

Ref No:

Wave files ref:

Collection Title:

Below section to be filled in by interviewee:

Interviewee's surname:

Title:

Cookson

Mrs

Interviewee's forenames:

Gender:

Mildred

Female

Occupation:

Date and Place of Birth:

Miller (Mapledurham)

8th May 1944. Blackpool.

Below section to be filled in by interviewer:

Date(s) of recording, SD cards used, tracks (from-to):

Location of interview: Zoom interview

Name of interviewer: Rebecca Eade-Gleeson

Recording equipment (including microphones):

Total no. of tracks: 1

Recording Format: MP4

Mono or Stereo:

Total Duration (HH:MM:SS): [00:35:47]

Additional Material: Potential for accompanying photos

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Interviewers Comments: First of multiple sessions with Mildred Cookson.

Interview Summary

Mildred Cookson: Track 1 [Session one: 15 May 2023]

Mildred Cookson, born Blackpool, 1944. Brief description of early interest in mills growing up. [00:00:57]

Description of the repair of Lacey Gren Mill by Chris Wallace. [00:02:28]

Story of tasking becoming the miller at Mapledurham, [00:05:03] and summary of daily life as a miller. [00:06:40]

Discussion of potential problems that could occur within the mill. [00:07:50]

Comment on replacement of old turbine with Archimedean screw. [00:10:24]

Description of environmental regulations and trading standards. [00:14:00] Mention of different products produced and sold by the mill. [00:17:09]

Account of the mill flooding. [00:18:20]

Description of boys who used to help in the mill for work experience. [00:21:08]

Reflection on being one of the only female millers, along with another female miller in Devon. [00:23:15]

Mention of swapping from the estate to external grain suppliers. [00:24:31]

Story of receiving an inadequate batch of grain. [00:25:50]

Comments on what happened to Mapledurham under the subsequent miller. [00:27:34]

Discussion of employing millwrights. [00:28:28]

Description of school visits, and public access to the mill. [00:31:04]

Comments on favourite things about milling. [00:33:44]

Mention of the potential issue of water getting in through the roof. [00:34:47]

Mills Archive Trust Oral History Project

Name of interviewee: Mildred Cookson

Interviewed by: Rebecca Eade-Gleeson

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Date: 15/05/2023

Ref. No:

[00:00:00]

Alright we are now recording. Um. Hello, uh, please can you just give us uh your full name please?

Um, Mildred Cookson

Brilliant. And where and when were you born?

In er, in Lancashire in, in Blackpool. Yep, do you need a date of birth or?

If you feel comfortable sharing

Yeah. 8th of May 1944.

Nice, and um what sort, what was the place like where you lived? Like, were you in a village, or a town?

Umm, started off in the south of Blackpool and then we moved up further north where it was a bit quieter. Umm, surrounded by what were fourteen windmills, that's how it all started really.

Ah, and uh who was in your family?

Just mum and dad and me.

[inaudible] and uh, um, so you said that you were surrounded by windmills, so when, were you first, like, find an interest in milling and windmills, how did that start?

Yes, yeah probably, 1960s, just going round looking at the uh at the mills [inaudible 1:23-1:27] and uh, it made me start thinking is this the situation all over the country. And then I got interested and then, um, just drawings of them, and painting them, um, kept a sort of diary of them, um, and then um moved down south. After getting married.

Oh, whereabouts did you move?

Where to?

Yeah

Originally to Slough, and then into Reading

Noise of understanding

To where I am now at Reading.

Is that where you started working in the milling industry?

Yeah.

Did you have, what were you, did you work before then?

Yes (audio feedback)

What did you do? (inaudible)

Worked in the, uh, um worked in the pension department, umm, uhh, at a place called Norcross, which is just on the outside of Blackpool.

Mm, so how did you first get into the milling industry, so how, what was your first job? (quietly) how did that happen?

It's not really a job, it was a hobby. Uhm, it never has been a job, it was, just I did it for enjoyment.

(both laugh)

So, uhm

How did you first get into it? Like, what was your first volunteering role then?

