



MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

Issue 74

May 2011

1 NEWSDESK

Visits to the Museum have improved during the Spring weather. We have sent information about our Printing Workshops to all Merton Schools but have not had a great response so far.

Outreach. Meg and I gave a visual presentation on the 'Life and work of William Morris to the residents of Kew House in Wimbledon. A very interested group of elderly folk enjoyed the talk and asked many

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Figure 1 – Our stall at the May Fair. The new tent coped very well with the high winds, and sealed effectively at night, giving us much comfort about the safety of our exhibits.

questions. They also enjoyed handling the artefacts and looking at the samples of Liberty and Morris materials and wallpaper.

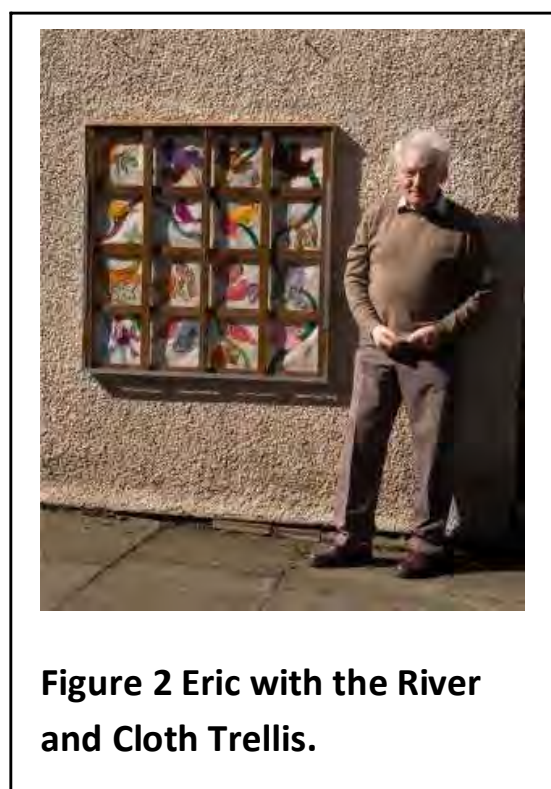
The annual National Trust Fair over the May Bank holiday was a great success this year. As the weather was fine and sunny (even if somewhat windy) the crowds were out in force and we are pleased to report that over £350 was taken which was a great

improvement on last year. A big thank you to all those volunteers and friends who helped man the WIM stall. For the first time in over 15 years I was unable to attend as I was recovering from knee surgery. We also had news of our former Archivist and long time member of the museum Marguerite Lee de Lisle in St Helier Hospital recovering from a broken leg. We wish her well.

We were pleased to be selling a new publication 'Town Trails-Ten Guided Walks in Mitcham Morden Wimbledon and Merton Park'. It is by the Museum of Wimbledon and the Merton Historical Society and is priced at £4 to members and during fetes and fairs. This proved very popular at the Bank Holiday Fair and we shall be taking it to the Wimbledon Village Fair on June18th and the Green Day Out at Morden Hall Park on July17th.

You will have received your invitation to the Opening of the new exhibition 'The Wandle Then and Now in photographs' on Saturday 11 June at 11.00am so we look forward to meeting as many of you as possible then. Food and drink will be available from 10.30 so get there early to avoid the crush.

We have had 2 volunteers' lunches since last Newsletter. The photo on the last page is from our March one, showing, for once, a proper group photo of attendees. The photo here is of Eric beside the River and Cloth Trellis work he has mounted for us. The lunch on 11th May was attended by 20 of us, with Mary's splendid cakes following our 'a la carte' rolls. Once again a great chance for us all to meet and get things organised.



We are pleased to announce that from Sunday 22nd May the Museum will be opening every Sunday from 2.00-5.00pm. Thank you to all volunteers who have agreed to join the rota to make this possible. If any other members or friends wish to join us on Sundays please let us know. You won't be needed more than once a month and will always be accompanied by an experienced Museum member.

As we are trying to cut costs at the Museum I am afraid that this will be the last Newsletter sent out if we have not received your subscription for 2010-2011. A reminder is enclosed for those who have not paid according to our records.

