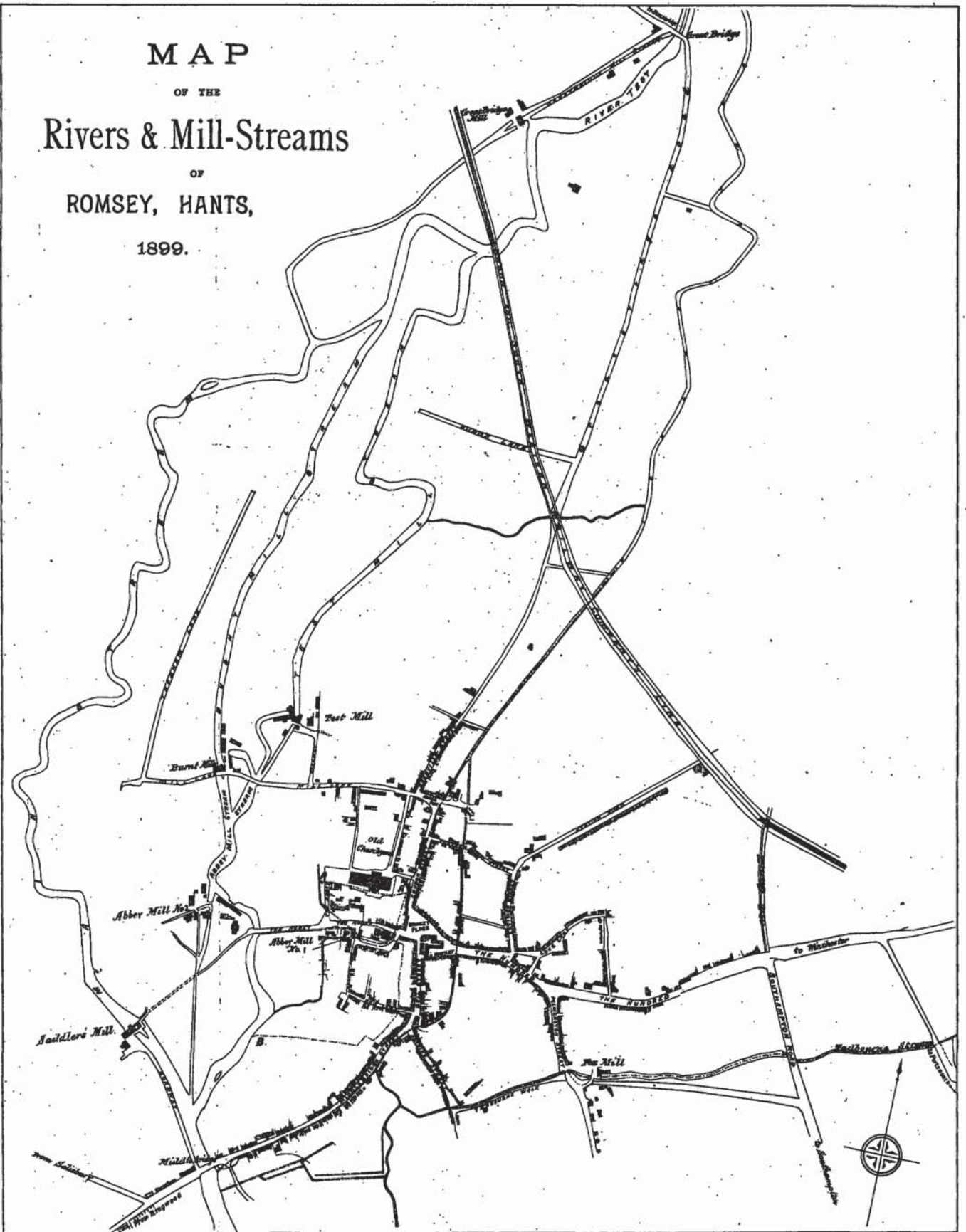


MAP
OF THE
Rivers & Mill-Streams
OF
ROMSEY, HANTS,
1899.



THE OLD WATER COURSES AND MILLS OF ROMSEY.

BY EDWARD BUCKELL.

