

Leather Mill, Near Goat Bridge, Carshalton

This mill was situated on the west bank of the Wandle a short distance upstream from Goat Bridge, Beddington Comer, on an island formed by a bypass channel. Opposite, on the east bank, in Beddington, were a corn mill and an adjoining drug mill.

The earliest mention of a mill there seems to be in an indenture dated 19 December 1644, whereby Sir Henry Burton of Carshalton sold Cranmarsh Mills, then in the tenure of Richard Hayward and William Timble, to Henry Pigott, a mercer of Croydon, together with some adjoining land [1]. (Cranmarsh Common was an early name for the area largely occupied by the present Mill Green at Beddington Corner.) On 3 February 1652/3 Jeffery and Mary Lambert, who had evidently acquired the property, agreed to "remise and quit claim" of the mills and land to Robert Cranmer of Mitcham [2], and on 9 February 1652/3 a formal indenture of sale from Jeffery Lambert to Cranmer was effected [3].

On 21 August 1680 Robert Cranmer's son John, who had inherited the property in 1666, sold the "leather mill called Cranmarsh Mills in Carshalton with appurtenances", together with a leather mill in Beddington, to Edward Dimblebee, a London leatherseller, for £641 [4]. On the earliest surviving map of Mitcham, drawn by William Marr in 1685, the mills are shown, on both sides of the river, noted as "Edwd. Dimbelly's Mill", evidently an erroneous version of "Dimblebee" [5].

Edward Dimblebee, leatherdresser of Southwark, was declared bankrupt in January 1705/6 [6]. In March 1705/6, Thomas Malyn and John Blake, the assignees appointed under the bankruptcy proceedings, complained to the Court of the Surrey and Kent Sewer Commissioners that the operation of the leather mills was hindered by the works carried out in connection with a new logwood mill built by Richard Bond further downstream, near the end of Willow Lane in Mitcham. The main feature of these works was a new channel made for the river, from a point just south of Goat Bridge, which formed, in effect, an elongated mill pond for Bond's mill.

A delegation of the Sewers Commissioners, having inspected the situation, reported to the Court on 21 May 1706 that "Mr. Bond altered the ancient current of the water without any order for his so doing whereby the water is raised on the tail of the mill late Mr. Dimblebee's above six inches higher than formerly and part of the common adjoining overflowed to the damage of several persons." The Court ordered that Richard Bond "do pull down the bay by him lately erected for turning the river ... and that the water be restored to its ancient channel", within one month, or pay a penalty of £100 [7]. Evidently Bond took no steps to implement the order, and the matter was to be raised again some years later, when on 20 September 1721 Captain Henry Daniel, who had purchased the leather mills some time before 1717, complained to the Commissioners of Sewers that the order requiring Bond to restore the course of the river had not been complied with. Richard Bond had died in about 1716, so the Commissioners made another order to the same effect to his widow Emma and son Richard, who had taken over the lease of the logwood mill [8]. Again nothing was done, and indeed the water engineering works carried out by Bond remained in place for a further 240 years.

Henry Daniel, "Citizen and Haberdasher of London", died in 1726 and by his will proved on 7 June of that year he appointed his brother Edward and his partner John Edmonds as

executors, and instructed them to sell his properties in Carshalton and Beddington and elsewhere, for the benefit of his sons [9].

The executors were directed to sell the properties "as soon as shall be by them thought fit", and in December 1729 the leather mills were purchased by Thomas Scawen of Carshalton. Probably he bought the property direct from Henry Daniel's executors, but there may have been an intermediary owner. In any event, Scawen soon granted the head lease to Captain Edward Daniel, acting as trustee for his nephews. On 18 July 1733 Edward Daniel insured the mills and contents with the Sun insurance company. There were by this date, according to the policies register [10], four mills "under one roof", evidently spanning the river, namely a copper mill in Beddington, in the occupation of Andrew Niblett, and two leather mills and a corn mill in Carshalton, occupied by "Savignac".

