

ROUNDBOUT VERWOOD

PAST and PRESENT

The Timber Mills - part 1 - Romford Mill

Romford Mill
1980s approx



James Thorne came to live at Romford Mill, in the late 1870's and on the 1881 census described himself as a Farmer and Miller. He started by collecting wheat from miles around, grinding it and returning the flour. On a small way he was also engaged in hurdle making, timber felling and saw milling and in 1891 was described as a Timber Merchant and Farmer.

Towards the end of the century he also became an Agricultural Contractor, starting his own threshing business. The first machines were horse-drawn and powered with a windlass-like affair to drive the thresher. His son Robert took over shortly before his father died in 1910 by which time the threshing tackle and machines were drawn and powered by steam engines. The engines had names such as "King of the Forest and "Greyhound" and always guaranteed an audience wherever they went.

In 1914 Robert purchased a new engine "The Romford Express" and after a two day journey from Basingstoke created a great amount of excitement upon its arrival. One of its main jobs was to draw 20 ton loads to and from Southampton which was begun early one day to return the next.

At this time the yard at Romford Mill was a very busy area with an engineering workshop, wheelwright, and blacksmith as well as a sawmill. The original watermill was still working as a grist mill, preparing cattle feed for local farmers. There were fifteen steam engines each towing its own set of tackle comprising a threshing machine, elevator and caravan with a straw trusser at the rear..

The heyday was in the 1930s but after that came a steady decline finally coming to an end in the 1960s after the invention of the combine harvester.

Today the yard appears very quiet indeed and the old watermill fortunately still looks very picturesque.

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