

## **Charney Bassett Water Mill**

**by Daphne Jones**

Charney Bassett being one of the villages on the River Ock has had a watermill since the 12<sup>th</sup> century, but apart from a mention in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, little is known of its past history. For some time the Manor had been part of the Pusey Estates which, on being sold in 1909 to Berkshire County Council, was divided into smallholdings, the Mill with its attached cottage and land being one. The present building on the site near the church dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century but the Mill has not been used since about 1915.



Charney Bassett - c1890 - The Mill, view of rear, with mill pond, 4 adults 1 child.  
 (v-cha003)

The building deteriorated over the years, but the machinery remained intact, with the exception of the Breastshot waterwheel which most likely went for scrap. In 1974 Oxfordshire County Council took over the administration of the Estates and was interested in restoring the Mill as a Museum. A survey was done, money allocated and essential repairs carried out including treatment for woodworm. With the Council cutbacks late in 1976 the money was withdrawn and it looked as if the Mill would have to wait for its restoration.

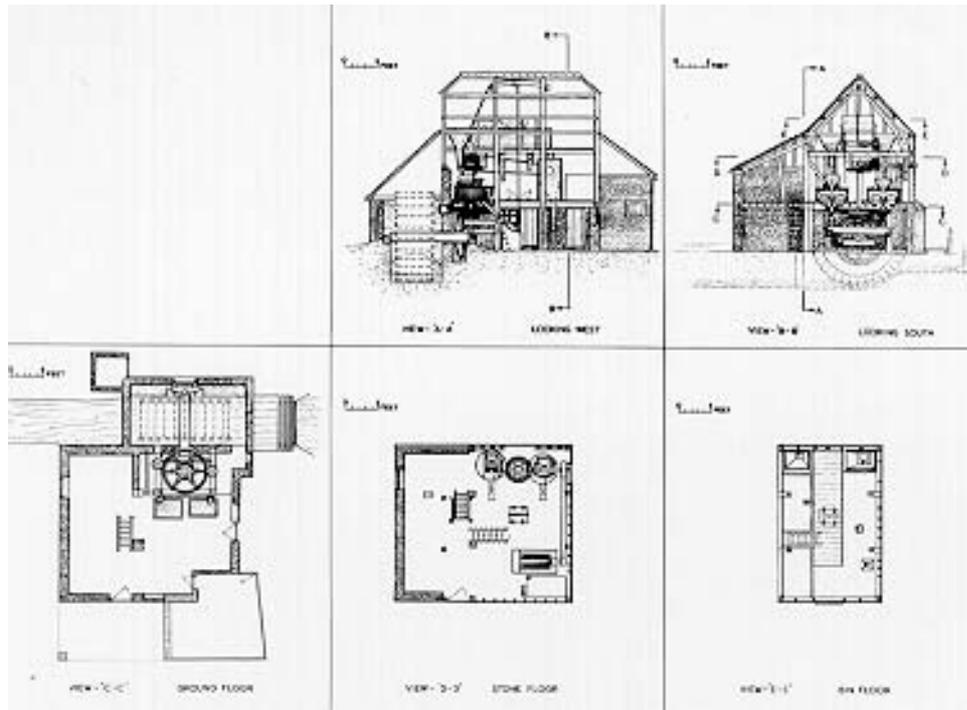
In 1975 the then Wantage Industrial Archaeology Group (now Vale of White Horse I.A.G.) was started following an Evening Class course. We meet once a month having a varied programme of speakers, films, members' evenings and outings. There is much to interest us in local industries and associated subjects in an essentially agricultural area. Our first project was a survey of The Mills of the Ock which was published. Other ideas for projects were being discussed when the County Museum Services approached us about restoring Charney Bassett Mill on a voluntary basis under their guidance. There being a wide diversity of occupations and interests amongst our members we felt able to take up the challenge. One of our members was restoring his own Mill - Venn Mill - and several members had experience in other areas.

