

BLD COPY 1

DAMILLOI

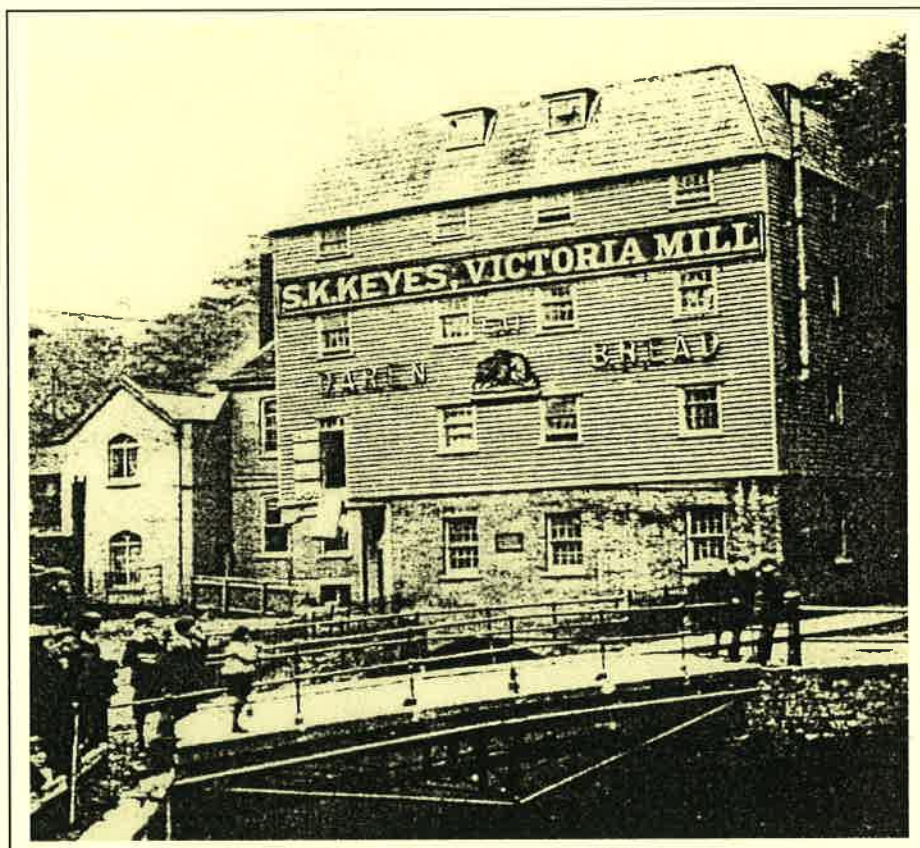
01/17

Kent County Council

# ROYAL VICTORIA MILL DARTFORD KENT

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

NGR: TQ 546 740



Oxford Archaeological Unit  
September 2001

01/17

Kent County Council

**ROYAL VICTORIA MILL  
DARTFORD  
KENT**

HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

NGR: TQ 546 740



**Oxford Archaeological Unit**  
September 2001

# ROYAL VICTORIA MILL, DARTFORD, KENT

## HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

#### *Summary*

- 1 INTRODUCTION**
  - 1.1 Background
  - 1.2 Aims and objectives
  - 1.3 Methodology
  
- 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**
  - 2.1 Chronology
  - 2.2 Historic description
  
- 3 CURRENT DESCRIPTION**
  - 3.1 Introduction
  - 3.2 General plan
  - 3.3 Exterior
  - 3.4 Interior
  - 3.5 Adjacent structures
  
- 4 CONCLUSION**

#### **Bibliography**

### LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1: Site location
- Figure 2: 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" Ordnance Survey map
- Figure 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 6" Ordnance Survey map
- Figure 4: 1933 Ordnance Survey map
- Figure 5: Historic illustrations of mill
- Figure 6: Ground plan of mill

---

## ROYAL VICTORIA MILL, DARTFORD, KENT HISTORIC BUILDING RECORDING

---

### *Summary*

*To the east of Dartford town centre is a single storey building of relatively unimpressive appearance currently used by the Royal Air Force Association as their Battle of Britain Memorial Hall. This is the surviving base of a formerly five storey tall corn mill which was constructed in the later 18<sup>th</sup> century and which must have been one of Dartford's more impressive landmarks prior to the removal of its roof and upper four storeys in 1941. It is now proposed to remove the surviving section of the building to allow the construction of a bus priority route through the centre of Dartford and the current programme of building recording and investigation is being undertaken as part of an Environmental Assessment prior to the work. The current recording and research confirmed that the structure is of local historical interest but that much as its significance, particularly as a well-known local landmark, was removed with the upper storeys in 1941. Although the structure is of limited significance as a piece of architecture it does hold the potential to retain significant archaeological remains relating to its former use as a mill.*

---

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Background**

1.1.1 The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) has been commissioned by Kent County Council's Transport Management Department to undertake a programme of building recording at the Royal Air Force Association's Memorial Hall at Dartford (NGR: TQ546 740) The building was formerly the Royal Victoria Mill (also known as Hard's Mill, Keyes Mill and Royal Mill) and the recording is being undertaken as a part of an Environmental Assessment relating to the possible redevelopment of the area. It is proposed to demolish the building to allow the construction of a bus priority route through the centre of the town. The current recording has been undertaken to a specification prepared by Kent County Council's Heritage Conservation Group. The former mill is located immediately to the east of Dartford town centre on a former mill stream from the River Darent. The building is not listed.

### **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

1.2.1 The principal aim of the project was to record of the building prior to the start of development works. The recording particularly concentrated on evidence of the building's construction, development and former use. The work also aimed to make an assessment of the significance of the building and to suggest a mitigation strategy for the loss of the structure. The work was entirely non-intrusive, recording the building while it was still in use as the RAFA Hall, and therefore much of the building's historic fabric and more significant features were obscured by modern surfaces.

### 1.3 Methodology

#### 1.3.1 The on-site recording comprised three main elements:

- a drawn survey which consisted of a hand-measured ground plan of the building (scale 1:50) with descriptive annotation
- a photographic survey which consisted 35 mm coverage (black and white prints and colour slides) of both the exterior and interior of the building
- a descriptive written record of the building and its more significant features

1.3.2 In addition a programme of historical research was undertaken on the building to provide a background for the recording and to allow a greater understanding of the structure. This was undertaken primarily at Dartford Library although the Kent Sites and Monuments Record was also consulted with regard to any relevant material which they might hold. All the site records (ground plan, photographs, negatives, notes etc) will be archived at the Centre for Kentish Studies.

