



THE MIDHURST SOCIETY

HEYSHOTT

BEX MILL, Bex Lane

Grade II
Mill building, converted into a house.
C18-19, much altered during the conversion.
Stone rubble, now painted. Half-hipped tiled roof. Casement windows.
Three storeys. Three windows. Modern addition behind with two weather-boarded gables.
Iron wheel on east wall.

Listing NGR: SU8849318793



Bex Mill in Heyshott is a good mile from the Village on the western parish

boundary, and dates back to the 12th. century. We know little of its history but it has played its part in village life. The Mill was fed by a stream, Costers Brook, which rises from under the Downs at Cocking.

One of the earliest documents I have is a lease of the mill and mill house in 1734 by the Rev. Christopher Golding to John Penicod. In 1758 Elizabeth Penicod left Dunford Farm, Becks Mead etc. to Richard Cobden, Maltster of Midhurst. In 1802 Richard Cobden leased the mill and mill house to several people, but in 1841 the property was leased to Henry Mills and handed down to a son, also Henry Mills.

Many improvements were made around this time. The first was to take out the wooden shafts and replace them with iron shafts; also an additional storage space was built on the mill building. Mr. Mills had a sifting machine put in to produce a finer flour. It was about this time that because of the shortage of water in the summer, the owner took out the narrow wooden water wheel and had a wider steel wheel installed, but this did not prove successful and a steam engine to supplement the water power was installed in about 1870. Henry Maxwell Wells inherited the mill and the house from his Uncle Henry Mills in 1905 and moved the steam engine to an outbuilding to the left of the mill door. There was no engine to be found at the mill in 1946, although evidence of

it could be seen. Henry Maxwell died in 1920, leaving the mill and house to his 3 sons, Henry Maxwell Wells, Donovan Wells and Morris Wells. It was during the lifetime of the Wells that I remember taking sacks of corn down to the mill in a cart drawn by a horse; it was to be ground for cattle feed. I enjoyed watching the working of the mill and I recall the wooden peg gears and the two grinding stones, grinding the corn between them, and how dusty it all was.



The Wells family sold the business in 1946 to Mr. Ruthven who kept the mill going until 1960, when it was being used to generate electricity for the mill house. The mill became redundant and was sold and converted into a private dwelling. The Ross-Smiths bought the mill and made many improvements eventually selling to Robert Slowe in 2003 who built three new oak frame outhouses. The Mill was subsequently sold to Dr Julian Neal in January 2018 since which time further modifications, extensions and refurbishments, both to the main building and its extensive grounds, have been completed.

The 3 mill cottages were pulled down in 1963-4 and a house has been built on the site with an outlook over the mill pond and woods, with the Downs in the background. The mill house is of interest as it is quite old, of 'Queen Anne' period or even older. It stands beside the road and has a well approximately 20 feet deep below the kitchen floor with a pump on the kitchen wall. A little stone and tile building, standing just below the mill house was used as a bacon-curing shed and later as a wood house and workshop, but in recent years has been converted into a pleasant bungalow.

The rest of the mill grounds have been sold and houses constructed. One could pass this spot today without knowing that the mill had existed, but the stream flows on beside the road for some 100 yards and under the little narrow bridge flowing on to Dunford and the River Rother.

Dr Julian Neal
August 2021