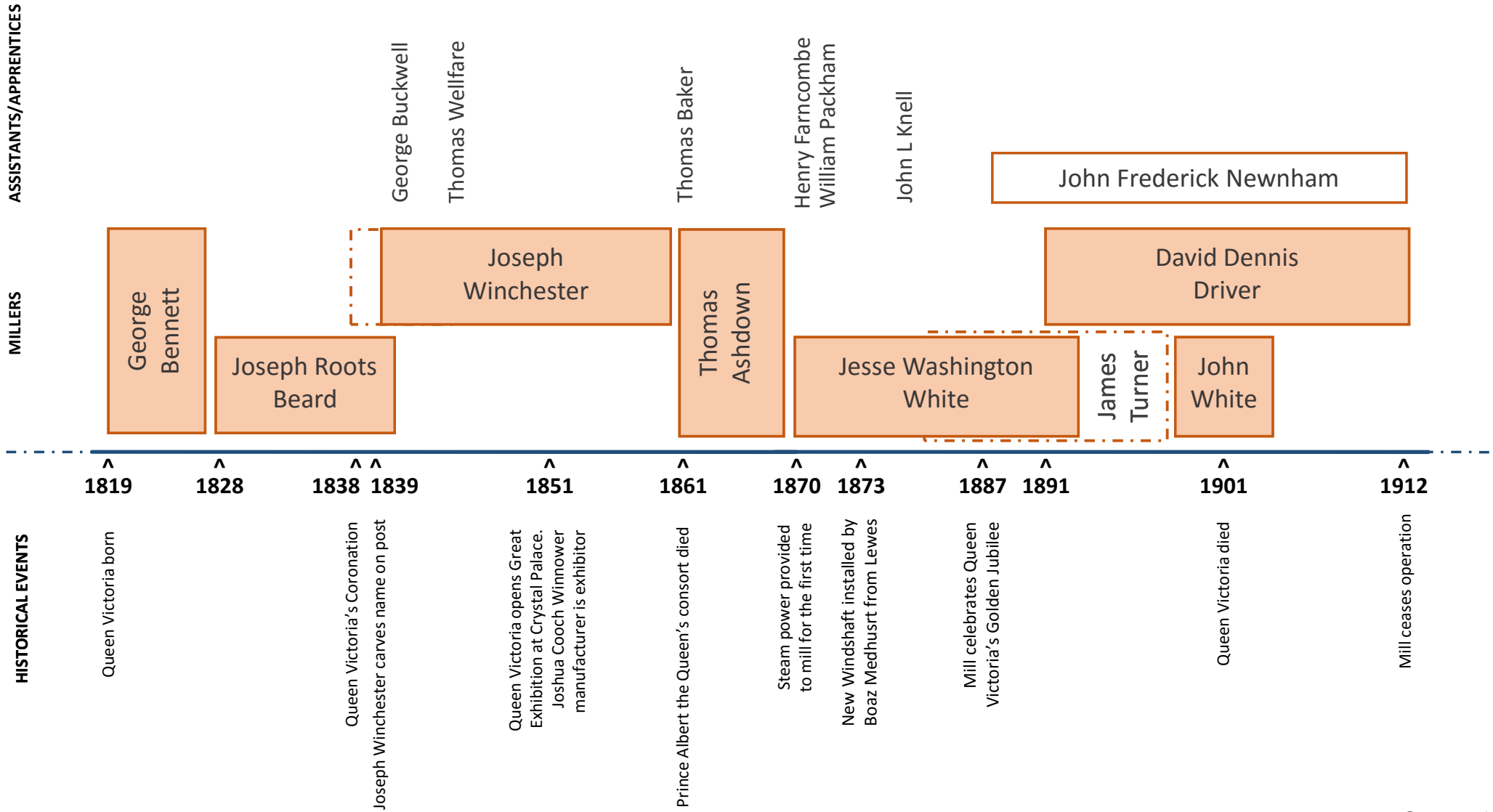


# The MILLER'S of OLDLAND MILL

# The Millers of Oldland Mill, Keymer



# The Millers' of Oldland Mill

## Introduction

Much has been written about the history of Oldland Mill, in Keymer in Sussex, its historical context, design, renovation and status as a grade II listed building. A newspaper article from 1927, suggested the mill "should be preserved for future generations", which over many years has happened with support of a team of local volunteers whose labour of love has restored the mill, and which is now a fully working mill producing its own flour.

This though is a story about the people that lived, worked and died at the mill in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it is through research of historical documents; including census records, trade directories, birth, marriage and death records, wills and newspaper articles that brings them back to life.

### List of Old Land Millers

George Bennett (tenure c.1819 – 1828).....	3
Josh Beard (tenure 1828 -1840) .....	3
Joseph Winchester (tenure c.1839-1860).....	3
Thomas Ashdown (tenure 1860 -1869) .....	3
Jesse W White (tenure 1869 – 1891).....	4
James Turner (tenure c.1878 – 1895).....	4
John White (tenure c.1894 – 1904) .....	4
David Driver (tenure c.1891 – c.1912).....	5

These were the tenant millers of Oldland Mill (except James Turner, whose family owned Old Land), but also noted are assistant millers and apprentices who shaped its history.

