

Arthur Lowe Photo Collection

Information from Tony Yoward

Mr Lowe died on Sunday 18 August 1996 at the Gosport Memorial Hospital aged 90 years. He was born on 2 April 1906.

He left his collection of maps and photographs to HMG. The photographs were put into archival hangers in seven albums containing almost 1500 photographs, which have now been deposited in The Mills Archive at Reading. A few of his earliest photos are included below.

This article was published in *Yesterday* in 1994.

Cycling into a Land full of Sails

On a cycle ride from his Gosport home in 1926, Arthur Lowe espied the mill at Earnley, near Chichester (*pictured*). The sails, two of canvas and two shuttered, were turning in a brisk breeze and seemed like arms beckoning him. He called on the miller, a Mr Ellis, who showed him all over the mill while flour was being ground. "The whole building seemed alive with the creaking of wooden machinery and the rumble of the stones, and it was quite absorbing. From then on I was fascinated by mills,



wind and water, and they have been important to me ever since" said Mr Lowe, of Braemar Road, Bridgemary, Gosport. Since that day he has visited many mills, later adding dovecotes to his interest, and on his trusty bicycle has travelled all over England to visit and photograph them.

His cycling mileage has topped 350,000, and the tally of mills he has visited and photographed comes to 600 watermills and more than 170 windmills. At home he would pore over Ordnance Survey maps looking out mills and planning his journeys. He covered Hampshire, West Sussex, and adjoining counties, the Isle of Wight was within easy reach, and he pushed his boundaries further, Surrey, Kent, Essex, Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire. Weekends were full, holidays were devoted to the further flung counties.

On the iron rail to Woking, then into the saddle, and before long the eastern counties sped beneath his questing handlebars. Now on his third bicycle and third camera, Arthur still spends many happy hours cycling to his beloved mills, often taking his bike on a train in order to reach the far off ones, having given up his car in 1958.

In his prime he would average 70 miles a day, sometimes more than 100 for a good mill, but now, at 83, he paces himself; lean and tanned, he still manages a lively pace awheel, but reckons that 35 miles a day is quite enough, after all, a chap wants to enjoy both the journey and the destination. One week was the longest holiday period, and he travelled as far as he could within the time, gradually covering the Midlands and the south west.

First he concentrated on windmills, but by the late 1930s he had more or less run out, so he widened his scope to watermills.



Harebeating Mill, Hailsham (1930)

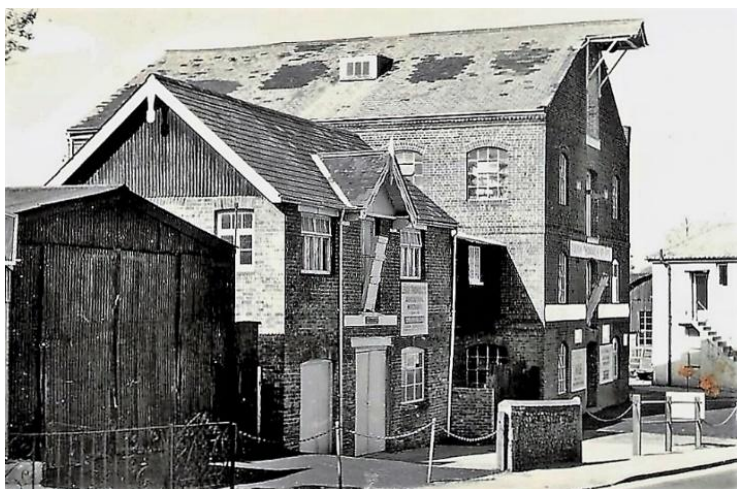


Staple Cross Mill, Sussex (1931)

"Windmills were always prominent and more easily destroyed than water mills. I like windmills but I gradually got to like watermills more. They are often hidden away in remote and very quiet places and there is always running water. I got bitten by them really, they were magical places. Often they were at the end of little narrow tracks, and to see them working was remarkable, the thundering wheel, water rushing over or under, and the whole building vibrating with the force of machinery". Yet most people didn't even know they were there.

"It just got hold of me and I visited as many as I could." He became a member of the Wind and Water Mills Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings when it was inaugurated in 1934, and now he belongs to four mill

groups and is an honorary member of the Hampshire Mills Group.



