Mill Memories

The Newsletter of the Friends of the Mills Archive

Issue 29

Autumn 2021

Sugar and slavery ~ p. 6

More Mills, Less Zoom

Elizabeth Bartram

Hands-on handmilling experience at a recent Heritage Open Day at the Museum of English Rural Life (see p. 20).

Well, you have certainly helped to put the wind back in our sails! Since we launched our funding appeal at the start of the year, to help cover the funding gap we faced as a result of Covid-19, we have been humbled by the positive response from so many. This, in addition to the continuing essential support of the Friends of the Trust, means that things are finally starting to get back to "normal".

The first volunteer to return to the office in May was Guy Boocock, after more than a year of absence and remote volunteering. Guy has written about his experience in this issue of Mill Memories on page 4. We now have several volunteers back on site, and a new recruit! Our Archivist Nathanael continues to operate our remote volunteering programme, 'Archiving @ Home', which has attracted interest from an unexpected direction (see Nathanael's article on page 17).

In the summer we were joined by a second-year student from the University of Reading, who received funding to work on a project to consider the intersections between sugar milling and slavery in the Caribbean. Jude Reeves, who recently completed her placement, has helped to design a digital exhibition, which we're delighted to officially launch in this issue. There's more information about the project and a walk-through of the exhibition on pages 6-9.

Development Manager Jane has been busy, some of you will have spoken or corresponded with her during recent months. I don't want to steal her thunder, so you'll have to turn to page 24 to read about her recent success in securing funding to support the Trust's operations and a long-awaited project on the history of millwrighting!

We're also getting excited about 2022, which will be the Trust's 20th anniversary! We would be interested to hear from you about your views on the Trust, it would be great to hear from those of you who've been with us since the beginning! There is plenty of planning going on for our anniversary year, find out more on page 21.

Thank you for your support, interest and enthusiasm, particularly in recent months, and we hope that we'll get to see some of you (without the aid of video conferencing software!) in the near future.

Watlington House Garden Hall to be used again for booster vaccinations

Mildred Cookson

Towards the end of 2020 activity in the garden was nonstop with tents being erected, deliveries being made of vaccines. From January 2021 the vaccination hub went live. It even continued during the snow and at one point 4,000 people were vaccinated over 9 days, around 444 per day.

The vaccination centre in the garden.

Then in July this year "tent city" was taken down and the garden was revealed once more. Unfortunately we had missed all the spring flowers, from snowdrops to tulips and daffodils, but just managed to see the lilac irises. It was interesting to see where the tents had enclosed parts of the garden, the plants there grew much taller, literally reaching for the sky.

At last we thought the garden would be back to normal for the tenants to use once more and enjoy. But this was to be short-lived. We were told the Reading surgeries wished to use the garden hall again for the autumn booster vaccination. So from September for quite a few months the house is supporting 'Reading Primary Care' once more. The good side this time is that there will be no tents, and we, as tenants, can enjoy the garden, and take advantage of picking apples, pears and even grapes.

Back to Work at the Archive

Guy Boocock

When the Mills Archive had to close its doors due to Covid-19 and Lockdown 1.0 in March 2020, I was busy organising and cataloguing the Rex Wailes Collection. I was also in the middle of preparing for my final year studying BA History and my dissertation. My last day in the Archive that month was spent finding books in the library of the Welsh woollen industry which would have been my dissertation topic. When that got cancelled in April, I offered up my lockdown time for remote cataloguing to ensure that the work to preserve our milling heritage continued. It wasn't the same as being in the office, but it was satisfying nonetheless.

Having begun to fall out of my daily routines during Lockdown 1.0, and with my mind going stir crazy – there's only so much Netflix one can binge! - the remote work helped to keep some form of normality in my life. I was kept busy cataloguing engravings and billheads in the Mildred Cookson Foundation Collection which provided an aspect of my work at MAT I really enjoy, researching the locations of mills on maps. The volunteer Zoom coffee breaks once a month helped me stay connected to everyone, but I was really missing the social interaction.

In September 2020, and with the pandemic continuing to keep everyone away from the Archive, I began my Masters in Archive Administration at Aberystwyth University via distance learning. The first few months were a real challenge on me mentally. By this point I had completely fallen out of any routine in my life, something that I rely on with Autism, and I had begun to fall into a relentless cycle of idleness to the point I wasn't even going for daily walks. Not being in the archive environment proved a real challenge, more so for archive students around the country whose Masters degrees rely on being in the archive environment. As students, we tried to motivate each other during weekly Zoom catch-ups, but somehow that just wasn't enough for some of us, and we began to fall behind. I don't study well at home and having been staring at the four walls for several months, I was now fighting a losing battle with my mind trying to focus. The reopening of cafes in November was a huge relief, and improved my studying, but that was a short-lived reprieve.

March 2021, and the Archive had begun their Archiving @ Home Hub, funded by The National Archives. (see p. 17) It was a breath of fresh air in an otherwise dark time for me. However, I was still falling behind with my studying, and I'd also started to feel disconnected from the Archive. Then in May, I had a phone call from Liz asking whether I'd like to return to the office now that things were beginning to ease. My only answer, though slightly hesitantly, was yes. Hesitant because of the very little social interaction I'd had with family and friends. Mercifully, that phone call changed my mental attitude and I completed an essay that had been dragging for months the next day.

But I needn't have worried about my social anxiety. When I walked back through the doors of Watlington House 14 months later, it felt like I'd returned home. It took some getting used to for the first couple of weeks – the first day back was socially awkward amongst the old gang – but now I've got my feet back under my desk, I'm cataloguing the John Bedington Collection of Staffordshire mill material which is expanding our catalogue of images of the county, and the garden is providing some enjoyable moments during breaks.

Photos from the John Bedington collection .
Below: Whiston Mill, Penkridge.
Right: Moneymore Windmill, Weeford.
Below right: Shenstone Mill, Shenstone.

