

City Mill, Winchester



A party was held in March this year to celebrate entering its fifth year of successfully milling flour at this National Trust owned watermill. However, when the millers turned up to mill shortly after, the sluice gate to the wheel was found to be broken and all idea of milling was halted until it could be fixed. Other Hampshire mills sportingly supplied flour for sale in the visitor's shop until the sluice was repaired and the team of five volunteer millers happily operated the machinery again.

Mixed fortunes have been the pattern throughout this mill's history from the earliest record when known as Eastgate Mill, the Domesday Book records a mill on or near this site paying a rent of 48 shillings per annum to the nuns of Wherwell Abbey - which appears to make it the most valuable mill in the whole of Hampshire as the average mill rent in the county was 10 shillings and 4 pence. Today's equivalent values being £2.40 and 52 pence. Like many another abbey mill it was left derelict following Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries. The name changed to City Mill when its then owner, Mary Tudor, gave the mill to the city along with other land in 1554 at the time of her marriage in Winchester Cathedral.

Use as a cornmill was revived in the 18th century, but like so many others fell victim to progress in the great industrial revolution. Plans were later considered (then shelved) to change its use to a power station and then in the First World War it saw service as a laundry. When that ceased and demolition was threatened it was bought by a group of benefactors who gave it to the National Trust in 1928. In 1931 it opened its doors as a youth hostel and this use continued until 2005.

Millwrights engaged in the 1990s recreated the machinery using gears rescued from Durngate Mill (demolished in the 1950s). The Science Museum supplied a stone nut assembly and two French Burr Stones from their reserve collection at Wroughton in Wiltshire; they had been removed to there from Abbotstone Mill (Alresford).

2002 saw the first attempt at milling but many problems surfaced and milling activity was disappointingly delayed; a number of issues in a 2003 survey required sorting before the machinery could be safely operated. Finally, 20th March 2004 saw the first public milling at City Mill; this continued until the waterwheel was found to be rotting and a generous legacy helped to fund its restoration in 2005. New stones, made from a composition incorporating basalt and quartz, were commissioned from a Dutch specialist and these arrived in August 2007.

Unique opportunities to see otters add an extra dimension to visiting this mill, which also provides a very good history video, working models plus a bakery advice section within its flour shop. So make sure you get to the meeting early and see it all for yourself!