

Hackbridge Mills, Carshalton/Beddington.

On the Arundel Map, the early 17th. century Howard estate map preserved in Arundel Castle, and the earliest known map of Carshalton, a mill is shown spanning the River Wandle just below the confluence of the Croydon and Carshalton streams, a short distance above Hack Bridge. Later, mills were also built on the east bank of the Croydon stream nearby, and the group was not given a specific name but were identified by their functions, until the 20th. century, when they were sometimes called Hackbridge Mills. I have used that name in this account as a convenient reference..

It is not known at what period the first mill was built here, and its early history is uncertain, but the following brief account gives an outline of some of the likely ownership arrangements before 1540.

In 1200 Robert De Beseville held some land and half a mill in Carshalton, and William De Flanders and his wife Maud held the other half.of the mill, with a messuage. Robert De Beseville's half-share passed to his grand-daughter Joan, who was married to William Ambesas. In 1289 they granted this moiety to the canons of the priory of St.Mary Overy at Southwark[1].

Joan Ambesas was later remarried to John De Bures, and apparently she had by then acquired ownership of the other half of the mill, formerly held by the De Flanders, which passed to the De Bures family. In 1360 the Carshalton Manorial Court heard a complaint "that the highway at Bakenescroft is undermined and sunk in default of the heirs of Bourers and of the Prior of the Blessed Mary of Overye." [2] Bakenscroft, later known as Bacons or Great Bacons, was an estate of the west bank of the Croydon Wandle, and was associated with the mill. The De Bures halfshare must have subsequently been given to the priory of St.Mary Overy, which was certainly in possession of the whole of the mill at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries, when it was confiscated by the Crown[3].

It is possible that the canons of Merton Priory, who held the tithes of the mill in 1538, also had a share in the ownership at some time. St.Thomas's Hospital in Southwark, which had been founded by the canons of St.Mary Overy priory, also may have had an interest in the mill for a period. The Hospital certainly held property by the Wandle in the vicinity of the mill in 1359, when a complaint was heard by the Carshalton Manorial Court against "the Master of the Hospital of

St.Thomas of Southwark for the waters of Hakebrigg diverted on to the common", and the same allegation was made the following year[4].

The original function of the mill is not known, but by 1361 it was in use as a fulling mill[5]. It was still a fulling mill 180 years later when, in February 15412, following its confiscation, it was leased by the Crown for 21 years to Anthony Silver, a London leatherseller[1],[3]. It soon afterwards passed into the possession of Walter Lambert, citizen

and goldsmith of London, who had previously farmed the tithes of the mill when they were held by Merton Priory. By his will, proved in 1545, he bequeathed to his eldest son Thomas certain lands and houses in London, and the "fullyng mille" of Carshalton[6].

In 1569 Thomas Lambert conveyed the mill to Anthony Wood[1], who converted it to the grinding of brazil wood. The following year the Surrey and Kent Sewer Commissioners required "Anthony Woode the Myllere of the Brasyll mylle" in Carshalton, to "drawe and lett the waters gooe durynge the amendement of the foresayde premises", evidently a reference to the conversion works [7].

By his will, proved on 7 February 1581/2, Anthony Wood bequeathed his "Brasell Mill otherwise called the Fulling", and its appurtenances, to his wife Margaret, and after her death to his eldest son Thomas[8]. In fact, it seems that the property passed directly to Thomas Wood, who died soon afterwards, in 1584, and bequeathed the mill premises to his brother Epaphroditus [1].

Epaphroditus Wood, by his will dated 10 November 1592, obviously written shortly before his death, bequeathed his estate to his mother and his pregnant wife in trust for his unborn child, should it be a son, who was to inherit when he came of age[9]. His wife did give birth to a boy, who she named John, and who duly inherited the mill and other properties.

In 1623 John Wood sold the brazil mill to Mr. William Burton [1], and by 1640 it had passed to his nephew Sir Henry Burton. Soon afterwards Sir Henry got into financial difficulties and had to sell some of his properties, and in about 1642 he mortgaged the brazil mill and its appurtenances to Sir Richard Gurney, Alderman and former Lord Mayor of the City of London, for 9:350. Sir Henry Burton died in 1645, and by his will proved on 29 January 1645/6 he bequeathed such of his properties as remained, including the brazil mill, still mortgaged, to his younger brother Charles Burton[10].

In July 1642 Sir Richard Gurney had been imprisoned in the Tower of London on a charge of treason, and his assets were later confiscated on the orders of the Long Parliament. On 22 March 1645/6 the Committee for the Advance of Money, appointed by Parliament to manage its finances, having obtained from Sir Richard the mortgage documents, arranged for the brazil mill to be leased to Anthony Fideo for five years from 6 July 1646.

Fideo reported to the Committee in December 1647 that he had begun to collect rent from the occupier, Edward Foster, but that subsequently Dixey Longe had evicted Foster and let the mill to "Widow Smith". (Dixey Longe was a London lawyer who held mortgages on other Burton properties in Carshalton.) He was ordered to appear to explain to the Committee why he had intervened. His explanation was not recorded, but evidently he was unable to justify his interest in the mill, and later the Committee agreed that Fideo's offer to redeem the mortgage for £350 be accepted. It was noted that the premises were then "out of repair."