## 2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Chronology

2.1.1 The single-storey building currently used by the Royal Air Force Association was constructed by William Loader in 1787 as the ground floor of a five storey tall corn mill (*Dartford Chronicle*, 20/6/1941). However there is known to have been a mill on the site since c.1450 when a new mill stream was cut from the River Darent near Princes Road. (Dartford Library 'Mills' Folder).

2.1.2 By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century the site was operating as a fulling mill (as it may also originally have been) and was occupied by Henry Bamme. In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century it was taken over by William Fuller, still operating it as a fulling mill, but it was soon converted to a corn and malt mill and was subsequently used for paper making. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries it had reverted to milling corn and this remained its operation until it was rebuilt in 1787. When William Loader died in 1810 the mill passed to the son of his nephew, John Hards, in whose family it remained until c.1886 when it was taken over by the established milling firm of Messers Cannon and Gaze Ltd. During this period the mill received royal patronage, initially in 1817 when flour was supplied to George IV but continuing through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with supplies to Queen Victoria and the front of the building was adorned with the Royal Coat of Arms until 1941.

2.1.3 In c.1893 the mill was taken over by L and S Keyes who also operated several other local mills and the mill (at that stage known as Victoria mill) appears to have stopped working in the later 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It then remained deserted or used as a store until 1941, having been purchased in 1925 by

Burroughs, Wellcome and Co. The building is reported to have been in very good condition but due to its timber frame construction it was considered to be too much at risk of fire during World War Two and was demolished in 1941 (other than the brick-built ground floor). In 1950 the surviving part of the building was taken over by the Dartford branch of the Royal Air Force Association and was used for the rest of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as their Battle of Britain Memorial Hall.

## 2.2 Historic description

- 2.2.1 As the mill was close to the centre of Dartford and was one of its best-known landmarks there are several surviving photographs and illustrations of the mill prior to the removal of the upper floors (see Plates 1-4, Fig. 5). From these, together with various contemporary accounts of the building, it is possible to gain a good impression of the form of the building. The earliest illustration of the mill dates to c.1800 and is contained within *Yesterday's Town* by Geoff Porteus. The illustration (not reproduced in this report) clearly shows the building with the same overall external form that it retained until 1941.
- 2.2.2 The structure was five storeys tall with the uppermost floor an attic contained within a mansard roof. The ground floor walls were of brick while the upper floors were of weatherboarded Baltic pine, some beams of which were 40 ft long and 18" square (*Dartford Chronicle* 20/6/41). The building was four bays wide by two bays deep and the windows appear to have been largely timber sashes. The front (north) elevation was four bays wide with each of the central pairs of windows at each floor relatively closely spaced. The rear (south) elevation was similar but the south-west corner resulting in there only being three windows at each floor level. The west elevation had two windows at each floor and the attic was lit by two dormers to each elevation. Although the east elevation is not shown on any of the photographs a pair of adjoining buildings are visible in this area, one of which is believed to be the mill house and some limited evidence of both of these buildings survives on site. There is reported to have been a set of mechanical stairs which could be turned over to allow access either up to the mill or to the house (*Dartford Chronicle* 20/6/41). The mill is reported to have consisted of four pairs of French Burr stones powered by a large breast-shot waterwheel (Dartford Mills folder).
- 2.2.3 The Ordnance Survey 6" maps of 1868/69 (1<sup>st</sup> edition), 1897 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), and 1933 have each been consulted and confirm the overall layout of the mill in this period without suggesting any significant phasing or alterations to the plan of the mill (See Figs 2-4). Each map shows two river channels south of the High Street converging to a single channel immediately north of the High Street. Each of the two channels serves a corn mill close to the centre of Dartford, the eastern of which is the subject of the current study. The river travels northwards towards the Thames and although there is a large mill pond shown to the south of the *Town Mill* (to the west) there is no mill pond shown to the south of the Victoria Mill.
- 2.2.4 One of the more interesting features of the historic photographs and maps is a large free-standing chimney at the south-east corner of the mill, shown

particularly clearly on Plate 1 but also apparently shown on each of the maps. From its location it appears that it must have been part of the mill and the size of the chimney suggests that there may have been a small steam engine installed at the mill to provide a greater power than the water wheel could have produced. There is no reference to a steam engine in any of the accounts of the mill and it would be somewhat unusual for a corn mill to be powered by a steam engine but the large size of the mill and the limited power that a breast-shot wheel (as opposed to an over-shot) could suggest the potential for it to have been a steam engine.

### 3 CURRENT DESCRIPTION

#### 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 The former Royal Victoria Mill is a single storey brick-built structure with a flat roof. Although from photographs it is apparent that it was once a tall impressive structure it is now substantially less attractive and it would be easily missed if one was not previously aware of its historic significance.

#### 3.2 General plan (Fig 6)

3.2.1 The main primary building has an irregular plan, roughly in the shape of a rectangle with two of its corners (NE, SW) cut off although neither of these appears to be a secondary truncation. The angled south-west corner is to allow a small public passage between the mill and the adjacent property while the north-east chamfer (now with a later structure abutting it) relates to a former loading door or hatch above. The chamfered north-east corner did not continue up through the former building and photographs show that the regular, rectangular upper floors overhung the ground floor with their corner supported by a column (see Plates 1-4). Carts would stop underneath the corner to allow sacks of flour to be loaded onto the carts through a door in the north elevation and possibly also through a hatch in the floor.

#### 3.3 Exterior

3.3.1 The *north elevation* (Pl.6) is covered with a thick cement render with 'ashlar' grooves and a small section of this render was removed to reveal red brickwork. The elevation has three windows each of which has eight lights, a softwood frame, a tiled sill and appears to be of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century date.

