

A woman in a floral dress is on the left, and a man is on the right, looking through a microscope. The background is a light blue sky.

Chesterton Mills in the Victorian Era

Chesterton Mills



[Chesterton Mill Photo,](#)
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[photograph Michael French.](#)
[Also available at National Mill Archive](#)

In 1847 William French, a local miller moved to Cambridge and began to rent Chesterton Mills.

Then in 1853 he bought the $\frac{1}{2}$ acre plot of land, which included the Mill for £440 at a public auction and the Mill was run by many generations of the French family for over 100 years. Most people now know it by the name French's Mill.

FACTOID!

The original windmill at Chesterton Mills is called a Smock Mill which means it is half brick, half wood and looks like a workman's smock.

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Then and Now – Chesterton Mill



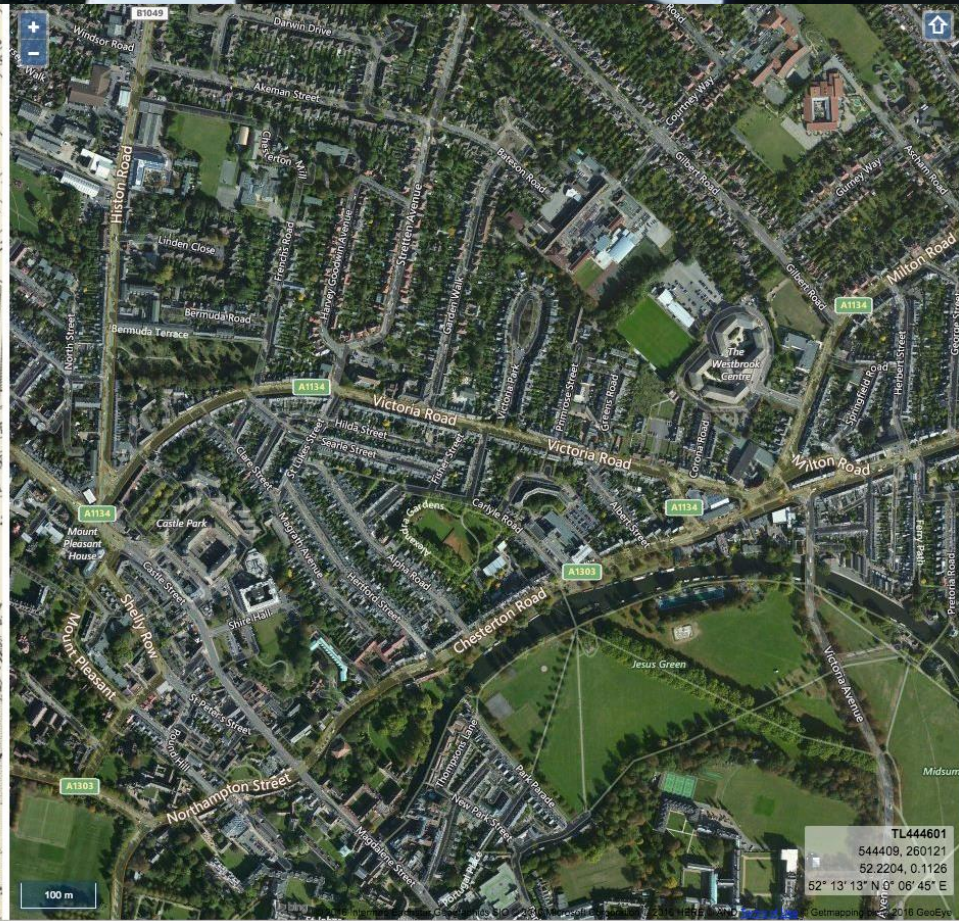
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A close-up photograph of a person's face as they look through the eyepiece of a microscope. The person has dark hair and is wearing a dark shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing another person in a floral shirt. The text 'Then and Now- Map' is overlaid in white on a semi-transparent dark blue banner across the middle of the image.

Then and Now- Map



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Can you spot Chesterton Mills?

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William French



William French was born in 1820 and was son of the miller, Thomas French. He followed in his father's footsteps in becoming a miller himself and worked at the family's mill in Harston, nearby Cambridge.

William died in 1901, the same year as Queen Victoria. He is buried in Histon Road Cemetery at the bottom of French's Road and you can still see his grave there today.

Photo of William French

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A Victorian French Family Photo!



This family photo is from 1890 and shows all the French Family.

Notice how many people there are in the family and the Victorian outfits they are wearing.

