

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed May 6, 1931

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Authority on Meteorology.

WINDMILLS AND WIND

In the initial volume of his "English Windmills," published last year, M. I. Batten tells us that in former times the question of who owned the wind was often disputed. A wind or watermill had "soke" rights, which meant that all persons living in a manor had to send their grain to it to be ground. "The wind that blew over the soil belonged to the owner of the soil. Therefore the wind belonged originally to the miller or his landlord. Acts of Parliament were passed in the last century to try and protect windmills from having any building erected so close as to take the wind away. But as land was gradually sold off in small plots and building spread, the question became more complicated. Soke rights had long since died out. If someone bought land near a windmill and erected a large building it was difficult for the miller to protest."

One reason why windmills have come on hard times and few men fancy the business of operating them is that the wind is erratic and the miller must work when it blows, often by night as well as by day, to offset the periods of calm.

One of the difficult problems was to decide when to stop the mill in case of a high wind. If the miller waited too long, the brake would fail to work, and the friction of the wooden brake on a wooden wheel often resulted in fire. In a heavy wind the millstones had to be well fed with grain or they, too, revolving fast, would send out sparks. By choking them with grain the miller could slow down his machinery slightly.

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