Sir Richard Gurney died on 6 October 1647, soon after his release from imprisonment, and in March 1647/8 the Committee for the Advance of Money decided that there had not been sufficient proof of his delinquency, and ordered that his possessions should be restored to his heirs [11]. Thus the mortgage on the mill was again vested in the Gurney family, and Charles Burton continued to be the nominal owner.

In the early 1650s, possibly at the commencement of the First Dutch War in the summer of 1652, the brazil mill was converted to gunpowder making, and, then or later, two other mills were built nearby for the same purpose. This industry was first managed by John Jarvis, a gunpowder maker, who went into partnership with William Molins and Abel Richardson, who supplied the saltpetre. John Pepper was the chief powder maker and Lewis Fossan was

the clerk to the company. William Molins, a former Controller of the Ordnance of the military train for the City of London Militia, apparently took over the management of the concern. It was recorded that between the end of August and the beginning of December 1653, 360 barrels of gunpowder were produced from these mills and supplied to the Admiralty[12]. Unfortunately, when tested later, most of it failed to explode.

Early in 1655, the Admiralty Commissioners conducted an enquiry into the quality of the gunpowder supplied by several powder makers contracted to there. Their report disclosed that about 75% of the powder

produced by Molins, and his partners was "bad", a failure rate much greater than for the powder supplied by the other manufacturers. The firm was said to, be "in the highest rank of offenders and upon national grounds may be conceived did act from a covetous disposition and willingly exposed the state to hazard by making the powder of bad materials." [13]

Following the enquiry, Molins evidently had his contract cancelled and Abel Richardson moved to Wandsworth and established a gunpowder mill there. Subsequently the works at Carshalton were managed by Lewis Fossan together with Thomas Fossan, a powder maker who had not previously been mentioned in connection with these mills. They supplied powder to the Admiralty in May 1656, but payment was deferred because of delays in delivery and their failure to repair old powder sent to them[14]. In November 1660, Charles II after the restoration granted the monopoly of gunpowder production to Colonel Daniel O'Neale[15], but the manufacturing of powder at the Hackbridge mills had probably already ceased by this time, although it was to resume a little later.

Charles Burton died in February 1660/1, and by his will dated 7 September 1657 he bequeathed all his property to his wife Elizabeth. This included "certain mills called Brazen: Mills with the appurtenances and the lands and meadow grounds thereunto belonging", which were still mortgaged to the heirs of Sir Richard Gurney, together with the Bacons estate: After Elizabeth's death the properties were to pass to Edward Henry Penton and Prosper Penton, the grandsons of his late sister Anne[16]. (Despite the description of them as brazil mills these had, as previously recorded, been converted to gunpowder making several years before.)

On 28 March 1661, soon after Charles Burton's death, Lewis Fossan and another member of the family, Bartholomew Fossan, sold the equipment and utensils in the mills to Josiah Dewye, a powder maker who was subcontracted to Daniel O'Neale. Dewye had previously made gunpowder at Chilworth near Guildford, since some time before the summer of 1651, when he was recorded as having supplied the Admiralty with a total of 749 barrels[17]. Unlike the former occupiers of the Hackbridge mills, he was an outstandingly successful gunpowder maker. In the Admiralty investigation of 1655, previously referred to, his powder was found to be the best of those tested, with a low failure rate.

An inventory made at the time of the transfer to Dewye mentioned

the buildings on the site, which included corning, stove, and boiling houses, a watch house, and three trough mills[18]. Josias Dewye then took over the working of the mills, having no doubt arranged with Elizabeth Burton for the assignment of the Fossans's lease to him, or the grant of a new lease of the premises.

Josias Dewye was to work at the gunpowder mills for the next 35 years or so. It has been surmised that early on he went into partnership with George Boreman, with whom he had been associated in working gunpowder mills at Leyton in 1650[19]. The name Boreman's Mead was given to a piece of land on the east side of the Croydon Wandle near the mills, on a map of 1773.

In 1664 Dewye was supplying the Ordnance with 900 barrels of gunpowder a month [20], and during the Great Fire of London in 1666 he provided 16 barrels of powder to be used to destroy buildings to form a fire-break [21]. In 1672 he was granted a licence to ship 200 barrels of gunpowder to the colonies [22].

It would seem that when he took the lease of the mills, or soon afterwards, Dewye also acquired the lease of Bacons house and land, for after 1663 he was charged with the Hearth Tax thereon, which had previously been paid by Elizabeth Burton[23]. The significance of the next reference found to Bacons is uncertain. This is a record of the acceptance by the Banstead Manorial Court on 2 August 1666, of the surrender by Josias Dewye and Walter Ramsey to Elizabeth Burton of a messuage and land "called Bacons"[24]. The Carshalton Manorial Court agreed likewise on 7! January 1666/7 [25].

Walter Rumsey, a London linen merchant who had been a witness to the signing of Charles Burton's will, was later to claim ownership of both Bacons and the mills, as was Josias Dewye.

In later years Dewye acquired other property near the mills. In May 1678 he was granted a 21-year lease of Fulling Mill Meadow in Wallington, and he purchased this from the owner John Hoskins in February 1693/4 [26]. In February 1679/80 he purchased a messuage in Carshalton and lands in Carshalton and Beddington from William Henman[27].

