

Sources of financial support for the work of Wheatley Windmill Restoration Society

Wheatley Windmill Restoration Society began life in 1976 as a voluntary society with annual or life members by subscription. The function of the society was obvious from the outset, however the mill has always been and remains in private ownership. The mill is a grade 2 listed building and was then in poor condition. The society raised restoration money through social occasions, jumble sales, coffee mornings, and sponsored events. As funds became available a group of volunteers, including Len Cripps the mill owner, under the direction of the late Wilfred Foreman worked on the mill. Wheatley Parish Council made some small grants and South Oxfordshire District Council gave the society a loan and this boosted the restoration fund.

By 1991 Rex Powell a volunteer, and Jim Munt a paid worker had stabilised the mill tower to parapet level. At the same time other volunteers now led by Dr Desmond Kay had restored the heavy internal timbers on each floor, and put in temporary floors. This enabled visitors to see round the mill, using a staircase to the first floor and ladders to those above. A temporary galvanised iron roof was erected to keep the structure from the worst of the weather, but this was rather unsightly.

By now the society was in debt and the committee divided about how to progress the project further. During the next three years, we worked very hard to pay off £3000 and resolve different visions of the future into a clear plan. In May 1994 the Co-operative Society of Great Britain gave £500 because the society was running a project which involved volunteers from the community. With this money we were able to commission Christopher Wallis MICE to survey the mill, salvage the remaining original timbers, and make drawings of the next restoration tasks. South Oxfordshire District Council gave us a notional £4000 to continue work, of which however we were eventually only able to claim £2,314 as the full sum could not be spent by the end of the financial year 1994-5.

It was contingent on receiving this public money that the society would conclude an agreement with the mill owner Len Cripps for continued public access, and that the district council would have a matching agreement with him. Both these agreements were in place by early 1997.

There was now enough funding for us to allow Christopher Wallis to begin work on the structure above parapet level. He put back the restored curb circle and centring ring on the mill parapet in April 1996. By January 1997 he had repaired the running trough and built a new running gear to hold the original truck wheels inside it. The assembly was put back and tested on a bitterly cold day. It worked perfectly. Meanwhile in 1996 the Oxford Preservation Trust promised £5000 coupled with a loan of £6,500 if the society could achieve continuing public access, and the Oxfordshire Buildings Trust offered £1000 provided we could secure a ten-year extension to the access. By May 1997 the society was finally in a position to begin accumulating money for the construction of the new mill cap, the breakdown of which is as follows:

- Oxford Preservation Trust gave £6,738.
- Oxfordshire Buildings Trust gave £1000.
- Bruce Ball Charitable Trust gave £250.
- CL Loyd Charitable Trust gave £100.
- The GR Cooper Charitable Trust gave £350.

- Sir Felix Brunner's sons Charitable Trust gave £2000.
- A private donor gave £50. 00.
- Wheatley Parish Council gave £100.

Christopher Wallis made a new oak finial at his workshop in 1997, while David Empringham restored the old cap ribs. In the same year, John Ayres felled oaks for the cap circle timbers and Christopher Wallis shaped them into a perfect circle. Also in 1997 Christopher Wallis bought a steel ring to go under the cap circle timbers. Christopher Wallis and David Empringham erected and levelled the cap frame in 1997. Christopher Wallis bought the shears and installed them in 1998. John Ayres felled, shaped and case-hardened the weather beam from an oak tree in Shotover Park in 1998. Then Christopher Wallis placed it on the end of the shears, which he had bought from Carpenter Oak. By 1999 a new sprattle beam was in place under the cap. He also made frameworks for the front and rear hatches from curved oak branches in that year. Then Christopher Wallis and David Empringham covered the completed cap framework with sarking boards and plywood and sealed all the joints on the plywood with galvanised iron strips. In 2000 they covered the plywood with bituthene, scrim and bitumen paint, while a lead worker clad the finial and upper surfaces of the rear' platform timbers with lead sheet. During these two years they also felled and roughly shaped six trees in Shotover park larch plantation, which Sir John Miller gave for major sail frame timbers.