Andrew Niblett made the original ball and cross surmounting the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, in 1708, when he was said to be working at a copper mill in Mitcham, tentatively identified by E. N. Montague as being one of the mills above Mitcham Bridge [11]. If so, it is likely that he left that mill before 1712, when Charles Parry was working there, but there is no evidence that he was at Beddington before 1733. He died in August 1736, and his mill was then probably abandoned or demolished.

The "Savignac" named as undertenant in the insurance policy of July 1733 was probably John Savignac, who had formerly been in partnership with his brother Paul as oil leather dressers at Southwark, until Paul Savignac's death in April 1723 [12]. There was no further mention of the corn mill, which was probably converted to leather working. Edward Daniel died about 1736, and the premises were then leased directly to John Savignac. He died in 1743, and was succeeded by his widow Judith [13].

In 1744 the tenants were Judith and her son Paul Peter Savignac. They were declared bankrupt in September 1753 [14]. Apparently they weathered this misfortune, but Judith seems to have retired about this time. Paul Peter Savignac carried on until his death a few years later, on 15 April 1756, at the age of 35. The business then passed to his widow Mary [16], and another dated 24 July 1766 [17] duly included "widow Savenach" (sic) at Carshalton.

Mary Savignac died on 3 December 1770 at the age of 49. By her will, proved on 25 February 1771, she directed that "my business of an oyl leather dresser" should be carried on by her sister Elizabeth Kirkham and other executors in trust to provide an income for her eight children for seven years. At the end of this period the lease of the mill premises, and the option of purchasing the articles of trade and the stock, should be offered to her eldest son Pillet [18]. He duly took over the management of the leather mill in 1778. Edwards, writing in about 1789, noticed "the Skinning Mills belonging to Mr. Pillet Savignac, who has a manufactory here for leather, parchment, &c." [19]

Actual ownership of the mill had passed from Thomas Scawen, after his death on 11 February 1774, to his son James. A few years later many of James Scawen's properties were sold in order to pay the debts incurred by his father, and in 1788 the mill was bought by Foster Reynolds. He died early in 1798 and by his will proved on 23 February of that year he bequeathed the leather mill together with other properties to his son William Foster Reynolds. A codicil to the will, dated 18 March 1796, specifically directed that the tumbling bay at Pillet Savignac's mill was to be maintained [20].

By 1805, when James Malcolm compiled his list of mills on the Wandle, Pilet Savignac had been joined by his brother Paul [21]. Paul Savignac died in 1828, and Pilet died two years later, on 16 October 1830, at the age of 89. By his will, proved on 15 January 1831, Pilet bequeathed his properties to a niece and a nephew [22]. It would seem that they, or the executors, came to an arrangement with Peter Pharaoh, who had worked at the mill since at least 1823, whereby he took over the lease and the business.

Peter Pharaoh was named as the occupier in Pigot's directory for 1832-34, and in later editions up to 1840. However, in June 1841 it was advertised that the lease of the leather mill premises, "late in the tenure of Peter Pharaoh", was available for sale, with immediate possession. The premises were said to be comprised of

"a very excellent modern residence of 15 rooms, with garden ground, extensive mill house with two 16 feet water wheels, stocks, copper, and other fixed implements, leather warehouses, kilns, drying lofts and certain land on the banks of the river, comprising almost six acres." [23]

The lease was probably then taken up by William McRae, who was named as the leather dresser there in a Post Office directory of 1845. McRae had worked a leather mill above Hack Bridge since about 1834, and the Book of Reference to the Carshalton Tithe Map of 1847 named him as the occupier of both mills, but he left the Hack Bridge mill in about 1850. The schedule to a Deposited Plan of 1849 also named McRae as the lessee of the Beddington Corner mill, when the owner was given as Esther Reynolds [24].

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 Anne and Elizabeth equally [25]. Presumably Esther Reynolds acted as trustee for her daughters. Brayley in 1850 listed the mill as "a leather dressing mill, powerful, the property of Mrs. Esther Reynolds of Trawling; occupied by William McRay" (sic) [26].