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Can you spot
William French
in middle of the
photo?

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Frederick the Baker



Photo published with permission
of Cambridge Collection

Frederick William was born in 1851 the second son of William French. He married Abigail Hicks in America but they soon decided to return to England and Cambridge. By 1885 they were in business as 'Baker and Corn Merchant' at 74 Searle Street where they lived with their 9 children. After Frederick's death in 1903 Abigail continued to run the shop until her death in 1921.

Like several of his brothers and cousins Frederick took advantage of his connection of being in a street close to the Mill and worked in a related trade using the flour from the family mill to make bread. He hoped to to buy flour and grain at discounted prices.

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74 Searle Street- Bakers and Corn Merchants- Then and Now



It would have been very common at this time for people to keep a few chickens in their yard or garden. They would buy the small amounts of grain to feed them from their nearest corn merchant such as this one, as well as their fresh bread. Now there aren't many shops in the area, but if you look carefully at the modern day picture you can see where the shop front once was.

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Maude's Move from the Country to the Town



This photo shows Maude French with the chickens in the field next to the Mill, which is where St. Luke's School now stands today! The field would have looked similar to this in the Victorian Era too.

She moved from the country, in Castle Camps to Cambridge town with her cousin Elsie, both to find work and to meet new people. It was in Cambridge that she met her future husband Edwin French, who continued to live a house next to the Mill and run the Mill after his father Arthur, and grandfather William before him.

[Maude with chickens on the field by the Mill](#)
[Published with permission of owner of photograph Michael French.](#)

[Also available at National Mill Archive](#)

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Living in a house next to the Mill felt very much like living on a farm, with animals such as chickens, turkeys and pigs living outside and an orchard and garden with fruit trees and vegetables

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Delivering Flour and Grain by Horse and Cart



Grain and flour from the Mill would be delivered by horse and cart from the mill to local bakeries in and around Cambridge.

Michael French, a member of the family shared a memory from his childhood of the smell of delicious baked goods, especially the doughnuts on display at the Oakington bakery. He would be allowed to have a doughnut as a treat for coming to help his father on the delivery round, which he very much enjoyed!

[Photo of French's Horse and Cart outside Mill](#)

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photograph Michael French.](#)
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Delivering Baked Goods by Handcart



The French family used to deliver flour to Maskell's Bakery on Victoria Road, near St. Luke's School. Maskell's would deliver the bread and other baked goods they made using a handcart like this one. To see a Maskell's handcart from the local Maskell's Bakery in Cambridge visit:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/Q9wMpXihT_2FCQMdSG0Tpw

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French Family Census

Parish or Township of Chester		Ecclesiastical District of		City or Borough of		Town of		Village of Chester	
No. of Inhabitants in House	Name of Street, Place, or Road, and Name or No. of House	Name and Surname of each Person who abode in the house, on the Night of the 30th March, 1851	Relation to Head of Family	Condition	Age of		Rank, Profession, or Occupation	Where Born	Whether Blind, or Deaf and Dumb
					Males	Females			
		Theodore Simons	Son		16		Brigade Apprentice	Harold's Yelling	
		Elijah D.	Son		14		Labourer	2° 2°	
		James D.	Son		11		Scholar	Cambs Cambs	
		Thomas D.	Son		7		2°	2° 2°	
		Helena D.	Son		4		2°	2° Chester	
51	Histon Road	Henry Hillman	Head	M	48		Carpenter	2° Histon	
		Lillian Huff	Wife	W	46		Washerwoman	Suffolk Wiltshire	
52	Bermuda Row	Thomas B. Clark	Head	M	31		Brickmaker	Cambs Cambs	
		Susan Ann D.	Wife	W	34			Worfolk Hilgay	
		Mary Ann D.	Son		4			Cambs Chester	
53	Bermuda Row	William Sutton	Head	M	23		Carpenter	Cambs Cambs	
		Elizabeth D.	Wife	W	21			Suffolk Redgrave	
		Frederick D.	Son		1			Cambs Chester	
54	Bermuda Row	Joseph Clark	Head	M	23		Bricklayer Lab	Essex Waltham	
		Ann D.	Wife	W	23		Tailor	Cambs Cambs	
		Mary Ann D.	Son		3			2° 2°	
		George Edward D.	Son		1			2° Chester	
55	Bermuda Row	William French	Head	M	27		Miller	Suffolk Alpheton	
		Rebecca D.	Wife	W	22			2° Persson	
		Arthur P. D.	Son		12			Cambs Chester	
Total of Houses	15 U B	Total of Persons			8				

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE					
1	2	3	4	5	6
Reference —					
H.O. 107					
1759					
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This census from 1851 shows William French and his family living in Bermuda Row, near to the windmill, after they'd moved into Cambridge from Harston.



