Open Days during 2020 will be on the following Sundays from 2.00pm to 5.00pm

12th April, 10th May, 14th June, 12th July, 9th August, 13th September, 11th October and Cobham Heritage Day, Saturday 12th September, from 12.00 noon to 5.00pm

Membership News

Retirement of Nita Rodd, our long serving Board member.

Last May, at our afternoon tea party in the village hall, members were informed that Nita Rodd would be retiring from the Board in July. Nita is one of the founding members of the CMPT and has held various positions on the Board, most recently in charge of the sales table. Nita’s contribution to the running of the mill and her knowledge of how the Trust was set up has been invaluable. “If in doubt, ask Nita” usually worked. She will be greatly missed, but for the time being she continues to oversee the stocking of the sales table. Throughout, Nita has been supported by her husband Michael and both received small gifts to thank them for their work.

Also at the party was long term member Gordon Potter, who celebrated his 100th birthday last year. He was one of the original members known as ‘the three musketeers’ who were instrumental in carrying out the initial Mill restoration. He stood up at the party to tell members more about those exciting times.

New picnic table: In memory of Harold and Anne Addicott

Last October we took delivery of a new picnic table of similar design to the two we already have situated on the river side of the mill. It is made from oak and has been much admired. It was very generously donated to the Mill Trust by Jeremy Addicott in memory of his parents. Harold Addicott was the treasurer of the CMPT and a trustee, a long term member of the Board and a keen volunteer.

Greta Curtis retires as a guide.

One of the original members of the CMPT since the 1990’s, Greta recently moved from Cobham to be nearer her family. She was the Hon. Secretary and a Trustee for many years and it was only last year that she gave up being a guide. She is anxious to keep in touch and we hope to see her at one of our Open Days. We send her our best wishes.

Our Crown Jewels

In 2019, the Trust was invited to take part in an initiative of the Cobham Conservation & Heritage Trust (CCHT) involving St. Andrew’s Church, the Mill and St. Mary’s Church in Stoke d’Abernon, these being considered to be the three crown jewels of our local historic heritage. We have been advised that this initiative will be continued and of course we will continue to play our part. Updated leaflets will be available at each venue on mill open days and will generally be available more widely at other times. All three locations will be open to the public at times coincident with our normal Sunday openings on the 2nd Sunday of the months April to October, and of course Heritage Day. As at the Mill, guides will be on hand at each venue.

New Banner

You may have noticed that we have introduced a new banner on the east side of the mill to advertise our open days. This is located lower than the original and replaces the old one that has been used for at least the last twenty something years. This had become rather ‘tatty’, and was never a simple task to either put up, or take down. The new one avoids both of these difficulties and is easier to store.
Sluice Gate malfunction

Our Sunday open day on 10th June 2019 started quite normally; all was working well. We had just completed the final showing of the video at about 4.30 and were trying to restart the waterwheel. Nothing happened, but why? A quick check revealed that the sluice gate had separated about half way down, leaving the lower half in position and blocking the path of the water from the leat. Luckily this happened just before we were due to close so not many visitors were aware of our predicament. We had just a month to determine the appropriate course of action and complete a repair.

Having removed the old sluice gate, it was clear that replacement with a completely new one was the best course of action. Thankfully, our normal source of timber, Norbury Park Sawmill, was able to supply the requisite timber components, cut to our specifications, and at short notice. Also, our group of volunteers was able to assemble, install and completely test the new sluice gate in time for 14th July 2019 open day. See below :-

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Mill Inspections

Last October, following our October open day, the Mill was subjected to a structural inspection by the Environment Agency. This was to be followed by a mechanical and electrical inspection later in the year. However, this inspection has been postponed several times due to EA personnel being required for more urgent duties as a result of severe flooding in the midlands and north of England. The latest date we have for this inspection is 23rd / 24th March.

Group Visits during 2019

In August, despite the rain, a group of about 20 adults from the Friends of Guildford Museum visited the mill. In September, we welcomed a group of 16 home tutored children between the ages of 7 and 12 years, accompanied by 7 adults. Afterwards we received the following message from their organiser:-

“Just a note to say thank you to yourself and your team of volunteers for the session you ran at Cobham Mill for our group today. It was fascinating for the children to see historic technology and water power in action, as well as the way the river has been managed for that, and to have a real life glimpse into everyday life in the past. We really appreciated learning from your knowledge, experience and enthusiasm. It was lovely too to spend a bit of extra time near the Mill afterwards - it is a very pleasant place. Thank you so much for a really informative morning.”

Volunteering at the Mill

Our current team of volunteers has continued to organise and run the normal Sunday open days and the occasional visit of other interested groups. However, our volunteer resources during last year were severely stretched. 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. Please do mention the Trust to new neighbours and especially to those who are reaching retirement or are already retired. If not already a volunteer, as an existing member, why not consider becoming a ‘volunteer’ yourself?
Routine Annual Maintenance

As usual, a few of the older elm paddles worked a little loose and required attention during the year. Inevitably this has resulted in a backlog of repairs and replacements that needed urgent attention during the period leading up to our first 2020 open day. The original paddles were made of English elm (Ulmus procera) and are supported by ‘starts’ made from English oak (Quercus robur). Due to the shortage of English elm, of which there are only about 100 trees left in the UK, we have been replacing the deteriorated elm paddles with English oak for a number of years. So far these newer paddles have proved to be up to the task. The recent adverse weather conditions and high water levels of the River Mole have delayed matters, and some elderly paddles will have to wait for a future replacement opportunity. Hopefully, they will survive for another year.

