

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COTSWOLD VOLUNTARY WARDENS 2025

ANNUAL REPORT and STATISTICS for 2024 - 2025 by MIKE CRIPPS



As the outgoing Head Warden, it is my pleasure to review the last year. I wish Sarah as Head Warden and Doug as Deputy Head Warden an enjoyable and successful term in these roles. I have thoroughly enjoyed my five years as Deputy and Head Warden; a period that we have seen the Wardens become much more integrated into the CNL team. This started under Andy Parsons the CEO 2019 - 2024 and has continued under Becky Waite our new CEO. It was a proud moment for the Wardens when Sarah and I were asked by Brendan McCarthy the CNL Chair to be part of the staff team for the selection process of the new CEO. I am so grateful to Brendan and the Board and all the CNL Staff for making me feel so welcome and very much part of the team, and for their recognition of the work of the Wardens. The year 2023-24 was the first time the hours contributed by the Wardens had passed the 50,000-mark reaching 51,351. The 2024-25 year saw the that record broken with a total of 55,352 hours, a remarkable achievement. A very big thank you to all of you for the hours you have contributed. However, there is still some under reporting with not all hours being submitted. The 2024-25 Annual Statistics are listed below, allowing you to see them in more detail.

Why are the statistics so important? Firstly, they are a recognition of our hard work as Wardens. Secondly, they form an important part of the annual reports to the likes of Defra, Natural England and National Trails who provide the substantial part of CNL's funding.

Looking at last year's statistics we can see our strengths and weaknesses. The number of active Wardens over the last three years has been virtually static at just over 370. For the past two years, we had to stop open recruiting and restrict it to where we have vacancies in specific roles. This is due to our core budget not being increased and the need to ensure that we can provide the correct support to the current Wardens. Targeted recruitment has allowed us to fill many of the Parish Warden vacancies, and this has seen a 25% increase in the total hours given and 23% increase in the miles patrolled. The number of guided walks at 354 are back to those of pre-pandemic level, which is good to see. The walks provided are now of a greater variety in the length, themes and even some at the weekend. Our "Shorter and Steadier" as well as "Coffee Morning" walks, are allowing non-regular walkers to enjoy the experience. The variety of walks has meant that the number of adults joining the walks reached 4252 an increase of 21%, of which 16% were new walkers. One area we do need to encourage are families that include children who will be future custodians of the Cotswolds. There have been many changes during the last few years, including, staff, rebranding, climate action, and budgetary challenges. During this period, I have been part of the small group that has examined and updated our risk assessments, guidelines and Warden role descriptions. This work continues and will include an annual review of these documents.

The quarterly meetings in the districts are important, as they are a great opportunity to meet colleagues as well as exchange information and ideas. The social connection in the districts is now much greater which helps the Parish Wardens and Guided Walk Leaders, who may not be involved in other roles, to feel more part of our great family of Wardens.

Once again thanks to you all for supporting me during my period as Head Warden and I wish you all a happy and healthy time going forward.

ANNUAL STATISTICS for 2024 -2025 FOLLOW ON PAGES 2 AND 3

Annual Statistics 2024-25

Active warden numbers **373**

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Hours worked | Parish Wardens | 9,246 |
| | Educational work | 1,004 |
| | Work Parties | 28,63 |
| | | 1 |
| | Guided walks | 6,364 |
| | As Cotswold Way Wardens | 1,474 |
| | Surveys | 73 |
| | Training | 1,416 |
| | Wardens Meetings | 3,147 |
| | Shows/Events/Talks | 616 |
| | Website & Social Media | 359 |
| | Press and PR | 458 |
| | Administration | 2,564 |
| | Total | 55,35 |
| | | 2 |

Activities:

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Parish Wardens | Miles of path patrolled | 9,695 |
| | Minor jobs completed | 2,389 |
| | Parish Council contacts | 354 |
| Guided Walk Leaders | Number of walks | 354 |
| | Number of Adults | 4,252 |
| | Number of children | 54 |
| | Number of new walkers | 626 |
| Education | Number of talks | 3 |
| | Number of Schools worked with | 16 |
| | Number of adults | 396 |
| | Number of children | 1,136 |
| Cotswold Way | Miles of path patrolled | 1,188 |
| | Minor jobs completed | 307 |
| Publicity | No. of shows /events attended | 27 |

