



MILL BITS

The Newsletter of the CRANBROOK WINDMILL ASSOCIATION

November 2024

Chairman: Nick Vinall, Secretary: Andrew Riddell, Treasurer: Susan Hooper

Association's AGM

This was held on 25th November in the Russell Building with the building being buffeted by "Storm Bert". After the usual business was completed, our Chairman brought us up to date with the situation regarding KCC's wish to divest themselves of Union Mill and their other seven windmills in order to save themselves the maintenance costs. From the public consultation, held in January this year, nearly 90% of the 2300 responses said that they disagreed with the divestment proposal. Despite this result the KCC 'Environment and Transport' (E&T) committee voted 8 – 6 in July to go ahead with the divestment motion. It was freely admitted to be a political decision by the majority conservative group.

But the motion carried included a condition that divestment shall be by a method that (quote) "ensures that the windmills have a sustainable future and are appropriately cared for and maintained as community assets". In other words Kent have to ensure, as far as possible, that whoever takes over our mill will look after it.

We estimate that this will cost the new owner £35,000 per annum on average. Of this about £5,000 p.a. is for annual insurances and Health & Safety issues and £30,000 is put aside for a major refurbishment every 8 – 10 years. This amount is nearly ten times the income we receive from visitor donations so is way beyond the means of CWA volunteers.

It will not be easy for KCC to find trustworthy new owners so they first approached CWA and the other Kent mills groups who obviously are keen to have their mills looked after. We in turn have approached the Parish and Borough councils, also National Trust and English Heritage. We await their responses but we're not holding our breaths.

Union Mill is a Grade 1 Listed building, which Kent has voluntarily maintained in good condition for 60 years but there would be no legal commitment for a new owner to do so. Without maintenance Union Mill could become a wreck like Providence Chapel in Cranbrook but much more prominently sited on The Hill.

As a long-stop we have applied to have Union Mill registered as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) and this will almost certainly be approved before Christmas. Approval will mean we must be notified by KCC of any proposed divestment and it gives us 6 months to scrutinise KCC's proposal, check that it meets the preservation requirements, and protest vigorously if it doesn't.

As encouragement (or perhaps a threat?), KCC have said if they cannot find a suitable new owner they might have the E&T committee vote again for divestment but this time without the 'sustainable future' condition. If the new motion was carried it would mean that KCC could divest their mills to any prospective owners.

It can be noted that a six months ACV delay would take the matter beyond the county

council elections on 1st May 2025. I'll leave you to work out the possible consequences if some members of the current E&T committee do not get re-elected.

The windmills potentially impacted are:

Chillenden Mill	Cranbrook, Union Mill	Herne Mill	Margate, Drapers Mill
Meopham Mill	Stelling Minnis, Davison's Mill		West Kingsdown Mill
Wittersham, Stocks Mill.			

Something Weevil this way comes

The observant may have noticed that on each floor of the mill, there was a small blue circular 'flying saucer' (right). These were pheromone traps for grain weevils, small ant sized beetles with elongated snouts (below) for boring into grain seeds to lay its eggs. We unfortunately acquired the weevils from some grain left over on the bin floor in covid times and forgotten. Treatment requires professional spraying of each floor's lower walls and floor boards where



the weevils hide in the gaps, together with a powerful aerosol fumigation throughout. As the weevil's life-cycle is quite short this needs to be carried out a second time a few weeks later to kill the newly emerged ones. It was done by Rentokil at a cost of £833.



Teddy Bears' Picnic

On August bank holiday Monday the teddy bears of Cranbrook gathered again for their annual dangerous sports club outing. They were treated to a zip wire and bungee jumping followed by high tea. We can report that all teddies survived the experience although there may have been the odd bit of concussion. Their young handlers enthusiastically threw them into the fray and squealed with delight at the bravery of their charges. Parents and grandparents looked on with occasional bemusement.



Zip-meister Andrew testing the arrangements

Michael Portillo is well known on TV for his train journeys in the UK and abroad. Earlier this year he came to Cranbrook, not by train but as part of a planned programme about The Weald. They filmed him at Cranbrook Museum, St Dunstan's Church, Cranbrook School, and in the picturesque High Street; then he came up to the windmill. We suggested going up onto the Staging for some panoramic shots of the town but he took one look at the stairs and said "no thanks". All the filming was done outside, mostly at the top of The Hill and facing towards the mill. He didn't use a script but had done his homework and ad-libbed very easily. Their main problem was having to keep repeating the shots due to the noise of passing traffic! The programme will be broadcast next Spring or Summer.

Chris Lear

We were very sad to hear of the death of Chris Lear though we knew for some time that he had been in poor health. Chris had been a member of CWA for over 15 years and played a major role in organising and being manager for our Saturday afternoon openings. Almost every week he would arrive early to open the Mill and Russell Building, get the sign boards out and sort out the stewards' name badges for the day and Chris was always so cheerful with stewards and visitors alike. His wife Carolyn must have felt herself very much to be a windmill widow. We missed him very much when he had to retire on health grounds and he is remembered with much affection. RIP Chris



We have set the sweeps to the mourning position in his memory.



National Mill Day in Holland



During the second weekend in May the UK celebrated its National Mills Day and the Dutch had their "Nationale Molendag" when 950 windmills were open to the public. In Holland, there were various activities, many organised by millers, such as pancake baking, children's games, cycling routes, mill-themed fairs, and parties. There is a [short video](#) of a flour grinding mill, still working commercially, in Weesp, east of Amsterdam.

A Windmill in Bulgaria

When the editor was on duty on Bank Holiday Monday, two young Bulgarian ladies were visiting. One was a UK resident but her friend came from "back home". I asked them if they had any windmills in Bulgaria and they thought not, so I decided to search the web and discovered some rather oddly shaped mills. This photo has the caption (Google translated):

"This is the story of a very real windmill ... made entirely of wood more than 100 years ago. It is the love and care of generations of millers that keeps the mill in the village of Belintsi alive, and today it is the only authentic working wooden mill in North-Eastern Bulgaria."



What the Papers Said - Tenterden's last Windmill

Kentish Express - Saturday 2nd July 1892

"During the storm the fantail of Mr. Pilbeam's windmill, Leigh Green, Tenterden, was struck by lightning. No serious damage was done although in several neighbouring parishes, cattle and outbuildings were struck by the lightning."



However, in 1913, Leigh Green Mill was not so lucky.

Kentish Express - Saturday 29th November 1913

A big fire occurred on Wednesday night at Leigh Green Mill, Tenterden. The windmill and store were burnt out, much damage being done to very valuable machinery and to a large stock of corn, oil cake, etc. The mills are owned by Mrs. Pilbeam, whose husband, Mr. James Pilbeam, purchased them in 1889 and added very considerably to the premises, and also installed valuable machinery including roller mills, gas engines, an up-to-date bakehouse, and every facility for carrying on a large business. On the death of Mr. Pilbeam the mills were let to Messrs. Foster and Ward, who have carried on the business during the past thirteen months.

Final Bits

Perhaps, inevitably, someone in Holland has designed a hot air balloon in the form of a windmill..

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