

ELSENHAM VILLAGE HISTORY SOCIETY

MINUTES OF MEETING 14th June 2023

MEMORIAL HALL ELSENHAM

Those Present:

Ray Franklin Chairman	Paul Salvidge	Heather Salvidge
Dave Verlander	Chris Bush	Diane Bush
Mike Rea	Margaret Rea	Anne Player
Keith Hunt	Jill Hunt	Brenda Davidson
Roger Clark	Phyllis Clark	Tony Bailey
Vic Dowsett	Tim Snow	Kevin Wood
Valerie Austin	Jean Beeston	Ian Beeston
Lynda Jolly	Lynda Bowcock	Carol Wylde
Sue Waite	Jess Lynch	Chris Rippingale

Apologies:

Ian Jackson	Moyra Jackson	Therese Clear
Sue Johnson	Roger Kendrick	Tricia Holyomes
Marco Newton	Lorraine Newton	

1. The Chairman opened the meeting and welcomed those present to the meeting and our speaker for the evening, Mr Tony Wellings.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting 08th March 2023

The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

4. Speaker, Tony Wellings

Our speaker this evening has been associated with the Stansted Mill Trust for many years and knows the mill well.

Tony introduced his talk by saying that grinding corn dated back to ancient Egyptian times. The Romans brought milling to Britain using Quern Stones. The lower stationary stone is called a saddle quern, while the upper mobile stone is called a muller, rubber or hand stone. The upper stone was moved in a back-and-forth motion across the saddle quern.

Windmills first appeared in Britain in the 12th /13th centuries and the earliest recorded mill in Essex was in Henham, first mentioned in 1363.

Stansted mill was a tower mill built in 1787 with a rotating cap that at first was turned into the wind manually. Over its life, several improvements were made. The addition of a fantail made the cap move into the wind automatically and the original manually adjusted sails were replaced by slatted sails that could be adjusted remotely to control speed and prevent damage in a storm. The mill was built where it was because it was expected that a canal would be built connecting Stansted to Bishop's Stortford and the Lea Navigation providing easy transport to London for the finished flour. The canal was never built and life for the Stansted millers was therefore somewhat hard to mouth! Because of this the mill never received very much upgraded machinery and remains substantially original.

Tony illustrated the inner workings of the mill with a number of photographs. He pointed out one unique feature of the mill which was a hatch at the top of the cap that could be opened to give access to the cap roof and fantail.

The mill suffered a chequered history not least because of the non-appearance of the canal and several owners went bankrupt. It was not for nothing that milling was known as a financially perilous occupation, the mill remained in business until 1910. James Blyth, later to become the first Lord Blyth, bought the mill in 1887 and his son instituted initial preservation work in 1930 before gifting the mill to the parish in 1935.

Around this time the mill was used for a number of experimental radio transmissions from the top of the tower. Later, in 1941, the mill was used as a headquarters by the local Scout troop (they left in 1963) but by then the condition of the mill was deteriorating. In the late 1950s a preservation society was formed to look after the mill and major restoration work started in 1966 after which the mill was in pretty good order. A further restoration effort took place in the 1980s. Being 18th century technology the mill is prone to break down and it is then down to the expertise of the volunteers to get it going all of whom have accrued much practical knowledge in the repair of 18th and 19th century machinery.

Further restoration is planned but Health & Safety legislation means that the tower has to be encased in scaffold to do this work adding significant costs to the work.

At this point the talk concluded and was followed by a question and answer session.

5. Open Forum and Any Other Business

5.1 Elsenham Fete

This Saturday will see us with a stand at the Fete so we will be delighted to see any of you who might like to come along.

6.2 Visit to Stansted Mill

If anyone would be interested in a visit to the mill, please let me know and I will see what can be arranged.

Meanwhile don't forget that there is the possibility of a visit to Saffron Walden Museum and / or its reserve collection. Again please let me know if you're interested.

6.3 Elsenham Croake

The appeal was heard by the Planning Inspectorate in May. The result is expected to be announced this month.

Secretary's Note: The planners have decided to allow the development of 130 new houses the Croake to go ahead. At the same time they passed the application for fifty houses to be built south of Bedwell Road.

6.4 Teas and Coffees

Our thanks go this evening to Sue & Chris Waite who kindly brewed the teas and coffees.

7. Date of Next Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Wednesday 13th September 2023 . Our speaker will be John Rhodes who will be speaking about Sir Walter Gilbey and the good he did not just in Elsenham but Bishops Stortford and it's surroundings too.

ENDS

Minutes Agreed: September 2023
Ray Franklin - Chairman