French Family Census

Administrative County of Cambridge

The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the

Page 56

Civil Parish

Manorial Borough

Manorial Ward

Urban Sanitary District

Town or Village or Hamlet

Rural Sanitary District

Parliamentary Borough or Division

Ecclesiastical Parish or District

Chesham

Chesham

Chesham

Chesham

Chesham

Chesham

Chesham

Site 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	ROUSES Total Males Females Persons	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	DATE of Birth	DATE of Marriage	AGE last Birthday	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Whether Registered	Whether Registered	Whether Registered	Whether Registered	Whether Registered	Whether Registered	Whether Registered
144	Occupation R No 1 Mill 4	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	(1) Deceased-Death Date
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	(2) Female, Infant or Child
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	
145	Dr No 24	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	
146	Dr No 25	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	
147	Dr No 26	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	
148	Dr No 27	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	
149	Dr No 28	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	
150	Dr No 29	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	
151	Dr No 30	1	James J. French Head M 30					Master	X					James J. French	
			Elizabeth W. Wife F 28					Scholar						Elizabeth W. French	
			Robert A. Son M 10					Scholar						Robert A. French	
			Adeline E. Son F 10					Scholar						Adeline E. French	
			Charles E. Son M 8					Scholar						Charles E. French	
			Frances E. Son F 8					Scholar						Frances E. French	
			Joseph A. Son M 7					Scholar						Joseph A. French	
			Henry Son M 6					Scholar						Henry French	
			W. Alfred Son M 5					Scholar						W. Alfred French	
			Martha Jackson Son F 4					Scholar						Martha Jackson French	

Total of Houses and of
Persons with less
than Five Rooms

Total of Males and Females...

NOTE.—Draw the pen through each of the words of the headings as are inappropriate.

Reference:

RG12/1280

PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

1 2 3 4 5 6

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Can you spot the names of all the children who lived in the French's house and how old they were? Who else also lived with the family?

Bill Mead- Worker at the Mill



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[Also available at National Mill Archive](#)

Bill Mead worked at the Mill in the 1930s until it closed in the 1950s. It was extremely hard work working at the Mill as it was difficult manual work, with lots of lifting of heavy things such as the bags of grain and flour.

It would have been very similar for workers at the Mill in the Victorian Era, with workers being expected to do lots of manual work for long hours, which must have been exhausting!

When Bill Mead died he was remembered in an article in Cambridge Evening News, in 1976.

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Life Working at Mill

Here is a picture of inside the windmill where grain was brought from the fields.

These wooden shovels were used to move the grain so it could then be milled into flour, which would then be baked into bread and pies by local bakers and colleges.



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From Wheat to Flour



Millstones were made of a special hard stone so they didn't wear away in the grinding process and mix stone dust with the flour !

A pattern of grooves was carved into the surface of the stones so the grain and flour moved from the centre to the edges as it was ground. It collected in a large bin (a hopper) before sieving to separate flour, bran and chaff. The flour would then be put into hessian sacks and weighed on the mill scales before being sold.

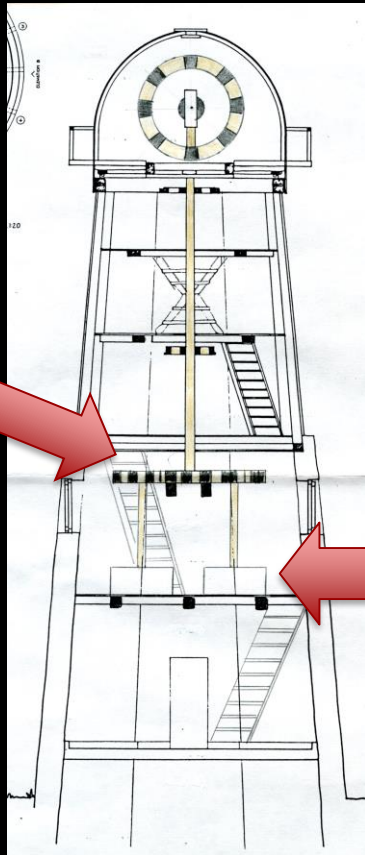
This photo shows the scales and weights that were used in the mill to weigh bags of flour, grain etc.

