

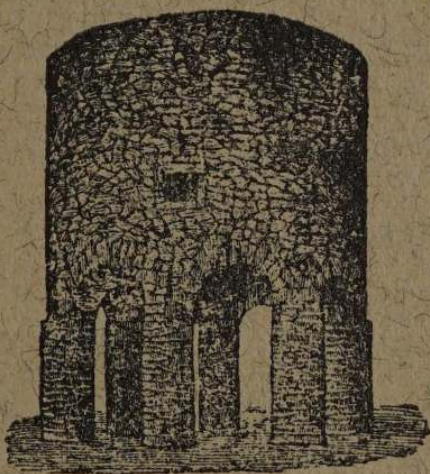


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The Old Stone Mill

by

Herbert Olin Brigham



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INTRODUCTION

The writer presents the following article as a candid analysis of facts concerning the Old Stone Mill. With the exception of a few bits of hearsay and tradition, also some stated opinions on recent writers, I have confined my material to known documents, quotations from historical writers or episodes of history. Everything which is printed in these pages is the personal statement of the author and does not in any way reflect the opinions of the officers or directors of the Newport Historical Society of which the writer has been Librarian since October 2, 1938.

Herbert Olin Brigham

91 Rhode Island Avenue
Newport, Rhode Island
October 2, 1948

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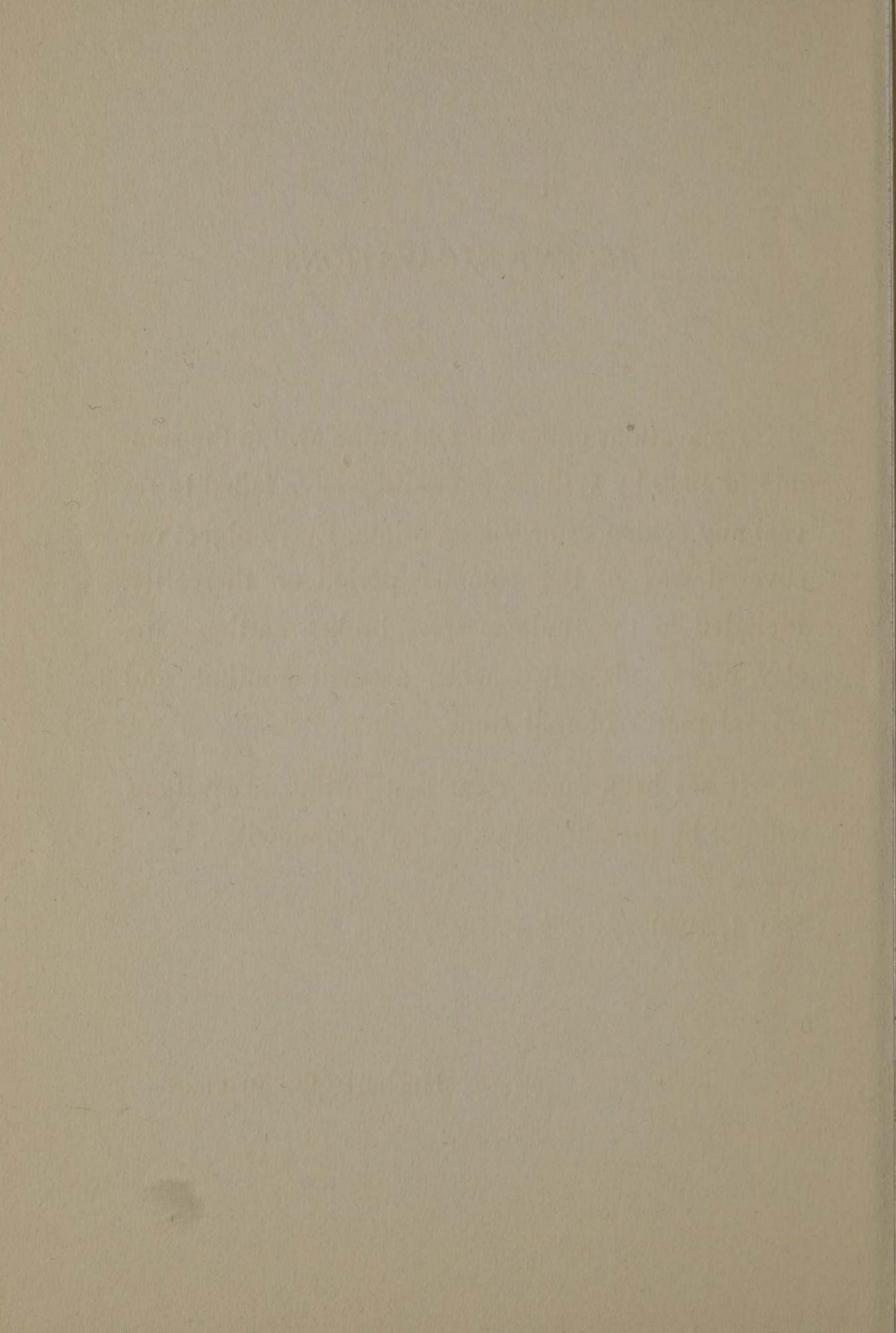
RECENT EXCAVATIONS

Excavations under the Old Stone Mill in the summer of 1949 by William S. Godfrey have failed to reveal any evidences of Viking origin. Every object uncovered was of the colonial period or thereafter. Included in the findings were broken earthenware, clay pipes, glass fragments, a small gunflint and several pieces of mill stone.

