

# SUFFOLK MILLS GROUP

## Newsletter Number 15

MAY 1980

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As in previous years, we are at present arranging practical work and visits to mills for the Summer season, and details of some of these appear inside. In particular we are keen to get the restoration of Thelnetham tower mill off to a good start, and as this will be the last Newsletter until the start of the 'work in' in July, I hope that more Members will soon be able to tell us they can help during the fortnight.

The A.G.M. at Bardwell on June 15th. affords an excellent opportunity to appraise the results of last year's work in, and to visit nearby Thelnetham mill as well, and I hope there will be a good turnout of Members.

If Members come across any item of molinological interest which they think would be suitable for the Newsletter, I would as always be pleased to hear from them.

Mark Barnard

## OF MILLS AND MEN (1) CHRIS HULLCOOP

The knowledgeable and observant visitor to our old mills will react in different ways to the mills he sees and the people he meets there, and will experience optimism and pessimism, delight and dismay, admiration and anger. In a little series of 'rambles' in the next few Newsletters I will try to examine why there are these extremes and why the world of old mills is only placid for those who take care not to look too closely. The conversion of watermills to houses is a subject that will always produce lively discussion, even angry argument, so I will start with this...

### OLD MILLS BY THE STREAM

"Here's just the place for you." How often colleagues at work have pointed out Suffolk watermills for sale in the local paper or the pages of 'Country Life'. How often we have read the estate agent's misdescriptions and the inevitable invitation to convert the mill into a house. Here is the very point of succession; the mill may have survived generations of neglect, be derelict but complete, and now like a desperate gambler risks all in a last 'double or quits' chance. Who will buy? The average mill enthusiast is not wealthy enough to buy and live in a fine mill house with its barns and other outbuildings, fishing rights and acres of land. The property pages of 'Country Life' are not for Mr. Average.

Why not a working watermill for the prosperous man who has nearly everything? For many years the large antique restored to full working order has given the rich man a relaxing and absorbing contrast to his business life. Railway locomotives, aircraft, barges, old cars and motor cycles, fair and cinema organs and many others come to mind. They all have one thing in common - they are meticulously restored and cared for. Every

detail must be correct and if possible in working order. If a part is broken or missing it is carefully repaired or faithfully copied. High standards are set by individual owners as well as fellow enthusiasts and those making boiler inspections or granting certificates of airworthiness. Careful restoration and maintenance of original function are vital and if the owner is enthusiastic but lacking in the knowledge and skill which guides such a restoration he admits this and consults books, societies and fellow enthusiasts. Sometimes the whole job is left to a specialist firm. The achievements of this informed approach can be seen everywhere today. As well as the gleaming old machines, look at the men who restore, own and run them. See their enthusiasm and sense of achievement, their individuality as well as comradeship and friendly rivalry with other owners. There is far more to this than the precise shade of Bugatti blue or the date of a valve gear modification.

Why is it that the majority of mills are excluded from this club for hallowed machinery? They can give as much joy and sense of pride and achievement as any locomotive or old car. Not only are mills left to rot, but most suffer the final indignity of house conversion, the transport equivalent of making a hen house from a Silver Ghost. There are several reasons and they are difficult to define.

Improving the status of where you live is now an industry. Garden and D.I.Y. centres provide lions for the gate, pillars for the front door and many other pseudo-georgian and mock tudor features. Every street now has its own 'Longleat' - sometimes two or three. At the top of this lucrative status industry is the converted mill. Beautifully illustrated features in glossy magazines describe and praise every detail, especially if 'real flair' is shown by arranging millstones as garden seats or 'creating features' from machinery. To quote a recent one : 'The architect managed to incorporate the machinery into the plan with the minimum of domestic inconvenience. Most of the equipment listed for conservation is in the basement, an area liable to flooding so unsuitable for general use. Four enormous mill wheels (the millstones) on the ground floor were topped with cushions and the room is kept mainly for parties.'