Dewye had evidently been acknowledged as the owner of Bacons by 10 September 1683, when the premises were said to be in the tenure of Elizabeth Burton[28], and by that date, or soon after, he had also declared his ownership of the mills.

His claim to be the owner of the mills was contested by Walter

Rumsey in a case heard before the Lord Chancellor on 11 November 1686. Dewye asserted that he had been assigned the property by the heirs of Sir Richard Gurney, having redeemed the mortgage taken out by Sir Henry Burton in 1642. He argued that because neither Elizabeth Burton nor Charles Burton before her, had taken any action to pay off the mortgage, they had relinquished their interest in the mills[29].

The Lord Chancellor upheld Josias Dewye's claim, but Ramsey was not satisfied with this verdict, and pursued the matter six months later, when the case was heard again in the Court of Chancery on 28 May 1687. The same arguments as previously were put forward by both parties, and the only new facts given in the report of the proceedings were that Elizabeth Burton had made her will on 2 June 1685, and had died soon afterwards[30]. (No other record of the proving of her will or the date of her death has been found.)

The same verdict was given as before, but there must have been some later developments, no details of which have come to light, whereby Walter Ramsey did establish his claim to the ownership of the property. When he made his will on 7 November 1691, he bequeathed his

message at Carshalton, "and all those three Mills now used as Gunpowder Mills", together with 14 acres of adjoining land, to his wife Sarah [31].

But Walter Ramsey did not die until 1694, and in 1692 he sold the properties to Josias Dewye. The sale was effected by the usual method of lease and release. The lease indenture, dated 8 December 1692, was between Walter Ramsey and John Dewye, a Croydon brewer who was Josias Dewye's brother[32], but the release, dated 9 December 1692, was between Walter and Sarah Rumsey, and John and Josias Dewye. John was acting as trustee for Josias, who paid the purchase price of £245. The property conveyed was the dwelling house and appurtenances, "those Four Water Mills now used or employed for making of Gunpowder", and the 14 acres of land mentioned in Rumsey's will[33]. There were, in fact, probably only the three mills referred to in that will.

A clause in the latter indenture would seem to have been included by Rumsey to assert his title and prevent further disputes. This stated that "the said Walter Rumsey ... immediately before and at the delivery of these presents ... shall be and continue to be the rightful owner", until the indenture was ratified.

Josias Dewye died in 1698 and was buried at Carshalton. By his will dated 9 October 1696 he bequeathed some of his real estate, including

Bacons, to his wife Jane and after her death to Josias Carleton, but most of his estate at Carshalton, including "all those Watermills for making of Gunpowder", was devised directly to him. He was Josias Dewye's grandson, the son of his late daughter Elizabeth, who had married Edward Carleton of Carshalton House, a tobacco merchant. If Josias Carleton were to die without issue, then those properties were to pass to John Dewye of Croydon, Josias Dewye's nephew, the son of his brother John[34].

Josias Carleton died early in 1700, and probably never entered into his inheritance. By his will made on 20 July 1699 he left most of his personal estate to his brother Arden, and there was no mention of any real estate[35]. When, on 30 April 1700, Jane Dewye applied to the Carshalton Manorial Court to be admitted as copyhold tenant of Bacons, she declared that her heir was to be John Dewye[36].

Josias Dewye had effectively retired a few years before his death, and it is recorded that John Dewye was working the mills from 1695, in partnership with William Walton until 1703 when Walton moved to other gunpowder mills at Waltham Abbey and Tooting Bec[37]. John Dewye was named as a supplier of gunpowder to the Ordnance every year from 1703 until 1711, after which gunpowder production seems to have ceased at the mills[37]. Dewye probably then concentrated his activities on the brewery business at Croydon which he had inherited from his father.

Within a few years two of the three Hackbridge mills had been converted to copper working. According to the testimony of an elderly local resident, given at a court case concerning the mills heard in 1772, "Mr. Morris had them after and he made copper mills of them." He gave the starting date of Morris's occupation as "pretty nigh three score years ago" (i.e. about 1714)[38].

John Morris had worked at a copper mill at Carshalton (Lower Mill) since before 1707 and was succeeded there by Benjamin Boss before 1720, so he may well have moved to the

Hackbridge mills in about 1714. He was certainly there by 1726, and in c.1730 Mrs.Elizabeth Morris, presumably his widow, was named as the tenant[37].

The third mill had been converted to wood grinding, and would seem to have been sub-let by John Morris and the later tenants of the copper mills.

John Dewye died in 1727, and by his will proved on 9 June 1727 he bequeathed all his properties to his grandson John Dewye Parker, the

son of his daughter Mary who had married John Parker of Waddon Court near Croydon[39]. John Dewye Parker was then only five years old, and three trustees were appointed to administer the estate until he should come of age.

The wood grinding mill had been converted to leather dressing by 17 February 17389 when it and its contents were insured with the Sun insurance company by Jacob Papineau[40]. He was in partnership with his brother Michael Papineau, who was then managing other premises concerned with leather dressing at Bermondsey.

