

## Summer 2023 Newsletter

Since our Spring Newsletter we had some eventful months and some of this has been covered in our AGM (9<sup>th</sup> of May) Newsletter and the June News Update, both can be found on our website <https://millofbenholm.scot/news/>

In May we had an exceptionally well attended AGM with over 30 people wanting to hear about the latest developments at the Mill of Benholm on a Tuesday evening.



The Board informed the AGM, amongst other things, that the process of the Community Asset Transfer for the Mill of Benholm had been started by submitting the Expression of Interest for the site to Aberdeenshire Council in beginning of May. Since then the Board had an initial meeting with part of the Aberdeenshire Council Asset Transfer Group where our Strategy Paper for the Community Asset Transfer of the Mill of Benholm was handed over to the Area Manager Tim Stephen.

After further internal meetings within Aberdeenshire Council the Mill of Benholm Enterprise has officially been invited to submit the full application for the Community Asset Transfer, which we are currently preparing.

On the 28<sup>th</sup> of June, Area Manager Tim Stephen together with his colleagues from relevant council departments visited the Mill of Benholm to learn first hand about the deterioration and condition of the Mill of Benholm and to discuss with the Board of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise how both parties can work together to not only stop any further deterioration of the site but to discuss the steps to successfully transfer the Mill of Benholm back to the community.

The first step in this process will be a License to Occupy (LTO) to enable the Mill of Benholm Enterprise to start work in the grounds of the mill, to make the paths safe again, cut back bushes and trees to allow access to all outdoor areas as well as to reinstate electricity and toilet facilities. The proposal for the License to Occupy including a detailed list of the planned work has now been submitted to Aberdeenshire Council.

An electrician has already been out to the Mill of Benholm to assess the electrical installation and a plumber will do the same in the first week of August. A specialist company for pumps will follow soon, to assess the pumps in the maceration tank and the holding tank for pumping wastewater to the reed bed for final filtration.

As soon as the LTO is granted by Aberdeenshire Council, work can start in the grounds of the Mill of Benholm.

And there will be plenty to do...



## Volunteers

Until now the work for the Mill of Benholm had to be done mostly “behind the scenes”, getting the right people and organisations behind the project, building a solid foundation with policies put in place, risk assessments being done, and governance checks applied, raising awareness for the Mill of Benholm, building a strong support network of politicians and organisations. Over the last 12 months the Mill of Benholm Enterprise (MoBE) has more than doubled its membership and nearly tripled its social media followship, while having no access to the site.

But now the next phase is appearing on the horizon and as soon as the Mill of Benholm Enterprise has been granted the License to Occupy it will be for the first time in years that we shall have access to the site with the permission to start work outdoors. The first step is to stop any further deterioration to the Mill of Benholm and make access to the site safe and enjoyable once again for everyone.

Even though during this first initial stage the buildings will stay closed, it will be a mammoth step forward in bringing the Mill of Benholm back into community ownership and revive the site, it will be as well a huge step and change for the Mill of Benholm Enterprise.

To be prepared for this next stage on the journey and to bring back the Mill of Benholm into the community, the Board of MoBE has sent volunteer questionnaires out to all members and printed a leaflet with the volunteer questionnaire on the back, which has been distributed throughout the area, to have a better idea about the volunteer base for the Mill of Benholm.

Completed questionnaires have started to come back and so our volunteer base is growing, but with a huge project as the Mill of Benholm is, there can never be enough volunteers. So, if you have not completed and returned your questionnaire yet, please do so. The questionnaire can be found on our website <https://millofbenholm.scot/volunteering/> Let's get ready...



Photo courtesy of Ken Whittaker of Whittaker Engineering, Stonehaven, showing the new waterwheel Arriving for the Mill of Benholm during the extensive restoration works in the 1990s

## License to Occupy (LTO)

If, and it still is an IF, Aberdeenshire Council will grant the License to Occupy for the grounds of the Mill of Benholm to MoBE late summer/early autumn of 2023, MoBE will be allowed to undertake agreed work within the grounds of the Mill of Benholm. Amongst other things, to remove all rubbish, broken items and unusable goods from the site, remove saplings, clear the paths and make them safe again with repairs to handrails, wooden steps and wooden boards, weeding and dealing with the overgrown vegetation on site, pruning trees and bushes, removing the excess vegetation from the pond and just tidy the whole site up. MoBE will as well endeavour to reinstate the toilets and electrics during this period.