Ignorance and action in isolation by people who do not know there is a considerable amount of mill knowledge and literature available today has much to answer for. If they buy a mill book the chances are it will be one of the poor 'coffee table' variety we have seen too many of recently. There is nothing like the amount of good informed writing on railways, old cars, aircraft and antiques of all descriptions. The 'mill literature' people are most likely to see are the irresponsible house conversion articles in newspapers and magazines which have a readership of millions. Local authorities could help far more than they do. They fear that if they offer guidance this will lead to impossible requests for finance and thus are reluctant to become involved. Authorities lack expertise to advise owners and restorers of mills and yet are often reluctant to seek the advice of people who could help. There are only a handful of local societies and one section of a national society for mill enthusiasts and by comparison with the world of historical transport their membership and influence is small.

Something difficult to define when it applies to mills is the assertion of individuality through the homes we live in. The converted mill is a house not a mill, yet the term 'mill' is kept in the address and cherished as a mark of individuality. Mills are high in the league of prestige when 'address dropping'. The misinterpretation of the idea of individuality expressed by Frank Sinatra in his song 'I Did it my Way' has much to answer for. In order to achieve freedom we need a discipline and can achieve little in isolation. When designing a new building a good architect will study the site with care and observe landscape and other buildings. If he extends an old building he will study the way it was built and his plans for the future will have a base in the past. A man who restores and flies a veteran aircraft must do it the right way, yet no-one could accuse him of not being an individualist and of his life he could say more than most 'I did it my way'.

So often people insist that their own first thoughts are correct. Some, as their knowledge increases, see the shortcomings of their first plans but most pursue the subject no further. There is no reason why knowledge cannot grow from what appears to be a bad start. Some famous ornithologists started as egg collectors and from this early interest grew knowledge and force for achievement. Many people of inspiration, innovators and inventors are praised for finding a new solution to an old problem. In aviation we think of Barnes Wallis, yet his innovations were not produced in isolation but came from the sound base of what was already understood and well known. Compare him with the stubborn, well-meaning but aerodynamically ignorant M. Mignet who designed the lethal 'Flying Flea', an early D.I.Y. aeroplane. Knowledge of the past, what is happening now, the successes and failures of others is a vital background to the success of any enterprise great or small. It is just as vital in the restoration of an old mill where the technology stopped twenty or two hundred years ago.

Another possible reason why mills are so badly treated when compared with old vehicles is their closeness to the mill house. The freeholds of mill and house usually go together, a disadvantage if anything goes wrong. It is quite common for someone to start the restoration of an old vehicle, only to find they have insufficient time, money or inclination. If other commitments take priority it is easy to sell and hand the project on to someone else and perhaps even to keep in touch and note progress. This is just not possible with most mills.

How much misguided conversion has taken place under the guise of creativity, a much overrated word. Everyone likes to be thought of as 'creative' and 'original'. Thus painting a picture, throwing a pot or designing a new building (however badly) are all 'creative' by the dictionary, while the proper restoration of something is not creative. Someone who designs and builds a new coal bunker is creative yet a mason meticulously restoring a cathedral's stonework is not creative. There is no doubt though as to who achieves most and what is of lasting value. The halfway-point between being creative by making something anew and restoring something old is the modification of something old to serve a new function. Somehow this has come to be regarded as 'creative'. It works very well for some buildings - for example, Snape and Ely maltings and Ipswich corn exchange - but for mills it is disastrous as it is the mill

and its function that is completely lost in a house conversion, only the building or cover remaining.

Some years ago now a Minister warned us all 'the party is over'. Politics apart, the money available as grants for mills is going to be very limited in the future and those mills which have not 'got their foot in the door' are going to have to rely heavily on enthusiasts who have little money. There are many people whose lives by any standard are a success. They have money and seemingly everything they could need, yet they are still searching. If ~~such a~~ person buys a mill, the chances are it has been house converted or has 'conversion potential' as the agents say. The agents will guide them to the worst and ~~they~~ will still be searching. A real mill could provide a sense of place which has sincerity and is not just another gimmick, but perhaps something honourable. There is usually a good house with a mill or more than sufficient land to build one.

