

Pilcot Mill Open Day

Julie Banks



On Friday 15 September I opened my home and adjoining watermill to the public. This was a charity event to support All Saints' Church, Dogmersfield.

57 people bought tickets for the event and the plan was for them to enjoy a relaxed afternoon tea sitting out in the sunshine in the beautiful garden.

Unfortunately heavy rain with thunder storms were forecast. I decided it would be necessary to accommodate all guests within the house. With this number of people it was a severe challenge to find enough seating space.



Fortunately I was supported by an enthusiastic volunteer team from the village. These ladies worked tirelessly ferrying food from kitchen to tables in adjoining rooms. This meant all visitors were provided with a magnificent cream tea including strawberries and cakes. The seating area was crowded but it is fair to say a good time was had by all.

Throughout the afternoon tours of the watermill were available. My son Matthew effectively managed the demanding task of providing a constant controlled flow of visitors from house to the watermill. It was fortunate that the threatened heavy rain never materialised. Otherwise everyone would have got very wet during this period. I was ably supported by Peter Mobbs of HMG, without whose help, the mill tours would have been far more challenging and a lot less interesting.

I had prepared informative illustrated sheets for each guest. These provided both the history and technical features of the mill (*shown below*), together with a general

description of the workings of a watermill. Feedback received indicated that everyone enjoyed their mill tour.

The consensus was that the day was a great success story combining the virtues of raising money for a good cause and promoting interest in our milling heritage.

Description of the mill

Pilcot Mill is a three story building separate from the mill house. It is timber-framed with brick infill and the upper storey is weather-boarded. The tiled roof is half hipped. A mill is recorded in the Domesday Book on the site of the existing mill which dates to around 1750.

An external iron Poncelet waterwheel is still in place, the original buckets have been removed due to corrosion. Outside the mill at the southern end is the base of an engine. The stream that powered the wheel floods easily and has two bypass channels adjacent to the wheel-pit. The pit wheel and all the original machinery are still in the mill including two pairs of stones, one of which is French burr. The pulleys for the internal hoist as well as the grain bins and chutes are intact.

Major renovation work was undertaken in the 1990's by Anne and Geoff Finnigan, the parents of the present owner, Julie Banks. A new schedule of work has been drawn up and will commence shortly.

The mill is a Grade 2 listed building.

History

A mill on the same site is recorded in the Domesday Book and a water mill is known to have existed there in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries.

1753 John Gilham, miller, Pilcot Mill applies for a marriage licence.

1788 To be sold by auction at The George Inn, Odiham. A freehold water corn mill situated in the parish of Dogmersfield called Pilcot Mill, with the dwelling house, yard, garden stable etc now in the occupation of Peter Bazeley, Miller.

1875 Frederick Eddar, miller, Pilcot Mill

1878 John T A Howkins, miller, Dogmersfield

1880 C Shirwell, miller, Pilcot Mill

1895 George Wright Jnr Miller

1940's-60's Mill owned by Amy Clutton

1970's-1988 owned by Mrs & Mrs Sanders, Red Cottages

1988-2009 owned by Geoff & Anne Finnigan

2009 to date owned by Julie Banks & Peter Finnigan

Pilcot Mill Waterwheel Axle

Dave Plunkett

Further to the report by Julie Banks on the Pilcot Open Day event I have been requested to add news about the repairs that were being planned during the past few months to save the waterwheel's axle, instead of wholesale replacement. The axle was renewed about 30 years ago.

Back in July this year I prepared an inspection report on the mill of which the major item was the waterwheel and attendant construction. The waterwheel's oak axle has not been turned since it was last renewed, so the top area has been exposed to the elements all this time. The outer supporting gudgeon has suffered and started to become loose and the axle is subject to some decay over a large area.

Advice was taken on how to repair the axle, firstly from John Christmas and secondly from Paul Bracey (one of our newer members). Together we have slowly prepared an engineering solution to a millwrighting problem, as the most economical method of repair. Using Paul's professional knowledge we now have a scheme with drawings and calculations to support our proposed repair.



During late October the waterwheel chamber silt was dug out and pumped dry with the generous help of a Dogmersfield neighbour. I have further investigated the degree of timber decay and cut out a large knot hole in the top surface, and drilled small deep test holes around the axle to determine where the axle should be cut off. A marked sketch was passed to John and Paul for advice. Recently the large knot hole and three test holes have received consolidating resin to ensure the core near the cut-off is sound.

Julie Banks employs a gardener/handyman, one day a week, who has taken an interest in the mill maintenance and external repair. Advice from the Lime Centre at Morestead has led to the use of lime mortar and timber preserver, and some pressure washing of walls and waterwheel areas has taken place.

Still needing to be addressed are a decision on the fabrication of the corten steel metalwork and the practical aspects of how to safely support the old axle while repairs are progressed.

Editor's note: *If any HMG members become involved with this they must remember that HMG no longer has insurance for this type of work.*

