



A successful country mill: Henry Smith & Sons' chamber house mill

Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK



Three years ago, this column featured a series on successful country mills that managed to adopt a roller system. I started with the Knapp Roller Mills near Bournemouth and concluded with the Earsham Roller Flour Mills on the River Waveney in Norfolk.

Returning to the theme, this one is local to where I live, so I visited it recently to see the mill today. The mill is now converted into private accommodation, but

the owners have retained, and maintain in good repair, the two wooden waterwheels and the sluice gear. Set in the wall at the roadside entrance is one of the English peak millstones, a clue that the mill was almost certainly producing grist at one time. This time, my source is an article in *The Miller* of May 5th, 1902, which asserted that at no time in the preceding 15 years had so much interest centered around the small country miller, who kept up to date the machinery and business, combining this with the energy, determination and character which they saw as the attributes of a successful man.

The article describes a visit by a party to this mill, notable for it being run by a family of millers and prompting the claim that

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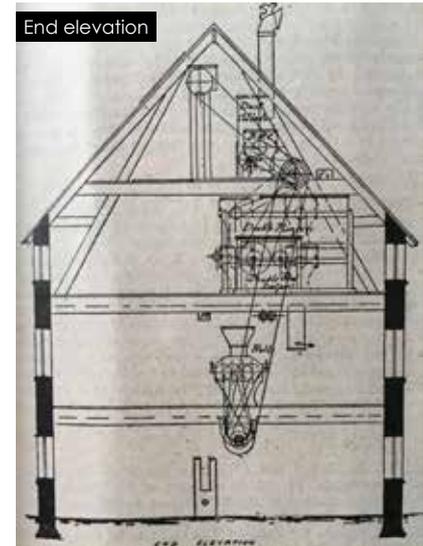
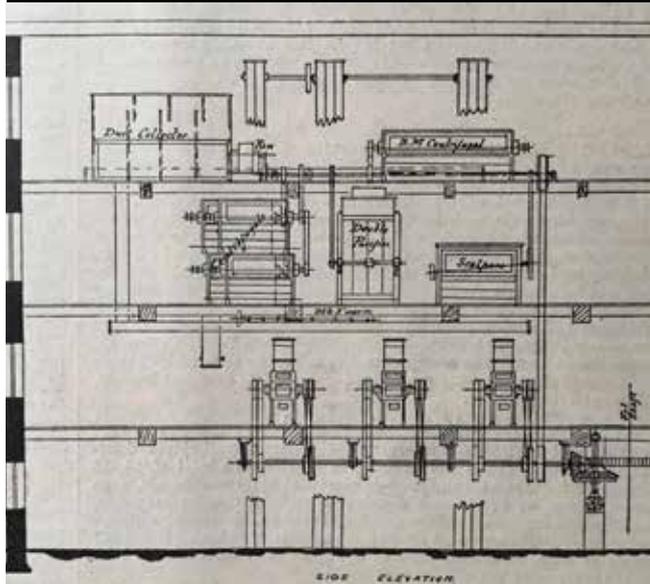
The Armfield roller system

Armfield advertisement from 1902



The Smith family

Side elevation



if one wants something done well, it should be done by one's self. The large Smith family provided many notable men in every department of the commercial and industrial enterprise; remarkable even in the milling trade which had a fair share of them.

Arriving at Reading by train from London, they were met by Mr Troke, a representative of Messrs JJ Armfield, milling engineers of Ringwood in Hampshire. He took the party on to the mill via another train to the small station at

Thatcham, where the Chamber House Roller Mills was located on the River Kennet, set in a pretty spot.

Mr Henry Smith had been the tenant since 1882, when the mill ran with six pairs of millstones producing flour with a very good name. The mill did a splendid gristing trade and this appeared to have helped tide him over the long periods of trade depression and unprofitable flour milling. Mr Smith was described as being an ideal country miller, genial, generous, having a ready sympathy with all who are about him and a kindly interest in the affairs of his less-favoured brethren. On entering the mill, the party was startled by the gear of the water wheels facing them and in close proximity to the main shafting. On this floor were also the elevator bottoms. The simple arrangement for starting and stopping the mill was

improved, according to Mr Troke, by adding only a pair of six-inch bevel wheels which made the old apparatus work without altering anything else.

On the next floor were the rolls. It was a one-sack plant, and there were three breaks and three reductions. The rolls were 12 x 6 inch and belt driven. The bran was clean, the pollard bare and the flour pure, which on such a concentrated system was a matter of surprise. Messrs Armfield & Co were credited with installing this arrangement, which had been working well for the previous five years.

The double purifier made excellent separations; the miniature scalpers and centrifugals ran lightly, dusting and dressing admirably, even in the very small space available. The mill was beautifully kept, the machinery compact and clean, still allowing plenty of room to work.

The storage bins were very capacious for the size, which was a good feature. Exhaust attachments were everywhere, benefiting both the plant and product alike. The compact mill was demonstrated to the visitors as a very good example of how a country mill could be run successfully and offered as an encouragement to the small millers everywhere.

Mr Smith regarded the wheat and flour tax as the one thing that just balanced the scales of justice between large and small millers, and also between all English millers and their foreign competitors. His sons, Sidney and Fred, assisted him in taking charge and being thoroughly interested in their work. Both were brought up in the mill, coming straight from school to begin the practice of flour milling.

The holdings at the Mills Archive mean that I can only provide geographical and historical snapshots. If you would like to know more please email me at mills@millsarchive.org



The modern waterwheels



Peak millstone at the entrance of the mill



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