

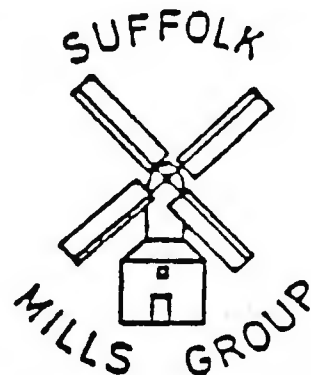
SUFFOLK MILLS GROUP

Newsletter

No. 46

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There was an encouraging response to the articles on patent sails in the last Newsletter, particularly of course Chris Hullcoop's assertion that English mills would have stayed in use longer if the much simpler cloth sail had persisted, as in Holland. Some of the contributions to the debate are printed below, but more of course would still be welcome!

A graphic, first hand description of working with patent sails in the 1920's was provided in the last issue by Claude Aldridge, one of the last (if not the last) of the Suffolk millers who could recall working a post mill in their heyday. Sadly Claude died shortly after the Newsletter was issued, and with him many memories of his milling days, some of which he shared in articles for our Newsletter (see issues 22, 34 and 35). Long may his family's country milling business at Barningham continue.

This Newsletter may be a little shorter than usual (I never know when I write this!) as I have to meet a deadline of mid November. Don't forget our social evening at Abbott's Hall museum on Saturday December 2nd (details inside). Next Newsletter hopefully in January. Merry Christmas!

Mark Barnard

VANISHED MILLS PETER DOLMAN

SHADINGFIELD

Shadingfield is a scattered parish on the former Blythburgh to Beccles turnpike road, now the A145. Kirby's map of 1764 marks a mill at approximately Grid Ref. 432843. By Hodskinson's map of c.1780 this post mill, if the same one, had become established at a new site just off the main road at Grid Ref. 434848. It worked throughout the next 120 years or so and being in fairly secure ownership escaped mention in the newspaper sale adverts of the mid nineteenth century. In 1844 the miller was Charles Pierson, who also ran a shop in the village. He is listed until 1892 (unless succeeded by a son of the same name) when 'wind' is given as motive power. In 1896 Robert D. Martin was miller using windpower but in 1908 'steam' had taken over. In 1925 Sydney A. Martin was miller, also by steam, and work probably ceased in 1933. The windmill was damaged by a gale in the late nineteenth century when it lost two sails and had its crowntree split. This possibly led to its premature demolition c.1904, independent steam power being used thereafter. The roundhouse was standing in the late 1930's but went some time after, nothing now surviving.

The one photograph of the mill that has come to light shows the buck extended

at the tail, with a small porch. A six-blade fantail over the ladder replaced the tailpole, sawn off flush with the steps. Two eight-bay anti-clockwise patent sails, of presumably four originally, provided power. They were controlled by the bollard and chain method formerly seen on mills in this corner of Suffolk, and last to be seen on late lamented Syleham mill and Thorpeness, which alone preserves the design now. The buck roof was similar to those at Syleham and Stanton in that the ribs did not spring from the top side rail but from a purlin about two feet above the rail, which gives mills of this type a rather 'skinny' appearance. An unusual feature of the roundhouse was that the roof was slated, probably at the same time as the house which appears to be of mid nineteenth century date. Just visible in the photograph is the chimney of a portable steam engine, which presumably is the agent of the windmill's subsequent demolition.

At some time in the 1830's a millwright by the name of Robert Everson, whose premises were in Upper Olland Street, Bungay decided to erect a speculative mill to service the village of Redisham, which adjoins Shadingfield to the west. The site chosen, at Grid Ref. 410844, however was just inside the parish of Shadingfield which means we can consider it here. The mill was let, and later sold, to Charles King, who apparently fell on hard times, trying to sell the mill at auction in 1846 and 1847 when it was described as a 'substantial TOWER WINDMILL' - 'The above mill is newly-built and well timbered, with 4 patent sails, placed on a good elevation, driving two pair of capital French Stones (4ft.4in. and 4ft. in diameter respectively) with flour mill and other requisite machinery.'

