

Longbridge Mill

Ruth Andrews and Ivor New

Photos by Ruth Andrews



Ruth: Having been unused for 2 years during the Covid pandemic, Longbridge Mill is suffering from an excess of reeds and nettles in its tailrace. HMG is hoping to resume milling but at present the water level backs up so much that the wheel cannot turn freely. During the winter the vegetation has died down – particularly the nettles! – so we have an opportunity to do something about it. This project, which all has to be undertaken within specific agreed guidelines, is progressing well but it has already taken several days spread over several weeks, starting in March. It has involved an ever-increasing number of volunteers, always with Ivor New directing operations; so far the cast list has consisted of Andy Fish, Eleanor Yates, Mick Edgeworth, Fred Spiers, Ian Deepprose, Rick Jones, Ruth, Keith, and Michael Andrews,



Ivor has designed a wonderful dredging tool – a large rake – which is pulled by a newly purchased winch attached to his elderly Land Rover.



The rake digs into the clumps of reeds, uproots them, and pulls the whole mass towards the bank without disturbing too much silt. Unfortunately it requires Ivor (in a full dry suit) to guide the rake while his helpers stand around on the bank operating the Land Rover and winch, and trying to pretend that they are being useful.



The trick is to stop the winch before Ivor falls off and the rake hits the bank. He then has to extract the rake so that the load of reeds land on the bank (and not back in the tailrace!). As you can see opposite there is still a lot more vegetation to clear.



This pair of goosanders are often on the island in the middle of the River Loddon, and there are plenty of swifts, swallows, or house martins darting about over the surface of the river hunting for insects; there are also wagtails which have been known to nest in the mill.

Ivor: *Wednesday 20 April:* While Ruth continued with the task of tidying and cleaning the mill following the two years of inactivity, Andy and I worked on the wheel, assuring ourselves that there was nothing seriously amiss that would stop the wheel turning. Although it was clear that the wheel was seriously out of balance, due to much of it being dry for a long time. It was also noted that many of the starts were loose and would need wedges adjusted or replaced. Additionally some of the 'sole boards' and starts have decorated badly and need replacing, the sole boards with old float boards and the starts with new ones which I'll have to make. Some work was done using the wedges available. Limited work was also done to try and find a simple way to easily control the wheel's rotational position while maintenance was undertaken, unfortunately with little success. The wheel was allowed to run and while the work done to date on the tailrace has greatly improved matters it is clear that the biggest blockage is now near its confluence with the river.



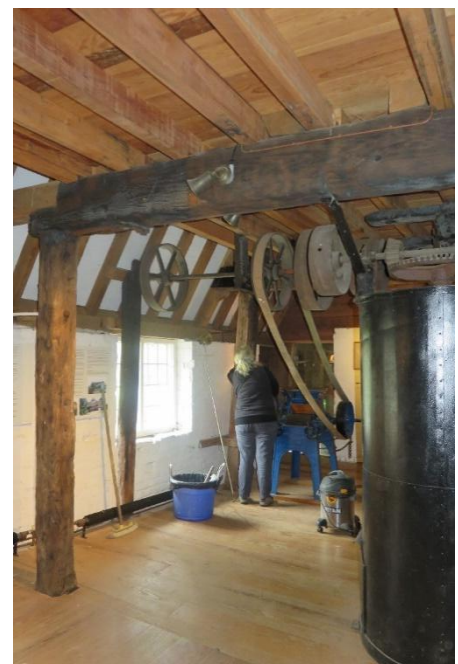
Andy and Ivor had to remove the plank on the walkway between the headrace and the wheel so that they could rescue the thin piece of plank that Andy had just dropped down an inviting gap – just at the moment when both Ivor and I had said “Mind it doesn’t ... “! If you look carefully, you can just see the hydraulic sluice which was installed when the mill was rebuilt after the fire.

The next day, Eleanor, her brother Rick Jones, and Ian Deeprise (a new member), and I successfully cleared a channel through the blockage at the confluence with the river, helped by a full flow of water as we had the wheel turning.

There is still some tidying up to be done as most of the blockage was willow boughs that were rooting in the silt. These were temporally left on the bank and still need removing. The water flow is now greater than it has been for ages but there is still a long section that needs to have reed removed to increase the width of the channel.

Eleanor adds: Ian Deeprise is a neighbour, who had worked with Jean Marc (the pub's manager) during lockdown, clearing scrub. He went home to get his waders and performed miracles with Ivor and Rick with loppers, saws, and secateurs. They cleared fallen trees, some of which had re-rooted, suckers, scrub, and all the rubbish which had washed downstream. Ian is particularly keen on getting a good view of the pub from the main road. It's not bad, but I think he'd like to widen the clearance of branches.

Eleanor removing cobwebs. Some parts of the mill are cleaned by the pub staff but it seems that they don't look up! Eleanor and Ruth have been removing 2 years' worth of cobwebs, birds' nests, and so on



Ruth: *Wednesday 27 April:* An even larger band of workers assembled at Longbridge: Ivor, Eleanor, Mick, and I were joined by Keith, Michael, Ian, and Fred Spiers. So we were able to split into groups and tackle several jobs. Fred and Ivor went inside the wheel to continue working on it, but I didn't take a picture of them. Ian, Keith, and Michael cleared the end of the tailrace where it meets the river, and cut back many overhanging branches, piling everything on the bank well back from the water.



Mick, Ivor, Fred, and Ruth dismantled the furniture of the millstone which is usually used for milling, so that it could be cleaned.

Fred and Ivor used the stones crane to lift the tun, and then the runner stone; it was covered in meal moth larvae which had to be vacuumed off.

After a very late lunch, we ran the wheel, while Ivor showed Ian and Michael around the mill.



We still have more work to do:

- The tailrace work we have done to date needs tidying up but the removal of reed to return the channel to its normal width will have to wait until the Land Rover gearbox issues have been resolved.
- Some starts and sole boards need replacing. This will involve making a new batch of starts.
- It would be good to access the mill sluices to inspect to their condition as bypass leakage is getting excessive.
- Find some grain and give the mill a full trial.

