

## Ravensbury Calico Printing Works, Mitcham

These works were situated in the present Ravensbury Park about 470 yards upstream from where Merton Road crosses the Wandle. They were not on the main river, but on the banks of an artificial side stream that still meanders round the edge of the park, and which at this end divided into two roughly parallel channels. The site was approximately opposite the end of the present Ravensbury Grove.

The earliest record found which indicates that cloth bleaching was being carried on in the vicinity was the report of a case heard at the Surrey Quarter Sessions in 1690, when William Wood, a whitster, was summoned for causing damage to the highway from Morden to Mitcham by forming a watercourse [1]. This watercourse was in all likelihood the side stream mentioned above, or a precursor of it, which would have supplied water to a series of ditches to facilitate the bleaching process. The highway across the site was later diverted.

Nothing more is known about William Wood, or any later bleacher at the site. The next occupant who can be identified was a calico printer, Peter Mauvillain, a naturalised French Huguenot.

He was a well-known calico printer by 1696 when he, together with his brother Stephen, signed a petition presented to the House of Lords opposing a Bill then pending, to curb the wearing of printed calico. They were also signatories to a further petition to Parliament in 1714, pleading for excise duties on old re-used linens and calicoes to be lifted [2]. In 1719 they signed another petition, against a Bill then under consideration to forbid the use of printed calicoes. Peter Mauvillain was then said to be employing 205 workpeople at his works at Wandsworth and Mitcham [2].

By this date the brothers also occupied land in Morden and Merton, having been granted a 21-year lease thereof on 2 October 1716 [3]. The site of none of these works is known with certainty, but the works at Morden are likely to have been on the west side of the Wandle at the south corner of the present Morden Hall Park, and the Mitcham works were probably on the site of the later works at Ravensbury.

In 1722 Peter and Stephen Mauvillain of "Mordon", by an advertisement published on 17 October of that year, informed the public that their stock of printed calicoes was for sale. These consisted of "several thousand done in England. The largest quantity in any one hand at the time of the passing of the Prohibition Act." [4]

Peter Mauvillain died on 7 March 1739/40 at the age of 72. By his will he bequeathed most of his estate to his wife Sarah and his brother Stephen in equal shares [5]. Stephen died soon after his brother, on 31 May 1740, aged 70, intestate, and administration was granted to his son Peter [6]. Sarah Mauvillain died on 17 December 1741, and by her will she bequeathed her estate, apart from a few annuities, equally to her nephew Peter Mauvillain and his sisters Hannah and Sarah [7]. Thus Peter Mauvillain effectively acquired the management of the calico printing business of his late father and uncle.

Not long afterwards he evidently went into partnership with Abraham Whittaker. On 25 December 1743 and again on 3 January 1745/6 they, described as calico printers, insured their stock in trade contained in Whittaker's warehouse in Thames Street, London [8].

Their partnership had apparently been dissolved by the time of Peter Mauvillain's death on 25 November 1755 at the age of 49. By his will he directed that his estate be sold and the proceeds divided equally between his sister Sarah Mauvillain and his sister Hannah and her husband Andrew Stone [9].

But he had drawn up his will some 12 years earlier, on 24 January 1743/4, and it would seem that he had, shortly before his death, come to some arrangement with John Cecil, a calico printer who had married his cousin Hannah. John Cecil was first recorded at calico printing works at Merton Abbey in November 1753, and then or soon afterwards was in partnership there with John Arbuthnot. Arbuthnot had also become a member of the Mauvillain extended family when he married John Cecil's daughter Sally Margaret in 1753.

The outcome of the arrangement was that on 12 November 1755 the landowner, Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew, agreed to grant a 99-year lease of Ravensbury House and about 102 acres of adjoining land, in Mitcham and Morden, together with a farm and other lands, to Cecil and Arbuthnot at an annual rent of £155. He also agreed to "use his endeavour to turn the road from Ravensbury House round by the Mill". The house, mill, and land were then occupied by Thomas Whapham, but Sir Nicholas undertook that if "any person should apply ... to take the ground belonging to Ravensbury Mill for the purpose of a Calico Printer and Whitster that he ... will make the first offer upon the like terms" to Arbuthnot and Cecil. This presumably means that he would terminate Whapham's sub-lease if required [10]. In fact, Whapham stayed on for many years. John Cecil does not seem to have become directly involved with these works, but he carried on at Merton Abbey until his death in April 1760.

