



Meopham Windmill – Heritage Statement and Assessment of Significance.

Version 2-February 2025

Martin Ingham, Conservation Officer, Heritage Conservation Team KCC.

Contents

Introduction.

1. Overview

2. Brief description of the mill

3. Site and setting

4. History and people associated with the windmill.

5. Repair and preservation since the original listing.

6. Features of Significance.

7. Assessment of Significance.

Summary.

Introduction.

This Statement of Significance is intended to set out the values attached to a specific Heritage Asset or identified significant place. It is drawn up in accordance with Historic England's preferred system & values, as set out in "Conservation Principles, Policies & Guidance." (2008 EH).

It is an articulation of why a historic asset matters to present and future generations and seeks to assess the relative significance of different aspects of the asset. It makes reference to the 4 categories of Heritage Value, set out in "Conservation Principles".

- Evidential Value- Potential for new knowledge to be enabled by study of the fabric.
- Historical Value- how the asset supports the narrative of the past by illustration or association.
- Aesthetic Value- how does the asset demonstrate artifice, design or craft or engage the emotions.
- Communal Value- How does the asset bring people together or demonstrate shared social value.

The assessment is based on research of records and inspection of the fabric to establish the evolution and chronology of the place, the values, uses, events and people associated, as well as the design, craft, technology and innovation associated with the asset and its setting.

The Assessment of Significance is produced in part to satisfy the NPPF requirement that local planning authorities require an application for development to describe the significance of any Heritage Assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting, with detail proportionate to the asset's importance.

The Statement of Significance is produced as a distinct assessment, to endure as a basis for future decision making, and not as a justification for a specific set of development proposals. It is not to be amended to suit a particular proposal.

This assessment should be referenced and presented in conjunction with any future application for work to the heritage asset, as the basis for an evidence-based benefit/harm analysis and heritage impact assessment.

1. Overview

There were once many thousands of timber-framed windmills at work in England. In total, fewer than 100 complete examples of post mills and smock mills have been preserved. Most of the surviving examples are located in the south of England.

Just over 20% of the UK's surviving post and smock mills stand within the borders of Kent (although one former Kent mill has recently been lost through boundary changes). Very few brick-built tower mills, which were popular in other areas, were ever erected in Kent.

The millwrights of Kent developed their own regional design of smock mill which is unlike those found in other areas. This design was favoured over other types of windmill, and many ancient post mills were replaced with smock mills during the late 18th and 19th centuries. William Coles Finch's survey of Kent windmills, published in 1933, includes contemporary photographs of 118 smock mills.

Of the 55 UK smock mills that survive in a complete or partly dismantled state, 17 of them stand in Kent. Meopham mill is one of six smock mills in the care of Kent County Council. These windmills are exceptional in terms of their very high listing grades, their historic and regional significance, their architectural and technological excellence and their mechanical completeness.

List entry

NGR: TQ 63947 65183 List entry no: 1054722

Grade: II* Date first listed: 22nd August 1952

List description TQ 66 NW 4/100

MEOPHAM WROTHAM ROAD (west side) Meopham Windmill 22.8.52 II* 1801 built by the brothers Killick. Smock mill. Lower two storeys red brick, upper three storeys weatherboarded. Four sweeps. Recently restored. Machinery complete and in working order. Listing NGR: TQ6394765183