3.3.2 The *south elevation* is of stock brick partially covered with render which has come away. Much of the elevation is in a very poor condition with several patches of rebuild and the eastern two-thirds of the wall encloses a small external yard (rather than the building) to which it was not possible to gain access in the current project. The most interesting feature of the elevation is a low shallow brick arch immediately above the current ground level and continuing beneath the surface (Pl. 10). The arch is 46 cm deep (the brickwork rather than the opening), it is c.3.5 - 4 m wide and would have enclosed the mill stream as it passed beneath the mill (shown on Pl.1). To the

west of this is a former window with arched lintel which has been blocked with modern brickwork. To the east of the low arch is another former opening which has been roughly bricked up and the eastern corner of the wall has been rebuilt in modern brick.

3.3.3 The *west elevation* (Pl.5) is again covered with hard cement render with grooves scoured to look like ashlar and it has two windows both of which are the same early 20<sup>th</sup>-century type as those in the north elevation. To the south of these is a mid to late 20<sup>th</sup>-century fire door. The southern corner of the elevation is curved to maximise the width of the adjacent public path.

3.3.4 The *east elevation* was formerly abutted by an adjacent building (believed to have been the mill house) and is now covered with a hard cement render although some sections have come away to reveal stock brick behind.

### 3.4 Interior

3.4.1 The interior has been substantially altered in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century post-mill phase of the building and only limited evidence survives from the building's historic phases. The internal plan divides east - west into two main areas: to the west half is an open hall (Pl.11) and to the east are several smaller areas providing utility spaces. The surfaces, decoration, and visible features in the western hall all appear to date to the mid 20<sup>th</sup>-century (or later) and there are no visible features of historic significance. The eastern half contains features of more interest although it again has been substantially redecorated in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century. The feature of greatest historic interest is the enclosed former mill stream within the kitchen which is represented by an up-standing ledge (c.1 m high by c.1m wide) now covered with a stainless steel work top and modern tiles. There also survives three relatively historic doors to rooms in the western half of the structure (to the kitchen and toilets) with ovolo-section glazing bars probably of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century date.

3.4.2 Another feature of some interest, although not apparently significantly historic, is a large bracketed stone porch (Pl.8) over the original doorway at the north-east corner but which has now been enclosed by a small 1990s extension (see below). As referred to above this doorway, where carts would have been loaded from above, would have been largely hidden by the overhanging floors above and it appears unlikely that an attractive architectural feature such as this would have been located at this hidden utilitarian doorway. Although the historic photographs are not totally conclusive they also suggest that there was no such porch in the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century and it appears that it was added in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.5 Adjacent structures

3.5.1 As referred to above in the historical background section and map analysis there was formerly a small group of buildings adjoining the mill to the east (including the mill house) and sections of the front (north) wall from these buildings survive. Two sections of the front wall survive with a northwards step between them from two historic buildings. The recessed section of wall,



immediately adjoining the mill, is now the rear wall of a later structure with plastered internal face and rendered external face obscuring any archaeological evidence. The projecting wall to the east of this is currently covered with thick vegetation preventing a full inspection or clear photographs but in this section of wall there survives an arch-headed window with two arched lights and a central mullion. The window is of softwood, it has a stone sill, two iron bars in each light and it appears to be of 19<sup>th</sup>-century date. The opening has been blocked with a corrugated iron sheet immediately behind the window and probably concrete behind that. The window is shown on several historic photographs (Pl. 2, 4).

- 3.5.2 The north-east corner of the mill is now adjoined by a small single-storey, flat-roofed extension believed to have been constructed in the mid 1990s to link the main building with the new strong room (with safe) in the small eastern structure (pers comm Mr Luck).

## 4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1.1 If the Royal Victoria Mill survived in the historic form which it retained until 1941 it would be one of Dartford's more significant buildings and would be listed. From the historic photographs it is apparent that it was an attractive structure and the accounts of its timber-frame construction with large timbers imported from the Baltic suggest that its internal form was equally impressive. In addition it would have been a monument to an important local industry for which Dartford is known. However the removal of the upper storeys of the building has removed much of the interest and significance from the structure. The 1941 work has so completely altered the building that it is almost impossible to understand the structure as a former mill and it has removed any architectural interest which the building held. The building which once was a tall landmark close to the centre of Dartford is now easily missed by passers by.
- 4.1.2 The history of the former building is clearly of interest however and the surviving structure (and area immediately surrounding it) holds the potential for retaining significant archaeological evidence of the building's former use. Although the current programme of non-intrusive building investigation has recorded the structure in its modern form many features remain obscured either beneath the building or under the external render and internal plaster on the walls. An intermittent archaeological watching brief undertaken during the works would be valuable in adding significantly to the current understanding of the building.
- 4.1.3 Particular features to record or look for evidence of would be:
- the mill stream beneath the building
  - the surviving window in the wall to the east of the mill currently obscured by vegetation
  - the foundations of the mill house
  - any evidence of the working of the 1787 mill

- any evidence of previous mill structures
- any evidence of the chimney and possible former engine at the south east corner of the mill suggested by the historic photograph (Pl.2).

Jonathan Gill  
Oxford Archaeological Unit  
September 2001

Server 5\projects\jon.gill\oau\projects\mills\dartford.doc

---

## ***Bibliography***

The documentary research has been undertaken at Dartford Library which holds a very useful folder of newspaper clippings, illustrations and other ephemera on Dartford Mills. Most of the material below (other than the maps) is contained within this folder.

### ***Books***

- |                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Boreham P &<br>Harris N (1995) | <i>Images of England: Dartford</i>   |
| Dunkin J (1844)                | <i>The History and Antiquities of Dartford with Topographical Notices of the Neighbourhood</i> |
| Cumming RF                     | <i>Watermills of the River Darent and its Tributaries</i>                                      |
| Porteus G (1981)               | <i>Yesterday's Town: Dartford</i>  |

### ***Newspapers***

- Dartford Chronicle 20 June 1941  
Kentish Times April 3 1931

### ***Maps***

- 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" Ordnance Survey map (1868/69)  
2<sup>nd</sup> edition 6" Ordnance Survey map (1897)  
Ordnance Survey 6" map edition of 1933