Sheila, May 2011

2 MUSEUM UPDATES

From our Curator

Merton Heritage Showcase Event

On Friday 20th of May the first Merton Heritage Showcase Event was held in the Baptist Church, Morden. The local history and heritage groups were well represented and we had all clearly made an effort to show the best of our work. Councillor Martin Whelton spoke at the opening emphasising Merton's long and fascinating history, and paying tribute to the volunteer groups without whom much of the history would have disappeared long ago. There were a series of interesting talks on various aspects of the Merton Heritage, but how much better it would have been if the audience and contained more 'strangers'. Sarah Gould's Heritage Alphabet was a fine example of ingenuity and John Hawkes was entertaining as ever talking about Merton Priory, but for most of us the really useful talk was given by Lucy Hares from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Her role over the next year will be to help and



Figure 3 Meg Thomas, John Hawks and Cyril Maidment in front of our stand at the Merton Heritage event

encourage applications to the HLF from Merton, for it seems Merton has not yet had its fair share of the money! The down side of the day was that very few of the public came to see us, as the event was not advertised widely. You could find out about it from Merton's web site but only if you typed in Heritage Showcase. It may be that this was a trial run to see how much interest there was among the groups - certainly the suggestion was that this was 'the first'. Sarah Gould and her team clearly worked very hard to set it up and how much more rewarding it would have been if we had been able to show our wares to more of Merton's residents. At the end of one of the HLF leaflets we are mentioned in the same breath as the V&A, writing about the River and Cloth project.

Meg Thomas

From the Archivist - Archive/Research

Jacquie and I are continuing our work on archiving and indexing, in particular following up from last Newsletter's report, building an archive around the work of William Kilburn. To introduce him to those of you who are not aware of his importance (and to remind those of you who are, please see the article about him below.

From the Editor - Some additional Updates

Ravensbury Mill

A trial date will be set for the action between LB Merton and the freeholder by the end of this month, still expected to take place about the end of July/beginning of August. In the meantime the committee will be continuing to meet, and to have meetings with LB Merton, to ensure its views are known and its interests protected. In the meantime, sadly, we must treat this as sub judice, and not publish any detail which may put this at risk.

In the meantime as you will have read above, the appointment of Lucy Hares as an HLF officer with specific responsibility for Merton, and the

revised organisation of the way HLF bids are handled, should mean we are set to hit the ground running once the litigation is complete.

We hope to be meeting with Lucy soon, to show her round the Museum, and start the ball rolling.

Wandle Valley Festival

As previously noted, funding shortages have meant that, this year, the Festival is restricting itself to be the publication arm of the various events which will make up the Wandle Weekend.

No formal brochure is to be published, but full details are on their website www.wandlevalleyfestival.org.uk or by click through from www.wandle.info

The Museum will be active that weekend, both through its Sunday opening, and with Mary's outreach location in the Chapter House at Merton Priory, where she will be preaching the gospels of William Morris and Arthur Liberty, as well as delivering her block printing workshops. For those who haven't been to the Chapter House this year, there have been considerable changes, and it is well worth a visit in its own right – see below



Figure 4 Claire with eel ladder and empty bucket

3 MERTON ABBEY MILLS AND PRIORY TRUST UPDATE

Nature notes – as mentioned last time, Steve and Claire have undertaken to monitor eel activity in the Wandle. Since then two eel ladders have been built to cross the weir at the Wheelhouse, with a trap built in to catch elvers so they can be counted before being transported upstream. The image here is of one of these ladders (or, to you and me, a bit of open drainpipe with a chicken wire filling, and a steady trickle of water running down it). Sadly no eels have taken the invitation to visit yet!

The Priory – please note Chapter House open days for 2011:

4/5th June - Wandle Weekend

30/31 July – Festival of British Archaeology

17/18 September – London Open House

October - Art exhibition (actual date to be confirmed)

At least at one of these we hope to have on show the recreated Magna Carta, and even, possibly, the Statutes of Merton, thanks to the energy and enterprise of Cllr Richard Chellew.

Anyone who has not seen the Chapter House this year will be surprised at the changes already made in anticipation of the land transfer taking place as we speak.



Figure 5 - Cllr Chellew's Magna Carta recreation.

4 SKYLON

A LOAD OF SCRAP

Further to my previous notes on industry, in the letters pages of the daily Telegraph there has been some correspondence concerning the fate of the Skylon from the Festival of Britain, which took place 60 years ago in 1951.

Some have said it was dumped in the River Lea.

I know that never happened because the company that dismantled both the Skylon and the Dome of Discovery was my then employer Geo. Cohen, Sons & Co Ltd of 58 Wood Lane. One of their functions was in the scrap metal and recycling business. I doubt whether dumping objects as large as Skylon, even in a dismantled state, would have been allowed anyway.