By 1744 Benjamin Steele was the copper worker at the other Hackbridge mills[41], but according to a lease of 1773 (to be referred to in more detail later), the premises were formerly in the occupation of William Thoyses and later of Benjamin Steele. Thus it would seem that Thoyses succeeded Elizabeth Morris at same time after 1730, and was there probably until about 1743 when he took the lease of a copper mill in Carshalton on the Wandle opposite the end of Willow Lane, Mitcham.

Benjamin Steele, "armourer and brasier", who had a foundry at Southwark, insured his dwelling house and the copper mills with the Hand in Hand company on 1 March 1748/9[42]. He renewed the policies on 2 April 1757 after a "fresh survey", evidently following some rebuilding or extension work, for the new valuation of the mills was £800 compared with the previous valuation of £400[43].

Benjamin Steele died in 1760 and in November 1760 administration of his estate was granted to his widow Mary[44]. On 14 August 1761 Mary Steele assigned the insurance policies of 1757 to the Governor and Company of Copper Miners in England, and obviously the lease of the mills was similarly assigned. This company, usually known as the English Copper Company, had been incorporated on 3 August 1691, and acquired an interest also in other Wandle mills, starting with the Wimbledon copper mills in 1720. The policies were renewed by the English Copper Company on 2 April 1764, when the mills were stated to be in the occupation of Benjamin Steele[45], but this must be a mistake and the occupier was probably the late Benjamin Steele's only son Andrew, working on a subcontract arrangement.

Mary Steele died shortly before 15 June 1768, when that part of her late husband's estate she had left unadministered was granted to the English Copper Company, his main creditor[46]. By this date, however, the English Copper Company had relinquished the lease of the mills.

Jacob Papineau was still working at the leather mill, described as "two leather mills under one roof", on 8 July 1757, when he insured the premises and the machinery therein, and a nearby dwelling house, with the Sun insurance company[47]. He died in 1760 and was succeeded at the mill by his son Jacob John Papineau. His brother Michael had also died in 1760, and for some time before his death had been in partnership with Hugh Mears, who had

married his elder daughter Susanna. Mears then carried on the business, initially in association with his mother-in-law Mary Papineau. They jointly insured the leather mill and its contents with the Sun company on 5 July 1764[48]. Soon afterwards, Mary's place in the partnership was taken by George Shepley.

George Shepley was born in Yorkshire in about 1738. When he applied for a marriage licence in 1763 he was described as a haberdasher living in the parish of St. Vedast, Foster Lane, City of London[49]. The marriage duly took place on 12 May 1763 at St. John's church, Horsleydown, Southwark, the bride being Mary Papineau the younger daughter of Mary and the late Michael Papineau.

On 1 January 1765 Mears and Shepley were granted the lease of all the mills on the site by John Dewye Parker[38], who had entered into his inheritance in 1743, with the intention of converting the copper mills to leather dressing. Jacob John Papineau was still in occupation of the leather mills and apparently held some managerial position in the new partnership. On 12 June 1769 Mears and Shepley insured two mills, presumably the two former copper mills, and a nearby dwelling house with the Hand in Hand insurance company[50].

Mention has been made previously of a court case heard in 1772. This was an action brought in August 1772 by Mears and Shepley against George Ansell, Robert Barker and Charles Bill, the proprietors of a calico printing works situated near the east bank of the Wandle a short distance upstream from their mills, with bleaching grounds extending down to the river. Their complaint was that George Ansell et al had continued and extended a conduit from the river, installed by a previous tenant of the printing works, to supply water to the bleaching grounds, thereby reducing the flow of water to their mills. Two bridges had also been built, which caused blockages. The action was unsuccessful, as was an appeal to the Court of Common Pleas on 25 November 1772[38].

Mears and Shepley's lease from John Dewye Parker was renewed on 24 September 1773 for 21 years, and the description of the premises

given in the indenture, and the plan attached thereto, makes it possible for the first time to identify the exact location of the mills[51].

Immediately to the north of the confluence of the Carshalton and Croydon streams of the Wandle, on the west bank, was the former Great Copper Mill, "now used for drying skins" and in the occupation of "Papineau". On the east bank opposite this mill was the former Lesser Copper Mill, now; used for skin dressing and occupied by "Gottlieb". A little to the south of this, on the east bank of the Croydon stream was the mill that had formerly been used for "rasping wood for Colourmen and Dyers", now used for dressing skins and also occupied by Gottlieb. These last two mills were connected by a "lately erected" drying house. There had originally been a gunpowder mill, of which only a conduit remained, a little way upstream from the former wood-grinding mill. "Gottlieb" may have been Jean Gottlieb Kloppe, a witness in the 1772 Court case, when he said he had been working there for the previous eight years.

There were various ancillary buildings including one "part of which was formerly used as a Melting House for Copper", a charcoal house, a lumber house, a brew house, a barn, and several workmen's cottages. By the terms of the lease the landlord undertook to erect a dwelling house for the tenants, to be included with the premises on lease. This house, which

later became known as Shepley House, was located in the vicinity of the present Shepley Close, off Strawberry Lane, and survived until the mid-1930s.

On 17 June 1776 Mears and Shepley renewed their insurance policy on the mills[52], but on 14 January 1777 Hugh Mears assigned his share to Shepley, and either then or later moved to Wales where he died in 1792. They had retained their premises in Southwark, and directory entries from 1778 until 1788 list George Shepley as an oil leather dresser at Horselydown.

