

Twyford's Historic Landscape: Mill No 3

The Mill at Compton

Words: Chris Corcoran - Drawings: Mike Matthews

In the exploration of the Mills of Twyford, we have, so far, met the cheating miller and his family; and discovered that there were five mills at Twyford in 1301. We have looked in some detail at the two surviving mills, Shawford and Hockley to see if they are the same as in 1301 and found that while Shawford Mill is probably in the same place, its surroundings have changed. Hockley is now the name for the Mill of North Twyford and is in a new position with major changes to its water courses and surroundings. Now we look at another of those five...the mill of Compton, of which there is neither local memory nor apparent sign.

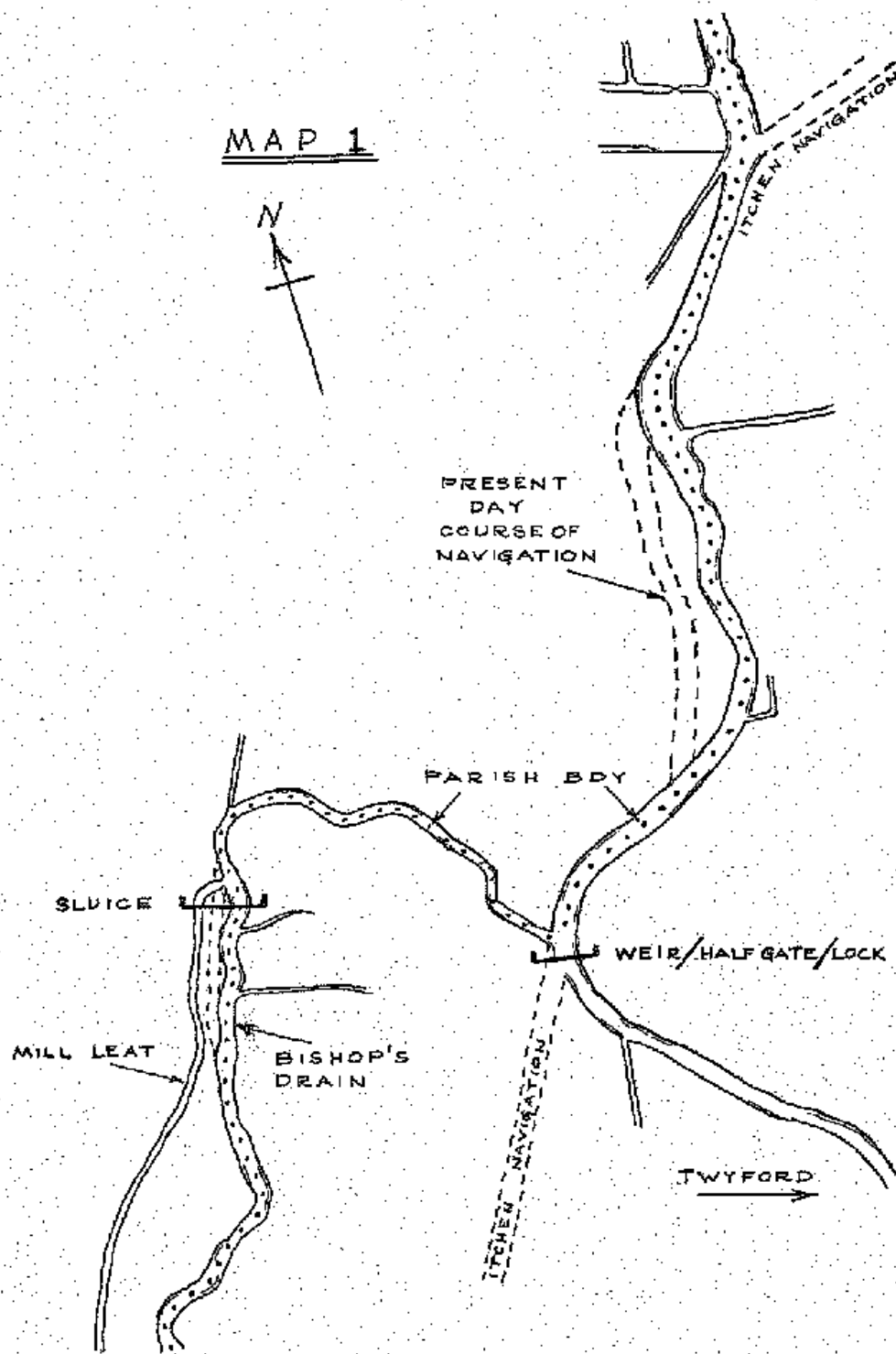
The Pipe Roll and JS Drew

The existence of the mill of Compton is firmly established by the Pipe Roll of the Bishop of Winchester's Estates for 1301 in the entry for Twyford: "Farms of Mills:....The same render account for.....£2 15s for the farm of the mill of Compton." Ed Mark Page for Hants Records.

In his "Compton near Winchester", 1939, J.S.Drew refers to a "certain mill" being one of possessions of John Wascelyn, (Compton was formerly called Compton Wascelyn) who died in 1302. Page 43. The Wascelyn family were noble and part of the royal circle. Drew also refers to a family of millers in the village at that time and over the next 150 years. .

As to where this mill was, Drew (who seems not to have known about the mill of Compton) surmises that, as it was held from the Bishop it may well have been at Shawford. but that is at odds with the Pipe Roll entry for the Mill of Compton. Shawford was under the direct management of the manor of Twyford while Compton was rented out. The Bishop of Winchester seems to have owned all the mills below Winchester via his ownership of the River Itchen; any mills in the valley required his agreement to use the flow of the River, even where, as at Compton, they were sited in a manor which did not belong to him. As to why Drew did not know about the Mill of Compton, this would be explained by his focus on Compton and his working from the records of the Priors Barton manor (which included Compton) rather than the Pipe Rolls of the Bishops estates.

MAP 1



Where was the mill? The locational Criteria

But where was this mill of Compton? It has firstly to be in the Parish of Compton and secondly to be powered by the flow of the Itchen.

