

SUFFOLK MILLS GROUP

NEWSLETTER NUMBER 1 II JUNE 1977



Welcome to the first Newsletter of the Suffolk Mills Group. The S.M.G ('Smig?') was first suggested almost a year ago by two East Anglian Mill enthusiasts, Robert Stevens of Cambridge and Peter Dolman of Ipswich. The original plan was to form an 'East Anglian Mills Group'; after consideration however, it was decided to start smaller County Groups since the problems of organisation might have proved too burdensome for a regional Group. The matter was decided partly for us, because almost as soon as the E.A.M.G. was suggested, the 'Friends of Norfolk Windmills' were set up. Subsequently we have seen the formation of the 'Cambridgeshire Wind and Watermill Society' and (most important of all) our own Group.

A date and venue for the inaugural meeting were arranged as being at Woodbridge Tide Mill on 28th, May, by kind permission of Peter Wyllie and the Friends of Woodbridge Tide Mill. Despite fairly wide publicity in local papers and even on Norwich Local Radio, the turnout was disappointing with sixteen brave souls turning up. This did mean however, that the discussion was lively and the meeting was easily controlled. The meeting got under way with a look around the recently restored Tide Mill and to follow was a slide show illustrating mills in the county which need attention, together with some of the more fortunate preserved mills. Then it was 'down to business'. The following Officers were elected:

Chairman	Chris Hullcoop, 42, High Road West, Felixstowe
Treasurer	Robert Shackle, 15, Catherine Road, Woodbridge
Secretary	Peter Dolman, 95, Bixley Road, Ipswich
Newsletter Editor	Mark Barnard, 41, Melbourne Road, Ipswich

The above form part of the Committee, which is to comprise of six members. Mike Weaver was elected to one of the remaining posts, the other remains vacant for the time being.

In the discussion that followed, the Group's title was agreed, also the subscription rates were set. The drafting of the Constitution was left to the Committee (a copy of which is enclosed with this Newsletter).

The meeting then went on to view two films, the first being shown by Mike Weaver was of the Tide Mill at work in the early 1950's. Peter Wyllie then showed his colour film of the repair work done to the Mill's machinery. These two films were extremely interesting and were well received. The meeting ended with a look at the new water wheel, made and installed by Jameson Marshall ltd., our local firm of millwrights, who made a very good job of it.

Following the inaugural meeting, the Committee have met several times to discuss and agree the Banking arrangements and Constitution.

We can safely say that the Suffolk Mills Group is alive and well!

Woodbridge Sweepout

On the Sunday afternoon following the Inaugural Meeting, three intrepid Committee members (messrs. Hulcoop, Shackle and Dolman) descended upon Buttrum's Windmill at Woodbridge to assist owner Martin Whitworth in sweeping out the mill so that it could be opened for Woodbridge Carnival Week.

The problem was in deciding where to stop for the surface of the interior brickwork is flaking, with the paint alone holding it in place. A compromise was reached, with loose stuff being removed; although a patchy appearance has resulted, the mill is certainly better than it was.

Being maintained by the County Council means that the mill is not kept in working order. The Council do their best with the limited funds available and the external appearance is very smart. However, some of the interior fittings need tidying up; for example, items like the crook strings and bell alarms are missing, also it's hard to explain to visitors how the brake works when the lever is lying in a rotting heap on the ground floor!

Minor items like these could quite easily be tackled by the Mills Group at odd week-end sessions; also the Council may be prepared to supply materials if the volunteers could be found to strip the old paint and flaking brickwork and to apply new sealer and emulsion paint. My own view is that efforts ought to be made to get Buttrums Mill into good internal condition for in it, we see probably the last of the famous John Whitmore towermills in complete state.

Any persons interested in helping to improve the interior of this fine 60 foot high towermill are invited to contact me on Ipswich 55838 ext.475 during office hours.

Peter Dolman.

Jubilee Bunting

For several years now Peter Dolman has put on his "Marshman's Smock" to run Herringfleet drainage mill four times a year. Few of the Broadland holidaymakers cruising by on the River Waveney can realise they are lucky enough to see the only full-sized workable drainage mill in Britain on one of the few days it is in action.

The last 'Herringfleet day' was June 4th. (the next one is August 27th.) and being Jubilee weekend we decided to 'dress her overall'. During the previous week there were some puzzled looks at a well-known local fertilizer firm when, during the lunch-hour, old red, white and blue bags were being cut into long thin triangles which were then stapled to four 35ft. lengths of baler twine. This made bright and very strong bunting.

