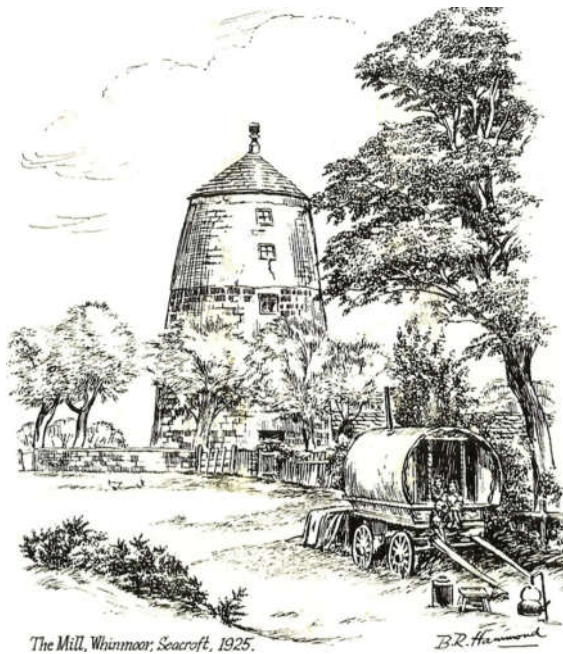


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Seacroft Windmill, near Leeds, West Yorkshire

By Jacquetta Hartley



The Mill, Whinmoor, Seacroft, 1925.

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The Seacroft Windmill is the most recognisable historic landmark which nowadays has been incorporated into the building of a well-known hotel. It is situated about 5½ miles north-east of Leeds off the Ring Road near the junction with the A64 York Road and can be seen arriving into or leaving Leeds.

Long before the hotel was built around the stone tower of the windmill it was surrounded by acres of farmland on Whinmoor. For many years during the 1930s it was known as Betty Barker's Mill, taking the name from the owner or tenant of the farm on which land the windmill stood, and was enclosed by only a few farm outbuildings and a gamekeeper's cottage. In some documents it is recorded as Whinmoor Mill and probably replaced the first windmill recorded on the site in 1370. This would have been a post mill built in wood.

From the Middle Ages until the present windmill went out of use local farmers would take their corn there for grinding into flour.

Right: The stone tower of the old windmill incorporated into the hotel complex.



Above: An aerial view showing the tower of the windmill in close proximity to the Ring Road near the junction with the A64 York Road.

Right: Location map of Seacroft showing the Windmill and the farm buildings, known as Windmill Farm or Betty Barker's, surrounded by a few outbuildings and a gamekeeper's cottage. Taken from the 1909, 6" Ordinance Survey map.