Table 1: Surviving post and smock mills in Kent

Mill type	Location/Name	District	Listing	Ownership	Present condition
Post	Chillenden Mill	Dover	II*	Kent CC	Preserved complete.
Post	<i>Keston Mill</i>	<i>Bromley</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>Private</i>	<i>Preserved complete. Now located in the London Borough of Bromley.</i>
Post	Rolvenden Mill	Ashford	II	Private	Preserved complete.
Post	Wittersham, Stocks Mill	Ashford	II	Kent CC	Preserved complete.
Smock	Ashford, Willesborough Mill	Ashford	II	Ashford BC	Preserved in working order.
Smock	Benenden, Beacon Mill	Tunbridge Wells	II	Private	Converted to holiday accommodation.
Smock	Charing, Field Mill	Ashford	II	Private	Converted to a house.
Smock	Cranbrook, Union Mill	Tunbridge Wells	I	Kent CC	Preserved in working order.
Smock	Eastry, Upper Mill	Dover	II	Private	Converted to a house.
Smock	Herne Mill	Canterbury	I	Kent CC	Preserved complete.
Smock	Margate, Drapers Mill	Thanet	II	Kent CC	Preserved in working order.
Smock	Meopham Mill	Gravesham	II*	Kent CC	Preserved complete.
Smock	Northbourne, New Mill	Dover	II	Private	Converted to a house.
Smock	Ripple Mill	Dover	II	Private.	Preserved complete.
Smock	St Margaret's Bay Mill	Dover	II	Private.	Preserved complete.
Smock	Sandwich, White Mill	Dover	II	Sandwich BC	Preserved complete.
Smock	Sarre Mill	Thanet	II	Private.	Derelict but complete.
Smock	Stelling Minnis, Davison's Mill	Folkestone & Hythe	I	Kent CC	Preserved complete.
Smock	West Kingsdown Mill	Sevenoaks	II	Kent CC	Preserved complete.
Smock	Whitstable, Borstal Hill Mill	Canterbury	II	Private	Converted to a house but complete.
Smock	Woodchurch, Lower Mill	Ashford	II*	Ashford BC	Preserved complete.

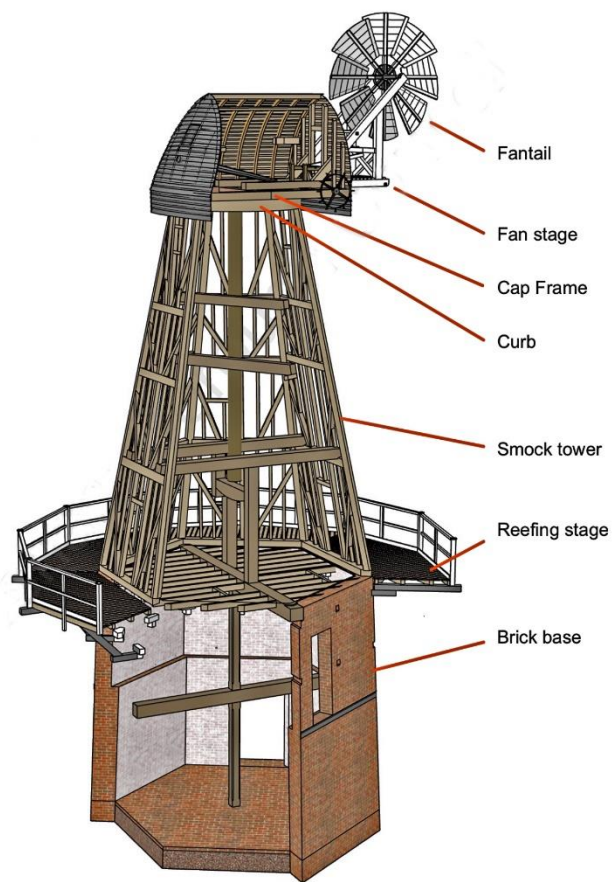
2. Brief description of the mill

The building envelope

The structure of the mill comprises a tapering six-sided timber-framed tower with four levels standing on a brick base of two storeys. The walls of the base have a less pronounced taper than those of the wooden tower above. The smock tower is framed using a combination of oak, elm and softwood.

The top of the tower supports a circular wooden curb ring, above which rests a four-sided cap roof with a central ridge. The rafters of the cap are gently curved to create the recognisable form of 'waggon-shaped' or hooded roof favoured by Kent millwrights. The front wall of the cap is curved in plan and slopes backwards slightly; the rear wall is flat and vertical.

Both the cap and the smock tower are clad with a double layer of feather-edged weatherboarding, painted white to exclude the weather. The red brick base is lime washed internally.



