

Autumn 92

No 1

THE WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

Newsletter



**The Vestry Hall Annex, London Road,
Mitcham, Surrey, CR4 5UD Tel 081 648 0127**

**OPEN: Every Weds 1-4pm,
First Sun of each month 2-5pm.**

**The museum is also open to schools and groups by appointment.
Admission: Adults 20p, Children & Senior Citizens 10p.**

The Aims and Objectives of the Museum

The Wandle Industrial Museum was established by local people in 1983 concerned by the decline along the banks of the River Wandle and determined to ensure that the heritage of the valley is no longer neglected but enhanced for the use and benefit of the community.

The aims of the Museum are:

to preserve, restore and interpret the River Wandle and its Industrial Heritage;

to establish a working museum based in Wandleside historic properties connected by a riverside walk.

The objective of the Museum is to increase awareness of the heritage of the valley through the development of Ravensbury Mill which will demonstrate the use of waterpower, the arts and crafts of the valley and working and living conditions from the time of the Domesday Book to the present day.

A New Face

The Wandle Industrial Museum is pleased to announce that as of 15th June 1992, Andy Vail has assumed the role of Museum Administrator / Co-ordinator.

Andy will be responsible for the day to day running of the Museum.

Editorial

Over fifty people attended a successful inaugural meeting of Museum members on 5th June to hear a talk by Eric Montague of the Merton Historical Society.

Museum worker Ray Leyden said "It was a very encouraging turnout. We hoped for about forty people, so we took a chance and put out fifty chairs - and it still wasn't enough!".

Members at the meeting included Merton Council leader Cllr Tony Colman. They heard that Mitcham and Morden MP Dame Angela Rumbold and local opposition leader Cllr John Elvidge have also become members.

Exhibitions at the meeting included some impressive gouache paintings by local artist, Ray Howell.

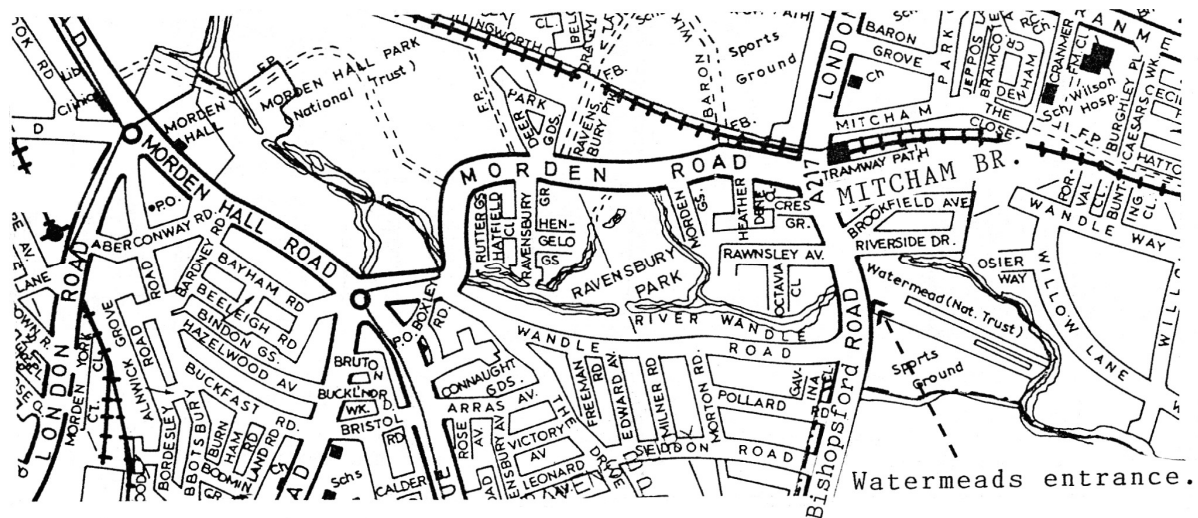
Following the meeting, member Meg Thomas has joined the steering group which will run the membership scheme until a committee is elected next Spring. She will co-edit this newsletter with Gosia Woznica. Other members of the steering group are Ray Leyden and Andy Vail. It is chaired by Stephen Ashcroft.



A guided walk through the Watermeads will be the next event for Wandle Industrial Museum members.

The Watermeads, of course, are National Trust property, and the guide will be Morden Hall Warden Paul Rutter. It will take place on Saturday September 5th, starting at 2.00pm, and is expected to take about an hour and a half.

Meet at the gates to the Watermeads near the junction of London Road and Bishopsford Road.



Make the first weekend in September a Weekend for the Wandle.

