



MILL BITS

The Newsletter of the CRANBROOK WINDMILL ASSOCIATION

Spring 2017

Chairman: Denis Hempstead., Secretary: Andrew White, Treasurer: Peter Bourne

What do YOU think?

There was a fantastic response from Volunteers to the January 2017 questionnaire and the results are summarised as follows:

Open Days - 54% of us prefer Saturdays, 17% Sundays and 29% Wednesdays. NO other days were suggested.

Length of Sessions - Everybody thought that 2½ hours was about right, although two were happy to work longer if asked.

Opening Times - 78% are happy with 2:30-5.00pm; 18% suggested a change to 2:00-4:30pm. One person suggested that "our opening times do not suit parents with young children and we should be open for longer". It was also suggested that "we should have a last entry time of say 4:30pm to enable the mill to close promptly at 5:00pm" and that the "Loos should be available to the public."

On the subject of "what would make volunteering at the mill more enjoyable, "More Social Events" were suggested, but there were, inevitably, some less serious ideas such as: "Install a Stannah stair lift"; " More wind and the sweeps back on"; "Not having to make the tea for everyone".

One suggestion, to help publicise the mill, was that we should give out stickers to visitors saying "I have visited Union Mill". BUT first prize must go to the Volunteer who said "I'm Happy with everything"; that's a first!

The Visitor Group will now produce a Questionnaire for our Visitors, designed to find out which days and times they prefer for visits. Whilst we are always looking to increase our visitor numbers and therefore try to match our opening times to current leisure patterns, we are mindful that there is no point in significantly changing these if they are not also convenient for most of us. We could be open seven days a week and there would always be a visitor knocking on the door. We will never be able to satisfy everyone. Many thanks to all those who responded.

Wynn Tremeneheere's Legacy

Members will recall that the Association received donations of around £1,200 in memory of Wynn. The Management Committee, with the support of Wynn's family, decided that these monies were to be used on two specific projects:

Firstly, to create the Miller's Workshop Exhibition in the Russell Building. This was completed last Summer and is now open for public visits.

Secondly, to catalogue and digitalise the Association's Archives. This material was largely collected by Wynn and includes several volumes relating to the History of the Mill and of the Association. It is clear that this work will take several years for us to complete.

However, progress is being made and you can now view some of the material online at the "Mills Archive" <https://catalogue.millsarchive.org/union-windmill-cranbrook-collection>

By linking our work with the "Mills Archive" public access to Wynn's work is available to researchers and others world wide. The "Mills Archive" is an independent Charity, based

in Reading, whose aims are to "preserve and protect records of our milling heritage, and to make them freely available to the public. Recently they were awarded Lottery Funding to write a short history of flour milling "From Quern to Computer". This very interesting booklet sets out how the milling process has developed from rubbing two stones together, use of animal power, watermills and windmills, to modern roller mills. Our Association has been very fortunate to acquire a number of copies which we will be issuing to each of our active members over the next few weeks. We hope that you will enjoy reading this and find the information of great relevance when talking to Visitors. If anyone is interested in finding out more about the Associations' Archives, please speak to either Peter Bourne or Nick Vinall.

Maintenance Matters

Sweeps - In January this year KCC (who own Union Mill) signed a contract with the millwrights, Owlsworth IJP, to repair the sweeps that they removed last spring. We are hopeful (but not certain) that sometime in June (this year!) the sweeps will be returned, having been repaired, cleaned and painted ready to grace the Cranbrook skyline again and enable us do some milling.

Weatherproofing of the smock - after 9 months of inaction KCC are back on the case and they recently asked if we have any suggestions for who might quote for doing the work. Fortunately the local firm who previously showed interest are still willing and very able. We await further progress.

Staging - The hardwood slats of the staging are showing their age and will need replacing in a year or two. The worst 20% needed renewing to be safe enough to allow public access to the Stage when we open the mill this Easter. A local chippy has replaced these with pressure treated softwood as a temporary measure; we hope full hardwood replacement will be done by KCC when scaffolding is erected for cleaning and painting the smock.

Reception area -The worst patches of brick wall have been scraped and repainted with a special paint "suitable for churches, castles and other historical buildings". The large display boards have been covered with new hessian, the central table surface is more slim-line and also hessian covered. New displays, more relevant to Union Mill, are in progress and the CWA stewards rota will move to the far left corner. We hope this revamp will give visitors a more relevant and coherent welcome. The shop layout is unchanged but Linda is reviewing the stock to be carried.

