

Beddington Mill.

This mill was situated on the Wandle on the east side of Wandle Road, Beddington, where the last building on the site, a corn mill erected in about 1850, still stands.

The early history of the mill is uncertain. It was probably one of the four mills at Beddington recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086. It is likely that it was one of the two mills which Sir Francis Carew owned in 1610, when he was a signatory to a petition to the Lord Chancellor against a proposal to extract water from the Wandle [1].

Another objector was John Smithe, who signed with an X. This was probably the John Smythe, miller, who on 9 October 1613 was granted a 21 year lease of "Bandon Mill" by Sir Nicholas Throckmorton Carew, grandson of Sir Francis who had died in May 1611 [2]. It is clear from the provisions of the lease that this mill was upstream from Carew Manor, and this location, together with a reference to the "Oulde Mill Bridge" in Bandon in a lease of 1612 [3], led Michael Wilks to suggest. that Bandon Mill and Beddington Mill might be identical [4].

The earliest unequivocal reference found to a mill here is on John Seller's map of Surrey of 1690, where it is named as "Bedington Mill." The Carew estate at this date was nominally in the possession of Sir Nicholas Carew, the great great grandson of Sir Nicholas Throckmorton Carew, who had inherited the previous year when two years of age. His son Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew died in 1762, when the estate passed to his daughter Catherine, and subsequently, in 1780, to a cousin of the late Sir Nicholas, Richard Gee, who assumed the name Carew.

Meanwhile, following Sir Nicholas's death, William Pellatt had been appointed as trustee to deal with the complicated state in which he had left his financial affairs. On 19 June 1780 Pellatt granted a lease of Beddington Mill and its appurtenances and machinery, together with a dwelling house and adjacent meadow lands, to John Williamson of Beddington, tobacconist. The lease was for 31 years from Christmas 1779, at the annual rent of £120. Williamson was to spend not less than £1000 in rebuilding the dwelling house, before 25 March 1783 [5].

The lease indenture had not specifically mentioned the function of the mill, but that it was a snuff mill is made clear by the record of an insurance policy taken out by Williamson with the Sun insurance company on 21 March 1783. Presumably he had completed the rebuilding of the house by this date. The policy covered the dwelling house, snuff mill and ancillary buildings at Beddington, and his utensils, goods and stock therein. In the register record he was described as "of Red Lion Court, Watling Street, Snuffmaker." [6] He renewed this policy on 1 February 1788, 13 April 1790, 11 May 1798, and 17 April 1804 [7].

John Williamson was last recorded at the mill in Holden's directory for 1808. It has been claimed that Charles Lambert, the next snuff miller to work there, took over in 1813 [8], but no contemporary record at this date has been found. John Hassell in 1817 mentioned "Beddington snuff mill (the property of Mrs.Gee)" but did not name the snuff miller [9]. The owner, Mrs. Ann Paston Gee, was the sister in law of Richard Gee Carew, who had died in 1816.

The earliest reference found to Charles Lambert is in the Beddington parish register, where the baptism of his son William was recorded on 25 February 1816. He was then described as a millwright, but when his daughter Susanna was baptised on 9 February 1821, he was recorded as a snuff miller. Perhaps he turned to snuff milling between these dates.

He was first named as a snuff manufacturer at Beddington in Pigot's directory for 1823-24. He had evidently been joined in the business by his sons Robert and Allen by 1841, when Charles and Robert were described as snuff millers, and Allen as a tobacco miller, in the Beddington census returns.

Charles Lambert died on 14 December 1842 at the age of 55. By his will, proved on 29 April 1843, he bequeathed "all my interest in the snuff mills, house and premises on lease now occupied by me together with all my live and dead stock, stock in trade", etc., to his wife Susan, but his son Robert was to have a quarter share, and after Susan's death was to inherit the whole [10].

Robert Lambert had taken over the management of the business by the time the 1851 census was compiled. Frederick Braithwaite in 1853 noticed that "Mr.Lambert's mill employs two wheels, equal to 25 H.P., for grinding snuff." He also mentioned the unsavoury state of the river there:

"The mill head, like that at Waddon, is full of mud; at times, the water does not exceed 4 in. in depth, and the stench is only kept in check by a low temperature. The chief cause of this, is the filth from Croydon, which finds its way through the wheel at Waddon mill." [11]

This pollution caused Robert Lambert, in March 1853, to complain to the Croydon Local Board of Health about the sullage entering the river and the offensive smells caused, as a result of drainage and sewage works carried out by the Local Board in Croydon. Later that year he brought an injunction against the Local Board, and again in May 1855 and June 1857, in which he was apparently supported by his landlord. The Local Board eventually made an out of court settlement on Lambert's claim for compensation [12].

The owner at that time was Charles Hallowell Hallowell Carew, who had inherited the Carew estates in 1848. He was the grandson of Sir Benjamin Hallowell, to whom Mrs. Ann Gee had bequeathed the estates in 1828. Sir Benjamin and his son and grandson all added Carew to their names. Charles Hallowell Hallowell Carew was an inveterate gambler, and within a few years had accumulated debts amounting to £350,000. In order to authorise the sale of his various lands and properties, to enable the debts to be discharged, a private Act of Parliament, the Carew Estate Act, was obtained on 25 August 1857.

