

## INVITATION TO TENDER: NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND PROJECT EVALUATOR

**Project name:** Reading emPOWERed  
**Commissioning organisation:** The Mills Archive Trust  
**Contract duration:** Work to take place within June – August 2025  
**Contract value:** maximum £5,637 available including VAT and expenses  
**Contract type:** Contractor, engaged on a ‘contract for services’ basis.

### About The Mills Archive Trust:

The Mills Archive Trust is a UK-based charity dedicated to preserving and promoting the history of traditional mills and milling, and, relatedly, the history of wind and waterpower. Established in 2002, the Trust collects, safeguards, and provides public access to a vast archive of documents, images, and records relating to windmills, watermills, and millers, primarily in the UK but also internationally. It serves as a valuable resource for researchers, historians, and enthusiasts interested in industrial, agricultural, and social history, as well as contemporary themes including renewable energy and feeding the world.

The need for this specialist resource has been confirmed by the more than 3 million records we now hold and up to 100,000 visitors each year to our website. In the course of building this repository we have raised and spent more than £2 million, trained and retained a professionally qualified archivist and built the country's largest library devoted to mills and milling. Recognition has included the Chairman receiving an MBE for Services to Heritage, and our status as an accredited archive service, accredited by the National Archives. Our volunteers also won the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the MBE equivalent for charities.

For the past 15 years we have been running a successful work experience programme. We regularly offer internships to provide paid work experience for young people, and we attract volunteers young and old. A number of our alumni have now found permanent positions in archives and other heritage roles across the country. In spite of significant Covid challenges, we maintained our digital service provision and engaging volunteers remotely to transcribe documents and write communications materials during that time.

**Mission: We protect, preserve and promote milling history for people to learn about and enjoy.**

**Vision: We wish to ensure that the role of milling and all its contributors – from ancient times and up to present day – are understood, valued and recognised as integral to people's histories and lives today.**

To do this, we aim to:

- Seek and acquire historical and contemporary records of mills and milling;
- Store, care for and keep together collections placed in our care;
- Encourage research into our milling history;
- Make as much of our material as possible available for public inspection;
- Provide facilities for research and education at the Archive and online;

- Offer advice and support to collectors, promoting future deposits;
- Build close links with existing organisations holding mill material, with a view to sharing information and possibly resources;
- Actively encourage an interest in mills by developing and promoting education and information programmes.

Our strategy identifies three themes to explore in our collections and educational activities, which are relevant to contemporary public interests, making the case that history and heritage are still important today. We jointly explore the themes of renewable energy and caring for an icon, the former relating to developments in wind and waterpower through the ages, including electricity generation and how it offers solutions for mitigating climate change. The latter covers the heritage aspects of mills as icons in the landscape, in creative thought and in national and regional memory and identity.

In response to Covid, we enhanced digital services. doubled our virtual footfall, corrected the drop in income and rebuilt unrestricted reserves following a 30% drop in 2020-2021. However, the 2-year funding hiatus prevented us recruiting an information/engagement manager, creating a key weakness in terms of producing and communicating educational materials and encouraging more people to interact with our collections and our activities.

#### About 'Reading emPOWERed':

In 2023, The Mills Archive Trust was awarded a grant of £198,751 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, made possible by the money raised by National Lottery Players. Wind and waterpower have been used for millennia to produce the food and goods needed to grow civilisations. The threat of climate change and energy costs have provided new impetus to understand these renewable energy sources globally and in our local community.

Wind and waterpower have the potential to address present and future climate needs. With funding until September 2025, The Mills Archive Trust has embarked on a project to preserve the records of wind and water power. Exploring these collections and their contents in new and inspiring ways, involving the public in those explorations, the Trust set out to test various learning opportunities in our local area of Reading in Berkshire, as well as more widely, about the history of both, revealing their course from traditional mills to modern turbines.

The funds we received were made available through the Lottery's Dynamic Collections funding stream. Dynamic Collections is about collecting organisations becoming more resilient and opening up their collections. This could include engagement, reinterpretation and improving collections management. From the Lottery's perspective, it was also designed to address long-term challenges in the sector, many of which were worsened by Covid, and support organisations in building on innovative ideas and recent trends, particularly in digital engagement. It was also about supporting organisations in helping to meet the changing needs of communities around them and to reflect more people's history and experiences.

### Outcomes:

#### A wider range of people will be involved in heritage

We will involve a wider range of people in heritage, especially children and young people aged 5–18, with a focus on those in deprived areas of Reading. Through workshops in primary schools, internships, and discussions with secondary education leaders, we aim to make heritage accessible and engaging. Collaboration with other organisations will help us reach diverse communities and we will help break down perceived barriers regarding access to archives.

