

Garratt Mill, Wandsworth

This mill was situated on the Wandle near the end of the present Trewint Street which runs down to the river from Garratt Lane, a little to the south of Earlsfield station. The site was just north of the bridge which now spans an island formed in the river. The name Garratt Mill was not generally used until the 19th century, but earlier references are to mills being at or near Garratt, a hamlet on the west side of Garratt Lane, a short distance to the south.

The first mill at or near this site was a gunpowder mill, erected in 1656 by Abel Richardson and James Lloyd [1]. In about 1650 Richardson, in partnership with William Mollins and John Jarvis, had taken the lease of mills at Carshalton and converted them to gunpowder making. The powder they made during the First Dutch War (1652-54) was found to be of inferior quality, and following an Admiralty investigation in 1655, their contracts were cancelled. The following year Richardson went into partnership with James Lloyd, and they leased land by the Wandle at Wandsworth from Hugh Hubbert, upon which they built a mill for gunpowder manufacture. The terms of the partnership were that Lloyd held a two-thirds share, and Richardson the other one-third.

In 1657 Richardson presented a petition to the Admiralty Commissioners. He referred to the defective powder made at Carshalton, but claimed that he was not to blame, as he was not directly concerned with the manufacturing process. Because he was now "unjustly kept" from the Carshalton mills, he stated, "therefore I am erecting mills within 4 miles of London. I beg to have the making of gunpowder for the state."

His plea was evidently successful, for the firm was awarded some government contracts. Richardson died soon afterwards, in September 1658. By his will he bequeathed one half of his share in the business to his son Joseph, and the other half in equal portions to his daughters Sophia and Elizabeth. They were all minors, and Thomas Edwards was entrusted to act on behalf of the children until they came of age [2]. Edwards does not seem to have taken any part in the operation of the mill, and evidently at some time James Lloyd bought from him Richardson's former share, and carried on alone.

In November 1660 Colonel Daniel O'Neale was appointed by Charles II as the sole supplier of gunpowder to the government. O'Neale then made arrangements with four gunpowder makers, as subcontractors, to provide the powder required. One of these was James Lloyd, who was to supply one-quarter of the quantity required. In order to ensure that he could fulfill this demand, Lloyd built two more gunpowder mills, upstream from the first mill, which were completed in about May 1661. These were situated on land leased from Ellis Crispe, on the west side of the river, in North Mead in Wimbledon parish. The land was within an approximately semi-circular meander of the river, and Lloyd formed a new straight channel between the western ends of the meander, and built the mills upon this channel, about 200 yards south of the first mill.

Following Daniel O'Neale's death in 1664, his widow relinquished the monopoly, and the subcontractors became contracted to the Ordnance Office. Lloyd became a major supplier during the Second Dutch War (1665-67), and established mills at Wooburn in Buckinghamshire to help meet the increased demand. After the end of that war, the need for gunpowder naturally decreased, and Lloyd found himself in financial difficulties. In 1668 he suggested to the Ordnance Office that they take over the leases of the Wandsworth and

Wimbledon mills, which he said were out of repair but could be restored to working order at an expenditure of £400. In 1671 the Ordnance Office did take over the leases, and paid Lloyd some compensation for cancelled contracts, which enabled him to pay off some of his other debts. He did not work at the mills again, and he died in 1675.

Apparently the Wooburn mill had been disposed of earlier, but in 1672 William Buckler renewed the lease from Ellis Crispe of the Wimbledon mill and also took over the lease of the Wandsworth mill. William Buckler had been apprenticed to a tallow chandler in 1642, but entered upon the gunpowder making business in the 1660s at Faversham, Kent, and he also became a regular supplier to the Ordnance Office during the Second Dutch War. Subsequently he also worked a gunpowder mill on Hounslow Heath, in partnership with Robert Dichardson, and they obtained a contract for the supply of powder on 1670. It was in order to increase his capacity that Buckler acquired the Wandsworth and Wimbledon mill in 1672.

The contract with the Ordnance Office was cancelled in 1674, but in 1675 the Ordnance Office granted William Buckler and his son Thomas, who had joined his father, compensation for the money they had spent in improving their mills. In 1675 also, the Bucklers were awarded a contract by the Ordnance as sole suppliers of gunpowder and saltpetre for the remainder of their lives. This turned out to be a relatively short period, but anyway, the monopoly was cancelled at the outbreak of war with France in 1677, soon after they had taken the lease of a mill at East Molesey.

