

The Rex Wailes Collection

No Half Measures at Palmer's

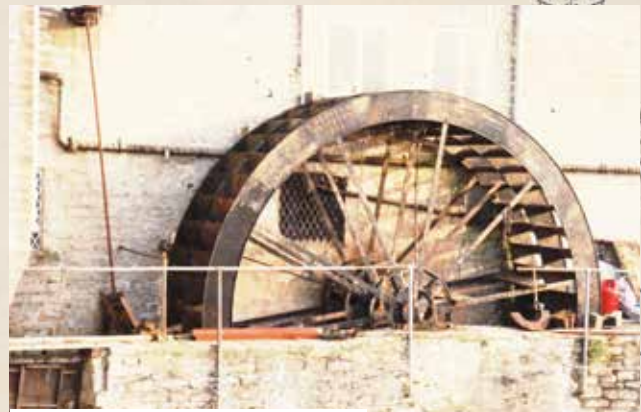
by Mildred Cookson, The Mills Archive Trust, UK

Rex, like his father, was first and foremost an engineer, but soon became the authority on wind and watermills. As an engineer he was also interested in industrial sites, such as foundries, brickworks and waterworks. One of my other interests is in breweries, so I was delighted to see that he had spent some time at Palmer's Brewery in Bridport, Dorset.

The brewery dates back to 1794 when the Dorset rope and net maker, the Gundry family, built the brewery on the banks of the River Brit. In the late 19th century, two Palmers brothers, John Cleeves and Robert Henry, bought the brewery and gave it their names: JC & RH Palmer. Today, their website points out, their great grandsons, John and Cleeves Palmer, work in the company. In all of 226 years, the mill had never ceased brewing nor the waterwheel stopped working, until March of this year. Then coronavirus called a halt to both, on the very same day that we closed the Mills Archive to visitors. When closed the brewery owners looked after their staff and tenants and they are now happily back in production. Which is great news as one of their well-regarded tours of the brewery is still on my bucket list! Amongst Rex's collection held at the Mills Archive are a series of photographs and notes recording his visit to the brewery in 1962. Rex's close friend Joseph Addison took most of the photographs, and a few illustrative examples are given here showing the waterwheel forged in Bridport by Thomas Helyer and installed in 1879. Further interior photographs show the pumping machinery used inside the brewery. Having written this article, I came across an attractive photograph taken in 1996 by my good friend Martin Bodman that shows the wheel so impressively that I just had to share it!

This vast collection contains many items of much of interest and even during the coronavirus lockdown we have been sorting and cataloguing material. There are now several thousand of Rex's items on our catalogue to inspect remotely, but it may well be 2021 before we can invite visitors to return and see the collection now housed in our "Milling and Grain Room".

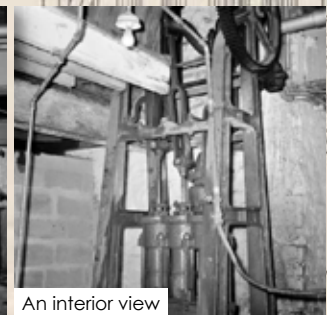
It will be well worth the visit, but unfortunately there will be no beer on offer!



Bridport Old Brewery: w-wheel of 1879



Brewing machinery



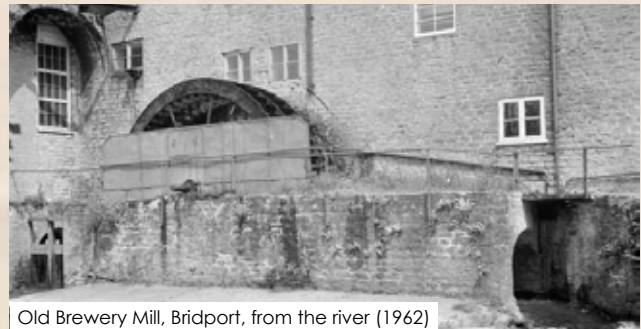
An interior view



The undershot waterwheel



View from the River Brit



Old Brewery Mill, Bridport, from the river (1962)