The Rex Wailes Collection

An Artistic Consultant

by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive Trust, UK

Last month's piece revealed some technical correspondence in Rex's collection with engineers, millwrights and iron founders.

As he was the Technical Consultant to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB), these were largely to be expected. More intriguing are the relationships he built with artists and photographers and these will form the theme of the next few articles.

In 1949 he was approached by Karl Wood (1888-1958), an established artist, for advice on his plans to publish a book capturing in paint all the windmills in Britain.

The planned book was to be titled The Twilight of the Mills; I suspect that, like me, he was a Wagner fan. Mr Wood was art master at Gainsborough grammar school. He had his own art studio and undertook private tuition in several subjects including painting, piano and singing lessons. Painting tuition resulted in sketching bicycle tours into Lincolnshire with his pupils. His first windmill painting was in 1926 and by 1956 he had completed 1394 windmill paintings

His letter is difficult to read; a note at the end explained that his typewriter ribbon had worn out! If he had had email the request would have been clearer but we would probably not have a copy (a problem for archives in the digital world).

Fortunately, The Mills Archive has the correspondence and, in a separate collection, the 1385 pen and ink drawings Mr Wood did on site as a basis for his paintings.

Three examples are shown with this article, whilst the rest can be viewed online at: https://catalogue.millsarchive.org/karl-woodwindmill-sketches

A mill move

Amlwch Port tower mill survives on Anglesey, but Roving Molly, so named because it was moved from a site 42 miles away in 1835, was demolished in 1934. When Mr Wood wrote the letter and then sketched the remains of Warton peg mill, I was not quite five years old and lived only six miles away.

Some 20 years later, the fate of that forlorn post was instrumental in me joining the SPAB, a charity of which I am proud to be a trustee. This unique remnant had been taken into 'storage' and then lost forever.