William Buckler died in 1678. Administration of his estate was granted to his widow Elizabeth, who had been his second wife, and she continued the business with her stepson Thomas Buckler. It was probably soon afterwards that they purchased from Ellis Crispe the land on which the Wimbledon mill was erected.

Thomas Buckler died in 1679, and bequeathed his interest in the Faversham mill to trustees to administer for the benefit of his sister Anne, and for the settlement of his debts. His freehold and leasehold lands in Wandsworth and Wimbledon, "and the Mills thereupon erected", he left to his uncle Thomas Buckler, together with the East Molesey mills. Apparently Thomas Buckler did not take over the working of the mills, and the business passed to Peter Rich, Elizabeth Buckler's elder brother.

Peter Rich was a London timber merchant. At the time he took over the mills, he was M.P. for Southwark and an alderman of the City of London. He was elected as a sheriff of the City in 1682, and in later years was an M.P. again. He began supplying the Ordnance with gunpowder in 1680, and in 1682 he entered into a contract with them to supply 800 barrels a month. A survey carried out in 1687 showed that the Wandsworth mills were the second largest supplier of gunpowder to the Ordnance Office in the country. Sir Peter (he had been knighted in 1685) also continued the working of the East Molesey mill.

Sir Peter's sister Elizabeth Buckler still retained an interest in the business, and when he died in August 1692 he bequeathed to her "my coppers pans and utensills whatsoever to me belonging in and about the powder mills at Wandsworth". His wife Ann was to arrange for the completion of his existing contracts, and then his son Edward was to "continue and carry on the said work of making of gunpowder at Wansworth and Moulsey". Edward was also to pay his aunt Elizabeth £150 per annum for the use of her "workhouses and materials". This

payment to Elizabeth Buckler, converted to an annuity of £50, continued to be given to her by successive occupiers until her death 38 years later.

Lady Ann Rich, with her son Edward, completed the contracts as directed, but they then continued working at the East Molesey mill only, until Edward's death in 1703. In 1693 Elizabeth Buckler leased the Wandsworth and Wimbledon mills to John de Berdt.

De Berdt had entered into an agreement with Sir James Chapman Fuller whereby Fuller was to pay half the costs and to enjoy half the profits of the business. Disagreements arose between the parties, mainly because of Fuller's reluctance to pay his share. Law suits ensued, and Fuller was imprisoned for a time, but it appears that the matters in dispute were still unresolved at the time of de Berdt's death in 1702.

A new start was made by John de Berdt's son, also named John. In November 1702 he renewed the leases, which as well as the mills premises included a powder house, some warehouses and a wharf on the Thames at Wandsworth, which had long been associated with the mills. As part of the leasing arrangements, de Berdt agreed to continue the £50 annuity to Elizabeth Buckler. He was a regular supplier of gunpowder to the Ordnance Office until his death in 1709. He bequeathed his estate to his wife Susanna in trust for his son John, a minor, who was to inherit when he came of age.

Susanna de Berdt continued with the management of the mills alone until 1712 when she married Edward Stables, Clerk-Assistance of the House of Commons. Her last recorded delivery of gunpowder to the Ordnance Office was in 1713, and she made her last payment to powder makers in 1715. No further references to powder making at Wandsworth have been found.

Edward and Susanna Stables continued to hold the lease of the Wandsworth mill until 1723, when the landowner, George Porter, declined to renew it. In 1727 the lease was granted to Melancton Strong.

John de Berdt, who had come into his inheritance in about 1725, died in 1731, and in his will referred to his freehold properties in Wandsworth and Wimbledon, which probably included the site of the Wimbledon powder mills. What happened to that site subsequently has not been ascertained. The buildings must have been demolished, or have fallen down, and the land reverted to meadow. There is no sign of any buildings there on John Corris's map of Wandsworth of 1787, which shows Lloyd's new channel as part of the main course of the Wandle, which it is to this day. At some time the parish boundary was resited so as to include that stretch within Wandsworth.

