

SUFFOLK MILLS GROUP

Newsletter Number 2

SEPTEMBER 1977

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SUFFOLK



I'm sure all of you have been eagerly awaiting Newsletter No.2. Well, here it is, complete with photographs, and I hope you enjoy reading it! As you will see from the following pages, S.M.G. has been very active in the three months or so since it was formed, especially with the East Bridge project. The open day at Pakenham was also particularly successful. Our membership is growing steadily, but it is participation that really counts, so I hope you will be able to support the events planned for the coming few months (see page 11). May I also draw your attention to the slight change in the membership rules, described on pages 9 - 10).

Our next Newsletter should appear in December, and will include a write-up of this year's episode of the 'Ramsey Rescue' (see Newsletter No.1) and some special items to mark the festive season. As always, I shall be happy to receive any contributions Members may wish to make to this Newsletter.

Mark Barnard

PAKENHAM MILL VISIT

'One of the loveliest sights I know is that of a windmill at work, the sails turning steadily against a blue sky, with cumulus clouds passing across it in ordered procession'. (Rex Wailes in 'The English Windmill')

"Is there a windmill still at work, where grain is ground by stones driven from the sails?" How often this question is asked! To find a windmill at work today is indeed a rare event. Members and friends of S.M.G. were therefore very fortunate to meet at Pakenham mill on just the right day (July 10th.). There to greet us was miller / farmer Mike Bryant with a bin full of maize ready for grinding, on a fine sunny afternoon with a good wind blowing. The mill looked a fine sight with the sails turning steadily, while within the tower the quiet meshing of the gearwheels seemed to disguise the power being generated. Climbing out onto the gallery around the cap, one could quickly appreciate that at this level the wind speed is twice that on the ground. Seen from the gallery the sails looked very large, and with the fly turning the cap into the wind and the wind itself threatening to pluck the nervous from the gallery, no-one could leave without a sense of wonder at this partnership of man and nature.

Meanwhile our hard-working Secretary was busy recruiting new members behind a table laid with newsletters and membership forms. As well as people who were just passing and saw the sails turning (the mill was open to all), several 'mill people' from outside Suffolk came along: Chris. Wilson from Over mill, Cambridgeshire; from Essex Mike Organ (Ramsey mill) and Clifford Jaques (Tiptree mill); from Norfolk John Lawn, millwright, (Caston mill) and Mr. Chapman (Denver mill). The talk was of timber prices, iron stocks and the best paints and tar!

After a welcome cup of tea and biscuits brought by Jean Bryant, the ground floor was darkened and a projector and screen set up. The slides shown covered the whole range of mill restoration and destruction: the lifting on of the new cap at West Winch, Norfolk, with John Lawn providing details; the collapse of the two Minsmere (Suffolk) smock mills from Mark Barnard; slides of Sussex mills from Peter Dolman, and shots of the restored tower mill at Rayleigh, Essex, from Clifford Jaques.

We thanked Mike and Jean Bryant for their hospitality and departed with something very precious: the memories of a beautifully-maintained Suffolk windmill at work on a fine Summer's day.

C.H.

EAST BRIDGE PROGRESS REPORT

The S.M.G.'s first project got under way as planned on 16th. July with six Members responding to our pleas for help, together with four Community Service 'volunteers' and their supervisor. The turnout was good for the six days work that we did, two more week-ends being necessary to conclude the dismantling.

