

# Harefield History Society

Newsletter No. 22

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## GULCHWELL its mill and its houses

I History: by Eileen M. Bowlt

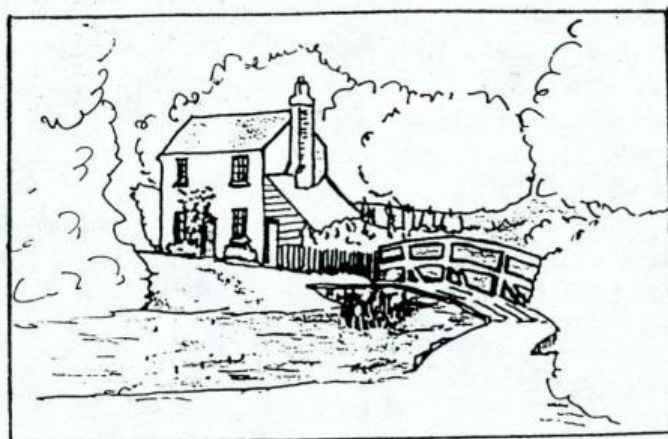
The Springwell area of Harefield was known as Gulchwell in former times. The new name came into use about 1800. Originally a spring or well at this point fed the Colney Stream and was subsequently affected by the canal workings and later quarrying. The plentiful water supply made it a suitable place for a mill. There was certainly one there in 1345 when members of the Ravening family sold Ravenyngmyll to Sir John Swanland<sup>1</sup>. The siting of this mill at Gulchwell is assumed from the continuity of the name and descriptions in later rentals.

There are references to further sales in 1346 and in 1405<sup>2</sup>, when a fishery was associated with it, while a court roll of 1510 gives a clear picture of a 60 acre estate, with a tenement called Ravenings standing near the fulling mill, belonging to Richard Aweedon<sup>3</sup>. The house had a garden, some meadow land and moor, a grove by the road from Drakenford to Harefield, an eyot and "a watercourse in the river leading from the floodgates of the mill, to the water coming from Gulchwell". The land included Le Malme, and (up the hill at the present Hill End) Popes Field, Popes Innings and a lane between Crpses and Popes Innings.

Henry Budbrook took the mill with its fishing rights in 1522. The building was in a decayed state and the new owner was supposed to repair it<sup>3</sup>.

The description of the mill as a fulling mill suggests cloth making in Harefield (neighbouring Rickmansworth was well known as a cloth making centre). Newly woven cloth had to be scoured to remove oil and size. This was done by pounding the cloth with gently falling fulling stocks, operated by water power. After drying and the removal of any knots or burrs, the cloth was returned to the mill to be laid in soapy water and fullled again to thicken and shrink it. The cloth was dried outside, stretched on tenter frames, held in place by tenter hooks (hence the common expression "to be on tenter hooks"). Although references to the fulling mill cease after 1636, the tenter frames were remembered in the field name Tenter Meadow, found at Gulchwell in Old Enclosure 24 on the Enclosure map of 1813 (see Map 2).

Ravenings house and mill were not, however, the only buildings at Gulchwell. Guybbs "by the fulling mill" appears in a court roll of 1522 when it was sold to George and Juliana Cooke<sup>4</sup>. In a rental of 1546, what appears to be the same house is called Gapes "hard by



Drayton Ford near Springwell with footbridge over River Colne at the county boundary. A road bridge was built circa 1912.

the fulling mill"<sup>5</sup> and in 17th century court rolls it is usually referred to as "Gapes or Gybbs" (by the end of the century the name Gulchwell was also used)<sup>6</sup>. The land on which the fulling mill was built, plus its fishing rights, were part of Gapes/Gibbs by 1636<sup>6</sup>.

Le Malme was one of the fields belonging to Ravenings. A rental of 1636 speaks of "a little cottage lately erected on Malme"<sup>7</sup>. It had probably been erected by John Lea about 10 years earlier and was very likely a two-bayed timber-framed house similar to other small cottages which still stood near Cripps Farm and at Hill End within living memory.

