

Grove Mill Carshalton.

This mill was situated at approximately the end of the present Devonshire Road, on a diverted tributary of the Wandle which flowed north from the grounds of Carshalton Park, under the High Street, then east to Westcroft Road. Then it turned north again, where it was carried on a length of artificial embankment and known as the Westcroft Canal. It then flowed in a cutting through the hillside and into the Wandle about 70 yards above Butter Hill Bridge. The mill was built into the north side of the hill, about 30 yards south of the confluence of the streams. The works to the tributary stream were in order to reduce the fall until it reached the hill, to enable an overshot wheel to be provided. '

Carshalton Park had been acquired by Sir William Scawen, a wealthy City merchant, early in the 18th. century. After his death in October 1722 his properties passed to his nephew Thomas Scawen, who had much work carried out to Carshalton Park, including the formation of a garden feature known as the Grotto Canal. It may have been Thomas Scawen who was responsible for the construction of the Westcroft Canal and the Grove Mill, but more likely it was his son James Scawen, who inherited his father's estate after his death in 1774, and carried out further works.

The earliest reference to the mill so far found was on 16 January 1777, when George Marchant, snuff maker, insured his snuff mill and its machinery, utensils and stock, together with a nearby dwelling house, with the Sun insurance company [1]. Thus it appears that Marchant was already in occupation of the mill when James Scawen granted him a lease for 61 years on 7 March 1777, effective from 25 March, at the annual rent of £60[2]. George Marchant renewed the insurance policy on 16 February 1778[3], and evidently some extensive work had been carried out to the mill during the preceding year, for the new valuation of the mill was then £1000 as against £500 in 1777. He renewed the policy again on 8 April 1779, when the premises were said to be in the occupation of John Arnold[3].

William Bridges of Wallington brought a legal action against James Scawen which was heard at the Croydon Assizes on 8 August 1783, seeking compensation for damages he claimed to have suffered resulting from the "new course into which the water had been turned" for the working of the snuff mill. On 7 November 1783 the jury decided that no compensation should be paid, and that Bridges should pay Scawen's legal costs. The bringing of this action supports the supposition. that the Westcroft Canal and the snuff mill were constructed by James Scawen soon after 1774[5].

On 17 September 1785 James Scawen sold the "new erected Messuage or Tenement and Snuff Mill with the Lands and Tenements thereunto belonging and the water running to the same" to William Andrews of London for £1200[2]. The premises were then still in the tenure of George Marchant, and a few years later, in about 1789, James Edwards noticed that on "the eastmost stream are some snuff-mills belonging to Mr. Marchant"[6], who seems to have left Carshalton at about this time. On 19 May 1789 he insured the machinery of a corn mill at Isleworth in Middlesex[7]. John Arnold stayed on as sub-lessee.

On 21 March 1791, William Andrews granted the head lease of the mill to Allen Lambert, a local millwright[5]. Allen Lambert insured the snuff mill and its appurtenances and the utensils and stock therein with the Sun insurance company, on 29 March 1792, when the premises were still in the occupation of John Arnold as sub-lessee[5].

Lambert later assigned the head lease to Robert Tutt, a calico printer of Stoke Newington, and on 8 June 1801 William Andrews granted a new lease to Tutt for 36 years at the annual rent of £80-6s-3d.[5] The premises were at that time in the occupation of George Cook, who was succeeded in about 1804 by William Heath. In 1813 Robert Tutt assigned the remaining term of his lease to John Bill, a wholesale ironmonger of London[5].

William Heath died on 30 October 1820 at the age of 71, but it seems that he retired a few years earlier, and was followed by his son Joseph. Joseph had evidently worked with his father previously; he was described as a snuff maker in the parish register record of the baptism of his daughter Jane on 9 October 1814. He was last mentioned as the occupier in Pigot's directory for 1832-34.

In February 1837 it was advertised that a 21-year lease of the "Grove Mills" would be available from 25 March. The machinery, which included a 20-foot-diameter diameter overshot water wheel, was said to be in good order and currently at work for snuff milling, but the mill could be converted to other uses. The premises were then in the occupation of Charles Lambert[9]. This may have been a son of the before mentioned Allen Lambert, but it is more likely to have been the Charles Lambert who was at this period working at the snuff mill at Beddington, and who had perhaps taken a short-term lease of the Carshalton mill.

In response to this advertisement, the lease was evidently taken up by Richard Clark and Francis Phillips, "snuff grinders", who dissolved their partnership on 31 December 1838[10]. Phillips then carried on alone, and was still there in 1850 when Brayley named him as the occupier of "A snuff-grinding mill, very powerful at times." [11]. Brayley also stated that the owner was Jonah Cressingham, who lived at Stone Court in Carshalton, but it would seem that he owned only a half-share of the freehold.