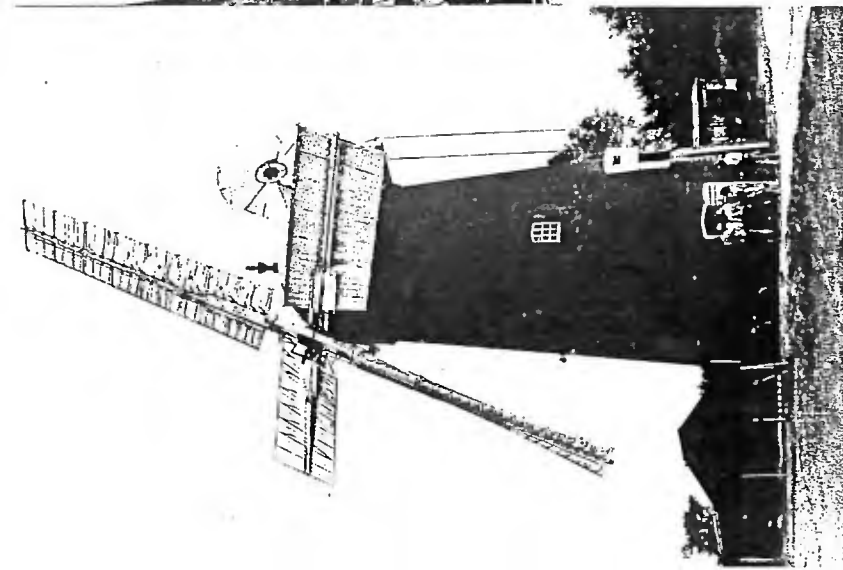
Two people gave sterling service for all six days and we are pleased to have such keen workers as Chris Hullcoop and Mike Peek in the Group. (I had intended to work six days but went down with a virus on the second Sunday). Several other people gave two or more days service and others came for one day. I'd like to record the Group's thanks here to Brian Flint, Bob Shackle, Chris Armour, Mark Barnard, Des Codd, John Snowden and Mike Weaver for the time they were able to devote to the project; keep it up lads! We must also thank the Community Service lads who, although not there by choice, did join in with enthusiasm when their muscle power was called for on the two days that they were there (thanks, Mr. Yates, for keeping them under control).

The work itself had been started by Chris Hullcoop and I the previous week when we removed the external bracing from the tower. Chris also spent a day on his own making a slipway to drag out the upright shaft and on constructing the 'East Bridge Hilton' which was to shelter cameras, tools, etc., in the event of inclement weather.

Work in earnest began on Saturday when the upright shaft, crankshaft and loose debris in the base were cleared away. The mill's owner, Mr. Geoffrey Rope, had lent us a tractor with forklift and trailer without which the job would have been impossible, and he demonstrated its use by pulling out the upright shaft for us. After this, yours truly became tractor driver in chief and during the course of the week I became quite proficient at demolishing farm gateposts!

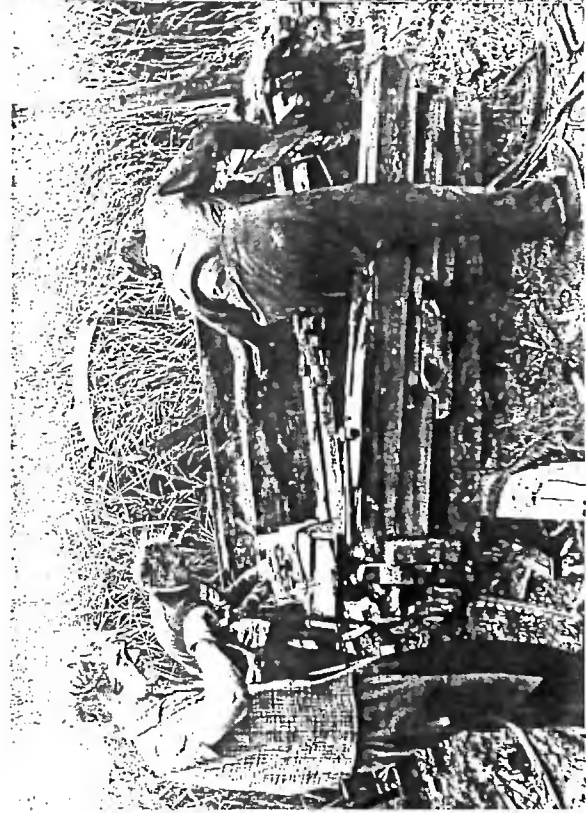
Meanwhile, the tower was gradually being dismantled, the timber going into three heaps: for transporting to Abbot's Hall Museum; for retaining but not taking to the museum, and for discarding completely. By Saturday afternoon three huge heaps had accumulated so the tractor was kept busy carting bits of mill back to the farm. Incidentally, we had numbered the timbers for keeping prior to dismantling with reference to a drawing.