The first task of course was a general survey. The basic construction is brick, stone and weatherboard, the building having been added to over the years as necessary, with the entrance having a rare covered area for waggons. It has two pairs of under-driven stones, and apart from some rotten cogs the machinery was in quite good condition, but the bin floor was fairly dilapidated.

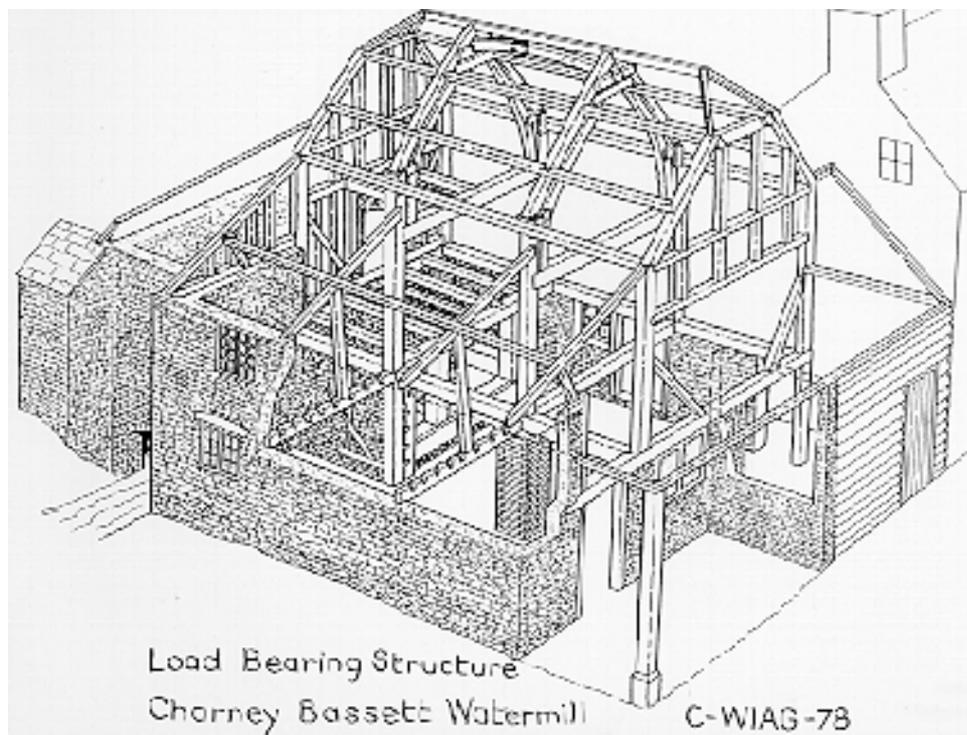
General tasks were allocated with no demarcation lines, but a good clean-up was undertaken first with years of dirt being shifted. The only body we found was a cat! A local Scout Troop was asked to help move two spare mill-stones on the stone (middle) floor. The floor boards were found to be rotten! A few weeks later one of the main beams was found to be rotten in its seating, but it was successfully repaired. Walls have been repointed and window frames repaired, and the rotten floorboards have been replaced. Gradually the machinery has been cleaned and conserved with any rotten parts being replaced.

Obviously the task with other commitments is taking a long time. The number of volunteers in any working party is only about 4-5 and up until recently parties could only work every other weekend. But progress and improvements since 1976 are very noticeable. A new staircase has been planned over the years and work is at present concentrated on its construction and siting. This will be a great asset as up to now access to the stone floor has been by ladder! It is not proposed to have any public access to the bin (top) floor. To the joy of everyone in the Group a suitable waterwheel was obtained from St. Helen's Mill, Abingdon, and this wheel is now being prepared for eventual installation in Charney Mill. Materials for the building work have been supplied by the County Estates with advice and guidance from the County Museum Services. Quite early on in the project the Group was fortunate in obtaining a grant towards the restoration of the machinery and replacement of the waterwheel.

