



COBHAM MILL PRESERVATION TRUST

NEWSLETTER ~ SPRING 2023

Open Days during 2023 will be on the following Sundays from 2.00pm to 5.00pm

9th April, 14th May, 11th June, 9th July, 13th August, 10th September, 8th October,

Please Note: The Mill will NOT be open to the public on Cobham Village Day

OWNERSHIP OF THE MILL

Reference to the “History of the Mill” section of our website, in the section “Owners and Tenants” 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 of Charlecote Park in Warwickshire. The full story is covered in greater detail in the first section ‘The Jolly Miller’, of the book ‘Cobham Characters’ by local historian David Taylor. A post script adds that a descendant of the Lucy family visited Cobham in 1996 with a family tree document that seems to provide supporting evidence for the story and the link with the Lucy family from Warwickshire.

In late 2019 we were contacted by a descendant of the Lucy family, currently living in Australia, who was planning to visit the mill in mid 2020. Sadly, that visit had to be cancelled due to the Covid 19 situation. However, the good news is that we have recently been contacted again, with the news that descendants of the Lucy family are intending the visit us during this coming summer.

We look forward to welcoming them at the Mill.

PIT-WHEEL DETACHMENT

The open day of Sunday 14th August last year is a day that we will not forget in a hurry. All had been operating smoothly, plenty of satisfied visitors (we hope), and with the anticipation of a normal and well practised shut-down and lock-up procedure ahead. Then, at about 4.30pm, the sudden slowing of the waterwheel accompanied an unusual sort of grinding noise. Immediately the water power was isolated and the waterwheel stopped turning. It immediately became clear just what the problem was. The pit-wheel had become detached from the axle-tree (its driveshaft inside the mill). The pit-wheel is normally fixed to and maintained concentric with the axle-tree by pairs of opposing wooden wedges, each pair being thoroughly checked to be securely fitting before operation, as they were on this occasion. We can only speculate that the recent extremely hot and dry weather, plus the inevitable local mechanical vibrations were the cause. A mid-afternoon check is now required (after approximately each 1.5 hours of operation).

A thorough visual check of the pit-wheel and associated components was carried out during the following days and a plan of action put together. Luckily, we are blessed with having a great team of support volunteers, with sets of suitable tools and engineering “know-how” enabling us to overcome most set-backs.

About two weeks later, and following at least a couple of half days spent at the bottom of the pit in trickling river water and a fair amount of mud, using jacking equipment and much of what is sometimes referred to as “brute force and ignorance”, the team successfully relocated the pit-wheel on the axle-tree. No mean feat with the pit-wheel estimated to weigh not too far short of a ton. After a few minor adjustments to check that all alignments were correct, and the connection to the ‘wallower’ drive through to the running stone was satisfactory, a closely monitored trial run was undertaken.

Thankfully, all went well. Congratulations to the team; we could not have done it without you.

MAINTENANCE OF THE MILL AND SURROUNDS

The building that we currently occupy and refer to as 'The Mill' is all that remains following the demolition of a much larger building to allow the A245 road widening in the 1950's. Much major restoration work was undertaken in the early 1990's, with the primary intention of stabilising the building structure, and getting the machinery back into working order again. This accomplished, the bulk of our current efforts are mainly concerned with our continued ability to regularly demonstrate the milling process whilst maintaining the structural and operational integrity of the facility.

To do this we are almost totally dependant on our volunteers. For some work we can call upon the Environment Agency (EA) which owns the mill, the local weirs, and the bulk of the adjacent surrounding land. Although we can call upon the EA for assistance (as we did for the repair of the flood light), we generally take care of and fund minor maintenance problems ourselves. In addition we also pay for the monthly mowing of the grassed areas adjacent to the mill, and those beyond the weirs, from April to October.

As you will understand, we rely totally on the River Mole to provide the power to operate the mill. It is the difference between the upstream and downstream river levels that provides this power. During recent years there has been quite a noticeable general reduction in the flow of the river, particularly during the summer months. So far, we have been able to cope with this by periodically adjusting the weirs, with the permission of the EA, during the days prior to our open days. However, on a couple of occasions last year it was touch and go whether we could operate at all. In part this was due to one of the weirs being jammed and not adjustable. The EA is fully aware of the situation but has so far been unable to obtain and install a replacement part. A recent communication from it advised that with the summer environmental windows of restrictions preventing it from lowering the river levels and performing invasive works on the river, it is unlikely that it will be repaired before next autumn. Let's hope that the weir control gearbox can be repaired prior to the start of the 2024 open day season.

