

Logwood Mill, Mitcham

This mill was situated on the east bank of the Wandle, at the end of Willow Lane, which formerly extended down to the river. It was first recorded as a mill site on a map drawn by William Marr in July 1685, whereon a "Colouring Mill" is shown [1].

In 1703 Richard Bond, described as a woodgrinder, rebuilt the mill, of which he had been granted the lease the previous year by the landowner John Cranmer. In addition to the rebuilding, Bond constructed a new channel for the river, to the east of its original course, from a point near the present Goat Bridge, to provide what was in effect a long mill pond. He also built a dwelling house near the mill, and claimed that he had spent over £2,000 in carrying out these various works [2].

This diversion proved to be a disadvantage to the working of the next mill upstream, known at that time as Cranmarsh Mills and situated just above Goat Bridge. This mill had been owned since 1680 by Edward Dimblebee (spelled "Dimbelly" on Marr's map of 1685), a Bermondsey leatherseller. In January 1705/6 he was declared bankrupt [3]. In March 1705/6 Thomas Malyn and John Blake, the assignees appointed under the bankruptcy proceedings, complained to the Court of the Surrey and Kent Sewers Commissioners that the operation of their leather mill was being hindered because of the works carried out to the river by Richard Bond.



A delegation of the Commissioners, having inspected the situation, reported to the Court on 21 May 1706 that "Mr. Bond altered the ancient current of the water without any order for his so doing whereby the water is raised on the tail of the mill late Mr. Dimblebee's above six inches higher than formerly and part of the common adjoining overflowed to the damage of several persons."

The Court ordered that Richard Bond "do pull down the (tumbling) bay by him lately erected for turning the river" within one month, or pay a penalty of £100 [4]. The outcome is not recorded, but evidently Bond took no steps to implement the order, for the matter was to be raised again some years later.

On 23 February 1712/13, Richard Bond took out a new lease of "two Messuages, two Colouring Mills" and about 26 acres of adjoining land, for 21 years commencing 25 December 1712, at the annual rent of £50, from Anne Cranmer, widow of John Cranmer who had died in 1705 [5]. Richard Bond died in about 1716, and the lease passed to his widow Emma, and the mill was then managed by her and her son, also named Richard.

On 20 September 1721, Captain Henry Daniel, who was then in possession of the leather mill formerly occupied by Edward Dimblebee, complained to the Commissioners of Sewers that the earlier order requiring Richard Bond to restore the river to its "ancient current" had not been complied with, and the nuisance persisted. The Commissioners then made a further order, requiring Emma Bond and her son Richard to pull down the tumbling bay, which penned up the water, within two months, under the penalty of £200 for non-compliance [6]. The order was later "respited until further notice", and again nothing was done, and indeed

Bond's new channel, sometimes later referred to as the "new river", continued to flow as the main course for the next 240 years.

On 8 April 1723 Anne Cranmer renewed the lease of the logwood mill and premises to Emma Bond for a further 21 years from 25 December 1722 [5]. Anne Cranmer died on 30 March 1727, and her properties, including the logwood mill, passed to her eldest son James. Emma Bond died on 12 August 1729, and her son Richard took over the lease and continued to manage the business. He was in financial difficulties by 1741, when he was in arrears with his rent, and he relinquished the lease when it expired on 24 December 1743. Possibly he continued to live in the mill house until his death in November 1746.

On 30 January 1743/4, James Cranmer granted to John Reeve and John Sargeson the lease of

"all that Messuage on the East side of the Millhead and two mills called the Colour Mills or Water Mills for grinding of dying wood or making of oyl. Also one small tenement or cottage called the Boyling House by a Pond on the West side of the said Millhead and the Warehouse and all other Erections adjoining to the said Messuages and Mills with benefit of having a head of water within one foot of the top of the Tumbling Bay in the Mill Pond and Great Pond to work the said Mills situate in the parish of Mitcham for the space of 12 hours from 12 of the clock at Noon to 12 of the clock at Night every week day during the term of 21 years from Christmas last at the yearly rent of 49£ with half of the Land Tax." [5]

(The use of the water for the other 12 hours daily was allotted to William Thoyts, the tenant of a copper mill on the west bank of the river nearly opposite the logwood mill, in Carshalton parish.)