Sugar and Slavery

Elizabeth Bartram

Sugar & Slavery: Reproductive Mills is a new Mills Archive digital exhibition, launched in October 2021. This exhibition sheds light on the links between technological developments in sugar milling and enslaved women's reproductive systems, especially in the early nineteenth-century before the abolition of slavery. The exhibition uses images from the Caribbean islands from the period of slavery and beyond in order to map the transition of both women and machinery from 'disposable' to 'vital' in the eyes of enslavers.

It is written by Jude Reeves, a second year undergraduate in the Departments of History and English, with the assistance of Emily West (Department of History) and Liz Bartram (Director of the Mills Archive Trust). The student placement has been funded by the University of Reading's Undergraduate Research Opportunities (UROP) programme, with additional funds from the Garfield Weston Foundation to create the digital exhibition.

The digital exhibition is now on our website, where you can explore it by visiting millsarchive.org/exhibition/sugar-slavery

You will find four sections, which include milling innovation, enslaved women's reproduction and the situation of some of these mill sites today.

Here is a sample of the exhibition, please visit the exhibition on our website to explore in full:

1807 saw the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, making illegal the importation of enslaved Africans to British colonies in the Caribbean. This meant enslavers were now unable to purchase new people from Africa, only those already in the colonies could be traded. When it was voted upon in Parliament, the Act passed with forty-one to twenty votes in the House of Lords and one hundred and fourteen to fifteen in the House of Commons. After decades of campaigning, it was finally illegal to

Figure 1 *- Displaying the intensity of the process of producing sugar in British Antigua. Central to the image is the windmill which encloses vertical rollers through which sugar cane is being passed to extract the juice to make sugar as we recognise it. This image comes from 'Ten Views in the Island of Antigua', published 1823 by William Clark. These images are very important for telling us about the process of sugar milling, but we must be aware of the idealised version the images project.*

export human cargo across the Atlantic, although trafficking between the Caribbean islands continued until 1811.

After the 1807 Act, enslavers on British Caribbean islands faced the reality that their enslaved workers were no longer so easily replaceable. Instead, maintaining a population of enslaved people required more consideration by enslavers towards reproduction on their plantations as a means of ensuring profitability on sugar plantations. Planters desired maximum efficiency from their sugar machinery and to generate the next generation of slaves to preserve the future of their plantations. Moreover, the process of industrialisation in Great Britain and the adoption of new technological innovations on Caribbean islands meant that this prioritisation of enhancing economic efficiencies on plantations was possible in a way that had never been seen before. Overall, then, the early nineteenth century saw some changes in slaveholders' attitudes towards women's fertility as well as heightened financial investment in sugar-producing machinery upon plantations.

Figure 2 - Postcard of Maison de la Canne, Martinique. The plantation operates today as a museum that highlights the link between the sugar industry and slavery.

In the period prior to emancipation, slaveholders commonly favoured enslaved labour over machinery as the force driving efficiency on sugar plantations in the Caribbean. However, following the abolition of the international trade in enslaved people in 1807, as the region moved towards emancipation, planters began to invest more heavily in their machinery on sugar mills.

Before the 1807 Act, the major invention in the sugar industry was the introduction of the three-roller vertical mill in 1449 by Sicilian Pietro Speciale. This introduction meant that the edge runner was pushed aside because the three-roller vertical mill made it possible to squeeze more juice out of the sugar cane. An edge runner is a rudimentary style of mill, composed of a grinding stone that grinds around the edge of a circular mill. However, new vertical mills pushed the second set of rollers close together to increase the pressure upon the cane after the first pass, making it far more efficient for sugar production.

Figure 2 depicts an example of the vertical three-roller mill from Martinique. This type of mill was extremely dangerous to use because it could not be easily stopped, therefore, if an enslaved person's hand followed the sugar cane into the roller there was little to be done, apart from attempting to cut it off with a cutlass (as seen in the bottom front of the image, leaning against the base of the mill) to avoid a person's whole body being drawn into the machine. Despite the fact that this image most likely represents an idealised version of working in a sugar mill, the women have no shoes, and many enslaved people on sugar plantations experienced problems with their feet, including cuts, infections and ulcers.

Jude's reflections on the project

'I can honestly say this has been a formative experience. It has given me the opportunity to examine and share a part of history that is deeply troubling as well as immensely relevant to our lives nowadays. To join the two realms of sugar milling and Caribbean slavery has presented an important opportunity to study both areas from different directions and gain a deeper understanding.

'In terms of my personal development, I have had the chance to explore different areas and job roles in the heritage sector and it has definitely given me a lot to think about. It has further invigorated my desire to work in curatorship in the future and I cannot thank Liz and everyone else at the Archive enough for taking me under their wing and giving me this fantastic experience during possibly the most seminal period of my academic life.'

Figure 3 - Postcard showing a posed scene from the late 1800s. Although taken after slavery had been abolished, many of the people became indentured workers, whose lives were still very difficult.

We welcome your comments and feedback on this exhibition, as well as your suggestions for future exhibitions.

"Cat in the Bag"

Mildred Cookson

I doubt that many people outside the United States have ever heard the name Judson Moss Bemis or his brother Stephen, who would introduce the 'cat in the bag' image that would be the signature logo for the company.

The company of J M Bemis & Co. started out in 1858 with Judson determined to launch a permanent business enterprise of his own. He contacted his cousin Simeon Farwell, the owner of a modestly successful bag factory. This gave him the idea to enter the industry himself with St Louis as his headquarters. So at the age of 25 Judson Bemis launched J M Bemis & Company, Bag Manufacturers with an investment of $4,000.