Herringfleet mill was extremely lucky for bunting as the Somerleyton Estate had provided a further four lengths. This was tied tip to tip, and along the four drive side hemlaths of the sails. The cloths were hoisted and set and as so often happens at Herringfleet, a strong wind blew up from nowhere at about midday. The turbulence created by the rapidly turning sails caused the bunting to roar as the wind gusted along the Waveney valley, and the scoopwheel thrashed up water from the dyke, all under the watchful eye of marshman Dolman.

Meanwhile, two useful jobs were in progress inside the mill. Two energetic young members of the Lowestoft Archaeological and Local History Society were busy with scrapers and brooms, giving the mill a long-overdue Spring clean for the Jubilee. A potential threat to the smock, caused by one of the corner posts slowly but surely sinking, has been averted for a while. The post was plated on the inside with a substantial timber, thus holding the movement until a millwright can replace the defective corner post.

Quite a number came to see the action, and towards the end of the day the Somerleyton family (including the dogs) crossed the plank to the mill. Alas! the several hours of rapid turning had torn the local bunting and we felt we ought to give Lord Somerleyton ours in its place. However, he would not hear of it when he heard of our plans to extend it and dress Pakenham mill for Monday and Tuesday.

Hanging the bunting (now extended to 50ft. lengths) at Pakenham was a little more difficult than at Herringfleet where the sails swing very close to the ground. Fortunately there was a good wind and with Mike Bryant inside operating the brake and Peter Bryant calling out when the sail was "just there", the bunting soon adorned the mill. A further touch was added by tying a Union Jack to the acorn finial of the cap. It was a fine sight adding just that little touch of colour to the magnificent black and white tower mill.

I wonder how many mills with their sails adorned with bunting turned on what was a windy Jubilee weekend? It could have been 10 or so with luck, but for a similar event in Holland the number would surely be hundreds.

C.H.

East Bridge Windpump

As many of you will have heard, this fine and unusual windpump sadly collapsed on Feb. 19th. this year.

It was built in the mid 19th. century to lift water from the marshes into New Cut which flows out to sea through Minsmere Sluice. There were originally three smock windpumps on Minsmere Level. One, near the sluice, had a wooden windshaft and poll-end and drove a scoopwheel, and was built about the time the New Cut was dug in 1810. It worked until the mid 1930's when the poll-end broke off and finally collapsed a year ago. The base and wreckage can still be seen. The other smockmill was built in the mid 19th. century to drain the marshes South of the New Cut and this also drove a scoopwheel. It was blown down in the mid 1920's when a 'Titt' windmill was built on the site. This is now derelict. It drove the original scoopwheel, and the foundations of the smock can be traced still.

All three mills had boat shaped caps, double shuttered Patent sails and fantails.

East Bridge mill worked until until 1939, when the marshes were taken over by the military authorities. The shutters were removed and never went back. When the owners, the Rope family, got the mill back after the war, the mill needed much repairing and instead they erected a new iron windpump nearby which is still in use today.

There are several unusual features about the mill. It drove a triple pump which is rare enough (Blackshore Mill, Reydon is the only other mill so equipped), but also the pump has square pistons and cylinders to make this mill unique. There is an external frame on the mill, which was added in the 1920's using parts of the mill blown to give added strength. Another odd point is that the cap is fitted with centering wheels both inside and outside the curb, which has double keep flanges as a result. The mill was attractive when at work, with the cap and tower tarred, and the sails and fantail painted red.

Before it fell down, plans were being worked out for its restoration. Now, however, we are faced with a total rebuild, which is not really suitable for an exposed site such as Minsmere (look what happened to Walberswick mill when that was restored- it only lasted a few years before it was burnt out by vandals). The Rural Life Museum at Stowmarket have fortunately agreed to have the mill for eventual re-erection. This means that volunteers will have to dismantle the mill and move it to Lower Abbey Farm from where it can be transported to Stowmarket when convenient.