[00:02:28]

Quite a, quite a story, but uhm, basically I moved down south, and started looking at mills round and about Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire, uhm, bought a book on milling to see what was going on, that's how I found out about how, found out about the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and obviously joined that. Uhm, and looking through the mills, there was one mill looked interesting, uhm, over in Buckinghamshire at High Wycombe, a mill called Lacey Green Windmill, the oldest smock mill in England. And, and uh, I went along there to look at it, and it was completely derelict, uhm, looked at about to fall down in fact, but it was quite a, um, an iconic... vision. So I used to go there every weekend, painting it and drawing it (coughs) and then one day I was doing that (audio feedback) and this gentleman came up and said, eh, you seem to be up here quite a lot, you know, do you like mills? So I said, yeah, definitely, uhm, all aspects of them and everything. And he said, uh, do you like this mill? I said yeah, it's a shame the state it's in. He said yeah, I'm actually gonna repair it. And I thought, that's almost impossible really. Umm, he said why don't you come along to a meeting in the village hall next week and uh I can, I'm having a meeting to show the village people what I'm going to do, and how I'm going to repair it. Uh so, along I went, and there was this gentleman, uhh, on the, on the sort of, um, raised platform, he got a model of the mill, as it looked, uhm, at that time, with lots of strings round it, and uhm, he actually, started talking about it and everything, and then he said this is how I'm going to do it. And he pulled these strings, and it completely untwisted the mill and got it back to how to as it should look. And then he said, once we've done that we can start doing the actual repair. And I thought, that's all very well doing it on a model but it will never work in real life (laughs) But, uhm, (audio feedback) in fact, that's what happened. He did it, and it was amazing, and the gentleman, uhm, was err a millwright called Chris Wallace, his father was the inventor of the bouncing bomb for the dam busters, Sir Barnes Wallace. And, uh, yeah amazing man. And uh he'd, he'd got a partnership with another gentleman called David Nicholls, and they went round the country repairing mills.

[00:05:03]

And, um, just during the course of helping repair this mill at High Wycombe, Chris said to me, you know, why don't you go and look at the mill near you. And I said, yeah but it's, it's a watermill, it's not a windmill. (chuckles) He said, yeah but it's a nice one, it's a nice mill, and we just repaired it. So off I went down to Mapledurham to look at the mill, and uhm, met them, met uh David Nicholls, who was actually milling there, for the estate, uhh, but of course he wanted to do his millwrighting, he did, he didn't want to end up being a miller. So, over the next two or three months, I went down there every week and he was showing me what to do. And then one morning, Sunday morning, we set the mill going, probably about half past nine quarter to ten, looked at his watch, and he said right I'll come back at 5 o'clock and see how you've got on. (laughs) so it was rather an interesting, um, initiation. (laughs) Fortunately on that day nothing went wrong, so um, that was good. So that's how I actually got into the milling, and the estate, obviously wanted the mill open at the weekends, for the public to

come and visit, so, uhm, I would mill, certainly every weekend, and then uh, during the week, I would mill as well and do school parties. And gradually built up a trade with local bakers, uh, outlets and everything and farmers markets and things. Uh, so yeah it was a good time.

Yeah, so what would like a typical day look like when you were milling at Mapledurham? What were you sort of, your main responsibilities?

[00:06:40]

I've actually written a whole paper for the archive on this, Day in the Life of a Miller, do you want me to go through it all because it's quite, it's quite (Interviewer chuckles), it's probably better if you look at that, and uh, perhaps pick bits out of that possibly. But no, it started off, you know, eight thirty, nine o'clock in the morning, just very quickly, getting the grain up, checking everything over in the mill, making sure everything's, uh, safe and secure, nothing's loose, no wedges are loose and everything, checking the water wheel, setting the mill stones into gear, starting to mill, and then during the day just keeping an eye on things, testing the flour all the time, bagging it up, into large bags for the bakers, and then sometimes (audio feedback) have the, had the time to bag up the smaller bags as well during the day, otherwise that was done on a separate day. Uhm, yeah and that was it really, just keep going until four or five o'clock and then shut down, and then Hoover everything out, every night, and thank the mill and then get in the car and come home. (Both laugh)

Was it a steep learning curve when you started, like did anything ever go drastically wrong? Or what was the most...

