

Calico Printing Works, Wandsworth

There were calico printing works initially established on land adjoining a side water of the Wandle, to the east of the junction of the present Broomhill and Buckhold Roads, on the west side of the present King George's Park. The associated bleaching grounds were to the east and south. Later, the works were re-located further east, on the west bank of the Wandle, about 200 yards south of the High Street.

The works were said to have been occupied by John Ousley by 1687 in connection with calico bleaching [1]. David Asterley, a calico printer, was probably working there by the 1720s. He was certainly living in Wandsworth in November 1726 when his son Benjamin was baptised in the parish church. He may have been in partnership with his elder son John when, on 12 September 1740, he insured his own dwelling house, and another house in the occupation of John Asterley, "callicoe printer", in Wandsworth, with the Sun insurance company [2].

John Asterley died a few years later, on 18 January 1743/4 at the age of 30. Subsequently David Asterley's surviving son Benjamin joined him in the business, perhaps in 1747 when he came of age. On 31 August 1759 His Grace the Duke of Norfolk granted to David and Benjamin Asterley a 41-year lease of property in Wandsworth. This included "all that New Messuage or Tenement, Printing Houses, Store Houses, Counting House, Stable, Carthouse, and other Outhouses with a Yard, Garden, Orchard, and a piece of Whitster Ground", together with a close of whiting ground called Marshes Close, a meadow "called Hobsons Meadow otherwise Callico Ground", and other pieces of land. The indenture referred to two earlier leases held by David Asterley of parts of the property, one dated 28 September 1747 and the other 14 April 1759, which were to be surrendered and included in the new lease [3].

David Asterley died on 22 May 1761 at the age of 73, and by his will proved on 19 June 1761 he bequeathed his estate to his son Benjamin [4]. Benjamin Asterley carried on with the business and on 1 April 1763 he insured his stock, utensils and goods contained in several buildings at Wandsworth, including a pencilling shop, with the Sun insurance company [5]. He renewed this policy on 16 May 1765 [6].

Later Asterley went into partnership with George Gun Munro. In April 1769 they were declared bankrupt [7]. Subsequently it was announced that their stock of "genuine large, valuable and great Variety of Fine Prints", together with utensils, materials, and farm animals and vehicles, would be offered for sale on the premises on 2 October 1769 and following days, "by order of the Assignees" [8].

Some of the effects may have been bought at that sale, but in November 1769 it was advertised that the bankrupts' "large, commodious and compleat Manufactory at Wandsworth, in the County of Surry, consisting of several Leasehold Messuages, Printing-houses, Outhouses, Lands, Meadows, Grounds, and Whitster Grounds, with all the necessary Utensils and Fixtures therein", would be offered for sale by auction about the middle of December next [9]. Some delay occurred, and a later advertisement announced that the auction would take place on 14 February 1770 [10].

There was evidently some difficulty in settling the affairs of the bankrupts, and a final dividend was not paid to the creditors until March 1775 [11]. The protracted proceedings may have been due, in part, to the death of Benjamin Asterley in November 1769, at the age of 44.

The next calico printer to work on the site was Henry Gardiner, who was there by 8 January 1774 when he took out a policy with the Sun insurance company to cover his dwelling house at Wandsworth and sundry other buildings, including two printing shops, store rooms, drying loft, colour house, compting house, millhouse, copper house and blue house, and the utensils, stock and goods therein [12].

It would seem that Gardiner moved to the site nearer to the Wandle shortly before 10 February 1780, when he insured the premises, described as "situate in a Field on the South side of the High Road at Wandsworth known [as] his Callicoe Ground", with the Hand in Hand insurance company [13]. He renewed this policy on 31 March 1787 [14], 28 March 1784 [15], 9 April 1801 [16], and 2 April 1808 [17].

Gardiner was a highly regarded calico printer, and "evidently made a specialty of patriotic subjects to appeal to the American trade" [18]. Daniel Lysons in 1792 referred to "Mr. Gardiner's calico-printing manufactory, which is of considerable extent, and employs about 250 hands" [19].