It has been made clear that furthur excavations will not be permitted by the Park Commission.

May 1, 1950

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The Old Stone Mill

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THE Old Stone Mill in Newport, Rhode Island, has given antiquarians and archaeologists cause for much conjecture as to its origin. There are at least three schools of thought, each having its coterie of vehement adherents. One group contends that Gov. Benedict Arnold, who in a will dated Dec. 24, 1677 mentions his 'Stone bilt wind miln', was the builder of the ancient structure; another dissenting group by various arguments, largely by the prototype method, insists that the Newport Tower, as they term it, was erected at an unknown date by a Viking group. Another group believes that Portuguese explorers, possibly Cortereal, constructed the Mill.

To these three groups should be added those persons who believe that all facts about the Mill must be substantiated by documentary evidence and that conjecture should be cast aside. Other persons are of the opinion that in studying the construction of the edifice, the questions of function, form, and adaptability for use as a mill for grinding corn should be given consideration.

In a little park, now surrounded by houses, stands this strange edifice, which has puzzled residents and visitors in Newport for over two hundred and sixty years. Located in the upper slope of a plateau, at one time giving a wide view of the open harbor or roadstead, the structure has withstood the ravages of time, passed through storm and hurricane, and now, in a fine state of preservation, defies the world to solve its mystery.

It has been the cause of much controversy, and the literature on the subject numbers a hundred books, pamphlets, and magazine articles.

The Structure

The structure, locally called the Old Stone Mill, is a circular tower about twenty four feet in maximum diameter and twenty six feet in height. The lower area consists of eight massive pillars and rough hewn arches, the wall above is in a form of a cylinder of solid masonry broken by a few small apertures. The whole is open to the sky and housing that existed has been destroyed. The building material is rough hewn native field stone and beach stone joined by a mortar of lime, sand, and shell.

There are varied peculiar features which indicate the former existence of a second story. Certain indentures and projections in the stone seem to be set-

tings for beams holding a floor in place. On this upper level a large niche with flues leading to exterior vents is assumed to be a fireplace. Other features which give credence to the theory of a second floor are small double splayed windows in two levels and projections which probably supported a circular staircase. There is a curious irregularity in the location of the apertures.

There is no doubt that at one time there was a certain amount of wood in the structure. This would include roofing, flooring, studding, support for the mill arms, the arms and possibly doors with the necessary framing for the open apertures on the first level. Today there remain no traces of this wooden construction nor do there exist any drawings, sketches or specifications showing such construction.

That the structure was at one time plastered or stuccoed is highly probable as even today traces of the plastering in two or more shades may be found.

There is a reference in Church's "History of King Philip's War" which might have a bearing on the old Stone Mill as a defense structure. Benjamin Church, under date of 1675, writes in his narrative, speaking in contempt to an officer who would not pursue Philip when Church felt that victory was within their grasp "Pray sir, then, Please to lead your company to yonder windmill, on Rhode-Island, and there they will be out

of danger of being killed by the enemy, and we shall have less trouble to supply them with provisions." It might be explained that "on Rhode Island" refers to the Island of Aquidneck on which Newport was located, and it might also be added that Col. Church had a definite interest in Newport as his wife and family were in residence in the town during the war, and he frequently visited them.

The First Documents

The year 1677 marks the first documented date which directly concerns the Old Stone Mill. In that year three references may be found in documents; first, a deed defining the bounds of the Jewish Cemetery; second, the use of the mill lot as a burial place for a child, and third, the will of Governor Benedict Arnold, dated December 24, 1677. This Will definitely states "My body I desire and appoint to be buried - - - in or near ye line or path from my dwelling house leading to my stone built wind miln". In a later paragraph he bequeaths to his wife Damaris various properties including "my stone built wind-miln," and at her decease bequeaths the property to his youngest daughter Freelove. On Feb. 13, 1720, Edward Pelham, who had married Freelove, gave to their son Thomas "for yearly payments during my natural life possession of my homestead, mansion house and windmill", and other realty. This quit claim was not recorded until

September 1727 at the time of Thomas's death. In the same year Abigail, widow of Thomas, made a lease of the mill fields. In 1731, with the consent of Edward the husband, Freelove's will was recorded, twenty-one years after her death. In this will the son Thomas received the Stone Mill with "all its appurtenances", and later, through an unknown document, Edward Pelham, Jr. brother of Thomas, obtained possession of the mill, for in 1740 he wills it to his daughter Hermione, wife of John Banister. In this will Edward Pelham calls the structure the "Old Stone Wind-Mill" which apparently is the first time the word "Old" was applied to the Mill. This will is dated May 21, 1740.

