

# SUFFOLK MILLS GROUP

## Newsletter

[www.suffolkmills.org.uk](http://www.suffolkmills.org.uk)

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What with Christmas and the New Year, it doesn't seem five minutes since I was writing the last editorial! Our one event since then, the social evening in mid December, was held in the comfortable and convenient surroundings of the Friends' Meeting House in central Ipswich. We showed a number of short films on DVD which had been made for us by Marcus Cook, including the latest one of the work at Stansfield mill last summer. This medium seems to be an effective and entertaining way of showing our range of work, and we are investigating the purchase of our own video camera to be able to make a more comprehensive record in the future.

2007 will see our 30th birthday (S.M.G. was 'born' on 28th May 1977) and to mark the occasion we plan a social gathering at Stanton mill in May. It is easy to be pessimistic about the future of our mills, but much has changed for the better in the life of S.M.G. and a great deal achieved - mills got working, mills opened to the public, mills conserved, mills protected through listing, owners advised, archives created, the list goes on. A flick through just a few of our 97 newsletters (100th issue due this time next year!) will show just how much we have done, especially in the early years.

Below is the events diary for the coming months. The next newsletter will appear in May/June.

S.M.G. public meeting, Ipswich	Saturday March 3rd
SPAB Mills Section meeting, London	Saturday March 10th
National Mills Weekend	Sat/Sun May 12th-13th
SPAB Mills Section day tour	Saturday May 19th
S.M.G. garden party, Stanton mill	Sunday May 20th
S.M.G. A.G.M., Ixworth mill	Sunday July 8th

Mark Barnard

## REMINISCENCES OF A COUNTRY MILLER (8)

Harold Hitchcock

We continue the account of country milling written in 1946 by Harold Hitchcock, proprietor of the roller mill at Rattlesden.

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To revert to the actual process of flour milling in those days (mid 19th century), the wheat (local grown only, for no wheat was imported in those days) was ground on French Burr stones. Although I have refrained from making any quotations hitherto, to show the craftsmanship involved, I feel I should here reproduce a part of an article given by Humphries in 1911 and quoted in Leslie Smith's

'Flour Milling Technology', which eulogises the millstone, as well as showing the superiority of grinding by rolls in language so far above any I could possibly command:

*It was a fine tool, the quintessence of the experience and knowledge of very many generations of capable millers and specialist millstone builders, but it had its limitations. Consider the thickness of a piece of bran and realise the degree of mechanical perfection involved in getting a millstone 4 feet in diameter and 10 to 15 cwt. in weight to revolve for 6,000 hours per annum, in balance, generally on a single point, so closely to a sister millstone that they touch the bran simultaneously on both its inner and outer sides without unduly pulverizing it and without coming into contact themselves. Something to be proud of! But consider also the amount and intensity of the friction involved - one stone stationary and the other revolving at a periphery speed of 1,500 feet per minute. The wheat was 'fed' to the stones through a hole in the centre of the upper one and was passed between them to their circumference by means of indentations in their surfaces, specially placed to force the grain or meal in an outward direction. This involves at least four feet of extremely severe rubbing in one grinding.*

*Compare that with the relatively gentle action of roller mills - two rolls revolving in the same direction at a differential speed; the faster at a periphery speed of about 880, and the slower at 350 feet per minute, and grinding done at only one point in the circumference. Obviously, if it be desirable to grind with a minimum amount of friction, rolls are incomparably superior to millstones, even though it be necessary to pass the stock through a much greater number of grindings, if rolls be used.*

Following the grinding came the important operation of dressing the meal. This was not performed immediately after the grinding but usually the day after. The meal, when warm from the stones, would not dress freely on the type of cloth used in those days but, when allowed to cool thoroughly, it could be dressed much easier and effectively. The practice which seems to have been adopted in most mills was for the meal to be first dressed through a rather crude dresser with very coarse cover, simply to remove the bran. After this it was fed into the flour bolter, a machine that was little more than a cylinder, covered with the bolting cloth through which the flour dressed, anything not able to pass through the cloth being rejected at the tail end of the machine.