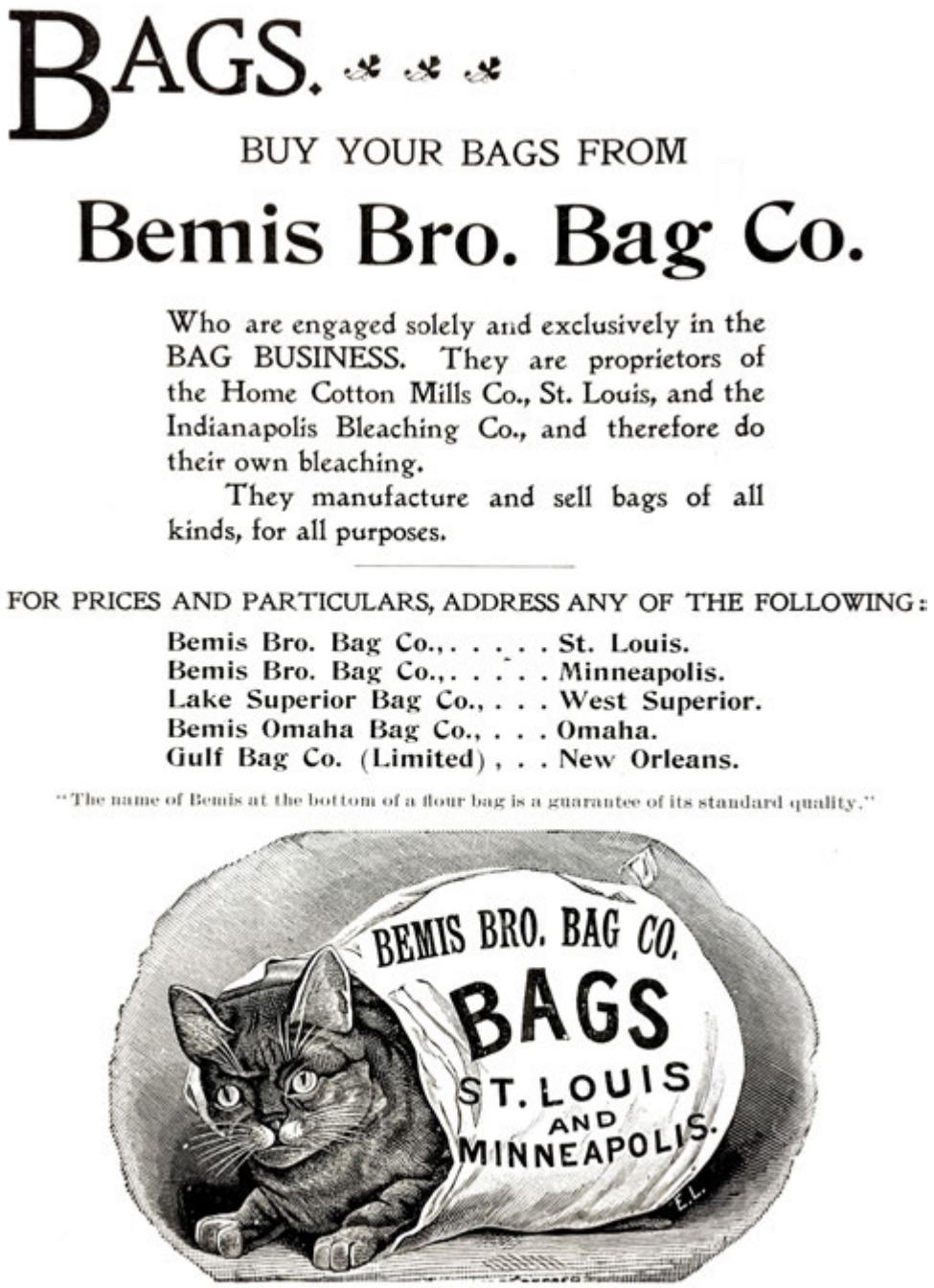
The factory he opened produced the first commercially machine sewn colour printed textile bags in the US, bags that previously had been hand sewn and hand stencilled.

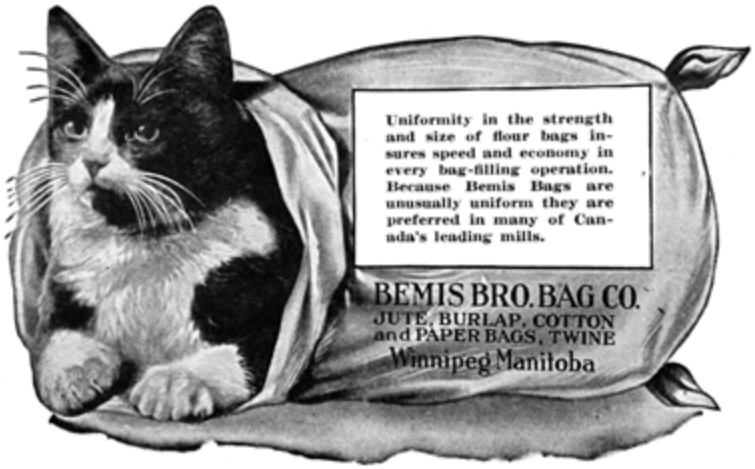
Bemis guaranteed all his bags against ripping, and soon sent circulars to most of the city's flour millers. The staff of four was soon filling orders and supplying expensive, custom printed Bemis bags which would save millers the time consuming messy task of stencilling, and also had appeal to the average consumer, long accustomed to buying flour in cumbersome wooden barrels.

The office and factory in St Louis, Missouri proved a very fortunate choice, for it had become the centre of trade for points north and south along the Mississippi river, as well as from tributary traffic from the Missouri and Illinois Rivers.

Stephen, the son of Judson Moss would take charge of the St Louis plant in 1885 and it was said that he introduced the 'cat in the bag' logo. The first cat was called 'Biddy', and was a common sight at the St Louis Bemis Bag company factory as the champion mouser. It is said that she was brought into the factory by her owner, Miss Annie Fyfe who was the lady in charge of the cotton department in 1882. One day Biddy was exploring an empty bag on the shop floor and when she emerged she struck her famous pose, which was seen by Stephen Bemis, inspiring him to use the cat as the company's trade mark.

Biddy first appeared on the advertisement for the company in the May 30th 1884 issue of the Northwestern Miller. Although the cat image changed over the years it was used for over almost 70 years until 1950.





