

The Rex Wailes Collection

The collapse of Mount Ephraim Mill

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

Mount Ephraim mill was a post windmill in the village of Ash, near Canterbury in Kent. Built in 1735 in Ringleton and moved to Ash in 1818, it had a single storey wooden roundhouse and a large post made of nine pieces of timber around which the upper part of the mill turned to face the wind. It was about 36 feet high, and like other mills in Kent it had two sails which were covered with canvas to catch the wind, and two which had wooden shutters. Rex Wailes first visited the mill in April 1936 when he reported that it was over 200 years old, but in fine working order. The sails were in good repair and only needed painting. Rex recommended various other repairs, which would at the time have cost about UK £35 – something like UK £2000 today. Rex visited again in June 1950, noting that the mill was one of the most interesting in Kent. Unfortunately, by this time the mill was in much worse repair, with a lot of evidence of wood worm. Rex now estimated about UK £350 would be needed for repairs – around UK £9500 today.

Sadly, it seems Rex's recommendations were still not followed – in 1952 he visited again to inspect the sails, concluding that they should be removed and examined,



as they were likely to be suffering from wet rot. Before his visit to the mill Rex had called on the nearby Holman Bros firm of millwrights in Canterbury. Unfortunately, their millwright Bob Barber was no longer carrying out this sort of work, and their only other employee with similar training was away on military service. Rex recommended that a suitable millwright should be found to remove the sails, and that he should train up the craftsmen who assisted him so that the knowledge of how to carry out this sort of work could be passed on.

The mill still continued unrepaired, however, and in 1955 the structure collapsed when it was blown down in a storm. Rex wrote to the owner, Mrs Brockland, expressing his condolences and noting that "had my advice been followed by the various bodies, she would have been repaired five years ago, and I do not think this would have occurred." Today there is sadly no trace remaining of this historic mill, except for the images and records contained in archival collections such as those held by the Mills Archive Trust.