

INTRODUCTORY.

I trust that readers will kindly pardon the many faults in this little book, and enable me to befriend the good works to which the profits will be devoted.

MITCHAM,

May, 1909.

MITCHAM
IN DAYS
GONE BY

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Mitcham in Days Gone By.

MITCHAM is described as being beautifully situated on the river Wandle, a stream abounding with excellent trout and remarkable for the transparency of its waters. This river Wandle, or Vandal, falls into the Thames at Wandsworth.* There were originally two villages, Whitford or Waterford, and Michelham, or the great dwelling.† In the early part of last century the London doctors, I have been told on good authority, were in the habit of sending their patients to Mitcham, especially when the camomiles were being gathered. "The air is remarkable for its salubrity, and the place was, by Dr. Fothergill, an eminent physician of the eighteenth century, called the Montpelier of England."† In the days of my childhood and early youth the printing factories were being closed one after

* Ambulator, 1793

† Lewis' Topographical Dictionary.

another, as calico printing was going out of fashion, and printed shawls, and dresses, etc., etc., were superseded by plain materials. The printers were mostly paid by piecework, and the men provided "tearers" (teasellers?) to prepare the colours and keep the material straight while the blocks were placed upon it. Girls and boys were employed, and given from 4s. to 8s. a week wages. If the men had children of their own, of course, they employed them, and were thus saved this deduction out of their earnings. The physic gardens were the chief industry of Mitcham at that time—camomiles, liquorice, white poppies (for opium), roses, henbane, spirting cucumbers, peppermint, lavender, angelica, etc. As few people have seen liquorice growing, I may say that in appearance it is like a plantation of young acacia trees, and grows about as high as standing wheat. The foliage is its beauty, as the flower is a small one of lilac hue, and not striking in any way. Rose-budding and camomiling, as they were called, were the busy times, and a small cartload of rosebuds was a very pretty sight to be seen in rose-budding time. When the camomiles were ready to gather, whole families went to work in the fields, and the schools always had holidays at that time because quite little children were able to help to gather the flowers, and the whole village was more or less

scented with them. The lavender fields were a sheet of purple, and the scent delicious. The men protected their eyes with veils while gathering the spirting cucumbers, as when ripe, they suddenly burst, and the juice is very poisonous. These poisonous plants were not grown by the public footpaths. From Wandsworth to Croydon was a tramway to convey coals from the Thames. The trucks were drawn by horses. This tramway was from Merton to Mitcham Church, and was called the Iron Road. It went from thence to Croydon where the railway now runs. There was a gate across the Merton Road near Half Acre Row, called the Field Gate, and a gate near South Place into the Common Fields. An old cottage in Half Acre Row, very much out of repair, was occupied by a very poor woman, who was allowed to live on the lower floor at sixpence a week rent, on condition that she should not go upstairs, as the two upper stories were not considered safe! There were several good schools for gentlemen's sons. The Rev. H. Burn, at Park Place, the Rev. — Hernall, at the Glebelands, Mr. P. A. Prince, at the Elms, Dr. Roberts, at Eagle House, and Mr. Rudd, at the Poplars, had each a large number of pupils. Two old houses were then standing, which were visited by Queen Elizabeth, namely, The Elms (opposite Eagle House), which was burnt down a few

generally five marquees erected for the occasion. This Green and some houses in the immediate neighbourhood are in the Manor of Fauxhall, which belonged to the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral, of late years transferred to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. When any property changes hands, the curious old feudal customs are still observed. In the old title-deeds of one of these houses it is described as being situated "on Whitford Green, now commonly called Mitcham Green." There is a pretty footpath walk (now partly spoilt by the railway) by the side of the Wandale to Merton Bridge, and is in Mitcham parish; it is still called Merton Pickle, the latter being an old word signifying "a small parcel of land enclosed with a hedge." The old wall of Merton Abbey is on the other side of the river. These walls enclose a space of about sixty acres. It may be interesting to mention that in 1117 a convent of canons regular of the order of St. Augustine was founded here by Gilbert Norman, Sheriff of Surrey. The priory was liberally endowed by subsequent benefactions. In the reign of Henry III. Walter de Merton, Lord High Chancellor of England, and afterwards Bishop of Rochester, founded here a seminary of learning, which he afterwards removed to Oxford on the foundation of Merton College. In 1680 Merton Priory was advertised

to let. Manufactories for calico printing were established on the site of the priory, where a great many persons were employed. Thomas à Becket was educated here under the first prior.*

One of the earliest manufactories of matches was situated on Mitcham Common soon after the days of flint and steel—it was the old work-house, and was later used as the india rubber factory where hundreds of india rubber sheets were made for the soldiers at the time of the Crimean War. In this building were, subsequently, made hundreds, or thousands, of miles of telegraph cable.

In England's "Gazetteer," 1790, it is said, "In 1637 Mitcham Church was burnt by lightning, and 10 bells melted, . . . but was soon re-built. On its Common are frequent horse races." *Collier's Wood House*, mentioned in *Ambulator*, 1793, as the seat of Francis Barlow, Esq., had very extensive grounds from Robinson Road, near Tooting, to near the Singlegate, at Merton. *Mitcham Grove* was the residence once of "the witty Wedderburn, afterwards Lord Loughborough, to whom it was presented by Lord Clive, in acknowledgment of his legal services. Wedderburn sold it to Henry Hoare, Esq., and he to Sir J. W. Lubbock, Bart., the banker."† During the time Mr. Henry

* Lewis' Topographical Dictionary.