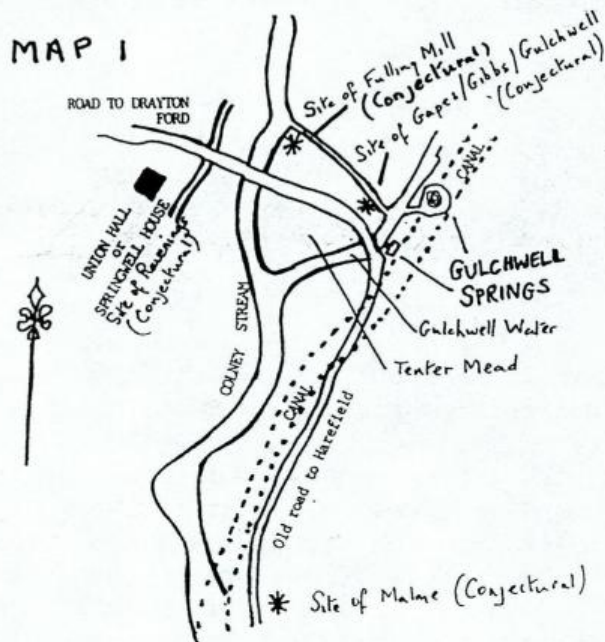
In 1636 John and Ann Weedon (the preceding A had been lost over the centuries) had recently sold Ravenings to Levy and Joanne Sparks (who also had Malme) and Gapes or Gibbs to Robert and Martha Summerfield<sup>8</sup>. George Wingfield acquired Gapes/Gibbs and Malme before the end of the 17th century<sup>9</sup> and the Gapes/Gibbs house was probably pulled down during his ownership (but after 1699). When Hannah Wingfield died in 1777, Malme was the only one of these two messuages left standing<sup>10</sup>.

Ravenings had many different owners after the Sparks and was finally bought by James Hunt in 1767<sup>11</sup>. Whether there was still a house on the site is not clear, but Hunt bought Malme and the Gapes/Gibbs site as well from Hannah Wingfield's great-nephew in 1780<sup>12</sup> and proceeded to build himself a new house named Union Hall. He prudently insured his new house with the Sun Fire Insurance Company at Michaelmas 1782 and from the policy we learn that it was built of brick with a tiled roof and had timber and tiled barn, stable and outbuildings<sup>13</sup>.

Union Hall is shown on plans drawn up in 1797 to illustrate sales of nearby land to the Grand Junction Canal Company, and again on a map dated 1805 in the

Middlesex Deeds Registry, by which time it had been given a more attractive name, Springwell Place. The house did not survive for very long, however, (could it have caught fire?) as Old Enclosure 11 on the Enclosure map shows an empty piece of land marked "Scite of Springwell House".

Nothing really is known about the demise of the house. James Hunt died in 1791 leaving his estate in trust for John Liptrap Esq., of Mile End Road. In 1794 he and his wife sold it to Alexander Ross Esq. of Harley Street, a banker and army agent. When Mr Ross and his partner became bankrupt in about 1805, all his property was taken up by Robert George Spedding of the Mines Royal Coppermills <sup>14</sup>. He still owned the land, including the empty site of Union Hall/Springwell House in 1813.



Based on maps of circa 1797 in Deeds Room of British Waterways, Willow Garage, Watford.

II Speculation: by Elona Cuthbertson

Where exactly were the three old farms and the fulling mill, none of which survives today? The manor court records tend to fossilize old names, which had mostly gone out of popular use by the time of the 1813 Enclosure map, but here is some of the evidence, leading to various tentative conclusions.

**RAVENINGS** Though manor court records suggest that Union Hall/Springwell House might have been built on Malme, the Middlesex Deeds Registry <sup>14</sup> gives Ravenings as the site, and this seems more likely. A survey of the area in 1699 <sup>15</sup> does strongly suggest that, starting from the vicinity of Drayton Ford, Ravenings was to the west of the Colney Stream. The dotted area of 22+ acres on Map 2 is much the same size as the 23 acres belonging to Ravenings in 1636 (Malme excluded) by which time the estate had contracted and seems to have been concentrated in the vicinity of Ravenings Moor, which was to the south of Woodwicks Weir <sup>16</sup>. A bridge linked the Tenter Mead with the lands of Ravenings and was in disrepair circa 1526 <sup>17</sup>.

