

SUFFOLK MILLS GROUP

Newsletter

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No.62
JUNE 1995

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This issue has been timed to go out with notice of our A.G.M. on June 18th at Flatford mill. I hope our efforts in securing this most interesting venue will be rewarded with a good turnout of members. The winter meeting at Ipswich library was a great success, everyone enjoying Martin Watt's lively and well rehearsed lecture on 'The Millwright's Craft' and Peter Dolman's account of the work of Whitmore and Binyon. The new venue, comfortable and convenient, certainly played its part.

This newsletter contains a variety of material, much of it concerned with bygone mills, especially post mills. John Salmon's reminiscences are a rare look back by someone personally involved in the earliest days of windmill preservation. It would be nice to include more 'mill memories' in future issues, so if any member can put pen to paper on this theme I would be pleased to publish the result.

My casual reference in the last editorial to the need for an index to our newsletters was meant as no more than an aide-mémoire to do something about it. I was delighted therefore to get a call from Peter Steggall, a longstanding S.M.G. member, offering to compile a complete index to all our articles and news items. This he did in a remarkably short time and the end result is enclosed as a separate document.

Forthcoming events are as follows:

S.M.G. Annual General Meeting
Herringfleet mill open day
Work-in at Stanton post mill
S.P.A.B. Weekend tour to Avon
S.P.A.B. Watermill Meeting

Sunday June 18th
Sunday July 2nd
July 29th - August 8th
August 31st - Sept 3rd
Saturday November 18th

Mark Barnard

WINDMILL REMINISCENCES John Salmon

I spent my schooldays (1922-27) at Sutton Valence, six miles south of Maidstone, a school which from its hilltop position has a magnificent view over the Weald of Kent to Tenterden church tower in the distance and with Headcorn in the foreground, about three miles away, and in clear weather I often saw the sails of the smock windmill there turning merrily in the wind. Then there was Sutton Valence windmill, another smock which had been disused since about 1918. It was finally pulled down in the last war. It was the second tallest windmill in Kent, that at Cranbrook being a few feet higher. Cranbrook was another windmill I was familiar with in my cycle rides with a friend round the churches in our

part of Kent on 'hobby' afternoons in the summer term.

At that time my parents and I were living at Ilford and in the holidays I often went on cycle rides in then rural south-west Essex. I often saw the sails of the smock mill at Upminster turning and I remember one day seeing both the composite windmill at Little Laver and the post mill at Moreton (less than a mile apart) busy at work. The main post at Moreton was dated 1715 and this section of it is now in the museum of bygones in Holy Trinity Church, Colchester.

But what really awakened my interest in windmills was an article on them with a full page of illustrations in *The Times*. I think it was in July, 1929. It was then that the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings started taking an interest in windmills, though it wasn't until 1935 that the Windmill Section (now the Wind and Watermill Section) was formed. Already the S.P.A.B. had set out to publish an illustrated survey of all the windmills in England, but only two volumes appeared, the first in 1930 covering Kent, Surrey and Sussex, and the second in 1932 dealing with Essex, Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, London and Middlesex. The latter was by Donald Smith who included three of my photographs and in his introduction he kindly mentioned the help I had given him. It was about this time that I got to know Rex Wailes whose expert knowledge did so much to rouse public interest in the preservation of windmills.

I remember cycling one day with a friend from Cambridge to Ely and seeing about half a dozen windmills at work at Swaffham Prior, Burwell and Soham. One summer about 1933 I ran a Scout camp at Southwold and had my first view of the Broads where there seemed to be literally dozens of pumping tower mills at work. The first article I wrote on windmills was entitled 'Local Types of Essex Windmills' and appeared in the *Essex Review* for October, 1931. This was based on a lecture I had recently given to the Essex Field Club. But as a teacher of history my main interest in windmills was naturally in their history and the results of my research in this direction I gave in a lecture to the British Archaeological Association in 1939, entitled 'The Windmill in English Medieval Art' which was published in their journal for 1941. In it I gave a list of windmills depicted in medieval stained glass, wall paintings (often in the background of a St. Christopher), stone and wood carving, etc., though I mostly excluded illuminated manuscripts. In the same journal of 1966 I published 'A Note on Some Early Tower Windmills' which included reference to a stone windmill built in Dover castle in 1294-5.