Exhibition floor - The worst patches of wall have been scraped and repainted with the 'castles' paint and repairs to the central model are nearing completion.

Machinery floor - Similar wall treatment has been carried out on the worst patches here. Suitable pictures are in preparation to add interest to the walls.

Odds and ends - The stone plaques on the outer front wall have been cleaned and can now be read. The emergency bulkhead lighting is now all working. Rain leaks via the stage doors will be reduced. Another of Wynn's archive books has been scanned and will be uploaded to the Mills Archive database.

Strippers Wanted
- male or female
(no audition necessary)

The recent improvements to the walls inside the main entrance now make the poor state of the door very apparent. The flaking surface paint needs stripping back to something firmer and then repainted. Any volunteers? Please phone Nick 01580 713332

Electric Mill

The Co-op Community Scheme seems likely to raise enough funds for us to buy the electric mill needed for the education programme. It can also be used to produce flour for sale to visitors when wind-milled supplies run short. When the electric mill arrives it is planned to house it initially in the Russell Building on a trial basis. This should increase visitor flow to the workshop museum.

Training New Millers

On four Wednesdays in March volunteers assembled at the Mill to be initiated into the mystical arts of milling. Some of the necessary preparations are probably already well known to several stewards, such as opening the cap and mastering the brake rope. However, the nuances of engaging the stone nut with the spur wheel needed careful practice, especially if the operative was to avoid getting his fingers caught in the gears! Many of the details would not have concerned members of the Russell family or their employees as they would not have heard of Health & Safety regulations. The instructors on these days were Peter Bourne, Chris Lear, and Terry West.



Initial briefing



Setting the gap between the stones

What the Papers Said

Canterbury Journal, Kentish Times, & Farmers' Gazette, 19th Sep 1896

During one of the Thunderstorms that broke over the Weald of Kent last week a windmill at Cranbrook, in the occupation of Mr. Hugh Russell, was struck by lightning, the sweeps being much damaged. The structure itself escaped.

Beacon Mill, Benenden

This mill (now body only) stands on the North side of the road from Benenden village to Rolvenden, set back and partly obscured by the original miller's house next to the road. It was probably built by the farmer of Beacon Farm, James Goble, and was described as "lately built" when advertised for sale (with the farm) in 1799. It has a three-storey octagonal smock on a two-storey brick base and stood c.50ft (15.24m) high (to the roof of the cap), compared with 72ft (21.6m) for the Union Mill. In its later years it had four patent sweeps mounted on a cast-iron windshaft and was winded by a fantail. It had three pair of stones and wide staging so, like the Union Mill, it probably originally had cloth-covered sweeps in its early days.

Perhaps ahead of its time, steam power was installed in about 1843 with a "12-horse high pressure expansive beam engine". It drove 4 pairs of stones for wheat and was could

produce 50 loads of meal per week. Another engine drove a fifth pair of stones. However, this investment did not seem to prove worthwhile as all the equipment was offered for sale five years later and the mill reverted entirely to wind. In 1858, the miller, James Golding, purchased the mill for £800, with about half an acre of land; the mill was then described as having 3 sets of stones (two French, one Peak) and had "an extensive trade".

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Beacon Mill was run in conjunction with Wandle Mill, on the River Rother, both being managed by the Collins family, farmers from Sandhurst. The mill ceased working in 1921 and the sails and fantail were removed two years later. Two of the sweeps were re-used on the White Mill at Headcorn but the second pair were considered unsuitable for the Union Mill, although we did receive a pair of 4-foot (1.22 m) diameter millstones from there.

The smock has now been converted into a self-catering let, Much of the iron work was sacrificed for the war effort in 1942, but the spur wheel remains, so if friends or relatives would like to visit the area and need accommodation it might be worth considering but perhaps not in the winter months! (try www.oldsmockmill.com/)



Beacon Mill (and original Miller's House) early 20th C



and today.

Caption Competition

Suggestion 1

"I know there are some stones here somewhere."

The editor would like to hear of any other suggestions you might have. Please email to the address below.



New Editor

Pat Brent has moved out of the area so has relinquished the role of Newsletter editor; many thanks to Pat for her work in the past. Tony Singleton has now taken on the task and welcomes your comments and input. If you have any interesting/amusing anecdotes relating to windmills, which you think other CWA members might like to read, please let me know by email on tonysing@unionmill.org.uk. These could relate to stewarding at the Union Mill, or perhaps another mill that you enjoyed visiting.