



Putting the wind back in our

Sails

The Friends of Windmill Gardens Newsletter - Winter 2010

Sails down, scaffolding goes up

Under blue skies at the end of October, two men were hoisted into the air in the basket of a cherry picker to start removing the bolts on the sails of Brixton Windmill. Restoration of the mill had finally begun.

The sails, or sweeps, have been removed and are being restored by specialist millwright Owlsworth IJP Ltd. Overall, the stocks (the wooden bars that support the sails) are in reasonable condition, but Paul Sellwood of Owlsworth is recommending the addition of stock clamps to strengthen the central part of the sails, as they will be under greater force once they are turning again. There have been a couple of instances of sails breaking on other windmills and Paul

thinks that adding clamps would minimise the risk of a similar incident here. The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings Mills Section agrees that they may be a good idea.

The two patent sails originally had wooden shutters that were opened or closed like venetian blinds and were adjusted by a system of rods and chains. Owlsworth will be restoring these so that the sails will turn in the wind.

Provender problems

The provender mill on the first floor of the mill has also been dismantled. The jib, or crane, for removing the provender millstones was wedged in place due to the weight of the main millstones pressing down

on the floor above (according to Paul, they weigh around 1.5 tonnes). So they had to insert adjustable props on the ground floor and the first floor to support this weight and 'lift' the millstones on the second floor.

The hopper that fed the grain into the mill was also completely blocked with debris, including the body of a dead bird. After Owlsworth has restored the provender mill, it will be powered by electricity and used in grinding demonstrations for the public and school groups.

Damp and spiders

In the meantime, scaffolding is being erected. The whole structure, including the cap, needs to be protected during the winter, and buttressing is required because the scaffolding mustn't touch the brickwork. The process has been quite involved but is progressing well. When

it is complete, Owlsworth will have access to the cap and winding mechanism.

Specialist restorer Stonewest Ltd has made a start on removing the old paint from the inside of the mill. There is quite a lot of damp, so the building will have to be dried out and some rotten wood replaced. Numerous large spiders have also made their homes in the mill, so this is not a job for arachnophobes!

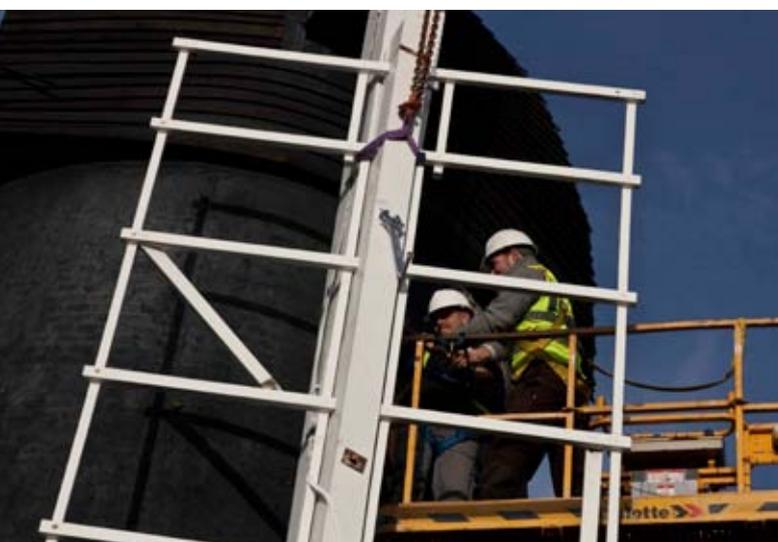
Stonewest will also be working on proper drainage and electricity supplies, as well as any necessary underpinning. Work is due to finish in spring 2011.

Kim Winter

Useful links

www.spab.org.uk/spab-mills
More about the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, Mills Section.

www.millarchive.com
The Mills Archive has many old photos of mills.



Preparing to remove the windmill's final sail

subscribe to our blog

brixtonwindmill.wordpress.com

You can watch the progress of the windmill's restoration on our regularly updated blog at brixtonwindmill.wordpress.com. To receive updates by email, click on

"Sign me up!" in the right-hand column and enter your email address – you'll then receive an email whenever an update is posted on the blog.

Celebrate with FoWG

Everyone is invited to **FoWG's Winter Party** – a big “thank you” for all of your support and hard work during 2010. It's been a great year for Brixton Windmill and our local community!

The party follows our **General Meeting**, which will start promptly at 7pm to provide an update on the works at the mill and to start planning the grand opening in spring 2011. The meeting will look forward to our next campaign – to upgrade the park!

Details for your diary:

Thursday 2nd December, St Paul's Church House, 24 Blenheim Gardens, SW2 5BZ. Meeting 7-8pm, party 8-10pm. If you can, please bring a dish of food or some drink to share.

