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Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

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# Mill News



**Millwright apprentice gets his reward**

Years of training pay off

**A second excavation on the Cambridge Fens**

This time at Spinney Bank West

**Looking at rural crafts abroad**

A Millwright Fellow follows one of his skills

# SPAB Mills Day Event 2024

Ian Wilson

*The theme of the Mills Day event, held online on 30 November, was Mills at Risk. Talks covered windmills and watermills that are currently on the Heritage at Risk Register or have been in the past. What happens when a mill is added to the Heritage at Risk Register? What steps can you take to protect a mill from different risks? Why do some restored mills remain at risk?*

Mildred Cookson opened the meeting voicing long-held concerns that this subject is neither clearly understood nor receives the attention it deserves.

The first speaker was Duncan McCallum: Duncan has nearly 40 years' experience in the heritage sector. He has been Chair of the SPAB since 2023 and is involved in other heritage-related activity in the UK and beyond. He is a member of the IHBC and a Fellow of the RTP1, the Royal Society of Antiquaries and the Royal Society of Arts.

He began by discussing the SPAB in context and its history. He explained the designation of listed buildings and scheduled monuments. His presentation set out to demystify the 'at risk' process, explain its quirks and show how owners can sometimes maximise benefit from scarce resources and the added efforts that government agencies, local authorities and other players in the heritage sector put into finding sustainable solutions. Understanding the

terms and processes involved and how to get the best from the Heritage at Risk Programme is important and Duncan explained the role that regional offices can play in advising applicants. Historic England has been publishing a rolling Heritage at Risk Register for over 30 years. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland slightly different approaches to solving these challenges have been taken. He highlighted some successful outcomes, notably Waltham Windmill, Polegate Windmill and Cobstone (Turville) Windmill. A key point in the concluding discussion was the need to make potential mill owners aware of the magnitude of their undertaking before they embark on this journey and discover the obstacles to be overcome.



Waltham Windmill, Lincolnshire.  
Picture – Paul Glazzard via Geograph.



Willingdon Polegate Windmill, East Sussex.

Luke Bonwick followed with a talk entitled "We can't save them all... can we?" Luke is a millwright consultant and building conservation manager at English Heritage.

In his talk he considered risks and threats to windmills (while acknowledging that many of the risks are common to other mills). He outlined some preservation successes and failures and explained why some restored mills remain at risk. Luke explained that the greatest risk to windmills is tail-winding and that this could occur through fantail malfunction. The importance of regular preventive maintenance was clearly stated. Post and smock mills are the most vulnerable due to their age and timber-framed construction. Weather mapping and winding data gathered by the Smart Molen project also has an important role in windmill safety. Timber-framed mills, post and smock mills are the most vulnerable of windmills. Particular risks

## *SPAB Mills Day Event 2024 – continued*

include poor workmanship in past restorations affecting the life of such works. It is important that appropriate materials and paint are used to prevent water ingress and consequent damage.

Loss of wind is an issue common to all windmills and vigilant monitoring of planning applications is necessary. Long periods of disuse can be particularly damaging. Luke cited the case of Cross-in-Hand Windmill, Sussex. Maud Foster Windmill was noted as a success, although also noting that it is currently for sale. The Kentish mills, represented by Meopham Windmill, were also considered a success, but with an uncertain future in need of understanding and sympathetic ownership. Potential owners need to be aware of the burden of operation and future major repair/maintenance.

The next session highlighted the situation of Thaxted Windmill in Essex, Grade II\* on the Mills at Risk Register. The presentation made extensive use of material prepared by **Anne Mason**, who is the project manager (unfortunately unable to attend), and was led by **Mark Rickards**, Secretary to the Trustees. He was joined by **Ed Morton**, of the Morton Partnership, lead consultant for the project.

Their talk covered the consultation and involvement of the community, the involvement of those with access limitations and learning difficulties, and a range of activities planned to engage with audiences beyond those traditionally interested in mills.

Importantly the talk addressed the structural and millwrighting repairs needed for this Heritage at Risk building. The mill was closed in 2018 as it had become unsafe. There is a serious damp problem, which has caused rot in the beam ends, resulting in the need for temporary supporting props. The problem has been caused by porous unprotected brickwork having an impervious plaster lining.

A detailed assessment has been conducted and a statement of works drawn up. A tendering process has been followed to select a preferred contractor to deliver the project, with structural works in 2025-27. The review of governance and resulting training, and the revitalisation of the board of trustees with four new trustees was described.

After a short break, Mildred left the meeting to be replaced by **Carole Leith** as moderator.

The next talk was presented by **David Kenny**: Tilty Mill, Essex – Archaeology, History and Heritage at Risk. David is heritage officer, Countryside Stewardship Heritage

Service, Historic England, and an archaeologist, having worked for English Heritage/Historic England for almost 20 years as a field monument warden, historic environment field adviser, Heritage at Risk project officer and heritage officer. He has a long association with Tilty, having initially visited to discuss consolidation of the scheduled abbey ruins in 2009. Within 10 minutes of arriving in the tiny hamlet, the subject of the mill arose and, it's fair to say, discussions continue.