Later in this article we will make reference to a painting of approximately the same date which shows the mill in a state of dilapidation. Benedict Arnold's will was recorded in the Town Council records and the original document is now in the possession of William Davis Miller of Wakefield, R. I. For some unknown reason the Town Council in 1752 again recorded the will in Volume 2 page 2 of its records. A printed copy of the will may be found in the Rhode Island Historical Magazine July 1885, p. 20, in the Arnold Memorial p. 54, and in Charles T. Brooks' book on the Old Stone Mill printed in 1851. A copy of Edward Pelham Jr's will is also printed in Mr. Brooks' book. The deed of the Jewish cemetery is reproduced in the Publications

of the Jewish American Historical Society v. 27, p. 175.

It is noteworthy that in the Colonial deeds which are in the State Archives or in the Newport Historical Society there is no reference to a stone built windmill prior to 1677, or a stone structure which may or may not have stood on the site of the Stone Mill. After the deeds previously mentioned there is a reference in a deed from John Wanton to Joseph Gardner in **which** the south boundary is "on Carr's lane leading to Pelham's Mill". Eventually "Carr's Lane" became Mill street which clearly showed the location of the Mill. There are several other deeds carrying phrases relating to the Stone Mill or road leading to the Stone Mill in the 18th Century.

Defense Discussion

During these early years the stone structure was undoubtedly used as a windmill, but in 1756 the voters at the Newport Town Meeting took action substantially as follows: "It being proposed to build a lookout upon Mr. John Banister's Stone Mill, - - - he agreed they shall build the same, they paying 10 pepercorns a year, and to have the use of it while the war lasts and make a 10 foot way by fencing to it and leave it in good order when given up". The Town Council records (vol. 2 p. 142) further state a meeting was called "by beat of drum" to consider on said affair, and also to consider whether it may be necessary to

build a watch house at Castle Hill or elsewhere to "watch of nights". Later the meeting was held and it was voted "there should be no lookout on Banister's Stone Mill, but ye Ward house in ye neck should be built." The "war" refers to the land and naval war between England and France called the "Seven Years War", but known in the American Colonies as the "Old French and Indian War" 1755-1763.

In 1762 Samuel Freebody was one of a committee to erect a watch tower on "Old Stone Mill." This statement by George H. Richardson is not official, but is probably accurate.

John Banister by his will probated in November 1767 devised the "Old Stone Mill" to his sons John and Thomas. A phrase therein states "Some time passed used for a powder house."

Stone Mill During Revolution

What happened to the Stone Mill during the period of the American Revolution is problematical. From December 1776 to October 1779 the British occupied Newport and it is reported that the soldiers did damage to the ancient structure. It is possible that the building was used as an ammunition magazine.

During nearly half a century, Frederick MacKenzie, an officer of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, kept a diary 1748-1791 and the period between 1775 and

1781 has been printed by the Harvard University Press. The Newport section is of deep interest to Rhode Islanders. The particular reference to the "Mill" is to be found in the second volume, p. 348, where, under date of August 11, 1778, MacKenzie discusses the need of erecting redoubts within the town "One near the Windmills above Easton's Pond and the other near the Stone Windmill behind Headquarters and near the Library". Apparently this latter location was not used, as a list of batteries in use August 28, 1778 shows only the redoubt at Easton's Beach.

After the British left Newport considerable Tory property was confiscated by the State of Rhode Island and Thomas Banister's interest in the Mill lot was included in the seizure.

For five years the question of ownership was in dispute and in April 1784 the legislature authorized the state treasurer to deed one half of the Mill lot to John Banister, Jr. and one half to the officers and soldiers of Col. Angell's regiment. Apparently the officers and soldiers made no use of the property as the transaction had some relation to deficiency pay and for no other purpose.

Six years later trustees on behalf of the State and the Regiment sold the property including the Old Stone Mill to William Peck. In 1794 Peck sold to Jeremiah Olney and in 1799 Olney sold to George Gibbs.

Gibbs and his descendants owned the area for fifty-five years.

In 1854 Judah Touro, a wealthy Jew, died in New Orleans and out of love for his native town bequeathed \$10,000 to the City of Newport for the purchase of the Old Stone Mill. The area now faces Bellevue Avenue with the Redwood Library and the Art Association in the vicinity. Patriotic citizens also contributed over \$5000 towards the purchase of the Stone Mill lot and as a result the entire tract was dedicated to public use and called Touro Park.

