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The Tanning industry in West Peckham and Roughway

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| *Taken from an article by Jane Semple, published in the Archaeologia Cantiana**Sir William Hampton, Pouchmaker*William Hampton was an alderman of the City of London from 1462-82. He was knighted in 1471.35He first appeared in the Wrotham court rolls when he purchased the tenement of John Wolfrych, tanner, in 1474. He paid a relief or fine of 6*d*., which, following the custom of Wrotham, was a quarter of the annual rent of 2*s*. The connection between the City and Roughway was leather. Hampton was buying it to make pouches and similar goods. The tanners of Roughway were selling their tanned hides to merchants like him. One can suppose that Hampton had come to know the tanners of Roughway in the course of business and was investing in the means of production. This implies that the tanners of Roughway supplied more than the local market even before the arrival of Hampton as a proprietor in their midst and that the volume of tanned leather increased afterwards.   Five years later Hampton expanded further when he bought *Terystenement*in Roughway from John Terry (snr) for £18 13*s*. 4*d*.36 The feoffees were John Wolfryche (jnr) and John Terry, tanner. One imagines that for the tanning families of Roughway the continuing presence of Hampton in their midst was the equivalent of having a neighbourhood bank. He died in 1492 and his will reveals him to be a very wealthy man. His bequests alone add up to £531 2*s*. 4*d*. and in addition he left unspecified lands in three parishes. His home was in the City of London in the parish of St Swithin’s. To the poor there he left £10, and 20*s*. for church repairs. To the poor of Wrotham he left 10*s*. and the same sum to the poor of Hadlow and West Peckham.   It is possible that he also had a tannery and a house in West Peckham, which is the parish and manor which abuts Roughway to the south. An area between Roughway and Oxenhoath in the parish of West Peckham is known as ‘Hamptons’. It seems likely that it got its name from association with the activities of Sir William Hampton whose name survives today in two properties; Hamptons Farmhouse and the mansion of Hamptons.   The area would have been as suitable for tanning as Roughway. The south-eastern boundary of Wrotham manor, Wrotham parish and the borough of Roughway runs along the course of the Ewell stream. Three dammed fishponds in the stream, associated with the mansion house of Hamptons, may be medieval fish ponds in origin or they may have started life as tanning pits. Hamptons Farmhouse is close by.37 It is a medieval house, which has been substantially altered, although some fifteenth-century work survives in one wing. Because the house bears the pouchmaker’s name it is probable that he built it. It is significant that three footpaths meet just north of Hamptons Farmhouse. One, known as Short Street Lane, runs from the tanners’ crofts at Roughway Street east of Roughway Bridge, in a south-easterly direction towards Hamptons Farmhouse. It meets the footpath coming south from *Makefeyres*, (Lower Roughway Farm) another tanning property, north of Hamptons Farmhouse. At this junction it is joined by a footpath from Upper Farm known in the fifteenth century as *Turks.*38 Here lived Robert Turke who was mentioned in Hampton’s will. If Hampton was tanning at Hamptons and staying at Hamptons farmhouse from time to time, the footpaths were a necessary means of communication for workers, business colleagues and friends.   In the early seventeenth century the name of *Hamptons*was given to the |


Fig. 7 Hamptons in West Peckham parish.

