



Burnham Overy Mills

Conservation Area

Character Statement



BURNHAM OVERY MILLS is situated on the coast road 9km west of Wells-next-the-Sea, 19km east of Hunstanton and 18km north of Fakenham. The watermill and windmill are an attached pair. The watermill straddling the River Burn has the date 1737 and was operated by Thomas Beeston who added the windmill in 1814.

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approx. 400m south-west from the windmill to the parish boundary with Burnham Norton on the main road beyond the water mill.



The black tarred mill, complete with gleaming white sails and onion shaped cap is one of several prominent tower mills along the North Norfolk Coast (Cley and Weybourne Mills complete the sequence) and is a local landmark clearly visible from all directions, from Burnham Norton across the Burn valley to the east, from Burnham Overy Staithe to the west and from Burnham Overy Town to the south along Mill Lane (named after another mill at Overy Staithe now gone) across cornfields.



The most rewarding approach however is the B1355 from Burnham Market before it joins the A149. Here on the edge of the

shallow valley bottom it is possible to appreciate the relationship between the two corn mills - the tower mill on top of a low rise, originally wind powered, and the mill astride the river Burn originally powered by water. The former is an isolated focal point in open countryside, the latter the centrepiece of a tight complex of red brick and pantile buildings set off by meadows in the foreground and a mass of trees beside the river.

Origins and Historical Development

Unlike many mills that survive on sites where water power has been harnessed since Domesday, the river Burn was navigable by small craft as far inland as Burnham Thorpe throughout the Middle Ages and there is no record of a mill here before the present structure. The gradual silting up of the river resulted in a shift of waterborne trade downstream to staithe at Burnham Norton and Burnham Overy from the 17th Century onwards.

This enabled mills to be established astride the river and the earliest part of the present structure, the central section, is contemporary with the mill bridge that carries the date stone 1790 and the initials of the first mill owner Edward Savory. He also built the brick tower mill in 1820 to supplement his business, a not uncommon arrangement among the more prosperous mill owners for whom a secondary source of power was often necessary especially during long dry spells. What is uncommon is the survival of both types of mill, not only here but just a kilometre upstream at Burnham Overy Town where Thomas Beeston's watermill had been operating since 1737 and who in 1814 took the rather unusual step of replacing the

windmill on higher ground shown on Faden's map of 1797, with a new tower mill beside his watermill.

It is clear from this sequence of events that Savory decided to set up his own business in direct competition with Beeston. The capital outlay on new buildings and machinery would have been considerable but North West Norfolk was a highly prosperous and progressive agricultural area in the 18th Century and Savory's diversification would have been financed by his farming activities, already well established close by. By 1827 when his son took over the family business and added a smart new gault brick wing to the Mill House, trade was thriving. A new rear engine house provided steam-driven mill stones that greatly increased capacity and in the mid-19th Century a large new granary extension alongside the road proved necessary. With the farm buildings, labourers' cottages, forge and other ancillary structures, Savory's business empire had reached its fullest extent by the mid-19th Century and the mill itself appeared very much as it does today.



The water mill continued in operation until it suffered a disastrous fire in 1959. Although the roof was rebuilt, the business never fully

recovered, and the buildings were acquired by the National Trust. The machinery was removed in 1989 leaving only the undershot wheel and the pit wheel when the property was converted into private residential units. The working life of the windmill came to an end just after the First World War and was converted into a house in 1926 when the single storey extensions were added. The sails and stocks were replaced during the restoration of 1957 and again in 1983. Today the windmill is owned by the National Trust and converted into holiday accommodation.

Character Overview

The relationship between wind and water mills is largely one of joint ownership, a matter of industrial archaeology. There is however very little visual link between the two. From the windmill the road runs downhill and the field that separates it from the group of buildings below is screened by a tall roadside hedge. At this point there is nothing to suggest what lies ahead until the road swings sharply to the left passed the chalk gable end of a cottage and the full extent of the watermill is revealed.

Impressive in extent, the result of several building phases, the mill straddles the river that rushes into the mill pond under a single arch. The building is long and low, no more than two storeys (though before the fire it had three floors), with the familiar weather boarded sack hoist the central feature breaking the roof line. Small pane casements under segmental arches pierce the brickwork at regular intervals on both floors. The mill is very much the focal point of this picturesque set-piece but, especially in summer, the volume of traffic attempting to

negotiate the double bend here makes it difficult to fully appreciate its immediate setting.



