

Mitcham Mill, Carshalton

This mill was situated on the west bank of an island formed in the Wandle, opposite the end of Willow Lane in Mitcham, which originally extended down to the river. On the east bank of the Wandle, just south of Willow Lane, was a logwood mill, first recorded in 1685. In about 1703 the lessee of the logwood mill, Richard Bond, rebuilt that mill and created a new channel for the river from a point just south of the present Goat Bridge, and also the bypass channel to form the island. The mill on the island, later to be generally known as Mitcham Mill, although it was in Carshalton parish, was thus obviously built at some time after 1703.

Indeed the earliest reference to it so far found is to property in the possession of Sir Thomas Mackworth in February 1738/9, recorded in James Cranmer's rent book [1], and from later references it is evident that it was then a copper mill. In fact, there is an earlier mention of Sir Thomas therein, under the date 12 November 1733, when Richard Bond junior, who had succeeded his father as tenant of the logwood mill, paid his rent to James Cranmer, the owner, by a bill "drawn on Sir Tho. Mackworth". [1]

Sir Thomas Mackworth had been Member of Parliament for Rutland intermittently between 1695 and 1727, and the family seat was at Normanton in that county, and it is not clear how he came to establish a copper mill in Carshalton. It has been suggested that his interest in copper working was due to his relationship to Sir Humphrey Mackworth, who was probably his grandfather, and who in about 1695 had established a copper smelting works at Melincrydden near Neath [2]. This connection perhaps provides some sort of a motive, but does not explain why he selected Carshalton as the place for his enterprise.

There are several further references in the early 1740s in James Cranmer's rent book recording rent paid to him by Sir Thomas Mackworth. Cranmer was not the owner of the copper mill, and the rent was for the use of a private road (the later Willow Lane) for access to the mill from Mitcham via a ford at the end of the lane. The rent was £1 a year. The owner of the site of the copper mill when it was erected was William Myers of Mitcham, and after his death in 1742 the property passed to his eldest son, also named William.

By 1743 William Thoyts was in occupation of the copper mill, when on 24 March 1742/3 James Cranmer granted him the lease of some of the water carried by Richard Bond's new channel,

"called the Mill Head and the Great Pond thereunto adjoining with Liberty to raise a head of water in the said Pond and Mill Head to be kept and used within one foot of the top of the tumbling bay to run from thence through the conduit at the Waste Gate in the parish of Mitcham into the River or Watercourse in order for the said Mr. Thoyts to work the copper mill erected on the land of Wm. Myers Esq. for the space of 12 hours from 12 of the clock at midnight to 12 of the clock at noon every weekday from Xmas Day last for 7 years and three quarters of a year at the yearly rent of £25 ..." [1]

William Thoyts was also to pay the rent for the use of the access road, increased to £2 per annum.

William Thoyts was a coppersmith based at Whitechapel, who had previously worked at a copper mill above Hack Bridge, from about 1732 until before 1744, and it would seem that he

relinquished the lease of that mill and started working at "Mitcham Mill" shortly before he took the lease of Cranmer's water. He was also copper milling at the Lower Mill, Carshalton, from c. 1732 until c. 1767. Sir Thomas Mackworth died in February 1744/45, and Thoys then apparently took over the lease of the mill. He carried on working there until about 1752, and soon after took the lease of a copper mill near Merton Bridge.

The mill was in the occupation of Edward Foster, a millwright of Mitcham, by 7 December 1753, when he insured the property with the Hand in Hand insurance company [3]. The function of the mill was not given in the register record. He renewed this policy on 6 December 1760 [4]. He died early in July 1763, and by his will proved on 12 July 1763 he bequeathed the lease of his "corn mill situate in Carshalton" to trustees for the use and benefit of his son Edward, who also inherited his father's milling tools [5]. This reference in his will, written a few days before his death, is the earliest found to the copper mill having been converted to corn milling, but it seems likely that the conversion was made soon after Edward Foster senior acquired the lease.

William Myers, the owner of the mill, also owned the mills above Mitcham Bridge, on the site of the later Crown Mill and Grove Mill, and on 21/22 March 1764 these, together with the mill "now in the tenure or occupation of Edward Foster", were conveyed by Myers and Archibald Stewart to Robert Cochran, a Mitcham surgeon [6]. Archibald Stewart, a wine merchant who had previously been Member of Parliament for Edinburgh and had moved his business to London in 1743, lived in Mitcham Grove near Mitcham Bridge. His interest in the properties is not known; he may have been a mortgagee. (The reference in the indenture is to the "newly erected mill called the Copper Mill", but this was obviously copied from an earlier document.)

The corn mill property included the water of the Wandle through the channel created by Richard Bond in 1703, for which William Thoys had had to pay rent. It would seem that Myers had come to an agreement with Cranmer in respect of including the water rights within the ownership of the mill. Such agreement would have been facilitated by the family tie resulting from William Myers's marriage to James Cranmer's daughter Elizabeth in 1743.

