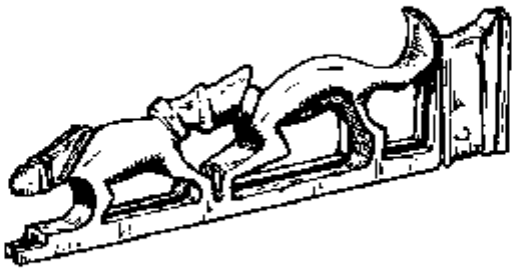
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

Flitwick Through Time

An Exhibition at the Church of St. Peter & St. Paul

May 2023

Kevan Fadden FSA

www.adalhs.org.uk

Flitwick Through Time



The oldest known man fashioned object found in the area. An Upper Paleolithic Mousterian hand axe discovered on Ruxox Farm. Circa 50,000 years.



Mesolithic scrapers and microliths. Middle stone age from Ruxox. Circa 7,000 BC .



Neolithic polished stone axe head from Ruxox.



Two Bronze Age barbed & tanged arrow heads Circa 2,000 BC and a leaf arrow head from the Neolithic, Ruxox.

Roman Artefacts from Ruxox



Roman sickle blade .



Roman bronze cloak pin and shut knife handle depicting a dog chasing a boar—4th Century AD.



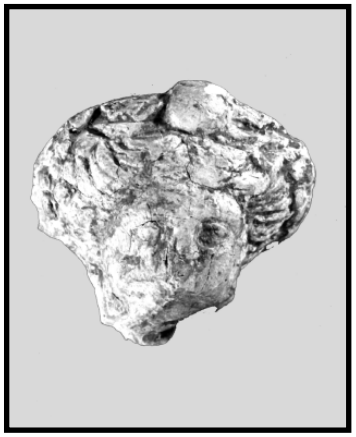
3 Roman Intaglios (carved finger ring stones) found on Ruxox Farm.



1st Century AD Roman fibula (or safety pin)...



Part of a Samian Pot with a lead rivet showing it had been repaired.



Head of Bacchus, from a pipe-clay figurine.

Belgic (Late Iron Age) Pottery Kilns above Doolittle Mill



Belgic pottery was found by the Society after the scrapers had taken the first cut for the Ampthill Bypass. With only weeks to go a rescue dig was mounted. A collection of pottery kilns emerged.



A pot from the excavation.



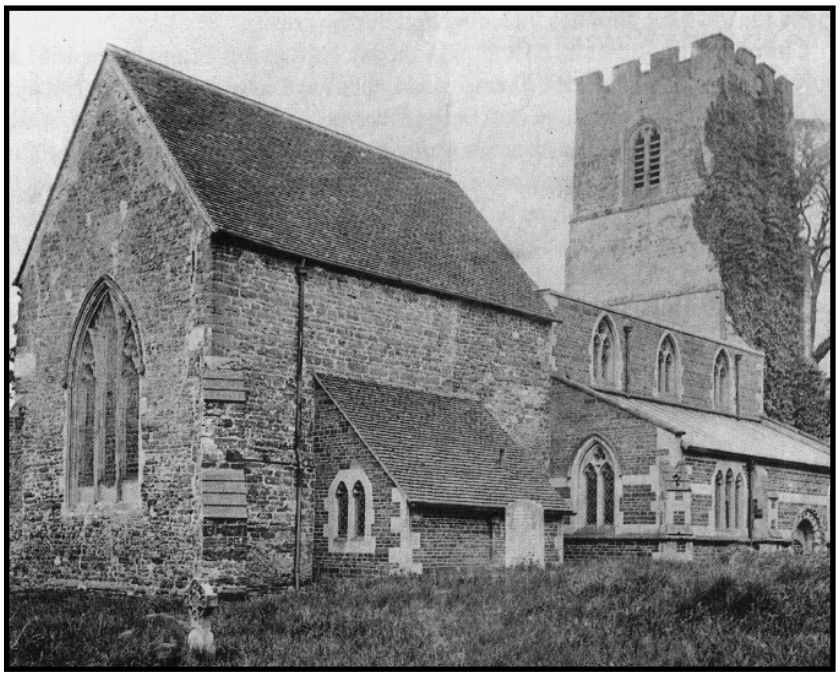
Just in time, the diggers cleared the site and cut away the hill. The black intrusions in the clay wall show further kilns. A Sample of the clay was taken and subsequently made into a pot.



