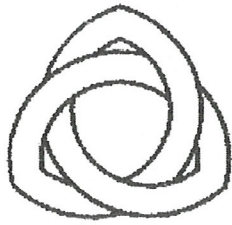


WASC 1861

May 2006
Independent Archaeology
Article on
work at WA, Dove
and Faversham
GP Mills
Peter Huggins



Newsletter 55

May 2006

INDEPENDENT ARCHAEOLOGY

Newsletter of the Council for Independent Archaeology

Editor: Tony Clifford

Community Archaeology: The Real Thing

In this issue we have a number of common threads in relation to community archaeology which begin to come together. This theme links the work which has (and continues) to be carried out at Mellor; it outlines the forthcoming UCL weekend regarding community archaeology and we confirm the details of our CIA Conference which will be hosted by a group renowned for their community approach.

CIA Conference 2006 will be run by CLASP, a Northamptonshire based group with their own approach to community archaeology. They are encouraging professionals and volunteers to learn new skills and put them into practice. **Book your place for the 23rd September at Bugbrooke, Northampton on the enclosed leaflet.**

Archaeology in the Community, a conference at the UCL will be providing a forum for the discussion of community based archaeology. It will be examining the themes and strategies that are central to its current and future development. More details inside.

Mellor has been the subject of ongoing work for the past ten years. In this issue we publish an account of some of their findings, their approach to community archaeology and some of the debate which the project has raised.

Community archaeology is happening in a variety of ways. See and experience it, get involved in the discussion and debate or simply read about it. The choice is yours.

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Gunpowder Mills

Gunpowder mills were once the staple producers of the munitions industry. Times have long moved on and in many cases only the vestiges of these works still remain. Peter Huggins provides the opportunity to look in some detail at the work which was recently carried out at the Waltham Abbey Incorporating Mill. We are also able to highlight some sites at Faversham in Kent: Oare Gunpowder Works and Chart Mill.

Gunpowder Incorporating Mill, Waltham Abbey

During National Archaeology Week 2005, members of Waltham Abbey Historical Society cleared vegetation and rubble from the site of an Incorporating Mill in the Royal Gunpowder Factory. The object was to understand the mode of operation of the mill and to be better able to interpret the remains to the public.

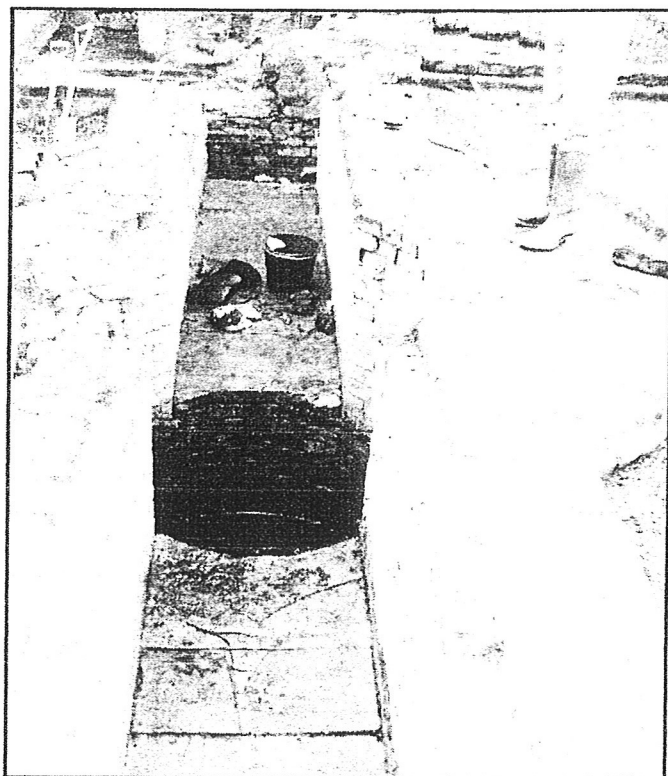
The mill was designed to incorporate the saltpetre, the sulphur and the charcoal, by rolling it between great stone runners which were driven around in a massive cast iron dish. The product of incorporation was mill cake, which then had to be broken down, and further processed elsewhere in the factory. The lower walls of the mill were of very substantial brickwork, the upper parts being flimsy to mitigate the effect of explosions. There were two dishes in the mill and two runners per dish. The mill was side-driven by a huge water wheel, as opposed to most such mills, which were driven by a central water wheel.

Early illustrations of such rollers show them to have been driven from above by means of huge gear wheels. Passageways below ground show this mill to have been driven from below. Since the water wheel was 'in' the Millhead Stream, the drive came into the side of the building, and was then transferred horizontally at right angles, and then transmitted vertically to the runners through the bottom of each dish. Thus there were two pairs of bevel gears to each dish. The passages were really maintenance ducts so that millwrights could gain access to the shafts and gears.

An early operation in building the mill was to lay a platform of great sandstone slabs upon which most of the brickwork sits. Being in the valley bottom, where the ground is unstable, the whole is probably set on timber piles. In the positions where the dishes sat, at the level of the slabs were two great cast iron plates with one-inch Whitworth bolts fixing them to something below; we can think of these as ground anchors of some sort. Two sets of three 1 1/2-inch bolts then connected to pedestals above, which would have supported the bearings on which the runner units rotated. The magnitude and quality of the engineering involved is staggering. This particular mill was probably constructed about the middle of the 19th century. Having uncovered the structure, it now remains to decide who and how to conserve the brickwork against the elements.

