

Mountnessing Windmill

If you have driven, or been driven, along the road to Brentwood the chances are you will have seen Mountnessing Windmill. On 6 August, Karl Afteni, chairman of the Friends of Mountnessing Windmill, shared something of the history and structure of this Post Mill.

Records indicate that there has been a mill on the site since 1316, but the current mill dates to 1807. It was built speculatively incorporating captured ship's timbers and was bought by the Agnis family, local corn millers. Although it continued in use in the 20th century, it was in a sad state, having lost a sail in a thunderstorm, when Emily Agnis sold it to Mountnessing Parish Council in 1938. Having been listed (Grade II*) in 1952 it was sold on to Essex County Council in 1956 for 1/- and has since undergone extensive restoration.

The whole upper body of the mill turns to face the wind. It has spring sails to control the speed – the spring can open the shutters to slow down rotation. The post, which is central to this post mill, is made of elm which stays softer than oak. The millstones of burrstone brought from the Paris basin were cut carefully to meet different purposes within the grinding and milling process. Operating the mill was a remarkable feat for the miller who had perhaps one assistant. (The Agnis family must have been tough – Joseph was aged 63 in the 1881 census and was still there in 1901. By 1911 his younger brother Robert was the miller, aged 77). The corn was lifted to the top 'bin' floor and allowed to pour down to the stone floor. The ground flour then was graded and sent down four chutes to the sack floor – a sack of flour could weigh sixteen stone.

Flour dust is explosive so no naked lights were allowed inside – and yet milling had to take place at night if that was when the wind was available. Today the Friends of Mountnessing Windmill open the mill for visits on the third Sunday afternoon April to September. The last opening in 2019 is on Sunday 15 September, 2-5pm. Do go along, but be warned that it's a steep narrow climb to the top of the mill.