

## The West Mill Indentures

By Neil B. Maw

Within the document bundle D/Epb - T46 that are in the care of the Berkshire County Archives at Reading, there are two Indentures that seemed to have created some confusion. The document bundle belongs to the Pleydell/Bouverie papers of Coleshill and deals with how the Fairthorne Estate at Watchfield came into the possession of Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell. Because litigation took place in 1745 involving the late Thomas Fairthorne's estate, and one of the defendants in the case being Sir Mark Stuart Pleydell, it explains why there were so many legal documents concerning Little Mill & Farm. However, within the documents gathered together for this legal action there are two indentures that appear to have been confused with another property.

The first indenture is dated 8<sup>th</sup> February 1648 and concerns a Richard Fisher of Mickleton in the county of Gloucester. The indenture states that if William Fairthorne will pay to Richard Fisher the sum of £320 then he will hand the title of, *'All that Messuage or Tenements with Appurtenances situate and being in Watchfield, also that Water Mill situate and being in Watchfield, also all those Six Yard Lands with Appurtenances lying and being in Watchfield.'* The indenture is an acknowledgement of the payment, *'And by those presents do fully, freely and absolutely grant, surrender, yield and forever quit claim unto Sir Humfry Forster, baronet of Alder Marston in the County of Berks.'*

There is documentary evidence that Sir Humfry Forster held the title of the Manor of Watchfield having purchased it from Thomas Tatton around 1640 just before the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642. By 1648, Forster was in trouble (please see a more detailed account of this below) and needed to raise money.

Looking at the description of the property above, it could easily fit the description of the site of Little Mill and Farm. However, the indenture states; *'All of which premises now are in the tenure, holding or occupation of Elizabeth Fairthorne, widow, during her widowhood according to the Customs of the Manor of Watchfield as the late Wife and relict of Edward Fairthorne, deceased, who lately held and enjoyed the said premises for the term of his life by Copy*

*of Court Roll according to the Customs of the Manor aforesaid.'* So this information informs us that the premises described in this indenture cannot be Little Mill and Farm as there was no Elizabeth Fairthorne there at the time, and it was Freehold property and not Copy hold.

The second indenture provides more information as to location of the premises being described. It is dated less than two weeks after the first one on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1648. This involves the sale of the Copyhold property detailed above, from Sir Humfry Forster to William Fairthorne of Watchfield and his son Edward. The price is £450. It mentions again that the property is in the tenure of Elizabeth Fairthorne but later in the wording it indemnifies the purchaser and the sentence ends with; *... 'and any of them and against all and any other person or persons whatsoever claiming in, by, from or under him, them or any of them or Thomas Tatton, gent, deceased, or Hester Stubbs, deceased, unto the said Edward Fairthorne ...'*

We have authentic documentation to confirm that Hester Stubbs and Thomas Tatton were both former owners of West Mill, Thomas being Hester Stubbs' Grandson, and the late Edward Fairthorne and his wife Elizabeth must have been the occupiers of West Mill Farm House, leased from Sir Humfry Forster. There is also good documentary evidence that Richard Fisher came from a long line of milling families. Therefore these two indentures explain the facts that the £320 that William Fairthorne paid to Richard Fisher was for the lease that Richard held on West Mill. Having done that, Sir Humfry Forster was then able to sell the Copyhold of the property to William for £450, making the whole estate of West Mill worth £770.

### **Note on Sir Humfry Forster taken from the Victoria County History of Berks, Vol 3**

His Manorial seat was the Manor of Aldermaston in Berkshire. He was created a Baronet in 1620. At the outbreak of the Civil War he supported the King and his estates which were in the '*King's quarters*' were sequestered. He had mortgaged his estates for £14,000 and this was one of the reasons for the sequestration, the Committee for Compounding taking the view that he had raised the whole of this sum of money to help the King, and

that it was therefore a very serious case of delinquency. Sir Humfry protested and it seems probable that he had raised part of the money for his own purposes, since in 1636 he had rebuilt Aldermaston Court. He further urged that his son had served Parliament and offered to pay for his discharge. The proceedings dragged on for several years, and when the discharge was granted in 1653 it was cancelled the following year. He recovered possession of Aldermaston and lived to see the restoration of Charles II. He died in 1663.