

## Willow Lane Calico Printng Works, Mitcham

These works were situated about 60 yards from the northwest side of Willow Lane, and about midway between the Wandle and the Tramlink route. The bleaching grounds associated with the works were between the works site and the Wandle, and extended to the southeast side of Willow Lane and as far as the Mitcham-Beddington boundary. There was another smaller printing works, about 200 yards northwest of the Goat public house.

The industry in the neighbourhood began with the bleaching of linen on the grounds by the river to the southeast of Willow Lane. The first bleacher or whitster to work there is thought to have been Adrian Collant, of Dutch origin. The first mention found of him was in the lay subsidy assessments for Surrey for 1593 or 1594, which included "Adryan Collande" and his brother Garret as "strangers" in Mitcham [1].

The owner of the land at this period was George Smythe, who on 1 September 1618 granted to his son Thomas, on his marriage to Sarah Handford, various properties in Wandsworth, Carshalton and Mitcham. Included in the grant was

*"All that messuage with the barn, stable, and appurtenances thereunto belonging now in the tenure or occupation of Adrian Collant being lately new builded and those parcels of Marsh Ground thereunto adjoining ... now also in the tenure of the said Adrian containing by estimation Twenty acres or thereabouts lying in Mitcham."* [2]

Adrian Collant died soon afterwards and was buried in Mitcham on 13 January 1620/21. He was described in the burial register as "a Dutchman dwelling a long tyme in this parish of Mitcham". [3] By his will, proved on 21 February 1620/21, in which he was described as "of Mitcham, Whitster", he appointed his wife Deborah and son Garrett as his executors [4].

Deborah Collant took over the lease, but relinquished it soon afterwards, when the property had come into the ownership of Sir Henry Seville. On 20 March 1622/23 he conveyed it to Richard Broughton, together with other properties in Mitcham. The grounds were described in the conveyance as "Two closes called Long and Firsey Closes in a field called South Close in the occupation of Sir George Hethersall ... late Deborah Callin [sic]", and "Two parks or whiting or bleaching places on the premises". [5] This description identifies the grounds as being to the southeast of Willow Lane, extending from the river almost as far as Carshalton Road.

The property was purchased by Robert Cranmer in 1654, but no record of the tenants during the rest of the 17th century has been found. There are references to many whitsters working in Mitcham during this period, but none that can be related to this site.

In about 1702 Richard Bond, a "woodgrinder", rebuilt or extended a logwood mill situated on the Wandle at the end of Willow Lane, which he held on lease from John Cranmer, son of Richard Cranmer who had died in 1665. In connection with these works Bond constructed a new channel for the river upstream from his mill, from a point a little south of the present Goat Bridge, to form a mill pond. This became known as the "new cut" or "new river". At about the same time, John Cranmer had formed a side stream, from a point near the commencement of the new cut, to the east of and some distance from it. This flowed through the bleaching grounds formerly occupied by Adrian Collant, then continued north of the later

Willow Lane. Branches were formed from this stream to supply a series of ditches to facilitate the bleaching process, both north and south of the lane. The lease of the logwood mill to Richard Bond included the bleaching grounds to the south of Willow Lane.

John Cranmer died in January 1704/5, and on 5 December 1707 his widow Anne Cranmer granted a 21-year lease of 22 acres of bleaching ground on the north side of Willow Lane to Thomas Selby, a whitster who had come from West Ham. These 22 acres were comprised of a close of 15 acres adjoining the river, known as the Horse Mead, and an adjacent close of 7 acres. Selby was probably the first to use this bleaching ground created by John Cranmer.

Richard Bond's lease of the mill and ground to the south of Willow Lane was renewed by Anne Cranmer for 21 years on 23 February 1711/12. After Richard Bond's death in about 1716, his widow Emma sub-leased the bleaching grounds to Thomas Selby [6]. Selby's lease of the 22 acres to the north of Willow Lane was renewed for 31 years on 22 November 1714 [6].

