

SUFFOLK MILLS GROUP

Newsletter

www.suffolkmills.org.uk

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It has not been a very good summer. Just as the last newsletter was completed, Chris Hullcoop suffered an accident at Syleham mill, which effectively ended the work there for this year. Soon after, Paul Joslin, the warden of Buttrum's Mill, was admitted to hospital and sadly will not be making a recovery. I have also had a health set-back, and another short spell in hospital with the threat of more to come. It just underlines the point made in the last editorial: none of us are immortal, and we really do need new faces and new energy on the S.M.G. committee.

Our visit to Stansfield mill in September was very enjoyable, with the usual hospitality from owners Gerry and Theresa Kane. Also enjoyable was the Herringfleet open day on October 7th: although there was little wind, proceedings were enlivened by a photo-shoot of a scantily-clad model posing on a sail! We were promised a photograph but sadly it has yet to materialise.

Brian Flint has risen to the challenge to write a piece to mark our 30th anniversary, and you can read it inside. The next issue is of course our 100th, and I would ask if you can make a special effort to pen a contribution, to make it a bumper issue. There is now very little newsletter material in reserve.

Forthcoming mill events are summarised below. The next newsletter will appear in February.

SMG social evening, Ipswich	Saturday December 1st
SMG public meeting, Ipswich	Saturday March 1st 2008
SPAB Mills Section meeting, London	Saturday March 8th 2008

Mark Barnard

REMINISCENCES OF A COUNTRY MILLER (9)

Harold Hitchcock

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

To return now to the subject of old time milling, which I have endeavoured to sketch in non-technical language. Apart from some experiments in the dressing of the millstones, there does not seem to have been much change until the 1880's. Round about this time the importation of foreign milled flour, chiefly from Hungary, being of a much better colour than that produced by stones in this country, gradually forced millers to adopt a more gradual system of grinding, to meet with this competition from abroad. The superior colour and bloom of the foreign milled flour was one reason only for the favour it gained among bakers. This flour

being produced from harder and drier wheat than our native grown possessed a strength and stability that our native grown wheat generally lacks. In the baking process it absorbed more water and produced a loaf that certainly pleased the eye and, therefore, was generally sought after.

In a rather pathetic attempt to hold their trade I believe some millers tried to use a proportion of the strong hard imported wheat but, as no conditioning process was known at that time, those who used the millstones only, found it was impossible to produce a flour ground by stones that could compete with the imported article.

Those millers who did survive, and who retained their trade, found it necessary to adopt a kind of stone-cum-roller system. Instead of producing all the flour possible in one grinding on the stones, what was known as 'high grinding' was adopted whereby a much smaller quantity of flour was produced in the first operation but a good quantity of middlings or semolina was made.

In this way the millstone was being used to perform similar work to the 'break' rolls in the roller system, the aim being to open up the wheat berry and reduce the endosperm to granular particles capable of being eventually ground into flour. Gradual reduction is perhaps the 'key' to present day roller milling and it is indeed interesting to see how almost unconsciously this generation of millers, who believed so wholeheartedly in the millstone as the perfect tool for all grain grinding, were gradually carrying out the evolution to roller milling.

After this 'high grinding' by stones, the middlings tailing over at the first dressing operation were treated on an early type of purifier and the purified middlings ground in one or two operations on rolls which, by the way, were first of porcelain and not of chilled steel as are now used. About this time too, the first silk covered centrifugal made its appearance and many small mills, using a purifier, double set of rolls and a centrifugal, produced a very passable flour. Probably no two millers used just about the same methods, each having their pet theories. Weird and wonderful contraptions were used for the conveyance of stock from one machine to another and, on such rough and ready plans, the skill of the miller had full play. All the craftsmanship they possessed was needed for the erection and running of such mills and I imagine one miller would have been 'quite at sea' on another miller's plant. Yet, for several years, they managed to retain their customers and often little isolated plants in Suffolk villages had a useful trade with the quickly expanding metropolis.

By the time the 1890's were reached, however, the increasing number of roller plants at the ports, as well as a large number of country roller plants, gradually forced these combined stone and roller plants out of existence, so far as flour production was concerned. The superior colour and baking qualities of the roller mill flour could not be successfully met by the old timers and, where they stubbornly refused to turn over to the new method, their name died out as millers of flour. My own father who commenced business at Rattlesden Mills in 1883, was alive to the trend of the times and, early in the 1890's, installed a small roller plant with the result that a very modest part of the great

flour milling operations of the country as a whole, is still performed on the same premises.

