

Oldland Mill Trust

Spring Newsletter 2019



Patron: Richard Burrows
Registered Charity: 1072911

The oldest regularly working windmill in Sussex

Another Big Paint!

Just when we thought we could take a breather after the 2018 sweep refurbishment (sweeps 1 & 3) we decided that sweeps 2 & 4 need the same treatment without delay due to rot in the hemlaths, the narrow timber 'lathes' around the 'hem' of each sweep. So we have brought forward the refurbishment of these two sweeps, work originally planned for 2020. Starting in April we will lower these two sweeps to the ground, strip the metalwork, and replace the hemlaths before



Shutter castings seem to multiply!

reassembling everything using the new shutter operating castings purchased last year. Work is already well in hand, with fettling and priming of the castings almost complete, new heavy-duty trestles manufactured, and the Accoya timber



Peter Camp with the new trestles.

acquired. If you can spare time during April, May and June, we are welcoming volunteers again to help with the painting. Briefing

sessions will be held on 1st and 6th of April. Please contact John Pryse (01444 871734 or j.pryse@btinternet.com) if you can assist.

Four of the 2018 Volunteer Painters subsequently joined as regular volunteers so the company can't be too bad!

Maintaining the rest of the Mill

Maintaining the woodwork on Oldland Windmill requires continuous attention, sometimes bringing to mind the old adage "painting the Forth Bridge". Essential painting on the sides of the mill was carried out in the Autumn of 2018 together with the lower parts of the roof and sweeps 2 and 4, the cherry picker again proving invaluable. Monitoring and prevention of death watch beetle and woodworm in the Mill Post is a regular part of the routine maintenance, which also includes weekly rotation of the sweeps if they haven't been run for milling. Health and Safety has, as always, been given due attention with the recent annual inspection of fire extinguishers and the testing of all portable electrical equipment. The latter includes several power tools kindly donated to the Mill so that the garage is now very well equipped, and soon to be further enhanced by a substantial work-bench currently under construction.

The Grounds

The East Gates were showing signs of rot and have recently been replaced by new gates made at the Mill. Fully adjustable hinges and a self-closing spring were incorporated in the light of experience. The west boundary hedge had become over grown with other species and was encroaching onto the grass at the

south end. After digging out the brambles, ivy, laurel & other intruders, the hedge line was straightened, grass reinstated & the remaining *Lonicera nitida* pruned & suitable shoots layered in order to promote more



*Derek Kenward
working on the new gates.*

orderly growth. The 'bridge' over the ditch into the lozenge was also widened to facilitate access particularly during this years sweep refurbishment.

Milling

Great strides have recently been made to improve our rate of grinding when the mill is working. Helped by our two recently refurbished sweeps, and with growing skill in tuning the mill for best output, we have pushed our record to 130 kgran hour, or about a ton per day, a rate we only dreamed of a few years ago. This has led us to construct a third wooden grain bin on the Bin Floor to increase our grain storage capacity.

A key factor (not so surprising with hindsight) is the moisture content of the grain, which we now measure carefully. We are grateful to Bodle Bros, whose long association with the mill reaches back over a century, for their advice on all-things grain related. Flour sales continue at the South Downs Heritage Centre, Ditchling Museum, Falmer Farm Shop together with a few speciality bakers.

Open Days

As both our total visitor numbers and gross income for open days fell slightly in 2018 compared to 2017, we decided to take a long

hard look at our programme. Following some lively discussions at both our Promotions and Fund-raising Committee and at our Trustees meetings, we are reducing our major Event Days from three to two per annum in May and September, but increasing the duration of the event from 4 to 6 hours. This should be more efficient given the substantial preparation time and effort needed to plan, set up, run and dismantle each event. We are also arranging for a Shuttle Bus to operate from near the Thatched Inn on every open day, including the Open Afternoons which will continue to be held on the first Sunday in the month from April to October inclusive. This is partly possible due to the generosity of Hurstpierpoint College who are lending us one of their minibuses. The two Event Days in 2019 will be themed 'Music and Morris' in May and 'History and Heritage' in September.

Tea Team

The Team were light on volunteers for much of 2018 but I'm pleased to say that Marylyn Rankin, our Tea Team lead, is hopeful of finding some more willing helpers for the new season.

There is a danger that we take the loyal regular members of the Tea Team for



More of PeterSheppard's delicious cakes.

granted, but they provide a critical service supporting not only the visitors but also the Mill Volunteers on open days! Most of our delicious cakes are made by our own volunteers, many using our own flour of course.

Publicity

Regular articles appeared in the local Talk About throughout 2018 together with

occasional Mid Sussex Times entries. We were invited to write an article for The Post Magazine which covers most of Brighton. This was well received and we have been asked to provide further copy in the future. This should significantly expand our promotion south of the Downs. We continue to use social media to feature current news and images particularly of open days. Cara Goulding and Rowena Newberry have been joint Publicity Officers during 2018, and I would like to thank them for all their activity on our behalf. Both will continue to contribute to our events, but we have been fortunate to be able to appoint Rebecca Street as our New Publicity Officer as from April this year. Rebecca was a Volunteer Painter in 2018 and enjoyed the experience to the extent that she wanted to increase her involvement in our activities!

