

Dogmersfield: Pilcot Mill on a tributary of the River Hart

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This small three storey mill is separate from the mill house. It is timber framed with brick infill and the upper storey is weatherboarded. The tiled roof is half hipped. The external iron Poncelet waterwheel is still in place but is deteriorating. Outside the mill at one end is the base of an engine. The stream which powered the wheel floods easily and has two bypass channels adjacent to the wheelpit. The pitwheel and all the machinery are still in the mill including two pairs of stones, one of which is a French Burr. The pulleys for an internal hoist as well as the grain bins and shuts are still intact. The mill and the mill house are listed buildings.

So recorded C. Ellis for SUAG in the 1978 Water and Windmills of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight Gazetteer entry. Today the mill building stands well with its stones and machinery still in situ but some inner, ancient woodwork is in need of attention. The mill house had been extended and a wooden garage which had been brought from elsewhere is, David Plunkett assured us, a valuable, genuine, representation of a typical design of a shed particular to the county, known as a "Hampshire Hovel".

Peter Finnigan inherited the mill and house on the death of his mother in May 2009. Anne and her husband Geoffrey were staunch members of Hampshire Mills Group and sometimes hosted group meetings in their garden. Geoffrey had been restoring the mill but had to call a halt due to illness and became one of Britain's first heart transplant patients.

This year, Peter and his wife Sarah asked David Plunkett (a visitor to the Finnigans and Pilcot Mill over many years) if HMG members would help them out with spring cleaning the mill, identifying and itemising its contents, along with the numerous artefacts Geoffrey had collected and stored. On Tuesday, 19th April, David Plunkett led a well organised band of HMG members in doing just that. His lively team comprised Mick Edgeworth, Peter Mobbs, John Silman and Alison Stott. I went along to capture the event on camera for the posterity. It was a long, hot,

sunny day's work but we were thankful for dry weather as so much of the sorting was done outside.

The mill is still in pretty good shape although some of the older timbers in the hurst frame and doors were becoming fragile. Geoffrey Finnigan had replaced the joists and floorboarding to the stones floor (1st floor) and the stones themselves were gathering moss (nowhere to roll to!). All the machinery was still in situ and ropes around the pulleys, which Geoffrey had renewed, were fine.

The massive oak wheel axle still looks healthy but the Poncelet waterwheel is now just represented by the two outer frames. Some previously salvaged rusting buckets and inners, found at the back of the 'Hampshire Hovel', had badly suffered from "rust beetle" and just two buckets were stored in the mill whilst all else was heaved into the skip.

The hard working team laboured long under a very hot April sun and returned on May 4th to complete the job with clearing the stones and bin floors. An arduous but satisfying job well done.

Article and photographs by Sheila Viner.