After Melancton Strong, "citizen and haberdasher of London", had acquired the Wandsworth powder mill site in 1727, he demolished the "decayed and useless" buildings and erected on the site a mill for grinding snuff. A little later he built another mill nearby, for oil milling. In 1735 he claimed to have spent £2,000 on these works [3]. By this date Strong's son, also named Melancton, had joined his father. At some time the snuff making was discontinued, and both mills were used for oil milling. Melancton Strong senior died on 28 March 1750 at the age of 74, and his son then carried on the business alone.

On 26 October 1750, Melancton Strong, "at Garrett Green near Wandsworth, Oyl Maker", insured his stock contained in two granaries at St. Saviour's, Southwark, with the Sun

insurance company [4]. The following year, on 27 December 1751, he insured buildings at "Garrett", including an oil mill, with the Hand in Hand insurance company [5]. On 27 August 1755 he insured a stock of grain in his granary at Point Pleasant in Wandsworth [6], and on 10 September 1755 he insured a stock of rapeseed in a warehouse in Thames Street, London [7]. On 6 September 1756 he took out a policy to cover his stock in a granary in Southwark [8].

Melancton Strong died on 7 February 1757 at the age of 51, and the mill and the business passed to his son Thomas Strong, who renewed the Hand in Hand policy on the buildings on 22 December 1758 [9], and again on 20 December 1765 [10]. He renewed that policy on 26 August 1768 after a "fresh survey" which increased the valuation to £2,000 as against £1,350 previously. The premises had evidently been rebuilt, and included a corn mill as well as an oil mill [11]. He renewed the policy on 25 August 1779 [12], again on 23 August 1782 and then yearly until May 1790 [13].

Thomas Strong appears to have retired at about this time; his name last occurs in the Wandsworth land tax register for 1791. The next reference found to the mills was on 26 September 1793 when "Garrett Mills at Wandsworth", with the machinery, utensils and stock therein, were insured with the Sun insurance company by Robert and William Were. The premises were then described as "Oil Mill, White Lead Mill & Granaries in one Building" [14]. They renewed the policy on 7 March 1795 [15], and again on 9 October 1797 [16]. The register record of the latter policy described the oil mill and seed granaries as being on the west bank of the river, but extending over it to link with the white lead mill on the east bank. Also insured were a dwelling house with the household goods therein, a barn, a stable, three seed granaries, a counting house, a millwright's house, and other ancillary buildings. On 27 October 1798 Robert and William Were, "Seed Crushers", insured their stock of linseed in one of their granaries [17].

Apparently William Were retired from active involvement in the business soon afterwards, but his brother Robert carried on with a new partner. Holden's directory for 1802-4 lists Robert Were and Thomas Bush as "seed-crushers and white lead makers" in "Garrett Lane near Wandsworth", and James Malcolm in 1805 listed "the very extensive oil mills belonging to Messrs. Were and Bush, in Garrat-lane" [18]. Thomas Bush was a brother of Richard Bush, who at this period was corn-milling at the Lower Mill at Wandsworth.

William and Robert Were were shareholders in the Surrey Iron Railway Company, incorporated by an Act of Parliament on 21 May 1801, and empowered to build a horsedrawn goods railway from Wandsworth to Croydon, with a branch from Mitcham to Hack Bridge, Carshalton. Its course in the vicinity of the oil mill was along the east side of Garratt Lane, and a private branch or siding to serve the mill was built along the course of the present Trewint Street.

The formal opening of the Surrey Iron Railway took place on 26 July 1803, but evidently Were and Bush made use of the railway even before it was completed. In a letter published in the Star newspaper on 29 September 1802, extolling the virtues of iron railways, the writer stated: "The Surrey iron railway is now at work from Wandsworth to Garrat. On Thursday last I saw one small horse draw three waggons, containing thirty-three quarters of linseed, up the road." The destination of the linseed was undoubtedly the oil mill, though the branch to it may not have been built at that time.

When the mill buildings and the machinery, utensils and stock were re-insured with the Sun company on 18 October 1806 it was in the name of Robert Were only [19], though he was still in partnership with Thomas Bush. The white lead mill had evidently been discontinued by this date.