Tradition and Hearsay

Now a few bits of tradition and hearsay: One Joseph Mumford in a deposition dated November 17, 1834, stated that his father, born in Newport in 1699, had called the Old Stone Mill a powder mill and later his father had used the structure as a haymow. At that time Mumford Jr. claims there was a circular roof which could be turned with the aid of a yoke of oxen. He stated there was a floor above the arches. These statements hold water as the Mumfords lived on adjoining property called the Brattle place and probably mowed the fields about the Old Mill as the Banisters had become interested in trade.

A John Langley, born about 1771, stated that he heard his father tell the story that Langley Sr. as a boy had carried corn to the Mill to be ground.

On Dr. Henry Jackson's map dated 1856-7 he states: "A lady, the mother of Clark Burdick Esq., told me in 1847 that her father who died ten years previous and was 100 years old was in the habit of visiting this mill and that it was in full operation in his early years. I was also informed of a person who was well known to some now living in this town who had often said that his father served as a miller in the mill. The mill had its original covering 100 years 'since' when by accident it took fire and was consumed." This statement does not agree with the ruined condition of the Mill as shown in 1740. Edwin S. Burdick stated that his grandfather had told him that in his youth, he, the grandfather, had carried corn to the Old Stone Mill.

Dr. Ezra Stiles of Newport, later President of Yale University, kept a diary from 1769-1795, but nothing is found in the printed edition concerning the Old Stone Mill in spite of the fact that the distinguished scientist and clergyman made four trips to study the famous Dighton Rock, a relic which aroused much interest for many years, but more recently, its markings have been deciphered by the late Professor E. C. Delabarre as in part the cryptic writings of Michael Cortereal, a Portuguese explorer, who took shelter in Mount Hope Bay in 1511.

From 1740 to 1885 the Stone Mill was allowed to fall into decay. To enhance its ancient appearance some person conceived the idea of planting vines over the outer wall, but in 1878 the City Council by resolution ordered their removal.

In 1885 at the request of Mayor Franklin, George C. Mason Jr., then Secretary of the American Institute of Architects, made a report on the condition of the Old Mill. Mr. Mason found the structure in a sad state with numerous cracks throughout the stone sides and the top a mass of open rubble. As a result the City Council ordered repairs to the structure and at that time two feet of construction was added to the upper portion. Harry W. Fludder, then a lad of twenty, told the writer in 1943 that he recalls working on the building in 1885 for his uncle, the contractor. The work was very thorough and is explained in detail by Mr. Mason in a report dated October 30, 1885. In this final report he notes that all the old port holes and one window, which in the course of time had been filled up with brick-work were opened and left as originally built. Mr. Mason concludes "This brick-work was evidently the work of later occupants fitting the "Old Mill" for their own uses and not a portion of the ancient structure.

For the past sixty years the Old Stone Mill has stood unchanged.

Early References

The manuscript and printed references relating to the Old Stone Mill are surprisingly meagre. Prior to 1677, the first known date, there has not been located one item or paragraph in any printed book, pamphlet or manuscript in either Britain or America.

Between 1677 and 1817 there is a paucity of material concerning the mill. No printed references have been found in this period and manuscript notations have already been mentioned.

Printing in Rhode Island and in Newport began in 1727. There was a short lived newspaper in 1732-33 and the famed Newport Mercury, still in existence, started in 1758. Yet in all these early newspapers printed during the 18th century not one stray item concerning the Mill appears.

In the same century many gazetteers, encyclopaedias, and books of travel gave space to Newport, but the description centers on the early history, commercial development, and the port's value as a naval base. Rev. Andrew Burnaby in his "Travels" printed in 1775 mentions the Redwood Library, but does not allude to the Old Mill.

The first printed reference to the Mill appeared in a gazetteer of Connecticut and Rhode Island by Pease and Niles, Hartford 1819.

This first appearance in print may have been stimulated by the action of Stephen Gould, local antiquary, who had re-recorded the Arnold will in 1817. Gould realized that the partial loss of the Town Records at the close of the Revolution had destroyed evidence concerning the ancient building, hence he filed the copy with the City Clerk and later deposited a copy with the local historical society.

The vicissitudes which befell the Newport records are worthy of note. On the departure of the British in 1779, a zealous sheriff seized the records and placed them on a small ship which unfortunately sank in Hell Gate. Eventually the documents were removed from the wreck and left in a New York warehouse. In 1782 the precious papers were returned to Newport and after many years of neglect were restored by a preserving process and placed in the custody of the Newport Historical Society.

In 1822 Timothy Dwight, then former President of Yale, published his travels and in mentioning Newport refers to the Windmill.

In 1823 a series of letters appeared in the Providence Gazette. These items show awakening interest in the Old Mill but oddly enough, a careful examination fails to disclose any communications in the Newport newspapers for the same year. It is quite true there was a dearth of local news printed at that

time, but that the Old Mill aroused interest in Providence instead of Newport is puzzling.