[00:07:50]

It was not straight away, not, no not straight away but after a few, a few, I think it was probably about a month or five weeks in, milling there was almost like a gunshot went off, frightened the living daylights out of me, and it was uh, a tooth that had broken on one of the main wheels, and cracked. Uhm, and David had warned me about this, that if that happened, you must stop the mill as fast as you can. Because otherwise you'll strip the whole lot of the teeth off, the whole lot'll just go. Because once ones gone, (audio feedback) the gear that's meshing with it will hit the next gear twice as hard, so it'll crack that one, and then the next one. And so, basically you gotta do it in the right order as well, you know, you can't just go and shut the um, the water wheel down you got to disengage the stones and then shut the water wheel down. So it's a case of learning as you went along, but learning, not by mistakes, but by intuition almost that you, you do things in the right order, so that there's less damage, and less um, less repair needed as it were. But, no, it was you know, you, you get to know the sounds of the mill. I think to me that's most important, is living with the mill, you've got to learn it, and understand it, and it speaks to you. You can start the mill going in the morning and just know it's not right, so you shut down, and have a look round, and you'll find something that's not quite right. And then you think, ah, that was it. Start again and absolutely fine. Uhm, and you can all, I can always, could always tell, whether a paddle was coming loose on the water wheel, made a slight different noise, uhh, slipping in and out perhaps, uhm, occasionally, there's the whole paddle would, uhm, drop out, and you've got to, hah, try and save it (laughs) and so that was quite a challenge, going down to the mill ponds and drag this, the paddle back in, cause quite expensive. I used elm on the paddles for the water wheel and I think when I first went there, they were about seventeen pounds for a new paddle, whereas when I left it was about seventy-five pounds, cause elm was in such short supply. Uhhm, and that's another story, but um, so no, you, you tend to, you know, you've got to know your mill, otherwise there's, there's no way, you know, I think um, it would cost you a lot more money and worry if you

didn't understand the mill, and understand how it's working to tell you what's, what's right and what's wrong. Yeah.

Yeah, and did the mill like change whilst you were there, like what sort of changes happened within the mill, like with the technology there was while you were working there?

[00:10:24]

The major, well it was just before I left, which was the, um, the taking out of the old, uh, um, turbine, which was underneath the water, to an Archimedean screw, which is above the water. And, that was quite a traumatic change, both visually, and mentally quite honestly, uh, I, I was not very happy about it at all, uhm, and one or two friends also sent in opposition letters about it. People who were very very knowledgeable as well, it wasn't just, you know, err neighbours or volunteers, these were, these were people, these were really specialist mill people. Uhm, and it did cause damage to the mill, which I knew it would happen, with all the digging and everything going on, uhhm, it cracked one of the walls in the mill and, yeah it was quite sad really, but, uh, anyway, um, it carried on. It's, it's still there and it's, you know, generated electricity, umm, making money for the estate, so, yeah that's fine. It has broken down twice, which um I, I had a feeling it would do anyway, but um, anyway. So yeah, that was the biggest change really, nothing, nothing inside, well everything I was doing is no different to what it would have been, you know, 400 years ago. That's the difference between traditional milling and modern milling. Traditional milling is hands-on, understanding the mill, all the different woods that are used, the different sounds, whereas modern milling is more technology based, on computers and things, so it's a different type of milling altogether, understanding. You've still got to understand wheat, and the properties of it and things like that, but the actual operation is totally different. Yeah. But traditional, traditional milling, is no different to say way, way back, just the same, same process. Yeah, the only difference is, um, today there are more, um, boxes to tick, and um, more paperwork.

Did you find that aspect of it quite frustrating?

It didn't happen to me very much, it happened, except in more or less in the last ten years really, it's got more and more, uhm, paperwork based, and I do know for millers that are milling now, that they do find it really irritating, you know, it's like everything, [audio feedback] um, it's just too much paperwork, even for the, and for the millwrights as well. In the old days, if a job needed doing at a mill, it was handshake, or written on the back of an envelope, and that was taken as, as word. Whereas nowadays, it's just a nightmare for the millwrights, it really is. They've got to fill so much paperwork in, before they even start on the job, and uh, pages and pages and pages, it's um, really, it's quite frustrating for them. And I understand a lot of it's necessary, but um, you know, it does put off I think, people doing millwrighting because, they just wanna get on and repair the mill. And not spend half the time, you know, doing paperwork but, uh, that's another story. Anyway, but, but no the general, the generally, um, it's just the basic things that came in for me like environmental issues, trading standards and things like that, which were all just part of the, of the, of the process.