Writing at about this time, David Hughson gave an account of the oil production here:

"The first operation is that of grinding the linseed under large stones, during which the seed is wetted, in order to prevent its discharging the oil; it is then dried over a furnace in an iron pan, after which it is poured into long bags, closed up in leathern cases; these are inserted perpendicularly between wedges, which are driven down by upright shafts, thrown up by a horizontal one, then suffered to fall by their own weight, after which the seed is taken out, again ground, and passes through the whole operation as before, the oil running off through small pipes into a receptacle under the floor, and the refuse of the seed is sold to the graziers for the purpose of fattening sheep and oxen. The concern is of so profitable a nature, that the last mentioned article is said to defray the whole expense of the operation ... The seed is said to be imported chiefly from France. A quarter of seed produces from twenty to twenty three gallons of oil." [20]

The "refuse of the seed" referred to by Hughson, was made into "oil cakes" as described by James Malcolm thus: "... after this oil has been expressed by the crushers, the husks, together with such of the oil and the pulp as remain, are made into cakes for the purpose of fattening cattle and sheep; these cakes weigh about three pounds and a half." He went on to name "Messrs. Were and Co. of Garrat Lane, Wandsworth" as one of the makers [21].

This explains the significance of the description of Robert Were as "Oil and Oil Cake Manufacturer" in the Sun register record of his renewal of his policy on 30 March 1812 [22]. He renewed the policy again on 7 December 1814 [23]. On 4 January 1816, "Robert Were & Co." insured only the stock and utensils in the oil mill and granaries [24].

Sir Richard Phillips, after visiting the mill in about 1815, gave an account of its working which supplements Hughson's:

"In my walk towards Garrat, my attention was attracted by a pretty mansion, which pleased my eye, although the monotonous blows of its adjoining oil-mill annoyed my ear. The owner, Mr. Were, politely exhibited its details; and more mechanical ingenuity than is here displayed could not well be applied to aid the simple operation of extracting oil from linseed. A magnificent waterwheel, of thirty feet, turns a main shaft, which gives motion to a pair of vertical stones, raises the driving beams, and turns a band which carries the seed, in small buckets, from the floor to the hopper. The shock on the entire nervous-system, produced by the noise of the driving beams, as they fall on the wedges, is not to be described." [25]

William Were, who had retained an interest in the business, died in Somerset in 1832. By 1835 Robert Were and Thomas Bush were in financial trouble. In March of that year it was announced that an auction would be held on 15 March of implements and stock belonging to a farm adjacent to the mill, "in consequence of Mr. Bush having given up the Mills and Farm" [26]. On 1 May 1835, Were and Bush, "in co-partnership together in the business of hop and seed merchants and seed crushers", assigned the remainder of their stock in trade and goods to their creditors [27].

At this period the mill premises were owned by William Foster Reynolds of Carshalton. He died on 19 November 1838, and by his will proved on 21 January 1839 he bequeathed them to his sons William and Charles [28]. In fact, by then Charles Reynolds was already involved in the business. In 1837 he had entered into partnership with George Lee as "seed crushers" [29], and they had presumably succeeded Were and Bush. They dissolved their partnership on 30 June 1843 [30], and George Lee then carried on the business alone.

The book of reference to a Deposited Plan of November 1849 named Esther Reynolds, the mother of Charles and William, as the owner, and Charles Lee was still the occupier [31]. Braithwaite visited the mill in 1853, and noted that there were "two wheels equal to 45 H.P., and a steam engine equal to 20 H.P." (He made a curious error by referring to "Mr. Garratt's oil mills", but also mentioned "Mr. Lee's grounds".) [32] This is the last reference found to the oil mill. In the Post Office London Suburban directory for 1860, Thomas Gray, paper manufacturer, was listed at "Garrett Mills", and in the 1862 edition, the Wandle Patent Pulp & Paper Company, with H. J. Ryde as managing director. On the Ordnance Survey maps of c. 1865 the buildings on the site are identified as "Garratt Paper Mills".



The mill in c. 1865
[75.2kb]

By 1865 however, Henry Whitehead Knight, a bone merchant, was in occupation of the mill, and it would seem that for a time both paper making and bone crushing were being carried on there [33]. The map of c. 1865 shows, in addition to a building spanning the main river, a smaller building sited on the bank of a side stream to the west, which may have been used for the bone crushing. Within a few years, however, the whole of the premises were in use as a bone mill.