It is next recorded in 1853 in the hands of James Hood. C. Leman was miller by 1858 and Phillip Rant by 1868. He continued to be listed until 1896, in which year steam power is also mentioned. In 1908 G.P. Rant is listed but in 1916 William A. Sillett was in charge. In 1925 Harry F. Martin, probably a relative of Sydney at the other mill, was miller and he worked the mill by wind and steam until 1929 when the sails were removed owing to their unsafe condition. The mill saw some use by oil engine power alone until 1939 when it was pulled down.

It was a four storey high octagonal smock mill of the south Norfolk type, with a very low base and long cant posts. Latterly it was tarred although the cap remained white. The six-blade fantail had alternate blades in a different colour, probably red, to match the shutters which were also red. It must have looked rather startling when first painted in this colour scheme! The boat-shaped cap had a narrow gallery along each side with an iron handrail. Power came from four eight-bay anti-clockwise patent sails, mounted on an iron windshaft with a flange coupling in its length.

Stanley Freese went in it and made notes of its machinery in 1933, by which time the windshaft and brakewheel had been removed. The wallower was iron, with a wooden bevel ring underneath giving a direct drive to the sackhoist,



which was operated by a counterweighted lever. The upright shaft was of wood, in two sections with a joint under the second floor. A wheel had once been mounted on it just under the dust floor. The two pairs of stones were on the first floor, underdriven by a large six-spoke compass-arm wooden spurwheel with an iron tooth ring and wooden pulleys mounted above and below the spokes. It is not clear if the spokes were iron or true wooden compass-arms; his notes suggest the latter. Only one stone nut remained and this was solid wood. The tentering was by small iron bridgetrees working thrust pins onto the footstep bearings. The governor which remained was driven off the stone spindle. Underneath the upright shaft bridgetree was a strut down to the ground. The engine drive was applied by means of a pair of iron bevels, one with wood cogs, driving an iron nut meshing with the spurwheel. The engine drive shaft had an external belt drive



Top: Shadingfield post mill

Above: Redisham smock mill,
Shadingfield in the 1920's

but in addition had an internal iron pulley, perhaps to drive a small machine on the ground floor. No flour machine remained.

The presence of compass-arm gearing and 'late' tenting gear, patent sails and an iron windshaft in an 1830's mill does not really 'fit' and suggests that a certain amount of second-hand machinery was used by Everson when he erected the mill.

LETTERS

From Mr. Matthew Licence

Patents v. Commons

I think, and records prove the fact, that really sail type neither prolonged or shortened a windmill's working life. The main reasons for a mill to close down was its position and its ability to compete with the much better steam and electric mills of the towns and cities. If the mill was a long distance from these steam mills then it would probably work longer, that's why Suffolk and Norfolk still had many mills still working in the 1930's. Although I admit that patents seem to have prolonged the mill's life, of the 30-odd mills still able to grind corn only 3 have common sails, none of them 4 common sailers. Records show that the last 'fully' common sailer, i.e. one with 4 common sails, last worked in 1936 and is still there, at Stevington, Beds., whereas patent sailers are still in use.

The problem with common sails was the reefing. The mill had to be stopped for each sail cloth to be altered and as Claude Aldridge said, in storms and rain what was easier, adjusting weights or stopping the mill and adjusting 4 wet, heavy and flapping common sails?

The common sails were of course much more powerful and cheaper, but millers were prepared to have the heavy and complex patent sails because when most mills were fitted with patents milling was still a good business and the strengthening of the mill for patents was affordable.

Some millers used their heads and on some mills the strength of common sails together with the 'automatic-ness' of patent sails was used. This can be seen, still at work, at Wilton in Wiltshire or on the preserved mill at West Kingsdown in Kent. All in all I think that patents helped windmills stay above water for a few years longer than they would have done with common sails.

From Mr. George Chapman, Hon. Sec., National Association of Water Power Users

I must take mild issue with Chris Hullcoop arising from his comments on Cubitt's patent sails. Waterwheels are not so inefficient, and at small heads such as are appropriate for waterwheels, many turbines are little if at all more efficient.

Further, peak efficiency is one thing. Waterwheels - overshot and breast-shot - actually become more efficient as the flow decreases, up to the point

where input power cannot overcome the total of losses from friction, windage, etc.. The waterwheel's other great advantage is its ability to pass debris which would clog a turbine, necessitating screens which may not reduce efficiency but are a wretched nuisance, very often, to keep clean. And any self-cleaning screen uses water one way or another, reducing overall efficiency.

