The Rex Wailes Collection

The books he has written

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive Trust, UK

Before Rex came on the scene there were no authoritative books on windmills. He changed all that in the decade after the Second World War. In 1948, The Architectural Press published his text Windmills in England, filled with wonderful, black and white photographs of every type of mill that existed at the time. Coupled with and exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, it must have raised the spirits of post-war Britain.

In 1954 he wrote The English Windmill and in 1979 the illustrated Source Book of Wind and Watermills. The former, illustrated by his very good friends, the artist Vincent Lines and the photographer Hallam Ashley, is still many years later the 'windmill bible'.

Rex had a major impact on the post war movement to preserve our milling heritage. He recognised we could save only the very best examples and his advice secured a number to the care of English Heritage. He advocated key examples: the post mill at Saxtead Green, Suffolk; the smock mill at Cranbrook, Kent; the tower mill at Sibsey, Lincolnshire and a drainage mill at Ashtree Farm, Norfolk.

His influence extend far beyond England. When The English Windmill was published in the USA his American publishers provided him with a personal extended, leather-bound edition in which he had pasted many notes and comments.

In 2008 Rex's daughter Anthea presented the book to the Mills Archive and it is now a star of our special collections library. More importantly it started us on the long journey to retrieve his vast collection from the Science Museum, where it had been kept since his death in 1986. Only now can we start to make it available to the public.

Rex would have approved. A footnote to his book says 'we must make haste and record what is left'. Thank goodness he was as good as his word, and those records are now at the Mills Archive. Once catalogued and conserved, the collection will be made available for everyone interested to come and see.

The presentation in 2008 by Anthea
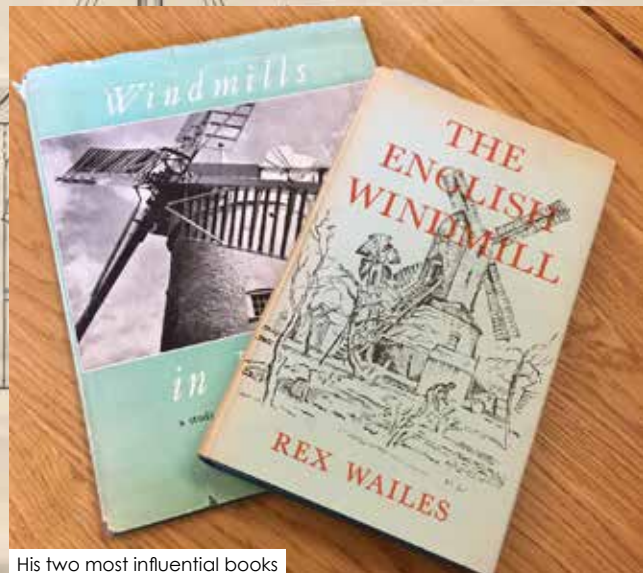
His two most influential books

The leather-bound edition of The English Windmill