The river running through the Town of Romsey, is called the Test. The earliest date we find for the use of this name is in a pamphlet by Richard Blome, written in 1673. During the last century the names Tëese, Test, and Anton appear to have been used indiscriminately by different writers. According to Camden, Ptolemy, in speaking of the mouth of the river in Southampton Water, referred to it as the mouth of the Trisanton. The same author states that Nennius; another ancient writer, calls the river the Trahanon. In the "Lives of the Saints" it is spoken of as the Terstan, and before that as the Ant or Anton. One writer says that the Anton rises in the N.W. of the county, and runs into the Tese one mile below Wherwell, the Tese having its origin near Whitchurch. If this be so, and the streams are nearly equal, one can easily understand that the name of either source might be used to described the whole river.

Just before its entrance into Romsey at Greatbridge the Test gives off two branches of about equal size—the Greatbridge mill stream on the west, and the Fishlake stream on the east. The former is evidently entirely an artificial cutting, but we find no record of its making nor of the building of the mill on it. The earliest date obtainable for this is 1785, but there was a mill there prior to that. The Fishlake stream is a more interesting one, and it also is in part or wholly artificial. The lower portion is undoubtedly artificial; the upper part is perhaps unusually winding for an artificial cutting. The bed of the stream is several feet

above the level of the main river, and many more above the level of the ground to the east of it; but this is explained in part by the fact that peat has been cut out there. We find no history of the making of this stream, but of the two mills, Town and Abbey, worked by its branches it is stated that "their antiquity is so great that no records can be found which show their origin, but there is every reason to believe that the Abbey Mill, which is not supposed to be the most ancient, was built for the use of the Abbey, and Monastery about the time of the re-building under Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester, in the reign of King Edgar 900 years ago."

The Fishlake stream therefore dates back at least as far as that. The Abbey possessed fishponds at Timsbury as well as at Romsey and Eling, and the name Fishlake would seem to indicate some former connection with one of these ponds, presumably one at Timsbury, in which parish the stream has its origin. Tench are still to be found in the ditches adjoining the stream, or they were there at any rate a short time ago, and were probably decendants of the fish in the old fish pond. Whether this stream was made for the purpose of driving the mills, or to act as a scouring stream to the Abbey and its surroundings, as Mr. Shore has suggested, it is difficult to say, but it was made probably for both purposes. Lower down, running from the back of Mr. Curtis's house in Church Street, through the Abbey precincts, is an old ditch connected with the Abbey mill branch of the Fishlake, and capable of being flushed from that stream; this no doubt formed part of the sanitary system of the Abbey in old times. Another somewhat similar ditch runs from just above the mill at the top of Narrow Lane. After passing a little way at the back of the houses in Middlebridge Street this turns round and empties into one of the larger branches of the Test about one hundred yards below the spot where the mill-stream joins it. We do not know whether this was an ancient ditch or not.

The Town Mill branch of the Fishlake, crosses Porters Bridge Street near the Berthon Boat Works, and flows between Church Street and Latimer Street, passing under the Hundred by Mr. Elcombe's, and thence to the mill at

the bottom of Bell Street.¹ Below the mill it flows along Middlebridge Street and joins the main river below Middlebridge. About a third of the way down it gives off a small branch that runs across and joins the Tadbourne Stream. There is a tradition that the Middlebridge Street stream was made by Cromwell to supply his soldiers' quarters with water, but this is unlikely, with the main river so near.

Commercially, the Fishlake Stream seems formerly to have been the most important branch of the Test, for it is said that "the machinery on the Town and Abbey Mill streams (both branches of Fishlake) was more than equal to all the machinery in the mills on the other branches of the Test put together, and this, in spite of the fact that only about one tenth part of the water of the Test flows down this stream." After giving off the branches above described, the main stream proceeds for about half a mile, and then divides into two.

The western division, which is the larger, runs through the Squab Meadows to Saddler's Mill, a short distance below which it is joined by all the smaller streams. From this branch a stream called the New Cut has been diverted at some time, which conveys a good deal of the water to work the Burnt Mills. The New Cut is referred to in a law suit dated 1733, quoted by Dr. Lathom, but there is nothing to indicate when it was made.

The eastern division or Test Mill Stream, occupied we believe, a natural bed also judging from its very winding course and uneven depth. It also appears that when the Test is mentioned in old papers it is described as running through Romsey in an eastern and western division.

