The project to restore and improve the Eling Experience is now well underway

Making way for the future
We’ve been working hard to clear the heritage centre to make way for our exciting new interactive exhibitions. New homes have been found for more than 150 artefacts in heritage organisations including Bursledon Brickworks Industrial Museum, Southampton City Council Arts and Heritage Service, and the National Museums and Galleries of Liverpool. Wherever possible we have also recycled materials from the display backdrops, such as wood and board, to Waterside Scrap Store and Hampshire Cultural Trust.

Getting the wheels turning
We are in the process of seeking companies to carry out the works to the Eling Experience which is split into three phases:
- Structural work to the heritage centre
- Internal fit out of the heritage centre and the mill
- Installation of the new exhibition

Industrial heritage specialists Dorothea Restoration are carrying out repairs to the historic mill machinery. The working waterwheel and the pit in which it sits are being cleaned and repaired, which is tricky as the pit or undercroft (below the ground floor) are full of water most of the time. Work on the wheel and the pit can only take place for around four hours either side of low tide, when the team descend a ladder into the undercroft to jet wash the sludge and begin work.

They have also been busy on the upper floors replacing the 97 oak teeth in the ‘crown’ wheel with new wooden teeth made from traditional fruit wood. This is used because, as well as being strong, its natural oils help to lubricate the teeth and keep the wheel running smoothly. They will also be removing the ‘tun cover’ - the wooden barrel-like object which covers the grinding stones and prevents the flour and grain from spreading through the mill. The metal bands that encircle it need welding, which wouldn’t be a good idea in situ, with all the wood and flour dust in the mill.

Over the summer we also completed the treatment of the beams and other woodwork inside the mill to guard against rot and wood worm.

We will be closed until early 2017, while the work is carried out.
Harvesting ideas

In developing our restoration project we have been painstakingly researching the history of the tide mill and surrounding area, as well as looking at how other heritage attractions make their past accessible and relevant. One member of the team has particularly enjoyed the excuse to indulge his passion for mills: even on holiday our miller Matt Painter seems to think of little else.

Bear’s Mill Ohio

Unable to stay away from milling for long, Matt took a detour while in America this summer, to visit another working mill. Bear’s Mill in Greenville, Ohio, is a four-storey flour mill dating from 1848. Although considerably younger than its Hampshire cousin (Eling was first mentioned in 1086), Bear’s Mill has had a productive life: after being converted from a sawmill to a flour mill in the mid-19th century it continued to use turbines to rotate French burr stones until 1882, when it was converted to work with rollers. All of the original machinery and the stones were left in place however, so are now being used again to process locally sourced yellow cornmeal, rye and spelt, as well as whole wheat.

Terry Clark, the miller, gave Matt a tour of the mill complete with colourful tales of past millers, including one whose wife would coat the floors with flour allowing her to follow his footsteps and track down the alcohol he had stashed around the building.

Outside the mill, a two acre mill pond and nine miles of Greenville Creek feed three turbines, two of which power the mill and the third generates electricity for all of the mill’s systems and lighting.

Matt returned from Bear’s Mill inspired by the passion of its staff and volunteers, the fascinating tours and tempting shop. He thoroughly enjoyed his busman’s holiday.

Sacrewell Mill, Cambridgeshire

At the end of September Matt visited Sacrewell Mill near Peterborough for their Harvest Festival. Part of the Sacrewell Farm and Country Centre, the eighteenth century water mill has recently benefited from a major renovation, part funded by a Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

The Harvest Festival gives visitors the chance to meet the farm’s animals, try out making corn plaits, apple pressing and pooh-sticks and sample the local Grainstore Brewery’s produce.

Meanwhile Matt was in his element, learning that Sacrewell’s pitchback water wheel is set in motion using a lever to release water into the buckets, rather than by hand as at Eling. Sacrewell’s machinery runs very quietly: the only sound being the rush of water into the buckets. At Eling a roar of water accompanies the water wheel turning and the ‘shoe’ and ‘damsel’ are made of iron and make a loud ‘clack clack’ as they touch. Sacrewell’s are made of wood and the whole process is a much more sedate affair.