One pleasing aspect of the position outlined above is that these old type millers did not have to close their doors when forced out of the flour milling business. Many of them had previously been carrying on a mixed business and now with an increasing population in the manufacturing centres, as well as in the metropolis, the need was for more stock to be raised to provide meat for the towns. As farmers increased their head of stock, so more of their own oats, beans, peas and barley was consumed on the farms and, before these cereals could be usefully fed to stock, it needed the miller's service in grinding them into meal. The millstones that hitherto had ground wheat for flour were turned on to this different class of work, known as 'farmer's grist'. No fortunes were made at this type of milling for, until the First World War, the charge was a modest one shilling per coomb and, besides grinding, it involved delivery back to the farmer and, in some cases, had to be first collected from the farm. A very well earned shilling I have always felt it to be! During more recent years with the advent of balanced rations, most of such millers have, by adding a geyser mixer and perhaps a corn cutter, considerably increased the scope of their business and, until rationing came along during the Second World War, were kept busy and at least managed to show the wolf at the door a bold front. Varying sorts of balanced rations for poultry, pigs and dairy cattle are now the order of the day and, while the provender miller must purchase his wheatfeed from a flour miller, much of the other ingredients required such as barley and maize meal, can be produced on his own stones or grinders from the actual raw materials.

THIRTY YEARS ON Brian Flint

On Sunday May 20th Suffolk Mills Group celebrated their 30th anniversary with a garden party at Stanton post mill. The inaugural meeting was held at Woodbridge tide mill on 28th May 1977 when sixteen people attended. A committee was elected, two of whom, Mark Barnard and Chris Hullcoop, still hold executive posts. The following year the A.G.M. was again held in the tide mill since when a number of venues have served including the Museum of East Anglian Life at Stowmarket, Bardwell tithe barn and various wind and watermills around the county.

At the inaugural meeting it was agreed that the committee would draft a constitution setting out the aims and objectives of the Group. This was done and, with small modifications, has been adhered to since.

In June 1977 Peter Dolman compiled the first newsletter of 8 pages. Items included Buttrum's Mill in Woodbridge, Herringfleet drainage mill, Eastbridge windpump and Ramsey post mill in Essex. The text was typewritten and the few illustrations were from line drawings. The first photographic illustrations appeared in Issue 2 the following September, compiled by Mark Barnard. Since then the publication has thrived, usually appearing three times a year and often stretching to 16 or more pages. Newsletter No.100 will

appear in the New Year and all but two issues have been under Mark's editorship. As time has passed the quality of production has improved with advances in technology, this being particularly noticeable in the reproduction of photographs. Contents have ranged across the whole milling spectrum, mostly relating to Suffolk, and provide a valuable resource for mill enthusiasts and researchers.

In furthering interest in mills the Group has held public meetings annually, during the winter, with local input and often speakers from outside the county covering a wide variety of milling subjects. These have been held at several different venues in Ipswich. Also, yearly in December the Group has hosted social evenings for members to watch slides, and latterly video films, and catch up with mill news in the county. The Group also arranges visits to wind, water and more modern mills, these usually being in private ownership and not normally easily accessible.

A way in which Suffolk Mills Group has been able to assist mill owners (and thus the mills themselves) has been the provision of grants towards repair work and materials. The Group's finances, although healthy, are naturally quite modest so aid is usually directed to those owners who are doing the work themselves. With a small repair job, with the owner and friends providing the labour, a few hundred pounds will purchase necessary materials to make the project viable.

Another way the Group has helped mills is by members, often from the committee, undertaking repair and restoration work themselves. This has often been during organised 'work-ins' which might last from a weekend up to two weeks. In the past these have notably occurred at Thelnetham and Stanton windmills but since the untimely death of our secretary, Peter Dolman, in 2002 less has been able to be done although Chris Hullcoop still manages to beetle away, usually single-handed, on various projects such as the new roof and other work on Burgh mill between 2001 and 2004.

Which brings me to the question 'What of the future?'. Our committee are all getting older - obviously - but with three of the six members in their seventies and only one under fifty it begs the question of how long the committee can continue without an injection of new blood to organise events, make decisions on grants, respond to planning applications, produce newsletters, collect subscriptions and manage finances.