As the work progressed we removed the curb intact, although some of the dog-irons had to be cut to free it from the cant posts. This was duly transported in one piece. The



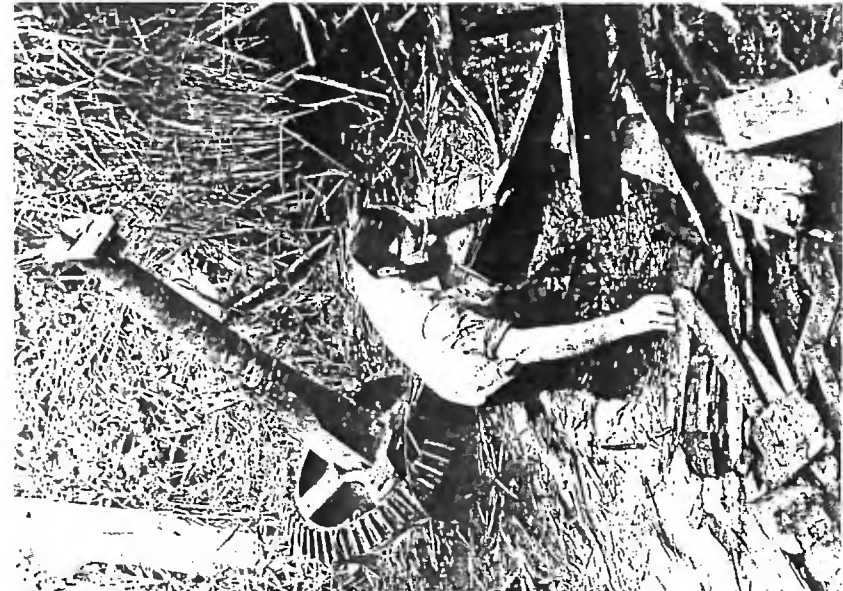
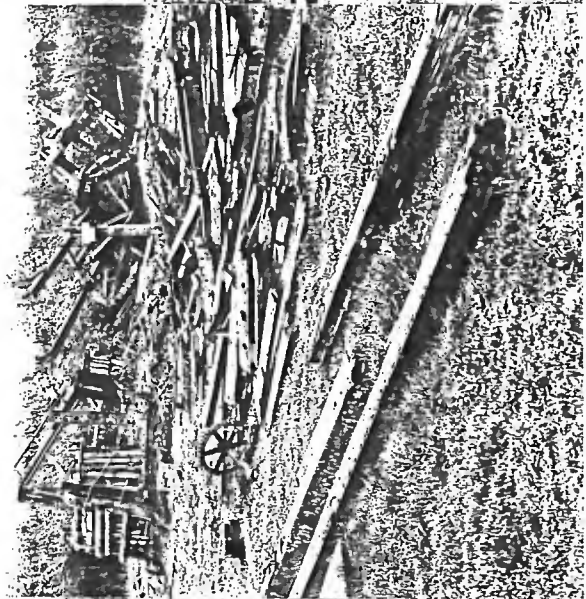
Pakenham mill open day (ABOVE)

Demon dismantlers! (BELOW)

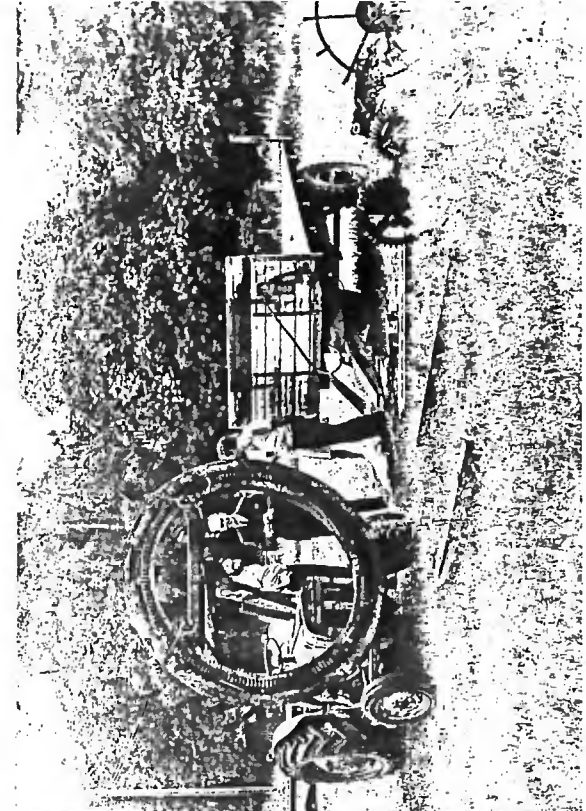


ABOVE: East Bridge mill in February
(Pictures by Peter Dolman)

BELOW: The piles of pieces grow larger and larger as the carcass is dismantled.