Preservers of old waterwheels have similar problems of aesthetics and engineering to preservers of windmills. There is a steady trickle of restorations which aim to make best use of the valuable water resource by generating electricity, particularly where the original milling machinery has gone. A typical watermill site with a constant flow can produce around £750 - £1000 worth of electricity per year, and this is an incentive which can hardly apply to restored windmills, so that their restoration requires total dedication for little if any material return.

The only constructive suggestion I can make about patent sails is to not be afraid of using modern materials, disguised appropriately, if they last longer and are stronger. So far none who has seen my glass-reinforced plastic waterwheel has exclaimed in horror, as it is black and after nine years could readily be iron: and I reckon it has at least another 91 years to run, as does its (ex-tractor) gearbox and the generator. Only the belt needs replacing, about every 7 - 8 years.

From Mr. David Barton

I was pleased to see that Mr. Claude Aldridge commented on my letter in the August Newsletter. He is correct in thinking that I have never worked in a windmill. As a schoolboy I cycled around Wickham Market to meet some of the last working millers, Mr. Ernie Self at Parham North Green, Mr. Stephenson Aldred at Saxtead Green, Mr. Ernest Gowing at Sweffling and Maulden's at Framlingham where there was a Whitmore & Binyon condensing steam engine. Mr. Self had received a visit from Rex Wailes who had departed with the gift of a mill bill. I recall Mr. Aldred looking out of the gable window in the buck and telling me how many working mills he could have seen in former days.

Undoubtedly a 'Cubitt mill.' was a remarkable piece of automation, controlled as Mr. Aldridge says by the use of weights to balance the shutters against the force of the wind. It enabled the miller to run his mill without worrying about the amount of sail he was carrying should the wind change. Life was hard in the past and whilst a miller could be soaked in handling sailcloths, one recalls that Thames barges sailed with decks awash, the skipper braving the elements without the comfort of a wheelhouse. Men, women and children laboured in the fields often soaked to the skin and frozen in the wintertime. Different days, very different ways one might say.

It is interesting that for the most part the Dutch retained the common sail and tailpole. One marvels at the massive tower mills of Schiedam with their

huge sweeps and galleries. Setting and furling canvas on these must have been akin to handling a square-rigger except the mill was firmly anchored to the ground. Besides corn and other mills there were hundreds of pumping mills, all with cloth sails and winded by tailpoles and winches. The millers and their families lived in these and children must have been lulled to sleep by the noise of the scoopwheel.

Chris Hullcoop writes comprehensively on the problems of sail construction and maintenance. In the absence of whips I would like to know how the Dutch set up their sails. One can see that one sail could be completed prior to hauling the stock up through the canister but was the other fitted afterwards? Stoke windmill which stood on top of the tunnel by Ipswich station had two common and two spring sails with a wooden windshaft. Chris extols the virtues of the common sail and we might remember that many mills were converted, first to spring sails and to Cubitt sails at a later date. By the same token tailpoles were shortened and fantails added to the steps of postmills. In August 1938 I made a sketch of Earnley smock mill near Selsey in Sussex which was working with two common and two spring sails, the former at 'dagger point' but at the inner ends. The reason for this must be lost in time I fear. Many mills had two sets of shutters to a sweep whereas the common sail was fitted with a leading board opposite the sailcloth. The Dutch do not seem to have any reservations in combining traditional thatch, steel stocks and aluminium aerofoils, cloth sails and novel shutter systems. Whilst one senses years of experiment led to the refinement of design in machinery it is interesting to learn that a mill could be fitted with sails that were too flat when taking the wind with a consequent loss of power, being unable to work in light winds. The angle at the inner end should be about 25° I believe.

One thing that I particularly miss in restored mills is the polished chain of the sack hoist, kept bright by the miller's hands and flour. One might also add the cobwebs! Several years ago I had to visit Paul's Home Warehouse, now the offices of Contship on the Wet Dock, to collect some wooden stakes from the top floor. My guide opened the doors of the lucam but could see no way of lowering the stakes in the absence of any rope to tie them up to the chain of the hoist. Also of course this did not have a hook like that of a crane. He was amazed when I showed him the miller's trick of passing the chain through the ring at the end of the hoist to make a loop around the load much as a miller does around the neck of a sack of grain or flour. My visits to mills in the days of my youth had not been wasted!

