

## (Christopher) John Silman 1934-2018

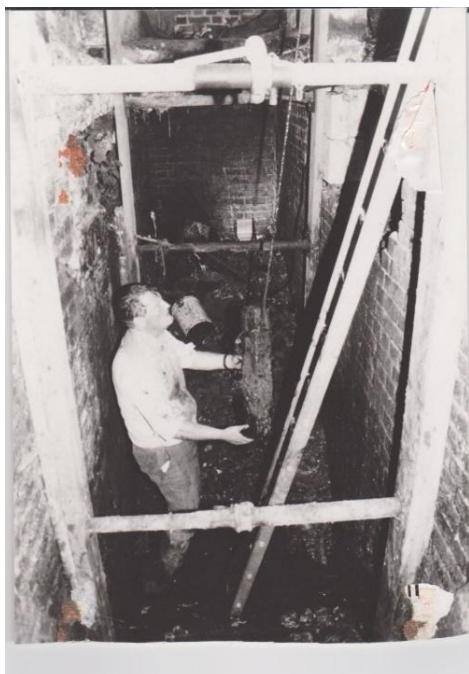
### ***Pamela Moore***

John Silman was born on 4 December 1934 at Woodcott in North Hampshire. An only child, his father was a farm manager, and John's early life in the country established his love of rural buildings such as barns and mills. After moving to Lower Upham, and being educated at the Gregg School, Southampton, John served in the Merchant Navy and Air Force. Whilst stationed on Thorney Island, he met his wife Margaret and they married in 1960. The family was completed by daughters Catherine and Rachel, and later, their beloved dog Lucky.

Margaret has two sisters and it was through one, Jean, that I first met John. I ran Christmas parties for staff children in the Naval Stores Department of Portsmouth Dockyard where I worked, and Jean would book in her nieces (John's girls) every year. John would bring them and we always chatted. I then lost touch for a few years, but when I joined Southampton University Industrial Archaeology Group (SUIAG), I recognised him from those parties!

John was a great family man, although his work as a salesman in the motor trade (latterly selling funeral limousines) often took him away from home. Once he became involved in SUIAG he would travel with copies of the Group's publications, and the joke was he could have sold igloos to Eskimos!

For many years John was a stalwart on the University of Southampton field visits, and made friends not just in the UK but also in Belgium. Although not great foreign travel enthusiasts, John and Margaret enjoyed holidays in the USA staying with Margaret's sister, Chris, who had moved there with her family.

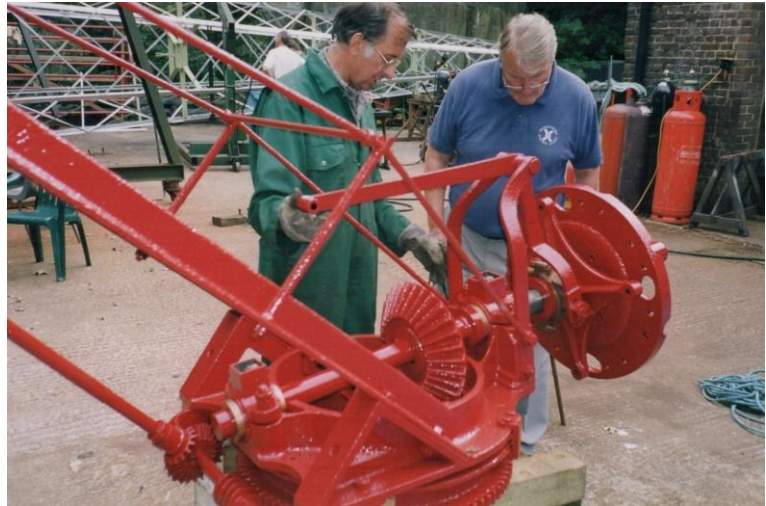


*Pamela Moore*



John was active in the SUIAG "Heavy Gang" from its inception and he would always get stuck in. The early project at Brownwich Farm investigating the wheel pit (*left*) was an example, as was the restoration of Southwick Brewhouse (*above, with the whole team*), where he could normally be seen (just!) inside the fermenting VAT cleaning years of dirt from it.

Later he moved more towards mills and, as well as renovation, enjoyed milling. He was for many years Chairman of Hampshire Mills Group, and latterly its President. Until his decline in health, John also served SUIAG (twice being chairman) and its successor Hampshire Industrial Archaeological Society (HIAS), eventually becoming its Vice President.



**John in action:**

*Left: Milling at Chase Mill, Bishops Waltham, 1999*

*Above: Inspecting the restored Crux Easton Wind Engine headgear at British Engineerium, Brighton, 2002*

*Below left: Considering the dismantled water pump at Brambridge House, 1993*

*Below: Installing a new weed screen at Wherwell Mill, 2006*

*Ruth Andrews*



The other areas of special interest in IA for John were farm buildings (he was active in the Hampshire Farm Buildings Survey) and canals. He and his family spent many happy holidays on canals, with a few falls into the water happening as part of the experience!

Away from IA, John loved cricket both as player and spectator, watching Formula 1 racing on TV, and adding to his collection of postcards,

John died on 19 January 2018. He will be much missed, and we extend our sympathy to Margaret, and to Rachel and Catherine and her family.

***William Hill (Mill News) writes:*** One of the joys of SPAB Meetings for both myself and my father (if memory serves) was his double act with Dave Plunkett at the end of meetings reporting on Hampshire Mills in that wonderful accent. More importantly, John and his gang at HMG did good work to preserve them for future generations. It's a good legacy.



**Sheila Viner writes:** Well known to many hundreds of mill and industrial history enthusiasts in Britain and the continent, John Silman was a founder member of the Hampshire Mills Group and was at the forefront of mill related research and restoration, serving on the SPAB Mills Section Committee and a keen promoter of the Mills Archive Trust. Always ready to share his knowledge, this genial gentleman will be sorely missed.

John receiving his citation from SPAB in 2006  
*Sheila Viner*



**Ruth Andrews writes:** I owe a lot to John. He used to say that he was just a 'salesman' but he certainly sold his enthusiasm for active investigation and restoration to me. Along with the rest of the SUIAG/HIAS heavy gang, we had a shared enthusiasm for "hands-on" effort which would be hard to repeat now we have all grown older. If you haven't done it, it's hard to explain the satisfaction of lifting heavy lumps of machinery, removing silt to reveal long-lost foundations, and trying to figure out how things worked when you are cold (or hot!), muddy, wet, and tired – but not hungry: the heavy gang always seemed to manage to feed itself well. Thank you John, you inspired me.



This is how I want to remember John – not quite taking life seriously while cleaning pigeon dirt in Beaulieu Tide Mill (2002), and enjoying a well-earned break at Wherwell Mill (2006).  
*Ruth Andrews*