Yeah. What sort of environmental regulations were there then? What did you have to be aware of?

[00:14:00]

Obviously, mainly keeping the mill absolutely spotlessly clean, otherwise you'll get vermin in. You still got vermin in anyway, in nose in, poking their nose in, but they, as long as they couldn't get to anything, like all the flour and the, and the um. The grain was all kept behind sort of rat-proof cages and things, so there was, they couldn't get at anything. Uhm, and as I say, I used to Hoover out every night, and when I say Hoover out, it was, it was probably half an hour's job every evening, because you gotta do

the whole floor. Because over the time I've been there, every winter it, the mill would flood at least, probably two or three times in the winter, and the, the water would come into the, the Thames would actually come into the mill. Uhm, and when it had gone down obviously, the floorboards slightly shrink each time, so you get gaps between the floorboards, so, and that's when the flour will, will find its way obviously during the day, from the dust in the air. So, every, every, all the floor had to be done between all the floorboards and everything, otherwise you start getting infestations and things, nasty little bugs and things around. And just keeping an eye on things really, that if you did spot something, you tend to it straight away, and um, that was really the environmental side of things. And trading standards were checking the flour twice a year, they'd come in, from the, from the council, and they'd just take away a bag of flour, a bag of grain, or two or three of each, and just off they'd go with it. Uhm, and then um, they'd then write a report and come back to me and say, absolutely fine, your wholemeal flour is wholemeal flour, your white flour is white, well not, I couldn't do absolutely [audio feedback] pure white flour, because you can't do that in a, in a traditional mill, but whitish flour, that was ok, um, semolina was alright, the brown was ok, and what have you [beep heard] so they'd check on that twice a year. And then the other thing was weights and measures. You can't just go out and buy, um, a scale, uh, a pair off scales in uh, in John Lewis and [clears throat] and weigh your bags of flour on that, they have to be thoroughly tested by the weights and measure inspector, and stamped, with a special metal stamp, a lead seal. Uhm, and they'd check that every time they'd come, to make sure no-one's [clears throat] interfered with that [clears throat] excuse me.

Bless you [quietly]

Um, so they'd do the small, the small scales when I did the small bags on, and they'd do the big scales for the thirty-two-kilogram bags for the bakers and things. So that was all, all, that was all done twice a year as well. Uh, the stitching machine, the stitching the bags up, that had to be tested as well, and checked every time. So, there was a few different things that went on during the year which were, just part of the makeup of the running of the mill really.

Yeah. So how many sorts of products were you selling? Like how many different varieties of things were you sort of producing in your mill?

[00:17:09]

Well it's wholemeal flour

Yep

And that would consist of, uh, wheat, I would do rye. I did do some spelt at the end, but I can talk about that later, um and then the by-products from the, from the flour, there was a special machine called the [clears throat] a dressing machine which you put the wholemeal flour through, and it would separate it into semolina and, well it separated it actually into the whitish flour, semolina and brown. And you put those three things back together again, you've got your wholemeal flour again. And that's all done with sieving and things, that's a rotating sieve that goes round in a, in a machine called a dressing machine.

Yeah. And um, so what, so what sort of places were you selling to?

Bakers, health food shops, farm shops and then farmers markets.

Um, you said you used to get flooded twice a year, sort of, what sort of procedures did you have in place to prepare for that and how did you deal with, um, with the mill getting flooded?

[00:18:20]