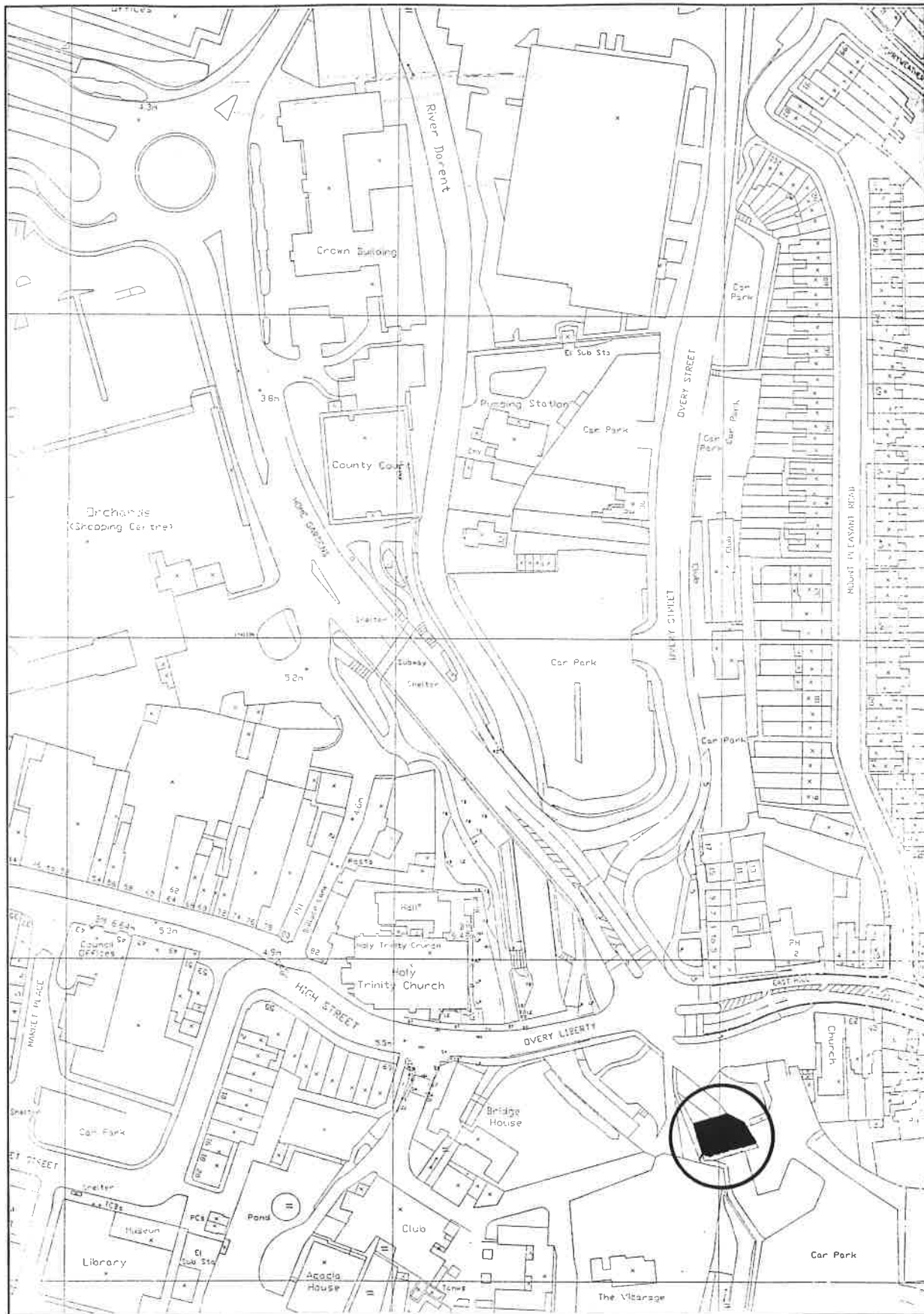


Figure 1: Site location



Figure 2: 1<sup>st</sup> edition 6" Ordnance Survey Map (1868/69)