Surely the only status worth having is that which derives from doing something really well and which is of lasting value? We often hear the phrase 'in original condition' and think of Arthur Negus and his beloved eighteenth century furniture. He becomes annoyed when he sees someone has usurped or tried to improve a piece. Honest repair is acceptable - something old that is used can be broken and must be repaired. It is the motive that shows as much as woodworking skill and is the difference between genuine and fake, things of lasting value and gimmicks. The intelligent man cannot deceive himself for long. He will know if what he has done is worthwhile and will not be fooled if his mistakes are praised by those who do not know or who seek to flatter.

Back to the property pages of 'Country Life' and in Suffolk four watermills have been sold in recent months. It is likely that the two gutted mills - Holbrook and Barking Mill, Needham Market - will be converted to new uses. This is not a bad idea when dealing with an empty mill if it is done well and any remaining parts of the mill are conserved and improved, such as the splendid waterwheel at Needham Market. The other two mills - Layham and Campsea Ashe - are amongst the finest in the county, the former workable, the latter complete. They are described by the agents as small country estates, and both have a lot of land, splendid mill houses and out-buildings. There is no mention of house-converting the mills. Peter Sellars once advertised his car thus : 'Distinguished car seeks new owner'. What are the chances that these two mills have found new owners who will appreciate and perhaps use them? Not very good but better than at any time since the mills went out of use. The main factor is still chance, that inevitable part of the lives of mills and men.

## **NEW BOOKS**

Reviewed by PETER DOLMAN and MIKE ORGAN

'THE WATERMILLS OF BRITAIN' by Leslie Syson. Published by David and Charles; 1980. Price: £7.95.

This excellent book is entirely new, not a re-issue of the author's earlier 'British Watermills', although it probably derives from it to some degree. There is a general history and description of watermills, followed by a tour around the country giving

brief details of the best mills. The book gives a concise explanation of the types of mill and their machinery, and is well illustrated with black and white photographs and line drawings, although some of the diagrams are over-simplified. What impressed me most was the sheer number of complete mills and even commercially operated mills outside East Anglia. It seems amazing that Layham mill is at present the only watermill in the region making flour (although to be fair, water power is used just beyond the boundary of East Anglia).

Well worth obtaining, if only because it is the only major book devoted solely to British watermills on sale at the moment. P.D.

'THE BATSFORD GUIDE TO THE INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY OF EAST ANGLIA' by David Alderton & John Booker. Published by Batsford; 1980. Price: £12.95.

This book is a handy reference work to the most interesting relics of industrial archaeology in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Essex. Besides mills, such subjects as maltings, bridges, early factories and brickworks are covered. Most of the book was written by S.M.G. Member David Alderton, who has spent many years seeking out industrial relics throughout the region, and very interesting many of them are. Some of the mill entries contain small inaccuracies but then the book does not aim to give particular emphasis to mills, although they do of course form a large part of the region's industrial archaeology. I was slightly annoyed to find Thelnetham mill, on which we are about to lavish so much attention, omitted yet the post mill roundhouse at Saxmundham included. The book is well set out and illustrated with 70 monochrome plates. I think it's worth getting - it certainly opened my eyes to some other aspects of East Anglia's industrial past - although some people may consider the price rather high.

P.D.

'THE MAIZE, THE WHEAT AND THE RYE' Edited by P.R.Gifford with a foreword by Vincent Pargeter. Published by Essex County Library, Local Studies Dept.; 1979. Price: £1.10. Essex County Library is to be congratulated for this imaginative venture in publishing booklets of local studies. This booklet does not claim to be a comprehensive study but is rather, as the sub-title states, 'a nostalgic look at Essex windmills'. Twenty four windmills are illustrated from black and white photographs with a short descriptive paragraph on each. These descriptions do not go into any great detail but do contain some interesting anecdotes of past millers and millwrights.

