Heritage Assessment of Ashlett Mill, Ashlett Creek, Fawley, Hampshire, SO45 1DT

March 2023

2 New Lane, South Harting, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU31 5LW

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This Heritage Assessment sets out the historical and architectural background to Ashlett Mill, Ashlett Creek, Fawley, Hampshire. The current mill building was constructed in 1816, although on the site of at least one predecessor. It is a large brick building of five storeys, with a contemporary extension to its north-eastern elevation. No internal machinery has survived, due to its later use as a dormitory associated with the construction of the nearby oil refinery, although the fabric of the building itself survives comparatively intact.

Project Background

Figure 1 Site location. © Crown copyright. All rights reserved. License number: AL100036068

1. Ashlett Mill lies on the eastern edge of the small hamlet of Ashlett on the west side of Southampton Water, *c.*1km to the east of the village of Fawley. It sits at sea level and is centred at SU 4662 0328. The underlying geology is the Barton Clay Formation overlain by Tidal Flat Deposits.

2. The owner is considering options for the re-use of the building and, in order to inform both themselves and the Local Planning Authority of the heritage significance of this building, they have commissioned West Sussex Archaeology Ltd to draw up this Heritage Assessment. A site visit was undertaken to the mill on 3rd January 2023 by George Anelay (West Sussex Archaeology Ltd) & Joe Thompson (Sussex Oak & Iron).

3. It is not the purpose of this Heritage Assessment to rehearse the clauses of the various publically available planning legislation, guidance and policy documents, suffice it to say that these provide the framework within which the heritage issues relevant to this site will be discussed. With reference to this project these are: the National Planning Policy Framework (2021 revision); the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990; and the New Forest District Council Local Plan 2016-2036 (Part 2, Section 2, pp.19-22).

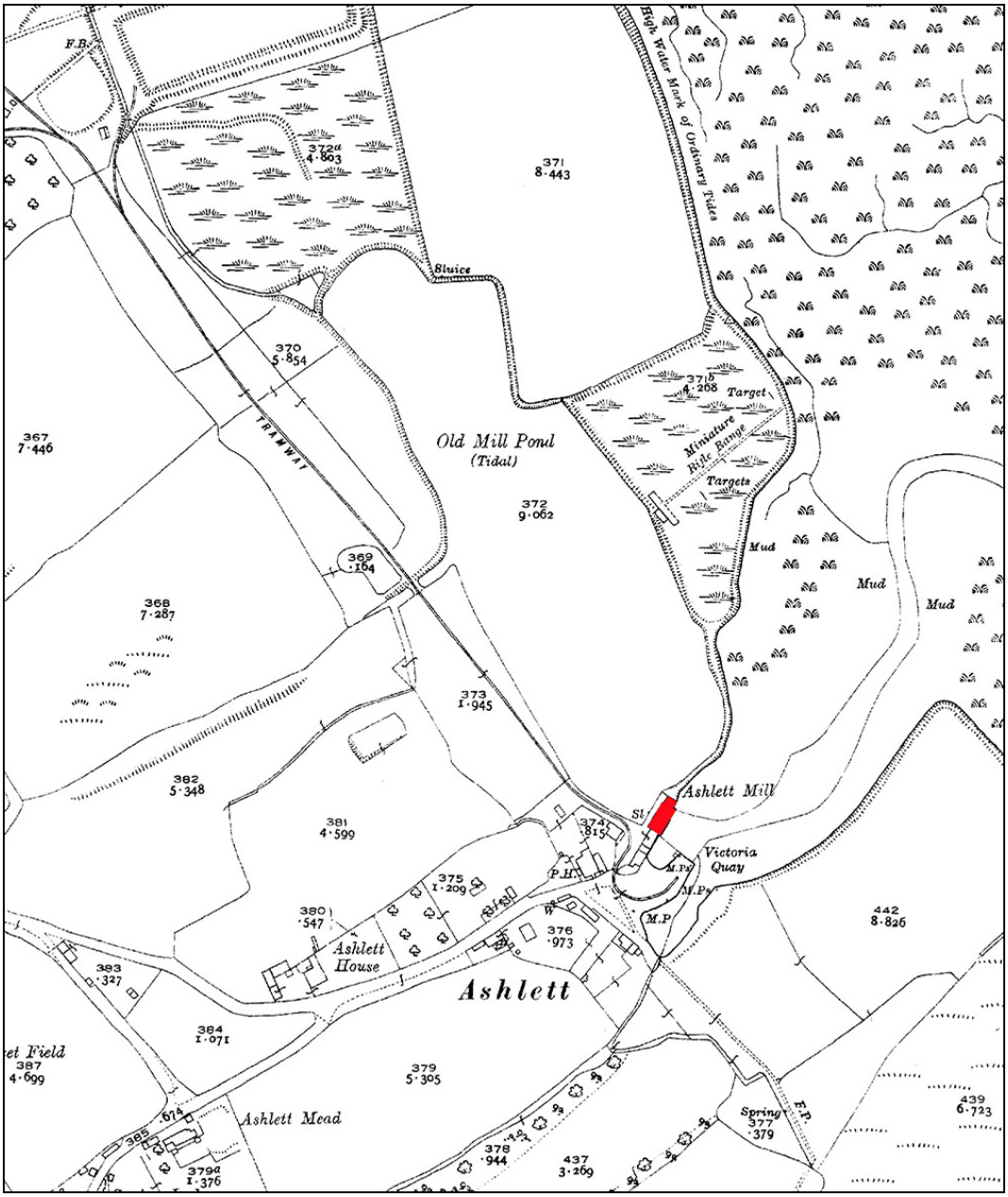

Figure 2 Extract from the 1932 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map showing the location of Ashlett Mill in red

