

Why I am a Volunteer

Anne Harrison

Over the years I have developed an interest in history and archaeology, and on retirement took an MA in Medieval Archaeology at Reading University. As a possible project I began looking at medieval bridges along the Kennet in Berkshire and this led naturally to looking at the mills since they were often sited near crossing points, although the building of the canal has seriously interfered with the waterways along the Kennet. I have often walked along the canal tow path and seen how the few mills still extant are now converted to smart residential accommodation.



The U3A team examining the Brian Eighteen collection.

When my local U3A (University of the Third Age) group was invited to take part in a project to catalogue the collection of local ex-millhand and historian, Brian Eighteen, I and some others came to a meeting in Dec 2016 at the Mills Archive where we were introduced to the Archive and the project. Brian's collections comprised photographs, postcards, cuttings, and assemblages of invoices, receipts, price lists, and all sorts of other mementoes of mills which he had acquired over his long career. Cataloguing these items was a good introduction to the workings of the Mills Archive database.

By November 2017 the Brian Eighteen project was complete but I decided to stay on since I was enjoying the varied work. Since then I have catalogued a collection of documents from family run mills near Cambridge, which is an area I know fairly well. In fact, my own family name cropped up in a sales brochure for one of the mills as the land agent. Now I am working with a huge collection of slides taken by Richard Hills over the years, including many East Anglian mills, and a boxful of slides taken on his holidays abroad in the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany. These are often challenging to locate but show how far and how often he travelled to photograph mills wherever he happened to be. These two collectors are typical of the enthusiastic people around the country who have donated their life's work to the Archive for the benefit of others.