A wide timber-framed reefing stage surrounds the mill at the junction between the brick base and the smock tower, at second floor level. It is accessed by opposing doors on the east and west elevations. The brick base has a single door in use at ground floor level – its opposite number being permanently closed - and a loading door at first floor level.

The brick base has a single window on the north west side. This is located above the adjoining single-storey outbuilding which formerly functioned as the engine house to the windmill, and is now used as office space.

The smock tower extends upwards from second floor level. Here there are opposing doors on the east and west sides and a windows on the north side. The third, or millstone floor, has windows on the north and south sides. The fourth or bin floor level has a window on the south side, illuminating the stairwell. At fifth or dust floor level the reduced width of the wall panels permits only a small glazed aperture on the north side.

The working parts

The machinery of the mill comprises two pairs of 'patent' sweeps, with adjustable shutters, driving three pairs of millstones in total: two on the third floor and a third pair, added late in the mill's working life, on the second or meal floor. This pair could alternatively be driven from below by the auxiliary engine located in the adjoining shed. The engine drive gearing remains in position, suspended below the second floor.



Secondary machinery rarely survives in a windmill but is present at Meopham Mill, adding to its technological value. This comprises a small flour dressing machine suspended above the second floor and an oat crusher or roller mill located immediately below it.

The inclined windshaft in the cap, which supports the sweeps, is of cast iron and is a replacement for the original timber shaft. The brake wheel, mounted on the windshaft, has a wooden rim carried by a central spider with six cast iron spokes.

At the rear of the cap, a cantilevered framework supports an eight-bladed fantail and associated reduction gearing. Via a ring of wooden cogs fitted to the curb and a large wooden worm gear, the fantail acts automatically to steer the cap around to face the wind whenever it changes direction.

