

# The Rex Wailes Collection

## Windmills and steam power in Barbados

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive Trust, UK

By the late 1960s, Rex was being invited to survey and report on mills in many places around the world. As an engineer he made great use of his contacts before starting on such an expedition. His planned trip to Barbados was carried out for McGill University in Canada, ably assisted by fellow engineer Sir Frank Hutson of DM Simpson & Co Ltd of Bridgetown. He first visited Simpson's offices just off Trafalgar Square, where the engineers there dealt very largely with sugar mills and worked closely with the Central Foundry in Barbados. Rex was shown catalogues of machinery there, manufactured by Fletcher & Stewart Ltd, a firm in Derbyshire. Rex visited the Foundry and saw for himself the machinery and steam engines which delighted him no end.

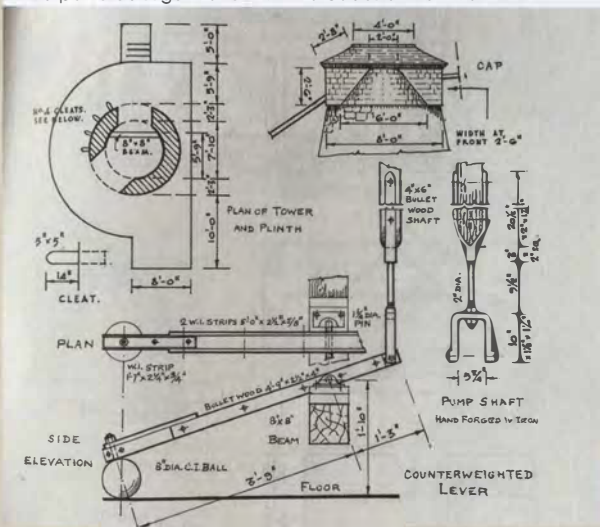
Rex's survey, carried out in January 1969, was subsequently written up in the Transactions of the Newcomen Society as a very detailed account with drawings and photographs of the many mills he visited.

Sugar mills have existed in the West Indies and South America for three centuries. Rex noted that they were first driven by animal power and waterwheels, later by tidal power, but particularly by windmills in Barbados. The focus on power source and technology was natural to an engineer and the technical details are of great interest, particularly as he recorded much in sketches later drawn up as detailed measure drawings. He also related anecdotes that bring to life his visits, such as his account of his visit to the Morgan Lewis sugar mill, now restored by a UK millwright for the Barbados National Trust.

"A Mr Lewand called for me at 7:15am and took me out to Morgan Lewis Mill. I had been there an hour, taking exterior photographs and struggling with flash, which kept shorting, probably because of the high humidity. At the next site was a derelict tower mill, but still with the machinery inside. Whilst there, quite a number of taxis drew up with tourists. Only one man went to the top of the mill, and one woman entered the lowest floor. None of the visitors put any money in the collection box, which was perhaps hardly surprising as it was in an insignificant position with a curled-up notice, hardly legible."

Rex's image of a worker moving the tailpole, so that the windmill faced the wind, is a reminder that when these mills were originally built they were operated by slaves, and the sugar they exported helped to fuel that trade until the British outlawed it in 1833, after a previous failure to abolish it.

Wind powered sugar cane mill in Barbados at work ca 1900



Sketch of Kirton, St Philip pumping mill, Barbados



Turning the sugar mill with the tailpole