I would esteem it a favour if we could view le système Berton at a future date at one slide a minute at most so that I could grasp the intricacies of the mechanism. Only the French could bore a hole through the windshaft at an angle I feel!

May I conclude with a quiz for those who live in Ipswich? Given that there

were sixteen working windmills in Ipswich in the 1850's, which Ipswich bus route passes the sites of six of these today?

MILLS AND ME (3) PETER STEGGALL

BOYS AND GIRLS AT BUTTRUM'S

In the January 1988 Newsletter I wrote about the five years from 1969 to 1974 when my work included responsibilities connected with the East Suffolk County Council's maintenance of three windmills, the post mill at Holton, the smock windpump at Herringfleet, and Buttrum's tower mill at Woodbridge.

Somehow the news got round that I was involved and, in October 1970, I had a telephone call from Leslie Marshall, headmaster of the primary school at New Street, Woodbridge; he wanted to arrange for a school party to visit Buttrum's. Although I felt some apprehension, I agreed to go myself. Mr. Marshall and his staff and pupils must have been reasonably satisfied, because I was invited twice more in the autumn of 1970, and on quite a number of occasions in the following years up to 1976.

The first two or three times, I went straight from Ipswich to the mill and met the parties there and conducted them over the mill. As things went quite well, and my confidence increased, I then took to delivering a short talk, with colour slides, at the school before we all walked up the hill to Buttrum's. The slides were ones I had taken of various mills in Suffolk and other counties. They were general pictures, with no close-ups or internal shots of structure or machinery, but they served to illustrate the principles on which mills worked, and the differences between post, smock and tower mills. I soon realised that the headmaster's knowledge of mills in general and of Buttrum's in particular, far exceeded mine, and he helped me with slides of his own and supplemented the information I was able to give the children on the guided tours.

Our normal practice, on arrival at Buttrum's, was to stand outside, weather permitting, for a few minutes while I explained the external features, the brick tower, the sails, the cap and the fantail. Then, after a firm warning from me and the teachers, that great care was needed inside, we went in and climbed carefully all the way up the steep stairs to the top floor just beneath the cap. From there we descended floor by floor, with explanations at each level, as to what happened there when the mill was working. This seemed to me the logical way to proceed, for, as I told the children, the milling process started with the sails at the top and worked its way downwards. The leaflet which I produced for the county council in the 1970's made this point, saying 'The best way to understand how the mill worked is to go straight up to the top floor, and then look at each floor in turn as you come down'; and the description followed accordingly. I was, therefore, surprised to see recently that the latest leaflet, though much expanded and much more informative than the original, starts from ground level and goes up, floor by floor, to the top.



Mr & Mrs Whitworth at Buttrum's

The children were always very appreciative at the time, and they each wrote me a 'thank you' letter afterwards. The letters were a source of great pleasure and some amusement, particularly those from children who seemed pleased to explain how frightened they were by the height of the mill and the steepness of the stairs.

Occasionally I met parties from St. Mary's and Kyson Primary Schools, Woodbridge. Then, from 1972 to 1976 there were visits by children from east and central London. I never discovered how they got to know about Buttrum's, but they had a routine of breaking their coach journey at Woodbridge on their way from London to Beccles. These London

children all came from congested and fairly depressing 'inner city areas' where the only playing space at some of their schools was on the flat roof of the school building. Naturally they were very excited and thrilled with St. Mary's School and its playing field, next to Buttrum's, where they had their pic-nic lunch. I found them very friendly and well-behaved, and it was good to see them enjoying themselves so much. They were on their way to spend a week at Ringsfield Hall, near Beccles. Mr. Bunch, a teacher with a school from (I think) Forest Gate, told me that Ringsfield Hall was opened in 1972, by a charitable trust run by a small Christian community, as a residential centre for parties from schools and churches. It seemed to be such an inspired and worthwhile venture that my wife and I became very interested, and we have continued ever since to follow and support the Ringsfield Hall Trust. All this is straying away from the theme of mills, but it shows how involvement with mills can broaden one's interests.

I must not forget to record the fact that during those few years in the 1970's when I was concerned with Buttrum's Mill, I always enjoyed the very friendly co-operation of the owners, Mr. and Mrs. Whitworth, both in connection with school parties, and the county council's responsibilities for maintaining the mill. It is good to see that progress has now gone far beyond mere maintenance to the most thorough restoration to have taken place since the mill ceased working 60 years ago. Buttrum's now looks really splendid, with the shutters in the sails, and the fantail working to keep her head-to-wind!

