



MUSEUM

**NEWSLETTER**

Issue 72

November 2010

## 1. NEWSDESK

Visits to the Museum. Numbers have been consistently good during the autumn months with several people doing research with which our team have been happy to help.

### Events Past

On September 1 Meg and I were pleased to attend the opening of the new Wandsworth museum by Boris Johnson, Mayor of London. The museum has been given a million pounds by the Hintze Foundation to setup and run the museum for the next four years. A group visit is to be arranged for 2011.

Members attended the opening of the River and Cloth exhibition in September at Merton Abbey Mills. The exhibition was beautifully displayed



**Figure 1 Mary Hart alongside Cllr Martin Whelton with the River and Cloth Team and the Mayor at the exhibition.**

in a large marquee and a River and Cloth DVD and publication was produced. The project is now completed and all the museum team were happy to participate in it.

Also in September we took part once again in the Celebrating Age Festival for the over fifties with an open

afternoon at the museum

**Outreach.** Our museum Printing and Education Team has been involved with a number of visits within the community including Trellis House Residential Home, Merton Priory Open House weekend, Mitcham Library, Wandsworth Scouts and Cub groups, the Morden Hall Park snuff mill phase 2 group for over 55's and Malmesbury primary school Morden.

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Our thanks to all of the Volunteers who have given their time to help with these activities.



**Figure 2 Tony Drakeford giving his talk at the AGM with some of the WVF storyboards**

The AGM was held on November 25th at Raynes Park library hall with over 30 members and guests present. We were happy to introduce our new Curatorial Advisor, Chris Taft, to members. He is from the British Postal Museum and Archive. After the business meeting and refreshments (with grateful thanks to Mary Hart for this) and raffle we had a very interesting talk on the wildlife of the Wandle by

Tony Drakeford, local author and naturalist.

### **Future events.**

The next volunteers lunch meeting will be on Wednesday, 15th December and will be a Christmas party.

The New Year dinner will be on Thursday January 13th and will be at Mama Rosa at Merton Abbey Mills at 19:30.

Please see booking form with this newsletter. This was a very successful event last year. Please get bookings in early. Same menu and price as last year! A selection of wine and soft drinks will be available for you.

A guided tour of the new Wandsworth Museum has been arranged for Tuesday 22nd February at 14:00. The cost is £5 per person but this ticket lasts all year so you can visit the museum as many times as you like. There is a café on site selling drinks and snacks. Please let us know if you would like

to join us. The museum is now sited in the old Wandsworth library in West Hill. The address is 38 West Hill SW18 1RZ. Buses stop outside.

**Membership subscriptions** for 2010 to 2011 are now due and a renewal form is enclosed with this news letter.

We hope to see you at some of our future events. Meanwhile, we wish all our members and volunteers a very happy Christmas.

Sheila Harris December 2010

## **2 Museum News from our Hon. Curator**

### **Museum Development Officers.**

The Museum Development Officers are part of the MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council). Their role is to support and advise non-national museums. We have benefited from our advice of the MDO for our area, Kate Hebditch whose support and help was invaluable in enabling us to attain Accreditation. A recent survey carried out to find out how effective this service was showed that it was highly valued, which has helped the MLA to fight for this support to continue in the light of threatened cuts. A full report will be published soon. One of the specific recommendations points out that the MDO network is a cost-effective way of supporting museums with income generation and service improvement and should be maintained'. Small museums such as ours need this access to professional advice. With the cuts in funding Ed Vaizey, the culture minister, has announced that the Arts Council England may take over the functions of the MLA in March 2012, but this is not yet certain.

Those of you who were at the AGM were able to meet our new Curatorial Advisor. As none of our volunteers are museum trained (but do have a wide range of other skills!) we needed to have a professional as part of the conditions of applying for Accreditation. Simon Lace had been our advisor

but when he moved to Maidstone not only was he far away but he was leading a much larger museum. Well worth a visit.

Chris Taft, who bravely agreed to fill the post, is curator of the British Postal Museum and Archives. The museum is in Freeling House, Phoenix Place. He has a great deal of experience in the museum world and is happy to help



**Figure 3 Chris Taft at the AGM with Alison Sheila and Nicholas**

us in any way he can, and due to modern technology he is just an email away. Do visit the Postal Museum website lots of exciting things to see especially if you are a philatelist.