Matt worked with volunteer Dennis whose dedication over many years had ensured that the mill machinery kept turning even as the fabric of the building decayed around it. The majority of the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund had gone into repairing the timbers and brickwork of the building rather than on restoring the machinery. Matt commented: “Dennis’s dedication and passion for the mill was inspiring, as was his approachable manner with the visitors.”

Matt will be sharing his experience with and learning from the team at Sacrewell throughout our project and beyond.

You can read more about Matt’s visits to Bear’s Mill and Sacrewell, as well as the restoration of the mill machinery, in his blog The Miller’s Tale at elingexperience.co.uk/millers_tale

Glossary of milling terms

French burrstones: n. millstones, used for finer grinding of wheat or other grains into flour; made by building up sections of quartz cemented together and bound with iron bands. French Burr comes from the Marne Valley in northern France.

Pitchback water wheel: n. water is fed in at or near the top of the wheel into curved paddles or ‘buckets’. The weight of the water causes the wheel to turn in an anti-clockwise direction.

Shoe: n. tapering trough taking grain from the hopper.

Damsel: n. spindle which strikes the shoe to distribute grain into eye of the stones. Sometimes known as “Dandelion” or Chatterer”. 
Eling connect

Eling tide mill was at the heart of local life for centuries. Our new exhibitions will focus on how the mill was central to the community; giving employment, processing farmers’ crops and of course providing food. During the restoration we're getting out and about spreading the word about this precious slice of industrial heritage on your doorstep, and hearing your feedback – ensuring that local people have a voice in how the project develops.

During the summer holidays community engagement officer Ruth was busy taking the mill’s history, and pieces from our collection, into the community. Local families got hands on with history and wildlife at two workshops at Totton Library. October half-term saw Ruth working with our partners the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust at Testwood Lakes. Visitors enjoyed craft activities and games and explored riverside wildlife with a mini-safari display which included real natural science specimens.

Find out more on Facebook.com/elingexperience or by emailing ruth.kerr@elingexperience.co.uk

Reporting from Eling

We have also been working with budding young writers from Eling Infant School on our Young Reporters Project. Pupils are using our historic artefacts and photos to explore how people in Eling used to live and how life has changed. They’ll be making regular reports as the Eling Experience project progresses.

Have we found our mascot?

Our search for a mascot for the Eling Experience has been a huge success – we have had more than 100 entries from Totton and Eling schools and will be announcing the winner soon. Look out for details on our website elingexperience.co.uk or in the next newsletter.

Youth Panel

We want the new Eling Experience to appeal to all ages so we have recruited a Youth Panel from The Garage Youth Centre. Members of the panel are exploring other local visitor attractions and telling us what they like. They checked out SeaCity Museum for us in October.
Finding out more

elingexperience.co.uk
Facebook.com/elingexperience
info@elingtidemill.org.uk
Project newsletters

Share your recipes
When the mill is operating we produce two types of flour, which are used by home cooks and professional chefs for everything from flavoured breads and rolls to pizza bases and dog biscuits. While the mill is undergoing essential renovations we will not be producing any flour, but when we reopen our products will be available to buy direct from us, from New Forest Marque and other local outlets. In the meantime why not share your recipes and photos on our Facebook page or email flour@elingtidemill.org.uk.

Making the news

Research into the mill’s history has turned up some interesting references to Eling in the press
Salisbury & Winchester Journal, May 1814

Foot-Race Extraordinary! — An extraordinary foot-race took place on Wednesday evening last, at Totton, for a considerable wager, between Mr. Aslett of that place, a pedestrian of some celebrity, and one of the best hundred-yard runners in the county, and Mr. Rogers, a miller of Eling, a very active athletic young man. The former was to run one hundred yards, while the latter carried a sack of wheat fifty. Considerable bets were depending, and the parties had been training for the purpose. The muscular powers of Mr. R. were however too great for the agility of Mr. A. and he won the wager by about two yards in fifteen seconds.

The project
New Forest District Council and Totton and Eling Town Council have secured a £1.3million Heritage Lottery Fund grant to enable us to invest in the future of the historic Eling Tide Mill, heritage centre and surrounding open spaces. Find out more at elingexperience.co.uk.