



“A great number of usefull books”
From a small library to a world-leading collection

by Ron Cookson, The Mills Archive Trust, UK

When we set up the Mills Archive exactly 21 years ago, we began with a small library of key publications. Today we are the proud custodians of the world’s biggest collection of books and journals covering the history of milling, where two corners of the library can only show a small sample of the Trust’s holdings.

The library is on the ground floor of a glorious 17th century house in the centre of Reading, only 30 minutes from Heathrow. Our reading rooms are attractive to visitors and provide a light and comfortable working environment for our volunteers and professional cataloguers.

This unique information resource for millers and the milling industry is freely available to the public, as well as those with a specific interest, and is complemented by our archive of several million historical records. A well-appointed reading room allows supervised access to records and special collections. It also provides visitors with opportunities to attend seminars and browse our exhibitions. Milling content ranges from old Dutch millwrighting books, such as the one Mildred is preparing for an exhibition, to the story of modern milling from Victorian times to the present day.

Our range is global, incorporating 25 languages ranging from Catalan to Welsh and we are working to make much available through our website, which already attracts 10,000 visitors a month (see millsarchive.org). Not only do we collect and look





after our history, but we also make it as widely accessible as possible. Our digital programme has already released more than 20,000 downloadable archival documents for use around the world. As we increase our focus on recent history, we are increasing the digital content in our library, already some 11 percent of our library catalogue content is digital.

Our interest in the history of milling, includes its many aspects, including changes in technology, the memories of millers and the stories of companies. But that is not all; we are keen to capture contemporary and older material on the wider issues such as food security, health and nutrition and economics and trade. We collect material on irrigation and drainage, transport, the design, location and construction of mills as well as the industry's various raw materials and products.

Many individuals and companies have donated some 6,000 publications together with extended runs of mill-related journals. These start in 1873 with the launch of *The Miller* published in Liverpool, England and *The Northwestern Miller*, hailing from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Both weekly journals spanned 100 years and are survived by *Milling and Grain*, which recently celebrated its 130th birthday, having been born in 1891 as the journal *Milling*.

What are we aiming for?

Support from the modern milling industry and those with an interest in milling helps us to offer internships to a steady stream of young researchers. Internships of up to 3 months have enabled them to develop intriguing stories using our material. This last year, Jude, Hayden and Jake (pictured) have respectively



created virtual exhibitions on sugar and slavery, the loss of millwrighting skills and (in collaboration with UK Flour Millers) women in milling.

We have unmatched insight into how two thousand years of cereal milling have fed the world, and the crucial role milling plays today, when globally more than 30 percent of all food is wasted and yet 840 million people suffer hunger.

We aim to set out and publicise how milling has transformed our way of life since the dawn of civilisation, how it has driven the development and growth of society and is now fundamental to progress and the improvement of health and nutrition. We will build the stories of the pioneers who changed the world, companies, visionaries and practical people, their struggles, challenges, and successes.

We focus on the contemporary relevance of mills depicting

the changes that have been made and their impact on humanity's hopes for the years ahead. We bring together themes such as "better technology, better planet" and "feeding the world" designed to resonate with different sections of today's public. Each theme embraces a thread of narratives, developing aspects of milling history:

"No other single thread of development can be followed so continuously throughout history, nor any which bears so constant a cause and effect relation to every phase of our progress in civilization." Stork and Teague's "Flour for Man's Bread" (1952)

Mind the Gap!

By recording and publishing the work of the current generation and its predecessors we aim to ensure that the role of milling and all its contributors are understood, valued and recognised as integral to people's histories and lives today. Our



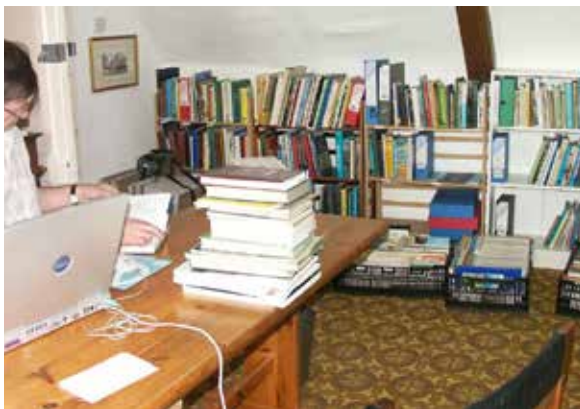


stories of these hidden heroes demonstrate to the public and decision makers around the world that milling, one of the main engines of growth for society, still has a major contribution to make.

Are there books, catalogues or journals on your bookshelves that you no longer need? If so, please consider donating them to us. We have many gaps to fill in our collections, particularly from the 19th and 20th centuries.

Two recent donations show how you could help develop this resource for future generations. We were bequeathed a rare diary from the staff of the First World War hospital trains which ran from the front line to the Channel ports, and this came to life once we could unite it with a later gift of two plaques from those trains, signifying the support of UK Flour Millers for some of the carriages in those wartime mobile hospitals.

We need not only books on the milling process itself and those involved with it, but we are also keen to develop our holdings on the raw material and the finished product. Think “from field to fork”! A good example is the donation from Robert Morton. He gave us many items relating to Hovis and the careers of John Figgins Morton and his family. JF Morgan (1872-1958) was managing director of Hovis and his biography and papers are now safe and added to the developing story of milling history.



Today's history

The first two decades of the 21st century have seen many important changes in milling and some that are short-lived and vanish. It is vital that you help us capture those fleeting moments as well ensure we fill in the story about the enduring successes. The more contemporary material you can donate (physical or digital) the better we can convince the public of today and tomorrow of the importance of mills, milling and millers.

