



From grain to a gallery

In its time Dyke Mill near Bourne has pumped water, ground grain and been used by an antique restorer but now it's enjoying a new lease of life as an art gallery

Words and photographs: *Chris Webb*

In the small sleepy village of Dyke, near Bourne, at the end of a white and purple tulip-lined drive, stands the last remaining smock mill in Lincolnshire and one of only three remaining in the country. In the eighteenth century the invention of the fantail led to the building of taller wooden mills. The fantail continuously revolved and kept the sails always face to the wind. These mills were normally eight-sided, and this shape gave them their name as they resembled the smocks worn by the countrymen at that time.

Built in 1650, the Dyke mill was originally a pumping mill in Deeping Fen

but was moved to its present location in about 1845 and fitted with corn milling machinery. Now sail-less, it once had two common and two spring-shuttered sails driving three pairs of stones – an impressive sight. Although at that time lovely to look at, it was expensive to maintain and the wooden walls were vulnerable to the rain.

The Dyke smock mill ceased its working life in the mid 1920s and was subsequently dismantled in 1926. The mill's previous owners, Mr and Mrs Dann, carried out vital restoration work in 1989, re-cladding the walls with European redwood, an endeavour that



would ensure an extension of its life for at least another forty years.

Later, the mill and house were put on the market then, three years ago, Richard Winkworth visited a Bourne estate agency and purely by chance discovered a tiny photograph and the details of the property tucked away at the back of the shop where they had been languishing for a year and a half.

Richard tells me that at that time he was only looking for a house in the area but something made him take away the details of the mill along with the more conventional properties he had chosen to view. This action started a chain of events that would eventually lead to the purchase of the house and mill and the founding of a business. Both he and his partner, Christine Beardwood, are convinced that fate played a helping hand in enabling them to buy the house and mill and transform the latter into an art gallery and the outbuildings into a framing and art workshop.

Christine is a talented, self-taught sculptor. Her father owns a foundry in Croft, Lincolnshire and she had a studio there. At this time she was busy sculpting, and Richard was managing four concession art galleries when they met at an art exhibition in London. Although not a case of love at first sight, they joke, Richard began travelling to Lincolnshire most weekends to meet Christine and they later decided to buy a house together in the county. This is where their story begins.

I am talking to this resourceful couple in their workshop, converted from several outbuildings near the mill. Painted white, carpeted and with heating and hot water installed it is a very pleasant place to work in, a far cry from the dark and oily building it once was when used by the previous owner for the repair of antiques, which were then sold from the mill. Richard recounts the day he was house hunting and put the mill details at the bottom of the pile of ten other properties he had chosen that day to show to Christine.

“Christine quickly thumbed through them and as soon as she came to the picture of the mill said she loved it. It was out of our price range but a unique find and somehow we were determined to have it. Naturally, we had some misgivings, as it would be a big investment, so I asked my dad to give us a second opinion. His very words were: we would be nuts to buy it.

“Completely ignoring this wise advice we went ahead and four fraught months later we were finally in a position to buy,

thus taking a huge gamble on setting up a home and business in an old house and mill in the Lincolnshire countryside.”

Christine continues; “It was a daunting prospect when we first took over the place. Although re-cladded outside, the interior of the mill needed lots of work, as did the workshop and house. We bought the property with the intention of setting up a picture framing business and art gallery. I am a sculptor so it was an ideal way to display my art work. Neither of us had run a business before so it was a case of in at the deep end.”

Two floors of the Mill, now renamed the Peremill Gallery, have been renovated and converted into an art gallery and picture framing shop. Heating has also been installed, a necessary expense as a damp atmosphere is fatal to paintings, Christine explains. She now holds art classes at the mill in sculpting and life drawing. Her bronze work has been exhibited at the Royal Academy in London and she has undertaken numerous commissions both here and abroad.

Christine elaborates: “We buy in paintings and other art work so often go to trade fairs where we can meet the artists and decide what to buy for the gallery. At the moment we have two paintings by Fletcher Sibthorp, a well-known artist, which are quite rare and several watercolours by a local artist Emma Ball. All the paintings are varied both in size and style and range from £20 to £4,000. It has been hard but satisfying work getting the business up and running but recently we have come up with a new, for us, art concept of three-dimensional pictures. We have called this new project Winkwood

Opposite: Dyke Mill dominates the garden

Below (from top): The mill's interior makes an unusual art gallery; The house and garden



Design. The pictures are typically sold to furniture shops, galleries, interior design businesses and hotels. Richard and I are quite competitive at the design stage and it is quite work-intensive cutting and assembling the pictures and framing them.