The bolting cloth used was of a very different nature to the silks now used in modern milling practice. Woven of cotton, the mesh was not nearly so exact or regular as that of present day silks. Instead of a perfectly square aperture, on a bolting cloth these were rather oblong and, whereas modern silks are laced tightly over the cylinder of the centrifugals used for flour dressing, the old time cloths were fixed quite loosely. When the bolting machine was being used and had a quantity of meal within the cover, a kind of flapping action against the ribs of the machine was imparted and, only under these conditions, would the bolting cloth perform its duty. If stretched tightly, I am told, its dressing power was almost 'nil'.

Rather crude but interesting methods were adopted to secure a fairly uniform speed for this machine, when used in a windmill and driven by wind power only with consequent large fluctuations in speed. The leather belt driving the machine passed over a pulley which was held by a sliding bracket. This again was controlled by a cord to which a weight was attached. By careful manipulation it was possible to drive the bolting machine in a fast wind, by a slipping belt, so reducing speed to the maximum found advisable by long practice. In a lighter wind the belt was held tight by the same device and the speed would be approximately the same under the varying strength of the wind.

Feeding the machine was accomplished by a similar device to that employed for feeding the millstones themselves. A trough or shoe was agitated by being held firmly against a revolving beater, and this motion gave a fairly regular flow of meal into the machine but was also flexible enough to increase the flow with an increase of speed, and vice versa.

Referring again to the journal kept by Mr I Clover and commenced 1828, it is interesting to note that during his first year of business at Buxhall mill, using the methods I have tried to outline, and using wind power only, the record shows he ground 1,001 Coombs (18 stones) of wheat. I think it shows the meticulous care of these old timers that he showed the odd coomb and did not enter his figures at the round 1,000. For the following year a considerable increase was recorded, a total of 1,526 Coombs.

During these two years each purchase of wheat was carefully entered in the book, the purchase price per coomb being shown and the total amount due. When the transaction was settled, the seller signed the book under the details of the purchase, against the word 'Paid' already inserted by the miller. So in this little book are the autographs of a generation of small farmers and land-owners who lived and farmed, and bought and sold, during the early part of the nineteenth century. It was a thrill to the writer to find particulars of a purchase of wheat from his own grandfather on more than one occasion!

Strangely enough the price ruling in those far-off days was nearly as much on average as that ruling in this present year of 1946. From 26/- to 28/- seems the commonest figures but it is noticeable that, towards harvest time when stocks were running low, the prices sometimes exceeded 32/- per coomb.

These purchases were usually for quite small quantities, 3, 4 and 5 Coomb lots being quite common, and the larger purchases do not seem in any case to exceed 20 Cos. Not having lived in those days I am not really competent to explain this with any certainty but I imagine all threshing being done by hand labour in the farm barns, after which winnowing by hand dressing machine was necessary and usual. By the time 15 or 20 sacks of wheat were threshed and lying on the barn floor, the farmer decided it was time to sell this quantity and so make room for further threshing by the old fashioned flail. Probably too, the quantity mentioned was a convenient load for a two horse wagon, for all corn in those days, and indeed up to 25 or 30 years ago, was sold delivered to the mill. Today not many farmers move their corn once it is threshed but expect the miller or merchant to send their lorries

post haste and clear it away immediately.

At the risk of running off my subject, I feel that just one extract from this old journal would be of interest to many in the present day. This is concerning the hiring of labour for the harvest and reads as follows, "July 9th (year untraceable but probably in the 1830's) Made an agreement with Thos. Manton, Thos. Grimwood, and 2 boy Grimwoods, G. Leakes, W. Stiff, Thos. Williams and John Poole, the 6 men at £5 each and £3 the boys, 2½ bus. malt the men, and 2½ bus. do. 2 boys, to clear the ground cut and carry all the corn on Mr. Davey farm, with 1s. each man earnest money. 7s 1.0.'.

