

## **The Culvers Bleaching Grounds and Corn Mill, Carshalton.**

The River Wandle divides into two streams just below Hack Bridge, which unite about 500 yards further north. The bleaching grounds were situated on the island formed by the two streams. The westernmost of these was artificial, and a mill connected with the bleaching process, and a later corn mill, were situated on this branch, on the south side of the present Culvers Avenue.

According to the defendant in a court case heard in 1743, the bleaching grounds were established, by an unnamed whitster, in about 1713 or a little later, before the westernmost stream was formed. This branch had been made by Philip Selby, a whitster who took over the grounds in about 1730, and who afterwards built on this "New Cutt" a mill for "milling his cloth."<sup>[1]</sup>

In fact, Philip Selby was in occupation of the bleaching grounds before 1 and 2 December 1729, when Thomas Scawen purchased the land, together with other properties, from Joseph Cator and George Fox, the executors of the will of John Cator, the former owner, who had died in 1725<sup>[2]</sup>. Philip Selby's brother Thomas Selby had been working at bleaching grounds at Willow Lane, Mitcham, since about 1718, and Philip may have previously assisted him there.

Michael Wilkes referred to an insurance policy of 1744, in respect of premises at Carshalton which included a corn mill and mill house, but I have not been able to find a record of such a policy in the surviving insurance companies's registers, and nor has any other reference to a corn mill on the site at this date been found.

On 23 October 1746 Philip Selby insured the cloth mill and his dwelling house with the Hand in Hand insurance company <sup>[3]</sup>. On 6 January 1753 the policy was renewed by John Hiscox, a whitster<sup>[5]</sup>. Presumably Selby had sub-let the cloth mill and grounds to Hiscox, for he retained an interest in the site, and on 30 November 1753 he insured four cottages near Hack Bridge which were probably occupied by workmen at the bleaching grounds<sup>[6]</sup>.

John Hiscox insured his mill again on 12 March 1760 after a "fresh survey" which increased the valuation from £400 previously, to £750<sup>[7]</sup>, so evidently extensive rebuilding or renovation of the mill had been carried out in the interim. Philip Selby died in 1760, and by his will proved on 21 May 1760 he bequeathed his estate to his wife Ann, and after her death to his brother Joseph and thence to Joseph's three sons<sup>[8]</sup>.

John Hiscox insured his stock contained in a warehouse near his dwelling house with the Sun insurance company on 26 January 1767 <sup>[9]</sup>. When he renewed the policy on the cloth mill two months later, on 23 March 1767, he was in partnership with another whitster, Thomas Furnell<sup>[10]</sup>. Hiscox and Furnell renewed the policy on the stock in the warehouse on 1 June 1768<sup>[11]</sup>, and again on 10 October 1769<sup>[12]</sup>.

John Hiscox died on 10 Mays 1772, and bequeathed most of his estate to his wife Hannah<sup>[13]</sup>, and she may have carried on the business for a while with Thomas Purnell. Within a few years. however, the premises were in the occupation of Foster Reynolds, who had previously worked at the bleaching grounds at Willow Lane, Mitcham.

On 14 April 1777 Stephen Allen, miller, and Thomas Frame, mealman, took out separate policies with the Sun insurance company to cover their utensils and stock in a water corn mill in Carshalton[14], and this is the earliest contemporary reference I have found to this mill, reputedly erected before 1744 as previously mentioned.

Ann Selby, the head leaseholder, died in January 1778. Her brother-in-law Joseph Selby, who was expected to inherit after her death, had predeceased her, and the lease was presumably taken up by his sons, as directed in Philip Selby's will. It may well have been the case that the brothers sold the lease to Foster Reynolds after coming into their inheritance. In any event, on 26 and 27 October 1781, Foster Reynolds purchased the freehold of the mills and grounds, and other property, from James Scawen, who had inherited the estate on the death of his father Thomas Scawen in February 1774.

James Edwards in c.1789 reported that at "Carshalton Mill", "Mr.Reynolds carries on a very extensive trade of whitsterning, or bleaching of linen. Sometimes 40 or 50 acres: of land together may be seen almost covered with linen; which to a stranger at a distance, is oftentimes mistaken for snow." [15] The corn milling was taken over by one of Foster Reynolds's sons, William Foster Reynolds, who on 5 May 1790 insured his utensils and stock in his corn mill "at Hackbridge." [16]

Foster Reynolds died early in 1797, and by his will proved on 23 February 1797 he bequeathed the bleaching grounds and mills, and other properties, to his wife Deborah, and after her death to his son Jacob Foster Reynolds [17]. He then took over the management of the bleaching business, while presumably William Foster carried on at the corn mill. Later, Jacob Foster Reynolds took his brother Thomas into partnership.