3. Site and setting

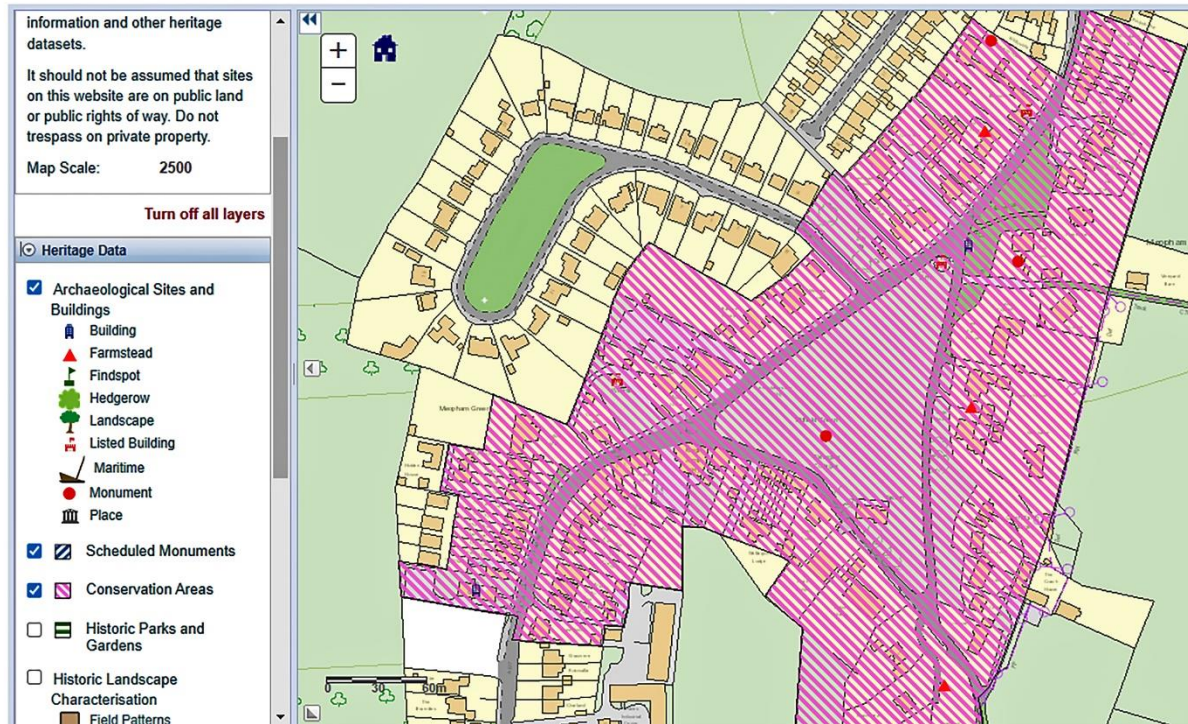


The windmill is set in the village of Meopham on the North Downs. The topography is a raised plateau on the chalk downs. The location of the mill was originally on the western edge of this linear village but has now been surrounded by later housing to the west. The windmill still sits opposite the triangular village green to the East and close to the historic village pub, The Cricketers.



The mill contributes significantly to the village green setting and in turn, has significance added by its setting in the village, so the group of buildings and open space have group significance and value. This group value has been recognised by designation as the Meopham Green Conservation Area. The Kent HER map, reproduced below, shows the conservation area, which contains relatively few statutorily listed buildings, the mill

being the most prominent, but has an overall cohesion and character, despite many of the dwellings being relatively recent in date. The triangular green would have originally been common land and appears to have led to the entrance of a historic house or estate, now lost.



The high plateau location of the windmill does screen it from distant views although it is a feature in some views along the main Wrotham to Gravesend Road.

4. History and people associated with the windmill.

The following notes on the history of the windmill have been compiled from James Carley's 1993 booklet "The Killicks and the Nortons – Millers in Meopham" and from R J Brown's 1976 book "Windmills of England".

Part 1 – The Killicks

The land on which the mill stands once belonged to the Nordish family, whose name first appears in parish registers in 1576. Five and a half acres at Pitfield Green were owned by Henry Nordish in the late 18th century. On his death in December 1800, the land, which included a cottage, was left to John Scudder. Part of this land eventually became the site of the mill.

On 24th June 1819, Scudder sold three quarters of an acre of land to James and Thomas Killick for £125. James was born in 1792, the eldest son of James and Sukey Killick, who were living in Strood. James moved to Meopham in 1819 with his wife Harriett to establish Meopham Windmill.

The land purchase description described the site as: *“All that piece or parcel of land or ground containing by estimate three quarters of an acre, used as a garden or orchard... at Pitfield Green in the parish of Meopham in the county of Kent... somewhat of a triangular shape, and abuts to lands belonging to James Buggs to the north, to the green called Meopham Green on the east, to the road leading from Meopham Church to Trottiscliffe on the south and to land of George Smith Esquire to the west.”*

An old tale describes the mill as having been built by three brothers who walked over from Strood every day. This may refer to the three eldest of James Killick's eleven children, James Jr, Thomas and John. The hexagonal shape of Meopham mill matches that of the family windmill at Broom Hill, Strood, which continued to be operated by Thomas and John following the death of their father in 1823 and their mother in 1836, while James Jr remained at Meopham.



An early photo of the mill, taken during the Killick family's ownership. The fantail has not yet been fitted, and one pair of sweeps is canvas-covered. (Rob Cumming Collection)

On the death of Sukey Killick, the Meopham operation was valued at £963.15s.0d.. James had to pay ten elevenths of this to his siblings. To do this, he arranged a mortgage of £500 from J. Nightingale, which was repaid in 1874. The valuation would have included the land with the “Wind Corn Mill” as well as various outbuildings, a Mill House, vehicles, probably a horse, and the equipment and goodwill of a business that had by then been established for 15 years.

By 1887, the partners in the business were James, Thomas and Richard Killick. James died on 9th December 1889, aged 97 - a long life which appears to have been devoted to windmilling. His son, also James, inherited the property but died very shortly

afterwards, in April 1891. His wife Matilda immediately sold up, ending the family connection with Meopham Mill.