By the early 1880's with still the one factory, Bemis were the second most successful manufacturer of flour bags and would become the number one in the world by the close of the 19th century.

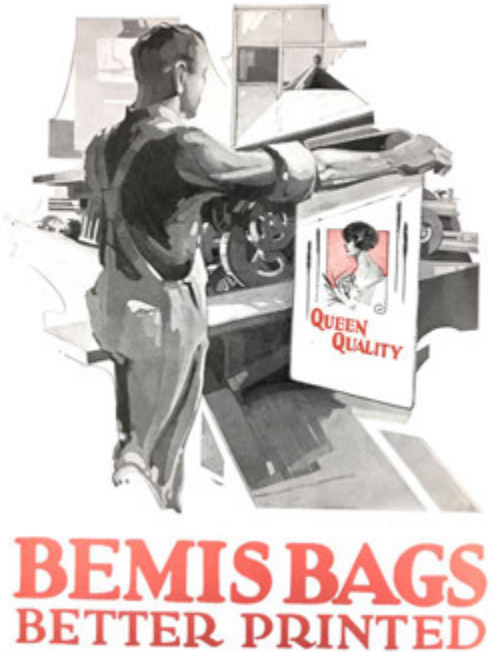
As the business grew in 1881, Bemis opened additional offices in Boston and Minneapolis. Significantly, Minneapolis would become the headquarters in modern times for the firm. The evolution in agriculture and advent of railroad networks would transform the milling trade here, which would become the 'Mill City' with the rise of Pillsbury, General Mills and others.

Further bag factories were established in Omaha 1887, New Orleans 1891, Wisconsin 1896, San Francisco 1897, Indianapolis and Memphis 1900, Kansas City 1903, Seattle 1905, and Houston and Winnipeg in 1906. In addition to this the firm began operating a bleachery in Indianapolis in 1896 for the finished bags and also opened a cotton mill near Jackson, Tennessee in 1900. The company-sponsored village that arose around the mill was eventually dubbed Bemis. In 1870 the Home Cotton Mills was established, and this would be the last acquisition by Bemis in 1902.

The company gained from its entry into the sale of raw cotton. Profits from this side-line business helped them to focus on burlap production. Firstly second-hand 'gunny' sacks were used that had shipped linseed from Calcutta, followed by original burlap sacks made from imported jute fibre.

Burlap, known as hessian in the UK, is a dense woven fabric created from jute, sissal or hemp, a coarse stranded yet eco friendly thread. Burlap is a strong, versatile material that is cheap yet robust and easy to work. It was first imported from India around the beginning of the 19th Century and used in packaging. Gunny sacks were also made from hessian.

By 1900 Bemis Bro. Bag Company was operating eight textile bag factories across the US, making burlap and cotton bags for grain, flour, feed and other products. They also ran two cotton mills and became the world's largest importer of burlap from India. In 1913, they built a paper mill in Peoria, Illinois, expanding to take in paper products.



In 1921 Judson Moss Bemis passed away and was succeeded first by his son, Albert Farwell Bemis, then by his nephew J S Bemis and later his grandson F G Bemis.

Bemis still continued producing cotton and burlap bags into the 1950s and 60s, but they were putting more emphasis on paper products.

In 1964 the name changed again from Bemis Bros. Bag Co to the Bemis Company Inc. and sadly this was the year in which the 'cat in the bag' ceased to be used. The new logo would be a "b" shaped bar with the oval still in use today.

1980 saw the selling off of their textile mills, and in 1990's the purchase of Milprint and Princeton Packaging confirmed them as the No.1 in bread packaging. The Bemis cotton mill at Jackson Tennessee was demolished on Monday July 31st 2017.

Bemis transferred its superiority in the milling industry into success in the complex food markets of today where it continues to be a major producer of flexible packaging.

The adverts shown here are reproduced from the Northwestern Miller journal. The Mills Archive holds the most complete set of the Northwestern Miller, from 1897 to 1973 with just a few issues missing.

Mills in Ukrainian Art

Nataliya Vine

While working on our cataloguing database a couple of years ago, I came across a fascinating article in *International Molinology* (issue 94, June 2017) about mills in Ukrainian art, which is close to my heritage. It was written by Viktoriya Katsay (Kharkiv, Ukraine), chief curator of the collection of Kharkiv Art Museum and Olena Krushynska (Kyiv, Ukraine), independent researcher of wooden architecture and TIMS member. Here is only a glimpse of the '*Windmill motifs in the paintings of Ukrainian artists of the mid-19th to early 20th centuries*'. I hope you find it interesting.

Above: "Catherine" (1842) by Taras Shevchenko, a prominent Ukrainian poet, writer, artist, folklorist and painter. It depicts a Ukrainian girl who fell in love with a Russian soldier (shown beneath the mill departing for distant lands).

Windmills first appeared in Ukraine in the 18th-19th centuries, and by the later 19th century some towns and villages had as many as fifty. They were built on the highest points in the fields between the village and the forest. In Ukrainian folklore, a windmill at a crossroads was believed to contain strong magical powers and women would visit windmills to carry out fortune telling. Small pieces of windmill sails were added to medicine. People met at windmills to sing, talk and play games.

Right: Another well-known Shevchenko composition, "A fairytale" (1844) based on the popular folklore story about the conversation between a soldier and Death, showing a typical Ukrainian wooden windmill with thatched roof.

Above: Windmills by Serhiy Vasylkivskiy. Below: ""The watermill" by Ivan Trush.

In the 1930s under the Soviet regime mills came to be seen as representative of private property and the "obscure old times" and disappeared from art. Although today the mills themselves are almost completely lost, they continue to appear in art as a symbol of the Ukrainian village.

"Near the windmill" by Ivan Shulha.

Above From the 15 page "Ukrainian alphabet" by graphic artist Georgiy Narbut. The image shows things which begin with the Ukrainian letter "B" (pronounced "v"), including a windmill ("Вітряк").