We do, however, remain in need of more volunteers to serve on the Promotions and Fund-raising Committee, ideally enthusiasts for developing the social media side. If you are interested or know of anyone who might be, please let Fred Maillardet know on 01273 842342.

Website

It's hard to believe that our 'New' Website has been up and running for 6 years! It was designed and subsequently run by Jim Watkin and continues to play an important role in promoting Oldland Mill even though social media is being used increasingly to keep the public informed. Jim is moving out of the Sussex area and so has relinquished his responsibility for this activity. However, we are delighted that Rebecca Street, our new Publicity Officer, is taking over all things Web related. We owe Jim a debt of gratitude not only for being Webmaster for 6 years, but for contributing to many other aspects of our restoration and running of Oldland Mill. Thank you Jim.

Group Visits

In addition to the regular Open Afternoons and Event Days, many members of the public are welcomed to the mill on Thursdays, the

regular volunteers working day. However, Oldland Windmill is also a very popular venue for private group visits, four bookings having been made already this year and one already completed. They may be booked through Chris Skingsley (07711 741625 or chris@skingsley.co.uk)

Membership and the 200 Club

As another membership year draws to a close, we can once again report an increase in the overall number of members to 358, which is 11 more than the previous year. We lost a few members on the way with the passing of some members, but we can confidently anticipate that the number of members will increase substantially in the near future as door-to-door leaflet drops have taken place to every address in the Ditchling and Hassocks areas in February and March respectively. So far these initiatives have resulted in the addition of 27 new members, 66% of whom have opted for Life Membership! A similar process is already underway in Hurstpierpoint. Geoff Miller and Roger Broadbent are to be congratulated on conceiving and implementing this very productive initiative.



Coffee in the sunshine!

Membership of the 200 Club was slightly lower than last year's record at 231, which enabled us to pay out 8 prizes in July 2018, and 9 prizes from August to date. We are also pleased to announce that following a survey of members, a change to the prize structure will be implemented from July 2019. This will provide fewer but larger monthly prizes to the same total amount. Full details can be found in your renewal form. The 200 Club is an important source of income for the mill, so please support us by

buying as many entries as you can afford. The first draw will take place on 18th July this year and every third Thursday in the month thereafter until June 2020. You do not have to be a member of the mill to purchase 200 Club tickets, so please copy the form enclosed with your renewal pack and encourage everyone you know to purchase a ticket or two! They'll be helping us raise vital funds to keep our Sweeps turning. Application forms can also be downloaded from our website. The prize-winning numbers over the last 4 months were:

November – 1 - 4 – 6 – 47 – 95 – 128 – 193 – 202 - 211

December – 63 – 78 – 120 – 169 – 184 – 188 – 194 – 205 - 208

January – 21 – 60 – 84 – 107 – 126 – 142 – 157 – 201 – 217

February – 59 – 78 – 86 – 97 – 113 – 183 – 206 – 212 - 220

Steve Berry has been our Membership Secretary for the past 7 years and has established excellent databases and protocol for operating both mill membership and the 200 Club. However, an increase in Steve's business workload means that it's time for him to move on, but I must pay tribute to Steve's energy and enthusiasm - and sense of humour - throughout those 7 years. I'm pleased to say that John Rayner has taken over from April. We can all help John by returning our membership and 200 Club renewals promptly this year.

Archivist

Peter Sheppard, our Archivist, has unearthed a fascinating letter from the Sussex Archaeological Trust to The Times published in 1937. It was appealing for funds to restore Oldland and contained the following:

..... Unfortunately, serious structural weakness has recently manifested itself, and Mr Rex Wiles, the expert on old mills, who has examined the mill on behalf of the Society, advises that an immediate expenditure of £150 is needed to make the mill safe. The Trust has no funds out of

which this expenditure can be met, nor can it face the possibility of damage being caused by the collapse of the mill. Unless therefore the amount mentioned can be obtained the Trust will be compelled to dismantle the mill, and thus one of the comparatively few remaining complete examples of windmills in Sussex will disappear.....

We have no record of there being any significant response, but at least the threat to dismantle the mill was not carried through. We've come a long way since then!

Epilogue

At the close of 2018, we have instituted a new 'Bees Knees' Award for the most outstanding achievement during the year. The first recipient was Stuart Meier for the superb design and construction of a Sweep Chariot, a vital transfer trolley to move sweeps around on the ground. This award balances the now traditional 'Pig's Ear' Award for a rather different distinction!



The Bee's Knees award!

I must close with the sad news that we lost another long-serving member of our Restoration Team when Jerry Dunster died in February. Jerry was a superb wood turner and produced a lot of our early memorabilia from oak and elm off cuts. Jerry also worked tirelessly in the early years of this century to turn our restoration vision into reality. Our thoughts go out to Jean and his family at this time.

May I thank all our readers for supporting Oldland Mill Trust.

Fred Maillardet - Chairman, Oldland Mill Trust