MANEY WINDMILL

By KEN WILLIAMS

But for a document drawn up in the year 1309, it is unlikely that we would have known a windmill ever stood at Maney, in Sutton Coldfield.

Dugdale, in his “Antiquities of Warwickshire”, written in 1730, quotes from the document in Latin, and Miss Bracken translates it for us in her book, the "History of the Forest and Chase of Sutton Coldfield”, which was published in 1860.

The document was drawn up in the third year of the reign of Edward 11, at a Court Leet and Court Baron, by a Jury under oath, setting out the ancient customs of the manor.

From this document we learn that the customary tenants of Sutton Coldfield were forced to have all their corn ground at the lords watermill, so long as it was in repair for grinding. The penalty for failure to do so was to forfeit the whole of their corn. The Tenants of Maney, Wyndley and Wigula (Wylde Green) were obliged to use the lords windmill at Maney.

This is the first and only authentic reference to the lords windmill that we have. Unfortunately the document doesn’t tell us what type of windmill it was, or exactly where it stood, except that it was at Maney.

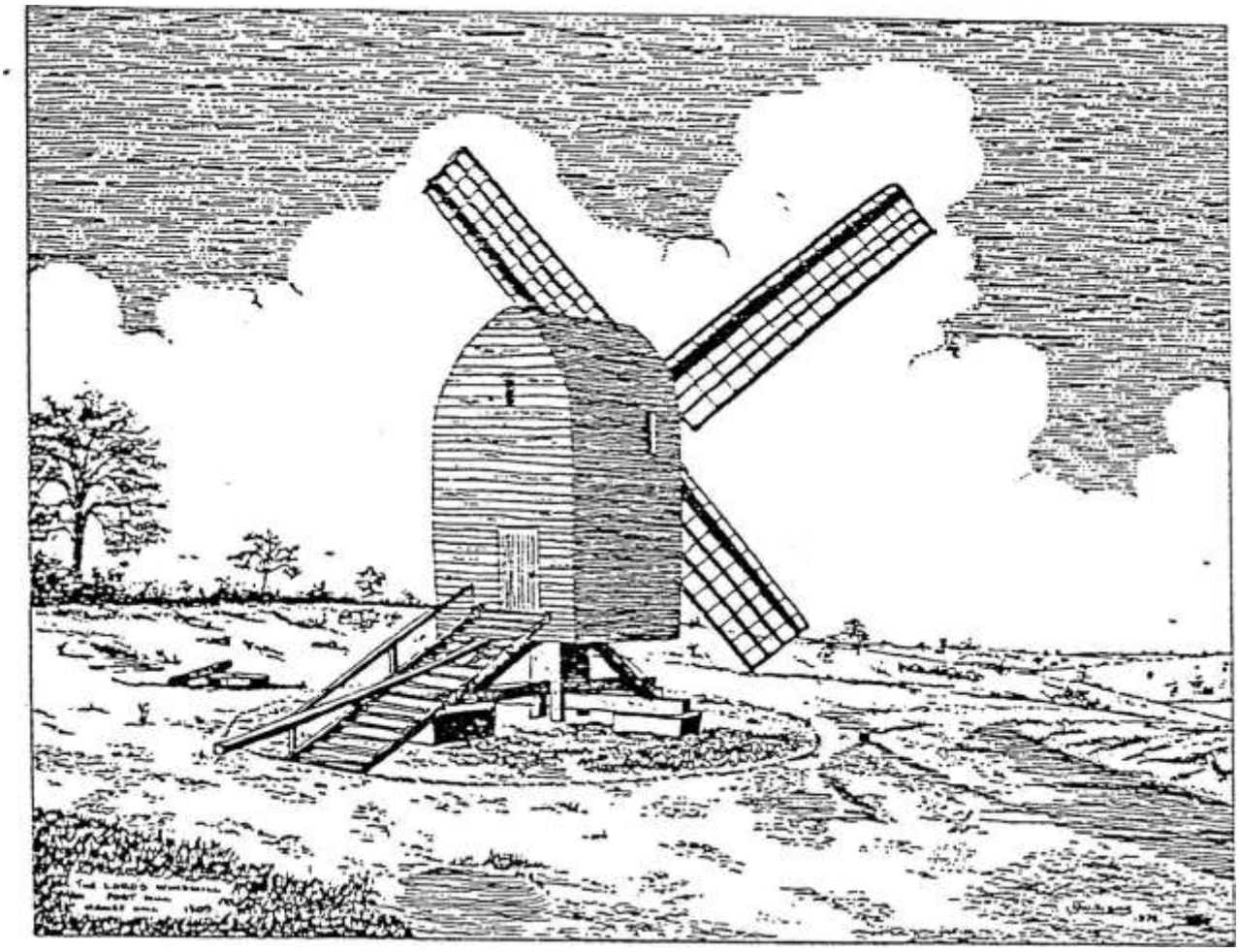
From the study of windmills and from an event that took place in the year 1853, we are able to conclusively identify the type of windmill and its approximate site at Maney.