Five years later, a Mrs. Anne Royall in a series of travels called "Black Book" alludes to the Old Mill, making a hazard that it might have been built by the Indians or by the French of Canada.

Paintings and Pictures

The first known depiction of the Old Stone Mill is an early painting by an unknown artist, now in the possession of Mr. Lewis G. Morris of Newport. It is a view of the town as seen from the harbor and the appearance of the contemporary churches, buildings and other structures would make the date approximately 1740. In 1884 the picture was reproduced by John P. Newell. The significant point about the painting is the ruined condition of the Old Stone Mill which stands on an eminence without any housing or other evidences of use and seems to be open to the sky. There is another painting, also by an unknown artist which was found over a mantel in a house on Mill Street in 1886, it is reported to have been purchased by Jane Stuart, daughter of the distinguished portrait painter Gilbert Stuart. This house near the Mill was at one time owned by the Mumfords, who, it may be recalled, had haying rights in the Mill lot. It has been claimed that the landscape in question was painted by Gilbert Stuart, but biographers of Stuart, especially

Lawence Park, had no knowledge of the picture and Stuart's special forte was portraiture. There is a bare possibility that Stuart's son Charles, who had a penchant for landscapes, painted the picture. Charles died in early manhood. In any event, the picture, now owned by Lawrence Phelps Tower of New York and Newport, is undoubtedly an early picture of the Mill.

A painting of the Stone Mill in the New York Historical Society is not of great significance, but an accompanying letter dated 1823 mentions a Doctor Mitchell who claims that "Light is wanted" on the old Mill, thus showing curiosity concerning its origin.

Later pictures dated 1827, 1833, and 1835, by Alexander Jackson Davis and William Guy Wall, dub the structure "Newport Ruin", clearly showing the decay into which the edifice had fallen. There are at least three paintings done in the Wall manner, but with slight variation in detail.

In the latter year Richard Morell Staigg painted the Old Mill with considerable detail and with youthful enthusiasm.

A New Theory

In 1829 Professor Carl Christian Rafn, Secretary of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries, Copenhagen, Denmark, was preparing a comprehensive volume on Northmen in the New World before

Columbus. A correspondent, one Thomas H. Webb, then secretary of the Rhode Island Historical Society, sent Professor Rafn a mass of material mostly about inscribed rocks in Southern New England. From September 1830 to October 1835 Webb furnished Rafn with all sorts of information concerning New England antiquities. Part of this correspondence with other data is to be found in the book entitled "Antiquitates Americanae" published in Hafniae in 1837. Then out of a clear sky came a letter dated Boston, May 22, 1839 from Webb addressed to Rafn in which the former secretary of the Rhode Island Historical Society then living in Boston, Mass. set forth for the first time the thesis that the Stone Mill might be of Norse origin. In his letter he casts doubt upon the construction by Arnold, then raises the question that if the Mill was standing in 1639 would not the English settlers have observed it, or on the other hand if erected later, would not the remarkable construction be chronicled. Webb supplemented his letter by forwarding two drawings both true in design but finished with too great care, completely ignoring the rough surface of the structure. In 1839 Rafn reproduced these drawings in a serial publication of the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries and for the *first* time brought forward the suggestion that the Newport edifice was built in the 12th century by Eric, Bishop of Gardar in Greenland. Bear in mind that Webb had

in earlier years searched the countryside for evidences of Scandinavian occupation with meagre results, but in 1839 he suddenly discovered the structure called the Stone Mill and rushed a message to Rafn with alleged affirmative evidence to support his statements.

The Norse theory was in full flight, destined to be a lively topic of dispute for decades to come. Thus two distinct groups were arrayed against each other, the one asserting that Benedict Arnold built and owned the Mill, the other firmly of the belief that while Arnold owned the Mill, other hands, probably Norse, erected it. There should be a third group whose sole object would be the accumulation of facts and the abandonment of loose conjecture, no matter how intriguing.

Benedict Arnold

For the Arnold theory the known elements have already been outlined. Now a word about Arnold, his English background, his life in America, and his accumulated wealth.

Benedict Arnold was born December 21, 1615 in Ilchester, Somersetshire, England, the son of William and Christian (Peak) Arnold. His genealogical background is well known and has been verified by the late Edson Salisbury Jones, a competent genealogist. The Arnolds were a substantial middle class family.

In 1635 Benedict, then a lad of nineteen, came with his father to America, first living at Hingham, Massachusetts, then at Providence. He found his way to Newport in November 1651. He became a freeman two years later and in 1657 replaced Roger Williams as President of the Colony, serving until May 1660. He was again reelected in 1662 as President. Under the terms of the Charter granted by Charles II in 1663, he was appointed Governor. Again elected in 1669 and in 1677 as chief executive, he died in office. At his burial nearly one thousand people attended the services. In the span of forty years Arnold had accumulated much wealth in land and personal property, had received high political honors, and had been an important personage in the colony.