On 22 and 23 July, 2006, the 'gardening' at the Incorporating Mill will resume. The weeds and brambles which were required by English Heritage to be cut off, rather than dug out, have grown again.

Also, in the summer months, it is hoped to undertake a survey of the present condition of the many sites in the factory. A serious problem has arisen with the water-powered buildings, which were at the end or



The photo shows the foundations for one of the cast iron dishes in which the rollers were rotated. The passage up the centre was for maintenance of the shafts and bevel gears. The deep pit led down to a cast iron plate and some sort of ground anchor. The drive to the mill came in from the right; two bolts for the main bearing block can just be glimpsed at the top of the picture.

sides of the Millhead Stream. The waterways were silted up until 12 years ago, when all the silt was dug out as part of the perceived need for decontamination. This exposed the brick walls of the waterways, with the result that trees have colonised these walls, and after a decade or so of growth, have loosened and lifted the bricks. One water wheel survives which powered a pump house and press, the machinery of which also survives. Walls stand but the building is un-roofed. The present policy is to leave this machinery to rot. This policy must be challenged without antagonising those who one might expect to be interested in its care.

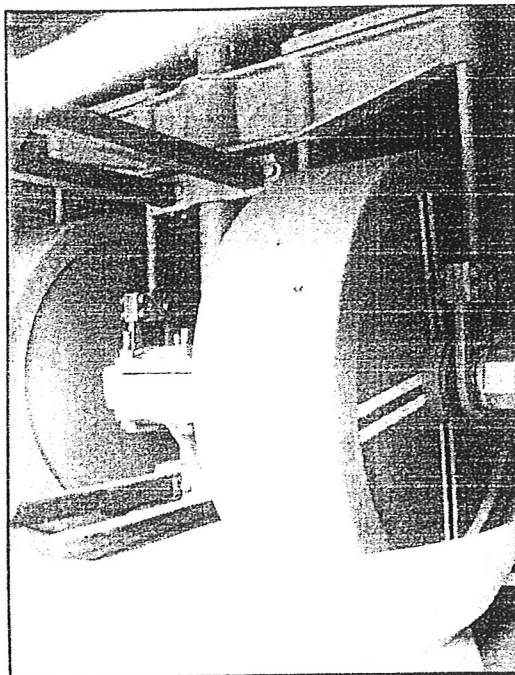
Also on July 22 and 23, there are guided tours of the Royal Gunpowder Mills, with a talk by Wayne Cocroft on "Foreign rivals; mills and factories in France, Germany, Portugal and the United States". *The talk is at 12.00, the tour at 2.00. Ring 01992 707370 to book.*

The Faversham Gunpowder Industry

This is reputed to be one of the first places in Britain where gunpowder was made. With a number of government factories in and nearby the town plus high

explosives factories alongside the Swale it was for a time the main centre for the nation's explosives industry.

Within the town it has left a larger legacy than anywhere else within the UK and a great many traces of it can still be seen.



Example of the paired runners in large cast iron dish used to incorporate the raw ingredients of gunpowder. These are located at the Oare Gunpowder Works, Faversham.

Amongst these are the Chart Gunpowder Mills and parts of the Oare Gunpowder factory. The town's 'Fleur de Lis Heritage Centre' hosts an 'Explosives Room' with an audio-visual record of the industry. A leaflet providing a guide to a gunpowder trail around the town is also available as are a range of publications. More details: 01795 534542 or e-mail to: [favershambtinternet.com](mailto:faversham@btinternet.com)

Chart Mills

These were a group of two pairs of mills operating in tandem from a central water-wheel. One complete mill, the oldest of its kind in the world remains, rescued and restored by the Faversham Society.

The mills are open to visitors April to October, 2-5 pm on weekends and Bank Holidays.

Oare Gunpowder Works

The site, situated some 3 miles north-west of Faversham, contains the remains of a former gunpowder factory that was in production from the late seventeenth century until 1934. A major conservation project was undertaken in 2004 to preserve the remaining structures and to provide access to the site. A visitor centre has been created which provides information on the works and its history.

It includes the remains of the structures in which gunpowder was manufactured, tested, packed and stored, as well as a series of ponds and canals to used to transport people and materials around the site. Part of the industrial remains are the extensive areas of woodland which was planted to form blast screens intended to reduce the effects of explosions.

The site is open daily (until 5pm) and the Visitor Centre 10am-4.30pm at weekends. More details - 01795 424341 or contact countryparks@swale.gov.uk

British Archaeological Awards 2006

Many of our members have taken part in the British Archaeological Awards over the years with great success, giving themselves or their Society's good publicity and archaeology in general a welcome boost. The main award for Independents is the Pitt- Rivers Award and details of this and other awards can be obtained from the web on www.britarch.ac.uk/awards/index/html.

It is straight forward but to ensure you have all the required information click first on the [list of 2006 Awards](#) and then on the highlighted award name. E.g. [the Pitt-Rivers Award](#) Then go back to Index and click on [Entry Form](#).

You will find a contradiction in where to send the forms [either address will do](#).

The Awards are supported by the CIA and those of you who regularly attend the Congresses will know how well the reports which many of the entrants give are received.

Please consider the Awards and if you have a project you have been working on during the past two years submit an entry before May 31st. Don't hide your light under a bushell!

Kevan Fadden