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| great house built by John Stanley, which was sited north of the junction of Park Road and Hamptons road.39 This has disappeared. A new *Hamptons*was built in the nineteenth century, higher up the hill.40   Not only did Hampton give his name to this piece of West Peckham but he may be the originator of the name attached to a piece of foreshore near Herne Bay. His will provided for masses to be said for his soul in the church of Herne in Kent.41Whether he had family connections with Herne is unknown but he must have been familiar with the place. One mile west of Herne church is a beach called Hampton with a pier bearing the same name.42 On this beach, from the sixteenth century, there were copperas works.43 The pyrites stones containing copperas were gathered from the beach and processed to produce vitriol, or sulphates of iron, used for dyes, for tanning and for dressing leather. Hampton gave his name to a district in west Kent. Could he have had copperas interests that gave his name to a beach on the Kent coast? If so, to be commemorated in two place-names makes him a London merchant of some Kentish importance.   Hampton must have had close ties with his Roughway neighbours because two of them are mentioned in his will. When Hampton bought *Terystenement*in 1479 one of the feoffees was John Terry (jnr), tanner. The will provided for a priest to sing masses in the parish church of Wrotham in Kent ‘for my sowle the sowles also of John Terre and Joan his wife my fader moder and all christen sowles by the space of a hole year after my decease’. This implies a relationship of some intimacy with John Terry, tanner, more than the working relationship with a fellow tradesman.   The other Roughway man mentioned was Robert Turke, who lived at *Turkes*, the house at the end of one of the footpaths to Hamptons Farmhouse. Robert was entrusted with overseeing a scheme of Hampton’s for improving the ‘fowle high weyes in the borough of Rowhey’. In the fifteenth century, with uncleaned ditches overflowing down the hillside, washing away the road surface and depositing mud, the ‘fowle high weyes’ mentioned in the will must have made for difficult living and travelling conditions. All the wash-down arrived eventually on the level ground of the tanners crofts beside the river. When this was combined with the detritus of tanning, with its smells and discarded animal parts, it meant that Roughway in the late fifteenth century was not the rural haven it is today.*The Collyn family*Hampton must have known the Collyn family whose tanyard lay south of Roughway bridge across the road from his own. Like the Wolfryches, their first appearance in the court rolls was in 1407. They had a long history of paying tanning fines from 1433 to 1477. John Collyn died in 1491 leaving a modest will.44 He left to Juliana his wife, two cows, three pairs of linen sheets and a bed with leather (lodir) covers. He asked to be buried in St George’s Church, Wrotham, leaving 5*s*. to the high altar, 5*s*. for a torch in the church and 20*d*. for church repairs. The friars of Aylesford received 10*s*. The two cows for his wife were not his only livestock as he left to William and John Wylkyn, perhaps godsons, a two year old heifer each.   John Collyn must have been more prosperous than his will implies. He may have passed on his property between 1477 when his last tanning fine was paid and 1491 when his will was proved. His heir was his son Robert who inherited all his property in Wrotham and elsewhere in Kent. The Wrotham property of *Makefeyres*in Roughway*,*which Robert held on the 1495 rental, amounted to 30 acres.45 How much John owned elsewhere in Kent is unknown but he may have had land in the neighbouring parish of Shipbourne where many Collyns lived. In 1481 he was presented at the hundred court for uncleaned ditches at Puttenden in Shipbourne. He also held land from Old Soar manor.46Altogether, Robert seems to have inherited enough land to generate the capital needed to run a tannery.   In 1500 Robert Collyn and William Pelsoyte became the tenants of *Fullerstenement*. This fulling mill was in the meadow on the west bank of the river north of Roughway bridge. A fulling mill could be used by tanners to rehydrate dried skins or to impregnate them with oils and could thus explain Robert Collyn’s interest.47   Robert may have had two tanyards; one at his father’s old house of *Collens*the other at *Makefeyres*itself, 700 yards away. A tree-filled depression on the western downhill side of Lower Roughway Farm may be where the tanyard stood. To the west and south of the house at *Makefeyres*rise two springs which form a stream running through *Makefeyres*’ land as far as Roughway Street. Robert used the streams within his own property, to wash hides and fill his tanning pits, before they flowed on to do the same on the tanners crofts. Today the stream is culverted beneath the meadow where the tanners’ crofts once stood. It issues into the river from a pipe north of Roughway Bridge. Tanneries certainly existed at *Makefeyres*in 1621 when Nicholas Myller made his will.48 He left to Nicholas Myller, the son of his nephew, ‘also the messuage Makefers with all the Tannyards, houses, closes, gardens, orchards, lands, meadows, pastures in the occupation of Jacob Heathe’. This was followed by the bequest of Upper Farm, a neighbouring property to *Makefeyres*. The next bequest in the will is another ‘messuage with tanne yard, howses, gardens