This is not only a huge amount of work as nature has been allowed to take over for many years now and the site is not small, but it will put significant financial burdens onto MoBE. Even though MoBE would not be responsible for the buildings during the LTO, Public Liability Insurance will be compulsory and not all work will be suitable for volunteers, so contractors will be needed. The testing of the electrical installations only has been estimated at £2,500 last year, without any repairs. We are estimating the costs for the duration of the LTO to be in the area of £10,000 to £20,000, if not more. MoBE is awaiting quotes for work and insurance over the next few weeks, which will paint a better picture and to enable MoBE to apply for funding.

To be able to enter the LTO, MoBE will need a solid volunteer base and support from the community. All the leaflets which have been distribute have a QR code to lead you directly to our PayPal donation page. If you can, please help the Mill of Benholm, try the QR code below... scan the donation millstone of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise to help the Mill of Benholm (it can be scanned directly from your screen)



## The Mill of Benholm in the Press

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of July The Herald on Sunday featured the Mill of Benholm with an article by Sandra Dick, highlighting as well the efforts other communities have put into the revival and restoration of similar mills in Scotland.

**ANALYSIS, INSIGHT, OPINION** Sunday July 9, 2023 **WWW.HERALDSCOTLAND.COM** 25

**By Sandra Dick**

A THROWBACK to a gentler way of life in the heart of Sunset Song country, for generations Benholm Mill's giant water wheel powered the gears that turned the stones that ground the oats.

The rhythmic process helped feed rural communities in the Mearns area of Aberdeenshire, vividly brought to life in Lewis Grassie Gibbon's classic novel of early 20th-century farming life. Such was the importance of the mill that when the last miller stopped work in the 1980s, it was extensively restored and became a visitor attraction.

In recent years, however, the only surviving traditional water-powered mill in the area has been left to nature. Mothballed by its local authority owners, its wheel has been stationary for almost a decade, leaving vegetation to take root in the lade, sluices and mill pond.

Although altered and left to its own devices, the A-listed water mill remains a special place in the hearts of villagers in Benholm, who tried, and initially failed, to take it under their wing.

Now, having battled since 2014 to secure the beloved mill's future, they are mounting a fresh bid to take it over, with hopes that it can play a central role in a new drive to lure tourists to their corner of the northeast.

The belief that if revived, the mill could play an important part in telling a real-life Sunset Song story of rural life in a heritage-rich but economically deprived area often bypassed by tourists.

Community-run Mill of Benholm Enterprise first tried to take over running the historic water mill from Aberdeenshire Council in 2018. However, councillors turned down the request, amid concerns the group might not have the financial power needed to run it.

The move condemned the mill, nestled in ancient woodland near the fishing village of Johnshaven and midway between Montrose and Stonehaven, to a further five years of stalemated.

During that time, the pandemic interrupted maintenance, its large wheel is said to have deteriorated, and over-increasing vegetation took hold.

**Hopes for tourism**

THE community group has now restarted the process of asking for a community asset transfer. Secretary Henning Wagner says the mill's revival could play a vital role in encouraging tourists to explore an area captured in the classic novel of farming life in the Mearns instead of whizzing past on their way to and from nearby Dunnottar Castle.

He said: "This is an interesting area. Benholm has a lot of listed buildings and bridges dating back to 1720s. Benholm Kirk has historically important monuments dating to the 1600s, and Johnshaven is a beautiful fishing village. "In Benholm, there's the snidgy coach houses, manse - all with connections to the mill."

Dunnottar Castle attracts many visitors every year, but often they just head straight back down the A90 to St Andrews or Edinburgh.

"We'd like to encourage a few to instead discover what is around here and stay a bit longer."

The mill is a magical place - it's like stepping back in time.

Hopes of its revival by the community come as work is due to begin on a new £4 million visitor centre at Dunnottar

**Once the scenic highlight of the BBC's classic television adaptation of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's 1932 novel, the only surviving water-powered mill in Aberdeenshire's Mearns area has been left in ruin - but now the villagers of Benholm are attempting to reinvent it for future generations**

**Sunset Song to rise again Scots villagers take a novel approach to bringing the past to life**

From left to right, enterprise group's Emma Pollock (chair), Hannah McGregor, Henning Wagner (vice-chair and secretary), Sally Lawry (minute secretary) and John Maxwell (treasurer)

Castle, which is expected to double its economic impact and boost visitor numbers.