OUR FINANCES

We remain very aware that most of the mechanical drive components could be close to 200 years old and are significantly worn. So, should any major component fail, we could be faced with very large expenditure. We have maintained financial reserves that we believe should be adequate to cover such an eventuality.

Some of our income comes from donations in the donations box and some from the profits from the mill's sales tables when we open to the public. This could not happen without the hard work of all the volunteer guides and sales persons, both young and old.

We are most grateful to our members who regularly pay their annual subscription, many of whom also make a donation. However, we have recently discovered that our bank account with Barclays Bank had been closed in error by Barclays, along with the direct debit facility. This has caused rejection of subscriptions and donations paid by standing order. Our treasurer has of course been in touch with Barclays regarding this matter and has been trying to restore normal service. We ask that you remain patient and take no action at this time.

OUR RECORDS AND FUTURE POLICIES

As outlined in previous newsletters, it is important that members ensure that we have their correct and up-to-date email address, or that they have made a specific request for communications by post only (Royal Mail). This can be done by letter to the mill or by email to info@cobhammill.org.uk, and we will do the rest. Unless you have specifically requested that all communications shall be post only, all future copies of the annual newsletter and other communications will be by email or via our website only.

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.

OUR NEED FOR FOR ADDITIONAL VOLUNTEERS

Over the 25 or so years that we have been opening the mill to the public, we have been very fortunate. We have been able to call upon the help and support of a group of very willing and capable volunteers. Some take on maintenance tasks, some to be guides during open days or when when we have specially arranged visits, and some are simply willing to assist at any time, and in any way they can.

Gradually, over the years, the number of volunteers that we can call upon has slowly declined. The rate of recruitment of new volunteers has slowly been exceeded by the rate of decline, and we can no longer rely on the "jungle telegraph" method of recruitment. Something more positive is clearly required.

Consequently, we will shortly be commencing with a new recruitment campaign. A new banner has been designed and copies will be located in the same two locations as the usual banner that advertises our pending open days. If you notice this new banner, please let us know what you think. Hopefully it will be a success and will not be necessary for too long.

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

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

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

As you will be aware, the part of the mill that we use today was or part of a much larger complex. It was originally added to the original much larger main mill building around 1822, just about 200 years ago. Whilst we are not specifically celebrating the by-centenary of this mill (more's the pity), we thought that we might look into the price of bread at the time that the mill was built.

According to one publication, which was pretty thorough, we discovered that at the time the mill was constructed a typical loaf of bread weighed an amazing 4 pounds and cost only 7.6d, equivalent to 3.167 pence in today's money. Further research showed that the price of the same sized loaf in 1922 was only 9.0d, equivalent to 3.75 pence in today's money. Amazingly, there appears to be negligible inflation during this 100 year period. Historians can probably explain this by reference to the effects of the repeal of the Corn Laws by Sir Robert Peel's government and the importation of grain from north America and Canada.

Continuing for the time between 1922 and today, we need to take into consideration the diminished size and weight of the typical loaf, and the relative cost. With an 800 grammes loaf costing £1.45 in Waitrose (at the time of drafting this), you would need to purchase 2.27 loaves at a total cost of £3.29 for the same weight of bread. This would be at a cost of 790d in old pence or if you prefer £3 5s 9½d. In old money terms the price has risen from 9d to 790d during the last 100 years for a 4lb loaf. That's a significant inflation since 1922, (you can do the maths). Mind you, the current loaf does come ready sliced and wrapped, and probably with added preservatives.

AND FINALLY

My thanks go to all our current 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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Post Script

The recent introduction of Cobham Village Day by the Cobham Conservation and Heritage Trust, and the celebration of this day on the 24th June, culminating with the Duck Race, has necessitated some changes to our normal annual programme.

The main changes are that the Mill will not be open to the public on Village Day, and our usual two consecutive open days around Heritage Day will be reduced to a single day only on 10th September.

