

Waddon Mill, Croydon.

This mill was situated on the north side of the bridle path which runs westwards from the end of Mill Lane, Waddon, and spanned the Wandle at the edge of a mill pond. The river here was culverted, and the mill pond was infilled, in 1964. Another mill pond, on the south side of the path, fed by springs within the present Waddon Ponds Park, remains. This originally fed into the northern mill pond.

This mill site was most likely that mentioned as the mill of Croydon in the Domesday survey of 1086. In 1127 Henry I gave the Manor of Waddon to the prior of Bermondsey Abbey. This grant did not include the mill, but after it came into the possession of Ralph de Halinge he bestowed it and adjoining land, in 1202, upon the Bermondsey Abbey prior in return for an annual rent [1].

In 1390 William Courtenay, the Archbishop of Canterbury, arranged with the prior of Bermondsey Abbey to exchange the Rectory Manor of Croydon for the Manor of Waddon. Thereafter the mill premises were in the possession of the See of Canterbury for the next 500 years, except for a brief period in the 17th. century.

The mill was rebuilt in 1448, when it seems a new weir was also constructed. The miller at that time was John Bekholte. In 1529 the premises were leased to John Oveham, a miller of Mitcham, for 20 years at the annual rent of £10-13s-4d. [2]

Towards the end of the 16th. century the lease of the mill was held by Bartholomew Clerke, who by his will proved on 7 March 1589/90 bequeathed it to his son Francis. He mentioned "my greate charge in new building the said mill." [3] Francis Clerke was evidently still in possession of the lease in January 1609/10 when he was a signatory to a petition to the Lord Chancellor, in opposition to a scheme for taking water from the Wandle to supply the City of London [4]. In 1646 the lease is said to have been held by Sir William Cowper [5].

The "brief period" mentioned above began in September 1648 when the Parliamentary general Sir William Brereton bought the Manor of Waddon, including the mill, for £1618-11s-8d. [6] Following his death in April 1661 the Waddon properties were returned to the See of Canterbury [7].

Later that year, on 21 August 1661, Archbishop William Juxon granted a 21-year lease of the manor and the mill to Christopher Gardiner [8]. Gardiner died the following year, and by his will proved in August 1662 he directed that the lease of his properties at Waddon be sold to pay off his debts [9]). However, on 8 August 1663 the lease was assigned to Henry Bishop, one of his executors [10].

The next reference found to a lessee was on 14 February 1708/9 when Archbishop Thomas Tenison granted a 12-year lease to Ambrose Parker, who was probably in occupation of the Waddon manor house at that time [11]. This lease must have been subsequently renewed, for Ambrose Parker, who died in 1735, by his will proved on 20 February 1735/6, bequeathed much of his estate, including the mill, to his son John Parker [12].

By 1734 Ambrose Parker had sublet the mill to Robert and Charles Smith, who on 10 July of that year insured the premises with the Hand in Hand insurance company [13]. They retained

the sublease after Ambrose Parker's death, and renewed the insurance policy on 10 July 1741 [14]. At the next renewal date, 10 July 1748, the policy was in the name of Charles Smith only [15]. John Parker later took over the responsibility for insurance, and renewed the policy on 14 July 1755 [16]. The mill was then still in the occupation of Charles Smith, but when Parker renewed the policy on 28 June 1762, the millers were named as Robert and William Smith [17], probably Charles Smith's sons. The policy was again renewed by John Parker on 21 June 1709 [18].

John Parker died in 1774, and by his will proved on 13 December 1774 he bequeathed all his properties at Waddon to his only son John Dewye Parker [19]. He renewed the insurance policy on the mill on 7 June 1776 [20].

John Dewye Parker was declared bankrupt on 6 March 1783 [21], and the insurance policy on the mill was renewed on 9 June 1783 by his assignees [22], who included Robert Smith, who was still in occupation together with William Smith.

The Commission of Bankrupt issued against Parker was superseded by a further Commission executed in April 1788 [23]. As a result, all his real estate, which included properties in Croydon, Carshalton and Wallington, was offered for sale by his assignees, in lots, at an auction held on 25 September 1788. The lease of the Waddon mill was then bought by John Hilbert of Wandsworth, who owned or held the lease of various properties in Surrey and elsewhere, including the Upper Mill at Carshalton. The insurance policy taken out in June 1783 was assigned to John Hilbert on 31 October 1788.

