

Fulwell Windmill

A brief history of Fulwell Mill

Fulwell Windmill started to appear on the Sunderland skyline in 1806 and became the familiar landmark we know today when opened in 1808. Built for Joseph Swan out of magnesian limestone from the adjacent quarry, it retained its links with the Swan family for many years. 1839 saw the only recorded fatality at the mill when a journeyman miller, William Wren, was thrown from the sails during a violent storm. Regional archives show a succession of millers renting, or leasing, the mill until 1879 when the Moody family took over, operating the mill until 1949. With the advent of alternative, more reliable forms of power, windmills had to change or become obsolete. The major change that took place at Fulwell during this time was the removal of the sails and installation of a gas engine at the beginning of the twentieth century. The mill was therefore able to carry on producing animal feed for the next half century, even though the cap that had carried the sails, and some parts of the structure of the mill, deteriorated. After the last miller in the Moody family retired in 1949 a neighbour, Jim Simpson, from Ivy House carried on some work until 1956, on a part time basis.

Restoration

After closure the fabric of the mill continued to deteriorate. In response to public concern Sunderland Corporation authorised the repair of the cap and the fitting of four dummy sails in 1955. During the 1970s the Tyne & Wear Industrial Monuments Trust became involved with some further restoration work. In 1996 the Sunderland City Council started the process which five years later would see the windmill restored to its nineteenth century working condition. The City Council, with financial aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, has presented the North East with its only working windmill, preserving crafts and traditions that span over seven hundred years of English history.

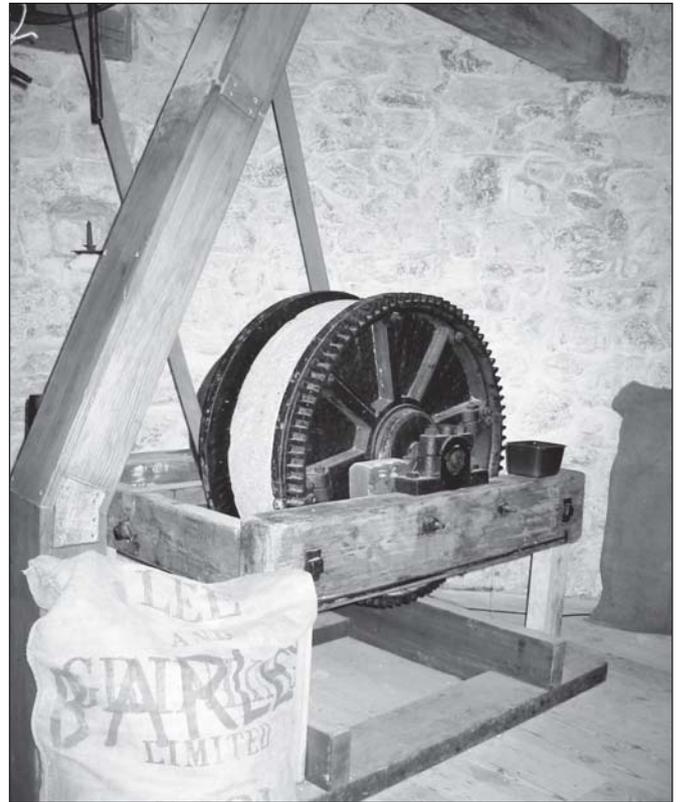


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Inside the Mill

The mill in design is typical of five floor English tower mills, but is unique in having the outside gallery built as part of the main structure, topping the first two floors. The ground floor, the largest in the mill, is where the different grains would have been delivered from farms in the locality and corn merchants for processing. It is also where the finished products of flours and animal feed would have arrived, been bagged, weighed and dispatched. On the first floor, known as the Miller's floor, several important machines were run including a grain cleaner, barley dresser and bolter for sifting the flour into its different grades. Within the thick wall of the tower base were housed the workshop and miller's office. The second floor is the main control centre for the mill. Here the main drive shaft terminates in the great spur wheel that drives all the machinery in the building, including the auxiliary drive shafts taking power down to the floor below and up to the millstones. Doors lead to the outside gallery, also known as the reefing stage, giving access to the sails and striking mechanism. The third floor, known as the stone floor, houses the millstones. At present there is only one operational pair of stones, covered by the wooden vat or tun. The fourth floor is called the bin floor and is where the sack hoist brings up the grain that is emptied into bins, where gravity takes over returning the grain to the millstones below. The



fifth floor has been restored using Perspex so that the visitor can see all the great wood and iron mechanism that turns wind power into a force to drive the machinery throughout the mill.



Find out more about Fulwell Windmill

For more information visit the Local Studies Centre at Sunderland City Library & Arts Centre, which has many books about windmills, such as:

- 'Windmills of England' by Brown, R.J
- 'Windmills and millwrighting' by Freese, S

More information can be found on the following websites:

www.fulwell-windmill.com, www.millsresearch.org.uk, www.spab.org.uk

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