

GOLDSWORTH & KNAPHILL NURSERIES - HOME OF THE RHODODENDRONS

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By the end of the 18th century things were starting to change in this mainly agricultural area. In the next few weeks we will be looking at the growth of local industries the coming of the canal, but for the majority of local labourers it was the development of the nurseries that was to provide the most employment as the sandy soils of our area, which had been poor for local agriculture, were found to be ideal for growing ornamental plants.



Farms that for centuries had managed to eke out a living by relying on the use of the common meadows and heaths to help feed their animals, were now turning their attention to growing exotic plants such as Azaleas, Rhododendrons and Clematis.

In the 1760's a man called James Turner bought a small parcel of land from the Earl of Onslow (Lord of the Manor of Woking) in what was then the Tithing of Goldings and began growing trees and shrubs, including up to fifteen varieties of Rhododendron (according to an early catalogue), which had only just been introduced into this country from America. This small nursery was soon acquired by a gentleman called Robert Donald, a well-known nurseryman of his day, whose son, also called Robert planted an arboretum on the site and took over the nursery in 1848.

By 1861 he had built up the nursery business at Goldsworth to cover about two-hundred acres,

employing thirty-five men and eight boys. He died in 1863 and for a time the nursery appears to have been run in trust until 1877 when the 'stock and goodwill' of the nursery was bought by another local nurseryman called Walter Charles Jackman, who had learned part of his trade at another local nursery at Knaphill, run by the Waterer Family.

We have come across the Waterer family many times in the past few months as they were an old Woking family with branches all over north-west Surrey. The nursery at Knaphill was probably founded by John Waterer who in the 1760's lived at a place called Ryde Heron in Knaphill (off Robin Hood Road). He died in 1780 leaving his land to his sister, Ruth, and upon her death it passed to his nephew, Michael, who appears to have been working on the nursery for some time.

Michael was the son of Ruth's brother Isaac, a cooper and farmer, who in 1737 had purchased

The headquarters of Goldsworth Nursery was Goldsworth House – demolished in the last century to make way for Goldsworth Park

for £140 land called Hilliers Acre (or Hiller's Acre) in Sithwood, Knaphill, from Daniel Green of Chertsey, land which was later to become part of the Knap Hill Nursery.

Michael was born in 1745, the second of six children; his elder brother, James, was in the Royal Navy and is believed to have been killed off Portugal in 1778. Michael married Anne Styles of Bisley and they had ten children, five sons and five daughters – of these Michael, John, James, Hosea and Elizabeth were all themselves concerned in, or had sons concerned in, the family nursery.

His son Michael became a partner in the nursery in 1809 when, like Goldsworth, they began specializing in the growing of rhododendrons. In the 1820's they bought more land at Bagshot, but when Michael junior died



The house can be seen at the bottom of this aerial view, taken just as work on the new estate started in the late 1970's.

in 1842 he had no children and the Bagshot land was left to his brother, John, whilst Knaphill was inherited by his younger brother, Hosea - with James, an auctioneer in Chertsey appointed as the executor of his Will (in which he left his `dear wife Sarah' £70 a year for life, a cottage and such furniture and household goods as she selected for it)!

Hosea continued to develop the nursery, but with no children of his own he left the property in 1853 to his nephews, Anthony Waterer, son of his brother, James, and Robert Godfrey, son of his sister Elizabeth. Both his nephews had been working with him in the nursery for many years. The partnership of Anthony Waterer and Robert Godfrey was to be a happy and successful one and by 1870 the nursery grounds at Knaphill extended to over two-hundred acres, sixty acres of which were dedicated to 'American Plants' alone.

One of the apprentices at this time was young Walter Slocock who in 1877 bought the nursery at Goldsworth from the trustees of Robert Donald. The land, stock and goodwill cost him £1,750 with a loan for £1,550 being raised for 'working capital'. Within a few years he had built up the business so that by the 1890's annual sales reached almost £14,000 and when he dies (in 1926) his personal fortune amounted to about £244,000.

Walter Slocock's sons, Walter Ashley and Oliver Charles, both joined the firm with Oliver's son, Martin, eventually taking over the business, but in the 1970's there was pressure to build houses on the land and almost one hundred

years after Walter Slocock had gone from working at Knaphill to buying Goldsworth, his ancestor made the move back, buying Knaphill Nursery in 1976 and selling Goldsworth for the development of Goldsworth Park.



In 1976 the Slocock family moved to Knaphill Nursery where a successful Garden Centre was run for many years.

ST JOHNS NURSERY - HOME OF CLEMATIS JACKMANII

Another well-known nursery family in the early 19th century was the Jackman's of St Johns. It was started by William Jackman on about fifty acres in the area now known as Jackman's Lane. He had four sons, two of whom, George and Henry, took over the nursery when William died in 1840, but a couple of years later the partnership was dissolved with George continuing to run the business on his own.

By 1851 George had built up the trade so that

it covered ninety acres under cultivation, employing thirty-five men and six boys. They specialised in raising clematis with the well-known '*clematis jackmanii*' being produced in 1859.

Unfortunately George Jackman died in 1869, leaving the nursery to his son, also called George, who continued to expand the business, so that eventually it covered over 300 acres, including land between Wych Hill and Egley Road, Woking.

When George Jackman II died in 1889 he left strict instructions in his Will, resulting in the forced sale of the St. Johns Hill site and ultimately the nursery's removal (via Bedford Farm in Egley Road) to Mayford (where the Garden Centre in Egley Road is to this day). The Hollies, the old family home on St Johns Hill (now called Deerstead House – below) was sold and the estate office in Jackman's Lane converted into a house – now called Kelwood.



THE COBBETT'S NURSERY OF HORSELL

In Horsell the Cobbett Family appear to have specialised in the growing of roses, but also grew other plants for the larger neighbouring nurseries at Knaphill, Goldsworth and St Johns.

Edward Brayley writing in his *Topographical History of Surrey* published in 1850, noted that 'Some extensive Nursery-grounds in this parish, in the occupation of Mr Henry Cobbett, are appropriated to the cultivation of roses, and other plants and flowers; and many persons visit them in the summer season, for the purpose of seeing the flowers in a high state of perfection'.

The Cobbett's had been farmers in the Horsell area and in the early part of the 19th century had set up a coal business, importing coal by canal to a wharf in Brewery Road and selling it to amongst others, the many local nurseries in the area (presumably to heat their greenhouses). It may be this contact with the great nurserymen of the area that prompted them to branch out into the nursery business themselves. Indeed between 1874 and 1878 there are notes in the coal business ledgers of deliveries made to William Jackman which were 'settled by nursery goods'!



The Cobbett's Nursery covered land to the south of Horsell High Street – commemorated today by Nursery Close and Rosehill Avenue.