

Drug Mill, Beddington Corner, Beddington.

This mill was situated on the east bank of the Wandle a short distance above Goat Bridge, Beddington Corner, and was adjacent to and on the south side of a corn mill. On the opposite bank, in Carshalton parish, was a leather mill.

It is not known when a mill was first erected here, and the earliest occupier so far found recorded was Joseph Bishe, who was rated for mills in Beddington in a list of those liable to pay a sewer rate dated 11 August 1763 [1]. The entry is repeated in a similar list drawn up on 24 July 1766 [2]. The association of Bishe with this mill was made on 10 April 1769 when he insured it, together with the adjoining corn mill and a nearby dwelling house, and the utensils and goods in both mills, with the Sun Insurance Company [3]. The landowner at this period was Thomas Scawen, who had probably acquired it, or at least the land on which it stood, when he purchased the nearby leather mill in December 1729.

Joseph Bishe was declared bankrupt in April 1788 [4]. Apparently the lease was then taken by Robert Lyon, who insured the "wood mill" (i.e. logwood mill) together with the adjacent corn mill and the dwelling house, on 21 March 1789 [5]. Robert Lyon was a millwright who was involved as leaseholder in several mills in Carshalton and elsewhere at various times, and presumably he sub-leased the drug mill and the corn mill.

By this date the mill was in the ownership of Foster Reynolds, who had in about 1780 purchased it and the neighbouring corn mill and leather mill, as part of the Culvers estate in Carshalton, from the trustees of James Scawen, the son and heir of Thomas Scawen, who had died in 1774. On 13 May 1791 Foster Reynolds's son William Foster Reynolds insured the drug mill and the corn mill and nearby dwelling house [6]. He re-insured the same properties, together with the water wheels and machinery in the mills, on 20 October 1797 [7].

Foster Reynolds died later in 1797, and by his will proved on 23 February 1798 he bequeathed the drug mill together with the corn mill and the leather mill, to William Foster Reynolds [8]. A valuation of Wallington made in 1806 indicates that the drug mill and corn mill were then in the occupation of his brothers Thomas and Jacob Foster Reynolds [9]. Thomas Reynolds insured the two mills on 8 April 1813 [10].

Soon afterwards, on 7 May 1813, James Smith and Alexander Aitken, "druggists", insured the drug mill and its machinery and stock, together with an adjoining house [11]. Alexander Aitken may have previously worked for Reynolds at the mill. He was certainly living in Beddington in July 1800 when the baptism of his daughter Mary was recorded in the parish register.

Smith and Aitken renewed the insurance policy on 10 June 1814 [12], but they dissolved their partnership on 1 January 1815 [13]. Alexander Aitken then carried on alone, and renewed the policy on 5 May 1815 [14], and again on 20 June 1821 [15]. Thomas Reynolds had also insured the drug mill, together with the corn mill, on 21 May 1816 [16].

Alexander Aitken died on 2 November 1832 at the age of 70, and was succeeded by his son Richard Aitken. The schedule to a Deposited Plan of November 1849 named him as the tenant, and the owner was then given as Esther Reynolds [17].

William Foster Reynolds had died on 19 November 1838, and by his will proved on 21 January 1839 he bequeathed most of his estate to his wife Esther, although the properties at Beddington Corner were to be held by his daughters Anna and Elizabeth as tenants in common [18].

Richard Aitken died on 6 December 1849 at the age of 46, and administration of his estate was granted to his widow, Mary Ann, on 22 January 1850 [19]. Mary Ann Aitken duly took over the management of the business, probably in association with William Aitken, most likely her brother in law, who was described as "drug grinder" in the Beddington census returns from 1851 to 1871.

Esther Reynolds died towards the end of 1857, and soon afterwards the Culvers estate, including the three mills at Beddington Corner, was purchased from her sons and heirs, Foster and Morris Reynolds, by their brother in law Samuel Gurney. He was a partner on the London bank of Overend, Gurney & Company, and in August 1837 he had married William Foster Reynolds's daughter Ellen.

The firm of Overend, Gurney & Company failed in May 1866 and was put into liquidation, and Samuel Gurney suffered financial ruin. Soon afterwards it was announced that, "by direction of the liquidators", his Carshalton estates would be offered for sale, at an auction to be held on 31 October 1866. In the sale catalogue the drug mill was said to be timber-built and tiled and to have a breast-shot water wheel of about 16 feet diameter. The premises were still held by Mrs. Mary Ann Aitken, whose lease was due to expire on 29 September 1869, at an annual rent of £132-10s. [20].