Windmills are thought to have been introduced into England during the Crusades in the 12th century. The earliest record of a windmill is in the year 1185, in Yorkshire. Another in 1191 was mentioned in the "Chronicles of Joceylyn De Brakelow" as having been built by Dean Herbert at Bury St. Edmonds.

Both of these windmills were Post Mills. This was first type of windmill in England. The body, or Buck, of a Post Mill was constructed entirely of wood. It was suspended on a large upright wooden post ran up through the Buck and on which it pivoted, allowing it to turn, for its sails to face the wind.

This upright post, called the Main Post, rested on the middle of two large crossed beams, known as Cross Trees, and was held upright by four diagonally inclined Quarter Bars, the ends of which are secured to the Cross Trees.

If the Cross Trees were allowed to lie on the they would soon rot so they would be raised off the ground and their ends rested on large stone blocks called Pier Stones. The life of the Cross Trees would thus be prolonged the air being allowed to circulate underneath.



Access to a Post Mi11 was gained by a wooden staircase at the rear, where also a Long pole protruded. This was known as the Tail Pole, and it was with this Tail Pole that the miller was able to turn the windmill to face its sails into the wind.

The next type of windmill to appear on the scene was the Tower Mill. The body of this mill was made of stone, and its sails set in a rotating cap on top of the mill.

The third type of mill to be introduced was the Smock Mill, so called because it's shape resembled a smock, which was a garment worn over the centuries by the poorer classes. This mill was constructed of wood and was fixed to the ground and, like the Tower Mill, its sails were fixed to its cap.

Both the Tower and Smock mills were introduced into England in the 17th century.

As Maney windmill was operating during the 14th century before either the Tower or Smock mills were known in England, then it could have only been a Post Mill.

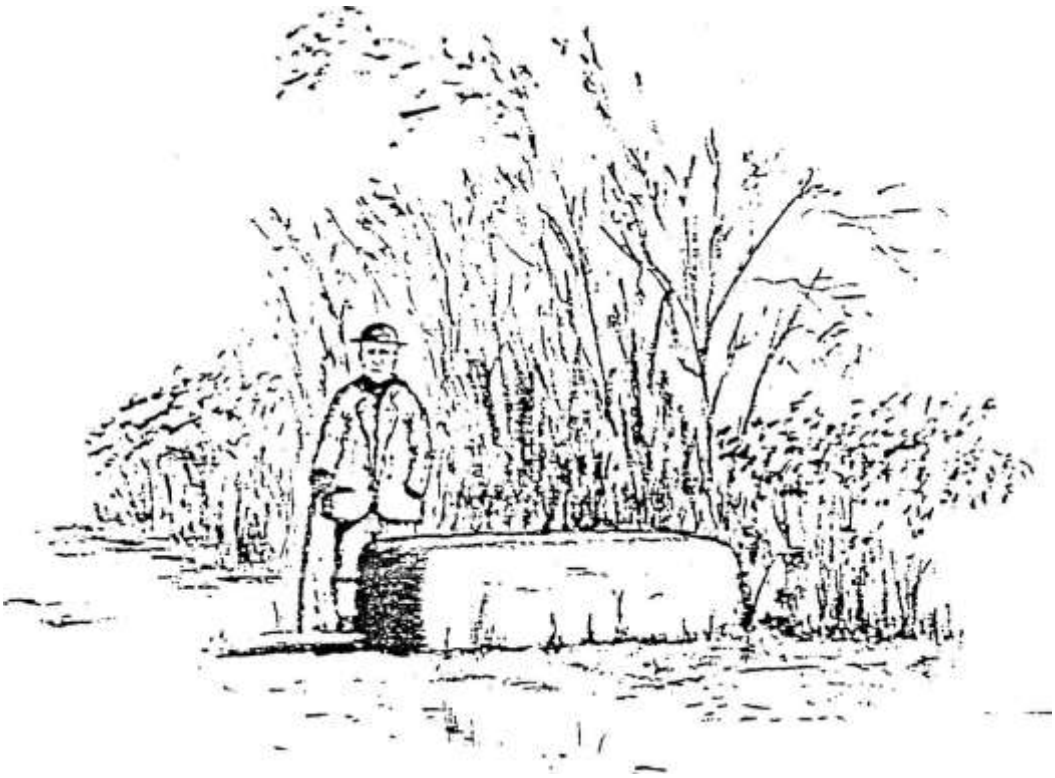
The Victoria County History of Warwickshire, quoting from Dugdale says, “Tradition maintained that from the time of King Athelston (c895—939) there has been a watermill in the manor of Sutton and a windmill in Maney”. Both belonged to the lord of the manor.

