

RICHARD HUNT
A STANSTEAD ABBOTTS
VICTORIAN BUSINESSMAN

BY
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Richard Hunt's parents William Hunt and Susanna Pearce married in London on the 29th June 1801. The Hunt family had lived in the Parish of Layston near Buntingford since the late 1600's and do not appear to have been particularly well off. Their oldest surviving son John was born in 1808 followed by Thomas 1813, Richard 1815 and Harriet 1817. Richard was born on the 11th February 1815 and was christened in Much Hadham Church on the 23rd April 1815. His father ran the post windmill at the north end of the village from about 1823 until his death in 1828. Susanna continued to run the mill until 1833, when John the eldest son was able to take over. We next hear of Richard in 1837 when he married Ann Knight in Bishops Stortford on the 14th of December. Ann two years his senior had been born in Much Hadham to James and Elizabeth Acres. He is recorded again in 1841 when he is found running the watermill at Mardock no doubt having learnt the miller's trade when under the guidance of his mother and elder brother at the families Much Hadham mill. By this time he was 25 years of age and had three male servants living in the same household. It is probable that these servants were in fact his mill workers.

Sometime in the 1840's Richard appears to have inherited some land and property possible from his wife's side of the family. So by 1851 we find he has moved to Stanstead Abbots where he is listed as employing 30 men spread over his milling business at the water mill in Roydon Road, as well as his coal merchant and barge owning concerns. This considerable improvement in his circumstances seems to have required far more additional finances than his known previous business interests could have provided. Sadly in 1852 his wife Anne died without it appears bearing him any children. After his wife's death Richard continued to pursue his growing business interests from his home at the Mill House in Roydon Road.



The Mill House in Roydon Road where Richard Hunt lived while running the water mill on the opposite side of the road

As the 1850's progressed he became to be regarded as a man of considerable substance and was well regarded by those with influence in this part of Hertfordshire. So much so that on the 17th October 1857 at the George and Dragon Hotel in Buntingford he was accepted as a provisional Director of the fledgling Ware Hadham and Buntingford Railway Company. He was also recorded as the Deputy Chairman of the Company on the engraved ceremonial silver spade used at Westmill during the turning of the first sod ceremony. This took place on the 20th July 1859 and heralded the start of the construction of the Buntingford branch railway.

In 1864 the old wooden watermill in Roydon Road, that straddled the mill stream, burnt down. Richard Hunt was involved in building a replacement in brick, next to where the old one had stood. Associated with this new mill was a considerable change to the road layout at the top of the High Street where it meets Cappell Lane and Roydon Road. An area of once public road disappeared behind a wall and fence when the mill stream was altered to feed the new mill. The change also moved Roydon Road away from right outside the Mill House, providing it with an improved degree of privacy. These alterations were to remain in place until the piping of the millstream under the road in 1934.

Whilst involved with recovering from the fire at the mill Richard Hunt was also building a large malting between the railway and the river just downstream of the then relatively new Stanstead Lock of 1857. This large and elaborately built malting, sandwiched between the river and the newly opened Buntingford line, was completed in 1866. Richard certainly wanted to ensure people knew that he was responsible for having it built, as the cast iron wall plates had raised moulded lettering which boldly declared "R HUNT 1866". The design of the malting certainly suggests an owner who had plenty of money to create a large and impressive statement of his wealth as well as being a successful place of business. This malting was initially known as the Abbey Malting and was rented to Mary Hankin a member of the well known local malting and barge owning family. Richard Hunt received a further boost to his wealth when his older brother John died in 1866 and Richard inherited further properties and land, mostly in Much Hadham. Needless to say this saw him further expanding his business interests and he seems to have a considerable portfolio of land properties and businesses in the ensuing years.



