

## Calico Printing Works, Summerstown, Wimbledon~Wandsworth

These works were situated on the east bank of the Wandle, just north of the end of the present Riverside Road running from Summerstown. They were established in Wimbledon parish, but were later extended eastwards into Wandsworth parish, and the associated bleaching grounds were in both parishes.

The earliest reference found to the site was in an entry in the Wimbledon Vestry Minute Book in May 1776, wherein Messrs. Coleman, Newton and Cuffley, calico printers, were named as the occupiers [1].



*The works at their fullest extent 1884-1886 [69.5kb]*

These men were Robert Coleman, James Newton, and Edward Cuffley. On 16 November 1778 James Newton left the partnership [2], and moved to printing works near Wallington Bridge. Edward Cuffley left the firm on 22 January 1782 [3], and Robert Coleman then carried on alone. James Edwards in c. 1789 noted "a genteel house belonging to Mr. Coleman who carries on a large calico-printing manufactory here" [4].

"Robert Coleman & Co. calico printers" were listed in Holden's directory for 1802-04, but there must have been a change of partners soon afterwards, for on 2 June 1808 the partnership of John Coleman, and Thomas Langham, calico printers at Garratt, was dissolved, and it was announced that the business was now "carried on by the said John Coleman on his own separate account" [5]. John Coleman, calico printer, (presumably Robert Coleman's son) was included in Holden's directory for 1809-11, and in 1817 John Hassell mentioned "Mr. Coleman's calico printing manufactory" near "Garrat" [6].

There were passing references to Mr. Edwards's calico printing manufactory at Summerstown in October 1821 and March 1822 [7], and this must have been the C. A. Edwards of the "Wandsworth Calico Print Works" whose daughter died in February 1822 [8]. By 1823 the premises were in the occupation of Richard Fort and James Newton, who dissolved their partnership on 31 January 1824 [9]. (This James Newton was the son of the before-mentioned James Newton, and had previously been in partnership with William and Richard Simpson at calico printing works near Wallington Bridge where James Newton senior had earlier worked.)

Richard Fort remained in occupation and was there in May 1825 [10], but in July 1825 the premises were advertised "To be Let or Sold" [11]. Two years later, in August 1827, the property was again advertised to be let. The premises were described in the notice thus:

*"A large and commodious brick-built warehouse, a substantial brick-built building used as a padding house, a brick-built dyehouse fitted up with backs, a brick-built bleaching house, with wood and lead backs and wash-wheels, a brick and timber building used as a hot mount or drying house, a coal shed, an engine house, including engine room, drying room and boiler room, with a 20 horse power steam engine, and a convenient and respectable dwelling house, with greenhouse, garden, and grounds, about 2 aces, together with about 14 acres of rich and productive meadow land." [12]*

In October 1832 the freehold of the premises "lately occupied by Messrs. Fort and Co." was advertised to be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 31 October 1832 [13]. However, it was announced soon afterwards that the sale was "postponed for the present" [14].

The following year a notice was published informing that the property was available to be let upon lease, and tenders were invited which were to be opened on 6 March 1833. The premises were then said to have been "lately occupied in the department of calico printing and bleaching" [15].

Evidently no acceptable tenders were received in response, and later in March it was announced that the building materials of the various structures, together with the plant and equipment, would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 28 March 1833. The notice described the buildings and the plant thus:

*"... comprising a padding-house 92 feet in length, a blue house 50 feet, a wheel-house 94 feet, a drying mount 120 feet, a wax shop 50 feet, an engine-house, coach-house, 3-stall stable, and numerous erections, sheds, &c. which will be lotted in a manner suitable for re-erection. Also the Plant, which includes a steam engine of 20 horse power, 12 cast iron vats of large contents, a large liquor back lined with lead, 3 cast iron washing wheels, with machinery and apparatus, a very large cistern, several underbacks lined with lead, coppers, cranes, boilers, and other apparatus, chiefly in the bleaching department."* [16]

However, the buildings were not dismantled, and by November 1834 they were in the occupation of Cornelius Payne and James Jones, silk printers, who were named in the book of reference to a deposited plan as the tenants of mills in both Wimbledon and Wandsworth [17]. Payne and Jones were not there for much longer, and on 4 December 1834 they were jointly declared bankrupt [18]. Some two months later it was announced that, by order of their assignees, the lease of their "Valuable Printing Factory, with steam and water power, Dwelling House and Land" would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on the premises on 11 February 1835. Also to be auctioned on the same day were their "Silk and Cotton Printing Plant, Machinery and Utensils" and other effects [19].

The lease was evidently taken by Anthony Heath, who was mentioned as being the occupier in May 1835 [20]. Pigot's directory for 1839 lists Anthony Heath, calico printer, at "Garratt print works" and this name was thereafter generally given to the works.

Anthony Heath was intending to retire from business in 1842, and arranged for his stock of printing blocks and copper plates, and his printing presses, rollers, calenders, and "a great variety of utensils suitable to the trade" to be offered for sale at an auction held on 1 and 2 August 1842 [21]. However, apparently the items were not sold, and Heath did not retire then, and when the freehold of the "Garratt Print Works" and adjoining land was advertised to be sold at an auction to be held on 31 July 1846, the premises were said to be "at present in the occupation of Mr. Heath, woollen calico printer" [22].

