



## **The Round House**

The Public Subscription Wind Corn Mill was built in 1801/02 on ground above part of the medieval town wall. Traces of what was probably a look-out tower above this part of the wall were lost when the Round House was extended further westwards in 1927.

The mill was built because of the high price of bread, caused by a series of poor harvests in the late 1790s and a cut in the amount of imported grain due to the Napoleonic Wars (1793 to 1815). Landowners were sometimes accused of withholding wheat from the market to keep prices high. With the poor going hungry, there was a fear of food riots, while employers faced calls for higher wages.

In the summer of 1800 it was announced that a public mill would be built by public subscription from among the town's better-off residents, pledged to keep the cost of milling and flour at a reasonable rate. The first plan was to build it on Brack Mount (near the Lewes Arms) but its owner, the Duke of Norfolk, refused permission, so this site, then known as Smith's Croft, was chosen instead, under a lease from Lord Pelham. An advertisement in the Sussex Weekly Advertiser of 20 September 1800 put out to tender the building of 'a Public Wind Corn Mill capable of working two pairs of stones 4ft 6in to 5ft with a bolter [flour sieve] completely fitted for use.'

A meeting at the Star Inn (now the Town Hall) on 9 October resolved that a smock mill should be built at a cost of no more than £600. There were 65 subscribers who paid at least £10 each. In the end, the total cost was £175 for the mill base and £650 for the upper structure or smock. The mill was grinding wheat and barley by early 1802, and in February a 'Grand Concert and Ball' was held at the Star to celebrate the mill's opening and encourage the local gentry to continue to support it.

## **Different owners**

The mill had been working for less than two years when it was badly damaged by a gale in December 1803. The mill committee had also got into financial difficulty: there was talk of misuse of funds and failure to pay tithes due to St Michael's Church. After several attempts by the committee to dispose of the mill, it was finally sold by auction in January 1813 to James Lade of Chiddingly, but he worked it for less than a year before selling it for £700 to local corn chandler William Smart (1772-1837).

Smart lived with his wife Frances at 74/75 High Street and owned much other property in the town. He was elected High Constable for the Borough in 1818. His son Samuel (1799-1865) worked for his father at the town mill on this site until 1819, when the smock was dismantled and moved to near where Lewes Prison now stands, when it was known as Smarts Mill.

It's not clear why the mill was moved - it has been suggested that the building of Prospect Cottages on the other side of the passage affected wind flow, but these were not built until the 1830s. A possible explanation is that access for delivery and collection was difficult. In fact,

when Lewes prison opened in 1853 it was found to interfere with the wind flow of the mill on its new site, and the mill base had to be raised.

It is also not known exactly when the building was converted into a dwelling. An early print of unknown date shows the mill base with a thatched roof added, though the picture is probably a more artistic than accurate representation.

In 1819 William Smart's daughter Elizabeth married Joseph Shelley (1788-1845) from a prosperous local family of carriers. William Smart's will of 1837 shows them living here. They had ten children in all. Under the terms of William's will his properties were left to his wife Frances and on her death (which was in 1849) the mill was to be sold to Samuel Smart. In the 1841, 51 and 61 censuses, Samuel Smart and his second wife Abigail were living at 75 High Street with the bakery next door at no 74 (these are now the Hugh Rae shop - bread ovens still exist inside the building).

These early transfers of ownership of the mill were 'copyhold' (a form of feudal tenure from the Lord of the Manor). As with leaseholds today, the freehold of the land was still owned by someone else: in this case, the Pelham estate. But in 1818, the freehold of the land was granted out of the manorial waste to Robert Neal, cordwainer [shoemaker], of Lewes. He is recorded in 1838 as living at 70 High Street and being freeholder of the Mill House.

When Neal died in 1855, property including the mill house was put up for auction and bought by Samuel Smart on behalf of Joseph Shelley's widow, Elizabeth, and she was still living here in 1861. When she died in 1864, Samuel sold it to her son Francis (b 1828)

After Samuel Smart's death, Joseph Shelley junior (b 1823) succeeded him to work the town mill on its new site, and it was then known as Shelley's Mill. He became a master miller and a prominent person in Lewes, although when he died in 1892 he was heavily in debt.

A thatched roof was still in place when Andrew Nash did a pencil sketch of the castle in 1848, but at some time later this was replaced by an octagonal tiled roof. An extension to the west, of two rooms, one up one down, and a linking stairwell, is first shown on an OS map of 1873.

In the 1871 census Francis Shelley and his wife Harriet were living here. He had been working as a printer's clerk but later that year was appointed Relieving Officer for the poor and the family moved to Castle Precincts. In 1877 the house was sold to a local doctor, Lewis Smythe, for £210, and in the 1881 census it was being rented by a tailor, Jonathan Jenner, with his wife Sarah, five children, two grandchildren, his mother-in-law and a lodger. By the 1891 census, Jonathan had died, but Sarah was still here, working as a laundress.

### **The 20th century: Virginia Woolf and John Every**

Dr Smythe died in 1906 and in 1912 the house was sold for £180 to John Nash who lived here until his death in 1916. His sister Sarah Woodhams lived here until 1919 when the house was put up for sale with estate agents Wycherleys. It was Mrs Woodhams who showed the Round House to the Bloomsbury writer Virginia Woolf and her husband Leonard.

As is recorded in her diaries and letters (the Friends of Lewes plaque on the house is an extract), Virginia Woolf saw the property in 1919, bought it on a whim for £300 and then, having viewed it again three weeks later with Leonard, sold it for £320 (instead, they bought

Monks House in Rodmell). It was bought from them by John Every (1857-1941) to house one of his workers at the Phoenix Iron Foundry. The new tenant was Arthur Broadbent and his wife.

