

SUSSEX MILLS TRIP



Saturday, 13th June was a lovely warm and sunny day for the HMG Day Trip, this time to five windmills and one watermill in Sussex. Andy Fish was our minibus driver for the day, starting out very early from Southampton and collecting members along the way via Winchester and Emsworth.

First mill on a packed itinerary was High Salvington Windmill, just north of Worthing, where we were greeted by Peter Hill, Chairman of the Sussex Mills Group (and our excellent host and leader for the day), plus many other SMG members. Peter Casebow, Bob Potts and Roger Ashton guided us over the mill. Built sometime before 1750, this black post mill ceased working by 1900. It has been restored to full working order and producing flour. The roundhouse contains interesting historical photographs including the stones being rolled out of the doorway. The granary has also been restored and is used for educational (schools) purposes.

High Salvington

The Glynde Windpump, remains of which were recovered from a site close to the railway near Glynde in 1988 where it had originally supplied water to steam engines, was erected here in 2006 but in a partially restored state. Restoration was completed in 2008 in accordance with information and photographs taken in 1929. A pavilion houses a shop and a kitchen, all staffed by ladies who gave us extremely welcomed refreshments. Our member, Peter Mobbs, who also belongs to SMG, joined us here. All of these buildings stand within a large paddock which enables the volunteers to stage fund-raising events such as fetes and barn dances.



Oldlands Windmill - Inside cap at Oldlands Windmill - Oldland Granary

A photoshoot only was available for Polegate Windmill which is now surrounded by a housing estate. One pair of sweeps (sails) lay on the ground waiting to be fitted with the one pair already aloft. Restored in 1967, this brick tower mill boasts its original machinery and three working oat crushers. A milling museum, education room and refreshment area are located in adjacent mill buildings.

Michelham Priory afforded us our only watermill on this trip and what a sweet one it is too. Located on the “free” side of the thirteenth century Priory’s moat, with the car park alongside, it is easily accessed. Once powered by two waterwheels in tandem on the mill’s north side, as depicted on a carpenter’s drawing dated 1667, there is now one sited on the south side. It is thought that the mill race and wheel were relocated in the nineteenth century as we see them now. Rebuilt several times through the centuries, milling continued until 1924 and a turbine was installed to provide power to the main house whilst the mill building was used as a store, all machinery having been removed. The Friends of Michelham Priory took on the task of the derelict mill’s extensive restoration in 1971 and the ensuing five years saw them re-laying the roof with old tiles, installing a new, wooden waterwheel and machinery plus a pair of French Burr stones; local elm was used for a new main shaft and oak and elm hurst frame. Operated regularly until 1995, major restoration was carried out in 1997 and a new cast iron waterwheel replaced the wooden one. John Harvey, Roy Tomkies and Franz Plachy were guides and miller as well as answering queries and selling flour to the public. All the volunteers here are members of Sussex Past/Sussex Archaeological Society. www.sussexpast.co.uk/michelham.



Michelham Priory Mill, and water wheel



Windmill Hill Windmill is extra special as it gives its name to the settlement around it, is both the youngest mill and is not only the largest windmill in the south east but is also the tallest post mill in the country; the floor plan measures 6.6metres x 3.73metres (21ft 8ins x 12ft 3ins); height 15.5metres (50ft 10ins). This mill also houses several unique features which include an innovative sweep governor, patented by the miller at the Clayton Mills, Charles Edwin Hammond, in 1873 to regulate the speed of the sails. From our volunteer

guides, Mike Chapman, Maureen Bishop and Rhys Clatworthy, we went on to learn that 1814 saw its erection, and so strongly put together that despite the 1987 hurricane, when another Sussex post mill succumbed, Windmill Hill Post Mill stood firmly on its brick foundations even though it had by then reached a state of dereliction. Henley-on-Thames millwrights, IJP Building

Conservation Ltd., had the entire body rebuilt in their workshop. Restoration was completed on this Grade 11* listed building in 2006. www.windmillhillwindmill.co.uk.



Last, but certainly not least, is the unusual West Blatchington Smock Windmill atop its three barns. A splendid tea was provided here by the smiling and patient, Sylvia Higgs and Joan Hill. Another mill surrounded by houses, this mill was built on a barn complex around 1820 and only worked until 1897. Its original machinery remains at the heart of this museum to milling. The main barn houses an education centre and a fascinating display of items, many rescued from other Sussex mills. A small shop, also surrounded by milling and farming artefacts is found in a second barn, whilst the third barn sees to the more practical needs of visitors and users of the workshop! We lingered at West Blatchington, tearing ourselves away to start the long trip home at 7.30pm.

It was a very long, very satisfying and very enjoyable day of meeting many happy like-minded mills enthusiasts and of learning the histories and workings of their very different mills. Peter Hills organised and orchestrated our visit superbly and we are all very grateful to him and all the other Sussex Mills volunteers many of whom, incidentally, were smartly attired in sweatshirts bearing embroidered images of “their” mills. Pride was reflected in the clean tidiness of each mill with work tools stored neatly and safely.

Sussex Mills Passports: It’s fun, particularly for young children, to have a Sussex Mills Passport to take along to each mill and get it stamped. Once the Passport has 12 stamps, it can be sent in to claim a limited edition silver coloured Dusty Miller Badge and a year’s free newsletters from Sussex Industrial Archaeology Society (SIAS).

Much more information on these and all the other mills in this beautiful county is available on: www.sussexmillsgroup.org.uk

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Joan Hill & Sylvia Higgs
The Refreshment Team !