

Excerpt from

Windmills in Kent

by James W. R. Adams of Kent County Council, 1954

Introductory

From time to time since the last war the Kent County Council, in connection with the functions which, as local planning authority, it exercises as to the safeguarding of buildings and rural amenities, has considered the matter of preserving various windmills in different parts of Kent. In June 1954 the Kent Planning Committee decided that all extant windmills in the Administrative County should be examined and that, as soon as this had been done, previous decisions should be reviewed and future action decided upon. This report comprises the information furnished to the Committee on various occasions and the decisions taken by the County Council, following the recent review.

Previous Action by the County Council

The first action by the County Council as to the preservation of windmills in Kent was the inclusion in Planning Basis for Kent, published in 1948, of a list of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest among which were the following twenty-five windmills, situate in fifteen county districts; those which are now demolished being marked with an asterisk.

Bromley Borough	Keston Windmill
Ramsgate Borough	Newington Windmill
Rochester Borough	*Delce Windmill
Ashford Urban District	Willesborough Windmill
	*Kennington Windmill
Herne Bay Urban District	Herne Windmill
Sittingbourne and Milton Urban District	* Milton Windmill
Bridge-Blean Rural District	Windmill on Barham Downs
Cranbrook Rural District	Benenden, Old Smock Mill
	Cranbrook Windmill
	*Sandhurst Old Windmill
Dartford Rural District	West Kingsdown Windmill
Eastry Rural District	*Ash Post Mill
	Goodnestone Post Mill, Chillenden
Hollingbourn Rural District	*Headcorn Windmill
	*Sutton Valence Windmill
Strood Rural District	Meopham Windmill
Tenterden Rural District	Biddenden Windmill (remains)
	Wittersham, The Stocks Windmill
Tonbridge Rural District	Hildenborough, Watt's Cross Windmill
	Hildenborough, Stocks Green Windmill
West Ashford Rural District	*Bethersden Windmill
	Charing Windmill
	*Egerton Windmill
	*Smarden Windmill

Consideration was given in 1949 to the problem of safeguarding these windmills by means of the making of Building Preservation Orders. Although such Orders, if confirmed, require approval to be obtained for the demolition, alteration or extension of a building, they do not enable the authority to require works of restoration. It was appreciated, therefore, that an Order might be of no immediate value in the case of some windmills, particularly those which were not in use and which had already suffered damage through lack of maintenance. It was realized that in such cases it might prove necessary to acquire the mills to secure their proper restoration. As a necessary preliminary step however it was decided to make a number of Building Preservation Orders. The Minister subsequently confirmed Preservation Orders for eleven windmills as follows:

Ash	Eastry R.D.
Barham	Bridge-Blean R.D.
Charing	West Ashford R.D.
Chillenden	Eastry R.D.

Cranbrook	Cranbrook R.D.
Herne	Heme Bay U.D.
Keston	Bromley Borough
Meopham	Strood R.D.
West Kingsdown	Dartford R.D.
Willesborough	Ashford U.D.
Wittersham	Tenterden R.D.

Consideration was also given to the preservation of Benenden, Rolvenden and Watts' Cross Windmills, and at a later date of Stelling Minnis Windmill, together with a number of other windmills ultimately included in the lists compiled by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government under Section 30 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947.

On various occasions since 1949, the County Council has agreed to make financial contributions towards the maintenance of certain windmills, on the basis that some degree of local interest and financial participation in any scheme of preservation should be evidenced before any expenditure from the general County rate was finally approved. Unfortunately very little evidence of local interest was forthcoming in most cases. In no case did any scheme reach an advanced stage, except at Cranbrook where active steps were taken at a comparatively early date.

In 1954 and 1955 requests were received from the owners for financial contributions to the repair of Barham Windmill (Bridge-Blean Rural District) and Borstal Windmill (Whitstable Urban District). The action taken as to the Barham mill is mentioned later in this report.

Borstal Windmill forms part of a private house. The Whitstable Urban District Council did not feel justified in making a scheme for preservation of the mill, but was of the opinion that the case was one which merited grant aid from the local planning authority. Although it is a landmark it was not thought that it was of any greater merit than Herne or Barham Mills and the County Council was not recommended to extend its commitments to include this mill.

