

# THE EMI SITE IN BURY STREET, RUISLIP

by Eileen M. Bowlt

Ashill Developments of Wimbledon have been busy recently canvassing public opinion on their plans for the redevelopment of the EMI site in Bury Street.

## Medieval activity on the site

So far as was known from documentary evidence and existing maps there had never been a building between the River Pinn and Mill House on the west side of Bury Street except for an adjacent barn. An exploratory archaeological excavation by AOC Archaeology in March 2008 uncovered post-hole evidence of a medieval structure and a pit containing pottery dating between 1050-1150 in the NE corner of the site. A few similar potsherds were found in the post holes<sup>1</sup>. These exciting finds suggest domestic occupation dating from the period when a motte and bailey castle was being constructed on the other side of Bury Street at what is now Manor Farm and continuing after the monks of Bec had arrived there.

Much of the pottery seems to have come from cooking pots and was of early South Hertfordshire greyware type. Over the years greyware has turned up in several places along Bury Street and Reservoir Road, indicating medieval settlement, even though the surviving pre-suburban houses mostly date from the sixteenth century<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps the building of the present Manor Farm House between 1505 and 1507 sparked a general 'great re-building' in Ruislip.

A piece of Roman pottery (50-160 AD) came from a later feature, similar to Roman sherds found by members of this Society in 1976 (see article by Colin Bowlt on Grim's Dyke on page 9 of this Journal).

## The Ewers and the site

John Sanders owned the Mill House (not so named until the twentieth century) in 1565 when the King's College Terrier was made and a Mr Sanders sold it to Richard Ewer in 1589, as recorded in a Court Book<sup>3</sup>.

A garden, orchard and two closes of land, the whole amounting to eight acres, went with the house, but there is no mention of any other building in the sixteenth century. However, AOC Archaeology unearthed the foundations of a seventeenth century building close to Mill House, and lying alongside and partially under Bury Street. This was presumably one of the outbuildings shown on the 1806 Enclosure Map that stood into the twentieth century.

Henry Nelson Ewer 1878-1947 became an engineer and started an agricultural engineering business, Gurney & Ewer, in the barn. (See related article on page 13 of this Journal). The firm is listed in a 1907 Street Directory as 'Gurney & Ewer Engineers' (see Fig. 1) and soon afterwards was called 'Mill Works'. Gurney & Ewer made munitions during the Second World War and the firm was sold to EMI c.1948. The site became separated from Mill House, which continues as a private residence.

## EMI

The history of EMI in Ruislip waits to be researched and written by some technically-minded person. Suffice it to say here that a variety of valves, including Klystrons, the Television Camera Tube called 'Emitron CPS' and photo multipliers were being made in the Valve Division in the early 1950s.

Thorn took over EMI and in 1994 the directors finally acquired a section, that was renamed Sens-Tech in 2007. The Sens-Tech website still gives the Bury Street address and says that the firm employs between 101-250 people, although very little appears to be going on there in August 2009. However, there were already plans to sell and re-develop the site in early 2008, hence the exploratory 'dig'.

Whatever happens, the archaeological finds are sufficiently interesting to ensure that further surveys are likely to take place if/when development comes to pass.