ABOVE: Windshaft, brakewheel and 'wallower'
BELOW: Owner Mr. Rope talks to Bob Shackle and Mike Peek during unloading the curb at the farm.



next problem was removing the cap frame. This was a real 'stick in the mud' and once freed it had to be dragged out which took a long time, even with a combination of tractor, tirfor winch and Weston tackle all being used together! After a bit of digging out, and having built a slipway for it, we dragged it out onto the bank, where it was descended upon by the five 'vultures' armed with crowbars and sledgehammers. The fan gears, bearings and loose or rotten timbers were removed. Despite strenuous efforts, though, we couldn't dismantle it further so it was eventually loaded in one complete unit (no mean feat in itself). Another problem was pulling the windshaft out of the dyke. This had the jagged ends of one stock and a complete sail attached together with the striking rod. The sail was broken off at the cannister by the team of C.S. lads pulling on the end and there followed another piece by piece hauling operation to get the half-ton windshaft and brakewheel out of the ditch. It was loaded the following day, with Mike Peek as tractor driver. The pump casing was also lifted out on the second Sunday and a start made on clearing away some of the loose debris.

The final week-end's work was mainly tidying up both the site and the farmyard where everything was stored. The pump was loaded and the water baled out of the pump pit. Then that happy mudlark Bob Shackle plunged in and brought forth many treasures from the black ooze, such as spare curb segments, striking weights and 12 or so complete shutters! We also fished for the neck-bearing which went to the bottom of the dyke when the mill collapsed. Mark found the wooden block on which the bearing sat but we couldn't find the brass itself, the water being too deep. That will have to wait until next year when the water level will hopefully be lower. The site was cleared and the base surveyed in detail (by Bob Shackle and John Snowden) and the stacks of timber and iron were put into some sort of order. Lower Abbey Farm now looks like a millwright's workshop!

Many things impressed me about the job. Mr. Rope, the owner, was very helpful, lending a hand at times and letting us have the free use of his tractor and trailer plus several tools for all six days. Bob Shackle proved to be an absolute wizard with tackle and ropes. He also provided for a couple of days some G.P.O. equipment which he had booked out in his own name for our use - a very sporting gesture since it included a brand new Tirfor winch! His friend John Snowden was bullied into coming along to help: he enjoyed it so much that he's become a full member of S.M.G..

In closing, I must thank Jameson Marshall Ltd., for loaning us their 30 cwt. Tirfor winch (very useful for dragging out windshafts) and of course our Chairman, Chris Hullcoop, who lent tools and did so much hard work for the Group.

The site has now been levelled and this Autumn the parts will be moved to Abbot's Hall Museum. What happens then is very much in the air at this moment, but S.M.G. will be keeping tabs on progress. The museum are thinking in terms of getting 'Job Creation' in on the rebuild, and Suffolk County Council are also involved. I'll report further in the next Newsletter, and also reveal some of the unusual design features that emerged as we dismantled the mill.

Peter Dolman

THOSE DAMNED ELUSIVE WINDMILLS

Windmills are normally tall structures, often prominent enough to be local landmarks. But some, like the legendary Scarlet Pimpernel, can be damned elusive.

My vote for Britain's best concealed windmill goes to Bidston Hill, on the Wirral, which my wife and I visited with great difficulty last June. We drove to the area, equipped with an Ordnance Survey map and an AA route, but got lost in a network of residential streets. A woman collecting her daughter from school redirected us, helped by a local street map but hindered by a one-way road system that made it necessary to send us on a long detour.

We eventually arrived in what appeared to be the right road, cut between steep, wooded banks, but with no sign of the windmill. The only person about, a telephone engineer, thought he knew where the mill was but was not sure how to reach it. Finally, more by luck than judgement, we went through a small gateway and climbed a narrow path up the bank. The path turned a corner and there, on a rocky plateau, was the tower mill, so familiar from pictures, its sails secured with chains and now with graffiti sprayed on its door.