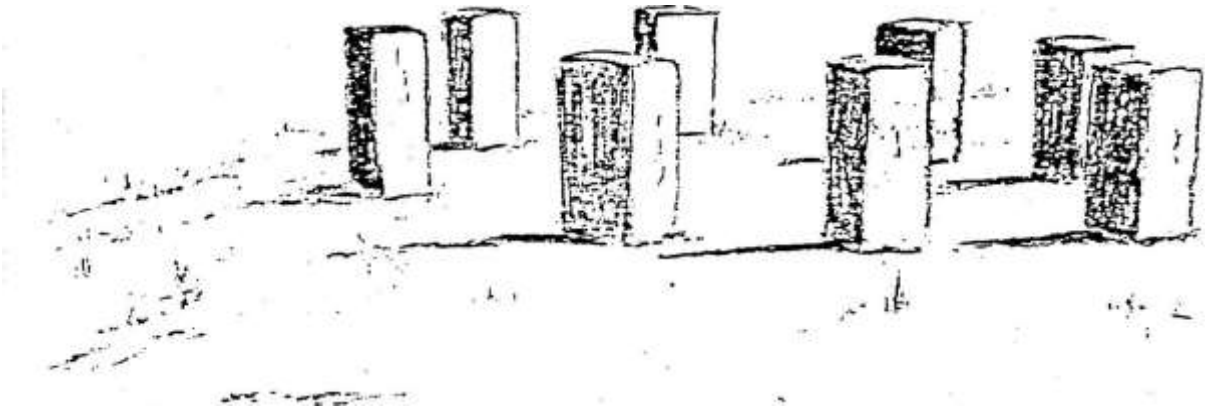
Whilst it is possible there could have been a watermill in Sutton at that time, it was much too early for windmills, as these were to come later during the 12th century.

It is because wood is not so durable as stone that Sutton's windmill disappeared from the scene so long ago. No remains of it have ever been found, nor does it appear on any maps of Sutton, unlike the lord's watermill which still existed towards the end of the 18th century and was recorded on maps of that time

Miss Bracken, however, recorded an incident that occurred in the year 1853, which she considered supported her theory that Druids had operated on Maney Hill, and which she also thought had a bearing on the origin of the name Maney.

> "Maney Hill has a name suggestive not only of the early working of its stone quarries, but that on its head were probably stones (Menei. Br.) arranged in a circle for Druids or their harmless successors, the British Bards.
>
> The latter held Convocations termed 'Gorsed' or 'Assembly', within a circle, around which upright stones were placed. The Bards, having laid a sword in the centre, proclaimed themselves men of peace and recited their poems.
>
> As well as the fact that in the year 1853 a large stone was turned of the hedgerow on the hill. It measured five feet in length and about two feet in width and thickness and was of a hard grained substance, apparently limestone or trap, but unfortunately it was broken up for the roads before its nature could be ascertained. It was worn and retained no marks of a tool."