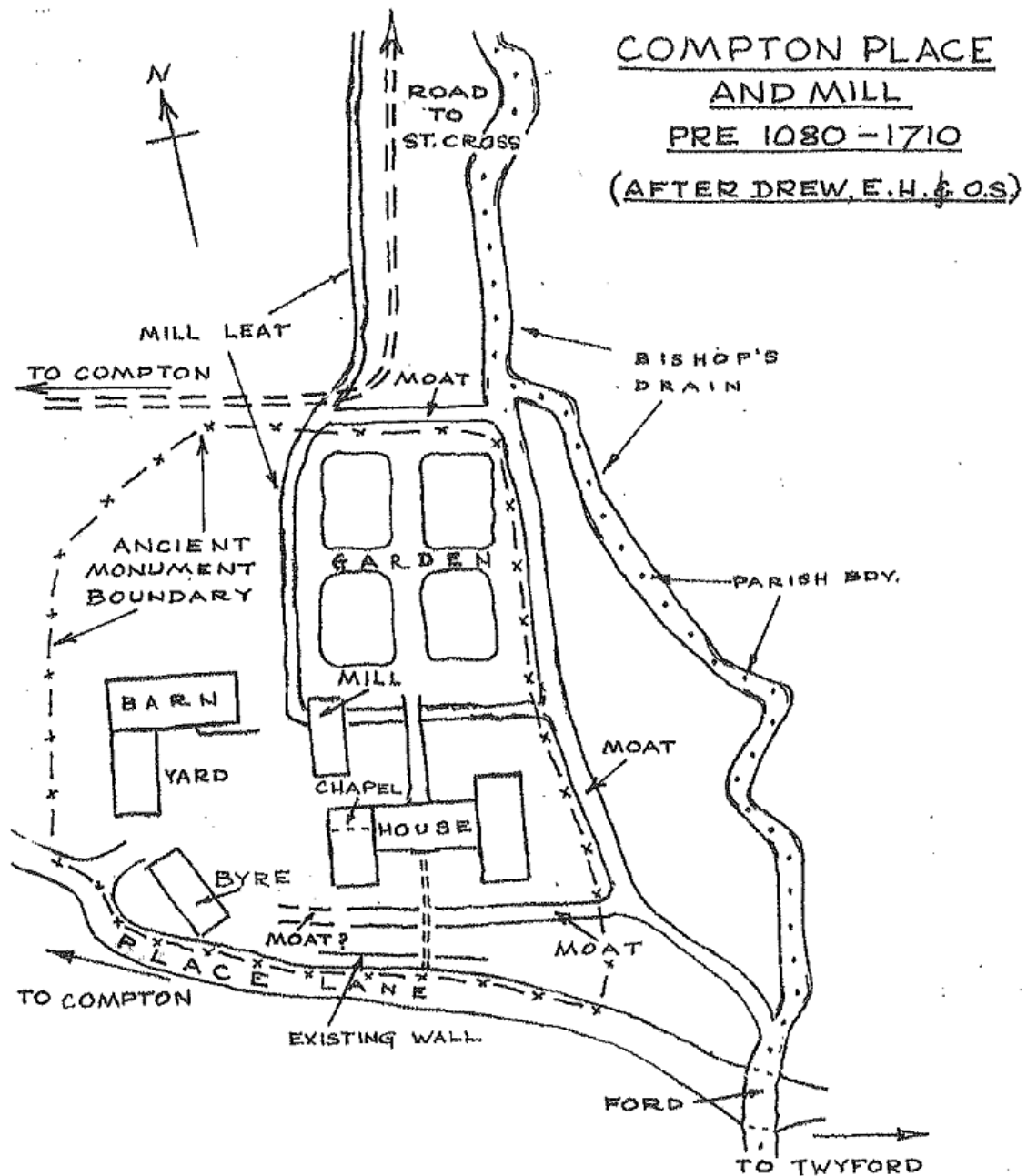
Then the design of the mill, probably an undershot wheel; then a sufficient flow and then a drop of three feet or so. To achieve this gain in height, we are looking for a leat is taken off the main flow upstream. Then there has to be a by-pass channel as well as the outlet at the base of the mill wheel. The size of the mill would probably be smaller than the Shawford mill is today, driving only one stone.

The function of the mill of Compton is to provide for the milling needs of the whole village as there was no other mill. For a regular monthly visit by every householder; the mill has to be easily accessible from the village by a good track. Mills are generally sited upstream of fords; and crossings. These criteria include substantial engineering works and the creation of rights of way; there is likely to be surviving evidence, however eroded.

The Location: Compton Place

Applying this scenario to the topography of the valley, this combination of water and road, upstream of the crossing of the river, is available only in the small area north of Place Lane Compton, between the railway and the lock. Here the land is above the valley floor, the land to the south and east being deep mud, permanently wet and flooded in winter and spring. This is the site of the mansion of the Wascelyn family and of their successors the Philpotts; it was demolished probably by Goldfinch before 1710; it is an Ancient Monument No 1012675 described in the citation as the site of a moated manor house.

There is no mention of a mill being part of the complex. It has never been excavated and there are no known descriptions or illustrations. There is an earthworks survey in the possession of the Hampshire Museum service. There is also a small map annotated possibly by Mike Hughes, a well known Hampshire archaeologist; he suggests a mill as part of the buildings complex. The location within the Wascelyn/Philpott ownership would also be consistent with a wealthy tenant of the Mill, able to build and maintain it and run it for profit and to pay his rent to the Bishop.



The Flow: The Bishops Drain, the Navigation and the Parish Boundary

Looking at the valley today, the Itchen has enough water to drive two mills at the same time all year round. Shawford Mill has abundant water with about one third of the flow of the river as does Hockley Mill from the flow of the remaining two thirds. Compton Mill was far enough upstream from Shawford Mill to have utilised the flow of the Bishops Drain without affecting Shawford's operating potential. The Itchen's flow on the Compton side of the valley is today of course carried for the most part by the Itchen Navigation. However the Navigation dates only from about 1710, so we have to figure out the previous alignment of the main watercourses.

