

THE ORIGIN AND REMODELLING OF WHITCHURCH SILK MILL

By ALISON DEVESON, MICHAEL PEARCE and MICHAEL BULLEN

ABSTRACT

The Silk Mill is one of the most prominent buildings in the north-Hampshire town of Whitchurch, but up to now its original function and date have not been well understood, and its architecture is more complex than it initially appears. Its history has now been elucidated by a combination of documentary sources, architectural observation and deduction, and by considering the history of the site as a whole.

THE MILL SITE AND WILLIAM HAYTER

The Silk Mill stands on the western side of Winchester Street, between the main course of the River Test to the south, and a tributary to the north, now canalised to form the mill stream which powers the water wheel. The two water-courses are connected by a channel across the front of the mill. The site, originally just a meadow and without the channel, was held by copyhold tenure from the Dean and Chapter of Winchester. Until the early-nineteenth century the copyholders were absentees, who sub-let the land to local tenants, presumably for grazing, although there were also one or two cottages on the road frontage.¹

In May 1813 the copyhold was acquired by Henry Hayter, a local ‘ironmonger, glass and hardware man’.² He renewed his lease in May 1814, but surrendered it in May 1816 to Joseph Wakeford, of Wakefords’ Bank in Andover, and Warwick Weston, a London yarn factor.³ By then, the cottages had been replaced with ‘several manufactories and other buildings’, according to a notice which appeared in the *London Gazette* in September 1815.⁴ This was addressed to the creditors of William Hayter ‘ironfounder, brush manufacturer, dealer

and chapman’ formerly of Whitchurch, in respect of the bankruptcy proceedings which had begun against him in the previous month.⁵ William Hayter was the son of Henry Hayter, who had invested in the business and was the principal creditor. William Hayter, trading as William Hayter & Co., took sole responsibility for the bankruptcy. His stock-in-trade was advertised in local newspapers shortly afterwards, and was directed to ‘iron-founders, agriculturists, brush and cabinet makers’.⁶ The sale items included an iron foundry and forge bellows, wagons and carts, eight cart-horses and harness, ploughs and drills, a variety of well-finished brushes, brush back-boards, and nearly one ton of bristles, several hundred feet of mahogany boards, well seasoned for chair and cabinet work, five logs of mahogany of convenient sizes, and an assortment of manufactured cabinet furniture, as well as a great number of other finished articles. William Hayter was clearly already engaged in all the occupations ascribed to him.

The buildings themselves were put up for auction in August 1816, and the advertisement named William Hayter as the occupant. The wording of the auction advertisement described his premises in some detail:

Whitchurch, Hants, Building Materials.

To be sold by auction ... the entire materials of all those extensive recently erected buildings late in the occupation of William Hayter iron-founder, brush-maker, turner, etc (a bankrupt) comprising several hundred rods of brickwork, ditto of slating, roofing, capital deal floors, girders, tie beams and iron work, two pair of massy iron folding gates, with circular ornamented heads and piers, about 200 feet of strong iron railing and supporters, 4 ft 6 in high, with stone coping and brickwork.





Fig. 1 The front of the Silk Mill



The whole of the machinery worked by a water wheel of 9 ft 3 in diameter. A capital dial clock with numerous other valuable articles ...⁷

Large quantities of building materials of all kinds had gone into the construction, and the ornamental iron gates and railings, together with the 'capital dial clock', were distinctive features. The sale notice, however, was not specific about the type of machinery worked by the wheel. The advertisement was not repeated in the following weeks, and the materials were not sold.

Weston and Wakeford kept the site until May 1817 and, as assignees of the bankrupt William Hayter, they also acquired the buildings. Their first intention was to demolish the structures, as the advertisement had suggested, and they obtained a licence to pull them down with the exception of one building 'lately erected and used as a counting house'. However, the licence to demolish may have been a formality, a necessary preliminary to the final transaction at the same court in May 1817 which determined the mill's future. The property was regranted to William Maddick, a silk manufacturer of Aldermanbury, London, who kept it until 1844.⁸

THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE SILK MILL⁹

As it now stands, the principal three-storey block has sides of about four rods, 66'9" and 67'0" (20.3m and 20.4m) long by two rods wide, 33'0" (10m), and one and a half rods, 24'0" and 24'9" (7.3m and 7.5m) high up to the eaves, as the two sides are slightly different.¹⁰ The walls are about 18" (0.46m) thick, of chalk blockwork with a red-brick facing under a hipped slate roof. The main north-east and south-west elevations are five bays wide, the centre being slightly wider than the rest, with segmental-arched windows. Over the centre of the north-east front is a broad pediment with a clock in the tympanum and on the ridge in the centre is a square wooden cupola with an ogee lead cap. Set back to left and right are matching two-storey weather-boarded timber-framed wings, with half-hipped slate roofs. The southern one, at least, was originally rendered on lathing. The

north-west wing spans the mill stream and contains the water wheel and spillway, now with a workshop on the first floor. The south-east wing has a doorway, which may be original, used as the main entrance to the mill, and there is now an office on the first floor (Fig. 1).

The mill is in the minimal classical style favoured by Georgian builders for industrial buildings, essentially a brick box with a pediment. Although normally associated with country houses, this was adopted for all purposes including town halls and hospitals, and made very little concession to function. The modest architectural embellishment and the greater care taken with the mill's north-east elevation, facing the town, indicate that this was intended to be the show front. The front and side eaves have a simple brick cornice of corbelled courses, the uppermost with the bricks set diagonally, producing a toothed pattern. This is a fairly typical detail of buildings from the latter part of the eighteenth century onwards. The multi-paned cast-iron windows are also typical of late-Georgian industrial buildings and would have been standard products of iron foundries of the period.

When the building was repaired in the late 1980s, the chalk blockwork of the walls was revealed which, as well as brick bonding courses, also had a number of built-in timber rails, usually provided as a fixture for linings or any other fixings. Three old oak timber beams were reused as lintels, and have been dated by dendrochronology. Two were from trees felled in the late sixteenth century and another from a tree felled c.1726.¹¹ The roofing slate would have come from North Wales. As slates can be laid at a lower pitch than tiles, they are more suitable for larger-span roofs.

Inside, the floor-to-ceiling heights of what are now the three floors of the main block are roughly similar, of between seven and eight feet (about 2.5m). The first and second floors are supported on softwood beams, most of them roughly chamfered, running front to back. Between these span the floor joists which, on the first and second floors, rather than being morticed directly into the sides of the beams, are notched over separate timbers fixed to the sides of the beams. Over the top are laid floorboards, some of which are broad and probably

original, but inevitably there has been much later replacement. The eight-bay main roof is of softwood, well-made and typical of early nineteenth-century industrial buildings. The three-bay roofs over the timber-framed wings are smaller versions of those of the main roof but noticeably less well-finished, the timbers having a pronounced adzed finish.

The clock mechanism is positioned directly behind the pediment. It is signed and dated 'HANDLEY & MOORE, Clerkenwell Close, LONDON, 1815' and is housed in its own protective wooden box with a pair of doors at the front which have original hand-made wrought-iron hinges. The weights drop down at the north-east corner of the mill. Although the main roof structure passes in front of the opening to the area behind the pediment, there is no evidence to suggest that the pediment is anything other than an original feature. Either side of, and threaded through, the central truss are the timbers of the structure supporting the cupola.

Interesting features of the interior are the large square-headed openings in the centre of the end walls of the main building. They are two storeys high, slightly narrower than the width of the timber-framed wings, and spanned by pairs of wooden lintels. The floor levels of the wings were set at an intermediate height to that of the main building. On the north side, the opening between the wheel house and main floors may have been helpful in allowing the maximum flexibility in the positioning of shafting and drive belts. The opening on the south side may have been to allow easy access for moving materials between the floors.

THE REMODELLING

As soon as one begins to study the fabric of the mill in detail it becomes clear that all is not as it appears, and that the building has been fundamentally remodelled. Most immediately noticeable is the evidence of re-fenestration, which shows that originally the building was of two storeys and that at a later date it was converted to three storeys by moving the existing floor and adding another. Although it was always of five bays, it is clear that the