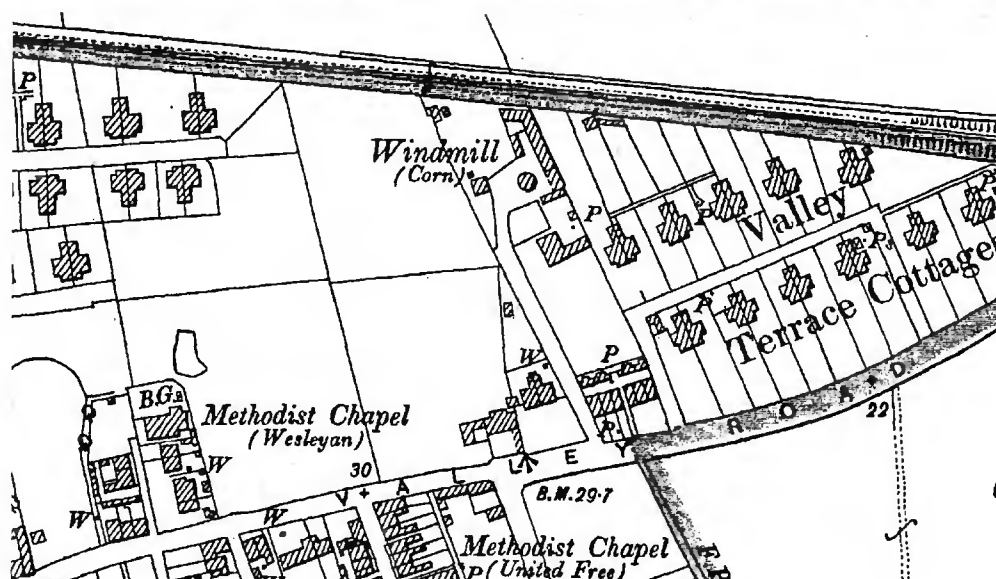
It would be a great pity if the Group were to fold after so many years good work but without new people with new ideas my fear is that this may happen before long. The Group holds an extensive archive of mill material which, were it to cease, would need to be re-housed, probably in the local records office with the possibility that the information therein might not be so easily accessible in future.

This may be seen as a plea for new committee members and I suppose it is but one important proviso is that anyone considering offering their services should live in Suffolk (or possibly north Essex) so as to be able to get to meetings without difficulty. These are held at committee members' homes at two or three month intervals on a rota basis.

MILLS ON THE MAP

The featured mill is the fine smock formerly standing in Leiston. The 1904 25-inch map extract (not to scale) shows the mill in a small yard, with outbuildings on three sides, and the mill house to the south. It stood to the north-east of the town centre, close to the Aldeburgh railway line. The photograph shows clearly the outbuildings, with the mill house on the extreme right. The two buildings on the left do not seem to tally with the map, and may have been built subsequently.

The mill was built c.1840 by Collins; the tithe map of 1841-2 records Samuel Collins as owner and when auctioned in 1849 it was described as belonging to the late Henry Collins, millwright, of Melton. In the 1890's auxiliary steam power was installed by the last miller, Henry James Lambert. It was demolished in 1917.



LAST OF THE GREAT DERELICTS (4) Bob Paterson

LELLEY TOWER MILL, EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE

Since writing the latest 'Last of the Great Derelicts' Lucy and I visited probably the least written about derelict - this time in the East Riding of Yorkshire. Lelley tower mill is close to the village of Elstronwick, some six miles east of Hull, and with an adjacent chimney dominates the flat countryside for miles around. The mill stands in a farmyard just off a small country lane (Mill Lane) with a row of cottages. The whole site feels derelict and the windmill itself is a sad sight.

The mill was built in 1790 (according to the listing description) for milling cereals. It was probably raised in height during the 19th century to the six storeys it is today. It is not known when the mill ceased work. It is marked 'Lelley Windmill (corn)' on an 1892 map which would indicate it was still working at that time. Since then, bit by bit, it has lost more and more of its original charm. It was a very attractive mill in its heyday. The tarred red brick tower was surmounted by a fine ogee cap and four double shuttered patent sails. It was very similar in design to Lincolnshire windmills and had a gallery around the second floor level.

Amazingly enough, the mill is still complete below the curb. The tar has mostly worn off, exposing the brickwork which is now beginning to look in pretty bad shape. As for the interior, I'd have to be pretty reckless to even consider going inside the mill. The closest we got was to see the ground floor which is now used as a pig sty - bedecked with bundles of hay. You can see a hurst frame with a set of stones and the mill is unique in boasting four pairs of stones on three different floors.

Roy Gregory recounted what remains above in his book 'East Yorkshire Windmills' published by Charles Skilton Ltd in 1985. To quote:

The wallower survives and the down shaft passes to the spur wheel on the third floor. The spur wheel drives two pairs of stones at this level and a third cog which takes power upwards to a grain cleaner on the fifth floor. A belt drive from a pulley mounted on top of the spur wheel drives a vertical shaft on which the governors are mounted on the floor below. These governors control the tentering to the main stone floor.

