

Presidential Notes

Here we continue John Silman looking back on his busy life in his Chairman's Diary Notes from 1999.

MARCH

3rd To Whitchurch Silk Mill with Tony & Mary to the inauguration of the new leaflet on Hampshire's rural industrial past. It is called "Preserved Power". The meeting organised by Alastair Penfold & Gavin Bowie of Hants County Museum Service was well attended and the actual introduction to the assembled representatives of mills etc was carried out very ably & wittily by Councillor Rice of Hampshire County Council. 25,000 leaflets have been printed. We were able to have a useful discussion with Alan Rice later in the morning.

8th Spoke to Jon Sims ref Heavy Gang work at Park End in Forest of Dean. Accommodation in bunkhouse available £8.00 per night for bed; Dinner, lunch, bed & breakfast £22.00. Sizeable gang going.

10th Arrangements now complete for Heavy Gang to visit Park End to excavate a cistern (I understand some 14ft diameter x 10/12ft deep) for the Dean Forest Railway. We are taking an Eastleigh Volunteer Transport Bus with your correspondent driving. 7am start from University.

14th Heavy Gang at Bosham Mill (in Greater Hampshire – Sussex really) to clean & inspect cast iron launder & two overshot water wheels on what is now Bosham Sailing Club's clubhouse. Very busy day by Mick Edgeworth, John Christmas, Ruth Andrews, George Jones, Barry Duke, Tony Yoward & self. I'm tempted to add "Old Uncle Tom Cobleigh and' all". Visual survey completed. Launder cleaned and enough mud removed from the wheels to allow JC to complete a letter detailing work needed to get perhaps one wheel into working order as a feature of the building. We will advise the club of a list of suitable millwrights. Thanks to all for a hard day's work.

19th To Botley & Curdridge Local History Soc to give a lecture on "History of Wind & Water Mills". Over 50 people present including people who'd never been before and 3 of whom joined their society immediately. Met John an old friend from my school days; we last met well over 40 years ago! All of this caused me to miss HMG's annual general meeting but I gather from those who attended that it went quite well.

20th To London with ME to SPAB's Windmill Meeting. Very interesting day with much information gained on methods of making windmill sails etc. Also news that another John Wallis Titt wind engine a "Geared Simplex" has turned up in East Anglia.

21st Making final arrangements for next weekend's trip to Park End – Forest of Dean – to excavate the large cistern there for the Dean Forest Railway.

22nd 3 bookings to complete Patrick's Milling Course on 6th November at Longbridge Mill. This from me publicizing the course at SPAB meeting.

27th 07.00hrs. Start from Bolderwood Car Park for Park End, Forest of Dean to do some "volunteering" for Dean Forest Railway. Party consisted of JS, JC, JH with Jean Davidson, Richard Hay & Nigel Sturt of SUIAG or HMG or both! After a trouble-free run in our E.U.T.S. Bus we arrived in Park End soon after 10.00 am. After some preliminary urging we were fixed up with shovels, spades, bar, wheelbarrows etc., and climbed up to a 9 or 10 feet circumference brick built cistern set some 16 or 17 feet down in the hillside above Park End Station. It was full to the

brim with who knew what.....Digging and wheeling away commenced at once and continued (with suitable breaks for tea, meals, sleep etc.,) for 2 days. We stayed at the Fountain Inn Lodge just across the road who provided Dinner (3 course), Bed (in two tier bunks), Breakfast (on large plates with all the trimmings) and Lunch (large club type sandwiches) for the total of £22.00 each! This is a special rate if you're working on the railway and WHAT VALUE!!! We all worked extremely hard and everyone was very uncomplaining; our hosts seemed very pleased with what we had done and after another uneventful journey we arrived back in Southampton about 7pm. I am sure the others were not tired but your Chairman was exhausted! Despite this it was a very enjoyable (& useful) weekend. If this seems too much like Industrial Archaeology and not much like news of mills I'm sorry but wearing two hats at the same time can be a trifle uncomfortable and I thought I should say what we did it in the wider interests of CONSERVATION!!! P.S. The Cistern is to be brought back into use for Steam Locomotives.

APRIL

6th Lecture to the University of the Third Age at Wickham on "History of Milling". Well received.

10th S.E.R.I.A.C. Conference at Reading University; we drove up (14 of us) in E.U.T.S. Bus. Good programme of lectures & excellent food & other arrangements. Lecture of the day by Bill White. At lunchtime we visited the Museum of English Rural Life – excellent if rather small.

