

# Combe Mill, Blenheim Palace Sawmills

Property Services



**Location:**

Long Hanborough, Oxfordshire

**Client:**

The Combe Mill Society

**Value:** £824,000

**Completed:** June 2012

**Specialist teams:**

Building Conservation & Architects:  
HCC Property Services Architecture & Historic Buildings Group;  
Quantity Surveyor: Davis Langdon  
Structural, Mechanical & Electrical:  
HCC Property Services Engineering Services;  
Project Management: Conservation Plus

Combe Mill is a mid-nineteenth century sawmill which was powered by water and steam. The original water wheel, steam engine and set of belt-driven machinery survive in-situ and have been restored to working order by the Combe Mill Society using volunteer skills. The beam engine and its boiler date from 1852. The building and its contents are listed Grade II\*.

Combe Mill is a good example of a working, hands-on museum which, thanks to Heritage Lottery Fund support, now enables visitors to effectively connect with their industrial heritage and learn about past technologies and social history. With the heart and soul of the Mill industrial museum already in existence, the scope of the project was simply to arrest decay, make repairs, reconfigure the layout and create facilities to put the operation on a more sustainable economic footing.

Potential disaster has been averted with the reinforcement of a cracked beam carrying the mill's belfry roof and replacement of the oak bell housing. The roof has been repaired, windows replaced and heating and lighting renewed while preserving the authentic industrial clutter of machinery and tools.

The answer to the problem of getting people easily to the different floor levels was to build a timber clad lift tower where the two historically distinct wings of the building meet and use a lift with front and side doors. A new steel staircase at the other end of the building frees up space for a new entrance and provides a good viewing point for the water wheel.

## Key Benefits

- The dilapidated mill buildings have been repaired and have a new lease of life.
- A new unobtrusive lift has been added in just the right location linking together the three different floor levels.
- With the installation of a lift and physically improved internal circulation the building is now accessible to all.
- An education room fully equipped with interactive exhibits has been created in the old 'Foreman's Office'.
- The Society can now host a greater range of participatory activities for school groups, the general public and special interest groups.
- The new building provides an improved café and function room which will help the Mill towards a self-sustaining future.

*“ Conserving the Mill building for future generations and developing the improved learning resources has been an exciting experience for society members. We are sure the local community will be proud of what we have accomplished and enjoy the new facilities. ”*

Tony Simmons, Chairman of The Combe Mill Society



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