Note no time is mentioned, the amount to be paid was for the ingathering of the crops and, should adverse weather conditions have prevailed, the work might drag out over several weeks. Many an hour of real hard labour, aching backs and loss of sweat must pass before the work was accomplished, and the reward of £5 does not seem to savour munificence bearing in mind the selling price of corn in the corresponding period.

## **A WINDMILL AT JERUSALEM**    Contributed by Bob Malster

From the *Illustrated London News* of 18th December 1858:

### WINDMILL AT JERUSALEM

Sir Moses Montefiore has caused to be erected at the foot of Mount Zion, about a quarter of a mile from the Jaffa Gate, a windmill for the use of the poorer inhabitants of Jerusalem, who had previously the laborious task of grinding their corn by hand-mills. The mill was constructed by Messrs. Holman, engineers and millwrights, of Canterbury, under the personal superintendence of Mr. T.R. Holman. Great difficulty was experienced in landing the machinery at Jaffa, the landing-stage there not being strong enough to bear it. Each piece had to be dragged ashore by about forty men. Four months were occupied in conveying it thence to Jerusalem, on the backs



of camels, the roads not being passable to carriages of any description. All difficulties were, however, finally overcome, and the machinery was fixed without loss or breakage of any portion. The tower of the mill is built of stone quarried on the spot, and the walls are three feet thick and nearly fifty feet high. All the modern improvements have been introduced in this mill. It is fitted with the self-acting regulating sails, to prevent its going too fast when the wind blows hard. It drives two pair of stones, and has flour-dressing and wheat-cleaning machinery attached. During the course of its construction it was looked upon with an evil eye by the millers there, and one of their head men was sent to curse it. Before the rainy season set in it was prophesied that the heavy rains prevalent there would wash it away; and, when the mill was found to have passed through the stormy season in no way injured, it was pronounced to be the work of Satan. The poor Jews, however, for whose use and benefit the mill was erected, are loud in their praises of their benefactor, Sir Moses Montefiore.

## FRANK AND HAYTER'S VISIT TO ALDEBURGH MILL

Chris Hullcoop

I was most amused to read Bob Paterson's article on 'the post mill what isn't' at Elmsett. I loved the thought of our modern Lethario climbing the 'Romeo' sails, throwing his leg over the 'Juliette' balcony and - well why not! No problems for him at Elmsett but if it was a real post mill still turning to wind the unaccustomed sudden movement of the whole structure could cool his passions!

Bob's hearty condemnation reminded me of an early condemnation of a mill converted to a house. Not long after the end of the First World War Frank Brangwyn the artist (who was later to become Sir Frank Brangwyn, president of the Royal Academy) and Hayter Preston visited a number of windmills in England and Europe. An account of their windmill wanderings was published as a book in 1923 and called simply 'Windmills'.

