

OBITUARY

Philip Francis Dacre Barrett-Lennard
24th October 1947 – 6th December 2013

Vincent Pargeter

It is sad to report the death of Philip Barrett-Lennard, who became a keen member of the Section as a young man, and went on to become a millwright and mill owner.

I first met Philip on a Section Mill Tour when he was in his 20s, and was impressed by his interest in mills and all things mechanical. He had already dismantled and stored the remains of Chinnor post mill in Oxfordshire, which was being demolished to make room for housing. He originally intended to rebuild Chinnor mill in his parents' garden in Essex, but his parents weren't keen on the idea and vetoed it!

I stayed with Philip and his parents in Rickling, Essex and saw Chinnor Mill, then in a barn nearby at Henham. We also visited the watermill at Great Bardfield which Philip had got working for the owners, Mr and Mrs Turner. I remember him phoning the Turners to get the by-pass gate closed, and when we went there, he was able to start the mill and we did a bit of wheat grinding.



Philip shaping a curb segment with an adze at Stelling Mill in 1968
Picture - Vincent Pargeter

Philip came of an aristocratic family, which once owned Belhus Park near Aveley in Essex. His father was a vicar, retired by the time I knew him, but Philip was not attracted to a life of the cloth. Rather, he spent his boyhood at the local blacksmith's forge and agricultural engineering business run by the Sell family, at Ugley near Rickling. He learned a lot by watching old craftsmen at work, and would spend hours chatting and asking questions, despite shivering with cold in the unheated workshops.

Mr and Mrs Barrett-Lennard decided that Philip needed a 'proper' job, so he started work at the Tax Office at Bishop's Stortford. I was in a similar position as a bank clerk in Rainham, Kent, but both of us wanted to follow our dream of working on mills. We decided to join forces and start a millwright company, much to the concern of our parents!

Our first job was to repair the curb of Stelling Minnis Mill in Kent, which was then still working. We did the job cheaply

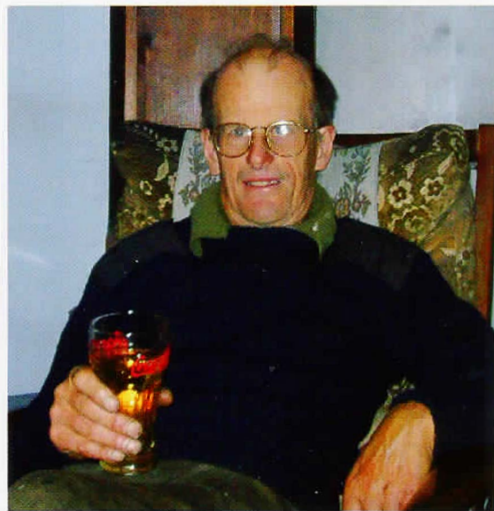
in holiday time for the miller, Alec Davison, and the mill continued working until Alec's death in January 1971.

After leaving our desk jobs for good, we worked on the windmill at St Margaret's Bay near Dover in the summer of 1969. This involved re-boarding the cap, repairing the tower, getting the fantail working, fitting a few shutters and a complete repaint. This was accomplished, and we got our first taste of working in winter as the job progressed.

Work continued to flow in, two new sails and a weather beam for Mountnessing Mill, and a new cap for White Roding Mill, both in Essex. At Draper's Mill, Margate, we got the mill working, fitting a fantail, two new sweeps and repairing the machinery. We painted Stracey Arms Mill in Norfolk, and at Billingford, also in Norfolk, we re-boarded the cap, repainted it and got the fantail working. Sometimes we worked separately, e.g. me in Kent repairing the cap and tower boarding at Charing Mill, and Philip in Essex repairing the cap, windows and doors at Thaxted Mill. We got together again to repair the cap of Herne Mill, Kent, and also to make and fit new sweeps and fantail to Patcham Mill in Sussex.

After three years, we decided that there was enough work around to form two separate firms, me to work in Kent and Sussex, and Philip in East Anglia. Our last job together was Upminster Mill in Essex, where we rebuilt the cap and fitted four new sails and stocks.