In February 2000 the society achieved charitable status, which made the financial position potentially much more secure. It meant we were eligible to apply for funds to trusts that will only give to charitable bodies.

The cap came to Wheatley and was craned onto the mill on 8th October 2000, thanks mainly to the faith and cash from the trusts listed above. In December 2000 Christopher Wallis wrote out a list of the remaining jobs and materials needed to bring the mill back into working order. This was to be the basis of work over the next five years.

It is worth mentioning that the society could never have put a cap on the mill without the regular support of some generous benefactors. The most notable of these was the late Sir John Miller of Shotover House. He not only gave us timber from his estate, but also kept up a steady stream of gifts in money which he raised when groups of visitors came to see the house or grounds. Another was Dan Schickentanz, the prize-winning baker. For a number of years, Dan gave us loaves of his delicious bread to sell at our August sale round the mill. Sue Costar, then a member of the committee, organised a tombola stall every year for this occasion too.

In spring 2001, Christopher and David put on the timber skirt round the base of the mill cap, with a special bird excluder under it to prevent birds from nesting between the truck wheels under the cap. By now South Oxfordshire District Council had a community trust fund. In 2001 the society decided to amass serious core money for a bid for financial support from this fund. To do this the society had to find 25% of the £84,550 estimated cost of remaining restoration itself. Our application went in for the December 2001 deadline, but SODC held it over for six months as they had no further funds to disburse at that point. While we waited, we spent some reserves on restoration and reinstallation of the windshaft under the mill cap.

The following grant giving trusts and public bodies responded to our appeal. Outright grants came from:

- Ammco Trust £200.
- Hon. ML Astor's Charitable Trust £100.
- Bamsbury Trust £2500.
- Bartlett Taylor Charitable Trust £250.
- CL Loyd Charitable Trust £100.
- Lyndhurst Settlement £2000.
- CPRE Oxfordshire Buildings Preservation Trust Ltd £2000.
- Oxford Buildings Trust £2500.
- Oxford Preservation Trust £3000.
- JE Ravenscroft Trust £100.
- Skinners Company Lady Neville Charity £1000.
- Woodroffe Benton Foundation £500.
- South Oxfordshire District Council produced £540 they had forgotten to give us in 1998.
- Wheatley Parish Council £250.
- Local businesses £100.

Conditional grants came from:

- Garfield Weston Foundation £5000 when a further £10,000 had been spent on the mill.
- Leche Trust £2,500 for satisfactory progress by July 2003.
- Manifold Trust £750 when a further £10,000 had been spent on the mill.

In May 2002, our project achieved the SODC support but only to the extent of 50.6%, rather than the 67% we might have got, if the council had stuck to the letter of their original grant application prospectus. We therefore launched a top up appeal. This produced:

- CPRE Oxfordshire Buildings Preservation Trust Ltd £500.
- The Doris Field Charitable Trust £1000.
- Francis Coales Charitable Foundation £250.
- Raymond Grant Foundation £250.
- Society members £750.

Between 2002 and 2006 trust money and retrospective financial support from SODC supplemented by contributions from the public sale of souvenirs and second hand oddments, an unexpected bequest from Jim Munt, and money we make from selling teas at local gardens for the National Gardens Scheme funded the following restoration work:

- Weathervane made and put back on original pivot over the rear hatch.
- Rail installed round rear balcony.
- Two support pillars installed to support cracked hurst frame beams under the millstones.
- Elm floors have been installed on three upper floors.
- Ash board floor have been installed on ground floor.
- A broken millstone taken away, repaired, and returned to the mill.
- The rotten wood cut out of the central shaft and the shaft repaired.
- The wallower wheel and friction ring for the sack hoist rebuilt and installed.
- The brakewheel rebuilt and installed.
- The sub-shears restored and installed.
- The brake lever repaired and awaiting installation.
- The lathe repaired and installed.