Work Party Activities

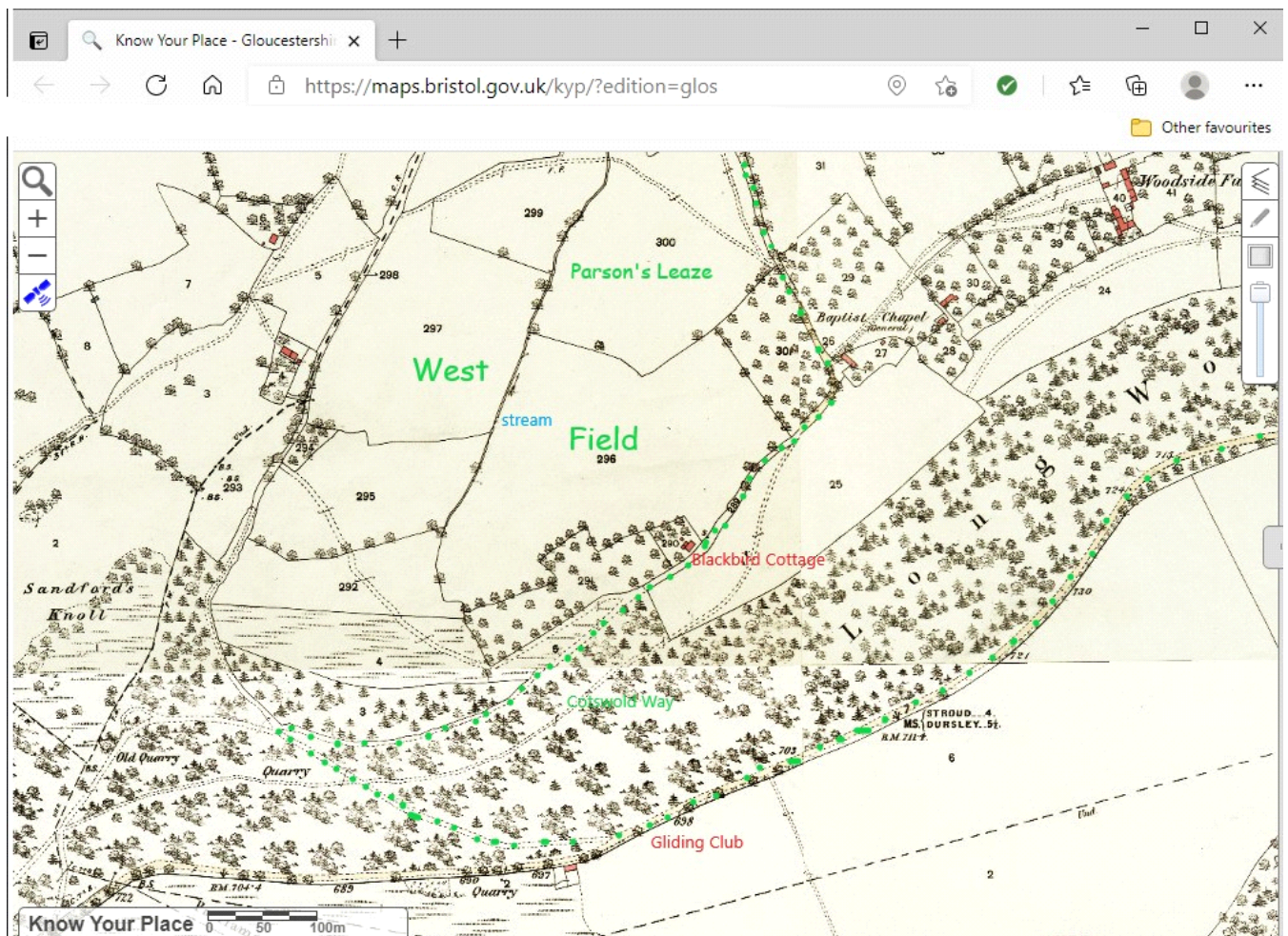
| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--------------|
| <i>Grassland Projects</i> | No. of grassland sites improved | 27 |
| | Approx area of grassland worked (m ²) | 46,85 |
| | | 0 |
| <i>Woodland Projects</i> | No. woodland sites worked | 18 |
| | Approx area of woodland work (m ²) | 23,41 |
| | | 1 |
| | Number of trees planted | 1,017 |
| <i>Water Related Projects</i> | Ponds/Dew ponds cleared | 3 |

dogs and I became much fitter, better educated and on occasions, ended the day a bit muddy. I explained to my wife that I did not regard mud as being “dirty” or “soiled” which seemed really derogatory terms and dissociated from the honest toil which had resulted in the occasional addition of a little mud in the process of ticking off the jobs list. My wife was still working and became increasingly frazzled coming home and enquiring cautiously what activities we had enjoyed that day.

