

Messrs. Cannon and Gaze's Mills Erith, Kent

Milling journals of the past at The Mills Archive

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive, UK



The election of Mr Stephen Cannon as President of the National Association of British and Irish Millers in 1903 occasioned two extensive articles in *Milling* that year: A biography on April 18 and a description of his Erith mills on June 6. The mills were visited as part of the nabim annual meeting that year.

The account of the visit opened, "On arriving at Erith, these mills were easy to find, because they formed an important object in the line of sight, riverwards, as we alighted from the train. They come within the category of port mills, for they are on the banks of the Thames and have berths for 10, 250-ton barges alongside."

The Cannon family at Erith Mills had been millers in Kent for nearly 150 years, going back to the 1750s. When the roller mill system started to come into vogue in the 1860s, Mr Stephen Cannon was one of the largest owners of millstone flour mills in Kent. In 1881 Mr Cannon took Mr JT Gaze into partnership in the Erith Mills and carried on his other three mills with 17 pairs of stones on his own account. The partnership prospered and in 1892 the businesses of the four mills were amalgamated into a family limited Company, under the name of Cannon and Gaze Limited. A new building was erected at Erith, installed with an up to date roller plant by T Robinson & Son, and the business of the four

mills was concentrated there. The stone plants at the other mills belonging to the firm were either employed on provender milling or relinquished.

Although the Cannon family milling career goes back to the latter part of the 18th century, it began in Earnest at the beginning of the 19th Century. In 1801 Stephen Cannon's grandfather, also called Stephen, was born at South Darenth Mills Kent. These mills were on the River Darenth and were driven by waterpower. The machinery consisted of three pairs of stones with a bolting mill for dressing the flour. Based on this simple outfit a lucrative trade had been established and the foundation laid for a family of successful millers.

The Grandfather had three sons, William, George and Stephen. All learned the milling trade and continued on to neighbouring mills. William, the eldest son, took on a five-pair watermill at Sutton, and another at Hone, which had two waterwheels. George, the second son, took a four-pair watermill at Horton Kirby. The youngest son, Stephen, the father of the new president, had a very humble start in life. His capital was just £8, the savings of his youth, together with a present from his father of five quarters of tailings wheat. This he ground at his father's mill and the resulting flour, about five sacks, and the offals, were sold marking the first investment in the large business subsequently carried on at Erith and Bexley. In 1839 he had taken on the mills at Bexley with four pairs of stones driven by water and in 1846 he bought Horton Kirby mills, which his brother had



Old style delivery



New style delivery

been working, bringing his milling power up to eight pairs of stones.

Grandson Stephen, was born in 1836 and was the only son in the family to continue in the milling trade, although his brother, Alfred, went into paper milling, having the mill at Sandford on the Thames near Oxford. Stephen, once his father had died, sold the Horton Kirby Mills and continued at Bexley. A new steam mill



Mr Stephen Cannon nabim
President-elect, 1903

with four pair of stones was added and then the Erith mills were bought, bringing the milling power up to 13 pairs of stones. In 1881 three more pairs were added and in 1882 a four-pair mill at Hall Place on the River Cray was taken.

The Erith mills, described in detail in Milling, were located between the main street and the River Thames. The offices and the powerhouse flanked the street and a large mill yard separated them from the mill and silo which were both adjacent to the river. The premises were built over various periods but had a harmonious appearance; the architecture was described as neat and calculated to suit the business. The engine was placed in the centre of the main building, a compound tandem type built by a Lancashire firm. Steam was also provided by Lancashire boilers which offered the most economic coal consumption. The main drive from the engine was by fly wheel with cotton ropes, six driving the roller shafts, four the machinery on the purifying and dressing floors and six the



screen house, provender mill and large elevator. There was also an auxiliary engine for driving the dynamo for lighting the whole of the premises by electric light.

