



East Hoathly & District Preservation Society

Argos Hill Windmill Trust Ltd., past, present & future.

Presented by Richard Howes

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Windmills have been in existence in the UK since the 12th Century and, along with water mills, were the principal sources of inanimate mechanical power until the arrival of steam power in the late 18th Century. Numbers peaked at around 10,000 around 1800 but have been in steady decline ever since, with about 500 remaining.

Structural designs fall into 3 categories:

post – in which the whole body of the mill turns with wind direction,

smock – which has a masonry base, a wooden body and a cap that turns to face the wind and

tower – which is built of masonry (usually brick) with a cap that swivels.

Argos Hill Windmill is of the post type, which sits 605 feet above sea level and dates back to 1656, although the present structure was built around 1835. It is one of 50 such structures that remain; 42 have been restored, 6 are under restoration and 2 (including the one nearby at Cross-in-Hand) are at risk.

Richards' interest for windmills began at the tender age of two, when his grandfather took him on an outing from Tunbridge Wells to the one at Argos Hill. That sparked a passion for these unique buildings which, over time drove him to join the Argos Hill Friends' group in 2008 and later, in 2010, to help set up the preservation trust.

By that time, the windmill was in a sorry state of repair, having been last used around 1927 when George Fuller was the miller. In 1929 the unusual pole mounted fantail was damaged, rendering it inoperable; the only other known example of that type of fantail is at nearby Cross-in-Hand. Come WWII the white roof had been repainted red to serve as a guide for allied aircraft. By the 1950s one of the four patent sweeps had broken off, the patent referring to a hand operated chain driven mechanism to control a Venetian blind style device to control use of the available wind power. That enabled the windmill to be controlled whilst still in motion and was a great improvement over earlier mills where the sweeps (and hence the mill) had to be stopped in order to make adjustments for the wind strength.

Wealden District Council took ownership in 1955 and did some cosmetic work to it.

In the 60's & 70's it was struck twice by lightning and then in the following decade the storm of '87 broke the round house roof and two sweeps. In 2011, WDC leased the mill to the Trust for 99 years, triggering a burst of restoration activity. After 8000 hours of effort and the scaffolding finally coming down, the sweeps rotated for the first time in nearly 90 years. Not that the work stops there, it requires about £5000 annually to maintain the status-quo.

Given that the last remaining lead paint to be found in the UK was used in this current round of restoration, no-one knows what will be used next time it needs painting, although they have a few years in which to think about it.