Quidhampton Mill, Overton

Richard Waldram

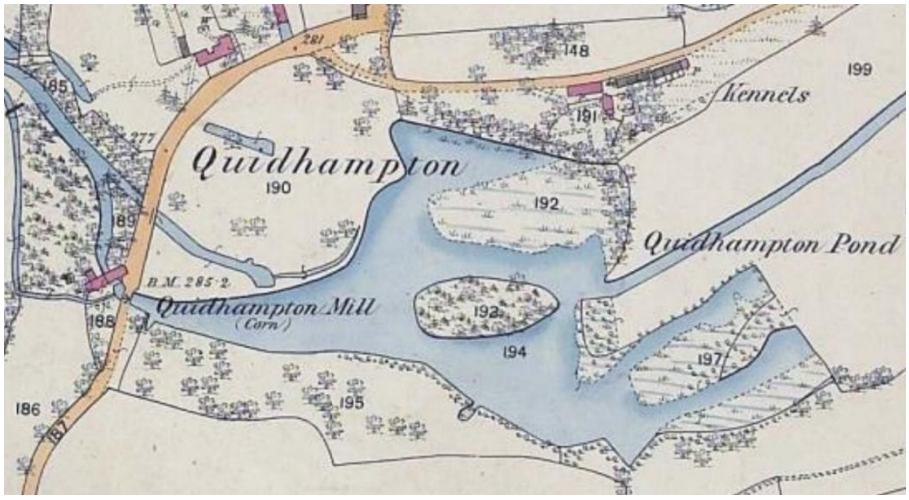
Part 1: History and Building

I have lived in Overton for forty years and every time I walked up Station Road I looked at Quidhampton Mill and wondered vaguely what was inside.

Last August, I was updating the information we have about Overton's listed buildings and asked the owners if I could have a look inside the mill. Rather to my surprise, my wish was granted. Being no expert on water mills, I made sure I would know a pit wheel from a wallower and read up what was already known about this mill.

The mill is one of four in Overton parish and lies only a mile from the source of the River Test. At the time of the Domesday Survey there were two mills in the manor of Quidhampton. One of them apparently soon fell into ruin, but in the 14th century rolls of St Swithun's there is frequent mention of the other, the tithes of which were confirmed to the almoner by John Syfrewast. This is probably the present Quidhampton Mill.

At the Hampshire Archives there are various leases of Quidhampton manor and mill between 1669 and 1819 in which it is described as a 'water grist mill or corn mill' but no other details are given. In 1763 John Webb, yeoman and miller of Quidhampton, insured his dwelling house for £50 and the utensils and stock in his water corn mill (timber, brick, and tiled) for £50. In 1819 the Mill was in the possession of John Portal who let it to Joseph Crimble. The Portal family owned the paper making business at Laverstoke and Bere Mills a few miles downstream. In 1922, when electric power was available, papermaking was transferred to a factory next to Overton station just to the north of Quidhampton Mill. Sometime after 1921, a bucket wheel was put in the mill to drive a water pump. It filled a tank near the top of the hill to provide running water to the newly built Station Bungalows.



The extensive mill pond shown in the Ordnance Survey map of 1873 was mainly filled in sometime after 1961

Mills and Millers of Hampshire records that John Loveless acquired the lease in 1907 and held it until 1939 when milling ceased. Quite by chance, I discovered that this is not the whole story. Just down Station Road lives a lady of 93 who grew up at the mill in the 1920s. John Loveless was her grandfather who had previously worked for the Crimbles at Southington Mill to the west of Overton village. Her father, also called John, was born in 1893. He went off to the war in 1916 when he was 23 and served with the Gloucester Regiment. He was badly wounded in the head and leg and spent the next three years in Roehampton Hospital. His daughter said "*he had a bad limp and was never the same man again*". At some point, however, he took over the lease of the mill. It was probably just after 1923 when she was born and her grandfather was 60.

