

**WHEATLEY WINDMILL
RESTORATION SOCIETY**

THOUGHTS OF
CHAIRMAN
MADDOCKS

~~1982~~ 1983-91

I was elected Chairman on Jan 12 1-85 (during my absence on holiday in Lanzarote) despite my insistence that I knew nothing of windmills , building, accounts or anything else that might be relevant.

That election plus the determination of my predecessor and the secretary to resign indicate odd state of the Society then. The first enthusiasm evidently evaporated and personal antagonisms were becoming important. Another leading member, Robert Franklin, I never saw. Another important member, Desmond Kay, gave up the Committee a year later. Wilf Foreman the inspiration for the project gradually drooped out of attending. But we did manage to keep going and even to get a few new participants.

The following paras, are intended to fill out the Committee minutes with a bit of flesh and to give some personal views on the highlights.

The fact that I still know next to nothing about building, windmills and accounts means that other reports are needed to produce a balanced record.

One important dispute arose in the first half of 1984. The question was whether we should use our limited funds to continue the work up the stone tower on all 8 sides or only on 2. The argument in favour of 2 was that we could then get on quickly with installing the 2 cross beams and the floor . Rex Powell vehemently opposed that it was unsound. As he was in a minority of one it seemed quite likely that he would leave us in disgust when we decided (as it seemed likely we would) to

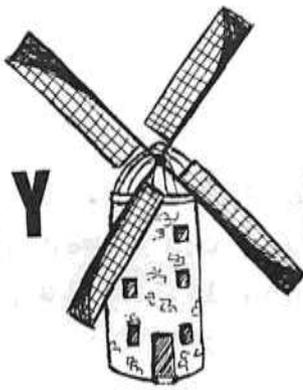
go for the 2 sided option. Tom Hassall found the solution of genius. He suggested we should consult Malcolm Aiers, the Conservation Officer of 801)0. He came promptly and decided in favour of the 8 sided plan which was graciously accepters. by the 2 siders but it was after that that Wilf Foreman's absences seemed to be more frequent. In my view it was a critical step in putting Rex effectively in charge of the work.

Another critical turning point was in October 1984 when Victor Markham attended a committee meeting. He is an expert in advertising and marketing. He said bluntly that before we could plan a fund raising campaign we needed to have a product and at that time we did not have one. We needed to be -able to say to the village that we were offering them an attractive site with car park, picnic tables, view to Brill etc., owned by a village trust and in return needed a few thousand pounds-for work to be done. He also developed a powerful argument that Len Cripps, like the Duke of Westminster, needed to think about inheritance tax and act accordingly, which probably meant conveying title of the mill to some kind of trust where all his interests would be protected. Len thought about all this, took legal advice and decided not to change his ownership. I myself regretted that decision but judged it would be futile and unkind to argue any further with him. I have tried not to raise it since 1984.

Exactly how inhibiting is the private ownership on our fundraising is difficult to judge. As financial contributions have been rather small, it is tempting to put the blame 'on that fact but there is not much real evidence.

Vic Markham's diagnosis that we did not have a 'product' proved correct. In spite of numerous bright ideas and the hard work of a dozen or so regular helpers, we have not been able to raise our fund activities to a higher level. We have gone on getting about £8,000 a year from all sources.

So, from the end of 1984 the committee had no regular attender apart from Rex, who knew much on the technical side. (Tom Hassall was heavily engaged in a job in London).



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The prospects for fund raising were not too cheerful. But it was not welcome to postpone indefinitely the hope of further work on the mill when only the first 8' or so of the tower had been done.

Rex's offer to do some work on the tower and to wait for payment without charging interest was therefore readily accepted. There was hardly any alternative. One effort was made to obtain a quote from another builder. It was clear that it was not competitive. From 1984 to 1991 Rex was in control of the restoration of the tower with Desmond Kay effectively in control of the work inside. Rex was not entirely in sole charge as Desmond would tell us of anything he thought might go wrong and Len Cripps was on the site most days to give another opinion. I would go and see Rex at work now and again but, as I have said, I could not pretend to have a valid view of any technical questions. Rex was therefore largely on his own to take the decisions he thought best. What he actually did I hope to get him to put on tape in conversations this winter.