4. Ashlett Mill is a Grade II Listed Building (No.1178585, first Listed 10th June 1987). The Listed Building description states: "Tide mill now public house. Date stone 1816, records go back to 1618. Brick, partly cement rendered, partly weatherboarded, some stone dressings, old plain tile roof, built on causeway of brick, rubble stone and earth. 3 1/2 storey and attic, 6 bay with single storey 2 bay addition at one end and 2 storey 2 bay addition at other. Front facing harbour has rubble stone facing to causeway to left hand of mill and brick facing to causeway below mill with sloping brick buttresses between bays, and 2 arched mill race openings beneath centre bays. Ground floor level stone band. On ground floor to left hand 4 bays, 16-pane segmental head windows. 1st floor raised string. On 1st floor 12 or 16-pane segmental head

openings to centre 4 bays. 2nd floor raised band. On 2nd floor 12 or 16-pane segmental head windows to centre 2 and end bays. In centre stone tablet with date. Mansard roof. On lower face segmental-headed 12-pane dormers, a pair in centre and one in bays either side. On upper face 3 smaller similar. To left hand 1/2 hipped single storey building with four 20 pane windows. To right hand set back 1/2 hipped building with verandah under end and two 20-pane windows on weatherboarded 1st floor."

Documentary Background

1. An abstract of the title to Ashlett Mill (HRO No.4M60/112) tells us that Thomas Barney acquired the site in 1780 off John Gorenge, describing the site as "one toft or parcel of land where then formerly stood a mill and where one mill and one cottage were then standing". By 1835 it had passed to Elizabeth, Ann and John Barney following Thomas' death. A later conveyance of 1846 of the mill from Ann Barney to A R Drummond Esq. held within the same bundle describes the property as "all that water corn mill with the storehouse cottage wagon house stable piggeries fuelhouse yard and small piece of garden ground adjoining thereto extending from Ashlett Lake to the gateway adjoining the highroad leading from Fawley to the said mill and premises which said premises are now or were late in the occupation of the said Stephen Barney". It is clear, however, from the map evidence, that the mill acquired in 1780 had been replaced in the intervening years by a new construction, here described.

2. The earliest historic map is the Ordnance Survey 1797 drawing (British Library No.OSD 75 pt.2,15), which shows a building, presumably the mill, on the north side of an opening in the tidal dam, with a dwelling on the south side, although the map is small scale and the details therefore difficult to make out. The later Fawley Enclosure map (HRO No.Q23/2/51/1) is significantly dated to 1815, one year before the date stone set within the existing mill (it reads 1816 TB – the latter presumably referring to Thomas Barney). This map does indeed show a different set of buildings from those shown on later mapping, with what is presumably the mill building set back from the remainder of the structures, which includes a small dwelling (in red). A copy of a map of 1825 (HRO No.COPY/241/1) is too poor quality to be certain as to the layout of the mill, but the 1838 Fawley tithe map (HRO No.21M65/F7/92/1-2) clearly shows the current building, although the small dwelling and adjoining outbuilding attached to the south of the mill may well have been retained from the earlier buildings. The mill and this cottage adjoining are given in the apportionment as owned and occupied by Stephen Barney. The map attached to the 1846 conveyance shows approximately the same situation, the slight difference in the building's shape between the two maps probably due to surveying inaccuracies.

Figure 3 Extract from the 1815 Fawley Enclosure map (HRO No.Q23/2/51/1)

Figure 4 Extract from the 1815 Fawley Enclosure map, showing a close up of the old mill (No.152) (HRO No.Q23/2/51/1)

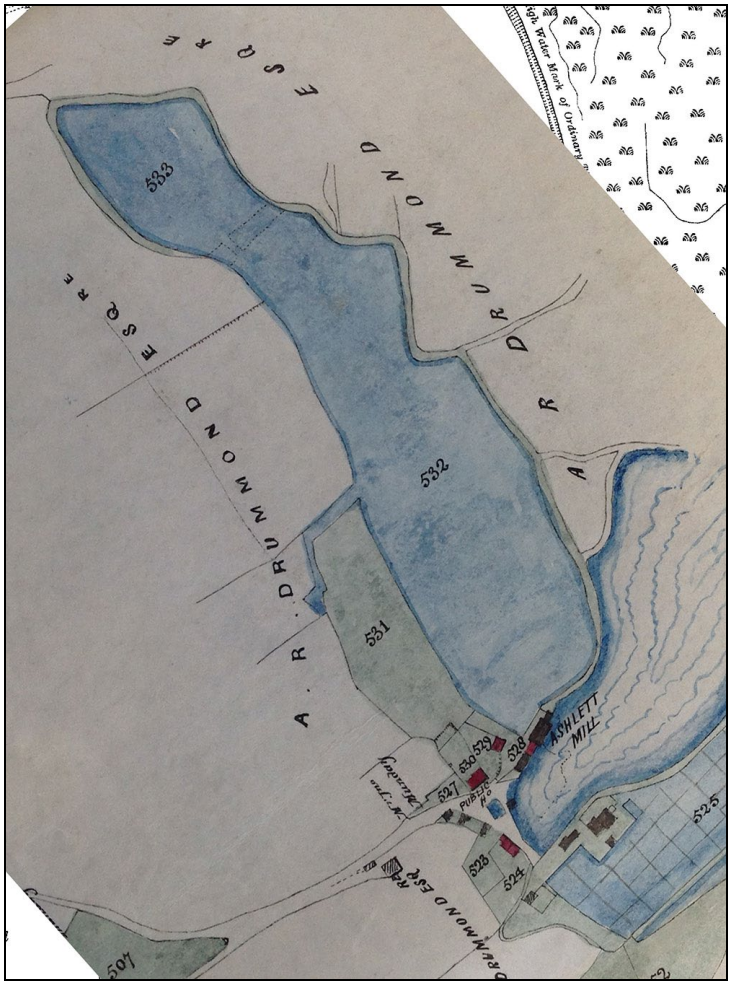

Figure 5 Extract from the 1846 conveyance map (HRO No.4M60/112)

Figure 6 Extract from the 1846 conveyance map, showing a close up of the new mill (No.528) (HRO No.4M60/112)

3. The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1868-81 provides the first truly accurate depiction, but the building is still clearly the same with little or no alteration. This continues through the subsequent editions, until between those of 1932 and 1970-2 the whole southern range, attached to the mill building proper, is demolished.