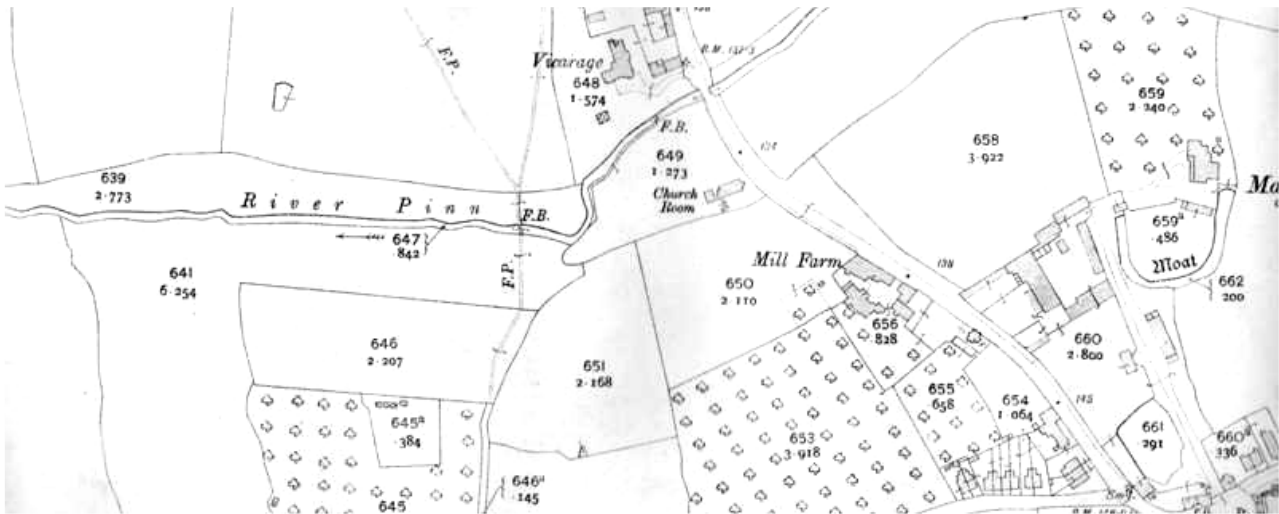
<sup>1</sup> AOC Archaeology Report

<sup>2</sup> RNELHS Journal 1985, p23, RNELHS Journal 1998, p18

<sup>3</sup> RNELHS Journal 2006, p3

The following map extracts show how the site evolved from farm buildings to factory

The **1866 25" OS Map**, which appears in this Journal's Grim's Dyke article, shows Mill Farm with two large barns and two smaller buildings.



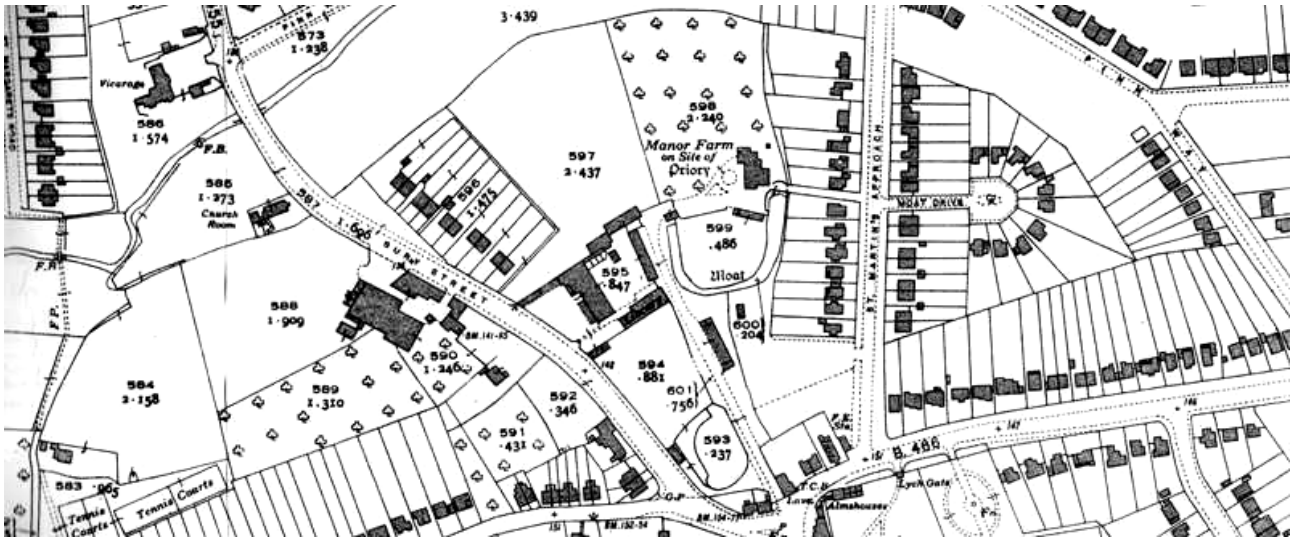
1866 25" OS Map

This Map shows both barns extended northwards. The one alongside Bury Street appears to have swallowed up one of the smaller buildings.