*The bleaching grounds  
and mills in 1808*  
[207.2kb]

Manning and Bray in 1812 described the Reynolds's "manufactory for the bleaching of linens" as "the most extensive in the Kingdom. Above two hundred acres of meadow land are frequently covered with cloth, most of the Russian and Irish fabrick." [18]

Thomas Reynolds died in 1819, and his son Thomas Forbes Reynolds then replaced him in the partnership with Jacob Foster Reynolds. They insured their utensils, goods and stock contained in their warehouse on 12 February 1823 [19]. The following year, on 31 December 1824, they dissolved their partnership [20].

The previous month a notice had been published, announcing that a 21-year lease of the "bleaching ground, dwelling house, buildings and premises ... late in the occupation of Messrs. Reynolds", was for sale by private contract [21]. This advertisement was published again in January 1825 [22]. In February 1828, the corn mill was advertised "To be let, with immediate possession." It was described as "a very commodious, roomy, brick built water corn mill ... The mill contains two pairs of stones for grinding wheat, and requisite dressing tackle &c. with a supply of water sufficient to give from 10 to 15 loads of wheat per week." [23]

The lease of the bleaching grounds was at some time taken up by Henry Curtis and John Ellis, bleachers, but they dissolved their partnership on 22 June 1831, announcing that "the business will in future be carried on by Henry Curtis solely." [24]

Henry Curtis was still in occupation of the bleaching grounds in November 1834, and the corn mill was then being worked by Edward Westropp [25]. (Spelt "Westrup" in the Carshalton parish register recording the baptism of his son William on 16 November 1834). The properties were then owned by Thomas Forbes Reynolds, but administered by his uncle William Foster Reynolds, who owned other parts of what was later to be called the Culvers estate.

Edward Westropp had quit the corn mill by November 1837, when it was, advertised that it was available to be let, with immediate possession. It was said then to contain three pairs of French stones, capable of grinding 30 loads of wheat weekly[26]. The lease was probably taken up by Henry Rose, who was named as the occupier in directories for 1839 and 1840, but by March 1840 the mill was untenanted, and it was again advertised that it was to be let[27].

Henry Curtis was apparently the last bleacher to work at the site. In March 1838 it was announced that the machinery and plant of the "bleaching mill", including an 8 horse-power steam engine, a large water wheel, pumps, etc., together with the materials of the "factory" building, would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on the premises on 11 April following[28]. It seems likely that the machinery was sold, and the buildings demolished, following the auction.

William Foster Reynolds, who had acquired the ownership of the later Culvers estate, died soon afterwards, on 19 November 1838. By his will, proved on 21 January 1839, he directed that this estate be sold by his trustees[29]. Accordingly, in March 1841 it was announced that the freehold of parts of the estate, including the "powerful brick-built corn mill" and the former bleaching grounds, would be offered for sale "early in June." [30] An advertisement published in May 1841 gave the date of the auction as 30 June following[31], but this was subsequently deferred until 26 July[32].

Presumably no acceptable bids were received then, and a further auction was held on 2 August 1842[33]. The sale catalogue appertaining to this gave the following description of the corn mill:

*"An entire brick erection, with walls of great substance, slated roof and three-storey high. The mill building measures at the base about 50-feet in front and 33-feet in depth, worked by a powerful 15-feet undershot wheel, 8 feet 10 inches wide, with a large head of water - without the liability of floods - which drives three pair of French Stones, with all proper dressing and other machinery ... capable of grinding. twenty-five loads of wheat weekly.*

*The interior of the mill is finely timbered, and altogether finished and fitted in the best manner, so as to promote the objects of the trade, and afford ample accommodation for the storage of corn, &c."*

The mill at that time was occupied by George Dives, who held a 21-year lease commencing Midsummer 1840, at the annual rent of £204. Dives had evidently taken the lease in response to the previously mentioned advertisement of March 1840.