Recent Survey

As the result of the decision of the Planning Committee to review all the previous decisions, already referred to in the introductory remarks, a survey was carried out and a comprehensive report was submitted in January 1955, followed by supplementary reports at later dates.

In a number of cases it was found that the base alone existed, or that the structure was wholly beyond repair. Excluding these, the following twenty-nine windmills were found to be standing in January 1955:

KESTON, Bromley Borough—Post mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

OARE, Faversham Borough—Tower mill. Listed as Grade II by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

DRAPER'S, Margate Borough—Smock mill. Listed as Grade III by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

THANET, Ramsgate Borough—Tower mill. Listed as Grade III by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

WHITE, Sandwich Borough—Smock mill. Listed as Grade II by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

WILLESBOROUGH, Ashford U.D.—Smock mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

CHISLET, Herne Bay U.D.—Smock mill. Listed as Grade III by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

HERNE, Herne Bay U.D.—Smock mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

BORSTAL HILL, Whitstable U.D.—Smock mill. Listed as Grade II by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

CHARING, West Ashford R.D.—Smock mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

BARHAM or BLACK, Bridge-Blean R.D.—Smock mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

CRANBROOK or UNION, Cranbrook R.D.—Smock mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

BENENDEN or BEACON, Cranbrook R.D.—Smock mill. Listed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government but ungraded.

WEST KINGSDOWN, Dartford R.D.—Smock mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

GUSTON or SWINGATE, Dover R.D.—Tower mill. Not listed.

RINGWOULD or RIPPLE, Dover R.D.—Smock mill. Not listed.

EASTRY, Eastry R.D.—Smock mill. Listed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government but ungraded.

ASH, Eastry R.D.—Post mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

CHILLENDEEN, Eastry R.D.—Post mill. Building Preservation Order in force.

STELLING MINNIS, Elham R.D.—Smock mill. Not listed.

HAWKINGE, Elham R.D.—Smock mill. Not listed.
STANFORD, Elham R.D.—Tower mill. Not listed.
MEOPHAM, Strood R.D.—Smock mill. Building Preservation Order in force.
ROLVENDEN, Tenterden R.D.—Post mill. Not listed.
WITTERSHAM or STOCKS, Tenterden R.D.—Post mill. Building Preservation Order in force.
WOODCHURCH or WHITE, Tenterden R.D.—Smock mill. Scheduled by the Ministry of Works as an Ancient Monument.
BIDBOROUGH, Tonbridge R.D.—Tower mill. Listed as Grade III by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.
STOCKS GREEN, Tonbridge R.D.—Smock mill. Listed as Grade III by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.
WATT'S CROSS, Tonbridge R.D.—Smock mill. Listed as Grade II by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government.

The general conclusion reached, as a result of the study made at this time, was that the most practicable policy would be to decide in principle that characteristic examples of post and smock mills should be preserved, distributed as fairly as possible in West, Mid- and East Kent, and that all available financial aid from general County funds should be allocated to these examples. No example of a tower mill could be found which was of sufficient interest to justify preservation.

Present Position

After careful consideration, nine windmills were selected and were made the subject of special recommendations to the Planning Committee and subsequently to the County Council:

ASH WINDMILL—Eastry R.D.

This fine example of a post mill was situated just south of the village of Ash near Sandwich. A Building Preservation Order was made in 1952, but in that year, the County Council was informed that the Ministry of Works contemplated taking steps to preserve this windmill. In April, 1955, however, no final decision had been made by the Ministry of Works and as the condition of the mill was deteriorating, urgent action was taken to add Ash Windmill to the eight mills which the County Council had agreed to adopt. In July, 1955, the County Council agreed in principle to do this but while negotiations were proceeding with the Rural District Council and the Parish Council, this ancient mill collapsed in stormy weather on 21st October, 1955, and is feared to be a total loss.

BARHAM WINDMILL—Bridge-Blean R.D.

This smock mill, sometimes known as Black Mill, is situated on Barham Downs, near Upper Digges Place, half way between Canterbury and Dover. The mill can be seen from many distant points of view and is a conspicuous landmark. A Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1952.