- Two staircases and handrails built to connect the stone floor to the bin floor and the bin floor to the dust floor.
- The threshing machine cleaned and refurbished.
- Both cast iron spindles for millstones put into working order.
- One pair of millstones redressed.
- Two pairs of sack flaps made and installed for eventual positioning of the sack hoist rope.
- Six hardwood window frames installed to replace rotting softwood ones.
- Two larch-wood sail stocks shaped and planed on site.
- Four larch-wood sail whips shaped, planed, and mortised on site.
- Seventy-two 6-foot sail bars (with some spares) cut, dried and planed to fit mortises.
- Twelve twenty-three foot sail uplongs roughly cut and dried in the workshop.

After all this work, the society was short of funds. It received emergency help from Wheatley Parish Council and Sir Felix Brunner's sons Charitable Trust. Just as matters were again becoming financially desperate, we received notification that Denis Farndell of Ambrose Rise had left one twelfth of his estate to the society. This gave the funds an immense boost, which enabled the millwrights to surge ahead with preparations to install the sail frames. All timbers on site, together with those still in the workshop were first removed for pressure treatment. This was done free of charge at South Bucks Estates in Beaconsfield. Everything came back to the mill in July 2007.

David Empringham, now joined by Carl Bettles after Christopher's demise in May 2006, worked on site over two days to reassemble all the parts. The long spars were lifted into position using a crane. By now, the scaffolding, which had disfigured the building for so long had gone, as had a timber store behind the mill and many piles of unused materials of one kind and another lying in the long grass. Receiving the timely legacy enabled us to claim the remaining funding from South Oxford District Council, which notified us in December 2007 that our eligibility for support would cease at the end of January 2008. David Empringham hastily worked out what the dimensions of the sail canvasses should be and ordered them from Jeckells the sail makers just in time to use the council support.

David and Carl, joined by David's son Stephen, next worked to reassemble the north pair of stones, fit up the horse and hopper and recreate chutes to the original dimensions. They also constructed two grain bins on the dust floor and set up the sack hoist to work off a friction ring under the wallower. As the tower was free of scaffolding, it was now possible to set up the Y-wheel mechanism to turn the mill cap manually from the ground, using an endless chain. In autumn 2008, the society applied for planning permission and listed building consent to put a fan wheel mechanism onto the rear of the cap. Despite a protest from SPAB, the district council approved our application and it was duly fitted in October that year, still funded by the Farndell legacy. The following April, the millwrights had the sails turning for the first time.

Preliminary attempts to grind grain into meal revealed that the millstones were too far apart. The millwrights made modifications to the governor in late 2010. With help from stalwarts from Wilton, society members have since carried out successful grindings and some of them have even made bread from the mill's product. Meanwhile, on the financial front, Oxford Preservation Trust gave us a grant of £2500 towards the fantail and the late Ivy Morgan left £1000 in her will.

To summarise, financial sources for restoration have been grant-giving trusts, local authority grants, sale of refreshments and souvenirs, gifts in kind and legacies. The public benefits from trust money spent on Wheatley Windmill in a number of ways. The easiest of these to understand is that society members open the mill to the public on the second Sunday each month from May to October during the afternoon. These events, which are advertised in the local press and on the Wheatley Windmill website, are always popular, except if the weather is atrocious or if a significant sporting event is on TV. The society also opens the mill by arrangement to other interested societies. Local history groups, ramblers, amenity societies, youth groups and so on have all been in recent years. Committee members have responded to many requests for help from school pupils undertaking course work for key stage 3 of the National Curriculum. Since 1990 we have taken numerous people over the building and explained its features to them. We can truthfully say that no one has ever been disappointed, with most of them expressing great interest. As the project began so long ago we now find that people, who first came a generation ago, are paying second or third visits. Invariably they remark on the vast difference and improvement. Whenever the millwrights are working on site, they welcome anyone who drops in to see what they are doing and they explain its significance in the overall plan. The windmill appeals to men and women and to all ages from inquisitive toddler to active pensioner. It provides a feature of Wheatley's southern skyline and is a significant tourist attraction on the parish boundary and bordering a popular circular walk in an otherwise somewhat bland environment. Lastly, the windmill is an important part of our industrial heritage and will always be in need of maintenance. To reflect this, the society changed its name from Wheatley Windmill Restoration Society to Wheatley Windmill Preservation Society in 2011.

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