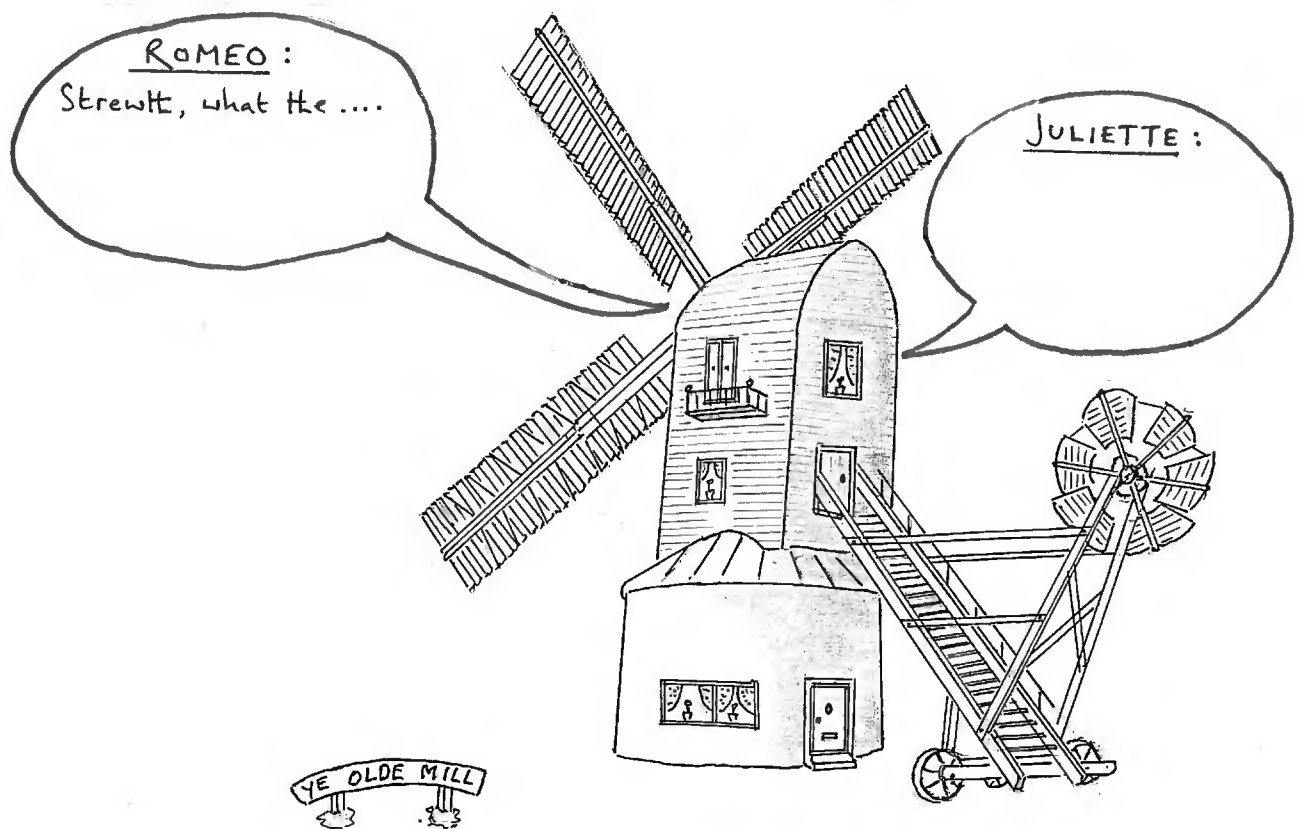
In this book there is an account of their visit to the tower mill at Aldeburgh which must have been one of the first windmills in England to be house-converted. Now I don't know if they received a hostile reception from the owner, a local vicar, or had the dog set on them or some other off-putting incident. Their subsequent description published in their book used language strong today let alone only a couple of decades after the old Queen had passed on. They call it '*a thoroughly unctuous abortion, a neat bit of hypocritical castration. It was originally a fine masculine affair, strong, austere, frowning - a very buccaneer of a windmill...*'.

They argue that it should have been left that way even if that meant its decay and eventual demise. They go on to describe what had been done to it: '*the Mill has been converted into a dwelling and adorned with plaster casts of saints in postures of supplication and sanctitude. The effect is shocking and ludicrous: one reels under the crushing inanity of the thing.*' '*...when it comes to putting a girl's chemise on the body of a helpless pirate - well, it is too damnably, tragically comic.*'

They go on to call it a '*tutti-frutti buccaneer*' and '*a paederast*'. Not content with this strongly-worded condemnation they further endow it with the impotence of Priapus, a mythological eunuch - and then sum it up with '*Let us hope that the next storm will blow it down. It's disgraceful.*' Then a better idea comes to their minds. '*Rather let us turn disgrace into triumph. Let us make it the next president of the Malthusian League.*'

They then go on to make a general attack on religion with the story of a hard drinking, hard swearing lecherous trawlerman who saw the light and became very religious. After a terrible run of ill fate and bad luck the trawlerman lost his faith and reverted to his former ways.