11th Heavy Gang at Kew Lane, Bursledon (see my notes for 12-2-99) to dismantle fallen wind pump. This was successfully carried out by Mick Edgeworth, John Hone, John Christmas & your Chairman. Very hard work carrying the portable generator down to the site but it's worth it for cutting recalcitrant nuts which won't come off any other way. Having received a copy of the Environment Agency's "Local Environment Agency Plan" for the North & South Rivers Way I have written back a sharp letter to the South East Regional Manager – we contacted them during the planning stage of this report detailing the problems of restoring & retaining mills on both rivers. The completed report dismisses mills in one paragraph in its Heritage Section. Tony Yoward and I are both disgusted after the work he in particular put in to help the planners. He is arranging for SPAB to also write in.

15th Having sent a copy of my letter to South East Regional Manager of Environment Agency to Mildred Cookson (Chairman of SPAB Mills Section) she also wrote to them and sent a copy to me. A very good letter indeed.

17th Took an E.V.T.S. Bus to the S.W.I.A.C. Conference held this year in Shaftesbury, Dorset. Early start but a pleasant ride via Fordingbridge, Cranbourne, 6d Handley & Tollard Royal. New experience for some passengers was a trip down "ZigZag"!! Interesting conference slightly spoiled I felt by failures in the systems supplied by the host school and by one speaker going some 20 minutes over his time with no thought for the following lecturers. Pleasant visit on the way home to the Royal Naval Cordite Factory at Holton Heath.

24th With Margaret to Tony & Mary at Emsworth to continue to work on the Arthur Lowes Photographic Collection (left to us by him on his death). We have got to the position where we are placing photographs into county order and into non-polluting plastic pockets so that would-be purchasers can choose which ones to buy. Worked till after 11.30pm still not finished.

25th With fellow heavy Gang members (RA, ME, JAC, JH & GJ) to investigate & record the "Wheatley Oast" near Binstead. It is for sale by auction on 6th May at Alresford. We found a very large building (it is suggested it be converted to a 6 bedroom house, complete with library &

gazebo in the circular oast). After a careful look & measure up we decided that there was more in the building than met the eye. The original part is carefully built with beautifully cut & prepared clunch or malm stone fitted together with great care and dead straight horizontal & vertical pointing of every block. The building has arcading both outside & inside and looks far too good for an industrial building. I propose to try and find out more about the Oast and will contact both East Hants D.C. & the Record Office. **Later:** Very saddened to hear from Jean Vear that John had died this afternoon. The world is a poorer place for his passing.

27th Learned from Jean Vear that John's funeral will be held at the East Chapel of Southampton Crematorium at 10.00am on Wednesday 5th May. Jean has asked me to say a few words about John at the funeral. Lecture to Hampshire Genealogical Soc. (Waltham Chase Branch) on the "Canals of Hampshire". Hampshire had parts of at least 7 canals viz. Itchen Navigation, Titchfield Canal, Andover & Redbridge Canal, Southampton & Salisbury Canal, Portsmouth & Arundel Canal, Avon Navigation and finally the Basingstoke Canal! I was very much helped by Laura Sturrock, who provided many slides and by Tony Yoward who not only provided many slides but also a sumptuous period map (photocopied and made up carefully) showing all the canals at the same scale. This was huge and was put on display at the village hall neatly with the organiser's handbag wedging it in place. My great thanks to Laura & Tony for their help. All this resulted in another donation to HMG.

29th Gavin Bowie called with a well written press release for National Mills Weekend, which he offered to let me send out under the HMG logo. I immediately added our sign and sent out copies to various television & radio stations and to as many newspapers as possible.

30th Mick rang me to say that he had read a report in the New Scientist that the Env. Agency is to install a 200KVA generator driven by a water turbine in the Thames!! If that's true I wonder if the left hand knows what the right hand is up to in the E.A.!! I was honoured to be asked by Jean Vear to give a tribute to John Vear at his funeral on 5th may. Trying now to encapsulate a life into 5 or 6 minutes; not an easy task.

MAY

5th Interviewed by a young lady, Georgina Windsor, for Radio Solent ref National Mills Weekend. Was able to suggest that people visit the listed mills in "Preserved Power"; talked about milling spelt flour at Headley Mill & Rupert's restoration in particular. Hope it sounds alright when broadcast on Saturday morning.