In the Carshalton census returns for 1851, William McRae, leather dresser, was said to be employing 68 men. Two years later, Frederick Braithwaite recorded "Mr. M'Crae's [sic] leather mills, using two wheels equal to 16 H.P." He went on to observe that

"A great deal of filth is constantly being discharged from these works, generally polluting half the stream, with the washing of the skins, and with lime and other impurities. At least 20,000 gallons of water are used daily, and a considerable quantity of chloride of lime ... The influence of the taint from these works are perceptible for a considerable distance down the stream, and pieces of skin were also observed floating on the surface." [27]

In August 1837, Samuel Gurney, a partner in the London banking firm of Overend, Gurney and Company, had married William Foster Reynolds's daughter Ellen. Following Esther Reynolds's death in 1857, he purchased the Culvers estate, including the Beddington Corner mills, from her sons Foster and Morris Reynolds. On 8 August 1862 he granted a new lease of the leather mill to William McRae for 21 years from 29 September next, at the annual rent of £190. McRae was only allowed the use of the river water from noon to midnight every day, and the water was not to be drawn lower than five inches below a full head [28]. (The use of the water for the other 12 hours was reserved to the tenant of the drug mill opposite.)

The firm of Overend, Gurney and Company failed in May 1866, was put into liquidation, and Samuel Gurney suffered financial ruin. "By direction of the liquidators", his Carshalton estates, including the mills, were offered for sale at an auction held on 31 October 1866. The leather works were described in the sale catalogue as a "Brick and Timber-built Mill, Boiling House, Leather Mill, and three Drying Stoves; also Two Lofts over the Mill for Drying and One for Dressing the Skins". There were two breast-shot water wheels about 16 feet in diameter, and numerous ancillary buildings, including a wheelwright's shop, drench house, drying house, blacksmith's shop, press house, store house and warehouse. The premises were held by William McRae, under a lease which was due to expire on 29 September 1869, at a rent of £196 per annum [29].

Some of the lots, including the Beddington Corner mills, were then purchased by the Croydon Local Board of Health. The sale was completed on 15 August 1867 [30].

The expiry date in 1869 of McRae's lease given above is at variance with the period of 21 years quoted in the previous description of it, but this was determinable by either party at 7 or 14 years, and it would seem that McRae had exercised his option. He may have stayed on a little longer -- he was named as the occupier in a directory of 1870 -- but on 25 March 1871 the Croydon Local Board leased the mill, together with the corn mill on the opposite bank, to his sons James and George McRae, for 21 years [31]. They then converted the corn mill to leather dressing, and worked it in conjunction with the leather mill. William McRae died on 20 August 1878 at the age of 81.

The leather mill, together with the former corn mill and the drug mill, were offered for sale at an auction held on 21 June 1880, "by direction of the Croydon Local Board of Health". The leather mill was said in the sale catalogue to have been substantially rebuilt in 1872, and to comprise "two spacious Floors with Stove Rooms and Drying Room, with Brick and Timber Washing House at end", and with one water wheel about 16 feet in diameter [31]. No sale resulted from this auction, and the mills remained in the ownership of the Croydon Local Board.

In the 1881 Carshalton census returns George McRae was said to employ 63 men and 3 boys. On 8 May 1882 the Croydon Local Board agreed that a new 21-year lease of the leather mill be granted to James McRae [32]. However, the listing in an 1885 directory was "Roberts, Henry David, Mitcham leather mills". (This name seems to have been generally applied to the mill from this time on, but it was of course in Carshalton.)

The Croydon Local Board of Health was replaced by the Corporation of Croydon in 1883, and on 25 March 1899 the Corporation renewed the lease of the leather mill and the former corn mill to Henry David Roberts for a further 21 years at the rent of £150 for the first year and £250 per annum for the remainder of the term. The same restrictions on the use of the water, to 12 hours a day, were imposed, as in the lease to William McRae in 1862 [33].



The mill in 1895.
[72.8kb]

Henry David Roberts died on 17 January 1902 at the age of 56, and the lease of the mills was assigned to his son Daniel Monteith Roberts, who carried on the business as H. D. Roberts & Son. On 12 January 1909 he negotiated with the Croydon Corporation a new lease for 12 years at the rent of £170 per annum [33]. It would seem that he quit the premises at the expiry of that lease in 1920.

