

## MILLING IN BUNWELL

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From ancient times man has always had a need to grind seeds and cereal grains to produce flour for food. In pre-Roman times in East Anglia this need was usually met by using suitably large flint slabs. With this method a flat or curved base stone was utilised, the grain being ground between this and a matching upper stone powered solely by hand. These are known as saddle querns.

These saddle querns were relatively inefficient and were later replaced by the more efficient rotary quern. Here a circular grooved lower stone was utilised, with a matching upper stone revolved (usually by hand) to grind the seeds.



Figure 1. Fragment of Beehive Quern found at Hargate

In 2011 a test pit was dug on arable land at Hargate as part of a Cambridge University research programme. About half of the top stone of a puddingstone beehive quern was found below the plough soil level (the upper stone's conical shape giving it its name), see Figure 1. This was a rotary quern turned by hand by a handle inserted into the upper stone, the corn grains being fed into the central hole at the top. This dates from the late Iron Age/early Roman period, proving the grinding of corn locally then. Puddingstone is a conglomerate

sedimentary rock composed of rounded flint pebbles cemented together by a younger matrix of silica quartz. It is largely confined to the County of Hertfordshire, and despite a superficial similarity to concrete, is entirely natural. The hardness of the silica made it an ideal building material as well as a media for the manufacture of quern stones in early Romano-British times.

In later times rotary querns were imported from the continent. A rich source of suitable material was the coarse gritty black Niedermendig lava stone from the central Rhineland area of Germany. This was imported into England from Roman times until the late Middle Ages, and fragments of such quern stones have been widely found in the Bunwell area.

The Domesday Survey (1086) mentions under land of Hugh Bigot that in HADESTUNA there was “then as now 1 mill”. This expression refers to the conquest of 1066 as well as the date of the survey. Mill at this time would only refer to a water mill, and with Hadeston in Bunwell assumed as the land around the Bunwell Low Common area, that can only place the mill somewhere in the vicinity of Peris Hall on the course of the river Tas. Its site is probably lost under the flood plain of the river in the present low meadows of the area. The Domesday Survey lists over 6000 watermills spread across 3000 different locations in England, some 580 of which were situated in Norfolk.

Late Saxon and Medieval water mills were often found on the upstream side of fords, which could place our Bunwell mill in the meadow to the west of the ford below Peris Hall. In order to drive a mill wheel a sufficient head of water was required.

Generally if only a small volume of water were available a millwright would choose to use an overshot wheel. Other types were undershot and breastshot, but these generally required a higher water flow, or a damming and diversion of the river to produce such a flow. We can only surmise that the Bunwell mill was of an overshot type. Such mills in medieval times would have been used for grinding grain, producing flour for bread, malt for beer, or coarse meal for porridge.

Windmills spread to Europe through Islamic Spain, reaching Britain in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Millwrights became highly skilled and respected craftsmen and, as Europeans colonised other continents, windmills spread throughout the world. The onset of the industrial revolution however signalled the end of their useful lives, though many have been restored as working windmills or tourist attractions. Alas Bunwell lost the last vestiges of the windmill at Great Green in 1971 when the remaining walls were pulled down. No photographs seem to have survived of it, nor does it seem to have been depicted on local postcards like so many other village windmills.

The earliest mention of a windmill in Bunwell (a post mill) occurs in the 'Petre Catalogue', a paper bound book held by the Norfolk Record Office. In this there is mention of land and a windmill in Bunwell circa 1639. Quite where this was located is unknown. Post mills were the earliest type of European windmill, the defining feature being that the whole of the mill that houses the machinery is mounted on a singular vertical post, around which it can be turned to bring the sails into the wind.



Figure 2. Typical Smock Mill

This illustration taken from a postcard of the now-demolished Smock Mill at Mulbarton Common shows the sloping timber superstructure mounted on a multi-sided brick foundation wall that is typical of a smock mill

The Bunwell smock mill was situated at Great Green in a meadow just to the south of the mill house, with an 8 sided tower and a boat shaped cap. Its base walls were 18ins thick with an external diameter of 12ft 6ins.<sup>1</sup> It was certainly in use by 1826 as it is depicted on Bryant's map of Norfolk and the first recorded miller is listed as James Ringer in 1836. The Austin family then seemed to be millers from 1836 until the sale of the mill in August 1874. The sale notice describes the property as consisting of ,“All that messuage or dwelling house in Bunwell, Norfolk, with the tower windmill, Barn, Stable, Cow house & other Outbuildings, Yards, Garden & Inclosure of very superior Arable & Pasture Land thereto belonging & adjoining & containing about 6 acres, now in the occupation of Mr. Henry Austin the Proprietor”.<sup>2</sup> It was then bought by James William Goldsmith; though by 1878 Charles Francis is listed in directories as miller.

The last miller was Charles Burroughes. He owned and lived at the mill in Mile Road, Carleton Rode, but also worked the smock mill in Rectory Lane, Bunwell. He died as a result of diabetes in 1891 and the business was sold. The mill then seems to have ceased commercial usage.

In 1971 the former mill house was simply known as The Cottage and was owned by Mrs. Bryan Jones. During February and March of that year the remaining walls were demolished and no traces remain above ground today.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.norfolk Mills.co.uk](http://www.norfolk Mills.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Norfolk Chronicle, 29<sup>th</sup> August & 5<sup>th</sup> September 1874