Get involved, make new friends

A key requirement of the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to restore the windmill and develop a five-year education programme at Brixton Windmill is for the Friends to provide 50 new volunteer guides trained to take visitors round the mill once it opens to the public next spring.

So increasing the number of FoWG members and encouraging some of them to train as volunteer guides is essential. Since March we have been on a concerted drive to enrol new members and get former members to renew their subs.

Several local public events have allowed us to raise the

profile of the Friends and to tell people about the exciting restoration of the windmill – you can read about some of them opposite. As well as these, we've also set up our stall in Windrush Square during the Open Squares weekend in June, at the Lambeth Country Show, and at our own Art in the Park event.



Meet new people at our local events

The result has been a big increase in our membership: over the past five months we have signed up a total of 130 new members, including those joining via our website. Many of these have volunteered to train as guides (see page 4 for an account of our first training day in September).

If you are a former member and have not yet renewed for this year or you are a supporter who has not got round to filling out a membership form, sign up today. You can renew online using PayPal at www.brixtonwindmill.org or you can write to our membership secretary at 24 Prague Place, London SW2 5ED. Family membership costs £5, single £3, and the concessionary rate is £1.

Please remember to tick if you want to train as a guide, and don't forget to tick the Gift Aid box if you are a UK taxpayer. Another condition of the HLF grant is that FoWG raises £2,000 towards the £581,000 cost of the restoration and education programme for Brixton Windmill, so the extra we can raise through Gift Aid really does help.

PHOTOGRAPHS: OWEN LLEWELLYN

Education Officer starts work

Lisa Rigg, the new Development and Education Officer for Brixton Windmill, started work on 8th November. She will be working on the project for three days a week for the next five years; the other two days she works for the Hackney Society, a civic and amenity society in her home borough.

Although she doesn't know Brixton very well, Lisa sees a lot of similarities between Hackney and Lambeth in terms of multi-cultural mix and social issues (though Brixton has better transport links – it takes Lisa about an hour to cycle from Hackney!). Her work in heritage, education, and historic buildings

since 1997 includes fundraising, building membership, organising events such as walks and tours, and commissioning books for schoolchildren, and she's looking forward to developing similar ideas for the windmill.



She also co-founded a local residents' group, helping to raise money to rebuild an open space, replacing a fountain and relaying paths. Such experience could come in very useful in revamping Windmill Gardens park.

Lisa is keen for the windmill to attract visitors beyond Brixton and Lambeth. “This is the only surviving grade 2* windmill in London,” she says. “That should be a big draw. And getting visitors from further afield is a good way of generating more money.”

We offer Lisa a warm welcome and look forward to working with her.

Kim Winter

Jean Kerrigan

Summer events round-up

The Friends of Windmill Gardens have held our own events and attended several local public events throughout the summer. This has helped to raise the profile of the windmill and build our membership and volunteer base.

PHOTOGRAPHS: OWEN LLEWELLYN



Flamenco and the puppet show were Festival highlights

Windmill Festival

Bathed in sunshine, the afternoon of the second Sunday in July was an organiser's dream! By 2pm the stalls were set, the performers poised, and the ice cream ready to melt.

Where else would you find a 12-piece ukulele band complete with fezzes, an authentic Flamenco dance troupe, and a multitude of thespians in period costume re-enacting the history of Brixton Windmill? What other small park offers the delight of a stilt-walker and an original puppet show? Where else could you learn circus skills one minute and join a dance workshop the next?

While the youngsters were busy making masks in the safety of the One O'Clock Club, we were introduced to the windmill's new MP, Chuka Umunna. Before the afternoon was over, we had all enjoyed a real multi-mix of music, theatre, and dance.

Jill Reyes

Five-a-side football

FoWG hosted another five-a-side tournament for under-16s in Windmill Gardens park on 18th September. About 50 young people participated from local estates and organisations, including Quwwa, Clapham Park estate, and Blenheim Gardens.

The teams played in three age groups - under-8, under-12, and under-16 - with members of the Fulham FC coaching staff providing referees and support staff. A great time was had by all.

So who won? Quwwa A headed the under-16 group, and the two teams fielded by The Reds won in both the other age groups.

Andy Weir

Archives Open Day

FoWG had a stall at Lambeth Archives Open Day at the Minet Library on Saturday 25th September, alongside other local history and amenity groups. This

year's theme was "Screen Lambeth - The Hidden Worlds of Film and Home Movies" with talks, screenings, and an exhibition of some of Lambeth's seldom-seen art collection.

The Open Day is held every autumn and is always lively and fascinating if you're interested in local history. It's a good opportunity for local groups like FoWG to make contact with each other and for raising our profile - our stall was visited by Lambeth's Deputy Mayor, Councillor Christiana Valcarcel.