Edward Foster junior died in 1766, and administration of his estate was granted to his brother Charles on 6 May 1766 [7]. Thus it was Charles Foster who on 4 December 1767 renewed the insurance policy on the mill taken out by his father [8]. On 5 June 1771 he took out a policy with the Sun insurance company to cover the utensils and machinery in the mill [9]. This policy also covered the machinery in the nearby logwood mill in Mitcham, of which he had acquired the lease a few years earlier. He renewed the Hand in Hand policy covering the mill buildings on 2 December 1774 [10], and again on 1 December 1781 [11].

On 19 November 1784 Robert Linton, a farmer of Morden, insured his utensils and stock in Foster's corn mill with the Sun insurance company [12], and Charles Foster transferred completely to that company and took out a policy with them on 28 March 1788, to cover both the corn mill and the logwood mill, and the utensils and stock therein [13].

According to W. H. Prentis, "the corn mill was burnt down in 1788 and was rebuilt in the following year by W. Fry, Esq." [14], but he had obviously mis-read a reference made by James Edwards in c. 1789 which applied to a corn mill near Mitcham Bridge [15]. Both mills were then owned by William Frye. On 28/29 October 1768 Robert Cochran had sold the mills

and other properties to his brother-in-law Rowland Frye [16]. He died in 1777 and by his will proved on 5 December 1777 bequeathed his estate to his brother William [17].

It would seem that during the next few years Foster rented out the mill to other millers for short periods. On 11 January 1790, John Watney, miller, of Wimbledon, insured his utensils and stock in the mill [18], and again on 31 December 1792 [19]. George May, a miller of Wandsworth, insured his goods in the mill on 16 November 1793 [20], and William Harwood, baker, of Mitcham, insured his on 22 March 1794 [21].

Charles Foster insured the mill buildings for the last time on 23 May 1792 [22]. He died in 1797 and was buried at Mitcham on 18 March, and on 29 March administration of his estate was granted to his widow Mary [23]. Mary Foster then took over the management of the corn mill and also the logwood mill, and insured both properties on 15 October 1799 with the Sun insurance company [24]. She re-insured the corn mill only on 17 July 1804 [25].

At some time after 1808 Mary Foster assigned the lease of the corn mill to William Aldersey and William Lazonby, with whom she was in partnership at the logwood mill. They dissolved their partnership as millers on 25 February 1811 [26]. Lazonby then carried on alone, but he died a few months later, at the age of 52. He was buried at Mitcham on 2 June 1811 having been, according to the entry in the parish register, 'kill'd by falling from a tree'. Administration of his estate was granted to his widow Mary on 4 November 1811 [27]. On 24 November 1812 Mary Lazonby took out an insurance policy on the corn mill, with its machinery, and some ancillary buildings [28].

She carried on with the management for a few years, but in August 1816 an announcement of the forthcoming sale of the remaining period of the lease of the mill was published [29]. The auction did not in fact take place until 11 July 1817. In the notice advertising the sale, the mill was described as being "in good repair and upon the modern plan, and drives 3 pairs of stones; the water wheel is 12 feet wide, and with the greater part of the machinery have been erected new within the last 7 years" [30]. The outstanding period of the lease was seven years.

It would seem that the lease was then bought by John Leigh junior, a miller of Wallington, and William Aldersey, making a come-back. They jointly insured the mill premises and machinery on 21 January 1818 [31]. Apparently there was some irregularity with this policy, and the premises were re-insured on 2 April 1818 [32].

When the policy was renewed on 13 January 1821, John Leigh had been replaced in the partnership by John Searle of Carshalton [33]. In fact, by that date, John Searle had apparently been working at the mill for some years; when he insured some property at Coulsdon in September 1819, he was described as "of Beddington Corner, Miller". [34] At some time, possibly when the lease was renewed in 1824, John Searle became the sole tenant, and was to remain in occupation for nearly a further 40 years.

As regards the ownership position, William Frye had died in 1795, and under the terms of his father's will, his properties were inherited by his niece Elizabeth Newton, and were to pass after her death to her son William Morris Newton [17]. He had duly inherited by 1803, having changed his name to William Morris Frye. He died in 1820, and by his will proved on 4 February 1821 he bequeathed his properties to his brother-in-law Henry Leigh Spencer [35]. After his death in 1829 they passed to his widow Elizabeth Frances Spencer.

John Searle carried on working until he was in his 70s, but in the 1861 Carshalton census returns he was described, at the age of 80, as being a "retired miller". His son William was at that time "a miller employing 4 men". John Searle died on 26 September 1866, aged 86.



The Mill in 1867 [56kb]

William Searle continued with the business, and was named as the miller there in directories up to 1872. He may have carried on for a little longer, but in October 1879 the mill, described as "a capital Water Corn Mill, driving four pairs of stones; stabling, cart sheds, yard, excellent dwelling house, garden and paddock, in all about 4 1/2 acres", was advertised to be let, for a period of 7, 14 or 21 years, at the rent of £200 per annum [36]. By this date the mill was in the ownership of the Freer and Fowke families. Elizabeth Frances Spencer had died in 1848, and her properties had passed to her two daughters, Elizabeth, the wife of Charles Thomas Freer, and Sarah, the wife of Sir Frederick Thomas Fowke.