The miniature post mill at Bloxham in Oxfordshire also proved surprisingly difficult to find, although it stands in open farm land. We first spotted the mill marked on a quarter-inch map and looked for it in vain while driving on the main road from Banbury to Oxford. The mill is shown midway between this road, the A423, and the A361 which passes through Bloxham itself. So we then looked for the mill from the A361. We still could not see it and no-one we asked in Bloxham knew that the windmill existed.

There were a number of small, unclassified, roads between the two main roads, most of them now leading to the modern housing estates which have obliterated so many windmill remains. Eventually we drove along one road which became a farm track and there beside it was the tiny post mill, unhappily battered from the winter gales which had damaged its sails but still surviving.

Other searches have had less satisfactory outcomes. People living within a few hundred yards of the site of Bebington tower mill, south of Bidston Hill, had never heard of the windmill. Further enquiries brought the information that the mill had gone and eventually led to the site itself, which had been built over. A woman living opposite confirmed that nothing was now left of the windmill but she was unable to say how long it had been gone although, she said, she had watched it being demolished.

At Capel, on the Surrey-Sussex border, a three-quarters of an hour search along a lane failed to reveal any trace of Shiremark smock mill. There was no-one there to ask but we later discovered we were a couple of months too late to see the mill whose derelict remains had burned down.

Finding hidden mills is part of the enjoyment of windmill visiting but it is always disappointing to discover there is no longer anything left to find. Some excellent county windmill books are now appearing and these, along with some privately produced lists, are invaluable. But up-to-date records are still badly needed for many areas. Any members who know of changes in the condition of any mill can help by making them known

to the Newsletter editor for publication. For a start, can anyone let us know the present condition of the following windmills in Lancashire, Cheshire and Merseyside: Bickerstaffe, Bretherton, Burscough (2), Crosby, Haigh, Liverpool, Parbold, Preston, Up Holland, Warton, Weeton, Burton, Threapwood, Buerton, Burland and Upton?

Peter Jennings

BOOK REVIEW

'VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN WINDMILLS AND WATERMILLS FROM OLD PHOTOGRAPHS' by J. Kenneth Major and Martin Watts. Published by Batsford; 1977. Price £3.95

The latest mill book to appear in the shops is this reasonably priced addition to the 'Victorian and Edwardian' series, consisting of 96 pages containing 137 photographs with informative captions supplied by two eminent molinologists (Better watch what I say or they won't be renewing their S.M.G. subs. next year!). The photographs come from other books in the 'V&E' series and from old Batsford book illustrations with other material from private collections. Some pictures are of dodgy quality, but these are usually of rare mills such as the one of St. Davids, Pembrokeshire, the last windmill to work in that area.

The book is divided into seven sections, including one on wind engines (a special interest of one of the authors). There is also an introduction and a brief glossary. The selection of photographs is generally good, both in terms of the types of mill and the areas of the country covered. Of particular interest in this respect are the illustrations of Tilshead post mill, Wiltshire, and St. Davids mentioned above. Several early interior photographs are also included. The standard of production is high, although I wish they wouldn't put pictures across the fold between two pages.

Inevitably there are errors; some mills are described as working when they are in fact at rest and vice versa, while Biscot smock mill, Luton, is described as having only two sails; four are visible in the photograph (just!). There are several pictures to interest we Suffolk folk, but again errors have crept in. Stoke mill, Ipswich is called simply 'Post mill at Stoke, Suffolk', a title which should be applied to the mill at Withermarsh Green, Stoke by Nayland. The High Mill at Southtown, formerly in Suffolk, is called High Mill, Great Yarmouth, a common error. More seriously, though, its heights are mis-quoted and should be (according to A.J. Thrower and Martin H. Press): to curb 102ft., to finial of cap 122ft. and to top of lantern 132ft. The Annular sail mill on Chalkstone Hill, Haverhill, is described as being built for Richard 'Raffles'; this should be Richard Ruffle. I believe that Layham mill burnt down later than the 1895 suggested, as it was not rebuilt until 1905 (I've no proof though).

I noted a few more slips: Freckleton and Warton mills are one and the same; 'Jack' at Clayton carries four dummy sails at present; Ringmer mill blew over and was not demolished as stated; there are four windmills in Anglesey with machinery remaining and one still has four sails (or had in 1975), the text saying that all the Anglesey mills are shells.

