

The Rex Wailes collection arrives at the Archive

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK

Milling and Grain talks to the Mills Archive trust about the very important transfer of an internationally recognised archive on wind-, water- and steam-driven flour mills, from the UK's Science Museum to the Mills Archive Trust in Reading, UK

Compiled by Englishman Rex Wailes throughout the 20th Century, It's a major collection that will be open to the public and attract millers and others who are interested in our milling history from all around the world. Milling and Grain, is supporting the collection and has the honour of having the room in which the collection is to be housed named after its title - The Milling and Grain Room.

July 23rd, 2019 was a momentous day for the Mills Archive. After long negotiations, the Science Museum released the Rex Wailes Collection, which had been held in their offsite store for more than 30 years, never to see the light of day. It is now in our care and thanks to support from Perendale Publishers, the collection is housed in the "Milling & Grain Room" at our quarters.

There was great excitement as the collection arrived, although Nathanael, our Archivist, now has his work cut out to go through and list more than 40 boxes of photos, glass plates, correspondence, diary entries plus many large technical drawings. Rex passed away in 1986, having amassed a wealth of material that captures how milling evolved during the early 20th century. Personally, having met Rex and talked about the mills on Anglesey, I was quite moved to see his life's work arrive.

His biography is on our web site, written by Nathanael, and here is the quote from Rex on how he started his life-time passion and work with windmills.

"One day, while I was photographing the big six-sailed tower mill at Coleby Heath, now demolished on account of the nearby aerodrome, the miller asked me if I would like to have a look inside.

"He showed me over from bottom to top and we finally ended up just under the fantail, looking out over a stretch of country that is said to have been settled by the ex-service men of Roman times. Here in the mechanism of the mill was part of the history of mechanical engineering in the solid; just the thing to whet the appetite of a budding engineer with a taste for the historical side of the profession. Since that day I have tried to look inside every mill I have come across, both at home and abroad."

Receiving the collection is just the beginning of the work; every item has to be looked at and listed, along with special treatment for the many glass plates and damaged





drawings. Conservation is just part of the work needed before we can make the collection available for people to come and see.

Rex travelled the world looking at mills and writing them up, so it makes it a very international archive as you will see from the continuing story.

I look forward to writing about this collection in future articles, and providing you with a fascinating glimpse into this mill stalwart's work. Rex himself aptly wrote articles for 'Milling – the predecessor of this current magazine - which I will be writing about in these articles.



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