Windmill sketches by Opanas Slation (1892-1933).

Images reproduced by permission of The International Molinological Society.

Archiving at Home

Nathanael Hodge

This time last year we were heading for a winter of more lockdowns and wondering how to keep the sails turning at the Mills Archive. We have always relied on volunteers to carry out work on our collections, but without the ability to invite volunteers back into the office, we needed another way to involve them in our collections. One area which suggested itself was the transcription of documents. We have lots of typed and handwritten material, but this has largely been overlooked in favour of digitising images to display online.

In October 2020 we applied to the Archives Testbed Fund from the National Archives, which is designed to support archives who want to test out new ideas. We were planning to build a digital facility to enable people around the country to volunteer remotely. Thus our "Archiving at Home Hub" was born.

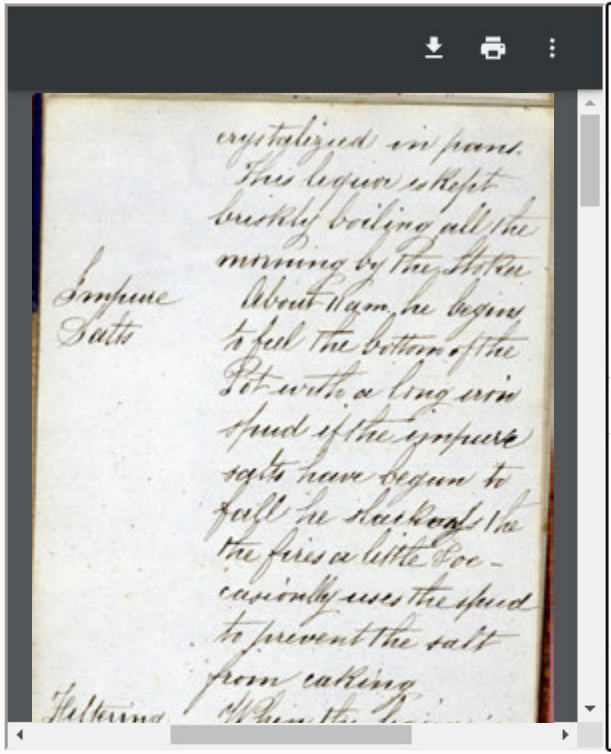
By Feb 2021, IT expert Paul Collins had built the site for us, and we were ready for the first volunteers to get involved. Over the page you can see an example of one of the documents we have had transcribed – an 1871 notebook about gunpowder manufacture from Waltham Abbey, from the Crocker collection – together with commentary by volunteer Mary Gregson.

To date (Oct 2021) 23 different volunteers have completed over 300 transcription tasks on the site. One unexpected development was interest from several schools who used the site to provide a week's work experience for groups of students. Some of the students gave positive feedback such as the following:

Reading and transcribing the documents assigned to me was incredibly interesting, I had the feeling of looking over the shoulders of the authors and getting a peek of their everyday lives, it was really immersive and I felt transported to many different eras. At times it was slightly tricky to decipher handwriting so a little investigating and guesswork had to be done, but overall the process was manageable and very enjoyable.

Imogen Ives

PDF display



Transcribed text

crystalized in pans.
This liquor is kept
briskly boiling all the
morning by the Stoker

Impure Salts

About 11am. he begins
to feel the bottom of the
Pot with a long iron
spud if the impure
salts have begun to
fall he slackens the
the fires a little & oc-
casionally uses the spud
to prevent the salt
from caking

Mary Gregson writes:

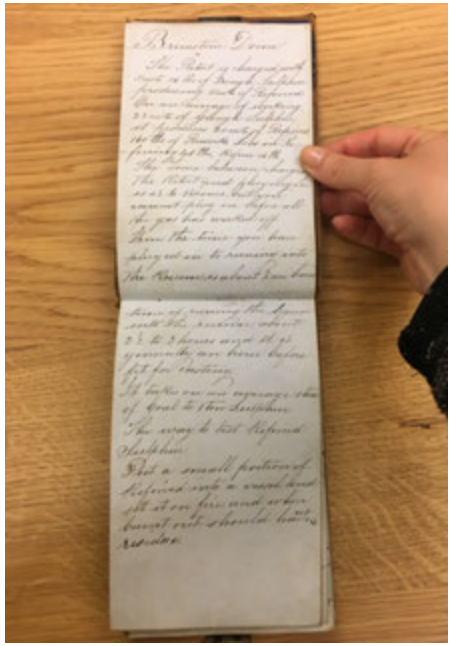
After looking at a document for an extended amount of time, the handwriting often becomes my friend. I'd even venture to say it talks to me, or at least it becomes a lot easier for me to understand what it's saying. The differences between a's, e's and o's, or u's and r's (which, from my experience often look quite similar) become familiar and suddenly a word that I would've pondered when I first started stands out to me straight away. This is a very satisfying feeling. However, no matter how confident I am with the handwriting, there are always moments that give transcription a staccato nature. Sometimes symbols, words or abbreviations do not lend themselves to understanding straight away but instead present a challenge. Good job I love a challenge.

The 1871 Waltham Abbey gunpowder notebook was no exception to this and had some fantastic moments that made me stop and puzzle for a while. A recurring theme throughout was, I presume, begun by writing implements. By ink and a fountain pen nib whose tendency to spatter made me ask myself the same question at regular intervals: Is this an ink spot or a dotted i?

It is surprisingly hard to tell sometimes! Especially when the dots are not necessarily directly above the i's. At one point I was so certain of an ink spot that I was googling 'urn spud' in an attempt to work out what the former word was. When that came up with nothing I tried 'what is a spud' (you can guess what kind of answers I got until I specified Victorian) and 'tools boiler stokers used'. Finally, I spotted an advertisement from someone selling an iron spud and suddenly the ink spot above the n became a dot for an i and the whole word was revealed to me. I was a lot more cautious with my ink spot presumptions after that.