In pursuance of the Act, and under an order of the Court of Chancery, the Carew estate was sold, in lots, at an auction held on 22, 23, and 24 June 1859. Lot 4, the snuff mills, were described in the sales catalogue thus:

"The Mills are brick-built and pantiled; and are worked by Two Breast Water Wheels, turned by the River Wandle. There are Four separate Mills, working Sixty-One Mullers, and a pair of Edge Stones; there are also Two Kilns and Two Drying Places, with Storing Sheds adjoining, together with a Millwright's Shop. The whole is in good working order, in the occupation of Mr.Robert Lambert, on lease (with the House, Premises and Lands) for an unexpired Term of Fourteen Years from Michaelmas 1848, at the yearly Rent of £275." [13]

The name of the purchaser, if any, is not known.

Robert Lambert carried on working at the mill until about 1878, when he concentrated his business at a snuff mill near Hack Bridge, which he had occupied since the early 1860s. He worked there until his death on 11 July 1886 at the age of 69.

After Lambert's departure, the mill was unoccupied until 1881, when it was acquired by James Wallis, who apparently bought the freehold. He converted it to corn milling, and also built a bakery on the premises. He had previously worked at the Riverdale flour mills at Lewisham for his father John Wallis, who financed his son's enterprise. James's younger brother, Thomas Henry Wallis, worked with him from the beginning, and in 1886 they went into partnership, and the business was then operated under the name of J. and T.H.Wallis[[14](#)].

The mill was completely rebuilt and fitted out with new machinery in 1891. The water wheels were replaced by a "Little Giant" double turbine, and additional power was provided by a gas engine. The grind stones were replaced by rollers. It was said that following these improvements, the adjoining bakery, together "with the mill, gives employment to 60 horses, who draw five-and-twenty vans." [[15](#)]

On 30 April 1907 the milling concerns at Beddington and Lewisham, the latter then being managed by John Wallis and his sons Joseph Powers and John Wallis, together with a newly established business at Tolworth managed by another son, William Wallis, were amalgamated into one company under the name J. and T.H.Wallis Limited. The first directors were John Wallis's five sons, with James Wallis as chairman [[16](#)]. John Wallis senior then retired and had no further involvement with the business. He died on 11 August 1912 at the age of 80.

At first the new company prospered, and an advertisement published in December 1908 claimed that they were "the largest Firm in the Kingdom who manufacture and supply flour direct to private families only from their own mills." [[17](#)] However, increasing financial difficulties forced the company to go into voluntary liquidation on 26 October 1911 [[18](#)].

In a separate but related development, James Wallis was registered as a bankrupt on 9 August 1912 [[19](#)], and it appears that he had made withdrawals on the capital of the company in order to pay some of his creditors, which had contributed to the failure of the company.

The outcome of the arrangements made by the liquidator to provide the best deal for the company's creditors was broadly to restore the situation to what it had been before the amalgamation. In March 1913 two new companies were formed, one to carry on the business at Lewisham, with John and Joseph Powers Wallis as directors, under the name John Wallis Limited, the other at Beddington, retaining the title J. and T.H. Wallis Limited, apparently with Thomas Henry Wallis as the sole director, James still being an undischarged bankrupt at this time [[20](#)]. Later James rejoined the company, but his brother retained control of the business.

In 1916 Thomas Henry Wallis's sight began to fail and he soon became completely blind [21]. No doubt James Wallis then took a more active part in the management, but he died soon afterwards, on 4 January 1917 at the age of 62. At the end of World War I, Thomas Henry's son J.A.D.Wallis (usually known as Donald) returned from war service and took over the duties of managing director. Thomas Henry Wallis became ill in November 1923, and was bedridden until his death on 11 May 1925 at the age of 60 [22].



The Mill in 1913 [78kb]

References

- 1.** Montague Giuseppi, *The River Wandle in 1610*, in *Surrey Archaeological Collections*, Vol.rXXI, p.179.
- 2.** Surrey History Centre, 281/5/3.
- 3.** Ibid. 285/5/2.
- 4.** Michael Wilks and Jennifer Bray, *Courts of the Manors of Bandon and Beddington, 1498-1532*, 1983, pp.xvii-xviii.
- 5.** Minet Library, Deed 3382.
- 6.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/291 No.440865.
- 7.** Ibid. MS 11936/351 No.540426, MS 11936/366 No.568076, MS 11937/23 No.678511, MS 11937,60 No.761783 respectively.
- 8.** Clayton Cook, *Tales of Beddington*, 1990, p.46.
- 9.** John Hassell, *Picturesque Rides and Walks*, Vol.1, 1817, p.91.
- 10.** PROB 111978 q253.
- 11.** Frederick Braithwaite, *On the Rise and Fall of the Wandle ...* in *Institution of Civil Engineers Proceedings*, Vol.20, 1861.
- 12.** Brian Lancaster, *The Croydon Case*, *Proceedings of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society*, Vol.18(7), 2001, pp.190,192.
- 13.** Sutton Archives and Local History Library, 4849/1!
- 14.** *The Miller*, 5 February 1917.
- 15.** Ibid. 7 September 1891.
- 16.** Ibid. 3 June 1907.
- 17.** *The Kentish Mercury*, 18 December 1908.
- 18.** *The Miller*, 4 December 1911.
- 19.** *The London Gazette*, 13 August 1912.
- 20.** *The Miller*, 5 May 1913.
- 21.** *The Wallington & Carshalton Advertiser*, 14 May 1925.
- 22.** *The Wallington & Carshalton Times*, 14 May 1925.
- 23.** *The Miller*, 3 October 1927.
- 24.** *The London Gazette*, 30 November 1934.
- 25.** Ibid. 14 December 1934.
- 26.** Ibid. 22 March 1935.
- 27.** J.Hillier, *Old Surrey Water Mills*, 1951, p.170.
- 28.** Sutton Archives and Local History Library, Michael Wilks, *Check List of Wandle Watermills*, 1967 (typescript).