

THE LOST WATERMILLS OF SURREY

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In 1951 a book was published on 'Old Surrey Watermills', written by Jack Hillier, looking at the history and heritage of what had once been a major part of our industrial landscape - but which even then was clearly in decline.

One local site he mentioned was the 'Heath Health Mill' near Fox Corner, which Mr Hillier perhaps rather harshly described as 'a very formal little brick-and-slated mill with no more pretensions to architecture than a sentry-box'.

At that time the mill was still in operation, producing wheat flour on two pairs of French Burr stones. 'The whole wheat flour, "husk an' all" as the miller put it, is sold for making stone-ground whole-wheat bread. So limited is the amount of this kind of flour ground in the country that flour milled here on Bullswater Common is now sent to all parts and even to Scotland!'

Sadly, only a short time after he visited the common, the mill closed down, and the old waterwheel that Mr Hillier observed in operation is now severely decayed.

A little downstream, at Rickford Mill, Hillier found that the waterwheel had been replaced by a turbine, but here again by the end of the decade the mill was to cease producing flour and in the early 1960's was converted into a residence.

Some of the ironwork still survives, but the wood is rotten.



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In truth that was the story that Hillier had found at many of the old mills in Surrey – declaring Ockham Mill as 'not proper to my subject' since

it had been turned into a residence and describing it as 'an odious building', in contrast to Byfleet Mill which although no longer

operational he thought was 'one of those that nobody interested in mill architecture should miss'.



The old mill at Byfleet, however, should not be missed – although sadly being tucked away down a private lane it very often is!

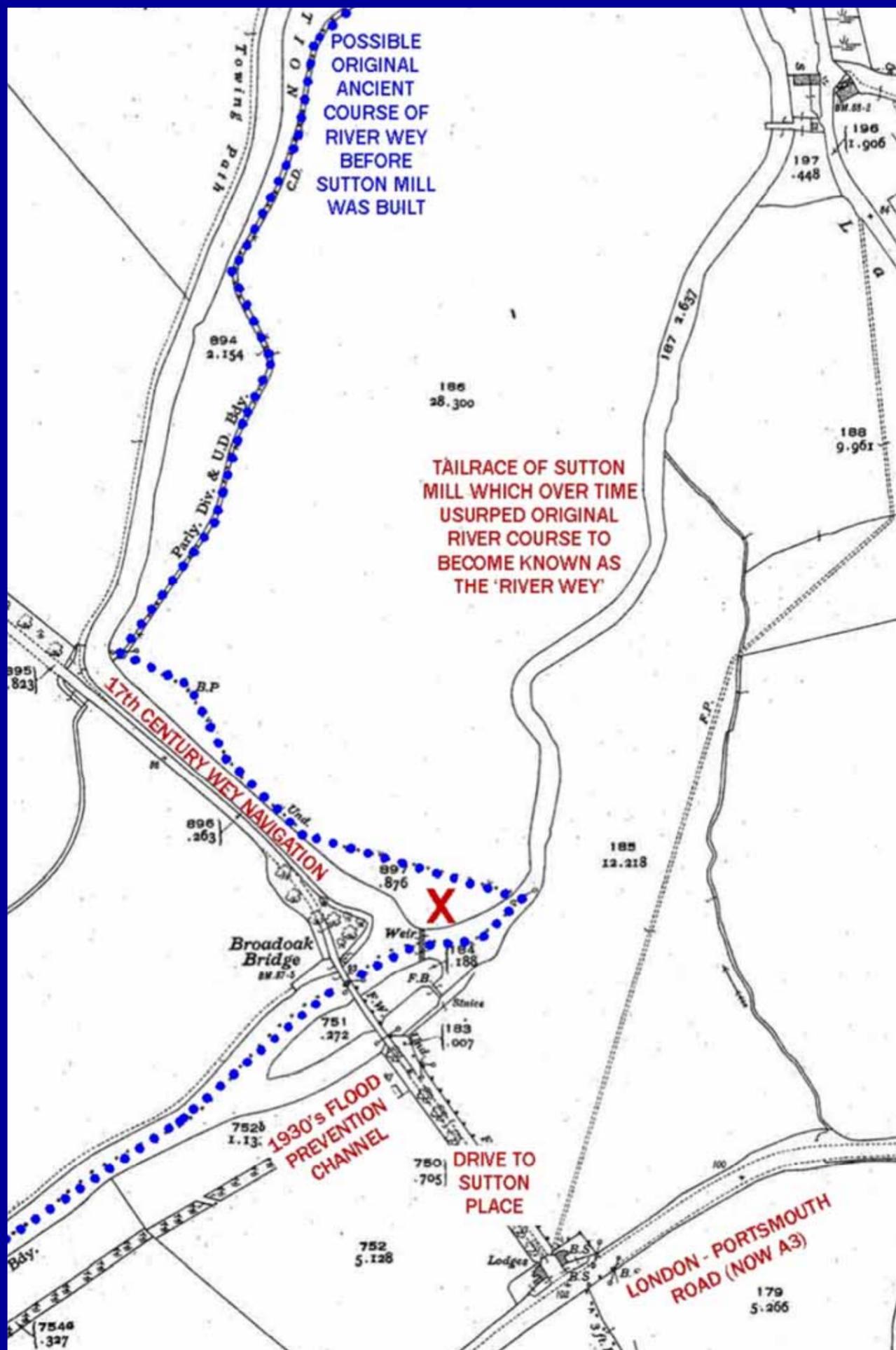
Jack Hillier clearly did not think much of the new 'roller-mill' at Coxes Lock, although the old buildings were (and are) quite impressive.

