

The fun of book publication and the latest – *Windmills of my Mind*

Ashok Vaidya

Photos courtesy of Bob Paterson and Simon Hudson

I never know what I am going to get when I volunteer to prepare a book for publishing. This activity was started one lunchtime in a Romsey pub, back in 2010, when our HMG Christmas meeting was discussing how we could make the tremendous archival collection of Tony and Mary Yoward more accessible to the public. Maybe rashly I put my hand up to say that if members provided me with the text and images, I would lay them out as an attractive book and get it printed. Everyone liked the idea – take all the watermills in Hampshire, visit them, take recent photos and gain an update on the their current condition, and combine this with the historical records we had to make a combined reference/guide book.

Over the next three years we worked intensively to collect the information and many members of the group became involved. On my part I faced a challenge – I was competent at using Microsoft Word but at a simple level, and these books needed text boxes, indexes, lists of references, tables of content and figures and lots more, all new to me – but this was a challenge and with lots of searching on the web I taught myself how to do all these. Equally daunting were the state of some of the images, and here I did the same and learned how to use Photoshop to clean up old images, and get the colour, brightness and contrast right for printing.

The *Mills and Millers of Hampshire* – volumes 1, 2, and 3 duly appeared and we sold them on the website. Job done I thought. But it was just the beginning as the Mills Archive needed a similar process for its third research publication – *Traditional Milling Technology in the English Cement Industry 1796-1899* by Edwin Trout. It seemed natural to volunteer to do this and it started a programme of about 2 publications a year for the Archive and I am now up to 20 books.

Which brings me to the latest project, which was not for the Mills Archive, but for a lifelong windmill lover, Bob Paterson. He is well known in windmill circles even nicknamed Windmill Bob by legendary radio DJ Bob Harris with whom he worked on his radio shows. This is an autobiographical book, a history of his hobby from early childhood, through to the start of his career in the music business in the 1990s. It concludes with a chronological account of his part-time work as a millwright's assistant from March 2021, and in true muso style, a Top 10 of Windmills!

What amazed me was how early on and enduring his interest has been. To quote from the book:

One day I was taken to Outwood Common for a walk and the sight of the post mill excited me somewhat and I started waving my hands around in the air. This must have been 1974, I was aged two going on three. Mum thought my interest started on a summer holiday in East Wittering in West Sussex around the same time.



Now all children have passions which last a few months until the next great thing, but in Bob's case it endured and grew into a lifelong interest. The key factor which made this possible was the dedication of his parents – Mum in particular – to support him, by taking him on trips all around the country to look at windmills and remains of windmills. And this developed into longer planned expeditions to different counties to visit as many windmills as could be found and in many cases with repeat visits years later.



Bob with his first windmill book, Christmas 1976

As Bob writes:

Wherever my parents thought there was a windmill, I would be taken there. It was unusual for them and they were interested to go to places they probably hadn't been to before. The first windmill books I was given were Windmills by Suzanne Beedell for Christmas 1976 and R J Brown's excellent Windmills of England.

From about age 10 Bob started to keep diaries of his windmill visits and these have been a great foundation for the descriptions he gives of the trips – the details of the journey, where they stayed, what they saw, what they learned. All things you would become hazy about, but the diary retriggers the memory and allows Bob to give a direct and interesting account of what they did.

In the book he deftly combines tales of the visits with information about the various mills visited, their history and current state, with photos (178, mostly in colour) taken at the time. Again a flavour of the writing:

I enjoyed all these day trips – of course – but I was always looking forward to our next longer stretch and the focus in April 1984 was our next 'big trip', this time to Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire, and back home via Lincolnshire. Mum was back in the driving seat.

Skidby tower mill is the only restored windmill in East Yorkshire and visiting her for the first time was one of the highlights of the trip, even though at the time she was only sporting two of her four sails. Built in 1821 to replace an earlier post mill, the mill worked right up to 1966. She is now owned by the local council who have maintained and returned her to working order.

Over the next hundred pages he describes the nearly thirty trips undertaken over the next twenty years before he became involved in the restoration and preservation of windmills, when he helped the work on Wicken Windmill. (I had the pleasure of preparing Dave Pearce's book on its restoration for the Mills Archive as Research Publication 15 in 2022). As Bob describes:

Work-ins at Wicken in the early 1990s were great fun. I never confessed to being particularly skilled in millwrighting, but I was (and still am) pretty deft with the paint brush. Work-ins lasted a week and I attended most between 1991 and 1994. I became a member of the Suffolk Mills Group in 1991 and I am now their treasurer!



With his family at Wicken Windmill in July 2021
Simon Hudson

I could go on with more details and excerpts but I think this gives the flavour of this interesting and involving book. To buy a copy at £25 + P&P e-mail Bob directly on windmillbob@hotmail.com and he will send you details of how this can be paid.