



MILL BITS

The Newsletter of the CRANBROOK WINDMILL ASSOCIATION

April 2026

Chairman: Nick Vinall, Secretary: Andrew Ridell, Treasurer: Susan Hooper

Maintenance - Sweeps come unstuck

For several months last year, turning the sweeps seemed largely a matter of chance, sometimes they would turn easily, other times with difficulty. Finally in October they refused to turn at all, even using the scaffolding pole in the cap. A sticking brake was the main suspect but we checked this carefully to no avail. Time to call in the professionals and after about three months they arrived. Surprisingly, the problem was quickly diagnosed and was due to the woodwork of the cap becoming distorted so that the front of the cap prevented the sweeps from turning.



The Fix. Within the cap there are four steel bracing rods with 'bottleneck' screws to adjust their lengths. The photo shows millwright Talie using a very large spanner with which he managed to create a 2mm gap in front of the cap, just enough to allow the sweeps to be turned. The creaking of the cap woodwork being squeezed back into shape was a bit disconcerting but we trusted the millwrights. Further adjustment needed the windshaft and sweeps to be lifted slightly and temporarily take their weight off the cap bearing. More spanner work and creaking then increased the gap significantly so that the windshaft could be re-lowered. The sweeps now turn freely, even when

driving the Burr stone. With a fresh supply of grain, courtesy of Weald Granary, we expect to be milling again soon. Talie is properly 'Talesin Woolsey', a millwright with Suffolk Millwright company and who started work as a tree surgeon with Suffolk Wildlife Trust before joining the business as an apprentice in 2019. You can read more about other team members including Mabel, the Head of Security, on [this link](#).

Mike Newsom

Mike was a stalwart of Cranbrook Windmill Association, a member for 25 years, volunteering for the whole range of windmill activities. His cheery manner and detailed knowledge and understanding of the workings of the windmill made him a very popular steward for visitors. He was able to explain clearly some of the more technical aspects for those visitors who were



interested but he could judge well when a simple version was all that was wanted.

Through training with his near neighbour Wynn Tremeneere, Mike became one of our master millers which he much enjoyed. Having the sweeps and millstones turning to mill the grain into flour gave him much pleasure. It was a great loss when he had to retire after his stroke some years ago but it was great to see him occasionally back at the mill afterwards thanks to Mitzi's efforts. We are delighted that Mitzi has now joined our stewards as a Welcomer to visitors.

Congratulation to Jill Hooper who celebrated her 100th birthday on 06 Jan 2026. Jill moved to Cranbrook with her husband John in 1958 and was delighted to see the restoration of the Windmill taking place by the Dutch millwrights. Jill stewarded at the Windmill, almost from the start of the CWA, until well into her 90's. She still enjoys the summer parties and looks forward to the Teddy Bear's Picnic on the August Bank Holiday when we will be celebrating Pooh Bear's 100th birthday!



Argos Hill Windmill

This windmill stands on top of Argos Hill near Mayfield in East Sussex and is a super-sized post mill, similar to the Jill Mill at Clayton on the South Downs near Lewes. Like that mill, it also received a later addition of a fantail attached to the tail-pole to assist with winding the mill. Perhaps its ideal location and the extra fantail helped it to continue working commercially until 1923. A trust was set up in 2010 which has raised funds to rescue the mill and it is now opened to the public by volunteers every 3-4 weeks during the summer. You can find out more on the following link including a virtual tour:

<http://www.argoshillwindmill.org.uk/>.

As with many windmills, situated on high ground, this often led to problems, as happened in 1910 and was reported in the *Sussex Express* of Friday 25th February 1910:

THE GALE - The extraordinary gale on Sunday evening caused some damage in this parish. The Argos Hill Windmill was set in motion by the powerful gusty winds, which broke the chains on the brakes. Fortunately, Mr. R. Weston must have noticed almost immediately, or the friction would doubtless soon have set the mill on fire.

An Unusual use for a Windmill

Our treasurer, Andrew, has drawn my attention to an article he found in a walking magazine about the Postmill on Reigate Heath in Surrey. This post mill was built in about 1765 and was last worked by wind in April 1862.

The mill was soon after restored and the roundhouse is now used as a chapel; it's thought to be the only windmill in the world which is a consecrated church.





*Inside the roundhouse
at Reigate heath*

Read more about it on [this link](#) or search for "Reigate Heath Windmill".

Oyler – what's in the Name?

John Oyler Russell lived in Western Australia and died in early April 2026, shortly after his 100th birthday. As you may have guessed, he was a descendant of the Cranbrook milling family although he had been a farmer all his working life. So how did he get the middle name of Oyler? To answer that question, we need to trace the Russell family back a few generations. The Union Mill was purchased in 1832 by two brothers, John and George Russell, and it was George's son, Ebenezer, who married Susanna Oyler, the daughter of a Cranbrook farmer. They had four sons, two of whom, Caleb Oyler and Hugh (photo right), continued the milling business. It is this Caleb which has his name, "Caleb O. Russell" on the grain hopper over the Derbyshire Peak stones on the Stone Floor.



Toward the end of the 19th century, many millers were struggling to survive on wind alone and had invested in auxiliary power, such as gas or diesel engines or steam-power; or they had the use of a watermill. After Ebenezer Russell's death in 1883, Hugh continued milling for a while but, in his forties, he decided to emigrate to Australia in 1902, and go into farming. Caleb Oyler had earlier established himself as a watermill at Mersham near Ashford and reluctantly returned to the Weald but most of his milling was carried out by water-power at Slipmill in Hawkhurst.



The Australian centenarian, John Oyler Russell, was actually the grand-son of Hugh (pictured above) and continued an historical tradition, very common in the 19th century, of being given a mother's maiden name for a second forename.

*John Oyler Russell celebrating
his 99th Birthday in 2025*

Final Bits

New members may be interested to look back at previous editions of Mill Bits; these can be found on [this link](#).

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