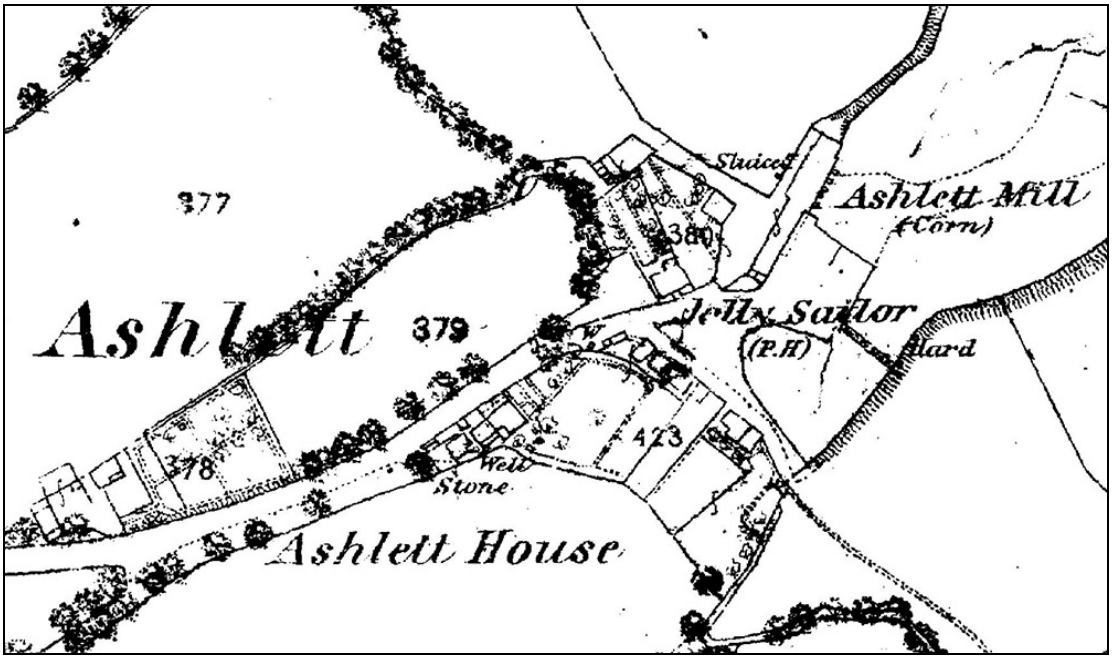

Figure 7 Extract from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map of 1868-81

4. The mill had apparently ceased grinding corn in 1902 (Vaidya, p.81), at that time containing two water wheels each driving two pairs of stones (HRO 124A09/1, p.25), with the wheels said to have been positioned at each end of the building (Vaidya, p.82). After it shut down it was used for accommodation, as a boathouse and boatbuilding business (by Theophilus Smith, a boat-builder and inventor), and as a store (*Ibid*., p.81 & HRO 124A09/1, p.25). The building was brought in 1920 by the Atlantic, Gulf and West Indies Oil Company (later to become Esso), who removed all the internal machinery and other "obstructions" so that it could be used as a dormitory for those constructing the oil refinery at Fawley. The first floor contained *c*.80 beds, while the ground floor was used for kitchens, washrooms and toilets (HRO 124A09/1, p.25). The second floor was to become an indoor rifle range, which continued into at least the 1960's (*Ibid*., p.26), and then latterly a skittle alley. In 1932 the building as whole had been converted into a social club serving the oil refinery (*Ibid*., p.26) until its closure in 2017.

5. As originally built in 1816 the mill was a comparatively simple, if large-scale, building. It consisted of a main block constructed of brick with stone string courses at ground, first and second floor level, with a plain-tile mansard roof and half-hipped terminals. Internally there were four floors, with a fifth in the upper attic space, divided into six bays.

Figure 8 The northwest elevation of Ashlett Mill

Figure 9 The southeast elevation of Ashlett Mill

6. Each ceiling was supported on five large oak transverse beams, one at each bay division, each supported by two equally spaced oak posts capped by oak bolsters with ogee moulded ends. The ceilings of the ground, first and second floors have a sixth transverse beam at their north-eastern end, since these floors were open into an extension at that end. Four of these transverse beams, the two at the eastern end-but-one of the ground floor and the eastern end of the first floor, have an upwards camber towards their centres, together with beaded moulding on their lower arises, probably indicating that they are re-used ship's timbers, the remainder are flat and plain.

Figure 10 View of the second floor looking north-east, showing the transverse beams supported on their posts, although the right hand posts are all replacements linked to the skittle alley (and probably shooting range before)

Figure 11 View of the first floor showing the two cambered and moulded transverse beams at its north-eastern end, probably re-used ships timbers

7. The floor joists running between the beams are softwood, many having partially slipped from their housings, but still remaining in place since the projection of the joist above the transverse beams is of sufficient length. At the north-eastern end of the building there is a three-bay brick extension of smaller dimensions, with both front and rear elevations being set back from those of the main building (the rear, seaward, being more so), and of only two storeys, with a simple double pitched roof. Internally the ceilings are supported on three more transverse beams. At the south-western end of the main building a single storey range of buildings was attached, now demolished and replaced, possibly originally including the cottage and outbuilding belonging to the previous mill.

Figure 12 A floor joist on the first floor projecting out of its housing in a transvers beam

Figure 13 The top of a floor joist in the top floor showing its upper projection resting on a transverse beam

Figure 14 Two of the transverse beams in the northern extension, looking northeast

8. Each floor of the main building would have performed a different specialized function as part of the milling process. Unfortunately all the internal workings and features have been removed, but it is possible, based largely upon the analogy of other similar structures of a similar date, to suggest the function of each floor at Ashlett. The ground floor must have contained the waterwheels, said to have been housed within the outer two bays over the two mill-races, both bays being lit by windows in the north-west elevation. There would appear to have been a door in each elevation, that on the mill pond side being in the third bay from the south-west end, while that on the seaward side is in the fourth bay. Each of the four central bays were then lit with further windows, all in the south-east elevation, save for that opposite its door. The purpose of this latter door would seem to have been to allow access to a jetty attached to the seaward side of the mill, allowing boats to pull right up to the mill. It is not clear where the internal stairs, were located; they are unlikely to have been in the south-western bay, where they are found on the other floors, due to the presence of the waterwheel. It is possible that they were within the northern extension, where the current stairs are. The northern extension at this level had windows in the south-western bay of its seaward elevation, and the central bay of its mill pond elevation.