window position has been adjusted vertically. A close study of the brickwork around the windows, particularly of the vertical rows of queen closers abutting the positions of original reveals, indicates that there were originally two tiers of windows, about five feet wide (1.5m), the same as the existing windows, but taller, at about six feet (1.8m) (Fig. 2). These changes have been based around the size of the cast-iron windows. The module size of the castings, of six by three panes, is about five feet wide by three feet high (1.5m × 0.9m) up to the centre of the arch. The original windows would have consisted of two of these castings, one above the other, the upper one with an arched head. As altered, the top-floor windows consist of a single casting (six by three panes) with an arched head, apart from the top centre front which has a straight head. The ground and first floor windows consist of a single casting with an extra row of panes added in wood above or below, depending on whether an arched-headed casting or a straight-headed casting was used, apart from the bottom pair in the centre front, each of which was cut down from a pair of the original. The cill level of the existing ground-floor windows is the cill level of the original windows, but the cill level of the original first-floor windows was about three-quarters of the way up the existing first floor windows. The arched heads of the original upper windows were comfortably below the level of the cornice. That the original windows had arched heads is shown by the survival in a number of places of cut bricks indicating the position of their springing in the otherwise rebuilt brickwork. Those above the two right-hand ground-floor windows in the north-east front offer a clear example of this.

A further discovery is that, as built, the mill had large arched doorways in the centre of each of the principal elevations. These were about 10½ feet (3.2m) wide. We can be sure of the dimension because the queen closers abutting each side of the reveals survive in the brickwork of both fronts. When the building was altered, pairs of windows were inserted in the former openings. On the north-east side, the outer reveals of the windows reuse the reveals of the former archway but on the south-west side, they are set further out. Also on the

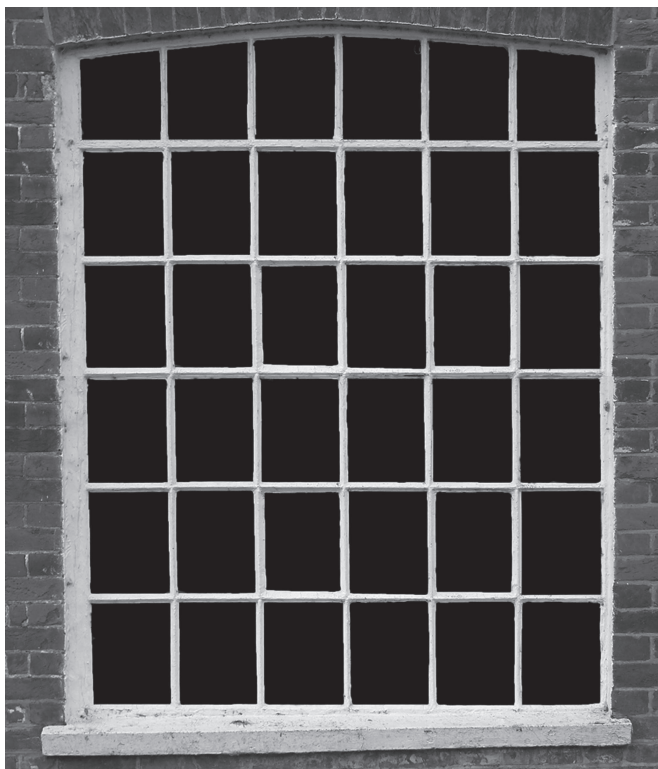


Fig. 2 The original appearance of the windows

south-west side, the springing of the former arch can be seen in the brickwork on either side of the central first floor window. This cannot be seen on the northeast front, suggesting that more care was taken at the time of rebuilding to remove evidence of the former opening and to strive for a better quality of brickwork on this, the principal elevation.

More evidence of the alterations can be seen on the inside. On the first floor, low down in the centre of the front and back walls, can be seen the internal wooden lintels of the large arched entrances which were cut in half when the central windows were inserted as part of the alterations. The lintel on the southwest side is that which has been dated to *c.*1726, indicating that it was a reused timber, as it is much too early for the building as a whole. As part of the changes, the original first floor was presumably lowered to form the present first floor, or raised to become the present

second floor. In addition, a completely new floor structure must have been made. Smaller secondary timbers have been attached to the sides of the main beams to support the ends of the joists on the first and second floors, to ease the process of inserting, or reinserting, floors within an existing masonry structure. Rather than having to be framed in as the beams were inserted, the joists could have been slotted in afterwards.

