



Friends of Lowfield Heath Windmill

November 1987

Newsletter No 1

Dear Friends,

This is our first newsletter and we enclose an account of our progress so far. We are writing this just after the Great Storm- the worst storm since the windmill was built- and we dismantled it just two months ago! Would it have survived? Was it built soon after the Great Wind of 1703, when over 400 mills, including the one at Charlwood, were blown down or caught fire?

There is a letter from one Thomas Foster, dated 13th January 1703/4, which illustrates how severe that storm was in this area:-

"Sir,

In answer to the letter you sent me, relating to the late Great Wind, the Calamity was universal about us, great numbers of vast trees were blown down, and some broken quite asunder in the middle, tho' of a very considerable bigness. Two Windmills were blown down, and in one there happened a remarkable Providence, and the story thereof may perhaps be worth your observation, which is viz. That the Miller of Charlwood Mill, not far from Reigate, hearing in the night the Wind blew very hard, arose from his bed and went to his Mill, resolving to turn it towards the Wind, and set it to work, as the only means to preserve it standing; but on the way feeling for the key of the Mill, he found he had left it at his Dwelling House, and therefore returned thither to fetch it, and coming again to the Mill, found it blown quite down, and by his lucky forgetfulness saved his life, which otherwise he most inevitably would have lost."

Incidentally, the wind was said to have been salt-laden within thirty miles of the coast and farmers complained that their land was ruined.

Now back to the present. Please remember we still need volunteers, especially to clean and sort bricks from the round-house, which will be rebuilt this winter. Contact Jean Shelley (862646) if you can help. You can also contact Jean with any other queries. Peter James is the man on the spot, who organizes volunteers on many jobs. You can contact him on 540705.

Those of you who missed the A.G.M. on 19th February 1987 might like to know that the Committee Members are:-

- Brendon Sewill: Chairman. Vice Chairman of the Charlwood Society.
- Peter James: Secretary. Mechanical engineer from Crawley.
- Jean Shelley: Treasurer. Committee member of the Charlwood Society.
- Sybil Barnby: Our representative from Lowfield Heath.
- Frank Gregory: From Brighton, Frank knows more about windmills and their restoration than anyone else in Surrey or Sussex!
- Ted Henbery: Ted is leading the restoration of Ifield Water Mill and lives in Crawley.
- Ron Martin: Secretary of the Sussex Industrial Archaeology Society. A quantity surveyor from Hove.
- Gera'd Moss: Past secretary of the Surrey Archaeological Society, from Redhill.

Please pass this letter on to someone you know who might like to become a Friend and ask them to send £1 to Jean Shelley (Mrs. J.M. Shelley) 4 Norwood Hill Road, Charlwood.

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Copied from
a postcard
dated
1906

The Mill, Lowfield Heath



November '87: THE STORY SO FAR

The development of Gatwick Airport resulted in the end of the village of Lowfield Heath, once part of the parish of Charlwood. Only the Church and the windmill were left. In the early 1980's, the Recreation Ground was sold for a large sum, which became The Thomas Alexander Mason Trust. As the interest from this money had to be spent within the old parish boundary, the Trustees were approached to see if they would be willing to help in the restoration of the windmill. They agreed in principle and a Windmill Committee was formed by members from the Charlwood Society, the Sussex Industrial Archaeological Society and the Surrey Industrial History Group. Some plans and costs were worked out and the owners were approached. No, they were not willing to allow public access!

The Committee had to think again. Was there any chance of moving the mill in order to save it, as it would obviously deteriorate if just left as it was? The owners were quite willing for a responsible body to take it away if planning permission were given. The Open Air Museums in both Sussex and Kent were approached. Both would have liked a windmill but did not have enough money to move and erect it. Could we move it to Charlwood so that Mason's Trust would be able to help? That seemed to be the only solution.

Where? That was the next problem. The Recreation Ground was not suitable. A notice in the local papers resulted in several kind offers, including one from the Gatwick Zoo and Aviaries at Russ Hill. The field next to the Zoo was rather low-lying ground but there were several advantages, including the car park and toilets necessary for opening it to the public.