The evidence for this is the boundary between Compton and Twyford. Parish boundaries had begun to take shape in middle Saxon times, seem to have been fairly settled by Domesday and were, according to Rackham, set in stone by 1180. Mark Page in a personal communication says that this boundary would have been set before Domesday i.e. 1086. . See also Time Team no 167 Dotton Mill..

Mike's Plan shows the parish boundary as on the 1908 OS, before it was changed at the request of Compton parish in about 1988. It shows the main river extending south of its present take off at Tumbling Bay in a broad easy sweep along the line of the Navigation before the two diverge. This is at a point where the parish Boundary goes off at right angles to the River/ Navigation. It follows the line of a deep irregular ditch. It now carries no flow and is overgrown but appears little altered. This is the Bishops Drain, a watercourse built to provide for the water needs of Compton, owned and managed by the Bishop

So the Bishops Drain was established as a significant and permanent feature of the valley landscape well before 1086. As it is a man made structure, not the natural river; it depends for its flow on the artificial raising of the river level. To understand how it would have been fed in 1300, we have to airbrush out the Navigation which is elevated from Tumbling Bay to Compton Lock. Before 1710, the level of the river would have been significantly lower than today. To provide the flow into the Bishops Drain required the same sort of Hatch as at Tumbling Bay today, or a weir across the river to maintain the flow in the Drain during the seasonal fluctuations of the river. Mike's plan shows this.

The Parish boundary follows the course of the Bishops Drain, at first due west until it reaches the very edge of the flood plain; it then turns southwards following the western edge of the valley floor, past Compton Place and down to Shawford Mill. There the Bishops Drain runs past the mill to re-join the main river. The alignment of the Parish boundary shows that the Itchen Navigation incorporated the existing course of the Bishops Drain for significant stretches; the parish boundary appears to have been unaffected by the construction of the Navigation.

The mill leat

As far as I can see the required fall can only be obtained if the mill leat was taken off the Bishops Drain about four hundred yards higher up. There is a point where the Parish boundary does not follow the centre line of the Drain, just at the point where a further hatch would have been required. The flow was then led along the western edge of the valley; Mike's plans show this.

The line of this leat can be seen on the ground at the northern end. Within the Ancient Monument, there is evidence of an elevated leat in a direct line. Significant earthworks survive; there is a deep depression which could have been the mill race. It all shows up in the earthworks survey of the County Museums service as well as on the ground.

The site of the mill of Compton

Mikes drawing shows two possible sites for Compton Mill but gives prominence to my preferred location and how it might have related to the mansion at Compton Place. Mike's drawing is the first of this great house ever to have been attempted and is only one of a number of possible interpretations of what it might have looked like.

All we know is that it had 14 fireplaces in the seventeenth century. If the mill was at Site 1, the surviving Earthworks, if I have interpreted them correctly, give very little scope for moving the

position of the mill wheel and building. A more detailed plan could be attempted based on the available evidence.

Site 2 was preferred by a number of the members of the Mills Group Committee when they inspected the site in the winter of 2013 but to my mind the levels do not work in its favour and it does not explain the evidence I have put forward in this article. The matter could easily be resolved by further expert evaluation and some limited excavation

The Wider Picture

This reconstruction is part of my attempt to interpret the multiple watercourses still evident in the valley between Hockley Mill and Place Lane, Compton. It is fraught with difficulties; Over the last one thousand years, this part of the valley has been modified by a series of major engineering works, all of which have had the potential to affect the site of Compton Mill or the Mill itself;:

The Bishops drain; the Wascelyn House; the water meadows of the 16th to 19th centuries; the Navigation of 1710; the railway of 1840; the bypass of 1938; tank exercises in 1944; the M3 and the restoration of the bypass route are the main ones.

Note: The grid reference for Compton Place is E: 4750 N: 2550