

The Jewel in our Crown – Eling Tide Mill Ruth Kerr 12th February 2019

The technology of milling has a fascination for many as was evident on last Tuesday night when SAS members flocked to hear Ruth Kerr talk about Eling Tide Mill. Introduced by Matt Garner, archaeologist and volunteer at the mill, Ruth is the Mill's Public Engagement officer, responsible for their children's education programmes, training volunteers, organising a bi-monthly lecture programme and outreach by giving talks herself.

The present Mill dates from 1785 and it is a Grade II* listed building, one of only two working tide mills in England (the other is at Woodbridge, Suffolk), allowing visitors to watch its nineteenth century technology in action, with a rare example of two sets of machinery, although only one is in use. The power is supplied by the water being trapped in the mill pond at high tide and then gradually released to power the water wheel and run the millstones until the tide comes in. Flour milled from wheat grown locally is available to buy.

Tide mills are believed to be Roman in origin but no evidence of a Roman mill exists, though some Roman coins have been found. Milling at Eling dates back to Anglo-Saxon times, with the first documentary evidence from the Domesday survey (1086) which lists two mills at Eling belonging to the King. There was also salt making on the Test at Redbridge, an area still known as Salterns. Eling was sold by King John in the early 1200s and it changed hands several times before being acquired by William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester and founder of Winchester College (1382 charter to Winchester College, which owned the Mill for seven centuries). The Mill would be leased out but leaseholders did not work the mill so it's difficult to find the names of millers themselves. An advertisement for a miller in December 1762 required him to be 'honest and sober', while an indenture document of 1708 concerns a 7 year-old child, William, an orphan from Brockenhurst who was apprenticed to look after the animals such as horses and pigs. Millers found various ways of supplementing their income, by charging tolls, wharfage fees, fishing, and later brewing and charcoal burning.

The late 18th century was a prosperous period for the Mill: Eling as a natural harbour was key to its growth, with imports of coal and exports of timber, wheat and salt. In 1771 John Chandler took over the lease, with the conditions that the mill and house be taken down and rebuilt (the buildings needed replacement every 200 or 300 years). He became involved in an allegation of fraud against him which was later retracted by the accuser in the newspaper, in order to avoid court action. The lease was transferred in 1778 and Chandler opened the 'Corn Store' opposite to the mill (now the Visitor Centre for ETME). This building has been used as a barracks (1797) and to house POWs in the Napoleonic wars, and in 1803 it became a steam mill.

The railway came to Totton in 1847 and brought prosperity to the village, which up to then had been less important than Eling. By 1851 a spur line known as Eling Tramway was built enabling flour to be exported by both sea and rail. An early photograph shows the Mill in 1854, when a George Adams worked there – sent from NZ where his descendants now live. They have much information about three generations of the Mackrell family who worked the Mill between 1863 and 1941, both documentary and from Ray Mackrell son of the last miller, Raymond. During the 1930s the mill machinery was failing and diesel power was used

to produce animal feed, but in wartime they could not feed animals anything which people might need and the Mill went out of business. It was used to store flour from Battersea Mill but everything had to be moved out due to the threat of invasion or bombing.

By 1975 the Mill had been empty for years, when it was bought by New Forest District Council and over the next five years it was restored by volunteers and professional staff and reopened in 1980 as a working tide mill again. The Corn Store building meanwhile was used by Coastal Defence in the 1940s and after the war by a tractor firm, then in 1996 it was restored with the Heritage Centre on ground floor while the upper floors were converted as apartments. Both the Mill and Heritage Centre closed in 2014, and through a partnership between New Forest District Council and Totton & Eling Town Council it has been restored with help from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and reopened in 2018.

Ruth's talk was followed by many questions from the audience eager to know more details of life at the Mill. SAS is organising a group visit on Saturday 13th April from 1.30 to 4.00pm, the booking form and details can be found under the Events section of the website.

The Tide Mill and Visitor Centre with Café are open throughout the year, daily from April to September 10.00 to 17.00; October to March Thursday to Sunday 11.00 to 16.00. For prices and events please see elingexperience.co.uk.

Sarah Hanna