

A Visit to the Isle of Wight in November 2015

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This three day trip from the Hampshire mainland was conceived and planned by David as a short inexpensive break for Ros and me. So, after booking hotel and ferry in advance we were off on the Friday morning of 26th November, to the Portsmouth ferry terminal, for the 11.00 am crossing to Fishbourne. 42 minutes later we were driving down the ramp and heading for the south east of the island at Ventnor. After a meander across the rolling countryside we took the steep zig-zag road down to the Ventnor esplanade. Here, we had planned a picnic lunch at the renowned Ventnor Haven Fishery, consisting simply of fresh crab and chips. This was most delicious, good value and well worth the diversion from Sandown. We have never had a meal like that on the mainland before and promised ourselves to return before long.

So, back on track, we took the coast road north via Sandown, to Brading, Bembridge and St Helens. One cannot drive along the short quay to the tide mill these days, but on-street parking is easy in November with a short walk along to the present Mill house.



St Helen's Tide Mill - detail 2016

This replaces the old St Helens tide mill dating to 1780 but much more is on view at low tide. If one walks a little further, this is one of the few places in Hampshire where one can walk safely around the man made lagoon which formerly encompassed two connecting tidal ponds. The outer pond walls have largely eroded away but are plainly visible at low tide. With the fading afternoon sun shine and the shimmering ebbing tide it was a most atmospheric site at that time. Pictures were pretty good too.

We met a number of local people (generally walking dogs) who were interested in our quest to learn about their tide mill.

So on in the fading light to Wootton Bridge where major consolidation repairs were in progress with some inevitable queuing of traffic up to the bridge (mill causeway). We parked on Pump Lane just up from the Sloop Inn, formerly part of the miller's house. With the old mill demolished in 1963 and modern housing in its place, it is not so easy to envisage the original mill layout. A good information board is visible to the public, and a photographic record was made thank goodness, when the mill was demolished. Our own photographs add to the archive.

After a good night at the comfortable Premier Inn, at the north end of Newport Quay, it was time to start on day two. We walked up to the head of the Quay, under the Newport Medina flyover, to the old Dolphin Hotel and former warehouses. A rather tranquil picturesque area if it were not for the traffic on the overhead bridge. My earlier research notes, confirmed the site of the former 17th century tide mill pond, was built-over by the present Riverside Centre and the Harbour Masters office. The best viewing point I found was the centre of the modern bridge which has no pavement. Beware!

Never mind, back to the car and onwards and westward to Freshwater. The working Calbourne Mill was on our route, so we stopped off briefly to say hello to Nigel (the miller).

The Alum Bay carpark was almost empty on arrival, then walking towards the cliff overlooking the Needles and multi- coloured strata of Alum Bay. Next touring through Freshwater looking for The Causeway and the church, but somehow missing our turning, not finding the old Afton tide mill site and heading through the village of Norton Green with the wide tidal Eastern Yar on our right.