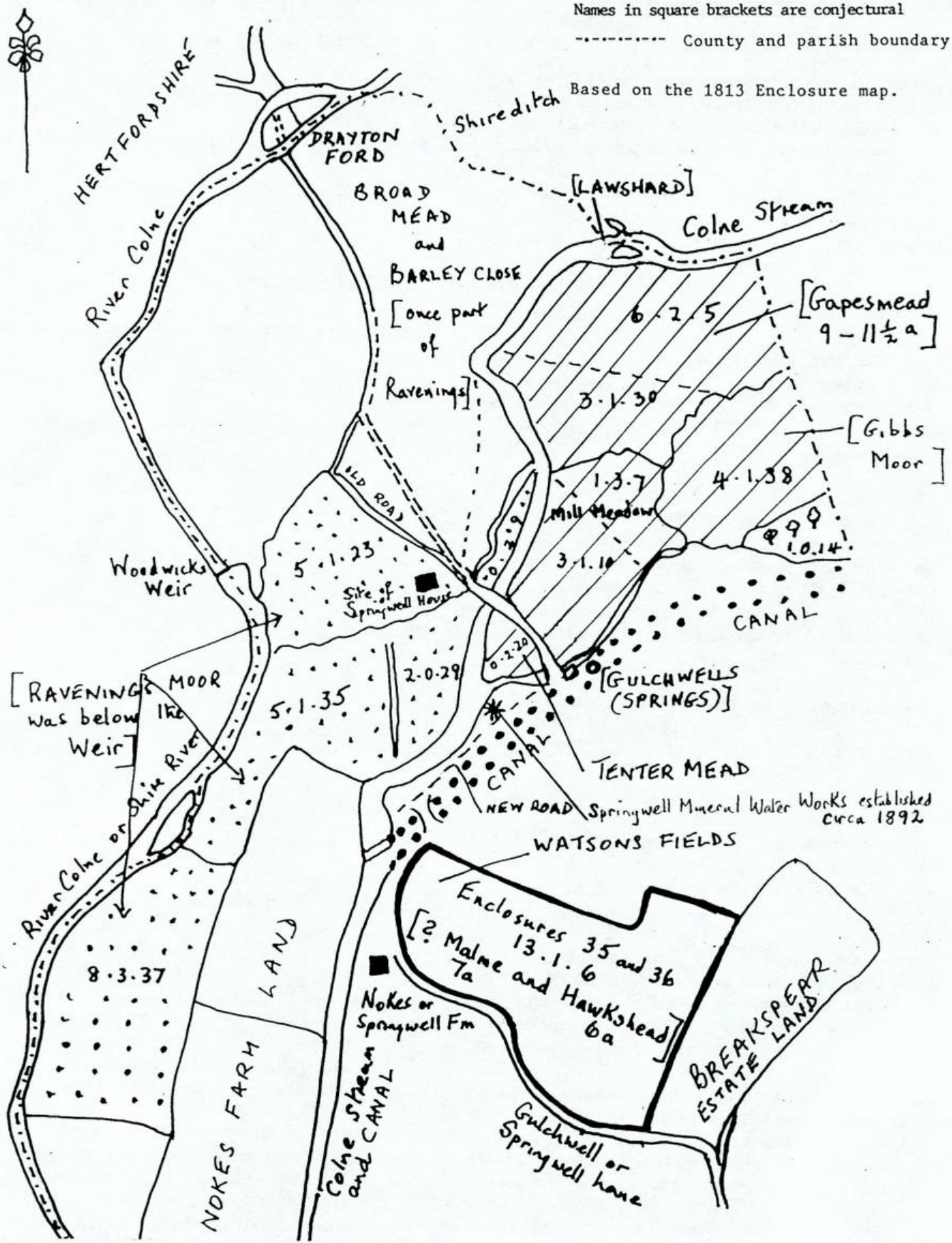
**THE FULLING MILL** Probably on the east bank of the Colney Stream, adjoining the Tenter Mead. According to manor court records, the mill had fishing rights in the Colney Stream from Lawshard (see Map 2) southwards; Ravenings had rights over the same stretch - from the opposite bank perhaps. Map 1 shows a small watercourse from Gulchwell to the Colney Stream which might have powered the fulling mill, but the floodgates of the mill seem to have been at Lawshard near the island <sup>18</sup>, so maybe the larger stream (which must have altered over the centuries) provided the motive force.

