

Mr & Mrs Stuart Brown (Plus 2 unknown others)

Hythe Watermill.

Transcript of tape recording made on 11th March 1980.

**Recorded by T. Lawrence (Typed verbatim from recording tape –
November 2004)**

TL: Mr. Brown, when did you acquire the Mill?

SB: '33

TL: 1933, did you know it before then?

SB: No, no. We simply came over to Hythe; my brother, I think he had some girl here, and he cracked up Hythe and so we came over and looked at it. I was going to build a house up in new North Road, and then some firm, of these.....

TL: Disreputable agents!

SB: ...precisely, if that's how you put it, sent us along particulars of the Mill and we fell for it.

TL: I'm sure you did, and you've been very happy here ever since?

SB: Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that – laughingly..

Mrs.B: It's been a great pleasure and it's been very interesting to live in an old house, I like it.

TL: Have you any interesting stories to tell us about the Mill?

Mrs.B: Well, many, and I've written you down the names of the people who lived over here long before we had it. That Mrs. Fagg who lives over there – she was a Gravener – which is an old Hythe family, she remembers it you see, the flood in 1907 when all the ducks and things were going about in the road and so on. Those people remember much more and they also have the same story that my children did long after that. They walked right down underneath the road and came out at the canal, you see it was 'the dare' of my children. They collected all the others and set out – it goes right underneath this room where we're sitting.....

TL: and underneath the pub, I believe, The Bell!

Mrs.B: Well, underneath the road somewhere and to my surprise, our children did it in the early forties, but to my surprise, Mr. Crooks' who is 69 had done it all those years before with his school friends, which is quite entertaining. And of course, Jack Swain was the carter when we came, he was the carter, and he told me the perfectly good smuggling story – I've not got it authenticated – but the arch that's underneath this, the culvert that is underneath this room, which is as high as, well like that, isn't it Stuart, sort of [? 4 foot] - has a ledge at the side, it's not completely round, and he told us and nobody's contradicted it, that that was on which to put smuggled goods and then when the Preventive Men came they could easily lift the sluice gate and of course the water absolutely floods through to turn the wheel, absolutely torrents down, so that no Preventive Man would go down there when the wheel was turning.

TL: What a marvellous idea!

Mrs.B: And there is said to be the little lookout window right up in the top, where my children had their smuggler's den.

TL: Do you know anything of the people who used to live in the Mill?

Mrs.B: Yes, well, look we've got quite a lot of things. We have a date of 1773 on a brick. That's the oldest date. These are the most interesting things. This is a Bill of Sale in 1832 and we found these which are all the details, which is almost as it is now, which are photos from an old paper – you see, we've got three – and it's almost as it is today in 1932. Mr. Davies did for us photos from this, which we gave to – you see

they're fairly faint, but there's one that's better than the others. And that is the oldest record – it is an actual record, 1832. And the house and the number of rooms, everything are as then.

SB: I had a copy of the original auctioneer's catalogue and I've lent it to someone, so I haven't got one.

TL: Neither a lender nor a borrower be.

Mrs.B: There are three of those, you see it's actually got the date, and as I say, Mr. Davies did do a print from it which I think John took back to Canada, or else it's in my desk or somewhere.

Another Voice: It would be nice to do some more prints of those actually.

Mrs.B: There are three of them, I don't know where they'll be, - in this remarkable leather thing – anyway they were part of the legacy of the house.

TL: Really! how nice.

Mrs.B: Well the records, all this, does show that the Birch's married in 1841, you see, I don't know who had it between '33 and '41. They married in 1841 and there's the list of the seven daughters and one son that were born. Two of the daughters died as teenagers; one, Emily never married and didn't die until 1925 in this house, she was the last of them. But four of them made rather interesting marriages in the town. It says – Alice became Mrs. Hobday, Julia became Mrs. Cobay and she married into the White Hart and her brother in law was the Mayor at the time and it was a very big wedding. Louisa became Mrs. Swoffer and Harriet became Mrs. Gilbert. And then the wife [?Mrs.Birch] died in 1975 [sic] and in 1976 [sic] George junior went out of it – he wasn't much good, I think, he didn't come into it.

TL: In 1875?

Mrs.B: In 1875 she died and 1876 George junior sold out. And in 1876 – this is what I can't make out, George Birch senior buys from the Seabrook Estate is it? – there's masses of stuff here. In 1876, we've got deeds and it's got all the names, but why he bought.....

TL: Well, of course the Mill Stream would run underneath the railway line owned by the Seabrook Estate...