Indeed, Anthony Heath was still working there several years later. In 1850 Brayley wrote that

*"Mr. A. Heath of Garratt-lane, alone employs about a hundred [persons] who print annually 25,000 pieces or dresses. This establishment has existed between eighty and ninety years, and is fitted up with the usual improvements in coppers, copperplate presses, cylinder, and padding machines, &c."* [23]

The Wimbledon Census returns for 1851 indicate a smaller workforce. Anthony Heath, then aged 70, was said to be employing 40 men and 10 boys. In the Wandsworth Census for the same year, his son Daniel Heath was described as manager of the Garratt print works.

Frederick Braithwaite in 1853 referred to Mr. Heath's print works and noted that the "deep colouring matter" produced by the washing of the goods was mingled with the water of the river [24].

The last record found of Anthony Heath was in the Post Office directory of the Home Counties for 1855. He must have died or retired within a few years, and the Post Office London Suburban directory for 1860 names Leves and Wagland, silk and woollen printers, at the works. For a period the firm was Kayes, Leves and Wagland, but the two original partners were the practical printers. In the 1871 Wimbledon Census returns James Wagland was described as a master printer and senior partner employing 100 men, 8 women, 50 boys and 2 girls; and Joseph Leves was also said to be a master printer.

The 1881 Wimbledon Census also records Leves and Wagland, living in adjoining houses, but James Wagland died soon afterwards, on 16 May 1881, at the age of 73, and Joseph Leves died on 15 June 1883 at the age of 66.

The business continued, presumably managed by Leves's son, under the name Joseph Leves and Company, who were recorded in directories from 1884 until 1895. The latter year marked the end of at least 120 years of textile printing on the site.

The premises were taken over the following year by the Corruganza Manufacturing Company, cardboard box makers, operated by Hugh Stevenson & Sons Limited. This was a large company, which had been established in 1859, with a head office in Manchester, and works at Birmingham, Leith, Glasgow, and elsewhere.

Soon after the firm was established at Summerstown, in 1898, Davis gave an account of the making of cylindrical cardboard boxes, and then went on to say:

*"Here are made square boxes, the sides being wired together at the angles. Corrugated cardboard is also made by machinery, and of this boxes are made for the safe carriage of bottles. Here, too, are made boxes of tin and celluloid. Postal and other rollers of all sizes are also made."* [25]

On 21 March 1900, a fire broke out at the works and destroyed one large building, but production was able to continue [26]. In 1917 the company acquired from Albert E. Reed & Company Limited a paper mill on the River Wandle at Melton Abbey, and converted it to cardboard box manufacture. They worked this mill as a separate company under the name Merton Board Mill Limited.

In about 1920 the Corruganza name was discontinued, and the company name Hugh Stevenson & Sons Limited was used instead.

On 3 April 1924 a serious fire destroyed a great many of the buildings, and much of the stock, at what was by this time known as the Summerstown Works. It was estimated that about £500,000 worth of damage had been caused, and about 600 men and women were likely to be temporarily unemployed. According to one report, some of the older buildings,

which had been formerly used for the silk printing processes, were not touched by the fire. It was also remarked that many of the workers could remember the time when, on the firm's recreation ground, there "were a series of dykes along which the silk was laid out after soaking to make the colours fast" [27].

Another fire, much less serious, occurred on 5 November 1964. This destroyed stacks of waste paper and cardboard, but the buildings were saved. Because of the date, it was thought that a stray firework may have been the cause [28].

Hugh Stevenson and Sons Limited operated the works until about 1971, when they were amalgamated with Bowaters, and the name then changed to Bowater Stevensons Containers. In 1979 the company became Bowater Containers Limited, and about 1986 Bowater Containers Southern. This company left the site in 1989, and it is now occupied by several small commercial and industrial firms.

### ***References***

- 1.** Surrey Record Society, vol. 25 (1964), p. 62.
- 2.** The London Gazette, 17-21 November 1778.
- 3.** Ibid. 22-26 January 1782.
- 4.** James Edwards, Companion from London to Brighthelmston, Part II (c. 1789), p. 18.
- 5.** The London Gazette, 2-6 August 1808.
- 6.** John Hassell, Picturesque Rides and Walks, vol. 1 (1817), p. 122.
- 7.** Wandsworth Local History Library, West Brixton Justices of the Peace Minute Book 1821-1822.
- 8.** The Times, 6 February 1824.
- 9.** The London Gazette, 7 February 1824.
- 10.** Wandsworth Local History Library, West Brixton Justices of the Peace Minute Book 1824-1825.
- 11.** The Times, 9 July 1825.
- 12.** Ibid. 9 August 1827.
- 13.** Ibid. 16 October 1832.
- 14.** Ibid. 30 October 1832.
- 15.** Ibid. 16 February 1831.
- 16.** Ibid. 21 March 1833.
- 17.** Surrey History Centre, QS6/8/164.
- 18.** The London Gazette, 9 December 1834.
- 19.** The Times, 5 February 1835.
- 20.** Wandsworth Local History Library, Wandsworth Vestry Minute Book 1830-1847.
- 21.** The Times, 18 July 1842.
- 22.** Ibid. 10 July 1846.
- 23.** E. W. Brayley, A Topographical History of Surrey, vol. 5 (1850), Appendix I, p. 34.
- 24.** Frederick Braithwaite, "On the Rise and Fall of the Wandle ... ", in Institution of Civil Engineers Proceedings, vol. 20 (1861).
- 25.** C. T. Davis, Industries of Wandsworth (1898), pp. 5-6.
- 26.** The Paper Makers' & British Paper Trade Journal, 1 April 1900.
- 27.** Ibid. 1 May 1924; also The Times, 4 April 1924.
- 28.** Mitcham News & Mercury, 13 November 1964.