

Liddington Mills

Historically there were two water mills located at the village of Liddington. One was just to the north-east of the Manor House and the other just to the north of the road that leads from Liddington to Wanborough. There is a fairly steep slope between the two and this caused the mills to be known as Upper and Lower. Over the years there has been some confusion as to the ownership and occupation of the mills and there is an additional complication created by another mill at Liddington Wick about one mile further north by Common Head Roundabout. This article is to try and understand the lineage of these mills and attribute some of their owners to each mill correctly.



Map courtesy of the National Library of Scotland – Geo-Referenced maps online

The above map shows the location of the three mills, called Upper, Lower and Moor. For the latter of the three mills, there is evidence in the form of documentary, archaeological

and photographic. This evidence has been collated and forms the listing number N1522, Moor Mill at Liddington Wick in the Shrivenham Heritage Centre online Catalogue.

The Victoria County History (VCH), Volume 9 provides information about the other two mills. However, the discovery of recent documents has shown that some of the information given is not correct. One of the paragraphs in VCH makes reference to a lease of 1768 between the Duke of Marlborough, who owned the particular mill to which the lease is referring, and Edward Cripps. The reference is correct in that the mill was leased to Edward Cripps. But the paragraph stating that, '*By 1773 this mill was known as Upper Mill...*' is not.

Documents in the Wilts & Swindon History Centre (WSHC) provide more detail. Firstly an Indenture dated 25th April 1810 (WSHC 1033/32). '*The Duke of Marlborough hath devised, granted and to farm letter and by these presents doth devise and to farm let unto the said Joseph Brind etc, all that the site of a Messuage or Tenement and Water Grist Mill on which the said Joseph Brind hath lately erected and built a good and substantial Water Corn Mill and Mill House with necessary Wheels, Millstones, Utensils and Implements to the same Mill belonging and in the schedule hereunder written comprised. And also a close of meadow or pasture thereunto adjoining and belonging and usually held and enjoyed therewith containing together with the said site of the said Mill by survey 1a Or 2p of Ground which said Mill Close, Mill House and Premises are situate, lying and being in the Manor and Parish of Liddington aforesaid and were before the Mill and Mill House was built by the Joseph Brind in the occupation of Edward Cripps and afterwards of his widow Susanna Cripps and are now in the occupation of the Joseph Brind.*'

The above document clearly confirms that the mill being described was formerly in the occupation of Edward Cripps. But before it went in to the hands of Joseph Brind, Edward Cripps' widow Susanna, wrote a letter to the Duke of Marlborough dated 22nd March 1802; '*Your Grace. The humble petition of the widow Cripps home is in the position of Liddington Lower Mill belonging to your Grace but is in a very ruinous condition, but was your Grace to have it put in repair I should be glad to state or rent it, which I hope you'll grant me the first refusal. I hope you pardon my writing to you, but the reason my troubling your Grace is, Mr Pearce seen me and asked me if the Mill was up or down and the Friday in the same week, March*

