

Woodhouse Eaves Windmill 1806?-1945

A report by Malk Temple

For many years the windmill at Woodhouse Eaves was a distinct landmark on the Charnwood Forest skyline. The compact design of the two-storey, *post* mill (as opposed to a *tower* mill) was typical for the Midlands in contrast to those much larger examples found throughout East Anglia. The wooden body, sometimes known as the *buck*, resembled a garden shed supported by a central (king) post and a trestle of timbers. The central post at Woodhouse was supported by angled-timbers called quarter-bars and two horizontal crosstrees mounted on four stone piers to lift the timbers off the ground and prevent rotting. Unlike the post mill at Mountsorrel whose supporting trestle remained exposed, the mill at Woodhouse Eaves was supported on a stone roundhouse which offered protection against the weather as well as providing useful storage for grain and flour.

Because the Woodhouse Eaves post mill did not have fantail the entire mill body (containing all the milling machinery) had to be rotated to turn the sails into the wind. This was done manually using the tailpole at the rear of the mill (like opening a canal lock gate). At some point one of the millers fixed a wagon wheel to the end of the tailpole and by harnessing a donkey or pony to the tailpole the mill could be more easily rotated (a process called *luffing*). Through cogged gearing, the millstones (driven by wind energy alone) would grind the corn into meal or flour. The mill's roundhouse was probably topped with an iron curb and rollers, attached beneath the mill skirt, to ease the process of rotation. However, it should be remembered that it was the timber trestle that supported the mill body's weight (transferring the weight through the piers) not the roundhouse. One unusual feature that the Woodhouse eaves mill were two bulges in the sides of the buck which were needed to accommodate two sets of stones sitting side-by-side at the front of the mill body and another pair to the rear, making 3 pairs in total. Originally there would probably have only been two sets; one fore and the other aft).



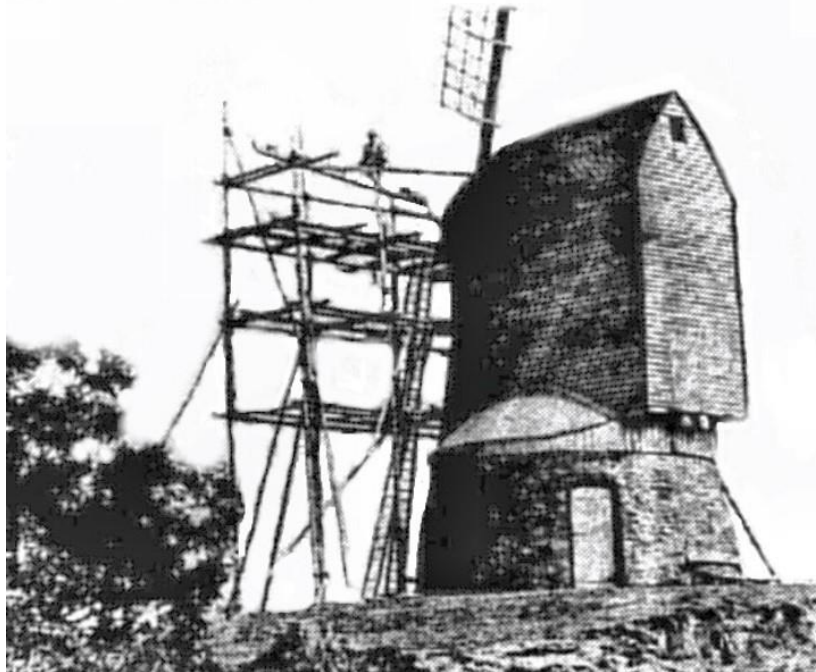
Although it never worked in the 20th century, it was a well-known landmark and the pride of the village. The windmill was a popular attraction for tourists coming over on charabancs from the Great Central Station at Quorn to picnic or to attend church gatherings most weekends during the summer.