John Bill had purchased the mill, of which he held the lease, from William Andrews, at some time before his death in 1831. By his will, proved on 10 September 1831, John Bill bequeathed his properties in Shropshire and Surrey to his daughter Sarah Ann Bill. Other properties in Montgomeryshire were bequeathed to his daughter Mary Eliza, wife of William Cother[12].

In 1836 Sarah Ann Bill was married to Jonah Cressingham, who thus acquired an interest in the snuff mills probably as part of a marriage settlement. This interest seems to have been a moiety, the other half being retained by his wife in her own right. After Sarah Ann Cressingham's death on 28 March 1838, her share apparently passed to her sister Mary Eliza, and William Cother, whilst Jonah Cressingham retained his share, as a lifetime interest.

By 1853, when Frederick Braithwaite made his survey of the Wandle and noted that the snuff mill had an overshot water wheel of 9 h. p. and a steam engine of 8 h.p., John Hedgecock was the occupier[13]. In fact, Hedgecock had evidently previously worked at the mill for Francis Phillips. In the Carshalton census returns for 1841, he was recorded as a snuff miller at "Westcroft Mill". and as a snuff grinder in those for 1851. It is not known for how long Hedgecock occupied the mill.

It is said that in 1864 the lease was taken by John Smith and Frederick Brownsmith, engineers and millwrights [14], who converted the mill to metalworking. It was thenceforth known as Grove Iron Works. Brownsmith later left the partnership, and by 1870 was the foreman at the Upper Mill, Carshalton.



*Grove Iron Works in c
1867 [111kb]*

On 9 February 1859, William Cother had executed an indenture of appointment whereby the mill premises were conveyed to his daughter Mary Eliza, subject to the life interest of Jonah Cressingham [15]. Cressingham died on 25 April 1874, and Miss Mary Eliza Cother then became the sole owner of the property. Soon afterwards, on 22 January 1875, she sold the mill premises to John Smith for £2750 [5].

John Smith was described in the 1881 Carshalton census returns as mechanical engineer, age 54, employing 20 men. He seems to have specialised in making mill machinery, judging from advertisements that were published in “The Miller” in 1875 and for many years after. In these he described himself as “Manufacturer of all kinds of modern engines, water wheels, wind and steam flour mills, etc. Drug mills and Snuff machinery etc. Improved silk flour dressing machines.” In about 1875 he made and installed a breast-shot water wheel in the nearby Lower Mill [16]. Another local contract was with Charles Brown & Company at the Waddon flour mill, to whom he supplied several sets of rollers in about 1879 [17] and further sets later.

In 1899, when aged 72, he sold the business to F.C.Nunn [18]. The name of the firm was then changed to John Smith & Company, and John Smith continued to work as a consultant for several years. He died on 27 April 1917 at the age of 90, and was buried at Carshalton.

R.Thurston Hopkins in 1930 described the mill’s water wheel as “A veritable giant of a fellow twenty feet in height and eight feet across the paddles” [19]. This wheel, and the steam engine mentioned by Braithwaite in 1853, continued in use until iron working there came to an end. The end came on 26 September 1944, when F.C.Nunn was still the proprietor. On that day the buildings and machinery were largely destroyed by fire. Only the offices and water wheel survived intact [20]. The mill was not rebuilt, and some years later the site was acquired by Vinyl Products Limited, who demolished the wheel and other structures that remained. All that survives is the dry bed of the embanked Westcroft Canal, on the edge of the Grove playing fields, close to the Westcroft Leisure Centre.

References

1. Guildford Library, MS 11936/254 No. 378957
2. Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, 2361/1/1.
3. Guildhall Library, MS 11936/263 No. 395256.
4. Ibid. MS 11936/278 N. 412346.
5. Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, Peatling Papers, Vol. 10.
6. James Edwards, Companion from London to Brixthelmston, c.1789, Part II, p.24.
7. Guildhall Library, MS 11936/362 No. 557559.
8. Ibid. MS 11936/385 No. 598278.

- 9.** The Times, 22 February 1837.
- 10.** The London Gazette, 22 January 1839.
- 11.** E.W. Brayley, A Topographical History of Surrey, 1850, Vol.4, p.68.
- 12.** PROB 11/1790 q504.
- 13.** Frederick Braithwaite, On the Rise and Fall of the Wandle ... in Institution of Civil Engineers Proceedings, Vol.20, 1861.
- 14.** Michael Wilks, The Grove Mill Mystery, in Bulletin of the Wandle Group, No.20, September 1992.
- 15.** Surrey History Centre, 254/1/3.
- 16.** The Miller, 4 November 1875.
- 17.** Ibid. 4 April 1887.
- 18.** Ibid. 31 July, 7 August 1899.
- 19.** R.Thurston Hopkins, Old Watermills and Windmills, 1930, p.113.
- 20.** Wallington and Carshalton Times, 28 September 1944.