

The 5 Mills of Twyford: The Unravelling of Shawford Mill

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This series of articles looks at what can be said about the Mills of Twyford before the current buildings were constructed. In the last issue I wrote about Hockley Mill and showed that the present position of the mill and its leats changed radically around 1800 and that the former mill was to the north and fed directly off the river. The current Shawford Mill was built only a few years before Hockley but as “The Mills of Hampshire” says, it may date back to Domesday. So this article explores that statement.

Trying to figure out what Shawford Mill looked like in the past 1300 years is a bit like peeling an onion; several layers have to be removed before you see what you are looking for. With the onion, you start on the outside; with Shawford Mill we start with the present day. Today’s mill sits in a complex and heavily engineered landscape, roads and bridges to the front, the Itchen Navigation and towpath to side and rear, the leats and the mill stream around and underneath. The levels are all over the place. Beyond are the massive railway embankments and cuttings. The mill faces a landscaped park and water meadows. Almost all postdate 1685 when the Mildmays started their building of Shawford Park and moved from the Manor House. The mill itself was built in 1785; none of the buildings you see as you walk along the Shawford Road or the Navigation footpath is older than this.

Clue 1: The Parish Boundary.

The Parish Boundary between Compton and Twyford was changed in the 1990’s but before that the western limit of Twyford followed water channels; the boundary is clearly defined on the 1:2500 OS maps of the 1908 series: see Plan 1 (*page 18*). Oliver Rackham says in his *History of the Countryside* that parish boundaries were set in stone by 1280 and Dr Mark Page suggests that the existence of Twyford Parish in the Domesday Book is proof enough that the 1908 Parish boundary was the parish boundary in 1086, (personal communication) (see *Note 1 below*)

(Note 1) The parish boundary was amended on the initiative of Compton and Shawford Parish Council by Ordnance Survey in the mid 1990’s. It moved the boundary from the Bishops Drain (note 2), north of Compton place lock, eastwards to follow the centre line of the Navigation.

Clue 2: The Channels

Let us look at this boundary a bit more closely. From south of Compton Lock, it follows the line of the Itchen Navigation to a point just down stream of the present Mill leat. It then cuts across the towpath (which is on a raised bank) and then resumes the centre line of the drain to the point about 600m downstream, where it re-joins the main river (not the Navigation). As we know, the Navigation was opened only in about 1710. For the 600 year period back to Domesday and before, what was the water supply that powered Shawford Mill and how did it get to the mill? The simplest explanation is that the new Navigation simply widened the existing channel which fed the Mill and modified the leats and hatches to maintain the drive to the mill.

What then is the evidence for the take-off point for the Mill feed being moved for the Navigation? Firstly, the line of the parish boundary as shown on the 1908 map. It does a curious

little indent, unrelated to the present channel, but immediately explained if the Mill take off was at this point. Secondly the new take off forms a dock for unloading goods bought by canal from Southampton to Twyford. Coal, stone, culm are listed on the new milepost by Shawford Mill cottage; perhaps cattle and sheep were sent back downstream, and hay, straw and flour for the markets in Southampton. I have heard that this was called Coal Wharf. Between Mill Cottage and the Mill, there is ample space for carts besides the dock, room for storage buildings and direct access to the Shawford Road. This would give much easier access to Shawford Park and to South Twyford than Compton Place Lock.

Clue 3: The Mill Buildings

So back to the Mill itself; the Mill buildings there today, the Mill, the Cottage and the converted barn all date to the late 18th Century. The Shawford Park Pigeon House is also early 19th Century. The miller's house however might have been much earlier. It is shown on the OS maps and Mr Gilbert did a painting of it, now in the Gilbert Room of Twyford Parish Hall. The house itself was purchased by an American in the 1950's dismantled and re-erected in the USA, which means that it was a timber framed building, and potentially much older than any brick building could have been.

Clue 4: Documentary Evidence: Domesday and the Pipe Rolls

The Domesday Book records Twyford as having six mills, four within the main manor and two in a second manor; none are named or located.

The Pipe Rolls of 1300/01 and of 1409/10 (HRO ed. Mark Page) record Twyford as having five and four mills respectively and both identify Shawford as the location of a mill.

Clue 5: The Ford over the Shawford Road

Now we turn to the Shawford Road. The crossing of the valley from Twyford to Shawford is, I think, the oldest and most used of all the routes across the Itchen. Its approaches from both east and west are much gentler than Winchester and the valley floor much firmer; it is likely to predate the mill by a millennium or three. Its course across the valley makes use of the island of firmer ground in the centre of the valley floor; most of this appears to be gravel, with perhaps softer ground on the Shawford side.

