

## Messrs Thomas Robinson & Son Ltd of Rochdale

### Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK



**An article in *The Miller* (February 2nd, 1903) reminded me to pay tribute to Robinson & Son as one of the milling pioneers who help transform milling from the use of millstones to the use of rollers.**

The firm was originally founded by Thomas Robinson, the grandfather of the members of the firm in 1903. He was a man with strong business instincts and started his business with a sawmill in Water Street, Rochdale, around 1840, at a time when very few wood working tools had been brought out.

His son, John Robinson, inherited his father's business ability and a strong inventive nature. He paid careful attention to the machines being used in his father's sawmill, studying their points and defects. Very quickly he designed some greatly improved machines for wood working, some of which amounted to new inventions.

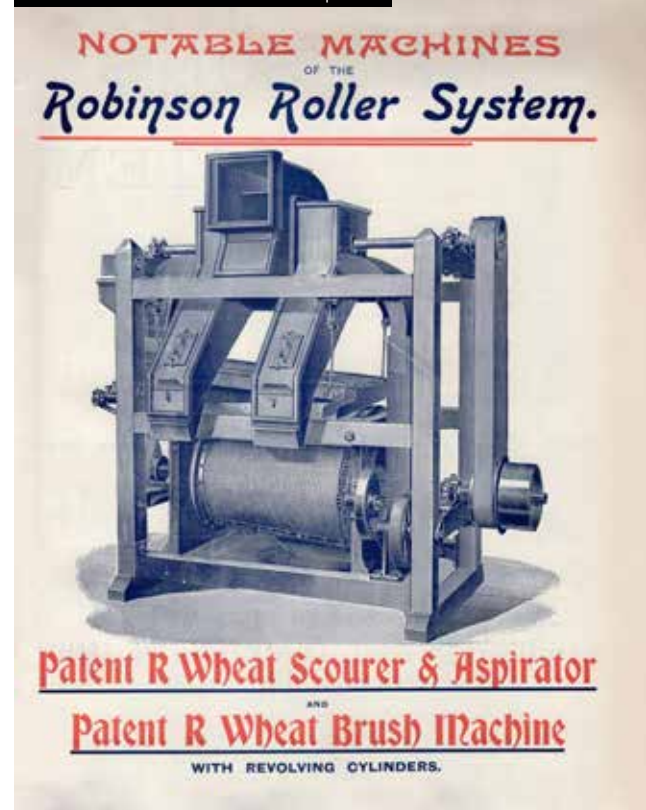
When they were put to work and found to be successful, the firm began to manufacture for the market as well as for themselves. This new branch of business increased very rapidly and about 1854 it became absolutely necessary to seek new premises affording more accommodation.

John Robinson was a far-sighted man, with a firm confidence that the business would ultimately become a great success, and he secured as a site for the new works, some land closely adjacent to the railway station in Rochdale.

He then built very extensive premises accommodating a sawmill and fitting shops. After that the business of making wood working machinery never looked back and they started to manufacture of every kind of machinery required in roller milling, building this into the main feature in the history of the firm. In 1862, Robinsons exhibited at the Great Exhibition in

London. Eight years later the grandson of the founder entered the firm and by the time his father died in 1877 he had seen the Railway Works placed on a permanent basis. In 1890, Messrs

Robinson's Wheat Scourer and Aspirator

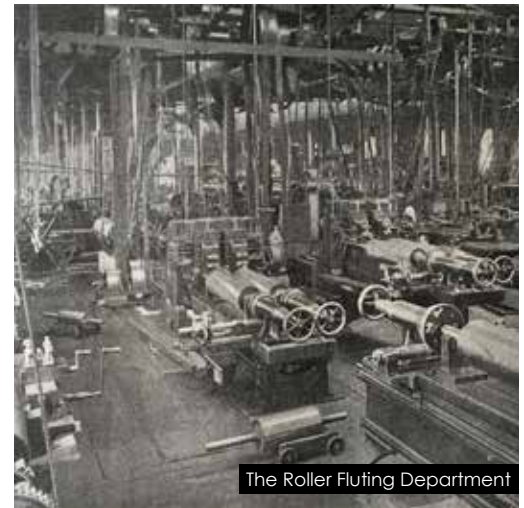




The Roller Mill Erecting Department



The Purifier Department



The Roller Fluting Department

Thomas Robinson and Sons became a private limited liability company.

