

Report of the Presentation given by Sheila Viner

Eleanor Yates

Sheila is on a quest to research all she can about every watermill in 'old Berkshire' (ie before the county boundary changes in 1974). There were possibly as many as 128. She illustrated her talk with her own photographs and reproductions of etchings, maps and drawings found in the Mills Archive and other sources. She found the Domesday Book a good starting point, but many towns have been developed since 1086 and mills have 'moved' parish or village.

She divided her lecture by the river used by each mill, starting with the Thames, often called Liquid History. Twenty-six of Berkshire's mills were on the Thames, including Old Windsor's which is Saxon, then Viking, then Norman and in use until about 1100. The other rivers are the Loddon, Ock, Letcombe, Pang and Kennet. Some mills are attached to a weir, some have a leat, others were a pumping system to take river water into, for instance, Windsor Castle and the Town Mill at Henley may have helped clear the sewage.

There were flour, paper, cardboard, animal feed, textile, thimble and sawmills. Many millers made a good income from their eel traps, often using the eels to pay their rent. They also grew reeds, osiers and other willows for the thatchers and basket makers. Often the miller was responsible for the weirs or lock gates and had to take time to help barges and narrow boats pass safely up and down the river.

Sadly many mills were converted to steam or electricity or demolished and often no trace of the mill can be found on her maps or in situ, so Sheila will be grateful for any identification members can do. She is appealing for anyone with photographs of mills while they were still working and the millers who ran them.

Kenneth C Reid and Kenneth Major have already done research into Berkshire's mills but Sheila plans to spend the winter in Berkshire Record Office in Reading, checking everything she has already found and looking for new information. The members of the Hampshire Mills Group are looking forward to hearing more in the future and wish Sheila well in her research.

Wimbledon Windmill Museum Closed until Further Notice

Andy Fish

On the afternoon of Sunday, 2nd August, disaster struck when one of the sails fell from the windshaft and went through the roof of the Wimbledon Windmill Museum. Fortunately no one was inside at the time and no one was injured. However the damage is extensive, but incredibly the upstairs exhibits were undamaged despite large amounts of debris, but sadly some of the lovely Victorian chimney pots were broken. Until the building can be made safe it has been decided that museum visits will have to be suspended. A thorough safety assessment will have to be made, including looking at the remaining sails, and as soon as it is possible to do so, the museum will reopen. This may not be for some time. The Trustees of the museum regret that

this is necessary and are working with the owners of the building, the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, to resolve the situation

Update: On 11th August the millwrights arrived and removed the remaining sails so that they can be thoroughly checked. The timber of the stock that failed is in remarkably good condition on the whole, but it appears that water ingress over the years led to weakening of the wood where it passed through the canister.

With no further risk of falling sails and a temporary patch to the roof, it is hoped that it will be possible to reopen for visitors in the near future.