etc. now in occupation of Martin Heathe…. in Wrotham’. So two tanning businesses were operating in the early seventeenth century. As with *Wybarnes*at Nepicar, it is tempting to believe there was continuous operation at the *Makefeyres*site from the fifteenth century, but hard to prove in the absence of documentation. *The tanners’ crofts at Roughway Street in the sixteenth century*Sir William Hampton’s death in 1492 left three tanners working near Roughway bridge: Robert Collyn, Richard Dyne,49 and William Godwatt. William Godwatt paid tanning fines from 1487 to 1515 and a son, John, paid a fine in 1510. He held no land on the 1495 rental but he could have been sub-letting land for which there were no records. In 1481 he was presented in court for flooded ditches near Sharpemyll. Which tanyard he was running is unknown but he seems to have been more dependent on tanning for his livelihood than Robert Collyn who paid four tanning fines between 1494 and 1500, while Godwatt paid fourteen between 1486 and 1513. Godwatt could have been running Hampton’s tanyard at *Wolveryches tenement*which was sold to James Bysshop in 1505.   The third tanner, Richard Dyne, was paying 81⁄2*d*. rent for three crofts of land called *Tanhousemeade*and another piece called *Les Bekys,*on Roughway Street east of the bridge (Fig. 6). A rental of the manor of ‘Sore’ shows that he held lands called *The Gore*and *Tanhowsehaugh*in the same area paying a rent of 9*d*. with the service ‘of finding every second year in August a man’ – for harvesting presumably.50 He owned more land in Shipbourne, revealed in his will. When he was assessed for tax in the 1524 subsidy his name appeared under Shipbourne, not Wrotham, and was assessed at £11 on goods, the second highest assessment in the borough.51 The highest was for Richard Colyn, ‘bocher’, at 20 marks (£13 6*s*. 8*d*.) on goods. The butcher was perhaps supplying hides to Dyne or to his Collyn relations tanning at Roughway.   Richard Dyne’s heir died before his father so that when Richard came to write his will in 1530 his lands in Shipbourne were left to his grandson, John.52 Richard Dyne’s plots of tan-house land had been sold in 1529 to William Kenham, ‘yoman’, of Dartford for £40 for 28 acres.53 Of this, £9 was to be given to John. One of the parties to the deal was John Brette, tanner, who may have been the working tanner operating the site for Kenham.   In the 1538 rental the land was still Kenham’s but by 1568 Thomas Robynson, gentleman, was in possession of nearly all the tanning properties near Roughway bridge; Richard Dyne’s and *Wolverychestannerstenement*. Only *Taborerscroft alias Tannerscroft*is in the hands of John Myller.   Thomas Robynson built himself a ‘new’ messuage on 4½ acres of ground called *Lowyns*(Roughway Farm) opposite *Makefeyres*and to the north-east of the tanners’ crofts. From there, someone could supervise or work the tanneries. As a gentleman he would not be a tanner himself. His total acreage in Wrotham was 13 acres 3 rods. He was still around in 1575 when he was a suitor at the manorial court of Soar, holding land on that manor too.54 Whether tanning actually went on at the tanners’ crofts or not under Robynson we do not know but tanners were operating in Roughway in the 1580s. Martin Hayt tanned from 1582, joined by William Homewood in 1587 and Martin Homewood in 1592 but which premises they were working is unknown.   We have the same lack of documentary evidence for tanners in the mid sixteenth century in Roughway as in the other three boroughs. Tanners are recorded at the hundred courts for 1514/1516. There is then a gap of eleven years until the next hundred court in 1527/8 at which no tanners are recorded. Between 1527 and 1547 there are 14 hundred courts in 11 separate years and no tanners are recorded. Perhaps there was a failure to record them, or maybe a serious drop in business. Or possibly the tanners migrated downriver to Hamptons in the parish of West Peckham – in the Hundred of Hoo – and were recorded there instead? It is hard to believe that tanning did not continue after William Kenham, in company with Brette the tanner, purchased Dyne’s*Tanhousemead*in 1529 (see above); and hard to believe that Thomas Robynson, Kenham’s successor, did not build *Lowyns*, in order to be near active tanning premises near Roughway mill. Yet no written records of tanners have been found from this period. We have to wait for the year 1564 for the tanners of Nepicar, Roughway, Winfield and Hale to reappear.   If the omission of tanners’ fines was because there were none to record, it could have been due to a recession in trade. There is some evidence that the population of Wrotham manor declined during the first third of the sixteenth century.55 Plagues and sweats afflicted the country on five occasions between 1499 and 1534, being particularly bad in London from 1530-34. In 1528 tenants sent a delegation to the archbishop at Knole to beg him to ask the king for a refund of the taxation of 1524 on account of their poverty.56 They affirmed that ‘many of thaym and specially of thayr neighbours that tarryd at home lackyd both mete and money’. In 1535 there was a disastrous harvest. Tenant numbers declined in Wrotham and presumably consumer demand for leather declined as well. This may be a possible explanation for the disappearance of tanners’ fines from the records. The population began to recover in the 1540s and 50s and the reappearance of tanners’ fines from 1564 coincides with this. |