

Ravensbury Mill, Mitcham-Morden

The building, refurbished and awaiting occupation, which spans the River Wandle on the south side of Morden Road, is the last of a series of mill buildings on the site, and was built in about 1800. The parish boundary between Mitcham and Morden runs along the centre of the river here, so the mill was in both parishes.

The earliest reference found to a mill here is in a rent roll for the Manor of Ravensbury, which recorded that rent was paid to Sir Nicholas Carew of Beddington by Mr. Westbrooke on a "newly erected mill below Ravensbury House". [1] This reference is undated, but ascribed to the 1680s, and must date from before the death of Sir Nicholas Carew on 9 January 1687/8.

"Mr. Lawrence Parker or John Westbrooke" was rated for a mill in Mitcham in a list of those liable to pay a sewer rate drawn up on 13 June 1704 [2]. A map of the area, surveyed in 1750, shows a building spanning the river, identified as "Westbrooks Mill" [3]. Assuming that a Westbrooke was still in occupation, he must obviously have been a descendant of the one referred to in the 1680s. The function of the mill at this period is not specified.

In September 1755 Mr. Busick was rated in the Mitcham Poor Rate Book in respect of a mill and land rented from Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew, the great-grandson of the previously mentioned Sir Nicholas [4]. This was, no doubt, the Robert Busick who was described as a logwood grinder at Morden when William Mills attested that he had hired himself to Busick for a year "in about 1758". [5] Robert "Buswick" was included in a sewers ratepayers list for Mitcham dated 25 March 1756 [6].

However, Mr. Arnold was named in lieu of Busick in the Mitcham Poor Rate Book for February 1756, and it seems possible that the sewers rate list was compiled some time before publication, and that William Mills's memory of the date, which he was recalling more than 30 years later, in 1791, was inexact. Another explanation of the apparent disparity might be that there were two adjoining mills, one occupied by Busick and the other by Arnold.

There were certainly two mills a few years later, both occupied by Latham Arnold. On 25 October 1758 Arnold, described as a tobacconist of Newgate Street, London, insured a mill on the Mitcham bank with the Hand in Hand insurance company [7]. The use of the mill was not mentioned in the register entry, but it was evidently a snuff mill. The Poor Rate record in February 1756, previously cited, referred to "Mr. Arnold's snuff mills". On 13 June 1761 he insured a logwood mill with the same company, said in the register record to be in Mitcham, but which on the basis of later entries was evidently in Morden [8].

He renewed the policy on the Mitcham mill on 24 October 1765, on 24 October 1772, and on 23 October 1779 [9]. He renewed the policy on the logwood mill in Morden on 11 June 1768 [10], and again on 12 June 1775 when it was then a "tobacco mill", and so had evidently been converted between 1768 and 1775 [11].

Latham Arnold died in 1781, and his will was proved on 21 March 1781. This was dated 7 December 1777, and in it he referred to a partnership "which I have lately entered into" with Martin Pearkes, the brother of the Rev. John Pearkes who had married Arnold's daughter Mary. He appointed him as one of his executors, and desired that he carry on the business of

tobacconist and snuff making in partnership with the other executors, namely Robert Palmer, Samuel Waterman, and his son-in-law Robert Wainwright who had married his daughter Anne. His grandson Thomas Wainwright was to be given a quarter share in the business when the executors thought proper, and his other grandson John Wainwright was to be given a quarter share when he was 21. However, the executors were given leave to vary these arrangements at their discretion [12], and they later did so.

When the insurance policy on the tobacco mill on the Morden bank was renewed on 13 June 1782, it was in the name of Martin Pearkes [13], but the renewal policy on the snuff mill in Mitcham, dated 19 October 1786, was in the name of all Arnold's executors [14]. On the register record of the latter policy it was noted that from 4 September 1788 it was combined with the policy on the tobacco mill, which was renewed on that date by Martin Pearkes [15]. Pearkes seems to have become the sole proprietor by that date, and subsequent references are to him only.