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Wind Power at the Mill



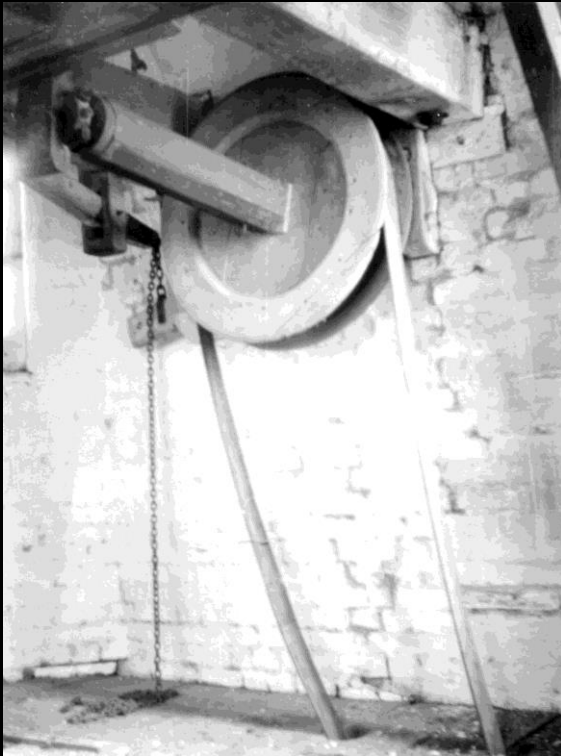
The first 20 years the windmill relied solely on its sails to drive the millstones which ground the wheat.

However they discovered that wind power did not create sufficient energy to keep the millstones grinding the grain for as long as power was needed.

The millstones

This diagram shows the mechanism of the windmill, including the gears that turned the mill stones.

Inside the Mill -the Workings of the Mill



[Photos of the pulley and grindstone in the Mill](#)

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[Also available at National Mill Archive](#)

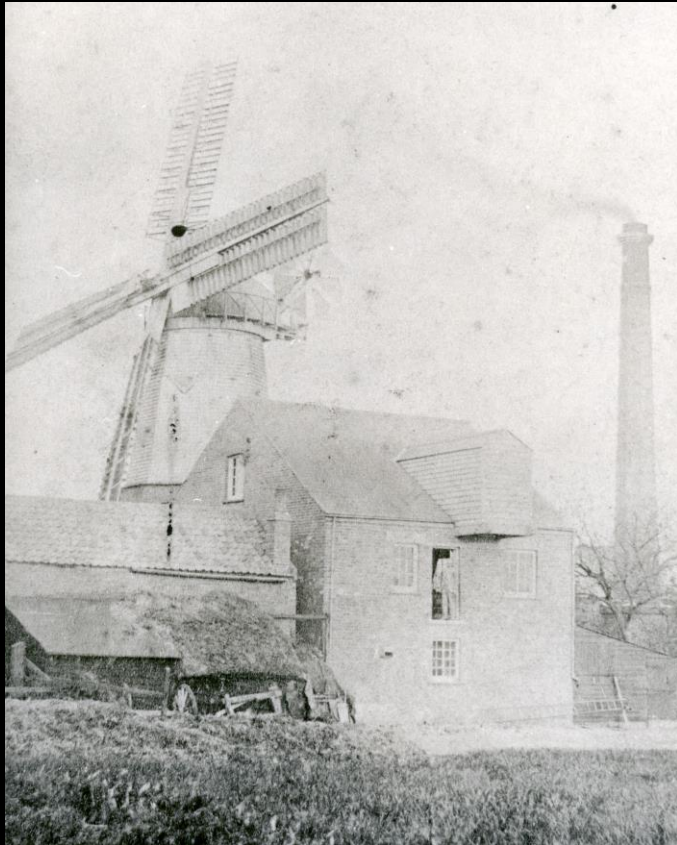
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The Need for Steam!

