

I found this 1933 press cutting from Paignton News which I think is fascinating – hope you do too! When reading it, remember the quotes of Mr Rossiter are nearly 100 years old now.

Memories of the town's fine old mill Mr Rossiter tells an interesting story of the ancient watercourse

The unearthing of a section of the ancient watercourse used for augmenting the supply of water to Paignton Mill (as reported in the “Paignton News” last week) has set those whose memories can carry them back half a century thinking of the good old days when the Mill still served the purpose of its medieval founders, the Bishops of Exeter, grinding corn to provide bread for the people of Paignton.

For none did our story revive more vivid memories than for Mr H B Rossiter, whose family worked the old Mill from about 1830 to the time it was put out of commission, and who is the head of the Torbay Mill Company, the well-known firm that can claim to be direct successors in Paignton to the medieval monks in the age-old craft of grinding corn.



PAIGNTON. FROM OLD MILL. SHORTON 29

COX, PHOTOGRAPHER
PAIGNTON

And what a picture Mr Rossiter can paint of that amazing Paignton of 50 years ago!

Victorian Neighbours

The Mill still stands, it is true, but only as a dwelling house. And where is the mill pond and the mill stream? The pond has been filled in and converted into a Council store; the stream runs underground till liberated in Victoria Park. Of the Victorian neighbours of the Mill, Littlegate Farm is remembered because of the road to which it has given its name, while the old Vicarage is similarly remembered because the row of villas that now occupies its site is known as Vicarage Terrace.

"All, all are gone, the old familiar places ...". True, the Clink is still fortunately preserved, maybe haunted by the shade of the solitary village constable, complete with box-hat and cane, who was the fore-runner of Paignton's present police force. "It has always been supposed," Mr Rossiter told a 'News' representative, "that the Mill was built by monks to grind corn for the Bishop of Exeter and his suite who spent the summer at the Palace, in the grounds of which the present Vicarage stands.

"My grandfather, John Rossiter, worked Shorton windmill till it was burned down about 1830 or 1840, and then he took over Paignton Mill, which happened to be vacant. In those days the mill provided Paignton with its flour. Incidentally it ground the flour for the famous Paignton pudding made to celebrate the opening of the railway in 1859".

"When my grandfather first had it, the mill was quite small, and had water wheels on both sides, and a house for the working miller. Mr J F Belfield, Paignton's last Squire, rebuilt the mill in 1854 to his own design so that it would take more water, and he also put in a steam engine to supplement the water-power in the summer."

"My father worked the mill till 1883, when the Local Board, wanting the water for drinking purposes, bought it and in 1884 it ceased to be used as a mill probably for the first time for 500 years. They took down the water wheels and cut off a corner of the building."

Questioned about his memories of the mill when he was young, Mr Rossiter recalled seeing a man accidentally hauled up by the joist. Instead of having his limbs broken, he escaped without a scratch.

During the winters of 1870 and 1871 the pond was frozen for weeks on end, and the youths of the town skated till midnight to extract the maximum pleasure from the unusual novelty.



An old mill stone is incorporated in the kitchen floor of a cottage belonging to Mr Rossiter in Princes Street. The cottage formerly stood against the mill pond.

Left is the Mill circa 1970, just before its demolition

Littlegate Farm

The house and buildings of Littlegate Farm practically adjoined the mill and the orchard of the farm ran right down to what is now Torquay Road, but was then known as New Road. The width of the orchard must have been considerable, for Mr Rossiter says it stretched from what is now "Sansom's Corner" to Cecil Road. *[could this be the junction of Littlegate Road and Torquay Road?]*

Above the mill stood the old Vicarage, the garden of which is now the yard of Starkey, Knight and Ford, the brewers. We speak of the "old" Vicarage, but as a matter of fact Mr Rossiter remembers its beginning as well as its end. He thinks it was built in the

middle 1860's and was probably pulled down about 20 years ago [1913?]. The extensive grounds stretched from the brewery site to Torquay Road.

Mr Rossiter recalled with a chuckle the prophecy of his father that when the wind was in the north, the Vicar would find his new Vicarage invaded by smells from the farmyard and smoke from the mill. "And so it happened," declared Mr Rossiter.

The Clink stands opposite what was then the mill pond. Mr Rossiter remembers that a man who was locked in it one night committed suicide and was found hanging in his cell next morning. "We had only one Constable" he said, "and he wore a box-hat and did not hesitate to apply his cane on boys who misbehaved."

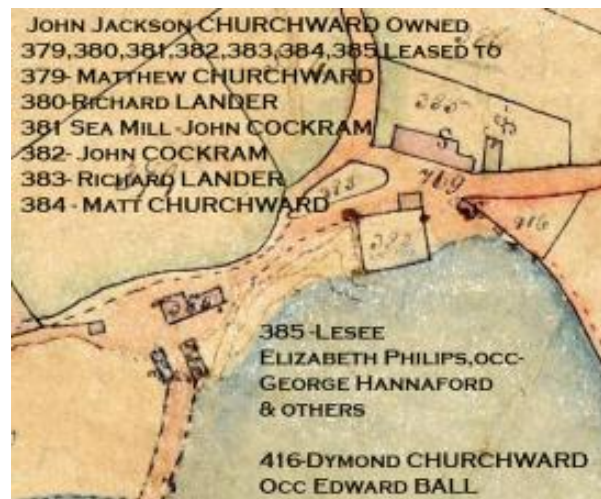
There were dozens of water mills in the district in those days, including the sea mills at Stoke Gabriel. "I remember my father taking me to see them" said Mr Rossiter. "I used to ride behind him on horse-back when I was quite a nipper".

The Sea Mills



There were two great mills, which were worked by the tide. When the sea came in the water naturally rose, and when the tide began to recede, sluice gates were opened to work the water wheels. Obviously the hours of working depended on the tides, which regularly necessitated night work. At neap tide there was insufficient water to work the mill.

Mr Rossiter recalls describing this mill to a man who stoutly maintained that there had never been any such thing at Stoke Gabriel. But one day Mr Rossiter happened to be in South Kensington Museum, and lo! There hung a painting labelled "Sea Mills, Stoke Gabriel, 1852".



Karen Chapman
February 2025