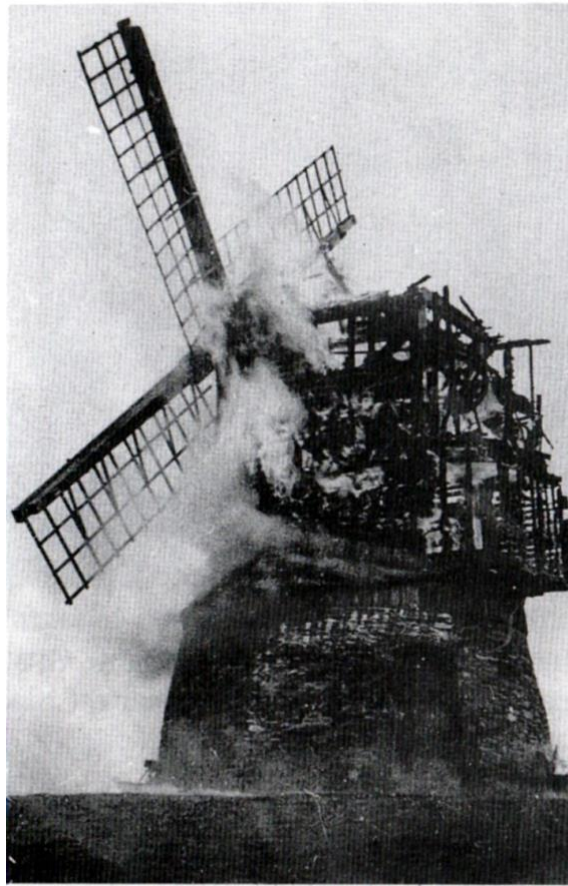
The mill was a favourite subject for an abundance of local artists like Quorn Hunt artist, John Sturgess and Alan White. Walter Harriman at the Post Office sold a variety of souvenirs depicting the mill.



The mill itself was regularly painted and (at least) twice refurbished in 1929 and again in 1944.



Disaster struck on 15th April 1945 when the mill was destroyed by fire.



Who or what started it nobody really knows. Schoolboys with cigarettes, local vagrants, airmen on leave have all been blamed but nothing ever proved. Attempts were made to have the fire recognised as a 'direct casualty of war' in the hope that funding for restoration would be forthcoming, but this was refused.

In the 1950s a restoration fund was started to try to rebuild the mill. In 1959- £1000 of the £2500 estimated cost had been raised. That project foundered. Again in 1979 a restoration scheme was relaunched by which time the estimated cost was put at £25,000.

Move to rebuild Leics. windmill

STOOD AT WOODHOUSE FOR 200 YEARS

DISCUSSIONS taking place in Woodhouse Eaves may lead to the building of a new windmill on the site of the notable mill burned down in 1945.

The project would be to reconstruct a portion of the outside of the wooden windmill and to restore the distinctive Woodhouse Eaves skyline as it was the nearly 200 years. The attempt would be made to reconstruct interior wooden and the total cost would be in the region of £2,500.

£1,000 bequest

These plans were given away to The Evening Mail by chairman of the County Council, Mr. Robert Martin. He revealed that he had recently taken private professional advice on the building of a mill.

At the same time prominent Woodhouse Eaves villagers have been discussing how money could be raised—in addition to the £1,000 left in the will in 1955 by Mr. Arthur Vernon Wilson, of Leicester.

Mr. Wilson, when leaving the money, expressed the hope that others who had a warm place in their heart for Woodhouse Eaves windmill would follow suit.

Recently money has been sent from America to the parish council—a total of 25 pounds from the Fratcher family, formerly of Woodhouse Eaves.