From 1976 Mark Barnard took over the conduct of visitors to the county council's mills, but in 1983, two years after my retirement, I had a pleasant

and unexpected reminder that my visits to New Street Primary School and Buttrum's had not been forgotten. Mr. Marshall, the headmaster, invited my wife and me to join a party from New Street on a conducted tour of Woodbridge tide mill. It was good to meet Mr. Marshall and his staff, and the children (different children, of course), again. We very much enjoyed being showed over the tide mill by Gordon Dunnett, and I was very glad to let someone else do the talking!

NEWS

CLAUDE ALDRIDGE

It is with sadness that we have to report the death in August of Claude Aldridge, at the age of 84. He was born into a well-known and widespread Suffolk milling family and as a teenager went to live with his uncle Fred Aldridge at St. Michael South Elmham post mill, having previously worked at Weybread watermill until it was burnt down. He helped his uncle with the business which during the 1920's was still good. By 1930 the trade was diminishing though and could not provide a living for two families so in September Claude left Suffolk for Hovis' West Mill at Newbury, Berkshire. Married the next year, he settled into his new job and soon became foreman of both the Hovis mills in the town. Claude still loved Suffolk though and yearned for his own milling business in his home county. His chance came in 1948 when he bought the run-down steam flour mill at Barningham. This he adapted to a feed mill, installing new and second-hand machinery to replace the obsolete flour milling plant. The business quickly took off and still flourishes today, in the hands of Claude's nephew David Pettitt.

Claude was a mine of information on mills in east Suffolk and had a wonderful collection of photographs of windmills in Norfolk and Suffolk. In recent years he had been crippled by arthritis which prevented him from getting out to visit mills, something he still liked to do. We are fortunate to have about four hours of conversation with him and his late brother-in-law, Eric Burroughes, recorded on tape, from which several fascinating articles have been compiled by Mark Barnard. In the last Newsletter there is an interesting letter about working windmills sent in by Claude in response to a previous point of view expressed in the Newsletter; sadly Claude never saw it in print.

David Pettitt has asked if he can take Claude's place as a member of S.M.G., so that the family interest can be continued. We are pleased to welcome him and are also pleased that he is preserving his uncle's collection.

Claude was one of the last 'real' Suffolk windmillers; with his passing we have lost a direct line back to the heyday of windmills in the last century. His like will never be seen again and he will be sorely missed by us all. (P.D.)

STANTON POST MILL

During October Richard Duke and his intrepid helpers Ted and Fred hoisted the second pair of new sails into place, giving the mill four sails for the first time since the 1930's. The new sails are based on photographic evidence of the original

inside pair, which had been taken down in 1939. They differ from the outer sails in having equal width shutters either side of the whip. The outer sails are a strange design, being approximately equal width but with narrow leading edge shutters, the resulting gap being filled with wide boards. I believe they were originally single-sided and have been converted to double-sided. The inside heel just catches on the peak of the buck roof so minor adjustments are being made. The buck has now been tilted back upright, allowing the wood-wears to be adjusted to their correct proportions. This has led to the need to lift the windshaft neck by 3" to improve clearance with the roundhouse roof, a task that was performed with the windshaft-lifting tackle from Pakenham windmill. This in turn means the upright shaft has had to be adjusted as the wallower was out of mesh with the brakewheel. There is plenty still to do before the mill is finished and able to grind. Meanwhile its external appearance is magnificent, a wonderful landmark for the village and a major achievement for Richard Duke and his small band of helpers. (P.D.)

