



Calcot Mill A.422

Mr Joseph Hunt: 50 years a roller man

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK



Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

Previous discussions with our publisher have centred around paying tribute to the role that individual people have played in the milling story. The launch of the Milling Hall of Fame in the March issue of *Milling and Grain* has given me the opportunity to think about who I would recommend for inclusion. I thought that this month rather than considering the pantheon of the greats such as Pillsbury, Rank or Simon, I would consider the story of a different type of hero.

I was aided in my quest by editions of *Milling* from 1950, when they ran a series entitled "Men in the Mill" and specifically one about Joseph Hunt. Here was a story about just one man who went quietly about his work for 61 years without seeking any reward, other than the satisfaction he got from improving the output of the mills in which he worked.

Popularly known among his friends as Joe, a native of Berkshire, Joseph Hunt was born on 21st January 1875 in the small village of Sulham, near Reading. He was a man of his time, who worked his way up from the age of 14 to become not only a master miller but also a millwright and engineer.

Joe's first job in 1889 was with Smith Brothers at Calcot Mill, pleasantly situated on a tributary of the River Thames, known as the Holy Brook, a channel of the River Kennet in a suburb of Reading. The mill at the time contained a combined millstone and roller plant, shortly afterwards to be replaced by a two-sack plant installed by C Hopkinson, milling engineers of Retford.

Joe worked six years at Calcot Mill, and then in search of enlightenment and experience he moved to Biggleswade, where he was rollerman in a two sack plant with pendulum plansifters manufactured by Harrison Carter. Sadly, this mill



Roller mills at Jordan's Mill, opened as a Heritage Centre in 2013



suffered a serious fire and in 1897 he went on from there to W Looker's Exchange Mills in Luton, where he helped to install a new two and a half sack Turner plant. He stayed there for two and a half years as mill foreman. It is interesting to note that a little later the youngest of Joseph Rank's three sons, J Arthur Rank, also did a thorough apprenticeship at the Looker Mill.

From Luton, Joe went back to Berkshire to Swallowfield Mill, only five miles from Reading. He was a shift rollerman in a two and a half sack Simon plant for seven years before returning to Bedfordshire. He was employed at William Jordan's Holme Mills at Biggleswade, which had by this time been rebuilt after their fire, and was fitted out with a new three sack roller plant by ER & F Turner. In 1911 he left Jordan's for Fleetham Mill, Bedale in North Yorkshire. At that time, the mill was occupied and worked by Thomas Burgess and contained a two-sack plant by Ashley's of Louth.



Joe Hunt made several improvements to the plant at Fleetham Mill. He was very handy at doing repairs and renewals, and one of his outstanding achievements was the remodel of the scalpers, making the new machines himself and installing them into the difficult space available. These new scalpers and other alterations, which were done by Joe during his time at Fleetham, greatly improved the mill's performance.

When this mill was given up in 1921, Joe transferred with the Burgess family to Thornton Dale Mill which was then a remodelled four sack plant containing machines by Simon, Turner and Armfield.

In 1927 at the Confectioners and Bakers' Exhibition

London, held a competition open to every British miller, irrespective of the size of plant, for the best milled flour from British Empire wheats. The First Prize Gold Medal and Diploma was awarded to Thornton Dale Mill with Joseph Hunt as the miller in charge on that occasion.

In 1934 he moved from Thornton Dale to Worksop where he superintended the starting up of a Simon plant, eventually increasing the capacity from three to five sacks per hour.

In 1940 he was in charge of installing another plant, this time at Grove Mill Retford, a mill of four sacks capacity in premises devoid of anything except four spacious floors and a grain silo at one end. During war time this was a truly commendable job because he drew the flow sheet, arranged the machinery, helped to install it and, with but four assistants entering the premises on 8th April 1940, the mill was making flour on 17th September in the same year.

Grove Mill was described as a demonstration to the genius of Joe as a “proved expert”; it was claimed that in small and medium capacity flour mills it would have been difficult to find a better all-rounder. Moreover Joe’s “quiet pleasing manner and genial nature” made him popular with all who knew him.



Joseph Hunt the day before his 75th birthday

He still worked occasionally at Grove Mill after retirement, and the accompanying photograph of him was taken on the day before his 75th birthday when he just took off his overalls for a few minutes before dinner hour and was back at work again in the afternoon.

The article concluded, “A lifelong Churchman, and in 61 years a miller, 39 years with two generations of Thomas Burgess & Sons, there was never a record of him being late for work on any day. He is an inspiration to all who respect and admire the activities of a real English Craftsman.”

I intend to write about more

mill people (not all men!) so I would be pleased to have any suggestions of suitable candidates; email me at mills@millsarchive.org



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