She and her sister played in the mill, whether it was working or not, and it worked most days. She remembers that it was noisy when the wheel was running but it did not bother them. Mostly they played 'houses' on the top floor. They had a curtain across it and this was their 'den'. Catching rats around the mill with their father was an endless source of fun. They paddled in the mill stream and the mill pond. Fishing for trout was only for the gentry but the odd trout did find its way to their table. She thought they tasted of mud. They used an eel trap, as all mills did, but she didn't like the taste of them either.

The farmers brought their grain by horse and cart and the sacks were taken in through the door on the first floor by the road. The grain was used to produce animal feed so the product went back to the farmer who brought it.

She lived at the mill till she married at the age of 20. She does not know exactly why milling stopped or when. When the war came, herds were reduced to dairy cows only and arable production increased to reduce dependence on imported Canadian wheat. The 'Ploughing-Up Campaign' started in August 1939. Farmers were instructed to plough two million acres of grassland for the harvest of 1940 and grain was reserved for human consumption. That would have put

John Loveless out of business because he did not have the machinery for removing impurities and making flour fit for human consumption.

The mill was listed Grade 2 in 1984 and is said to be a 17th century timber-framed building with later alterations. The miller's house is 19th century. In front of the mill is a footway above the watercourses, formed by 3 brick arches flanked by walling.

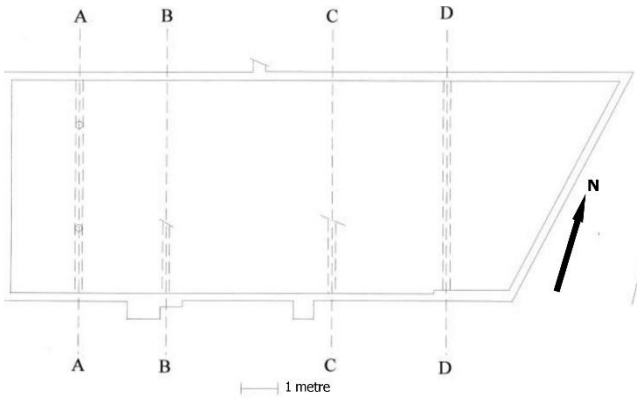
Historic England Archive No 1731_035

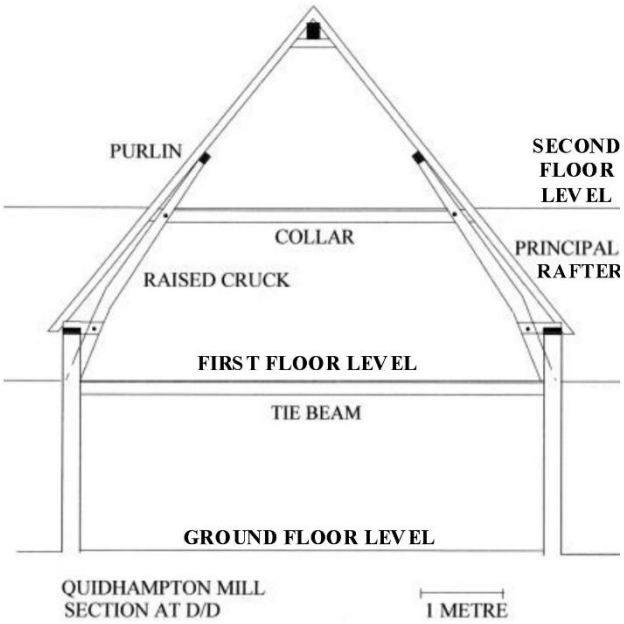
The views above were taken in 1951. The left one shows the timber framing and the access door to the stone floor from the road. The massive brick buttresses and the tie rods (*below left*) must have been put in after this date. It had been evident for some time that the roof was in danger (*photo below right, Tony Morris www.overtonpictures.com, taken in 2005*). In 2007 the whole mill house was encased in scaffolding and the roof covered with tarpaulins for a couple of years.

