

## Wilton Windmill Visit, Saturday 15 April 2023

*Carol Burdekin*

About 18 HMG members (including quite a contingent from the Longbridge area) met on a chilly, but bright, Saturday morning at Wilton Windmill, situated above the village of Wilton, nine miles south-east of Marlborough on the North Wessex Downs in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The windmill is the only working windmill in the Wessex region, and is now an Associate Member of the HMG. The Society that runs the mill kindly invited HMG members along for a visit, which is how we found ourselves standing on a not a too muddy field, gazing up at this magnificent mill, built in 1821, when the new Kennet & Avon Canal was constructed. It milled flour for local farmers until 1914, when it was left unused, becoming derelict.



*Russell Burdekin*

We were met by **Charles Baxter** who kindly made us coffee, and supplied delicious rolls, which he had made himself that morning using some of the stone-ground wholemeal flour produced at the mill. These were accompanied by a choice of two jams, one of which, the strawberry, was made last year by Charles and his wife, and was very good.



The granary, now used for presentations about the mill, with some of our group. *Keith Andrews*

The group was then split roughly into two, and the group I was in went straight to the top of the mill, a bit gingerly at first, having to navigate the vertical ladders, but easier coming down, but well worth it, as the views over the Wiltshire countryside were splendid.

Once at the top, one of the millers, **Mike Clark**, proceeded to give us a potted history of the mill, as well as pointing out and naming the implements used in the production of the milled flour.

Unfortunately, the mill was not in operation during our visit, but they do mill about twelve times a year, and their stone-ground wholemeal flour can be purchased, when available, from the shepherd's hut situated next to the windmill.

The Mill is owned by Wiltshire County Council, but run by volunteers, The Wilton Windmill Society. As mentioned, the mill was built in 1821 when the new Kennet & Avon Canal was built. Water from the old River Bedwyn was used to fill the canal, but this left five local watermills with insufficient water. Apparently, when built, Wilton Windmill was "state of the art" employing all the latest developments in windmill technology, with its machinery almost entirely made of cast iron, and according to a temporary report "universally admitted to be of a very superior construction". For further information on the history of the mill, and details of the mechanism and how it works and so on, go to [www.wiltonwindmill.co.uk](http://www.wiltonwindmill.co.uk)

It was in 1972 that the Wiltshire Historic Buildings Trust began to restore the windmill, as close as it could to its 1821 original condition, having persuaded Wiltshire County Council to buy the derelict mill. Their long term aim was to guarantee the future of the mill for succeeding generations by restoring it to a working windmill. This work took about four years, and was paid for by various contributions including one from Marlborough & Ramsbury District Council. The Society relies on donations to keep the windmill working, as there is always something that needs to be done to the fabric and the machinery to keep it in good working order, so all donations are gratefully accepted. For further information, there is an excellent family guide book on sale on site for only £1 where you will find a lot more information on the mill, and from where details for this article were obtained.

After the visit to the windmill, an added bonus was a trip to Crofton Beam Engines, as it is only about a mile from Wilton Windmill. Those of us who are not local took the opportunity of incorporating it into our visit to Wiltshire. It was a good walk, not too far, and clearly signposted. The Canal & River Trust are currently carrying out extensive work on the canal below Crofton installing electric pumps to replenish the upper reaches of the canal, the job that Crofton still occasionally does. Unfortunately, the engines were not in steam, as this was carried out the week before over the Easter weekend. Obviously, thanks to the Lottery, a lot of money has been spent on the site, and it is so well set out and has good facilities. For further information go to [www.croftonbeamengines.org](http://www.croftonbeamengines.org)

It was advertised by HMG as "a good day out", and it certainly was; I do hope everyone enjoyed it as much as I did.