The castle, which sits 160 feet above the North Sea, is already a magnet for visitors seeking out its dramatic cliff-top views and historic links with the Honours of Scotland - the Scottish crown jewels - which were kept there in hiding from the invading forces of Oliver Cromwell.

The castle visitor centre comes as Aberdeenshire is on the brink of a new era of tourism. In May, the first cruise ship, the 1,200-passenger AIDAnura, docked in Aberdeen's new harbour while Aberdeen's airport has undergone an expansion and the opening of the F&J Live venue has boosted conference and live performances in the city.

King Charles is also said to be making plans to upgrade Balmoral Castle in preparation for a tourism boost in the area.

**TV adaptation**

THE secluded mill was used in the BBC's classic television adaptation of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's 1932 novel as "Langhob's" mill, and is described by Historic Environment Scotland as "an exceptional and rare survival".

It's thought there was a mill on the site as far back as the 12th century, while a charter granted in 1492 talks of a mill at "Benham". It later passed into the hands of the Keiths, the powerful Earls Marischal whose family is commemorated by the 17th-century Keith Monument at nearby Benholm Kirk.

Elements of the existing mill building have been found to date back to 1711, although it is almost all Victorian, with the mill rebuilt in 1817 by which time there was a well-established community in the village of Benholm.

The surrounding area includes the traditional Coach Road, the crucial route between Aberdeen and Edinburgh, and includes a number of historic bridges built in the 18th century to help speed travellers and mail coaches along the east coast.

At one time, there would have been hundreds of similar mills dotted around the country, providing communities with oatmeal, bruised oats and hatched oats.

The Benholm mill, with its kiln and miller's croft, sits alongside a mill pond containing enough water to fuel a whole day's work. The pond is supplied by a lade which takes water from the nearby castle burn and burn of Benholm, but was traversed by bridges built in the early 18th century.

The mill continued to produce oats from grain grown on local farmland until 1962, and the death of the last miller, Lindsay Watson.

With the mill towers halved and the kiln fires extinguished, Kincairdine and Deeside District Council stepped in to purchase the mill and carry out an extensive restoration. It reopened in 1996 as a tourist attraction only to close again just 18 years later.

According to Mr Wagner, some of the previous renovations will have to be repeated, including repairs to the wheel.

"The wheel hasn't turned for a few years now, but the restoration was done to a high standard in the 1990s," he added.

"The problem is the bits that are in the water and which are submerged. There will be some repair needed which will now need to be addressed."

"It is a waste," he said, referring to the restoration work that was carried out and which will now need to be redressed. "But sometimes things happen and it always goes to plan."

"There's a lot of work to be done but it's all possible."

It's expected that major effort will be required to remove vegetation which has clogged the vital water supplies to the mill wheel, while the community is also hoping to take over a nearby ancient woodland, opening up the area for walks and community events.

**'Early stage' talks**

AN Aberdeenshire Council spokesperson confirmed: "We are in discussions with a local community group on its proposed community asset transfer of the Mill of Benholm. These talks are at an early stage and we have a responsibility to assess each request transparently against a specified list of criteria."

Big wheels keep on turning: historic mills once left to rot are being reborn thanks to the communities they once served.

In John O'Groats, the category B listed mill is to be brought back into use as a heritage visitor attraction and community venue.

John O'Groats Mill Trust has received £1.6m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and £1.5m from the Scottish Government's Regeneration Capital Grant Fund to revive the mill, which is said to have all its machinery intact and in working order.

Meanwhile, in Thurso, work is under way to convert historic Caudean Mill into a whisky distillery and visitor centre. The £4m development of the mill, unused for well over 90 years, will create 12 jobs and include an exhibition telling its story as a mill.

In Lanarkshire, Carluke Development Trust aims to rebuild the listed Carluke High Mill's three historic buildings and develop the site as a heritage attraction, community learning hub and more. It is one of Scotland's few remaining windmills and the most completely one left in the country.

And on the Isle of Lewis, a community restoration project to revive the 19th-century Garrabod Mill is also under way.

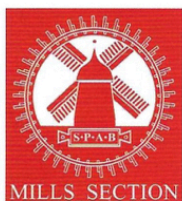
**“We'd like to encourage visitors to discover what is here. The mill is magical - like stepping back in time”**

You can access the article and further images on their webpage

<https://www.heraldsotland.com/news/23640884.benholm-mill-restoration-lure-tourists-sunset-song-country/>

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) featured the Mill of Benholm in their July issue of their magazine Mill News, writing about the history of the Mill of Benholm which is assumed to be a milling site since the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, with being specifically mentioned in a charter in 1492 when John and Isabel Lundy granted the lands and barony of "Benham" with the mill to their son Robert. In the following century the mill passed by marriage from the Lundy family to the Keith's, the powerful Earls Marischal as records show.

