



Wilton Windmill

ENGLISH

The Early Start

Dada got me up at 4.00 o'clock this morning. A rough shake and a quick 'Get up, there's work to be done', and he was gone. I slid out of bed very carefully trying not to wake my two sisters. We all sleep in the same bed with them at the one end and me at the other, head to tail. I quietly got my clothes on and went out to the yard. A splash of cold water from the trough on my face, a quick visit to the privy and then I ran the hundred yards to the Windmill. The wind was up, the rain blowing sideways.

It had been fine weather for a couple of weeks with none of the usual autumn winds. My father had several customers waiting for their grain to be milled and the ground floor of the Windmill was full of two hundredweight sacks. They are so heavy that only Dada can lift them. I can just about drag them across the floor. Getting them up to the Bin Floor will be the first job but before we can do that we need to set the sails.

Up to the dust cap and off with the brake so one of the common sails goes vertically up from the gallery. Dada sends me up to draw the sails across and tie them in place. One done and we turn the sails round again till we can set the second common sail. The other pair of sails are called patent sails and they are much easier. When both are fully set we can start turning. Dada sends me round to haul on the chain that closes the shutters on the patent sails. This hangs down on the far side of the gallery. Once the shutters are closed the mill starts to turn faster and we can start lifting the heavy sacks of grain up to the bin floor.

I race up to the bin floor as Dada attaches the sacks of grain to the chain at the end of the sack hoist rope. When ready he pulls on the control rope and the sacks lift like magic off the floor and up through the trap doors. As it hits each trapdoor, it opens the flaps and moves through. As it gets clear they slam shut, bang, bang, bang till it reaches me on the bin floor. When Dada has heard three bangs he knows the sack is at the top. Up above me is the clever sack hoist mechanism with a pair of bevel wheels that touch when you want the rope pulled.

I unload the sacks and slide them ready to go in the bins. When we have enough to start Dada comes up and tips the first six sackfuls into the bin. There'll be more to lift when we need them later in the day.

Now we stop the mill with the brake briefly to check all the controls. Putting on the brake involves going up to the dust cap and releasing a rope. You slowly let it go and gradually the brakeband slows the huge brakewheel. We can then put the millstones into gear and start milling. The machine is doing its job, rumbling gently as the gears take the strain. The smell of warm flour is all around, and a fine dust is visible in the light from the lantern. It's not yet

dawn and we're already hard at work. I should be at school in four hours' time and it takes nearly half an hour to walk there.

Dada spends most of his time on the spout floor, hand in the sack that's collecting the milled flour. He's checking how fine it is and adjusting the controls if he needs to. Occasionally he goes up to the stone floor to check the grain is falling properly from the bin into the hopper and checking the shoe is feeding the grain into the stones at the correct speed.

Occasionally he forgets to top up the bin and suddenly we hear the noise of a bell. This bell, the warbler, rings just before the grain runs out. If the stones run empty, with no grain between them, they can cause sparks that could set light to the whole windmill. Dada tells stories of this happening at other mills and of worse things he calls dust explosions.

We go up again and again to top up the bins and on the spout floor more and more sacks of flour stack up. We'll make good money from the farmers for these. Sometimes we ask for money from the farmers and sometimes they just give us a bit of their flour. This is how we make a living.

Dada shouts at me to adjust the chain to slow the mill down a bit. The wind has picked up and we dare not let it run too fast. It's already 8 o'clock and I tell him I'll be late for school. No breakfast yet and I've done 4 hours' work already with no pay. Dada still needs me to help so I'm going to be late to school. When I do get there, even if I run the 2 miles flat out, I'll probably get the cane. If I'm just a few minutes late I get it on my hand but I guess I'll get a full caning from Mr Roberts on my backside this time.

Dada eventually lets me go. Breakfast is just grabbed as I run in and collect my books. 'Have a good day at school', shouts my Mum. Then I'm off down to Bedwyn village and to find out my punishment.

