Windmills of Finland

by Nathanael Hodge, Rex Wailes Collection, Mills Archive, UK

Rex Wailes' love of windmills led him to travel extensively through many countries, recording the varieties of mill he found. His journeys across Finland led to him amassing over 1200 photographs of Finnish windmills. The main types of windmills common in Finland were similar to those in other countries but with a few variations.

Varvasmylly

Varvasmylly – 'toe mill'

The varvasmylly or 'toe mill' is the Finnish name for what in England was called the 'post mill'. This is the oldest form of windmill in Europe and was very common in Finland. It consists of a mill body containing the mill stones, which rotates around an upright wooden post to face the wind. A tailpole is used to turn the mill. Finnish 'toe mills' were characterised by vertical timber panels with four equal sides and usually contained two pairs of heavy millstones.

Mamsellimylly

Shingle mills

Harakkamylly – 'magpie mill'

The harakkamylly or 'magpie mill' was similar to the 'toe mill', but with a hollow central post through which the power of the sails was transmitted into the base. This meant that the machinery and stones could be housed in the base instead of in the upper part that was turned to the wind. A long tailpole which could be moved into a horizontal or sloping position was thought to resemble the tail of a magpie, hence the name. A variant in South Bothnia was named after the kanahaukka, the northern goshawk.

Mamsellimylly – 'mademoiselle mill'

The mamsellimylly is the type of mill known in English as a 'smock mill' from its resemblance to someone wearing a smock – the Finnish mamselli is from French mademoiselle, indicating a resemblance to a woman in a dress. This mill has a fixed body almost exclusively constructed of weather-boarded timber, and a moveable cap. The caps came in many shapes and sizes but usually had a manual tailpole to turn it to the wind.

Harakkamylly

Shingle mills

Shingle mills drove saws or other woodworking machinery and were in widespread use in the 19th century when roofs were made from thin chips of wood. They could be powered by wind or water, and shingle machines could be attached to mills with millstones. Commonly they were skeleton mills, constructed without any weather-boarding on the framework.