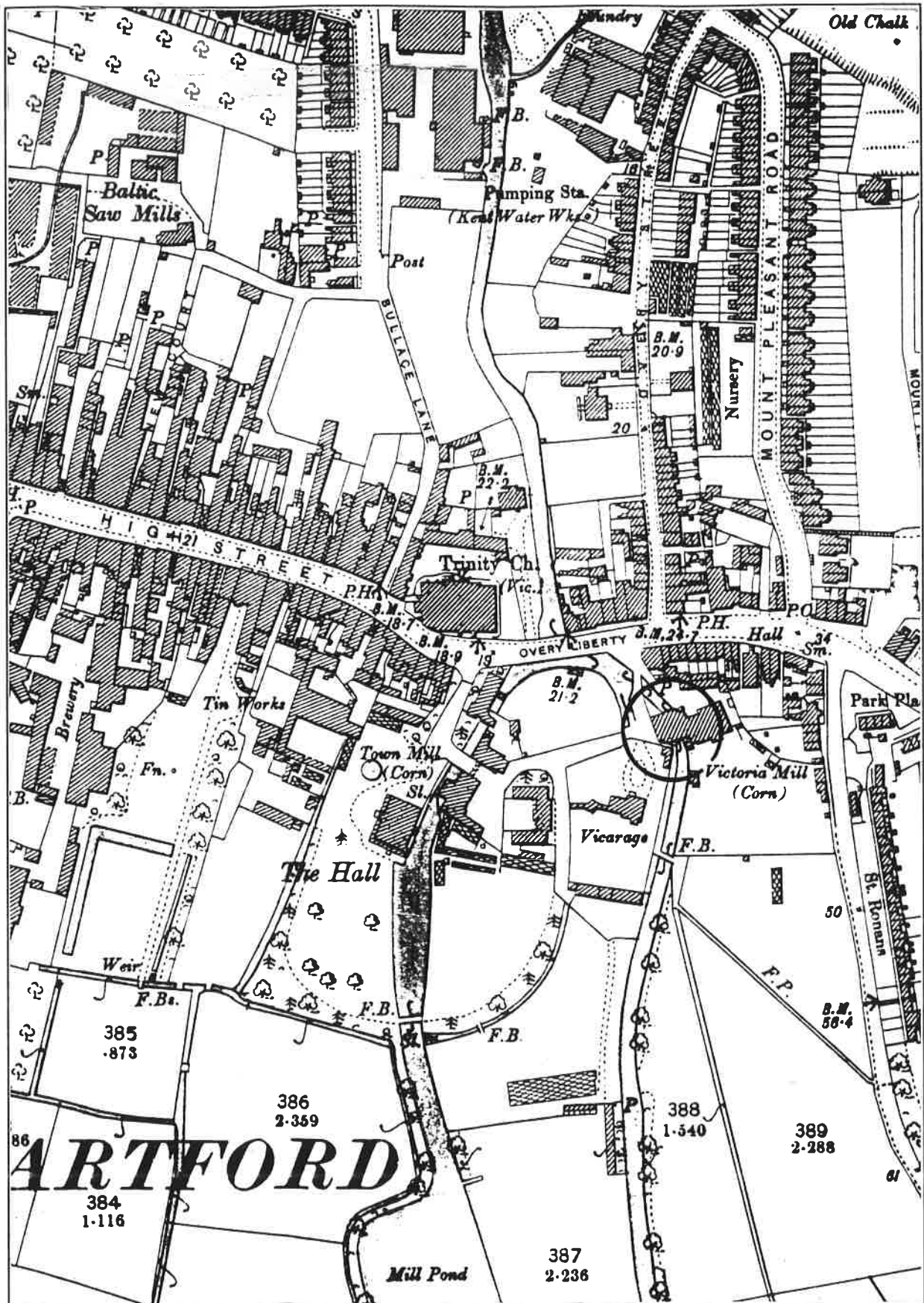


Figure 3: 2<sup>nd</sup> edition Ordnance Survey map (1897)

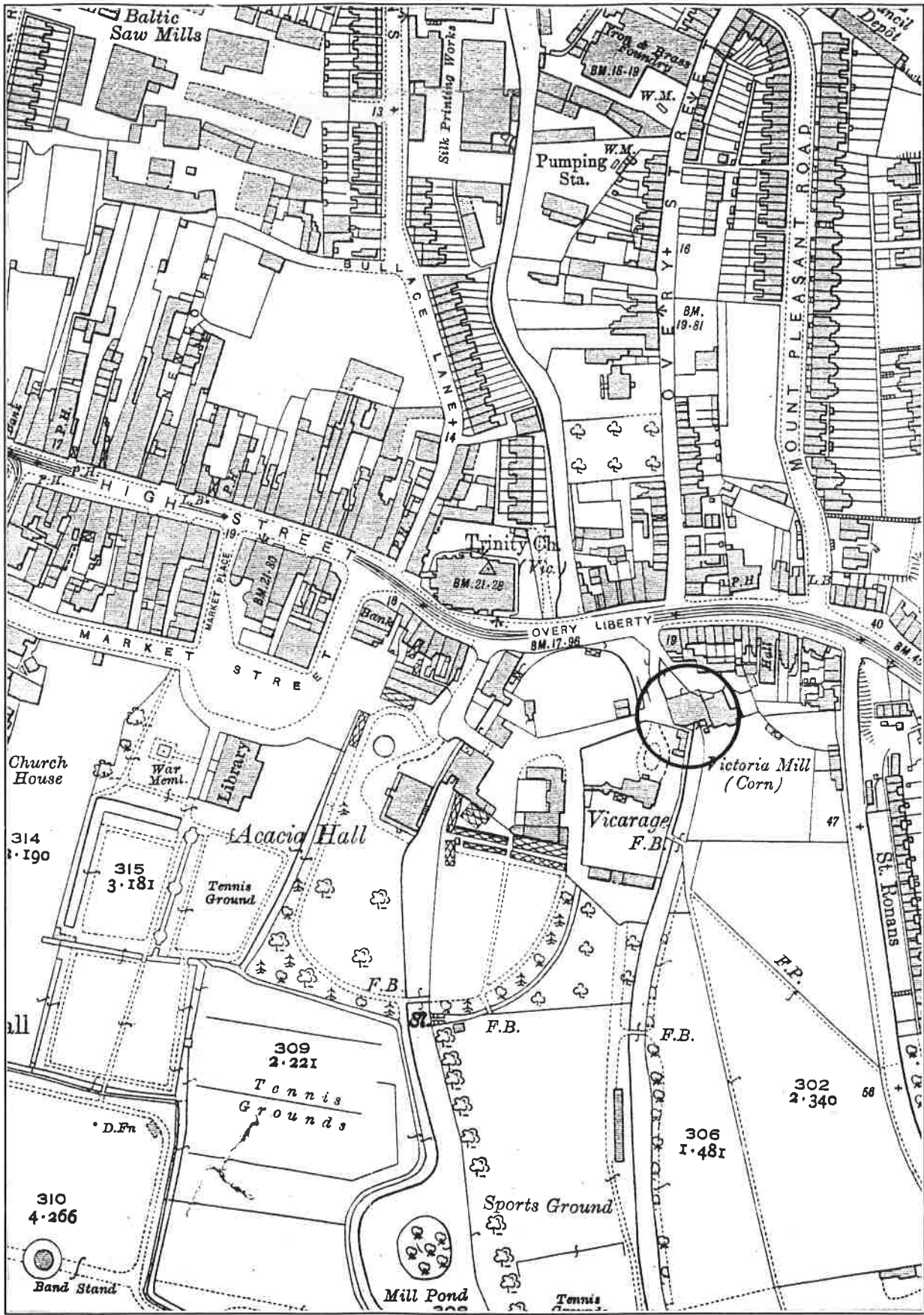
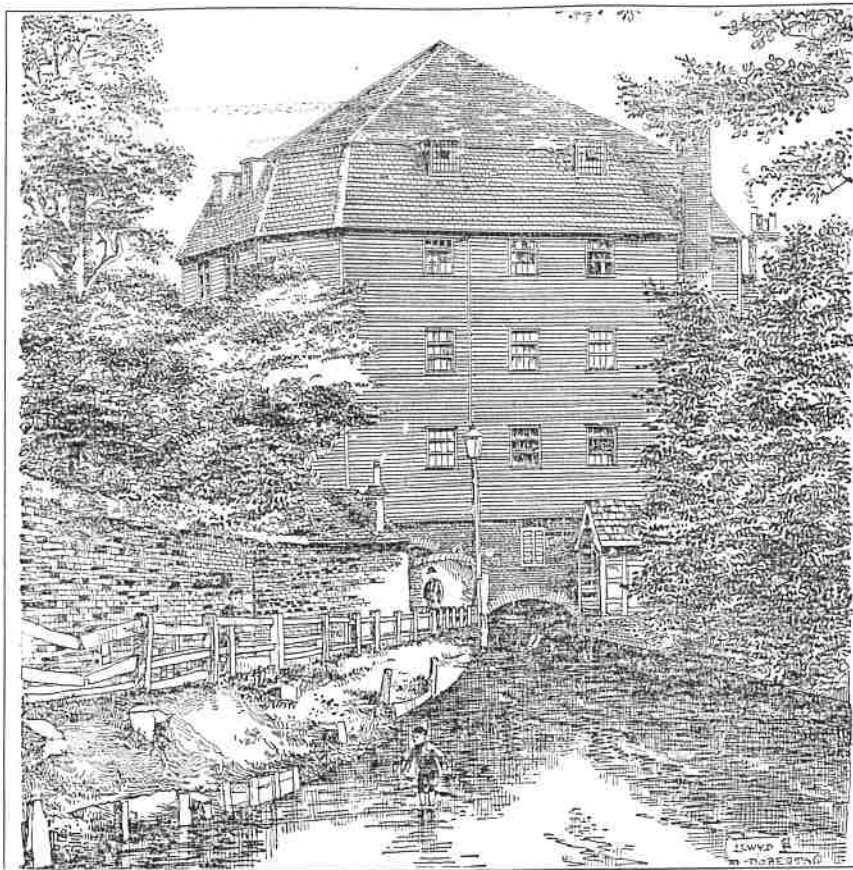