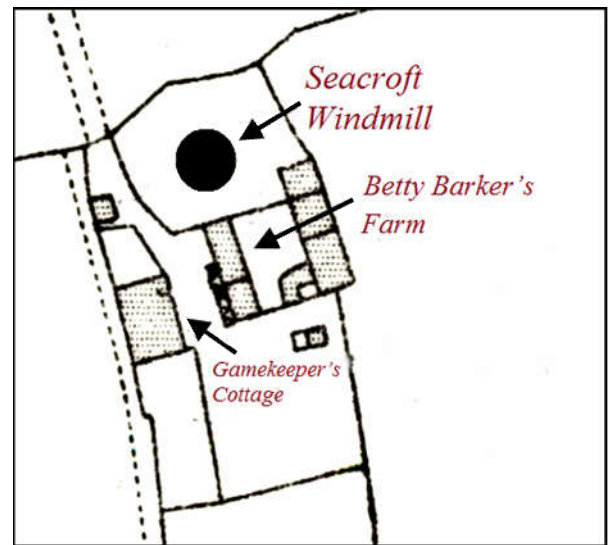
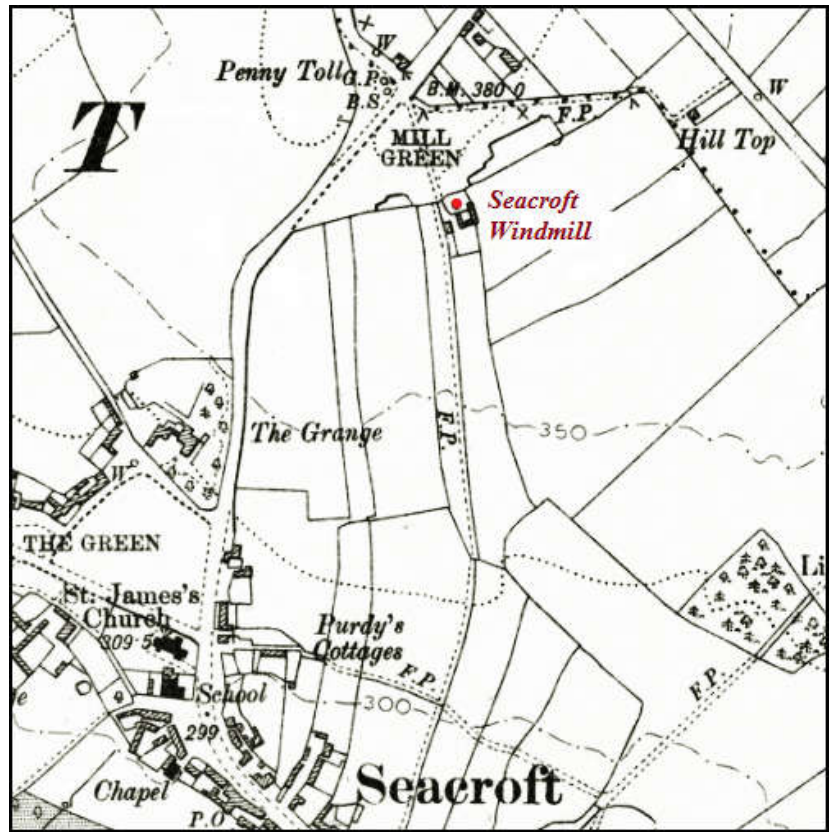
The stone windmill was probably built sometime in the 1700s and it was reported in a newspaper of 1767 that the windmill was blown down in a storm. However, on studying old photographs of its structure it is evident that the top levels were rebuilt in later years so perhaps it was damaged rather than destroyed.

It is also suggested that the mill could be the Flint Mill mentioned by John Smeaton writing in April 1774, in which he discusses the weathering of the lattice sails (Repts of the Late John Smeaton, F.R.S. Vol. II 1812) and was one of several local tower mills grinding corn.

In 1822 the mill passed into the hands of the Chippendale family who moved from Yeadon and were at that time in the business as corn millers. It is said that on William Chippendale's 80th birthday in 1842, he stood on his head on top of Seacroft mill to show that his health was good. According to a tithe map of 1834 the Seacroft Windmill was owned by John Wilson, who leased it to John Pearson.

Right: Plan of the Seacroft Windmill illustrating the farm known as Windmill Farm or Betty Barker's Farm, outbuildings and a gamekeeper's cottage, taken from the 1909 25" Ordinance Survey map.

It is thought that the mill was in use in 1928, but apparently by then it was not powered by wind, although it is marked on early 19th century maps as a 'windmill' so presumably it would originally have been powered by wind using sails. It ceased to operate sometime in the earlier 1930s when the circular stone tower was capped in lead with a shallow conical covering made by Mr. Willie Wood, a plumber from Crossgates on the instructions of Mr. Darcy Wilson (1851-1936) of Seacroft Hall, then Squire of Seacroft.



Darcy Wilson's died in 1936, unmarried. The estate was subsequently sold to Leeds Corporation and Seacroft Hall was demolished in 1953-4.

It is not sure how many levels the windmill had, but four-storeys can be identified from the earliest photographs showing windows taken in 1942.

Left: The Seacroft circular stone tower windmill as it appeared in 1942. It shows a close up view of the windows, the lead cap and rebuilding work at the top levels. The sails were removed long ago. Courtesy of Kent University Special Collections.



Left: Seacroft tower windmill taken in 1942 shows it was in rural surrounding with what was possibly the farmhouse situated on the right. The sails probably rotted away some time ago and were removed. Courtesy of Kent University Special Collections.

Right: Another view of the Seacroft tower windmill showing the lead cap and without sails taken in the early 1950s. The photograph shows its rural surroundings with a pond at the bottom right and what was possibly the farmhouse just visible through the trees on the right. Courtesy John Edenbrow.