Nothing much you can do, you can't stop the River Thames, they would, the environment agency, would quite often give me a quick ring and say [clears throat] heavy rain up north at Oxford, it'll be coming down in three to four days, we've opened some sluices up, but you're gonna get uh high water. So you got a bit of warning like that. So, I would obviously mill, two or three days on the run, to make sure I got a good stock in. Cause you're never sure whether it was going to be flooded for a week, a month, or even longer sometimes, before it went down again. So, um, it was a good sign to get milling, and uh, do as much as you could, and then once the river starts to come up a bit, it comes up very fast indeed in fact, um you can actually watch it coming up, it's quite frightening. Uhm, the thing, the main thing to do is to block the water wheel, or what we call chock it, so that you put, uhm, wooden planks at the front and back of the, of the wheel so it can't move. Cause otherwise once it gets flooded it will back, it will start going backwards and er, not, not good for the wheel anyway, but uh, so um, that was the main thing. Um, and the same inside the mill, the first, the first wheel inside the mill, the pit wheel, that would also be, be blocked as well, so it couldn't turn. Uhm, yeah, the pit wheel is in the same as the um, the water wheel, so it's [clears throat] below the ground floor of the mill as it were. But quite a few times [clears throat] the river would raise high enough that it actually came into the mill, which was quite, quite scary, you know. The worst time I think, was up to my knees inside the mill, which I, I only saw that twice, but uh, yeah it's just that it, you can't do anything about it. You've got to wait til everything goes down and then you've got thick mud on the floor with dead fish and god knows, real smell, horrible. You've gotta clean all that up, which can take weeks and weeks to dry out. And you still get the marks on the wall, uhm, from where it, where the, where the water level was so, yeah, so reminders haha that it can happen and does happen. Yeah.

Was there any damage to any of the equipment within the mill?

You gotta be careful because obviously, things like the pit wheel, which as I say is below the level of the floor, uhm, the wooden er cogs there, oak cogs, will tend to swell, if they're underwater for a long time. And that means they're not gonna mesh very well with the, with the next wheel up. So you have to be a bit careful, just to keep an eye on that and that once they've shrunk again they can get loose, so [audio feedback] you gotta check everything over. And uh, cause each one is individual, you gotta check each one so it's quite a job.

And um was it, was it just you working in the mill, or did you have a team?

[00:21:08]

No just me. I had a young lad, well I had a team of young men over the years, that were from local schools or colleges that just wanted a bit of experience, and they were all brilliant. From uh the um Reading, Reading Bluecoats, the oratory school, they were absolutely brilliant. And uh, they all loved it. And I used to say to them when they first started, look if you're enjoying it, tell me, cause I don't wanna waste my time teaching you stuff, if, if you're not gonna carry on, and uh, not one of them left. And they all found it amazing on their um sort of CVs in later life, my son particularly, uh who used to help me, um, when he went for his first interview, they didn't ask about his qualifications, they just asked about being a deputy miller. [laughs] So, yeah, they found that absolutely fascinating, and that was good. Yeah, I think, I think they used to enjoy being in, doing something different, hands-on, um, it, I suppose going back, computers and technology and iPhones weren't around particularly that much, so it, they weren't uh um choosing between that and, and that. But they just loved it, they, they just loved, you know, sort of seeing this machinery, it was like that, the inside of a clock, big, big gears

and everything and uh yeah, and they, they wrote it up, and newspapers and things to be interviewed, so they really enjoyed it, so it was good. [laughs]

Do you know if any of them ever went on to do anything else in milling after?

I, I don't think so, I don't know, I don't think so. I know one lad, the very first one I had, went to live in, Denmark I think it was, and he came back a couple of times to see me over the years and, and said he'd been visiting mills over there, so the interest was there, but not the actual, you know, taking up of, of the, of milling.

Um, so obviously, you're a woman miller, were there any other female millers at the time?

[00:23:15]

There was one other lady down in Devon, um, but quite often the newspapers picked up on it and said the only lady miller in the UK, and she used to get really quite cross with me [laughs] even though I'd say, you know, there is another lady, but I don't, I, I yeah, she was milling as well, so that, that was good. So that, we were the only two at the time, as far as I know of, and I think I was the only one to work towards the end, I think she gave it up in the end, and went into uhm, either buying or working in an art shop in the end, but uh, I carried on, so I was probably the only lady miller for a while anyway definitely.

Did you face any particular challenges because of that?

No not at all, I think I was respected, more than anything, by millers. Get my legs pulled sometimes by the boys on the uh, on the, on the estate, when they'd deliver grain to me when I ordered it, they'd deliver grain at night, and lave it in a, um, a very high sided, um, truck, um, with just a, um, control to fill sacks up from it. But of course I couldn't see inside it so, the was I filling all these sacks with grain, and of course when I then put them into the mill, and tipped them in, there was leaves and things had blown in over night from the trees all round.