The booklet is well presented. It comprises of 32 pages (10" x 7") with a glossy cover. It is available from Essex County Library, Goldlay Gardens, Chelmsford, Essex. Please allow for postage. M.R.O.

## **A ROTARY QUERN FROM N.W. ESSEX**      KARL & DON PATERSON

An example of a rotary quern stone from the Stansted area has recently come into the possession of one of us (Karl Paterson). The history of its discovery and the exact location of the find are not known.

The quern is made from an extremely hard flint pebble conglomerate with an equally hard siliceous matrix. Geologically this 'Hertfordshire Puddingstone' is a fairly recent formation occurring within the Reading Beds of Tertiary age and

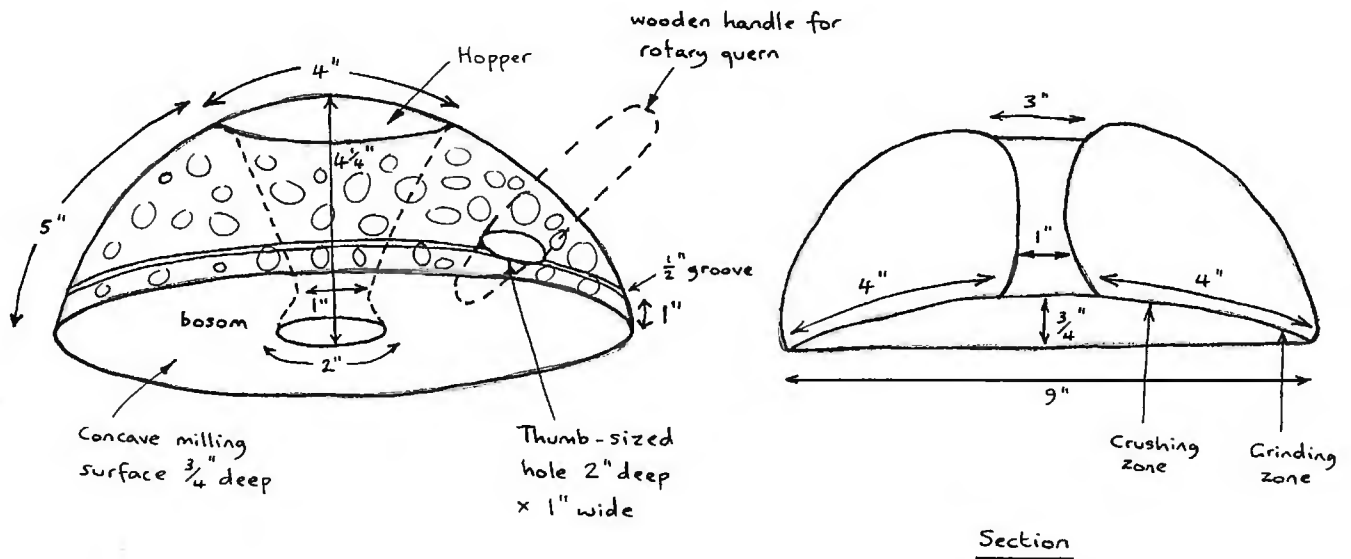


Fig.1 Rotary Quern. Hertfordshire Puddingstone. Stansted Mountfitchet, Essex.

distributed along the northern margin of the London Basin in Hertfordshire and Essex. Its type location is in Hertfordshire, hence its name, but boulders are also found in north-west Essex.

This upper or rotating stone (Fig.1 above) is dome shaped, 9 ins. in diameter and 4 ins. high, with a central eye hole of 3 ins. diameter at the top, funneling down to 1 in. near the bottom and then widening out again into a lower annular space or 'bosom' of 2 ins. diameter. The lower surface of this domed stone is slightly concave with a maximum depth of  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. to 1 in.. A  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. groove is present about 1 in. above the largest circumference and at one point in the circumference the stone is penetrated by a thumb-sized hole which allowed the insertion of a handle.