By 1811 Henry Gardiner was in partnership with George Dixon, but Dixon retired on 7 April 1813 [20]. Gardiner carried on the business, and renewed his Hand in Hand insurance policy for the last time on 4 April 1815 [21], but in November of that year "the valuable Plant and extensive Buildings, Implements, &c. of Henry Gardiner, Calico Printer, retiring from business", were advertised to be sold or let [22].

Evidently no sale was then effected, for the plant, implements and effects were again advertised to be offered for sale, at an auction to be held on the premises on 20 May 1816. The following day, a "Capital High-pressure Steam Engine of six-horse power, nearly new, and all necessary apparatus", together with an "Eighteen feet Horse Wheel and sundry machinery", were to be offered for sale [23].

It would seem that most of the plant and implements were then sold, but a further auction was advertised to be held on 7 and 8 August 1816 of "All the useful Building Materials of a large Brick Dwelling-house, and Offices, several ranges of brick and timber buildings, containing printing and pencilling shops, cutting house, loft and store rooms, counting house and ware rooms, madder and colour-houses, millwrights' and carpenters' shops, with drying lofts over them, and sundry other extensive buildings, forming the calico printing works of Henry Gardiner, Esq., the whole to be taken down and cleared away ... ". The steam engine and horse wheel, and some other machinery, were to be auctioned on the second day of the sale [24].

Apparently most of Gardiner's works buildings were demolished then or soon after. The register record of the insurance policy he had taken out in April 1815 was annotated as "void September 17, 1816". Later, in about 1830, some cottages were built on the site, which became known as Frogs Island. Gardiner retained the head lease of the site until at least April 1836, when the freeholds of portions of the Spencer estate at Wandsworth, acquired in 1792, were offered for sale. These also included other plots held by Gardiner on lease, all of which he had evidently sub-let [25].

Henry Gardiner died at Farnham on 14 July 1839 at the age of 95. His house, Downe Lodge, situated near the earlier works to the west of the Wandle, which he had built in about 1783 and in which he had lived until his retirement, still survives as No. 33 Merton Road. It was converted into flats in 1994, having previously been used for office accommodation.

References

- 1.** Dorian Gerhold, *Wandsworth Past* (1998), p. 43.
- 2.** Guildhall library, MS 11936/56, No. 85334.
- 3.** London Metropolitan Archives, E/BER/5/EI/6.
- 4.** National Archives, PROB 11/866 q199.
- 5.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/146, No. 198167.
- 6.** *Ibid.* MS 11936/161, No. 219513.
- 7.** *The London Gazette*, 2-6 May 1769.
- 8.** *Public Advertiser*, 23 September 1769, quoted in Ada K.Longfield, "More Eighteenth Century Advertisements and English Calico Printers", in *The Burlington Magazine* (March 1960).
- 9.** *The London Gazette*, 11-14 November 1769.
- 10.** *Ibid.* 16-20 January 1770.
- 11.** *Ibid.* 18-21 February 1775.
- 12.** Guildhall Library, MS 11936/228, No. 334954.
- 13.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/123, p. 16.
- 14.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/129, p. 327.
- 15.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/135, p. 55.
- 16.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/139, p. 145.
- 17.** *Ibid.* MS 8674/143, p. 38.
- 18.** Florence M. Montgomery, *Printed Textiles, English and American Cottons and Linens 1700-1850* (1970), pp. 285-6.
- 19.** Daniel Lysons, *The Environs of London*, vol. 1 (1792), p. 503.
- 20.** *The London Gazette*, 20-24 April 1813.
- 21.** Guildhall Library, MS 8674/145, p. 228.
- 22.** *The Times*, 16 November 1815.
- 23.** *Ibid.* 18 May 1816.
- 24.** *Ibid.* 3 August 1816.
- 25.** *Wandsworth Notes and Queries 1898-99*, p. 97.