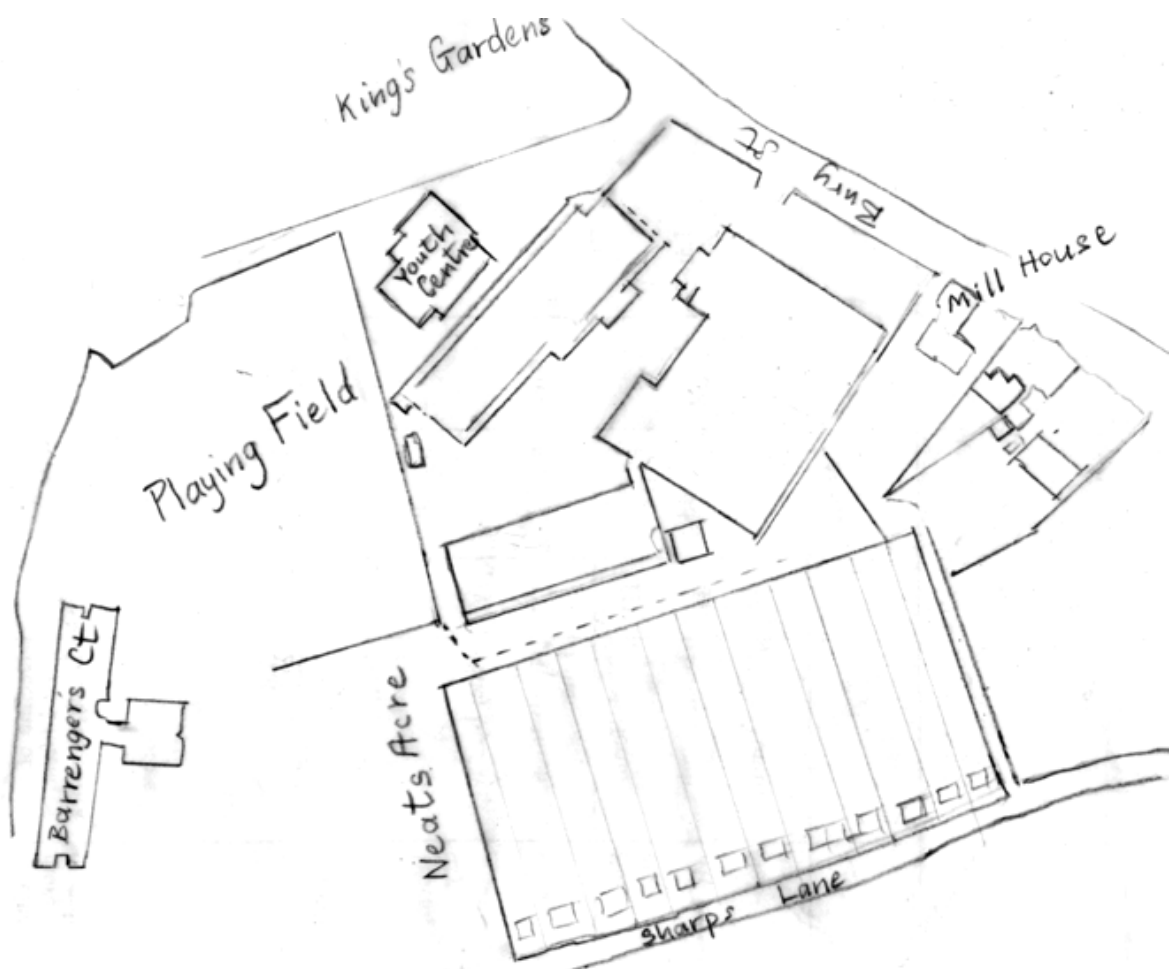
1935 25" OS Map

The barns look much the same, but a large squarish building has been built at an awkward angle beside the westerly one.