In 1789 Hilbert engaged the engineer John Smeaton to design a new 'water wheel for the Waddon mill, and he prepared drawings of an overshot wheel 8 feet 2 inches in diameter and 6 feet 2 inches wide. It is not known if this was actually made and installed [24]. It is evident, however, that much work was carried out on the mill at about this time, for when Hilbert renewed the Hand in Hand policy on 4 March 1791, the valuation was set at £1800, as against £800 in 1783 [25]. The mill was then noted as being in Hilbert's "own possession", but no doubt it was sub-let to a miller whose name has not been recorded.

John Hilbert renewed the insurance policy on 1 March 1798 [26], and again on 22 March 1805, when the occupier was named as "Watney" [27]. This was Daniel Watney, a Wandsworth miller, who was first recorded as being at the mill in the Croydon Poor Rate Book for 1803. It would seem that Watney later sub-let the mill to Edward Daniel, who was described as a miller at Waddon in Holden's directory for 1808. He was followed by Philip Dove, who was named in the same directory for 1809-11, and also in the Croydon census returns of 1811. John Hilbert renewed the insurance policy for the last time on 2 March 1812 [28].

John Hilbert died on 18 January 1819 at the age of 86, and by his will proved on 1 February 1819 he bequeathed certain of his properties, including the lease of the Waddon mill, to William Tate, referred to as his nephew, but who was actually the son of his late cousin William Tate Senior [29]. Tate renewed the insurance policy on the mill for one year only on 13 March 1819 [28].

In April 1819, an advertisement was published announcing that some properties would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 18 May following, "by order of the executors of

the late John Hilbert, Esq." Among the lots was the lease of the Waddon mill, which was described thus:

"a capital Water Corn Mill, with 4 pairs of stones driven by 3 overshot wheels, being the first on that celebrated stream the river Wandle, situate at Waddon ... with 2 messuages, stabling, barn, or store house, and other buildings, yards, gardens, orchard, and with meadow land, containing 4 acres, in the occupation of Mr. Daniel Watney, on lease which expires at Midsummer, 1821." [30]

However, the auction was cancelled on 17 May, and William Tate remained in possession until his death [31].

The mill had been sub-let to William Rayley by 1823 and he worked there until his death on 28 February 1830. Daniel Watney retained his lease until his death on 10 June 1831 at the age of 60. By his will proved on 29 June 1831 he bequeathed some land at Waddon which he had purchased to his son John [32], but his eldest son Daniel took over the lease of the Waddon mill. Daniel Watney is said to have rebuilt the mill in about 1833, which was "opened with ceremony by the Archbishop of Canterbury. It had a breast wheel of 20 feet diameter driving six pairs of stones." [33]

William Tate died on 28 May 1834, and soon afterwards some of his properties were sold by his executors to pay his debts, and it was probably about that time that Daniel Watney junior purchased the head lease of the mill premises. This was formally granted to him by the Archbishop of Canterbury by an indenture dated 2 July 1835, for the term of 99 years commencing 29 March 1832, at the annual rental of £106-10s. [34]

In March 1839 it was advertised that all the machinery of the mill, including three overshot water wheels, would be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 10 April 1838 [35]. It seems that this was a preliminary to a refitting of the mill, and a reference in 1853 was to only one overshot wheel [36].

Directory entries for 1839 and 1840 name Francis Edward Bowman as the occupier of the mill. He was also described as the miller there in the 1841 Croydon census returns, but soon afterwards he was succeeded by George Chasemore. Chasemore had previously worked a corn mill at Beddington Corner, from about 1820 until the early 1840s when it seems he moved to Waddon Mill. By 1851 he was employing 8 men at Waddon.

In March 1853 George Chasemore complained to the Croydon Local Board of Health about sullage entering the river near the mill, and its offensive smell, resulting from sewage works carried out by the Local Board [37]. At about this time Frederick Braithwaite visited the mill and noted the pollution of the Wandle there. He also wrote that the mill "has occasionally to stop in dry seasons, one-quarter of its time, for want of water." [36]

This shortage of water was also of concern to Chasemore, and in 1854 he, with the backing of Daniel Watney, commenced legal proceedings against the Croydon Local Board of Health, claiming compensation for the injury and loss caused by the pollution, and by the lack of water in the river which he attributed to the Local Board's abstraction of underground water in Croydon. The case was first heard at the Kingston Assizes in April 1854, then transferred to the Court of Exchequer where in 1856 a verdict was given in favour of the Local Board, although Chasemore was awarded some compensation on account of the pollution. His main

concern, however, was the shortage of water, and he appealed against the verdict, and following another defeat in May 1857, he appealed to the House of Lords. In July 1859 the Lords upheld the earlier verdict, on the principle that any landowner had the right to the water that lay beneath his property [37].