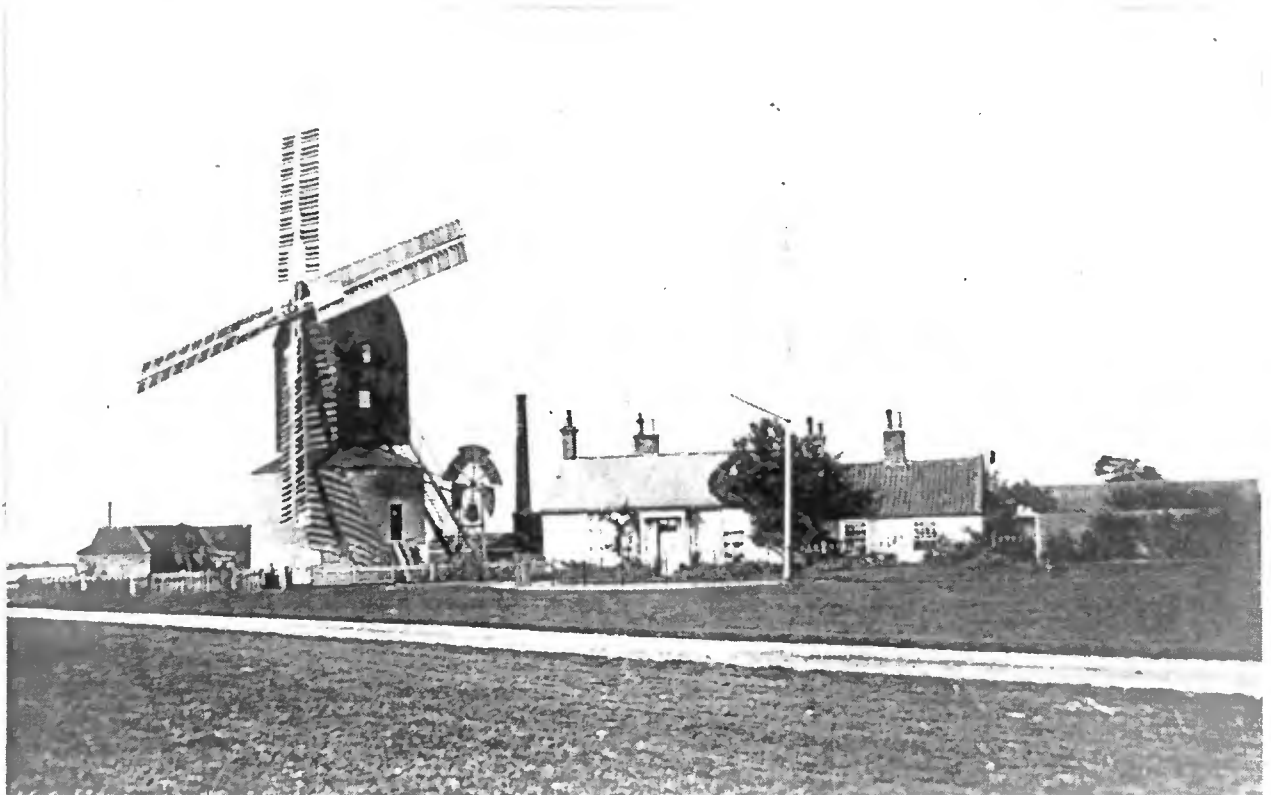
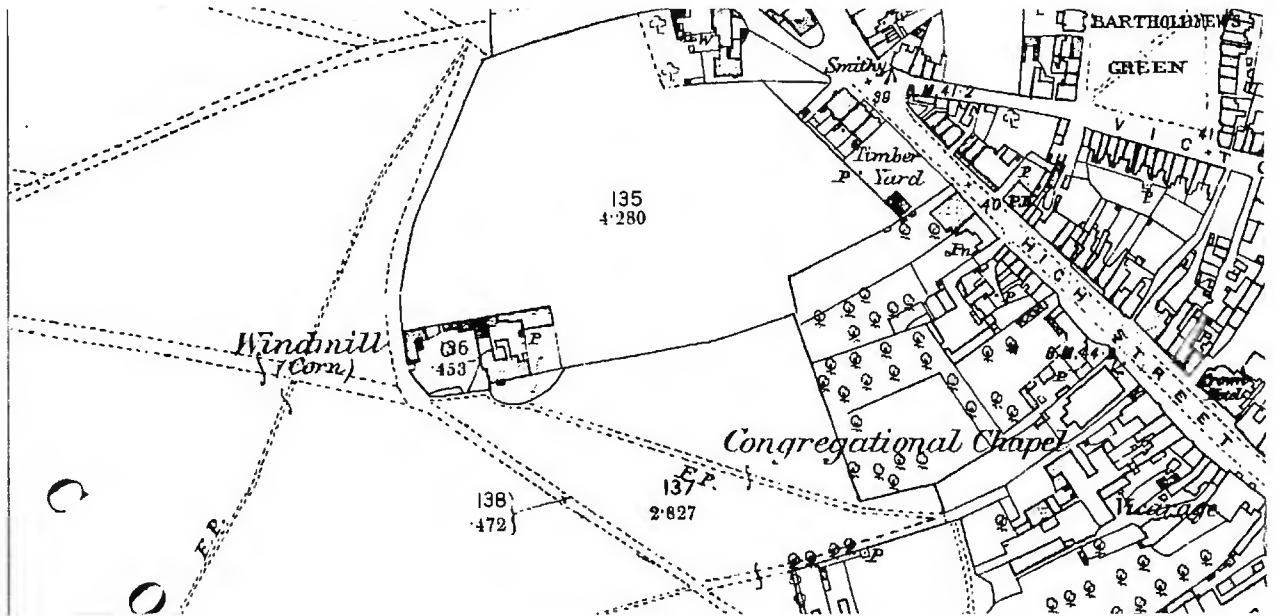
Some years ago I heard that when the vicar read the description of his mill in the book he was not amused and very annoyed (probably incandescent!). I believe a court case followed. I wonder if any local historians know anything about this. What was the final outcome and was the book banned in Aldeburgh! Not far off a century later the mill is still there and is now a smart holiday home. Nothing much changes!