My last pre-war memory of windmills is of a breezy day in April 1939 when I took my bicycle by train down to Saxmundham and spent the day cycling round the Framlingham district when I saw no less than five of Suffolk's lovely post windmills busily at work, one of which, of course, was Saxtead Green. That is a sight no one will ever see again.

I retired from housemastering in 1970 and for about ten years I lived in Suffolk where I got to know such windmill enthusiasts as Chris Hullcoop and Brian Flint. I have given many lectures on windmills up and down the country, the last being about five years ago. Now I live in the Cathedral Close at Norwich. I sometimes

wander into the cloister, to look at the fourteenth century roof boss of a man on horseback with a sack of corn over his left shoulder (was he hoping to save the horse the weight of the sack of corn?) riding towards a post mill where the miller stands at the top of the steps waiting for his customer.

VANISHED MILLS Peter Dolman

ELMER'S MILL, WOOLPIT

One of two post mills in Woolpit (the other was in Mill Lane), the last to stand was set back from the main road in Broomhill Lane to the west of the village (Grid Ref. TL967626), within sight of Drinkstone mills. It was not a particularly old mill, being mostly framed in softwood although it had originally been open trestle and a mill is marked on maps back to 1736 (Kirby) and possibly 1675 (Ogilby). As detailed early history eludes me at present I will speculate that it was rebuilt around the turn of the 18th/19th century. It was possibly the mill owned by John Riches junior in February 1830 when he assigned his property for the benefit of creditors and in September 1830 George Bauley of Hesselton was advertising for a journeyman miller, presumably for this mill. Bauley was certainly at the mill in 1831 when he advertised for both a baker and an apprentice miller and baker.



Woolpit mill in August 1928

The tithe map lists him as owner and occupier in 1845 and following his death it was advertised in September 1847 as 'An excellent Windmill, having a spacious Brick-built Roundhouse, 2 pairs of superior French stones, flour mill, sack tackle...'. Also included was a common right upon Woolpit Green and Heath. The mill was not sold although the Elmers used to say that they bought it in 1849; possibly they took a lease on it then for it was again advertised for sale in October 1852 after which the Elmers possibly acquired the freehold. The first Elmer listed was John, in 1853, and from 1858 to 1883 Thomas (in 1874 Thomas and George). In 1885 Harry Elmer is first listed and he continued at the mill until 1922 when Harry Elmer and son are listed. A baker's business in the village centre was also run by them and this continued until quite recently (1960's/1970's) in the family. The Elmer family also had post mills at Great Ashfield and Chelmondiston (the 1916 directory gets the entries muddled). After old Mr. Elmer died interest in the mill waned and it stopped work in July 1953. For most of the 1930's and 1940's it was worked by an employee, John Cross. After ceasing work it went downhill alarmingly fast and finally collapsed on 26th September 1963, subsequently being cleared and the site obliterated for gravel extraction.

The mill was very low, the trestle being about three feet above ground, and to give useful space the roundhouse floor was sunk about two feet (as at Drinkstone and Stanton). The patent sails were fitted c.1870 and came low enough to the ground to once kill a pig. Two pairs of stones were driven by head and tail wheels and the brakewheel had been given a new rim in front of the old one, a modification often to be found where iron gearing replaces wood. There was a bolter and oat crusher as well as the stones. Nearby stood a small steam mill with a pair of stones driven by an ancient beam engine which was second hand. Remarkably this engine still survives in working order and on view at Crofton pumping station on the Kennett and Avon canal. Being so close to Drinkstone comparison was always being made between the two. Woolpit was reckoned to work better, being higher geared and so turning the stones faster. Denis Sanders referred to it as being almost 'jig-built' compared to the shambolic framing at Drinkstone; however, it is this shambolic veteran which is still standing, not the modern upstart of a neighbour!

