



COBHAM MILL PRESERVATION TRUST

NEWSLETTER ~ SPRING 2022

Open Days during 2022 will be on the following Sundays from 2.00pm to 5.00pm

**8th May, 12th June, 10th July, 14th August, 11th September, 9th October,
and Cobham Heritage Day, Saturday 4th June, from 12.00 noon to 5.00pm**

Before you do anything else, please read the section on "Our records and future policies" on Page 3.

Covid-19 and how it has affected us.

You will by now be aware that the mill has not been open to the public since the commencement of our winter maintenance programme in December 2020. This work was due to be completed in March 2021. We were originally hoping to open as normal in April 2021 following the commencement of the Covid-19 vaccination programme. However, the first 2021 opening of the mill had to be further delayed due to combination of Covid 19 restrictions and the availability of the necessary volunteers to operate the mill.

Although we were unable to open the mill, the opportunity was taken to undertake some very necessary maintenance work on the weir immediately below the mill entrance passageway. This structure had been in need of repair for some considerable time and was completely rebuilt using the original bricks, many of which were recovered from the tailrace. All repair work was organised and skilfully carried out by Tom Brown and Gerard Klijnsmit with the help of Malcolm Perry. Further exterior work, to substantially cut back the pyracantha bushes and other overgrown vegetation, was undertaken by Adrian Mills. We are most grateful to all four for their help and expertise.

The Landscaped Area - a new look for the area beyond the weirs

During last spring, wildflower seeds were sown in accordance with the plan attached to last year's newsletter. The planned sowing was made with agreement of the Environment Agency (EA) which owns some of the land. It specified that only native varieties would be used. At the time, we organised that the monthly mowing of the area would be restricted in accordance with the plan.

The first mowing of 2021 took place **in** early April and carefully followed the plan, as did the second mowing in early May. At the time the area was beginning to look a little "ragged and unkempt" with no sign of any wild flowers. Then it all started to go wrong! Someone had entered the site and mown the entire area, including all the marker flags identifying exactly where the Yellow Rattle seeds had been planted.

By the time the summer came along, still with little or no signs of any wildflowers blooming, it was decided that we would admit defeat and resort to mowing the entire area as in previous years. However, we will try again this year, but on a more modest scale. This time we will be setting seed or planting purchased plants, but only within about a metre or so of the boundary hedges, and we will make sure that everyone knows exactly where to mow and where not to mow.

We are hoping that our members, and any other interested local groups (scouts, guides, local schools etc.) will come forward with the wildflower seeds or plants, and we will make sure that necessary access is available. But please remember, only wildflower varieties native to the UK should be used.

Group Visits during 2021

There were no group visits during the whole of 2021. However, during November, we did receive a couple of requests to visit the mill. The first was from a Student at Kingston University studying Historic Building Conservation who was considering the mill as a possible case study module. The other was from a representative of the South East Rivers Trust which was conducting a systematic survey along the River Mole to record possible barriers to the normal annual migration of the European eels.

Both were welcomed at the mill on the same day (29th November 2021) and given full access to both the mill and the surrounding areas, including the weirs. Some photographs were taken and notes were made. Subsequently we have received a report on the findings of the South East Rivers Trust. A précis of the report is given below :-

As part of the Thames Catchment Community Eels Project, the South East Rivers Trust has been working to map barriers to eel migration across the Mole catchment area. Barriers such as weirs are present throughout the entire catchment and can prevent fish and eels from moving up and down the river. Until recently many of these were not known about or mapped. The team now have a more robust dataset of where these barriers are and what they look like. This will be used strategically to assess which barriers can be removed or made passable to eels and fish. In total 107km of river has been mapped with 119 barriers located, 66 of which were previously unrecorded. The weirs at Cobham Mill have fish and eel passes fitted and don't pose an issue to movement along the River Mole.

Routine Annual Maintenance

The last routine annual maintenance programme started in late 2019 when the tun was removed and the running stone was lifted to clear away the remnants of the flour milled that year. The work continued into the early part of 2020 and the first Covid 19 'stay-at-home'/lockdown began. At that time all preparations to get the mill up-and-running again came to an end. Since then, Covid-19 has been the primary reason why we have not been able to open the mill to the public.