#### Heritage will be in a better condition

Volunteers will enhance the discoverability of our collections through accurate cataloguing and improved metadata, making Reading's history better preserved and more accessible. We will improve the visibility of key themes through new website pages. Archival-standard packaging will protect items, some of which will be reboxed during cataloguing. Raised awareness of the Trust's work will lead to new donations from individuals and organisations. We will also offer advice to the public on preserving their own archives, including digitisation and care of old photographs.

#### Heritage will be identified and better explained

We will create new ways for people to explore the history of milling and renewable energy—through virtual exhibitions, workshops, and partnerships with non-heritage groups. Diverse perspectives will help explain heritage in more inclusive and engaging ways. New materials—like donated archives and artworks—will be preserved and added to the historical record, reinforcing the message that today's actions shape tomorrow's history. Overall, this work will expand our collections and improve public access, both online and in person.

#### People will have learned about heritage, leading to change in ideas and actions

People from diverse communities will come to see heritage as something that belongs to them. Through various activities, they will learn about the history of milling and renewable energy in accessible, creative ways. Self-guided opportunities will include a heritage walking route in Reading, enriching everyday experiences. Volunteers from varied backgrounds will contribute to cataloguing and storytelling, helping shape how heritage is described and accessed. We'll gather feedback to understand learning outcomes and shifts in attitudes—such as increased awareness of sustainability and community impact.

#### The funded organisation will be more resilient

Our 2022 SWOT analysis and Strategic Plan highlighted that long-term sustainability depends on prioritising public engagement and education. However, a lack of funding during and subsequent to Covid prevented us from hiring an information and engagement manager, limiting our outreach. *Reading emPOWERed* will address this by tackling two key challenges: limited visibility beyond milling and an aging supporter base. The momentum from this project will motivate staff and volunteers, revitalising progress interrupted by the pandemic. Local engagement will raise our profile in Reading—one of the UK's most diverse towns—and help us build connections with new communities. This, in turn, will strengthen governance by broadening trustee representation and enhancing inclusivity. We will invest in digital services shaped by local needs, making our work more accessible and future-proof.

### Approved purposes:

1. Conservation and cataloguing of 10 collections (5 already selected by the Trust + 5 to be selected by participants).
2. Design of art exhibition based on input from artists in residence.
3. Design of the heritage & community trail 'Reading Renewables Route'.
4. New educational webpages and improved registration software.
5. Organisation of public art workshops.
6. Organisation of school workshops delivered by partners, Jelly and Design Nature.
7. Participation in Reading Climate Festival.
8. Recruit 1 Information and Engagement Manager for 24 months.
9. Recruit 2 interns for 3 months.
10. Design and circulation of first 'Renewable Reading' magazine.
11. Expansion of the existing community loans scheme.

### **About the invitation to tender:**

We are looking to appoint a freelance Project Evaluator to work with the Director and Chairman of the Trustees to develop and implement an evaluation methodology for the project. The evaluation should help us understand the impact of the project, including to what extent we have achieved stated objectives and project outcomes; identify any unplanned outcomes; help us understand what has enabled us to achieve our aims (as well as what may have hindered this).

Proposals are welcomed from individuals or consultancies with an understanding of the archive sector, a proven track record of working within funded projects, and experience of interpretation.

The following outputs will be required:

- A start-up meeting with key staff.
- Agreement of research methods and methodologies.
- Interim progress meetings on Zoom.
- Delivery of final report.

The evaluator's responsibilities will include:

- Gathering qualitative and quantitative evaluation data.
- Where appropriate, providing the team with evaluation tools.
- Producing an evaluation report at the end of the project, approved by the Trust.

Who we are looking for:

- A skilled evaluator experienced in working in the heritage/archive sector.
- Experience delivering evaluation with a range of people.
- A flexible approach, particularly in ways of thinking.
- Available to start and complete the work between June and August 2025.

The start and end dates will be negotiated, but the work will take place and the final report delivered during the period June – August.

The maximum amount available is £5,637 which must include all expenses and VAT. The payment schedule will be 33% on signing the contract and 66% at the end.

Costs should include VAT and expenses as well as a breakdown of each person who will be working on the project, their day rate and how many days will be allocated to complete the work.

The contractor will be responsible for their own travel expenses, tax, NI and pension contributions.

#### How to respond to this invitation to tender:

Please email your proposal to the Director, Elizabeth Bartram, by 11.59pm on Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> May. The proposal should cover:

1. Why you would like to work on this evaluation.
2. Why you think you are suitable, including examples of relevant experience.
3. A costed proposal for how you would approach the evaluation (including timescale).
4. Two referees.
5. Details of Professional Liability/Professional Indemnity Insurance.

For more information, contact Elizabeth Bartram at [liz.bartram@millsarchive.org](mailto:liz.bartram@millsarchive.org)

*This contract is funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and made possible by money raised by National Lottery players.*