The owner intimated in July 1954 that he was prepared to replace two missing sweeps at an estimated cost of £230 provided that the County Council would make a contribution of £100. It is understood that he has now replaced the sweeps. The County Council originally resolved in relation to this mill that "(a) provided the work of replacing the two missing sweeps, recently carried out at an estimated cost of £230 has been completed to the satisfaction of the County Planning Officer, the owner be informed that the County Council will contribute £100 towards the cost of this work provided that no objection is raised by the Ministry of Works to the County Council making this contribution under Section 11 of the Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Amendment Act, 1913; and (b) the owner also be informed that the County Council will give favourable consideration to contributing towards the future cost of maintenance of the Barham windmill providing he informs the County Council immediately any works of repair appear to him to be necessary and first submits to the County Council plans and a specification of the work he intends to carry out." Subsequently the County Council agreed to increase the £100 to £200 and to contribute a similar sum towards the cost of replacing a pair of sweeps and middling, subject to certain conditions.

CHILLENDEEN WINDMILL—Eastry R.D.

This is a post mill located just north of the hamlet of Chillenden in the Parish of Goodnestone roughly half way between Canterbury and Deal. It is sited in relatively flat agricultural country and is an important landmark. A Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1952.

The County Council some years ago agreed to contribute £100 towards the cost of essential repairs and to make an average contribution of £60 a year towards the cost of maintenance. Arising out of the present survey, the County

Council has approved in principle the acquisition, repair and maintenance of the Chillenden mill by the Council, and has authorized negotiations with the Easry Rural District Council as to the detailed arrangements.

CRANBROOK WINDMILL—Cranbrook R.D.

This smock mill in the Weald of Kent, more correctly known as Union Mill, Cranbrook, and for which a Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1952, undoubtedly merits special priority. It is described in the recent appeal, which will be referred to later, as follows:

"This mill was built in 1814 by Humphrey the millwright for Henry Dobell. Henry Dobell was a relation, it is believed a brother, of Sidney Dobell, the critic and author.

"Humphrey was a millwright of some note, he built a number of mills of which Cranbrook is the sole survivor. His business premises were in Waterloo Road, Cranbrook, the site is now occupied by Cornwallis House. His name appears in the church accounts when he was paid for rehangng the bells, he also designed and made a turntable for a large telescope to the order of an astronomer who lived in Sissinghurst.

"Few mills in the south of England approach Cranbrook in size and no other is so high. Originally built with cloth sweeps, a timber stage and no fantail, it was modernized with shuttered sweeps and winding gear in 1842 by William Medhurst of Lewes and George Warren of Hawkhurst.

"The mill is fitted with three large pairs of stones, with the usual dressing machines, all of which could be driven in a strong wind."

The County Council decided in this case that, subject to the mill being first put into good repair, the Council should take it over and accept full liability for its future maintenance at the estimated annual cost of £170. It was further decided that the Council should reconsider the matter if the funds needed for the immediate repairs could not be raised by public subscription. The Wind and Watermill Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings together with the Committee for the Preservation of Rural Kent of the Kent Council of Social Service have issued an appeal for subscriptions towards the estimated cost of repairs, which is £2,500. The Cranbrook Rural District Council and the Cranbrook Parish Council have promised to support the appeal.

HERNE WINDMILL—Herne Bay U.D.

The village of Herne is within the Urban District of Herne Bay but is separated from the town by the coastal road, Route A.299, and by a narrow strip of open country. The smock windmill occupies a conspicuous position between the village and the coastal road, and is a feature of the landscape. A Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1952.

The County Council has, in this case, resolved that "subject to the Herne Bay Urban District Council agreeing (a) to contribute £200 towards the estimated cost of £1,200 of carrying out the repairs immediately necessary to the windmill; (b) to contribute half the average annual cost of maintenance or £50 a year towards the average annual cost of maintenance whichever is the greater; and (c) to maintain and manage the windmill as agents for the County Council, negotiations be opened with the owner of the windmill with a view to its acquisition by the County Council, repair and subsequent leasing back to the owner at a small rent." The Urban District Council subsequently agreed to these terms.

