

# The mills of La Mancha

by Nathanael Hodge, Mills Archive trust

In Rex Wailes' collection are some notes from his visit to Spain (in perhaps the 1950s/60s) when he toured the mills of La Mancha, famous for their appearance in Don Quixote. He wrote:

La Mancha is a flat brown richly cultivated plain south of Madrid, intersected by long straight roads almost treeless, without rivers, and stretching as far as the eye can see. The country folk live in small white villages and towns and go out to work on donkeys or mules in blue smocks and berets every day of the week.

At occasional intervals are outcrops of rock rising to perhaps 100 feet above the general level of the plain, and should there happen to be a town or village at the bottom one finds windmills on the top, a few still at work, but the majority derelict. Such is the mill which is supposed to be the scene of Don Quixote's famous exploit; it stands above Villa Cañas and is called "El Gallo" (The Cock).

Further south at Campo de Criptana is the biggest group of mills; here are four at work and as many are derelict, perched up above the white-washed town on the usual rock, which seems to be common land. They appear to be precisely similar to all others that we saw in La Mancha, only small details varying.

Two mills standing next to each other were examined, one called "El Infanta" (The Princess) was built in 1780, the other called "Burlleta" (Wind Stopper) was built in 1889. The tower (castillejo) is of local stone with plaster inside, whitewashed inside and out, and with its stone floors is a model of cleanliness.

These towers are about 17ft diameter inside. The cap (caperuza) is conical and is turned by means of a tail-pole (gobierno); a winch

At the same time the wind rising, the mill-sails began to move, which, when Don Quixote spied, "Base miscreants," cried he, "though you move your arms more than the giant Briareus, you shall pay for your arrogance," Don Quixote



(borriquillo – little donkey) is used to haul round the tail pole.

Grain is carried up to the hopper (tolva) in plated straw baskets about the size and shape of a carpenter's tool bag. The tower contains two floors and a mezzanine floor and communication is by a single stone flight of stairs. The ground floor contains only the meal and spout and sacks and is lighted by the doorway. Twelve small windows in the wall light the top floor, which, besides the millstones, contains a modern sifter driven by a belt.

It is an interesting speculation as to how the mills evolved. They may conceivably be descended from those of France, but as yet no one has given us a convincing theory as to their origin.