On Saturday 5th you can join our members' guided walk along the river's bank through the Watermeads. Then on Sunday 6th September you can help to clean up the Wandle.

The clean-up, which has been jointly organised by environmental groups, will cover the whole length of the river. It will be a major effort in the battle against pollution.

There are several centres in Merton where people will be available to meet and brief volunteers between 10am and 3pm. They include Merton Abbey Mills, Savacentre and the London Road entrance to the Watermeads.

If you'd like to be part of a Wandle Industrial Museum working party, be at the Watermeads entrance (again!) from 10.00am.

Highlights of Eric Montague's talk on Mitcham

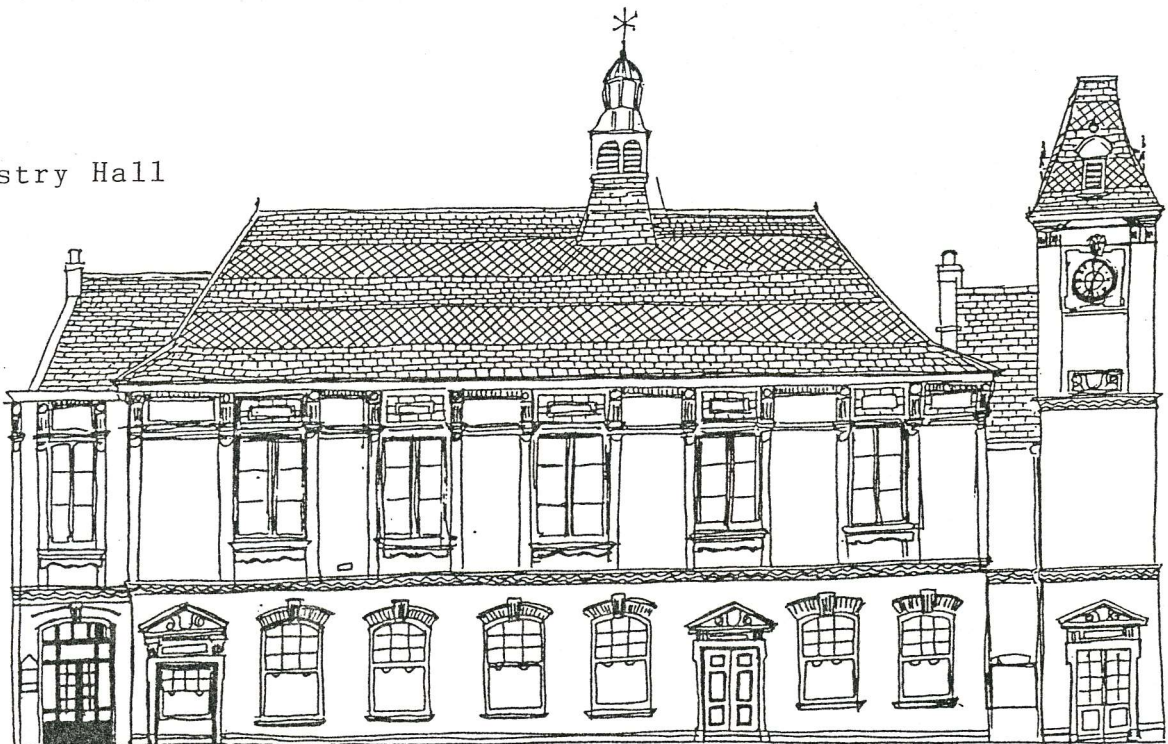
Eric Montague began his talk by telling us we were standing on Peat! Our venue, the Vestry Hall was near the site of the "Bull" ditch, which ran along the edge of the Cricket Green, along by the Public Toilets, to Church Place and the Bull Public House, to join the River Wandle at Phipps Bridge.

The Vestry Hall was built in 1887 to the designs of architect Robert Masters Chart. Considered architecturally ugly by Mr Montague, at the time the Vestry Hall was actually praised by the Webbs! Prior to the buildings construction all Mitcham Vestry meetings had been held either in the church vestry or in a room in the Burn Bullock. Minute books from meetings of the Vestry survive from the 18th Century.

The Mitcham Urban District Council was created in 192M, the area having previously been administered by Croydon Rural District Council. Mitcham was granted Borough status in 193%, and finally became part of the London Borough of Merton in 1965.

Prior to the building of the Vestry Hall, the site was occupied by the old lock-up (erected 1765), a pair of stocks and a cattle pound. The lock-up was used to temporarily imprison local drunks and tramps.