Need For a Mill

Why was there a need for a windmill in Newport in 1675? Peter Easton, one of the original settlers kept a diary or made marginal notes in printed books. In his personal copy of Morton's "New England Memorial" under the date 1663 he wrote: "This year we built the first windmill" and in the same book he recorded in quaint language the destruction of 'our' windmill on the 24th of August 1675 during a very severe storm. This original wooden mill, its construction apparently sanctioned by the town authorities, existed for twelve

years and its loss deprived the community of any facilities for grinding corn.

Let us briefly review the hazards of the colony in the last half of the 17th Century. The first war between the English and the Dutch occurred between July 1652 and April 1654. The second Dutch war was from Feb. 1664 to July 1667 and in the latter year the Colony of Rhode Island took measures to place itself in a state of defense and by legislative action caused the erection of beacons on the south coast. No mention is made of any defense structure on the hill on which the Stone Mill now stands.

In March 1672 the third war broke out between the British and the Dutch and a year later the Dutch again assumed control of New York.

The third Dutch war ceased in Feb. 1674 and in the following year the Indian outbreak known as the King Philip's War began.

In 1675 Arnold had been out of office as Governor since May 1672, and was living in Newport. Again he assumed the governorship in 1677 and found the colony in considerable turmoil. The King Philip's War was over, but the Indians were still restless. Trouble with Connecticut over jurisdiction in King's Province in Narragansett country, west from Newport beyond the islands of the bay, was brewing and several men had been arrested and taken to Hartford.

This controversy may have had a bearing on the construction of the Stone Mill, although it is more likely that the troubles with the Dutch were far more dangerous. It is always obvious that the possibilities of the Stone Mill as a watch tower were at all times under consideration. Its splayed narrow windows, the broken or parapeted top now made smooth by later hands, suggests to military men a form of defense. Arnold may have also considered the risk from fire or from high gales.

It is highly improbable that an edifice of this size could have stood exposed to view from 1639, the date of the first settlement, to 1677 without some comment in print, in manuscript, or brought down by word of mouth as tradition.

As one stands and looks up at the massive stone structure with its varied openings and its unique construction one wonders what strange twist caused Arnold to erect a building of this character. Yet it would seem incredible that the first comers to the lower end of the Island would have permitted a stranger from Providence to usurp the commanding location on the plateau and seize possession of a stone ruin, if such it was.

Newport During the Indian War

Newport in the period from 1672 to 1676 was not seriously affected by the Indian Wars. Persons from

devastated towns in other parts of New England took refuge on the Island and during the latter part of the period strangers were "warned out" by the town authorities.

Hence prior to 1677 there was an ample supply of casual labor and in addition skilled masons. In other words the circumstances might have been an earlier W.P.A. Possibly Arnold's idea of a combined fortress, lookout and mill took root and the settlers aided Arnold in erecting the building. To these people, it was a commonplace matter, hence the few records that are extant give no clue to its construction. In some distant day a letter written by a worker on the job may come to light.

As a matter of record, Rev. Dr. Jackson about 1853 collected mortar from the mill, from a tomb vault, from the old Bull House 1640-41, the Easton house, the Atkinson house, the Vernon house, and the Southwick house. These mortars placed in separate receptacles were indistinguishable and showed erection at the same general period and with the same type of materials.

A house probably built by Jeremy Clarke and known at various times as the Robinson, the Sueton Grant and Atkinson house was destroyed in 1894 and the immense chimney bore in its stone work a striking resemblance to the Old Stone Mill. Jonas Bergner,

Archibald Forbes and others offered the opinion that the method of erection was identical and that the builder of both structures was Nicholas Easton, a master craftsman in early colonial days.

This same Dr. Jackson in 1856-7 prepared a map of Newport which he embellished with facts about the early beginnings of the Colony and quotations from colonial records. Referring to Benedict Arnold he notes on this map "Benedict Arnold caused Thames street to be laid out 100 ft. wide - - - and built his house a stone building upon the east side of the street where now (1857) the Rhode Island Union Bank Building stands. - - - land extended from near Frank Street to the Coggeshall lands in the neck. - - - the windows of his house were guarded by grates of iron similar to our jails. He caused a stone fort to be erected opposite to his mansion upon land where R. Carr now owns and Commercial Bank, and two cannons were kept therein for its additional defense, and it is said there is a small cannon now in existence which was stationed at his door." Mason also states that Arnold kept guard boats plying back and forth in front of the town.

These statements prove clearly two things: first that Arnold used stone for construction when others used wood; second that he had a fear of attack and guarded his property by various means of defense. Possibly both of these mental attitudes caused him to

erect the Stone Mill in the form of a defense structure.

