

# The Rex Wailes Collection

## *The Power of the Press: How it changed our landscape (with some help from Rex Wailes)*

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills  
Archive Trust, UK

I wrote in the June issue of *Milling and Grain* that Rex on his return from the USA “discovered an article in the *Daily Mail* on June 17th, 1929 entitled ‘Our Vanishing Windmills: How you can help save them’. This was to change his life and that of many others.”

A hundred years ago, Spanish Flu had infected one third of the world’s population and killed 50 million people, more than the recently ended First World War. These two disasters had killed off or incapacitated a disproportionately large number of working-class men. The social impact of this twin cataclysm has been well-documented from the loss of great poets to the gradual empowerment of women. What can easily be forgotten was the impact on small mills, particularly in rural areas. During the War these, mainly small family businesses, survived with the help of the elderly and the female members of the family and the local community. However, ten years later a lost generation of would-be millers and the increasing needs for repairs meant that many traditional mills had ceased working and were vanishing from England’s picturesque landscape. The *Daily Mail* appeal prompted a national upsurge in interest in windmills and the work of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB).

Rex’s collection includes his copy of the original appeal and a carbon copy of his letter a fortnight later offering to help the SPAB. Ten years later The Hertfordshire and Essex Observer

*This is  
what  
started  
it!*



## OUR VANISHING WINDMILLS.

HOW YOU CAN HELP  
TO SAVE THEM.

KEEPING ENGLAND  
PICTURESQUE.

Lovers of the picturesque old windmills which are rapidly disappearing from the countryside are given the opportunity of helping to save them.

An official of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings told a *Daily Mail* reporter on Saturday:

Unless some action is taken we shall soon be without windmills. The beautiful specimen at Rottingdean, Sussex, has been bought by the parish, after this organisation had been consulted. Another one that has been made safe for the future is a very fine specimen at Reigate Heath, Surrey.

Unfortunately it is possible for a remote windmill to be pulled down before anyone in London or any keen local antiquarian hears anything about it. If anyone hears that a windmill is in danger he should make it known to local people interested in such things, and let us have the news of it together with a photograph.

We should be grateful for photographs of all interesting windmills still standing, whether they are in immediate danger or not.



BEMBRIDGE MILL

An effort to preserve the sole remaining Windmill  
in the Isle of Wight.



Tel. Museum 2385.

386-388, Euston Road,  
N.W.1.

16th July, 1929.

A. R. Powis, Esq.,  
20, Buckingham Street,  
W.C.2.

Dear Sir,

I have just returned from Abroad and have seen announcements in the Daily Press of last month to the effect that the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings is interesting itself in the preservation of Windmills, and wishes for information regarding old windmills which might be saved.

For some years this subject has been my special hobby and I am at the moment in the process of arranging information with a view to writing two books on the subject. I have a fair amount of information that might be of use to you, and if you could make an appointment either this week or the week after next, I might be able to be of some service to you in this matter.

Yours truly,

carried an extensive article praising Rex Wailes' work. Since 1929, the Society's newly formed Windmill Section had handled 201 cases, repairing 42 mills under Wailes' direction and fundamentally changed the public outlook. The plan to protect the windmills of Great Britain had been transformed "from the most forlorn of lost causes" to be regarded as a normal and reasonable undertaking.

Generous donations from Messrs Spillers and Joseph Rank were acknowledged as making an enormous difference and the increased help given by Local Authorities was seen as a good sign. The day after this optimistic article appeared, Britain declared war on Germany.