Whilst working in Cohen's drawing office, as part of my apprenticeship, I was given the task of drawing up thick wire

'fingers', rather like a partially clenched hand. These were to be used to tear the aluminium sheets from the dome roof after some of the fixings rivets had been removed. The fingers, suspended from crane



Figure 6- Skylon

hook, could then be inserted in the holes and the sheet pulled away from the dome frame.

In one of the letters (on Saturday, 22nd January), the correspondent wrote that the company he worked at were customers of Cohen's, and were given a paper knife made from the metal from the Skylon.

I have a video copy of "One foot in the Past", a BBC programme with Dan Cruickshank. In the programme he visits an ex director of Cohens, Mr Philip Levy, who shows him a section of the Skylon which he had kept as a souvenir.

Mr Levy said that the Cohen's contract was to dismantle the Skylon and reduce it to scrap. I imagine this was the fate of the Dome, too.

What Mr Levy didn't mention was that the anemometer from the Skylon was re-erected on the roof of Cohen's office in Wood Lane, opposite the BBC Television Centre, and the dial, which displayed the wind speed, was placed in the reception area of that building, which is still there and (I am told) now owned by the BBC itself!

I wonder if the dial is still on display. The building was empty when I last saw it, during a Merton Historical Society tour to the Television Centre.

All of this confirms to me at any rate, never believe everything you read in the newspapers.

Eric Shaw

Jan 2011.

5 WILLIAM KILBURN

We recently reported on the acquisition of some illustrations of the rococo designs of William Kilburn, the calico printer who was based at

Wallington Bridge Mill. We are of course indebted to Peter McGow (see sections 6 and 7 of "Mills of the Wandle" on the museum website) for considerable information about him.

A portfolio of his work may be seen on the V&A website at <http://collections.vam.ac.uk>

and a site in the US also has some of his stunning designs and comments at <http://bjws.blogspot.com/2011/02/william-kilburns-1745-1818-calico.html>

A retail opportunity has recently been taken by John Lewis, with a new range of trays and mats. The Sutton Word Factory (a creative writing and heritage project) also featured some literary contributions about him in a workshop last year, including a short poem.

William Kilburn was born in Dublin in 1745, and having served his apprenticeship in a calico

printing factory in Ireland, moved to London where his skills caught the eye of the eminent botanist William Curtis who approached him to do the drawings and engravings for his "Flora Londinensis", around 1777. Two years later he agreed to



'Seaweed' a Kilburn design printed on chintz.

co-manage the calico print works at Wallington, which he eventually bought outright. His employees upheld the high standards of production which he had personally set, and were well rewarded. One employee, C.O'Brien, wrote the earliest British text on calico printing, in 1790.

Successful designs are, however, open to plagiarism, and his were "leaked" to factories in the Manchester area who used coarser fabric and inferior colours but who were able to produce results quicker and therefore corner the market. He was instrumental in obtaining the first ever legislation to copyright designs, initially for a period of 2 months, namely The Calico Printers' Act, (1787). This was subsequently amended and he received growing support from other local calico printers.

He was rare in being both a brilliant designer/artist and a shrewd businessman and was described as possibly the most eminent calico printer of the time.

Alison Cousins

Editor's note.

Another first for the Wandle Valley - The first copyright Act! More immediately, given our rightful emphasis on William Morris, the care Kilburn took for his workers 100 years or so earlier is an interesting parallel, even though the two great designers came from such different social backgrounds. The Seaweed design illustrated above was the design presented by him to Queen Charlotte.

6 BUNCE

The expression 'bunce' meaning a bonus or something obtained for free, is a slang expression that has been around for a hundred years or so.

Steve Llewellyn of Wandle Heritage remembers reading that this has a Wandle connection. The story went that farmer George Bunce, who had the use of the area now known as Bunce's Meadow in the 1870's (see Eric Montague's excellent book on Phipps Bridge), was a 'grazier' with a special skill for buying really poor quality 'store cattle', feeding them up, and selling them on as prime beef. Because he has the use of the old calico bleaching grounds, Nelsons Fields and what is now part of Morden Hall Park for a nominal rent, the whole profit was gained for free. So, is this yet another Wandle Valley claim to fame? The expressions 'grazier' (meaning a farmer who doesn't raise cattle, but merely buys adult cattle and fattens them up on land he rents for the purpose), has disappeared from common usage, as has the expression 'store cattle' (meaning cattle too old to be sold as calves, but not yet fully grown) although both are probably well known in the trade still. This recollection of a once common Wandle trade is probably excuse enough for this article.