[00:24:31]

So, in the end I decided this is getting a bit stupid, so I stopped getting it from the estate and um, and then bought it, bought it in myself, from a, a grain merchant, which was, it worked out about the same pricing anyway, because even though I wasn't particularly getting paid by Mapledurham, it was, we kept books all the time, so every time I wanted some grain, it was recorded, umm, and how much it would have cost sort of thing, so, um, when I started buying it for the estate, they, they didn't mind at all. It sort of kept the books straight anyway, so that was good.

Yeah

But you gotta be careful with the grain, because it's gotta be the right protein, the right moisture, and, and a thing called the hagburg [sp?] which is the elasticity of the, of the um, the flour and the water mixed together with the yeast, to make sure you've gotta, a good rise for the baker, otherwise you get just a flat loaf, so. All those things had to be tested, so again, that's something else that, I would do the sort of moisture testing myself, but the other things had to be done, um, either by the grain merchant, uhm, or a specialised place to do that. Yeah.

When you checked it was it ever inadequate, and what would you do then?

[00:25:50]

Yeah, once it was, and the grain went back to the, back to the grain merchant straightaway. Yeah. I mean the, the, what they'd done, they'd over dried the flour, uh the grain, because when grain is brought in immediately from the field, it's quite damp and it's too wet to, to mill. Otherwise, it would just stick to the mill stones like porridge, you know, be a right, right sticky mess. So it has to be the right moisture content, and this was very very quite low and the baker rang me and said, got a real problem with this batch of flour, it just won't rise. So went over to talk to him, we had a long chat about it, and I think we both came to the same conclusion, that the grain had been artificially dried, which they do, uh, it's no problem with that, with warm air, but they'd over done it, and it had actually killed off most of the gluten, so there was no gluten left in the flour for it to rise, so I phoned up the grain merchant and told him that, and there's no problem, he just came and collected seven tonnes, I used to get seven tonnes delivered at a time. He'd just come and collect it all and, take it away and bring me a new batch.

How long did seven tonnes of grain last you?

It depended on how much I was milling, you know, could do a, I could do a tonne in a day if I wanted to, but erm, it was, you know, no point in over milling and not being able to get rid of it. So uh, the grain will keep longer than flour so. It, it spread itself out over the years. Probably, over a year, forty-five, fifty tonnes a year, probably. It doesn't sound a lot, but it, it's quite a lot for a traditional mill.

Yeah. And um, after you retired what happened, like does a new miller come in to Mapledurham?

[00:27:34]

Supposedly.

So it's still going?

No. No. No it's a, a sad story. I don't wanna go really into that. But um, yeah, I mean, yeah, so ah the person that took over did it for a few years and, then uh, I think it was when, presumably it might have been lockdown that caused this, I don't know, but he just uh, walked away and that was it. Um, I have [inaudible] two or three times, and the, the mill is in a real, not a very nice state at the moment, and I've been out with the millwright cleaning up and tidying up a bit, needs a lot more doing to it again before it'll mill again, but um, we'll see.

Yeah. Um, when you needed repairs, was there one millwright you'd always use, and um what was the relationship between you and the millwrights like?

[00:28:28]

Yeah, I mean, yeah the, I got to know all the millwrights, because I, from the SPAB side of things, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings side, I used to run a millwright meeting once a year. And I'd invite all the millwrights on the um millwright directory that we had, probably between ten and fifteen millwrights, uhm, and most of them would come to this meeting in London once a year, and we'd spend the whole day discussing problems they had, how we could help them, how they could help us, um, how they could help mills and millers. Umm, so I got to know them very well indeed. And, obviously, the local one to me was the one to use, but they were quite expensive, um, and I did call upon another millwright, in Wiltshire, who was absolutely brilliant. He's a one-man band and all he wants to do is to keep mills working, so, if I phone up and said I got a problem, he was there the next morning, he was absolutely brilliant. And, he did, he did most of the repairs for me over the years. The main um local millwright did build a new water wheel for me, so the large jobs, uh, they would do, but basically the other one would come in and get on with the job, uhm, have all his tools in the back of

his van, he'd bring his dog, and sometimes he'd bring his, his uh, his wife and his, and his um, say his wife and his dog with him. And they'd sit by the river while he did his work and then off they'd go home again, but uh, no he was um, excellent, so yeah. And if you've got a good relationship, it, it pays off in the end because they get to know you, you get to know them, and I would, you know, if I had a problem, I could strip everything down ready for him coming in, so that he wouldn't spend, spend time having to do that so, I tried to keep his time to a minimum as well, so he could get the job done in a day, and then when he'd gone, sometimes he actually would help me, put everything back together, and then we'd start milling again, and he loved it. He would, he would you know, stay for an hour while we milled. Other times I'd just put it all back together after he's gone, and um, and everything was fine so, yeah, building up a relationship is, is very important.

