

PRESS RELEASE

25th August 2020

Cumbria has a new old mill!



L-R Graham Bell Director, Cultura Trust; Karen Mason, Mille; Phil Healy, Chair WBCM Ltd, Graham Brooks, WBCM Ltd

The lockdown has created a scramble for the essentials of life, the most basic being bread and the flour kneaded by hand to make it fresh at home. While supermarket shelves emptied, this ancient cornmill at Warwick Bridge has come back to life to feed the community.

The handover of the 'key' by charity owner Cultura Trust, leasing the mill to the Community Benefit Society, Warwick Bridge Corn Mill Limited, can now unlock the mill's full potential.

If you'd walked past the site in 1170, 850 years ago, you could probably have dropped off your sack of grain and returned for your bag of flour. Ever since, someone has been milling on this site. Now your flour is made in a mill that is pretty much as it was when rebuilt in 1845. This is food with a story.

The unusual lease, prepared by Cultura's lawyers Sintons LLP, marks the threshold between 20 years of the trust's determination to save this piece of living history and passing it into the hands of the community to run. Community share issues are still rare, and often are to save a pub or something under threat of closure; here, right from the start, the community will be living, breathing, baking and eating the fresh straight-out-of-the-oven results of their efforts.

The lease and shares together provide the security for the community to invest, to convert a vision into edible benefits. Twenty years ago, Graham Bell, Director of Cultura Trust, could see (if not yet

smell) that vision of what treats lay ahead: ‘we looked at options including creating a microbrewery, which then were rare, but really, this mill has flour dust engrained in its walls and floorboards – we couldn’t ignore that call to revive the life it was made for.’

Nurturing it back into life has not come cheap. £2m has been spent buying and carefully restoring the building and machinery, thanks to a lifesaving grant of £1.34m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, unlocking other funding from Historic England, the RDPE LEADER fund and a range of others including the Headley Trust – one of the Sainsbury family trusts, which is a welcome connection with the food industry.

Not only a key was handed over upon the signing of the lease, but also the miller! The miller is a young lady with a passion for making mills work, fostered as a volunteer at Heron Mill 10 miles south of Kendal. Karen Mason now shares her livelihood with this mill: ‘when the mill is busy, it purrs – you don’t just hear it but feel it, taming the raw power of gushing water into the steady flow of warm flour.’

Neighbour Phil Healy watched the mill sit idle, then saw the work on site turning the huge wheel again, and believed in the vision – so much so he became the founding chairman of Warwick Bridge Corn Mill Limited: ‘receiving the sluice-gate key as a symbol of the lease is in character with this wonderful, powerful, longstanding “member of our community” that we’ll be taking care of. Every one of over 200 people who have bought shares feel strongly about this mill – their mill, their neighbour, their investment.’

MORE

Warwick Bridge Corn Mill Limited has engaged a community enterprise based in Edinburgh, Breadshare, to run the operation. This will include flour production, baked products and courses in traditional breadmaking. In addition, volunteers will be able to lend a hand learning some of the skills in milling to keep the mill turning, which will keep the flour flowing.

ENDS

Notes to editors

For further information about Warwick Bridge Corn Mill and this story, please contact:

Cultura Trust (a Registered Charity)

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Cultura Trust began in 1965 supporting civil society through planning and environmental initiatives. In the 1980s it became a building preservation trust acquiring landmarks to demonstrate how heritage at risk can live once again. From 2004 it delivered a 12-year programme of traditional skills training for 40,000 participants, winning international acclaim. Warwick Bridge Cornmill was chosen by the Council of Europe as an example of good practice in climate sustainability: reusing an historic asset, working with the community, harnessing renewable energy and contributing to the local circular economy.

Warwick Bridge Corn Mill Limited (a Community Benefit Society)

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<https://www.warwickbridgecornmill.co.uk> Warwick Bridge Corn Mill Limited was established in October 2019 and has 219 shareholders, raising over £100,000 with support from Co-operatives UK under the Community Shares ‘Booster’ programme. The CBS is managed by a committee of local people with a range of relevant skills, supported by volunteers. The milling business (flour, baked

products, courses) is operated by Breadshare Community Interest Company under contract. Flour can be bought through local outlets; see the website for details.

Warwick Bridge Corn Mill (Listed grade II*)

The site has a well-documented history going back to 1169, enduring the border wars and over 200 years in Howard ownership (see the weathervane lion dated 1839). It was in use until 1989 by Bob Willis, which meant, unlike most mills, the building, millrace and machinery survived intact, and was acquired by Cultura Trust in 2015.

Cultura Trust acknowledges the support of all our funders on this project: National Lottery Heritage Fund, Historic England, RDPE Leader programme Solway, Border and Eden, Architectural Heritage Fund, The Headley Trust, The Pilgrim Trust, Garfield Weston Foundation, The Wolfson Foundation, Cumbria County Council, Arts Council, Cumbria Waste Management Environmental Fund and other groups and individuals. Thank You. Without your support this project could not happen.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund



Using money raised by the National Lottery, we inspire, lead and resource the UK's heritage to create positive change for people and communities, now and in the future. www.heritagefund.org.uk #NationalLotteryHeritageFund

The National Lottery

- Since The National Lottery's first draw took place on 19 November 1994, more than £40 billion has been raised for good causes in the areas of arts, sport, heritage and community.
- National Lottery players contribute around £30 million to good causes every week.
- The National Lottery has made more than 5,500 millionaires but its primary purpose is giving to good causes - over 565,000 individual grants have been awarded across the UK, that's the equivalent of 200 life-changing projects in every UK postcode district.

Sintons LLP

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