A wall plate from the malting by the railway which have been incorporated as a feature in the rebuilt malting's reincarnation as a residential complex

Richard Hunt's connection with the Buntingford Railway resurfaces in the records in 1867. Like many small local railway companies of the time the financial demands of building and then attempting to run a railway exceeded the pockets and lasting enthusiasm of the wealthy locals. The railway opened to traffic in July 1863 but less than four years later the company's finances were at a critical and many thought an irretrievable state. We find Richard attending the meeting of shareholders called on the 26th march 1867 to accept the Great Eastern Railway Company's offer to purchase the Buntingford railway. Richard Hunt is minuted as trying to persuade those present to hold off selling out to the larger company and await better days. His exhortations were to no effect as the assembled shareholders in the end chose by a significant margin to sell. Later in the year on November 5th Richard Hunt signed an agreement with the Great Eastern Company for the provision of a siding to serve his new malting. The agreement included the usual minimum usage levels and the cost of £320 to be split 50/50 between Mr Hunt and the Railway Company. Traffic to this siding grew quickly and in 1869 Richard signed another agreement for an additional switch and lever for his siding at his expense. This addition turned his one ended siding into a loop accessible from both ends. This would have facilitated the horse shunting of wagons whilst the loading and unloading of wagons was in progress at the other end of the siding. This would have been to Mr Hunt's financial advantage rather than the railways, hence his willingness to pay the total cost. Business at this malting continued to grow, so much in fact that Richard added a sizeable extension in 1876. This malting continued to provide considerable traffic to the railway until well into the C20th eventually closing as a malting in 1954. It was known later as St. Margarets Malting, despite it being in the parish of Great Amwell, due to its proximity to St. Margarets railway station. Interestingly some older railwaymen were still referring to it as Mr Hunt's malting as late as the 1960's.



A view of the impressive roofline of Mr Hunt's Abbey Malting
as seen from the Folly in the 1970's

In 1871 Richard is recorded at the Mill House with his niece Sarah Ward living with him and performing the duties of housekeeper. He is now being described in the census as a landowner indicative of his move up the social scale. We should not therefore be surprised to learn that in 1875 he gave up the tenancy of the mill and moved out of the Mill House into Stanstead Hall just around the corner in the High Street. Records show that he married a third time in 1887 to Jessie Louise Vincent who had nine children of her own from a previous marriage. Richard continued to be very active and successful in his businesses until at the age 75 he decided to sell many of his business interests and properties and retire to Much Hadham where he would retain considerable land and properties.

In connection with this an auction was held on the 3rd June 1891 at the Pied Bull Hotel in Stanstead Abbots. The sale included five maltings and twenty houses variously located in Stanstead Abbots, Roydon and Nazeing. All together they were estimated to be worth £2,000 in yearly rent a considerable sum in the early 1890's. A rough guide at the time for residential property being that thirty years rent was roughly equivalent to the guide sale price. The value of businesses and associated premises of course depended on the buyers expectations of future trading profits. Although a number of lots were not sold at the auction it is Lot 23, withdrawn due to the highest bid of £770 not reaching the reserve, which contains the greatest interest for the local historian. For within that lot was included the Stanstead Abbots Windmill located close to the Millstream and then existing malting buildings; near to the present site of Glenmire Terrace.