Coxes Lock Mill at Addlestone was still producing flour at that time, with again the replacement of the waterwheel by a turbine, but it appears to have been the sheer scale of the operation - the roller-mills producing 3,600 sacks of flour a week – that caused the ire of the author.

He certainly didn't seem to mind the fact that the mill at Chobham was now powered by a turbine ('installed six years ago' by Mr Benham), although he might not have been quite so forgiving had he known that this mill too was soon to cease operation and subsequently be replaced by a bungalow!



A map (based on the 1934 Ordnance Survey, 25" map) showing the possible location of the mill at Sutton.



At Woking Mill again he found a turbine instead of a waterwheel (and mill stones replaced by the printing presses of Messrs Unwin Brothers), but his entry for 'Old Woking Mill' seems to concentrate more on the mill mentioned in the *Victoria County History* at Sutton – which Hillier declared to be a 'mystery' as the book claimed the mill there to be at Trigg's Lock, where he and the long-standing lock-keeper knew 'there was no sign of any mill'.



At Woking Mill there is no longer the printing presses, let alone the millstones, as most of the old buildings have been demolished to make way for modern apartments and houses

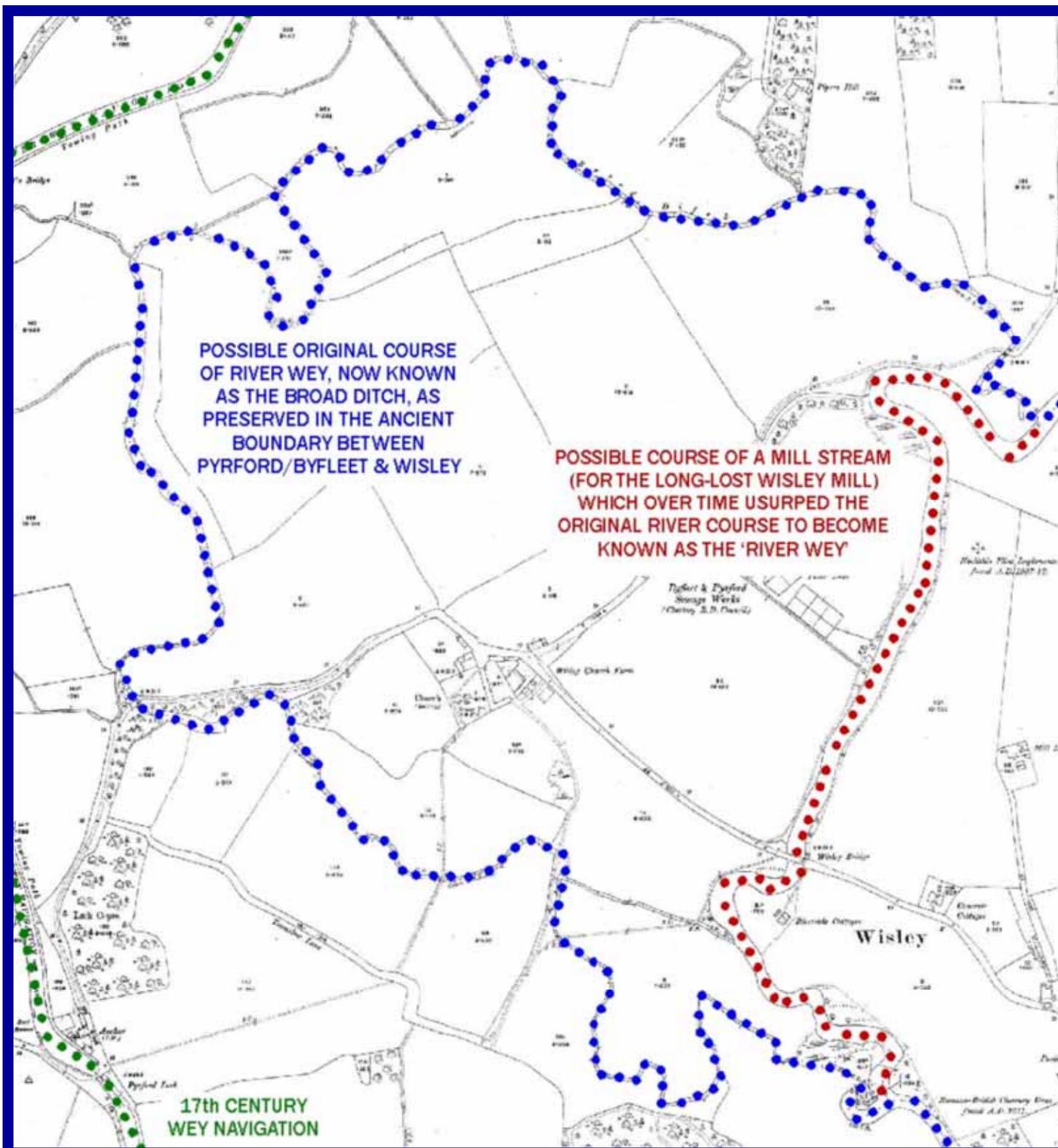
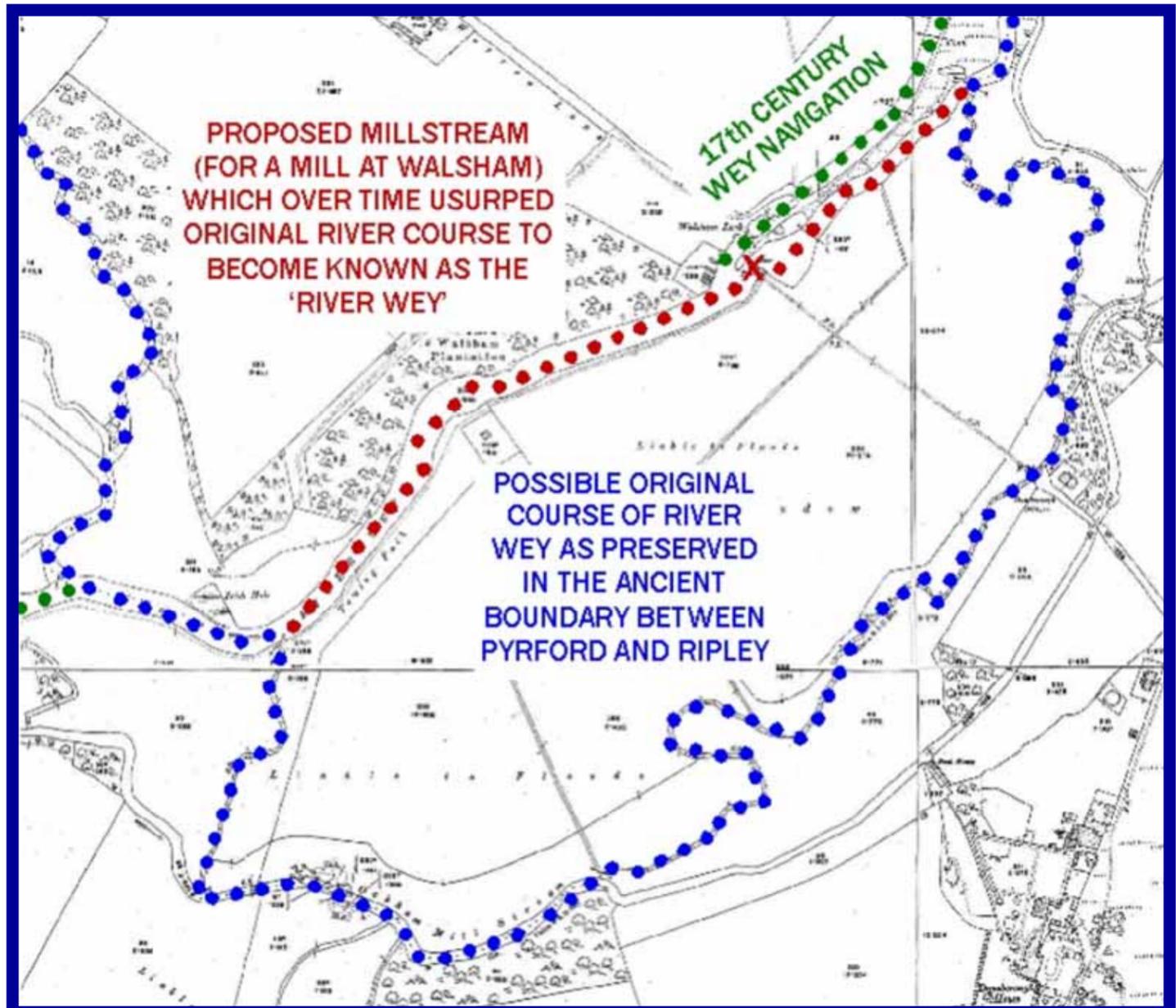
He was right, of course, but more modern research may have come up with an answer. A study of the maps of the area (and field walking on the meadows upstream from Triggs), has revealed the possible location of the long lost 'Sutton Mill' - recorded in the Domesday Book as being valued at five shillings – the same value as Byfleet Mill and each of the two mills at Pyrford.



