

Calico Printing And Bleaching Works At The Old Palace, Croydon

These works were established within the old Archbishop's Palace, part of which remains, and is now in use as a girls' school. It is situated in Old Palace Road, Croydon, close to the parish church.

Croydon Palace was one of the residences of the Archbishops of Canterbury until 1780, when a private Act of Parliament was enacted enabling the See of Canterbury to sell the property. The Palace and its grounds were accordingly offered for sale at an auction held on 10 October 1781, and were then purchased by Abraham Pitches of Streatham (later Sir Abraham) for £2520

He evidently leased out the property, and the earliest reference to its use for calico printing was in August 1788, when the Honourable John Byng noted the fact in his diary recording a visit [1]. The occupiers at that time were probably Gardner, Gill and Company, bleachers and calico printers, whose principals, Edward Gardner and Thomas Gill, were declared bankrupt in November 1791 [2]. By order of their assignees, the lease of the property was advertised to be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 28 March 1792. It was said to consist of bleaching grounds and various buildings, "being part of the Archbishop's Palace at Croydon, together with extensive Copper bank, lately erected, and every other necessary appendage for a capital Trade, particularly in the Muslin branch, which has been carried on there to a great extent " The premises were said to "have recently been improved and completely fitted up at a very great expense " On the same day the "Valuable and Extensive Plant and Utensils" were also to be offered for sale [3]

The lease of the premises, and the fixtures and utensils, were again advertised to be for sale at an auction to be held on 8 November 1793, when it was stated that part of the property had already been "let off" [4]. This part may have been that known to have been later occupied by Francis Hudson, calico printer. His mill was situated outside the gatehouse to the east of the main buildings, on a side stream of the Wandle where it flowed out of "Laud's Pond "

Sir Abraham Pitches died in 1792 and by his will proved on 27 April 1792 he bequeathed the Palace properties to his wife Jane [5]. Dame Jane Pitches died in 1797 and by her will proved on 11 April 1797 directed that all her real estate be sold for the benefit of her daughters [6]. Accordingly, an auction was held on 24 May 1797, at which the Palace estate was purchased by Bernard Holbrook of Lambeth for £2892-15s. The indentures of lease. and release were dated 2 and 3 September 1797 [7].

In all likelihood Bernard Holbrook had bought the lease of the premises at the auction held in 1793, for on 2 February 1796 he had. sub-let a part of them to Samuel Starey. Another part was then occupied by William Lane and Joseph Mann [8]. Samuel Starey had previously been in partnership with his brother Benjamin as wholesale linen drapers in King Street, City of London. He moved-to Croydon in about 1795

On 6 September 1798 Starey purchased the freehold of the Palace property from Bernard Holbrook for £3042. The indentures of lease and release. were dated 26 and 27 October 1798 [7]. He also acquired the tenants. By 1799 Joseph Mann, had gone and William Lane was in partnership with. Joseph Ancell. By 1802 Joseph Ancell's son William had joined the firm,

and when Joseph Ancell died in August 1802 he bequeathed his share in the partnership to William [9]. Holden's directory for 1802-4 listed separately Lane and Ancell as calico printers, and Samuel Starey as a bleacher, at the Palace

William Ancell quit on 31 December 1803 [10], and James Malcolm in 1805 noted the "calico and printing grounds of Messrs. Lane and Lay at the College (I e. the Palace)" [11]. This "Lay" was Benjamin Lay who jointly with William Lane took out an insurance policy on their printing -shop's and drying rooms, and stock and utensils therein, with the Sun insurance company on 18 January 1808 [12]

Meanwhile, on 24 June 1799, Samuel Starey had been granted a 42-year lease, at the annual rent of £85, of some meadow land called Parsonage Field situated to the west of the Palace, by John Hilbert of Wandsworth who had purchased it in 1796 [13]. Starey was to "expend 0700 for erection or repair of buildings for use of trade of calico printer", and accordingly he built a mill on the river at a point about halfway along the present Rectory. Grove, and formed a mill pond by widening the river