Another Puddingstone quern (Fig.2) in the Geological Museum, London is considerably larger with a 13 in. diameter and 8 ins. high. It has a similar groove 1 in. wide just above the lower rim of the domed side. No hole for a handle is present in this larger stone. The central hopper in this stone is more like the negative shape of an old-fashioned pedestal egg cup - i.e. the sides are initially steeper than in the Stansted example.

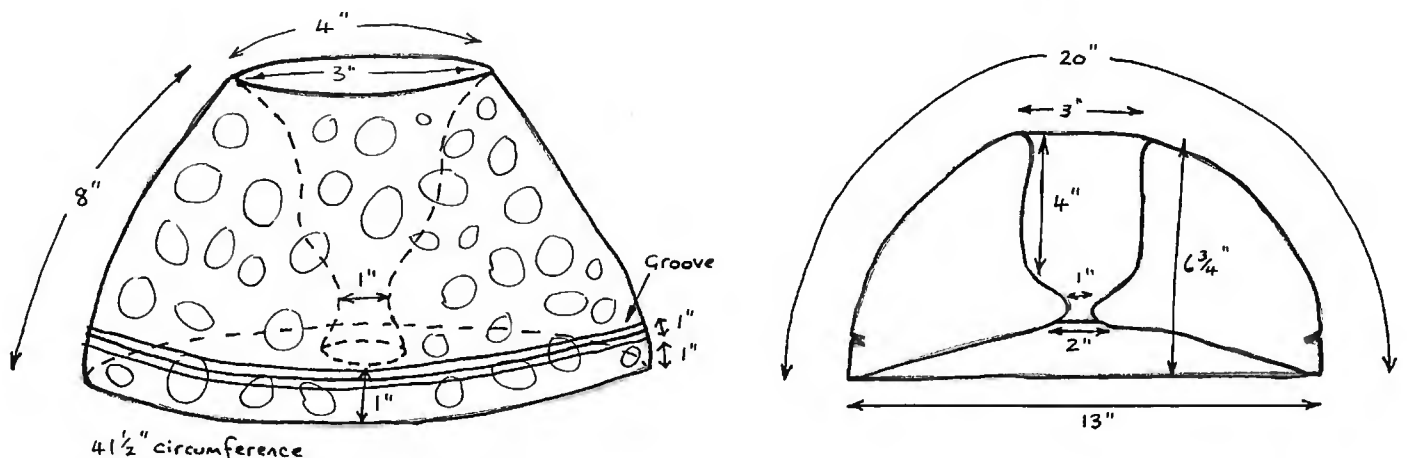


Fig.2 Rotary Quern, probably Romano-British. Hertfordshire Puddingstone. Geological Museum, London

dismantling. As always some bolts undid as if assembled yesterday while others had to be patiently sawn and chiselled through.

Meanwhile the River Board were repairing the sluice and Mr. Rope watched in dismay as his fields began to resemble lakes. Not until mid May was he able to put cattle on that part of the marsh. I'm sure they did better in the heyday of the mills but then they had the hands to look after them all.

Two full trailer loads of parts were taken up to the farm and now all that remains on the marsh are the foundations and the old scoopwheel channel. Four years ago four drainage mills could be seen here; now only the vane-winded annular sailed Climax put up for Mr. Rope in 1947 by the 'War Ag.' remains. C.H.

#### LIASON WITH S.P.A.B.

A meeting of representatives of the S.P.A.B. Wind and Watermill Section Committee and the local mills groups ('C.O.G.S.') was held on March 23rd. in London. SMG was represented by Mark Barnard and Mike Organ. Topics discussed included mill protection and listing, mills parts banks, safety, the training of millers and millwrights and the bequeathing of mill records. The next meeting will be in November.

