

Oldland Mill Trust

Winter Newsletter 2019



Patron: Richard Burrows
Registered charity: 1072911

The oldest regularly working windmill in Sussex!

Sweep Refurbishment and Milling.

Sweeps don't last for ever!

A year ago, an item in the Newsletter explained that the shutters on our two newly refurbished sweeps were working well - opening or closing when pointing skyward depending on the wind conditions - and in particular we expected that they would allow strong gusts to 'blow through' without overstraining the mill. And indeed, work well they have! In recent years, we frequently stopped milling during gusty spells over concern at the creaks and groans emanating from heavily stressed timberwork. However, this spring, on one particularly windy day, Fred hurried up the steps when the mill was working, to ask in a concerned tone "shouldn't we stop the mill – it's *very* gusty out here?". But the refurbished sweeps were working so well that Stuart Meier, the Lead Miller inside, hadn't appreciated just how gusty it had become! And flour grinding continued unabated.



Traditional Stoneground Wholemeal Flour



Richard Gaterell on sweep assembly

This summer we refurbished the remaining two sweeps. This could not have been completed on time without the support of all our additional 'Summer Volunteers', namely:

Louise Castelton, Alan Catharine, Geraldine Dandridge, Nat Dudman, Howard Farley, Jerry Georgeson, Ian Hawes, Winnie Fox, Catherine Hinchliffe, Ped Kerdmai, Gregg Lock, Andrew Mackay, Paul Mercer, Nigel Roberts and Colin Wilsdon.

Our practice has been to repaint the sweeps every 7 years, but these were done a year early, and we were very worried at the level of rot we found. We had planned the replacement of the outer edge 'hemlaths', but were concerned to find that we also had to replace eight of the much thicker crosspieces, called 'sailbars'. More worryingly, we found advanced rot in one of the sweep 'whips', the major timber beam in the middle of the sweep. We took professional advice to ensure we achieved the very best possible repair, a long slow process which stretched over many weeks. The replacement timber was especially chosen to match not just the species, but the internal growth pattern as well. The final result was amazing, the new and old timber blending seamlessly with an almost invisible glue line thanks to Peter Camp's meticulous craftsmanship!



Andy and summer volunteers at work.



Peter Camp working on the whip repair.

A secondary benefit of the refurbishment has been the installation of 'interboards' which cover the space between the trailing and leading shutters, and reducing the gaps between shutters from 1/2" to 1/4". These small but significant changes increase the 'swept area' and improve the aerodynamics to allow grinding at lower wind speeds. This certainly helped the mill work more efficiently, as this summer we were able to grind a large batch of flour using only *two* sweeps, the second pair being on the ground undergoing refurbishment. This is a first for us - and a first for the mill in the past 100 years!

Maintenance

Despite the focus on the sweep refurbishment, maintenance remains an ever-present need. A few damp patches were observed on the inside of the mill's roof in the Spring, spreading from some of the joints in the weatherboards. Andy Pearce, our Maintenance Lead, arranged for Facelift to loan us a 17m Cherry Picker (CP) for a day in March so that the roof could be inspected from the outside, the roof being too high for the Mill's 12m CP.



17m Cherry Picker

The inspection confirmed that some of the joints needed repair, and a 17m CP was hired for a week in August. Problem joints were treated with hardener, filled and covered with glass fibre painted on with two applications of undercoat. Two topcoats will be applied next Spring/Summer, again using a 17m CP.

Safety

Safety continues to be an important consideration during mill maintenance and milling operations. The Mill Accident Prevention Team (APT) meet every four months under the guidance of Colin Hewitt, the Mill's Safety Officer, to discuss not only how to make the Mill a safer place for both volunteers and visitors, but also to ensure that the mill itself is protected. Recent discussions have included ensuring safety of all involved during the sweep refurbishment together with how best to induct the Summer Volunteers.

Safety on Mill Open Days is also key and with so many visitors we are looking for volunteer First Aiders to be on call during these days. We have improved accessibility to the Mill with re-treads on steps and line-painting to emphasise changes in levels. We had a recent near miss with a visiting small child; we all need to be vigilant and aware of our surroundings - especially when the sweeps are turning - to ensure that all our safety barriers are securely in place and prevent not only adults but children from accessing restricted areas!

We continue to enforce the policy of no smoking anywhere in the Mill grounds and are pleased to note that the wearing of personal protective equipment is becoming second nature among virtually all volunteers, especially as regards safety shoes or boots, gloves, goggles and hearing protection when necessary. Face masks are also routinely worn during Milling and Flour Packing operations.

Lightning Protection

We were fortunate to receive a grant from the Turner-Dumbrell Foundation this year to install a Lightning Protection System within the Mill, and consideration of the most appropriate design commenced in the Spring. Although there are trees nearby, they do not provide lightning protection to the mill as it is a tall structure with its sweeps rising still higher. A strike would be rare, but its results could be catastrophic!

Many mills in the Netherlands use a system whereby conductors run down the sweeps and are connected to the ground. This scheme was initially proposed, but at a working mill like Oldland the mill body and sweeps are turned regularly, so such a system would have to be applied only when lightning was predicted. Andy Pearce has therefore sought a *permanently* connected solution based on that applied to some other Post Mills, for example Chillenden Post Mill in Kent. The final scheme will have conductors running down the side of each sweep, and then connected to the ground via the windshaft front bearing and the bearing at the top of the main post that supports the mill body – the Pintle Bearing. The top of the roof will also be connected to the system, attention being given to keeping the system as inconspicuous as possible. A lightning contractor will

install the protection system with help from Mill Volunteers in digging the trench for the earth ring to be buried around the mill.