An entry in the Mitcham Vestry Minute Book dated 2 September 1813 reads:

"About the year 1753, Mr. Arbuthnot, who then lived at Ravensbury House, Mitcham, and carried on a most extensive Manufactory there ... undertook for his own convenience and advantage to turn a Public Carriageway, leading close by his house over the River Wandle to Morden ... in the execution of this work Mr. Arbuthnot built a New Bridge over the river instead of the one near his house which is entirely removed." [11]

This diversion of the road is probably that referred to in the lease agreement of 1755 given above. The highway which was diverted was that which William Wood damaged in 1690. A part of the old road remains as Ravensbury Lane leading off from Merton Road.

Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew had not formally executed the lease agreement of 1755 before his death on 8 April 1762, but by his will he devised all his real estate in trust to William Pellatt, and authorised him to grant this (and other) leases. Accordingly, on 15 June 1763, Pellatt formally granted the lease, backdated to 25 December 1755, to John Arbuthnot only [10].

Although the printing works were carried on under Arbuthnot's name, it would seem that he subcontracted much of the work to Thomas Whapham, whose name is mentioned in a number of contemporary references as being associated with the mill. In a list of those liable to pay a sewer rate, drawn up on 25 March 1756, he was named as the tenant of Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew [12]. In 1761 Whapham was rated as the occupier in the Mitcham Poor Rate Book, and in 1763 he built a tumbling bay and a dam in the river [13]. In 1762 and 1763 he signed the Mitcham Vestry Minute Book on behalf of John Arbuthnot [14]. He died in April 1765 and in his will gave instructions for the expenditure of £36, "now in the possession of John Arbuthnot Esq.", which was presumably an outstanding debt [15].

It appears that Arbuthnot became much interested in farming, and he took over the management of the farm included in the 1763 lease, which was situated on the Morden side of the river. There he experimented with the growing of various crops, and with manures, drainage, and rotation of crops. He invented several types of plough, and other farm machinery. He was especially successful in growing madder, the roots of which were used to produce a dye for textiles, and which he would have used in his calico printing business [16].

The calico printing would seem to have been less successful than the farming. Charles O'Brien, who had worked for the renowned calico printer William Kilburn at Wallington, wrote of Arbuthnot that he "had a pattern cut out for Queen Caroline, but though elaborate and well executed, it was in the common stile of effect, with 3 reds, 3 purples, an outline and so on." (He probably meant Queen Charlotte, the wife of George III.) He was more critical in another passage with reference to a new process of "chemick printing": "Arbuthnot made some stir with green stalks in light chintz which soon flew, and no provision being made to supply the vacant parts ... the cloth then had a truly ludicrous appearance; the flowers seeming scattered here and there without stalk or any other appendage." [17].

John Arbuthnot eventually got into financial difficulties, and in 1778 Admiral Marriott Arbuthnot, a distant relative, took legal proceedings to recover the sum of £5,000 he had lent him in 1774 [16]. On 4 August 1778 John Arbuthnot assigned most of his estate and effects to trustees to enable them to pay his creditors [18], and the Admiral took possession of Ravensbury House and the mill and grounds in about 1780 [16]. In March 1779, it was announced that on 20 April following, the sale by auction would be held of John Arbuthnot's "extensive and valuable Stock of Blocks, adapted to the Spanish, African, American, German, French and Home Trades". Also his utensils in trade and a stock of about 100 pieces of printed cottons and linens [19].

Following this disaster, John Arbuthnot went to France with his family, in about 1780, but soon returned, and was granted the post of Inspector-General of Leinster, Munster and Connaught for the Irish Linen Board, effective from June 1782. He then went to Ireland and remained there until his death in December 1797 [16].