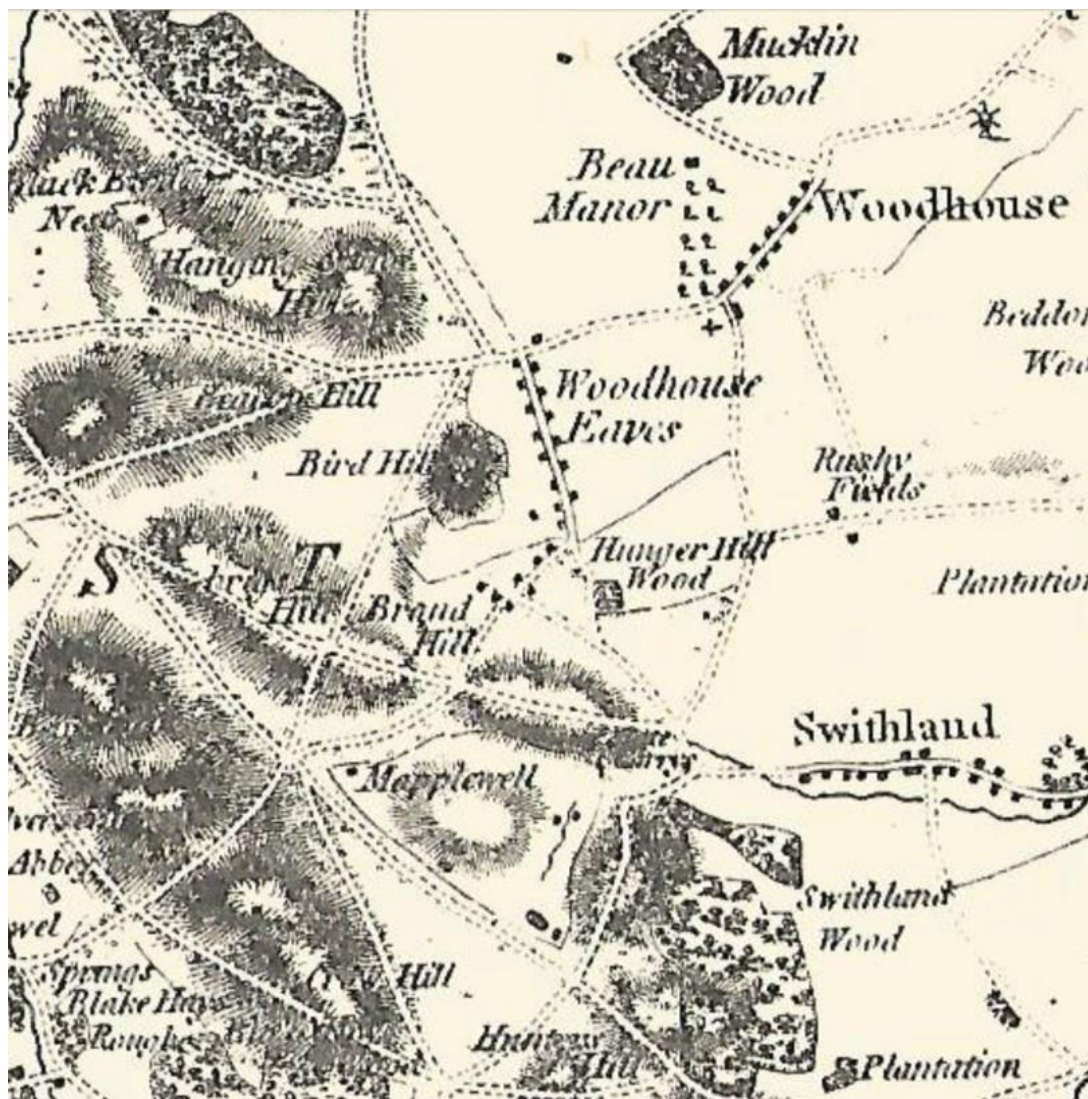
The Robert said of the village mill, which stood on a hill 100 ft above the village: "No one dreamed more than I the calamity that led to its burning down. To raise the mill again would be a noble service of the highest order."

THE WINDMILL as it looked before the fire.

The original restoration fund of (£1000 + interest) could not be traced. The Parish council understood the funds were with the county council but no record of it could be traced. Coincidentally it seems there were no parish council minutes to show where funds had gone. Approaching the millennium, when the subject was raised again, estimated costs by this point had exceeded £250,000. For this reason, it was decided to construct a look-out platform above the stone roundhouse (the only bit of the mill remaining) at a cost of £10,000. This platform has remained open most Sundays during the summer until 2023 when it finally had to close, having succumbed to wet rot. The dilemma arises again; can the windmill or platform be renovated and can a fresh solution be found to prevent deterioration of the structure in the future.