Vestry Hall



The original Vestry Hall building cost £4000 to build, and was opened on 18th May 1887. It was built with Red Brick and Mansfield stone. The Clock was paid for by the 'Mitcham Penny Readings', and the bell's original function was to summon the Fire Brigade. The bell from Potter and Moore's Distillery at Figges Marsh was said to have been hung at Vestry Hall, sadly it no longer remains. The post from the old stocks had also been retained in the cellar for some years, but has since disappeared.

Mr Montague drew attention to various other items which were previously housed at the Vestry Hall, some of which had been lost, others relocated, including a painting by Miss Moberley, now in the Mayor's parlour, the Board listing past Mayors of Mitcham - now at the Civic Centre, and a map of the main war-time incidents in Mitcham - now in the Library.

The Vestry Hall was also home until the mid- 30's for a number of finds from Col. Bidder's archaeological excavations. Some of them are now housed at Kingston's Heritage Centre.

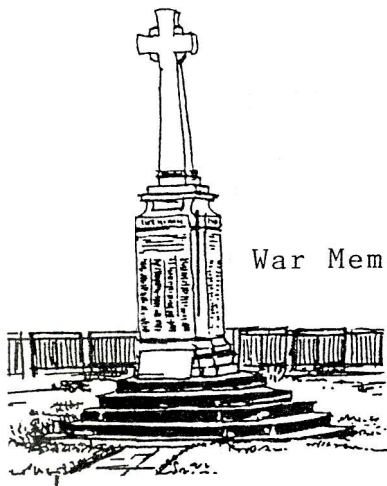


The current Fire Station along side Vestry Hall was built in 1927. Previously to this, the village fire engine had been housed in the Vestry Hall itself.

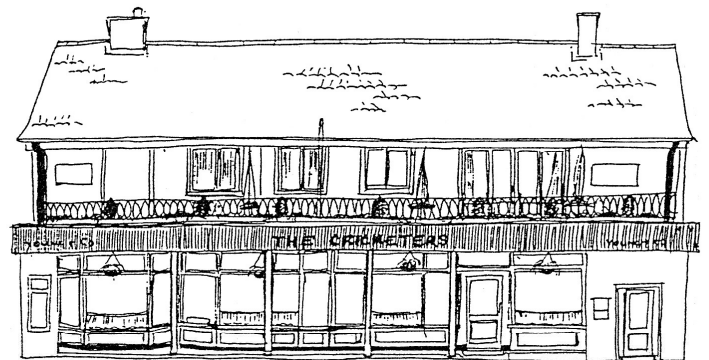
The original village Fire Engine, known as 'little squirt', although replaced by a steam engine in 1883, was often to be seen taking part in street parades in Mitcham, until it was scrapped during WW2. _

Mr Montague finished his talk by referring briefly to other buildings in the vicinity: The Cricketers Public House is on the site of an earlier inn, the Swan. The existing Cricketers was finished in 1957, and officially opened 9th January 1958.

The Vestry Hall was extended in 1930, and in 1936 the Council obtained Mitcham Court which was used by various departments for many years. The Vestry Hall Annexe (home of the W.I.M.) was a wartime addition. The War Memorial behind the Vestry Hall was built in 1919. The Old School Rooms opposite date from 1788, and from 1873 they were used for a School of Industry.



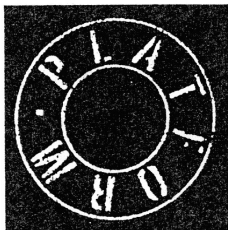
War Memorial



The Cricketers Pub



Rooms.



The Power Of The Wandle

By PLATFORM member James Marrott

For 1,000 years the Wandle generated more energy than was needed by the inhabitants of its valley and (indirectly) it provided power for the city of London. The Lower Wandle, running 3 1/2 miles from Merton Abbey to the Thames at Wandsworth, turned nine watermills, whilst the watershed of this part of the river contained six windmills. The areas of Merton, Tooting, Wimbledon and Wandsworth were long self-sufficient in renewable energy.

Around the last war, the mills finally stopped and today the valley produces none of its own energy, but imports the power of non-renewable coal and gas - whose burning contributes to the Greenhouse Effect.

The Wandle is more than a source of energy. For literally millions of plants, birds, fish, insects and mammals, it is an essential life support system. Previous inhabitants of the valley have understood the river's importance, respected it as vital to their livelihood, even revered it as holy. The confluence of the Wandle and the Thames was a place of Bronze Age water religion - beautiful swords and shields were cast into the waters at the point where the Waste Transfer Station now stands in Wandsworth.