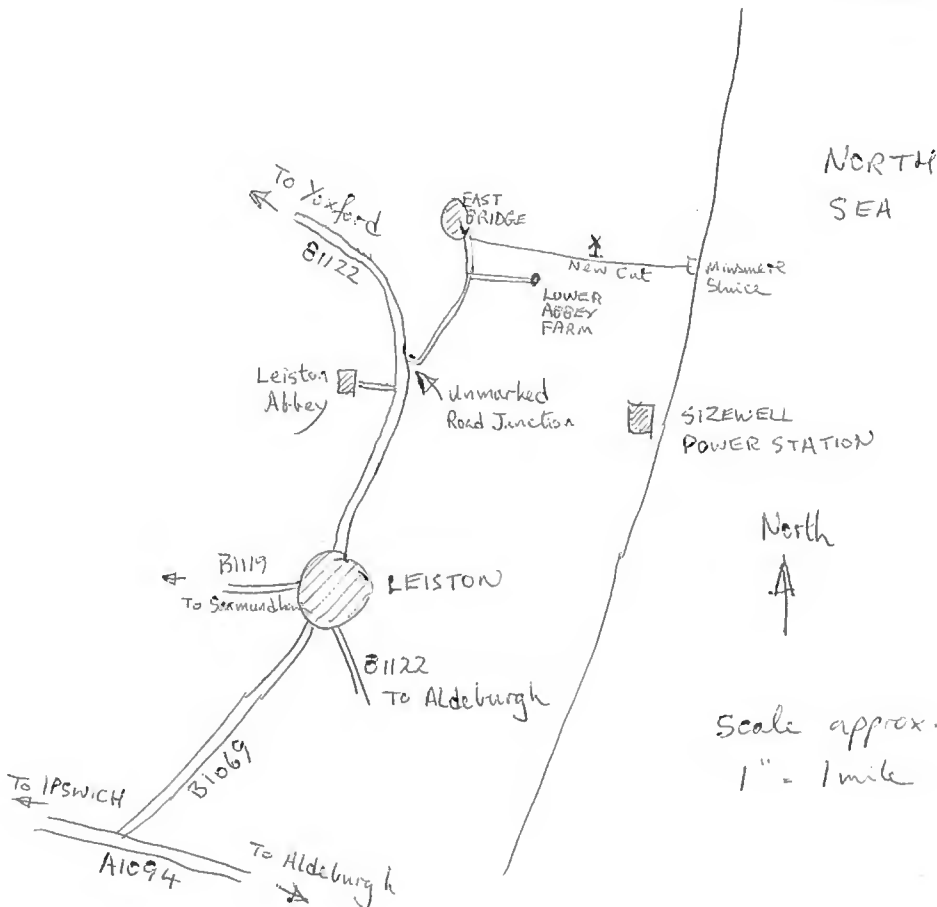
The dates for this work are Saturday and Sunday 16th/17th July. If more work is needed we shall fix further dates on the Sunday. Volunteers are needed to help dismantle the wreckage and to sort the bits worth keeping out from the firewood. We will have a tractor and trailer to cart the pieces in but will need other tools and equipment. If anyone coming could bring items like saws, hacksaws, cold chisels and hammers it would be much appreciated. We could also use a chainsaw if anyone has one they could spare

for the weekend.

Any member or friend is more than welcome to come and lend a hand: please could I know who will be coming three days in advance please?

Those coming please assemble at Lower Abbey Farm, East Bridge, near Leiston at 10.30 on Saturday 16th. See map below for details of location.

Peter Dolman



Transport

It is not the intention of the group to provide transport to any events and meetings. Members wishing to attend are asked to make their own way to such events. To assist in sharing of transport to events we intend to issue a list of members' addresses together with their particular 'kinks' (regarding mills, that is!). Should any member wish to be excluded from the list, would they contact me as soon as possible.

PCJD.

Ramsey Rescue

Ramsey Mill near Harwich in Essex is one of the four surviving tall East Anglian post mills. The other three, all in Suffolk, are Saxtead, Framsdon and Friston. Originally a Suffolk post mill, Ramsey was erected on its present site by millwrights Collins of Melton (near Woodbridge) for miller Robert Brooks in 1842. The mill was worked for nearly 100 years until the start of the last world war. Since then, 30 years of neglect brought the mill to near-collapse. This was prevented by fitting some props and ties (very gently!) in 1973. Since then the repair work has proceeded every year, consisting mainly of two weeks full time work in September. This year's dates are: 10th.-25th.

September 1977. We need volunteers during these two weeks, especially if you can spare a day or two of holiday between week-ends. Much preparatory work has to be done at week-ends through the summer in order to be ready for the two weeks 'work in' in September, so if anyone would like a preview to see 'what they would be letting themselves in for', contact:- Chris. Hullcoop at 42, High Road West, Felixstowe, Suffolk IP11 9JE (telephone (work) Ipswich 76911)

You could then arrange to visit the mill on a Saturday or Sunday and see in detail the work that is planned for this year. Briefly, this will be:-

1. Repairs to head of the mill

Replacement of all diagonals, studs, weatherboards, head gable ribs, etc. Repairs to corner posts and transverse beams, which seem to be in good condition, but experience shows that there can be surprises (both good and bad) when boards are removed.