#### OPENING OF EAST BRIDGE MILL

A fine sunny Easter Saturday (5th. April) saw about 100 people gathered beside the rebuilt East Bridge smock drainage mill at Abbot's Hall museum, Stowmarket, for the opening ceremony. We arrived early to set the bunting on the sails (originally made for Herringfleet mill to celebrate the Jubilee in 1977 - see Newsletter No.1). There was little wind so we had to put the pump out of gear if the sails were to turn at all. Soon the official party arrived and Jack Carter, Chairman of the museum's Management Committee, introduced Suffolk County Council Chairman Kenneth Kemp-Turner and the leaders of the Friends of the Museum. He told us how the mill had been saved from the dyke into which it had collapsed by S.M.G., how all the money had been raised and how millwrights Jameson Marshall of Wickham Market had rebuilt the mill. He then handed over to naturalist Ted Ellis who had travelled down from Norfolk to open the mill. What a good idea it was to ask him; he seemed in his natural habitat by the water meadows of the River Rat. Although we had never met we felt we already knew him as his sincerity and enthusiasm came over in exactly the same way as it does on the television. Ted and Jack pushed the mill into life with a broom handle applied to the





waiting sail tip. A little later we all adjourned to a splendid buffet lunch provided by the Friends of the Museum for all those who helped with the project. Mr. and Mrs. Rope, on whose land the mill stood for about 100 years, were there and Mr. Rope commented on how large it looked. We talked over the ethics of moving a mill from its original site. There is no doubt that the great majority of mills must be kept on their original sites, but for a few rebuilding on a museum site provides the only hope of survival. The decision to rebuild at the museum site was the right one. It cost £34,000 and really it collapsed just in time; if it had happened now with the cut-backs it is doubtful if it would have been rebuilt.

The mill owes its existence to many people : Jameson Marshall's men who worked through the cold and muddy days of winter, Geoffrey Wilding the previous museum Director and especially Peter Dolman who spent many hours preparing a splendid set of measured drawings and without whose dedication the project would never have been started.

#### PLAQUE FOR RAMSEY POST MILL

In April Chris Hullcoop and Mike Organ were invited to a presentation at County Hall, Chelmsford to receive a cast aluminium plaque awarded by Essex County Council in recognition of the repair of Ramsey mill. About ten awards were made by the Council and other bodies. It was very pleasing to see Mark Arman there : his dedication to Thexted and especially its tower mill deserve wide recognition. After a buffet supper the awards were presented in the Council Chamber by the Duke of Grafton. In his speech the Duke commented how Essex had so often led the way in conservation (such as the appointment of Vincent Pargeter as the county's millwright). Us Suffolers can afford a chauvinistic chuckle though as Essex certainly don't lead in spelling. When you next visit the mill see if you can spot the mistake!

#### LOCAL MILLWRIGHTS CEASE TRADING

Our Members will be sad to hear that local millwright and building contractor Jameson Marshall Ltd. of Wickham Market has been forced to close down. The recent belt-tightening by local authorities has resulted in less money being available for mill repairs and the firm could not secure enough work to carry on trading. Jameson Marshall Ltd. worked on many projects throughout the country in the last few years, notably at Wilton, Mapledurham, Thorpeness, Friston, Woodbridge tide mill and the Minsmere windpump at the Museum of East Anglian Life.

#### PAKENHAM WATERMILL REPAIRS CONTINUE

Repair work at Pakenham watermill has resumed following a hiatus of several months due to lack of funds. Suffolk Preservation Society, the owners, have secured a loan of £20,000 from the Architectural Heritage Fund which should be enough to conclude all repairs and enable the mill to be opened to the public.