As originally built, it appears that the mill was of two equal storeys, each about three quarters of a rod or 12 feet (3.7m) high. Each was lit by a row of tall windows with segmental arched heads and of equal height. In the centre of the ground floor, front and back, was a large segmental arched carriage entrance (Fig. 3). The arrangement of large entrances to the mill, as with barns, allowed carts to be driven through the building, in this case to unload materials or to collect goods for delivery. This

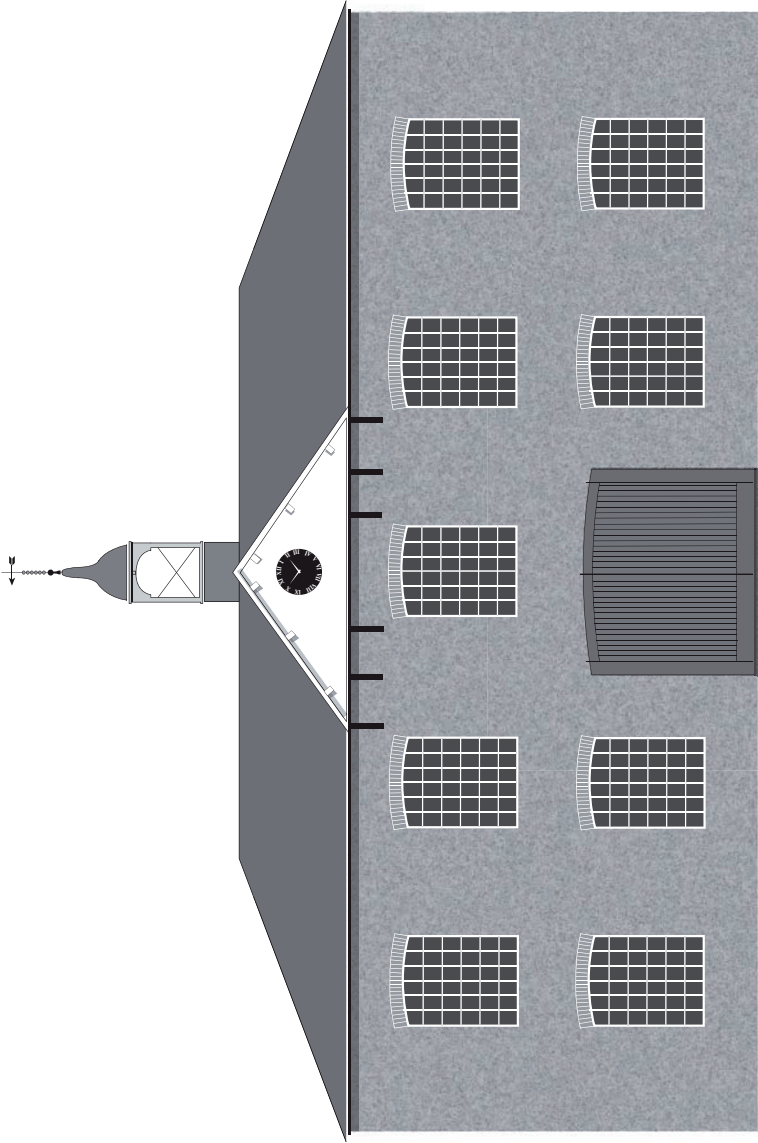


Fig. 3 Reconstruction drawing of the principal block of the original mill © Michael Goddard



Fig. 4 Detail from the 1839 plan, surveyed in 1819. It is not completely accurate in that the mill is shown about 2m too far to the north-west

would have been the building which housed the water-powered machinery for processing timber, and for the cabinet and brush-making sides of the business. We can see from the catalogue of William Hayter's stock, when it was advertised for sale in 1815, that he was cutting mahogany logs, a hard wood, to make boards for furniture.¹² This could hardly be done with a crosscut saw, but powered circular saws were available, and cabinet-makers had the use of smaller powered tools, including

drills and lathes, which would also have been used for making the brush handles and stocks (the blocks into which the bristles were set).¹³ Except for these components, brushes were handmade until the introduction of brush-making machines into England in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Hayter's building would have functioned as a sawmill on the ground floor with the lighter machinery on the upper floor.