PLATFORM'S project THE POWER OF THE WANDLE was built on these understandings. In their collaboration from December 1991 to June 1992, Stephanie d'Orey (economist/anthropologist) and James Marriott (sculptor) worked to draw attention to the physical and the spiritual energy of the river, its motive power and its inspirational power, both in the past and in the future.

After months of research, dialogue with local groups (such as the W.I.M.) and work with institutions (such as the Intermediate Technology Development Group), the project had its public aspect in May. PLATFORM worked in three different localities along this section of the Wandle. At the Delta, a tent hung with sheets of gold together with actions to clear rubbish from the river, drew attention to the importance of this derelict area, ecologically and as sacred place. At Merton Abbey Mills, the watermill on the wheelhouse was adapted to generate power, for the first time in decades, which was used to light an exhibition (POWER STATIONS: POWER HOUSES) putting forward ideas on a renewable energy path for Wandsworth and Merton. And along the courses of two buried tributaries (Garrett Brook and Wimbledon Brook) carried out an energy survey of 200 households and a ritual lighting up of the valley using the power of the Wandle.

POWER OF THE WANDLE was part of a larger London-wide project called STILL WATERS which aimed to bring back the rivers of this city to the imaginations of its citizens. Throughout May events, performances and exhibitions took place along the courses of the Fleet, the Effra and the Walbrook, as well as the Wandle. PLATFORM's involvement with these areas began in 1988 with the start of our long-term venture THE SEARCH FOR A SUSTAINABLE CITY, and we shall be continuing this work for many years. On the Wandle, this means in Wandsworth carrying through the well advanced plans to install a micro-hydro turbine in Bell Lane Creek to provide electricity for a school, health clinic or environmental centre. And in Merton, trying to establish the generating ability of the Wheelhouse and the exhibition as permanent features, possibly with a second turbine nearby.

For information please contact PLATFORM, 7 Horselydown Lane, Bermondsey, London SE1 2LN. 071 403 3738.

The Wandle Industrial Museum recently had the opportunity of collaborating on a project with Polka Theatre for Children.

The Wimbledon based theatre approached the Museum when they were planning to stage their musical play entitled 'Indigo Mill'.

Set in Victorian London, the play told the story of a young girl called Hope and how her life changes from intrigue and despair when she meets and is befriended by the artist William Morris. He takes her away from the city slums to work in his vividly-coloured world of dyes and prints at Merton Priory on the River Wandle.

Because of the obvious links with the River and William Morris, the Museum was asked to complement the show and mount a corresponding exhibition in the Theatre Gallery.

The collaboration turned out to be a very successful one, both the play and exhibition generated a great deal of local interest in the Wandle topic. As a result the Museum has received visits both from interested individuals and school parties.



School Visits

The Wandle Industrial Museum offers an educational service tailored to cater for the needs of local schools, colleges and local interest groups in studying their industrial heritage.

The introduction of the National Curriculum has brought new demands on schools to become more involved in local based projects relating to history, geography, science and technology subjects.

Merton along with other Wandle Boroughs, has identified the River and it's associated industries as a suitable focus for study. As the only Museum to represent this rich history, schools have naturally turned to the Wandle Industrial Museum for support and help. In turn the Museum has continued to develop its educational service with the support and guidance of Richard Stanley, the Advisory Teacher to Humanities for the London Borough of Merton.

The Museum recently ran some very successful workshop days for Stanford Middle School in Merton. Children were first shown a slide show and video by local historian Peter Harris on the development of the textile industry along the River Wandle, paying particular reference to two of the industries leading figures, William Morris and Arthur Liberty. Afterwards the children were allowed to examine original Liberty printing blocks and assorted silk fabrics at close hand.

