

HUDSON'S WINDMILL:

The windmill, eventually known as 'Hudson's Mill', was originally built at the top of Brooksend Hill on the southern edge of Birchington, quite near to the main road. It must have been there at least by the mid 1700s and was quite possibly there in the first quarter of the century. Tradition has it that the sound and the movement of the sweeps on a windy day upset the horses as they coped with going up or down the steep hill. This could well have been true, but an article in the Kentish Gazette of Saturday 8th August 1772 only states:

'Yesterday the windmill near Birchington in the Isle of Thanet, which has been so long complained of as an annoyance to the road between Canterbury and Margate, was removed 60 yards backwards at the expense of the Hon. Charles James Fox, who is proprietor of the estate.' The article continues, 'The removal was completed in little more than one day, with the utmost ease, and by the assistance of two horses only. The weight was supposed to be upwards of forty tons, as neither the sweeps or the millstones were taken down. The engineer was Mr Peake, a Carpenter at Manston, in the St. Lawrence parish.' (Ramsgate)

The plan of the mill and its accompanying buildings was drawn up when Charles Hudson sold the mill to James Fright of the New Inn, Birchington Square and is dated 15th October 1891. Hudson actually left the mill in the week ending 4th July 1891, when he took over his large new modern roller mill at Ramsgate and the Birchington one was put up for auction at the White Hart Hotel, Margate on Monday 10th August 1891.

The footings of the base of the old mill can still be seen in the garden of 'Mill Haven' at the end of Mill Row in Birchington. The coach house is still in the farther corner of the garden and there are areas of cobbled yard on several parts of the garden. The earliest owner we can trace appears to have been the Hon. Charles James Fox, (from the 1772 article about its removal). Later, James Hudson, Charles's father, was put in charge of the Mill Row windmill in 1840 by his own father, Zechariah Hudson of Ash Mill. James was only 32 when he came here. He settled in well and the mill soon became known as 'Hudson's Mill'. At a fairly early date after his arrival, he probably built the Mill House, at the top of the Row. Whether it was he who made the circular structure at the southwest end of the house, which is now stated to be unsafe, is not entirely clear. Between 1840 and 1850 it was decided to bring in more plant and also to raise the mill itself by 15-20 feet. This was probably the point at which it was lifted up and stood on the brick housing that provided the steam-driven machinery. This can be seen in the sketch that was made of the windmill in about 1840-45. In the 1829 map, the windmill can be clearly seen, together with the one near the present railway bridge by the station, known as the Seed Mill.

The Seed Mill was owned by Richard Read who married Mary Ann and had seven children by her. All of them were baptised in All Saints Church. This means that Richard remained in the area for quite some time, so although he must have been older than James Hudson, the two men were both running

their mills during the same overlapping periods. The seed mill was later owned by Anthony May, who was eventually declared bankrupt.

The 1829 map also shows Griggs' Mill on the corner of Quex Park. It looks as if it stood at Woodchurch, but since the farm at Woodchurch abutted the Quex land, the exact location for a cartographer could again be quite ambiguous. The location of this one is most clearly shown on the estate maps drawn up for the owners of Quex Park in 1774.

While James and his wife Eliza (Lee) lived at Birchington Mill, they had six children, four girls and two boys. The eldest son, Charles James, followed his father into the milling business and carried on at their Birchington Mill after his father's death in 1889. By this date, however, he must have begun to realise that the small millers were having a harder and harder time to make a decent living. Easier transport on the newly built railways meant that bulk milling was more economical. At this point, he discovered the large power mill at Ramsgate was coming up for sale. It was a huge step to take, but with the support of his family and friends, he eventually took the plunge and bought the Ramsgate Mill. He sold the Birchington one to James Fright of the New Inn, who bought it as an investment (a very unwise move, in the end). After several failed ventures the mill was finally demolished and the site sold.

If James and his son Charles Hudson were to return to their Birchington mill site today, they would still see the lane that led straight from the mill to the Canterbury Road, as well as the footpath that stretched from the top of Mill Row right the way down to Great Brooksend Farm and on to Upper and Nether Hale, and over to St Nicholas-at-Wade. The terraces of mill cottages in Mill Row are still there, as well as the Red House at the bottom of the Row. The open fields are still just behind the site, though now they are more often filled with brassicas, rather than corn!

In Coles Finch's book about Windmills, he states that Griggs' Mill, which used to stand at the southeast corner of Quex Park, was supposed to have been moved to the top of Brooksend Hill. This is quite definitely not correct for two reasons.

1. The two windmills are shown together on a map of 1829 and 1843, although Griggs' mill was not working at the later date.
2. Both windmills are known to have been functioning at the same time between the late 1700s and the early 1800s.

When Coles Finch noted his information, he said his facts were locally stated. Although local people often remember things quite well from the past, there is always an element of doubt and total accuracy is impossible, especially when people were not directly involved with a business. The placing of the windmills on many of the old maps is also quite arbitrary. It is doubtful whether the early cartographers were all that concerned about the exact location of the mills – sufficient for them that they were shown at all. On one map, Gore End is shown as 'Grove' End – a name it has *never* had locally.