

The Steam Mill at Old Mills, Seaton Ross

Wind milling was an unsociable occupation, the wind miller only being able to work when the wind blew - this could mean working in the middle of the night! As a consequence, millers began to add a new form of additional power that became available – steam power, using a portable steam engine or a permanent steam engine in an additional erected engine house. In the old days the wind millers also took corn to the watermills when there was no wind, and the water millers went to the windmills when there was no water. The Steam Mill at Old Mills was built in the early 1850's to overcome lack of wind, or sometimes too much, to support the existing 5 sailed windmill. which was erected on the site of the old post mill in the early 1790's. This ensured that production did not stop no matter what the weather did. The steam engine was kept in reserve for days when the wind failed enabling the mill to keep running for the whole year. The owner of Old Mills at the time, Richard Hartley had the Steam Mill erected "On the most improved principle to be in excellent repair and well adapted for carrying out an extensive and profitable business". The new engine shed, which contained the steam apparatus, consisted of a 12 horsepower engine and a 16 horse-power boiler, capable of "doing a large business". The Steam Engine was capable of manufacturing 15 lasts of corn per week and driving a pair of stones besides all the machinery in the granary building attached. The steam mill operated as a belt driven corn grinder used to grind wheat. It was totally independent of the five-sailed mill and did not drive the sails when there was no wind. When the windmill was at rest, it was possible to climb onto the tower and up to the tip of the upstanding sail. From here you could see the balloon go up at the York gala, and at one time you could also see 8 or 9 other windmills in the surrounding villages.



The 70 foot chimney, engine shed and granary building became part of the flour mill production at Seaton Ross together with its neighbour windmill the four sailed New Mill which was built between 1810 – 1820.

Sadly the golden age of the windmills declined during the late 19th and early 20th century and the old windmill at Seaton Ross was dismantled in the early 1950's with just the tower remaining. The photograph shows the chimney, engine house and granary still standing to this day alongside the tower of the old five-sailed windmill – a testament to days of yesteryear.

Malcolm Young – Seaton Ross - 2006