Another challenge I came across was abbreviated measurements. These would have been perfectly understandable at the time of writing, but I often find that measurements change incredibly frequently throughout history. So, although I am familiar with the basic measurements used today, this does not give me much of a head start when it comes to Victorian measurements, especially ones that relate to milling (and gunpowder). I found the first one I came across easy, galls = gallons, I've got this. Then cwt was sprung upon me. For once, I couldn't solve this one with Google. Then I remembered that a Scottish handwriting guide that I'd used during another project had a section on abbreviations. I had a glance but didn't want to get my hopes up as I wasn't sure if Scottish and English measurements were the same, but there it was, cwt = hundredweight. And all suddenly made sense. In a moment of enlightenment, not only had I deciphered the abbreviation, I'd also learnt a new measurement from the nineteenth century and improved the flow of my transcription as I was able to instantly transcribe any later measurements that were the same.

Coming across these little challenges is rewarding because equal to the satisfying feeling of realising that I'm understanding the writing with comparative ease is the feeling that I've used all the resources at my fingertips to piece together the puzzle of an unknown word. Whilst fitting these pieces together I'm also learning about a century that I have great interest in and playing a part in increasing the readability and visibility of the document. All of this makes me incredibly proud and thankful for the opportunity to transcribe.



Above left: Screenshot of a transcription.

Right: The gunpowder notebook, from Royal Gunpowder Factory, Waltham Abbey. Donated to the Mills Archive by Alan and Glenys Crocker.

Milling at MERL

Elizabeth Bartram

On Saturday 18th September, we joined forces with artist Amanda Couch and her collaborative project, *Enchanting the Commons,* to take part in an outdoor event hosted by our neighbour, the Museum of English Rural Life.

Featuring the Mills Archive as well as Rise Bakehouse and the 'Becoming with Wheat Companions' of volunteer gardeners, Amanda presented a series of everyday performances to process the wheat that has been cultivated in The MERL garden, focusing on dehulling, threshing, winnowing, milling, and caring for, and baking with a sourdough starter. Our main contribution was the provision of a set of information banners that covered the role of milling and its place within food production, from the history of cereal cultivation and processing, through to the bread we eat. We also had information about the Mills Archive and encouraged the local visitors to consider a visit to the Archive in the near future.

Nathanael and I were joined by Guy and Mildred, who all did a great job in sharing the history of milling, both local and global, as well as having a go at some hands-on milling (with mixed results)! It was a successful collaborative event and our first foray back into public demonstrations since Covid. We hope to have many more events in the future – especially for our Friends, so watch this space…

Left: Guy manned the info desk, providing recipes from the Archive to try out at home, while artist Amanda assisted visitors in having a go at threshing – improvising with a dustbin lid and a pillowcase! – and milling using two querns.

Mills Archive 20 years

2002 - 2022

April next year will mark twenty years since the Mills Archive was founded.

We have lots planned to mark the occasion throughout 2022. There will be plenty of events, especially for our Friends. We are thinking about a birthday party and exhibition, so watch this space. You'll also receive a special edition of Mill Memories.

Make room for cake!

Photo of 280 pound cake which fed 5000, from the Northwestern Miller journal, 1943.

We'd like to ask for your help in recording the last 20 years of the Mills Archive and how our success has been a joint effort and only possible thanks to supporters like you.

Would you be willing to share with us your reflections on what the history of milling and the Mills Archive mean to you? Perhaps you have a particular memory that stands out for you, or perhaps you were able to find out a key bit of information about your local mill or family history as a result of making contact with us.

We would also like you to get in touch if you have any ideas for how we could mark the occasion throughout 2022.

To get in touch, please email 20years@millsarchive.org

Women in Milling

Elizabeth Bartram

Female members of the Russell milling family of Cranbrook Windmill, Kent (1917/18) (photo from the Cranbrook Windmill Collection)

We have recently employed a student on a part -time basis to research and write about the contributions that women have made to feeding the world over thousands of years. This work forms an important part of a collaborative project that will reveal to the public the remarkable roles that women have played. We'll be revealing more about this project next year.

We are delighted to welcome our new project intern, Jake Banyard from the University of Reading, who will record and share the history of women in milling, with an initial focus on UK flour milling. Jake's post is funded by the Garfield Weston Foundation, who awarded us £75,000 in 2020 for our project, "Hidden Heroes".

Women have always been involved in milling (the production of a more palatable, digestible and malleable form of staple grains), from ancient times and up to the present day. In recent centuries, women have helped to run a mill as part of the family, taking up the responsibility of miller when their father, husband or brother was unable to do so. In the past 100 years in particular, with the industrialisation of flour production in the West, women have been employed in a variety of related and essential roles, such as the home economic experts and nutritionists of the 1940s onwards, and the cereal chemists and marketers today.

Do you know of a woman, either historically or involved in operating a traditional mill nowadays, who we could feature in our project? If so, do get in touch by emailing Liz.Bartram@millsarchive.org

Jake Banyard writes:

I'm Jake and I am a French and History student at the University of Reading. The opportunity to use the resources at the Mills Archive to research the place of women in the history of flour milling is a really exciting one, and I'm looking forward to contributing to the work that the Trust does. Gender history interests me greatly and I think that the task of uncovering women's involvement in the story of milling, in which their part has sometimes been forgotten, is an important and relevant one.

As a final year student I am currently writing a history dissertation on the Bemba people in Northern Rhodesia (present day Zambia), focusing on colonisation and the construction of copper mines. My dissertation will discuss how Bemba women's lives changed as more and more people moved from rural to urban lifestyles. While this might seem a long shot away from UK flour milling it deals with a lot of similar themes about women's work which often go under the radar!

