

Kingsley Mill, News

David Plunkett

This ancient mill site has been known since the 14th century and for the past two hundred years or so has been a linked mill and mill house. It has been the home of the Hills-Szumlicki family for about the past fifty years. Richard Hills has carried on the family tradition of maintaining and caring for this property since his mother, Mrs Szumlicka, died in 2012.

It is a rare and unusual mill for Hampshire; although it was believed originally constructed as a corn mill it was associated with the areas iron and forging industry about two hundred years ago. The history of this mill is well recorded in the HMG book 'The Mills and Millers of Hampshire', Vol. 3 – North and East, published in 2013.

It is sited at the head of the River Slea (a southern tributary of the River Wey) where two streams join, being the Kingsley Stream and the Oakhanger Stream. There is a small header pond in front of the mill leading to two narrow waterwheel chambers and a central bypass channel, built in stone, as are much of the foundations. Each former waterwheel drove two pairs of millstones.



Rear view of Kingsley Mill in flood

It is understood that the production of flour for human consumption ceased during the First World War due to government regulations, but that milling continued for animal feed into the inter-war years. Over the years, one waterwheel and main gearing has been lost while the set nearest to the house survive almost complete. Although a fire in 1976 did much damage, careful conservation and repair has ensured that the surviving waterwheel and machinery are

restorable to working order. The outer bypass channel has been strengthened and reinforced at its head. Measures to better control the water flow were put in place.

The Hampshire Mills Group has had two members meetings at Kingsley Mill over the years and always had a good cordial relationship with the Hills-Szumlicki family. John Reynolds of Winchester and Jeff Hawksley of Romsey, have surveyed the waterwheel remains and produced drawings, to enable a working model to be made. This has been undertaken by Mathew Lovering and a video of it working is available.

Back in 1965, J Kenneth Major and David Jones inspected the property and produced a report for the owners. More importantly David Jones detailed the main gearing and operational controls of this mill, a fact which has come to light very recently.

Richard Hills has sought the advice of other HMG members, including myself. This resulted in a small team, led by myself, offering to rebuild the decayed waterwheel. The waterwheel project team includes Rupert Dawnay, Dave Hibbert, Ivor New and Peter Mobbs. After some months of preparation and John Reynolds design drawings, the oak timber has been purchased and delivered.

The work is progressing at this time on machining the timber to exacting profiles of this narrow clasp arm waterwheel. Site installation is programmed to begin in early June with completion in late June.



Rupert and Ivor repairing the axle



Setting out the Water Wheel on the Plunkett patio