Cath did not work on Thursdays, so we could walk the dogs together. She particularly wanted to walk a particular part of the Cotswolds Way and we happened across a line of about 20 men working to revet the footpath. They were an affable bunch, all pensioners, enjoying what they were doing, not sentenced to community service and very happy to talk about it. It was South’s Thursday Work Party. They described the job satisfaction, the opportunity to visit interesting sites, and all done with the best of company. I chatted to Tony & Bill while Cath was at the other end talking to Noel. When we walked on, I remarked thoughtfully that I might enjoy becoming a warden. I seemed old enough, enjoyed being out of doors and did not mind getting muddy. Anyway, Bill assured me that it never ever rained on Thursdays and lots of heads had nodded. I remarked to Cath that the only snag that I could see was that I am not very practical and might test their patience. “You start on Thursday” she replied, smiling happily. And Noel had given us a free copy of “The Cotswold Lion”.

LOCAL HISTORY IN MAPS ALONG THE COTSWOLD WAY by John Graham, S District

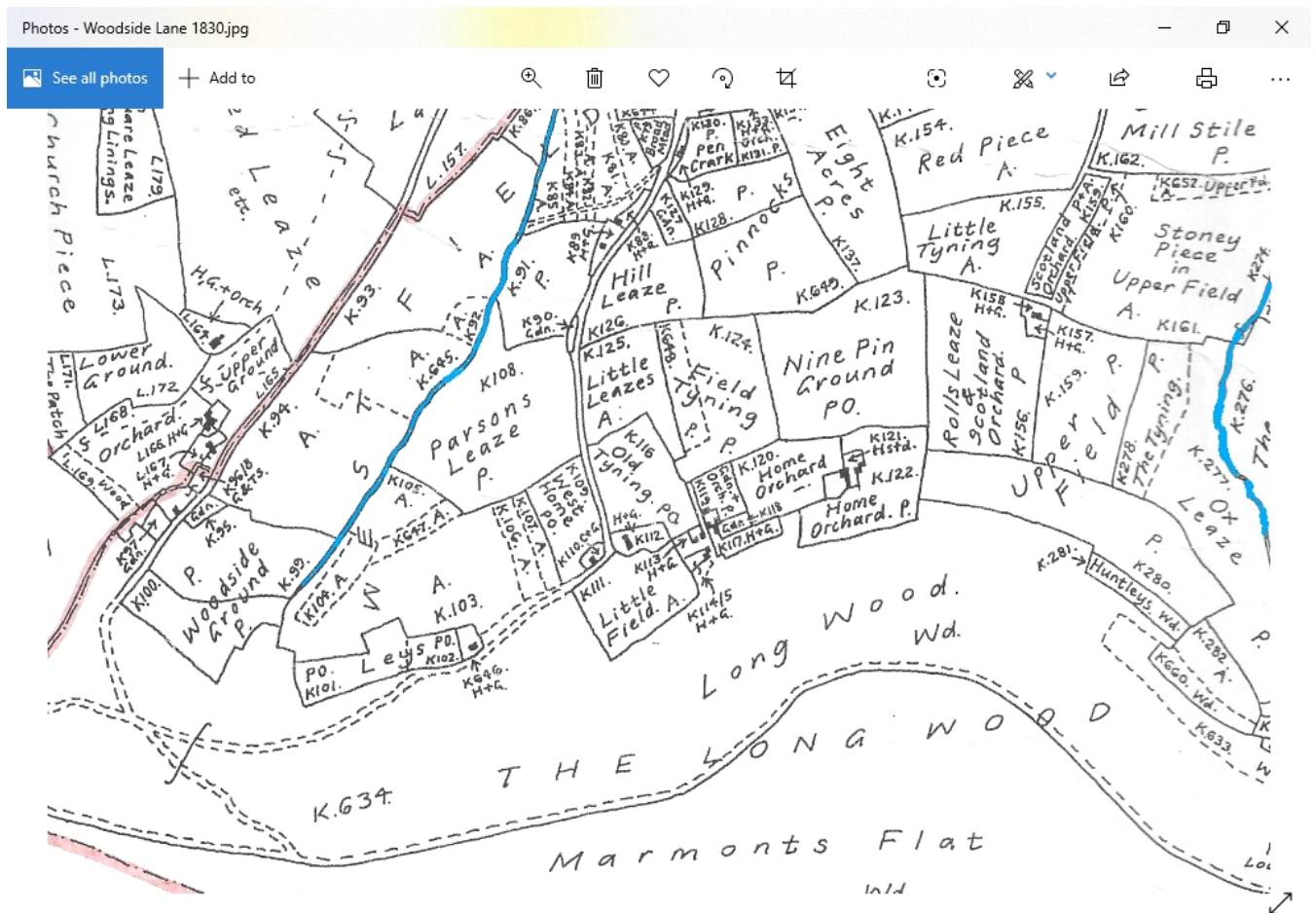
If interested in local history, there is a website of old maps for this area. It is free to use and is useful to keep alongside when reading Peter Griffin’s book on the Stanleys. The website is “Know your place”. Tythe maps & maps of field names are also available. The Council has preserved old names in new housing estates. “Dyehouse field” bothered the developer who feared that the name might discourage possible house buyers.



