



COBHAM MILL PRESERVATION TRUST

NEWSLETTER ~ SPRING 2018

The Annual 'Volunteer's Get-together' will take place on Sunday, May 20th from 3.30pm – 5.30pm in the New Hall at the Cobham Village Hall, off Lushington Drive. Please join us for a welcome glass of wine, followed by afternoon tea. Why not bring along a guest (or two), but please do let us know.

RSVP to info@cobhammill.org.uk, or leave a message on 01932 867387, or by post to the Secretary, Cobham Mill, Mill Road, Cobham, Surrey KT11 3AL

Open Days during 2017

As usual our Open Days proved popular, with donations and takings from the sales table very much in line with previous years. We were particularly pleased to see so many families, some recently moved to the area, bringing their children and showing interest in the way wheat used to be converted into flour.

Group Visits

Group visits were numerous throughout the season. We were very pleased to welcome the Berkshire Environmental Association last June, from whom I received the following message of thanks: -

"The BEA (Berkshire Environmental Association) enjoyed a wonderful, informative visit to Cobham Mill. Thank you to all the volunteers who spoke with passion and great fondness for this wonderful piece of working history; your enthusiasm was infectious. It is incredible that people had vision and the energy to bring this project to fruition and that it has been fortunate to have a band of people, like yourself, to create a new history for it. We greatly appreciated the opening of the mill for our visit – we felt very special and honoured."

We were also pleased to welcome two groups of children from the Cobham Free School last September and were impressed with the interest they showed.

Volunteering at the Mill

Our team of volunteers has continued to organise and run the open days and weekday visits of other interested groups. However, our manpower resources were severely stretched at various points during last year as many of our older volunteers have stepped down. The Board is working hard to recruit more members and more volunteers and we hope that our current members will do everything possible to spread the word. Volunteering need not be onerous: some volunteers may only offer a few hours a year, but are nevertheless welcomed. Please do mention the Trust to new neighbours and especially to people who are reaching retirement or recently retired.

One of our original volunteers, Mr Gordon Potter, will be celebrating his 100th birthday this coming May. Gordon together with two other millers became known as "the three musketeers" as a result of the painstaking work they undertook in the restoration project in the 1990s. Many congratulations, Gordon.

Wood from the cherry trees recently removed from the Tilt

In times past, fruitwood was the material of choice used in the manufacture of parts of the mill machinery. We hope that the replacement of the cherry trees on the Tilt will provide us with a small cache of old cherry wood that we can 'season' and keep for any repairs that become necessary. In this way, we feel that the original memorial trees will continue to play a part in Cobham's heritage. The Trust has applied to Elmbridge Green Spaces Committee for a small supply of suitable wood, should this become available.

Future of the Mill – the saga continues

As reported in last year's newsletter, the Environment Agency, which currently owns the mill, initiated discussions with the Mill Board concerning the future of the mill. The Agency indicated that it wanted to pass on ownership of the mill to the Trust. In principal, this is a move acceptable to the Trust as there had always been a determination that the mill should one day be considered to belong to the people of Cobham. However, the proposal from the EA included a requirement that the Trust should also take full responsibility for the ownership, maintenance and operation of the weirs, a proposal we felt to be both unrealistic and unfeasible. The discussions then stalled.

Toward the end of last year we made a tentative enquiry regarding possible progress on this matter, suggesting that since we had heard nothing for such an extended period, the whole idea of the EA disposing of the Mill, land and weirs had been quietly dropped from its agenda. This resulted in a quick response to the effect that the 'disposal' was still an on-going objective.

The Board has consistently made it clear to the EA that it resolutely holds the view that the weirs are a fundamental part of the local flood prevention / protection facilities, as represented in our excellent video presentation, and as such must remain firmly in the ownership of the EA. The EA does not hold the same view and the ultimate necessity of the weirs remaining under its ownership continue to be disputed.

In January, we had a brief meeting with a senior estates surveyor from the EA, the primary objective being that he become more familiar with the mill, weirs and the areas of the surrounding land that is currently owned by the agency. At this meeting he was also made aware of the CMPT's position on our possible take-over of ownership of the weirs, the extent of the maintenance and running costs we currently bear, as well as the work we undertake to preserve the mill as the only fully working watermill in Surrey.

The recent installation of the solar powered and remotely operated river and weir monitoring cameras, presumably considered by the EA to be a necessary addition to the river monitoring facilities, further confirms our position that the weirs must remain firmly in the ownership of the EA.

It has also come to light that Cobham Park Estate has been approached with a view to it purchasing or taking over the responsibility for the weirs and surrounding land. Unsurprisingly, the Estate was "not at all interested".

