

An Island Jewel: How Calbourne Watermill shines out from the centre of Wight



Wendy, the all important face at the door - Victorian roller mill - Rex Punt the miller explains

The delightful, diamond shaped Isle of Wight is so easily dismissed as a holiday playground with many of its well known treasures commercially cashed in on. Well, in the very heart of the island, far away from the well publicised tourist spots is a watermill producing several types of flour in the traditional, stoneground way and teaching whoever comes the ins and outs of milling and flour production. For a modest sum people can wander for hours at will, throughout the mill buildings, the ten acres of woods and meadows, the outbuildings charting the rural life of the locality and the part the mill has played in it.

Noted in the Domesday Book, the mill changed hands and tenancies many times through the centuries until the present owners, Tony and Sally Chaucer, bought Lower Calbourne Mill in the millennium year, 2000. They have wrought many changes – all to the good - and with the survival of this traditional, working watermill as the essential reason for their ground-breaking innovations in line with current environmental expectations and legislation.



Stones floor photo John Mears - The Boulter - Well labelled machinery

Bringing this ancient mill site into the 21st century are: A Bio-Bubble which deals with waste water from all aspects of the mill site, ensuring a clean flow into the Caul Bourne to safeguard the SSSI site of Newtown River, which it joins just 3km away, and the Hamstead Heritage Coast; solar and wind power to the shop, offices and cafe. The most recent additions are the wooden

Eco-Homes built for holidaymakers to rent complementing the campsite, all set apart from the visitors' mill site.

Education plays a vital role with visiting schoolchildren, as the Chaucers strongly feel the mill site offers opportunities encompassing a host of activities throughout the school curriculum for the complete range of ages. As well as a room set aside with two querns on a work bench where the millers and teachers can work with young children, Margaret Punt acts as a Mill Interpreter explaining all the workings of the mill, inside and out. Not only are maths, science, history and geography covered but modern studies for the older students are found in environment, business management and, that very popular new university course, Leisure & Tourism!

On the subject of Tourism - the cafeteria produces lovely, home cooked, wholesome, reasonably priced meals.



The rotary dresser - Hands on experience with a quern - And of course the shop

Out of the 30-40 tons of flour milled each year several types are produced; apart from the usual wholemeal try: Rye, Spelt, Barley Meal, Malted multi-grain and their own strong white flour. Many shops across the Island, and on the Mainland, are supplied as well as mail-order and direct sales.

Neil Smith is the full time miller who also runs training courses in milling. He is ably supported by relief millers, Rex Punt and Richard Monk.

The mill is powered by a 20ft diameter iron overshot wheel fed from a launder off of the Caul Bourne (which flows through the site). Being able to get up close to a lot of the machinery such as the roller mills, boulder and dresser is a bonus, although, of course, there are safeguards around the working stones and gearings.

Enterprise has to be embraced to ensure the survival of this watermill in its tranquil setting, where the main body of visitors is seen in the spring and summer. Tony and Sally Chaucer have successfully achieved a balance without comprising the integrity of the watermill and preside over a very well ordered and well run site. So all I can say, is VISIT IT AND OFTEN!

Sheila Viner and John Mears visited Calbourne Water Mill on 3rd September 2010.

To discover more about this lovely old watermill and how to visit it, go to the website: www.calbournewatermill.co.uk or telephone 01983 531227.

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