

England's National Silk Mill “Punches Above its Weight”

It may be small, but the lovely old Silk Mill in Whitchurch is on a par with the likes of *The Bodleian Library* and *Stonehenge* when it comes to how it welcomes its visitors. The oldest **working** silk mill in Britain still weaving in its original building, welcomes over 10,000 visitors a year. Yet the 200 year old Mill on the banks of the River Test has earned national recognition - joining the ranks of the mighty National Motor Museum at Beaulieu and the celebrated Ironbridge Gorge Museums achieving the much prized **Accreditation of Quality Assured Visitor Attraction**.



The **Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme (VAQAS)** is managed by VisitEngland and, through its network of regional assessors, boasts an incredible reputation for instigating, modifying and shaping change to the customer experience at visitor attractions across England.

The scheme acts as a benchmark, setting nationally agreed standards for visitor attractions in the UK that can demonstrate their commitment to customer focus ensuring high quality of service and experience.

Councillor Keith Watts, Chairman of the Whitchurch Silk Mill Trust, said: “It’s a living, industrial heritage site which weaves silk and enthral all who walk through its doors. For a small visitor attraction it punches well above its weight with the quality of service and events we are able to hold.”

Sue Tapliss, Manager at the Mill, said “The *Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Accreditation* is designed to help us be responsive to visitors’ needs and expectations. It provides a reassuring official endorsement to prospective visitors that at Whitchurch Silk Mill they will receive a warm welcome and high standards. This is mainly because of the hard work and enthusiasm of the Mill Team and the volunteers from the local community who make sure everything is ready for the visitors”

Opening times are: *Tuesday to Sunday* from 10.30am to 5pm. Admission is Adults £4.50, Children £2.50 and Concessions £4. Please **gift aid** your entrance money so that tax can be reclaimed on it then you can come back to the Mill for free yourself as many times as you like over the next year.

So, why not make it a regular visit? Then you can see the progress being made with silk production, changing displays and exhibitions, not to mention the development of the garden through the seasons. And of course, Whitchurch Silk Mill will be celebrating National Mills Weekend too!

Contact: Sue Tapliss, Whitchurch Silk Mill, 28 Winchester Street, Whitchurch, RG28 7AL, Tel 01256 892065,

Email sue.tapliss@whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk.

Photograph of Marie the Silk Weaver with a finished bolt of silk cloth: reproduced by kind permission of Phil Turner; Photograph of the Silk Mill by John Mears; others are by Sheila M Viner.