

WASC 2064

W41 628

Correspondence from Mrs. Jell
Watson on Saltpetre Boiling Pot
donated to Mills and Powder Mills

Hotel

History

Battle Mills

JILL WATSON
POTTERS COTTAGE
FIRGROVE ROAD
CROSS-IN-HAND
EAST SUSSEX
TN21 0SS

WARGM Co.	
Date Rec'd	27 JUL 2004
File	
Action	Copy

Tel/fax 01435 863551

16th July 2004

Lynne Leonard
Royal Gunpowder Mills
Beaulieu Drive
Waltham Abbey
Essex EN9 1JY

Dear Lynne

Further to our conversation this morning - I now enclose two photographs of what I have called for years a Vat. Having very recently acquired the Shire booklet which shows a picture of a similar article I will now refer to it as a Saltpetre boiling pot!!

I have always believed that it originally came from the Powdermills at Battle. I saw similar items there in 1972 when the Estate was being split up by the Websters. I walked along the dam and saw, I think, three small buildings built of brick and tile (similar to a potting shed) with a single door to each and a large cast pot to the left of each building. There were numerous upright implements leaning against the wall adjacent to the pots and a lot of other debris lying around. It looked like everyone had packed up work and gone home. I now realise how important this was as it must have been a bit of a time warp for nearly a 100 years - how I wish I had gone back and taken photographs. I learnt my lesson though and did record the Ashburnham brick works a few years later with the bricks still lying in the sun to dry, overgrown with grass and everything still in tact.

Later, in the 1970,s I purchased my pot in a farm sale at Ninfield (3 miles from Battle) where it had been used as a cattle trough. It was difficult to move and we rolled it off a trailer and it stood for the next 20 years by a 16th C. Sussex farmhouse and my daughters ponies drank from it. When we dredged the pond it was used as a receptacle for temporarily storing the Carp!
Whilst at the farmhouse (half a mile across the field from Glaziers Forge) I discovered many cast iron items when digging and found Cannon balls etc etc Some of which are now in the possession of Lewes museum (not on display), including the "Puddlers Hole" which I mentioned.

I will be delighted to give you the pot and will contact the owner of the other one that I discovered at Dallington, identical in shape but smaller. They are

Sign Displays

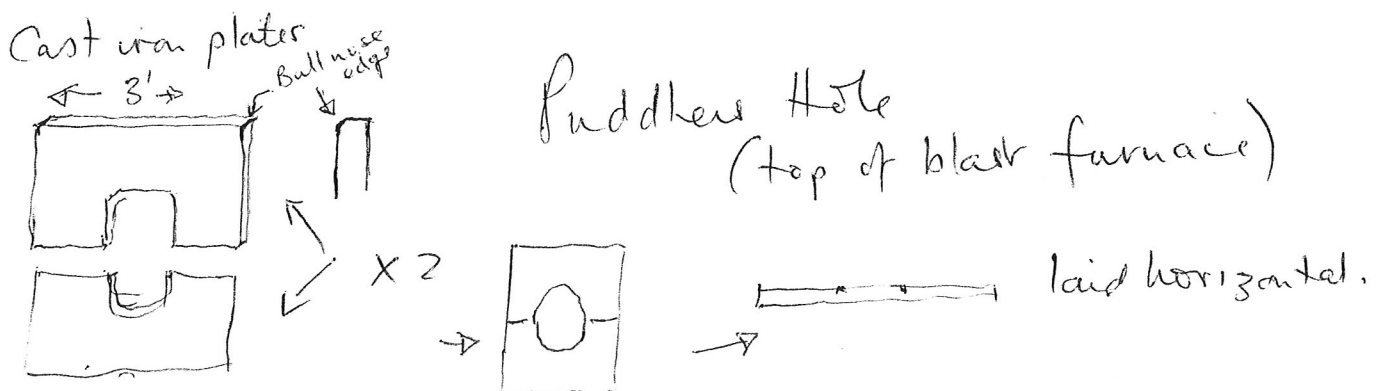
very heavy. A scrap man once asked to buy it and I said he could providing he could lift it, needless to say it stayed where it was. I will make arrangements for delivery but this will take a little time which I know you also need.

I look forward to a trip up to Waltham Abbey and meeting you, it was lovely to talk to someone who was as interested as I am in all things connected to the Iron industry.