Figure 15 Ground floor plan of Ashlett Mill showing original features

9. The first floor of the main building is likely to have been the machinery floor, housing the gearing and shafts from the waterwheels up to the higher floors, and possibly also other machines used for dressing/bolting the wholewheat. Nothing remains here to indicate where such machinery might have been, although it would seem likely that the gearing and shafts rose up through the penultimate bays at each end, perhaps the reason for the opposing windows of larger size in these bays, providing as they did additional lighting. The other bays

all have single smaller windows, in the central two bays set into the seaward wall, and in the end bays in the mill pond elevation. A single door existed in the pond side, accessed by an external staircase, directly above that on the ground floor. At this level the northern extension had a window central to the north-eastern elevation, and another in the south-east elevation above that in the floor below. There are existing stairs on this level within the south-west bay of the main building and within the northern extension, although it is unclear whether either are original, since they are covered by modern boarding.

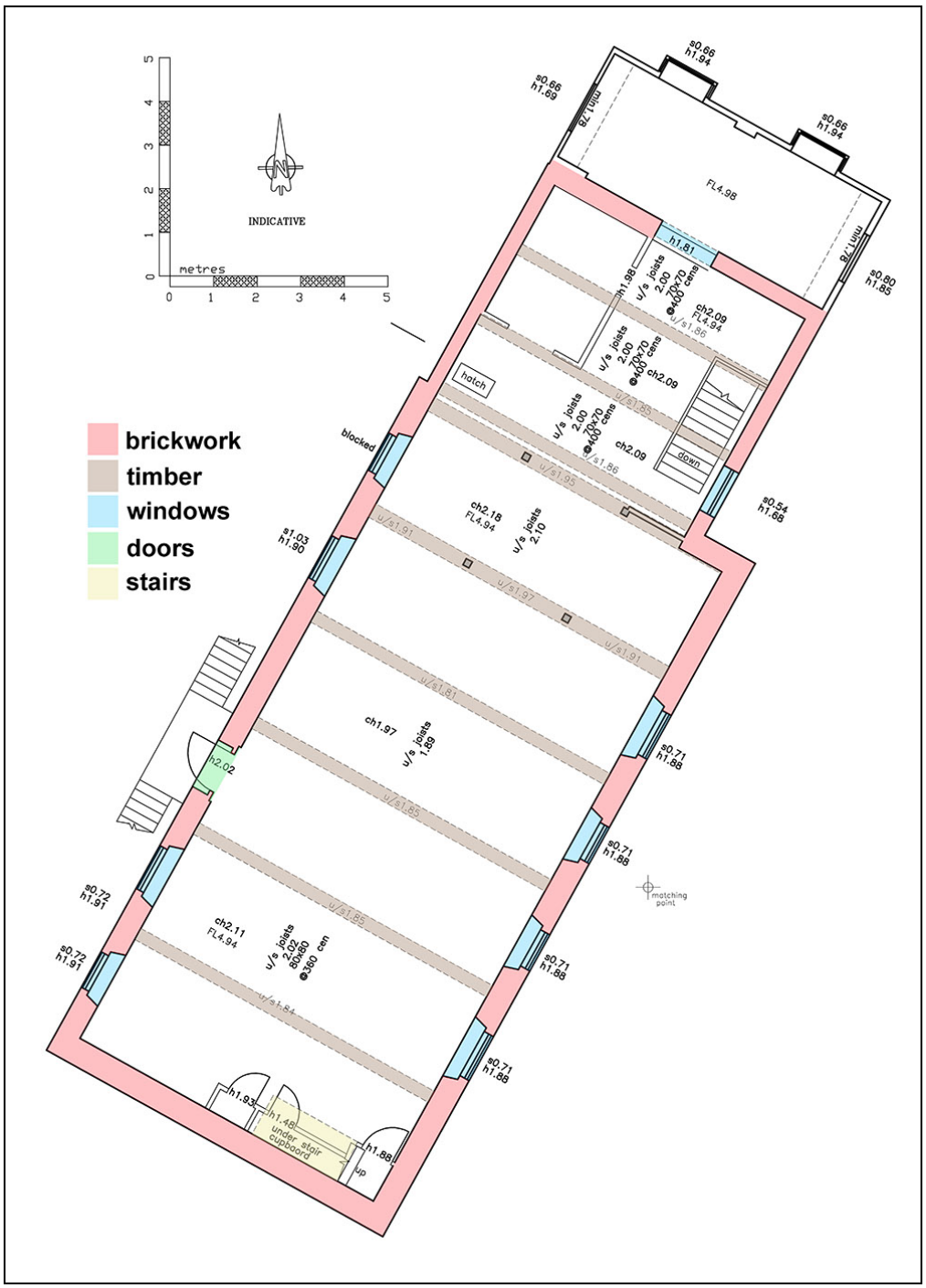

Figure 16 First floor plan of Ashlett Mill showing original features (the stairs are uncertain)