There are living descendants of these individuals, including myself, but I hope everyone that reads it will find this social history interesting.

Colin Hewitt  
(Mill volunteer and  
Great Great Great Grandson of George Bennett)  
September 2016

### **George Bennett (tenure c.1819 – 1828)**

George Bennett was born in 1789 in Keymer, and christened in the church of Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian on the 7th June. He was the fifth eldest child of Richard Bennet a local Yeoman farmer and his wife Jenny (nee Simmons). Richard was a contemporary of Thomas Turner whose family owned Oldland.

George was already employed as a miller when he married Anne Holford in Lindfield in May 1818, George was living in Bolney at the time so may have been working at the Mill there.

George worked as the tenant miller, at Old Land Mill from about 1819 when their eldest child Edward<sup>1</sup> was born in the Mill House, followed by Frederick in 1821 and Frances in 1822. But by 1828 the family moved to Falmer where George worked a miller there, then in Edward Street in Brighton as a grocer.

### **Josh Beard (tenure 1828 -1840)**

Joseph Roots Beard was born in 1796 in Chailey. His father was Thomas Roots Beard the Post Master in Chailey.

He married Elizabeth Gosling.

Joseph and Elizabeth were living at Oldland from 1828<sup>2</sup>, and stayed there until 1840<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth often wrote to her married sister Sophia Peskett in Maidstone.

In 1841 Joseph and Elizabeth moved to Plumpton Mill<sup>4</sup>, Joseph was not only the miller but held the freehold to the Mill and associated land.

### **Joseph Winchester (tenure c.1839-1860)**

Joseph Winchester was born on 2nd February 1818 in Hurstmonceux the son of Samuel and Ann Winchester. Joseph was the miller at Oldland Mill and was the first miller to scribe his name on the post in 1839. Whilst nothing is known of his early life, he certainly had gone to school as he could at least write his name.

In 1841 he was living at the Mill with George and Charlotte Buckwell. George was employed as the Loader, Joseph as the Miller.

Joseph married Frances Packham in 1842 in Clayton, they had 6 children born at Keymer.

Joseph employed a second miller a journeyman called Harry Farncombe, and his nephew William Packham was an apprentice by 1851.

However, by October 1855 Joseph was insolvent and an assignment was granted to trustees Lewis Slight of Burgess Hill and James Wood Esq., of Keymer<sup>5</sup>.

Joseph though continued to be employed as the miller at Oldland, until 1860<sup>6</sup>, but by 1861 he had moved to Nuthurst, where he worked as a miller.

### **Thomas Ashdown (tenure 1860 -1869)**

Thomas was born in Ditchling in 1820 the son of George and Elizabeth Ashdown, and married Mary Ann Washington in Lewes in 1842. They had 9 children between 1844 and 1866.

Thomas worked as a grocer and brewer in North Street, Ditchling before working briefly in Chailey, then as the tenant miller at Oldland from about 1860.

Thomas was sufficiently busy that he employed another miller called Thomas Baker, born in 1809 in Mayfield, who lived with them in the Mill House at that time.

However, Thomas had stopped working at the Mill by late 1869 as by 1871 he became a farmer of 95 acres in Old Park, Barcombe, near Falmer, and subsequently 576 acres at Mary Farm House in Falmer, employing 12 men and 3 boys.

Thomas died on 30th December 1899 in Ditchling.

### **Jesse W White (tenure 1869 – 1891)**

Jesse Washington White was born in Chiddingly, near Hailsham, (East) Sussex, in 1841, the son of Richard and Eliza. Richard was an agricultural labourer.

By 1861<sup>7</sup> Jesse was working as a groom for George Dempster a farmer at Muddles Green. It was here that he noticed an 18-year-old housemaid called Maria Onion, and they started going out together. Consequently, Jesse married Maria in Hove, Sussex on Christmas Day 1865.

Jesse started working at Oldland Mill in about 1869 as their son George Frederick<sup>8</sup> was born in Keymer late that year.

In 1873 Jesse commissioned a new cast iron wind shaft which was manufactured and installed by Lewes based Millwright Boaz Medhurst.

Jesse organised an event at the Mill for Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee celebrations on 20th June 1887, providing bunting which he affixed to the 4 sweeps, and a large union flag on top of the mill which presented an excellent photo opportunity.

By May 1888<sup>9</sup> he was employing an assistant loader/miller Frederick Newnham to help with the workload. Frederick, full name John Frederick, was born and lived in Ditchling.

Maria died on 17th July 1890 at Mill House after a lingering illness. Jesse died there on 30 November 1891, he was only 50 years old.

### **James Turner (tenure c.1878 – 1895)**

James was born in Nuthurst in 1806 the son of James and Anne. A descendant of the local Turner family who owned Oldland.

James was the farmer at Newlands in Keymer, with 206 acres and employed 9 men and 2 boys. He married Mary Marten in Keymer in 1836 and they had 2 children, Ellen and Henry born there. But Mary died in 1852 aged 41.

James remarried in Brighton in 1864 to Elizabeth Cooke, she came from Clayton.