Yeah. Speaking of building relationships, you'd have people, like school visits come into the mill whilst you were working there as well and opening it to the public. What was that like, having, showing off the mill to the public?

[00:31:04]

Yeah, it was good. The weekends, it was the general public, um, and in the end I didn't go in on Saturdays, there was a gentleman who, who was one of the house guides, for Mapledurham House, and he got very interested in the mill, and he would come in on Saturdays, and just, just start the wheel up, he wouldn't be milling, he'd just let the wheel, the waterwheel free wheel, and talk to visitors and take them round. Um, Sunday, I would go, and I'd be milling on the day, as well as showing people round as well, which was you know, quite difficult to do sometimes. Um, but during the week we had school parties, sometimes it was school parties, sometimes it was grown-up parties, but it would be, you know, four days a week, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, um every week, showing people round. And, school children were wonderful, they were very um, enthusiastic, very um, wanting to know everything about everything and, um, it was really good, it made me think sometimes, and uh, yeah, and then they'd sit outside doing drawings, and the teachers would send me the drawings and letters afterwards, which I've got a whole folder full of them, it's wonderful stories and pictures so it's lovely. Yes it was, it was really enjoyable. Anything from um, a private school in Henley, to uh, a big school in Reading, you know, would come. So, we'd have anything from ten children to fifty children. Obviously with large numbers uh, we had to divide it into small groups, so could take, you know, the whole of a morning to do thirty children and say, because I'd do probably ten at the most at a time. That was enough to cope with and then, uh, while that lot was outside drawing or walking around the village, looking at the, the church, the alms-houses and the house, then swap over and uh, and then do the mill, so, yeah it was good. They enjoyed that, very much.

Yeah brilliant, um, well I think that's probably enough to get started with today, unless there's anything else you particularly want to talk about?

I don't think so, uh, I made a few notes, uh, don't think so, I think um, no I think that's about it. And talk more about [audio feedback] the millwrights and that perhaps later on as well possibly.

Yeah

Got some more stories about that, as well. So uh yeah, and all my, I sort of, as the result of the SPAB I got involved with the heritage lottery fund, which is another story as well.

Yeah

[00:33:44]

So there's all different spin-offs um from the actual milling itself, but I mean, the milling itself was just absolutely amazing, I mean, just being so privileged to work this 400 year old mill, and, just enjoy everything round it, you know, the river, you got kingfishers, you've got grebes, you've got all the swans nesting right next to you, you've got the fishermen you could talk to, and, yeah, it was just an amazing environment, and so, okay you had to, you know, you couldn't relax in one sense, but on the other hand it was, it was very relaxing. It just, just having the water all round you, and just thinking, the water that's gone under my wheel, is now going out through, you know, London [laughs] and through the um, what you call it, the barrier, and out into the channel, and you know, so it's amazing how it, just the flow of everything, just yeah, lovely. Yeah, it was great.

Brilliant, yeah

[00:34:47]

And there's also, you know there's also, keeping an eye on not only the machine. But the building itself, cause there's no gutters.

Yeah

So, you gotta be careful water's not running down the wall and checking on things, and water coming into the mill via the roof, because you get build up of moss and things, and if it all builds up then the water's got nowhere to go, so it'll come in. So sometimes you go in to the, after a, after a very heavy shower, you'd walk into the mill shop, and there'd be a big pool of water in the middle of the floor. You'd think, oh heavens yeah, it's the roof again, so out you'd go and clean the roof off with all the moss and then you're ok again. So, it's, it's just keeping an eye on things all the time, it's maintenance pays. And I run a course called maintenance matters, and it certainly does, you know, you don't have to, erm, look very far when you see mills, sometimes in a state they're in, think yeah, this hasn't been looked after, that's the reason you know. Anyway, another story again, another day. [laughs]

Yeah

[00:35:47]