Historical records

There is no sign of a mill on James Prior's survey map of 1799, so the earliest map evidence was thought to be for 1835 when a tiny mill image appears crudely added by hand to a local survey map. However, it now transpires that a blurred mill symbol can be detected on William King's 1806 map of the area.



Prior to the mill's arrival, this highpoint in the village was identified as Blackbird Hill. There have been suggestions that the mill was previously sited in Derbyshire before moving to Woodhouse Eaves. If this is true, it may have been moved sometime during the latter half on the 1700s rather than in the 1830s as some sources suggested prior to the King's Map revelations. In the Loughborough library archives a letter suggests after Mountsorrel mill was taken down in 1874 (because of quarrying being extended on Broad Hill) it was relocated Woodhouse Eaves. This, however, was not the case. Both mills in fact appear on maps of the 1860 period.

One reason for the confusion may be the fact that at one point Mountsorrel mill was owned by a William Herrick; very possibly a relative of the Beaumanor Hall Herricks at Old Woodhouse. We know that in 1835 a John Cawrey bequeathed the mill to his son (John). By the mid-1850s ownership had passed to Richard Hives (miller at Quorn watermill). However, local archivist Evelyn Brown, has recently discovered conflicting thoughts about the village millers in the 19th century and where they lived. The earliest reference she found identifies an Isaac Leake recorded as 'miller' in the 1851 village census. Although Melville's directory of 1854 confirms Richard Hives as owner. The person actually working the mill at this time was in fact Richard's cousin, John Hives Snr. (1804-1879). John had been previously the miller/baker in Rearsby, before moving to Sileby and living at 99 Barrow Road for 11 years until 1851, which is probably when he moved into Woodhouse Eaves.

By 1851 John Hives Senior's 1st wife had died and he had remarried (Martha ?) and moved into Breakback cottages, set back off Beacon road (a cottage once thought to be part of the village workhouse). Evelyn points out that as his daughter, Caroline Carr Hives was born in Woodhouse Eaves on 31st January, 1876. This suggests John Hives Jr may have already moved here to assist in the running of the mill several years before his father's death in 1879. The 1881 census confirms John Jnr, wife (Caroline née Carr) plus 2 of his 3 children are living at Breakback Cottages . The last entries we have for John Hives Jnr listed as a miller are in both Kelly's and Wright's Trade Directories for 1888. No miller for Woodhouse Eaves is listed in any directory after this date. By the time of the 1891 census, John Hives Jr (plus wife and daughter) were already living in Aylestone, where John was working as a grocer. In the 1903 trade directory, he is recorded as a 'shopkeeper and hay dealer'. Ann Long when chronicling her (Hives) family tree in the late 1970s (just before her research appeared in Nigel Moon's Leics. Mills book) would not have been aware of this Aylestone move until the 1891 census details were made public c.1991.