#### COUNTY COUNCIL MILLS

S.M.G.'s much-anticipated visit to Herringfleet smock mill seems as far away as ever. Although the mill is now in working order once again, the County Council is seeking



advice about safety arrangements and until this is completed the mill cannot be demonstrated to the public. Meanwhile David Bissonnet, an architect in private practice, is reporting on the condition of Buttrum's Mill and Holton mill and will be preparing specifications for repair work, which will hopefully be acted upon as soon as possible. Buttrum's Mill (Woodbridge) is to be opened to the public on the afternoon of Sunday June 29th. by Mr. and Mrs. M. Whitworth, the owners. This will be in aid of funds for a cancer scanner, and there will be other attractions and refreshments available.

#### PROGRESS AT DRINKSTONE

S.M.G. is continuing its efforts to keep the famous Drinkstone mills standing. Last year we worked on the smock mill (see Newsletters 12 and 13); this year it is the turn of the post mill (dated 1689). It's difficult to know where to start and stop with this mill, but we are planning three main jobs:

1. Building a new concrete track;
2. Fitting new step treads and platform;
3. Fitting ties to contain the bulging roundhouse walls.

The track will be the most difficult job and we have made a good start by placing two rings of twelve exactly level pairs of pegs around both sides of the track. Alan Noble brought a 'Dumpy' levelling instrument complete with pole and we were able to set the pegs very accurately. At present the track is made up of sundry pieces of wood, iron, millstone, brick and flint. It is in a bad way and cannot support the mill turning to wind for very much longer, especially in wet weather.

Would anyone particularly interested in helping at Drinkstone please contact Chris Hullcoop (42, High Road West, Felixstowe) who will forward details. We must do our best to help the post mill see its fifth century!

## **EVENTS**

S.M.G. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING : BARDWELL SCHOOL, SUNDAY JUNE 15th. at 11 a.m.

This year's A.G.M. will be held in the village of Bardwell, the scene of last year's S.M.G. 'work-in' at the tower mill. The Primary School is right opposite the mill in the centre of the village (see location plan), and toilet / washing facilities will be available to us.

#### AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the last A.G.M.
3. Report of Treasurer
4. Report of Editor
5. Report of Secretary
6. Election of Committee Members for 1980/81
7. Any other business
8. Chairman's report on S.M.G. work during 1979/80 (illustrated with slides)

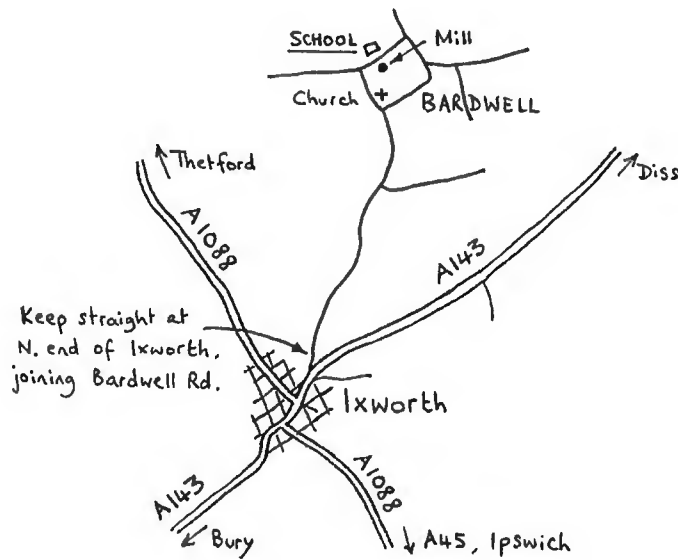
Lunch Members are invited to bring a pic-nic lunch, although there is a nearby pub. During lunch there will be plenty of time to wander across the road and visit

Bardwell mill, which will be open.

Visit to Stanton mill. Meet at Stanton mill at 2.30 p.m. following the A.G.M. for a visit to this fine post mill which is well worth seeing.