THE LAST DAYS OF ELMER'S MILL Chris Hullcoop

I often recall the demise of the romantic old ruins and none fitted this description better than Elmer's mill at Woolpit. A head and tail post mill with wooden windshaft, patent sails and fantail winding, it was working up until 1953. There was also a little steam mill with a pair of French stones on a hurst driven by a very old and unusual steam engine. I recall Wilfred Clover saying he could hear it working from his mill and it sounded like a broken winded old horse. I was none the wiser about its sound!

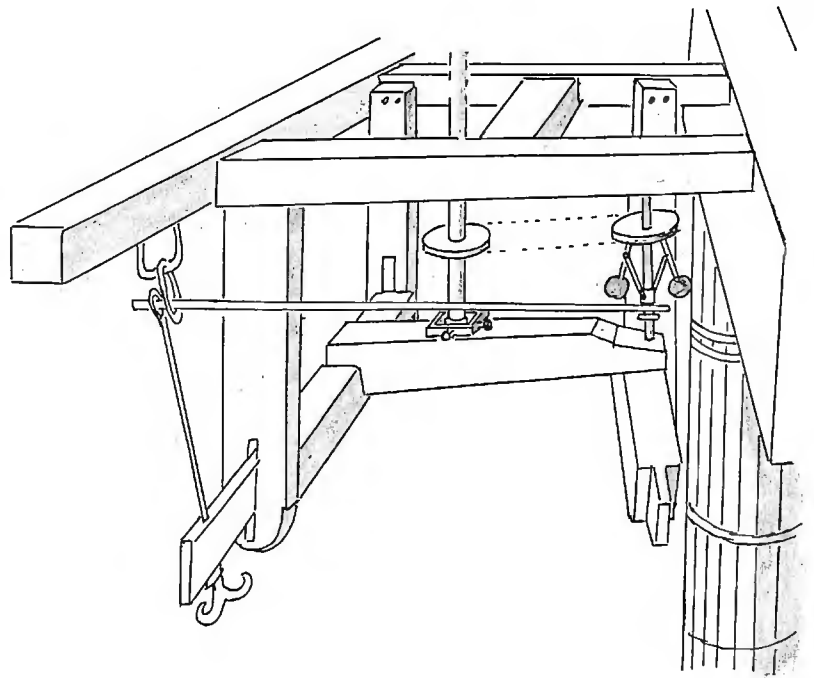
Once out of use the mill deteriorated very quickly as it was built mainly of pitch pine and not good English oak. The mill and the land had been bought by Mr. Darby who ran the gravel extraction business so even without decay its days were numbered.

By the early 1960's the front left corner post was rotting away and the mill soon developed an alarming lean from the side girts upwards. The then secretary of the Suffolk Preservation Society Mr. Westropp and I tried to do something to help the mill but the attitude was 'We have preserved Saxtead and don't need any more'.

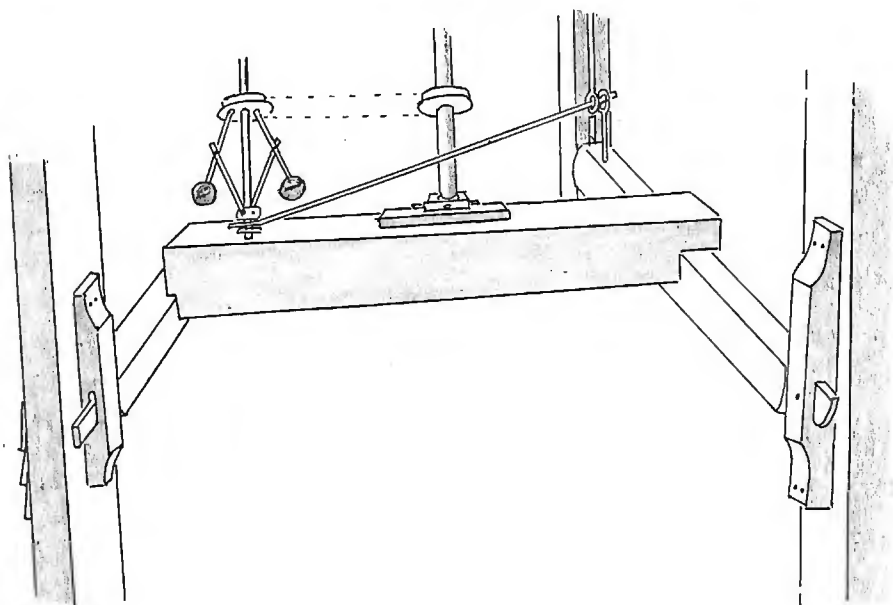
We could see the end was near and one day I visited the mill with an old friend who was a talented artist. In a few minutes he produced a little sketch showing the mill in the terrifying state of its last days (reproduced overleaf). The top left hand side window was like an open trapdoor and it would have been easy to fall vertically out of it! I made some sketches of the wooden tentering gear of the head and tail stones which were still in place.

