

NAYLAND'S MILLS

Like much of Nayland's past the origins of its mills are shrouded in mystery. However, there is no doubt that milling was going on here before Domesday in 1086, centuries before the village we know today was built. The first known reference to a mill is in Little Domesday Book, the last part of the Domesday survey consisting of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk, which was never incorporated into the final book. The record states:

"At Eiland [Nayland] the same Robert, father of Suane, held in King Edwards time two carrucates of land as a manor with Soche. Always six villans. Then twenty bordars now seventeen. Then six slaves now two. Always one plough team in demesne. Then four plough teams belonging to the men now three. **Always one mill ...**"

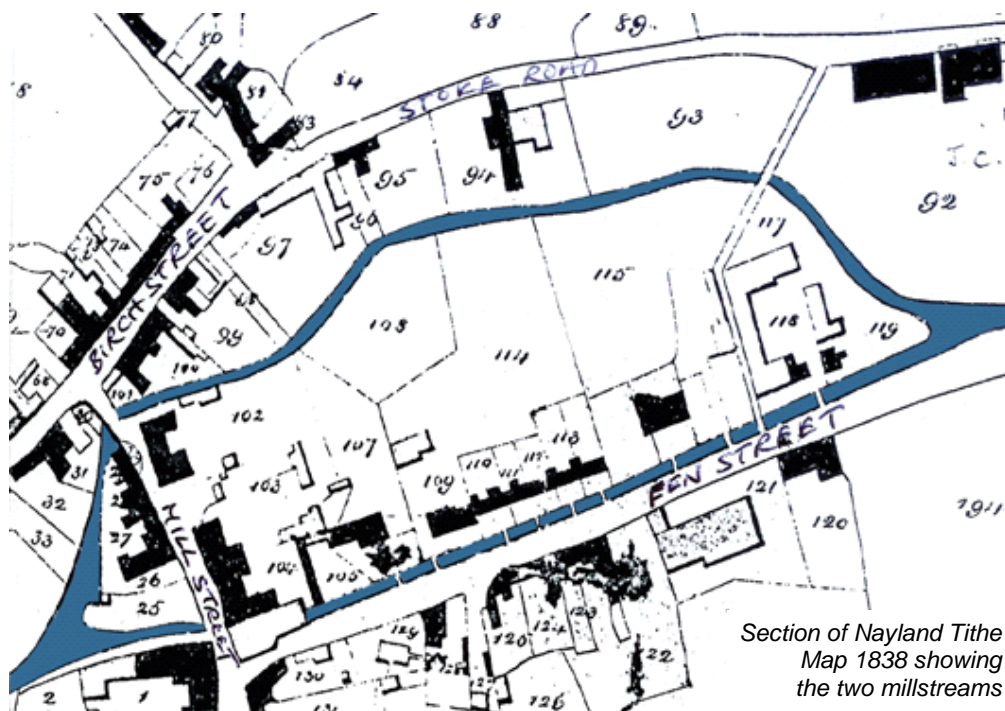
Whether the mill on the corner of Fen Street and Mill Street is that referred to in Domesday is not known. The next known reference to a Nayland mill is provided by Dr Slade in his history of Nayland where he mentions a record dated 1415 which says that "this Henry Scrope held Nayland Manor and a water mill parcel thereof ...". More than two centuries later a reference to the present site in a deed dated 1674 refers to "the corn mill next to the road to the fennages".

Following the decline in the wool trade Nayland's prosperity increased through its subsequent industrialisation. This largely came about as a result of the Stour Navigation Act in 1705 when many kinds of goods were transported by barge traffic on the river. Corn milling expanded and Charles Gowing [1846-1934] remembered his father saying that when he worked at Nayland mill he had sent 1000 sacks of flour to London in a week. Barges came up the millstream to the mill where a gantry had been built across the road to facilitate loading. This disappeared when the top storeys of the mill were taken down around 1920.

Sometime after 1415 a second mill must have been built as a deed of 1613 refers to the conveyance of a property "lying between the **two mills** at Nayland ...". This second mill which disappeared around 1850 was on the corner of Mill Street and Bear Street. In a conveyance of 1823 it was described as a corn mill formerly called the leather mill. On old maps of Nayland the stream running through this mill can be clearly seen to the north of the mill stream in Fen Street. It appears to be as wide as the Fen Street stream, running behind the houses in Birch street and meeting the other stream at the bottom of Fen Street. It was eventually piped and covered in. It is possible that the mill on this site could have been Nayland's first mill and the Fen Street mill came later but unless we can locate any older maps we will probably never know.

At the end of the eighteenth century the two mills were taken over by the Stammers family who were prosperous millers owning mills all over Essex and Suffolk. In the early part of the nineteenth century the Fen Street mill was "re-edified" or more or less rebuilt by the Stammers. On the 1839 Tithe Map William Stammers was listed as owning both mills and also a Steam Flour Mill in Fen Street opposite the corn mill. This mill operating at least from 1821 was reputed to be one of the first in England but was not very successful.

Jeremiah Stannard who owned Wissington Mill acquired the mill at the corner of Fen Street from William Stammers in



Section of Nayland Tithe Map 1838 showing the two millstreams

1846. During the 1870s several of the more enterprising millers were induced to adopt a new method of manufacture. They discarded their millstone plants and installed complete roller milling plants of Hungarian origin. However all these mills were disappointing in their results and proved commercial failures. The machinery was complicated and unsuitable for any but a particular class of wheat and the mills were unable to make a sufficient percentage of high grade flour.

It was during Jeremiah Stannard's ownership that corn milling ceased at the end of the nineteenth century and the mill was then adapted for various other uses.

Finishing on a tragic note (not for the squeamish) the following report in the Suffolk Chronicle in 1851 concerned the mill in Jeremiah Stannard's time. The report described a fatal accident in the mill. "On Wednesday last, as Walter Stannard the second son of Jeremiah Stannard was amusing himself with the millers in the large mill, he incautiously went too near the machinery when the upright shaft which was revolving rapidly caught his clothes and being thus drawn into the machinery he was instantly crushed to death.

Charles Appleby, miller, at the inquest deposed that the deceased was six years of age, that he had been in conversation with him on the fourth floor of the mill only a few seconds previously when on turning round he discovered the deceased lying dead upon the floor; he had been whirled round by the shaft and in passing through the machinery was mangled in a most dreadful manner, the two feet and one hand were severed from the body and were lying at a distance of two yards from the trunk the head was literally crushed and the brains were scattered upon the floor. The evidence of Appleby was corroborated by that of Charles Gowing and a verdict of Accidental Death was returned. The grief of the parents may better be conceived than described. This is the second child they have lost by untimely death, the first having been drowned in the mill pond a few years since."

The fourth floor where this tragedy took place was later demolished and any ghosts hopefully disappeared with it. However, there have been tales of ghosts in more recent years on the first floor!

Wendy Sparrow

[Reference: The Annals of One Hundred Years of Flour Milling (1840-1940) E Marriage & Son Ltd]