Yours sincerely

Jill Watson

Mrs Jill Watson



WASC 2067

COPY

POWDER MILLS HOTEL HISTORY

• The History of PowderMills •

The PowderMills Hotel stands in a thickly wooded valley with a small stream, the "Asten" meandering through, next to the historic battle field of 1066. The stream rises on a high ground to the left of Battle Abbey and runs in a south easterly direction through the Great Park, former residence of the Abbot of Battle and by the way of Crowhurst Valley straight to the English Channel at Bulverhythe, St. Leonards.

The Asten was, at one time, a very hard working stream with no less than five gunpowder mills stretched along its banks. The first was the "Farthing Mills" and stood by a millpond of six acres. Next was the "House" or "PowderMills" proper with a pond of 12 acres. These PowderMills included the proprietors residence and several buildings for the various processes in the manufacture of gunpowder. Further down the stream, there was another large pond (now filled in) and mills known locally as "Pepper in eye."

Lower Pepper in eye was the fourth estate of the series and the last was situated at Crowhurst, another mile downstream.

PowderMill House, at the centre of the gunpowder works, was originally built in 1676 when the 1st lease was granted to John Hammond.

Due to an explosion in 1796, the house was destroyed with much of the Gunpowder works. The house (now the Hotel) was rebuilt in that same year and by the end of the century, the mills had recovered and were flourishing once more.

It was reputed that these PowderMills made the best gunpowder in Europe and the reputation of the Battle factory was very high during the Peninsular and the Crimean Wars. The Duke of Wellington visited the mills in 1806 when he was stationed in Hastings and another famous visitor was Charles Dickens.

The Battle gunpowder had a special formula of salt petre, sulphur and charcoal mixed and reduced to a very fine powder. The salt petre and sulphur were imported, the charcoal from Alderwood, which was delivered to the works and burnt in pits. For the finest powder, dog wood

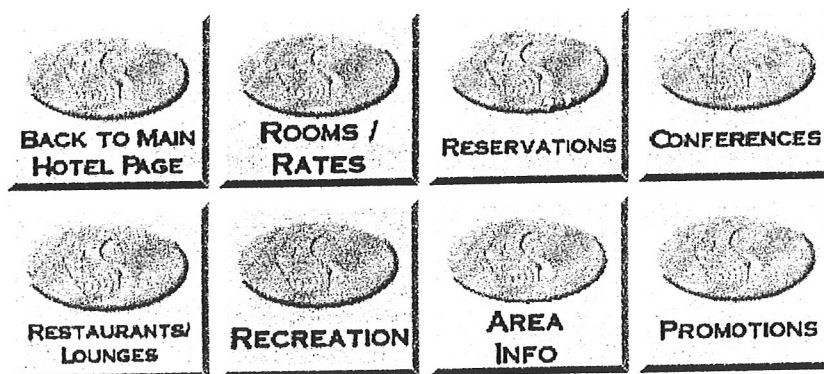
was used. This was carefully preserved, peeled and tied into bundles closely resembling the osiers used for basket making, then piled in large stacks by the cylinder houses.

There was an enormous use of timber in this area starting with the Romans with Iron mills in Dallington, Beauport Park, Brede and Crowhurst Park. In the 18th century, both the iron and gunpowder industry were flourishing but both needed large amounts of timber. During the middle ages "the dense forest of the weald" is often mentioned.

The packing of the powder, when it was ready, was carried out by the local women. It was sorted for different uses, munitions for the Armies, Sporting and Blasting, and sorted in powder magazines ready for delivery. It was then carefully placed onto wagons and then taken to Tonbridge where it was loaded on barges and conveyed by water to the magazines at Erith. During the Crimean War from 1854 to 1856, 1300 barrels of gunpowder were sent to the Crimea from the Battle Mills.

The extensive works over the years did not escape accidents, and there were many deaths due to explosions. In 1876, the Duke of Cleveland, the then owner of the Battle Abbey Estate, refused to renew the lease because of this constant danger and, after 200 years of gunpowder manufacture, the mills were closed and fell silent.

PowderMill House remained empty until 1901 when, following the death of the Duchess of Cleveland, Sir Augustus Webster, the 8th Baronet, bought back the Abby and the local Estate which had previously been owned by his ancestors and moved with his family to the house where the Webster family resided until 1976 when the government bought the Abbey and the remainder of the Estate was auctioned.







IN LOVING MEMORY OF MRS. DORIS LILLIAN TAYLOR 1925-2008