Philip was joined by Adrian Colman, and they saved Garboldisham Mill, the last post mill in Norfolk. Although the post was good, the entire trestle was rotten beyond repair. In addition, the brick piers had been undermined by rabbits and one had started to heel over. Philip supported the mill body with timber props in the traditional way, and renewed all the cross-trees and quarter-bars as well as rebuilding the piers on new foundations. Due to the mill's severe lean, it had become misaligned with the piers, and had actually to be moved a little on steel rollers to get it back to its proper place. Tackling a job like this with minimal equipment requires courage, a good grasp of the forces involved, and an ability to solve problems. Philip had all of these attributes, and proved himself a true millwright in the old sense of the term.



Philip enjoying a beer at home in 2009
Picture - Vincent Pargeter

Obituary - Philip Barrett-Lennard - continued

Meanwhile, at Chinnor, a local group had set themselves up to rebuild the post mill on a new site, fairly close to the original one. This group included Chris Wallis (son of Barnes Wallis of dambuster bomb fame), who was also a millwright. Philip gave the stored materials of the mill to the group, and it returned to Oxfordshire where it stands today: the last example of a post mill with three cross-trees and six quarter-bars.

Philip continued work at Thaxted, getting the fan working and fitting new sails and stocks. He then joined up with John Lawn of Caston Mill in Norfolk, and they formed the firm Lennard and Lawn. One of their early jobs was restoring the drainage mill on St Benet's Level, opposite Thurne Mill. This involved a major cap and fantail rebuild as well as new stocks, clamps and sails. Time was a factor in this job, and I made up the whips and sail framing in kit form as a sub-contractor for them to assemble, paint and fit.

Philip and John worked on many of the Norfolk drainage mills including Thurne Dyke, Hunsett, Stracey Arms, Turf Fen, How Hill etc. They also repaired Norfolk corn mills like West Winch, Denver, Paston etc.

Eventually, Philip and John decided to work separately in their own areas, Philip repairing the ancient Great Gransden Mill. About this time, Philip purchased Clavering North Mill and used it as a workshop as well as a dwelling, but it was not ideal. After a brief period milling flour on a millstone hursting driven by a combine harvester engine, he decided to move to Norfolk and retire from millwrighting.

Philip purchased the Six Mile House on the River Bure, accessed from the A47 'Acle Straight'. This was a former marshman's house, totally derelict and literally falling down.

Undaunted, Philip underpinned and re-roofed the building, turning it into a home again. During the work, Philip discovered the remains of a mediaeval salt works, and researched its history.



*Garboldisham mill 1972 after Philip renewed the
wrestle and straightened the buck..
Picture - Vincent Pargeter*

While living at the Six Mile House, Philip met and married Joan (Josephine), the wedding taking place at Upton church. Philip and Joan lived at the Six Mile House, Philip doing a little reed cutting and farming organic wheat on the adjacent land. Joan's main interest was digging, collecting and selling old bottles and other artefacts found in Victorian rubbish dumps. Their house contained various fine examples of bottles, dentifrice jars etc from the Victorian era, all finely decorated, as well as antique furniture. Philip installed a fine Victorian coal-fired cooking range, decorated with tiles, which Joan used for cooking as well as heating. Philip and Joan went on long trips to visit Philip's relatives, to bottle fairs and rallies, and also collected stationary engines and other items of interest.

The Six Mile House was wonderful place for wildlife, with fine country views, but remote and not easy of access. As time went on, Joan began to hanker for somewhere easier for shopping and visiting friends. Philip, although reluctant to leave, was also starting to feel his age, and to slow down. Eventually, they moved to a house in Fleggburgh and sold the Six Mile House.

Philip had been suffering from thyroid problems for some time, and began to lose the use of his legs and Joan could not cope. His illness was not properly diagnosed, but after a spell in a care home, he was admitted to the James Paget hospital in Great Yarmouth. He died of a lung infection, and was buried at Fleggburgh Church on the 2nd January 2014.

Vincent