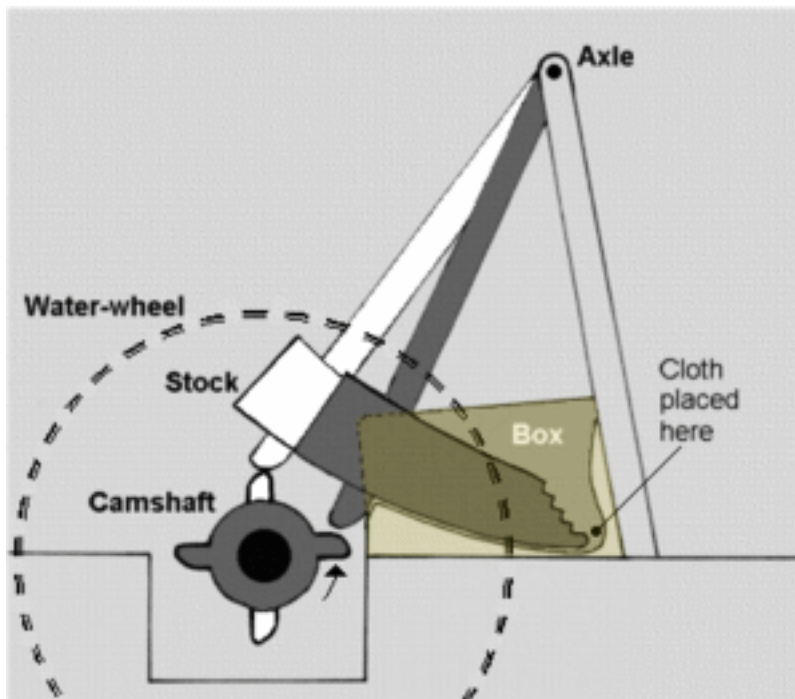


Little Mill (and Farm) Watchfield

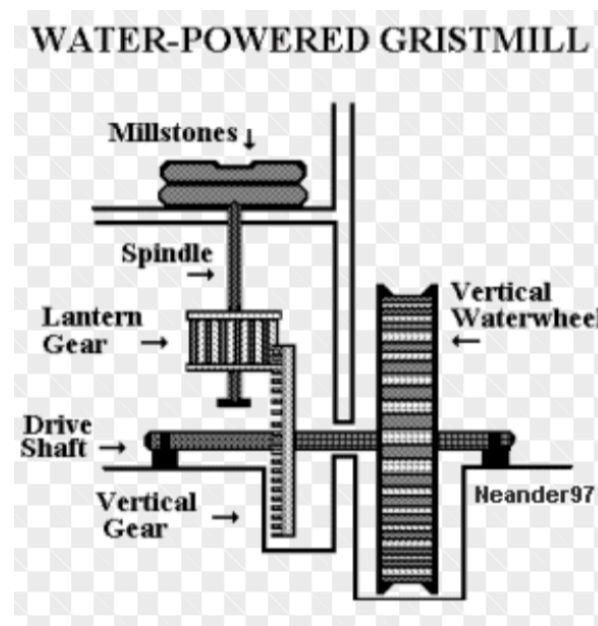
It is known that there was a mill operating just on the southern edge of the village of Watchfield that was known as Little Mill. It's also known that the Fairthorne family owned it from at least 1606. In the 19th and 20th centuries it was generally known as Tuckmill.

Tucking or Fulling is one and the same process. When raw wool is knitted together to create a fabric, it still contains natural oils and is bloated. It was discovered that if it was pounded and the oils removed it created a very versatile and durable fabric. Anciently, the method of pounding the material was carried out by human feet in tubs of water but as always, man's ingenuity invented a mechanical process whereby a wheel driven by the force of water could pound the material more evenly. Fullers Earth and also stale urine were used during the pounding to neutralise the oils.



The earliest documentary reference to the type of mill being used at Little Mill is from an Indenture dated 22nd January 1672. It belongs to the bundle of papers that make up Berkshire County Archives Ref No: D/Epb - T46 and is part of the Pleydell/Bouverie

Collection. The Indenture is a formal agreement between William Fairthorne and his wife Mary, to hand the Farm and Mill over to their son Edward. The description is described as, 'the Messuages and Tenements with their Appurtenances in Watchfield and also all those six Yard Lands to the same belonging and also all that Water Corne Mill in Watchfield.' And there we have the evidence that the mill was being used in the traditional way to grind corn into flour.



The whole of the Fairthorne Estate that consisted of a Farm House, Farm buildings associated with the farm, and the Mill and Mill House, went in to the hands of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell of Coleshill on 5th December 1746 (Later to become the Radnor Estate). A full account of the circumstances of how this came about can be read separately. Within the documents that are contained in the bundle noted above, there is a description of a, 'Water Grist Mill House erected over the said Mill ...' This confirms that in 1746 the mill was still equipped to grind corn.

Contained within the document at the Berkshire County Archive Ref No: D/P112/26A there is a description of an exchange of land between the Radnor Estate at Coleshill and the Barrington Estate at Beckett, Shrivenham. The document is dated 3rd August 1789 and

forms part of the official Enclosure of Bourton & Watchfield. There is a clause that states, *'the Earl of Radnor (of Coleshill) gives to Lord Barrington (of Beckett) a Mill House, a Tucking or Fulling Mill formerly stood, and all that part or parcel of pasture land, formerly the Mill Bank adjoining the brook.*

The documents mentioned above provide us with the evidence that Little Mill was used as a Corn Grist Mill from the early 17th century (and possibly earlier) until at least 1746. Sometime within the period of 1746 to 1789 it was used as a Tucking Mill, and furthermore the wording, *'formerly stood'* suggests that at that moment in time it was either no longer *'Tucking'* or perhaps no longer a working mill. So it is highly likely that it was only Tucking for a very short period in its history and that its last known use as a Tucking Mill is why the name stayed with it for the following two centuries.