The first miller officially recorded was Archibald Brown in 1696.



The Magazine of the Mills Section of the  
Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

NO  
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July 2023

# Mill News



**I find it very fulfilling...**  
and it gives me an enormous sense of  
purpose. (a mature apprentice  
millwright) page 2

**Crowning glory**  
How to celebrate with a windmill (or  
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**Melchior, an informal Guest of  
Honour**  
At the formal opening of Kibworth  
Windmill page 20

## *The Mill of Benholm*

*Mill of Benholm Enterprise (SCIO)*

*The Mill of Benholm is a rural watermill complex in the North East of Scotland, situated within the hamlet of Benholm, near the fishing village of Johnshaven in the Mearns. The current mill originated in the 18th century (1711 was engraved on a stone and visible until recently) and was altered and rebuilt in 1817.*

Although the origin of the Mill of Benholm goes probably back to the 12th century, a charter in 1492 gives further evidence of the mill when John and Isabel Lundy granted the lands and barony of 'Benhame' with the mill to their son Robert. In the following century the mill passed by marriage from the Lundy family to the Keiths, the powerful Earls Marischal, as records show. The nearby Benholm Kirk displays the Keith Monument from 1620. The first miller officially recorded was Archibald Brown in 1696.



The Mill of Benholm comprises a small two-storey meal mill with attached kiln and external overshot waterwheel. Close to the mill is a mill pond holding enough water for one day's work. The pond is supplied via a lade taking water from the Castle Burn and the Burn of Benholm. There is as well the former miller's house (occupied until 1876 when a new cottage was built on higher ground and the "Auld House" by the stream used to house the pigs, cattle, hens and horses of the miller), a byre to the south of the mill and a grain store to the north.

According to Historic Environmental Scotland, the Mill of Benholm is an exceptional and rare survival and the site received its category B listing in 1972, upgraded to a Category A listing in 2009.

The mill was a fully operational working mill and produced oatmeal from oats grown on the local farmland until the last miller, Lindsay C. Watson, retired in 1984. Shortly afterward the then Kincardine and Deeside District Council purchased this Grade A-listed complex and after extensive restorations over nine years in 1995 re-opened it as tourist attraction, community hub, learning centre and cafe with the mill being in full working order.

From 1996 to 2014, the Mill of Benholm was a successful and much-loved hub for the community and for many visitors. The facility was closed and mothballed in 2014 by its owner Aberdeenshire Council.

The Mill of Benholm is situated in an idyllic spot of five acres of land opposite the Mill Brae Woods. A footbridge leads into these semi-natural woods composed mainly of wych elm and ash, with scattered sycamore, gean, larch, hazel, and Norway maple with now overgrown, nature walks, viewing areas and an open-air classroom.



Since its closure in 2014 the community has been looking into a sustainable way to revive this 'Gem of the Mearns' with the Mill of Benholm Enterprise (SCIO) being founded in 2017. Since 2017, the Mill of Benholm Enterprise (MoBE) has worked on a sustainable solution and in 2019 has applied for Community Asset Transfer of the site with the support of the North East Scotland Preservation Trust. This unfortunately failed, but a new board of trustees has started a fresh approach in 2023 and restarted the process of the Community Asset Transfer to Aberdeenshire Council by submitting the Expression of Interest in May 2023.

The main focus is on halting any further deterioration of the site as maintenance has been reduced to the bare minimum. Nature has started to take over, roofs have become leaky, and the wheel has not been turned for more than three years. Until 2020 the waterwheel had been turned weekly with the lade, sluices and pond kept in good working order.

As soon as MoBE secures ownership, work will start to deal with the overgrown vegetation, leaking roofs and

## *The Mill of Benholm – continued*

other urgently needed repairs to enable MoBE to open the site safely to the public. At the same time work will start on the water structures of the lade, sluices, pond and waterwheel to restore these back to working order. All this work depends on grant funding and will be undertaken with the help of volunteers and suitable contractors.

Due to being mothballed since 2014, the electrical system and plumbing will need an overhaul in this phase as well to ensure lights, toilets and all other facilities are in good working order.

After all necessary work has been completed a mobile catering unit will be used to serve coffee, cakes and other refreshments to visitors enjoying the historic mill and the nature paths through the grounds and Mill Brae Woods.