1939 25" OS Map

The back barn has gone, see Fig. 2,  
and the large square building has been extended over part of its site.  
This may be the main building that we see today, with a straightened façade.  
Other buildings have been built around the edges of the site during EMI's ownership.



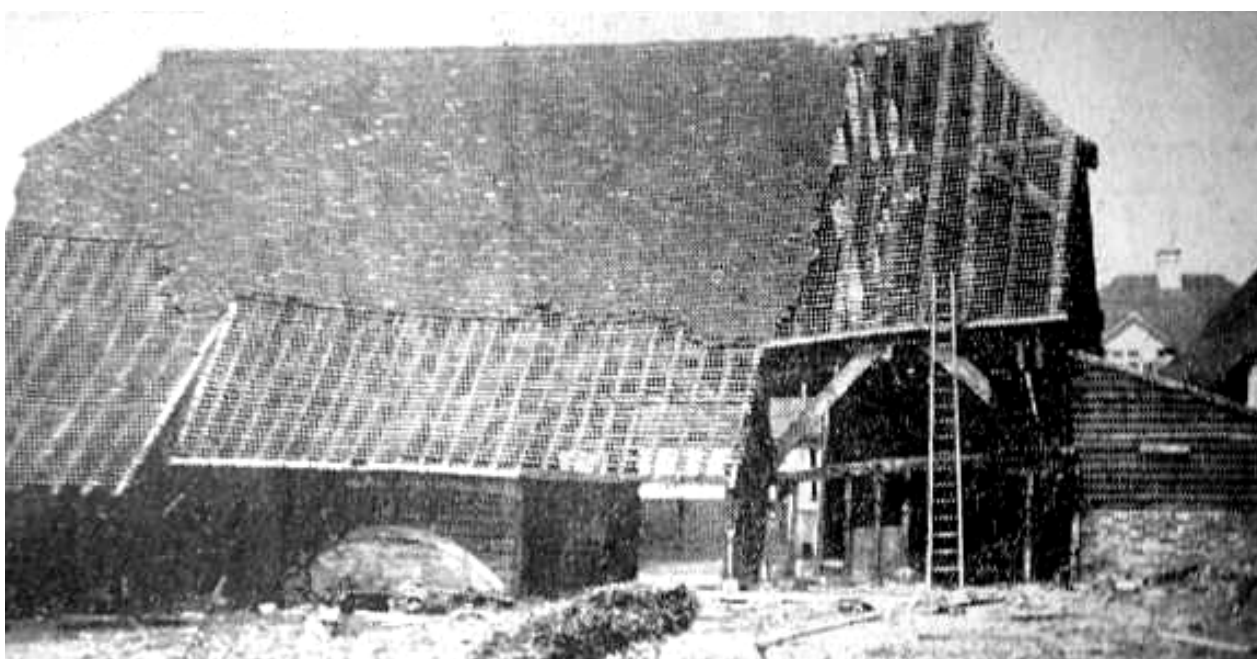
1986 Site Layout



**Fig. 1. Gurney & Ewer, Engineers.**

From the style of the clothes the photograph dates from c.1910, unless anyone can provide a more precise date from the bicycle or vehicle.

The building end on to Bury Street besides the vehicle is Mill House. Next come the gates that still lead to the side door of the house, followed by the barn and extension. Behind in the trees it looks as if the back barn is filled with hay.



**Fig. 2 The back barn at Mill House, during demolition in March 1936**

The picture was published in the Gazette on 20 March 1936, together with the information that

'Mr Ewer was going to replace it with a modern service station.

He was intending to save the ancient beams and tiles for future use.'