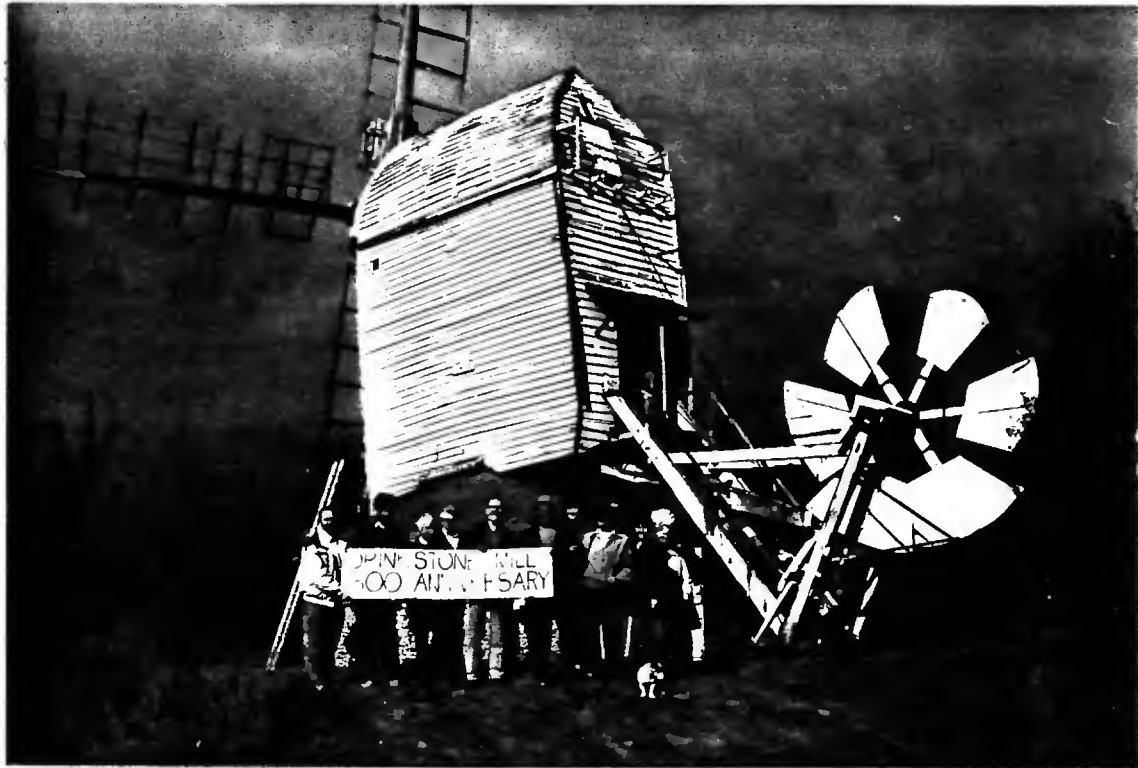
THORINGTON STREET WATERMILL

The flood gates at this mill partially collapsed at the end of October, due to a failed joint in the sill. This is fairly easily repaired though, and has focussed the attention of the owners, Tendring Hall Estate, on the increasingly unsatisfactory state of the mill, which is let on a peppercorn basis to S.M.G. Secretary Peter Dolman. Peter started a programme of minor repairs in 1987-8 and now proposes to do further work. Anyone interested in giving assistance should contact him on Ipswich 42388. The immediate priority is to repair the flood gate frame and renew the gates so that the pond can refill, as apart from giving power to the mill the pond is used by a fishing club. Beyond this there is a need to do patching repairs to the weatherboarding and some windows, to paint the mill, and to begin to stabilize the decayed sills of the hurst frame so that the stones can be worked again. The Estate will hopefully provide help with materials if we can supply the labour. In the future there could be scope for holding a 'work-in' at the mill to do larger-scale repairs.

HAPPY 300TH. BIRTHDAY

1989 has been Drinkstone post mill's 300th year and our visit there in October was in celebration of this auspicious event. Caroline Shackle made a splendid fruit cake iced with a picture of the mill complete with shutters in the spring sails and even a pair of millstones. When the time came to cut the cake it seemed a shame to slice up such a work of art. Phil Bailey made a banner proclaiming the event which was held aloft for the photos (see p.11). Some 30 or so members attended and were able to see inside the post mill, the smock tower and the engine shed.

This summer we found that the front pair of sails (spring shutter) were in a bad state with the stock centre all but rotted through. Fortunately good



pitch pine clamps had been fitted and the sails were held for many years on the clamps. The danger was that the stock had rotted so much in the centre that the halves could pivot on the outer clamp bolt and fetch up on the roof. Rather than take down the sails we decided to hold them for a few more years by fitting steel rod and angle iron ties around the stock, whips and clamps near to the canister. This job was accomplished, but only after I had dropped a large piece of angle iron onto the delicately tiled roundhouse roof and said some rather bad words!

