

The re-opening of the “Lark” roller mills

Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK



The Miller of December 2, 1901 reported on the re-opening of the Lark Roller Mills at Mildenhall in Suffolk, UK. These mills were the headquarters of the enterprising firm of Parker Brothers Ltd, and were erected on a favourable spot on the River Lark. The site was protected by an ancient manorial right, by virtue

of which the old mill had the exclusive right to grind corn in the large parish of Mildenhall.

Messrs Parker Brothers Limited was a private company with Joseph Parker, Luther CF Parker and W Ralph Dodd as directors and Ernest A Parker as secretary. The milling, malting and merchandising business ran two mills at Barton, one a stone mill and the other a roller mill, the water mill at Icklingham, and two at Mildenhall.

The Lark Mill, having just been fitted out by the milling engineers ER&F Turner of Ipswich, was opened by Mrs Joseph Parker at the request of Mr Turner himself. Mr Parker then gave a short speech in which he explained that, after a great deal of consideration as to whom should be entrusted to do the proposed alterations and additions to the Lark Roller Mill, they had decided to place the work in the hands of Turners of Ipswich. The two roller mills could now deal with no less than 1,600 “coombs” of wheat a week

and it was their aim to supply the very best sack of flour it was possible to obtain. A coomb was a medieval Suffolk measure of approximately four bushels (140 litres), which was still in use locally well into the 20th century.

Mr Turner in response said he had had considerable experience in introducing roller milling. He had spent considerable time setting up roller mills in various parts of the Continent where his firm first operated, before roller mills were much known in England.

An inspection of the mill itself showed how everything was carefully planned, and how clean the machines and floors were. The two double sets of break rolls were said to be very imposing in appearance, and in company with six double sets of smooth rolls, made up a pretty picture as a roller mill floor. On the upper floor were the Turner purifiers, making perfectly pure stock that was being taken off right to the tail end of each machine. Local wheat was coming to the mill and in splendid condition, and this was evident in that every roll was quite cool, the stock well



Icklingham Water Mills (Parker Brothers Ltd)



Barton Mill (Parker Brothers Ltd)

dusted and the general workings showed most intelligent handling of the plant as a whole.

The hoppers, spouts and elevators were provided with small glass windows to facilitate the constant observation that was evident everywhere on the part of those who had charge of the mill and the absence of noise and vibration was remarkable. The dusted middlings had just that kind of feel that was so appetising

to the practical man, and the quantity and quality of patent flour “resulted in great satisfaction”.

It was noted that whenever it was necessary to have two feeds going to the same set of smooth rolls, they were remarkably alike in quality. All the rolls were fitted with exhaust trunks. The reels, sieves and centrifugals were of Turner’s well-known type and at the time were working without any seeming pull, strain

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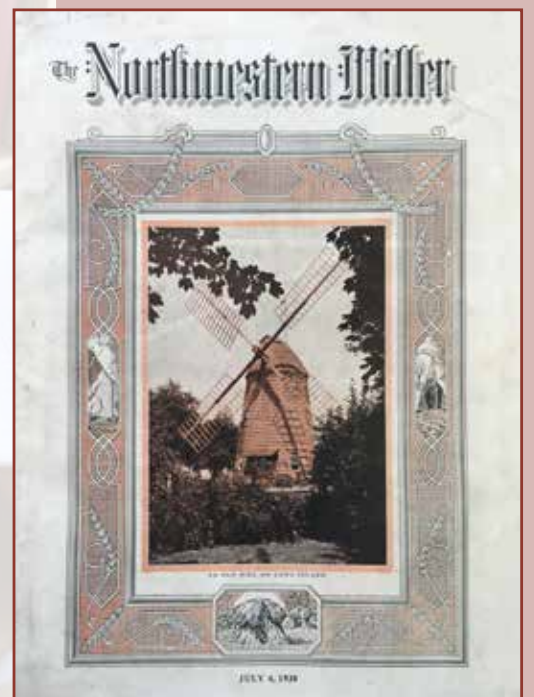
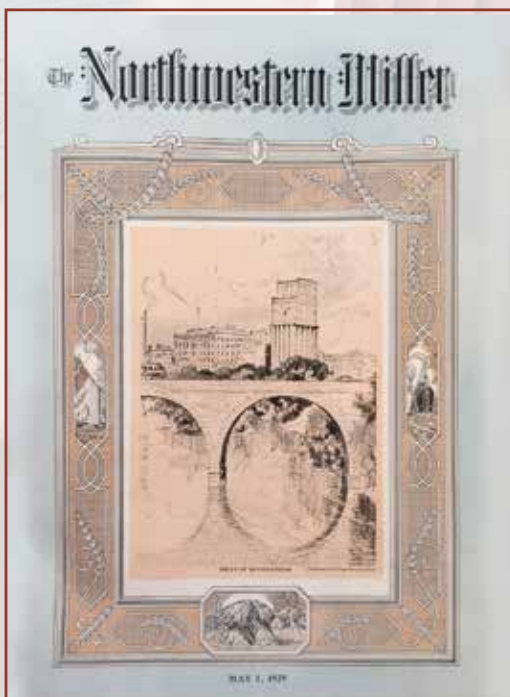
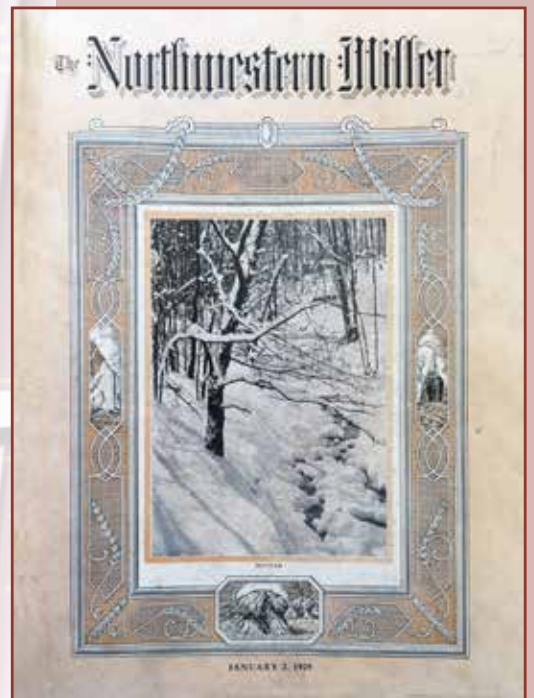
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We are proud to present here, front cover illustrations from this valued and long-serving publication as a visual reminder of the importance contribution past magazines provided to our industry.