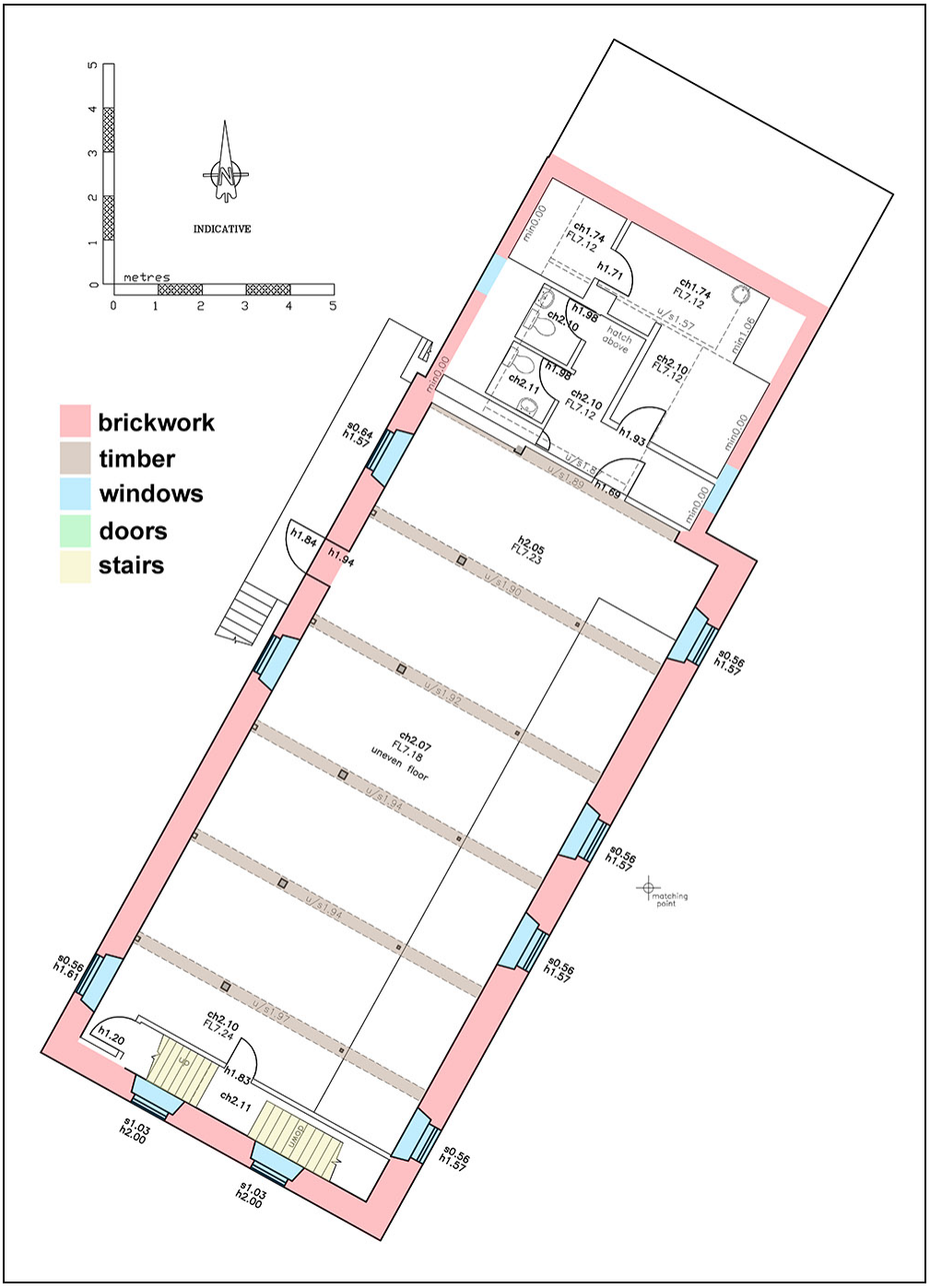

Figure 17 Second floor plan of Ashlett Mill showing original features (the stairs are uncertain)

10. The second floor would probably have held the millstones, said to have been two pairs of stones for each wheel. It is not known which bay they would have been laid within, but it is noticeable that the penultimate bay of each end has no windows to light it, unlike all the others, perhaps marking them out as separate and suggesting a location for the stones. The south-western bay is lit by four windows, two in the south-west wall and one each in the other two. This profusion of lighting may well be linked to the existence of original stairs in the same

location as those existing today. The two central bays were also lit, although the northern of these was by two windows, one in each elevation, while the southern had only one in the seaward side. The north-eastern bay has a single window in each elevation. At this level it is the roof-space of the northern extension that lies off the end of the main building, but it would appear to have been used, since two dormers existed, one on the seaward side in the south-west bay, and the other in the central bay on the pond side. It is possible that stairs ran from top to bottom of this extension in its south-eastern corner, lit by the row of windows one above the other on each floor. The function of this extension as a whole is not clear, but it may have served as offices and/or storage space. Its roof is of similar design to the main building with collars and side purlins, the latter being of triangular cross-section, probably to prevent the build-up of combustible flour dust.

Figure 18 The roof of the northern extension, looking southwest

11. The third floor of the main building lies within the lower part of its roof-space, it is likely to have been the bin floor of the mill. There were originally no windows on this level, save for two in the north gable end and one centrally placed in the south.