The significance of the description of Shepley as "oil" leather dresser is that he used linseed oil to make the leather soft, as compared with the harder leather resulting from water-based processes. Essentially, the skins were placed in troughs of oil and pounded by hammers worked by a water wheel. At some time before 1778 George Shepley converted one of the mills to oil milling, so that he could become self-sufficient as regards the supply of oil. For it was in 1778 that the engineer John Smeaton was engaged to design a new water wheel for



The Blackbrige mills in 1972
[20.5kb]

the oil mill. He prepared drawings for a low-breast wheel 18 feet in diameter and 3 feet 6 inches wide, but it is not known if this design was adopted[53]. Whatever work was done was presumably completed by 14 June 1779, when Shepley insured the oil mill and its machinery with the Sun insurance company[54].

According to James Edward:, writing in about 1789, "These mills were unfortunately consumed by fire in 1783, the damage was estimated at about £1000. They are since completely rebuilt."[55] It is not clear if all three mills were thus destroyed, but it would seem that the rebuilding resulted in the arrangement that was to last for many years: a leather mill spanning the river just below the confluence, replacing the two former mills, and an oil mill on the east bank of the Croydon Wandle, on the site of the earlier wood grinding mill.

The owner, John Dewye Parker, who lived at Waddon Court near Croydon, was an eccentric character, and among other fads, "used to keep his bills on him., the unpaid in one pocket and those paid in the other."[56] It was perhaps his unorthodox business methods that contributed to his downfall. He got into financial difficulties, and in March 1783 a Commission of Bankrupt was issued against him, which was superseded by a further Commission brought in April 1788[57]. As a result, all his estates, which included properties in Croydon and Waddon as well as those at Carshalton and Wallington, were offered for sale by the assignees, in lots, at an auction held on 25 September 1788. George Shepley then purchased the mills, house and lands which he had held on lease, for £7000. The conveyance from Parker's assignees to Shepley was dated 18 December 1789[58].

George Shepley's wife Mary died in 1786, and in about 1890 he moved from Horseleydown to live in Shepley House, with most of his six surviving children. It was in the latter year that he took his eldest son Richard into partnership. Later, his sons Hugh and Michael also became partners.

During the decade of the 1790s, Shepley bought up piecemeal, as and when they became available, sundry plots of land adjoining the mills and Bacons estate until, by 1800, he owned virtually all the land to the west of the Wandle bounded by the river, Strawberry Lane, and Nightingale Road, and on the east bounded by the river, Hackbridge Road, and London Road as far south as Wallington Bridge. In connection with the western

half of the estate, Shepley reached an agreement with the Carshalton Vestry whereby a public footpath which ran across his land was closed, and in return he donated an 11 feet wide strip of his land adjoining Strawberry Lane to enable that road to be widened.

In 1781 he brought an indictment against the Carshalton Vestry for neglecting to repair Sparteley Green Lane (now Wrythe Lane), having earlier offered to pay £20 towards the cost. As a result, the Vestry was fined at the Quarter Sessions and ordered to carry out the repairs, which were completed in 1783.

In 1793 Shepley proposed to the Vestry that he build a bridge to replace the medieval Hack Bridge, which was in a ruinous condition, in exchange for a piece of parish waste land. His offer was not accepted, and ultimately, in 1803, he prosecuted the Vestry for their failure to keep the bridge in repair. The indictment was later withdrawn, and a public subscription fund was set up to raise money to build a new bridge. In fact, most of the money was provided by Shepley, who decided that the bridge should be constructed of iron. The new bridge, one of the earliest iron bridges in the south of England, was erected in 1805 and survived until 1912.

George Shepley also had an interest in mills at Wandsworth. The Upper Mills there, then comprising two leather mills, had been leased since before 1721 to Jacob and Michael Papineau, and after their deaths the tenure had passed to Mears and Shepley, and then to Shepley alone. By 1790 the mills consisted of a corn mill and an oil mill, and were under the management of Jacob John Papineau, and by this date George Shepley had become the owner. He also bought other property in Wandsworth, including some warehouses near the mouth of the Wandle, and the Middle Mill, a corn mill which he purchased in about 1801.

It was doubtless George Shepley's ownership of mills at Carshalton and Wandsworth, and his interest in communications relative to his mills, that led to his support for a scheme for the building of a canal from Wandsworth to Croydon, conceived in 1799. Indeed, it is quite likely that he originated the idea.

The promoters, who included a number of other Wandle mill-owners, engaged the engineer William Jessop to advise on the proposal. He was unable to recommend its adoption, insofar as the water to supply the canal would have to be drawn from the Wandle or its sources, and the supply to the mills would be thereby diminished. He suggested as an

alternative an iron railway, of a type which was coming into use in the Midlands, on which goods could be carried in wagons drawn by horses along iron rails.

Jessop's suggestion was accepted, and accordingly surveys and preparations for a submission to Parliament were made, which resulted in an Act authorising the construction and working of the Surrey Iron Railway, passed on 21 May 1801 (41 Geo.III cap 33). In addition to George Shepley, his sons Richard, Hugh, and Michael were all named in the Act as shareholders in the company.