In 1927 Every had the house extended further westwards, covering the site of the old lookout tower (which explains the 1920s-style fireplace in the extended living room). After his death the house was bought in 1943 by local builder Alfred Philcox, who may have planned to live here close to his office in the High Street and the firm's workshops in Westgate Street. But this never happened, and Arthur lived here with his daughter Myrtle until his death in 1968.

The house, by now owned by Richard Philcox and his sister Rosemary Brown, was then rented to a series of students from Sussex University. After Rosemary's daughter Jane married Robin Lee in 1977, they lived here with their family until 1993, when the house was bought by Annie Crowther. Annie lived here until 2009.

## Smock mills

This was a 'smock mill' and would have had five floors altogether, which explains the massiveness of the remaining walls. The two-storey brick and flint base supported a tapering eight-sided wooden tower (covered with weatherboarding) supporting the sails. The name probably referred to a resemblance to the smocks worn by working countrymen of the day. The base had two high entrances at the front and rear to allow easy access for grain to be delivered and flour despatched.

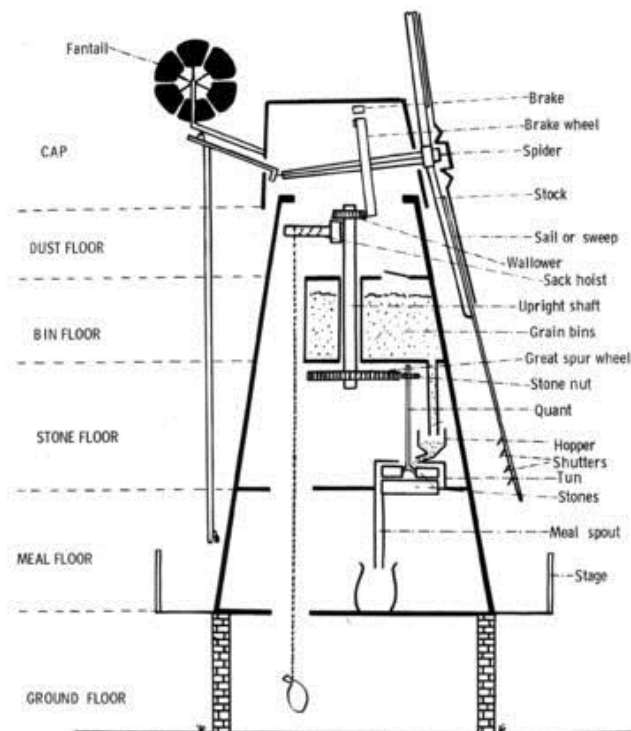


DIAGRAM OF TYPICAL SMOCK MILL.

Beneath the cap of the mill was the bin floor, where grain was stored for grinding. Sacks were lifted up through trap doors in each floor. On the next floor down the grain fell through sacking or wooden chutes into the hoppers and then into the millstones. After grading, the flour passed to the meal floor where it was bagged for distribution.

## Points of interest

A plaque discovered in the Round House garden refers to 'a portion of the Town Wall built about AD 1150, repaired by murage grants AD 1245-1345'. Murage (French mur = wall) was a tax levied to repair town walls.

The garden has revealed medieval pottery shards as well as animal bones from when the butcher William Smith used the site as a slaughter-house in the late 18th century.

Pipe (or Pipes) Passage got its name in Victorian times after a clay-pipe kiln was constructed in the 1830s near the High Street end of the passage. The remains can still be seen in the back yard of the Freemasons Hall.

A drawing (from *The Cricketer's Guide*, published by Baxters in 1817) of a cricket match in progress in The Paddock, shows the windmill in relation to the castle and St Michael's church.

An ink and wash drawing, *Lewes Castle with Cattle* by James Forbes (1749-1819) shows the windmill sails in place.

A Reeves photo of 1870 shows the original smock tower of the mill in its new location on Race Hill with Lewes Prison in the background.

An 1890s Reeves photo (taken from some distance, roughly where The Avenue is) shows the 1870s extension before it was further extended in 1927. Another photo (from about the same date) shows the front of the house before the present porch was built.

A 1939 sketch by Karl Wood (1888-1958), art master at Gainsborough grammar school. Between 1926 and 1956 on extensive travels by bicycle he made almost 1,400 windmill paintings, intended for a book that was never completed.

The fireback in the dining room is clearly from the Phoenix ironworks as it is marked with John Every's initials and the date he bought the house - 1919. Metal window frames and two boot-scrapers in the garden were also probably produced by the works.

Many of the original deeds from the times when the building changed hands still survive, including the one covering the transfer from Sarah Woodhams to Leonard Woolf and then to John Every in 1919. This carries Leonard Woolf's signature and that of the Woolfs' servant, Nellie Boxall.

The round wall plaque says that the mill was moved to the foot of the race hill (ie near where the prison now is) in 1835, but this is incorrect. Gideon Mantell's diary notes that the mill was on its new site by 1819. The plaque itself was in place on the house by 1941, when it was mentioned in an article, *The Old Windmills of Lewes*, in the *Sussex County Magazine*.

The square plaque, provided by the Friends of Lewes, includes a quote from Virginia Woolf's letter to Dora Carrington recording their brief ownership of the house (see page 2).

*Notes based on 'The Public Subscription Windmill and the Round House at Lewes' by Annie Crowther (2001).*