Penny Steele

Herb cuttings evening

As part of our plan to transform a disused sandpit in Windmill Gardens into a medicinal herb garden, seven participants gathered at Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses in September.

Fabrice Boltho opened their historical herb garden for our first selection, and showed us how to prepare and plant the cuttings in sterilised pots. We learned about different herbs and their virtues, ending up with several trays of planted cuttings, each hooded with a transparent plastic bag to let in light while encouraging rooting.

Watch this space for details of our next workshop to visit our overwintering seedlings, as we prepare to house them in their new bed in Windmill Gardens.

Annick Alet

Feast on the Bridge

On Saturday 11th September several Friends boarded a 133 bus armed with booklets, postcards, children's windmills, and our new promotional banners. We were heading for Southwark Bridge, where the Friends had table space on the Brockwell Bake stall at "Feast on the Bridge", part of the Mayor's Thames Festival. The bridge was closed to traffic for the event, which brings people together to share food, conversation, and dance and to reclaim a public space in the city.

This was the first time FoWG had promoted Brixton Windmill outside the Lambeth area. We soon honed our sales pitch and signed up 17 new members and several volunteers, as well as making more than £65 in sales and donations.

Chris Patton



Annick Alet New banner makes impact

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRIS PATTON

Guides, gadgets and lots of laughter!

Kit Reynolds describes the first training day for volunteers who are interested in being guides, while Alex Gaffikin catches up with two of the trainers.

On a bright Sunday in September, around 20 volunteers gathered to learn more about the history of Brixton Windmill and what was involved in being a guide. Settling down with tea and biscuits, the group listened to the expertise of Mildred Cookson from the Mills Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). Mildred, who owns a watermill near Reading, gave us a potted

history on how mills evolved, illustrated with plenty of pictures. This included some of the 12 mills in Lambeth. Surprisingly, flour was only one type of milled product – an apothecary mill near The Cut once mixed potions.

We then went across to tour Brixton Windmill. Guiding us through the floors up to the cap at the top, Mildred explained each part of the

mill, answering lots of questions.

After a delicious lunch, Beth Jones from the Field Studies Council gave us a bag of gadgets and we broke into groups to calculate the mill's height, take photos for a scavenger hunt, and measure the wind speed. All these activities can be used with schoolchildren, as guides can opt to help manage school groups with their teachers.

The day wrapped up with Richard, an actor and one of the longest-standing Friends, giving us some tips on talking to large groups. This involved some intriguing group voice exercises, which generated lots of laughter!

Alex Gaffikin

Kit Reynolds

“Don't just talk at them”

Beth Jones from the Field Studies Council shares her top tips on how to get schoolchildren, especially from secondary schools, engaged with mills.

1. Many young people just walk through parks – they don't really stop and look around. When you first invite a class to come to Blenheim Gardens, give them space and time to orientate themselves. Perhaps give them an activity to get them exploring.
2. Blenheim Gardens and the windmill are a great resource for students. They can find out about local history, practise using maps, measure wind speed and think about weather and science.
3. Give students activities, don't just talk at them. On the volunteer training day we did activities like spotting the difference

between the windmill now and an old photo of the windmill, and a scavenger hunt, looking for things like “something historic”, “something scientific”. Secondary school students love technology – so challenge them to take pictures of what they find.

HELP

TRANSFORM

BRIXTON WINDMILL

- ▶ Strengthen your CV.
- ▶ Learn new skills.
- ▶ Make a difference to the local community.

Looking for an exciting and interesting way to make a difference in conserving Brixton's heritage? Do you love chatting to people? Maybe you could be a guide to Brixton Windmill.

Whatever your interests or skills, we would love to hear from you. If you are interested contact Alex Gaffikin, volunteer co-ordinator, at info@brixtonwindmill.org.

“It takes three days to dress my stones by hand”

Mildred Cookson from SPAB tells us about her mill.

When did your passion for mills begin?

I became interested when I was 14 years old. Where I lived in Lancashire we were surrounded by 14 windmills – all working. Now, sadly, only one is left working.

Tell us about your own mill.

I have a working watermill in Mapledurham near Reading. It makes flour five days a week, which I sell to two bakers in Henley. I just about break even!

Sounds like hard work...

I dress my grinding stones by hand. In the olden days stone dressers would travel around the country. They knew the sorts of grains being ground on the stones and would alter their dressing accordingly. Nowadays they use electrical tools and all the stones are dressed the same, so the skills are being lost. I do it by hand - it takes me three days.

What do you do for SPAB?

I am a trustee. Our mills section campaigns for mill preservation and shares expertise.

Any tips for bread makers?

My flour is wholemeal, but done properly wholemeal loaves aren't stodgy. Making bread by hand you get a different loaf each time...but novices should be prepared for the odd brick!

Alex Gaffikin