By 1780 Thomas Hatcher was in occupation of the Ravensbury works, having previously been at calico printing works at Wandsworth. In about 1781 he engaged a calico print cutter for the wage of 7 shillings a week [20]. He died on 29 July 1787, and by his will proved on 7 August 1787 he bequeathed all his possessions, including "my utensils and machines used in my Manufactory or Trade", to his wife Alice [21]. In about 1789 James Edwards noticed at Ravensbury "a neat white house which belonged to the late Mr. Hatcher, a gentleman much noted for his manufactory in the callico line, which he carried on here. This manufactory is now in the possession of Mr. Fenning, late of Merton Abbey." [22]

This was William Fenning, who had been in partnership with James Halfhide, Benjamin Vaughan senior and Benjamin Vaughan junior at calico printing works at Merton Abbey from 1769, and latterly with Halfhide only, until he was declared bankrupt in April 1788. He evidently started afresh soon afterwards at Ravensbury, buying the lease from Alice Hatcher, and he was to remain there for over 20 years.

In 1792 it was stated that at Ravensbury,

"Mr. Fenning has some grounds for the bleaching and printing of calico ... Mr. Fenning has an engine in case of fire, the pumps of which are worked by the same wheel that is used in the business. He experienced the benefit of this machine, a few months ago, when his premises took fire, and would have been totally consumed but for this admirable invention." [23]

William Fenning died on 9 August 1812 at the age of 74. By his will, proved on 12 January 1813, he directed that the calico printing business be carried on by his wife and son, also named William, who had been in partnership with him [24]. William Fenning junior did continue calico printing, but only for a few years. In March 1817 an advertisement was published, offering for sale by private contract, "by order of Mr. William Fenning, leaving the business", the lease of his "extensive Printing-Grounds, Manufactory, Water-Mill and Plant" at Ravensbury. The property included

"16 acres of bleaching grounds, with a capital range of brick building 200 feet in length, 2 stories high, containing printing shops, press rooms, store rooms, drying lofts, &c., &c.; storage for 100 chaldron of coals, copper house and other suitable detached buildings; and a water mill of adequate power for working a variety of machinery." [25]

William Fenning moved to Stamford Street, Southwark, where he died in February 1837. In his will he described himself as "coal merchant."

The offer of the lease was taken up by Bailey Austin, a calico printer who had previously worked elsewhere in Mitcham. On 27 October 1817 he was granted a 21-year lease of the premises, which included a 20-acre "Whitening ground", by the Hon. Hugh Arbuthnot, who had succeeded Admiral Arbuthnot as head lessee in 1794 [26]. The landowner at this time was Mrs. Anne Paston Gee, the widowed sister-in-law of Richard Gee Carew, the last of the Carews, on a female line of descent, who had died in 1816.

Bailey Austin died in July 1823, and by his will proved on 13 August 1823 he bequeathed most of his assets to his brother-in-law Frederick Benjamin King, who had married his sister Emma. He directed that King should continue to carry on the business of calico printing "in which I am now engaged trusting it may with God's blessing remunerate him for all his past great kindness and affection towards me". [27]

Frederick Benjamin King did carry on for a few years, but by 1828 he had been succeeded by Edward Walmesley, who had testified as a witness to the signing of Bailey Austin's will, when he was described as a linen draper. On 11 August 1831 Walmesley was granted a 7-year underlease of the premises by his uncle, John Bonus Child [28]. This was, presumably, some temporary financial arrangement. On 11 August 1836 Walmesley surrendered the outstanding term of the lease taken out by Bailey Austin in 1817 [26], and on 31 August 1836 he was granted a new lease by the Hon. Hugh Arbuthnot [29].

A condition of the lease was that Walmesley should arrange for the provision of a new water wheel to replace the existing, to be completed within three years. It was possibly to obtain the funds for this work that, a month later, on 29 September 1836, Walmesley mortgaged his lease for £4,750 to the executors of John Bonus Child, who had died in 1832 [30].