The head of water at Triggs Lock is from the higher position of the 17th century Navigation. There is no fall at this point on the old river.



But if Sutton Mill was a 'mystery' to Hillier, the two Domesday Mills at Pyrford didn't even merit a mention. Where they were nobody knows (although Walsham Weir is one possible location), and the long-lost mill at Wisley (thought to be in the vicinity of Wisley Sewage Works) was likewise not recorded by Hillier in his book.



Based on the 1914 Ordnance Survey map (before the boundary between Pyrford and Ripley was altered to run along the present River Wey), this map shows the possible location of Pyrford's two Domesday Mills. There would certainly have been enough head of water to power a mill (or two) here - and perhaps turbines incorporated into the weirs of the Wey Valley could be a valuable source of 'free' and green energy today!

Sadly one mill that he did record in detail has also now also disappeared – Newark Mill – but the story of its destruction will have to wait another day in our chronological history of this area.

The boundary between the parishes of Pyrford and Byfleet with Wisley twists and turns across the meadows, following the line of what is now known as the 'Broad Ditch'.

The present River Wey cuts off the corner considerably, and with the name of a nearby field on the Wisley tithe map of 1842 recorded as 'Mill Land' could this be the location of Wisley's long-lost medieval mill?

Excavations in 1977 and 1978 in advance of the construction of the M25 found a medieval settlement site possibly associated with the mill and the diversion of the river.

After Domesday, the mill was recorded again in 1206 and 1342, probably falling into decay soon after as the latest pottery from the excavation was similar to 14th century ware found at Brooklands, also excavated in the 1970's.