It is so easy to make a mistake when writing about mills (as I know only too well) so don't let my 'nit-picking' put anyone off what is a good book at a very reasonable price, and a welcome addition to any 'Mill Maniac's' library.

Peter Dolman

EAST SUFFOLK WINDMILL PRESERVATION IN THE 1940's

In the Summer of 1938 there were still about 40 mills in the County of East Suffolk carrying four sails, including some 25 post mills. Hardly any of these were preserved, and only a few had even a short-term future as working mills. It is not surprising, therefore, to learn that during the War years many mills were lost, or deteriorated to such an extent that they would never again be considered as possible candidates for restoration.

However, there were some moves being made to ensure the survival of at least a handful of mills: two surveys of mills in the County were carried out in the late 1930's, and in 1939 Buttrum's tower mill, Woodbridge, Alderton smock mill and Friston and Saxtead post mills were singled out by the East Suffolk County Council as suitable for retention. During the ensuing years several other mills were also considered for repairs, often following requests for help from their owners. These included Westhall, East Soham, Wortham, Blundeston, Holton, Halesworth and Parham.

In the case of Westhall post mill, which had been disused since 1932, a condition survey revealed that the mill needed many repairs, including a new roof and one new stock. It was decided that these would be too expensive, and that no help could be offered. (Westhall was demolished in 1957). At nearby Holton, concern was expressed in 1942 about the encroachment of gravel workings around the post mill, threatening to undermine it. At this time large quantities of gravel were needed for the construction of military air-fields in the locality. Luckily the County Council were able to get an assurance from the Air Ministry that the mill would be safeguarded. Neighbouring Halesworth's post mill was not so lucky - it was pulled down in the same year.

Attempts were also made to save Wortham mill, which was one of only two smock corn mills in the County capable of restoration, the other being Alderton. The mill had ceased work in 1939, following failure of the fantail to turn the cap. This was caused by the worm gear shaft of the fantail drive becoming loose, owing to an outward movement of the sheers which carried its bearings. By 1945 the cap had suffered badly, and needed partial re-roofing, while the sails also needed some attention. Overall, though, the mill was structurally sound and the total cost of repairs was £200. Despite plans to launch a public appeal for funds with the help of the Wind and Watermill Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and the fact that negotiations were under way for the County Council to purchase the mill, Wortham was demolished early in 1948.

After the War, in 1948, the Planning Committee of the East Suffolk C.C. decided as a general policy to preserve, in original condition if possible, one of each type of wind-mill. Those selected were: Saxtead Green (post); Buttrum's Mill, Woodbridge (tower);

Herringfleet (smock drainage). Responsibility for the maintenance of the last two passed to the County Council in 1951 and 1958 respectively, while Saxtead was placed in the guardianship of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works in 1951. The County Council achieved its objective in 1968 when it aquired Holton post mill on a 50-year lease.

Of the other mills which had been considered for repair, most have now been demolished - Parham went in about 1944, Earl Soham in July 1947 and Alderton in 1956. It is a pity that the County Council's declared windmill policy could not prevent other losses, even into the 1960's, such as Debenham tower mill and Westleton post mill. We can ill-afford to lose mills of this calibre today.

Mark Barnard



Westhall Mill towards the end of its life
(The roundhouse still remains)

HERRINGFLEET OPEN - AGAIN!

After weeks of dismal weather the Bank Holiday open day (August 27th.) dawned fine and sunny. However, the wind was virtually non-existent at Ipswich. This didn't deter Mark and I though as we piled onto the motorcycle and chugged up to Herringfleet, calling at Oulton Broad to pick up the key from Trevor Thompson, the County Council's Building Surveyor in charge of the mill. Walking across the marshes, the breeze was stronger, but still not enough to run the mill. Nevertheless, we set to preparing the mill for visitors. As usual, vandals had broken in and left the door unlocked; still, as long as they don't cause serious damage we can tolerate their intrusions. While turning the mill to wind, we struck trouble when the winch chain broke with metal fatigue. A temporary repair was effected with a 6-inch nail; we'll have to get a shackle to repair it in the future.

Our first visitor, S.M.G. Member John Snowden, arrived shortly after this and together we hoisted the sailcloths. When set, a heave got the sails turning sluggishly, and with further occasional nudges they kept going in the ever-increasing breeze.