Even though much of the preparation work was already completed in early 2020, this will necessarily be repeated before our first 2022 opening. This has also been delayed until Sunday 8th May to be sure that everything is satisfactory. Also, you may have noticed the mill floodlights have not been illuminating the mill during the hours of darkness up to about 11.30 pm. The cause has been investigated and remedial work is in hand.

Our Crown Jewels

We will continue to play our part in this Cobham Conservation & Heritage Trust (CCHT) initiatives as best we can. Updated leaflets will normally be available at St. Andrew's Church, St. Mary's Church in Stoke d'Abernon at the Mill during our open days, and will generally be available more widely in the Cobham area at other times.

Volunteering at the Mill

Our volunteer resources during past few years have become severely stretched. The Board continues to work hard to recruit more members and more volunteers, and we trust 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?

Relationship with the Environment Agency (EA).

As you will know, the mill and most of the surrounding areas, including the weirs, are owned by the EA. Some years back the EA proposed to transfer their ownership to the Trust (CMPT) but with certain conditions attached. The Trust considered the attached conditions to be both unreasonable and unworkable. Despite periodic discreet enquiries we have since heard nothing further on this matter.

For many years our primary contact with the EA has been Michele Cooper, with whom we have enjoyed a very professional and helpful relationship. We have recently been advised that Michele has been promoted to other duties within the EA and that our new primary contact will be advised shortly. We would like to thank Michele for her most valuable help, and wish her well in her new position.

Data Protection

As previously stated, the UK's departure from the EU should not impact the way we protect your personal data. We still need to comply with the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA), now known as the UK GDPR. However, enquiries have led us to conclude that we no longer require members to provide a specific statement that we may hold their data. The reason for this is that most, if not all, communications with members are of a "servicing" nature (i.e. this newsletter or notification of specific events etc.). Such communications come under the term "legitimate interest", but primarily because the data we hold will not be used for the purposes of direct marketing.

For the Philatelists

We still have a few 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. Should anyone be interested, I'm sure we can agree a price.

The Closure of Norbury Park Sawmill

We have been using Norbury Park Sawmill as our source of timber for the mill components for many years. These include the waterwheel paddles, the 'starts' that support the paddles, the wedges that locate the waterwheel and the pit-wheel on the axle-tree, and the sluice that controls the flow of water to the paddles. Originally the paddles were made from English elm (*Ulmus procera*) but for the last 15 or more years all the foregoing components have been manufactured using Oak (*Quercus robur*). Luckily, we have maintained a small stock of spares to cover most emergencies.

As a result of the closure of Norbury Park we will be on the lookout for a suitable alternative timber supplier. If you know of one that might fit the bill, please let us know.

Our Finances

We are most grateful to our members who regularly pay their annual subscription, many of whom also make a donation. This income is usually supplemented by the profits from the sales tables and donations made when we open the mill to the public. Sadly, we were unable to open the mill to the public in 2021. However, so far this year, we have been fortunate to avoid any problem due to flooding, and the careful attention of our technical volunteers has kept us mainly free from other major expenses. We remain very aware that most of the mechanical drive components could be close to 200 years old, and many are showing significant signs of wear. So, should any major component fail, we could be faced with very large expenditure. So far we have maintained financial reserves that we believe should be adequate to cover such an eventuality.

Our records and future policies.

As outlined in the 2021 Newsletter, 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. Unless you have specifically requested that all communication shall be post only (Royal Mail), all future copies of the annual newsletter and other communications will be by email or via our website only. So please don't forget to keep your membership and annual subscriptions up to date.

It is therefore most important that you ensure that we have your current email address, or that you have made a specific request for communications by post only. This can be done by letter to the mill or by emailing us at 'info@cobhammill.org.uk', and we will do the rest.

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.**

Richard Ward,
Chairman

Trustees and Board members: Maggie Bowen; Ray Brodrick; Noel Ingram; David Taylor;
Patricia Ward; Richard Ward

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