Our Romeo, a simple soul with a one-track mind does not appreciate that the building he is in is likely to move. The wind changes.  
What did he say to Juliette and how did she reply?  
A prize for the best suggestion.  
Please send your entry to the editor.

## MILLS ON THE MAP

This time we feature Black Mill, the last corn windmill to stand in Southwold. The photograph was taken from the south and shows the mill surrounded by low outbuildings, including an engine shed with tall chimney. Adjoining the mill yard is a single storey miller's cottage, and set back to the right is a smaller single storey cottage. All these can be made out on the map, the 1884 edition of the 25-inch survey (n.t.s.). However the building on



the extreme right of the photograph is not shown, so the photograph is probably earlier than the map.

Black Mill was moved here from Southtown near Yarmouth in 1798. A very early photograph shows it with a single storey roundhouse and different sails, with one pair of commons, carried in a wooden poll-end. There are several reports of gale damage in the 1860's and it was probably after the 1867 gale, tearing off the sails and damaging the roundhouse, that the mill was raised and modernised. In its enlarged form it was a big mill, with a three storey roundhouse containing two pairs of steam-driven stones and a further two pairs in the buck.

Its last owner was William Laws, who sold the milling business and turned property developer, building houses close by. Despite being in good order, the mill was taken down in 1894 and the site built over. Today its name endures in nearby Black Mill Road.

## **NEWS**

### **JOHN PELLING**

It was with surprise and sadness that I learned of the death of John Pelling, announced at the SPAB Mills Section meeting in London in November. Although resident in Sussex, John had been a member of S.M.G. from the early days and always took a keen interest in our work. He was a 'regular' at Mills Section meetings and tours, relating the latest of his innumerable windmill forages in his gentle and courteous manner. We have lost another stalwart supporter of windmills. (M.B.)

### **TIDE MILL LOTTERY BID**

Good progress is being made on project planning for the restoration and recommissioning of Woodbridge tide mill, which is to be the subject of an application for lottery funding in 2007 (see Newsletters 90 and 94). The aim of the bid is to enhance the mill as a tourist attraction and education resource, and up-date the building in response to changes in areas such as fire precautions, health and safety and catering for people with disabilities. The lottery will require clear public benefit to be demonstrated, and five ways of achieving this are planned: milling flour again; replacing the mitre inlet gates to the mill pond; providing level access to the waterwheel and pond; live ground floor displays on plasma video screens; interactive working models.