Meg Thomas

### **3 News from the Hon Archivist.**

The recent donation of a complete copy of the Merton and Morden News of October 14th 1955 provided much enjoyment and nostalgia. A local paper packed with real news in broadsheet format! One advertisement for a local shop was promoting frilled French "ninin" net curtains (presumably pronounced as if it were an emergency vehicle). Not many of these survive in Morden today I suspect.

We had been sorting out the mass of newspaper cuttings from the late 1980's and 1990s, and wondering why there were so many multiple copies and why several had been mounted on the back of cornflake packets (Sainsbury's if you must know). Often, the justification for retaining them

cannot have been more than that the word "Wandle" appears fleetingly in some context or another.

The local press were well up to speed regarding the exhibitions, catastrophes, and potential future locations of the museum. Museum events were advertised well in advance and reported in good detail thereafter. Certain reporters clearly supported the museum well, and all various titles of the time gave equal coverage.

Clearly celebrity status made a difference even then – there are more photos of Anita Harris opening the Threads exhibition than there are of all the mayoral attendees for the various annual events put together. "PC Plod", (constable George Parkinson) and his charity walk on our behalf received almost excessive coverage, and as for the Savacentre proposals – knowing then what we know now (does that sound a little Rumsfeldian ?) many trees could have been saved.

We also have a photocopy of an article from the Charter Day souvenir special issue of the Mitcham Mercury for September 21st 1934 to mark the creation of the borough of Mitcham two days previously. The front cover lettering on the originals is in lavender and green and although much faded, are now collector's items. Several are in safe hands in Morden Library. Our copy is on the obligatory acid-free paper – conforming to conservation standards but not half as unique or satisfyingly tactile.

Celebrity "culture" also brings us right up to date. The latest addition to the information files on modern industries along the Wandle, comes from the Daily Telegraph for November 13th 2010 which reports on the fact that in deepest Mitcham ( about which the paper is predictably rude), can be found the dancewear company Chrisanne, which make the frocks for Strictly Come Dancing. Yes, there are nimble fingers sewing an average of 10,000 sequins per garment in a modern factory on Morden Road, opposite the VW showrooms.

## MUSEUM WINS "ORANGE BLOB" AWARD

Well, it's official. And somewhat ignominious!! Our small but perfectly formed little hut is not appreciated by our local council. In its September 2010 publication: Mitcham Cricket Green: Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan – Consultation Draft, the museum location is identified by a little orange blob - deemed to be "a building that has a negative impact".

Later on, the report comments that The Vestry Hall, The Fire Station and The Cricketers Pub combine to create a significant group of buildings at the centre of the sub area. What?? Can this be the same Cricketers ( the "modern" replacement for the traditional hostelry ) which is currently abandoned, with broken and boarded-up windows, rotting rubbish bags, and a general aura of dereliction?

Strangely, there is no celebration of the most welcome recent restoration of the White Hart pub after years of having to endure being The Hooden on the Green? The refurbishment is quite stunning and enlivens the junction it commands. This report is extremely well (i.e. expensively) produced, with some excellent photographs, and makes for interesting reading.



**Figure 4 The offending map from the Conservation Plan**

[Editors note: The full report can be seen at

[/www.merton.gov.uk/living/designandconservation/conservation\\_areas/conservation\\_areas\\_listed\\_from\\_e-m/mitcham\\_cricket\\_green.htm](http://www.merton.gov.uk/living/designandconservation/conservation_areas/conservation_areas_listed_from_e-m/mitcham_cricket_green.htm)

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## 4 Other News

Firstly, our apologies for late delivery of the November Newsletter, but we have taken the opportunity to include AGM news, so the delay has been not entirely wasted.

### Museum email addresses

These have changed over the last year, so a reminder of the official email addresses:

**chair@wandle.org** not surprisingly, our chair, Andrew Wakefield

**Curator@wandle.org** this no longer comes to me, but just to Meg Thomas, for obvious reasons. She also has [meg@wandle.org](mailto:meg@wandle.org)

**treasurer@wandle.org** This goes to Roger Steele, who holds that post

**secretary@wandle.org** This used to go to Ray, when he held that post, but now comes to me. You can also use [ndhart@wandle.org](mailto:ndhart@wandle.org)

**archivist@wandle.org** This used to go to Jacqui Tucker, but is now forwarded to Alison Cousins

**printer@wandle.org** This goes to Mary Hart

**office@wandle.org** This is the right address for Sheila Harris, or any business which should be recorded in the Museum's own records. Anything urgent should also be copied to one or more of the other addresses.