I had permission from Mr. Darby to remove saveable parts and had started to dismantle the tail wheel. I thought that if there

was sudden collapse the tail of the buck and the stones would stay up as indeed they did. I had started to dismantle the wheel and on my return found it all on the ground. The wheel was salvaged, along with the tail stone tentering gear and the remaining stock and whips and other assorted pieces. Some of this I placed in a hut on the old mill



Tentering gear, tail stones



Tentering gear, head stones

house premises owned by Miss Elmer, daughter of the last miller. She gave the engine to enthusiasts in the West Country but died not long afterwards and the house was quickly sold. The pieces I had saved were lost. I was particularly sorry to see one of the wooden track wheels which had survived intact embedded in a flower bed as a feature where it soon rotted away. The owners would not part with it. I did try to persuade mill loving vehicle owners to assist me in its capture one dark and stormy night, but they were too nervous for such direct action and it was too heavy for my old motorcycle!

The mill site itself has been gravel extracted and all that marks it are two millstones by the gate of the old mill house. The mill went down in 1963 and looking back it seems hard to contemplate the traffic flowing through the main streets of Stowmarket and Woolpit past the coaching inns as it had always done. Elmer's mill must have been a welcome sight to weary travellers from London in days of old.



Elmer's mill in its final days
(drawn by Marcus Cook)

CORRESPONDENCE

DAVID PEARCE of Lister Cottage, 14 Church Lane, Long Clawson, Melton Mowbray LE14 4ND writes:

I was interested to read the article on wind farms in the last S.M.G. newsletter. Wind power is a busy area, and a little clarification from me might be helpful.

Firstly, the well known firm Ecogen tends not to be an owner or operator of wind turbines. They are particularly active at the prospecting, planning inquiry and site design stage. Ecogen have initiated a considerable number of wind farm schemes, which have then been developed in conjunction with other organisations active in wind energy. The actual wind farm may be owned and operated by a third group. For example, PowerGen is part owner of the 24 x 330kW wind farm on Anglesey, which is now known as Rhyd y Groes. (Similarly, PowerGen owns the 11 x 450kW wind farm at St. Breock, Cornwall, which was commissioned last year.)

Secondly, a considerable number of new contracts to supply 'renewable electricity' were awarded at the end of 1994. These contracts are the government's means of encouraging the development of renewable technology. (In fact the prices agreed show that convergence with 'conventional' electricity is likely to be attained soon by wind power.) The February 1995 issue of the magazine Wind Power Monthly lists all 67 wind energy contracts awarded in this latest round. There are none in East Anglia: this reflects the lower average winds compared to the west coast and Scotland.

Winning a contract to supply is one major hurdle, but there are others which all prospective wind farms have to face, for example obtaining planning permission, and negotiating a connection agreement with the Regional Electricity Company. These and other difficulties mean that perhaps relatively few of the nearly 500MW of new proposed wind farms will be built. Even so, the industry is developing into an important one, and I would like to see a more confident approach by British manufacturers.