2. Sail repairs

All four sails remain, and are in poor condition. They are large and span nearly 70ft. They were beautifully designed and made and of course are the last working sails. As well as work to sail bars and hemlaths, we hope to fit four new clamps.

3. Other work

Lots of little 'odd jobs': hopefully a lightning conductor, work to floors, steps, painting and applying protim, etc.

Ramsey mill is a grand place to work on a fine day, with views of the estuary and shipping at Harwich and Parkeston on one side and the rich farmland of Essex on the other. For many visitors to this country Ramsey with its post mill is their first sight of an English village as they leave the busy port for the open landscape beyond.

C.H.

Milldates & events

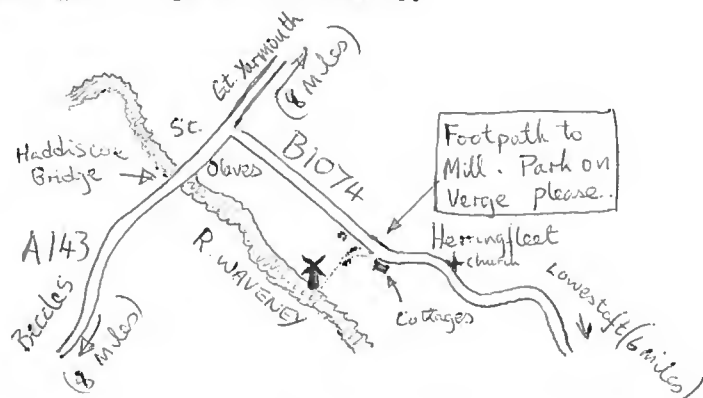
The 'Cambridgeshire Wind and Watermill Society' are holding their first public meeting on Saturday July 9th, at Over Windmill (North-West of Cambridge, near Longstanton). Refreshments will be available and visitors will be able to buy stone-milled flour from the mill which is the only working wind mill in Eastern England. If possible, the mill will be running and visitors will be shown round by Chris Wilson, the mill's owner, restorer and miller. A small charge will be made to raise funds for the society.

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings is organising a three day mill weekend based at Norwich starting on Friday 5th. August. Details from Mrs M.Dance. SPAB, 55 Gt. Ormond St., London WC1.

The Suffolk Mills Group get under way with an informal gathering at Pakenham Windmill on Sunday 10 th. of July, starting at 2.00 pm. by kind permission of Mike Bryant. Members requiring sustenance are advised to bring sandwiches if necessary, but tea and biscuits will be laid on. In addition to the normal delights of looking round this fine towermill (which, incidentally, will be grinding (wind permitting, of course)) members will be able to bring along their slides to show on a projector. Any friends and Mailing members who come are asked to pay 30 pence admission. If you want to attend, please let me know at least 3 days in advance, otherwise we may not be able to guarantee you a cup of tea!

Working party at Minsmere - see elsewhere in this newsletter for details.

Herringfleet Open Day . As usual, I will be running the Marshmill near St.Olaves.(See map below for details of location). The date is Saturday 27th.August from 11.30 to 5.30. There are no 'Facilities' at the mill so come prepared! I would suggest that a packed lunch is the minimum requirement; if the weather is against us 'wellies' and macs will also be desirable.



The Museum of East Anglian Rural Life at Stowmarket are giving a Baking and Stone Dressing demonstration on Saturday 3rd. September. Members wishing to come are asked to 'Mill around' the Whitmore & Binyon engine house at 2.00pm. Friends and Mailing members will be asked to pay 5p over the museum entrance fee. When you arrive tell the man(sorry, 'person') on the gate that you are SMG, we can get reduced Party rate then.

PCJD.

Membership rules explained

To save possible confusion over types of membership and associated matters I shall attempt to explain the intricacies of S.M.G. membership.

1. Full members whether over or under 18 years of age are entitled to receive all literature sent out by the group. They are also entitled to free admission to all S.M.G. events.
2. Newsletter or 'Mailing members' receive all literature but if they attend any events they must pay a sum equal to the normal entrance fee (if any) plus a small charge levied by ourselves. This rule applies to any guest that might accompany them.
3. Family members have the same rights as (1), with the exception that members of the family have free admission to events.
4. Corporate members have the same rights as (2) above.

Voting rights are set out in the constitution.

PCJD.

Contributions

The committee welcome material for inclusion in the newsletters. These can be in the form of 'letters to the editor', articles on any topic connected with milling, photographs and other pictures may also be sent in as the committee intend that future newsletters should be illustrated to as good a standard as is financially possible. Items for publication may be sent to either the Secretary or the Editor.