A fourth cog meshes with the spur wheel to take power via a vertical shaft down to the ground floor, driving various items of equipment on its way. It is also connected by bevel gears to the external drive pulley. On the second floor this down shaft drives a third pair of stones, connected by a belt, which stones are controlled by their own governors. On the first floor it provides power for a dresser and on the ground floor, a fourth pair of stones, again connected by a belt drive.

One imagines the tests of time have taken their toll the further up the tower you go. I was joking with a friend the other day, saying I would only consider having a look if I could be winched down from a low flying helicopter!



Lelley mill (August 2007)

What are clearly visible, however, are the iron windshaft and a four-armed cast iron cross where the sails were once fixed. The ogee cap and wooden brakewheel have long disintegrated, as has the fantail, although there are some remnants of winding and striking gear.

One wonders if there's any future for a mill like this. Would any money be available to do a holding operation? Removal of the windshaft and any extraneous visible machinery for safe storage would be needed, as well as covering the exposed hole at the top

of the tower with a tarpaulin and boarding up the window and door openings. All openings are unprotected and it's a matter of time before the machinery crashes within the tower. Deterioration is inevitable, but it would be sad to see the mill fall further into dereliction.

Restoring the mill to full working order would be a monumental and expensive task. One wonders if there is much point doing this. There aren't many restored windmills in this county. Only one, at Skidby, and a fine mill it remains to this day. The interesting windmills at Keyingham, Hutton Cranswick and Garton are at least 'safe' for the time being. Lelley is not.

Oddly enough, as derelict as this mill is, it was the one windmill I was looking forward to seeing over and above all the other tower mills in the region. Most of them are either house-converted or shells.

NEWS

PROGRESS HALTED AT SYLEHAM MILL

Some of you will have heard of my unfortunate accident at Syleham mill on 22nd July in which I broke my arm. It was a classic accident. I untied the ladder to move it around the roundhouse and then went to lunch. When I returned I had forgotten the ladder was untied and down I went. Fortunately Mark Barnard who was there to help drove me to Ipswich hospital. They asked if I had any medical conditions. I said "Yes, stupidity, can you treat it?" They said no!



Chris Hullcoop returns to rig a temporary cover on Syleham mill for the winter - this time making sure the ladder is tied! (14th October)

I was six weeks in plaster and I naively thought I would be back at work in three weeks; it's more likely to be six months. With winter fast approaching we have now covered the exposed part of the roof with polythene sheet.

I had cut the five 10ft by 5ft aluminium sheets into 20 triangular sheets to fit the steep cone constructed to form a roof to cover from the top ring of the roundhouse roof to the top of the post. I managed to fit just over half of these before my trouble. The finished effect can be seen from the completed side. The roundhouse will have a unique appearance, the roof consisting of a shallow cone with a steep cone on top. Someone said it reminded them of the Roman Catholic cathedral in Liverpool by architect Sir Basil Spence and known by the locals there as Paddy's wigwam! (C.H.)

BUTLEY MILLS CONVERTED

In the June 2005 newsletter we reported that a planning application had been made for the conversion of the former mill buildings at Butley into five holiday apartments. The work was completed in 2006, allowing the accommodation to open for the 2007 season. Apart from the addition of two lucams to add visual interest, change has been kept to a minimum. The pattern of window and door openings has been retained, including a number of the cast iron windows which now have new timber casements behind. It is also pleasing to see that the brickwork has not been unnecessarily repaired or repointed. At the rear, an extensive area of decking overlooks the mill pond. On part of the ground floor is a display of milling by-gones. The building is still owned by the Hewitt family, who closed the milling business in 2001.



Butley Mills (November 2007)

TIDE MILL LOTTERY BID UP-DATE

After considerable delays due to the need for an Environmental Impact Assessment, Suffolk Coastal District Council resolved to approve the planning and listed building applications in August. English Heritage had expressed concern over the visual impact of the proposed decking walkway around the side and back of the wheelhouse, allowing access from a new door in the side of the lean-to outhouse on the river elevation. This is an important part of the scheme as it provides an extra fire exit and achieves good visitor circulation. Following a letter of support from S.M.G., and some changes to the design, the objection was withdrawn.

It has now been decided to renew the waterwheel which is steadily deteriorating and becoming out of balance. The cast iron wallower, which is severely worn but serviceable, will also be renewed to ensure the long-term objectives of the work. The flour dresser will be repaired to show visitors how it functioned, but it is not considered practical or necessary to fully restore it. The specialist engineer has specified the electrical equipment needed for the provision of supplementary power including a 30 h.p. motor with a gearbox and clutch.