Edward Walmesley died on 4 February 1841 at the age of 69, and by his will proved on 4 March 1841 he bequeathed all his estate to his wife Mary [31]. Even before the probate, Mary

Walmesley had arranged for an advertisement to be published, announcing that the lease of the works, together with the plant, utensils and stock in trade, were available for sale by private contract, "in consequence of the decease of the proprietor". The notice appeared on 1 March 1841 [32].

There was evidently no acceptable response to this offer, and the following May it was announced that the "valuable lease and goodwill of those old-established Premises, well-known as the Ravensbury Calico Printing Factory", with dwelling house, appurtenances and land, would be offered for sale, "by direction of the Executrix of the late Edward Walmesley, Esq." at an auction to be held on 7 June 1841 [33].

Again no acceptable bids were received, and another opportunity to buy the lease was announced in November 1841. The lease and goodwill would be on offer at an auction on 21 December 1841, and on the following days the machinery, plant, utensils and implements, and copper plates and printing blocks, would be auctioned [34].

It would seem that a sale then did take place, for on 12 January 1842 Mary Walmesley was able to redeem the mortgage on the property taken out by her late husband in 1836 [30].

The next occupant of the premises was probably Lawrence Daniel Dolbell, dyer, "of Ravensbury and Lower Mitcham", who was declared bankrupt on 19 February 1845 [35]. He was evidently followed by John Geary, dyer, who was named as the occupier on the schedule to the Mitcham Tithing Map dated February 1846. On the schedule to a Deposited Plan dated 28 November 1849, John Geary was also listed as the lessee, and the premises were described as factory and dyeworks [36].

On 16 November 1849 a partnership was formed between Edward Carter and John Downing as silk printers at the Ravensbury works [37], and on the same day Carter and Downing went into partnership with Alexander Gibson, a draper [38]. Presumably they took over the business from John Geary, although he stayed on and was recorded as a dyer at Ravensbury Factory when the 1851 Mitcham census was compiled.

The partnership of Edward Carter and John Downing, "silk, woollen, challi, and fancy printers, at the Willows Mills and Ravensbury Mills", was dissolved on 27 May 1850 [38]. John Downing then continued working on his own account at the Willows Mills, while Edward Carter and Alexander Gibson carried on at Ravensbury with a new partner, Owen Bowen. Edward Carter resigned soon after, on 4 December 1850 [40]. The following year, on 23 August 1851, Bowen and Gibson were declared bankrupt [41].

The lease of the works was then taken up by Peter Dempsey and George Heard, shawl printers. In 1853 Braithwaite paid a visit to

"the print works of Messrs. Dempsey and Hind [sic] which employ one wheel of 8 H.P. ... This firm used half a carboy of sulphuric acid weekly; a carboy, or about 8 gallons, of muriate of tin per month; and 5 cwt. of prussiate of potash, and 5 cwt. of oxalic acid per annum; also a certain quantity of sulphate of copper, chloride of lime, &c. all which materials are discharged into the river. Moreover the works require, for washing the goods, all the water that can be obtained, and four men are constantly employed in rinsing them in the stream. The deep colouring matter may be observed for more than 200 yards." [42]

The landowner of the works premises last mentioned in this account, Mrs. Anne Paston Gee, died in 1828, and bequeathed her properties to her cousin, Sir Benjamin Hallowell, who then added Carew to his name. He died in 1834 and was succeeded by his son Captain Charles Hallowell Carew. After his death in 1849, the estates were inherited by his son Charles Hallowell Hallowell Carew, then aged 18. By the time he entered into his inheritance, he had accumulated massive debts, and many of his properties were later sold to enable his debts to be discharged. The Ravensbury printing works were included in the properties offered for sale at an auction held on 20 July 1855, when they were purchased by Peter Dempsey. The conveyance was not completed until 2 December 1856 [43], by which date Dempsey was working alone, George Heard having resigned from the partnership on 11 April 1856 [44].