Part 2 – The Nortons

John Norton purchased the mill and land from Mrs Killick on 14th August 1891 for £830. John's brother, Tanner, worked the nearby windmill at West Kingsdown and Tanner's son, William Morgan Norton, was soon brought into the Meopham business. He married Clara Payne and was permitted by John to build the present Orchard House, which stands close to the road. Other parts of the Norton enterprise included a sweet shop and tea rooms which are shown in old postcards.

In August 1902 the Nortons purchased row of four shops in Nevill Parade, operating two and leasing out the other pair. "J & W Norton" sold a wide range of products including flour, groats, bread, corn, hay, straw, manure, seeds, dog biscuits, rice for feeding poultry, medicines and feedstuffs for cows and other animals, and eggs for rearing pheasants and other game birds.



Meopham Mill, c1905, at work with one pair of common sweeps and one pair of shuttered sweeps. A fantail has now been fitted and the rear wall of the cap has been painted white. (MWT Collection)

John Norton died on 2nd April 1908, leaving his entire estate to William. Trading continued, but the business suffered during the first World War. William's son Leslie Norton, born in 1895, joined the business after leaving school, and was the last person to work the windmill.

Around 1914, flour production at the mill ended, but the milling of animal feed by wind power continued. In around 1923, a 15hp paraffin-petrol engine was purchased from Richardson's Mill, Boughton-under-Blean, which was being demolished. A set of Derbyshire Peak millstones were also purchased, and set up on the second floor, as there was no extra room at third floor level. The new millstones were set up so that the engine could power all the machinery in the mill, without having to turn the sweeps.

The engine was installed in the shed beside the mill, which is now used as the Parish Office. It had a heavy fly wheel which had to be spun to start it. The engine worked first on paraffin and was later switched to petrol after it had warmed up. It is on record that Meopham Mill generated its own electricity from about 1923 when the engine was installed – but how this was achieved is unclear.

The two remaining sweeps were still turning in August 1930, but by September 1934 they had lost their shutters and were clearly out of action.



Meopham Mill, c1918, showing the Norton's shop and a large advert for the tea gardens. The mill now has four shuttered sails. (MWT Collection)

Early in 1935, the mill was hit by strong winds and was only saved by the combined efforts of Mr Norton and his sons, Leslie and David. On 16th March the East Kent Gazette reported: *"During Sunday night three men risked their lives on top of a windmill in a gale, fighting to save the mill from fire and collapse. About eight o'clock in the evening it was found that the fan, the small wheel which keeps the big sails into the wind, had broken away from its gear... and was whirling at terrific speed. Sparks were flying from the friction, and a warning was telephoned to the nearest fire brigade to*

stand by. Mr Norton and his two sons managed to climb out onto the timbers supporting the fan, but in the gale were helpless. Piece by piece the fan broke up, but other serious damage to the mill was averted."

After the death of Mr Norton in 1967, the lease of the mill was put up for sale. The Meopham Windmill Trust was established and enough money was raised locally to purchase the lease of the mill and engine house. The Trust was also able to purchase the land on which the mill stands. This was laid out as a garden and the windmill was opened to the public for the first time in July 1971.



circa 1930

5. Repair and preservation since the original listing.

Leslie Norton took charge of the business before the Second World War. As a result of local interest, the mill became a listed building in 1952. In 1958, Mr Norton approached Kent County Council for assistance with the mill's preservation. After an inspection by the County Architect, KCC acquired the freehold of the mill and engine house on 13th November 1959, leasing it back to Mr Norton for 999 years.

Restoration work was undertaken by E. Hole & Son, millwrights of Burgess Hill in Sussex, at a cost of £4,375. The work began in May 1962 and was completed in October when four new sweeps were installed.

Before the mill's working life ended, the mill had gained a set of sweeps much larger and heavier than those for which the building was originally designed. Over successive

periods of repair, from the early 1960s onwards, modified versions of the enlarged 1920s patent sweeps were fitted to the mill.