A less savoury connection is also possible. Monty refers to the Bunce's Meadow area gaining a reputation for illicit gambling and prize fighting around the time of the First World War, and at least one definition of 'bunce' refers to the proceeds of gambling.

None of the on-line definitions can provide a proper origin for the expression, so I am happy to repeat the claim on behalf of farmer Bunce and the Wandle Valley, and to challenge anyone to provide a better source!

Nicholas Hart, 1 May 2011

7 From Paper to Poppins

I am sitting with Meg at the Cinema Museum in Kennington watching a series of old 8mm homemade films. The museum is housed in one of the buildings that were home to Charlie Chaplin as a boy. If you want to see an archive then this is the place. Room after room was filled with cinema and film materials. They had photographs, films,

programmes, uniforms, signs, cinema seats, projectors and much more. So why were we there?

As I said Meg and I were sat watching some 8mm films. These had been brought into our museum by someone who thought they may be of interest to us. The films had been made by the ladies grandfather in the mid-1930's and the early 1950's. They showed workers at Hugh Stevenson & Sons Ltd at their factory, during a sports day, a football match, and on a works outing. Unfortunately what they didn't show was anybody in the factory working. This would have been difficult for any amateur film maker due to the low light in the factory. Certainly the employees looked very happy and it was interesting noting the different clothes styles between the 1930's and 1950's. I am not sure if the film maker had permission to film but people seem to be use to him doing it.

So where were the films made and what does it have to do with the Wandle Industrial Museum?

The company involved as I have already said was Hugh Stevenson & Sons Ltd. They had a factory in Riverside Road, SW17 known as the Summerstown Works. This is now Garrett Business Park. The sports day appears to have taken place on the fields/Garrett Park north of the Garrett Business Park which may well have been owned by Hugh Stevenson at the time. I have not done any research to confirm this. The link with our museum is that the factory sat next to the River Wandle. Sadly I cannot find evidence that says they used the Wandle.

According to Edith Streets blog

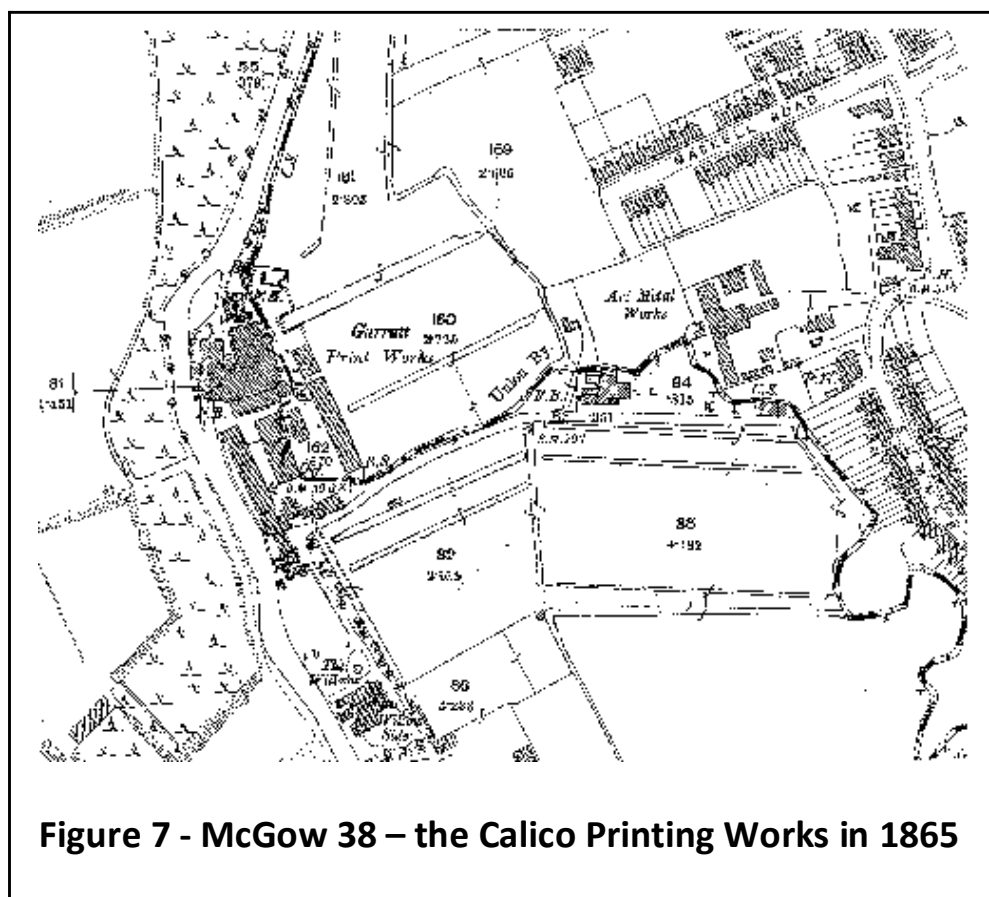
(<http://edithstreets.blogspot.com/2010/11/thames-tributary-wandle-earlsfield.html>) Riverside Road in 1776 was the site of a Calico Printing Works occupied by calico printers Coleman, Newton and Cuffley. By 1823 it was occupied by Fort and Newton also calico printers but the property was for sale in 1827 when it consisted of a warehouse, a dye house a bleaching house, drying house, coal shed, an engine house,

