

Oldland Mill Trust
Winter Newsletter 2023

Patron: Richard Burrows
Registered charity: 1072911



The oldest regularly working windmill in Sussex! Now 320 years old!

Introduction



Season's greetings and welcome to the Winter edition of the Oldland Mill Newsletter. Weather wise, it has been a challenging year as the lack of suitable wind has limited milling while prolonged periods of wet weather interfered with the maintenance and repair of the mill. Nevertheless, despite the weather, thanks to your support and the efforts of mill volunteers, the trust has successfully maintained Oldland Mill in good repair as a working mill. Looking at the mill today, it is strange to think that in 1980 it narrowly escaped being demolished as a 'dangerous structure'. The initial and immediate task was to make the structure safe and consider whether and how it might be saved for posterity as a working mill. Structural restoration was finally completed in 2008, when we were able to produce our first flour and move from restoration to learning how to operate the mill safely and productively. We are now at the point where we are

confident that we can run and maintain the mill employing traditional methods and craftsmanship. And so we now find ourselves in a new phase, one of long-term **custodianship**. The Trust and trustees will now focus on their role as custodians of Oldland Mill as an iconic historic working mill, caring for the mill, and conserving it as it was when it ceased operating in 1912. The Trust, along with all those members and volunteers involved in this 40-year plus journey can rightly celebrate the success of their efforts and labour.

The new workshop, named the Annett-Bolton Building, has proved to be a major asset, providing much needed dry work and storage space. While the weather has been a hindrance to maintenance work on the mill, we had good weather for our Event Days and Open Afternoons. These were well attended and provided an important boost to our funds. It was noticeable that there was a marked increase in young families visiting the mill, which is to be welcomed. There was also a significant increase in use of card payments.

As I have mentioned before and explained at the AGM in July, we are in the process of converting the Trust into an Incorporated Charitable Organisation and hopefully the process will be completed shortly.

Winnowing machine

At the October Open Afternoon this year our restored working nineteenth century winnowing machine was on display. Following threshing, where the grain is separated from the corn, winnowing is needed to clean and remove the 'chaff' from the grain, after which the grain can be milled to produce flour. Originally, both would have been done by hand. Corn would be threshed using a flail to beat the harvested corn. Winnowing was then done by throwing the threshed corn into the air, allowing the lighter chaff to be blown away. Early attempts to mechanise threshing and winnowing date from the early 1730s but effective mechanisation did not become commonplace until the beginning of the 19th Century. Our winnowing machine, pictured here, was manufactured by Cooch & Sons Ltd of Northampton, an agricultural engineering company which was started by John Cooch in 1800 and continued in business until 1971. The original design was patented by John Cooch in 1800. The machines were manufactured and improved by his son Joshua Cooch, who took over the running of the firm in 1828.



The Trust was gifted one of these machines in 2014. At that point the machine was in a state of complete disrepair and as such was unusable. Over the next two years Trust volunteers painstakingly renovated and repaired it, so that today we are able to use it regularly. This machine is identical to an award-winning machine exhibited by Cooch & Sons Ltd at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Grain is lifted from a hopper, via a conveyor belt of small buckets, to the top of the machine where it passes over a roller and drops into a jet of moving air generated by a fan driven by an external drive wheel. The air movement is adjusted to blow dust, chaff and light seeds (e.g. weed seeds) out of the sides of the machine, with the grain shaken through an upper sieve onto a lower sieve, with perforations too small to allow the grain to fall through. The angled positioning and vibration of the screens cause the grain to move towards the front of the winnower into a collecting tray ready for bagging. Before external sources of power were available, early machines would have been powered by geared hand cranks. Later models may well have been modified, as we have done, by the fitting of an electric motor. The invention of the first useable electric motor dates from 1834 and is credited to the German-Russian engineer Moritz Hermann Jacodi. By the 1880s electric motors were widely used to power machinery.