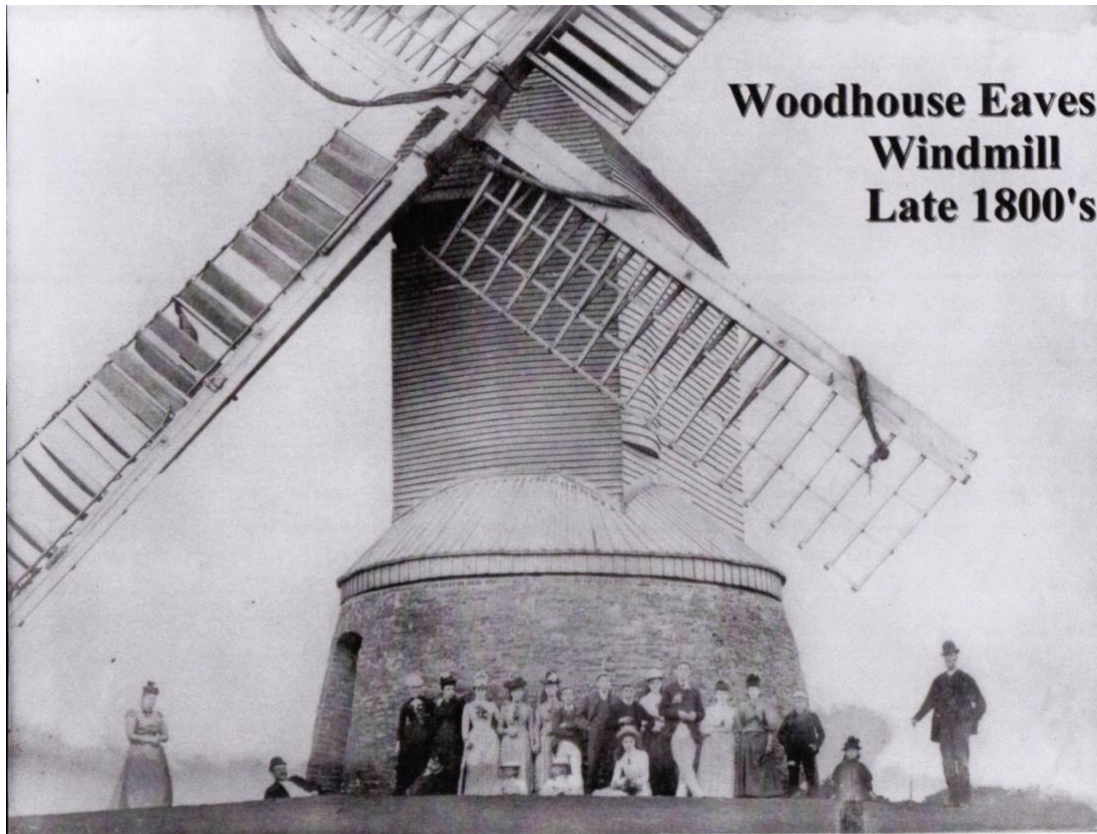
[Evelyn's researches also showed that John Hives Jr. and those Hives who occupied the Main Street thatched cottage (referred to as 'miller's cottage' by Ann Long) were, in reality descended from two different sons of William Hives (1774–1847) the miller who had previously run mills at Shipley in Derbyshire (then Asfordby and Rearsby). The Hives family who ended up living in the so-called 'millers' thatched cottage in Main Street were, it turns out, not John jnr.'s family but were in fact descended from John Hives Sr's brother, William Sr (1807–1884). William's grandson, Bernard Preston Hives (his mother was a Preston) married Sarah Jane Preston, the daughter of an Oliver Preston and moved back into her family's thatched house after her father died in 1913. Bernard Preston Hives remained there until the house was demolished after a thatch fire c.1949 or 1950.]

Thanks to the Hives family we know that the Woodhouse Eaves millers were part of a great midland milling dynasty. Those Hives milling at Woodhouse Eaves can be traced back to George Hives (1670-1747) miller of Cotgrave. His son, Timothy Hives (1711-1773) was a committed teetotaler. He was reputed to have challenged local ale-drinkers to a feat of strength, carrying an 18 stone sack of corn round the mill and up the mill steps. After several years of defeat one local alehouse even *smuggled* in a circus strongman on their behalf to challenge Timothy's performance. Another of George's sons, Richard (1704-81) went from Cotgrave to Brooksby (water) and another, George ran (Hickling) mill. Other Hives descendants were at one time running mills at East Drayton and Sneinton, Hose, Thrussington (Water) & Syston, Rearsby (water) Sileby, Mountsorrel, Barrow upon Soar, Asfordby (William 1807-84), Melton, and Loughborough, Measham and Shipley and Ilkeston in Derbyshire.