The point about these 'official' addresses is that they are role specific and can be redirected quickly if someone is away, or the role changes.

### **The Wandle achieves national recognition.**

In November the final results for the Our Rivers Awards were revealed on BBC Breakfast.

Not surprisingly the Thames headed the list of Worst Rivers, but also came second in the list of Best Rivers! Our own River Wandle made it no 5 in the list of Best Rivers, headed only by the Rivers Wye, Thames, Dart and Great Ouse out of a list of 500 individual rivers voted for by more than 3,000 people.

The Our Rivers website says: "The most popular reason for selecting a BEST river was because it was a 'great spot for spotting wildlife' and the most popular reason for selecting WORST river was a combination of 'sewerage and other discharges' and 'pollution from roads and streets'" Full results can be viewed on the Our Rivers Website:

<http://ourrivers.createsend1.com/t/r/l/etkyhl/ykuuqduk/y>

### **Stone Arch at 38 Sheridan Road.**

This property was designed by Merton Park's most famous architect, John Sydney Brocklesby, designed dozens of houses in the Arts and Crafts style, including three large houses in the style of Greystones, and a number of unusual flint cottages in Sheridan Road, inspired by his love of the Norfolk-cottage style. The story is that the developer 'gave' a Norfolk cottage to go with these properties to the original buyers. Happy days!



**Figure 5 Part of the stone arch in Sheridan Road**

Anyway, we were contacted by the daughter of a previous owner, worried that the new owners might destroy or dump a decorative stone arch in the garden of No 38, brought there by her father some 50 years ago from Merton Abbey, and which she thought might have been Priory remains.

The new owners turned out to be very friendly, and dedicated to restoring the building to its original design. At their kind invitation Alison and I visited the site to inspect the arch, in the company of Dave Saxby. It turned out to be a Victorian concrete moulding to go over a fire place or door, and clearly has more connection with the William Morris site on which it was found than the Priory itself. It is however very decorative, and a



further indication of the wide range of commercial designs connected to the site. The owners are also kindly donating some Victorian stained glass to the Priory Trust for display in the Chapter House. Although not William Morris designs, they are of good quality, with 4 different bird designs and help illustrate the kind of commercial activity associated with Merton Abbey.



Talking of the **Chapter House**, Dave Saxby has created a Facebook community page (search for **chapter\_house**) which will be used to publicise Chapter House events. We should keep an eye on this to see if worth adopting a similar strategy for the Museum.

Dave Saxby himself was on TV as part of the Lord Mayor's show - he is associated with the Spitalfields regeneration and dressed up as a 19th century tailor to accompany the Spitalfields Tapestry float, which celebrated 800 years of the cloth industry in that area.

Finally, I missed an anniversary a year ago - the November 2009 edition was my 40th as editor of this newsletter, and I had intended that the February 2010 edition would have been both a 10th Anniversary celebration issue and the beginning of a drive to bring some significant change to the newsletter to stop it going stale in my hands. I blinked, and that didn't happen, but, coincidentally, the newsletter has changed. The May 2010 issue (no 70) was our first in colour, and it has helped bring the newsletter to life, and a wider range of contributions are appearing. Further evidence that our Museum is not ossified or moribund, but evolving dynamically (or is that organically?), and long may that continue.

## **5 What If?**

One Wednesday afternoon Mick Taylor and I were discussing the subject of Merton Priory. The question arose 'What if the priory had not been dissolved'? We looked at the plan of the area by the WM Morris works model and were surprised to see how large an area that the priory land covered and wondered what subsequent development would never have happened if the Priory had still existed.

A few examples, to give some idea, doubtless readers will know of further examples. There would have been no Morris works, nor would the site previous to Morris have existed, nor would the Liberty site have been where it is now located. Although I have seen a map which shows part of the Priory wall between Liberty's site and the main Priory land area.

I wonder why this should be. There were portions of the wall at various locations around the site. Does this mean that the Liberty site was outside the Priory site?

Merton Board Mills and its predecessors might have existed since the site was partly located outside of the boundary along Merton High Street.