Milling report

Milling has been limited this year by the lack of suitable winds. Between January and October 2023, there were 12 milling sessions of which only 9 proved to be successful, when the wind was strong enough to actually grind some wheat! The wind proved fickle during the early summer months so we did not manage to produce any flour from April through to June and we ran out of flour, both loose

and packed. During the late June/July period there was very little wind and our millers were unable to grind any flour for about six weeks. When the weather conditions improved, we had several packing sessions and our outlets were restocked. We now have the problem of wet rot in the tip of one of the sweeps which, while not a major problem, is taking time to repair and is preventing the mill from working. And once again we have exhausted our stock of flour. The wind challenges we faced this year would, have been faced by the original millers. Not until a reliable external engine drive became possible in the wake of the industrial evolution did milling become independent of wind direction and strength. Ironically, the industrial revolution allowed rapid and efficient rail transport of grain to be milled at large central steam-powered mills, which ultimately caused the demise of local wind and watermills.

The 2021 harvest Zyatt wheat, from Gibraltar Farm in Firle, East Sussex was used up by July and from then we have been using the 2022 harvest Crusoe wheat from Mill Farm in Chiddingstone, Kent whenever conditions permit milling. We have produced 842kg of flour in 41 sacks. Of these, 9 sacks (each ~16kg) were sold to a local baker and the remainder (each ~21kg) were packed in 1kg bags for sale directly or through our local retail outlets. It is interesting to note that approximately 50% of our flour sales go to artisan bakers rather than retail outlets, perhaps confirming the quality of our product.

We were advised that because of weather conditions the quality of 2023 harvested wheat was unlikely to be very good for milling. Happily, we were able to secure approximately 1 tonne of good quality Crusoe from Snowhill Farm near Betchworth, Surrey. We collected this on 2nd October and put it through our winnower the following day to clean it ready for milling. It is now safely stored within the mill. We are now confident that we have sufficient wheat to see us right through until the 2024 harvest becomes available next autumn. *Chris Skingsley, Lead Miller*

Mill Operations

The new workshop has quickly shown itself to be a valuable asset in many ways, including much needed on-site storage (e.g. for the full range of new extending ladders in the generous roof space) and providing a solid flat concrete floor able to accommodate relatively heavy machine tools. It is also able to house the volunteer team for tea and coffee breaks in inclement weather!

The Mill has accumulated a very large number of items and equipment needed for the repair and maintenance of the Mill, all of which require storage. Storage on site is thus a challenge. We are in the process of refitting the garage to optimise both storage and useable space. We were fortunate that the large storage rack used in the old portacabin could be dismantled and reassembled against the east wall inside the garage on Mill Lane.



Our large robust storage boxes could thus be reused. In addition, the opportunity was taken when creating a storage space to include a significant number of large drawers, thus enabling modest-sized items such as gloves, goggles, scrapers... etc, to have a dedicated home rather than being 'lost' among other items in an excessively large storage box.

The Mill Operations Team had met 'virtually' throughout the Covid Pandemic but recommenced face-to-face meetings in February 2023. All subsequent meetings have been held on site in the new workshop. Developing and updating the Major Work Plan for the year inevitably featured regularly on the agenda, but substantial time was also devoted to elaborating on the 'Sweep Inspection Criteria.' This was partly prompted by safety considerations of rotating the sweeps when the public were on site, but also by a reconsideration of the need to remove the sweeps every 7 years for a thorough inspection on the ground. It has been agreed that sweep removal will in future be undertaken following the results of a thorough sweep inspection undertaken every Spring. This will give sufficient time to plan and implement the removal during the summer. This reflects the modern 'Condition Based Monitoring' (CBM) approach to avoid failures. *Fred Maillardet, Operation Lead*

Mill Operations Maintenance, Restoration and Painting

Washing of the mill to remove dirt and algae was completed by the middle of May, when restoration and repainting of the front of the Mill and the Roundhouse began. The front of the mill bears the brunt of the weather, the mill always being turned to face the wind, and it was last painted in 2017. Good



progress was made in the sunny weather until the end of June, but July and August were very wet and windy and completion was delayed until the sun returned in September. Working on the front of the mill is complicated by the sweeps, though standing on the stocks – the large timbers at the centre of the sweeps – does enable the top of the front to be reached.

The area below the stocks was painted from the cherry picker, and from ladders for the bottom part. Whilst the front of the mill was painted using our conventional oil-based system, breathable paint was used on the Roundhouse roof as part of our paint trial programme. Black tar varnish was used as per usual on the Roundhouse walls (last painted in 2016). The rear and right-hand side of the mill and the gates have been sprayed with Algon. This is an organic compound that helps prevent algae, and we hope it will ease the washing task next spring.