The Landscaped Area

Following the floods of 2013/14, the Environment Agency undertook the restoration of the spillway to its original condition and the re-landscaping and re-seeding of the adjacent area. This was partially completed during 2015. Notably, the re-landscaping included the parcel of land outside the area owned by the EA. We were advised that, to enable the re-seeded area to become properly established, it would be best to keep the access gate locked for the time being. Due to other considerations, primarily the levels of litter left behind and the "constituents" of the litter, it had been agreed that the area should remain locked unless a specific request to enter is made during our Sunday opening periods.

Recently, we have been approached by the Cobham Conservation and Heritage Trust (CCHT) concerning the possibility that the area might be opened to the public more frequently. The Mill Board has responded by outlining the many potential problems associated with such a move, and suggested it should first contact the EA in this regard. Should the EA agree with the proposal, then the CCHT will need to take a significant share of the responsibility for locking / unlocking the gate, and maintaining the area's cleanliness.

Since the 2013/14 flooding, the EA has introduced a new set of steps into the river, with adjacent new and padlocked gate close by the entrance to the fish ladder. The entrance to the fish ladder has also been modified better to control the flow. In our opinion it is not fit for purpose, and some further modification is necessary. Also, a new (again in our view, unnecessary) gate was installed at the far end of the furthest bridge. Additionally, the EA advised us of plans to amend and improve the steps to the footway over the main weirs. In the light of its current financial situation it seems unlikely that this will happen in the near future.

Nevertheless, despite limited funding, the EA has installed two new solar powered cameras to monitor remotely the condition of the river flow at the weirs. The Mill Trust has "unofficially" been offered the facility to be able to view remotely the live output of these cameras. No decision on this has so far been made, particularly as acceptance could be construed to conflict with our position that we are not in any way able to take responsibility for the weirs.

We remain hopeful that, given time, the unnecessary repointing of the brickwork that was done a couple of years or so ago will eventually mellow and become less noticeable. Overall, and primarily from a visual point of view, we were grateful that the old original cast iron guttering was re-used, and that no additional, probably plastic, guttering along both sides of the entrance passageway was fitted. The replacement roof tiles are generally considered to be a good match with the originals.

Mill Maintenance.

At the time of going to press we should be well on the way with the reassembly of the milling machinery following our usual winter maintenance programme. There will of course be the necessity to replace some of the waterwheel paddles and to ensure that the flow through the leat is not impaired by the usual root growth from the adjacent willow tree. Also there will be plenty of local tidying up to do around and about the mill building before our first open day on Sunday 8th April. (Any offers of assistance will be gratefully received!)

Improved Lighting

Already installed before the April open day last year were new and more up-to-date sealed pit area strip lights. These were introduced following the mill survey on 'health and safety' grounds and enabled some of the older strip lights to be reused in the entrance passageway, giving much improved lighting in this area.

However, over the winter period, one of the new strip lights failed. Because the new light units are of a more complex design than the units they replaced, we have needed to call upon the EA to help sort out the problem. It doesn't say much for the longevity of modern lighting equipment.

Mill Restoration Video

Those of you who have visited the mill during the last few years will probably have seen the video that describes the restoration work that was undertaken by a group of volunteers during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This video, frequently shown and usually for sale as a DVD during our open days, has now been made available to a worldwide audience via our website. Simply open your browser, and search 'Cobham Mill'. Go to the 'History of the Mill' page and then to the 'The Mill Restoration' page and play the video.

Most important: Data Protection:- please read the attached form carefully, complete, and return.

The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has recently been updated and will apply from 25th May 2018 when it supersedes the 1995 Data Protection Directive (DPD). The UK Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) will be superseded by a new DPA that enacts the GDPR's requirements.

This will require the Cobham Mill Preservation Trust to obtain valid and particular consent for us to hold your personal data. As a consequence, a form that provides further information, and requires your completion and return if we are to continue holding your data, has been attached to this newsletter.

And finally

My thanks go to all our hard working volunteers and also to all Cobham Millers for their continued support. If you know of anyone who would like to join our volunteers in maintaining the Mill, or who might be able to assist in any way, please do ask them to get in touch. Our contact details are shown below.

And just one last request; please make sure that we have your up-to-date email address. Using email enables us to avoid the ever-rising cost of printing and mailing your annual newsletter. Remember, all recent newsletters can be viewed on the 'Newsletters' page of our website.

Richard Ward,
Chairman

Board members: Maggie Bowen; Ray Brodrick; Bob Cummings; Noel Ingram; Nita Rodd; David Taylor; Patricia Ward; Richard Ward

Telephone: 01932 867387 (please leave a message).

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