops. They were taken over by Rank Hovis McDougall Ltd in 1964 and the flour mill closed at the end of that year.

Records of the mill were found in an outhouse of the old mill buildings and donated to the Leighton Buzzard and District Archaeological and Historical Society in 2011.



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