Figure 4: 1933 Ordnance Survey map



View of mill from south, From The Kentish Times April 3 1931

Illustration of mill from Dartford Mills Folder at Dartford Central Library

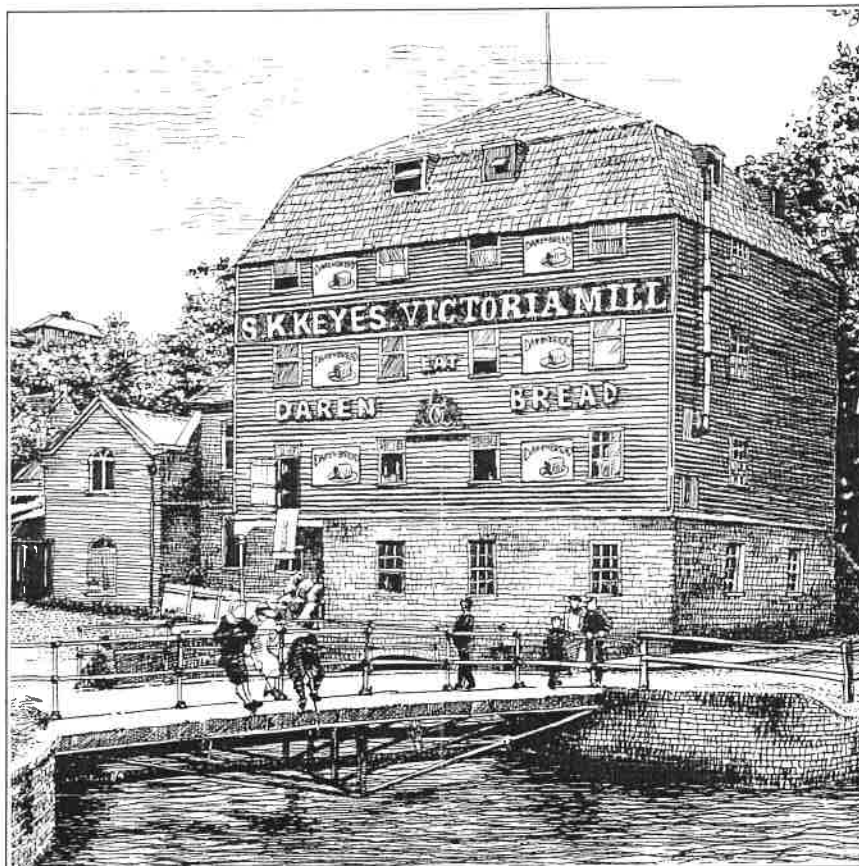


Figure 5: Historic illustrations of mill



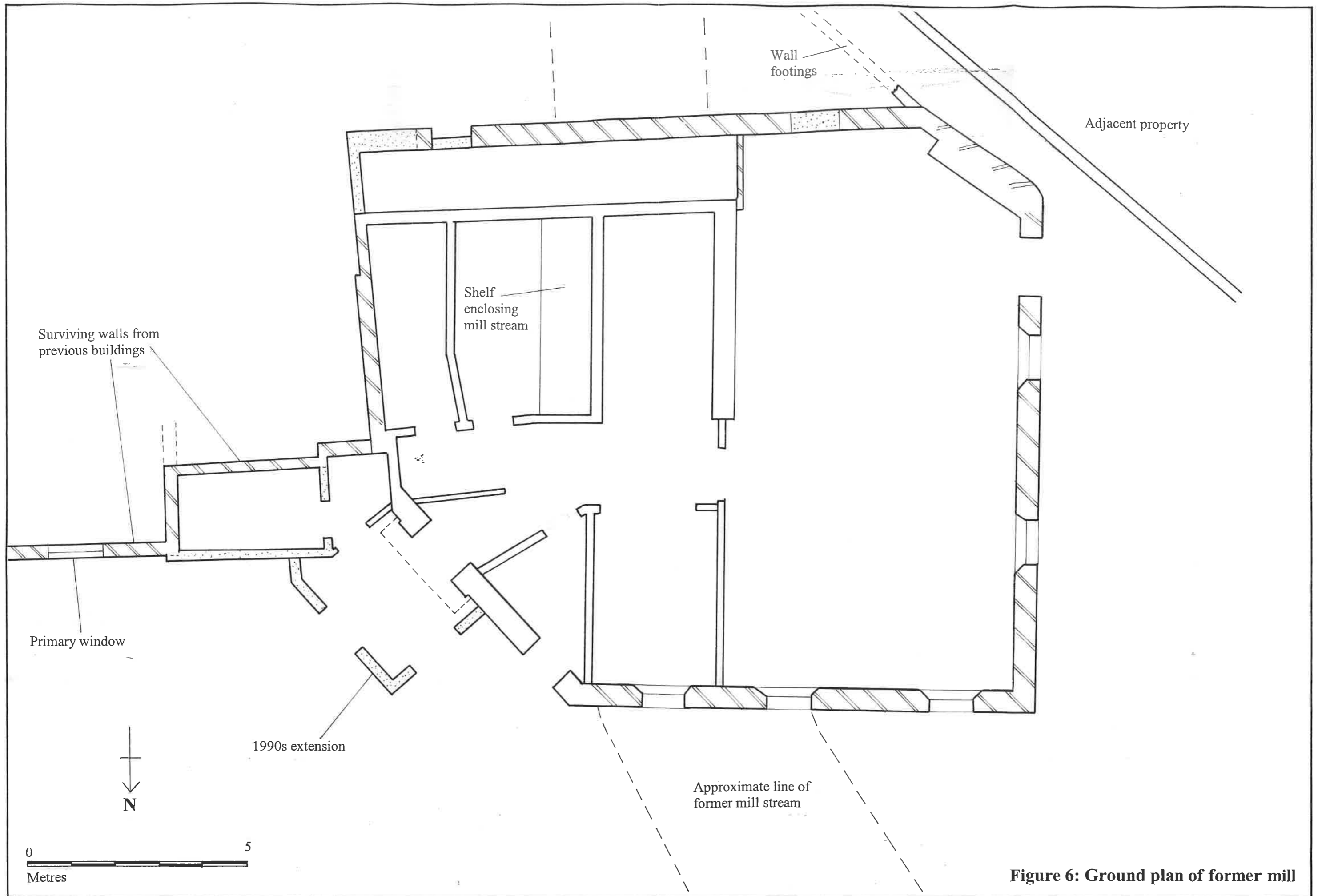