The turning sails attracted several Broads cruisers, aided no doubt by the notice on the river bank: 'Mill Open - FREE'. During the afternoon we had a total of 60 visitors including several S.M.G. Members, a lad doing a project on windmills at school, and Bob Malster, a local journalist and author. He did a splendid write-up the following week in the local paper and this should have spread the Group's fame further throughout East Anglia.

By five o'clock the wind was freshening and the mill was getting into its stride. We had to pack up, though, so after demonstrating the different sailcloth settings for the benefit of the cameras we packed away the cloths and locked up the mill for another four months.

Everyone who came enjoyed it, for the weather was just right with a blue sky and fleecy clouds, and while the wind could have been stronger it did enable the sails to turn occasionally.

Peter Dolman

MEMBERSHIP

At the Committee Meeting held on 17th. August we discussed, among other things, the way the Group's membership was growing. At that date we had 18 Full Members, 8 'Newsletter Only' Members, 2 Family Members and no Corporate or Group Members.

We decided that although quite a few Full Members had families they either didn't want them at Mills Group 'do's', or didn't think the extra £1.50 subscription was worthwhile for the saving in admission charges.

We therefore propose to change the Membership rules of the Group as follows:-

1. Full Members shall be entitled to receive the Group's Newsletters, vote at Meetings and be admitted at whatever reduced rate the Committee can negotiate for visits to mills or other places of interest.

2. 'Newsletter Only' Members shall be entitled to receive the Group's Newsletters and vote at Meetings.

3. Family Membership will be abandoned when the subscription falls due for renewal. All Family Members will be invited to become Full Members at the appropriate subscription rate.

4. Corporate or Group Members shall be entitled to receive one Newsletter and to cast one vote at Meetings for each subscription paid.

5. All Members are invited to bring as many friends, relatives and children as they wish to visits and informal meetings, but everybody except Full Members will be expected to pay the admission charges demanded by the owners of the establishment, and / or any additional levy raised by the Group to cover expenses incurred in organising the event.

6. Annual subscriptions shall become due for renewal twelve calendar months after the end of the month in which membership commenced. Any subscription which has not been renewed within three calendar months of the due date shall be regarded as having lapsed.

The Constitution will be amended accordingly.

Robert Shackle

MILLNEWS & COMING EVENTS

PARTS OF LEICESTERSHIRE MILL AT WOODBRIDGE

For only the second time ever in Suffolk, a six-armed sail cross can be seen on a windshaft. Suffolk's only six sailed mill (in recent centuries) at Bury has been gone for years now but our local millwrights, Jameson Marshall Ltd. of Hollesley have brought the cap of Wymondham mill, Leicestershire to Bloomfields yard at Woodbridge (next to the Tide Mill) where the parts will be stored while they build a new cap. As well as the cap frame parts and windshaft, the nine foot brakewheel and curb can also be seen. It is a good opportunity to study these parts in comfort on the ground, but hurry if you want a look, for I expect the re-erection will be progressing quickly during the winter and the parts won't be there for long.

STONE DRESSING AT STOWMARKET

Several Members of the Group were among those who turned up at Abbot's Hall Rural Life Museum at Stowmarket on September 3rd. for the demonstration of stone dressing and baking, as mentioned in our last Newsletter. The 'dresser' was Mr. Hitchcock, who used to be miller at Rattlesden tower mill. One of our Members, Cliff Lovett, also tried his hand at the craft. A visit was also paid to the re-erected Alton watermill, giving us a chance to think about a suitable site for rebuilding East Bridge mill, which we hope will be able to pump water into the future millpond.

BUCK AND FOUR SAILS TO SUPPORT

Just a reminder that Chris Hullcoop and Mike Organ will be running their two-week 'work in' at Ramsey post mill (near Harwich) until Sunday 25th. September. Do come along if you can, either to help or to take photographs.