Some of the lots, including the three Beddington Corner mills, were then purchased by the Croydon Local Board of Health. The sale was completed on 15 August 1867 [21]. It is not known why the Croydon Board acquired these properties, and in fact less than three years later, on 1 March 1870, a delegation of the Board members was appointed to ascertain from neighbouring landowners their interest in purchasing the mills. Evidently the landowners evinced no interest [22].

Ten years later the Croydon Board made a more positive attempt to sell the mills, when they were offered for sale at an auction held on 21 June 1880. The drug mill was described in the sale catalogue as "the Capital Drug and Logwood Mill, comprising a Substantial Brick and Slated-Building of one Floor with Double Doors on two Sides. Attached to this mill is an Iron Wheel 16 feet in diameter." There was also a nearby chipping shed. and a stable. This description indicates a more solid building than the timber mill bought in 1866, which in fact had burned down in 1870 and been rebuilt [23]. The premises were on lease to Mary Ann Aitken for 21 years from March 1871 at the rent of £110 per annum [24]. Evidently no sale resulted from this auctions and the mills remained in the ownership of the Croydon Local Board of Health.

In the 1881 Beddington census returns, Mary Ann Aitken was said to be a dyewood chipper and grinder, employing 12 men...One of these men was her son Richard Cobden Aitken and he carried on with the management of the business after his mother died on 29 March 1889 at the age of 77. Later he took his son, Alexander William Aitken, into partnership.



The mills in 1895.
[72.8kb]

The Croydon Local Board of Health was replaced by the Corporation of Croydon in March 1883, and on 11 April 1899 the Corporation granted a 25-year lease of the drug mill, backdated to 25 March, to Richard Cobden Aitken and Alexander William Aitken at a rent of £113 per annum. They were allowed the use of the water of the river only from midnight to noon each day. (From midnight to noon the water was reserved for the use of the tenant of the leather mill opposite.) It was mentioned that the water wheel was 16 feet in diameter and 5 feet 9 inches wide [25].

Richard Cobden Aitken died on 24 November 1902 at the age of 58, and on 20 May 1903 Alexander William Aitken assigned the lease to Richard Norman Aitken [25], whose relationship to him has not been ascertained. The firm of "Aitken, M.A. & Son, drug grinders", continued to be listed in directories until 1918.

In his book about the Wandle, published in 1924, J.M. Hobson stated that the drag mill was still at work. But a "prefatory note" to the book was dated 1914, which suggests that it had been completed by then [26], and no other reference to a drug mill there after 1918 has been found. Possibly it was taken over and converted to leather dressing in about 1920 by the Favlova Leather Company, who had then taken the leases of the nearby leather mill and the former corn mill, which had been converted to the same use some years earlier. In that case, the former drug mill went out of use when the leather mills closed down in the early 1950s.

References

- 1.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 46.
- 2.** Ibid. SKCS 47.
- 3.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/189 No.268824.
- 4.** The London Gazette, 1-5 April 1788.
- 5.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/359 No.555381.
- 6.** Ibid. MS 11936/376 No.583816.
- 7.** Ibid. MS 11937/19 No.671895.
- 8.** PROB 11/1302 q133.
- 9.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, map cabinet.
- 10.** Guildhall Library, MS 11937/101 No.880993.
- 11.** Ibid. MS 11937/104 No.882662.
- 12.** Ibid. MS 11937/108 No.896224.
- 13.** The London Gazette, 10 January 1815.
- 14.** Guildhall Library, MS 11937/110 No.905593.
- 15.** Ibid. MS 11937/133 No.979977.
- 16.** Ibid. MS 11937/113 No.916493.
- 17.** Surrey History Centre, QS 6/8/411.
- 18.** PROB 11/1906 q57.
- 19.** PROB 6/226 p.99.
- 20.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, SBG 728.
- 21.** Croydon Local Studies Library, HEA/1/6.
- 22.** Ibid. HEA/1/7.
- 23.** The Croydon Advertiser, 8 August 1885. Report of case Bidder v. Bridges; evidence of Richard Cobden Aitken.
- 24.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, 48/28/7.

25. Croydon Local Studies Library, D.S.70.

26. John Morrison Robson, *The Book of the Wandle*, 1924, p.103.