On 21 July 1718, Anne Cranmer's son James leased a further three closes of land to Thomas Selby, adjoining those Selby had on sub-lease from Emma Bond. Thus for a period he occupied all the bleaching grounds in the vicinity of Willow Lane, but by 1738 he had sub-leased the grounds to the south of Willow Lane to Thomas Kirkham.

Thomas Selby is recorded as having paid his rents periodically up to 1740, but on 29 December 1741 James Cranmer leased the 15-acre close for 14 years directly to Thomas Kirkham, together with a small piece of adjoining land formerly occupied by George Ormerod as bleaching grounds, and two closes of land called the Drying Ground, which were probably situated on the south side of Willow Lane [7].

George Ormerod's stay in Mitcham had been fairly brief. He had taken the lease of the land, which was near the logwood mill, in June 1739 [6], but left in about 1742 and went to bleaching grounds above Wallington Bridge.

Evidently Thomas Kirkham got into financial difficulties and was unable to pay his rents, and on 1 February 1745/6 James Cranmer granted the lease of the whole of the 22 acres north of Willow Lane, together with two other closes, to Thomas Selby's son, also named Thomas, on his undertaking to build a new dwelling house. Thomas Selby senior had died a few days earlier, on 16 January 1745/6.

Thomas Kirkham was declared bankrupt in May 1747 [8]. Presumably he had previously relinquished his sub-lease of the grounds to the south of Willow Lane, leaving Thomas Selby junior in occupation of the whole of the bleaching grounds.

The house Thomas Selby built, later to be called The Willows, was completed in 1746. He insured the house and adjoining premises with the Hand in Hand insurance company on 3 October 1746 [9]. He took out a policy on the same property with the Sun insurance company on 3 September 1750, and the register record includes in the schedule a warehouse, bucking house, boiling house, and ash house, which were in the tenure of Thomas Kirkham, "whitster, his [>i.e. Selby's] servant", who was presumably working off his debts [10].

Thomas Selby died soon afterwards, on 27 January 1750/1, at the age of 33. His widow Sarah paid the rent on the properties in April and July 1751, but on 15 July 1751 James Cranmer

leased Kirkham's former premises to Thomas Reynolds, whitster, for 21 years [7]. Sarah Selby remained in possession of the grounds to the south of Willow Lane for a time, probably until her second marriage in 1753.

On 13 October 1753, Thomas Reynolds renewed the policy with the Hand in Hand company taken out by Thomas Selby in 1746 [11]. At the next renewal date, 7 October 1760, the policy holder was Foster Reynolds, Thomas Reynolds's son [12]. He renewed the policy on 6 October 1767 [13] and again on 7 October 1774 [14].

In about 1780 Foster Reynolds took the lease of some bleaching grounds at Carshalton which Philip Selby, Thomas Selby senior's brother, had formerly occupied. However, Foster Reynolds still carried on at Willow Lane for a while, and renewed the insurance policy on those works on 4 October 1781 [15], but on 18 October 1785 he assigned this policy to Richard Burfoot.

As regards the ownership at this period, James Cranmer had died on 5 June 1752, and bequeathed the bleaching grounds to his wife Dulcibella and most of his other properties to his son James [16], but it would seem that James took over the management of the whole estate.

It is unlikely that Richard Burfoot, who was described as "Gent.", carried on the bleaching business himself, and he must have sub-leased the premises to bleachers of whom no records have been found.

The next mention found of an occupier was to George Sutherland, who had been in partnership with Benjamin Bailey at the "Cloth Mill" at Carshalton. He moved to Willow Lane probably in about 1798. He was soon in partnership with John Mann Vevers, as calico printers, and this is the earliest intimation of the use of the premises for this activity. Vevers left the partnership on 26 January 1803 [17]. Sutherland was then joined by James Gould, but their partnership was dissolved on 14 July 1804, when Sutherland left [18].

James Malcolm must have visited the premises before this date, when he recorded "Mr. Sutherland's calico and printing grounds", and also referred to "Mr. Sutherland's gate", evidently a gate across Willow Lane, then a private road [19]. Malcolm's account was published in 1805, by which date James Gould had entered into partnership with William Tomson and John Thomas Taylor, but Taylor left on 30 September 1806 [20].