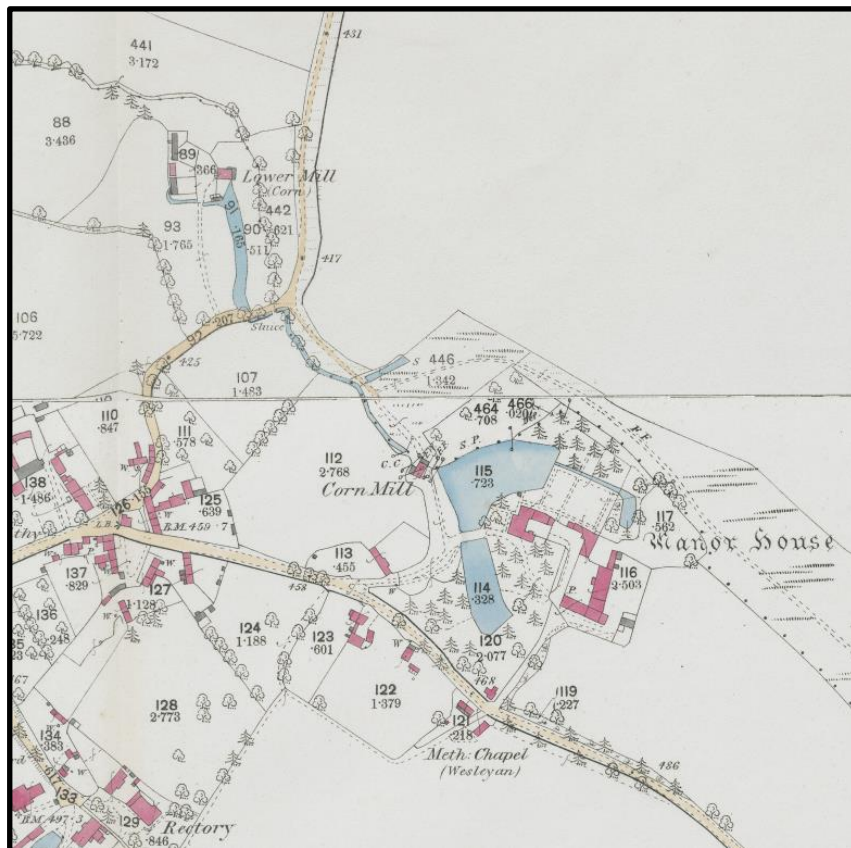
19th, he sent for me and demanded the key of the door which I refused till I had got my property away, he told me he would brake the door open and if not he would put a padlock on that I should not get in, but I never had any notice from Mr Brook nor Mr Finny to quit. Mr Pearce surprised me, therefore I hope your Grace will take the widow's petition in to consideration will always be acknowledged by your ever duty full obedient humble servant.' (WSHC 1033/32).

In this letter Susanna Cripps specifically calls the property, *Liddington Lower Mill*, and when this information is combined with the description of; '*a close of meadow or pasture thereunto adjoining*,' it is clear that this is Lower Mill and not the Upper Mill close to the Manor House.

The Manor House and farm were put up for sale on 27th May 1867 (WSHC 374/130/54) and the drawing that accompanied the sale gives a good indication of the layout of Upper Mill and its position relative to the Manor House. This mill at the time of sale was occupied by a Mr Berry.



The map below shows both mills relative to each other and also gives an idea of their general layout circa 1880.



Map courtesy of the National Library of Scotland – Geo-Referenced maps online

The census records provide some further information about the millers. The census of 1851 shows that John Brind was the head of the household, aged 77, a *'Farmer & Miller.'* The next census in 1861, confirms that this must be Upper Mill, as the address specifically states, *'Manor House,'* and the head is still John Brind, ten years older. However, he did not operate the mill himself. In 1851 the Miller was James Savory who was aged 70, and in 1861 it was Thomas Stevens, aged 64.

Having clearly identified who is at Upper Mill, the two census' above show another miller who was Thomas Pinniger, and who must have occupied Lower Mill. The 1851 census shows that he was aged 39 and was with his wife Christian, also age 39, daughter Elizabeth, age 11, and son William, age 5. Thomas was still at Lower Mill at the next census in 1861.

The census for 1871 does not show any miller at all for Liddington, which is surprising when there are two mills. But the 1881 census shows two millers, Henry Tyler, aged 34, and William Yeates, age 55. However, it is not known to which mill they belonged. The census for 1891 records, '*The Mill, Village, Liddington.*' This gives the impression that at this time there was only one mill, and the Miller was James Carter, aged 34, along with his wife Martha, aged 33, and seven children. It's likely that Upper Mill, located at the Manor, had been abandoned, and James Carter was working Lower Mill, but that has yet to be verified.

There are no further millers recorded within the next two census', so it may well be that the mills at Liddington, like many mills around the country at that time, became obsolete.