Stone craft was at a high level in early New England. The mason, the miller, the carpenter were in the vanguard among the early arrivals. The rough hewn native stone was a natural medium and the exact proportions of this mill structure showed the type of work capable of being performed by English workmen of the period.

There is an authentic report of a stone mill used for the manufacture of sugar in the Barbadoes, British West Indies. This mill had a fireplace on the second floor and was built by a William Arnold who lived in Barbadoes from about 1651 to about 1688. Benedict Arnold according to his biographer, Hamilton B. Tompkins, had traded with the Barbadoes and in a letter to Roger Goulding, his son-in-law, at Boston, mentions a "nasty parcel of molasses" and further urges Goulding to finish his (Arnold's) business at Barbadoes. A facsimile of this letter dated August 31, 1674 is printed in Bulletin 30 of the Newport Historical Society. Additional research may show pertinent facts concerning this Barbadoes mill and the relationship between the two Arnolds.

The Historians

The historical scholars, including the earlier group as Bancroft and Lossing; the New England Chroniclers

as Palfrey, Elliott, and Drake; the writers in the latter nineteenth century as Higginson, Mason, Winsor and Fiske and the modern historians as Avery and Channing give little credence to the Norse theory for the Old Stone Mill.

George Bancroft in 1834, and in later editions, gives slight attention to the early voyages of the Vikings; B. J. Lossing, on the other hand, visited Newport in 1848 and examined the mill but reached no definite conclusion, even ignoring Governor Arnold and his ownership.

Among the New England historians Charles W. Elliott made no reference. John G. Palfrey in 1858 devoted considerable space to the subject and assumed the Arnold theory in a manner to influence thinking for many decades. Samuel A. Drake in 1875 followed the same reasoning. Thomas W. Higginson, who spent much time in Newport, disbelieved the Norse premise.

In 1884 George C. Mason, Jr., a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, published an article in the Magazine of American History entitled "The Old Stone Mill". This article was reproduced in his father's book entitled "Reminiscences of Newport". Appended to the story are measured drawings made in 1878 which show clearly the apertures in the cylindrical surfaces. Mason unfortunately

used the English Chesterton mill as a prototype, but otherwise his general conclusions were sound and his architectural details illuminating. At that time he doubted that any structural changes were made during the many years of the mill's existence, but, as it may be recalled, Mason a year after publication of his article made an official report to the Mayor of the city on the condition of the edifice. In his story he states "I have found myself confronted with constructive features which point to the last quarter of the seventeenth century as the time when the structure was built and to Governor Benedict Arnold as the designer as well as the owner of the Old Stone Mill."

Justin Winsor, a most profound historian, devoted a replete chapter to Pre-Columbian Explorations in his "Narrative and Critical History" printed in 1889. In a scholarly presentation, he followed Palfrey's conclusions and added "There is not a single item of all the evidence thus advanced from time to time which can be said to connect by archaeological traces the presence of the Northmen on the soil of North America south of Davis' Straits."

Sixteen years later Edward Channing pays tribute to Winsor's erudition and also speaks highly of Arthur Reeve's study of Vinland, published in 1890. Reeves considers the Norse theory for the Old Stone Mill as "in disfavor."

Clarence S. Brigham writing in 1902 stated "The most we can safely assert is that according to historical tradition, the Norsemen visited several points in the eastern coast of America; but that we can identify the locality of any one of these visits is not proved by any documents yet adduced."

The Feral Theory

John Fiske scouts the idea that the Norsemen built the Old Stone Mill. Fiske also makes a telling point, never refuted, that colonists bring with them domestic animals of various types. These animals left to themselves revert to a "feral" state and remnants of the breed are usually found in later years. In New England animals of the "feral" type do not exist. The casual visit on shore of a ship's crew or exploring parties of some size even remaining for a winter would leave some traces of a tangible sort, indestructible material as crockery, glass or other matter.

In 1914 William Hovgaard, formerly of the Royal Danish Navy and at that date connected with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in his book "The Voyage of the Norsemen to America" came to the conclusion that Arnold built the Old Stone Mill.

It has been claimed that the Old Mill bears physical evidences of Norse religious usage as a baptistery. The suggestions thus far made have not been lucid or conclusive in either presentation or argument.

The belief fostered by recent writers that there was a secret colony from Greenland in Vinland and that certain ecclesiastical authorities had a part in this secret colony is not borne out by any facts existent anywhere. This premise has no justification whatsoever and is based to a large extent on conjecture and theory.

Again interest is revived in the ancient structure. Two recent books advocating the Norse theory by Philip A. Means and Hjalmar R. Holand have aroused much curiosity on the subject.

The first book "Newport Tower" printed in 1942 is a curious blend of special pleading, wishful thinking, and visionary writing. It is filled with criticism especially aimed at the "Arnoldists", and unfavorable comments on learned historians as Bancroft, Fiske, Palfrey and Winsor. The treatise lacks balance, but by its very completeness arouses interest and stimulates further investigation.