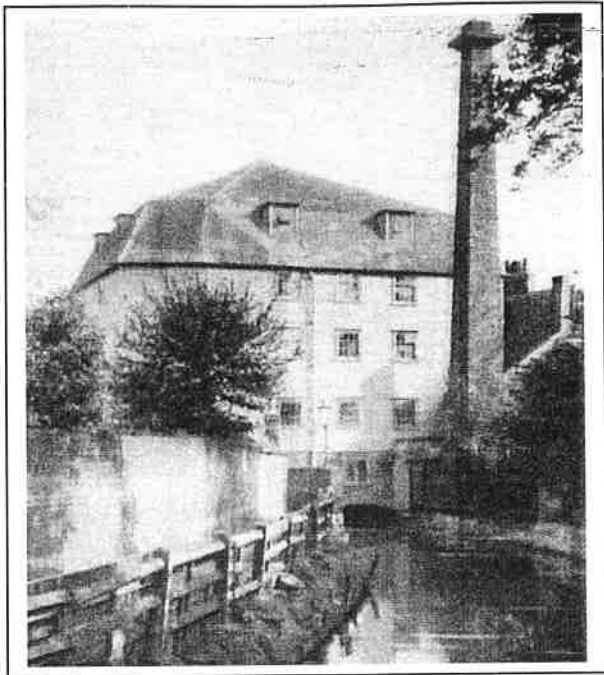
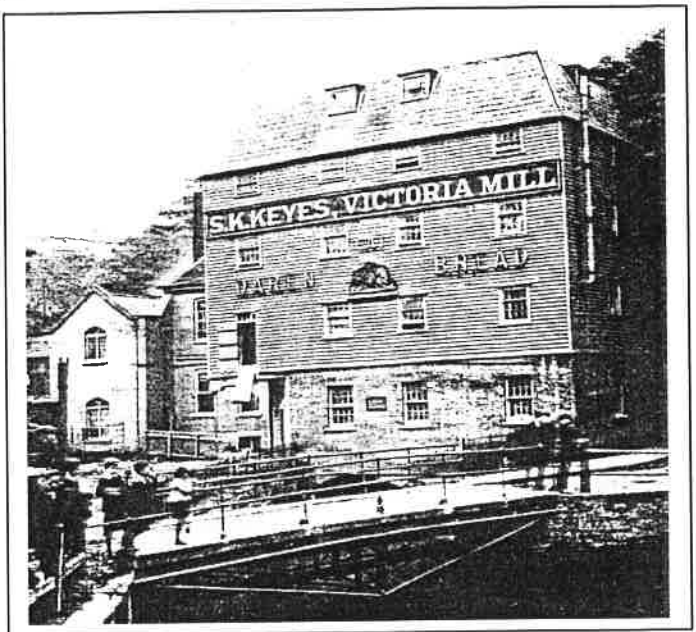


Figure 6: Ground plan of former mill

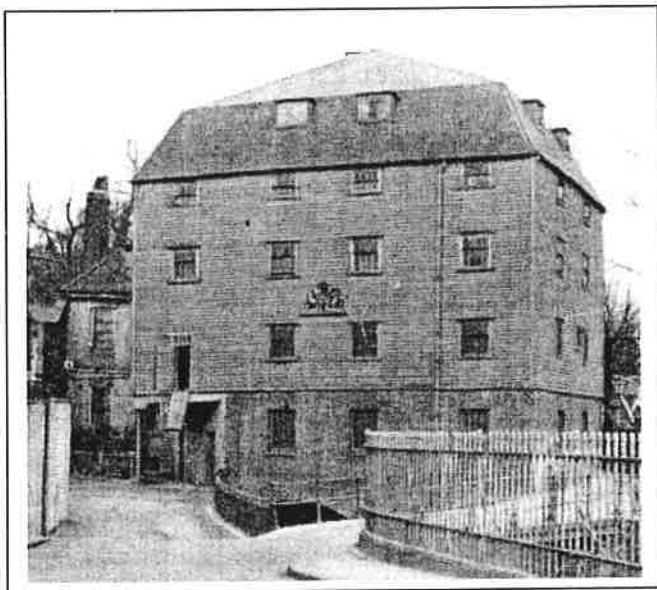


**Plate 1:** Mill viewed from south (rear). Note low brick arch over mill stream which survives. (From Boreham and Harris, 1999)