The section with the roller mill plant was between the warehouse and the cleaning house, the silo granary being at the end of the range. On the roller floor were two lines of Robinson double roller mills, arranged lengthwise, the five breaks being carried out on six double mills and the reductions on eleven double sets. The first break rolls were fed by "Moir" feeders. There was also a neat arrangement for storing fresh cut rolls without taking up too much space.

On the second floor there were a full line of "Koh-i-N'or" purifiers with an improvement by Stephen's son Herbert of a hood over the sieves, which was portable, so the top of the sieve could be brushed while in motion. The next floor contained three purifiers, four rotary sieves acting as scalpers, four grading sieves and an "Avery"

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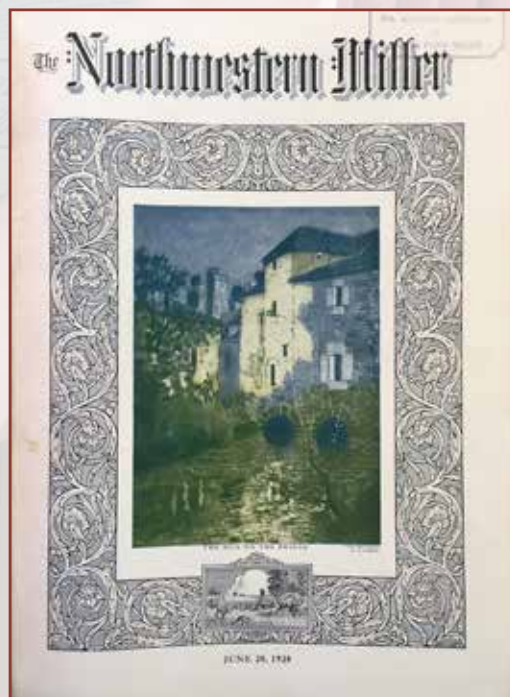
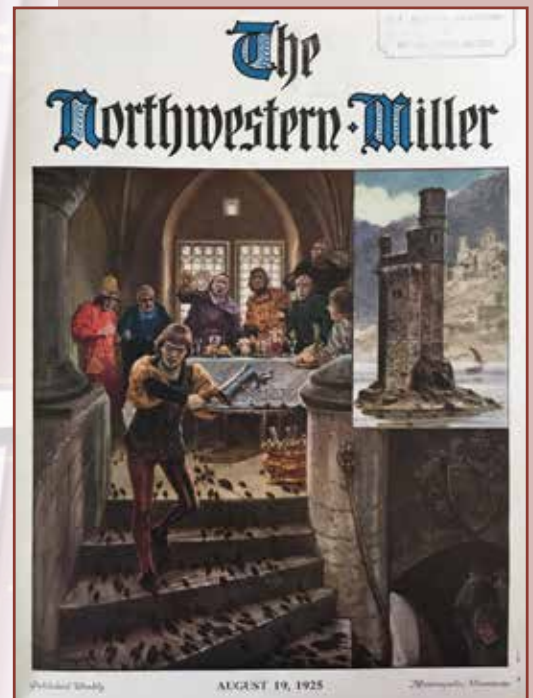
For well over 100 years milling technology has been global with many magazines serving or having served our industry from flour and food to feed and oilseed processing and now to fish feeds.

A most recent contribution to the Trust's collection is a complete century of past edition of the now out-of-print 'North-Western Miller' from the United States.

We are proud to present here, front cover illustrations from this valued and long-serving publication as a visual reminder of the importance contribution past magazines provided to our industry.