The company depended upon nobody and made both their own tools and machinery. In the layout of the premises, the nearest to the railway was the sawmill and joinery works. Here almost every kind of wood working machine could be seen; doors, windows and all kinds of woodwork being manufactured from the log.

The timber from the log was first sawn on a large double horizontal saw frame, working with two saws carried in two light working frames with a horizontal reciprocating motion. They were driven at a high speed from a double throw crank, the centres of which were opposite, so that the motion of the one saw balanced the other. The saws cut in both directions at their stroke, so that the feel of the timber was continuous, and the machine was able to turn out a large quantity of excellent quality work.

Next to be seen was their newest pattern of roller mill. It was

greatly improved with all the corners rounded off and looking very attractive. A new feed arrangement with two feed rolls had never been seen before. The adjustment gear of the roll proper was a very ingenious affair, and the reviewer insisted that it really had to be seen to be fully appreciated.

Everything about the new machine was movable, any part could be lifted away in a moment and the lubrication system was first class. The roll casings were lined throughout with wood and the Robinson's roll was regarded as a marvel of accuracy, capacity and finish.

There was also a new whizzer with ingenious spider lifting beaters, unlike anything else seen on the market at the time. It was a remarkably clean machine and developed its own air current which wiped the wheat clean and dry besides giving just so much frictional action and movement to the wheat as to make it fit for immediate grinding.



Rolls could be seen in every stage of manufacture and finish, and every detail was attended to before the smallest order was allowed to leave the works. During the visit there was a line of massive 30-inch break rolls ready ordered and almost fit for delivery.

There was the roll boring machine which bored both ends at once. It had six tools at each end, so arranged that each

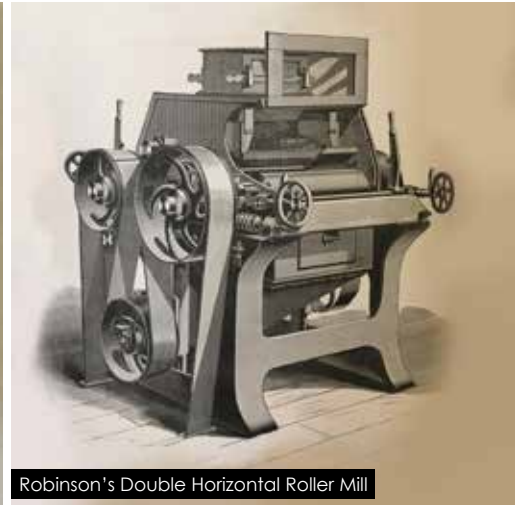
tool was a little in advance of the other, so that when the complete set had gone through once that finished the job. In the roll fitting shop there was a compressed air lift, which could accommodate everything and move it where needed.

In the shop the shells were received from the foundry, roughly turned and cut to the exact length and sent to the boring machine mentioned earlier. After that the spindles were pressed in by hydraulic pressure. Following on the process, the roll under operation went to the first grinding machine and two-and-a-quarter hours afterwards, it underwent the process again.

There was a massive electric crane in the erecting shop, with all kinds of machinery, silo columns, rope driving wheels, engine beds and cranks, lathes, and a score of other things. In an



Robinson's Patent Vertical Wheat Whizzer



Robinson's Double Horizontal Roller Mill

adjoining room were conditioners and dryers, a large room was also devoted to fitting up centrifugals, the finish and beauty of these was said to be “proverbial”. The article concluded: “Long may our country rejoice in such sons and long may all those sons flourish”!

The holdings at the Mills Archive mean that I can only provide geographical and historical snapshots. If you would like to know more please email me at [mills@millsarchive.org](mailto:mills@millsarchive.org)



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