The freehold of the estate was purchased by Samuel Gurney, the senior partner in the London banking firm of Overend, Gurney and Company, either at the auction in 1842, or later by a private arrangement with his in-laws; for in August 1837 he had married William Poster

Reynolds's daughter Ellen. He later built and resided in a large house which he called the Culvers, on the site of an earlier house, situated in the southern part of the former bleaching grounds.

George Dives did not remain for long at the corn mill, and in July and August 1843 it was again advertised to be let, with immediate possession[34]. On the schedule to the 1847 Tithe Map of Carshalton, the miller was named as William Dearling. Frederick Braithwaite in 1853 noted that "Mr.Darling's (sic) mill for grinding corn is driven by a wheel of 20 H. P. "" [35]

The firm of Overend, Gurney and Company failed in May 1866, and Samuel Gurney suffered financial ruin. Later that year, on 31 October, the Culvers estate was offered for sale by auction, in lots, "by direction of the Liquidators of Messrs. Overend, Gurney & Co." The corn mill was described in the sale catalogue as being brick built and slated, consisting of four floors. There was a 16-foot diameter breastshot water wheel[36]. It will be noticed that these features differ from the corresponding ones described in 1842, which suggests that the mill was rebuilt during the interim. That part of the property containing the mill and the former bleaching grounds and the Culvers house was then purchased by John Peter Gassiot, a retired wine merchant.

William Dearling was named as the miller there in directories up to 1878, and probably retired at about that date and moved to Croydon where he died on 12 February 1881 at the age of 68. He was succeeded by Percy and Herbert Thomas, who were described in the 1881 Carshalton census returns as brothers aged 21 and 20 respectively, employing five men. They were there until at least 1896, according to directory listings, so it was probably one of them who testified, in that year, at a local government inquiry into proposed sewage works, that the mill was worked four or five days a week[37].

John Peter Gassiot died in July 1899, and the estate was offered for sale by his executors in 1902. The mill probably ceased production about that time, but nothing further has been discovered about it. It is said to have been demolished about 1960. Two of its grind stones are displayed in the grass verges at the junction of Millside with Culvers Avenue near the site.

## ***References***

- 1.** National Archives, C/2/411/23 (per Andrew Skelton).
- 2.** House of Lords Record Office, Scawen Estate Act 1734. Private Act 7 Geo.II cap-9 (No.38).
- 3.** Michael Wilkes, The Book of Carshalton, 2002, p.101.
- 4.** Guildhall Library, MS 8674/69 p.308.
- 5.** Ibid. MS 8674/80 p.175.
- 6.** Ibid. MS 8674/82 p.53.
- 7.** Ibid. MS 8674/93 p.186.
- 8.** PROS 11/856 q217.
- 9.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/173 No.242199.
- 10.** Ibid. MS 8674/105 p.253.
- 11.** Ibid. MS 11936/183 No.257591.
- 12.** Ibid. MS 11936/193 No.275362.
- 13.** PROB 11/977 q178.
- 14.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/256 Nos.382908 and 382909.

- 15.** James Edwards, Companion from London to Brighthelmston, c.1789, Part II, p.21.
- 16.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/366 No.569261.
- 17.** PROB 11/1302 q133.
- 18.** Owen Manning and William Bray, The History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey, Vol.3, 1813, p.cxxiii.
- 19.** Guildhall Library, MS 11937/142 No.1000639.
- 20.** The London Gazette, 15 June 1825.
- 21.** The Times, 5 November 1824.
- 22.** Ibid. 25 January 1825.
- 23.** Ibid. 9 February 1828
- 24.** The London Gazette, 24 June 1831.
- 25.** Surrey History Centre, QS6/8/164.
- 26.** The Times, 1 November 1837.
- 27.** Ibid. 24 March 1840.
- 28.** Ibid. 21 March 1838.
- 29.** PROB 11/1906 q52.
- 30.** The Times, 27' March 1841.
- 31.** Ibid. 29 May 1841.
- 32.** Sutton Archives and Local Studies Library, 48/4/8.
- 33.** Ibid. 48/4/10 and The Times, 16 July 1842.
- 34.** The Times, e.g. 11 July 1843.
- 35.** Frederick Braithwaite, On the Rise and Fall of the Wandle ... in Institution of Civil Engineers Proceedings, Vol.20, 1861.
- 36.** The Times,. 6 October 1866 and Sutton Archives and Local Studies Library, SBC 728.
- 37.** A.E.Jones, An Illustrated Directory of Old Carshalton, 19730 p.102.