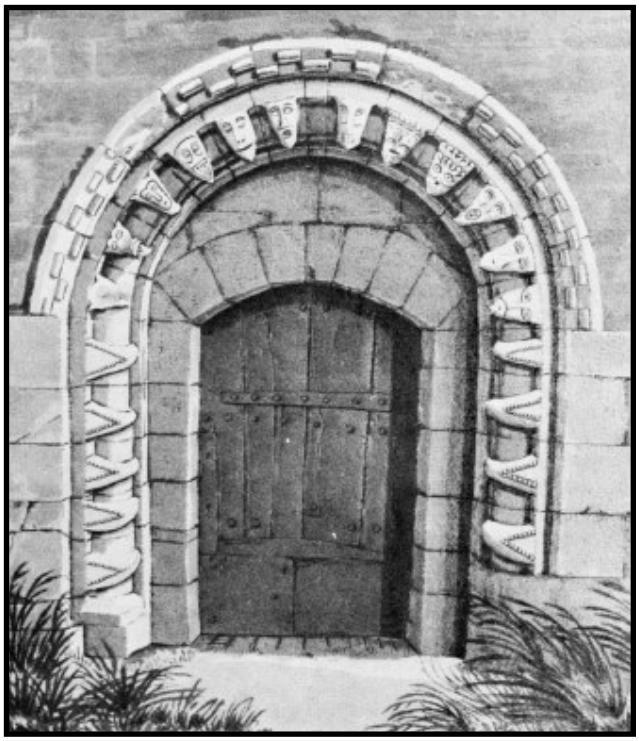
Unfortunately we had a series of tropical storms and the trenches filled with water. Robin Ellis is seen here bailing it out with bucket. Someone likened it to the battle of the Somme.

Although the excavation was not "text book", due to the storms, it proved to be worthwhile. The pottery produced on the site was grog tempered of early first century type from bee-hive kilns. Without the Society's efforts all evidence would have been swept away without record. The photograph (bottom left) says it all. There was no professional involvement on the bypass.

The oldest extant building in Flitwick is the Church of St. Peter & Paul Founded in the 12th Century.



This interesting photo of the church taken Circa. 1865 gives some idea of the changes made to the building. The Chancel is higher than today and the North Aisle had just been added (1857-8), the Norman North Door and surround, re-sited. The cement rendering on the tower has been removed.



A Fisher drawing of 1813 showing the beak Head Norman carving, this was drawn before the North Aisle was added. Counting the blocks below the arch shows how it was fitted into the Aisle wall .