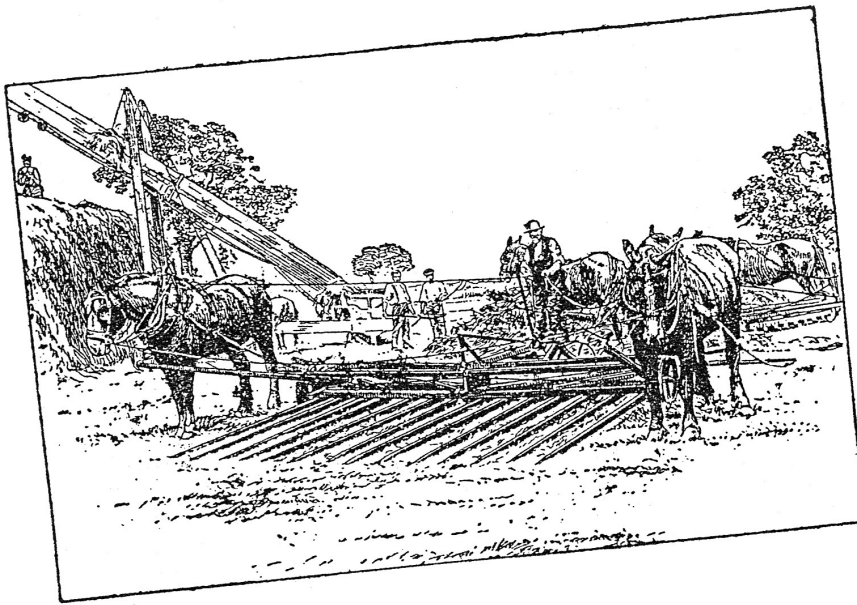
Once the children understood some of the processes involved in printing textiles - the 'fun' really began as the children were allowed to have a go themselves. Each child had been asked to bring along a white hanky and under supervision they were given the opportunity to block print their own designs. This proved a great hit with all the children, and particularly with a boy called William;

'Thank you for spending your time on us. I liked the video and I thought the way they did the printing was very clever. Thank you for helping me do my printing. I hope you enjoyed the day because I sure did'.

The children's day was completed with a visit to Merton Abbey Mills, formally Liberty Mills where they saw the last remaining working water wheel on the River Wandle.

Recently teachers have been turning to the Museum as a primary research source when developing material for lessons and in May we were asked to organize an Inservice Training Day for Harland First School. This again was highly successful and validated once more the need for a local Museum such as ours.

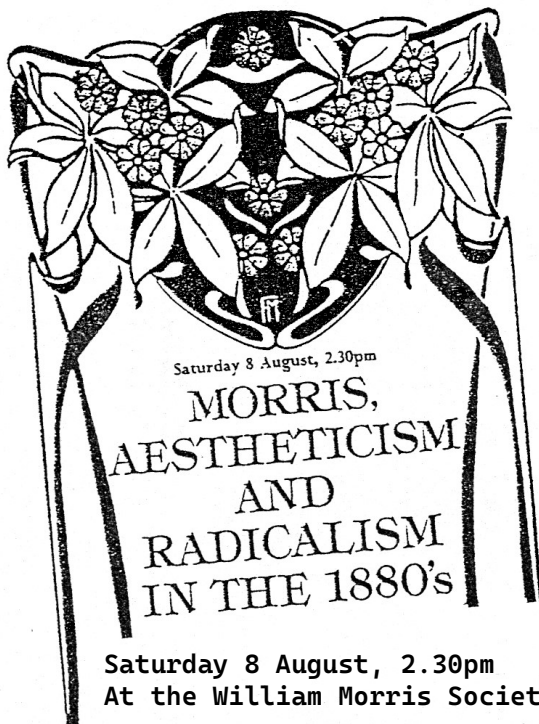
'WHAT'S ON'



'Make hay while the sun shines' could be more than just a proverb at Morden Hall this year.

Hay making is planned in the park with the hay going to Deen City Farm and local horse owners. Volunteers are needed to help load hay bales onto carts. According to warden Paul Rutter they will need "working gloves and strong backs

Telephone Paul (or at least his answerphone) on 081 6N8 1845 for details of dates and times.



A talk by Norman Kelvin (Professor of English at The City of New York) who has been magnificently editing the 'Collected Letters of William Morris' (Princeton University Press), Volumes 1 and 2 in print, Volume 3 to come. At Kelmscott House, 26 Upper Mall W6. Tickets £2.00 from the Society.

Any Suggestions?

What events would you like arranged for Museum members?

If you can suggest speakers to invite or places to visit, or if you know of organizations whose aims are similar to our own (or, come to that, if you can offer something yourself), please let us know.

RESEARCHING SOUTH LONDON LABOUR & CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT HISTORY

CONFERENCE

Saturday, 19 Septmeber 1992 9.30am-5pm.
Vauxhall Heritage Centre, Kennington La.
(Entrance in Tyers St), London, SE11 5HY

Speakers include: Sean Creighton, Mary Mills, Sarah Newens, Alan Weaver and Dan Weinbren.

-LOCAL MOVEMENTS--CROSS FERTILISATION WITH FAMILY, FRIENDLY SOCIETY, INDUSTRIAL, ORAL, & REMINISCENCE HISTORY - RESEARCH PROBLEMS & SOURCES - FUTURE LIASON & COLLABORATION. For further details contact Sean Creighton on 081-870 3259.