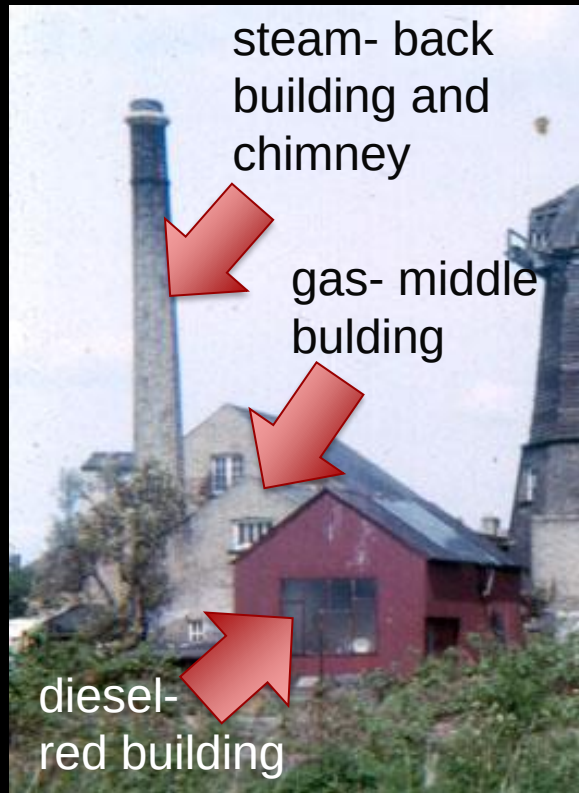
The Industrial Revolution



Wind was not a reliable source of energy for the Mill. So in 1868 William French installed a steam engine. This had its own Engine House with a very tall chimney. Coal was used to heat water making steam under pressure. The steam drove the pistons of the engine which turned the drive wheel. A belt connected the drive wheel to the machinery in the windmill. When there was too little wind the new engine would be used.

Can you spot the chimney in the background of the photo which shows that this picture was taken after the installation of the steam engine?

The Evolution of Technology



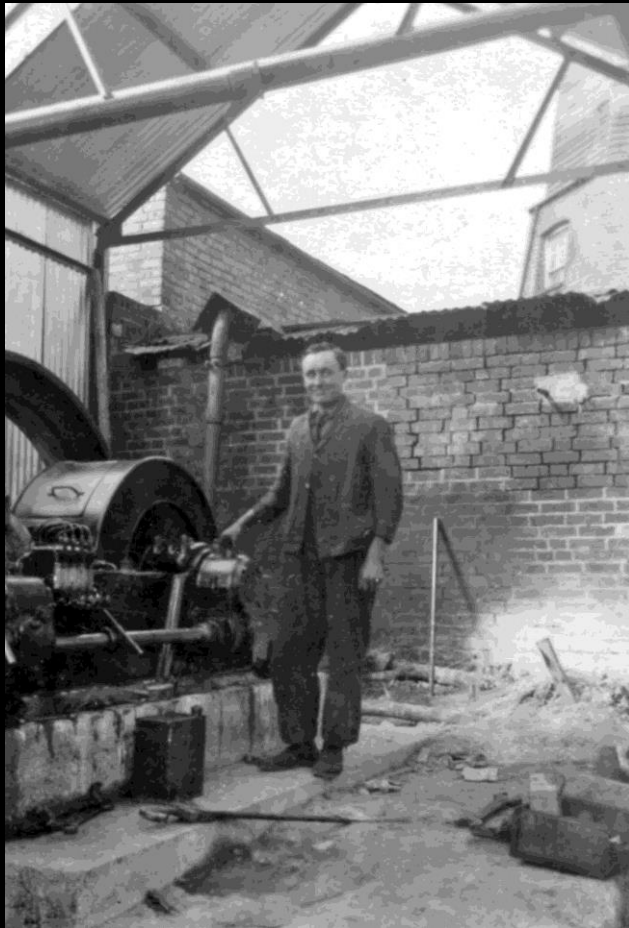
With the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, the Chesterton Mills started to embrace new technologies as they emerged.

Firstly with steam power, then gas, and finally diesel in the 20th Century.

This photo shows these three different technologies that were located in different buildings on site; steam in the big building at the back with the chimney, gas in the middle building, and diesel in the red building in the foreground.

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The New Diesel Engine



This photo shows Eddie French, another family member who worked at the local engineering firm and installed the working on the Diesel Engine in the new engine house in 1937.

Can you spot part of the windmill in the back of the photo?

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A person is shown from the side, looking through a microscope. The background is dark, and the person's face is partially visible. The text "Discover More..." is overlaid on the image.

Discover More...