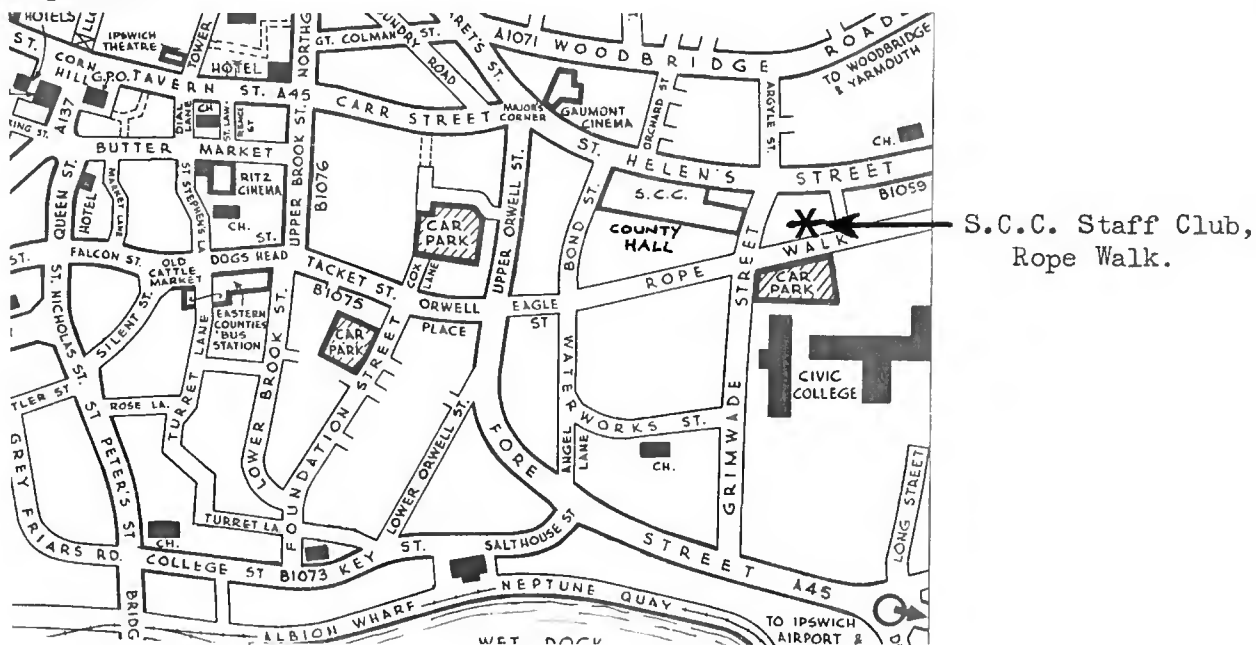
OPEN DAY AT GARBOLDISHAM POST MILL - SUNDAY 9th. OCTOBER, AT 2.00p.m.

This event is being organised jointly with the 'Friends of Norfolk Windmills'. (Garboldisham mill is, of course, just over the border into Norfolk). Visitors will be able to inspect the only remaining post mill in Norfolk, which has been under repair for several years now by the owner, Adrian Colman. There will be a chance to buy wholemeal flour milled on the premises. Friends and mailing Members will be asked to pay 5p. organising fee to the S.M.G.; admission otherwise free. Please could the Secretary have numbers attending three days in advance.

Garboldisham mill is located seven miles west of Diss on the B1111 (just south of the main Diss - Thetford road).

PUBLIC MEETING IN IPSWICH - SATURDAY 12th. NOVEMBER, AT 7.00p.m.

We are holding a meeting in the Suffolk County Council Staff Club in Rope Walk, Ipswich (for exact location see map below). There is ample free car parking next to the building. We hope to show a new film on windmills and will also have guest speakers showing slides on molinological topics. Refreshments available; Non-Members and mailing Members pay 30p. admission please.



HERRINGFLEET OPEN DAY - SUNDAY 1st. JANUARY 1978

One for the dedicated mill maniac this! Blow away those New Year's Eve alcoholic fumes with a bracing trip to the only working marsh mill in the Broadland area. Open from 11.30a.m. to 4.00p.m. Free admission (and bring wellies!). Herringfleet mill is about one mile above St. Olaves bridge, on the River Waveney.

The first S.M.G. event of 1978!

Newsletter Contributions

The next Newsletter will appear just before Christmas and we would therefore like contributions of a festive nature for it, such as humorous anecdotes, jokes, puzzles, crosswords or cartoons (all connected with mills, of course!). Any ideas to the editor please.

Back Numbers

Copies of the first Newsletter are available from the Editor at a cost of 30p., inclusive of postage.



Ramsey Mill, Essex, during its working days. Repair work on this fine post mill is in progress this month (see Millnews).