If the railway (Tooting Junction to Lower Merton) had been built, what route would it have taken? If there had been no station at Merton Abbey, what would have happened to the business sidings that ran from the station area?

I can remember 'Lamben Sheet Metal Company' in Littlers Close, shown on some maps as Runnymede Galvanising Works. I visited it on business several times.

To the north of what was Station Road were several engineering companies, one that I know of was 'The British Rototherm Company Ltd'. They produced industrial thermometers with a circular dial. We used them at Frys Metals to measure the temperature of our white metal alloys prior to casting them into ingots and wire. There was also a joinery company, by the name of Evans I believe.

There would have been no shops along part of the south side of Merton High Street between Mill Road and Abbey Road nor would the Wimbledon Palais have been built on the corner of Mill Road.

Savacentre and Merantun Way would not have been built. As I mentioned earlier, no doubt some readers will be able to add to this. I think it would be very interesting if they can.

Certainly Mick and I have another subject to talk about now, other than Fulham Football Club!!

Eric Shaw

Editors note. Eric's note really helps bring some graphic context to the major changes that could take place in the area once the Priory had been removed. I can add a further one – the line of the Wandle itself.

**Figure 8 Overlaying the outline of the Priory onto the modern map, from the Priory Trust website**



As you can see from the picture here (courtesy Priory trust website) the Wandle now runs up the Western side of the site, between the Guest House and Chapel sites. In 1538 that line did not exist. The main river ran along Windsor Avenue and up Christchurch Road (now the

Pickle Ditch) with subsidiary streams crossing the site, one on the line of Bennetts ditch to serve the Priory's mill and the fishponds and another stream washing the walls of the monk's quarters to take away the waste. The line of Stane Street only crossed it once in those days, up by the Brown and Root building. The current stream was only created in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as a result of a battle between mill owners for control of the flow which lasted 40 years in the courts! None of that would have happened without the removal of the Priory.

## 6 News from Merton Abbey Mills/Merton Priory

To follow up on the River and Cloth project, touched on in

Newsdesk, the end of project exhibition at Merton Abbey Mills really demonstrated how worthwhile the whole plan was.



**Figure 10 One of the 12 trellis designs**

The pictures here show the wall of hangings created by some groups, while the trellis designs pay proper homage to William Morris. For those who can't get to the Museum, a sample of each is on display in the Wheelhouse and we have a sample of each for display at the Museum as appropriate.

Because of our input into the project, the organisers have kindly agreed we can access the spare material left over, currently in store. This should save us some considerable costs in our own projects going forward.



**Figure 11 Potter Steve Llewellyn, basking in the warmth of one of Mary's hand knitted sweaters while clearing up the snow.**

The Wheelhouse was also the scene of another filming visit by the BBC, this time for their BiteSize program. These are short films for use in Open University and Children's TV about different crafts and occupations. The team filed various market traders about their crafts, but focussed on Steve Llewellyn's potting at the Wheelhouse, with a further session in Steve's workshop back home where he could demonstrate glazing techniques. Broadcast is expected early in the New Year.

As to the Priory, in the expectation of a land transfer sooner rather than later, a program is being planned for

next year which will make a substantial difference to the layout and displays, with the first stage to be ready by the Wandle Weekend at the beginning of June. April 2011 is being pencilled in for a major open day for display of the proposed plans, and the recruitment of volunteers. Anyone interested should keep an eye on Dave's Chapter House Facebook page (see above)

Finally, a gratuitous photo of Merton Abbey Mills in the snow.



**Figure 12 MAM in the snow looking across the Wandle**

**INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS**  
IN THE WANDLE VALLEY



The Wandle Industrial Museum, The Vestry Hall Annexe, London Road, Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3UD. Tel: 020-8648-0127

**Company No 01792482, Charity No 288655.**

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OPEN: Every Wednesday 1 ~ 4 pm;  
First Sunday of each month 2 ~ 5 pm.

The Museum is also open to schools and groups by appointment.

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Admission: Adults 50p, Children & Senior Citizens 20p

The Wandle Industrial Museum would like to point out that the views of contributors to this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the Museum. We would be happy to give the right to reply to anyone who finds the content contentious.

All contributions and news items gratefully received and appreciated - please feel free to let us know at any time - telephone or write or email to [ndhart@wandle.org](mailto:ndhart@wandle.org)