

Ogier sponsors National Trust for Jersey Milling event

News - 26/04/2024

The Le Maistre family name is one that has been synonymous with farming in Jersey for centuries.

And while some of the current crop of Le Maistres have branched out into different professions, the agricultural tradition still runs deep.

For twin brothers Alan – who is now chief executive of the National Trust for Jersey – and Charles, a managing conveyancer in Ogier's Local Legal Services team, promoting, supporting and sustaining farming in Jersey remains a hugely important part of their lives.

Tomorrow, the Trust hosts its annual Heritage Milling event, at the historic Le Moulin de Quetivel in St Peter's Valley.

It acts as a perfect showcase of Jersey's historic agricultural methods, but for the Le Maistre twins, it is also a reminder of how the island's land could and should be used today.

Alan said: "Agriculture is probably an area that has not been high enough on the Trust's agenda previously. We are fortunate to be the custodians of a lot of land, but we have not always been actively involved in what we do with that land and how we can encourage agriculture to thrive on the island. There is a huge untapped opportunity to use land owned by the Trust."

The milling event on Saturday 27 April, which is being run in partnership with Ogier, will see 300 kilos of locally grown wheat transformed into stoneground flour using traditional and, perhaps more importantly, sustainable farming methods.

Alan added: "Preserving Jersey's heritage and culture and telling the island's story is hugely important. It is incredible how many mills there used to be on the island and now Quetivel is the last one."

As well as watching and learning about the milling process, the event will also give attendees the

chance to see bread and Jersey wonders being made and to see the watermill in action.

Charles said: "Ogier firmly believes in its responsibility to support the communities we operate in and the long-standing partnership with the National Trust aligns perfectly with Ogier's values of helping to preserve Jersey's cultural identity and supporting social sustainability for the next generation.

"The event at Quetivel mill is always a fascinating exploration of how the island used to run but the lessons have real world applications today.

"We all share a responsibility to look after our island by promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly practices such as regenerative farming. Ogier is passionate about supporting organisations such as the National Trust for Jersey which look to preserve the island's culture and future."

Working mills were commonplace in Jersey up until the 1900s but nearly all, including Le Moulin de Quetivel, ceased operating on a commercial basis with the advent of steam power. A few were brought back into brief operation by German forces during the Occupation for producing wheat when supplies ran low but milling ceased again after the War and the building fell into disrepair.

A fire almost destroyed Le Moulin de Quetivel in 1969 just as the National Trust for Jersey had begun negotiations to repair and restore it. However, the project was revived two years later and, in 1979, Le Moulin de Quetivel was officially opened to the public as a visitor centre and the only operational watermill in the island.

Alan said: "It is so important to keep that mill running from a historical perspective but it is not just about keeping the past alive for the sake of it but also about utilising skills from the past and considering how they might be important in the future."

There has been a growing focus worldwide on renewable energy sources and in Jersey's States Assembly politicians recently decided to investigate building an offshore wind farm in Jersey's territorial waters capable of generating between seven and eight times the current electricity demand.

Alan added: "The mill is critically important for a number of reasons. We have educational visits which are designed to raise awareness of energy production.

"There is constant talk about sustainability and the mill is a textbook example of renewable energy."

As well as energy, there have also been questions raised in Jersey about its self-sufficiency, with food brought to the island by ferry and therefore at the mercy of the weather.

At the outset of the pandemic, there were brief concerns as to whether the island would be able to ship in food supplies at its normal rate. And while those concerns were ultimately untested, there have still been calls for more of what Jersey consumes to be produced within the island.

The Le Maistre twins, alongside their cousin John, have been running Le Tacheron Farm in their spare time for several years.

And while Alan has taken a step back from this since heading up the National Trust for Jersey, the farm continues to grow from strength to strength under John's management.

Charles said: "We predominantly grow heritage varieties of crops with a focus on cereals.

"When the pandemic hit we were contacted by the government's agricultural team to ask about how much grain we grow and the quantity of flour that we can produce using our own mill.

"It is quite shocking how much bread is consumed in the island and the amount of flour and products made from flour that are brought in and how little of it is produced locally."

Le Tacheron Farm uses traditional farming methods with a focus on sustainability and regenerative techniques.

What began as more of a hobby for the Le Maistre family has become a business, with products produced on the farm on sale in a number of local retailers.

Charles added: "We started out as a hobbyist farm just trying to preserve the way that our family has always tended to the land for centuries. It developed into an expensive hobby which became a small business that is now a fully functioning, self-sustaining farm.

"It has taken a lot of time and energy but the farm is now financially stable and growing. We have never tried to create a capital focused enterprise. We are simply trying to create a farm that operates in the right way while preserving the methods that we love.

"We are fortunate that we have been able to take that vision and move it to where it is now self-sustaining".

The Trust's Milling event will see wheat grown at Le Tacheron Farm turned to flour and made available for sale in a process that starts and ends in Jersey.

"We spoke to the National Trust a number of years ago because we realised they were milling at Quetivel and we told them that we were producing this old-fashioned grain in Jersey and that some of the grains we were growing would have been similar to those from the period of time when milling was commonplace," said Charles. "There is definitely a synchronicity between our rather old-fashioned way of farming and the way that the Trust operates.

"Our farm has been supplying the Trust with grain for four or five years. It is a lovely relationship and these events are something we really look forward to every year."

Alan added: "Le Tacheron is a really interesting partner because the farm is focused on regenerative farming and is all about growing heritage crops sustainably using local production methods all the way through. It is field to fork and that is a really interesting method."

"The Milling event is all about the value of the crops we are growing and how we are growing them and that is why it is such an important event for us"

The Heritage Milling event at Le Moulin de Quetivel takes place on Saturday 27 April between 10am and 4pm with last entry at 3pm.

Donna Le Marrec, marketing and events manager for the National Trust for Jersey, said: "We look forward to welcoming as many people as possible to Quetivel mill later this month. It is always a fantastic family-friendly day and one that we are hugely excited about each year. The National Trust for Jersey is grateful to Ogier for its support of this event."

Entry to the milling event is free for Trust members, £4 for adults and £2 for children.

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