**GAPES/GIBBS/GULCHWELL** This farm was next to the Fulling Mill and in the triangle between the Colney Stream and Gulchwell Water. The 1699 survey indicates that it was south of Gapes Mead (Map 2) and that a meadow adjoining Gapes Mead belonged to the farm (this would be Mill Meadow, also on Map 2). The farmhouse was near Gulchwell edge. Though the 1813 Enclosure award says that Mill Meadow was previously known as Malme, this seems unlikely: the acreage between Gulchwell Water and the Colney Stream more or less tallies with that given for Gapes Mead plus the Gulchwell farmlands in earlier times, so Malme must have been elsewhere, not in hatched area.

**MALME** Two sites for this farm have already been suggested. Here is a third proposal: Watsons Fields, near Noakes/Springwell Farm (Map 2). The 1699 survey mentions (on 23.9.1699) the yard of Malme, then in the tenancy of John Branch, in association with a) Noakes b) a meadow belonging to the Ashbys of Breakspears and c) the river. Rocque's map of 1754, admittedly not at its best in this part of the parish, shows buildings here just to the north of Noakes/Springwell Farm. In 1771 James Hunt (see paragraph 2 above), already the owner of Ravenings, had acquired 6 acres called Hawksherd or Hawkshhead to which, later, he added other holdings including Malme <sup>19</sup>. Among the lands which Mr Spedding of the Coppermills obtained from the bankrupt Alexander Ross (see above) were Malme, 7a, and Hawkshhead, 6a <sup>20</sup>. These 13 acres could be the fields numbered 35 and 36 on the Enclosure map (see Map 2) which were still Spedding's in 1813. By this time Enclosure 35 was known as Watsons Fields, a name which it may have acquired from Richard Watson, tenant of Malme in 1723 <sup>21</sup>.

The field name Malme bears a close resemblance to Maum or Malm Field, also in Harefield and also on the steep eastern slope of the Colne Valley, but south of Jack's Lock. Malm or maum (there are numerous spellings) could refer to the soil type, chalky loam, which would fit the bill for the possible site of Malme (Enclosure 35-36) as well as Malm Field further south.

**REFERENCES** 1) Victoria County History 2) Public Record Office CP 25 (1) 151 33 33 3) Greater London R.O. Acc 1085 M54 4) Ibid M11 5) Ibid EF2 6) Ibid EM3 7) Ibid 8) Ibid 9) Ibid EM3 10) Ibid M67 11) Ibid 12) Ibid 13) Guildhall Library 14) GLRO MDR 1807 4 601 15) Acc 1085 EM11 16) Ibid EM3 17) Ibid M55 18) Ibid M54, EM3, EM11 19) Ibid M67 20) Ibid M45 21) Ibid EFB



**SPRINGWELL TODAY** The Gulchwell Stream runs in a gully parallel to, but below the level of the canal tompath, and goes under a road bridge before it joins the Colney Stream (the 6 inch Ordnance Survey, 2nd edition, 1899, shows a ford at this point). The Springwell Mineral Water Works established in the 1890s by the owner of Harefield Grove (see article in "Here and There in Harefield") had buildings on the site marked \* on Map 2. Currently there are industrial buildings north of the road on the putative sites of Gapes/Gibbs/Gulchwell and the Fulling Mill, while buildings on the Tenter Meadow have recently been demolished - Franklins Mineral Waters of Rickmansworth had a bottling plant here. Gapes Mead is now part of Stockers Lake. A footpath for use by the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust runs alongside the Colne Stream and leads to the island near Lawshard. The Shire Ditch is dry but is marked by a county boundary post. The sloping fields north of Springwell/Noakes Farm have been eradicated by chalk quarrying.