† Black's Guide to Surrey.

Hoare lived there, he entertained on one occasion Mrs. Elizabeth Fry. This estate was afterwards called Ravensbury Park. *Baron House* is described as a large one built with red brick having a handsome area of pleasure ground. It was the property and residence of the late Counsellor Barron.* The grounds extended from the commencement of Baron Grove to Morden Lane. *Mitcham Hall* was the seat of Andrew French, Esq., a large square white house with figures of a lion and a dog on the piers of the entrance gates in front. Behind the house are good gardens, plantations, etc.* *Gorringe Park* was at that time called Biggin Grove, a seat belonging to John Manship, Esq., one of the directors of the East India Company.*

Eagle House is thus described: A large house built with red brick, pretty lofty, and has a cupola at the top. . . . On the piers of the entrance gates are the figures of two eagles in stone. This seat is in the occupation of John Bond, Esq.* Mr. Bond was a London banker, and the grounds of Eagle House extended from where the Holborn Schools now stand to the Holborn Workhouse in the Merton Road; Bond's Lane at that time being the back lane to Mr. Bond's premises. Near the Carshalton Road is

* From London to Brighthelmston, 1789.

Park Place, the seat of William Pollard, Esq. It is a handsome house, built of grey stock bricks and finished in the present taste. This house was erected about the year 1780 by Mr. Gregg, Attorney-at-law, who sold it to the present possessor. *The Canons*. Near the south-east corner of Lower Mitcham Green, Mr. Cranmer has a genteel white house, which is his residence, and on the opposite side of the Common he has another, *Cranmers*, which he lets to James Portis, Esq. This is a manor house, and was once the residence of Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, who suffered martyrdom at Oxford in 1555. In the garden is a white Marseilles fig tree, said to be planted by the above Archbishop. Its branches are very low, but its stem, which measures 30 inches in girth, has every possible mark of great age. On the road to Mitcham Church is a large, low antique building belonging to Mr. Tanner Worsfold. In the central part of this house are the remains of an old chapel; the timber work of which remains very sound and entire, though it may be of a more early date than the present church. It is said to have been used during the rebuilding of the church after its being destroyed by lightning, and that it originally belonged to the Abbey of Merton.* I sup-

* From London to Brighthelmston, 1789.

pose this is the house referred to in the following notice: "An ancient house in the village, formerly occupied by Mrs. Chandler, contains the remains of a chapel supposed to have been the Oratory, held by Henry Steele, in 1348, under the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury."* The Church is dedicated to St. Peter and St. Paul; its length is 31 paces, and width 20 paces, exclusive of a large square tower at the southern corner, which contains eight bells, and bears a neat turret upon the top, terminated by a weathercock. East of the tower is a chancel eight paces in length and seven in width.† In the beginning of last century this church was much out of repair, and it was pulled down, with the exception of the tower, and the present church built on its site, the centre isle of which is copied from Winchester Cathedral.

Mrs. Tate, "an aged maiden lady," and her sister, lived in an antique building on the side of the Green, near the "King's Head Inn," and they built the almshouses, chiefly to befriend domestic servants. Mr. Langdale lived at the Firs—the old wall of these grounds, with the date 1664, was standing until quite recently, and the footpath is still called "Langdale's Walk." The corner on the Common, near

* Black's Guide to Surrey.

† From London to Brighthelmston, 1789.

Mitcham Junction, where there is the sign post to Wandle Paddocks, was then called Rook Croft Corner.*

The Canons of Baieux had a manor at Mitcham, valued at forty shilling per annum, probably from a grant of the Bishop of Baieux, as they at the same time held of him a manor in Whitford.*

Figg's Marsh, a flat piece of common land containing about 30 acres, was called from Sir Edward Figue, in the time of Edward III.†

Sir Julius Cæsar's house was situated near Upper Mitcham Green, on the right-hand side of St. Mark's Road. The following extract is from Black's Guide to Surrey:—

Sir Julius Cæsar, who died in 1639, Charles I.'s Master of the Rolls . . . had a residence at Mitcham, where, in 1598, he received a visit from Queen Elizabeth. In his MSS. there may be found a curious entry in connection with it. "Tuesday, September 12th, the Queen visited my house at Mitcham, and supped and lodged there, and dined the next day. I presented her with a gown of cloth of silver, richly embroidered; a black net-work mantle with pure gold fringe; a taffetta hat, white, with several flowers, and a jewel of gold set

* From London to Brighthelmston, 1789.

† Lewis' Topographical Dictionary.

therein with rubies and diamonds. Her Majesty removed from my house after dinner to Nonsuch (13th September), with exceeding good contentment. Which entertainment of her Majesty with the former disappointment (a visit promised in 1596, but never made) amounted to £700 sterling, besides mine own provisions, and what was sent by my friends."

The learned Dr. Donne resided in Mitcham for some time, in Whitford Lane.

The snuff mills near the bridge on the Sutton Road, and those in Morden Lane, were in use at the end of the 18th century.