Two more partners then joined the firm, Thomas Bremridge and John Dennis, but evidently things did not work out well. The lease of the "Capital extensive Calico Ground, now in full work", in the occupation of Messrs. James Gould and Co., was offered for sale at an auction held on 19 August 1807. The notice advertising the sale gave the following description of the works:

*"comprising a copper plate-shop, block shop, a building adjoining, capable of containing 4 presses, and 10 tables more, and every other requisite building for the business, being extremely compact; 63 acres of meadow and pasture land, 12 of which are used for bleaching ground; the whole within a ring fence; a handsome dwelling-house with numerous apartments, and every description of domestic offices, productive kitchen garden, orchard, pleasure ground ... "* [21]

Soon afterwards it was announced that the utensils and effects of Gould & Co. would be offered for sale by auction on 14 September 1807 and following days [22]. The partnership of Gould, Tomson, Bremridge, and Dennis was dissolved on 11 November 1807 [23].

They were succeeded by Benjamin Bailey (previously mentioned as George Sutherland's partner at Carshalton), in partnership with William Bennett, but Bennett left on 29 September 1809 [24], and went to calico printing works in Wimbledon below Merton Bridge. Soon afterwards Bailey went into partnership with Joshua Ryle, but he left on 9 March 1811 [25], and Bailey carried on alone. On 15 March 1815, he insured the premises with the Sun insurance company for £4,550 [26].

John Hassell in his description of the Wandle mentioned the grounds of Mr. Bailey, a calico printer, at Mitcham [27]. This was published in 1817, but he must have made his visit earlier, for in December 1815, and January 1816, and again in April 1816, the lease of the premises was offered for private sale [28]. In October 1816 Benjamin Bailey was declared bankrupt [29]. He sold The Grove, his house in Carshalton, to his former partner, Joshua Ryle [30], but it seems he still had funds available to enable him to take the lease of the calico printing works near Merton Bridge where William Bennett had gone to, who had left in 1811.

James Cranmer, the owner of the Willow Lane properties, had died on 5 June 1801, and bequeathed his estate to his daughter, Esther Maria Dixon, the widow of Captain Richard Dixon [32]. She died on 17 January 1819, and was succeeded by her eldest son Richard, who then changed his name to Cranmer. Thus it was the Rev. Richard Cranmer who in 1824 granted the lease of the printing works to Samuel Makepeace [33]. However, it was recorded that Makepeace was in occupation of the works in 1820 [34], so it seems likely that he had succeeded Benjamin Bailey a few years earlier.

Some years later, Samuel Makepeace, with the approval of Richard Cranmer, carried out certain alteration works in order to increase the supply of water to the side stream on which his mill stood. In May 1827 Cranmer received a complaint that due to an "archway" erected by Makepeace, the premises of the "Upper Factory (late Bingham's)" were deprived of water. Soon afterwards, on 3 August 1827, Cranmer agreed that Makepeace should make another archway in order to discharge water near the logwood mill, following complaints from the occupier of that mill, William York [35].

The "Upper Factory" referred to was that briefly mentioned at the beginning of this account, situated to the northwest of the Goat public house. Very little is known about it. A building was shown on that site on a map of 1790 [36] at the end of a road (much later named Arney's Lane) leading from Carshalton Road, but the above reference to "late Bingham's" is the earliest found, and the use of it then was not given. There is a little information about it in its later years, which will be disclosed in due course.

In September 1828 Samuel Makepeace enlarged the "trunks" by which water from the main river passed to the side stream, which provoked a complaint from John Searle, the occupier of a corn mill on the Wandle opposite the logwood mill [37].

The Rev. Richard Cranmer died on 1 November 1828, and bequeathed his estate to his sister Emily [38]. In 1818 she had married William Simpson, a calico printer who had formerly worked at Merton Abbey and then at premises in Wallington where he carried on printing

until 1830. He then relinquished the business, in order to devote himself to his duties and responsibilities as landowner and Lord of the Manor of Mitcham.