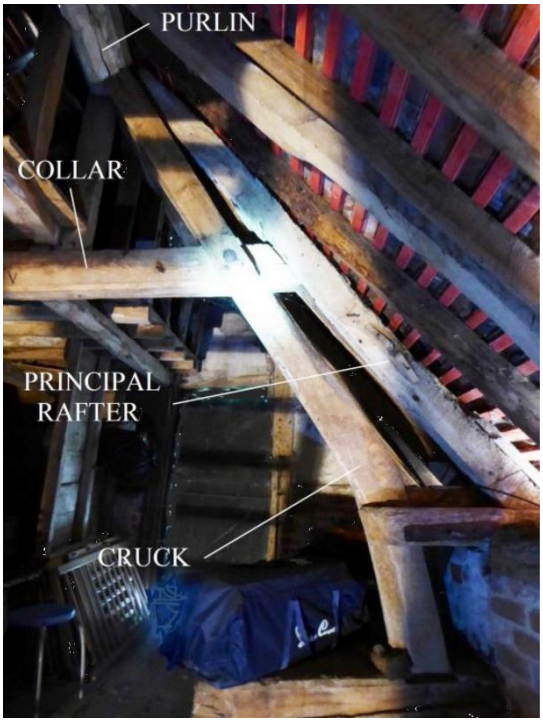
I found that details of the planning application for repairs were still on the Borough Council website. There were three reasons for the collapse. Two of the tie beams had been cut resulting in outward thrust on the walls. Some of the trusses had failed and the purlins were not of adequate scantling. The buttresses and tie rods (above) had failed to solve the problem.

It was now time to go and have a look. Knowing that there was no electric power and very poor daylight, I went armed with an extension lead, a flood

light and a torch. Inevitably the extension lead was too short and I spent a good deal of time stumbling around by torch light amongst a lot of clutter trying to get my bearings. But I soon realised with great excitement that all the machinery and equipment had been left exactly as it was when the mill was closed. I also realised I would need to come back, better equipped to get photographs and survey the whole building. This meant recruiting my long-suffering wife to hold the end of a tape measure. Fortunately, she likes this kind of thing and in four hours the job was done.





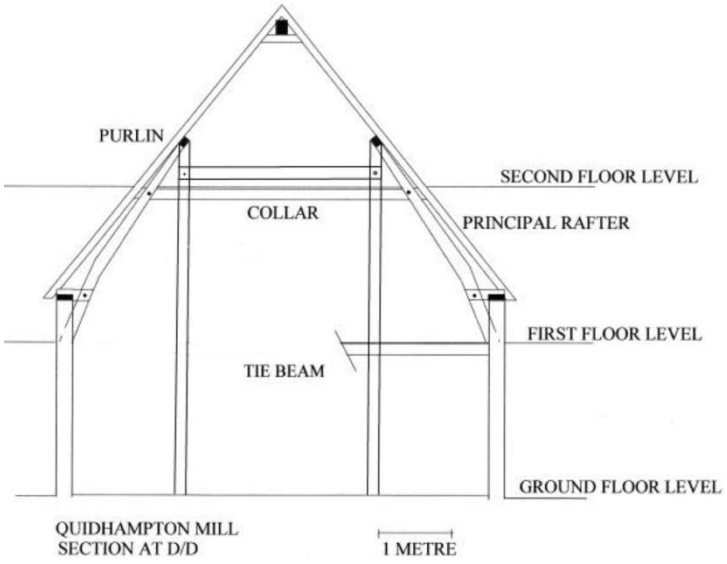


The building is a four-bay structure, with three raised cruck, arch-braced trusses at B, C, and D. There is an additional tie beam at A not associated with a truss. Tie beams A and D are intact but those at B and C have been cut, probably when a new water wheel and machinery were installed sometime in the 19th century. The photograph left, taken at first floor level looking east, shows the south end of truss D which is the best preserved.

This form of construction is unusual but is ideal for a mill because it provides clear working space on all three floors.

The disadvantage is that it results in outward thrust on the walls. If any tie beams are cut, the whole structure depends on the integrity of the collar, the

cruck and the wall. Eventually, four of the crucks failed, the south wall began to lean, the purlins sagged and the roof collapsed. New purlins were put in supported by vertical posts from ground level, leaving the original roof structure otherwise intact. This is how the building was saved.



The photo above shows one of the new oak posts supporting the purlins from ground level.

Part 2: Mill Machinery will be in the next newsletter.