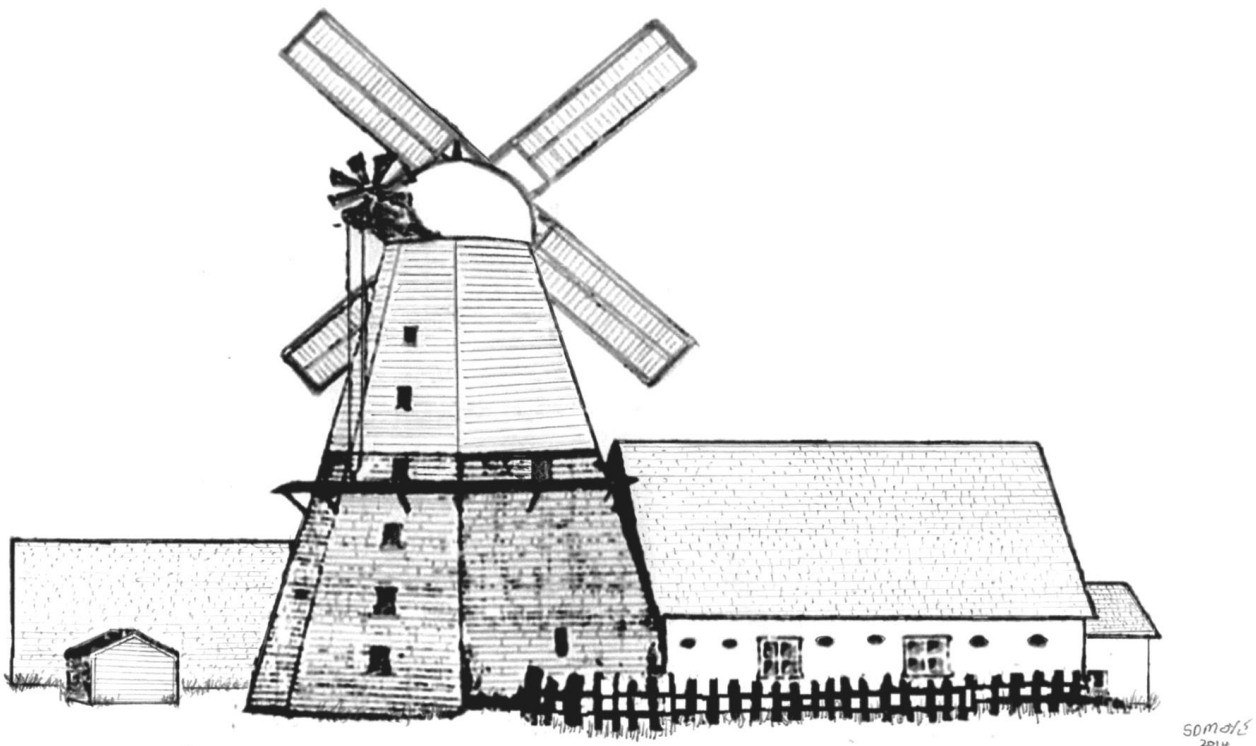
The smock windmill at Stanstead Abbots is estimated to have been 70 feet high to the top of the cap making it the largest ever smock mill built in Hertfordshire and the second largest of all types in the County. Evidence would suggest that it was built in the last quarter of the 1800's and possibly dates from the 1880's. This is very late for a windmill as the period from 1870 to 1890 was a time of windmills being torn down and windmill owners going bankrupt. In addition this windmill was built in a sheltered spot down in the valley surrounded by buildings and trees. This is hardly a site or at a time in the history of milling when any serious return on the investment could have been expected. This large smock mill was hexagonal in form with four lower brick storeys topped by three timber ones and then a wooden cap upon which were mounted a fantail and four huge double shuttered sails. It is the author's belief that despite no definite documented evidence it is highly probable that this windmill was built by Richard Hunt as the first of two very large windmills that he had built. The Stanstead Abbots Windmill was built close to a malting which suffered a severe fire in 1892 and it is believed that the upper wooden part of the windmill suffered fire damage as well. Confusingly a building in Glenmire Terrace today carries a plaque declaring "OLD WINDMILL 1770". This old rectangular building on the banks of the mill stream is clearly not the hexagonal windmill itself, but is the much altered and rebuilt remains of a boathouse which does date back to the 1770's



The building in Glenmire Terrace known as the "Old Windmill of 1770"
{Aug 2014 This building now known to have been a boathouse}

In 1891, the same year as the auction, Richard Hunt retired from business and moved to Much Hadham where many years earlier he had spent his formative years. He had purchased an even larger and rather grand home on the main road known as Culver Lodge, which can still be seen today. He had been there less than a year when he embarked in 1892 on the building of the second largest windmill ever built in Great Britain; which was completed the following year. A tower mill with a total height of 115 feet it was only exceeded at 122 feet by the Southtown windmill at Great Yarmouth. This very large windmill at Much Hadham was built quite close to the railway station and even more importantly Mr Hunt could watch the eight patent sails turning from the comfort of his sitting room. The windmill only lasted in use until the severe storm of the early morning of Saturday the 7th of September 1895 when the mill was struck by lightning and three of the eight sails crashed to the ground. The windmill was badly damaged in the storm and was never returned to working order. Richard died on the 23rd December 1896 in Much Hadham although his probate document records him of Stanstead Hall. No doubt this was for the benefit of all those who had known him at the height of his business activities, as a Mr Dalton was resident at Stanstead Hall at this time. His personal estate for probate purposes was assessed at £17,079 13s which approximates to £1.5 million in 2014 monetary values. It is understood locally that his family sold up and moved themselves and their wealth to the seaside town of Bournemouth. Certainly his wife Jessie, who lived on until she was 85 years of age, died in Christchurch Hampshire during March 1920.