During the course of the initial preparations, a line to Hack Bridge, branching off from the main line from Wandsworth to Croydon at Mitcham, had been added to the scheme, and undoubtedly George Shepley was responsible for its inclusion. Although there were calico bleaching grounds and a corn mill just north of Hack Bridge, and other mills further north not far from the route of the branch railway, Shepley had the most to gain from a railway terminating near his mills.

The formal opening of the Surrey Iron Railway took place on 26 July 1803, which probably included the Hack Bridge branch. Then, or soon after, Shepley had built a single-line private branch or siding from the terminus just east of Hack Bridge, crossing Hackbridge Road and running along the side of the road leading to his mills (now Restmor Way). James Malcolm, describing the Hackbridge branch in 1805, referred to "its winding course to Mr.Shipley's (sic) oil and skin mills at Carshalton."^[59] Shepley's siding terminated at a "wagon house" just south of the oil mill.

George Shepley did not enjoy the advantages of the railway for very long. He died on 15 February 1807 at the age of 69 and was buried at Carshalton on 24 February. By his will proved on 16 March 1807 he bequeathed his Carshalton and Wallington estates to his eldest son Richard^[60]. Richard Shepley died the following year, on 2 July 1808, at the age of 42, and was also buried at Carshalton. By his will proved in August 1808, he bequeathed the estates recently inherited from his father to his only son George, who was then 6 or 7 years old. Until he came of age the estate was to be administered by three trustees, namely his father-in-law George Harrison, his brother Michael Shepley, and Jacob Foster Reynolds, the owner of the Culvers bleaching grounds just north of Hack Bridge^[61].

Richard Shepley's widow, Lydia, was married again, on 30 March 1811, to Thomas Harrison, who was probably her cousin. She then moved to her husband's house at Wandsworth Common with young George and her four even younger daughters.

During March and April 1810 it was announced that sundry properties formerly owned by George Shepley would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 18 April. These included the freehold of property in Wandsworth and the leasehold of premises in Horseleydown. At the same time Shepley House at Carshalton was offered to be let for 14 years, and in June 1810 most of the furniture therein was put up for sale^[62].

Evidently Michael Shepley, George Shepley's only surviving son, was reducing the extent of the family investments and business activities, but he did carry on with the management of the Hackbridge mills, on behalf of his nephew George. In May 1817 the Committee of the Grand Surrey Canal Company tried to persuade him to transfer his transport arrangements from the Surrey Iron Railway to their canal, which would have involved road transport to Croydon and conveyance by barge on the Croydon Canal to the junction of that canal with the Grand Surrey Canal north of New Cross. On 3 May 1817 members of the Committee met Michael Shepley and gave him "calculations ... to show the comparative expense of the Canal to Croydon and of the Wandsworth Railway to Carshalton." It would seem that Shepley questioned these calculations, and subsequently the Committee asked the wharfinger of the Croydon Canal to ascertain if that company would reduce their tolls, "as there appeared a probability of bringing the object about of getting Mr.Shipley's (sic) Trade upon the Two Canals."^[63]

The outcome was not recorded, but it is highly unlikely that Michael Shepley changed his arrangements. Indeed, it appears that the Surrey Iron Railway was well used by successive occupiers of the mills until its closure. The Rev.H.G.Dodd in about 1900 wrote that "old inhabitants still remember the cars passing Beddington Corner all day long loaded up with oil cake from Shipley's (sic)"^[64]

Oil cake was a byproduct of the linseed oil milling and was used as a cattle feed, but one wonders if it was a major source of trade. Also "all day long" must have been an

exaggeration, but this reference does indicate a reasonable usage of the railway, which continued beyond the Shepley family's direct involvement with the milling

processes: This involvement had come to an end by 1825, after George Shepley had come of age., when he granted to others separate leases of the oil mill and the leather mill.

On 31 August 1825 Daniel Watney, a flour miller of Wandsworth, entered into a 21-year lease of the oil mill, back dated to 27 June, at the annual rental of £700. By this date the mill had been rebuilt on the site of the former oil mill, on the east bank of the Croydon Wandle, but was a much larger structure. The premises included many ancillary buildings, among them a foreman's house, a counting house, coopers', millwrights', and blacksmiths' shops, granary and stables, and were to be used "for the sole purpose of manufacturing oil." There was one water wheel 18 feet in diameter and 8 feet wide. Daniel Watney was granted the exclusive use of the branch railway from the Surrey Iron Railway, and the use of the adjacent road jointly with the tenant of the leather mill[65].

At this period Daniel Watney was in partnership with his son James, and they were also working the Middle Mill at Wandsworth. They dissolved their partnership on 27 June 1829, when Daniel Watney retired, and then James carried on at Wandsworth, while his brother John took over the management of the Hackbridge oil mill[66].

On 1 October 1825 George Shepley granted a 14-year lease of the leather mill to Alexander Ross, at an annual rent of £250. This mill was described in the indenture as "that newly erected water mill partly standing upon ... the site of a certain leather mill of the said George Shepley in the occupation of the said Alexander Ross and lately destroyed by fire and partly on and across the River Wandle at or near the junction of the two streams." Evidently Ross had previously held the lease of the mill which had burnt down. The new mill had three water wheels, each 18 feet in diameter but of differing widths, and there were a few other buildings and a nearby dwelling house.