Architectural and documentary evidence

combine to indicate that the initial construction on the site started not long after May 1813 and that the mill was finished in the first half of 1815, the clock being the final touch. In the August of that year bankruptcy proceedings began against William Hayter. The scale of the business and the construction had clearly overstretched him. He had a considerable investment in stock-in-trade, and was trying to run both a woodworking and a metalworking business at the same time, but the true extent of his financial problems did not appear for several years. In July 1815 he obtained nearly £300 by forging signatures on a bill of exchange, but this was not enough to avert the bankruptcy and, by the time the fraud was discovered in 1819, he had disappeared.¹⁵

THE ANCILLARY BUILDINGS

There was a second large building on the site at the time of the bankruptcy. It lay in the northern part of the site, along the edge of the mill stream, and was shown on a plan of the Whitchurch properties of Sir Samuel Scott dated 1839. Scott's properties had been surveyed twenty years previously but the 1819 survey only survives in written form. It once had an accompanying plan, which we can assume was the basis of the 1839 plan, since it is unlikely that Scott would have commissioned a new plan for the same properties¹⁶ (Figs 4 & 5). The materials of the second building were described in a sale notice which appeared in the *Hampshire Chronicle* in 1822:

... at the Silk Mills, Whitchurch ... all the substantial building materials, of a long range of buildings, erected but a few years since, which for the accommodation of purchasers, will be taken down and sold in convenient lots ... about sixteen or eighteen thousand of excellent slates, forty thousand building bricks, a few lots of good seasoned chalk stone, cast-iron window frames, pillars etc ... [the joinery] was all of the best American and Baltic timber.¹⁷

This notice appeared five years after William Maddick had acquired the property, but he would hardly have intended to demolish an

expensive building which he had erected himself. It was one of the buildings which had overstretched Hayter's finances and which Maddick did not need.

A parallel for the site as a whole is the Taskers' Waterloo Ironworks at Upper Clatford. An image of Taskers' in the 1820s, admittedly an artist's impression, shows a remarkably similar group of buildings¹⁸ (Fig. 6). They include a two-storey building identified as a workshop with a large, roughly central, doorway, hipped roof and cupola, not unlike the Whitchurch mill in its original form, except that the Taskers' building had two chimneys whereas, as far as we know, Hayter's mill had only one. At right angles to Taskers' workshop was another building with a single chimney, labelled 'iron foundry'. Hayter's 'long range of buildings' was in the same relationship to the mill as Taskers' foundry to their workshop, and is likely to have accommodated his foundry and probably also the stabling, cart sheds, tack room, and storage. Like the mill itself, it was not demolished when advertised but, by 1846, it had been considerably reduced. The remaining two-storey east end, 2 rods or 33 feet long (10m), became a weaving shed.¹⁹ By 1886 it had been extended east to make four cottages, which were converted into two in 1988²⁰ (Fig. 7). The part of the building which had been demolished ran back towards the mill, and the line of its rear wall still forms part of the embankment of the mill stream. The whole building was just over 153 feet (47m) long by 23'6" (7.2m) wide. The overall height to the eaves may have been about 1 rod or 16'6" (5m), as apparently are the remaining cottages. The part containing the furnace would have required the full height of the building, since even the smallest type of iron furnace then in use was about 10 feet high.²¹ There is no evidence that water power had been harnessed to drive the bellows supplying air to the furnace, although this may have been William Hayter's ultimate intention. Horse-power could have been used, as in the illustration of Taskers' early foundry. The small scale of the operation was probably similar to that of a contemporary foundry in Devon which, though nominally a foundry, was essentially a blacksmith's forge.²²