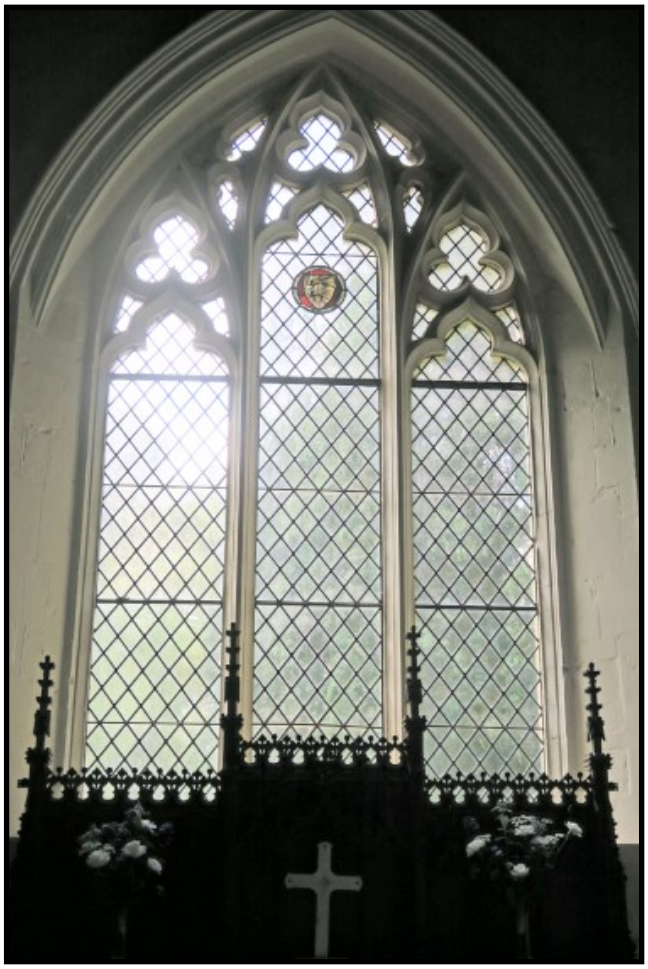
The doorway as it is after relocation, luckily retaining the Norman Arch. It is just a rumour that we are all much taller today.



The Altar and East Windows in the early 1970's,.



The stained glass was installed during the alterations of 1857-8 under the direction of the Rev. Dell Brooks and paid for by his family. The window was said to be unsafe and it was replaced by plain glass.



The window today has revised tracery in the centre light with a roundel below.



The Church before the Chapter House was built.



This roundel now set in the East window was resting on a window sill in the South Aisle. It is made up of Medieval stained glass fragments charged with two leopards sable. The shield of Arms of David Rufus de Flitwick. The leopards were painted on the glass.



In the 1960's and 70's stealing lead from church roofs was rife, we shall never know if this was the deterrent that foiled the thieves in Flitwick.

The view from the Church Tower before the modern estate building. The earth works associated with the pioneering garden and arboretum created by Major John Thomas Brooks in the 19th Century. were clearly evident.





Close up of the garden earthworks. Note the trees in the background. The garden was one of a small number in the country importing shrubs and trees from across the world at that time. It competed with Kew Gardens for exotic specimens, some still exist on the other side of Flitwick Manor where the Major lived.



Part of the Norman Motte & Bailey, home of David Rufus de Flitwick whose arms are portrayed in the church. He and his descendants were Lords of the Manor from about 1210 for a 150 years. It was damaged by the Major who built a “prospect tower” on the Motte to give him “fine views over the manor grounds and the surrounding countryside”.



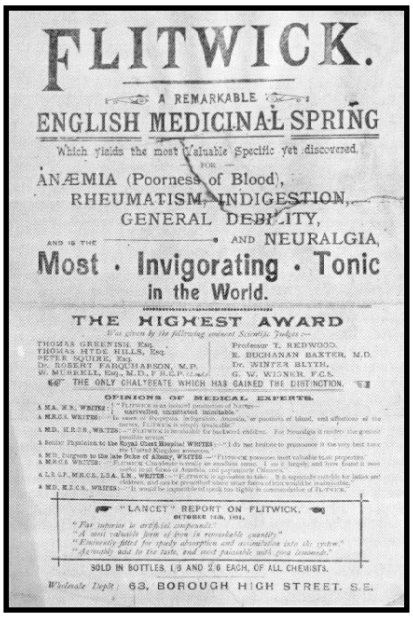
The arms of David Rufus de Flitwick used on the cover of **FLITWICK: A SHORT HISTORY** published by this the Society in 1973. Or two leopards sable.