Peter Dempsey was soon in financial difficulties. In February 1857 he mortgaged the property for £2,500, and borrowed a further £500 in December 1858 [45]. In 1861 he borrowed several sums of money from William Simpson, Lord of the Manor of Mitcham, and arranged with him a further mortgage [46]. The end of Dempsey's occupancy came on 29 August 1862, when the premises were conveyed to William Simpson by Charles Sumner and Frederick Rolt, Dempsey's mortgagees [47]. Some years later, in 1869, Peter Dempsey became manager of Swaislands silk printing factory at Crayford, Kent [48].

Peter Dempsey was the last textile printer to work at Ravensbury, and it was probably of his establishment that Benjamin Slater, an elderly resident of Mitcham, recalled in 1911:

*"this was noted for calico printing, also silk printing, and the noted Paisley shawls were made and printed here to a large extent. There were a great number of hands employed here, both men and women, French, Scotch and English ... "* [49]



*The printing works in c. 1865 shortly before they were but to other uses.[119kb]*

After William Simpson acquired the works premises in 1862, he leased them for one year to James Wilkinson on 4 August 1862 [50], but Wilkinson died soon after, on 1 October. On 12 May 1865 Simpson sold the property to James Terry and James Whitehead [51], and they immediately mortgaged it for £6,600 [52]. They took out a further mortgage for £8,000 on 22 July 1867 [53]. By this date there were two separate companies working on the site, George Hallet and Company at the Areuga hair and bristle factory in the mill building, and George Michael Glass operating as British Isinglass gelatine manufacturers in other buildings.

On 15 February 1868 Terry and Whitehead granted a 21-year lease of part of the hair and bristle works to William Edward Lewis Hooper [54]. On the same day they leased for 21 years the other part of the works to James Thorne Roe [55], and both Hooper and Roe then carried on business there as flock manufacturers. Roe had previously worked as engineer at the Dunts Hill Flock Mill at Wandsworth.

At about the time he took the lease, James Thorne Roe had entered into partnership with Jacob Morris Harris. They dissolved their partnership on 31 May 1872 [56], and the following day Roe went into partnership with William Edward Lewis Hooper, as flock manufacturers, and they united their businesses under the name of James Thorne Roe & Company [57]. The management of the works probably remained in the hands of Roe's brother, Timothy Thorne Roe, who was described in the 1871 Mitcham census returns as employing 12 men, 4 women and a boy.

On 1 March 1874 Henry Hoare, a Fleet Street banker, who by then had acquired the freehold of the whole property, granted a one-year lease of the former gelatine works buildings to Edmund Lamprell, John Charles Andrews and Arthur Thomas Emerson, lace merchants [58]. The following year Hoare renewed the lease for a further 9 years [59]. Soon afterwards, on 14 April 1775, Henry Hoare sold all the property to Gilliat Hatfeild of Morden Hall [60].

The last reference found to Lamprell and Company, as "skirt and fancy manufacturers" at "Ravensbury mill", was in the P.O. London Suburban directory for 1884. James Thorne Roe had resigned from his partnership with William Edward Lewis Hooper on 25 December 1877 [61], and Hooper then carried on the business alone until 21 March 1884, when he surrendered the outstanding term of his lease to Gilliat Hatfeild [54]. No reference to any occupiers of the works after 1884 has been found.

Gilliat Hatfeild died in February 1906, and his properties then passed to his son Gilliat Edward Hatfeild. According to the recollections of Mr. Sales, grandson of William Williams, one-time bailiff of the Morden Hall estate, the old "factory" was used as a warehouse and workshop in connection with the maintenance of the estate. He recalled that:

"The waterwheel in the factory was undershot and was in regular use all through the '30s and early '40s. It was used to drive the various machine tools used in the workshop, in drills, planes and saws, etc. A sluice gate was opened to allow the water through to drive the wheel and a large lever was used to engage a clutch which transferred to drive to a belt system, The various tools were driven by subsidiary belt systems" [62].

Gilliat Edward Hatfeild died in February 1941, and his sons put up parts of the estate for sale by auction in May 1946. The Ravensbury site was subsequently acquired by Mitcham Borough Council. They demolished the mill buildings which had been damaged by bombing in World War II. A housing estate was later erected on the former bleaching grounds to the north of the mill site.

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