Davis wrote that in about 1873 a Mr. Pease took over the mill [34], but 1878 is a more likely date. Knight was listed as a "manure manufacturer" at "Garrett mills" in the Post Office London Suburban directory for 1876, and he died at Garratt House on 17 December 1877.

In later directory entries, the firm had become Pease & Sons, bone crushers, by 1885, and by 1888, Wickens, Pease & Company Limited, bone merchants, later bone and tallow merchants.

On 3 March 1890 a fire broke out in the main building of the "tallow melting mills", which was largely destroyed, although the "surrounding premises escaped injury" [35]. The remains of the building were demolished and the Ordnance Survey maps of 1894 show only the building on the side stream and some others nearby. The business was continued in these.

In 1898 Davis gave an account of the processes then being carried on at the works:

"the leg bones have each end sawn off, so that the marrow may be easily extracted. Every particle of grease is boiled out in large vats. The fat is skimmed off, and the liquor is evaporated and the liquor becomes size. The bones are sorted, the leg and rib bones are picked out. The leg bones are exported to France, where they are made into tooth-brush handles, and other bone articles. The remaining bones are either crushed on the premises or sent to the manure works, where they are made into superphosphate of lime." [34]

It was reported in January 1919 that the mill was "dismantled", with only a part of a water wheel remaining [36]. Local directories continued to list the firm of Wickens, Pease &

Company Limited at Trewint Street, however, until 1939. Perhaps it was merely office accommodation there, and the bone crushing was done elsewhere.

References

- 1.** The account of the gunpowder making period is based largely on A. G. Crocker et al, *Gunpowder Mills: Documents of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Surrey Record Society vol. 36) (2000), ch. 4; and Dorian Gerhold, "Wandsworth's Gunpowder Mills, 1656-1713", in *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, vol. 89 (2002).
- 2.** National Archives, PROB 11/284 q635.
- 3.** Dorian Gerhold, *op. cit.* p. 182.
- 4.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/90, No. 123272.
- 5.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/78 p. 290.
- 6.** *Ibid.* MS 11936/112, No. 148282.
- 7.** *Ibid.* MS 11936/113, No. 148434.
- 8.** *Ibid.* MS 11936/116, No. 153743.
- 9.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/91 p. 149.
- 10.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/103 p. 281.
- 11.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/107 p. 348.
- 12.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/117 p. 225.
- 13.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/125 p. 302.
- 14.** *Ibid.* MS 11937/2, No. 619355.
- 15.** *Ibid.* MS 11937/8, No. 638734.
- 16.** *Ibid.* MS 11937/19, No. 671295.
- 17.** *Ibid.* MS 11937/23, No. 683367.
- 18.** James Malcolm, *Compendium of Modern Husbandry*, vol. 1 (1805), p. 7.
- 19.** Guildhall Library, MS 11937/74, No. 794786.
- 20.** David Hughson, *London ...*, vol. 5 (1808), pp. 395-6.
- 21.** James Malcolm, *op. cit.* vol. 3, p. 100.
- 22.** Guildhall Library, MS 11937/100, No. 868826.
- 23.** *Ibid.* MS 11937/110, No. 900887.
- 24.** *Ibid.* MS 11937/112, No. 914186.
- 25.** Sir Richard Phillips, *A Morning's Walk from London to Kew* (1917), pp. 84-5.
- 26.** *The County Chronicle*, 10 March 1835.
- 27.** *The Times*, 19 May 1835.
- 28.** National Archives, PROB 11/1906 q57.
- 29.** Surrey History Centre, 504/11/1.
- 30.** *The London Gazette*, 30 June 1841.
- 31.** Surrey History Centre, QS6/8/411.
- 32.** Frederick Braithwaite, "On the Rise and Fall of the Wandle ...", in *Institution of Civil Engineers Proceedings*, vol. 20 (1861).
- 33.** Tony Evans, "Mr. Strong's Mill at Garratt 1727-1840", in *The Wandsworth Historian*, no. 75 (2002).
- 34.** C. T. Davis, *Industries of Wandsworth* (1898), p. 5.
- 35.** *The South-Western Star*, 8 March 1890.
- 36.** Wandsworth Local History Library, *Wandsworth Notes*, vol. 8, p. 103.