

Dyeworks in Garratt Lane Wandsworth

These works were situated between the River Wandle and Garratt Lane, on the site of the present Mapleton Crescent just before its junction with Garratt Lane, where the river now enters a culvert which carries it under the Wandsworth shopping centre.

The works were probably established by Abraham Hebert, a dyer who was working in Wandsworth at the time of his marriage in October 1654. Another member of the family, Henry Hebert, dyer, was named in parish register entries from 1668 to 1674.

Abraham Hebert died in September 1682, and bequeathed his "dyehouse and utensils thereto belonging" to his granddaughter Susan Hebert, who was then a minor. But his grandson, Abraham Gosselin, was to "enjoy for his use my now dwelling house with the dyehouse, kettles, tenters and appurtenances" for ten years, paying an annual rent of £60 to Susan [1].

In fact, it would seem that Matthew Hebert, probably Abraham Hebert's nephew, took over the business [2]. He died on 12 July 1703, and was succeeded by his widow Mary and eldest son Abraham [3]. Soon afterwards, in March 1704/5, they were jointly declared bankrupt [4].

A later occupier may have been Thomas Kirby, a calico printer who insured his goods in his dyehouses in Tooting Lane (i.e. Garratt Lane) on 11 September 1725 [5]. The next occupant is likely to have been Everard Fawkenor, a London silk and cloth merchant, who left Wandsworth in about 1735, after having been knighted and sent as ambassador to Constantinople.

Thomes Williamson was probably working at the dyeworks by the late 1730s. He was described as "of Wandsworth" when he married Christiana Stephenson at Clapham on 27 June 1741. He was included on a list of those liable to pay a sewer rate in Wandsworth drawn up on 25 March 1756, when he was rated on a tenter ground and other property [6].

He died on 20 October 1761. By his will proved on 7 November 1761, in which he described himself as scarlet dyer, he bequeathed the lease of his dwelling house and dyehouse at Wandsworth, and his stock in trade, to trustees to be managed to provide an income for his wife Christiana. After her death the annuity was to be paid to his brothers James, John and William and sister Elizabeth in equal shares [7].

Evidently his wife and his brother John took over the management of the works. They were named on a sewer rate list dated 11 August 1763 [6]. John Williamson died in 1782, but evidently his brother James had taken over the works some time earlier. He was rated for dyehouse and lands in 1780, in the earliest of the Wandsworth land tax registers. Christiana died in October 1785. James Williamson carried on the business until his death on 23 May 1799, and in June administration of his estate was granted to his widow Betty [8]. She was named as the occupier of the works in the Wandsworth land tax registers from 1800 to 1806, but it seems that the management was in the hands of her son, James Gaston Williamson, who was named as the occupier in Holden's directory for 1802-4.

Betty Williamson died on 23 March 1810. James Gaston Williamson carried on working there until his death on 31 July 1822. His widow Elizabeth was granted administration of his estate [9], and she took over the management of the dyeworks. She was named as a scarlet dyer at Wandsworth in Pigot's directories up to 1828.

She retired a few years later, and on 1 March 1831 it was announced that the lease of the dyeworks, "which for a great number of years had enjoyed a portion of the Hon. the East India Company's business in the dyeing of scarlet and blue cloths, being specially adapted for that particular branch of the trade", was on offer [10]. This advertisement was repeated on 3 May 1831 [11].



The dyeworks in 1838
[78.8kb]

A few weeks later it was advertised that "sundry Dye-house utensils" belonging to the works, and some household furniture, would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on the premises on 14 June 1831 [12]. A further auction, of all the plant and machinery, including two steam engines, was advertised to be held on 25 June 1831 [13].

This marked the end of dyeing on the premises. The book of reference to a Deposited Plan of November 1834 indicates that the buildings were then occupied by Richard Bell as a "chemical factory" [14]. The Wandsworth Tithe Map of 1838 names R. Bell as the tenant of the factory.

In the Wandsworth census returns for 1851 Richard Bell was said to be a "Lucifer match manufacturer" and some of his employees were making cardboard and metal matchboxes. If at the "chemical factory" he occupied by 1834 he was then engaged in making matches, he was an early supplier of this product; the friction match was invented in 1826.

In the 1861 census returns Richard Bell, at the age of 80, was described as a "retired lucifer manufacturer", and the business was apparently being carried on by his sons Richard and William. Richard Bell died on 25 January 1865, and administration of his estate was granted to his son Richard, described as "Wax Vesta manufacturer". Apparently the wax stick had been devised by Richard Bell senior; in Kelly's London Suburban directory for 1872, the firm was described as "patentee of the wax vesta match and cigar light", and Cecil Davis also attributed the invention of the "wax taper" to Bell [15].

By 1881 Charles Bell was employing 420 hands, making wax vesta matches and boxes. The last reference found to Richard Bell & Company was in an 1884 Kelly's directory.

On the Ordnance Survey maps of 1894-96, the buildings on the site were identified as the "Wandle Colour Works". These works were conducted by Joseph Freeman, Sons and Company, who were listed in directories from 1898 onwards. Davis in 1898 wrote of Freeman's that "they manufacture all classes of colour, from the finest used by artists to those used by house painters, also those used in paper staining. They also make various kinds of varnishes, and printers' ink - both for lithography and letterpress printing." [16]

In its later years the firm seems to have specialised in making colours for cement, and with a change of name to Cementone Ltd in about 1966, they were at Wandsworth until 1969. They were followed by Mercury Displays Ltd together with Devon Displays Ltd, but by 1978 the premises were occupied by the Inner London Educational Authority Divisional Office. In

about 1986 the buildings were demolished and the site incorporated into what is now the Wandsworth shopping centre.

References

- 1.** National Archives, PROB 11/307 q109.
- 2.** Minet Library, Deed 196.
- 3.** John Traviss Squire, Mount Nod (1887), p. 36.
- 4.** The London Gazette, 1-5 March 1704/5.
- 5.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/22, No. 37947.
- 6.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 46.
- 7.** National Archives, PROB 11/840 q413.
- 8.** Ibid. PROB 6/175 p. 279.
- 9.** Ibid. PROB 6/198.
- 10.** The County Chronicle, 1 March 1831.
- 11.** The Times, 3 May 1831.
- 12.** Ibid. 28 May 1831.
- 13.** Ibid. 20 June 1831.
- 14.** Surrey History Centre, QS6/8/164.
- 15.** Cecil T. Davis, Industries of Wandsworth (1898), p. 27.
- 16.** Ibid. p. 11.