MICHAEL ROOTS of 14a Cricket Ground Road, New Lakenham, Norwich NR1 3BQ writes:

Following their successful trip to Holland in May 1994, Friends of Norfolk Windmills are hoping to visit Belgium and France next year. The trip is likely to be for 4 days / 3 nights duration, and based in the West Flanders / Pas de Calais area. The dates have yet to be decided but will probably be between late April and early June. Start saving!

COLIN BUDGEY of 16 Pedlars Path, Danbury, Chelmsford CM3 4HZ writes:

I have for sale Volumes 1 - 4 of Essex Windmills, Millers and Millwrights in mint condition, still with their paper covers. I don't know what they are worth, but I am open to offers. I also have for sale an antique Stanley compass plane, about 100 years old but a very fine tool. I'm asking £100 or offer for this if any S.M.G. member is interested.

PUTTING MILLS IN THE PICTURE (2) Peter Steggall

In November 1994 (Newsletter No.60) I wrote about the popularity of mills as subjects for artists and for pictures to hang in our houses. Just before Christmas I was pleased to learn that at least one S.M.G. member, in addition to our Editor, had read my rather inconsequential ramblings, though I think that his attention was caught first by my name rather than by the title of the article. He wrote to me assuming that there could be only one Peter Steggall - a man with whom he had worked, before retirement, at Post Office Telephones, Colchester. The letter came from Mr. V.F.B. ('Jimmy') Medland, now living at Holt in Norfolk.

I felt rather sad that I was not his old friend and colleague, and I telephoned to tell him. He was probably disappointed, but we had quite a long, friendly chat, and he agreed to my using his letter here. This is what he wrote about his interest in mills.

'Having read you in the S.M.G. newsletter, I felt duty bound to reassure you that some others (or me, at least) have windmill pictures round the walls. Above my bed are two water-colours [of unidentified mills] one of which is a close 'up and under', truly in the 'Behold a giant am I' style. On a side wall is a print of an etching of Mountnessing Mill before restoration, as pretty a post mill as I'll ever see partly because she was slightly headsick. On the dressing table is a print of a very, very old French Wind (Saw) Mill which really belongs in a fairy story book; and a shot of the head and sails of Pakenham Mill taken almost straight up the batter at night - most commanding and ghostly. And lastly, in the lounge, a print of Sheringham Mill (as was) near the highest point in Norfolk. All this is a side interest of my windmill / windpump postcard collection, which is my main hobby now that I'm not very mobile. I've a postcard friend (posrcard fiend) nearby who takes me to the shows door-to-door. So I can still get around.

At the moment I'm trying to get my friend to take me to Somerton to see the new aero-generators, but I'm sure they'll never have the beauty of post- and smock-mills.'

After another chat on the 'phone, I sent him a few mill postcards to add to his collection. Once again, a common interest in mills has resulted in an unexpected and pleasant encounter.

NEWS

SPROUGHTON MILL UP-DATE

In the last newsletter we reported that, as a result of a new engineer's report on the mill which had been prepared on behalf of S.M.G. and the S.P.A.B., both Babergh District Council and English Heritage had decided to oppose demolition of the mill. The owner has now made an outline application to convert the mill into one or two dwellings, with vehicular access and a parking area on the opposite side of the river, from which the mill is reached by a new footbridge. We understand that negotiations are under way for

opposite side of the river, from which the mill is reached by a new footbridge. We understand that negotiations are under way for the sale of the mill, subject to consent being obtained for conversion.

S.M.G. supports the conversion of the mill, provided it is done in a sympathetic manner. It is beginning to look as if the public inquiry into the demolition bid, due to resume in July, will not now take place. (M.B.)