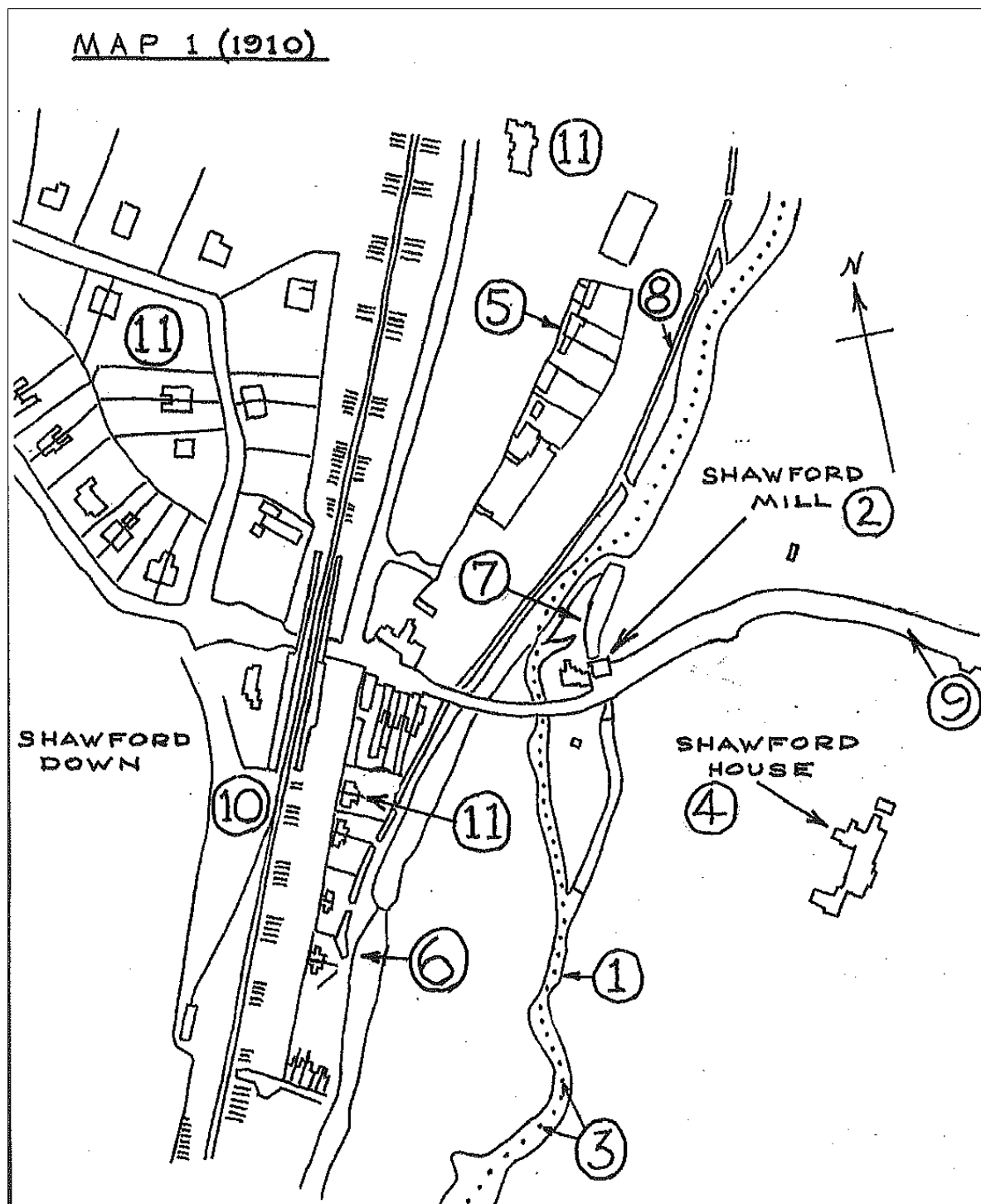
At this time, before the mill, the flow would only have come from spring lines along the Western edge of the valley along the boggy line at the bottom of the Station Lane gardens; it would have flowed as a winter bourne. So a short causeway would have sufficed for the crossing of any soft ground.

However once the mill and its feed was built, the flow of water across the Shawford Road was increased to, - tradition has it, - about 1/3 of the flow of the river, so forming a broad area of shallow water, later known as Shawford Lake; this name occurs in deeds and is still known of by local residents.

I would guess that it went from the Mill race across to the Navigation and perhaps 200 yards south. It would have been fed both by the Mill race and by the by pass channel

The approach to the ford of Shawford Lake from the east was very gentle but from the west had a much steeper gradient. It would have functioned as a watering place for the animals grazing the down land to the west.