PROGRAMME 1990/91

John Wise presumably had high hopes when he agreed with Sir Roger Newdigate's steward to take Brackenbury Farm from Ladyday (25th March) 1765 on a seven years lease. This was twenty one years before the present Harefield Place was built and, having no house in Harefield at the time, Sir Roger himself stayed at Brackenbury on his visits to the parish. In fact the lease specified that he should have the use of the kitchen, two bedchambers and garrets over them, a lock-up bedchamber, a cellar and stabling for horses reserved for him "when required".

John Wise paid £126 per annum for 112 acres and was allowed to keep the muck, one six inch wheel cart, two stray horses and the Gypsy Teammaster (who would supply teams of agricultural workers when needed). He had to lay two loads of dung for each load of hay carried off.

John's hopes were not realised, however, for on Thursday 16th February 1769 (about five weeks before his rent fell due) John ran away with one of his horses, and two men with a cart came about midnight and took away "the best part of his goods, his two best cows, the other horse and his wife". They paid the maid her wages and on taking leave of the girl said "she would never see them more".

A sad little story. One wonders where they went.

Source: GLRD Acc 1085 EF16 Eileen M. Bowlt

Swan Upping

You will remember the recent talk which Captain Turk, the Queen's swan upper, gave to the History Society. In the 17th century many wealthy people laid claim to swans, among them the Dowager Countess of Derby, living at Harefield. According to her account book (in the Huntington Library, California) her Clerk went swan upping in the summer of 1634. At the end of August he was paid for "Upping my La: Game of Swans" in Hertfordshire (a "game" was a flock of swans); the task must have taken three days since he claimed expenses for himself and his horse for this period. He also went swan upping at Staines on the Thames on Lady Derby's behalf. Lady Derby had swans in her park at Harefield; their wings would have been clipped to prevent them from flying away. These swans were regularly fed with oats. There were extra rations for swans being fattened up for the table. Clearly these handsome birds were a luxury item on the menu, and they seem to have been reserved for grander occasions when nobility was being entertained, or festivities such as New Year. During the course of 1634-5 Lady Derby received several swans - live birds presumably - as presents; they included "a cupple of signettes" and two white swans. Finally, there was one curious item in the household accounts: a certain Mr Burwood was paid £2 per annum for "tewneing" the swans. I'm not sure what this means - in spite of consulting the Oxford Dictionary! Elona Cuthbertson

Summer Visits 1990

Saturday 9 June	Hatfield House	Depart 12 noon
Saturday 21 July	Woodstock & Blenheim	9.00 am
Saturday 15 Sept	City of Gloucester	8.30 am

Autumn/Winter Meetings 1990/1

Mon 24 Sept	Latest Developments at the Chiltern Open Air Museum Speaker to be advised
Mon 22 Oct	A Miscellany of British Medals Roland Buggey
Mon 26 Nov	William Morris Margaret Simister
Mon 28 Jan	Eton College T.P Conner
Mon 25 Feb	The Work of the Colne Valley Park Groundwork Trust Speaker to be advised
Mon 25 March	Harefield Scrapbook Lorraine Piercy
Mon 22 April	Annual General Meeting Conservation Reports
Mon 27 May	Social Evening

Enquiries about the summer visits to the Programme Secretary, June Norris, 30 Milne Way, TEL 822692.

AN INVITATION

The Friends of the County of Middlesex invite members of the History Society to a Cheese and Wine evening to be held on Thursday 24th May at St Mary's Church Hall - The Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust will also be contributing. Time 7pm - but please check.

Local History Conference

The annual local history conference at the Winston Churchill Hall in Ruislip, organised by our Society (principally by Val Woodward and Lorraine Piercy), was a great success despite two major last minute alarms and excursions. We enjoyed a variety of lively and stimulating contributions, interesting displays and book stalls. Harefield's anthology "The Village School" which Pat Ashby compiled from local records and reminiscences - and other sources - was specially well received. Congratulations to all concerned - not forgetting our caterers who gave the lucky speakers a really nice lunch, and the team serving so many teas and coffees.