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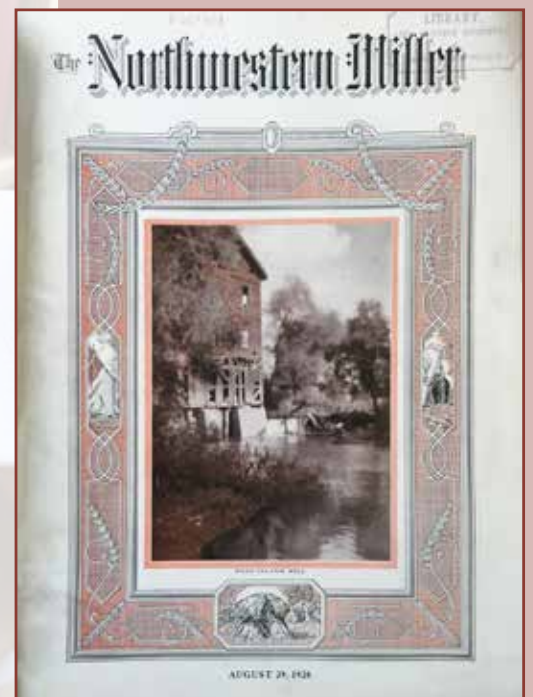


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automatic scale, which passed 100lb loads to the break plant.

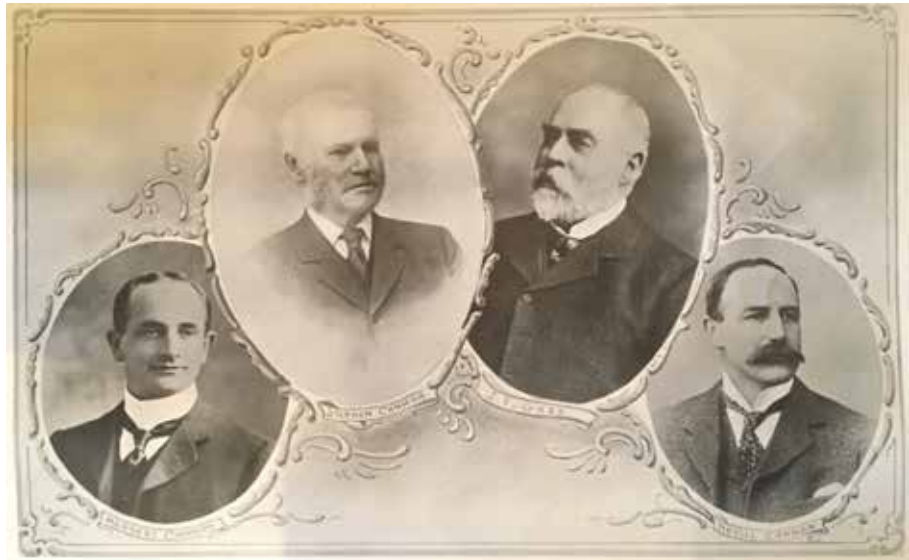
The top floor contained all the dusting and dressing machinery, with 21 centrifugals and three reels. All except six of the former were 27-inch diameter and made by Robinson. The system of purifying the break stock appeared to work well. The plant was able to grind either hard or mild mixtures, with additional roll and silk surfaces being coupled up to the system when the latter was being ground.

The cleaning house was fitted with a complete cleaning set, washer, whizzer, dryer, cylinders and scourer, as well as all the minor adjuncts such as separators, dust collectors, graders etc. Nearly all

the wheats were washed and conditioned, and when the hard sorts reach the mill they were nearly as mild in structure as the English sorts. The silo granary had a complete set of Robinson wheat mixers. And a barge elevator could lift 30 tons per hour.

The provender mill had five pairs of stones and was driven by the main engine. Stabling was provided for 30 horses, but the firm also used two five-ton steam motor wagons, one by Messrs Mann of Hunslet, Leeds, the other by a southern firm. The whole of the premises were protected from fire by "Grinnell" sprinklers, the pressure for which was provided from a tank on the tower as shown in the illustrations.

The firm also at the time ran a large country water mill at Bexley, where the provender trade was carried on. A number of horses



were also stabled there for work at both mills and a blacksmith's forge was kept busy in shoeing work. The Bexley mill was finally sold in 1946 by Stephen's grandsons and daughters as was the Erith mills and sadly, on May 20, 1966, one of the most beautiful buildings in Kent was totally destroyed by fire.

The geographical and historical spread of our holdings at the Mills Archive mean that I can only provide snapshots; if you would like to know more please email me at mills@millsarchive.org.