His talk covered Cistercian Tilty Abbey and the water engineering that powered an earlier watermill on or near the site of the surviving 18th-century mill. The mill is on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register and efforts to secure its future are ongoing. Surveys of the abbey site and landscape have revealed the layout of the monastic building. The watermill was rebuilt in the 1760s. The mill currently stands, boarded up and largely intact. An earlier windmill was completely removed. The watermill stands astride its watercourse with an internal wheel.

David was followed by **Lydia Franklin**: whose subject was "Satanic Mills, Forty Years On." Lydia is Conservation Officer at SAVE Britain's Heritage.

Forty-five years ago, SAVE's Satanic Mills exhibition launched a campaign to save the great textile mills of the North of England. This talk offered an insight into SAVE's past successes as well as some current cases as it continues to campaign for the protection and reuse of historic mill buildings. Lydia explained the origins of SAVE, which was established in 1975. The initial focus was on industrial architecture in the Pennines, focusing on the exhibition held at the Heinz Gallery. A particular success was the repurposing of Saltaire Mill, which houses the Hockney Gallery. SAVE continues to campaign for the reuse of industrial buildings, challenging demolition and ongoing neglect, potentially providing much needed homes. An example was described based on disused industrial buildings in Newton Abbot, Devon.

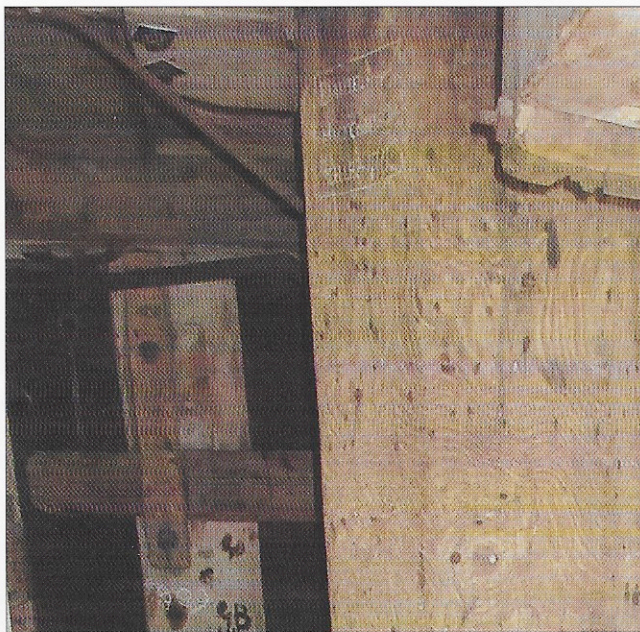


*Thaxted Windmill, Essex.  
Picture – Ian Scotter.*

## *SPAB Mills Day Event 2024 – continued*

**Nick Hill** followed with a talk on tree-ring dating and the development of Kibworth Harcourt Post Mill.

As part of the SPAB's recent major repair works at Kibworth Harcourt Post Mill in Leicestershire, a programme of tree-ring dating was carried out in 2021-22. Combining the results with a recent study of the building's structure, Nick Hill presented an analysis of the mill's historical development, from the early 17th to the 19th century. As an introduction to his talk, Nick explained the use and application of dendrochronology. The main post bears the inscription 'Daniel Hutchinson Miller 1711'. This was assumed to be the date of erection of the mill and the name of the first miller.



*The inscription on the main post at Kibworth Harcourt Post Mill.  
Picture – Nick Hill.*

Recent studies of other timbers have revealed a felling date of 1760 and some of the construction techniques used (eg forelock bolts) would not have been available in 1711, being more consistent with a rebuild in 1774. The main post revealed a radiocarbon date of 1574-1620, indicating that this was retained in the 1774 rebuild. Other later repairs were detected, for instance the cross-trees were dated 1800, the flour dresser was a later addition. The post was painted to afford extra protection until the later addition of a roundhouse.

The day closed with a discussion and closing remarks, with both Mildred and Carole moderating and thanking speakers.



*Graffiti at Kibworth Harcourt Post Mill.  
Picture – Nick Hill.*

The overriding messages were the challenges of securing funding and knowledge, the importance of collaboration and the need to offer help to understand the scale of undertakings.

## **Stop Press**



Historic England

Historic England supports the installation of clamps on windmills because of the public and heritage benefits they bring both in terms of health and safety, and avoiding catastrophic stock failure, thereby facilitating repair and helping to secure their future. This also applies to sites where historically clamps did not exist, but any degradation on the windmill sail should be addressed before they are fixed. However, there may be rare cases where further careful thought needs to be given.