

Duntshill Mills, Wandsworth

This mill was on the west bank of the Wandle nearly opposite the present Flock Mill Place off Duntshill Road, near the end of the sharp bend in the river. The course of the river hereabouts has been altered, and the former course was from the before-mentioned bend, running westwards then turning to run northwards in a very irregular semi-circle across the present recreation ground and turning to regain the present course at about opposite the present Haldane Place. This loop became a back water when the present straighter course was formed, early in the 19th century. It was identified as "New Cut" on the Wandsworth Tithe map of 1838. The original mill site was thus on the north bank of the southern part of the loop, but after the straight cut was formed, the mill buildings were extended northeastwards so as to adjoin the west bank of it, and another mill was built opposite it on the east bank of the new cut.

The early history of this site has not been ascertained. It was not shown as occupied on John Rocque's maps of c. 1741-45 and 1768, nor was it mentioned by James Edwards in c. 1789 or shown on his map.



The mill in 1865 [59.1kb]

The site was first occupied as a calico printing works, and the earliest reference found to a calico printer who may have worked there was to William Rigby, whose name appears in the first of the Wandsworth land tax registers, that for 1780, and who was listed in Holden's directory for 1802-4 as being a calico printer at Garratt Lane, Wandsworth. The reason why he is tentatively associated with works there is a matter of elimination, as the other known calico printing works off Garratt Lane at this period can be related to other printers.

The first calico printers who can positively be associated with Duntshill were William Bennett, George Moore, William Mason and William Johnston, who dissolved their partnership on 10 October 1807, to the extent that William Bennett retired [1]. Holden's directory for 1809-11 duly recorded Moore, Johnston and Mason as calico printers at Garratt Lane. John Hassell in 1817 mentioned "Messrs. Moore and Mason's calico grounds" [2]. William Johnston was in fact then still a member of the partnership, and remained so after George Moore left on 11 July 1828 [3].

There was a reference to Mr. Mason, calico printer at Dunt's Hill, in April 1829 [4], but during October 1830, it was advertised that the lease of "valuable Premises at Dunt's-hill", suitable for silk printers, dyers, and bleachers, was available to be purchased by private contract. It was stated that the plant, which included a 6-horsepower steam engine, could be taken at moderate terms, and that the sale offer was due to "the present proprietors retiring from business" [5]. William Johnston and William Mason formally dissolved their partnership on 3 December 1831 [6].

The premises were then converted to a different use, and Charles Terry was named as a parchment manufacturer there in Pigot's directory for 1832-4. The Wandsworth Tithe Map of 1838 shows three groups of buildings on the site, one being on the east bank of the "New Cut", and the book of reference thereto names William Terry as the occupier of all three, which were described merely as workshops and buildings. Terry was followed soon

afterwards by Thomas Townsend, who was named as the parchment manufacturer there in Pigot's directories for 1839 and 1840.

In 1853 Frederick Braithwaite found two activities being carried on at the premises: "the shawl printing .works of Messrs. Bender and Thompson", and "the parchment and colour works occupied by Mr. Townsend" [7]. Later Thomas Townsend abandoned parchment making and concentrated on colour manufacture. He was described as a colour manufacturer in the 1861 Wandsworth Census returns, as was his son James. The colours made by Townsend were apparently dyes for textiles, and he became well known for his carmine, produced from cochineal [8].

According to a Post Office directory of 1866, Phillip Thompson was printing shawls there, Thomas Townsend was manufacturing colours, and the third works (that on the east bank), was occupied by Roe and Company, horsehair manufacturers.

James Thorne Roe, who had worked as engineer for his father Freeman Roe, left the company and in February 1868 took the lease of part of the former Ravensbury print works, where he operated as a flock manufacturer. About this time, Roe and Company were succeeded at Duntshill by the Wandsworth Flock Company, who were described in a Post Office directory of 1870 as "horse, doe, hair, wool, and flock manufacturers".

Thomas Townsend died on 18 April 1874 at the age of 83, and the colour making was continued by his sons James and Thomas Townsend junior. Phillip Thompson had left the site by 1878, and the Townsends by 1890, and thereafter the entire works was occupied by the Wandsworth Flock Company. Davis in 1898 gave an account of how "woollen rags of all descriptions" were processed to produce flock [9].

The Wandsworth Flock Company had been established by Charles Henry Pike and his brother Seymour James Pike, who were related to the Townsend family. Charles Pike died on 18 July 1879 at the age of 35. Seymour Pike retired in 1918, when his son Roy Pike took over the management, and he died on 3 January 1930 at the age of 72. Roy Pike carried on the business until the beginning of 1940, when the firm closed down due to the economic conditions brought about by the onset of the Second World War [10].

A later building on part of the site, spanning the river, the offices of Kenco Coffee, was probably built during the 1960s. This was vacated in 1993, and was demolished and the area redeveloped in 1994-95. The flock mill is remembered by the name of a new road approximately on its site, Flock Mill Place.

References

1. The London Gazette, 10-13 October 1807.
2. John Hassell, Picturesque Rides and Walks, vol. 1, p. 123.
3. The London Gazette, 15 July 1828.
4. Wandsworth Local History Library, West Brixton Justices of the Peace Minutes Book 1828-29.
5. The Times, e.g. 16 October 1830.
6. The London Gazette, 6 December 1831.
7. Frederick Braithwaite, "On the Rise and Fall of the River Wandle ... ", in Institution of Civil Engineers Proceedings, vol. 20 (1861).

- 8.** Cecil T. Davis, *Industries of Wandsworth* (1898), p. 11.
- 9.** *Ibid.* p. 14.
- 10.** *Wandsworth Borough News*, 2 February 1940.