The Swire Charitable Trust supports the preservation of the Mills Archive's Millwrighting Records

Jane Freebody

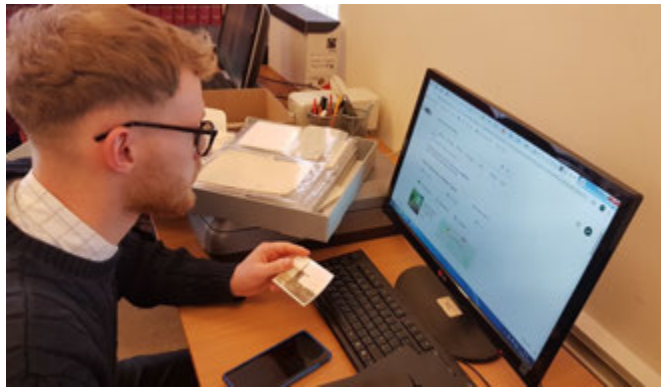
SWIRE CHARITABLE TRUST

"The Swire Charitable Trust is delighted to be able to support the Mills Archive with a grant from our Covid-19 Recovery programme to help restart their vital work in cataloguing and digitising millwrighting records, so they can continue to protect this valuable knowledge of our milling heritage."

In June this year, the Swire Charitable Trust made a substantial grant of £23,289 to the Mills Archive Trust to support our core activities. This has helped us to focus on our millwrighting records, such as those contained in the important Vincent Pargeter Collection. We have hundreds of important drawings and texts by millwrights that are just waiting to be catalogued and digitised, so that people all over the world can view them. The grant has enabled us to employ an intern and engage a small team of volunteers to work through these records, and to share some of the fascinating stories contained within them.

The condition of manuscripts in the Armfield Collection when they were rescued by the Mills Archive with the help of David Plunkett.

One of our former volunteers, Hayden Francis-Legg, has taken on the millwrighting internship. He started on 27th September, after completing his MA in History at Reading University. Hayden knows the Mills Archive well, having volunteered for us for the past two years whilst a student, and he's delighted to be returning as an intern. He says, "I am really excited to learn more about millwrighting and its history. As a rural historian, traditional craft skills are so important to our society and our heritage; without them we wouldn't be here today, so I feel incredibly lucky to be able to explore one of them in such detail." Hayden's future career plans include encouraging public engagement with heritage, so this internship should provide him with very useful experience.



Hayden working as a volunteer at the Mills Archive

The skill of millwrighting, the craft of building and repairing traditional wind- and watermills, involves an array of different technical skills including engineering, architecture, stone masonry, carpentry and building. But the skill is in danger of being lost; there are only 13 professional millwrights working in the UK today. The Mills Archive's foundation trustee, Mildred Cookson, was instrumental in ensuring that millwrighting was added to the Heritage Craft Association's "red list" of endangered crafts in 2019. Committed to safeguarding the centuries-old skills that underpin the UK's heritage sector, the Swire Charitable Trust welcomed the opportunity to help protect the skill of millwrighting.

With Swire's assistance, the Mills Archive is able to redouble efforts to preserve and make accessible the important millwrighting records held in our collections. Vincent Pargeter is considered the UK's top millwright. His collection, which comprises 27 boxes of material, including 18 rolls of large drawings, has not yet been touched, so there is lots of work to do.

Right: Sails for Hardley Mill being manufactured, August 2008. Photo from the Vincent Pargeter collection.

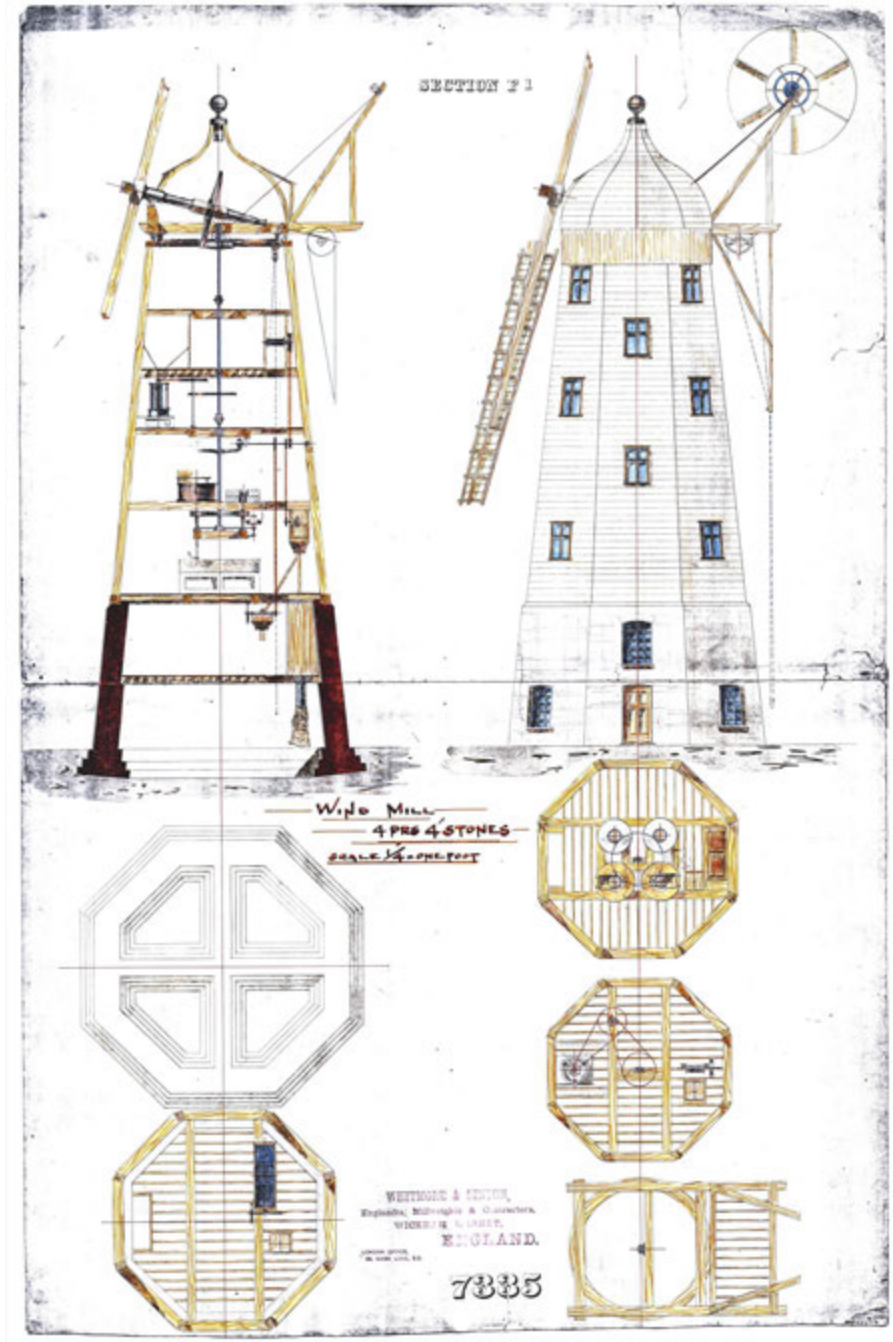
The Derek Ogden, Christopher Wallis and J J Armfield & Co collections are also awaiting more detailed cataloguing and digitisation, as are many smaller collections, such as those of Jon Sass and David Nicholls. Some of our most important records are found amongst these smaller collections, such the day-books of millwrights that explain exactly what was happening in a mill at a particular time.

