

HISTORICAL DEDHAM

Troubles at Mill

*In the March issue we wrongly stated that Dedham Mill closed in the 1980s because of a fire. **Charles Clover** sets the record straight.*

Dust in air can cause explosions. Any particle will do it: grain, flour, starch, even metals; and the designers of mills and factories know that precautions have to be taken. Records show that to this day many burn down with the eventual verdict of “no suspicious circumstances”.

One day in 1908, Dedham mill burned almost to the ground, in a conflagration that was both a catastrophe for the village and for the Clover family who then owned it. The mill was redesigned and rebuilt but it took until 1913 to reopen. A year after it burned, the owner and builder of the great 19th century mill, my great great uncle, Ebenezer Clover, died. History does not relate whether the fire affected him. But the loss of his life’s work cannot have been easy for the then leading businessman of the village and staunch Methodist who was involved in all sorts of good works. These included the dissolution of the village’s loss-making grammar school in 1888 and the placing of the funds in a trust which still exists.

As an epilogue, I remember in the 1960s rushing to the end of the garden to see smoke rising from a modern

aluminium structure on the east end of the mill. That was rebuilt to be demolished again for the present flats when the milling business failed. It took several fire engines, pumping water from the river, to save the present red brick structure. Otherwise the view would be very different today.



Dedham Mill in 1908, 1922 and 1938