The large stone described by Miss Bracken as having been discovered in a hedgerow on Maney Hill, was a 'pier stone', the sole survivor of four pier stones on which the ancient mediaeval Post Mill had stood and which lifted it off the ground.

In his book "Windmills and Millwrighting" published in 1957, Stanley Freese explained how Post Mills were mounted on four piers of stone which measured five feet in length, two feet wide and from two feet high. He also added that the piers must be of good quality, a cracked or crumbling stone would endanger the whole structure.

The stone, described by Miss Bracken, fitted exactly the description given by Stanley Freese in 1957, of a pier stone. Conclusive evidence that the windmill at Maney had been a Post Mill and that it had stood on Maney Hill.

That the stone was of good Quality is borne out by it having survived on Maney Hill for at least 544 years, until the year 1853, when having been discovered, it was, regrettably, broken up for the roads.

Just how long the Post Mill stood on Maney Hill is not certain, but we do know that by the year 1583 it was no longer there, for the earliest map of Sutton Coldfield dated 1583, held by the Public Record Office in London does not show the windmill.

The origins of the name 'Maney', have long thought to have been associated with the Druids and Druid Stones. It was Miss Bracken who suggested that the name Maney may have been derived from the word 'Menei', meaning stones.

Stones, however, may have had a bearing on the origin of the name Maney, but not the sort that Miss Bracken had in mind. In fact the name may well have been more associated with the mediaeval windmill and the operation of dressing the millstones.

The face of a millstone has a regular pattern of furrows cut into it which run from the centre outwards. It is through these furrows that the corn escapes in the form of flour after having been ground.

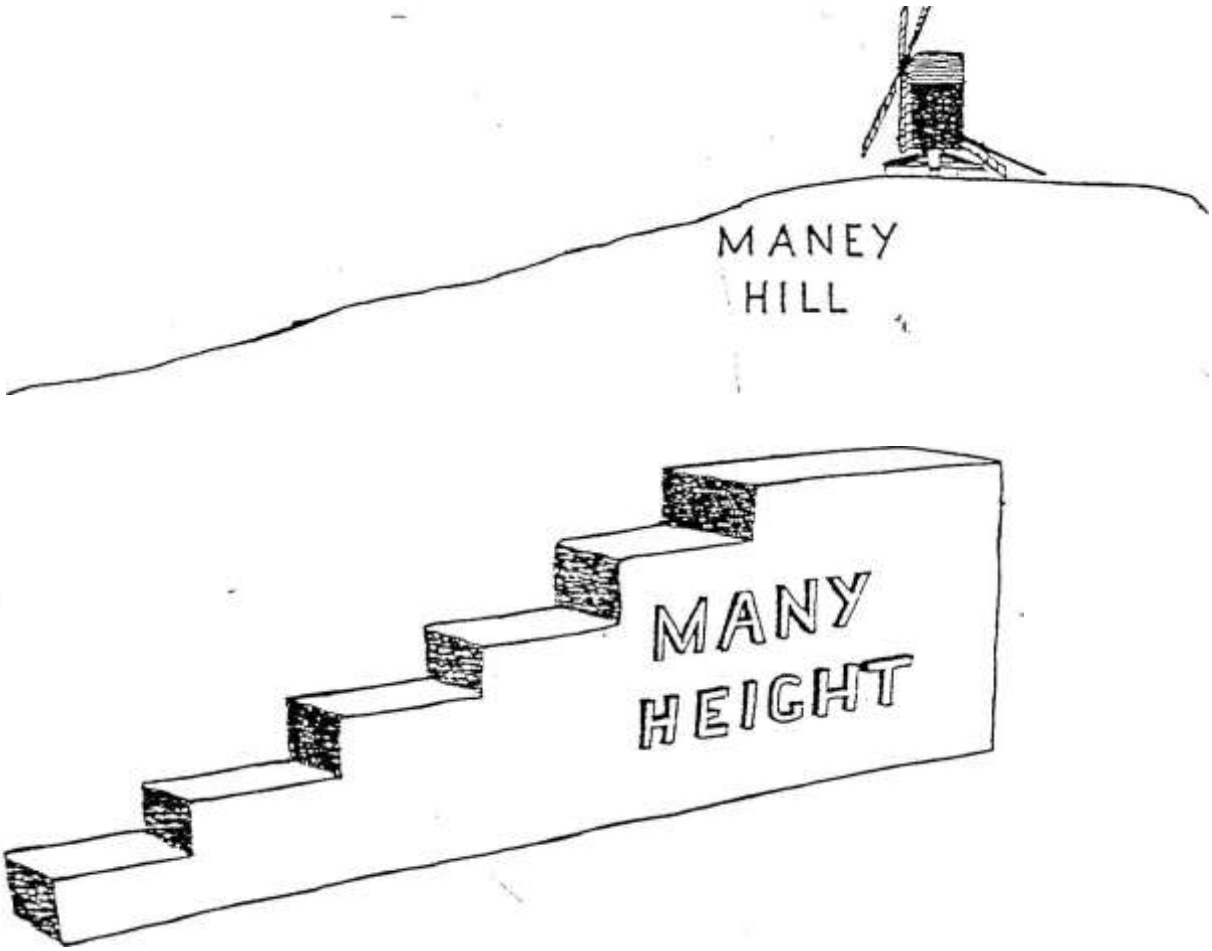
After being in use for a time, the face of the millstone wears down and the furrows need re—cutting, or 'dressing.'