Flitwick Moor - a hidden resource

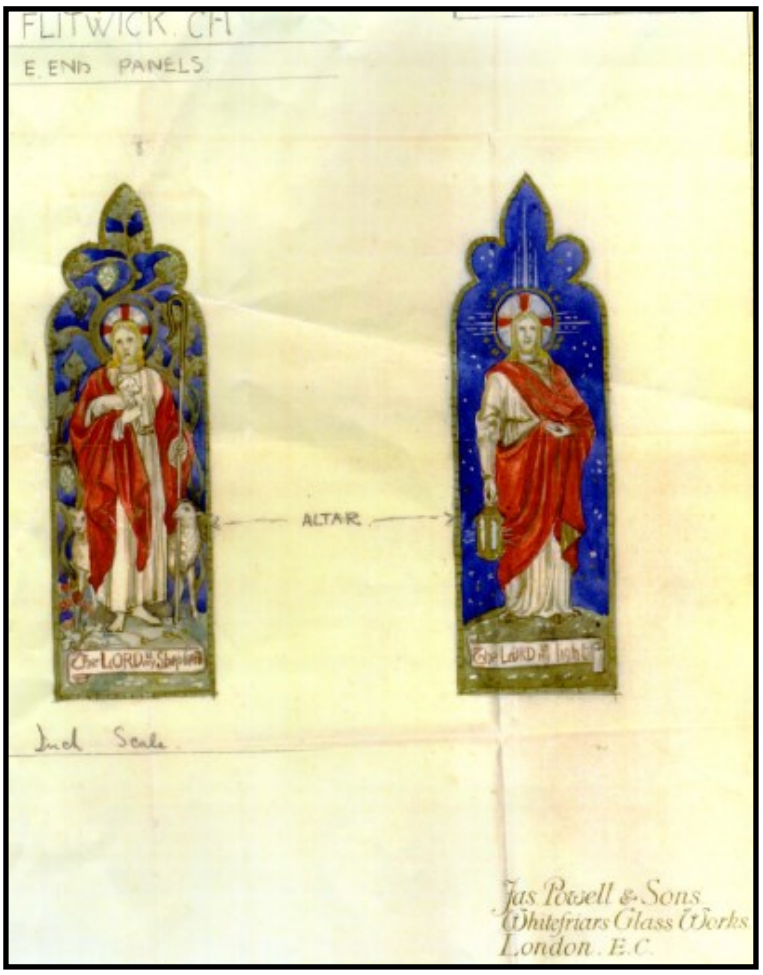
In 1891 Mr. Henry King Stevens , a “bird-stuffer” who lived at Folly Farm, obtained recognition in the Lancet for medicinal water that he obtained from the Moor. This chalybeate water was supposed to be good for anaemia, rheumatism , indigestion and many other ailments, in fact “The Best in the World”*. The business prospered and “Flitwick Water” was sold throughout the area. Two cart loads of carboys were sent to London each week by train. The business tailed off in the 1930’s.



Some of the extensive advertising.



**This was somewhat inaccurate, for in fact. Mr. Stevens pumped ordinary water twice through bags of peat dug from a site in the Moor at three spades depth and dried for a year. The peat, being strongly impregnated with minerals, produced the sherry-coloured liquid that seemed likely to bring fortune to its proprietor.*



An Interesting Comparison.

The original designs for the Lower East Stained Glass Window with the Actual.

The two apostles St. Peter & St. Paul to whom the church is dedicated.



