

The Rex Wailes Collection

Kate and Becky: How it feels to work behind the scenes

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive Trust, UK

Much of the work on the Rex Wailes Collection relies on paid interns and student volunteers. During the Covid lockdown these have been helped to work from home, but they prefer to be at the Archive so they can see and handle the precious documents.

We provide valuable work experience for these young people, supervised by Nathanael, our archivist, and we hope to raise the finance to continue this work as we return to normal.

Kate, who is now a qualified archivist, started on her journey while she was a student after she interned for us a few years ago. I thought I would share a “background” article written at the time by Becky, one of our volunteers, who has also gone on to a successful career.

“When I spoke to Kate today, she was cataloguing the Rex Wailes collection by uploading information from one of the many boxes Rex left onto the website catalogue. She is concentrating on Finnish mills Rex collected documentation and photos of and then she must catalogue the information, such as which parish and province and then eventually Kate will scan photos on the website.

“Rex wrote a few articles for the Newcomen Society which is a society which celebrates the history of engineering and technology. Kate told me that it was strange reading these articles because all of the information provided by Rex has so far been very factual and precise, whereas these articles are much more personal and have more emotion than any of his other documentations, which is quite nice really because after all, Rex was passionate about mills and it’s good to see that passion come across not only in the vast amount of boxes full of his collection but also in his own words.

“Also, that is exactly what we are trying to do here at the archives through the blog! We want to bring the people of the archives to life! Kate showed me some of the postcards Rex had collected and written on and honestly, I don’t know how she can read them as Rex’s handwriting is rather difficult to decipher! However, Kate said that although it is challenging at times, most of the place names are written in capitals so luckily she can read them easily.”

As Becky explained, the Mills Archive is always aiming to capture and share the passion people have for mills and milling.



Mildred and Nathanael introducing Kate to one item in the Rex Wailes Collection



Kate's scan of a skeleton mill for making roof shingles mill in Kustavi, Finland