The mill is offset by the domestic scale of the cottages at right angles to it and hard by the roadside overlooking the mill pond. It is clear from the chalk gable end of Watermill Cottage and the change from red brick to chalk block on the front of the adjoining cottage that this row, probably contemporary with the original late 18th Century mill, was raised and refronted about 100 years later. Their attraction lies not just in their setting but the range of wall materials used and the traditional design elements - simple plank doors, white painted casements, brick chimneys and slight variations in ridge line - which have been retained.



Approached from the other direction, the view ahead takes in the attractive range of red brick and pantile buildings that run back from the mill. The variations here are achieved by changes of roof level - the tall engine shed chimney, steeply pitched house and low outbuilding, uncluttered by sheds, ranch-type fencing or the kind of planting that so often spoil the setting of traditional buildings. Passing beside the mill the view opens out across the mill pond to the cottages with just a glimpse of the cast iron verandah on the mill house. Set back on the corner and almost hidden by one large holm oak and a lime tree; the house was built in 1779 (datestone on a chimney stack), received a red brick skin to its flint face in the 1820's and an impressive three bay east wing in gault brick under a hipped smut pantile roof in the 1860's. The materials used, including bricks from the Holkham brickworks, the scale and delicate iron trellis work together confirmed the wealth and status of the family business. Its location between workers' cottages and the early industrial complex of mill, granary and engine shed was deliberately chosen to emphasise the pivotal role of the Savory dynasty.



Listed Buildings

There are 4 listed buildings in the Conservation Area. The statutory list was revised in 1985 and there have been no further additions.

Listed Grade II*

- **Windmill**, Tower Road. Black tarred brick tower mill dated 1816. Weather boarded onion cap, cap wheel, 4 sails, 6 storey casements. Converted to residential. No machinery surviving.

Listed Grade II

- **Watermill**, Mill Road with bridge attached. Originally 1791. Red brick and red pantiles. 2 storeys with additions including early 19th Century, engine house (with cast iron radial glazing bar windows), casements, weather boarded locam.
- **Bridge and parapet wall**, Mill Road. Attached to watermill red brick datestone ES1790.
- **Mill House**, Mill Road. Early 19th Century. Gault brick front, red brick rear. Smut pantiles. Symmetrical front sashes, hipped roof. North wing has a wooden verandah.

Important Unlisted Buildings

Gathered around the listed Water Mill and Mill House are a range of unlisted farm buildings, later extensions and row of cottages that contribute greatly to the character of the Conservation Area. Such is the unblemished quality of this group that

the unlisted buildings complete the stock of vernacular buildings within the designated area.



Traditional Materials

The character of Burnham Overy Mills Conservation Area owes a great deal to the use of a range of local materials in the construction of its historic buildings. These materials include:

- Red brick
- Gault brick
- Flint rubble
- Clunch (square blocks and random)
- Orange pantiles
- Smut grey pantiles

Archaeological Interest

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments in the Conservation Area. The only archaeological sites on the Norfolk Sites and Monuments Record relate to the two listed mill buildings.

Detractors

Apart from some recent farm buildings tucked away off the road there is nothing to spoil the Conservation Area, all of which is owned and cared for by the National Trust.

Conservation Objectives

Statement 1

The overall conservation objective is to protect and reinforce the established special character of Conservation Areas and their setting.

This will be achieved by:

- Encouraging the retention and maintenance of buildings which contribute to the overall character of each conservation area
- Ensuring that new development is sympathetic to the special qualities and character of each conservation area
- Protecting the setting of the conservation area from development which adversely affects views into or out of the area
- The retention, maintenance and locally appropriate new planting of trees
- Maintaining and enhancing local features and details which contribute towards an area's local distinctiveness
- Working with the community to prepare schemes of enhancement
- Encouraging the removal of detractors to the special character of each conservation area

Contacts and advice

Within conservation areas, a number of special controls apply and it is advisable that anyone proposing to carry out new development, alteration, extensions, installations or demolition should seek advice from Development Services at an early stage. Special controls also apply to the trees and some may be subject to Tree Preservation Orders. Anyone wishing to carry out work to trees within a Conservation Area should therefore seek advice from Development Services.

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BURNHAM OVERY MILLS CONSERVATION AREA



NOTATION	
	CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY
	LISTED BUILDINGS
	IMPORTANT UNLISTED BUILDINGS



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