STANSFIELD TOWER MILL

Nearly three years ago we visited Stansfield mill to meet the new owner and advise him on how best to preserve his mill. Having been undisturbed for over 60 years, the interior is an alarming spectacle of decay. Before World War Two the cap and curb were removed and concrete laid on the dust floor. The boards and beams soon rotted to allow large slabs of concrete to fall to the ground floor where they remain. Looking up, the dust floor has gone and only a fragment of the bin floor survives. Remarkably the drive to the stones and the tentering remain in place although the stones themselves have been removed. The upright shaft and the spurwheel were wedged precariously across the tower. Rare auxiliary machinery has survived very well as it is tight into the wall and thus protected by the overhang formed by the batter of the tower. We were afraid that the new owner could be expensively and badly advised by those with no knowledge or experience of old mills such as builders and all those smart-suited, mean-spirited, regulation-driven people who have to advise demolition as the only way to



Securing the spurwheel before lowering the upright shaft

'cover themselves' against anything going wrong.

We promised to return to measure the tower, make safe the upright shaft and outline some specifications for a new roof. Three years later Mr. Kane the owner reminded us of our promise so on Good Friday Mark Barnard and myself arrived, armed with tools and a coil of new rope.

Half or more of the spurwheel was intact and worthy of preservation so we tied it back to a good beam. The upright shaft however was in poor condition so we lowered it to the ground. After pulling down a large amount of pigeon guano we constructed a little platform at bin floor level. From here a short ladder was placed to take us to the top, some 40ft from the ground. We found the 18ins (two bricks thick) wall in perfect condition. About 3ft of brickwork had been removed when the cap and curb were demolished. The curb diameter of the full height tower was about 17ft. The mill was probably built by William Bear, as old photos show a dome-shaped cap of the type he favoured.

We have asked Mr. Kane to obtain millwrights' quotes for various cap roofs from a simple flat roof to a dome set on a cap frame which could one day accommodate a windshaft and sails. He hopes this summer to clear out all the old concrete and debris from the ground floor and, once a new roof is on, start work on floor replacement.

We have to be realistic in our advice and it is little use calling for restoration and reinstatement to full working order when this would need a major lottery or pools win. Phased repairs which are complete and very worthwhile in themselves but which could be taken further is the best way forward. (C.H.)

NEW SAIL CLOTHS FOR HERRINGFLEET MILL

Those visitors who were lucky enough to come to the open day at Herringfleet on May 7 (warm and sunny, with a steady breeze) witnessed a truly splendid sight, the mill at work with its four new sail cloths.

The old cloths are unsatisfactory in several respects. They are not a matching set, two being of thin canvas (showing the effects of mice!) and two of a very heavy canvas, far from ideal for its purpose. Their fit is poor, and the ropes are of almost random lengths. Their pale green colour is not a traditional one, and derives from modern preservative stains. The new cloths are made of Duradon, a rot-proof manmade fibre, and are coloured ochre, like the sails of a barge. We were delighted with their perfect fit, which results in less drag, allowing the sails to turn more readily in a light wind. The old cloths have been retained as a spare set.

The County Council are to be congratulated for agreeing to order the new cloths, which were made by Jeckells Sails Ltd., Station Road, Hoveton, Wroxham NR12 8UT. As a bonus, the N.R.A. has recently dredged the surrounding watercourses, enhancing the mill's setting. Later this year (after the open day on July 2) the mill will be re-decorated (proper coal tar is to be used on the tower) and repairs carried out to the cap frame, tailpole assembly and scoopwheel housing. (M.B.)

CORTON MILL FOR SALE

The newly-converted tower mill at Corton has been put on the market by its architect owner, Andrew Allen. S.M.G. had opposed several aspects of the conversion, notably the 'Chinese hat' roof, but to no avail. The conversion boasts a fitted kitchen, 3 reception rooms, 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, a studio and garage. Asking price in April was £159,950, reduced to £145,000 by the end of May. Agents are Woodcock & Son (01473 233355). (M.B.)

STANTON MILL

At the 1993 A.G.M., held at Stanton mill, a collection was taken in memory of Richard Duke to provide for a permanent memorial at the mill. After much discussion the Committee chose to provide a brass plaque which could be fixed outside the mill. This has now been mounted on the roundhouse wall where it is visible to visitors yet recedes into the brickwork when seen from a distance. In addition there will eventually be a display of pictures showing the work done by Richard and his helpers from 1986 to 1993.

