



MILL BITS

The Newsletter of the CRANBROOK WINDMILL ASSOCIATION

April 2025

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

The KCC situation

You will know that, in July 2024, the Kent 'Environment and Transport' Cabinet Committee (ETCC) voted to support a change to the KCC Heritage Conservation Strategy so that divestment of the eight KCC windmills could go ahead. Until then the KCC policy was to retain and preserve the windmills. The motion was carried by 8 – 6 votes (details below). The decision was then made in August by the Kent Environment Minister, Rob Thomas. This included the commitment to divest the windmills "by a method that ensures that the windmills have a sustainable future in which they are appropriately cared for and maintained as community assets".

The Kent windmill group held their bi-annual March meeting in Woodchurch with three KCC Officers (civil servants) in attendance. They are tasked by the ETCC politicians with achieving divestment of the eight KCC windmills. The Officers reiterated the preference that responsibility for each mill should be taken over by an 'interest group' such as a Windmill Association, rather than by a commercial organisation. There was some discussion about how the necessary long term funds for maintenance might be sourced.

The Head of Heritage confirmed that the divestment procedure still has one final stage of confirmation, to be taken at the next ETCC meeting on 24th June. This will be after the Council elections on 1st May.

If the election brings a significant change in the political balance of the councillors overall, the ETCC make-up must be changed to reflect the new balance. This might affect the outcome of the ETCC's June 24th meeting. The eight ETCC members who voted FOR divestment were all Conservatives and one admitted that they had been 'whipped'. Of the six who voted AGAINST, five were from other Parties. It would not take a big political swing to significantly decrease the current Conservative majority in the ETCC.

In short, divestment of the KCC windmills is not yet a 'done deal'. It could be affected by the outcome of the Council election on 1st May.

Weald Granary

At the start of April, David Hall and Nick collected about 400kg of grain from Weald Granary near Mereworth. Thanks to their generosity the grain is donated to Union Mill. The granary is a (non-profit) farmer owned, storage, marketing, and distribution co-operative, capable of storing 80,000 tonnes from over 200 members (website says 192) around the south east. A typical storage silo holds 6,000 tonnes.

The grain varieties supplied were Crusoe, Skyfall, and Illustrious. They have slightly varying individual properties but are all classified as Group 1 with a high 12% protein content that makes them suitable for bread-making. The gluten protein makes the bread dough stretchy, enabling it to rise, but not collapse during baking.



A Grain Moisture Meter

David with the manager >



The manager, John, showed us round and explained the complex working of the grain storage and distribution system, also the laboratory. There, testing is carried out on various factors needed to confirm the quality of the grain supplied to millers.

Group visit to Weald Granary

John invited a group of CWA members to visit the granary and to see its workings and the laboratory. It takes 35 minutes to drive from Cranbrook. The two possible dates are Wednesday 18th and 25th June, between 10.00 – 14.00. It would last about an hour maximum. Nick will advertise it nearer the time.

Milling Report

David Hall writes: Do you remember when we last milled flour at Union Mill? I wasn't sure but I have some video and photos taken on 13th March 2019, over six years ago!

Since then we have had Covid lockdowns, a major refurbishment, missing shutters, unbalanced sweeps, a sticking brakewheel, a wonky vertical drive shaft, and lack of wind at the right time. However, on Wednesday 16th April, based on the Met Office forecast of SW winds of up to 36mph, eight trainee/millers gathered at short notice and, under the expert guidance of master miller, Terry West, we winnowed a supply of fresh, grandly named 'Skyfall Crusoe Illustrious' grain and engaged the French Burr Stone Nut with the Spur Wheel. After feeding grain into the eye of the stone we set the Sweeps in motion and turned the Lighter Screw to gradually reduce the gap between the runner and bed stones until fresh flour appeared at the meal spout - a magic moment! It was also very pleasing to see the Tentering Gear governor weights operating to maintain the correct gap between the stones as the wind gusted. On Saturday 20th April, at long last, we again sold to visitors wind-powered stone-ground flour. The photo shows the milling team holding the products of their labours.



Michael Portillo Visits Cranbrook



In case you missed it, the man of many colours is appearing in another BBC series of railway journeys, the latest starting with “[Paddock Wood to Frant](#)”, in which he stops off in Cranbrook. I leave it to you to work out how he got here by train!

If, like me, you find his wardrobe a little disturbing, you can jump to 5min 40sec to just view the Cranbrook section. I understand that he was invited to enjoy the view from the staging but declined. This image is a still from one of

two aerial video clips of the mill included in the programme.

Wheels of Time - Update

There are now 55 museums and “heritage sites” spread over Kent taking part in this scheme and you can find a list, with the badges young visitors can collect by using the following link: <https://kent.wheelsoftime.uk/>

Its success means that other counties are now taking part. In addition to Dorset mentioned in a previous edition (still only 7 venues to visit), it has been joined, in 2024, by Surrey, who have 12 venues, and by Essex with 19 venues.

What the Papers Said

A Lucky Escape

Staffordshire Advertiser, Saturday 27th April 1799

LEWES, Sussex - Wednesday morning, the Windmill on Rodmell Hill was blown down. The grinder at the time was inside the mill and perceiving his danger, attempted to escape by flight. He had scarcely reached the second step of the ladder before the Eastern brace gave way, and the mill pitched over him and the ladder he was descending. Fortunately, standing directly inline with the door-way, his situation was within the mill, and though quite buried in corn and meal, he was in about an hour got out alive and sensible but with one arm broken and much bruised. He is now in a fair way of doing well but had he descended three or four steps more, he must have been crushed to atoms.



Final Bits

Editor: Tony Singleton. t: 01580-753431, e: tonysing@unionmill.org.uk