

# Skjern Windmill

## The Windmill 1924 - 2024 with the Lund Family

### The Family Around the Windmill

- Johannes Lauridsen Lund was born in 1898 in a small community. He grew up on a smallholding where his father, Laurids, faced challenges due to a leg injury and became a winter school teacher. Johannes' mother, Jørlene, managed the farm with the help of their older children, including Johannes. After his confirmation, Johannes apprenticed at a local mill, becoming a miller's apprentice in 1916. He was known for his innovative spirit, continuing his work as the only apprentice under the mill manager. Later, he moved to another town and worked at various mills, eventually taking over the operation of a windmill in Skjern in 1924. He purchased the mill in the 1930s and continued its operation until his passing in 1967.
- Agnes was born in 1903 and grew up in Skjern as the daughter of a local tailor. She trained as a men's tailor, which greatly benefited the community. Johannes and Agnes married in Skjern in 1925 and built a house near the windmill around 1930. They had two children, Erik and Esther. Agnes played a vital role in the mill's operations, managing bookkeeping while caring for the home and children.
- Erik, born in 1927, grew up next to the mill. After completing his education, he worked in agriculture and trained as a cook. His culinary career took him to various places, including work on ships traveling to the East. After returning to Denmark, he worked as a cook in Copenhagen, where he met Tove. They married in 1956 and managed a restaurant near a lighthouse for several seasons. They eventually returned to Skjern to help at the mill, which Erik managed until 1978, when changes in the industry made the mill less viable. After Johannes' death, Erik continued to operate the mill until it was transferred to a local preservation association. He later worked at a paint factory until his retirement in the late 1980s, passing away in 2008.
- Esther, born in 1932, tragically lost her life to tuberculosis in 1948 on her 16th birthday after being hospitalized for her illness.
- Tove Margrethe, born in 1930, grew up in another region and trained as a nurse. She met Erik during her internship and they married in 1956. Tove worked in various nursing roles, including as a home care substitute and later at a nursing home. They had three children: Birgitte in 1957, Marianne in 1960, and Mads in 1970.

# Anecdotes

## The Office

In the office, there were several lacquered wooden chairs lined up against the wall facing the desk, where our father sat. The chairs were often filled with local farmers, chatting with pipes and tobacco in hand. Conversations flowed in a calm manner, marked by understanding humor and meaningful pauses as stories were shared.

When larger business deals were made, tobacco was offered. It was said that some farmers preferred to use more expensive finely cut tobacco in their long pipes, opting to scrape it out later at home and save it for a later smoke.

Sometimes, Marianne helped her grandmother clean the office on Saturdays. They had to fetch water from the basement, as there was no running water in the mill. The water was cold, and if hot water was needed, kettles on the oil stove were always ready.

Farmers would scrape their pipes in the ashtray, collecting the ash in a bucket as part of the cleaning routine. The tobacco and filters were separated, and the ash was saved for someone who would collect it for making their own chewing tobacco. The smell was quite distinctive!

There was also a light yellow unglazed piggy bank on the windowsill that received coins from the farmers from time to time. The pig had likely come as a promotional item. Grandfather Johannes had promised his oldest grandchild, Birgitte, the contents for her confirmation, leading to disappointment when she did not receive it. This may have been an attempt to quell her repeated questions about the money inside. The pig's fate is known now—it has been preserved by a local museum, and Marianne remembered seeing it in a Christmas exhibition years later.

Our father, Erik, was somewhat bilingual, speaking a version of Danish adapted for home and using the local dialect in the office. In retirement, he enjoyed showing tourists around the mill. English came easily to him, and he even refreshed his German skills to better guide curious German visitors.

## THE MILL

**In the mill itself**, the grinders were placed on the grinding loft on the first floor. The hoisting mechanism was particularly exciting for us. When the grain needed to be milled, it was hoisted up through the small hatches in the floor of the grinding loft. A rope hung down to the ground floor, the bridge loft.

The rope with the self-locking loop was placed around the top of the sack, where it was tied. Using a pulley, the machinery higher up in the mill was activated, and the sack disappeared through the hatches. When the sack was completely through, the hatches automatically closed and became part of the floor again. A similar hatch construction also existed at the dryer leading down to the basement.

The hoisting mechanism also allowed us to test whether it could lift boys, even girls! It was cool, although no one was allowed to go all the way up through the hatch to the grinding loft; I think it would have hurt our heads!

Birgitte especially remembers the large millstones and when they needed to be dressed. This was something they did themselves at the mill. Here, grandfather Johannes used a pair of regular glasses as protection against stone chips. Our father could also dress them. It was cost-saving; you did it yourself.

Up here in the grinding loft were doors leading out to the gallery, a millwalk that went around the mill. There were two doors, one on each side of the mill, positioned directly opposite each other. This made it possible to safely go out onto the gallery when the wings were turning. The placement of the wings against the wind determined which door was used that day. When we stood on the gallery, the wings appeared incredibly large; taking just two steps up to them was frightening – they swayed!

