

Calico Bleaching Grounds Near The Barracks, Croydon.

These bleaching grounds were situated to the northwest of Croydon parish church, and were described in 1805 as being "near the Barracks." These barracks were established in 1794 on a triangular site at the junction of Mitcham Road and Factory Lane, on the north side of the latter road. The site has been used for military purposes ever since, and is now occupied by the Territorial Army Centre.

The bleaching grounds were to the southwest of the barracks, on Stubbs Meadow, partly on the site of the present Stubbs Mead Council Depot and Stubbs Mead Car Pound. They were not near the main course of the Wandle, but by a side stream that ran northwestward from the main river at a point on the east side of the present Wandle Park, then turned to run southwestward in an irregular semi-circular course to join the main river beyond the western side of Wandle Park.

It is not known when the bleaching works were established, and the earliest indication of them found is on the Croydon Enclosure Map of 1800, on which are shown some buildings beside the stream in Stubbs Meadow, and near to the barracks.

The reference given above, from 1805, was by James Malcolm, who mentioned the bleaching grounds of Messrs.Lanre and Lay, "on the outside of the town, near the Barracks." [1] Lane and Lay were rated for land at Barrack Field in the Croydon Poor Rate book for June 1809. These men were William Lane and Benjamin Lay, who had also worked at Croydon Old Palace since about 1804. They dissolved their partnership on 3 August 1810, when Lay retired and Lane carried on alone [2].

The premises were next occupied by Messrs.Ancell and Walton, who were assessed for "a stable and manufactory in Barrack Field" in the Croydon Poor Rate book for January 1812. John Walton had been described as a calico printer in the 1811 Croydon census returns, in which two labourers at "Ancell's Manufactory" had also been named. The "Ancell" was William Ancell, who had earlier worked with his father Joseph Ancell and William Lane at the Old Palace. John Walton was his brother-in-law.

The 1812 Poor Rate record has the word "insolvent" written against the names Ancell and Walton, and in February 1812 it was advertised that the lease of the premises, together with the plant and utensils, would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 20 February 1812 [3]. Evidently no acceptable bids were received and a further auction was advertised to be held on 17 March 1812 [4]. Again no sale was effected, and in May 1812 the lease of the property was offered for sale by private contract [5].

The outcome is not known, and no further information about the site has been found until 1829, the date of an estate map of Waddon whereon is indicated a factory and 26 acres of land in Stubbs Meadow in the occupation of Thomas and William Lains [6]. The "Lains" were probably the sons of the William Lane previously mentioned. Nothing further has been discovered.

References

1. James Malcolm, Compendium of Modern Husbandry, Vol.1, 1805, p.6.
2. The London Gazette, 4-7 April 1810.

3. The Times, 19 February 1812.
4. Ibid. 17 March 1812.
5. Ibid. 8 May 1812.
6. Lilian Thornhill, From Palace to Washhouse, Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Ltd. Proceedings, Vol.17 [9], 1987, p.217.