When the set of replica sweeps was installed in 2003, these were made so large that the outer ends passed within 50mm of the reefing stage handrail – much less than the recommended safe clearance. The operational and design problems associated with the wide patent sweep strongly suggest that a revision was required. Analysis of the historic photos, provided evidence of the smaller size and form of common and patent sweeps that the mill worked with for several decades. It was therefore proposed to revert to the arrangement of sweeps fitted to the mill during the later years of the 19th century.

The appearance of the windmill was returned to a form reflective of its last years of commercial prosperity at the turn of the 20th century.

The two hollow steel stocks were renewed with stocks in solid treated timber.

The 2024 restoration renewed the whips in traditional solid timber, treated with preservative to provide maximum longevity.

The sweep assembly has been decorated with an appropriate paint system based on linseed oil, a key ingredient of the traditional lead paints used during the mill's commercial life.

The existing lapped board cladding of the smock has been retained in situ, but overlaid with new lapped boarding with black stain finish, to provide protective weatherproofing.

At the time of writing, February 2025, the mill is undergoing safety checks in preparation for returning it to wind operation.

6. Features of Significance.

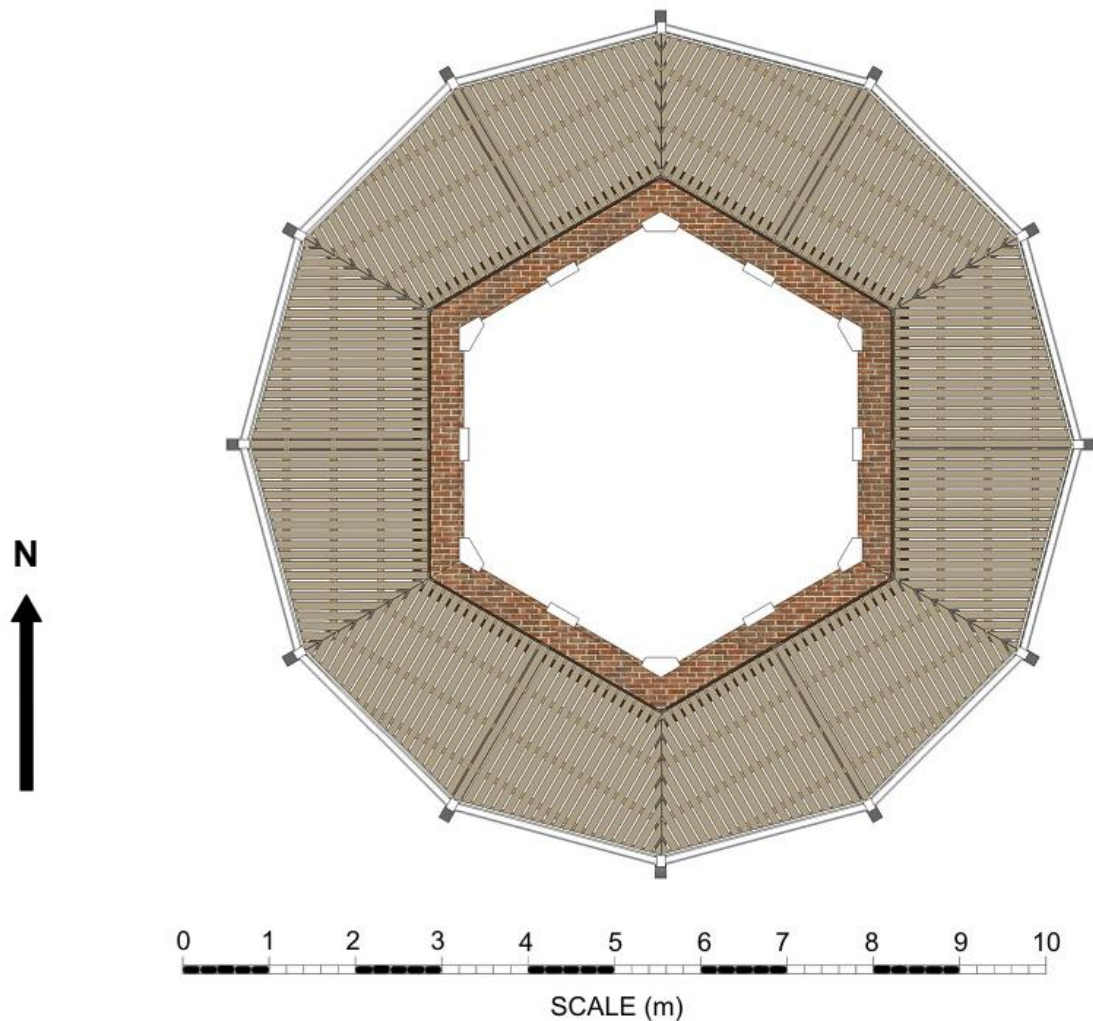
Meopham Mill is one of six smock mills in the care of Kent County Council. These windmills are exceptional in terms of their very high listing grades, their historic and regional significance, their architectural and technological excellence and their mechanical completeness. Although Kent's smock mills conformed broadly to a common and recognisable form, the details of their design varied subtly across the county.