Holand's book called "America 1355-1364" issued in 1946 is a much sounder book, but filled with a series of hypotheses some of which cannot stand serious inspection. The volume was received with acclaim by critics, but keen students of mediaeval construction and usage have nipped Holand's arguments to shreds.

The Portuguese theory is based upon the wanderings of Miguel Cortereal who, shipwrecked in Narra-

gansett Bay, took refuge for the winter of 1511 among the Indians near Taunton. The chance that Cortereal and the surviving members of his crew took time to build a structure twenty six feet high is very doubtful. The fight for existence in the cold New England climate would have been sufficient for these Mediterranean people. Seamen as a rule are not workers in stone.

Humor and Fantasy

The century old controversy has been enlivened by elements of humor and fantasy. Henry W. Longfellow in 1841 produced a poem "The Skeleton in Armor". A Viking brings the Prince's child to the westward and "There for my lady's bower built I a lofty tower". The publication of the poem only intensified the Norse argument and confused the issue.

Six years later there occurred an unseemly squabble between two Newport jokesters and David Melville, an early gas light developer. The humor soon got out of bounds and the two conspirators invented Bishop Oelrischer, Professor Scrobein and Graetz of Gottenberg, which offense finally brought forth seething denunciation by Rafn.

Still another bit of labored humor was printed in 1851 by Benjamin F. Tilley entitled "Lecture on Mysterious Knockings".

Samuel Laing, able British scholar, declared "But these sly rogues of Americans dearly love a quiet hoax". None of these clumsy attempts at fun making did any good to the Old Stone Mill problem.

Chesterton Mill

The origin of the design for the Old Stone Mill was for many years based on a false conception due to mistaken information concerning Arnold's birthplace. In the past, many mis-statements had been printed about the Arnold family in England but Edson S. Jones' researches clearly placed Benedict Arnold's birthplace as Ilchester, Somerset, instead of Warwickshire as previously believed. This fact, known since 1902, dispelled the opinion that Governor Arnold had modelled his circular building on a structure known as the Chesterton windmill.

This English windmill was built in 1632 by Sir Edward Peyto, Lord of the manor of Chesterton, Warwickshire, and was designed by Inigo Jones, famed British architect. Lord Willoughby de Broke, a recent owner, has stated that the mill was probably not built as an astronomical observatory but "for purposes of general interest".

Another coincidence in nomenclature is the name of Limington or Lemington Farm mentioned in the wills of Benedict Arnold, his daughter Freelove Pel-

ham and his grandson Edward Pelham. This farm of 160 acres at Newport was probably named in memory of Limington, a village adjoining Ilchester and not as previously supposed in honor of Leamington, a town in Warwickshire.

There is also a possibility that contemporaries of Gov. Benedict Arnold had helped him in planning the odd shaped stone structure. One instance may illustrate this conjecture. The fireplace in the mill, a subject for much controversy, was built in similar manner to prototypes in several English castles. Means in his "Newport Tower" illustrates a fireplace in Castle Hedingham, Essex, a large single flue which slopes up through the thick wall and comes out at a vent behind a buttress. John Coggeshall and his forebears lived in the town and as a manorial family would have had access to the castle. Coggeshall emigrated to America in 1632.

The case for the Norse theory has been supported by a few enthusiasts. In a span of over a century over a dozen protagonists have offered vague theories. The picture is befogged by indefinite references to Icelandic sagas, Norse voyages, ecclesiastical wanderings, church colonies, and crusades to the Holy Land. Round churches, chapels, baptistries, towers, and windmills, all are used as prototypes.

The conclusion of a recent supporter of this Norse group that a crown colony of Norway, distant three years for the round trip, was the secret colony under the control of a bishop, the church edifice modelled to some extent on the round Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, is almost beyond comprehension.

Recent Excavation

During the summer of 1948, a competent archaeologist, William S. Godfrey, sponsored by the American Archaeological Society, excavated the ground under and in the vicinity of the Stone Mill. His official findings are not yet a matter of record, but nothing was uncovered to justify the extravagant claims of the Norse theorists. Among objects brought to light were English coins dated from 1696 to 1702, numerous animal bones, stone segments undoubtedly a part of a mill stone, and loose plaster fragments. There were also traces of burned material in layers and large stone boulders adjacent to the footings of the columns. The footings were substantial and adequate for the weight of the structure.

In this story no attempt has been made to use technical language or to describe the various surveys made to determine the orientation of the Mill.

Here then is the story of the Old Stone Mill told without prejudice and as far as possible with documentary evidence. In a quiet park in quaint old Newport the pigeons fly about the ancient structure and nest in its upper reaches; children and nursemaids bask in the warm sun and strangers stroll up the paths leading to the old Mill. Nearly everyone looks with interest at the round stone structure, but the Old Mill refuses to tell its story. It still remains "the most enigmatic and puzzling building in the United States of America."



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