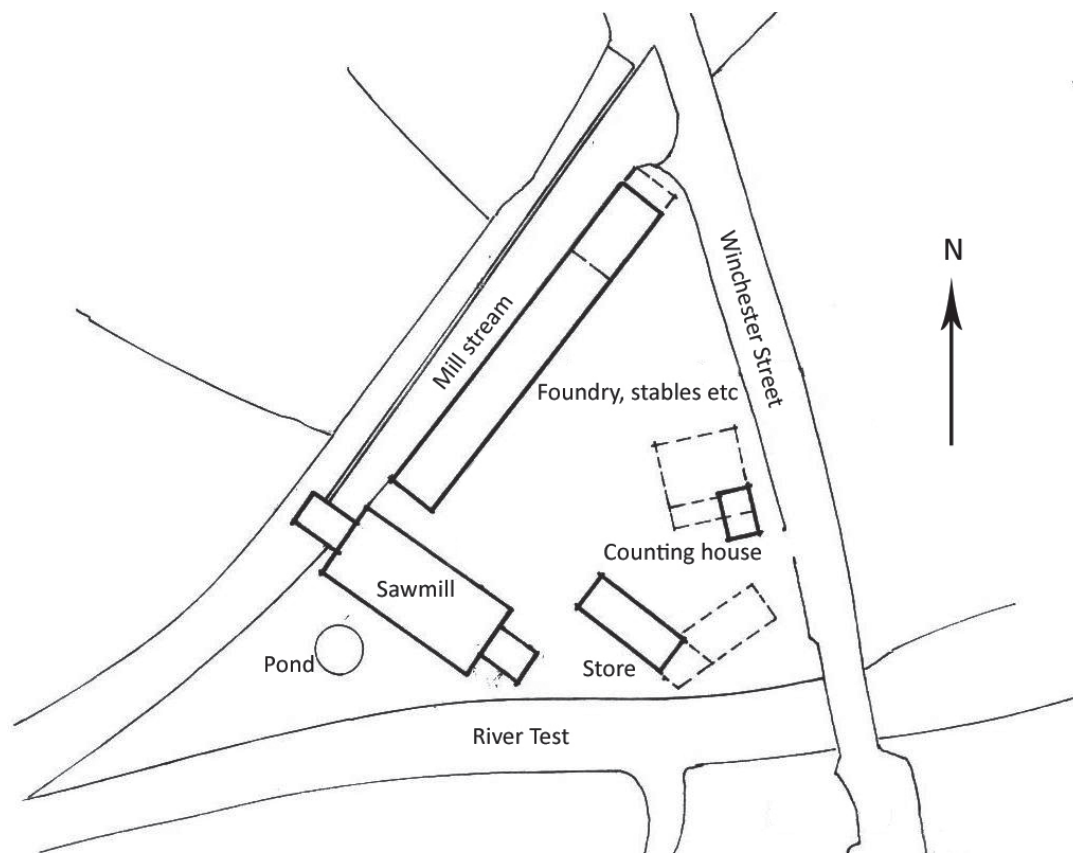


Fig. 5 Conjectural sketch plan of the original building layout, showing buildings by Hayter 1813–15, and the relative position of later buildings (broken line) for reference

Figure 4 indicates a low wall actually in the stream, stretching from Winchester Street to the wheel house. It appears that Hayter raised the level of his half of the stream by about three feet (1m) towards the mill wheel, channelling it between this wall and the back wall of the foundry, to raise the water level sufficiently to power the wheel. The low wall no longer exists, as the north bank of the mill stream has also since been raised. Behind the mill was a round pond, about 20' (6m) wide, to water horses when in harness.²³

Apart from the two large buildings (sawmill and foundry) there was a small counting house or office, near the site entrance (Fig. 5). It was similar in size to the two end wings of the mill,

and may well have been a similar timber-framed building. It was excluded from the licence to demolish in 1817, perhaps because it was occupied by someone employed to look after the horses at night, or for security. The whole site was, like Taskers', separated from the road by iron gates and railings which survived until the 1940s (Fig. 8).

THE MILL SITE, WILLIAM MADDICK AND HIS SUCCESSORS

When William Maddick took over the Whitchurch site and buildings in 1817, he had been in business as a silk weaver in London for