As John Hives jnr. had left the village before 1891 we don't know when the mill finished working. It's unlikely anyone was left behind able to run it. The trade directories list no millers in Woodhouse Eaves after 1888 although the 1891 census records a 15-year-old, Francis Joseph Hardy as an 'assistant miller'. It's unlikely a 15 year old could have operated the mill on his own; without any help or experience. Evelyn Brown has found that by the time the great storm of 1895 rendered the mill inoperable, Frank had already been serving a year in the Royal Engineers. Therefore, Hives family story that John Jnr. was still busy singing in the church choir on the night of the storm could well be an example of how memories become

warped with time. We do know the great storm in March 1895 not only broke the mill's windshaft at Woodhouse Eaves but it destroyed over thirty other mills throughout the East Midlands.

From one early photo (pre-1895) of a wedding party gathered by the mill, we learn that at some point it had two different types of sails. (Turning anti-clockwise). This photo shows two common sails (covered in canvas), while the other two were shuttered sails added to improve efficiency and control. However, by the time of the great storm it appears only common sails were being used which still required reefing everyday according to the wind strength.



1945 Windmill Model by Claude Preston

Claude Preston was a young RAF wireless operator from the village who was seriously injured in the blitz of 1940 whilst attending a gunnery course near Shoeburyness, Essex. After many months in hospital, he was invalided out of the service. A major part of his recuperation involved spending hours at a workbench honing his craftwork skills. The time spent paid off when he was taken on by Messrs. Goddard and Son, painters and decorators of Ashby Rd. Loughborough. However, woodwork remained his hobby and passion, and he spent hours in the small workshop behind his terraced cottage in Victoria Rd, Woodhouse Eaves, making wooden toys and working models, including a locomotive and tender made from scraps of tin and discarded food cans.

Witnessing the fire in 1945 Claude was considerably upset by the loss and was immediately determined to make a scale model of the mill. On the morning following the fire he went with a friend up to the smouldering remains with a wheelbarrow. Rescuing what damaged wood and metal they could, they also took measurements of the surviving timbers from which to draw up some plans. He also called upon the expertise of two local men, Isaak Kirk (87) and Bray Wainwright (89) both of whom had worked in the mill as lads back in the 1870s and 80s. The model is scaled at ½ inch to a foot, with an interior structure replicating the real mill and brass fittings throughout. It took six months to make. The body of the mill (buck) turns on ball bearings let into the curb of the roundhouse which took Claude two days to turn on a treadle-lathe. The roof is adorned with a small weathervane in the form of a fox made of copper. The real weathervane from the mill was for many years on the roof of Mill Villa in Woodhouse Eaves where



Claude believed John Hives, the last miller, once lived. It is now on the stable roof of Long Close in the village. Most of the fine work and cutting of the wood was performed not on a proper workbench but on the top of Mr Preston's kitchen-copper. All the left-over pieces of timber were used to make match holders, ashtrays and candlesticks.

Sir Robert Martin of the Brand (Woodhouse Eaves) suggested the model should be found a place in Leicester Museum, but Mr Preston told the Monitor he wasn't keen to part with it at that time, even though he had already been offered £50 for it by a local man. The model travelled to local model exhibitions in the months immediately after its completion, including one at Pinxton. After Sue Preston (Claude's widow) passed away three days before her 103rd birthday in March 2018, her family wanted the windmill model to be enjoyed by local people as a tribute to Claude's efforts to preserve a memory of this iconic landmark. It was therefore donated to the Mountsorrel and Rothley Community Heritage museum where it can still be seen.

Selby's Garage Model

One legacy from the loss of the village mill is another structure which has become a treasured piece of village heritage: a 1/3 scaled, working model of Woodhouse Post mill which has graced the forecourt of Selby's Garage for over sixty years. Powered by electricity, it was built in the late 1950s by Frank and Peter Selby with the support of locals; Geoff Kirk, Sam Davey and Eric Allsop. Frank Slack helped to make the sails in the Maplewell Hall school workshops. In 2010 Barry Selby carried out some repairs and installed replacement sails. Although the future may bring some changes along main street it is hoped the mill model will be saved as a much-loved reminder of the village's iconic windmill.



Mark Temple