

Account of Purley on Thames Blowing in the Wind

by Tom Hine

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Tom is a former member of Project Purley who is very much into Mills and we were delighted to renew the acquaintance at the BLHA AGM. His house on Westbury Lane was replaced by two new ones after he left Purley. This was published in the Project Purley Journal of May 2019.

This article all began on unearthing part of an old mill stone when digging in my garden in April 1998 at Westbury Lane.

My curiosity roused, I visited the Berkshire Record Office and after some delving found that there once stood "Lirp Aloof" Windmill where "Oakley Cottage" now stands. She was erected in the late 1790's by Mr Lirp. The mill took the name Aloof because of her high position, and commenced milling the following April. (all windmills like ships are referred to in the feminine gender).

She was a tall mill, necessarily so to catch the wind in her sails when the prevailing wind blew from over Beech Road/Sulham direction.

Grain was brought to the mill both locally and by barges mooring on the Thames just below Scrases and Westbury farms. Thence up Westbury Lane by horse and cart. Brunel was approached by a later miller, Mr Avril, with the idea of building a 'halt' for commercial use only, near Westbury Lane bridge, conveniently just where the cutting becomes an embankment. The idea was rejected for one reason or another. (One opinion was that labourers from the fields and farms might use the 'stop' as a convenient means of transport to local hostelrys during the working day.

The last miller, a Mr Foops was inside the mill when a gale blew up severely damaging the mill, rendering her beyond repair. She was pulled down the following April by local millwright Mr E Koj.