

Morden Hall Snuff Mills, Morden

These two mills were situated in Morden Hall Park, on opposite banks of the Wandle. Each mill had a breast-shot water wheel, arranged side by side with a catwalk between them. The last mills built on the site remain. That on the east bank, and the adjoining Morden Cottage, date from the mid-18th century, while that on the west bank and the nearby mill house, the latter now occupied as the Snuff Mill Environmental Centre, are of the 19th century. The water wheel of the older mill is still in position, minus its paddles. The other wheel was removed in 1968.



The mills in 1913.
[83.2kb]

The earliest indication found of a mill on this site is on John Rocque's map of London of the early 1740s, whereon a building is shown spanning the river. The first reference found to an occupier is in a list of those liable to pay a sewer rate dated 25 March 1756, which names "Garth and his tenant Davenport for mills" in Morden [1]. Garth was Richard Garth, then Lord of the Manor of Morden. The significance of Davenport is made clear in an insurance policy issued by the Royal Exchange company to Peter Davenport, tobacconist, on 25 March 1758 [2]. The premises insured were a dwelling house and an adjoining snuff mill with one water wheel, in Morden, in the occupation of Peter Davenport and Nathaniel Polhill.

This partnership had been formed in 1754, following the death of Peter Davenport's father John Davenport, tobacconist of St. Saviour's, Southwark, where he had been in partnership with Nathaniel Polhill. By his will, proved on 7 October 1754, John Davenport had bequeathed his share in the business to his son Peter, and to Peter Taylor [3]. Taylor presumably was involved in the management of the premises at St. Saviour's and was not mentioned in connection with the Morden mill.

Peter Davenport died in 1760, and by his will proved on 17 February 1760 he made cash bequests to his partners Polhill and Taylor, but did not appoint a successor [4]. However, his son Benjamin Davenport, then a minor, was later connected with the business.

Their mill was evidently on the west bank of the river, for on 9 February 1763 Thomas Sainsbury of Ludgate Hill, London, tobacconist, insured a snuff mill on the east bank, in his own occupation, with the Hand in Hand company [5]. This mill had probably been sub-let by Peter Davenport to Sainsbury, some time before 1758.

Thomas Sainsbury was an alderman of the City of London from 1778 to 1795, and Lord Mayor in 1786-87. He had been in trade as a tobacconist since before 1755, when he married the daughter of his partner Stephen Preacher. In about 1784, after Preacher's death, he went into partnership with Abraham Langford, who married his daughter Elizabeth [6].

The mills had evidently been leased to Peter Davenport some time about 1754, and re-leased subsequently, but the earliest record which has been found is an indenture dated 24 November 1779, which renewed for a further ten years a lease granted to Nathaniel Polhill and Benjamin Davenport, son of the late Peter Davenport, by Richard Garth [7]. This was superseded by another ten-year lease dated 28 February 1780 granted to Nathaniel Polhill only [8].

Thomas Sainsbury had renewed his insurance policy on 2 February 1770 [9], again on 16 January 1777 after a "resurvey" which increased the value from £400 to £525 [10], and finally on 7 January 1784 [11].

Nathaniel Polhill was also a partner in a London banking firm, and served as Member of Parliament for Southwark from 1774 until his death on 29 August 1782 at the age of 59. The tobacco business and the mill were then taken over by his eldest son, also named Nathaniel, but he died a few months after his father. By his will, proved on 23 December 1782, he bequeathed his "trade as a tobacconist" to his brother Edward, on condition that his younger brother Robert be taken into partnership when he came of age [12].

Thus it was to Edward and Robert Polhill that Richard Garth granted a further 25-year lease of the mills on 12 August 1786 [13]. On 8 November 1790, they renewed the insurance policy which Thomas Sainsbury had taken out on the east mill in January 1784, and which he had surrendered on 8 October 1790, when it was extended to cover also the west mill [14]. Although Thomas Sainsbury had relinquished the tenancy of the east mill, he continued to live in the nearby Morden Hall, which he had occupied since about 1778, until shortly before his death in 1795.

On 7 December 1790 Edward and Robert Polhill insured some ancillary buildings on the site [15]. They renewed the insurance cover on all the buildings on 27 December 1797 [16].

Richard Garth had died in 1787, and his estates were inherited by his eldest daughter Clara. She married Owen Putland Meyrick, and on 30 June 1812 Meyrick granted a further 21-year lease of the mills to Edward Polhill [17]. Robert Polhill had apparently quit the business by this time. He died a few years later, in 1837.

On 21 February 1831, Edward Polhill surrendered the outstanding term of his lease to the then owner, Elizabeth Lowndes Stone [18]. She had inherited the property from her sister Clara Meyrick, who had died in 1826, Owen Putland Meyrick having died in 1825. At some time Edward Polhill had taken on a partner, John Jones, and apparently they carried on trading in their premises at Southwark under the name Polhill and Jones until they dissolved their partnership on 24 June 1831 [19]. Edward Polhill died in about September 1837.

A week after Polhill's surrender of the lease of the mills, on 28 February 1831, Elizabeth Lowndes Stone granted a 14-year lease to Alexander Hatfeild, George Friend and William Tomlin, of The Minories, London, tobacco merchants [20]. These men were the partners of the firm of James Taddy and Company.

