

The Rex Wailes Collection

An Artistic Collaboration Part 2

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I mentioned in last month's article in *Milling and Grain*, how the sad loss of war artist Thomas Hennell towards the end of the Second World War threw plans for Rex's book "The English Windmill" into disarray.

Built on over 30 years of careful recording of windmills throughout England, this seminal book was destined to influence National and Local Government and become the bible for windmill researchers and enthusiasts for the second half of the 20th century.

Illustrations by photographer Hallam Ashley (the subject of next month's article) and artist Vincent Lines has ensured the book's enduring popularity. It is a masterpiece of technical and artistic cooperation. Wailes wrote of the artist in the preface of the book when published in 1954 that Vincent's "drawings are a delight as well as being accurate records".

Lines had been chosen for the post-war project "Recording Britain" published by the Oxford University Press (1946) to which he contributed twenty watercolours. He was a close friend of Thomas Hennell and the pair often painted together in the countryside around Hennell's home at Ridley, near Meopham in Kent.

The two majestic windmills, Sibsey Trader Mill and Saxtead Green Post Mill, that I have chosen as examples are described at length by Wailes, who emphasised their national importance. This directly resulted in both mills being protected for future generations and are now in the care of English Heritage and subjected, despite the effects of Covid-19, to major conservation work as I write.

The third, interesting example is the scoop wheel from the wind-driven drainage mill at Hickling Broad in Norfolk. The mill known as Stubb's mill, ceased working in 1947. As a class they intrigued Wailes; such wheels were capable of lifting several tons of water per minute and accounted for most of the successful reclaiming of the Fens until new technologies took over in the 20th century.

The maintenance of the surviving mills is vital and some years ago I was pleased to buy one of Vincent Lines' drawings at a charity auction where half the proceeds went to the SPAB's Mill Repair Fund.

The Mills Archive has a few copies of "The English Windmill" available to any reader prepared to make a small donation to cover post and packing. If you would like to email us at enquiries@millsarchive.org, we will operate on a first-come, first-served basis!