In February 1880 the property was again advertised to be let, when the lease period was fixed at twenty-one years at the rent of £227-10s. per annum, "including use of plant" [37]. Again the offer was not taken up, and the advertisement, in a slightly different form, was published again in March and in June 1881 [38].

In the earlier advertisements it was suggested that the mill might be put to uses other than corn milling, and it appears that this is what happened and that corn milling was never resumed there. In 1884 the premises were taken over by J. S. Deed & Sons, and converted to leather dressing. At about the same time, the firm acquired the neighbouring former logwood mill, which had been converted to leather dressing in 1875, erected other buildings, and operated the whole complex as the Eagle Leather Works.

This company had been founded, initially as leather sellers, in London in about 1834 by John Simpkin Deed. By the time they took the leases of the two mills, he had retired (he died in March 1892 at the age of 83), and the management was in the hands of his sons Martin and Alfred Deed. Alfred Deed became chairman when the firm was formed into a limited company in 1909, and retained that position until his death in August 1914. Martin Deed died in March 1922. Herbert Alfred Deed, Alfred's son, was chairman from 1929 until his death in February 1939, and the chairmanship was held by successive members of the family, retaining the name John S. Deed & Sons Limited. The firm specialised in the production of high-quality soft leathers such as white buckskin and sheepskin.

The former corn mill building survived for a further 80 years after its conversion. Hillier, in 1951, described it thus:

"It has a brick base up to the first storey, tarred weatherboards above, and a pleasant unevenness as to roof-line by reason of a T-shaped plan and the greater height of that end of the building originally housing the corn-milling central shaft and stones, forming the short cross-piece of the 'T'. A large external breastshot wheel of mid-nineteenth century date drove the mill, and still remains, having the normal Wandle diameter viz. 18 feet, with four sets of compass-arms spanning its 10 feet width, the whole wheel of cast-iron, with L-shaped floats
... .

"In this quondam corn-mill there is nothing to give a hint as to the millwrights' work formerly there, except an oak-cogged pit-wheel, but the space available would suggest a three-pair

mill. For the main upright timber members the builder used the butts of trees, the spreading bases placed uppermost and forming capitals to support the beams of the floor above ... the cross-beams are now studded with tenterhooks whereon the leather-dresser stretches his skins." [39]

The mill building was demolished in 1965. In that year, as part of flood control measures carried out to this part of the river, Richard Bond's "new channels" of 1703 were filled in and the flow restored partly to its original course. John S. Deed & Sons Limited continued with leather production in their other buildings in Mitcham until 1989.

References

1.]Surrey History Centre, 470 (Rent and Memorandum Book of James Cranmer 1717-1749).
2.]E. N. Montague, Copper Milling on the Wandle (1999), p. 14.
3.]Guildhall Library, MS 8674/82 p. 68.
4.]Ibid. MS 8674/95 p. 14.
5.]National Archives, PROB 11/889 q335.
6.]Surrey History Centre, 303/21/4/1.
7.]National Archives, PROB 6/142 p. 118.
8.]Guildhall Library, MS 8674/106 p. 322.
9.]Ibid. MS 11936/206 No. 298118.
10.]Ibid. MS 8674/116 p. 246.
11.]Ibid. MS 8674/125 p. 18.
12.]Ibid. MS 11936/324 No. 498596.
13.]Ibid. MS 11936/353 No. 542316.
14.]W. H. Prentis, The Snuff Mill Story (1969), p. 122.
15.]James Edwards, Companion from London to Brighthelmston, Part II (c. 1789), p. 18.
16.]Surrey History Centre, 303/21/4/4.
17.]National Archives, PROB 11/1037 q507.
18.]Guildhall Library, MS 11936/364 No. 564695.
19.]Ibid. MS 11936/392 No. 609795.
20.]Ibid. MS 11937/1 No. 622279.
21.]Ibid. MS 11937/3 No. 625660.
22.]Ibid. MS 11936/385 No. 600750.
23.]National Archives, PROB 6/173 p. 225.
24.]Guildhall Library, MS 11937/37 No. 695204.
25.]Ibid. MS 11937/59 No. 765465.
26.]The London Gazette, 26 February-2 March 1811.
27.]National Archives, PROB 6/187 p. 233.
28.]Guildhall Library, MS 11937/102 No. 876697.
29.]The Times, 2 August 1816.
30.]Ibid. 30 June 1817.
31.]Guildhall Library, MS 11937/121 No. 939200.
32.]Ibid. MS 11937/124 No. 941591.
33.]Ibid. MS 11937/131 No. 975248.
34.]Ibid. MS 7253/77 No. 314676.
35.]National Archives, PROB 11/1638 q13.

- 36.**]The Miller, 6 October 1879.
- 37.**]Ibid. 2 February 1880.
- 38.**]Ibid. 13 June 1881.
- 39.**]J. Hillier, Old Surrey Water Mills (1951), p. 177.