

Lower Mill, Wandsworth

This mill was situated on the north side of The Causeway where it crosses the Wandle, about 70 yards north of the present railway bridge.

The earliest reference found to a mill there was to Lampit Mill in 1371, when it was a corn mill [1]. In 1569 Steven Smythe was the miller when he was required by the Surrey and Kent Sewer Commissioners to carry out works to the adjoining banks of the river and the adjacent bridge [2]. It was included in a list of corn mills on the Wandle at Wandsworth as the "Loan Mile" in 1610, when the miller was Thomas Browne [3].

In 1628 Laurence Caldwell, deceased, was recorded as having held Lampit mills, formerly occupied by Richard Cross [1]. In 1669 George Street and Francis Scott were prosecuted at the Surrey Quarter Sessions for raising the banks of the river at the corn mill called Lower Mill [1].

On 14 February 1726/7 the premises were insured "in trust for Benj. Wattson" with the Hand in Hand insurance company [4]. The function of the mill was not given in the policy register, but Benjamin Watson was described as an "oilmaker" when he insured the upstream Middle Mill on 12 October 1724 [5], so it is reasonable to assume that the Lower Mill was then also an oil mill.

Benjamin Watson died in May 1728, and on 19 June 1728 the policy was assigned to his brother-in-law Daniel Brown, who was also an oilmaker. Brown renewed the policy on 21 February 1733/4 [6]. At the next renewal, on 14 April 1741, the policy holders were Samuel Bishop and William Raper, who were distillers, and also took out a policy to cover buildings by the Thames at Tork Place, Battersea, later known as the Battersea Distillery [7]. Following a change of partners in the distilling business, these policies were assigned to Daniel Booth junior, William Raper, Mark Bell and Bean Nicholl on 24 July 1745.

They renewed the policies on the Lower Mill and the distillery on 25 May 1748. William Raper and Daniel Booth later left the partnership and on 2 January 1748/9 the policies were assigned to Bell, Nicholl, and a new partner, John Baker [8].

An entry in the Wandsworth Vestry Minute Book on 24 April 1755 names the owners of the Lower Mill as the Reverend Sampson and his sister, and confirm that it was an oil mill [9]. When the insurance policies were renewed soon afterwards, on 13 June 1755, the partnership consisted only of Mark Bell and John Baker [10].

"The Reverend Mr. Sampson and his tenants Bell and Baker" were named as liable to pay a sewer rate on a list drawn up on 25 March 1756 [11]. A similar list dated 11 August 1763 also named Bell and Baker [12], and when the insurance policies were renewed on 15 February 1760 it was in their name, but on 7 January 1765 John Baker assigned his share to Joseph Gosse, "of Battersea, distiller". There must have been some extensive rebuilding works carried out on the mill shortly before, as the valuation was then £1,300 as against £1,050 on previous policies [13]. Bell and Gosse renewed the policies on 16 February 1767 [14].

A survey of the mill carried out for the Rev. Thomas Sampson on 25 March 1770 found that it was out of repair [15]. It was evidently rebuilt soon after, for it was mentioned at a Wandsworth Vestry meeting held on 26 June 1770 that Bell and Company had paid their poor rates while their mill was "a building" [9]. The newly-built mill was re-insured on 16 February 1774 by Mark Bell, his son James, and Joseph Gosse [16].

On 8 January 1777 the "corn mill of Mr. Bell" was destroyed by fire, with the loss of one life [17]. Presumably the mill had been converted to corn milling at the rebuilding in 1770, or possibly earlier when the reconstruction works were carried out prior to 1760.

Again the mill was rebuilt, and insurance was taken out by Gosse and the Bells for the last time on 16 February 1781. The register record of the policy was marked "Void June 20, 1783" [18], when the partnership relinquished the lease. This was taken up by Richard Bush, whose father, Richard Bush senior, was the head partner in a firm operating the newly-established Wandsworth Distillery, situated on the bank of the Thames just downstream from Wandsworth Bridge. Richard Bush had probably been working at the mill for some time previously, for he had insured his utensils and stock contained therein with the Sun insurance company on 3 January 1783 [19].

In September 1790 Richard Bush requested the permission of the Wandsworth Vestry to take some waste water that ran across parish land near his mill, as he was inconvenienced by "want of water to work the mill" [20], but apparently received no response. The following month he came to an agreement with Richard Shepley and George Shepley, the occupiers of the Middle Mill and Upper Mill respectively, to widen his tumbling bay by ten feet [21].

He appealed to the Wandsworth Vestry again on 13 September 1797, complaining of the loss of water he suffered "by the waters passing through the Plain into the River", and sought permission "to make a Cut across the said Plain to convey such water into the Stream at the back of Mr. Shepley's Mill [i.e. the Middle Mill] as also for a Piece of Ground belonging to this Parish on the left hand side of the Causeway leading to the Town from his Mill for the purpose of being converted into a place for to contain a head of water for the use of such Mill upon paying an annual rent for the same" [22]. Neither of these requests was granted, but Richard Bush did receive permission to make some alterations to his tumbling bay [23].

His concern for his water supply continued, and in the Act of 21 May 1801 (41 Geo. III cap. 33) authorising the construction of the Surrey Iron Railway, which was planned to commence by the side of a basin to be built just to the east of his mill, he managed to have included a clause "to prevent any injury being done" to his mill. Clause III recited, "That all and every Sluice Gate and Sluice Gates, Waste Gate and Waste Gates, that may be erected by the said Company of Proprietors [i.e. of the railway] by virtue of this Act, at or near the said Dock or Bason, shall at all Times be under the Direction and Regulation of the Occupier or Occupiers for the Time being of the said Mills." Richard Bush was in fact a proprietor of the Surrey Iron Railway.