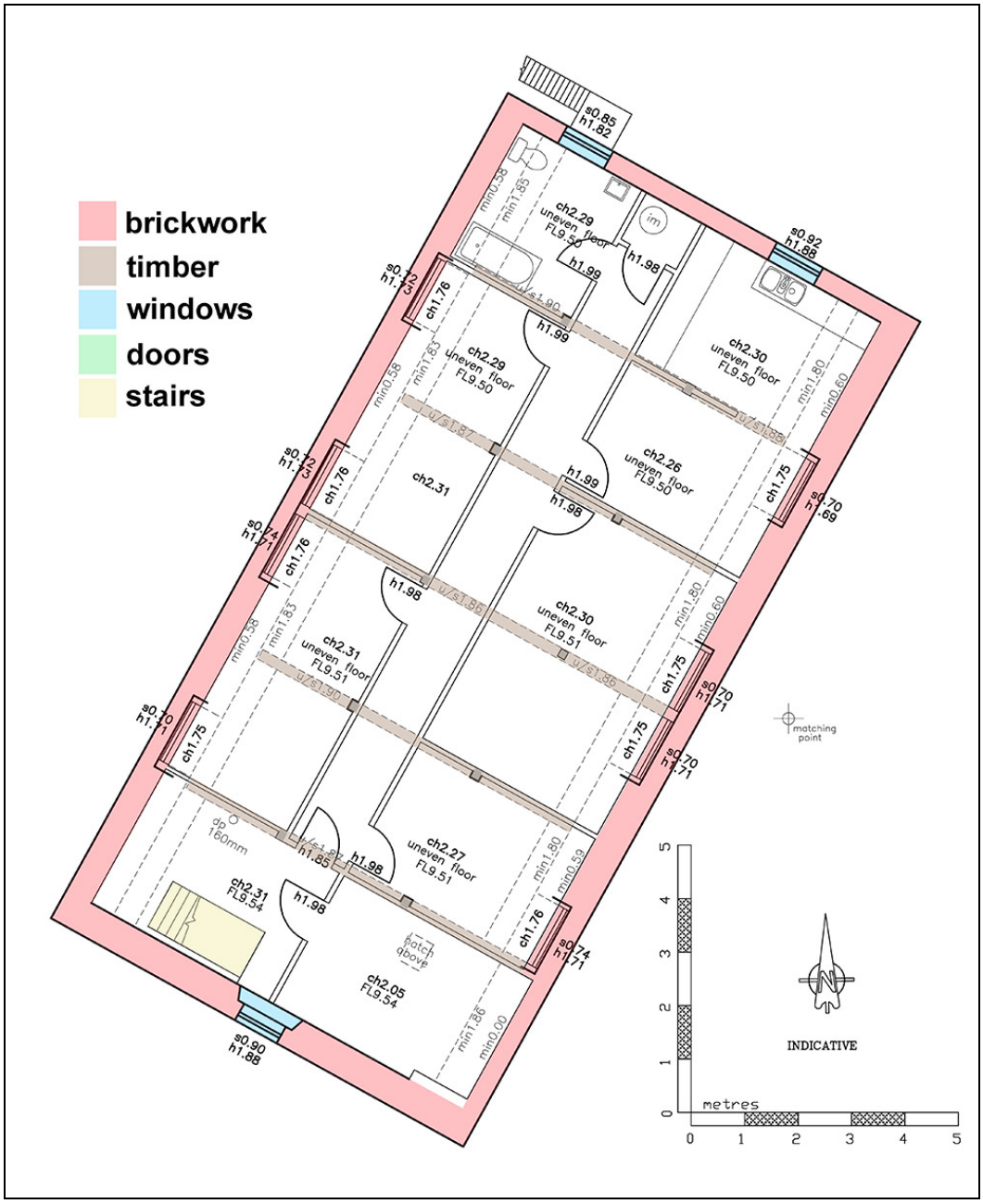

Figure 19 Third floor plan of Ashlett Mill showing original features (the stairs are uncertain)

12. The top floor, set within the upper level of the roof, would seem to have been the hoist floor; indeed it is the only place within the mill where some trace of the original fittings remains, with some of the timbers that once held the hoists still surviving in the north-east half of the roof-space. Evidence for the hatches that must have allowed the hoists to drop down through the floors of the mill is now largely obscured, however a possible infilled hatch is visible in the ceiling of the northern of the central bays on the first floor. The upper attic floor was lit by eight windows, two in the gable ends, and three dormers along each of the long sides, the central ones being slightly off-set to the north to miss the principal rafters. The triangular space between the floor and the

lower part of the roof seems to have been partially separated off by a low-level retaining board along the whole length of the attic. The roof above is constructed with high collars and three tiers of in-line and triangular section side purlins. At the two ends of the roof, these purlins are staggered at a slightly higher level to allow for the half-hipped ends. As with the roof of the northern extension, the purlins are all of triangular section. There are no common rafters between the principals, with the tiles and their battens/cleft laths being supported instead upon sarking boards running from eaves to ridge, possibly again as a way of reducing dust retention.

