

The Bircham Brewery Well

This well was sunk in what is now the courtyard of the west side of the Old Brewery Hotel. I have been unable to establish when the well was first dug but it seemed to provide an endless supply and Miss Ann Bircham tells me that it provided sufficient water for the needs of the brewery until the business closed in 1876. In the brewery days the water was raised manually by two men turning the handle on a big wheel which operated the pump drawing from the well. In later years, the water was pumped mechanically to the Brewery House and there is still evidence in the well-head of a heavy wooden platform on which an engine was probably fixed.

Miss Bircham says that the water was always very cold and very good and that the supply never failed in the driest weather. She thinks the well is about sixty feet deep and that there is a platform about halfway down which was used when the well needed cleaning.

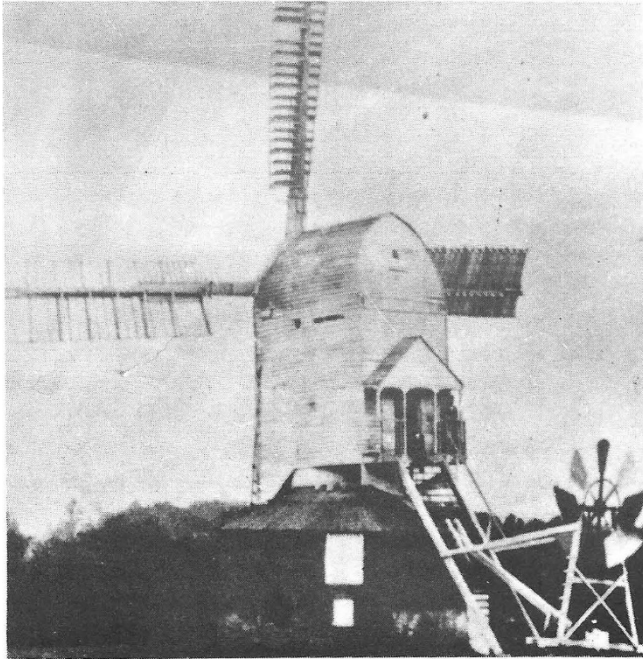
The present roof over the well head is an interesting construction. Octagonal in shape it rises to a height of some twenty feet above ground level. One section of the octagonal base brick wall has been left open for access to the well. The brick wall is three feet in height and has the year "1900" inscribed on a section. Above the wall is a timber construction in heavy oak of sleeper beams and uprights cross braced to carry the very steeply pitched tile roof. At some time in the past metal ties have been inserted to reinforce the timber and counteract the outward thrust of the roof. The tiling is interesting; the first five courses from the base are flat pin tiles, above these are more pin tiles rectangular on three sides but the lower and exposed edge curved in a semicircle. The hips to the octagonal roof are in lead and the gutters are ogee cast iron.

At the present time, the brickwork is sound and the oak timbers are in good condition. Slipping tiles on the roof and the guttering both need attention and the lead flashing on one edge of the octagonal roof is missing.

There is an interesting history to the building of the roof over the well. The work was carried out in 1900 by Harry Hawes, a Reepham builder who, in 1949, wrote his now fabled account of Reepham during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He recalled that the oak timbers for the work came from the old post mill at Booton when it was pulled down.

The brick base can still be found on the righthand side of the road to Norwich on the rising ground behind Mill Cottage. This mill was first built and stood at the end of Mill Lane near the top end of Ollands Road. It was moved to Booton because, as the story has it, the miller fell out with his neighbour who subsequently built a wall and planted trees, which, in time, effectively kept the wind from the windmill. This

threatened to put the miller out of business so he removed the windmill to Booton. A somewhat long-term revenge.



The Post Mill at Booton before it was pulled down in the late 19th century.

Long may the well-head and its high pointed roof remain to remind us of some very human bits of Reepham history.

Tony Ivins

From an article published in the Reepham Society Magazine, Spring 1990.