

Mills over the border – Mills in Sussex

Peter Hill's talk as reported by Alison Stott

Pictures to illustrate the report by Ruth Andrews and Peter Hill

Peter began chronologically with grain being crushed using the mortar and pestle, saddle quern, and then the familiar rotary stone quern. As populations increased animal power was used; Peter had an interesting picture of an 'oblique' ox mill.



The pound stone displayed at Caudwell's Mill

About 85BC the little Norse or Greek horizontal mills appeared with their small single wheel driving a stone above. Between 20–11BC the vertical waterwheel was illustrated by Vitruvius in his detailed drawing. 650 years later the Persian vertical wind tunnels were built, funnelling the prevailing wind through vertical gaps in a surrounding wall to turn the blades inside.

Peter moved on to mills in Sussex, illustrating with a map the 80 mills which still exist (formerly 900) with many more situated on the Eastern side of the county which is more windy. His pictures were arranged chronologically by type.

The simple trestle **post mill**, with no storage, such as Nutley Mill, cannot be very high, 66ft being the maximum possible.



High Salvington (*left*) is also a post mill, but this time the trestles are encased in a roundhouse meaning that there is storage on the site and production can be increased. Next to it is the windpump from Glynde, a much smaller hollow post mill.

Peter had a wonderful illustration of a little post mill being moved from its original home in Brighton, where it had become surrounded by new buildings. It was being pulled to its new home by no less than 82 oxen. (*See cover picture.*) Apparently oxen will plod straight and steadily once set in motion. Another mill was not so fortunate: it started its journey being pulled by two teams of 20 horses, but on reaching a corner one team bolted left and one team bolted right! It spent a few nights

leaning against a pub before continuing its journey being pulled by a traction engine.

On Windmill Hill, Herstmonceux (for sale for £1,000,000) the mill (*right*) has been restored; it is mounted on a double-storey roundhouse. Peter said that the miller and the local farmer had a dispute, the farmer planted trees all around the mill to keep off the wind, so the miller raised the mill by an extra storey.



The trouble with simple post mills was that they had to be turned into the wind by the miller; this problem was overcome by the invention of the fantail in 1745. Originally the fantail was mounted at the end of the post which was used for turning the mill, the post being driven round by the fantail to keep the mill's sails always facing into the wind.

A couple more mills which were moved were Jill Mill built in 1821 and moved to Clayton Hill in 1866 (later rebuilt as a tower mill) and Lowfield Heath Mill, moved from Gatwick, dismantled, and now in Charlwood.



The **smock mill** has a 'roundel' base, a reefing stage for setting the sails, and a cap turned by a tailpole or a fantail. The shape was said to resemble the smock worn by peasants at the time, and was usually eight-sided. Peter showed various examples of this type of mill, such as West Blatchington (*left*, which was painted by Constable) and mentioned that all the mills visible from the sea appeared on Admiralty charts to aid navigation.

The **tower mill**, built of brick or stone, could be built much higher, with a cap driven by a fantail. Being more substantial, many have survived although converted to new uses, such as at Battle where the dust floor is a cocktail lounge, Icklesham where Paul McCartney has incorporated a recording studio, Rye where the mill burned down and has been replaced by a fibreglass

replica, and Jack which has a chapel on the stone floor. This is reputedly haunted as the open pages in the bible on display are mysteriously turned over! Selsea has a fixed cap and was used as an observation tower.

The most common re-use is as a house. At Pratts Mill in Crowborough the tower has been incorporated into the house, at Alfriston the mill still stands but the National Trust have wrapped a house round it. The owner of Barnham Mill made great efforts to save it in working order, but it was for sale in 2015 as a house.

Peter had many other pictures of mills, derelict in some cases, undergoing restoration in others. He had a couple of examples of mills used for pumping, one which was near Pevensey can now be seen at the Weald and Downland Museum where it has been restored to working order.

His talk ended with a brief selection of watermills. As he said "so that we poor windmill-deprived folk of Hampshire would not feel that Sussex was totally lacking such gems".



Polegate Mill, restored in 1967

Altogether this was a fascinating tour through our neighbouring county.