Mrs.B: And by the way, it's in the Parish of Newington, all the deeds are in the Parish of Newington, up to our deeds, all the previous ones are in the Parish of Saltwood and Newington, - isn't that strange? And they're all buried in Newington Church, I believe. And then, he bought, in 1876, all this is about the different bits he bought. And then he died in 1910, I think I've put down, and Emily lived on here until 1925. She ran a little school in these two rooms. This is a little cottage, you see, built against the house, but I'm not sure if it's there in the 1833 or not; you see it's been cut through, it was a workman's cottage because he had to go up and possibly regulate the water in the night you see, and so she ran a little school in these two rooms, so we were told. Well then between 1825 [sic] when Miss Birch died and 1833 [sic] when we came, Miss ? Prewin who was the Post Mistress lived here with Nellie the maid, and I think a Mr. Batt ran it didn't he Stuart? And Jack Swain was the carter, he told me an awful lot and gave me the horses' brasses and things. It was sold to us in 1933 as a going concern but I believe it hadn't gone for a year.

TL: You mean as a Mill or a School?

Mrs.B: As a Mill. No the school was only a little side bit.

Another Voice: The carter being the man who delivered the flour?

Mrs. B: The carter drove.....the horse was still in the field when we came, where the houses have been built, you know, and Jack Swain lived round in East Street, and he

had been the carter for the horse. There were stables and things.....[two voices speaking at once, and difficult to decipher]

TL: The Seabrook Estate?

Mrs.B: Yes, here it is, the Seabrook Estate and Company. To Mr. George Birch – this is 1876. So must there have been tenants from 1841 – 1876, and if so, why are all these daughters mentioned and why do their marriages come in if they hadn't owned it, is what I can't make out?

TL: Sounds rather as though there was some kind of.....

Mrs.B: There's an 1856 here somewhere. There's a mortgage afterwards; he mortgaged it to his son in law, Swoffer, and somebody else, it's most complicated.

TL: If you would like me to look sometime, I could probably work it all out for you, as I'm familiar with deeds.

Mrs.B: There's the picture when we came, 1832[sic] you see, where it says it's going to be demolished. I'll tell you who might have some interesting lights on it, the Hoskins – I think Phyllis was born there – and I think that might have been a mill field where they bought, I'm not sure about that. I do know that the stream which starts under Saltwood Castle as a tiny little stream, doesn't it, gathers in a whole lot of water in that hollow up there below Philbeach, and of course it's quite a lot of water. The pond is obviously artificial, artificially built, and the stream did go out by Eastbridge, which is the end of Mill Road. It's still called Eastbridge House. On any old map, that was an old bridge. The end of the High Street was Eastbridge wasn't it? And then the stream wandered down, you see it's older than the canal, the Mill Stream, but quite whether it met the sea or whether it just sort of distributed in water meadows, I've got no record.

TL: Well that's an interesting thought.

Mrs.B: You see 1733, our date, is before the canal, so the stream didn't go into the canal as such, it wandered out at Eastbridge.

TL: The canal, of course, is about 1805.

Mrs.B: Somewhere there ought to be a map before the canal was built, that's the one we'd like to see.

TL: Well I've got....no, I haven't got a very small scale map, I might be able to produce something.

Mrs.B: Well, there must be good maps before the canal was built mustn't there? I mean it was a big feat, the canal. It seems to me what we want is the end of the 1700s, we want the map then don't we, to get us back.

TL: Yes, I'm sure we can find something, we'll have a look around.

Mrs.B: And then I've written down the little bit which in a way is interesting because we let a part of the studio that was a beam engine and that was sold for scrap, and we let a part of the Mill as a studio to Mr. Baker Clack and of course the town has his pictures, they were all done up there, all those pictures that are in the Town Hall and so on, they were all painted up in what we call The Studio. He rented it in 1936 and he died in '65 I think. After that, there was only one, there was a sculptress who sculpted some angels up there for Dedham Church, but since then nothing's happening in the Mill at all.

TL: Well, thank you very much indeed. I wonder, Mr. Brown, could we finally ask you if you have a personal memory of your own early childhood that you could pass on to the children of today.

SB: I left school at 13 and I got half a crown of week.

TL: And what was that doing.

Mrs.B: In a solicitor's office?

SB: Yes, going out and serving writs. I used to get a shilling if I served one.

TL: Successfully?

SB: Yes. Of course, before I went to work, during the summer there would be haymaking, you see, my father had a farm and they used to cut it with horses you see and we would come along with rakes and turn it over so that the undersides got dry. There wasn't any excuse for not helping, you see.

TL: But you didn't get paid?

SB: No, I don't think so.

Mrs.B: You used to pick up the stones from the field, surely?

SB: Oh, yes.

Mrs.B: I think they did get paid a bit for that, 'cos he went to a boarding school, his father died rather young.

TL: What is the very earliest thing you can remember?

SB: That's about as early as I can remember, 13. We used to go miles to church and we used to go every Sunday too. I don't know whether you did or not?

TL: Three times on Sunday, we had to go!

SB: Did you?

TL: That's quite right. My grandmother told me that she remembered when she was a very small girl, playing with her doll in front of the fire and it melted, because it was made of wax, and she burst into tears.

SB: You're not dressed for going underneath, are you?

TL: Not today.

SB: It's rather muddy, you see they're doing work up the top there and the stream comes down and it's rather 'clayey', you see, so I wouldn't advise you to walk in the stream.

