

## Aerated Bread Company

Records held at the London Metropolitan Archives (LMA) throw light on the period when the Aerated Bread Company (ABC) operated the Upper and Middle Mills, Wandsworth.

In 1864 the ABC leased the mills from James Watney at a rent of £850 pa. According to Peter McGow they were already on site in 1862. The ABC was established in 1862 as a bakery using a new method of forcing carbon dioxide into dough under pressure, rather than through kneading and fermentation. ABC bread was marketed particularly to hospitals as nutritional, easily digested and untouched by human hand.

This picture from our archive is of the Upper Mill, Building A, as it looked in 1895.



The LMA records contain some interesting insights:

- Oversight of the mills entailed considerable effort. The company approved cheques for all expenditure other than from petty cash, and regularly examined petty cash records and engineering reports.
- A stocktake in 1870 recorded numerous types of wheat and grades of flour on site, including fine Pollard, coarse middle, tailswheat, American, Revetts, Saxonka, Talavera, Red English and White's Mixture. These were stored in sacks, in grinding, in bins, and in transit. Storage locations were a granary in Bell Lane, a barge alongside the granary, the middle mill, and the "waterside" and "steamside" upper mill buildings. Other property included anthracitic coal for the steam engine, tallow, oats, five two-horse wagons, one single horse wagon, 13 horses, timber for repairs, and spare sacks. All buildings were in good condition and machinery in good working order.
- In July 1870 4 pairs of stones out of 7 were working at the middle mill, 4 out of 8 at the upper mill waterside, and 6 out of 6 at the upper mill steamside. A director expressed concern that a new decorticating machine did not give value for money when the mills

were not working at full capacity, and questioned whether ABC as a bakery company should also be in the milling business, rather than buying flour on the market.

- By 1873 Wandsworth expenses amounted to more than £1000 a week, major items being wheat and wages.
- In October 1873 Mr James Childs bid to take over the company. By January 1874 he was chairman and managing director. On 30 April the board agreed to dispose of the lease of the mills to George Pimm and his business partner Seth Taylor. Presumably Taylor put up the £3250 cost of transferring the lease.



A picture from our archive showing a clock used by Pimm & Co, Wandsworth.

ABC diversified into tea rooms, which proved popular, particularly with respectable women who would not be seen in public houses unaccompanied by men. At its peak in 1923, ABC had 150 branch shops in London and 250 tea shops. Allied Bakeries acquired ABC in 1955 and continued to trade under the ABC name until 1982. Most mass-produced wrapped, sliced bread is now made by the mechanised “Chorleywood Bread Process” of dough production to make a soft, fluffy loaf.

Pimm’s company went on to manufacture another innovative product, Wando bread, but that is another story.

***John Sheridan***

Reference: (LMA catalogue references ACC/2910/001 and ACC/2910/002.)