



The Buckland Mill in the garden of Yewdells, the home near Reigate of management consultant Duncan Ferns

Nine years ago, when management consultant Duncan Ferns bought Yewdells, a timber-framed cottage at Buckland, near Reigate, the property came with a coal and wood store that has since taken over a sizeable chunk of his life.

"We were told that the scruffy shed in the garden used to be a windmill, but we didn't give it a lot of thought at the time," Duncan told me. "It was only about a year after moving in that we thought of either pulling it down or trying to do something with it."

"I got in touch with the Mills Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and was surprised to find that they knew absolutely nothing about the windmill in my garden! It wasn't even listed in the windmill 'bible' - Windmills of Surrey & London."

What Duncan had in his garden is now believed to be the UK's only surviving wind-powered sawmill, dating back to the 1870s.

"Many components of the mill, including the four shuttered sails, fantail and several cog patterns, were stored and in

good condition, but there is no surviving evidence of millstones."

Three elements of circumstantial evidence point to the Buckland mill being designed as a sawmill and workshop. First, the size of the structure is smaller than a grain mill, but similar to a small number of documented wind-powered sawmill workshops known to have existed around the UK. Second, Duncan Ferns' house, Yewdells, which is thought to have been built in 1713, is known to have been the home for generations of Buckland Court Estate carpenters. Finally, Yewdells was the site of a commercial, outdoor steam sawmill from 1892 to 1950. Francis Sanders is described in directories of the time as 'Steam Sawyer'; a Wantage Traction Engine, bought by Mr Sanders for £475 in 1900, was linked to stationary sawing equipment from 1900 to 1950. Yewdells was still registered as a sawmill in Kelly's Directory of 1951.



Work in progress - the mill encased in scaffolding prior to restoration of the tower



The new tower begins to take shape



View up through the tower of the windmill, showing the main drive shaft

Standing on a shallow brick foundation, the mill is a 12ft x 12ft, two-storey structure with a flat lead roof from which rises a tapered round tower to a height of 9ft. A small 3ft cap sits on top of the tower, enabling the 9ft shuttered sails to rotate above the flat roof. The overall height to the top of the sails is 38ft. Some of the structural timbers are 'adzed' rather than sawn and are probably significantly older than the date of construction. The village church of St Mary the Virgin was rebuilt in 1860, and as this date is contemporary with the likely build-date, some of the

timbers used in the mill may be from the old church. The first floor is reached by a ladder staircase, and further steps give access to the turret above.

"Yewdells is a listed Grade II building, so we got the mill also listed Grade II to help with grant aid. That's when the Department of National Heritage confirmed that it is the only known surviving wind-powered sawmill in the UK," Duncan explained. "Howard Jones, an architect who specialises in windmills and who used to be the windmill architect for Kent County Council, pieced together all of



Phase 2 of the restoration project involved the casting of numerous cogs and fittings



Inside the mill is a lathe made by Drummond Brothers Ltd., of Rydes Hill near Guildford. Do any Surrey Monocle readers know anything about this company?

the parts that were lying around and drew up the restoration plans. Below the tower the structure is almost entirely original, and about 50% original above the tower."

Restoration began in 1995, mostly with private funding but also with sponsorship from Mole Valley District Council, Surrey Historic Buildings Trust and the BAA Gatwick Environmental Grants Scheme. The most recent grant, for 50% of the required cost of about £14,000 and 100% funding for public display boards, has come from the Rural Enterprise Scheme run by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

A yew tree growing just one foot from the mill was felled, with permission, in 1995. It had 120 rings, and as the mill almost certainly pre-dated the tree, this suggests a construction date of pre-1875. Inside the mill is a cast-iron plaque bearing the name of 'W Cooper, Engineer, Henfield'. William Cooper was a millwright working from Henfield, Sussex, who probably designed the workings of the mill. His company was active from 1854 to his death in 1876, so the best indicative date of the Buckland Mill is c1860-1876.

Phase 1, from 1995-97, saw the replacement of rotten timbers, a re-built tower section and repairs to windows, doors and weather-boarding. Oak shingles were added to the tower and pitched roofs, and a York-stone floor was laid.

Phase 2, from 1999-2001, involved the reconstruction of a working cap frame. This involved the casting of numerous cogs and fittings and the refitting of the sails.

Phase 3, from 2003 onwards, involves adjustments to restore full working of the sails, installing electricity, setting up an iron saw-bench and lathe to be driven from the wind-powered line-shaft, and production of display boards for visitors.

"After scouring the country for a Victorian saw-bench, we eventually found one less than five miles away in Kingswood," said Duncan. It is, in fact, a circular saw-bench of about 1900 made by Kirchner & Company (London). Also in the mill is a Lathe made by Drummond Brothers Ltd., of Rydes Hill near Guildford.

"We have already opened the windmill to the public on a few occasions," said Duncan, "as part of the National Heritage Open Days convened by the Civic Trust, English Heritage and locally by Mole Valley District Council. Now we're looking forward to demonstrating that the windmill can work - on the rare occasions when the wind blows through the surrounding trees!"

For further information, or to arrange to view Buckland Windmill by appointment, see the website at www.bucklandsurrey.net.

Buckland Windmill

The last of its kind discovered in Surrey

The UK's only surviving wind-powered sawmill is expected to be up-and-running again by February. Mike McIntyre talks to its proud owner, Duncan Ferns