Access to this material is vital to enable today's millwrights to restore mills authentically. Our records provide the essential details and context needed when a specific mill is under repair, saving the modern millwright time, effort and money in their already challenging role. As engineer Geoff Wallis put it, "Fundamental to good conservation practice is the ability to research the history of the mill before work starts".

Our millwrighting collections also provide researchers with the information they need to create an accurate picture of mill technology in different eras and areas. Guy Blythman, a writer on traditional wind- and watermills, finds the account books of former millwrights particularly valuable "because they list mill parts and/or repairs and modifications that had to be carried out and enable us to see the mills as they really were". There was considerable regional variation in the design of mills, and this is reflected by the millwrights' records.

We would like to thank Swire for their very generous contribution to our efforts to preserve these precious millwrighting records. Do look out for the fascinating millwrighting stories that will appear in our e-newsletter over the coming months, as a result of the work now under way.

Millwright Vincent Pargeter at work on Upminster Windmill, 2008. Image copyright the Friends of Upminster Windmill.



A drawing by millwrights Whitmore and Binyon from the Peter Dolman Collection.

The Growth and Decline of Millwrighting

Hayden Francis-Legg

This tower mill at Stanford , Kent would have had regular maintenance by a millwright.

Evidence of millwrighting has been noted across the world and across centuries from the Ancient Greeks and Romans to the Byzantine Empire and Medieval Europe and, finally, to Modern Britain. In Britain, the millwright predominantly worked with simple timber structures, hence why the terms 'millwright' and 'carpenter' were synonymous in the Middle Ages. However, as mills became more technologically advanced and other materials such as stone became more popular, the craft of the millwright adapted. The ability to maintain and repair all types of mills, including post, tower and smock mills, and deal with the necessary materials became a significant element of millwrighting. Over time, this meant that the skill was invaluable to the maintenance of the milling industry, hitting a peak in the mid-nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, following the Industrial Revolution, the traditional craft of millwrighting was superseded by the introduction of technology such as roller milling. Though some millwrights could adapt to this new technology, it wasn't enough. As more mills began to switch to roller milling the traditional way of milling was deemed inefficient in comparison. Therefore, as the use of traditional wind- and watermills diminished over time, so did the traditional craft of millwrighting.

Right: Roller milling machinery at Abbey Mills, Reading, early 20th Century.

The craft did see a small revival in the 1960s and 1970s due to an increased interest in traditional mills, however it was not sufficient to achieve significant national support for the skill. Although there are still practising millwrights today, millwrighting features on the HCA's RED list of Critically Endangered Crafts, meaning it is "at serious risk of no longer being practised in the UK".

There have been steps made to increase the number of millwrights by organisations such as the SPAB, with the inclusion of millwright training in their recent 2020 fellowship. However, if they are to remain a part of our national heritage, the future state of our mills depends on an increased interest in millwrighting and a sustainable programme to produce more millwrights.

Modern millwrights and a four-legged volunteer at Rayleigh Windmill, 2018. Photo by Mike Fogg.

RECRUIT A NEW FRIEND FOR THE MILLS ARCHIVE TRUST

"I am very proud to be a Friend of the Trust … it works tirelessly to liberate important historic material and has grown exponentially… The Mills Archive will always be an institution which is very close to my heart."

- James, Friend of the Mills Archive Trust

"The continuing support of the Friends of the Trust helped us through a difficult period, and has ensured that we can secure our collections, enrich our catalogue and help a new generation of young people to gain work experience and appreciate the wonder of wind and watermills."

- Dr Ron Cookson, Chairman of the Mills Archive Trust

The Friends of the Mills Archive Trust are a special group of people – you share our passion for preserving, protecting and promoting the history of mills and milling. Like us, you want everyone to understand and value the essential role played by milling, not only in our history but in our lives today.

We need to find more people like you, people who are keen to inspire others to learn more about and enjoy our milling heritage, to support our amazing collections and ensure that they remain freely available for everyone.

Do you know of other mill enthusiasts who would like to help us achieve our goal? They might be members of your local history society, academics in your department, friends who live in or near a mill, or people you know whose family members were (and maybe still are!) involved in milling. Whatever their connection to milling, we'd love to hear from them and welcome them to the Friends of the Mills Archive Trust.

Please encourage your friends, family and acquaintances to support us by becoming a Friend of the Mills Archive Trust. Direct them to the registration form on our website at https://millsarchive.org/friend/register.

We are very grateful to all our Friends for your ongoing support. The archive relies on our community of like-minded individuals who value our milling heritage. Thank you!

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

Charity No: 1155828

Cover image: Postcard showing feeding a wind-powered sugar cane mill, Barbados. Mildred Cookson Collection.

Mill Memories is edited by M Cookson and N Hodge