Milling will be possible only if supplementary electric power is introduced, via a pinion driving the spurwheel. After careful survey, it is planned to locate a 3-phase motor in an inconspicuous position on the bin floor, with a vertical drive spindle down to a new pinion in the position of the south-east stone nut. The adjacent south-west stones will be set up to work.

The wheelhouse will be rebuilt slightly wider, so the wheelshaft bearing can be enclosed, and allowing visitors to view the turning wheel at a safe distance. New timber decking will



provide level access around the outside of the wheelhouse to a new door in the side of the rear outhouse.

Internally, it is proposed to use the right hand end of each floor for administration and displays (including video), allowing the remainder to be kept as much like a working mill as possible. As at present, no visitors will be allowed beyond the meal floor, but improvements in methods of fire detection will mean that the external wooden fire escape is no longer needed.

Further work, leading to estimates of cost, is limited until the outcome of current planning and listed building applications is known. (M.B.)

#### FURTHER REPAIRS AT SYLEHAM

We last worked at Syleham mill in the summer of 1999 when we repaired the roof and walls of the roundhouse.

Most roundhouses are built with a timber ring on top of the walls to hold the lower ends of the roof boards and another smaller timber ring at the top to which the top ends of the boards are secured. The diameter of this top ring is a little smaller than the width of the buck, and has to be completely open to allow sacks to pass through, whatever the position of the buck. At Syleham it is 9ft diameter and when the mill was complete the buck above gave complete protection. Most of the buck was blown down in the great gale of October 1987 leaving only the crowntree, one sidegirt, the tail gable by the door and the bottom floor. This floor, completely exposed to weather, then had to protect the



Chris Hullcoop at Syleham mill (24th January 2007)

roundhouse below. In order to make it watertight we covered it with corrugated steel sheets and sealed it to the post as best we could.

Now after a few more years the buck remains have deteriorated further and the few heavy timbers left threaten to fall on and smash the roundhouse roof. None of the remaining buck timbers are sound and we are in danger of losing the roundhouse if it is not made safe and watertight.

In the last days of flour production at Syleham the windmill was beyond use and Miss Jillard used the Ruston oil engine to drive the stones and auxiliary machinery in the roundhouse. All this is in good order, nothing has been removed and it would be quite possible to produce flour again.

The roundhouse at Syleham is one of three listed in Suffolk, the others being Thorndon and Saxmundham, both now house converted. Syleham is by far and away the best as it contains all original machinery including a cleaner by Martin of Beccles, the only one in existence. Close by is the engine shed complete with the fine 12 h.p. oil engine. A long belt passing through the wall connected the engine to the machinery in the roundhouse.

Syleham is a site very worthy of further repair. This should be designed to be long lasting and maintenance free, thus keeping the roundhouse watertight for many more years. (C.H.)

If any member would like to help with this project in the summer please contact Chris Hullcoop on 01394 671462.

#### BARDWELL WINDMILL UP-DATE

Following on from the report of the 2006 A.G.M. in the last newsletter which bemoaned the fact that little is heard by the Group about Bardwell mill these days, I thought I would give members an up-date on the mill following a visit by my wife and I.

We bought Stanton mill in August 2004 and in spite of travelling hundreds of miles to see other mills all over the country, for various reasons had never got round to visiting Bardwell and introducing ourselves. Anyway, on a fine Sunday in late October 2006, we made a decision to put this wrong to rights and, ignoring all other distractions, drove to our neighbouring village to visit the mill.

Once there, we introduced ourselves to Enid Wheeler who gave us a warm welcome and over tea and cake told us about the recent history of the mill. James Waterfield restored the mill to working order in the 1980's and sold it to the Wheeler family when he moved to Maud Foster Mill. During the hurricane of 1987 the mill was tail-winded, the sails ripped off and the cap badly damaged. Private donations and grants from English Heritage and the local council, totalling over £100,000, have enabled the cap and fantail to be restored, so that all that is missing are the sails.