Reeve and Sargeson later sublet the mill to Jacob Vault, who was listed in the Mitcham Poor Rates Books from 1756 until 1765 [7], and named as being liable to pay a sewer rate in August 1763 [8], and in July 1766 [9].

Reeve and Sargeson were succeeded by Charles Poster, a millwright. He was also the tenant at the former copper mill in Carshalton, referred to previously, which had been converted to corn milling by his father, Edward Poster, in the early 1750s. On 2 July 1770 he insured the logwood mill with the Hand in Hand insurance company, when it was said to be in the occupation of John Wood [10]. On 5 June 1771 he insured the utensils and machinery contained in the mill and some adjoining buildings, together with similar effects in the nearby corn mill, with the Sun insurance company [11].

Poster renewed the Hand in Hand policy on the mill buildings on 7 July 1777, when they were still in the occupation of John Wood [12].

A further policy with the Sun company to cover his utensils, machinery and stock, was taken out on 28 March 1788 [13].

Charles Poster 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 [14]. Mary Foster then took over the management of the logwood mill and the corn mill in Carshalton, and insured both mills with their contents with the Sun company on 15 October 1799 [15]. She renewed the policy on the logwood mill and its contents and appurtenances only, on 17 July 1804 [16].

At some time, probably soon afterwards, she went into partnership with William Lazonby and Joseph and William Aldersey, but the partnership, engaged in "the Trade of Grinding Dyer's Woods, carried on by us at the Colour-Mill, in Mitcham", was dissolved on 21 January 1807 [17]. Mary Poster then continued with the business alone, and she re-insured the logwood mill and its contents, together with her dwelling house, on 21 October 1807 [18]. She insured the stock and utensils in a warehouse adjoining the mill on 14 April 1808 [19].

Within a few years Mary Poster had surrendered the lease of the logwood mill, and by 1812 it was in the occupation of John Coppard. He insured the mill, its contents and appurtenances, and his dwelling house, with the Sun company, on 7 July 1812 [20], and renewed the policy on 10 March 1818 [21].

John Coppard, described as a drug grinder, was declared bankrupt on 30 May 1822 [22]. Joshua Ryle of Carshalton, his major creditor, then took over the mill premises, but Coppard's assignees held a meeting in August to consider whether they should pay the debt owing to Ryle [23]. Presumably they decided that it was best for all concerned that Coppard should continue his business. In the event, Coppard did resume work at the mill, but on 1 December 1824 he was again declared bankrupt [24].

At this date the premises were still in the possession of the Cranmer family. James Cranmer had died in June 1752, leaving his estate to his son, also named James. He died in June 1801, and by his will bequeathed his properties to his second wife Rebecca, with the proviso that his half-sister, Mrs. Ann Welsh, should be entitled to half the rents arising from the logwood mill. After Rebecca's death the estate was to go to his daughter, Mrs. Esther Maria Dixon, and after her death to her son Richard Dixon, provided they both changed their surname to Cranmer upon entering into their inheritance [25].

The succession as appointed by James Cranmer was duly followed. His widow Rebecca died in 1815, and her daughter Esther Maria died in January 1819, and then her son, Rev. Richard Cranmer (née Dixon) came into possession of the Cranmer estates.

John Coppard was probably followed as tenant of the mill by Joseph York, who was there by 1827. He was named as a drug grinder at Carshalton in Pigot's directory for 1832-34, but in the 1839 edition he had been replaced by William York, presumably his son. He carried on working at the mill until 25 March 1850, having been given notice to quit on that date a year previously by his landlord William Simpson [26].

William Simpson had acquired the ownership of the Cranmer estates through his marriage to Emily Cranmer. She was the sister of Rev. Richard Cranmer, and when he died, without issue, in 1828, the estates passed to Emily. William Simpson had married Emily in 1818, when he was a calico printer working at Merton Abbey. He left there in 1821 and moved to premises below Wallington Bridge, which he occupied until about 1830. He then gave up the business in order to devote himself to his duties and responsibilities as Lord of the Manor of Mitcham.