STANSTEAD ABBOTTS WINDMILL



An impression of the Stanstead Abbots windmill as it may have appeared
when in operating condition at the end of the 1880's

[Drawing based on an illustration, a written description and very limited photographic evidence]

The Stanstead Abbots Glenmire Windmill

The first documented reference to the Stanstead Abbots windmill occurs when it is first offered for sale in 1891. Various attempts to date its construction have led to suggestions it may date from as early as the C17th. The following information suggests that the windmill was not in existence until well into the second half of the 1800's.

1. Does not appear on Briant's map of 1822
2. Is not mentioned in the Tithe description of 1840.
3. If in existence at the time it would be visible on a photograph of the old wooden watermill taken not that long before it burnt down in 1864. Its absence from this photograph indicates a build date for the windmill after 1864.
[Dorree and Perman Amwell and Stanstead's Past in Pictures, page 54]
4. A windmill is not mentioned in Thorne's description of the village published in 1876.
[James Thorne FSA "Handbook of the Environs of London" published 1876.]
5. The windmill appears in the background of a photograph of the Old River Lea taken by the well known photographer P. H. Emmerson in 1888
6. A view showing the Lyndsell family sitting in the garden of the Pied Bull in around 1890/1 includes the windmill seen over the roofline of the malting which was to burn down in 1892.
[See page 57 of Amwell and Stanstead's Past in Pictures Dorree and Perman 1997].
7. A picture taken in 1892 reveals the windmill which can be seen faintly in the top right of the picture showing the ruins of the burnt out malting. The windmill appears to have lost its sails but the image available to the author is too faint to be entirely certain. *[This picture can be seen on page 169 of Amwell and Stanstead's Past in Pictures Dorree and Perman 1997].*

The above suggests the date of the windmills construction can be placed within the 10 years between 1877 and 1887. This was at a time when powered roller mills were rapidly making older types of water and wind powered mills out of date and very uneconomic. Indeed the authors own family built a windmill in Suffolk in the early 1800's when the demand for grinding corn was increasing, only to dismantle the mill and sell off the associated mill house and workers cottages in the 1880's in order to avoid impending financial problems.

Given the Stanstead windmills sheltered position and obvious considerable cost of construction it tends to point to a rich person wishing to indulge their interest in windmills rather than an economically viable business venture. At this time Richard Hunt was at the height of his business success and living in Stanstead Hall having given up the running of the water mill. He would appear to be by far the most likely candidate to have the interest and funds to indulge in a project that can have been for nothing more than a wish to see a large windmill in operation. This is further supported by his later even greater project in building the very large windmill at Much Hadham. He spent a reported £5,000 on this mill engaging the services of the well known and renowned firm of Sanderson's of Louth Lincolnshire. The fact that this was the last corn windmill ever built in England rather emphasises the unusual circumstances connected with its commissioning by a retired rich businessman who perhaps wished to leave behind prime examples of the windmill, a redundant technology that he clearly had a great love for. Sadly both the windmills at Stanstead Abbots and Much Hadham did not last long as complete structures following Richard Hunt's death.

A double tie bar type of wall plate bearing R. Hunt and the date 1866. These can also be found incorporated into the rebuilt malting



RICHARD HUNT

1815 – 1896



Portrait of Richard Hunt later in his life

Born	11 th February 1815 at Hadham Cross at the house now called Yew Tree lodge
1815	The ninth of ten children born to William and Susanna between 1801 and 1817.
Marriage 1	To Anne Knight of Hadham Cross on the 14 th December 1837.
1837	Anne dies in 1852 there were no children from this marriage.
1841	Richard recorded as living at Mardock Mill.
1851	Richard as recorded living at the Mill House, Roydon Road, Stanstead Abbots.
Child	In 1858 Richards only child Frederick Camp was born following a liaison between Richard and one of his servants. Miss Camp was from Wareside and returned there with young Frederick supported by Richard. Frederick was on good terms with his father throughout his life and continued to assist his stepmother Jessie after Richard died.
Marriage 2	To Emily Westropp on the 26 th May 1859
	Emily dies in 1865 there were no children from this marriage.
1875	Richard moves to Stanstead Hall, High Street, Stanstead Abbots in 1875.
Marriage 3	To Jessie Louise Vincent in December 1887
	Jessie outlived Richard there were no children from this marriage.
1890	Richard moves to a larger house in Much Hadham called Culver Lodge.
Death	Richard died on the 23 rd December 1896 in Much Hadham
1896	