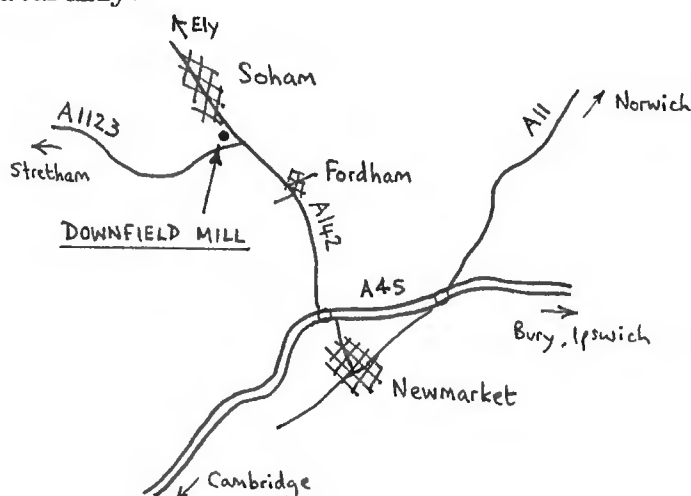
Visit to Thelnetham mill. From Stanton, Members can continue on to Thelnetham mill (approx. 5 miles), the scene of this year's work-in, and appraise the task we face!

Please note All three mills - Bardwell, Stanton and Thelnetham - are in a derelict condition and the owners cannot be responsible for accidents. At Stanton, on no account should the external steps up to the mill be used.



VISIT TO DOWNFIELD MILL, SOHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE : SUNDAY JULY 6th. from 2.30 p.m.

This fine and distinctive tower mill was purchased by Leicester enthusiast Nigel Moon in 1974, who has gradually returned it to working order. Last month the mill worked by wind for the first time since 1958, so Cambridgeshire now possesses the only two regularly working windmills in the whole of East Anglia (the other being Chris Wilson's at Over). The mill is open every Sunday (admission 30p. adults; 15p. children) but we have arranged a definite time for Members to meet, after which it may be possible to visit another mill in the locality. There is excellent wholemeal flour available at the mill, at a very reasonable price - milled on the premises, naturally!



Downfield Mill is easily found on the A142 Ely road at its junction with the A1123 just south of Soham.

S.M.G. 'WORK-IN' AT THELNETHAM MILL : SAT. JULY 26th. to SUN. AUGUST 10th. 1980

It is now less than two months to the annual S.M.G. 'work-in' and preparations are well in hand. Those attending the A.G.M. will be able to see the mill for themselves and to judge the nature of our task, and its magnitude. Several components have been removed already, such as the fan gearing; also the dust floor has been removed (after it collapsed!). It is hoped to install the main dust floor beams in advance of the work-in to provide strong safe access to the upper tower, and also to support the upright shaft when the cap is removed. Materials are being ordered for the work and the dozens of ancillary items are being organised.

Luckily we have been offered some small grants towards the repairs and we have also applied to the Historic Buildings Council for a grant. Although many mills these days are looking to central government for considerable amounts of money, we hope our modest claim will be successful in view of the excellent value for money we offer as amateurs and the fact that the end result will be a fully working mill which will be regularly used and carefully maintained.

Work on the mill continues most week-ends and we would be grateful for any assistance Members may be able to give. A 'phone call to Peter Dolman (Ipswich 76996) will confirm whether or not anyone will be at the mill. Meanwhile we still need more people at the work-in and would be pleased to hear from any Member or friend willing to help at any time during the fortnight.

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Work by Other Mills Groups

The Cambridgeshire Wind and Watermill Society will be holding working parties at the following mills:

Lode watermill: June 22, 29; July 27; August 24, 31 (10 a.m. - 5 p.m. in all cases)

Burwell windmill: June 15; July 6, 20; August 3, 17 (8 a.m. - 12 p.m. in all cases)

Histon windmill: June 8; July 13; August 10 (2 p.m. - 5 p.m. in all cases)

Please contact Bob Stevens (0223-811643) for further details.

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