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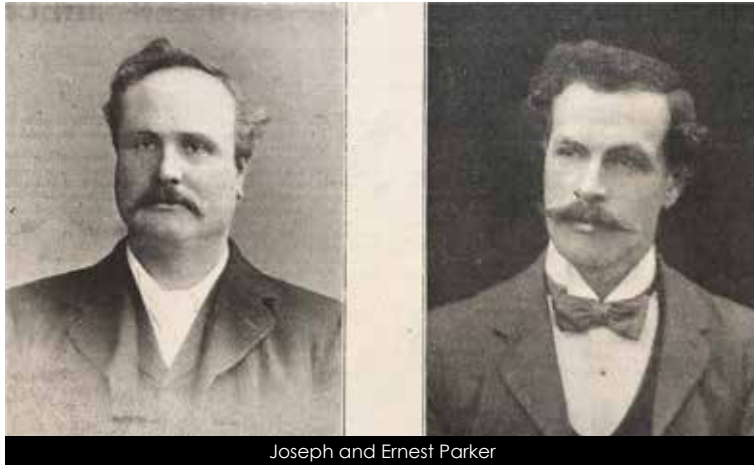
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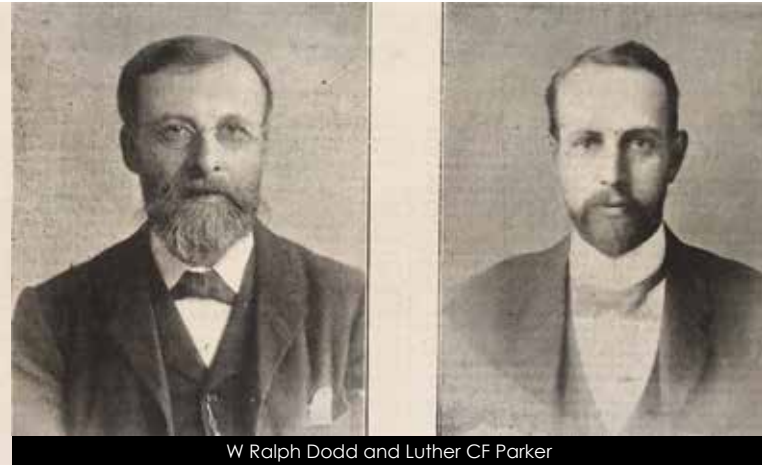
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Joseph and Ernest Parker



W Ralph Dodd and Luther CF Parker

or vibration. Double flour worms were also in evidence provided with abundant cut offs in order to meet all needs for the different qualities of finished products.

Two turbines drove the mill itself with a handy little engine and boiler for auxiliaries, but as there was a good average supply of water there had been no occasion to use steam at all. The mill and premises were lit by electric light throughout and the building itself had a smart appearance, the floors were high, and consequently, the flow of the stock by gravitation did away with the need for a great amount of conveyors.

Background and historical notes

During the late 18th century the nature of milling changed. Up to this time a mill would serve its local area and small farmers brought their corn to the mill to be ground, the miller would then be paid by keeping a proportion of the flour that he produced from each milling. In the late 1700s the miller became pro-active in the process. He began to buy corn at the new Corn Exchanges for himself. He hoped to buy at lower prices and store some of his purchases until flour became scarce. Then he would mill it and sell the flour on the open market and make his profit that way.

Mills also changed as the miller needed to store the corn he had bought. Thus mills grew another storey, and corn hoists were extended to lift corn up to the top floor for storage. Hopefully this was the driest part of a water mill, and the hardest for vermin to penetrate.

Lark Mill had steam power introduced in 1868, and some time later the water wheel was replaced by water turbines. In 1887 the old wooden Lark mill was replaced by the large steam and

water driven roller mill illustrated here. Roy Silverlock noted that it was reported as “the most important event in the locality”, in Simpson’s Retrospect for 1887. Simpson was a Mildenhall printer and publisher. By 1890 it was called the Lark Roller Mills and run by Mr Owers, who retired in 1897.

In 1897 Lark Mills were taken over by Parker Brothers, who already kept the mill at Barton Mills, and it would remain with that family until the late 20th century. In November, 1901 the expanding firm of Parker Brothers re-opened the Mildenhall Mill. The River Lark Navigation and all its rights were finally sold to Parker Brothers of Mildenhall on July 30, 1902. From 1919 to 1936 a dynamo driven by Parkers’ mill supplied electricity to parts of Mildenhall. In 1969 flour milling ceased at Lark Mills, and it went over to animal feedstuffs.

By 1890 Icklingham Mill had an undershot waterwheel and a turbine. The waterwheel was 18 feet by five feet. In April 1893, Parker’s watermill at Icklingham was converted to use electric lighting. A generator was run off the waterwheel. It was the first flourmill in Suffolk to be lit by electricity. Parkers were also to rejuvenate a few local watermills by converting them to roller mills over the next few years.

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