

Ron and Mildred hail from a part of NW England known as 'Windmill Land.' Unsurprisingly, when they moved to Reading west of London in 1968, Mildred soon found their nearest windmill at Lacey Green near High Wycombe and became active in helping to rescue what was a ruin in danger of collapse.

Nearer to home, the mediaeval watermill on the Thames at Mapledurham had just been repaired. Mildred rapidly became Britain's only female watermill, running the mill by herself for 30 years. She also rose to prominence in the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings as chairman of their Mills Section and for the last decade a trustee.

In 2001 they identified the need for a specialist archive and library to look after images and documents relating to the history of milling. Ron, recently retired from the pharmaceutical industry, volunteered to set this up as an independent charity. The Trust, started with just Mildred's collection, is now caring for some four million items from 270 collections. Ron was honoured MBE by the Queen in 2010, but their proudest moments were the Archive's award of National Accreditation in 2016 and its recent Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

Mildred and Ron Cookson, welcome. I understand Mildred that you initiated the setting up of the Mills Archive Trust in the UK. Can you tell us a little about that?

Mildred: Back in 2001 I was worried that there was no depository at all for a collection of milling materials I had going back many years. We talked to others about this and we realised that there was nothing in the UK capable of looking after historic milling documents and items properly so we decided in 2002 to set up the Mills Archive Trust. It started from home before moving to Wallington House in Reading. Traveling to many countries as a traditional miller I saw roller mills and it made me realise that things had evolved and nothing had been done about recording this transition. There is nowhere in the whole world doing what we are doing here in the UK today, gathering information on milling technology and milling people. It's been wonderful. We now have over 400 collections and more than four million images and other items.

Ron, from Mildred's vision about evolution in milling, how important is the international aspect of milling to the Mills Archive Trust?

Ron: It's stunning how we are attracting international attention. From a family problem to a national issue, we had then realised that there is a lot of international material that had no home. A lot of people seem to think the history of milling stopped around 1900 with windmills and water mills. Here, there are two fundamental issues; one being contemporary relevance. History is about today not what happened 200 or 2000 years ago. The other is that milling is not just British, while we are based in Britain we have a website that in an average year is attracting well over 200,000 new visitors and they are coming from 150 countries. The Archive is very interested in recording the international development of milling.

How important to the Archive is the individual in terms of recorded history?

Ron: One of the things that helps us do so well is the telling of stories about people. Underneath it all we can stimulate interest around the people involved in milling, the problems they had to face and how they overcame them and what impact that had.

We know the Milling Hall of Fame, and we have been developing our own recognition of individuals which we are calling 'Hidden Heros'. We are looking for stories about people who are hidden away and people who have been forgotten, but who may have made major contributions to milling.

Would you be able to point to an example of such a person?

Ron: This book I came across is amazing. It's 'Seeing for Yourself' by E. Cora Hind. She comes from Canada, born 1861 and passed away in 1944 or 1945. As a woman in Canada at that time men had all the power and influence, but she became an authority on the yield of grains - around the world. Within a space of 10 years, before the Second World War, she became the Canadian national authority on grain yields. When she died the Winnipeg Grain Exchange had a two-minute silence in her honour. It's magical that this one woman was able to do so much. Just telling that story gets you thinking about a subject that you might not have thought about before.

Moving on to the Milling Hall of Fame. Our magazine introduced the idea (it was my colleague James Taylor in our office who originally suggested it) and with the support of Mühlenchemie set up the physical Hall. Following our first inductee last year we are making a second presentation on March 20 which is World Flour Day to this year's inductee. Would the Mills Archive Trust keep a record for prosperity of those who are inducted into the Milling Hall of Fame?

Mildred: We would be delighted too. We already have the Milling and Grain Room which is housing the Rex Wails Collection.

Ron: We are doing the similar things, we are preaching about the value of people contributing to milling and feeding the world and addressing the whole set of issues that go with that. This has the opportunity to say thank you to certain people during their lifetime. We would be very happy to keep records of everything you give us and persevere it prosperity. We are not doing this for this year and next year but for the next generation and the one after that, by recording stories now which may be relevant to those in 2080 and beyond.

Are people and industry outside the UK important to the UK's Mills Archive? Should we be asking them to consider forwarding collections to your Archive.

Ron: Absolutely. In fact one of the first collections we received was from an ex-pat who had gone to the United States and found there was no place for his work as a millwright and would we take his work. That was 15 or so years ago. Of course, it's about American mills but the material is easy to make available as we are all digitally connected. We have all the records in properly stored but we can use copies and make them available digitally. Our investment

is on the digital side in making these materials available to as many people as possible.

Mildred: That's what has happened with the Rex Wails collection. He travelled widely. In Finland he took hundreds of photographs and the Finnish Government were over the moon when they saw what we had done with them. We are connecting people around the world all the time.

Finally, you are a registered charity, you are a recognised and authorised archive in the UK and you're looking for support outside the UK. Is that a fair observations?

Ron: We are looking for international support now. For example, we have one of the best collections on Islamic mills in the world as one of our trustees was a specialist in that part of the world. Our outlook is international and our products are as well.

Thank you very much for organising the support of the Mills Archive Trust for the Milling Hall of Fame.