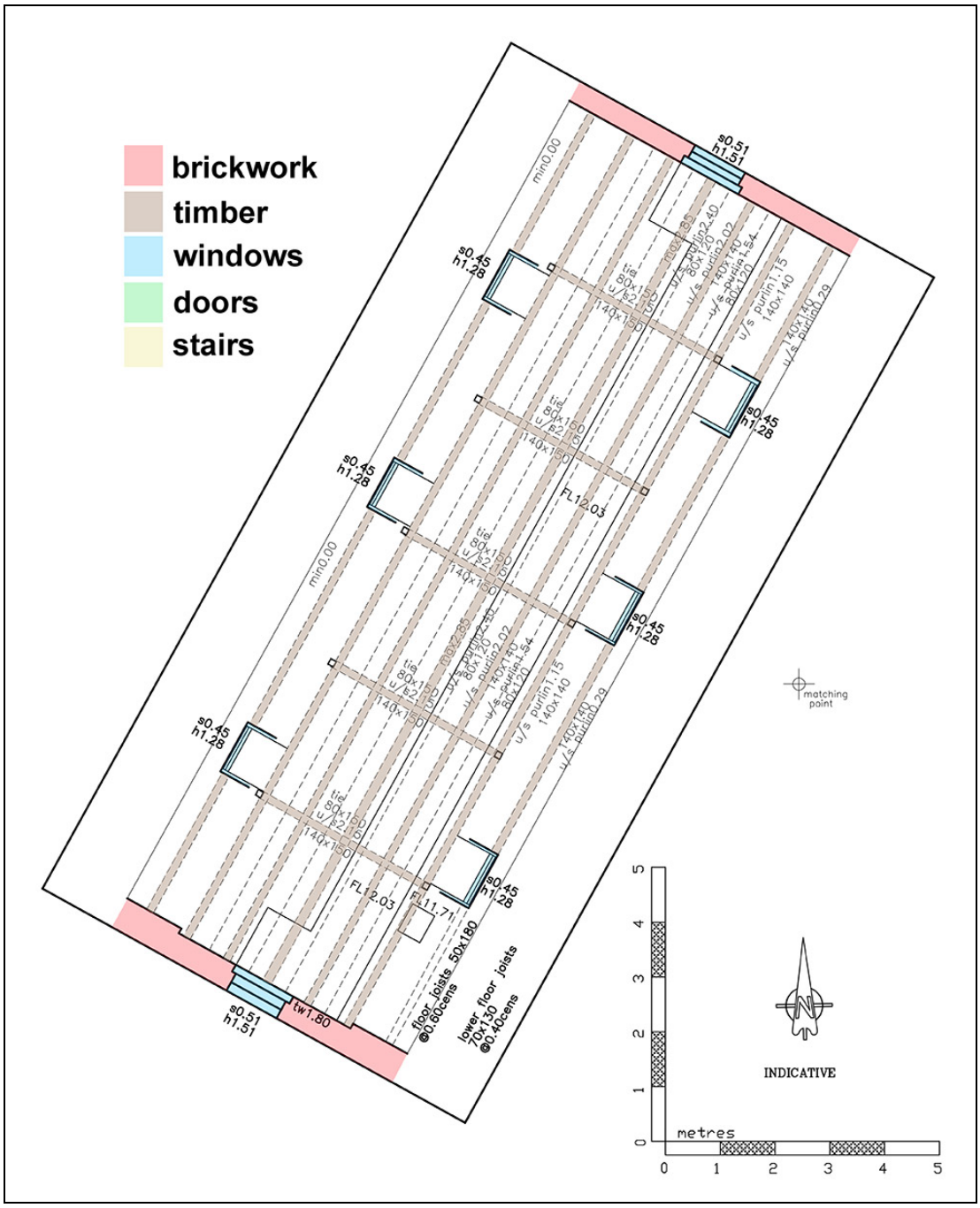

Figure 20 Fourth floor plan of Ashlett Mill showing original features

Figure 21 The remains of the hoist timber in the roof-space of the upper floor, looking north

Figure 22 The location for a possible hatch in the ceiling of the first floor

Figure 23 The evidence for a low-level retaining board in the fourth floor on one of the posts, with a coat of whitewash respecting their position

Figure 24 The roof of the mill, looking north-east

13. Aside from the stripping out of all the internal machinery and fittings, comparatively few significant changes have been made to the building since its initial construction. A number of historic photographs have survived showing Ashlett Mill from the early 20th century onwards. These illustrate the various alterations that have taken place over the course of the past century. There are nine dated photographs of the south-east elevation from *c.*1910, *c.*1920-30, 1952, *c.*1966, 1972, 1978 (x2) and 1992 (x2).

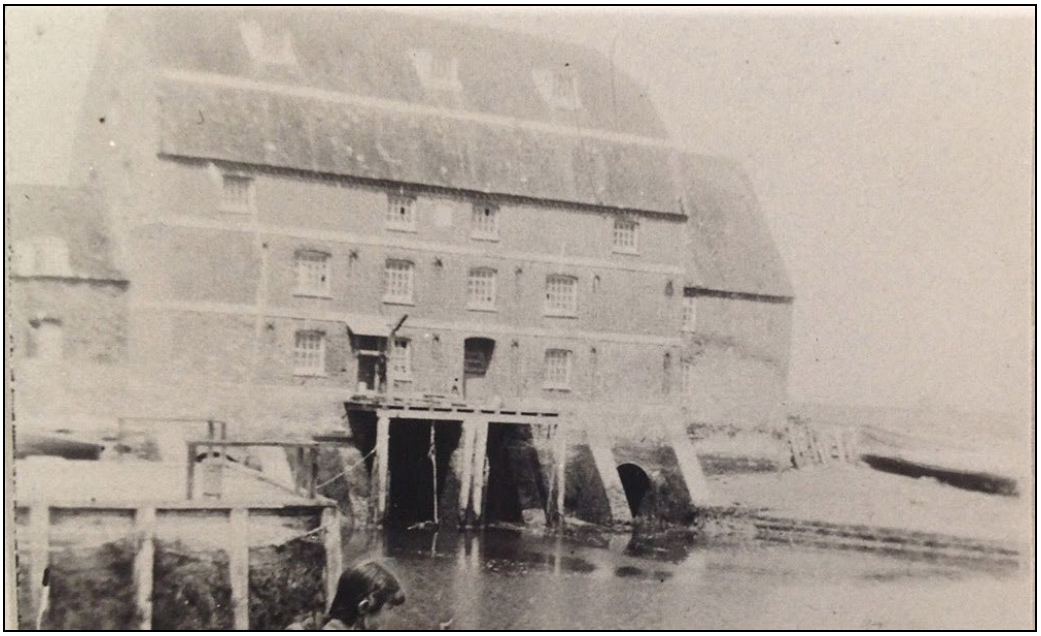

Figure 25 The southeast elevation of Ashlett Mill *c.*1910 (HRO No.70A09/4/48/1)

Figure 26 The southeast elevation of Ashlett Mill in 1952 (HRO No. 65M89/Z300/5)

14. There are comparatively few changes to this elevation between the earliest photo and 1966, when the lower buildings attached to the south-west end of the mill were demolished. The only significant changes appear to be: the blocking up of the outer sluices; the insertion of a new opening between the southernmost windows on the ground floor, presumably to access the attached jetty (this may be linked to the blocking of the early door to the north, as evidenced by the *c*.1910 photograph of this elevation); and the blocking up of the right-hand ground floor window.

15. At a later phase, between 1966 and 1972, a new row of four windows is inserted into the lower roof below the existing three. A more significant phase of development seems to take place between 1972 and 1978, which involved: the addition of a new building at the south-west end of the mill; a brick addition to the northern extension (including the blocking up of some of the earlier windows); the insertion of a window into the blocked up door in the ground floor seaward elevation; the addition of a new ground floor window at the left-hand end of the same elevation; and the complete removal of the jetty.