George Chasemore had other business interests. He was the senior partner in the Union Bank, and a director of the Croydon Gas Company, and by 1861 the mill was being managed by his son Henry Chasemore. Within a few years the Chasemores had abandoned the Waddon Mill and they established a steam-powered corn mill in Church Road, Croydon, which was operated by Henry Chasemore until his death in 1893.

In 1863 the working of Waddon Mill was taken over by Charles Brown, who had previously worked with his father at flour mills at Waltham Abbey [38]. He was apparently untroubled by the problems that had beset Chasemore, although he did have cause to complain to the Croydon Local Board of Health, in March 1866, about the condition of a ditch leading to his mill [39].

Daniel Watney died on 16 March 1874, at the age of 74, and devised the head lease of Waddon Mill to his sons Daniel and John in equal shares. By an indenture dated 22 December 1875 they agreed to a re-arrangement of their respective bequests of their late father's properties, which included premises at Croydon and Wandsworth, and Daniel Watney became the sole lessee of the mill in exchange for other interests [34].

In May 1875 a boy working at the mill was crushed to death by the water wheel. A report of this accident reveals that at this period, Charles Brown was in partnership with his brother-in-law Joseph Rickett, and that supplementary steam power was being used [40]. In 1879, John Smith of the Grove Iron Works, Carshalton, supplied several sets of rollers to Charles Brown, to replace the grindstones [41], and possibly at this time the water wheel was removed.

On 25 May 1883, Daniel Watney sold the remaining term of his head lease of the mill to Charles Brown for £2500 [42].

On 23 August 1885 a fire broke out in a granary close to the mill, which had been built in about June 1884. The two top floors of the five-storey building were destroyed, together with a large quantity of grain, and between £7000 and £8000 worth of damage was caused [43].

On 1 January 1887 Charles Brown, together with Joseph Rickett and Edmund Rickett (probably Joseph's son), formed a limited company with the name Charles Brown and Company [44]. At some time Charles Brown had acquired the leases of the Waltham Abbey flour mills and the Stanley Bridge flour mills at Chelsea, and when the partnership was dissolved on 31 December 1887 [45], Brown retained Waddon Mill and the name of the firm, while the Ricketts took over the management of the other two mills [38]. Later, in 1891, Charles Brown acquired the lease of the Tower Bridge flour mills at Shad Thames, Bermondsey.

In the autumn of 1892 the Waddon Mill was fitted out with new machinery [46], and during the following year the old machinery was offered for sale [47].



The Mill in 1913 [56kb]

On 4 October 1897 a wheat washing and drying house close to the mill was destroyed by fire, resulting in £4000 worth of damage, but the main buildings were saved from damage through the efforts of several local fire brigades [48].

In 1898 Charles Brown took his sons Herbert and Edmund Dunn Brown into partnership. He retired in 1905, and went to live on the Isle of Wight, where he died on 4 July 1915 at the age of 78. Edmund Dann Brown had resigned on 31 December 1910 [49], and Herbert Brown carried on, assisted by his nephew John Leslie Williams [50].

On 20 March 1922, Charles Brown and Company was registered as a limited company with a nominal capital of £250,000 in £1 shares. The first directors were Sir Herbert Brown (he had been knighted in 1919) as chairman, John Leslie Williams as managing director, and Reginald Herbert Brown, Sir Herbert's son [50]. Two other sons, Rex and Malcolm, were also involved.

In the summer of 1927 Charles Brown and Company Limited took the lease of the Royal Flour Mill at Vauxhall, and had it completely refitted [51]. Soon afterwards they sold their interest in Waddon Mill, and all the plant, machinery and utensils therein were advertised to be offered for sale at an auction to be held on 28 September 1928 [52]. This marked the end of the use of the premises as a mill.

According to local directories, in 1929 the buildings were occupied by the Non-Inflammable Film Company Limited, but in 1932 were said to 'be unoccupied'. The next tenants were Pax Britannica Industries Limited, who were there from 1934 until at least 1939. Later, in new buildings, a succession of light engineering firms occupied the site, which today is still part of the Mill Lane Industrial Estate.

At some time, probably about 1890, a single-line branch railway, or siding, was built from a point on the former Wimbledon & Croydon Railway (now the Croydon Tramlink route) just north of the bridge carrying Purley Way, to serve Waddon Mill. Named Waddon Marsh New Siding, braches were later built from it to a few factories on the west side of Purley Way. It has not been ascertained when this siding was taken up.

References

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