The trial of a new sweep shutter crank fastening system using coach bolts and bearings rather than the existing coach screws is under way. The new system involves enlarging the hole in each of the 204 cranks and in the 8 shutter control bars, and it is planned to install as many bolts as possible over the winter and spring – a major operation. This will enable the sweeps to be run safely at Open Events, provided of course that there is sufficient wind! Repairs are also under way on the tip of Sweep 4, where there has been some rot at the end of the Whip – the large timber that runs the length of the sweep.

Three large pieces of oak have been installed to repair the rear steps, two to replace the top steps, and the largest to replace the bottom step. Work has also continued to develop a system for protecting the steps from rot at their joints with the side-timbers (known as Stringers).

We have also been busy undertaking necessary groundworks. Ten tonnes of aggregate have been spread on the car park, and this has greatly reduced lying water in the unpleasantly wet conditions being experienced this autumn. The west Yew Hedge and the strip of grass planted in the spring are both growing well – indeed the grass needs a lot of cutting, probably due to the very good soil it has been planted on and the mild autumn. Bushes have been planted along the splendid north wall, and together with the new building and the painting of parts of the mill, the overall site is looking rather fine. *Andy Pearce, Maintenance Lead*

Promotion and Fund-Raising

Our fundraising activities this year have been both fun and financially rewarding. The Event Days and Open Afternoons were very well attended and raised £5,571 to help support the mill. The weather, while not always good for milling, was definitely on our side. We have reviewed and replenished our stock of memorabilia. We now have bought pint glasses, tote bags, tea towels, pens and cards for sale at our events and by popular request we plan to have china mugs and possibly smaller glasses for sale next year. We are always open to other suggestions.

We had a stall at ‘Hassocks on Show’ and were at ‘Light Up Hassocks’ on the 1st December when we sold flour and mill mice along with other items of memorabilia. Local Ditchling and Hassocks events are important as they help raise the profile of the mill and allow us to highlight the need for more volunteers.



We are grateful to all the volunteers who have helped to run the stalls and the wonderful tea team under Marylyn Rankin who have turned up faithfully to the Open Afternoons and Event Days this year. We are particularly grateful to Chris Horlick (Mr Punch) who has been giving free, and extremely popular, shows at our Event Days for many years. We plan to continue with the same pattern of Open Afternoons and Event Days in 2024 – Event Days on the first Sundays of May and September and Open Afternoons on all the other first Sundays of the months between and including April and October. We look forward to seeing you there. *Juliet Strange, Promotion and Fund-Raising Lead*

Membership, volunteers and the 200 Club

Currently, we have 304 members of whom 216 are Life Members, 44 are Family Memberships and 44 are Individual Members. The number of Annual Members renewing their membership has again declined. Despite the very modest membership fee, annual membership is not proving to be attractive. We are thus reviewing our current membership arrangements, which have not changed for many years. While we will retain the current annual membership option, we intend to introduce a

subscription offer for members and supporters of Oldland Mill. We hope to introduce a new membership scheme next year, with details outlined in the Spring Newsletter.

The 200 Club year starts on 1 July each year, you can apply for tickets (£12) when renewing your membership or by contacting the Membership Secretary, Alison White (membership@oldlandwindmill.org.uk). There is no limit on the number of Draw Tickets you can purchase. There are three Cash Prizes drawn on the third Thursday of each month. The size of the prizes depends on the number of tickets sold. Good luck. *Alison White, Membership Secretary*

Help to preserve this iconic building

There has been a slight decline in the number of volunteers regularly attending the Mill and actively involved in the running and maintenance of the mill. The Trust would warmly welcome volunteers to join the Board of Trustees or to join our marketing, events, maintenance, and milling teams. The time commitment need not be large. We are also seeking additional off-site storage space, if you can, or know someone who might be able to offer dry storage space please contact the Trust. If you are interested in volunteering in any capacity, please contact the Trust via our email address: info@oldlandwindmill.org.uk which can be found on our website www.oldlandwindmill.org.uk where you can make a donation, and find out more about the mill and the work of the Trust. You could also call in at the mill most Tuesday and Thursday mornings (9.30am onwards) when the mill is normally open for maintenance and repair.

As I write this, the forecast is for cold weather and a possible white Christmas. On behalf of the Trust, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.



Dr Stephen Waite

Chair Oldland Mill Trust

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