

## Calico Printing Works Below Wallington Bridge Beddington.

The bleaching grounds associated with the works were situated close to the northeast bank of the Wandle where it flows in a semi-circular curve about 270 yards northwest of Wallington Bridge, and in the vicinity of the present Birchwood Avenue. The works buildings were on the east side of the grounds, approximately on the south side of the present Elmwood Close and in Kilburns Mill Close, about 50 yards from London Road, and near a piece of former waste land called Brewers Green. Thus the works were not on the main river, but on a tributary stream running westwards from Beddington Park.

The site, originally meadow land, was said to have been leased in 1742 to George Ormerod, a calico printer, who soon afterwards converted it into a whitening or bleaching ground [1].

George Ormerod was first recorded in 1719, when a Bill was promoted in Parliament, which sought to prohibit the production and use of all printed calicoes, in order to maintain the woollen and silk manufacturing and printing trades. A petition of calico printers opposing the Bill was presented to the House of Lords which was signed by, among others, George Ormerod, who at this date was probably working at Crayford in Kent. Nevertheless, the Act was passed in 1720, with some provisos which enabled calico printers to continue working [2].

Ormerod later moved to Mitcham, where he occupied premises in the vicinity of Willow Lane. He was first mentioned in connection with those works in 1739 [3], but was probably there earlier, as he was first noted as having attended a Mitcham Vestry meeting in July 1735. From later references it is evident that he left Mitcham between 1741 and 1743 [4], which ties in nicely with the date 1742 cited previously for his first appearance at Wallington.

Ormerod evidently prospered at Wallington. He took on two apprentices in 1745, three in 1746, one in 1747, and two in 1748 [5]. A coverlet printed by him, dated 1752, is preserved in the Philadelphia Museum of Art [2].

George Ormerod died in 1754, and on 1 February 1755 administration of his estate was granted to his widowed daughter-in-law, Mary Ormerod, in trust, to be managed for the benefit of her children [6]. A list of those liable to pay a sewer rate in Beddington, drawn up on 25 March 1756, duly included "Omrod Widdow" as the tenant [7].

Subsequent occupiers of the premises are said to have included Messrs. Pullen, Downey, and Hiscocks and Matthews [1]. None of these can be identified from other records, but "Hiscocks" may have been John Hiscox, who worked at the Culvers Mill from 1753 until some time after 1767.

In about 1765 the premises were leased to George Ansell [1>]. He was in partnership with Robert Barker and Charles Bill by 1 October 1767 when they insured their "Printing Shop and Folding Loft in one Building", and a Whites Loft and Colour House in another building, and the utensils, stock and goods contained in both, with the Sun insurance company [8].

In August 1772 a legal action was brought against George Ansell et al, at the Surrey Assizes held at Guildford, by Hugh Mears and George Shepley, the lessees of leather mills near Hack

Bridge, a short distance downstream from the bleaching grounds. Their complaint was that Ansell, Barker and Bill had continued and extended a conduit from the river, originally installed by Ormerod, to supply water to the grounds, thereby reducing the flow of water to the plaintiffs's mills, and had also built two bridges which caused blockages. The action was unsuccessful, as was an appeal to the Court of Common Pleas on 25 November 1772 [1].

On 1 January 1773, Ansell, Barker and Bill insured their utensils, stock and goods in the mill, together with those contained in the Lower Mill at Carshalton [9]. They had acquired the lease of the latter mill in 1770. They renewed the policy covering the contents at Wallington only on 20 January 1774 [10].

Within a few years there were new tenants at the calico printing works and grounds, a firm headed by James Newton. Newton had formerly been in partnership with Robert Coleman and Edward Cuffley as calico printers on the Wandle at Wandsworth, and resigned from that partnership in November 1778. It seems likely that Newton then went to Wallington, with new partners.