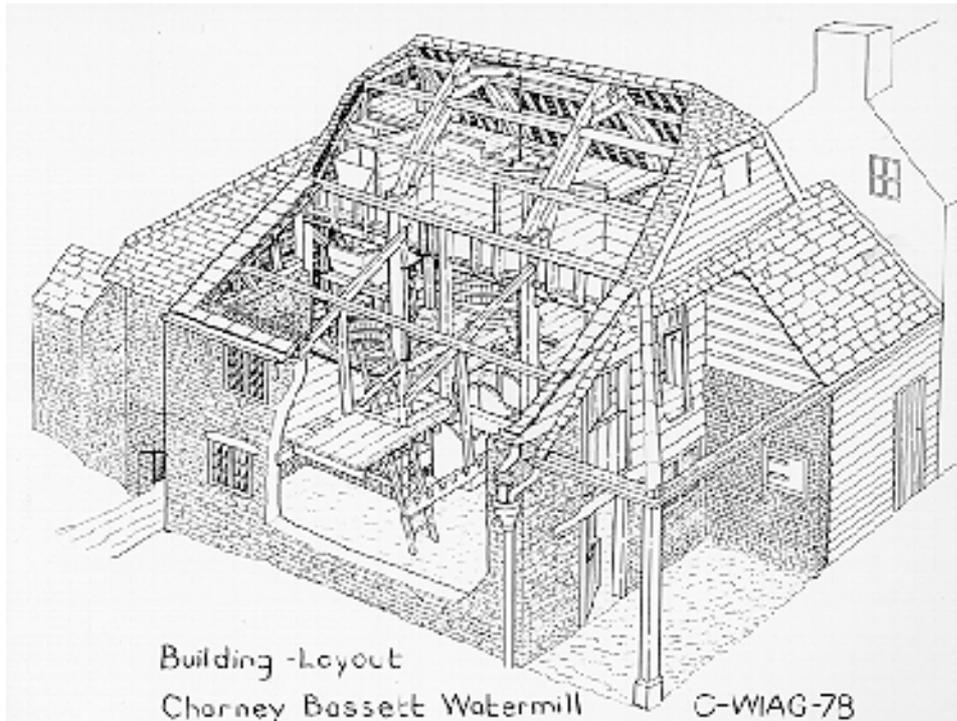
Over the years the villagers of Charney Bassett have been very interested in the project and quite early on a local farmer introduced some of our members to Mr. Belcher who had worked at the Mill. His reminiscences have been recorded. Open Days have been held and one Exhibition in the old Wantage Museum, with a 'progress' one in the Vale and Downland Museum. Eventually, Charney Bassett Mill will be opened as an on-site Museum under the auspices of the Oxfordshire Museum Services.



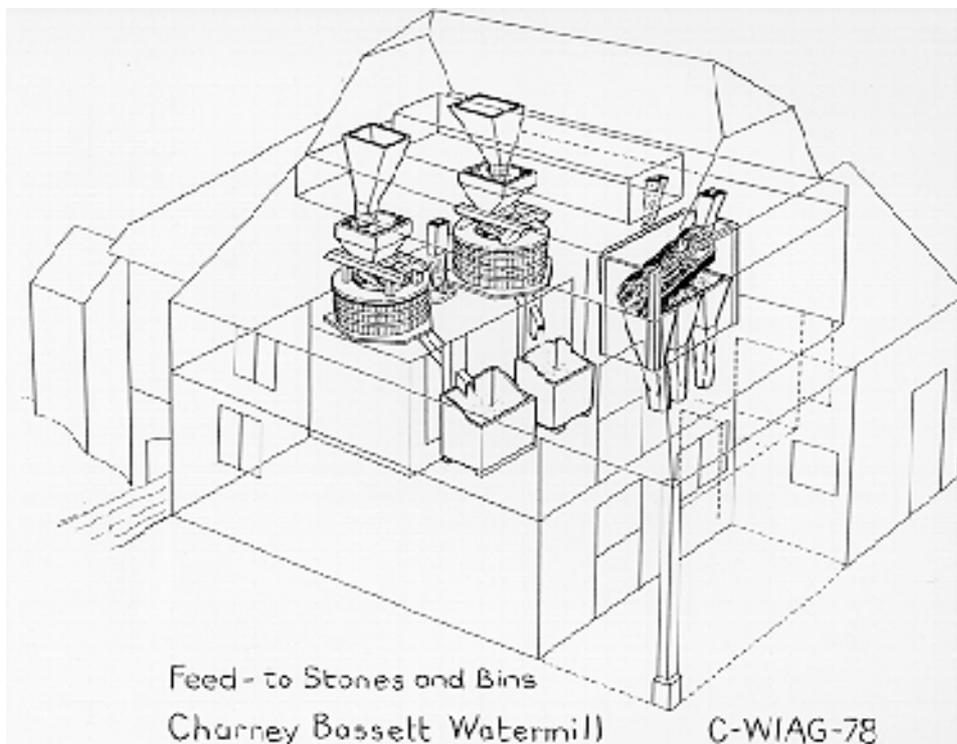
Charney Bassett - the watermill, 5 cross-sectional drawings (Ref: C-WIAG-78) (v-cha009.jpg)



