



# ROLLER

## MILL REVOLUTION REVISITED

Nigel Harris' new book looks at evolution of modern milling from a U.K. perspective

by Arvin Donley

The most significant game changer in the production of wheat flour was the invention of the roller mill and its replacement of the grindstone mill as a means of extracting as much flour as possible from the wheat grain. In his new book, “Wheat Flour Milling: from Millstones to Rollers,” Nigel S. Harris examines the historical aspects of roller milling and how this transition has affected the U.K. flour industry over the last 140 years.

Harris notes in the introduction that he was inspired to write the book after attending a 2011 meeting of the Mills Section of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings where one of the speakers — Rob Shorland-Ball, a one-time flour miller and museums and heritage adviser and consultant since 1994 — told delegates about his role in an English Heritage Project called “Flour Milling: The Roller Milling Revolution.”

Harris said the text of one of Shorland-Ball’s slides made a major impression on him: “A history ignored? Roller mills have been frequently ignored by historians and often shunned by mill societies. Perhaps traditional stone milling and water/windmills blend better with the ‘Heritage’ landscape where most mill enthusiasts dwell. It is nevertheless strange that issues which concentrated the minds of so many mill owners have been of so little concern to many of those who record their stories. Past experience suggests the passage of time will eventually bring wider recognition to the technical achievement and enterprise of the roller mill revolution. Sadly, by then, most of the archaeology will have gone.”

Harris, who already had written “Traditional Corn Milling Watermills,” published in 2015, and “Watermill and Stoneground Flour Milling,” published in 2014, decided to take the next logical step and write about

the transition from millstone milling to modern roller milling, which he does artfully in this book.

The book’s 10 chapters take the reader on a journey that covers three centuries, starting with a brief history of wheat and flour to traditional millstone milling to the roller milling revolution, which basically occurred during the last 25 years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and finishes with an overview of the U.K.’s milling industry today.

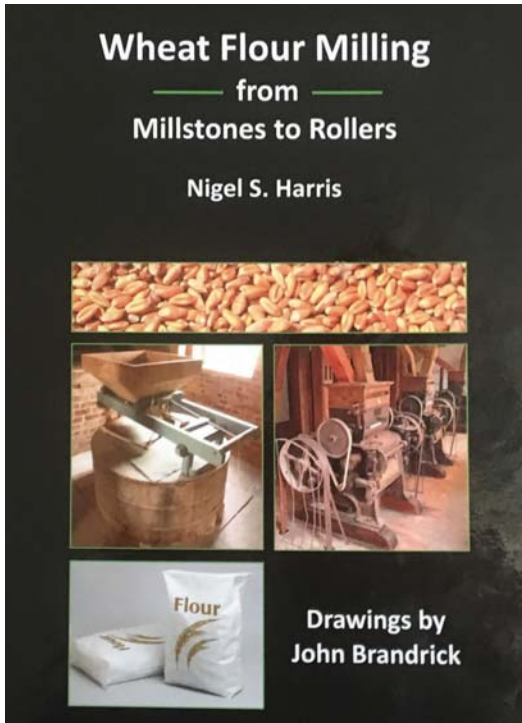
The large, hardbound, 174-page book utilizes over 600 color and black-and-white photos, diagrams, maps and illustrations to help tell the story of the evolution of the U.K. flour milling industry. Most interesting are the many decades-old black-and-white photos of antique milling equipment.

Harris does a magnificent job of meticulously describing the advances that have taken place in milling equipment over the years. In Chapter 4: The Evolution of Roller Milling, he examines the many years of trial and error involved in the development of roller milling technology, which ultimately led to the introduction of the gradual reduction system in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that ushered in purifiers, sifters and other parts of modern milling.

Another chapter is dedicated to the pioneers of roller mill plant manufacturing in the U.K., such as Henry Simon, who installed the first complete all-roller mill plant to operate in England without the use of millstones.

Besides giving a detailed account of the technological changes that have taken place over the last several centuries in the milling industry, the book also discusses how wheat flour consumption trends have given rise to technological developments, including the roller mill revolution.

In the third chapter on traditional mills leading up to



the roller mill revolution, Harris writes that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century mills were “the focal point of every community, because it was the means of converting grain to flour, without which the population couldn’t survive. Whoever owned or controlled the mill was an important person. The mill was central to each community’s well-being and economy.” He also notes that the increasing popularity of white flour and the use of hard wheat from America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was the impetus for the roller mill revolution.

The book’s final chapter provides an overview of the major players in today’s U.K. milling industry and describes the continued impact of consolidation — 30 companies operate 50 mills with the top four responsible for 65% of U.K. flour production, a far cry from the nearly 2,000 flour mills that were in operation when the roller mill revolution began.

To learn more about the book, visit [www.wheatflourmilling.co.uk](http://www.wheatflourmilling.co.uk). To order the book, visit The Mills Archive Trust website (<https://millsarchive.org>). The direct link to the book is [https://millsarchive.org/shop/product/175962/wheat-flour-milling-from-millstones-to-rollers#.WiK1Q1V\\_IV](https://millsarchive.org/shop/product/175962/wheat-flour-milling-from-millstones-to-rollers#.WiK1Q1V_IV). It is also available at <https://www.amazon.co.uk>. **WG**

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