From the CW in Penn Wood walkers can look down the hill to Woodside Lane. In medieval times the village had a 3 field system in which all villagers had strips, mixing the good land with poorer areas. The “West Field” was part of this, and lay north of “Blackbird Cottage.” This cottage was once an ale house where considerate wagoners felt obliged to rest their horses before tackling the climb up to the Nympsfield Road.

The early editions of the OS maps record a Baptist Chapel at the corner near “Blackbird Cottage,” This was built for a benefactor who wanted to bring Christian values to the rough & godless residents of Woodside Lane. Current lane residents include former chairman of the parish council and also a District Councillor. Clearly, the benefactor’s plan worked well and the redundant chapel was converted to a house. The 1830 map of field names records “Parson’s Leaze” which may be the land given with the chapel to produce an income for the minister. The map records hordes of little plots of land, but all of those hedgerows have long gone, although some names are still in use.

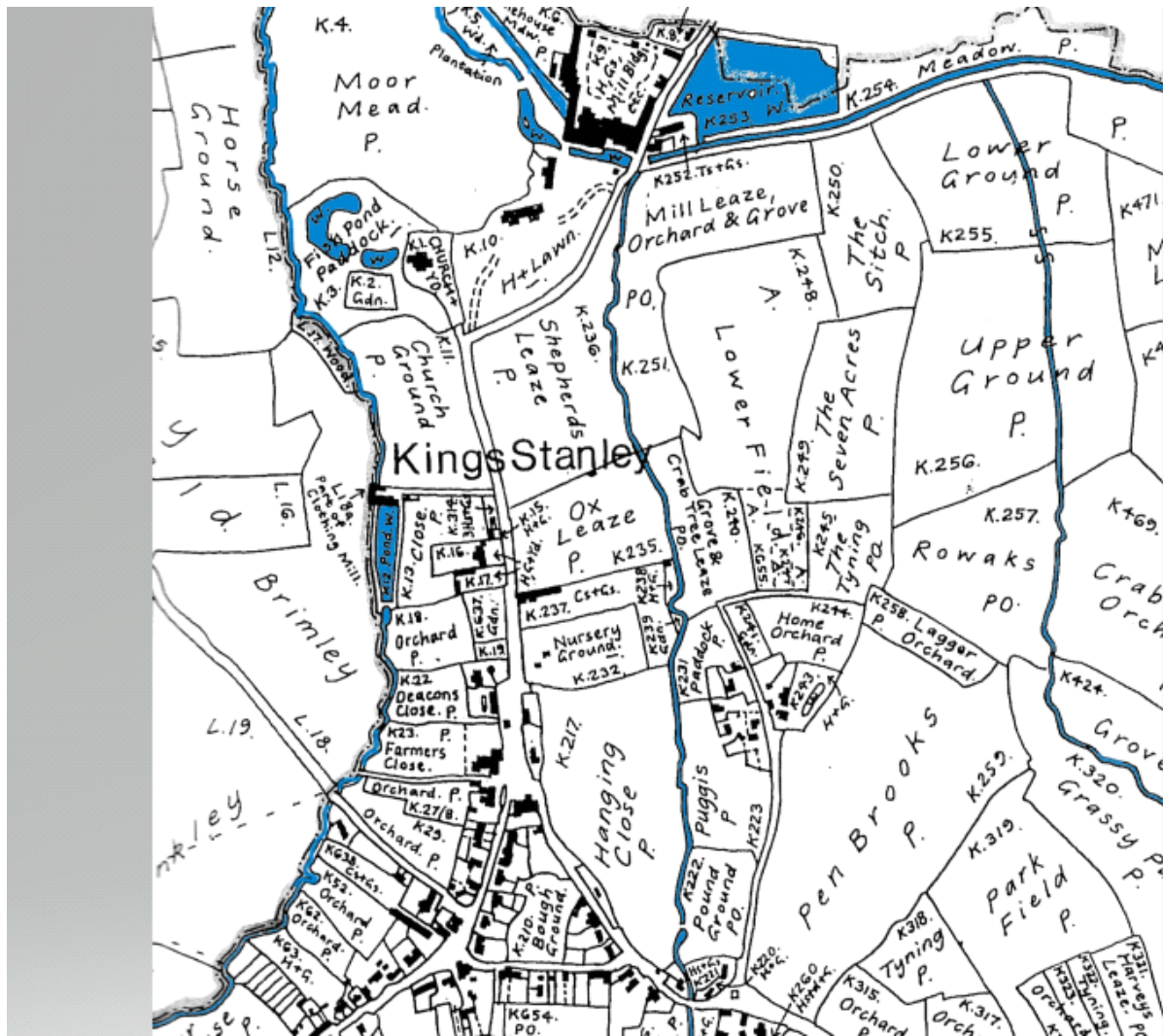
Field names for the local parishes were recorded by Geoff Gwatkin of Ross on Wye, and are fascinating. Our property is in a plot called “Cuckoopen Orchard”. I understand the origin of the “Pen” part, but was mystified by the “Cuckoo” prefix. Over a pint, an elderly resident explained that in earlier days some locals had tried to extend springtime by catching a cuckoo and keeping it penned up.



The CW passes downhill from Pen Wood and enters Coombe Lane. The old maps show that this was originally named "Meeting House Lane" from times when dissident believers had to meet in secret beneath an ancient tree for fear of being burned as heretics.