Open Days

For the first time we experimented with two rather than three major Event Days this year. The two days were, however, longer so that the total visitor time available on site was about the same. Both days were well attended and enjoyed by young and old. Indeed, we are seeing more children at our events, which bodes well for the future. A total of 1,325 visitors came through our gate (including Open Afternoons) and they contributed approx. £6.5k to the Trusts funds. This is especially pleasing as it reversed a downward trend in both visitor numbers and income attracted last year.



Another busy event day.

Thank you to *all* those volunteers who make these days both possible and profitable, enabling so much valuable work to be completed on the mill. We are seeing more and more children at our events which bodes well for the future. David Cumberland and Juliet Strange, our Open Day Lead and Promotions Secretary respectively, are already planning next year's events, the details of which will appear in the Spring 2020 Newsletter.

Tea Team

The highest takings on Open Days after the Entrance Gate are invariably 'refreshments', the term we use to describe the sale of Tea, Coffee and Cakes. Most of the cakes are homemade by our own volunteers and their partners or members of the Tea Team, namely:

Jill Bowen, Erika Chapman, Tina Davey, Liz Edmunds, Sarah Jenkins, Drusilla Meier, Valerie Morfield and Pat Saunders.

Our thanks are due to Marylyn Rankin who quietly but efficiently organises the team and ensures that stock is adequate to meet the demand, irrespective of the weather!

Visits

In addition to the advertised Mill Event Days and Open Afternoons, there have been six private visits this year by a variety of clubs, societies and age groups. One group took advantage of the lovely summer weather and the Mill's splendid grounds, by bringing their own picnic! A local Cub Pack visited earlier in the year and it is amazing how interested these young people are in the Mill. We hope they may grow up to become Mill volunteers in the future.

Chris Skingsley, our Visits Lead, ensures that all visits are conducted by experienced Mill Stewards and tailored to suit the ages and fitness of our visitors as there are three steep flights of steps to negotiate in order to reach the top floor! For those unable to climb the steps, Gordon King has arranged for a selection of Mill Videos to be on display on demand in both the Round House and on the Spout Floor. These videos range from the historical record of reconstructing the Mill Body through to showing the Mill working, including a soundtrack to create the right ambiance within the stationary Mill! These Mill visits are very important as they not only spread knowledge of Oldland Mill but also add some very welcome and valuable contributions to the Mill's funds.

Publicity

The focus of the Mill publicity during the summer of 2019 was attracting visitors from *beyond* Hassocks and Ditchling. An article in The Brighton Post led to a surprising number of people travelling over The Downs to visit the Mill. Ongoing support from The Brighton Post, The Talk About, the Mid Sussex Times and Sussex Living, along with an increased Social Media presence – driven by Beckie Street, our Publicity Officer - has contributed to the increase in the number of visitors over the season, when compared to 2018, despite the reduction in the number of Event Days. The provision of the Shuttle Bus on all Open Afternoons along with Event Days - another innovation this year - has also undoubtedly encouraged more visitors.

Membership and the 200 Club

John Rayner, our Membership Secretary, reports that Life Membership numbers are now 216, a 25% growth since last year, with the balance between Family and Individual Members remaining relatively constant at 73 and 66 respectively. This yields a total of 355 paid up members. We are attracting new members from across the UK - from Totnes to Cromarty - and also internationally e.g. Florida, USA!

200 Club Winners over the last eight months were:

March	22 – 61 – 71 – 83 – 97 – 148 – 155 – 202 – 208
April	46 – 48 – 95 – 142 – 153 – 191 – 197 – 206 – 213
May	6 – 14 – 120 – 154 – 158 – 158 – 172 – 189 – 196 – 218
June	46 – 50 – 51 – 61 – 75 – 161 – 176 – 196 – 215
July	113 – 163 – 164
August	47 – 73 – 127
September	5 – 115 – 141
October	129 – 153 – 181

Note the fewer but larger prizes in recent months in response to the member consultation carried out last year.

Grounds

Following the work last Spring to renovate the South end of the West hedge, work continued to clear out all invading growth, weeds, etc, to enable the Lonicera to thrive and gain height.

Following the completion of work on the sweeps this summer and the subsequent removal of the three marquees, the bare and trodden ground thus exposed was worked to a tilth and then fertiliser and a generous amount of grass seed applied. Although rather late in the season, the warm and wet weather helped to produce good growth which is already being mowed. John Wiggins, our Grounds Lead, surprised us all with this very welcome swift recovery of the grass!

The drainage ditch around the Lozenge together with numerous smaller channels previously dug to prevent heavy rain flooding the car park, were also cleared recently of woodland debris.

Epilogue

David Friend constructed an oak bench in memory of John Annett which has stood proudly on the Spout Floor during the summer, a reminder of John's critical role in saving and restoring Oldland Mill. As reported in the previous Newsletter, Jerry Dunster, a very long-serving volunteer, died in February 2019. I would record the generosity of Jean Dunster in donating all of Jerry's large collection of engineering tools to the Trust.



Iris Annett with John's memorial bench.

Mill Christmas cards will be available again this year and Geoff Miller will be handling orders and enquiries. His letter and photocopy of the three cards available is enclosed with this Newsletter.

May I thank all our readers for supporting Oldland Mill Trust throughout another very successful season.

Fred Maillardet Chairman, Oldland Mill Trust.