The first evidence of this change of tenure is an indenture of a 21-year lease of the property, dated 31 March 1779 but to run from 31 December 1781. The lessor was Sir John Thomas Stanley and the lessees were James Newton, James Morison and William Kilburn, calico printers and partners, who were described as then being in occupation on the premises. The property included a "Messuage or Tenement, Bucking House, Mill House, Ash House, Work Shop, Granary, Barns, Stables, Outhouses and Buildings thereto belonging." There were also several pieces of meadow, pasture and arable land, formerly in the occupation of George Ansell, one of which, called Broad Mead., "both been converted into and used by the same George Ansell as a Printing or Whitening Ground." [11]

On 29 December 1779 John Newton and his partners insured the works buildings and their contents with the Sun insurance company. The premises included a colour house and cutting shop, a printing shop, a pencilling shop with folding loft over, and a warehouse "on the opposite side of the River." This must refer to the tributary stream previously referred to. Also covered was "Mr. Newton's House" and the goods therein [12]. The policy was renewed on 3 February 1780 [13]. James Newton alone took the lease of an adjacent field called Shoulder of Mutton Piece on 1 January 1782, for 21 years from 25 December 1781 [14].

Writing in about 1789, James Edwards described the approximate site of the works:

*"... a small triangular area of waste land called Brewer's Green. On the middle of the west side is a pleasant little white house belonging to Mr. Kilburn, a noted callico-printer. His manufactory lies about a hundred paces southwest from the house."*

He also noted that further south, on the west side of the road, was

*"a handsome house built with grey stock-bricks ... This house was built a few years ago by Mr. Newton of Merton Abbey. It is now belonging to John Holland Esq." [15].*

This house still survives, situated just north of Wallington Bridge, and is now known as Bridge House, 280-282 London Road.

Edwards's description indicates that James Newton had left the partnership by that time and moved to Merton Abbey, and in fact he had gone to calico printing works there in about 1785, joining the partnership of John Rivers, John Leach and Richard Howard. He later became the head of the firm and, with a succession of different partners, worked there until he retired in 1812. William Simpson, of whom more later, then became the senior partner. James Morison probably left the partnership at about the same time as Newton, and Kilburn then carried on alone.

William Kilburn was born in Dublin in 1745, and was the only son of Samuel Kilburn, an architect. As a youth he was apprenticed to John Lisson, a calico printer at Leixlip, Co. Kildare. After the death of his father he moved to London, and achieved some success in selling his print patterns. He became acquainted with William Curtis, a renowned botanist, and painted the illustrations of flowers for Curtis's "Flora Londinensis", which began publication in 1777.

After Kilburn became established at Wallington, it was said that "he now rose rapidly in wealth, and was soon the most eminent calico printer in England having brought the art to a pitch of perfection never since equalled ... His pieces of muslin chintzes sold for a guinea per yard, and he had the honour of presenting one of them, the seaweed pattern designed by himself, to her majesty Queen Charlotte." [16]

On 9 April 1785 Kilburn insured his premises with the Sun insurance company. The buildings and effects covered were the same as those insured by Newton, Morison and Kilburn in February 1780, except for the omission of Newton's house and goods [17].

In March 1787 a number of calico printers, including William Kilburn, presented a petition to the House of Commons complaining of the losses caused to them by the copying of their designs by other printers, and they introduced a Bill to secure the copyright of original designs [18]. Kilburn later gave evidence that his designs were immediately copied "upon coarse Cloth and in bad Colours", and that he had lost £1000 worth of work a year for the past three years. He produced one of his original designs, together with a counterfeit thereof [19].

The Bill was accordingly considered, and despite opposition from some other calico printers, was passed into an Act on 21 May 1787 as 27 Geo.III cap-38. This protected the copyright of the designer, but only for a period of two months after the design was released, and was only effective for two years. The Act was renewed in 1789, to be valid for a further five years (29 Geo.III cap.19).

In February 1794 William Kilburn, together with William Fenning of Mitcham and other calico printers, presented another petition, pleading for the Act to be renewed in July and that it should be made permanent, and that the copyright time limit should be extended to three months [20]. These requirements were duly incorporated into a further Act passed that year (34 Geo.III cap.23).

In December 1791 William Kilburn agreed to buy the lease of a logwood mill near Wallington Bridge held by John Filby, and the arrangements were completed in March 1792. Kilburn then demolished the mill and built in its place a new one designed for the making of cotton.