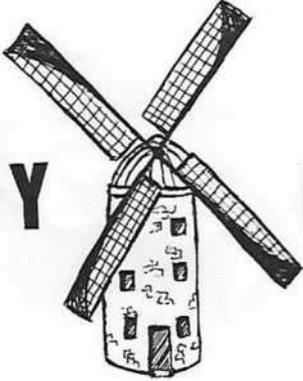
A judgement of Rex's work depends upon one's view of what the restoration should be doing. If one takes the view of SPAB that it is better to do nothing than to use methods or materials that are not authentic. By 'authentic' SPAB and their supporters mean 'the same as or very near to the original'. Rex means 'able to do the job at least as well'. The Committee therefore found itself having several arguments over the use of steel, concrete, choice of colours, an old railway sleeper etc. It 'would be easy to endorse the SPAB view and condemn Rex on every point but I think it is too simple. First of all there was the matter of cost which was vital for the Society. Either we accepted the Rex solution

or we postponed work indefinitely. I am not sure we were wrong to go ahead and complete the tower with the funds we had (or hope to have). Secondly, it is possible to be too fussy about 'authenticity'. Take the railway sleeper for example. To my mind it looked sufficiently like the piece of 18th century timber it was replacing. The question was therefore - can we legitimately use a piece of 19th century timber which we know to have been used previously as a railway sleeper? I was happy to answer that question Yes.

My conclusion on the work done by Rex in this period is that he has done us a remarkably good 'job for very low cost and without any firm indication of when he will get paid in full. He deserves our thanks but is likely to get them in only muted form because of niggling little disagreements with members of the committee over the years. Of course there are things here and there that might have been done differently and more to the liking of SPAB but at what cost and who would pay?

One of the problems that concerned some Committee members was keeping some control over our debts to Rex. Like most builders he was slow to put in writing any indication of our debts. He was also inclined to begin with an estimate that turned out to be optimistic. Our debts to Rex. Like most builders he was slow to put in writing any indication of our debts. He was also inclined to begin with an estimate that turned out to be optimistic. Our debts to Rex did increase more than had been indicated but not ridiculously. Even an interest-free debt without a definite term had some committee members worried.

At the time of writing (September 9 1991) it seems clear to me that the restoration work has come to an end unless some quite unforeseen and enormous stroke of good fortune comes our way. In April 1990 Rex made a detailed estimate of the cost of finishing the restoration. It was £22,000, taking advantage of every favourable assumption. At about the same time he was talking of £4,000 as the cost of finishing the tower up to the rim. Now that we have got to the rim we know that the cost has been over £11,000 It would not be unreasonable to take the cost



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of finishing the whole project as at least £55,000. It would be prudent to increase it further to take account of delays in starting and added costs if SPAB type views have to be accommodated more than Bex imagined in 1990. Without exaggerating one might think in terms of £70,000 at 1991 prices. And that is probably another very low estimate.

The other main inhibition is the genuine problem of whether or not one should accept the SPAB principle of 'better no work at all than work that is not authentic'. We had trouble enough on the relatively simple repair of the stone tower. The remaining work involves a lot of mechanical engineering including the manufacture of new parts e.g. the sails and the roof. On all these matters there are likely to be the most bitter disputes. The temptation to do nothing and to argue that I am acting on pure SPAB principles seems to me to be overwhelming.

On the assumption therefore that nothing much more will be done to the mill for a very long time I am turning my mind to recording for future historians what has been going on in the last 15 years during which this Society has at least ensured that there will be a structure to argue about in the 21st century.



Arthur I-laddocks

Sept 9 1991