

# The Rex Wailes Collection

## French windmills

by Amanda Knight, Volunteer, Rex Wailes Collection, Mills Archive, UK

A quest to begin a new career as an Archivist led me to seek some hands-on experience at an accredited archive before embarking on the recommended qualifications; and who better to ask than the Mills Archive?

Happily, running true to form as a recipient of the prestigious Queens Award for Voluntary Service, the team at the Mills Archive kindly welcomed me aboard as a volunteer in September 2021 and since then I have spent much of my time in digitising and cataloguing images from the Rex Wailes Collection.

Rex Wailes' extensive collection of images of French windmills arrived on my desk in a small, unassuming but weighty, cardboard box. Inside were 52 neatly labelled envelopes containing a vast array of prints, negatives, drawings and postcards of more than 50 French windmills.

Most of these seem to have been taken by Wailes himself on trips to France in 1928, 1938 and 1950. The principal regions covered are in Northern France (Finistère, Pas-de-Calais, Nord), the southern-most windmill featured being the Moulin de Rochoux at Bouée, Loire-Atlantique.

The Collection features many superb images of both the exteriors and interiors of post mills, tower mills, drainage and smock mills and it is difficult for me to pick out one particularly beautiful mill or interesting approach to their construction or operation over any other.

However, certain details seemed to stand out to Mr Wailes; the Archimedian screws deployed in the area's drainage mills feature heavily as do the cap and sails of the small tower mills in the Finistère region.

Another striking aspect of the Collection stems from Rex Wailes' trip to France in August 1950 where firm friendships were struck between Mr Wailes and his wife, Enid, and two French-Flanders milling families - the Vercruyce family at Moulin du Nord post mill at Hondschoote, Nord, and the family of Abel and Lucie Deschodt whose post mill was at Wormhout, Nord.

Warm-hearted Christmas cards from the Deschodt family continued to be sent to Rex and Enid Wailes throughout the 1950s. The last featured in the Collection remarked, "the sails still turn." This was in December 1959 but sadly, the mill ceased the production of flour just four years later, with Mr Deschodt gifting the mill to the municipality of Wormhout just one year before his death in 1967.

The mill has since been restored and is open to visitors.

There seems to be a tendency in these parts of Northern France to name the mill after the resident miller. For example, Moulin Deschodt was formerly known as Moulin Briarde.

This nomenclature may make locating them for the purposes of indexing slightly challenging, particularly where the mills in question have since been demolished. But surely the most intriguingly named must be the Moulin De l'Ingratitude, a seemingly innocuous looking post mill at Boeschepe, Nord but with a tale perhaps worth investigating!



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