Time marches on however and to complete the work started in 1985 I will be running a 'work-in' at the mill from Saturday July 29th to Sunday August 6th when the roundhouse roof will be re-felted, using materials bought for the job by Richard and handed over with the mill. Hopefully the roof boarding (fitted by Amos Clarke in 1938-9) will not have deteriorated too much and can be re-used with patching. The sails hit the roof edge in a couple of places but as this is due to wobbly walls I doubt if much can be done about it now, short of major rebuilding.

If enough help is forthcoming other tasks will be tackled. One such task is replacing parts of the fan track with free-draining gravel rather than the hoggin which traps water in wet seasons, allowing the carriage wheels to squeeze it outwards resulting in a deep rut. Other possible jobs include adjusting the machinery and setting up a pair of stones to working order.

The usual 'work-in' arrangements apply (i.e. bring a tent or caravan if desired) with the added benefit of all the facilities of the house for cooking, washing and accommodation if required. If you can help (and no particular skills are necessary, just enthusiasm) please contact me at the mill (address on front page) or telephone 01359 250622. (Peter Dolman)

WORK AT DRINKSTONE MILLS

An ambitious programme of work has started this year at Drinkstone mills. Over the winter three new roundhouse roof saddles were made and delivered to the mill. These 'patent' saddles enable a ladder to be placed on the roundhouse roof without damaging it, to reach any part of the buck in complete safety. They consist of small horizontal platforms of about four square feet which are kept horizontal in any position on the roof by the two bearers either side being set at the angle of the roundhouse roof. On top of the platform is a sturdy piece of steel angle which pivots about a bolt in the centre. This locates the ladder very firmly and once lashed the ladder cannot slip.

We intend to re-board the head of the mill and the

weatherboards are now drying out after pressure treatment against rot. Last year we covered the buck roof with aluminium and provided wide aluminium-covered drip boards to take the place of Wilfred Clover's guttering and downpipes. This year we plan to cover the upper third of the head and tail gables (the raked areas) with aluminium but keeping the main area below weatherboarded. This is a good compromise between weatherproofing and traditional appearance. The roundhouse roof leaked again last winter so there are yet more areas covered and held together by cement. It looks a little grim but it must be remembered that not a single tile, rafter or wallplate is good enough for re-use.

The sides and tail of the buck, the step strings and winding gear all need attention, and the front pair of spring sails are rapidly approaching the twelfth hour. Another task this year is to paint the aluminium-covered smock mill cap roof and take down the strong but inelegant platform. (C.H.)

We badly need help in all this. If any member can spare a day or two would they please give Chris Hullcoop a call on 01473 711504 (daytime) or 01394 671462 (evenings).

OPEN DAYS AT HADDENHAM WINDMILL

Newly restored Haddenham tower mill near Ely will be holding open days on Sundays June 18, July 30 and September 17, from 2-6pm. There will be a display of photographs showing the lift-on of the cap and sails. For details contact Nicholas Law (01353 740798).

STOCK MILL VIDEO

Pascal Associates Ltd (makers of the splendid Mountnessing mill video) have made a video of Stock tower mill. For details contact Vincent Pargeter at Essex County Council on 01245 492211.

EVENTS

S.M.G. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: SUNDAY JUNE 18th at FLATFORD MILL FIELD STUDIES CENTRE

This year's A.G.M. takes place on the morning of June 18th at Flatford Mill. Full details are included on a separate sheet with this newsletter.

WORK-INS AT WICKEN SMOCK MILL: SATURDAY JUNE 24th-SUNDAY JULY 2nd and SATURDAY AUGUST 19th-SUNDAY AUGUST 27th

Members are reminded of these dates, when it is hoped to complete work to the sails (see last newsletter for details).

HERRINGFLEET WINDPUMP OPEN DAY: SUNDAY JULY 2nd, 1-5pm.

Another chance to see the mill in action with its new cloths. With suitable weather it's wonderful material for video buffs!

WORK-IN AT STANTON POST MILL: SATURDAY JULY 29th-SUNDAY AUGUST 6th

For details of this work please see the above news item.