



Pictures © Nick Hirst



This statement sets out the broad philosophy of the Section:
more detailed and specific guidance on the historical technical and practical
aspects of mill protection and repair is available from:

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A PHILOSOPHY OF REPAIR OF WINDMILLS AND WATERMILLS



Windmills and Watermills are an irreplaceable part of our national heritage. They form a vital part of the traditional landscape and have an important place in the history of industry, engineering and technology, in the development of motive power and the processing of raw materials. In their structure and machinery they represent an enduring quality of craftsmanship. Mills have a unique place in the tangible record of the past and their proper protection, repair and continued working is the sincere objective of the Mills Section.

The majority of mills have already been lost, due to disuse and decay. Many have more recently been destroyed, either by the removal of machinery or by poorly considered conversion to other uses. Ideally, mills typical of their region or which, through their structure and machinery, illustrate features of historical or technical development, must be the prime candidates for protection and repair. Due mainly to limitations of ownership or finance, however, such a choice is not always available, so other considerations must apply. The aim of the Mills Section is therefore to fight for the conservation and repair of any mill which stills retains its machinery.

In all repair work it is essential that a mill is not regarded merely as a building but as a machine. While the building often forms an integral part of the machine, it is the mill in its entirety, building and machinery, which is of importance. The true repair of any machine must be to working order, and the Section will pursue this ideal wherever feasible. Many degrees of repair are possible, however, and all are valid if they are undertaken with the primary aim of preserving mills as machines.

Mills worthy of protection, but which, through limitations of ownership or finance, cannot be repaired fully at the present time must not be abandoned. Holding repairs can be undertaken, often at modest cost, to conserve that which survives, by weatherproofing, and preventing structural failure. Such repairs are vital if more mills are to survive intact. If carried out well, this work can lay the foundation for

fuller repairs to be undertaken in the future, when conditions may change and proper support for the continued existence of a mill may be assured.

The aim of repair should be to retain and maintain as much as possible of the existing structure and machinery in order to preserve the historical and technical integrity of each mill. As a general rule, a mill should be repaired to the same appearance as when it last worked, a rule that applies as much to the interior as to the exterior.

Ancillary machinery, engines and buildings, such as the miller's dwelling, kilns, granaries, cart sheds and other related outbuildings, even if comparatively modern, are all part of the history and development of milling and, where options allow, should be retained and repaired in a like manner, alongside the mills they served.

Particular care should be taken to document each mill and site before the commencement and during the progress of the repair works. Original features that relate to the working of a mill should be kept in their correct context, irrespective of whether the mill is to function or not.

Where replacement of any part is deemed necessary, such replacement should be carried out using appropriate and comparable materials and new parts should be faithful copies of the originals. Should no original part survive as a pattern, the design of new parts

should be based on all available evidence, to be in keeping with local tradition and practice. Old parts removed and replaced are often worth preserving separately as they may be of historical or technical interest.

Where mills are to work, it is vital to ensure that the machinery is set up to run as smoothly, efficiently and safely as possible. Effective maintenance must follow repairs and a working mill will require regular checks and running adjustments, preferably by a miller, millwright or capable custodian.

The removal of any item of machinery from a mill and the moving of a mill to a new site will normally be opposed by the Section, except where all attempts at on-site protection have failed and the building or machinery is threatened with certain destruction.

In order to function, windmills and Watermills depend upon a close relationship with the natural sources of energy from which they derive their power. Ideally, therefore, the space around a windmill should be maintained as clear as possible of buildings and trees, to allow a free flow of wind. Similarly, an uninterrupted water supply is vital to work a waterwheel or water turbine. The maintenance of all watercourses, dams, weirs and ponds, with the provision of access for their repair and management, is therefore of particular concern to the Section.

Many mills and mill sites are having their potential investigated for the production of hydro-power. The Philosophy of the Mills Section views this in exactly the same way as any other adaptive re-use. For all listed mills there is a presumption towards the requirement of Listed Building Consent for any hydro-power installation. Irrespective of the status of the mill it is vital that new and modified works are appropriate to their environment. Such works need to be as unobtrusive as possible, or they should be kept

separate from the traditional installation. Any scheme that is not in the best interests of conservation, that threatens historic fabric or working parts, is not acceptable. In most cases, however, a compromise in favour of the natural and historic environment can be achieved.

Windmills and Watermills are primarily machines, and proposals to convert them to other uses will always be critically examined by the Section. The SPAB was founded in 1877 by William Morris as a direct result of the contemporary spoiling of history, craftsmanship and true function which he witnessed being carried out as 'restoration'. The Mills Section bases its philosophy on over seventy years experience in the protection and repair of mills in many parts of the country, and aims to encourage the sincere and proper repair of mills, to ensure that truly representative examples will survive for future generations to study and enjoy. All such work will raise problems which can only be answered by those with adequate knowledge and experience. Such advice should be sought and considered carefully before any action concerning the future of any mill is taken.

***The Mills Section Committee, 1983.
(revised 2000 and 2004)***

The objectives of the SPAB Mills Section are:

- To stimulate the interest of the public in the preservation of wind and watermills
- To provide technical advice on questions related to the repair of windmills and watermills
- To make a detailed survey of windmills and watermills as a permanent record with historical data of all mills in the country.
- To encourage the craft of country milling
- To give financial help wherever possible