

Extract from "Somerset Windmills and Sites" p 57
PORTISHEAD 458 767

An indenture made on 25 March 1832 between the Mayor, Burgesses and Commonalty of the City of Bristol and John Nesbitt of Portishead, miller, records that the stone tower mill and cottage were recently built or building and were to be 'completed according to a plan and elevation already submitted by the said John Nesbitt to the Surveyors of City Lands '.

The lease was for 99 years at a rental of £3 per annum. By 1846, however, it appears that John Nesbitt had left the mill and all attempts to let it again failed. A legal letter of 4 May 1848 refers to the mill having 'been unproductive for nearly two years past' and suggests that the tower be converted into a dwelling to provide additional accommodation for the tenant of the mill cottage, ' in consequence of there being a Mill in Portishead worked by Steam, there was little prospect of the Mill under the lease being worked to any advantage '.

Permission was granted for the conversion on the understanding that no new building was to be permitted on the land ' without the elevation--being first submitted to the Committee ', and a Mr Gay put in an estimate to carry out the conversion in 1848. The proposals included removal of the machinery, putting a new roof on, new floors, a staircase and a chimney stack and the work was apparently undertaken as planned ⁶⁷.

There is a story, set between 1860 and 1865, which refers to the windmill being used by smugglers ⁶⁸ and a watercolour apparently dating from about 1875 showed the mill with a thatched head ⁶⁹, but it would seem likely that memories of the mill lived longer than the mill itself, for Portishead windmill appears to have been one of the last built in Somerset, to have had one of the shortest working lives and to have formed one of the first windmill house conversions, a sad tale.

The site is very close to the sea and the mill gave its name to Windmill Bay just below, and it is stated that the mill never did much work because the situation was too low and 'people brought their corn there and had to wait sometimes six weeks before the wind was suitable'.

The straight tapered stone tower still stands, incorporated in 1908 into a building for a golf club house, which is now a public house.

⁶⁷ BCA. (Papers 03280.1-.5).

⁶⁸ *Somerset Memories and Traditions*, Frances H. Wood, 1924.

⁶⁹ Watercolour in possession of Miss Wilmott in 1930's.