James Taddy, the founder of the firm, had died on 27 June 1828 at the age of 82. He had established himself as a snuff maker at No. 109 Fenchurch Street, London, at some time before 1783, and by 1809 had become a wholesale tobacconist, and had taken on two partners, his brothers-in-law James Tomlin, who had married his sister Susannah, and Alexander Hatfeild, husband of his sister Ann. In 1813 the company moved to No. 45 The Minories, where James Tomlin's cousin George Friend was established as a tobacconist [21]. In 1817 George Friend had become a partner, followed at some time by his nephew John Banks Friend, and also William Tomlin, James Tomlin's brother, probably after James Taddy's death.

The partnership was formally dissolved, to the extent that James Tomlin and John Banks Friend resigned, on 1 June 1831 [22]. This arrangement must have been agreed some months earlier, as their names were not included in the lease of February 1831. George Friend died soon afterwards, probably in August 1831, leaving only Alexander Hatfeild and William Tomlin as the partners.

Two more partners, Friend Williamson and Henry Back, had been taken on, and William Tomlin had retired, by the time the company was granted a new 14-year lease of the mills on 28 February 1845 by the Rev. Richard Garth [23]. He was the second son of Elizabeth Lowndes Stone, and had changed his name to Garth when he inherited his mother's estate after her death in 1837.

Alexander Hatfeild's son Gilliat had joined the company by 31 July 1851, when Friend Williamson retired. Prentis gave a transcript of the formal agreement whereby Williamson surrendered his interest in the business, copied from the original. He noted thereon Friend Williamson's "very shaky signature", apparently suggesting that he was at an advanced stage of senility or infirmity, but in fact when Williamson died some 15 years later, in 1866, he was only 51 years of age [24].

Following Williamson's resignation, the partnership consisted of Alexander and Gilliat Hatfeild and Henry Back. It seems that Back died in about 1856, and when the Rev. Richard Garth renewed the lease of the mills for a further 14 years on 15 July 1859, it was to Alexander and Gilliat Hatfeild only [25].

Alexander Hatfeild died on 15 March 1865, and the business was then carried on by Gilliat Hatfeild, who changed the name of the firm to his own, although it later reverted to Taddy and Company. On 7 November 1867 the freehold of the mills was conveyed to Gilliat Hatfeild by Richard Garth, eldest son of the Rev. Richard, who had died on 30 January 1862 [26]. In 1873 Hatfeild purchased the Lordship of the Manor of Morden, and much land and property in Mitcham and Morden, including Morden Hall, from Sir Richard Garth (he had been knighted in 1872).

It was probably at about this time that the manufacture of tobacco became more important than snuff making. Although snuff continued to be produced at Morden for almost the next 50 years, the premises at The Minories were extended to meet the growing demand for tobacco. In about 1896, in response to trade competition, Taddy and Company launched a publicity campaign, and a series of advertisements was published in the press in respect of their "Myrtle Grove" pipe and cigarette tobaccos in packets, and their "Myrtle Grove" cigarettes.

Gilliat Hatfeild died on 10 February 1906 at the age of 79, and his estate was inherited by his son Gilliat Edward Hatfeild, who continued to manage the business. According to Prentis, "in 1922 a strike in The Minories premises decided him to give up the business altogether" [27]. This information was apparently given to him by Emma Groves, daughter of John Groves, the former works foreman. Although the reason stated for the closing down of the business may have been correct the date was not. It was reported in a contemporary trade journal that James Taddy and Company had issued a circular on 28 June 1920, informing their customers that the business was discontinued from that date. The editor of the journal had invited the company to explain why they had closed down, but they had declined to give their reasons [28].

Gilliat Edward Hatfeild stayed in residence at Morden Cottage where his father and grandfather had also lived, but the mills remained unused, and the mill workers were offered other jobs on the estate. The before-mentioned John Groves continued to live in Mill Cottage, which his father William Groves and grandfather John Groves had occupied, the latter from about 1850 until his death in 1889 at the age of 75.

Gilliat Edward Hatfeild died on 9 February 1941 at the age of 79, and bequeathed the land and buildings comprising the present Morden Hall Park, and other properties, to the National Trust, who remain the owners.

References

- 1.** London Metropolitan Archives, SKCS 46.
- 2.** Guildhall Library, MS 7252/6, No. 34027.
- 3.** National Archives, PROB 11/811 q270.
- 4.** Ibid. PROB 11/853 q54.
- 5.** Guildhall Library, MS 8674/98 p. 333.
- 6.** Wilfred H. Prentis, *The Snuff-Mill Story* (1969), p. 21.
- 7.** Surrey History Centre, 85/2/94.
- 8.** Ibid. 85/2/96.
- 9.** Guildhall Library, MS 8674/110 p. 45.
- 10.** Ibid. MS 8674/119 p. 128.
- 11.** Ibid. MS 8674/127 p. 45.
- 12.** National Archives, PROB 11/1098 q603.
- 13.** Surrey History Centre, 85/2/98.
- 14.** Guildhall Library, MS 8674/132 p. 268.
- 15.** Ibid. MS 8674/132 p. 293.
- 16.** Ibid. MS 8674/137 p. 172.
- 17.** Surrey History Centre, 85/2/98.
- 18.** Ibid. 85/2/99.
- 19.** *The London Gazette*, 1 July 1831.
- 20.** Surrey History Centre, 85/2/100-101.
- 21.** Prentis, *op. cit.* p. 142.
- 22.** *The London Gazette*, 6 September 1831.
- 23.** Surrey History Centre, 85/2/102.
- 24.** Prentis, *op. cit.* pp. 146-7.
- 25.** Surrey History Centre, 85/2/104.
- 26.** Ibid. 313/5.
- 27.** Prentis, *op. cit.* p. 149.
- 28.** *The Tobacco Trade Review*, 1 July 1920, p. 24.