

Open Days during 2015

We could not have been more fortunate with the weather than we were for each of our Open Days last year. The early ones were particularly beautiful with our visitors commenting on the lovely views from the Mill and how tranquil everything seemed despite proximity to the A245. Our first opening in April caught us unawares, however. Everything had been made ready and checked, everything, that is, except the parasol. As it was being raised for the first time in 2016, there was a heavy shower of little pieces of green canvas. A family of mice must have made its winter nest in the canopy and had eaten away substantial chunks of it. There was much concern, especially when the cost of repair had been determined. However, our member Keith Simm made a very generous donation to enable the Trust to purchase a new canopy. This one, needless to say, has been very carefully stored away over the winter.

Each Open Day was very well attended. We estimate that between 80 and 100 people visited each month, with considerably more in September on Cobham Village and the National Heritage Days. It may well be that the new banner, kindly sponsored and provided by John D Wood Estate Agent, which we located on the entrance passageway facing East, helped to draw attention to each event.

Mayoral Visit

In September, we welcomed the Mayor of Elmbridge, Councillor Janet Fuller, who led a party of Mayors and other Civic Dignitaries around the Mill as part of her mayoral day, showcasing Cobham. Again, the weather was excellent and the sun glinted off the multitude of gold chains.

Shalford Mill

On the same day as the Mayoral visit, we were delighted to welcome a team of Millers from Shalford Mill near Guildford, anxious to see and hear a working Mill milling grain. Shalford Mill is much larger than ours, but, unlike our Mill, it no longer works. Our visitors were also interested in recording the mill in operation with a view to using the sound track in Shalford. Sadly their professional sound recordist was unhappy with some of the sounds and extraneous road noises, so nothing came of this.

Our Volunteers.

Our team of volunteers has continued to organise and run the open days and weekday visits of other interested groups. However, in 2015, we lost Anne Mager, who died at the beginning of the season. Several other volunteers were unable to participate as much as they would have liked, for various reasons. Amongst these was Keith Simm, a longstanding trustee who had been ill for some months. He died in December. For many years Keith took responsibility for organising the rosters for Open Days and for group visits. He is remembered with particular affection by those whom he very gently, but effectively, cajoled into acting as guides, technicians, and sales personnel. He made a sometimes onerous task look easy! Keith will be greatly missed, especially for his wise counsel, his engineering expertise and technical skills, and for the behind the scenes work he undertook keeping our manual up to date.

Mill repairs

During the July open day some of the wooden wedges that normally secure the waterwheel to the axletree somehow worked loose. This allowed the waterwheel to become misaligned to the extent that some of the lower paddles were in contact with the mill wall. The resultant peculiar noises and the slowing of the waterwheel triggered an immediate shut down. A quick inspection revealed that most of the outer wedges had departed into tailrace, leaving the waterwheel leaning away from the north wall. (See the photographs below.)





Most of the old retaining wedges were eventually recovered from the tailrace, but it was agreed that new oak wedges would be the most appropriate repair option. Using a new design, Norbury Park Sawmill quickly manufactured two sets of wedges for us. After much head scratching, caused by the not inconsiderable weight of the waterwheel, the task of correctly locating and carefully realigning it took the team a couple of days to complete. Ultimately this was achieved. With over an hour's successful and problem free test running undertaken, the mill was declared ready for operation on the forthcoming August open day.

The Landscaped Area

Following the frequent flooding during the early months of 2014 much silt and debris was deposited on the areas beyond the weirs. As a result and to help reduce the possibility of a recurrence, the Environment Agency decided to repair and restore the spillway to its original condition and to re-landscape the adjacent area. This was finally completed last January. Further work is planned to repair the steps to the footway over the main weirs, and also to provide a means to ensure better control of the flow through the fish ladder.

Structural Survey

A specialist company, on behalf of the Environment Agency, has carried out a structural survey of the mill. Its report runs to more than 20 pages and is very detailed. Apart from many minor defects, which to a great extent might be expected in a building nearly 200 years old, there are some significant repairs and other actions that the survey recommended should be carried out in the short term. These will probably be completed in the coming months and include some exterior brickwork repointing, replacement of broken, cracked or missing roof tiles, guttering repairs, together with some additional guttering along the entrance passage. This work will probably require some temporary scaffolding around three sides of the mill; so don't be surprised if you see this.

An improvement that has already been installed, although not as a result of the survey, is the replacement of the pit lights with more up-to-date double sealed strip lights. This has enabled some of the older strip lights to be installed in the entrance passageway giving much improved lighting in this area.

Important Development

The Cobham Mill Preservation Trust currently leases the Mill from the Environment Agency. We understand that the Agency wishes to reduce its portfolio of properties. A letter from the Agency's Estates Officer-South East has lately advised us that the Agency is currently reviewing its ownership of the mill, and that it is likely that it will look to selling the building and its adjoining land. As part of the process, an external valuation of the property and the mill buildings is probable. We have also been advised that the valuation will take into account the Trust's on-going tenancy and the condition of the building.

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 and opening it to the public, please do ask them to get in touch.

Richard Ward, Chairman

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