Emsworth Town Mill

Arthur is one up on many of the younger members in that he was privileged to see quite a number of the mills when they were working. Sadly, many of the mills in his photographic collection exist no more. "There were actually very few windmills in Hampshire and I have seven of them on film."

Arthur is a retired joiner whose family have been builders in Gosport for many years and he has a craftsman's interest in the skilled woodwork which went into building the mills. "Each mill has its own character and is different in some particular. They were all hand-built with local materials of stone, of bricks, and quite a lot were all wood. Massive shafts, usually of pine, great spurwheels of oak, up to ten or 12 feet in diameter were fitted with applewood teeth which had to mesh accurately with bevel gears to drive the stone nut. There were ingenious methods of disengaging the drive to the stone or stones; other machinery, such as the flour dresser, was driven off the main shaft. When the mill was in gear and grinding the miller could get on with other jobs, the hopper feeding the stones automatically, a little gadget called a damsel, an iron forging agitating the shoe of the under-driven stones. An alarm bell rang if the stones ran dry. After the church, the mill was the most important secular building to exist, from medieval times right up to the end of the 18th century, and many villages had two mills." He believes there may be as many as 60 windmills in England in working order or capable of working, and among them just a few still working commercially. Six windmills at least have been restored to near working order by the Norfolk Mills Trust. Many more water mill buildings have survived, well over 100 of them capable of working.

There are heroic tales of the hard work put into restoring mills, much of it by volunteers, and Arthur knows of a young man and wife hard at work restoring a Dorset mill right now, a project that has taken them two years so far. It is an expensive business – putting two new pairs of sails on a windmill costs £10,000. Counties with lots of rivers and streams have plenty of mills, but with water extraction and falling water tables, quite a few have been left dry of motive power. Every village in the Meon Valley had a water mill at one time. Best known for grinding the flour for bread – often a bakery was part of the complex

– mills have also been used for making gunpowder, especially around the Medway in Kent, or for grinding stone for pottery making in Staffordshire. There were fulling mills where cloth was prepared, particularly in Gloucestershire, many were used for preparing animal feed, and other mills produced paper. Bere Mill at Whitchurch, Hampshire, once produced paper for the Bank of England. Off the A34 between Winchester and Newbury is a fine and rare silk mill, open to the public, where a water wheel occasionally drives some of the machinery for spinning. The death knell for most 'green' powered flour mills came with the advent of steam and mass production using huge steel rollers, but the ones that are left are seeing a revival of interest.



Barton Mill, Basing



Waltham Chase Mill

Arthur is pleased by this and was delighted by the goings on at Bartley on the Sussex-Kent border last year. Wheat was cut, ground in the nearby mill and baked into bread next door, all within seven hours – you can't get fresher bread than that. So many miles were covered by Arthur's second bicycle on the mill quests that it got metal fatigue and the frame actually broke in half while he was riding it in Dorset. He found a new frame and used all the other bits from his old bike, including the hub gears, and carried on. Then his much prized, three-inch dropped handlebars (known as Lauterwassers, he learned from author Eric Newby) snapped off. Since then he has had to make do with flat ones, which he doesn't like as much. He admits to having any amount of spills from his bike and once ended up in Hastings Hospital having been found unconscious in the road. "Cycling is not as pleasant as it was, because of the motor traffic, but that does not put me off. I am out on my bike every day, rain or shine." His favourite mills are Hockley Mill near Twyford, in Hampshire, beautifully kept by its owner though not working, and Sheffield Mill, Furners Green, East Sussex, smaller scale with a huge pond. When he was last at Sheffield the wheel-buckets of the overshot mill (the water hits the wheel from the top) were gone but the 18th century machinery was still in fair order inside. Not long ago he saw that mill house and mill were for sale, but it was just a little beyond his reach – £600,000!

The skills necessary to restore mills to working order have not died out, and

there are some six or seven professional millwright companies in the country, including one busy engineering concern in West Sussex, E Hole & Son Ltd of Mill Road, Burgess Hill, which operates mainly in Sussex and Kent and has done work on Eling tide mill near Southampton, and on Bursledon windmill in Hampshire.

This article was written in 1994, and it is fascinating to see how the mills have fared since. Congratulations to Tony for ensuring that the photos have survived. Editor.