The late Vincent Pargeter, a well-known 20th century millwright and consultant, described Meopham Mill as “the only remaining example of a Medway-type mill, and... therefore very important.”

Structural significance

Overall, the mill is comparatively small and slender, with diameter at the curb of only 2.8m. A more typical size is 3.5m diameter, as at Herne Mill. Unlike the majority of

smock mills constructed in the UK, Meopham Mill is unusual in being hexagonal, rather than octagonal, in plan. Other hexagonal smock mills in the local area were Killick's Mill at Broom Hill, Strood, and Lower Stoke Mill. The last named stood on a tall brick base and was very similar to Meopham mill in appearance. It is possible that all three mills were versions of the same original design of which Meopham is the sole survivor.



Very few six-sided English smock mills survive intact, and the majority of these have an association with water pumping rather than corn milling. A slender hexagonal tower is lighter and therefore more ideally suited to water pumping than a large octagonal one, as only limited space inside the mill is required to house the necessary machinery.

At Meopham Mill, the available space on the 3rd or millstone floor is extremely tight. Only two pairs of millstones can be accommodated here, whereas larger mills could be fitted with three or even four pairs on one floor. The pattern of the floor beams in a hexagonal smock mill does not readily lend itself to the function of corn milling. Meopham Mill's main beams span across the centre of the floor in several instances, making the associated floor framing more unorthodox.

Mechanical significance

Pargeter identifies several unusual mechanical features of the windmill, some of which cannot now be found at any other example. These include:

- A fan stage of ‘Medway’ pattern. The arrangement of timbers that supports the fantail could formerly be seen at other smock mills in the area that no longer exist. These include those located in and around Rochester and on the Hoo Peninsula.



- Details of the sweeps, including the arrangement of the spider cross at the centre and the provision of additional shutters outboard of the last bar at the tip of each sweep. The design of the spider cross meant that one pair of sling irons pointed forwards while the other pair pointed backwards, allowing all four slings to be made to the same length.
- Rare interior details. These include individual cast-iron cogs to the great spur wheel; most examples either have individual wooden cogs or bolted-on sections of segmental iron teeth. The ‘underdrift’ arrangement of millstones is typical in Kent, where the overdrift arrangement prevails, but may have been a common feature of mills in the Medway area.

7. Assessment of Significance.

Assessment of relative significance of different aspects of the asset with reference to the 4 categories of Heritage Value, set out in “**Conservation Principles**”.

- Evidential Value- Potential for new knowledge to be enabled by study of the fabric.
- Historical Value- how the asset supports the narrative of the past .
- Aesthetic Value- how does the asset demonstrate artifice, design or craft.
- Communal Value- How the asset brings people together or demonstrates social value.