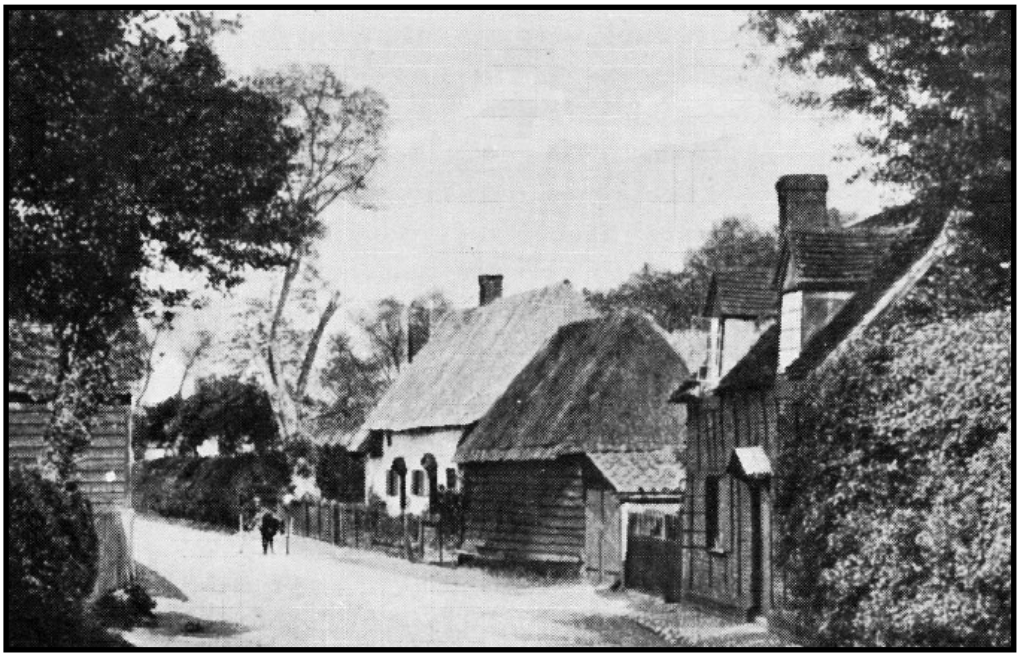






The West Window in the Tower, Christ Appearing to St. Peter.

A memorial to Major John Hatfield Brooks. 1794-1858



Church Road at the turn of the century, the bier shed between the cottages

Flitwick Moor. The largest wet-land site in Bedfordshire.



Peat Harvesting.

Peat extracted from Flitwick Moor was used for fuel until coal became available, but in 1910 it was sold for purifying coal gas. it was transported by rail to Leicester, Nottingham, Desborough and other towns from Flitwick station. As the business expanded a light railway was installed from the workings to the edge of the Moor. In 1967 North Sea gas was introduced which did not require purifying so the business collapsed.

Left. Peat was dug and loaded directly into purpose made trucks.



The engine shed and trails with two trucks in a siding. This photograph was taken just before the complex was removed .

Corn Mills in Flitwick



Flitwick Mill at the start of the 20th century. Driven by the River Flit, it almost certainly occupies the same site as the mill mentioned in Doomsday in 1086. It has been extensively restored in recent years and has ceased grinding corn. The chimney, for a supplementary engine has been destroyed.



The overshot wheel in the 1970's, still in use for grinding cattle food.



The lower grindstone in the process of recutting. A very skilled but necessary job.



Crown Wheel and pinion, part of the complex drive which transmitted the power provided by the water-wheel to the machinery in addition to grinding corn.



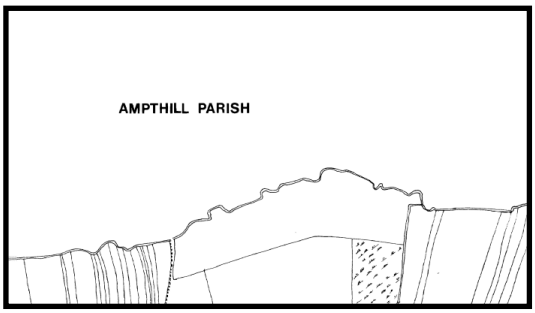
This machine was used to crush corn for cattle food. Note the belt drive.

A second water mill in Flitwick was remembered by Mr. Charlie Scott in a talk to the ADALHS in 1967. He mentioned the tributary to the river Flit known as the Running Waters. He travelled on the cart which took the last load of corn to the mill before it closed down in 1886 when he was three years old. The Society located the site in 1982 prior to the Ampthill Bypass.