The CW crosses Broad Street and passes through large, modern fields towards the old centre of King's Stanley. Opposite the "King's Head" PH is a playing field named "Marling Close". The old maps record this as being called "Hanging Close". It is tempting to imagine the local judge breakfasting in the pub while watching the departure of miscreants for whom the stocks on the village green had failed to induce improved behaviour. It is more likely that the field was a place where local clothiers hanged cloth to dry after being dyed, especially as not far away beside Stanley Mill is a little wood named as "Hangman's Wood". Some locals feel that there could be a case for restoring the stocks as Wardens did elsewhere.

The Way passes on past lovely old buildings by Manor Farm. Local archaeologists carried out excavations here and found several remains from Roman times. The farmer was so impressed by their professional approach that he invited them to return and continue their research at a future date. However, he suggested that this time they dig up a field not far away as the soil that the archaeologist had excavated was the spoil bulldozed from the other site when a new barn was built.



The Way continues past Stanley Mill and across the old railway line. In our lifetime the railway was removed, but the site of the old platform lay where there is now a caravan offering burgers to the unwary who park there for their walks.

LOOKING BACK AT 'TROUBLE AT T'MILL

By Mike Cripps, Avon Valley District

Vera and John Larking, former Wardens, have passed away in the last couple of years. They joined the Cotswold Wardens in 1991 and served in Central District until 2005, John rejoined for a short while in 2006. Vera kept a diary of and a photographic record of their work as part of the district work party. Last year, I reproduced some of Vera's diary and photographs highlighting some the water related projects they worked on between 1994 and 2000. One such project was some restoration work carried out at Trinity Mill, Bagendon near Cirencester.

I have reproduced some excerpts from the articles written by John for the Wardens' Magazine in 2000 and 2001 along with some comments from Vera's diary and using her photographs.