Jonathan Wheeler, Enid's son, has started to make a new set of sails using notes and plans made by his late father, Geoff. From the various airbrush engineering illustrations and cutaway drawings for the boy's comic *Eagle* which Enid showed us, he was a



The new sails under construction at Bardwell mill

brilliant technical artist. The timber and lead paint has been bought and progress has been made in that Jonathan has set out and trial assembled the first sail frame under cover next to the mill.

I can't remember how much money is still needed, but the family, with the Friends of Bardwell Windmill, are continuously fund raising and Bardwell village is often host to an event in aid of the mill. Indeed, only the day before, Enid had hosted a rock 'n' roll picnic. Oliver, a Ruston & Hornsby agricultural steam traction engine owned by the family, is also used for fund raising including 'traction engine driving days', where members of the public can learn to drive him. Current fund raising is going towards the 192 shutters needed for the sails at a total cost for materials of £4,800. It is hoped to raise the money by getting each individual shutter sponsored at a cost of £25 each.

Also in evidence at the mill is some tower scaffolding, which not only gives access for maintenance to the underside of the fan stage, but makes it easier to replace a rotten window frame.

The mill has a bakery attached which had been in daily use to help with fund raising. Now it is used two or three days a week by Mick the Baker, who is well known for his band, and previously ran the Swan Bakery in Garboldisham. (Dominic & Linda Grixti)

#### SWILLAND STEAM MILL

Application has been made for the conversion of the former steam mill at Swilland to seven holiday apartments. The mill was erected in 1901 adjacent to the post windmill, and extended by one

bay in the 1930's. Empty of machinery, in recent years it has been used as a studio and gallery by Bernard Rooke. The mill retains much of its original character, with decorative brickwork, cast iron windows and a lucam carried on cast iron brackets. These would be safeguarded in the proposed scheme. S.M.G. welcomes the proposal, but has asked that the steam mill chimney is repaired and its missing corbelled head replaced. (M.B.)

## **EVENTS**

**S.M.G. PUBLIC MEETING: 'PICTURES FROM THE PAST';  
SATURDAY MARCH 3rd at 7.30pm; FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE,  
FONNEREAU ROAD, IPSWICH**

The theme of this year's public meeting is mill archives. In the last few years great strides have been made in establishing a recognised repository for UK mill records, the Mills Archive Trust, and making its content widely available through the internet. The person largely responsible is our speaker, Dr Ron Cookson, who will cover the work of the Trust and mill records in general, with special reference to Suffolk.

The Friends' Meeting House is a short walk from the central shopping area, close to Christchurch Park. Please do come along to support this event and display our poster if one is enclosed.

**NATIONAL MILLS WEEKEND: MAY 12th-13th**

As usual we plan to run Herringfleet windpump on the Sunday. Look out for more National Mills Weekend details nearer the time.

**S.M.G. 30th ANNIVERSARY GARDEN PARTY: SUNDAY MAY 20th from 12 noon  
at STANTON POST MILL**

We thought we would celebrate our 30th birthday with a special social event, and what better place to hold it than Stanton mill, one of the country's finest working post mills. Food and drink in the form of a buffet lunch will be provided (some of it made with Stanton flour), and there may be a chance to see the mill grinding. Our thanks go to Dominic and Linda Grixti for agreeing to host this event.

**S.M.G. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING: SUNDAY JULY 8th at IXWORTH MILL**

Advance notice of this year's A.G.M. - don't miss it!

**THELNETHAM WORK-IN: SEPTEMBER 2007**

We have not held a work-in at Thelnetham mill for many years. There is now work to do which encourages us to hold another one, over a long weekend. The most likely time is September 15th-16th. Work would include repairs to a sail clamp; repainting the fantail; fitting a replacement 'swing link' to the fantail drive; renewing the oak bearer for the fantail drive layshaft; repainting sail shutters. All those interested please contact Dave Pearce on 0115 936 2398 (day) or 01664 822751.

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