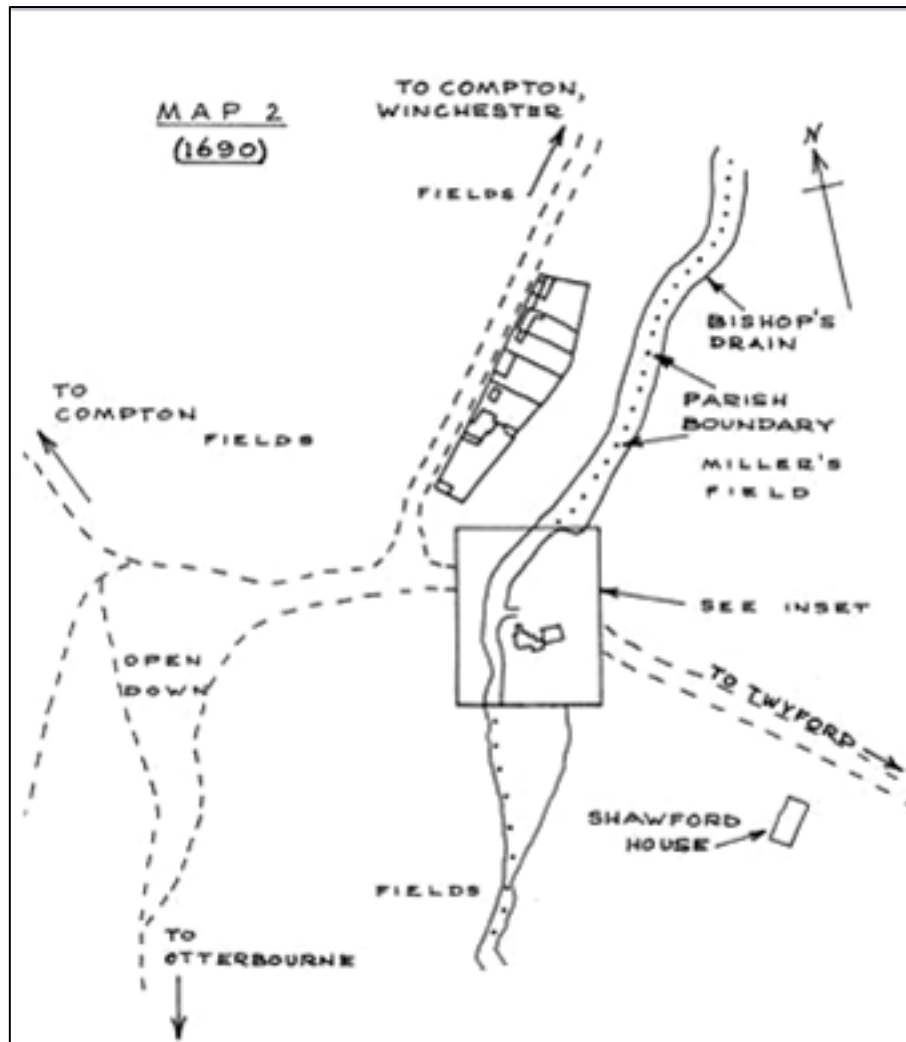
On the 1:2500 OS maps of the 1930s, you can see how all the tracks across Shawford Down converge on what are now the Station and Down car parks.



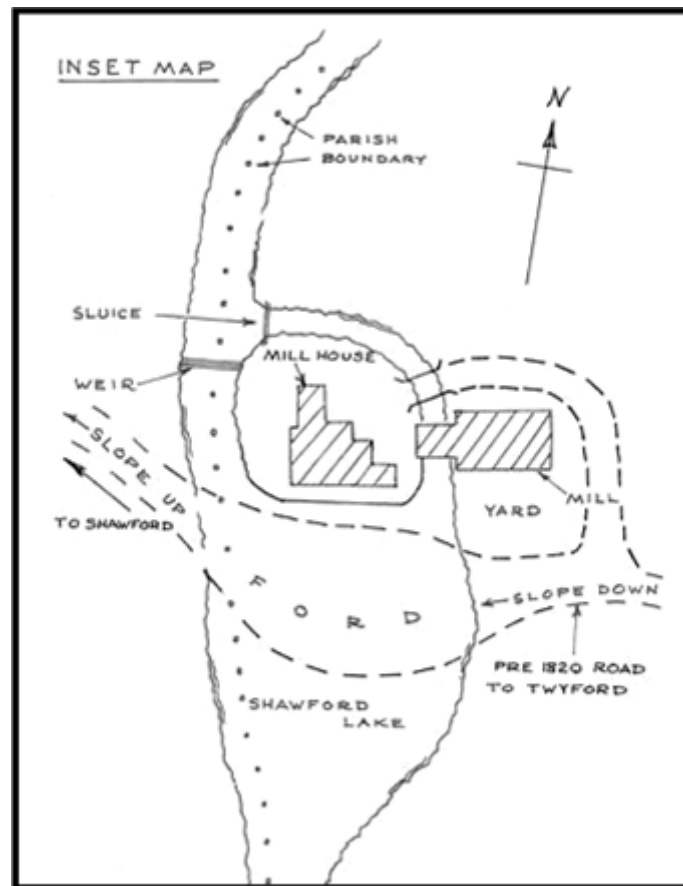
The numbers on Map 1 are roughly in chronological sequence:

1. The Bishops Drain and mill leat...pre 1086 (see note 2)
2. The mill...pre 1086.
3. The parish Boundary ...pre 1086

- 4 Shawford housere-built about 1685
5. Group of older Shawford houses.... 1600's and later
6. Itchen Navigation ...about 1710
- 7 Shawford Mill wharf....about 1710
8. Goldfinches new drain (wrongly called Bishops Drain)... 1810
9. Shawford Road realigned ...1810 ?
10. Railway and accommodation works ...1840
11. Shawford houses...1860's to 1900's



Map 2
The same area in about 1680



Inset Map

The Mill in more detail in about 1680

The loss of Shawford Lake and the Ford

The ford and Shawford Lake were progressively eroded so that now there is little trace of them. Firstly, the Navigation: this was built at a higher level and the road had then to be elevated six feet, or more, to cross the Navigation. So the approach to the ford on the Shawford side had to be filled and a bridge across the navigation constructed, possibly with further bridges across both the mill race and the by-pass channel, all at the expense of the Navigation Company.

The ford on the Shawford side of the Itchen was then lost in 1710. (Is this when the Bridge Pub got its name?) Sheep and cows would still have needed access to the water for drinking, either from the Navigation or from Shawford Lake. The northern part of the lake was reduced by the bridges and on the western side by the Navigation; Shawford House has incorporated the eastern part of the ford and the Lake within its park, and this may have occurred shortly after 1710, but the bulk of the lake is now the field onto which Park View faces.

The Diversion of the Shawford Road

The Shawford Road was diverted to its present position by Shawford Park in about 1810 to give Shawford Park more privacy. The old route lay to the south, following a much straighter line from Norris Bridge to Shawford, passing close to Shawford House. The 1810 diversion reduced the size of the yard to the front of the mill. When the Shawford Road was widened further, probably in the 1930's, the yard of the Mill was reduced still further.

Shawford's Lost Road to Compton

The railway, built in 1840, further obliterated many features of the older road pattern on the Shawford side of the valley. One clue to the shape of Shawford before 1840 is the alignment of the Bridge Hotel, which is skew to the modern road; the older cottages to the north of it align north south, suggesting a road to Compton and Winchester along the west frontage of these cottages. Traces of this road can be seen in terraces along the Station Lane gardens. This right of way met up with Red Lane at some point under the railway. These two roads were replaced by Station Lane to the east of the railway and the footpath to the west.

(Note 2) The Bishops Drain is the name of the channel constructed to divert part of the flow of the Itchen from the eastern side of the valley to the west, for mills and watering of animals. It is called "the Bishop's", because it was the Bishop of Winchester who owned the whole of the flow of the Itchen; he controlled its use, owned any mill that was powered by it and charged rent.

The name is often wrongly applied to the small drain which goes under the Shawford road and along Park View. This was described as "Mr Goldfinch's new cut" in a sketch map in the Mildmay papers in the HRO dated about 1820.

Summary

So, what evidence do we have for Shawford Mill before 1700? We have a power source for the mill, a Domesday reference, which is a continuous record in the Pipe Rolls for corn milling (rather than fulling); we know the owner and the rent. Then there are the Leats which were modified in 1710, the Parish boundary and finally a busy ford leading to Twyford villages to the west and linking to Compton and Winchester and the outside world.

Envoi

This essay is based on one of a series of studies on the local landscape and the evidence it contains of our villages in earlier times, all published in Twyford's Parish magazine. Much documentary evidence is to be found in the Hampshire Record Office and there is much yet to discover in the Mildmay and Heathcote Papers, the Railway Company's plans and the Compton Tithe map, which may disprove anything and everything I have written here. Please let me (Chris Corcoran) know.

In any study of the history of a landscape, mills are rich mine of investigation.

Drawings by Mike Matthews