

Mill Experience Weekend

I met Anne and Andy Parry at a mills meeting some 18 months ago or so, and felt that if ever I had a chance to visit their mill, Felin Ganol, Llanrhystud, I would certainly take it. The Welsh Mills Society's Mill Experience Weekend in April 2017 provided just that opportunity.

Whilst this water mills business is all quite new to me, most of those attending were very familiar with their workings, some owned their own mills which are either working or at various stages of renovation, whilst others were keen and knowledgeable enthusiasts.

Andy and Anne looked slightly anxious as we all arrived on the Saturday morning – not only because they didn't know what our expectations were, but also for more practical reasons – the dam and the mill pond needed fixing quickly if we were to mill any flour at all that weekend!



Thankfully willing volunteers stepped forward to splash about in the river collecting stones and repositioning them to repair the weir (damaged by a fallen tree), whilst other even harder souls waded through thick silt in the bottom of the mill pond to plug any obvious holes in the banks with clay. Just before we stopped for lunch,



Andy opened the sluice gate to allow the diverted water to run down the leat and into the mill pond. It worked! Andy looked much happier!

We all cheered as the massive water wheel started to turn, then we went inside the mill where I for one tried hard to work out what was going on! Experienced millers talk about the sounds of the mill and how they can hear if it is working properly – or not. I concentrated on these sounds for a while, as the mill



rocked, rattled and rolled into action, wood creaking on wood or squeaking against metal. A mill is in effect a massive gear-box, as the waterwheel drives the shaft which turns the pitwheel which meshes with the crown wheel to drive the oak mainshaft, and the spurwheel cogs mesh with the stone nut to drive the spindle, and the chattering damsel constantly taps the shoe to feed the grain evenly down into the eye of the grinding millstones.

Anne demonstrated the whole milling process from start (hoisting a sack of grain) to finish (filling bags of flour), her

experience and observation well in tune with the finer details of the milling process. Whilst milling she was also informing us about the properties of different grains.

Andy and their son Will have recently restored a grain cleaner from America and we watched it in action. Even though the grain going through had already been cleaned, it was incredible how many tiny seeds and husks



were still in the mix.

They also have a bolter which is an interesting machine like a long graded sieve - it sifts and grades the flour according to its different textures or degrees of fineness.

Obviously it has to be enclosed or there would be flour everywhere, so you cannot watch it in action.



Of course there is more to water mills than the milling itself so during the second day we watched in amazement the lifting of the runner stone off the bedstone using very specialist tools supplemented by straps and blocks of wood to keep it upright and stable against the wall, so we could have a go at cleaning and dressing the stones (crickey that mill bill is SO heavy!). Others had a go at lime mortar pointing. We also learned quite a lot about meal moths, as well as the various rules and regulations about product labelling, and so much else.



It was a fascinating weekend amongst congenial company which gave me a greater insight into how significant water mills have been in the past but also their potential role in the future. Some may look at them in the landscape with dewy eyes reflecting on the demise of this old technology....but as we wean ourselves off oil we should be serious about using water power for a wide range of commercial and domestic applications.

Thank you so much to Anne, Andy and Will for a very interesting weekend at their beautiful mill (and special additional thanks to Anne for feeding us so well – the bread and cakes were particularly delicious – I wonder why!)

Liz Bunney