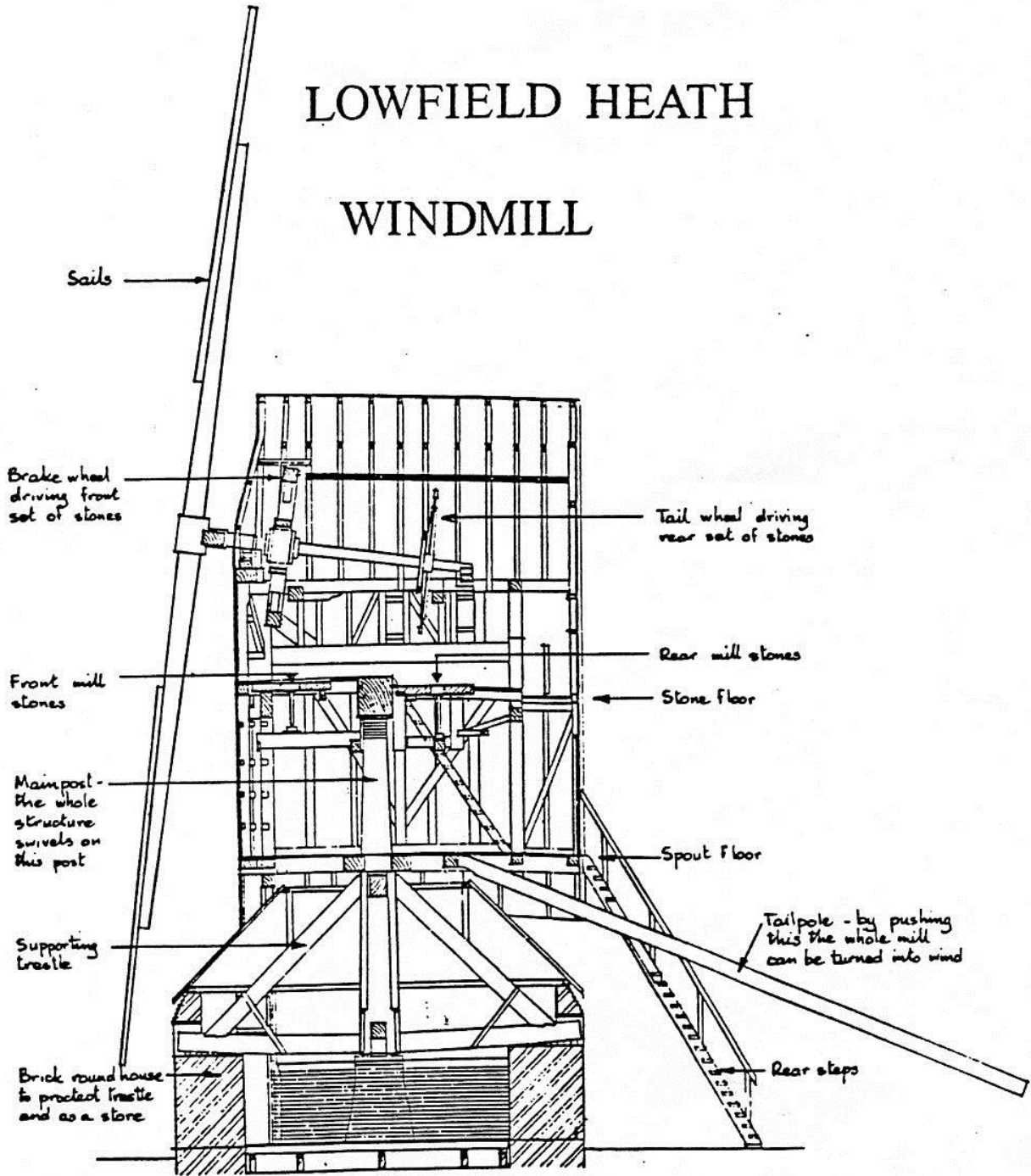
More estimates. It would cost £80,000. We had to have firm promises for at least two thirds of the money before we could start. We managed to obtain this in February and, at our first A.G.M. were able to announce the decision that we considered it right to go ahead with moving and restoring the windmill.

We knew that professional help would be needed for most of the work, but that some could be done by volunteers. July was an exciting month. In beautiful sunny weather, the scaffolding was erected. On July 6th, the West Sussex Rural Engineering Company with a crane lifted the roof off the mill and on to a low-loader. The next day it was the turn of the windshaft assembly with brake wheel and tail wheel. During the following days the front was removed. This is the largest section, 11ft. x 18ft. Then the ladder was taken off and the back, and the side panels, upper and lower. It was the turn of the crown tree next, it is a horizontal timber 2ft. x 2ft. x 11ft., one piece of solid oak and the heart of the mill. That was followed by the sheer trees, then the post itself after the joints had been eased open. That left the quarter bars and the cross trees. The latter were moved on July 30th and the crane went home. All the timber had been carted to Charlwood and only the brick round house remained. This had to be taken apart by volunteers and the bricks taken to the Zoo. One big bonfire and the site was vacated on September 13th.

During this winter, the timbers will be repaired and we hope to put in new foundations and start rebuilding the roundhouse. All should be ready for re-erection of the mill in the summer of 1988. In 1989 or 1990, we hope to erect the sails, money permitting. Then it will be possible to grind corn.

Our task is a very unusual one. We are privileged to be able to save a post mill, of which there are less than fifty left in Britain. Only a very few of these are working mills and only two other post mills have been moved this century. It is encouraging that so many problems have been solved and so much progress made already.

LOWFIELD HEATH WINDMILL



SECTIONAL VIEW