The owners of the Lower Mill named in the Act were the Reverend Charles Sampson and Jane Drew. Charles Sampson had recently inherited the share of his father, the Reverend Thomas Sampson, upon the latter's death early in 1800 [24]. Jane Drew was probably his aunt.

On 9 September 1803 Richard Bush insured his utensils and stock contained in the mill, together with some buildings at Garratt Green Farm, with the Sun insurance company [25]. He continued in occupation until some time after 1808, but Peter Dormay, a coal and corn merchant, had taken over by 1813. Evidently Dormay was also troubled by lack of water, for on 25 March 1814 he was granted by the Wandsworth Vestry a 21-year lease of a piece of parish land adjoining the mill premises, upon which he erected a steam engine [26].

Richard Bush had evidently acquired a share in the ownership of the mill from the Rev. Charles Sampson, for when he died in 1822 he bequeathed this share to his wife Anna, and after her death to his grandson Richard, son of his son Thomas [27]. Peter Dormay carried on working at the mill, and was listed in Pigot's directory for 1823-24, but on 17 May 1826 Thomas Bush, presumably acting as trustee for his son, granted a 21-year lease of the mill and its appurtenances to Daniel Watney, at the rent of £800 per annum. This Daniel was a son of the Daniel Watney who by this date had bought the Upper Mill at Wandsworth. Thomas Bush, described as a "seedcrusher", was then working at the Garratt Mill, producing vegetable oils.

Daniel Watney was named as the occupier in the book of reference to a Deposited Plan of 1834 [29], and also on the schedule to the Wandsworth Tithe Map of 1838. He gave up milling a few years later, and went to the Wandsworth Distillery, previously mentioned. His younger brother James Watney, who was managing the Middle Mill and Upper Mill at Wandsworth, then took over the Lower Mill also. In about 1847 James Watney went into partnership with William Henry Wells, and in May 1848 they purchased the Surrey Iron Railway basin and wharf following the closure of that railway in 1846.

Watney and Wells were duly named as the occupiers of the Lower Mill in the book of reference to a Deposited Plan of November 1849, wherein the owners were named as Charles John Sampson and Richard Yeats Bush [30], the latter by then having entered into his inheritance.

Frederick Braithwaite in 1853 described the mill thus:

"... the lower or tidal mill, also belonging to Messrs. Watney, is prevented, by the flow of the tide, from working during six to eight out of twenty-four hours. The power is derived from three wheels, collectively equal to 45 H.P. and a steam engine equal to 18 H. P. ... At the mill head, there are two overfalls, over which the tide frequently flows from the River Thames." [31]

By this period, the Wandsworth corn mills were being managed mainly by Wells, while Watney was involved in the development of the Stag Brewery in Pimlico, in which he had acquired a quarter-share in 1837. In the 1861 Wandsworth census returns, William Henry Wells was recorded as a miller employing 40 men, which must have been the total for all three mills. However, later in 1861, on 20 June, the partnership of Watney and Wells was dissolved [32], and soon thereafter the three mills acquired various new occupants.

Messrs. Fullwood and Allsop were recorded as being the millers at the "Causeway Mill" in a Post Office directory of 1866. These were George Fullwood and his brother-in-law James Allsop. Later directory listings give the name of the firm as George Fullwood and Company, from 1870 until 1882, and they apparently ceased operating after Fullwood's death on 17

October 1883. In directory entries from 1884 until 1892 the millers there were named as Sutherland and Company.

In July 1889 it had been advertised that the freehold of the mill was to be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 16 August 1889. The property was described in the notice thus:

"... having an area of land and water of about four acres, comprising a substantially-built Flour Mill, fitted with 12 pairs 4-ft. French Burr and Peak stones, dressing machines, and necessary appliances, driven by three water wheels equal to about 60-horse power, 25-horse power horizontal engine, engine-house, mill-house, stabling, yard, and wharf frontage to Mill Pond, and barge bed, which will admit of two barges lying alongside." [33]



The mills in 1838
[111kb]

Writing in 1898, Cecil Davis recorded that Bulstrode, Pimm and Company, who were then working the Upper Mill, used the Lower Mill for first cleaning the wheat before transferring it [34]. The mill was probably demolished soon afterwards. A reference in 1911 was to the site of the old Lower Mill [35].

References

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3. Montague Giuseppe, "The River Wandle in 1610", in Surrey Archaeological Collections, vol. 21 (1908).
4. Guildhall Library. MS 8674/34, p. 160.
5. Ibid. MS 8674/29, p. 218.
6. Ibid. MS 8674/47, p. 325.
7. Ibid. MS 8674/60, p. 174.
8. Ibid. MS 8674/72, p. 154.
9. Wandsworth Local History Library, Wandsworth Vestry Minute Book 1744-77.
10. Guildhall Library, MS 8674/84, p. 272.
11. London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 46, pp. 24-28.
12. Ibid. SKCS 46, pp. 403-408.
13. Guildhall Library, MS 8674/93, p. 141.
14. Ibid. MS 8674/105, p. 204.
15. London Metropolitan Archives, Sampson Papers, 58.75(5).
16. Guildhall Library, MS 8674/115, p. 227.
17. The Universal Magazine, January 1777.
18. Guildhall Library, MS 8674/124, p. 55.
19. Ibid. MS 11936/306, No. 46951.
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24. National Archives, PROB 11/1339 q238.

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32. The London Gazette, 26 July 1861.
33. The Miller, 29 July 1889.
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