Value	Criteria.	Asset Specific Notes	Assessment.
5	Significant age or historical exemplar or associations of international importance.		
4	Specific features, archaeology or association of unique or national importance		
3	Over 200 years old, period example or association of more than local importance	Meopham windmill has a well documented history within the settlement and represents the rural industry that used to be central to rural communities. It has an unusual hexagonal plan, unlike most smock mills which were octagonal. It still retains some of the original plot of land and associated structures, mill house and shop are still extant. The surviving machinery and working mechanisms illustrate lost practices, technologies & aesthetics and will have increased significance when operating under wind power. Now its restoration & conservation is writing a new chapter in our history.	
2	200 year old or younger, period example or some association of local importance		
1	Off little Historic value by example or association. Recent construction.		

Historical Value.

Assessment. 3.0

Value	Criteria.	Asset Specific Notes	Assessment.
5	Potential or specific embodied evidence of national importance or major innovation.		
4	Specific value or potential for evidence of more than local or minor importance.		
3	Illustrative of period practice over 200 years old. Local value significance or evidence.	The windmill is a working machine, with much of its significance dependent upon maintenance of the moving parts and the ability of the sweeps to safely turn in the wind, to turn the shafts gears, stones and mechanisms within. Few hexagonal working mills remain and each is a bespoke construction with its own unique characteristics and details. Much of this significance is lost if turned into a static stage set or residential experience, even if some features are preserved, as the operational turning of the machinery is prevented, removing the evidential value and hastening decay. The original cladding has been encapsulated and the unique mill mechanisms remain.	
2	Illustrative of period practice in last 200 years. Unlikely to have hidden features.		
1	Unremarkable, common or recent construct. Unlikely to be of note in future.		

Evidential Value.

Assessment. 3.0

Value	Criteria.	Asset Specific Notes	Assessment.
5	Of significance at a national level to society or a group, embodying specific value.		
4	Important to local community by association or use, and recognised nationally.		
3	Locally valued building or institution, part of local scenery.	The windmill has a long association with the local community as a key structure serving the agricultural economy. The millers were important members of the local community and the mill a focus for local commerce and rural agricultural activity. Grinding grain for food and fodder gave the mill an importance to the local community, beyond merely the visual presence. The location at the centre of the village illustrates the commercial importance & it remains a key feature that adds community identity. It was the local community that took on the lease when commercial milling ceased and set up the trust and volunteers to rescue the mill.	
2	Social or community awareness, but little specific involvement or attachments.		
1	Little shared social value & few community links to establish shared attachment.		

Communal Value.

Assessment. 3.0.

Value	Criteria.	Asset Specific Notes	Assessment.
5	Unique product of important designer or craftsmen, potentially exemplar in setting.		
4	Innovative or exemplar design with excellent bespoke craftsmanship. Outstanding setting.		
3	Strong sense of design or good quality craftsmanship & detail. Enhances setting.	The windmill has high fortuitous aesthetic value, deriving from its functional, industrial design and distinctive technology. It has group value, enhanced by the central location off the village green, adding to aesthetic value.	
2	Standard design type & unremarkable craftsmanship & detail. Neutral in setting.	Aesthetic value is increased across the full sensory spectrum when the mill is wind powered and rotating. Internally the fortuitous aesthetic value remains as high, through the survival of much of the original machinery	
1	Little design quality, mass produced, detracts from quality of setting.	and the grind stones, that have their own particular visual and sensory appeal, deriving from the functional design and complexity of hand made technology.	

Aesthetic Value.

Assessment. 3.0

Summary.

The cumulative value of significance, 12 out of 20, is reflected in the Grade II* statutory listing, which is a higher category, confirming a heritage asset of more than local importance.

Much of this significance is linked to the operational machinery and is only partially realised when the windmill is not able to turn in wind. Returning it to operational condition is therefore a priority.

Significance of the setting, despite residential encroachment should not be understated, and the windmill has group significance, not only with the mill house, but also the buildings and open space of the green and the village pub. This is recognised by the designated Conservation Area. Views of the windmill from the Green are often reproduced as exemplar of a Kent rural idyll.

Much of the communal value is reflected by the efforts of the local community to restore and preserve the windmill, and by the continued efforts of the local volunteers.