It is during the operation of dressing the stones a certain tool has to be used, the name of which has such a striking similarity to the name Maney, as to suggest that, perhaps, it is from this, that Maney Hill derived its name.

First the millstones must be separated. They are extremely heavy and special tools must be used to prise them apart.

The Millwright inserts a crowbar between the millstones and prises them slightly apart. He then places the narrow end of a stepped wedge shaped piece of wood between to keep them apart. He repeats the operation, inserting the stepped piece of wood until the millstones are sufficiently apart to allow a rope to be passed through the eye of the top, or Runner Stone, which is then lifted away using the Sack Hoist machinery.

The interesting part of this operation is the stepped piece of wood used to keep the millstones apart. This is called a "Many Height", the shape of which resembles a hill in miniature, and its name so similar to that of Maney Hill, that perhaps, it could be suggested Maney Hill took its name from "Many Height". It is not unusual for roads to be named after mills or even parts of the working machinery. An example being Netherstone Road at Hill Hook, a Netherstone being the top or Runner Stone used to grind the corn.



Of the four Pier Stones on which the Post Mill stood, only one is known to have survived, until it was found in the year 1853. It was because no one knew of its association with the lord of the Manor's Post Mill, that it was broken up and used for the roads. The other three Pier Stones may have shared a similar fate, or perhaps, have been incorporated in a building or wall. Maybe one or two of them lie buried somewhere on Maney Hill.

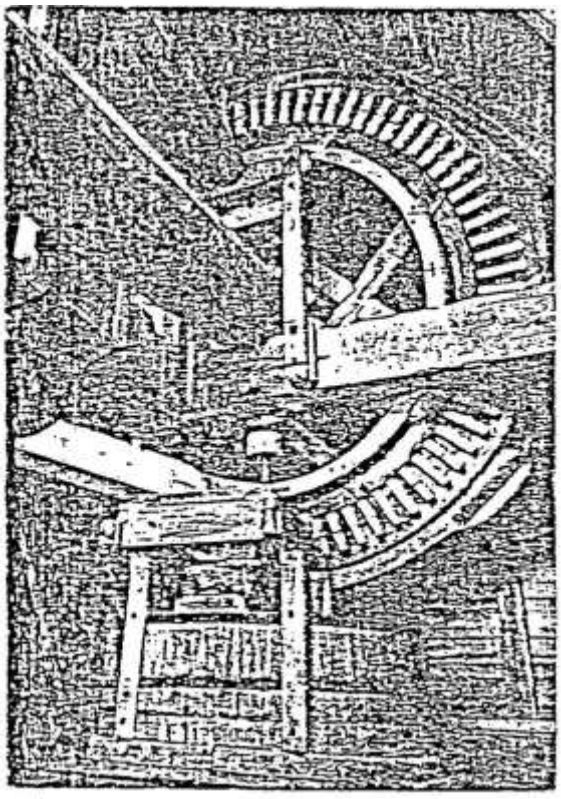
There is always the possibility that one or more might come to light in the structure of some old Sutton building. Hill Hook Mill site was recently excavated and in the wheel pit a stone of very similar proportions to a Pier Stone was seen. This was a block of stone on which the end of the water wheel axle shaft rested. As it had to take the full weight of the wheel and cast iron axle then it was required to be of a very hard and durable stone. The site has now been filled in hiding the stone from view. It is doubtful whether it will be excavated again.