One stream not yet mentioned runs along the southern border of the town. This is the Tadbourne Stream or as it was formerly called the Tadbourne Lake, and is a small stream which rises very rapidly after rain, and is supplemented by what remains of the old Canal. It empties itself into the main river in Broadlands (see plan) and has on it one mill the Fox Mill.

¹ The Town Mill was at the bottom of Bell Street, but is not noted on the map.

Romsey, at the date of the Domesday Survey contained three mills which paid between them the sum of twenty five shillings; these were owned by the Abbey, as was, indeed, the whole village. It is not possible to be certain of the sites of these old mills, but presumably two of them occupied the same, or nearly the same, positions as do the present Town mill and Abbey mill (No. 1). As to the third, we cannot hazard a guess.

Other mills mentioned as held by various individuals. Earl Morton one mill, 15s.; Ralph de Mortimer one mill, 7s. 6d.; Gilbert de Bretteville one mill, 20s. We have no clue to their situations, but they seem to have been outside the town boundaries. It is mentioned in an Essay by Speed that "the Abbess and Convent let the Town mills by indenture, dated February 6th, in the 24th year of the reign of Henry VIII, to John King," and the good dames appear to have been well advised as to careful preservation of their substance, for it was specially stipulated that "John King should grind or cause to be ground all the grain, as well wheat as malt, to be expended within the Monastery, without taking any toll therefrom, when and as often as need shall require, and he shall repair and maintain all manner of repairs pertaining to the same house, viz., in dawbinge, thetchinge, ringinge and cogginge, and all manner of repairs belonging to the said mill at his own proper cost." They were also possessed of other water and fulling mills, and the various fisheries are very particularly mentioned in the agreement. In the middle of the century there was a mop yarn and whiting manufactory, but it is now a flour mill again.

Abbey Mill (No 1), as has been said is probably one of the ancient mills, but we find nothing recorded earlier than 1708, when the then owner, a Mr. May, introduced the new bolting machinery for the first time into this part of the county. "Bolt" is properly spelt "Boult," and signifies a fine transparent cloth; technically a meal sieve for separating the course from the fine flour. In 1841, the present mill was worked for flax spinning, and in the manufacture of sacking and canvas. There was another mill close to it, on the site

of the present Congregational classrooms, and used as a flour mill; this is gone now.

In 1708, the earliest reference we can find, Test Mill is said to contain one small water wheel for "tucking," a provincial term for fulling, and used in the manufacture of "shalloons," a kind of woollen fabric. The name seems to be derived from Chalons, in France, where the material, presumably, was first made. We do not know how far back the manufacture dated. Swift says: "In blue shalloons shall Hannibal be clad," but, then, perhaps, Swift is not an exact historian. At one time about 300 people were occupied in Romsey, but the work was mostly done by handlooms. It has been a paper-mill for half a century.

Abbey Mill (No. 2) appears to have been erected in 1683, but none of the old building remains. It was largely wooden; the straight stream leading from it was made about the same time. In a private letter dated February 15th, 1733, from Mr. John Godfrey to his relative, Mr. Puckeridge, it is observed "that half the town remembers the erecting of the mill, and the digging of the carriage way therefrom." The mill has been used at different times as a tannery, saw-mill, paper-mill, parchment manufactory, and is now a leather board mill.

Burnt or Mead Mills are referred to in 1733 as an ancient corn mill. We find nothing further concerning them, but that they were rebuilt in 1755. Adjoining there was formerly a paper mill, built in 1760, and it is stated that a small "tucking wheel," used for leather dressing, was removed four years previously, so there must have been an older building there.

The present Saddler's Mill was built in 1748, but prior to that there was a small grist mill. The Mill house was erected in 1777. Close by, on the east side of the river, there was formerly an oil and skin mill, which was afterwards used as a sawmill, but has now disappeared.

Fox Mill, Mr. Shore has suggested, may have been originally Folks Mill, or the mill where the tenants could grind

their corn independently of the Abbey mill or the mill of the Lordship. We cannot find out anything about this mill in the past, and are under the impression it is comparatively modern. It does not seem likely or possible that the Tadbourne Stream could supply enough water without the aid of the canal, and the latter was only made about 100 years ago.

The map which accompanies this paper is from the Ordnance Survey, drawn to scale by Mr. Frank Jenvey, of Romsey.