William York was succeeded at the mill by James Sprules, who had worked for York since at least 1841. He was related to William Sprules, who grew and distilled mint, lavender, and other herbs, at Carshalton and elsewhere. In the 1851 Mitcham census returns, James Sprules was described as a master drug grinder employing three labourers.

Frederick Braithwaite in 1853 visited "Mr. Sprules's dye-wood and drug mill employing two wheels equal to 30 H.P." He went on to record that, "Mr. Sprules mentions, that in 1852, being short of water for some time, the gates were shut down three hours in every twelve hours and even then, there was a deficiency of water." [27]

James Sprules continued to work the mill until shortly before his death on 11 April 1869 at the age of 73, and he was probably the last drug grinder to work there. On 26 April 1875, William Simpson junior, who had succeeded his father as owner after the latter's death in 1860, granted a 21-year lease of the mill to James McRae, a tanner and leather dresser [28]. James McRae was also at this date working at a leather mill above Goat Bridge with his brother George, and no doubt he soon converted the mill to leather dressing.

In 1884 the premises were taken over by J. S. Deed & Sons, leather workers. At about the same time, they also acquired the neighbouring corn mill in Carshalton, converted it to leather dressing, erected other buildings on the Mitcham bank, and operated the whole complex as the Eagle Leather Works.

The firm had been founded, initially as leather sellers, in London in about 1834, and was later managed by John Simpkin Deed. By the time they acquired the leases of the two mills, he had retired (he died in March 1892 at the age of 73), and the management was in the hands of his sons Martin and Alfred Deed. Alfred Deed became chairman when the firm was incorporated as a 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 until his death in February 1939, and the chairmanship was later held by successive members of the family, retaining the name John S. Deed & Sons Limited. The company specialised in the production of high-quality soft leathers such as white buckskin, suede and sheepskin, and in making book bindings and various fancy goods.

Water power continued to be used for many years, but the water wheels were inoperative by October 1960, when an article describing the leather preparation processes here was published [29]. The wheels remained in place until 1964, when flood control measures were carried out to this part of the river, and Richard Bond's "new river" was filled in and the flow of the Wandle restored in part to its original course. The mill buildings were then demolished, but Deed's continued with leather working in other buildings on the Mitcham bank until 1989.

References

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- 2.** Merton Heritage Centre, Simpson Papers, Box 10.
- 3.** The London Gazette, 31-24 January 1705/6.
- 4.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 42.
- 5.** Surrey History Centre, 470.
- 6.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 43.
- 7.** Eric N. Montague, A Study of the Textile and Printing Industry in Mitcham and Merton from 1590 until 1870 (1992), p. 103.
- 8.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 46.
- 9.** Ibid. SKCS 47.
- 10.** Guildhall Library, MS 8674/110, p. 242.
- 11.** Ibid. MS 11936/206 No. 298118.

- 12.** Ibid. MS 8674/119, p. 330.
- 13.** Ibid. MS 11936/353 No. 542316.
- 14.** National Archives, PROB 6/173 p. 225.
- 15.** Guildhall Library, MS 11937/27 No. 695204.
- 16.** Ibid. MS 11937/59 No. 765465.
- 17.** The London Gazette, 20-24 January 1804.
- 18.** Guildhall Library, MS 11937/75 No. 808886.
- 19.** Ibid. MS 11937/81 No. 815851.
- 20.** Ibid. MS 11937/99 No. 872333.
- 21.** Ibid. MS 11937/121 No. 941211.
- 22.** The London Gazette, 4 June 1822.
- 23.** Ibid. 13 August 1822.
- 24.** Ibid. 7 December 1824.
- 25.** National Archives, PROB 11/1358 q373.
- 26.** Merton Heritage Centre, Simpson Papers, Box 31.
- 27.** Frederick Braithwaite, "On the Rise and Fall of the Wandle ... ", in Institution of Civil Engineers Proceedings, vol. 20 (1861).
- 28.** Surrey History Centre, 298/2/30.
- 29.** The Mitcham News and Mercury, 21 October 1960.