On 27 March 1792 the freehold of a number of Sir John Thomas Stanley's properties were offered for sale by auction. These included, as Lot I, the Shoulder of Mutton Piece of which James Newton had taken the lease in 1782. He still held the lease but had presumably sub-let to William Kilburn. Lot III comprised

*"a capital Messuage, with suitable Offices and Buildings and Garden with spacious and numerous Erections for the Calico-printing Business, in great repute, and about 20 acres of Meadow and 6 acres of Arable Land; situate in the Hamlet of Wallington, on lease to and occupied by Mr. Kilburn, of which ten years will be unexpired at Christmas next, at the yearly rent of X80." [21]*)

Both these lots were purchased by George Shepley for £465 and £2510 respectively [22]. Shepley has been previously mentioned as one of the tenants of the leather mills who brought the legal action against George Ansell and his partners in 1777. He had purchased those mills in 1788, and subsequently bought several nearby properties. On 26 October 1792 Shepley assigned the freehold of the Wallington properties he had recently bought, to Giles Bleasdale, one of the trustees appointed under the terms of the marriage settlement in respect of his daughter Mary [23].

In April 1802 it was advertised that the "valuable Plant, Implements and Utensils in Trade, and complete fittings up of the Cotton Mills and Printing Grounds at Wallington, late the Property of Mr. Wm. Kilburn, Calico Printer and Cotton Spinner", would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on the premises on 24 May 1802 and following days. Among the effects of the printing works were "several thousand Blocks for Calico-printing, amongst which are some of the most curious of sea weed chintzes, and others that have been in constant work." [24]

The following year it was announced that an auction would be held on 7 and 8 February 1803 of the building materials contained in the "extensive Printing Offices, Workshops and Stabling, to be pulled down", on the premises, "late Kilburn's Calico Grounds." The buildings to be demolished apparently included everything except the "dwelling house late Mr. Kilburn's." [25]

Despite the indications given in the above notices that William Kilburn had ceased working at both the cotton mill and the printing works in about 1802, there are later references that show that he continued working at the cotton mill, and possibly at the printing works, until his death in 1818. He was certainly at the cotton mill in 1806, when he was assessed for a local rate in respect of a cotton mill and bleaching grounds [26]. His name was listed in Holden's directories from 1802 until 1811, variously described as calico printer or bleacher. James Malcolm in 1805 included in his list of Wandle industries the

*"very extensive calico and printing grounds of Mr. W. Kilburn at Wallington". [27] John Hassell in 1817 noted that at Wallington, "Mr. Kilburn has here cotton mills and bleaching grounds." [28].*



The premises in c.1868.  
[101kb]

William Kilburn died on 3 December 1818 at the age of 73, and was buried at Beddington on 9 December. At some time he had taken a man named Clarkson into partnership, and after Kilburn's death his son Thomas took over his share. The business was soon discontinued, and in November 1819 it was advertised that,

"by order of Messrs. Kilburn and Clarkson, bleachers, retiring from business", their "valuable Plant and Utensils in Trade" would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on the factory premises on 25 November 1819 [29].

The owner of the calico printing grounds site at this period was George Shepley, grandson of the previously mentioned George Shepley who had died in 1807. He inherited this and other properties whilst a minor, and his estates were being managed by three trustees pending his coming of age. One of these was Jacob Foster Reynolds, owner of the Culvers bleaching grounds, and it would seem that Reynolds took over the lease of the Wallington premises from Kilburn and Clarkson in 1819.

It was recorded previously that William Simpson became the senior partner in a firm of calico printers at Merton Abbey, on the retirement of James Newton. The other partners at that time were James Newton junior and Robert Kelham Kelham, but the latter left the partnership in 1814. On 22 October 1819 Simpson gave notice to his landlords of his intention to relinquish the lease of the Merton Abbey premises on 25 March 1821.

Early in 1820 Simpson and Newton took over the lease of the Wallington premises from Jacob Foster Reynolds. In February 1820 they began to erect new buildings at Wallington.. As these were completed, they moved their printing facilities into them, but continued to carry out other processes at Merton Abbey. As arranged, they quit the premises at Merton Abbey in March 1821 [30].