The Pavlova Leather Company was named as the occupier in directory entries from 1920 to 1923, the Wattle Leather Company from 1929 to to 1933, and the Hackbridge Chamois Leather Company in 1937 and 1938.

An account of the leather dressing process as carried on at the mill in its later years was given in an article published in 1981, based on the recollections of an elderly man who worked there for many years, starting as a boy in about 1907. According to this account, the Carmarthen Leather Company worked the mill after World War II, and closed down in the early 1950s, when leather working on the site ceased [34].

Water power was used, in part, right up to the end. Hillier, in 1951, a few years before closure, wrote:

"The leather works have two water-wheels, one an all-metal wheel with the maker's name, 'W. R. Dell & Sons, Engrs. Croydon', embossed on the shield, eighteen feet in diameter, three feet across, U-shaped floats, only capable of use for short periods owing to the insufficient water-supply and used for generating electricity; the other, an older metal wheel with wooden slats, of similar diameter but slightly wider, is now disused." [35]

The mill buildings were later occupied by a succession of light engineering firms. Andor Soane Engineering Ltd. were there in 1969. In 1973, A. E. Jones identified the building on the site as the former mill, with some alterations [36]. The present building, occupied by Jara-Spray Ltd., bears no resemblance to Jones's sketch, and is evidently a later structure. The mill house, "Riverside", remains, and is listed Grade II. Its date of erection is ascribed as early to mid-19th century, so it seems likely that it was built by Pillet Savignac.

References

- 1.** Croydon Local Studies Library, d S655.
- 2.** Ibid. d S66.
- 3.** Surrey History Centre, 599/388.
- 4.** Croydon Local Studios Library, d S655.
- 5.** Copy in Merton Local Studies Centre.
- 6.** The London Gazette, 21-24 January 1705/6.
- 7.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 42.
- 8.** Ibid. SKCS 43.
- 9.** National Archives, PROB 11/609 q119.
- 10.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/38 No. 61418.
- 11.** Eric E. Montague, *Copper Milling on the Wandle* (1999), p. 10.
- 12.** National Archives, PROB 11/590 q84.
- 13.** Ibid. PROB 6/119 p. 71.
- 14.** The London Gazette, 8-11 September 1753. This notice names Jacob and Paul Savignac, but later notices refer to Judith and Paul.
- 15.** National Archives, PROB 6/132 p. 92.
- 16.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 46.
- 17.** Ibid. SKCS 47.
- 18.** National Archives, PROB 11/964 q84.
- 19.** James Edwards, *Companion from London to Brighthelmston*, Part II (c. 1789), p. 21.
- 20.** National Archives, PROB 11/1302 q133.

- 21.** James Malcolm, *Compendium of Modern Husbandry*, vol. 1 (1805), p. 7.
- 22.** National Archives, PROB 11/1780 q44.
- 23.** *The Times*, 12 June 1841.
- 24.** Surrey History Centre, QS 6/8/411.
- 25.** National Archives, PROB 11/1906 q57.
- 26.** E. W. Brayley, *A Topographical History of Surrey*, vol. 4 (1850), p. 68.
- 27.** Frederick Braithwaite, "On the Rise and Fall of the Wandle ... ", in *Institute of Civil Engineers Proceedings*, vol. 20 (1861).
- 28.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, Peatling Papers, vol. 10.
- 29.** *Ibid.* SBC 728.
- 30.** Croydon Local Studies Library, HEA/1/6.
- 31.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, 48/28/7.
- 32.** Croydon Local Studies Library, HEA/1/7.
- 33.** *Ibid.* D.S. 70.
- 34.** J. Williams, "Chamois Leather Production at Goat Bridge", in *The Wandle Group Bulletin*, no. 9 (1981).
- 35.** J. Hillier, *Old Surrey Water Mills* (1951), p. 174.
- 36.** A. E. Jones, *An Illustrated Directory of Old Carshalton* (1973), p. 197.