

The Rex Wailes Collection

The Rex Wailes Collection: Rex Wailes visits the USA and surveys Long Island and Nantucket windmills

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I have mentioned previously that travelling formed an important part of Rex's lifestyle. In 1929 he took a three-month trip to North America and spent much time on the Eastern Seaboard as well as in Canada. His trip to Long Island and then to Cape Cod and Nantucket produced a wealth of information from photographs and the notes he made. His diary of the time, now at the Mills Archive, outlined his approach:

"Next morning, Saturday, I met Mr Fuller as arranged and we walked up to the mill which he unlocked and left me with a flashlight, and instructions to return the key to him at 1pm. I spent all the morning there, measuring up and taking photographs." This mill is still standing for the visitor to see today.

His eye for detail was impressive as can be seen from the images here. Some such as the broken glass plates of the interior details from two of the Long Island mills did not benefit from the rigours of intercontinental travel almost 100 years ago. Digitising has rescued the images and the plates are carefully stored so no more harm can come to them.

Rex subsequently published his American work in a series of articles, which had significant impact in America and then internationally as his reputation as an adventurous and meticulous researcher and photographer began to grow. He encouraged local historical societies to take more notice of their industrial monuments and made lasting trans-Atlantic friendships.

On his return in July 1929 he discovered that an article had appeared in the Daily Mail on 17 June 1929 entitled "Our Vanishing Windmills: How you can help save them". This was to change his life and that of many others.



Interior below cap, Hook Mill, East Hampton, Long Island



Nantucket smock mill

Hook mill, Long Island



Brake wheel and wallower, Gardiner Mill, East Hampton, Long Island