By the time of the move, William Simpson's brother Robert had joined the partnership. Evidently the firm prospered in the first few years at Wallington. In Pigot's directory for 1823-24 it was recorded that,

*"There are also situated at Wallington, the very extensive print works of Messrs. Simpson, Newton and Co. where some of the finest work is finished in admirable style."*

James Newton left the partnership in July 1823 [31]. By this date the printing works were leased directly from George Shepley, who had come of age in about 1822. Simpson and Company had also acquired the lease of the cotton mill from the owner, John Bridges, and apparently had converted this to calico printing.

In 1826 the Simpsons were in financial difficulties, and informed their creditors of their intention to close down the business in July 1826 [30]. However, their difficulties must have been overcome, and they carried on working at the site for a few years longer.

On 31 March 1818, William Simpson had married Emily Granmer, whose brother the Rev. Richard Cranmer was Lord of the Manor of Mitcham. After his death in 1828, Emily inherited the family estates, and thus William Simpson became Lord of the Manor. No doubt it was the responsibilities and obligations associated with his new role decided him to

relinquish the calico printing business, which he did in about October 1830. His was apparently the last use of the premises for calico printing, and subsequently most of the land reverted to agricultural purposes. One of the buildings, however, remained.

The use to which this building was put for the next 30 years is uncertain. William Grubb was named as the occupier of a flock mill at Wallington in Pigot's directories for 1839 and 1840, which possibly refers to this mill. The schedule to the Beddington Tithe Map, dated 30 September 1841, named William Sampson as the tenant of the premises, which were described merely as factory and yard.

In about 1860, Thomas Holloway and his son Robert Frederick, who had previously occupied the flock mill near Wallington Bridge, moved to this "factory", and converted it to flock milling (if it was not already used as such). Thomas Holloway died on 5 July 1863 at the age of 72, and Robert Frederick Holloway carried on the business until his death on 15 January 1893 at the age of 72. It would seem that he was succeeded by his son and grandsons; local directory entries from 1895 until 1901 name M.Holloway & Sons, bedding, wadding and flock manufacturers, as the occupiers.

In the mid-1960s the premises were occupied by Willmar Engineering Works. The building still remains, now converted into housing accommodation, situated at the end of Kilburns Mill Close off London Road.

### ***References***

- 1.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, 7/21.
- 2.** Muriel Clayton and Alma Oaks, Early Calico Printers around London, in *The Burlington Magazine*, May 1954.
- 3.** Surrey History Centre, 4'70.
- 4.** Ibid. 2400.
- 5.** Cliff Webb, *An Index to Surrey Apprenticeships, Vol.2, West Surrey Family History Society Record Series, Vol.6, 1989.*
- 6.** PROB 6/31, p.542.
- 7.** London Metropolitan Archives:, SKCS 46.
- 8.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/177, No.249370.
- 9.** Ibid. MS 11936/218, No.320201.
- 10.** Ibid. MS 11936/229. No.335507.
- 11.** Minet Library Deed 5870.
- 12.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/280, No.422584.
- 13.** Ibid. MS 11936/280, No.424498.
- 14.** Minet Library, Deed 5871.
- 15.** James Edwards, *Companion from London to Brighthelmston, Part II, pp.21-22.*
- 16.** *The Gentlemen's Magazine, Vol.CII, December 1818, p.222.*
- 17.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936329, No.503335
- 18.** *Journal of the House of Commons, 15 March 1787.*
- 19.** Ibid. 27 March 1787.
- 20.** Ibid. 25 February 1794.
- 21.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, 7/6.

- 22.** No indenture of Shepley's purchase of the premises has been found, but there are references to his ownership thereof in several other documents, e. g. Minet Library, Deed 5873; Surrey History Centre, 273/3/13; Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, 717.
- 23.** Minet Library, Deed 5873.
- 24.** The Times, 17 April 1802.
- 25.** Sutton Archive and Local Studies Library, 7/7.
- 26.** Ibid. A Valuation of the Hamlet of Wellington in the Parish of Beddington ... made in the year 1806.
- 27.** James Malcolm, Compendium of Modern Husbandry, Vol.i, 1805, p.6.
- 28.** John Hassell, Picturesque Rides and Walks, Vol. 1, 1817, p.7.
- 29.** The Times 20 November 1819.
- 30.** Merton Heritage Centre, William Simpson's Letter Book.
- 31.** The London Gazette, 22 July 1823,