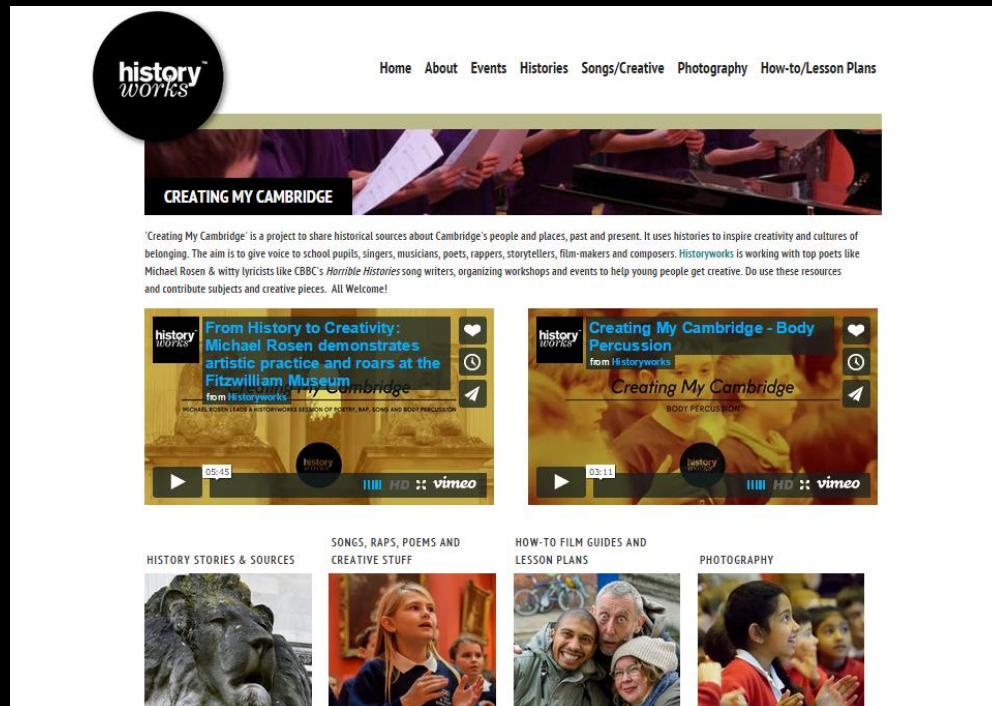
- All photos from Michael French's Collection also available along with other resources at: [National Mill Archive](#)
- [From Quern to Computer- a new book from the National Mill Archive](#)
- [Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central library](#)
- [Victorian Bakers- BBC programme clips](#)

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Web Resources available at:

<http://www.creatingmycambridge.com/history-stories>



The screenshot displays the 'historyworks' website interface. At the top, a navigation bar includes links for Home, About, Events, Histories, Songs/Creative, Photography, and How-to/Lesson Plans. The main header features the 'historyworks' logo and a large banner for 'CREATING MY CAMBRIDGE' showing people at a piano. Below the banner, a paragraph describes the project's aim to share historical sources and inspire creativity. Two video thumbnails are featured: 'From History to Creativity: Michael Rosen demonstrates artistic practice and roars at the Fitzwilliam Museum' (05:45) and 'Creating My Cambridge - Body Percussion' (03:11). At the bottom, four categories are listed with corresponding images: 'HISTORY STORIES & SOURCES' (a lion statue), 'SONGS, RAPS, POEMS AND CREATIVE STUFF' (a girl singing), 'HOW-TO FILM GUIDES AND LESSON PLANS' (a group of people), and 'PHOTOGRAPHY' (a group of children).

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Home About Events Histories Songs/Creative Photography How-to/Lesson Plans

CREATING MY CAMBRIDGE

'Creating My Cambridge' is a project to share historical sources about Cambridge's people and places, past and present. It uses histories to inspire creativity and cultures of belonging. The aim is to give voice to school pupils, singers, musicians, poets, rappers, storytellers, film-makers and composers. Historyworks is working with top poets like Michael Rosen & witty lyricists like CBBC's *Horrible Histories* song writers, organizing workshops and events to help young people get creative. Do use these resources and contribute subjects and creative pieces. All Welcome!

From History to Creativity: Michael Rosen demonstrates artistic practice and roars at the Fitzwilliam Museum
from Historyworks
MICHAEL ROSEN LEADS A HISTORYWORKS SESSION OF POETRY, RAP, SONG AND BODY PERCUSSION
05:45 HD :: vimeo

Creating My Cambridge - Body Percussion
from Historyworks
Creating My Cambridge
BODY PERCUSSION
03:11 HD :: vimeo

HISTORY STORIES & SOURCES

SONGS, RAPS, POEMS AND CREATIVE STUFF

HOW-TO FILM GUIDES AND LESSON PLANS

PHOTOGRAPHY

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