James was still a farmer but also a miller at Newland by 1878<sup>10</sup>, but by 1890 he was miller and farmer at both Newland and Oldland<sup>11</sup>, and by now was living in Gurr's Croft. Although he was 83 by then he most likely used John Frederick Newnham and another assistant called David Driver to do the day to day milling activities.

James died on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1895 aged 88, whilst working in the fields on Oldland Farm, when he was seen by one of his workers to collapse but died before he could be helped.

### **John White (tenure c.1894 – 1904)**

John White was born in Chiddingly, (East) Sussex in 1847 the youngest son of Richard and Eliza, and Jesse White's younger brother.

John was one of two miller's apprentices working for George's Wickens in Chiddingly, aged 14.

John married Sarah Potter in 1870 in Eastbourne where John was by now a fully-fledged miller. They had several children; including Hephzibah Maria in 1875.

By 1891 he had a Baker's shop at 11 Southdown Terrace on Ocklynge Road, Eastbourne, where his daughter Hephzibah was the assistant in the shop. John was now a Miller's foreman, so supervising a number of millers and could have taken over as miller from his brother Jesse at Oldland when he died in November 1891, employing John Frederick Newnham and David Driver as assistant millers. We don't know exactly when John and Sarah physically moved into the Mill House at Oldland, although they were definitely there from April 1901, but could have been there from 1894 the year daughter Hephzibah Maria married in Keymer.

John also owned a baker's shop and confectioners on the High Street in Ditchling, and employed O.J Myall as manager in about April 1904<sup>12</sup>.

But on Saturday 26th November 1904 John was riding his horse and dog cart at Stonepound Hill crossroads when a motor cyclist, turning right from London Road lost control and ended up under the horse which made the cart hit some boulders and John was thrown from the cart and was severely injured. John died at Oldland Mill House three days later, as a consequence of the injuries sustained in the accident. The coroner's inquest into the accident was held at the Mill House the following Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> December.

### David Driver (tenure c.1891 – c.1912)

David Dennis Driver was born in Nutfield in Surrey in 1872 the son of Jacob and Rhoda Driver, who were originally from Norfolk.

By 1881 the family had moved to Ditchling and were living in a cottage on East End Lane. Jacob was a Cowman, and nine-year-old David was at school.

Aged 19, David was already employed as a "miller flour mill", so probably assisting Jesse White at Oldland. It was here that he met Hephzibah White, Jesse's niece. She most likely would have visited the mill with her father John, especially if John took over from his older brother when Jesse died in November 1891.

David married Hephzibah in Keymer in 1894. They had one son Albert William born in 1895 in Ditchling.

By 1901 they were living in Oldland Cottage and David was earning a living as a corn merchant and miller and was assisting his father in law, who by now was the tenant miller. It is interesting to note they were milling corn at this time.

In 1904 David took over fully the milling duties when John White died suddenly following an accident, becoming a business partner with Sarah, John's widow. In 1910 they tried unsuccessfully to sue Major Patton-Bethune, from Burgess Hill who they alleged owed them nearly £19.

With his son Albert assisting, they were both still working the Mill in 1911, they also had the services of John Frederick Newnham who had been working as the miller's assistant for more than 20 years.

David was the last full time miller at Oldland Mill when milling ceased in about 1912.

### References

<sup>1</sup> Baptism record from St Cosmas and St Damian, Keymer, dated September 9<sup>th</sup> 1819 states George's Abode, and trade as "Old Land Mill/ Miller,"

<sup>2</sup> Listed as 'Josh Beard, Miller, Oldland' under Ditchling entry in Pigot's 1828 Directory of Sussex, page 705

<sup>3</sup> Joseph was listed as 'Miller', under the Ditchling entry in the 1839 and 1840 Post office Directories for Sussex

<sup>4</sup> 1841 census for Plumpton, [Archive reference HO107/1113/3/7/9]

<sup>5</sup> Noted in Perry's Bankrupt Gazette 20 October 1855, © Find my Past

<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0000207%2f18551020%2f010>

<sup>6</sup> Joseph and Frances had a daughter Grace born in Keymer in 1860, but in any case, Melville's Directory and Gazeteer of Sussex of 1858 lists Joseph Winchester as a 'Miller' in Keymer. The 1861 census for Nuthurst shows the family living in the Mill Cottage in Nuthurst, so moved between the winter of 1860 and April 1861.

<sup>7</sup> 1861 census for Muddles Green, Chiddingly [Archive reference RG09/569/68/17]

<sup>8</sup> George Frederick White, birth registered Dec 1869 (GRO reference Vol 2b/ Page 157)

<sup>9</sup> Newspaper article from the Mid Sussex Times 8<sup>th</sup> May 1888, © Find My Past, reference

<http://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0001598%2f18880508%2f143>

<sup>10</sup> Listed under Keymer in the Post Office Directory of Sussex 1878

<sup>11</sup> Listed under Keymer in Kelly's Sussex Directory 1890

<sup>12</sup> Newspaper article from the Mid Sussex Times 25 May 1926 mentions OJ Myall's association with John White, © Find My Past, <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0001598%2f19260525%2f076>