



Friends of Lowfield Heath Windmill

Newsletter No 21

Spring 2006

News from the Committee.

The last year has seen some changes in and around the mill and we continue working towards getting the machinery to the position where it can be used to grind flour. The gearing requires alignment and the balancing of the sweeps is still outstanding. Work on the construction of the new bolter is progressing well although some mechanical drawings are still required. Most of the metal work has been fabricated and fitted. The pulley and the rotating drum are almost finished and work has started on the construction of the feed hopper. It will soon be possible to move the bolter onto the stone floor of the mill body thus freeing up the roundhouse as a visitor centre again. The committee are concerned that some rot has been noted in the stocks and this is to be investigated to establish the extent of the problem.

The plots of land between the road and the Millfields housing development, including the one on which the mill stands have been put up for sale. A Millfields resident has bought one plot; the other two are, as yet, unsold. The land on which the mill stands is to some extent protected by our 99-year lease and we are waiting to see if there is any interest in this plot.

2005 Open Days were again very successful after a slow start in April and May National Mills Day when we had low visitor numbers. The remaining five days were, however, very busy especially on the Heritage Open Sunday in September. The committee has decided to increase the number of Open Days in 2006 by one and have included Heritage Open Saturday to the list. Full details can be found on page 4 and if you want even more information about the mill try our new web site, the address and a resume are also on that page.

We are experimenting this year with the use of a local flock of sheep to keep the grass surrounding the mill short. An initial trial has been successful although some fencing improvements and a water supply are needed. Needless to say, it is intended to ensure that the sheep are not there on Open Days!

The possibility of carrying out dendrochronology (tree ring dating) on some of the mill timbers to establish the age of the mill is being considered. The main problem with this is establishing suitable timbers for the work and advice is being sought. The committee is also considering the possibility of co-opting a Charlwood resident onto it in an attempt to strengthen the ties with the village. If you are, or any one you know is, interested in joining the committee, we would be very pleased to hear from you

👍 THE MILLER'S THUMB. 

Michael Yates

When I am showing visitors around Lowfield Heath Windmill, I try to include in my talk, items of a non-milling as well as a milling interest. One of these is the miller's thumb, a phrase that I bring into the conversation when describing the miller's working day on the meal floor. I point out the meal chute and say that the miller would have constantly been feeling the product from the stones as it came down this chute in order to assess its coarseness or fineness. Experience would tell him if the milling was correct and if it wasn't he had two means of altering it. He had a twist peg near him from which a piece of string went up to the stone floor and over to the shoe (or spout) feeding the grain to the stones. By turning this peg, he could alter the angle of the shoe and thus alter the rate of feed of the corn to the stones. He also had a tentering screw by which he could make small adjustments to the gap between the stones thus changing the degree of grinding. At this point I ask the visitors to imagine what happens to the miller's thumb as a result of its constant use in rubbing the flour between it and his forefinger or forefinger/second finger or the palm of his hand. If no reply is forthcoming I explain that the end of his thumb becomes flattened and bulbous and that, in the old days, a good and experienced miller could be identified by the shape of his thumb.

Now comes the chance to move away from milling by asking if anyone knows of a British fresh water fish called the miller's thumb (or bull head). I have found, in my five years as a guide, that very few people have ever heard of it. I then say it is a bottom feeding fish with a large broad head that got its name from its resemblance to the shape of the thumb of a flour miller. This digression once resulted in two visitors making a second visit to the mill and bringing with them some carefully prepared handwritten notes about the fish together with an excellent pencil drawing of it. These have now been added to my collection of milling ephemera. Incidentally, one of the earliest references to the misshapen human miller's thumb and its origin is to be found in Yarrell's "History of British Fishes", 1836, where he describes in some detail how it occurs. The earlier references going back to Chaucer's time all refer to the honesty, or rather, dishonesty of the miller, implying that he had a thumb which took more than his fair multure or toll.

3.

From our Treasurer

Accounts: We had some generous donors last year but unfortunately that means we are down some £300 on income this year. Our expenditure has been high mostly due to materials for the new bolter, plus a new video monitor. We are hoping to reduce our mowing costs by having sheep to graze the grass but of course this means money for fencing.

May we stress that all donations, however small, are most gratefully received.

Mill etchings

This rather good etching of Ashcombe mill near Lewes dates from around 1900 or maybe later. It was a unique mill, erected in 1832 and fitted with six sweeps – the only post mill in England to be equipped as such. The windshaft was a massive casting with three sockets for the sails and this assembly together with the brakewheel weighed about eleven tons; a later cause of the mill becoming very head sick and possibly aiding its collapse. Despite its six sails this mill still powered only two sets of stones, but could probably work in light winds – a distinct advantage over other mills.



John Weston ran the mill from 1832 until 1853 and from then on by the Martin family, a member of which ran Chailey South smock mill at that time. Mr C. Saunders owned the mill from 1888 until 1912 when it was taken on by the Sussex Archaeological Society, but sadly the mill collapsed in a gale during March 1916. The massive windshaft was rescued from the wreckage by Mr. John Every of the Phoenix Foundry at Lewes, but unfortunately upon his death in 1943 was cut up for scrap.

4.

The mill now has its own web site, courtesy of our Chairman Peter James who has built it on the back of his Ockley Windmill website. We hope the site will give you all the information you might require about our Open Days this year and lots more.

Please have a look at it and tell us, via the [web site email link](#), if you think we have missed anything or perhaps suggest any improvements that we could make.

The web site has LHW :-

History
Jolesfield machinery
Photo gallery
Latest News
Opening Times
Membership Form
Other Surrey Post Mills

and links to :-

The Sussex Mills Group
The Mills Archive
SPAB Mills Section
Muggeridge Collection

<http://www.ockleywindmill.co.uk/lowfieldheathwindmill.htm>

Do try and get along to see us, we are making steady progress with our restoration and we do appreciate your support and a chat about what we are doing. Even better come and help us on Sunday mornings, no special skills required, we are mostly DIYers learning as we go. Another option is to help marshal the visitors, for an hour or two on Open Days. We have some very good guides, but whilst they are busy showing people around, we need to have someone to direct people in the right direction until one of the guides is free.

If you don't have access to a computer here are the OPEN DAYS for 2006

SUN 30th APRIL 2pm-5pm
SUN 14th MAY- *National Mills Day* 10am-5pm
SUN 28th MAY 2pm - 5pm
SUN 25th JUNE 2pm - 5pm
SUN 30th JULY 2pm - 5pm
SUN 27th AUGUST 2pm - 5pm
SAT 9th SEPT *Heritage Open Day* 2pm-4.30pm
SUN 10th SEPT *Heritage Open Day* 10am-5pm

Contact: 01293 862374 or 01403 272664
or most Sunday mornings at the mill, for further details

If you would like to receive the next Newsletter by e-mail please contact mhrowgarth@aol.com

This would cut our printing and postage costs.