Imagine the climb required to put storm boards on when the wings needed painting or to set up Christmas lights in them.

**The Christmas lights:** it was so exciting for us when the cross shone brightly over the town. When we drove to Skjern, there was the magical point where the mill wings lit up; this signalled that December had arrived.

The first Christmas after our father's death, it was even more touching to see the light on the old mill. Mads especially remembers an early morning in December when he was on his way to work – it gave him a thrill when the light from the mill's wings shone brightly over Skjern.

We can see in pictures from old albums that there has been Christmas lighting on the mill for many years. We remember it throughout our childhood.

**When the mill was to be started**, we sometimes got to stand out on the gallery. When the sails on the wings were adjusted, and the brake was released, the wings had to be helped to get going: we pushed and pulled on the wings, one wing at a time, until they started spinning faster and faster and the mill was running. It was magical for us to be a part of it. Standing there at a safe distance from the wings when they swept close to the mill, right over the gallery. Birgitte remembers the rush of the wings, which made you feel almost 'pulled' along.

The rollers and sieves were located on the bridge loft on the ground floor, where we could follow the process and see the grits and the sifted flour being filled into sacks.

Above the grinding loft, accessed by a very steep and worn ladder, one would find the star wheel made of metal and wooden gears, to which the grinders could be connected. These gears were made of iron. It was impressive and in a construction that only Mads probably understands.

The entire construction with 'metal gears against wooden gears' was what made the mill special and gave it its light, almost whispering and soundless quality when it worked.

Marianne especially remembers how you had to twist and turn to navigate between the gears and reach the next steep ladder up. This led all the way up to the hat with the wind rose made of iron.

Up in the hat was the large wing axle, the 'enormous timber beam' to which the wings were attached, and the 'shoe' it rested in. Terms like 'the Bear' and 'Cat stone' sparked our imagination. From here, there was also a view of the fantail. The green hat was, impressively, loose on top of the

rest of the mill, and the diligent little fantail ensured that the wings never faced the back wind. It turned the hat with the wings around so the wind was directed correctly onto the wings.

Here, one would think you couldn't go any higher; BUT there was a hatch at the very top of the hat. Here, you could see the sky! Marianne remembers being lifted up so she could look out through the hatch over the town of Skjern.

Once, during a town race, Mads and a friend were allowed to sit in the hatch with their legs dangling down in the mill hat and follow the running competition. The rest of us chose a much safer spot on garden chairs set up on the gallery.

Otherwise, the hatch was used to crawl out onto the mill hat when something needed to be fixed with the fantail. Here, one would sit astride the mill hat.

**The dryer with its noise.** The dryer had its sound, and at times it operated around the clock; the neighbors noticed – both when it was noisy and when it went quiet; it was something the sleep had to get used to. Once, a little mouse found its way into the dryer and had to be rescued up – much commotion – before drying could continue. Currently, a beautiful exhibition space has been created in the dryer. For a short time, the basement was even converted into a rehearsal space for a local band. The room was decorated with soundproofing made of egg cartons and black fabric – and had smart lights. Was it perhaps Flash the band was called?

**Sprouted sacks that needed to be scraped clean.** We could all help scrape the sprouts off. If we passed by, we were given knives from the daily cutlery and lent a hand. It was fun to help out when we could, but how helpful we actually were knew only Agnes and Tove.

The sacks were placed on the large sack cart, with a large wooden frame and two large wheels, when they needed to be scraped. They were then hung to dry on the fence around the mill.

The grain that needed drying came in sacks or loose weight by truck. It was unloaded and then pushed down into the grate outside the dryer. Here, a snow scraper was efficient. There were tough seasons when the grain was so wet it sprouted through the sacks. And it was heavy to push it over and down through the grate to the dryer's basement, where the drying process began.

The moisture content had to be measured, and as we remember, this required climbing up to the top of the dryer on a ladder and taking a grain sample. This was repeated as many times as necessary to approve the moisture content. Here, father had some long days that stretched into the evenings. For while the dryer was running, he would rather not leave the mill, and mother would bring him his warm meals.

**The long green warehouse** (which is red today) next to the mill was a great fascination for us children, especially the two large paintings that adorned the wall. The motifs were something like "What father does is always right" and "The woman with the eggs," and we children experienced it as looking at a giant storybook.

Otherwise, the warehouse was used to store grain and flour in sacks. When there was a lot of grain at the mill, all floor space was filled up; yes, there were also sacks stacked around the office and out to the dryer when it was busiest.

When the sacks needed to go from the mill to the warehouse, the door to the warehouse was opened, and a piece of plank wood was placed over the gravel road to the warehouse door. It sloped down, and they had to keep their tongues straight in their mouths to make it across. With the sack cart carrying the grain sack over the plank, they had to land safely on the other side and into the green warehouse. It was necessary to have a supporting arch beneath the plank. Yes, we remember it as if they were high up in the air, driving with the sacks over the plank! Standing in the gravel today and viewed from an adult height, the sight is not so overwhelming, but the technique of that solution was certainly impressive.

