

The Rex Wailes Collection

Stansted Windmill, Essex

by Nathanael Hodge, Rex Wailes
Collection, Mills Archive, UK

Stansted windmill stands in the village of Stansted Mountfitchet in Essex, England, not far from London Stansted airport. It was first erected in 1787 by Joseph Linsell and his wife, along with the adjacent house, granary, bakehouse and malthouse (later destroyed in 1877). At the time the mill was mortgaged for UK£500 to Mrs Cressell of Little Sampford, Essex.

The mill was sold by auction in 1807 to Henry Chaplin, who mortgaged it to Robert Sworder. As Chaplin's heir was unable to pay the interest on the mortgage the mill passed to Robert's son Thomas Sworder in 1854.

Although the Sworder family owned the mill, the millers were Edward and Charles Hicks and their descendants. The unreliable nature of the wind and competition from newer forms of milling technology meant that it was hard to make a profit from running a windmill.

There were frequent disputes between landlord and tenant over the funding of repairs and improvements, with Hicks requesting the addition of steam power, which was never carried out. In 1867 the mill was sold to William White and in 1887 to James Blyth, later Baron Blyth of Stansted Mountfitchet. In the same year it was dressed from top to bottom with bunting for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

The Hicks family continued to mill until 1910 when the mill finally ceased work after 123 years. In the 1930s the second Lord Blyth had the mill repaired and made over by deed of gift to the Stansted Parish Council, with Rex Wailes as a co-trustee.

The mill was a Scout hut from the 1940s to 1963 and became a Scheduled Ancient Monument in 1952. In 1964 it was opened to the public, and restoration work was carried out in 1966 and again in 1984-5 and in 2010. It remains open to visitors today.