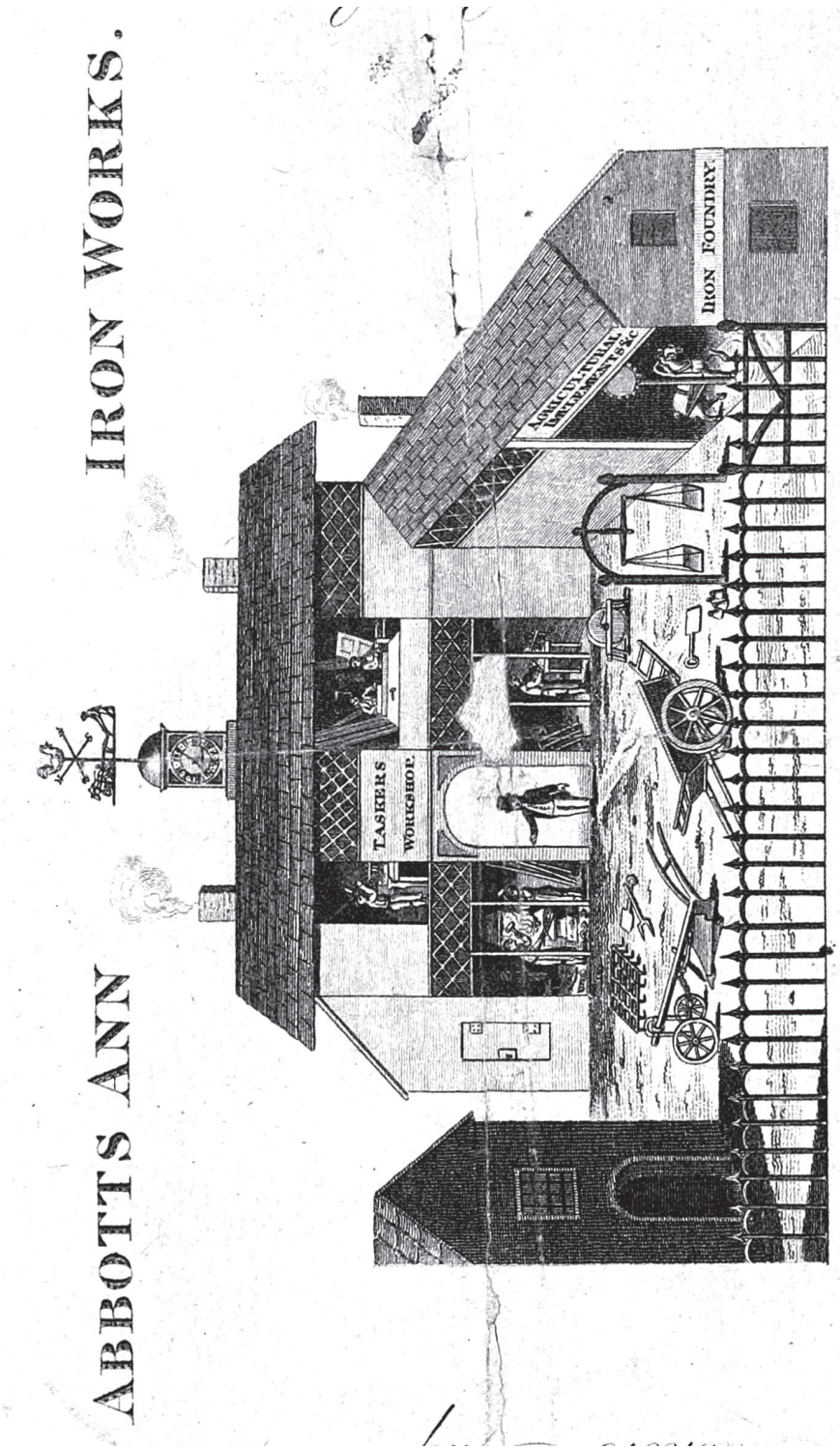


Fig. 6 Taskers' Iron Works, from HRO 27M92/ 84



Fig. 7 Four cottages before restoration, the remnant of a long range of buildings to the left



Fig. 8 The mill gates

many years.²⁴ It is to him that we must attribute the conversion of William Hayter's buildings into a silk mill, since the alterations were completed during the early years of his tenure. It was described as a 'factory, garden and tenements', occupied by 'Mr Maddock' in the 1819 survey and was marked as 'silk factory' on the 1824 printing of the 1" Ordnance Survey map.²⁵ Maddick's alterations can be deduced from observation on the site and, for those

buildings which have been lost, from plans and photographs.

Not needing a cart access, but needing more floor space for machinery, Maddick remodelled the mill to create three floors, adjusted the fenestration and built up the central openings. The alteration of the main building to accommodate an extra upper floor was consistent with the installation of winding machines which, by the 1820s, were metal-framed and

relatively light and small. Winding was the first part of the process whereby raw silk was prepared for throwing and then weaving. Winding machinery needed less power than throwing, and was usually placed on the top floors of mills.²⁶ At Whitchurch, weaving was done on the middle floor, where notches for the frames of hand looms are still visible in the floorboards, and on the ground floor. Looms powered by the water wheel were not introduced until after the sale of the mill at the end of the nineteenth century.²⁷

There was, in the southern part of the site, a third substantial two-storey building, now known only from plans, photographs, and the recollections of those who knew it or worked on it. Like the mill, it had chalk walls with brick facing while the fenestration was different on each of the floors. Cast-iron windows on the ground floor and leaded-light casements and a sash window in wooden frames on the first floor provide evidence of construction in two stages (Fig. 9). It is probable that Hayter built the ground floor before his bankruptcy and that Maddick completed the building by extending it and adding the upper storey, the leaded lights being the nearest he could get to matching the iron windows. The first floor was a single large room, used as a weaving shop for hand looms during most of the nineteenth century²⁸ and, perhaps for a short time, as a school room.²⁹ The ground floor was a store room and had various later uses, including as a garage. When it was demolished in 1962 and replaced by a single-storey structure (now the shop) the original cast-iron windows of the ground floor were retained.³⁰