TL: Another time, perhaps!

SB: Now you could go, if you came with Wellingtons and the like you could go from here to the [?ketchfit].

Mrs.B: I don't think he wants to do that.

SB: It certainly wouldn't improve a posh pair of trousers over there now.

Another voice: Mr. Brown, do you remember Queen Victoria's Jubilee?

Lots of voices, trying to encourage Mr. Brown to remember!!

SB: No, I can't say I do. I must have known about it, ...Queen Victoria?

Mrs.B: It's Mrs. Mardell who has a distinct remembrance of it; she's up at Tynwald. It's not at Hythe, but she told me she sat here looking at that and she said she was going to write it up because she had been taken by her father. She's got a perfect memory. She's only aged 93 but she remembers every detail of that.

TL: I think we've done very well for the time being.

Mrs.B: You haven't asked usI've written it down...about the workings. There are four pairs of stones, three on one floor and one on another, and from time to time we've had schools here and I've mugged up the bits and it's very interesting. You can tell the wood – our wood- the wooden bits I think are apple or alder. You can tell what type of neighbourhood you're in by the wood and the stones are French burr, aren't they, and I think all the wooden part is apple and alder. And it's most intricate, the machinery, it's beautiful the way it glided round.

Another voice: Is the machinery still there?

Mrs.B: No, not after all this time, and the war did such a lot, and at the moment there will never be a pond again I think, because the base of the pond which should be puddled clay I think it probably cracked in that drought a few years ago and age, and the water leaked through into the Mill, you see, because they're huge walls because

you see it's artificial and so we diverted all the water to the other gate, because originally there were two gates, there's the sluice gate and the race gate and the sluice gate is dropped so that the pond can fill and then when they want the water the race gate is lifted, you see. But, we've diverted all the water by the sluice gate so that none of it comes near the house at all, and this means that the pond has dried up and silted up and is no longer a pond; we've only got a stream. Do you know Mr. Sutton who belongs to the Civic Society?

TL: Oh yes.

Mrs. B: Well, he's been twice to see us – he's a retired engineer and he just wished he could put it back as it was. He's been around with us but strangely enough he doesn't feel it's hopeless. I would have thought it had gone far too far.

TL: The actual Mill machinery, or the pond?

Mrs.B: The pond, and the sluice gate.

TL: Well, I'm sure it could be done.

Mrs.: Well, he's taken a great interest but I don't know what he's done about it.

TL: Well, that's a colossal lot of work.

Mrs.B: And, of course, it's a built up area and in the old days the water could have flooded out onto the water meadow, but it's a built up area now. We've had two floods right through this house. Of course, in our time, we've had three, one before the war and two about four years ago.

TL: You stayed here during the war did you?

Mrs. B: No, the house was quite badly bombed, I mean every window, all the lattice windows, the little old windows are gone. They're all new windows. We were away for four years. We're a scheduled building which makes us.....do you find that with yours?

TL: It has advantages and disadvantages.

Mrs.B. I feel it's like a white elephant.

TL: Well, I'm rather proud of it.

Mrs.B: Well, it's a liability isn't it?

Break in recording....

SB: Are you wanting to go through the Mill?

TL: Well, that would be very nice, if you can spare the time.

SB: My wife thinks it's dusty in there, so we won't ask her to come with us!

TL: Really, well that's very nice of you.

SB: We can go right up the top and it's amazing considering the age of the thing how there's no water coming through at the top, although, we've had a few gales.

TL: Well, that would be very nice indeed.

Mrs.B: Have you got time?

Another break in tape....

Continues, apparently outside and difficult to hear.

Mrs. B:and these people who live over there, who were children here can remember all sorts of things, they can remember pinching grapes – there's a vine on this, and they can remember coming over with balls and finding a little flower for their mothers.....where those houses are, we sold the old horse was looking over there if I remember and there were pigsties over there and that was a

lovely stable, there were wooden steps going up to it, you know how stables go up. That was bombed, I think.

Break in recording...

Mrs.B: Inside there are masses and masses of hoppers and things, it's most interesting. Have you been to the little mill at ?Saltern, at Mersham, that's going?

TL: I've seen one.....

Going up steps, and a lot of interference.

End of side one.

Side Two... Intermittent snatches of conversation, obviously on the move whilst being shown around - and not very clear.

SB:that was the Mill wash house and I turned it into a summer house. We put the chair in there for the winter but it is used for a summer house.

Another Voice: It must be lovely on a summer's afternoon.

SB: It's quite useful. You've seen the wheel.

Break in recording.

SB: This was the old wash house of the Mill. When you have washing machines you don't want wash houses. This is where I do my odd jobs.

Break in recording.

SB:you see there was one bedroom there and one bedroom was there. There were steps going up from here and steps going up from there...you see, I left those steps but another pair went up here. You have seen this picture.....

Another Voice: Oh, that's lovely.

SB: You see that's the waterfall. I think you've seen it all.

End of recording.