It would seem that this expenditure, and the purchase of the Palace property, resulted in financial difficulties for Samuel Starey, for on 4 February 1800 he mortgaged the Palace premises to John Freeborn [7]

A few years later, probably in 1803, the Croydon, Merstham and 'Godstone Iron Railway Company bought a strip of land on the east side of the Palace grounds (the site of the present Church Road), required for their railway from Croydon to Merstham. This land included Francis Hudson's mill, mentioned earlier. The price agreed was £798-12s. which was paid to John Freeborn as the mortgagee. The indenture of sale was dated 5 January 1809 [14], but the mill must have been demolished and the railway, track laid before then probably by 1804; the Croydon Merstham and Godstone Iron Railway was opened to Merstham in July 1805. Francis Hudson. moved his calico printing business to Old Ford, Middlesex

William Lane and Benjamin Lay moved. away, a few years later and Samuel Starey was in sole occupation of the Palace premises when he died on 28 October 1809 at the age of 52. By his will, proved on 17 February" 1810, he bequeathed all his property to his wife Elizabeth [15] 9 and she carried on the calico printing and bleaching business, which was managed by her sons Thomas and Samuel

John Hilbert, the owner of the mill to the west of the Palace, died on 18 January 1819, and by his will proved on 1 February 1819 bequeathed certain of his properties, including that mill, to William Tate, the son of his late cousin William Tate senior [16]. In April 1819 an advertisement was published announcing that a number. of. properties would be offered for sale at an auction to beheld on 18 May following "by order of. the executors-of the late John Hilbert Esq " Among the lots was "a close of meadow land, with head of water, mill house, barn and 8 tenements, situate opposite the church at Croydon, in the occupation of Mrs Starey and-her undertenants " [17] However the auction was later cancelled [18] 9 and William Tate retained the ownership

Parts of the old Palace buildings not used by the Stareys were let mainly as housing accommodation, but there were rooms used as schools aid as warehouses, and a few for manufacturing purposes. The best documented of the latter usages was that of William James McRae, a ribbon manufacturer, who was there from 1820 until 1825. On 15 July of that year

an auction was held at the old Palace of his engine looms, winding engines, filling wheels, warping frames, throwing silk mills, and other plant and utensils [19].

The Starey brothers and their mother carried on the business successfully for nearly 20 years, but eventually got into financial difficulties, and the freehold of the Palace estate was advertised to be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 14 January 1829 [20]. Evidently no sale was then effected, and the property was again advertised to be for sale, at an auction to be held on 3 June 1829 [21]. The date was later changed to 2 June 1829 [22].

Again, the premises remained unsold, and they were still in the possession of Thomas and Samuel Starey when they were declared to be bankrupt on 1 December 1831 [23].

By order of the Bankruptcy Commissioners the Palace premises were again advertised to be offered for sale, at an auction to be held on 20. March 1832 [24]

At this auction, two of the lots, including the Palace buildings, were bought by Benjamin Helps Starey, a cousin of the Starey brothers, the son of their uncle Benjamin. Thomas and Samuel Starey then carried on the business, as tenants of their cousin, but Samuel moved to London soon afterwards and became a coal merchant. Their mother Elizabeth Starey died on 17 August 1833, at the age of 76. At about this time Thomas Starey went into partnership with John Oswald

Despite their financial troubles -Thomas and Samuel Starey had retained the lease of the mill to the west of the church. William Tate, the owner, was in financial difficulties himself at the time of his death on 28 May 1834, and by his will proved on 5 October 1834 he bequeathed the mill and other properties to his sister Mary Dewsbury and his brother Francis Tate in equal shares, with the proviso that they be sold to pay off his debts and to provide for various legacies, should his personal estate be insufficient to meet these. commitments [25]