The water supply to the leather mill was restricted to "the use of so much of the water from time to time supplying" the oil mill, "as can be spared when the said Oil Mill is not at work, and during the whole of two calendar months between the twenty-fifth day of March and the twenty-ninth day of September in each and every year." Ross was allowed the use of the road by the side of the branch railway, but not of the railway itself[67].

George Shepley died on 3 January 1835 at the age of 33, intestate and unmarried. Administration of his estate was granted to his eldest sister Susanna Mary Shepley on 10 March 1835, his mother Lydia, the next of kin, having declined to act[68]. Susanna Mary then allotted ownership of his properties to herself and her two sisters Lydia Jane and Georgina, in equal shares. (The fourth sister, Sydney, had died on 5 March 1828).

On 30 January 1836, Lydia Jane Shepley married William Wilson, and on 30 September 1837 Georgina was married to John Wilson. Under the terms of the marriage settlements in respect of the two sisters, the shares in the estate were re-allocated. Susanna Mary Shepley retained her one-third share, the second was allotted to William and Lydia Jane Wilson and John and Georgina Wilson, and the third was held by Robert Wilson and William Frederick Harrison. The relationship between the three Wilsons has not been ascertained, but probably they were brothers. William Frederick Harrison was the son of Lydia Harrison by her second marriage, and was thus the half-brother of the three sisters. In the interval between the two

marriages, Michael Shepley had died, on 21 March 1837, at the age of 66, and was buried at Carshalton, where there is a memorial to him in the parish church, erected at the expense of his sisters Susanna and Mary, the surviving children of George Shepley senior.

So it was that when Alexander Ross's lease of the leather mill expired in 1839, it was renewed by Susanna Mary Shepley et al. The new indenture was dated 9 December 1839 and the lease was granted to a new lessee, William McRae, oil leather dresser. In fact, McRae had evidently taken over Ross's lease some years previously; the book of reference to a Deposited Plan prepared in November 1834 named William Macrae (sic) as both lessee and occupier[69].

The new lease was for seven years at the rent of £105 per annum. The indenture repeated the restrictions on the use of water, in favour of the oil miller, and recited that "differences have arisen between William McRae and John Watney in regard to the water of the stream, and other matters, and the rent of William McRae has been considerably reduced because of his alledging (sic) great waste of water." [70]

Evidently McRae's lease was later renewed, and he was named as the occupier on the schedule to the Carshalton Tithe Map of 1847. In that schedule he was also named as the occupier of the leather mill at Beddington Corner, and soon afterwards he concentrated his business there.

In September 1849 it was announced that the lease of the leather mill was available for sale by private contract. The lessee would have the option of purchasing at a valuation "such of the tenant's fixtures as do not belong to the landlord." The premises could be viewed "on application to Mr. M'Rae (sic) on the premises" [71], so evidently McRae was still in occupation while awaiting the advent of a new tenant.

This did not take place immediately, and the advertisement was repeated in May and June 1850. Eventually the lease of the premises "lately occupied as a leather mill by Mr. William McRae" was taken on 12 October 1850 by Mark Markwick, "Patent Epithem Manufacturer", for 10 years at the annual rent of £100 [72]. The usual restrictions regarding the use of water were imposed, but the branch railway had become obsolete by this date. The Surrey Iron Railway had closed on 31 August 1846, and the rails and stone sleepers had been lifted by March 1847. No doubt the rails, at least, of the branch to the mill had been taken up at about the same time. Some of the sleeper blocks were later taken to the Grove Mill at Carshalton, and are now displayed at the Sutton Heritage Centre.

At the oil mill, John Watney had left in about 1840, and in April 1841 it was advertised that the lease was for sale by private contract. It was said that "the machinery consists of a powerful water wheel, two pair of rolls, two pair of stones, 21 presses, cisterns of various dimensions, and every requisite for carrying on an extensive trade." [73]

The lease was probably then acquired by the partnership of John James Saunders, John Harrison and John Harrison junior, who were described as "seed-crushers" when they joined with their landlords in a petition against the Surrey Iron Railway Company (Dissolving) Bill on 24 April 1846 [74]. They were still in occupation in November 1849 [75], but oil milling was soon to cease on the site.

When a 21-year lease of the premises was granted to Charles Fox on 24 January 1854, he was described as a woollen manufacturer, and it was stated in the indenture that the mill, formerly "used for the manufacturing of oil" had not "recently been at work."[\[76\]](#) In March 1859 the tenants were named as Maitland and Lingard, trading as The Carshalton Wool Company[\[77\]](#).

Within a few years the former oil mill was again to have a change of use. In the early 1860s it was taken over and converted to snuff milling by Robert Lambert, who was then also working at the Bedlington

snuff mill. He vacated that mill in 1878, but carried on at Hackbridge until his death on 11 July 1886 at the age of 69. He was succeeded by his son Alexander Lambert, who had previously been working with him. It was said of his snuff mill in 1900 that it was "one of the largest if not the largest in the United Kingdom. It is quite a usual occurrence for as much as five tons of snuff to be sent out by Mr Lambert in a week."[\[78\]](#).