Each time the river floods, a muddy mess is left behind in the pit and on the pit wheel. This gets worse with each subsequent flooding. So far this year the mill has been flooded several times with the worst to about 4 inches above floor level. All this flooding residue still needs to be power jet spray cleaned before we can open to the public. We plan to do this in early April.

The clearance of the usual root growth from the nearby willow tree, to ensure adequate flow through the leat, will also need attention at time closer to our April open day. So there is still plenty of work to be done, both inside and outside the mill building before our first open day on Sunday 14th April. Any offers of assistance will be gratefully received!

Ownership of the Mill

You will now be familiar with the fact that the Environment Agency is the current owner of the mill and in early 2016 it initiated discussions with the Mill Board regarding the possible transfer of ownership of the mill to the Trust. These discussions later stalled due to the EA’s unrealistic and unfeasible requirements for the transfer to proceed.

Since then, despite a number of discreet enquiries in an attempt to determine whether the EA has moved matters forward, all we know is that the future of the Mill is still under consideration. Of course, we will keep you updated should we hear anything further.

Past ownership of the Mill

With reference to the “History of the Mill” section of our website, there is a further section “Owners and Tenants” that leads to a page entitled “What we know of the ownership and tenants of the Mill”. This shows that in 1777 the mill and the house opposite were leased to Thomas Lucy. Later, in 1778, Thomas Lucy probably purchased the lease after a questionable pay-off of £1050 by the Lucy family.

Recently we were contacted by a descendant of Thomas Lucy, who currently lives in Melbourne (Australia), and is planning to visit the mill next June.

Data Protection

The UK’s departure from the EU will not make any difference to the way we have to handle your personal data. We still need to show compliance with the equivalent UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). To date only about 40% of our members have provided us with the requisite approval to maintain your personal data. If you have already completed the form or provided the Trust with an equivalent response, I thank you. However, for the remainder of our members, I am again asking that you provide us with a clear indication that we may hold this data. Please use whatever means is most appropriate for you (i.e. by hand, by Royal Mail, by email etc.). Alternatively, a simple letter will suffice, but please make sure that whatever method used clearly identifies the preferences for all the members that the communication covers and is signed and dated appropriately. (Please note that a Membership Subscription form is also included, just in case you need one.)

The Landscaped Area

The Cobham Conservation and Heritage Trust (CCHT) approached the Mill Trust concerning the possibility that the landscaped area might be opened to the public more frequently. Although the area is often open for public use during the times when the mill is open, we have again approached the CCHT on this subject and have been advised that this possibility is still under consideration.

As reported in the 2019 newsletter, the Landscaped Area was being considered for inclusion in an updated version of the Cobham Conservation Area. The Cobham Character Appraisal & Management Proposals Working Group, set up by Elmbridge Borough Council, has completed its review and its final report now shows this to be the case.
Our records

Over the years we have tried to keep our records as up-to-date as possible. However, despite our best endeavours, this has not proved to be an easy task. Members move location and may not advise us, members pass away and we don’t hear, or simply members do not wish to continue with their membership and we are not informed. Therefore, as a means of minimising the unnecessary paperwork and postage costs, we now apply the following policy.

Should our current records show that a member has not paid the annual subscription for 3 consecutive years, the member will no longer automatically receive a copy of our annual newsletter, nor will the member receive further communications from the Trust.

As part of our continued efforts generally to reduce unnecessary paper work and postage costs, we will continue to send out copies of the newsletter by email, unless you have specifically requested communications by post. However, and where possible, please advise us of your email address by emailing us at ‘info@cobhammill.org.uk’ or ‘membership@cobhammill.org.uk’, and we can do the rest.

For the Philatelists

During 2017, we accepted a request for Cobham Mill to be involved in the introduction of a new postage stamp issue to commemorate Windmills & Watermills. As thanks, we were given a limited number of First Day Cover envelopes with the £1.40 stamp pre-franked by a simplistic waterwheel design surrounded by the words “COBHAM MILL, COBHAM, SURREY” and dated 20th June 2017. We still have a few left. Should anyone be interested, I’m sure we can agree a price.

Mill Restoration Video

As mentioned in last year’s newsletter, but worth another mention, is the video that is frequently shown during our open days is now available to a worldwide audience via our website. Simply open your browser and search ‘Cobham Mill’, go to the ‘History of the Mill’ page, then to the ‘The Mill Restoration’ page, and click play.

Our Finances

We are grateful to our members who pay their annual subscription, many of whom also make a donation. This income is supplemented by sales and donations made when we open the mill to the public. Our Sunday Open Days proved particularly popular this year, with additional funds generated by our tea and cakes lady Elizabeth (plus a willing assistant or two). All this helps to defray our maintenance and other operating costs.

We have been very fortunate that, despite damage caused by flooding, the careful attention of our technical volunteers has kept us free from major expense. If the driving mechanism of the mill should fail, and some of it, if not most of it could be close to 200 years old, we could be faced with a very large expenditure. Hopefully, we maintain adequate reserves to cover such an eventuality.

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; David Taylor; Patricia Ward; Richard Ward

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