16. There are three dated photographs of the north-west elevation, from *c*.1910, 1927 and 1952. These again show little change before 1966, although the earliest image has no flight of steps going up to the first floor door, nor the mass of creepers that are seen on the 1927 and 1952 images, and the right hand window on the ground floor has been blocked. The most significant changes happen after 1952, with the addition of a new window on the ground floor to the right of the door and a new door on the second floor, presumably to serve the fire escape added to the elevation in 1965, and the insertion of a matching set of windows in the roof to those added to the south-east elevation in the 1970's. As noted above the other changes are the removal and then replacement of the south-western attached buildings and the extension to the north-western, with the loss of its earlier windows.

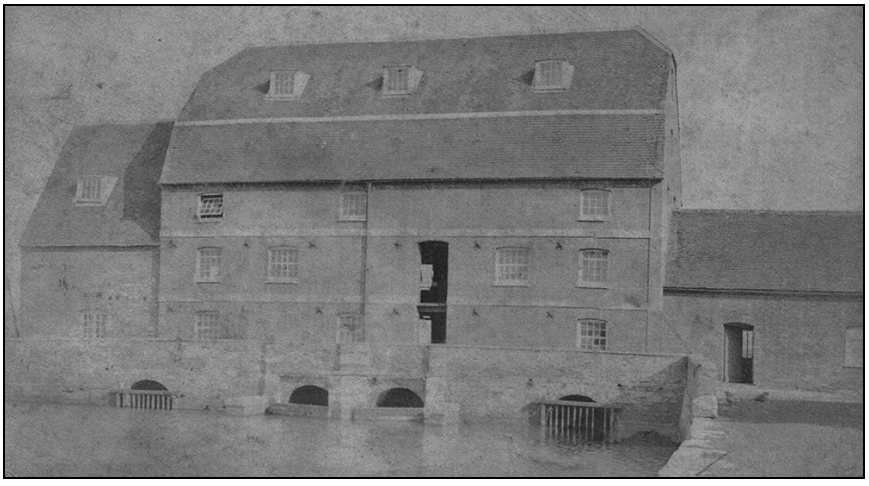

Figure 27 The northwest elevation of Ashlett Mill *c*.1910 (from Ashlett Mill 200: 1816-2016 by Waterside Sports& Social Club)

Figure 28 The northwest elevation of Ashlett Mill in1952 (HRO No.65M89/Z300/4)

17. In addition to the changes outlined above seen on the historic photographs, and probably during the working life of the mill, the internal timbers were painted, first in blue and then using a white limewash or distemper. Also during this phase metal straps were attached to the ends of the transverse beams of the ground and first floor ceilings in order to restrain the external brickwork with large cruciform washers, an operation that might have been linked to settlement evidenced by the dislocation of the stone string courses.

Figure 29 One of the metal straps attached to the transverse beams

Figure 30 Details of one of the large cruciform washers on the exterior brickwork

18. Rows of wrought iron hooks fixed to both slopes of the mansard roof, on the pond and seaward sides, were probably also attached at this time, possibly linked to some sort of display at the time of the Diamond Jubilee in 1897, when the adjoining Victoria Quay was built. After its closure as a mill in the early 20th century, and probably during its use by the oil refinery, it underwent a number of other alterations. A series of what would appear to be vent pipes were added to the external elevations from the ground floor, possibly associated with its use as kitchens and washrooms for the refinery workers, the ground floor being subdivided into smaller spaces. Repairs were carried out to the buttresses and cut-waters on the seaward side, and the northern of the two central sluices was blocked, leaving only one still functioning, controlled by an adjustable sluice on a rack and pinion system. A wooden first floor deck, supported on iron columns, was added to the northern extension, itself then replaced by a larger example using brick columns. Internally a significant number of the oak posts supporting the transverse columns were removed to make way for the snooker tables on the first floor and the shooting range, then skittles alley, on the second floor. Between 1960 and 2017, the roof of the main range was repaired and strengthened with additional purlins added in, and some of the originals replaced. The lower attic was also converted into smaller spaces, with the ceilings being raised above their original level, and the gable windows in the high attic replaced with louvres.

Significance & Recommendations

1. There are twenty-two tide mills recorded in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, of which only six survive as any significant mill structure and only six have control of a tidal pond (Plunkett, p.27). Ashlett Mill fits into these latter two categories, although unlike the neighbouring Eling and Beaulieu mills, it has no surviving internal gearing or machinery. However it does exceed them both in terms of size, with this, and its choice of materials, being indicative of a high quality industrial building, almost certainly erected to take advantage of high grain prices in the years immediately following the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars. Its original external elevations and internal spatial divisions are largely intact and most changes are reasonably legible. Its setting on the causeway enables it to have a large visual impact and positive contribution to the landscape and seascape. Some additional significance is added by its documented associations with Thomas Barney, the boat-builder and inventor Theophilus Smith (who occupied it immediately after its disuse as a mill), and the Atlantic Gulf and West Indies Co (later Esso). Its relative significance as an historic building is reflected in its Grade II Listed status, although its lack of internal workings prevents it sharing the Grade II* rating of Eling Mill.

2. Ashlett Mill has ceased to function as a social club, and a new use is being considered. While originally all five floors of the building were almost certainly open plan, with the possible exception of those areas within the northern extension, currently the ground and third floors are sub-divided as a result of 20th century alterations carried out before the building was Listed. In investigating the options for future re-use, the return of all the floors to the original open-plan design is to be preferred, with the northern extension perhaps utilised should smaller spaces be required. In terms of the external appearance, the removal of the external fire-escape and second floor door on the buildings north-west elevation would be considered a heritage gain, with its replacement with a more simple stair leading to the first floor doorway. Of lesser significance, although also considered a gain, would be the restoration of the original door and window arrangements on the ground floor and the removal of the air conditioning unit on the north-west elevation. Other issues that should be addressed are the structural implications of the removal of the original internal posts on the first and second floors, with their re-instatement being preferred, and the historic settlement of sections of the building, notably at its north-east and south-west ends, as evidenced by drops in the stone string course. A final issue concerns the operation of the sluices, and whether the existing system of only one functioning is adequate for the management of the tidal pond.

Bibliography

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