Back at the leather mill, Mark Markwick was followed by Edwin Frost, an oil leather dresser, who entered into a 21-year lease on 25 March 1862, back-dated to 29 September 1861[\[79\]](#). He died on 1 October 1866, and an 1870 directory named Mrs. Edwin Frost as the occupier. By 1874 her son, also named Edwin, was the tenant.

By 1875 Susanna Mary Shepley and William Frederick Harrison held joint ownership of the mills. Lydia Jane Wilson had died on 12 May 1872 and her husband William had died long before, on 20 November 1827. Georgina Wilson had died on 29 August 1873. Her husband John lived until 1888, but had apparently relinquished any claim to ownership. Robert Wilson had died on 17 April 1870.

William Frederick Harrison died on 22 November 1879, at the age of 65, and Susanna Mary Shepley then became the sole owner of the mills until her death on 10 April 1882 at the age of 79. The name of Shepley then ceased to be associated with the mills, but the Shepley lineage continued, in part, to retain ownership for a little longer. Miss Shepley bequeathed her estate in half-shares, one to her grandnephew Charles Frederick William Hofman, the grandson of William Frederick Harrison, and the other half to be equally divided among the four children of her late sister Georgina. The properties were sold off during the next few years, and according to A.V. Peatling, the Shepley estate at Carshalton and Wallington was purchased by Edwin Curtis Goad in August 1888[\[80\]](#).

Edwin Frost continued in occupation of the leather mill, and in the 1881 Carshalton census returns was described as employing 75 men. On 21 October 1897 the Public Health Committee of the Croydon Rural District Council received a report from their inspector in regard to "Frost's Mill, Hackbridge." He reported that the sanitary arrangements there were "in a defective condition", that the river was being polluted by leather scrapings, and that the only water supply for the employees was from the river[\[81\]](#).-

The outcome of the inspector's report was that the owners of the leather mill, Douglas, Lapraik & Company of Bermondsey, were served with a notice to provide a sewer connection to the premises, and to attend to the other matters. They were also to make similar arrangements in respect of two other works premises they owned that had been established on the site, neither of which was actually on the river. One was in a building called The Lodge, to the north of the leather mill, occupied by F.Braybrooke & Company Limited, parchment makers. The



The mills in c.1898
[107.2kb]

other was to the east of the snuff mill, and occupied by William and John Sagar Limited, leather degreasers. A similar order was also sent to Alexander Lambert, who by this time owned the snuff mill of which he had previously held the lease.

There were numerous delays in the implementation of these requirements, but eventually it was reported on 3 December 1903 that the works were nearing completion[82]. By this date, F.Braybrooke & Company had been succeeded by John Boughton, who was also a parchment maker. Soon afterwards Edwin Frost moved to Croydon, and was followed at Hackbridge by James Beach & Sons Limited, chamois leather dressers and parchment makers. In about 1918 John Boughton moved to a former snuff mill near Butter Hill Bridge at Carshalton, and soon afterwards James Beach & Sons moved into The Lodge premises, while still remaining in occupation of the leather mill.

By 1927 the Hackbridge Chamois Leather Company Limited was working at the leather mill, and was still there in 1937, but in 1938, the date of the last pre-war local directory, Doldea Limited, shopfitters, were named as the occupiers of Hackbridge mills. William and John Sagar limited were working on the site until at least 1938.

As to the snuff mill, Alexander Lambert had purchased the freehold in 1894, but in 1905, at his instructions, the property was advertised to be sold at an auction to be held on 30 August 1905. The mill was described in the sales particulars as a

"Substantially constructed Mill of Three Floors, Brick and part Timber built with slate and copper roof and brick chimney shaft. The Ground Floor measuring 100 ft. by 45 ft. with an additional space by furnace of 29 ft. by 25 ft. and brick-built Drying Room of Two Floors 25 ft. by 16 ft., the whole well lighted by 14 windows ..." There was a breast-shot water wheel, 18 feet in diameter and 10 feet wide, of 30 horsepower.

One of the conditions of sale is of interest, it suggests that there may have been some irregularity in the manner in which Susanna Mary Shepley administered the estate following the death of her brother George back in 1838. This stated that the purchaser was not to be permitted to investigate the title of the property prior to the marriage settlement arrangements involving Georgina and Lydia Jane Shepley, and was to accept the statements contained therein that they and Susanna Mary Shepley had inherited it as co-heiresses. Potential buyers were assured that on the occasion of the sale to Alexander Lambert in

1894 "a statutory declaration was obtained that the property had been held consistently with the title shown for many years previously." [83]

Evidently no sale resulted from this auction, for Alexander Lambert carried on working at the mill until 1912, when he moved to other premises at Goat Green, Beddington Corner. He was succeeded as occupier by Arthur Coles & Company, calico printers, who had previously worked at premises at Merton Abbey, and who operated at the former snuff mill until World War II. The building was used as offices by Copes Football Pools after the war, until the 1960s, and was later demolished.

The leather mill was absorbed into buildings erected by Gilbert White, engineers, in the 1970s, and the present "Watermill House", the offices of ALK Minibus Hire, and adjacent buildings, at the end of Restmor Way, may possibly incorporate a part of the structure of the old mill.

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