On 2 September 1789 Pearkes insured a barn near the mills [16] and on 26 December 1789 he insured a warehouse opposite the snuff mill [17]. He insured his machinery, utensils and stock contained in both mills and the warehouse, and also those in his London premises at No. 6 Newgate Street, with the Sun insurance company, on 15 September 1790 [18]. He renewed this policy on 17 September 1791 [19], and again on 13 September 1792 [20]. He renewed the policy on the barn in Mitcham on 1 September 1796 [21], and that on the warehouse on 19 December 1796 [22].

Martin Pearkes renewed the Hand in Hand policy on the two mills on 2 September 1795 [23], when the overall valuation was increased to £1,100, from £750 in 1788, indicating that some extensive rebuilding or extension works had been carried out, but the buildings were still described as being of timber. He renewed this policy for the last time on 9 September 1802 [24]. He renewed the policy on the barn on 1 September 1803 [25], and that on the warehouse on 26 December 1803 [26]. The register records of these last three policies were all annotated "Transferred May 16, 1805 by Martin Pearkes to John Rutter of No. 4 Love Lane, Aldermanbury, Tobacconist." Evidently Rutter had recently acquired the lease of the premises.

John Rutter had founded his business, probably then only making tobacco, at No. 9 Newgate Street, London, in 1790, and so would have known Martin Pearkes at No. 6 in the same street, before he moved to Love Lane. He was soon joined at the Ravensbury mills by his nephews Thomas and John Rutter, the sons of his brother Thomas. According to Thomas Rutter junior's will, he and his brother went into partnership with their uncle John on 25 December 1805 [27], under the name John Rutter & Company.

The property at this period was still in the ownership of the Carew family, on a female line of descent. Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew had died in 1762, leaving only an unmarried daughter. The estate eventually passed, in 1780, to Richard Gee, a grandson of Philippa, a sister of Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew's grandfather Sir Francis Carew. Richard Gee then assumed the name Carew. He retained ownership until he died in 1816.

Both Thomas and John Rutter junior died before their uncle John. Thomas died on 12 March 1821 at the age of 48, and by his will, referred to previously, proved on 27 June 1821, he bequeathed his quarter share in the profits of the company to his wife Maria. He appointed as one of his executors his brother Isaac Rutter "of Mitcham, snuff manufacturer", who

evidently was by then involved in the family business [27]. Their brother John died soon afterwards, on 4 July 1821, at the age of 51. Administration of his estate was granted to his widow Elizabeth on 27 April 1821 [28].

John Rutter senior died on 9 September 1826 at the age of 84. By his will, proved on 22 December 1826, he directed that the business be carried on by his before-mentioned nephew Isaac Rutter, his grandnephew John Rutter (son of the late John Rutter junior), and his grandnephew Walter Dean (son of his niece Priscilla). For the first three years, Isaac was to have a half share in the business, and the other two a quarter share each, and thereafter the three were to hold equal shares. However, by a codicil, he revoked the bequest to Walter Dean, and directed that Isaac and John Rutter be equal partners [29].

The name of the firm had become Isaac Rutter and Company by 1832, but Isaac died on 7 July 1837, at the age of 68. Administration of his estate was granted to his son Isaac Campbell Rutter on 23 February 1838 [30]. He and his cousin John Rutter carried on with the business, and from about 1853 his brother James was also a partner, until his death on 12 August 1857 at the age of 36.

By this date the mill property had passed out of the ownership of the Carew family. Richard Gee Carew at his death in 1816 bequeathed his estate to his brother's widow, Anne Paston Gee. She died in 1828 and demised the 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 estate was inherited by his son Charles Hallowell Hallowell Carew, then aged 18. By the time he came of age and entered into his inheritance, he has accumulated massive debts, and many of his properties were sold in July 1855. These included the Ravensbury mills and grounds, which were then purchased by the engineer George Parker Bidder [31].

