

The Rex Wailes Collection

Sails and earthquakes

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive Trust, UK

The Milling and Grain Room at the Mills Archive was set up with the help of Perendale Publishers to house the Rex Wailes Collection, the most important mill collection of the 20th century. To explain more of the context to visitors, our archivist, Nathanael has created three interpretative panels.

Using images from the collection that we have so far come across, they show the life and times of Rex himself, some of the gems already uncovered, and an idea of the amount of work needed to care for and save some of the damaged items. Many of the drawings are in need of conservation. An appeal has been set up to help with the funding of this and I hope it will enable us to be able to repair the damaged drawings so as to be able to allow access to them. For more information see <https://millsarchive.org/appeals/rex>

Rex's background as an engineer served him well in understanding the function of the many types of mills and their machinery which he visited and wrote up in great detail. As well as his own photographs, documents and drawings, he was given much by local people on his travels in the UK and the rest of the world.

The Mills Archive always makes sure that our collections as they are catalogued are available to view both on our web site and by a personal visit to Reading. One of my favourite images is the 1900 photograph of the millwrights Wakes & Lamb putting up a sail on the windmill at Coleby Heath in Lincolnshire. It was a tall six sail tower mill, sadly pulled down in 1942 due to the proximity to the airfield. The stump remained in the mid-1950s, but had gone by the early 1970s.

The aftermath of the earthquake at Wents Mill, Peldon in Essex is captured in a photograph from 1884. The mill largely escaped but the mill house looks in danger of collapsing.

The original was given to Rex by Mrs Went in March 1956. Her husband had been the schoolboy with the black arm band. His father had recently died and his brother was running the milling business

Both are good historical examples underlining how important these images are to be kept for future generations. With support from the milling world we can release so much more.