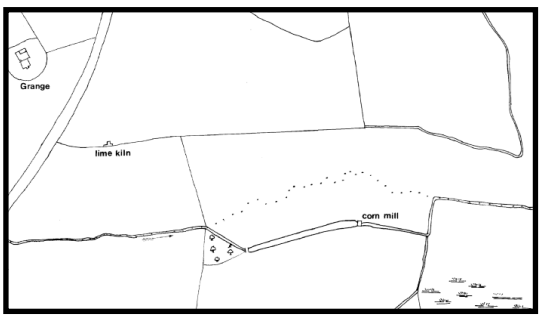


When the river bank was cleared and bed brushed it revealed the foundations of the mill, the track of the wheel, and brick tiles leading into and out of the mill.

The track of the wheel allowed us to work out it's diameter, unusually it was 15 feet and 6 feet wide.



Pre-enclosure map 1793. Parish boundary between Ampthill and Flitwick defined by the stream .

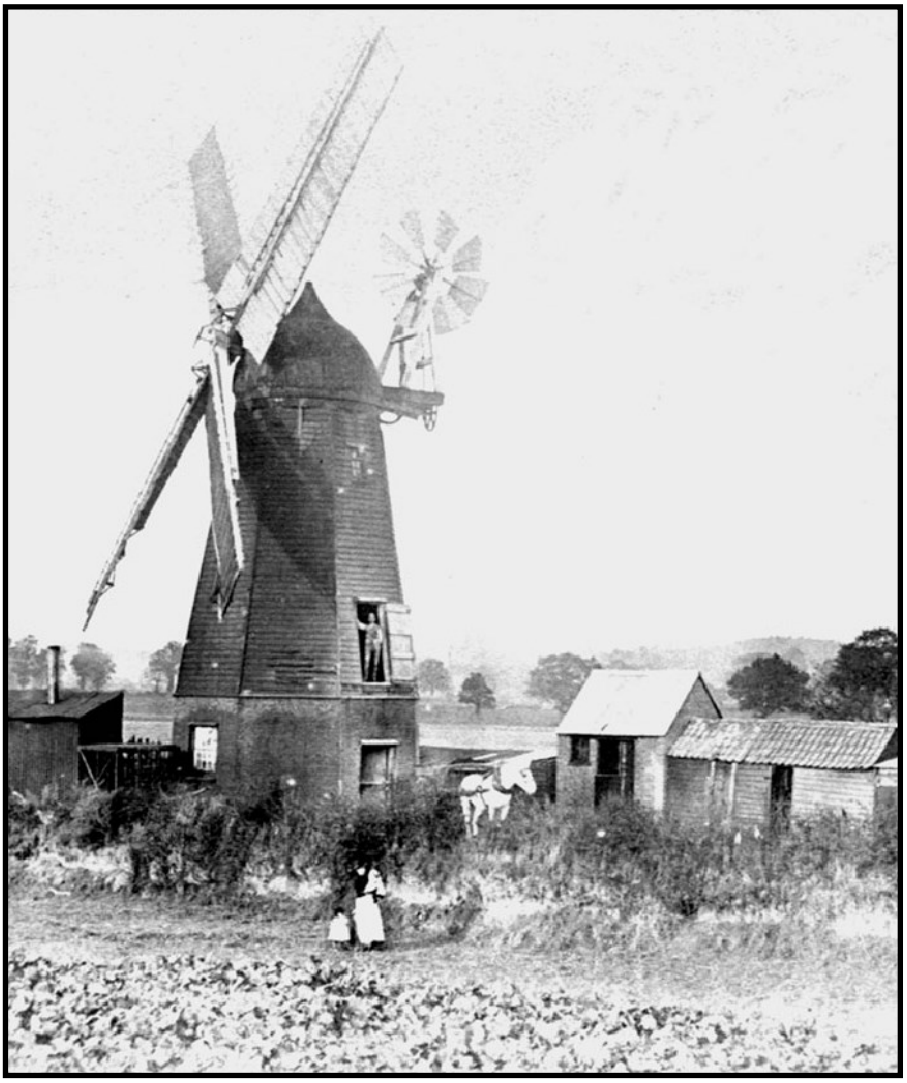


OS map 1881. Stream diverted to mill.

