



## Stone Cross Windmill A Tower of Strength

What is it about windmills? Why do they seem to touch such a deep chord within many of us? I have been pondering this thought ever since we began our project in VU3A and the fascination has grown with each contribution – dreamy, romantic images and a rich vein of information.

But the fascination began even earlier for me .....one bright spring morning in fact. We had driven out to a nearby garden centre and just as we climbed out of the car we both noticed an unfamiliar, continuous sound and the air around us seemed strangely alive. It was unmistakable. A mere sixty yards away a windmill, a smart white tower which I am ashamed to say we had never noticed before, was in full swing on that bright Sunday morning. The sweeps were happily turning against an unusually pristine sky.

Gardening was abandoned and we entered the world of windmills. Stone Cross windmill had recently been restored with the aid of the Heritage Lottery fund as well as much dedicated volunteers. It is now originally built in 1875 by  hard work by a band of local owners by a charitable trust. It was local craftsmen and is located not far from Pevensey Bay. On that fine Sunday morning it had opened to the public – the very first visit of the season. Newly ground Stone Cross flour was on sale, a tour of the windmill beckoned as well as a visit to a windmill museum which is gradually being developed in the roundel on the ground floor.

We made the tour. It was not an easy ascent as neither of us is small or sylph-like. But there are enthusiastic volunteers on each level, both to explain in great detail the intricacies of the Victorian engineering as well as to ensure that visitors do not fall back down into the meal bin! The engineering is really beautiful – even for someone like me who does not really understand or retain such details. You come away full of admiration for the ingenuity of our forefathers as well as for the miller himself. I wondered what it was like to spend so much of one's life in such a small and exacting space.

There are many superlatives that have been attributed to Stone Cross Mill. It is considered to be the most highly developed tower windmill in the country. The quality of the craftsmanship is very high and it is reputed to have more ironwork

than any other mill of its type in the country. The trust received one of the highest grants ever for the restoration of a mill .....and recently it received an award for the quality of the restoration (from the society for the protection of ancient buildings).

However impressive the accolades and the engineering are, it is the human story of the mill which touches me most. Perhaps you noticed as you made the virtual tour that Stone Cross windmill is a "she". The Dutch molinologists (yes there really is such a word), who visit her regularly call her "the old lady of Stone



Cross". She is a beautiful, well crafted mill and cuts a fine figure against the Sussex sky. She has also survived against the odds. In 1928 two of the four sweeps were seriously damaged in a gale and had to be removed. She continued working with just two sweeps until 1937 – a fortitude which has been captured in this painting by G. Dobbin. During the war she was used as an observation post by the army and a gun was mounted on the roundel. Could she really have repelled an invading army? I have no doubt the old lady would have tried. Inevitably the soldiers left their mark upon her, scratching their names into her woodwork.

In 1960 she was destined to be converted into a chic residence. Fortunately, the conversion never happened and she was rescued by a Mr Ron Hall who had fallen in love with her and bought her with a view to restoring her to her former glory. Single-handed he did not quite succeed but the Charitable Trust which was formed on his death has finished the mission which he began and the "old lady" reigns again over the Sussex countryside.

And finally ....I was amused to discover the photo on their website of the society's current council, looking very much like any U3A group on a field trip!



Love Your Local Windmill!