

The Rex Wailes Collection

Hallam Ashley (1900-1987) and Horstead Mill

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Last month I introduced the close working relationship of Rex with photographer Hallam Ashley, with Mr Ashley an exact contemporary of Rex.

In 1929 he married and settled in Norwich, where he was to live for the rest of his life. In the 30s he became well known as a photographer, taking pictures in exhibitions around the world, as well as a growing number of archaeological sites, excavations and similar subjects – much of this for the Castle Museum at Norwich. He was elected a fellow of the Royal Photographic Society in 1935.

During WW2, Mr Ashley volunteered for the RAF and worked in the photographic section. When the War ended, he began photographing buildings for the National Buildings Record (later the National Monuments Record), which would become his main source of work until the 1980s.

His interest in mills continued, working alongside Rex and with an emphasis on mills in East Anglia. In 2010 the Mills Archive collaborated with English Heritage to publish a tribute to him entitled “Traditional crafts and industries in East Anglia: the photographic legacy of Hallam Ashley”.

Typical of Mr Ashley’s work was a series of images of millers practising traditional crafts such as dressing the bed stone (something I used to do for 30 years!). The photograph of Jack Drayton is particularly evocative as it is annotated on the reverse; “This was the last occasion on which this one remaining pair of stones was dressed as the mill was burnt out within a few months.”

The mill in question was Horstead mill, owned by the Norwich firm of RJ Read. See more in my article on the company in this issue of Milling & Grain. The mill was sited on the River Bure near Coltishall. There had been a mill on the site since before the Domesday Book in 1086.

This mill was built in 1789 to replace an earlier 16th century mill. The mill burned down in January 1963 and was never restored. The mill pond is now a popular site for angling and wild swimming. The two other Ashley photographs underline not only the commercial cost but also the loss of an aesthetic and heritage treasure.

The Mills Archive is proud of its role in safeguarding such important records of our milling history, and we continue to value the interest and support we receive from Milling and Grain and its readers.