Up to three sacks could be stacked high in the warehouse, and each could weigh around 100 kg. They were stacked by hand or with an electric sack lifter. It was fast and efficient, but not for children.

It was tempting for us children to hide and play in the warehouse, but it was also very dangerous as the sacks could topple down. It probably happened a couple of times that we played over there if we weren't caught.

**To keep mice away from the grain**, cats were necessary. We noticed when new kittens arrived, as their meowing could be heard from the loft above the office. It was time to set the milk bowl with warm milk up there so that mother cat wouldn't have to leave the kittens to eat. The milk was warmed by grandmother Agnes in a saucepan, which we took over to the mill.

The cats had to live in the mill! – even if we tried to sneak them home and argued that “it wanted to come with me.” The cats meant a lot at the mill.

Once, our mother, who was a nurse, managed to bandage a broken leg on a little kitten. The kitten had gotten stuck under the dresser just outside the office. It recovered and became a good mill cat.

**After school, we often stopped by the mill**, sometimes bringing our friends to see how things were going. There were always candies in the drawer of the office, so it wasn't bad to visit the mill. The mill was always a place where you could bring your class, friends, and family.

Our father Erik was good at telling stories and would gladly welcome school classes from the children of the next generation to visit the mill.

If a horse-drawn wagon came to the mill, it was tied to the round iron ring right by the door to the platform. And it happened that one of us children was lucky enough to get a ride around the mill in the horse-drawn wagon. If it was Alfred Mortensen coming in his truck, there were good chances of going on a countryside trip if it could fit in.

We were also allowed to weigh out chicken/pigeon feed in paper bags on the green scale or whatever was going on. The large sewing machine used to patch the sacks was off-limits for us; I think it was a cobbler's or upholsterer's model, with a giant needle – and a bit too dangerous for us; it was work for the mill workers.

Otherwise, we often slipped over to grandmother, who lived in the house next door. Here, we would enjoy reading, listening to stories, and enjoying the treats grandmother had prepared. The garden was filled with apple and plum trees, as well as gooseberry, blackcurrant, and redcurrant bushes. Here, we learned to crochet, knit, and do cross-stitch – or at least some of us did.

**Grandmother Agnes** played a significant role at the mill, both as the one holding the threads, and as the bookkeeper, cleaner, coffee brewer, and provider for the lodgers who stayed in the basement. She hosted larger meetings when important agreements were to be made – yes, her dining table, often covered with a yellow/green checkered oilcloth, could accommodate most.

**A sharp eye** – a good ear was a big part of looking after the mill. We started by living in the above grandmother and grandfather next to the mill. Then a house was bought a few houses across. From here, the mill could be seen through the West Window. Many trips were made through the living room to the West Window. When there was a storm, we kept a close watch. We looked at the sails and the brake: was it facing directly into the wind? Had the sails shifted in the cross? For there was the story from when the mill ran wild during a storm. When the fire department was called, they thought they could stop it by throwing an iron chain around the wooden shaft! The chain broke, and it ended with Grandpa Johannes sitting up in the mill's cap, pouring water on the shaft for the sails while they spun away. They managed to cool it down so that the wooden structure didn't catch fire; almost everything was made of wood. It was said that in the old days, they let the mills run through the storm if they got out of control; it could slow them down a bit as long as there was enough grain to fill the mills! Or the story from when the tailwind had lost one of its sails. Our father was a boy then, and he went off to find it; he thought he could take it home in his pocket. However, it was much larger in reality, about 1 meter, and had wedged itself into the grass at one of the neighbors' places. Otherwise, Dad and Grandpa always had an ear out and could identify what might be wrong based on the sounds. The mill is still being watched, as Marianne can see the mill from the East Window in the dining room. When something needed to be repaired, mill builders were required; if our childhood heroes, Blacksmith Johannes, Carpenter Henriksen, and later Bjarne Nimbus, couldn't fix it. We experienced being able to follow the mill builders in their work, especially when new sails were needed; they lived in a caravan by the mill. Mads has the finest series of pictures from there, taken with his very first camera. Among the millers' apprentices, we remember: Ole Mortensen, Henning Nørrum, 'Laursen', Mads Peder Søndergård, and 'Hanse'. The sweep boys: Åge and Jan.

**In general, the mill has played a significant role in both our childhood and youth.** It has even carried over to the next generation, where the chance to meet Santa Claus when he was to be awakened in December, a bit earlier than the other kids, was a hit. The story of our mill is also one that the next generations of both grandchildren and great-grandchildren continue to share – “it's my great-grandfather's mill,” they say. Friends and family have heard these stories many times,

IN SHARED MEMORY

BIRGITTE - MARIANNE - MADS