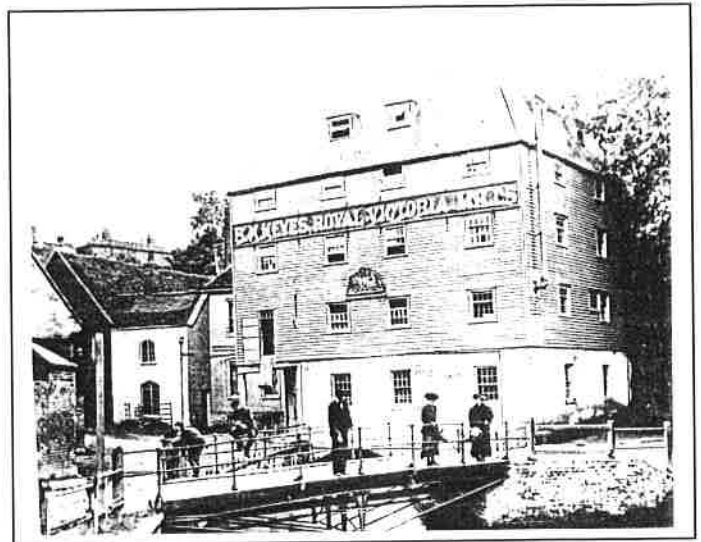


**Plate 2:** Mill viewed from north (front). Note Royal crest on front of building and structure to left, one window of which survives.

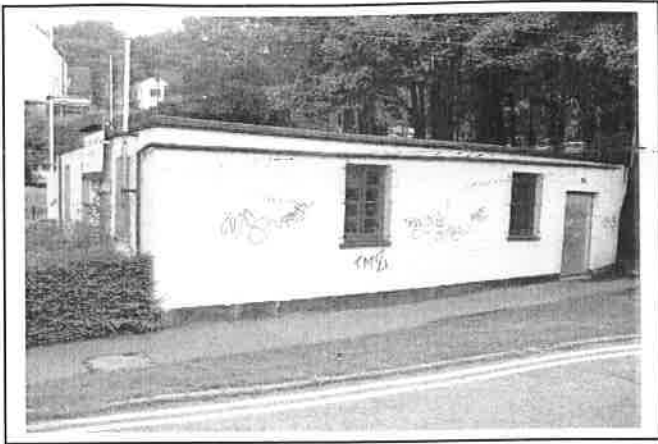
**Plate 3:** Mill viewed from north



**Plate 4:** Mill viewed from north



It is not possible to date any of these photographs more precisely than to say that they are late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other than Plate 1 they are all contained within Dartford Library's mills folder.



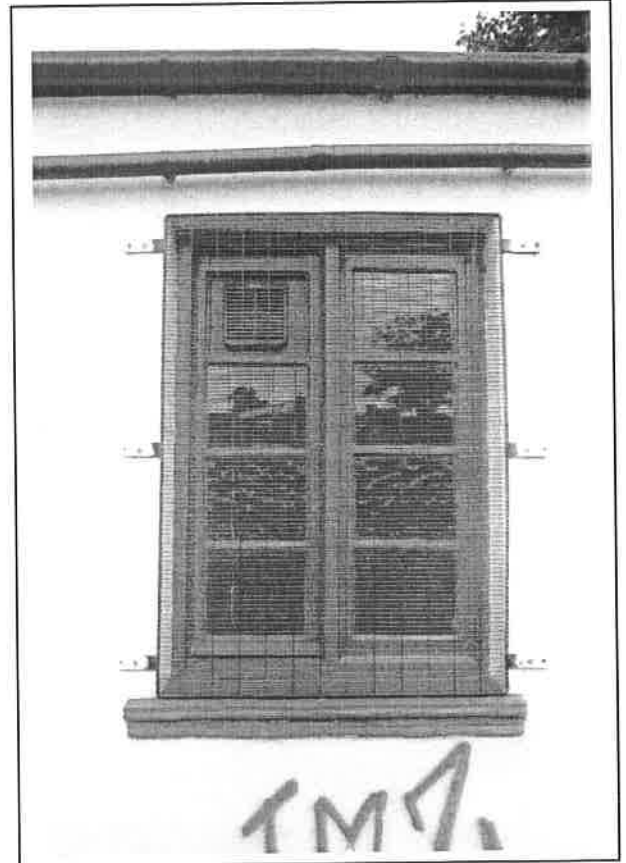
**Plate 5:** West elevation of former mill



**Plate 6:** Former mill viewed from north-east



**Plate 7:** East wall of former mill (to left) and rear face of front wall of former mill house

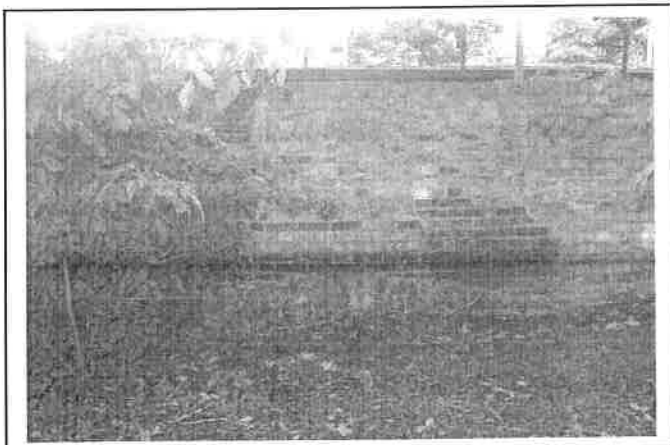


**Plate 9:** Typical window in west wall



**Plate 8:** Bracketed porch (now internal) probably added in C20th

**Plate 10:** Low arch in south wall of former mill through which mill stream formerly passed



**Plate 11:** Interior of hall



### **Oxford Archaeology**

Janus House  
Osney Mead  
Oxford OX2 0ES

t: (0044) 01865 263800  
f: (0044) 01865 793496  
e: [info@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:info@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)



### **Oxford Archaeology North**

Storey Institute  
Meeting House Lane  
Lancaster LA1 1TF

t: (0044) 01524 848666  
f: (0044) 01524 848606  
e: [lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk](mailto:lancinfo@oxfordarch.co.uk)  
w: [www.oxfordarch.co.uk](http://www.oxfordarch.co.uk)



**Director:** David Jennings, BA MIFA FSA

Oxford Archaeological Unit is a  
Private Limited Company, N<sup>o</sup>: 1618597  
and a Registered Charity, N<sup>o</sup>: 285627

**Registered Office:**

Oxford Archaeological Unit  
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0ES