In a second phase MoBE will restore the site further to enhance the historical and natural beauty of the site, with more learning facilities, outdoor events, closer connection via a path to Benholm Kirk, showcasing the milling and farming history of the area, and much more.

We hope as well to host volunteer weekends together with the SPAB on this site in the future.



### *What's behind the doors?*



*Pictures by Mildred*





## Conservation Plan

The architect Sonya Linskaill, RIAS, RIBA, RIAS Advanced Accredited Architect and Heritage Consultant is currently drawing up a conservation plan for the Mill of Benholm, which will be the foundation for all further restoration work. Beside assessing the buildings and site, she has interviewed many people who have been involved with the Mill of Benholm over the years from family members of the last miller Lindsay C. Watson to people involved in the restoration of the Mill of Benholm in the 1980/90s to people who have worked at the mill or just know a lot about the Mill of Benholm. This will be an important as well as an interesting document when it will be issued late Summer 2023.



## Mill Brae Woods

The Mill of Benholm Enterprise is getting closer to lease the Mill Brae Woods from Brotherton Estate. There had been further delays, but the lease has been agreed in principal and now the solicitors are drafting up the legal text. So, hopefully there will be no further delays and the License to Occupy for the Mill of Benholm and the Lease for the Mill Brae Woods will be signed in the near future.



## Visits, Stakeholders and Support

Over the last few months, many organisations have visited the Mill of Benholm to discuss collaboration in the future, amongst others there were Mearns and Coastal Healthy Living, Embark Forrest School, Johnshaven Primary School, Aberdeenshire Council Community Mental Health Team, Milltown Community, all are interested in working together in the future and more visits are to come.

We have already received many letters of support with very strong supportive letters from our MP Andrew Bowie and our MSP Mairi Gougeon.

But you don't need to be a politician to write a letter of support, please email your support to [secretary@millofbenholm.scot](mailto:secretary@millofbenholm.scot)

Furthermore, MoBE has started to work together with SCOTO (Scottish Community Tourism), SPAB (Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings), and COSS (Community Ownership Support Service of the Development Trust Association Scotland), all strongly in support of the Mill of Benholm

## Last but not Least

### **The Mill of Benholm Needs Your Help**

Please support the Mill of Benholm Enterprise and become a member. Let's make this story a success story of the community of Benholm and Johnshaven.

To help us in our efforts to not only revive the Mill of Benholm with its Category A listed buildings, described by Historic Environment Scotland as "an exceptional and rare survival", but also to stop further deterioration, before it is too late, please write to your local Councillor, your MSP and your MP to draw their attention to this important project for the local community and visitors and harness their support.

So please, if your relatives, friends or neighbours are interested to support us and become members, ask them to get in contact either through  
Facebook - Mill of Benholm Enterprise @benholmmill  
Instagram - @millofbenholmenterprise  
Email – [secretary@millofbenholm.scot](mailto:secretary@millofbenholm.scot)  
Or visit our website [www.millofbenholm.scot](http://www.millofbenholm.scot)

To support the Mill of Benholm Enterprise financially without extra costs to yourself, please sign up for Easy Fundraising at

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/millofbenholmenterprise>

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**You spend, brands donate to Mill of Benholm Enterprise.**

Help us when you shop with 7,000+ brands. Join now.

Or go to our website [www.millofbenholm.scot/donate/](http://www.millofbenholm.scot/donate/) with the possibility to go direct to our PayPal fundraising site.



## And we shall be at the Johnshaven Fish Festival on the 12<sup>th</sup> of August 2023



**To support the Mill of Benholm, become a member of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise (SCIO), learn more about the mill, the history and the conservation area of Benholm or to let us know what you would like to see happening at the Mill of Benholm come see and visit us at our stall**

**Meet the Trustees of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise At the Johnshaven Fish Festival**

The Mill of Benholm Enterprise (SCIO) endeavours to revive the Mill of Benholm, a historic watermill located in the conservation area of Benholm.

To learn more about the Mill of Benholm Enterprise (SCIO), the Mill of Benholm or our project to restore and revive the Mill of Benholm, to be enjoyed by generations to come. Please visit us at our stall at the Johnshaven Fish Festival, on our website [www.millofbenholm.scot](http://www.millofbenholm.scot), on Facebook [@benholmmill](https://www.facebook.com/benholmmill) or get in contact via email to [secretary@millofbenholm.scot](mailto:secretary@millofbenholm.scot)

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