By the end of the 1960 the windmill fell into disrepair and its lead conical covering was stripped. The adjacent farm buildings were demolished in 1964 leaving the isolated tower of the windmill looking extremely vulnerable. Around 1970 a hotel group began seeking planning permission to build a motel including a restaurant with a car park on the site, but it was not until 1973 and after much persuasion did the Leeds Corporation granted planning application to the Reo Stakis Organisation. The approved plans for a motel was on condition that the old stone tower of the windmill was retained, and incorporated into the design. The ruined stone windmill tower was successfully restored with a reinforced lining and 12 feet of the top reconstructed, it was incorporated into the new hotel complex and now serves as a reception and lounge at ground floor level, and has heating equipment installed above.



Left: This photograph was taken in 1963 It shows the derelict windmill and farm buildings, known as Windmill Farm or Betty Barker's Farm. The farmhouse and outbuildings were demolished in 1964 and the lead conical covering of the windmill tower was stripped sometime before. In 1973 the stone tower of the windmill was restored and incorporated into the new Windmill Hotel.



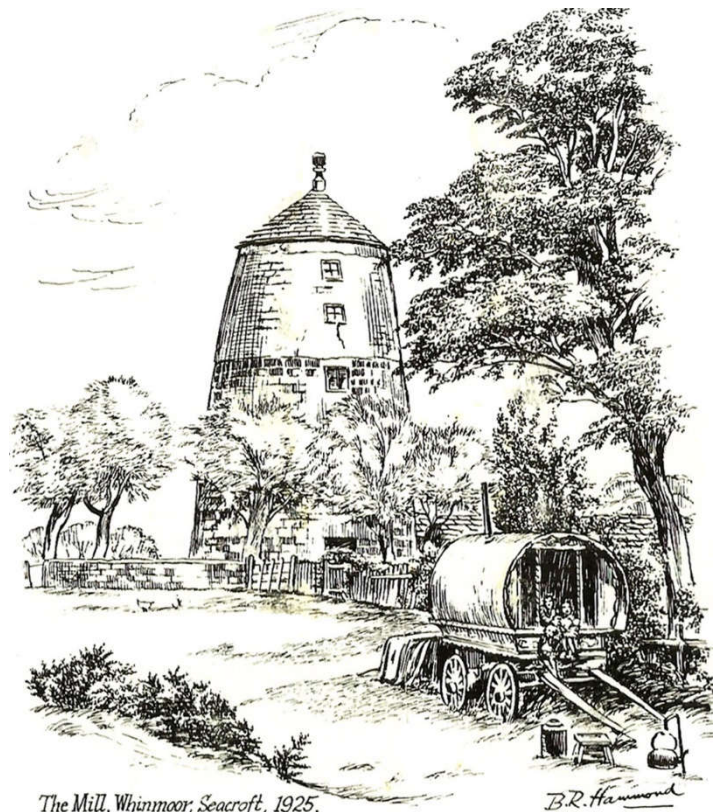
Left: A view of the ruined stone windmill tower seen in the foreground on the left with the farmhouse and outbuildings that were once used as part of the farm. The photograph was taken before the farm was demolished in 1964. It is looking east from the Ring Road near the junction with the A64 York Road. The houses in the background form the Mill Green estate and in the far distance tower blocks can be seen.

Right: Another view of the ruined stone windmill tower and the farmhouse taken from the A64 York Ring Road before the farm was demolished in 1964.

In 1980 planning permission was granted to extend the hotel, with extra rooms and more parking spaces. It was known as the Windmill Hotel until it was takeover by the Ramada Jarvis in the late 1980s and was renamed Ramada Hotel. In 2008 it was acquired by Britannia Hotels and is now called the Britannia Leeds Hotel.

While the adjoining buildings look out of place and out of character for such a landmark, it is still an impressive sight to see a ruined building of architectural and historic interest such as the Seacroft Windmill restored and incorporated and become an integral feature once again. It reminds us of its story through the 200 hundred years or more of its life.

Right: A drawing of the Seacroft Windmill by B. R. Hammond as it appeared in 1925. It shows the top level that was rebuild in later years with windows, and the lead conical covering cap. A gipsy caravan is in the field in front of the windmill.



The Mill, Whinmoor, Seacroft, 1925.



Left: A windmill of the post-mill type, perhaps similar to the mill built on the same site in 1370. Taken from a manuscript of the 14th century.