In order to increase the available reservoir of water to supply the water wheel, Maddick dammed the main river to form a mill pond. He used the spoil from a channel cut next to the southern two-storey building (which later caused subsidence, particularly at the south-west corner) and along the front of the mill which, apart from its north-west corner, was more securely founded. The water supply was controlled by hatches. Finally the two-storey building was extended by the addition of a pair of single-storey cottages, which survived until condemned and demolished in 1949³¹ (Fig.

10). Figure 5 represents the state of the whole site after Maddick's alterations.

William Maddick remained at his business in London and employed a series of managers to run the mill.³² This was the pattern of more famous silk firms such as Courtaulds and Grouts, who had their sales offices in the Guildhall area but their mills in rural locations.³³ Maddick gave up his lease of the mill site in 1844 and, in 1846, it was sold outright to his last manager, William Chappell.³⁴ It was probably Chappell who demolished the counting house to build a family house, the present No. 24 Winchester Street. The attached cottage, No. 26, was added sometime before 1873.³⁵ The Chappell family continued to run the mill until 1886 when it was sold to John Hide as a business for his son James.³⁶ Stephen Walters & Co. of Suffolk bought it on James Hide's death in 1956. In 1971 the mill was sold to Ede & Ravenscroft of London, who, having secured planning permission for some residential development, closed the business in September 1985. It was immediately bought by the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust which maintained the business, restored the buildings, and created the Whitchurch Silk Mill Trust in 1990 to secure its future.³⁷

The origin and date of Whitchurch Silk Mill, which hitherto have been tentative, have now been confirmed, and instead of an isolated building, the mill must be seen in its setting as part of a busy industrial site, first as a sawmill and furniture factory with a separate iron foundry and ancillary buildings, and then as a silk-throwing and weaving factory. This account of the early history of the mill is based on documentary evidence and that which can be deduced from the site and buildings themselves. We are confident that the account is broadly correct but, where the detailed evidence is inconclusive, some conclusions are qualified as probable or possible. Further research, which might include more accurate surveys and some archaeological investigation, may clarify these points in the future. Although for two hundred years there has been much reconstruction, demolition and rebuilding on the site, the Grade II* listed mill has survived it all.



Fig. 9 The two-storey building from the rear (west), showing iron windows on the ground floor and wood-framed windows on the first floor



Fig. 10 The two-storey building and the cottages from the south. The south-west corner was later reinforced with a buttress because of subsidence. The straight joint between the building and the cottages shows that they post-dated it

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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the mill and Hampshire Record Office gave permission to use the reproduction of Taskers' bill-head. Thanks are also due to the Librarian of the Guildhall Library, London, for information on William Maddick, to Geoffrey Hide for family history and to Michael Goddard for the reconstruction drawing (Fig. 3), for which the Historic Buildings Committee of Hampshire Field Club generously provided a grant. We acknowledge an unpublished report by Paul Drury, formerly of English Heritage, on the mill and associated buildings in 1986.

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Author: Alison Deveson, 8 Lynch Hill Park, Whitchurch, Hants RG28 7NF; Michael Pearce, Jasmine Cottage, Homington Road, Coombe Bissett, Salisbury SP5 4LR; Michael Bullen, Gramshaw House, Gramshaw Road, Salisbury SP2 7JR

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Notes

- 1 HRO 11M59/WDC/E2/59505–6, 59510, 59512, 59561: court books of the Dean and Chapter of Winchester Cathedral, various dates; HRO COPY 744/1–2: T. Lawrence, *Survey of the Burrough of Whitchurch, in the County of Southampton*, 1730.
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- 10 Historic buildings were designed and built to Imperial dimensions but, since 1972, they have been replaced by metric measurements. Both are given in this report. The mill buildings

- appear to have been designed to the old rod dimensions, where 1 rod of 16'6" may be read as 5 metres.
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 - 23 Plan accompanying sale deed, Sir Samuel Scott to Robert Rawlins (1839).
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 - 31 Hampshire County Council Silk Mill file.
 - 32 The managers' names can be traced in Whitchurch parish registers.
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