KESTON WINDMILL—Bromley Borough

This post mill stands in the grounds of a private house half way between Keston and Holwood Park, south of the town of Bromley and only about 15 miles from Charing Cross. A Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1952. The proximity of this mill to London and the fact that it is the only windmill extant in this part of Kent are the principal reasons which justify its preservation. The County Council has authorized negotiations being opened with the owner, in consultation with the Bromley Borough Council, as to a possible basis of preservation.

WEST KINGSDOWN WINDMILL—Dartford R.D.

This smock mill is about halfway between Farningham and Wrotham, in the Parish of West Kingsdown, and about 23 miles from Charing Cross. It is a conspicuous feature in the landscape particularly from the London-Folkestone-Dover Trunk Road, and a Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1952.

The estimated cost of repairing this mill is approximately £1,250, and it is estimated that the annual cost of maintenance would be about £75.

The action decided on by the County Council in this case is that "subject to the Dartford Rural District Council agreeing (a) to contribute £250 towards the estimated cost of £1,250 of carrying out the repairs immediately necessary to the windmill; (b) to contribute half the average annual cost of maintenance or £50 a year towards the average annual cost of maintenance, whichever is the greater; and (c) to maintain and manage the windmill as agents for the County Council, negotiations be opened with the owner of the windmill with a view to its acquisition by the County Council, repair and subsequent leasing back to the owner at a small rent."

WILLESBOROUGH WINDMILL—Ashford U.D.

This smock mill is situated on an important site north-east of the town of Ashford and, with the adjoining meadow, will constitute an important feature of the landscape immediately adjoining the new trunk road known as the Ashford Bypass. A Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1952.

The County Council originally agreed in this case to contribute towards an approved scheme of painting the windmill, provided that its contribution did not exceed an average of £30 a year and provided that the owner agreed to carry out certain repairs to the structure of the windmill. These repairs were estimated to cost £117, and painting the mill was thought to involve about £150.

The owner has not accepted the County Council's offer of financial assistance, but it was observed in April 1955 that the windmill had recently been repainted. The County Council has now decided that "the preservation of this windmill never-the-less be approved in principle, and the Ashford Urban District Council be asked to arrange for the structure to be inspected not less frequently than once a year and to report to the County Council if it appears to the District Council that action is necessary to acquire the windmill publicly in order to secure its proper maintenance."

WITTERSHAM WINDMILL—Tenterden R.D.

This post mill, also known as Stocks Mill, stands in the grounds of a private house south of the "Isle of Oxney" in the hamlet of Stocks, not far north of the boundary between Kent and Sussex. A Building Preservation Order has been in force since 1953.

When inspected in connection with the present survey it obviously needed considerable repair. The owner informed the County Council that there was considerable local interest in the preservation of the mill, and added that he had already received ; contributions amounting to £125 to the fund it was proposed to start. He added that a committee of influential local residents had been formed, and that it had been represented to him that, if the ownership of the mill was transferred under proper conditions to a suitable holding trust or council, a public appeal could be launched with good prospects of obtaining further contributions. In this connection the owner expressed his willingness to transfer the mill to a holding trust or public body subject to certain conditions.

The County Council has decided in this case to inform the owner that it would "consider an application for a contribution towards a satisfactory scheme for preserving this windmill provided that substantial financial support is also forthcoming."

Future Action

It will have been observed that different arrangements for ownership and management, for restoration and maintenance have been made in respect of the eight windmills for which the County Council has decided to accept financial liability. It may be that the arrangements now contemplated will have to be varied in the light of changing circumstances, but it is now County Council policy to preserve those windmills if practicable.

Of the remaining windmills in the county some, as has already been pointed out, are subject to Building Preservation Orders and others are listed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government under Section 30 of the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947. One, the Woodchurch or White Windmill, near Tenterden, is scheduled as an Ancient Monument under the Ancient Monuments Acts, 1913 and 1931 and accordingly comes under the aegis of the Ministry of Works. It is to be hoped that by one means or another some of these will be maintained, so that they may, with the windmills taken under the County Councils' wing, continue to make their present special contribution to the landscape of Kent.