The drawings for the new mitre gates for the mill pond inlet have been completed and specified for fabrication in highly durable ekki timber with greenheart posts. A simple mechanism comprising heavy weights suspended in tubes will ensure that the gates close when the tide begins to fall.

The work needed to comply with food safety legislation, so that flour can be sold for human consumption, has been agreed. A study into milling potential has indicated that three one-hour milling sessions on consecutive days twice a month should be sufficient to empty a full corn bin (one tonne).

The cost of the works contained in the lottery bid has now been estimated at just under £1M. As the H.L.F. cannot offer more than 90%, this leaves at least £100,000 for the Trust to find. The Stage 2 submission to the lottery will be made early in 2008, by when the Trust will need to show that it is likely to be able to raise the £100,000 sum. (M.B.)

NEWS FROM BUTTRUM'S MILL

A disappointing season in terms of visitor numbers was made worse by the news that the warden, Paul Joslin, was admitted to hospital at the beginning of August. He was subsequently diagnosed with a brain tumour which has been deemed inoperable, and has now been transferred to Aldeburgh community hospital. This was Paul's tenth year as warden, during which time he has been a fine servant to the mill as well as overcoming other serious illness. We send him our very best wishes.

Fortunately, Keith Burton, one of the small band of dedicated volunteer helpers at the mill, was able to man it for the remainder of the season. Keith now plans to use the mill for the promotion of wholefoods, using a tabletop electric crusher to mill small quantities of organic wheat to order. With a fair wind (pardon the pun) this could help to give the mill a new lease of life as a visitor attraction. (M.B.)

ARNOLD'S MILL, OULTON

I was recently contacted by a mill enthusiast from Northamptonshire, who could not find the truncated tower of Arnold's Mill (Grid Ref 502946) when walking along the river bank from Skepper's Mill (502936). Recalling the threat of demolition back in 2000 (see Newsletter 77), I decided to investigate.

It is an easy and pleasant walk to the river from Oulton church, which itself is worth a visit (Norman, formerly cruciform plan, Grade I). The surviving piers of Skepper's Mill, a skeleton smock long gone, lie on a small mound just to the south of where the path meets the river. Heading north along a very overgrown path, I reached a cleared, 'improved' area, newly sown with grass. Beyond was a new pump, enclosed by iron railings, with a nameplate 'Oulton Share Pumping Station'. Of Arnold's Mill, and the small brick pumphouse which adjoined it, there was no trace.

It does seem a pity that substantial remnants of Broadland's pumping mills, visible from the river, can be removed with apparent impunity. Although not listable, they are nevertheless of local interest, especially in the context of a National Park based on Broads and linking waterways. Fortunately I have several good slides of it, taken when we visited in 1978 on the S.M.G. boat trip to the drainage mill sites in this area. By way of compensation we publish the fine view taken by Stanley Freese in 1937, which also shows an interesting-looking corrugated iron shed and, for good measure, the derelict tower of Burgh St Peter mill on the opposite bank. Those were the days!

While in the area I also checked on the tower mill stump at Somerleyton (480959). Fortunately this still survives. (M.B.)



Arnold's Mill in 1937 (photo: Stanley Freese)

EVENTS

S.M.G. SOCIAL EVENING: SATURDAY DECEMBER 1st, from 7.30pm, at THE QUAKER MEETING HOUSE, FONNEREAU ROAD, IPSWICH

We return to the Quaker Meeting House (aka Friends' Meeting House) in central Ipswich (close to Christchurch Park) for this year's social get-together. The theme will be mill videos and DVD's, and Bob Paterson has been tasked with obtaining some of the best from around the country. We also have two further video records of the late Peter Dolman, and hopefully some film of the work at Syleham this year (although sadly the camera was not running when Chris fell off his ladder!).

As on previous occasions we will supply some eats and liquid refreshment, but please bring along some more if you can. Also, you are welcome of course to bring your own videos or DVD's.

S.M.G. PUBLIC MEETING: SATURDAY MARCH 1st 2008

This winter's public meeting, in Ipswich, will feature Luke Bonwick as the guest speaker. Full details in the next newsletter.

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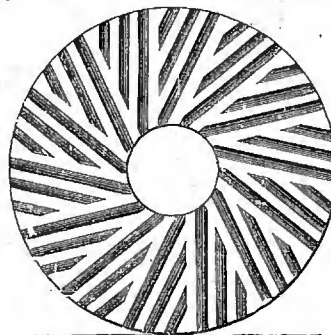
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