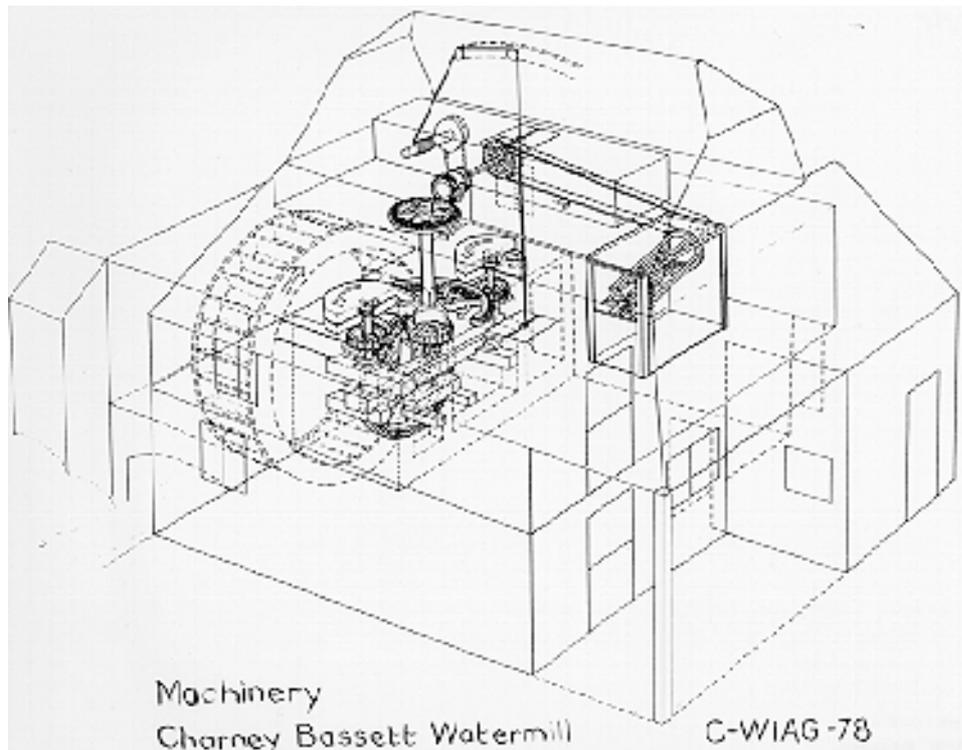
Charney Bassett - 1978 - the watermill, cross-sectional drawing "Load bearing structure" (Ref: C-WIAG-78) (v-cha011.jpg)



Charney Bassett - 1978 - the watermill, cross-sectional drawing "Building Layout" (Ref: C-WIAG-78) (v-cha012.jpg)



Charney Bassett - 1978 - the watermill, cross-sectional drawing "Feed to Stones and Bins" (Ref: C-WIAG-78) (v-cha013.jpg)



Charney Bassett - 1978 - the watermill, cross-sectional drawing  
"Machinery" (Ref: C-WIAG-78) (v-cha014.jpg)

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