

# Langdon's original mill

David Pinder and Robert Rowland

*With minor modifications, this article comprises the text and illustrations of a display which formed part of a WLHS exhibition on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.*

*The document can be printed, but has been designed to make it easily read on a computer or laptop screen. For this reason, its format is landscape. When read on screen, the right and left arrow keys can be used to move to the next or previous pages. If the text extends below the bottom of the screen, the down arrow key will reveal it. This can also be achieved by using the minus button in the toolbar at the top of the screen.*

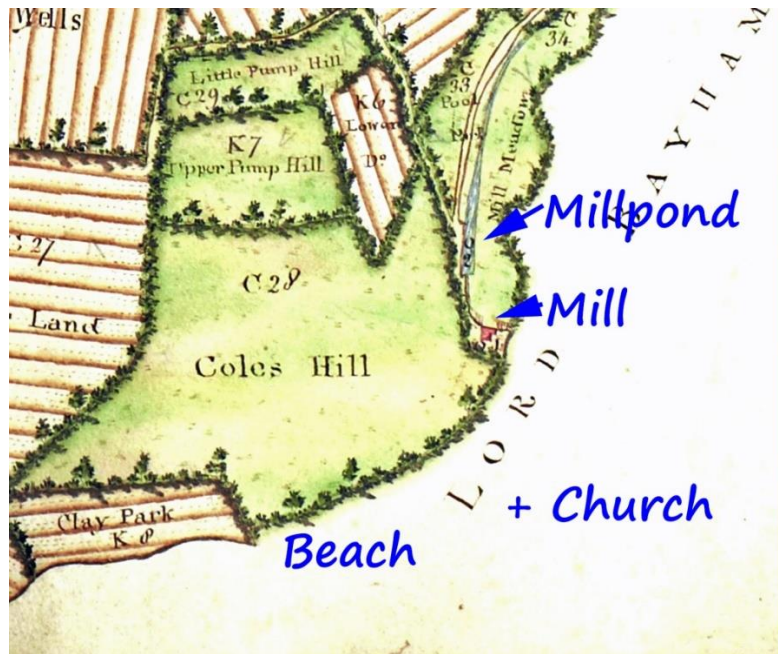
*© David Pinder, Robert Rowland and Wembury Local History Society, 2023.*

It would be easy to assume that the well-known former Wembury Mill, above the beach, was the parish's only mill. But in fact there was another – Langdon Mill - which has left no trace in the landscape and has been almost completely forgotten. So, where was this important element in the local economy, and what was it like?



*Figure 1 The beach mill at its peak, as envisaged in the 1950s by Marjorie Rowland, Robert Rowland's mother.*

A detailed map of the Langdon Estate c. 1788/89 (often called the Calmady Map) locates the mill precisely. This extract from the map (Figure 2a) shows that it stood almost 300 m inland from the beach, in a corner of the field now managed by the National Trust as a nature reserve. Many people know it as Roper's Field. Walking from the bottom of Church Road towards Pump Hill, Langdon Mill site is on the right, immediately after the stream. Figure 2b shows the site when viewed from the Marine Centre.



*Figure 2a The original mill's location as shown on the Calmady map; 2b the site as seen from today's Marine Centre.*



Although we might expect the stream running through the field to have driven the mill directly, it did not. Instead, upstream, a leat took water from the main flow and channelled it to a long, narrow millpond, also shown in Figure 1.

What was the Langdon Mill like? Remarkably, a painting survives from the period, and shows part of the mill on its right-hand edge (Figure 3).



*Figure 3 watercolour of the mill's setting.*

Even though it is a partial image, it reveals two important features:

- the waterwheels were overshot, with the water providing the power from above,
- and the mill faced towards the stream, allowing the water to return to the main flow immediately it had done its job. Both these features are illustrated by a modern painting (Figure 4).



*Figure 4 A modern realisation of the mill's appearance, as envisaged by John Mills, a long-serving WLHS committee member and talented artist.*

Helpful though they are, these paintings tell us little about the mill's condition, but an estate survey produced to accompany the Calmady Map is very revealing. It comprised:

- the miller's accommodation, seemingly on the upper floor;
- two complete sets of milling machinery;
- and two waterwheels.

It was, therefore, quite a substantial structure and, according to the survey, was *'stone and slated'* and in good repair externally.

Internally, however, things were very different. While one waterwheel and its machinery were in good condition, much of the remainder was very run down. In the surveyor's words:

*“. . . the other wheel is gone as well as all the inside work . . . it will cost £25 for labour and ironwork . . . . nothing will do again but the stones, the shoot and the trough.”*

Beyond this, the miller's accommodation was uninhabitable:

*“There has been an upper floor, which is entirely rotten decayed and the partition quite gone, which must be replaced before the miller can live here . . . .”*

In addition to these problems, the mill generally suffered from *“a scarcity of water in the Summer.”*

Given this water-supply drawback, and the mill's extensive dilapidation, it is no wonder that it shut down, with its work transferred to nearby Wembury Mill.

When did this happen? We cannot be exact, but we can identify a time frame. According to Land Tax records, the earliest likely date is 1802 when the Langdon miller – William Curry – moved to Wembury Mill. However, it is possible that he was replaced by another miller at Langdon. In that event, it seems unlikely that the change occurred much later than 1814. Until then, Wembury Mill had belonged to Wembury Manor, but in that year the Langdon Estate purchased it (and the whole of West Wembury). It seems improbable that, thereafter, two mills would have been kept in production by the one estate.

Whatever the precise date, changing times eventually brought about the demise of the Wembury Mill, too. Milling in Wembury had ceased completely by about 1900, a likely cause being that nineteenth-century advances in milling technology meant that small-scale local mills became decreasingly viable throughout the country.



*Figure 5 The beach mill languishing in the fallow years between its working days and its resurrection as a café*