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Uncertain Future for Stoke Prior Mill, near Bromsgrove (grid reference SO 943674)

Like Townsend Mill at the other side of Bromsgrove, this mill is growing more and more dilapidated while the County Council and other authorities argue with owners and prospective rescuers. The Bromsgrove Messenger reported on 23 May 1980 the worries of Stoke Prior Parish Council regarding the safety of children playing around the mill and its associated millers' house, for the site is on the edge of a housing estate. The house was once attractive, but is now derelict and thoroughly vandalised. The mill has been boarded up to protect it by the owners, Clements Displays Ltd., who want to preserve and use the building, but with alterations which the Council apparently cannot approve. According to the Messenger of 19 October 1979, the arguments had already been going on for two years then. The owners wanted to remove the top floor and the chimneys, but the Council required "the buildings to be renovated without demolition".

The mill is a huge one with four storeys, built in brick. The newspaper report states that it "towers above the surrounding countryside as it has done for some 200 years." The first part of this statement is true enough, but it is to be feared that the second part is misleading, to say the least. The present building is little more than 100 years old, having been built after the previous mill had been burnt down, it is believed during the ownership of W.H. Wall, who had the site from 1860 to 1876 ;-- hence the common reference to the mill as Wall's Mill. In the early part of the 19th century, the mill on the site was known as Brick House Mill; in 1820 the miller was William Niblett, in 1846 William Bladem, from 1860 to 1876 Wall, then until 1892 Mrs. Louisa Wall; and during all this time it was probably a flour mill. Before the fire the old mill was water-powered, but the new mill had steam as well as water power and had rollers as well as two pairs of stones. Then, probably early in the 20th century it became a box-making factory. In 1934 it was recorded as derelict, but in 1944 H.E.S. Simmons recorded that it was being used by L.G. Harris & Co. for brush making. It has been unoccupied for the last two or three decades.

If I may express a personal view, I would suggest that this mill has no architectural or aesthetic attraction - indeed, it could be considered downright ugly - and without any very interesting historical significance or machinery, -I find it difficult to see why there should be so much fuss over its preservation. It is in a very different category from Townsend Mill, which, before its disgraceful neglect, was an attractive if conventional country mill with a complete and workable set of machinery.

D.G.T.

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