Some more problems came to light this year. On exploring below the meal floor at the head we found the prick post to be right on the edge of the head lower cross-beam. A tie was quickly fitted to prevent further movement and next year we must strengthen this joint and fit some extra diagonal braces to the head.

The smock tower needs attention as well. The cap roof which we made from old pallets and fitted 11 years ago is still structurally sound but leaks in places and needs patching. The roofs of both granary and railway carriage need a new top layer of ruberoid. A lot of hard work. (C.H.)

NEWS IN BRIEF

Repairs to Bardwell tower mill continue to make progress. The new fantail is finished, ready for assembly, and owner Geoff Wheeler may not need to lift off the cap, depending how he gets on with fixing the new curb track with the cap still in place.

The second pair of sails at Thorpeness post mill was removed on 4th October owing to concern about the condition of the stock. Both stocks will now be renewed, together with a good number of the sail shutters.

A lightning conductor was fitted to Herringfleet windpump by Dorothea Restoration in early October. The same firm will also be doing similar work at

Thorpeness.

Buttrum's Mill, Woodbridge has lost its warden. Steven Miles resigned in August, and in the New Year the search will start for a replacement.

The house-conversion plans for Corton tower mill, mentioned in the last issue, have been allowed on appeal. On a happier note, the plans for a restaurant at Sproughton watermill have been withdrawn.

S.M.G. members Ken and Jenny Read have just opened a restaurant at Holbrook mill, where they live. It will be managed by chef John Orr who has worked at London's Mayfair Europe hotel and at his own establishment in France. We wish Ken and Jenny every success with the venture.

A Note from the Secretary

With this Newsletter you will be receiving a complete, up-to-date list of members. Against each name appears the renewal month for subscriptions; if you receive a reminder letter then your sub. is due, or overdue! Last year we managed to get the subscription records back up to date and as a result some members were asked to pay for arrears of up to a year. This has occasionally resulted in members being asked for another subscription immediately after paying one! Please bear with us; we try to get things right but mistakes can and do sometimes happen. I would particularly request that subs are not sent to any other committee member than the Secretary.

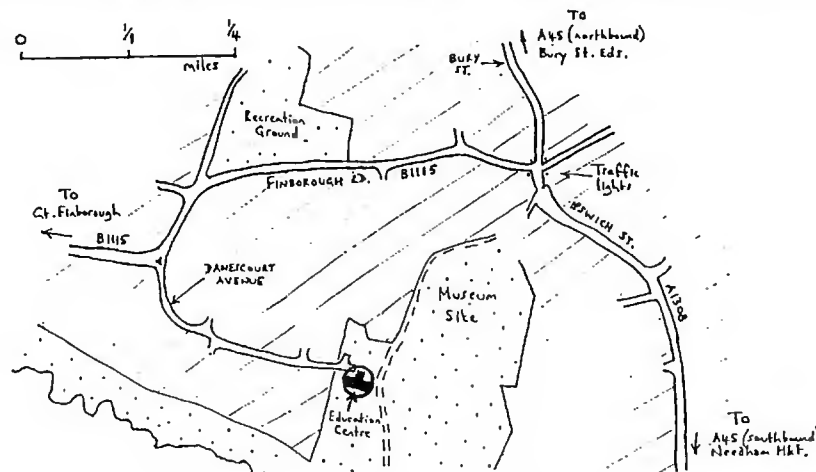
S.M.G. Chairman Chris Hullcoop is now on the 'phone at home - Felixstowe 671462. He also has a new work number at Levington Agriculture - Ipswich 711504.

EVENTS

S.M.G. SOCIAL EVENING: SATURDAY DECEMBER 2nd AT THE EDUCATION CENTRE, MUSEUM OF EAST ANGLIAN LIFE, STOWMARKET; from 8pm.

This year's social evening will be held at the Education Centre, Museum of East Anglian Life, Stowmarket. This is a room at the primary school in Danescourt Avenue, adjacent to the museum site, which is reserved for use in connection with the museum. We held our A.G.M. there in 1986.

As in past years there will be a free buffet with wines and beer. Please bring along some slides to show if you can. Danescourt Avenue is a turning off the B1115 Finborough Road about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile from the town centre (see map below).



Advance notice The date of next year's public meeting at Ipswich Town Hall is Saturday February 17th.