Trinity Mill sits just feet from the main A435 road from Cirencester to Cheltenham astride a man-made loop of the River Churn. A mill has been on the site for over 900 years and is mentioned in the Domesday Book as being owned by a Saxon probably named Ulward.

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Apparently milling continued until 1940 and remained in working order until 1995, when heavy rains caused the river to rise and overflow the sluices. This resulted in the mill wheel together with the gears and transmission going out of control until some of the oak wedges, which keyed the wheel to the axle and acted as shock absorbers, were shaken out. The wheel ground to a halt at a drunken angle against the side wall of the internal mill race, where it remained.

Apparently, the 13-foot diameter wheel weighs about 10 tons and access to the narrow mill race is via two small doors 69 inches high by 28 inches wide, making working on the wheel extremely difficult. The wardens were also faced with the problem of one of the main beams on the floor above sagging on the wheel acting as a brake!



Before the wheel and transmission could be returned to working order, they had to address the non-working mill sluice. This had created a back water 40' by 30' and filled to a depth of 3' with silt and sludge.

John comments ***"The main river sluice through which all the water flows is currently constructed of solid baulks of oak bound together with huge bolts and topped by heavy cast iron lifting gear. The whole weight in excess of three quarters of a ton and in need of replacement."***

Before they could start on the sluice the river level had to be dropped, and a coffer dam built. Work on the wheel itself was complicated by the lack of space for heavy lifting gear and the limited space meant only 2-3 people of the small team of 6 could work in the space.

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Vera's diary entry for the 24.08.2000 ***"Back to the Trinity Mill and the start of many enjoyable days repairing the sluice gates, clearing the river of mud, repairing the watermill and building a coffer dam. Most of the time, there was about seven of us and we were there from August 2000 to November 2001."***

John comments in his 2001 article about the work of removing the sluice gates ***".....using crowbars, ropes, brute force and ignorance, the job was surprising easy. Several smaller nuts that had been in place since 1866 unscrewed quite easily after a squirt of WD40, but all the very big nuts had to be sawn off."***



Apparently it was like taking a jigsaw apart. One important job was left to the carpenter of the team, to measure all the bits and pieces, then liaise with the sawmill and order the new oak timbers. This Warden, using his skills and his own tools, patiently cut and chiselled all the necessary joints in 9" oak to create the new frame and gates for the sluice. The ironwork was cleaned, with welding repairs where required and finally given a good coating of Hammerite. All the bolts, some 18" long, were new. Bit by bit the silt was removed from the millrace by other members of the small

team

The next job was the mill wheel, with its solid iron axle fitted at one end with a 12-foot diameter cast-iron gear wheel. The mill wheel itself is also solid iron and is not connected to the hub allowing it to rotate separately around the hexagonal axle. The wheel and the hub being keyed together with a series of wooden wedges which prevent metal to metal contact. The problem the team faced was rebalancing the 10-ton wheel without the aid of lifting gear and working in a confined space. Initial attempts to separate the top of the hub from the axle using crowbars failed. The use of a lorry jack and a block of wood was working until the jack broke. With the jack welded and holding, the slow process of easing the components apart and sliding the first thin wedges proved successful, gradually they increased the size of the wedges. Carefully managing to get the wheel suspended.



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The next stage was to replace and knock home the wedges and hopefully the wheel would be true and would turn. Sadly, it would only turn 3" forward and back. They followed the transmission shaft to the first floor only to discover under lots of dirt and droppings, and behind screens and covers that a 9" square beam was resting on the horizontal crown wheel which supplied power to various pulley wheels. They thought this was the end of the line! With no

way to jack up the beam they returned with hammers and chisels to pare away some of the beam until they could free the crown wheel; fortunately, the beam had held!

John comments – ***"With a Warden running around like a hamster inside the mill wheel, we finally got the whole system running freely."***

Whilst the team had worked on the wheel the patient carpenter had cut all the joints in the new timber, and they were ready to reconstruct the frame for the sluice gate, but not before building the coffer dam so that the bottom sill and side timbers, which would be under water, could be sealed with cement.

Producing a risk assessment for this project would be challenging. The team acknowledged that Health and Safety placed restrictions on how they carried out the work. Many of our Work Party jobs today are aided by the skills of our Wardens allowing us to complete some wonderful conservations.