

HEXHAM  COURANT

# Farm grinds out fine result from its mill

By WILL GREEN

william.green@hexham-courant.co.uk

THE first stone grinding flour mill to be built in Northumberland for more than 100 years has opened in Stamfordham.

Farmer Andrew Wilkinson, who, with wife Sybille, runs Gilchesters Organic Farm, near Stamfordham, spent the past six months building the mill with miller Colin Graham.

"We got the mill from a company in Germany. It was made to order and shipped over in July," explained Mr Wilkinson.

"The mill represents the first and only stone grinding flour mill in Northumberland for well over 100 years.

"We actually found the mill first, and then set out to find a miller. We heard that ADM Milling Ltd was closing its Newcastle operation and we got in touch with its personnel department who were pleased to put us in touch with Colin.

"We constructed the mill between us, and began milling at the end of October. It wasn't the easiest thing to do – the grinding stones – which should last us 50 years – alone weighed two and a half tonnes.

"We've had the most extraordinary month since we started. It's been the most incredible learning curve. At one stage we even took the everything to bits again to learn how it worked.

"Since we got it set up, the orders have come in thick and fast, and we are supplying our organic flour – from traditional



■ In the bag: Andrew Wilkinson, left, and miller Colin Graham.

Photo: D490641

varieties of corn such as Spelt – to Booth's supermarket chain, many local delis and farm shops – such as the Vallum Farm Shop, North Acomb Farm Shop and the Kielder Organic Meats Farm Shop.

"We also supply the likes of Fenwick's in Newcastle, the Corbridge Larder and Stewart and Co. Fine Foods in Jesmond.

"There has been a huge increase in people's interest in baking and baking products over the last few

years. There has been a real resurgence and people are looking for local products."

Mrs Wilkinson's parents have a restaurant in her native Bavaria and, drawing on that experience, she recently started to host bread making courses at the farm, under the expert eye of breadmaker Catherine Barraclough.

Three local bakers are already using the flour.

She said: "We've had fantastic support from farm shops and delis. They have

all been so open to new produce.

"Our next struggle is distribution. At the moment Colin does all our milling and our deliveries! We were very lucky to find him. He is one of a rare breed who just asks what needs doing and does it."

Colin said: "It was a big change for me, going from grinding more than 11 tonnes a day to about half a tonne.

"But it's a much better, more relaxed environment. It's also different

working on my own, rather than in shifts with others. I'm now doing everything myself – I mill it, bag it and deliver it!"

Mr Wilkinson concluded: "It is extremely important that the grain is milled slowly and gently – stonegrinding in other words.

"It must be opened up so that the most important components remain intact. The gentle process leaves the high concentration of minerals and vitamins intact."