John Rutter died on 23 July 1869 at the age of 71. Isaac Campbell Rutter carried on, and by 1878 had been joined by Henry Crofts Rutter, who may have been a son of the late John Rutter. Isaac Campbell Rutter was recorded in the 1881 Morden census returns as employing 14 men and 3 women. Henry Crofts Rutter died on 10 December 1884 at the age of 40. Several other Rutters were mentioned at various times as having worked at the mills, for example, Ernest James William Rutter, who was the works manager there when he died on 30 January 1883.

Isaac Campbell Rutter died on 29 November 1889 at the age of 74, and was succeeded by his sons Hugh Campbell and Leonard Campbell Rutter, who retained the long established name Isaac Rutter and Company. They were probably still the proprietors when the firm moved away in 1926.

By 1898 the firm was making cigarettes in addition to pipe tobacco and snuff. They were awarded a gold medal for their Mitcham Shag tobacco at a Brewers' Exhibition held in October 1906. At the same occasion their Mitcham Cricket Green tobacco and Mitcham Cricket Green cigarettes each gained them a bronze medal [32]. The production of snuff seems to have been reduced after 1900 and to have been discontinued about 1915.

In November 1925 it was reported that Isaac Rutter and Company of Mitcham had "amalgamated their interests with those of Messrs. E. & W. Anstie Ltd., Devizes, who are very old friends of theirs." [33]. Rutters vacated the site soon after.



The mills in c. 1913.
[79kb]

The mill buildings were taken over by Whiteley Products Ltd., who moved here from works in Hampshire. This firm had been founded in 1893 by an American, William Whiteley, for the manufacture of rubber cord exercise equipment, which came to include skipping ropes, punch bags, and starting gates for horse racing. Later the company made many other products using elastic and rubber [34]. One of the water wheels was used for driving machinery until about 1965.

In 1989 Whiteley Products Ltd. vacated the premises, which remained empty and became increasingly derelict until 1994. Then alteration and reconstruction works were carried out to the mill and at the same time residential buildings were erected nearby on land formerly belonging with the mill.

References

1. Eric N. Montague, *The Ravensbury Mills* (1995), p. 3, with reference to Surrey History Centre, 212/9/2.
2. London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 42.
3. Merton Local Studies Centre, *A Plan of Part of the River Wandle in the Parish of Morden and County of Surrey*, 1750.
4. Surrey History Centre, LA5/4/1.
5. *Mitcham Settlement Examinations 1784-1814* (1973), p. 54.
6. London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 46.
7. Guildhall Library, MS 8674/91 p. 32.
8. *Ibid.* MS 8674/95 p. 347.
9. *Ibid.* MS 8674/103 p. 169; MS 8674/113 p. 342; MS 8674/122 p. 346 respectively.
10. *Ibid.* MS 8674/107 p. 228.
11. *Ibid.* MS 8674/117 p. 120.
12. National Archives, PROB 11/1075 q107.
13. Guildhall Library, MS 8674/125 p. 220.
14. *Ibid.* MS 8674/129 p. 194.
15. *Ibid.* MS 8674/130 p. 362.
16. *Ibid.* MS 8674/131 p. 307.
17. *Ibid.* MS 8674/132 p. 23.
18. *Ibid.* MS 11936/369 No. 573544.
19. *Ibid.* MS 11936/379 No. 588589.
20. *Ibid.* MS 11936/387 No. 604906.
21. *Ibid.* MS 8674/136 p. 268.
22. *Ibid.* MS 8674/136 p. 332.
23. *Ibid.* MS 8674/136 p. 28.
24. *Ibid.* MS 8674/140 p.30.
25. *Ibid.* MS 8674/140 p.215.
26. *Ibid.* MS 8674/140 p.261.
27. National Archives, PROB 11/1645 q360.
28. *Ibid.* PROB 6/197 p. 99.
29. *Ibid.* PROB 11/1719 q655.
30. *Ibid.* PROB 6/214 p. 80.
31. Eric N. Montague, *op. cit.* p. 10.

32. The Tobacco Trade Review, 1 November 1906.
33. Ibid. 1 November 1925.
34. A description of the various products is given in Sally Festing, "Ravensbury Mills - a Local Industry", in Merton and Morden News, 10 August 1973.