Evidently some disagreement arose between James Howell and William Mackie, who were the executors of William Tate's will, and Francis Tate and Mary Dewsbury, which resulted in a case brought before the Court of Chancery. The details have not been ascertained, but it appears that the legatees were unwilling to sell their late brother's properties in order to pay his debts, as provided for in his will. The Court found in favour of the executors, and some of Tate's properties, including the mill at Croydon, were advertised to be sold at an auction to be held on 1 March 1838 [26]. The auction was later deferred until 29 March [27], and again until 26 April 1838 [28]

At that auction the Croydon mill was purchased by William Haarris, a Croydon building contractor, for £1600. The lot he bought was described in the sale catalogue as "comprising fourteen cottages and gardens, a water bleaching mill, two cottages . a yard . a garden, and a piece of meadow land occupying about five acres " [29] The conveyance to Harris from William Tate's executors was dated 10 August 1838 [30]

On 29 September 1840 William Harris granted a new 21 year lease of the 'bleaching mill' and its appurtenances to Thomas Starey and John Oswald [30]. They carried on in partnership together until Oswald's death on 2 August 1848 at the age of 60. He was succeeded in the business by his son Edward Charles Oswald

In December 1847 the Croydon Highways Board received a report they had commissioned , on the matter of persistent flooding in the Old Town area in the vicinity of the parish church and the old Palace. It was reported that a major cause was "to be found in the water (i e. of the Wandle) having to pass into Messrs:Starey's pond opposite the Church, which has a dam so high to create a power that it pens the water to the height of 7 feet. This dam throws back the water as far as Bog Island 'and the Old Town and is the cause of the Church land being inundated to a certain height but which if the Mill Head did not exist would not be the case" [31]

Nothing was done immediately following the reading of this report, but the matter was given serious consideration some two years later

In August 1849 the Croydon Local Board of Health was set up, and charged, among other matters, with making arrangements for the provision of proper drainage in the town. They also were concerned with the flooding in the Old Town, and it was decided that the streams and ditches in the as should be diverted and. culverted, and the ponds filled in. These measures would diminish the flow of water to the mill, and alleviate the flooding problem, but would of course severely affect the functioning of what was sometimes known as "Harris's Mill"

In 1850 the Local Board began negotiations with Starey and Oswald in respect of compensation for the diminution of their water supply. These negotiations-were complex and protracted, but the outcome was that the Local Board purchased the mill from William Harris for £1000, paid £100 compensation to Starey and Oswald, and paid for a replacement steam-operated mill to be erected within the Palace, which was put into use in about April 1852 [32]

The changes that were taking place did not apparently greatly affect the running of the business. In the 1851 Croydon census returns Starey and Oswald were described as employing 55 men and women.

Samuel Starey died in July 1856 at the age of 69, and bequeathed his share in the business to executors to be sold for the benefit of his wife Beatrice Mary [33]. Evidently that share was purchased by Edward Charles Oswald, who continued to manage the business alone for the next 30 years.

Benjamin Helps Starey retained the ownership of the old Palace estate until his death on 6 April 1874, at the age of 66, and bequeathed it to his wife Ann. In 1879 she started to sell parts of the Palace grounds. Oswald closed down his works and moved out in about 1886, and the following year Ann Starey was preparing to sell the main Palace buildings. In June 1887 it was reported that, the estate had been. bought, by private treaty, by the Duke of Newcastle [34]. He gave the property to the Sisters of Mercy of the Church of England, and after carrying out much restoration work, they established a girls' school there, which was opened in 1889.

References

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- 6.** PROB 11/1289 q261.
- 7.** Croydon Local Studies Library, Paget Notebooks, Vol 19, p 173.
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- 14.** Ibid. Paget Notebooks, Vol 19, p 175
- 15.** PROB 11/1508 q103
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- 20.** Ibid. 9 December 1828
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- 23.** The London Gazette, 2 December 1831
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- 25.** PROB 11/1838 9 601
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- 31.** Quoted in Brian Lancaster, The Croydon Case.... Proceedings of the Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Ltd , Vol 18 [9], p 150
- 32.** Lilian Thornhill, From Palace to Washhouse, op.cit. p 222
- 33.** PROB 11/2238 q653
- 34.** Croydon Chronicle, 4 June 1887