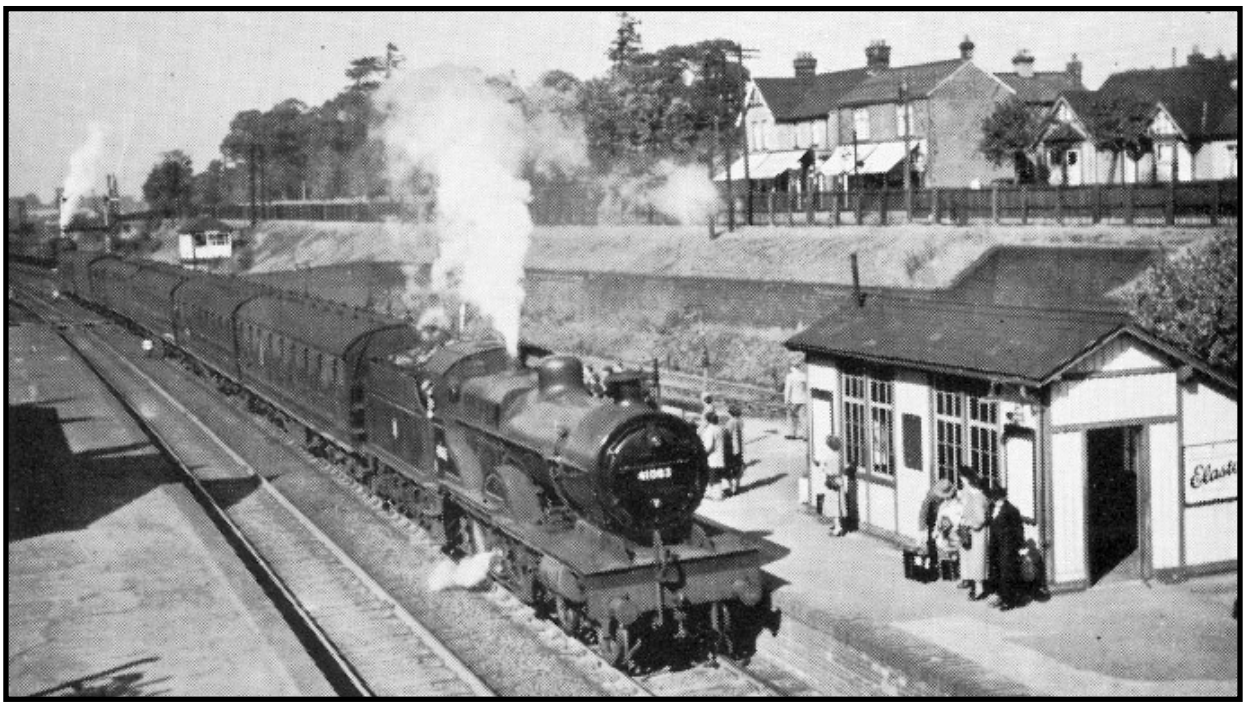


The mill proved to be purpose built, constructed between 1793 and 1881. The owner (almost certainly John Morris, the Ampthill Brewer). cut into the hill side to provide an effective mill pond, built the mill, and then diverted the stream into it.

Most mills like the East End mill have an ancient foundation and have developed over time with large mill ponds. This one took the full force of the stream and had a brick culvert bypass, an interesting layout The mill was obviously built as a complete unit but did not survive long. It was probably vulnerable to flash floods.



The smock windmill which stood near the west end of Windmill Road was built in 1843. It is seen here with Mr. Deacon the Miller in the doorway and Mrs. Deacon with two of their nine children. It burned down during the night of 10th November 1903.



Steam train pulling into Flitwick Station.

The Crown Public House



The Crown Circa 1890. It was badly damaged by fire on November 5th 1874, while the Landlord, Noah Billington was at the Elstow fair. The pub was looted and the mob became a drunken rabble.



This photo shows the pub rebuilt, taken about the turn of the century.

By 1926 the business had been taken over by J.W. Greens from Luton. John Cox, the Landlord is standing in the doorway.