Thus it was to William Simpson that, on 19 October 1832, Elizabeth Spencer, the owner of the corn mill occupied by John Searle, complained about further alterations carried out by Samuel Makepeace. It was alleged that he "had been lately altering the Trunks through which water passed to his bleaching grounds and that he had also dug a Ditch in the Waste for the purpose of taking water from the river." [39]

The outcome of the various complaints is not known, but evidently Makepeace continued to be troubled by a shortage of water, and at some time he installed a steam engine to supplement the water power. Despite his problems, his business was successful, and he worked there for about 25 years. The Rev. H. G. Dodd, writing in about 1900, recalled that "Mr. Makepeace was famous for printing bandanna handkerchiefs such as farmers and butchers of bygone times used, and generally carried in the crowns of their hats." [40].

In May 1845 it was advertised that "in consequence of a reduction in the establishment", a portion of the utensils, machinery and effects, including 7,000 printing blocks, belonging to the print works, would be sold by auction on the premises on 22 May 1845 [41]. This auction was later deferred until 28 May [42]. The auction probably did not take place, as a more comprehensive sale was announced in June. Then, "All the extremely valuable Machinery, Steam-engine, Polishing, Turning, and Slide Lathes, extensive Plant and Utensils, Copper Plates, 10,000 Printing Blocks ... and numerous other articles", would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 26, 27 and 30 June 1845. The following week, on 7 and 8 July, the materials of all the buildings would be offered for sale [43]. The latter auction was subsequently deferred until 14 and 15 July [44].

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Samuel Makepeace quit the premises on 27 September 1845 [39], and began a new career in preparing culinary herbs at Figges Marsh, Mitcham. His enterprise was not a success, and in May 1851, he was confined in a debtors' prison [45]. His belongings, or some of them, may have been bought at the auction in June 1845, but certainly not the building materials. Soon after Makepeace left, William Simpson leased the premises to Edward Homesham Cox, a farmer, who took possession on 28 November 1845. Cox subsequently spent, so he claimed, upwards of £700 in making improvements to the works, by July 1846. Meanwhile, in February 1846, he advertised that they were available to be let, "at a very moderate rent" [46].



*The works c. in 1865  
[85.3kb]*

The offer was repeated the following year, in March 1847 [47], and again in June 1847 [48]. Eventually the works were sub-leased, to Edward Carter and John Downing, who had entered into partnership on 16 November 1849, and who also worked at the Ravensbury print works. Described as "silk, woollen, challis and fancy printers", their partnership was dissolved on 27 May 1850 [49]. Carter then carried on at Ravensbury with new partners, while John Downing continued to work at the "Willows Mills" with his son Henry, who was also described as a silk printer in the 1851 Mitcham census returns.

On 31 August 1852, William Simpson granted a new 21-year lease of the premises, which included the "former printing factory lately used as a pencilling house", to Edward Homesham Cox [50].

Frederick Braithwaite in 1853 noticed the "small print works of Mr. Downing" [51], and John Downing was listed as a calico and silk printer there in a Post Office directory for 1855. At some time later, he moved to work at Littler's works at Merton Abbey.

The premises were unoccupied when the 1861 Mitcham census was taken, but in the 1871 returns, --- [blank] Bradstreet was described as a fancy goods manufacturer at "Willow Mills", employing seven men and 10 boys. This is the last record found of the use of the works, but the buildings remained for some years, and as late as 1949 it was said that "the chimney stack and a broken water wheel remains." [52]

Braithwaite in 1853 had also noted the other works in the vicinity, to the northwest of the Goat public house, as the "gelatine works of Mr. Arney, using one wheel of 6 H.P." [51] The 1841 Mitcham census returns had listed Samuel Haslem, calico printer, as the occupier, but in the 1851 census Gerard Arney was named as a gelatine manufacturer there. A Post Office directory for 1855 listed Arney & Co., patent gelatine maker. That is all that has been found about these works. Arney is still commemorated in the district; the lane that led to the mill was called Arney's Lane, and the small part of it that survives, from Carshalton Road to Tramway Path, is still identified by that name.

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