“The pictures come in all sizes and colour ways and cost from £45 to £200. We concentrated on the gallery and picture framing at first but we are now promoting our own art and recently exhibited in Italy and are going to a show in Dubai later this year.” Christine continues: “Fortunately we get quite a lot of orders from the shows and then it is all systems go.”

Richard tells me he imports computerised framing equipment from Italy and sells on to other galleries. He does all the framing and learned his trade working in the family art gallery business in London. Christine is still involved with her sculpting and will take commissions for her work – both figures and portraits. The gallery is

open to visitors all year round but busier in the summer. They have recently commissioned a website which is under construction and should be on line very soon. This, they hope, will attract even more business.

Christine shows me round the mill which is surprisingly light and airy. The octagonal walls are hung with an eclectic art mix of colourful oils and serene watercolours. A selection of Christine’s cleverly sculpted heads are also on display. We climb the narrow stairs up to the top floor, which is yet to be renovated. From high up here there are wonderful views from the windows all round. Christine tells me the local vicar holds a prayer meeting there several times a year to bless the surrounding countryside. The couple plan to install larger windows to take advantage of the views but that is on the ‘to do’ list for now.

Renovations to the house, which is about 150 years old, are also on the waiting list and will include a new kitchen and bathroom. Some work has been started. A dividing wall has been knocked down in the kitchen to make a large kitchen diner and the attic has been converted into a small sitting room. A log burning stove has been installed in the dining area which they have started decorating. Christine has put any spare time and energy into redesigning the garden. It has clearly been a project close to her heart. When they moved in although not terribly neglected it needed some attention. She likes to try different colour combinations and this year has planted lots of white, purple and pale pink tulips and hyacinths. An impressive stone urn is the main focal point and is planted round with an attractive display of mixed spring bulbs. I admire an old green pump and Christine shows me the old shallow stone well underneath, now home to frogs and various aquatic creatures. The adjacent ceramic containers are filled with clusters of white petunias behind which is a triangular shaped shrub.

Being artistic, she has also tackled topiary and is busily growing box hedging to trim into cone and bird shapes. The other borders surrounding the well-mown lawn are planted up with cottage garden plants including iris, hardy geraniums, campanula, Solomon’s seal and various shrubs. They will make a colourful display in the summer. The overall effect is charming. On this lovely sunny day with the sound of wild birdsong, the ancient mill, and blossoming trees in the background it becomes quite enchanting. Like everything this talent-

Below: From the top of the mill you can see for miles; Some of Christine’s sculpted heads





ed couple tackle there is evident attention to detail.

I ask if they think the gamble has paid off. The couple nod emphatically. Richard says that moving from London to a small village in Lincolnshire was initially quite a culture shock for him, especially when he realised the amount of work they were about to undertake. Three years on they have no regrets about their decision.

Richard said: "This is a wonderful village and we really love living here. Apparently the Car Dyke built by the Romans to connect Lincoln with Peterborough and beyond runs through the village which is how the village gets its name. Henry Penn, the famous eighteenth-century bell founder cast one of the bells for Lincoln Cathedral at his foundry in Peterborough in 1717 and sent it to Lincoln on a raft passing through the village. This indicates that

the waterway was still navigable more than 1,500 years after it was built. There is a timeless quality to this village and the organic farm opposite still uses old farming methods. We have even become involved in the hay-making in the summer and help herd sheep up the lane when required. We feel privileged to have had the opportunity to preserve the smock mill which is part of Lincolnshire's heritage. As it is open to the public they also have the chance to share in part of the county's history."

It was a pleasure to visit Richard and Christine at Peremill Gallery. I am sure this charming couple will be even more successful as they continue to expand the business. Their plans for the future include further renovations to the mill, and their combined talent and enterprise will ensure its longevity and a continuing link with a rare example of Lincolnshire's past.

Below (left to right): Richard and Christine at the entrance to the mill; An old pump in the garden