When millstones wear out, millers would usually put them to some use. They are made into steps, footpaths and a variety of other uses. Worn out millstones are often found in the close vicinity of the mill, so it is possible that there may be some lying under the ground at Maney.

Regrettably little is known of the lord's windmill on Maney Hill, other than that contained in the document dated 1309, and the fact that we have been able to identify it as a Post Mill. Unlike most of the other Sutton mills we do not have the name of any millers who operated it.

From our knowledge of windmills, we can picture what Maney Hill Post Mill looked like, for most Post Mills were similar in shape. We can also imagine how it operated.

A good example of a local Post Mill can be found at Avoncroft museum, Bromsgrove, although the bottom section of their Post Mill is enclosed with a 'Round House', inside of which can be seen the Main Post, Cross Trees and Quarter Bars. Its four 'Piers' on which the ends of its Quarter Bars rest, consist of brick unlike Maney windmill which would have been large stone blocks — and these are raised high enough for the Round House to be built.



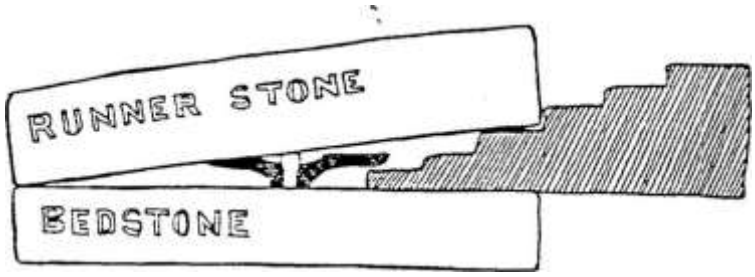
The Brakewheel and Millstones in the Post Mill at Avoncroft, Bromsgrove.

Maney Post Mill had its base or Trestle open and exposed and not covered by a Round House. The inside of Avoncroft's windmill would have been very similar to the one at Maney, with very cramped and dusty conditions.

The Manorial windmill, being such an early windmill would have had 'Common' sails, that is the sails, or sweeps would have been covered with cloth. At the beginning or end of a working day, spreading or removing the cloth could be a tricky and sometimes a dangerous operation, especially during strong winds.

We have no evidence as to the fate of the lord's windmill on Maney Hill. It could have fallen into disuse and deteriorated over a long period of time, or have been burned down during a storm, a fate often happening to windmills when the corn ran out leaving the stones running dry and giving off a shower of sparks which ignited the flour dust in the air, and in turn set the wooden structure on fire and fanned by the high winds would soon engulf and consume the entire mill.

It would be nice to think that Maney Post Mill did not meet such a violent end as some others did but, perhaps, that it was dismantled and re—assembled at some other parish to serve the needs of its inhabitants.



Maney.

The lord's windmill at Maney & 'Soke' rights.

c 1509

Large stone 5'x2'x2' found in hedgerow on Maney Hill, thought to be Druid Stone. Broken up and used for roads.

1853

Miss Bracken suggests Maney named after 'Meini' (stones). Thought used for Druids.

1860

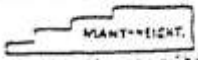
Subsequent historians agree with Miss Bracken's explanation

1860 - 1972

Windmill identified as a Post Mill.

1977

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION



Maney Hill Named after Maul-meight. A wooden tool used by Millwrights in dressing mill-stones.

1977

1853 Stone found in hedge-row confirmed as a Stone-pier on which a Post Mill stood