

Presidential Ponderings by John Silman

First, I beg forgiveness in not producing any notes etc for the details of HMG business that I have been involved with since May this year. I cover that period in a resume, and unashamedly expand on it too because I enjoyed it so much, beginning with a brief look back at early March. So, here goes.

Our youngest daughter gave us a Christmas present of tickets to a lecture lunch at Uppark, a National Trust property south of Winchester. This was entitled "Village Life in the 40s and 50s in Hampshire". I found this extremely interesting as the speaker, like me, was brought up on a country estate during WW2 as the son of the farm bailiff and he talked of things like the advent of the first tractors. Also like me, he had been to the local railway station with his father to collect a shiny new Fordson from the goods yard, but, Fordsons had to be driven on their metal wheel rims along public roads. The rear wheels were fitted with "spuds" of iron when the tractor was safely onto estate-owned ground! Almost all of his experiences were similar to mine even down to threshing the cereal crops with steam traction engines and bringing the straw into ricks in the yard. When I was six years old the estate employed 19 people on the farm, yet when I visited to obtain details of changes in the 1960s no permanent work was carried out by any staff- all labour was hired in on the need to use basis! Thanks for a delightful look at the past Rachel - the lunch was super as well.



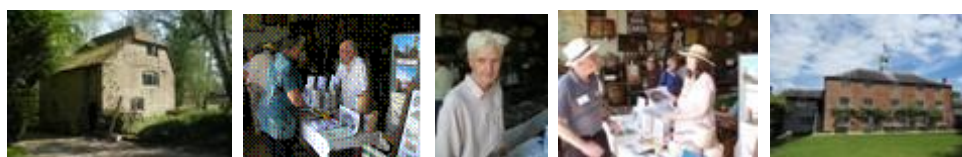
The photographs are: Fordson Tractor; Cobbs Mill; Crux Easton Wind Engine; Hockley Mill; Jane Hurst in Alton. All sourced from the Editor's library.

Other diary notes for March cover: a jaunt with Basil Hunt to Cobbs Mill in Sussex to meet John Christmas and Mick Edgeworth to collect items "surplus to requirements"; (these were such items as sieves for grain cleaning from weeds etc. and gearings); an excellent HMG spring meeting in Alton which went extremely well, thanks to much help from Jane Hurst of Alton. Thanks Jane. Another meeting - this time of the Crux Easton Wind Engine Trustees, accompanied by my fellow Trustee Ruth Andrews; we had a chance to look at the work carried out by Janes (the millwrighting company) to the top of the well to stabilise the structural beams; this looks to have been carried out in a very professional way with excellent results. My March diary notes ended with a work party at Eling Tide Mill refitting various items plus using my layman's artistry with a paintbrush. (Well, I like to feel useful!)

16th April with others on the bus driven by Andy Fish to the SERIAC conference at Brighton University. The work of the Mills Archive Trust was presented by Colin Mitchell who did an excellent job in completing his talk within the allotted time span – which took some doing as the previous speaker had overrun his scheduled slot by a considerable degree. 19th April saw us at Pilcot Mill, Dogmersfield, for a second visit to clear out and tidy the inside and outside of the mill. We completed our tasks on 4 May and I must say it looks much better now.

May began with Tony and I speaking to the Whitchurch Society. The subject was "So you think you know about industrial archaeology". At the well attended meeting Tony Yoward and I answered many questions regarding the artisan tools and machinery, domestic and industrial, which we presented both on slides and with actual items, in the form of a fun quiz; my favourite is a strange object, once in daily use by vehicle drivers everywhere, which keeps everyone guessing – a carbide lamp battery. Went to Christchurch to look at a possible former mill site (unnamed) which, during a dig had yielded a large wooden plank 10ft down in the mud: we discarded the theory of a mill but it does pose the question of the possibility of an early wharf or shipbuilding site – it being located within the estuary. Hopefully, we will be advised of the research outcome. Mick and I went to Winchester on the 9th to inspect an application to install a turbine at Town Mill, Alresford. Sunday May 14th was National Mills Open Day at Hockley Mill and I enjoyed telling the public about the mill's history whilst showing them over it. In all, a long but very satisfying day.

I went with Mick to Aldershot on the 23rd, to look again at the water collection system installed by the military as a backup in case the municipal system should be destroyed or damaged by unfriendly means – a very interesting installation of ponds and pipework. On the 27th I attended a meeting regarding Bursledon Windmill where it is hoped that volunteers will take on the responsibilities of running the mill. The minutes of the next, decisive, meeting which I was unable to attend, have not yet been received but I hope our Editor will have been notified by the time this reaches the printing press.



Tony Yoward and I enjoyed a very good day at John Lovell's 'Lords Farm Open Day' on the last Sunday in May; it went very well with lots of interest in our combined HMG and HIAS stand and, as usual, we sold a good many books and discussed a great many mills and other industrial landscape changes in Hampshire. There were fascinating items to look at all around us regarding rural life in the past. John has since featured in the September edition of Country Living Magazine taking up a four page spread with super photographic representations of his collections and the story of how he accumulated them. This article followed on the several about John and his curious collections which had appeared both in national and local press and on radio in preceding months.

Basil Hunt and I went to Whitchurch Silk Mill on 22 June to check the reed growth around the wheel. On 11 July I assisted Basil conditioning wheat for milling flour to sell at the Hampshire Water Festival. We milled this wheat at Longbridge three days later with a team consisting of only Mick, Basil, Sheila and yours truly. It went well considering the small crew. On July 18th I gave a talk on the subject of postcards to members of the Warsash Senior Club and the next day travelled to Lymington with Mick and Alison Stott to join a walking tour looking at the old Salterns. Another talk on postcards was given to the Locks Heath Senior Citizens Club. On 22 July I went up to Longbridge for our regular milling day. Mills and Milling was the subject of a talk to Shedfield Society on 29 July.

Time Off! On a private note, August 9 saw us greeting three of the American members of our family as they safely arrived at Terminal 1, Heathrow - on time and, I think, first off the aircraft! – and what a joy to spend “quality time” with them.

September got off to a cracking start with Alresford Show on the first Saturday. Basil and I helped John Lovell in manning his stand. It was a very good show and seems to get bigger every year. Talked to many people about a wide diversity of rural things. Thanks for inviting us, John. The HMG Annual General Meeting was enjoyed at Warnford Village Hall on 17th, again with lots discussed and this time an excellent video shown to us by Phil. Turner of the erection of a Dutch sawmill built within a windmill and immediately put into action sawing timbers. It was interesting to learn how it all had to be put together and the final alignments tinkered with to perfect the performance of the machinery. I gave my Postcards talk to the Grateful Hearts Club at Eastleigh on 27th. As a volunteer minibus driver I took this friendly lot on outings far and wide up until a couple of years ago.

My talk on Postcards was repeated a few days later on 4th October, this time to the East Hants. Rotary Club – who gave a very good dinner as well! The last day of the month saw me giving another talk, this time it was to Warsash Society to talk on The British Canal System (another of my favourite topics) where it was very well received.

November's events began on the “sparkling” 5th at Devizes where the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society held their ‘Industrial Archaeology Symposium’ in the Wharf Theatre beside the Kennet & Avon Canal. An excellent all-day programme but, thankfully, no fireworks! Two days later I went with Andy to Hockley Mill to meet specialist woodworm consultants ref. treatment costs. We asked for a quote which should arrive shortly so that grants can be applied for from SPAB and English Heritage.