with a 20 horse power steam engine, and a dwelling house, with greenhouse, garden, and grounds. In 1835 the premises was occupied by Anthony Heath, calico printer, at "Garratt print works" and in 1850 he employed 40 men. There were further occupiers until 1885 when the site was taken over by the Corruganza Manufacturing Company, cardboard box makers, operated by Hugh Stevenson & Sons Limited with a head office in Manchester.

She also said on her blog that during the First World War they also began to operate the Merton Board Mills. I have my doubts about this and couldn't find anything in the museums archives. In fairness to Edith she does say that any information she gives does need to be confirmed. She says that Hugh Stevenson operated the Summerstown works until about 1971 and finally left the site in 1989. Whether any of the earlier companies who occupied the site used the river is anyone's guess and needs further research. Who was Hugh Stevenson & Sons Ltd? The listing in Grace's Guide

(http://www.gracesguide.co.uk/wiki/Hugh_Stevenson_and_Sons)

shows Hugh Stevenson and Sons of Victoria Mills, Pollard Street, Manchester. This was their head office. The Company was established in 1849 and was registered on the 18 June 1898 'to acquire the business of box manufactures of



the firm of the same name'. At the same time they were incorporated as a private limited company. In 1900 they became the proprietors of the Corruganza Manufacturing Co. In 1914 it shows them as box manufacturers and machinists. Specialities: every kind of cardboard box, metal-edged boxes, cylindrical boxes etc., celluloid boxes, plain and decorated tin boxes, show-cards of tin and cardboard, corrugated paper and boxes made of tin and cardboard, embossing and gold blocking, box-making machinery of every description, printing and lithographing, mounts and frames for photographs, leatherboards, strawboards and general box-making supplies. Employees 2,610. This number of employees may well be for only the Manchester site? Another web site by Neil Roland: Levenshulme's intriguing history (http://menmedia.co.uk/southmanchesterreporter/comment/blogs/s/1405749_neil_roland_levenshulmes_intriguing_history) indicates that 'Along with regular road name signs from the old post office – Queensway, Monica Grove etc., is a final green sign 'Hugh Stevensons.' So if you are ever in Manchester see if you can find it.

As well as the Manchester and Summerstown sites they also had sites in Edinburgh one based on the A8 between Edinburgh and Glasgow near to Maybury and a factory near to Broxburn. They also had 'a massive plant in Errwood, Manchester'. These pieces of information come from Michael Turner a former employee of the company on Roots Chat (www.RootsChat.com). Michael also says they were 'A very large business of its time its employees numbered several thousand across the UK.' It also appears that they had another factory at Darlington Hugh Stevenson & Sons (North East) Ltd.

The company was taken over by Bowaters in February 1966 and finally dismantled in the 1980's. However the name of Hugh Stevenson & Sons Ltd continues to be quoted. During its life it was the subject of two major court cases. The first was shortly after World War One and involved Contract Law and is Hugh Stevenson & Sons Ltd v Aktiengesellschaft fur Cartonagen-Industrie and is about dissolving a partnership where one partner becomes an enemy alien. Under an

agreement of November 22, 1906, made between the English company and the German company, the German company became partners in a business carried on in Manchester in the name of the English company alone, and this agreement remained in force until the outbreak of war between Great Britain and the German Empire on August 4, 1914, which operated as a dissolution of the partnership. After the outbreak of the war the English company continued to carry on the business and to use the partnership machinery for that purpose.

The question raised by this appeal was whether the German company were entitled at their option to a share of the profits of the business made since the dissolution or to interest on the amount of their share of the partnership assets in accordance with the provisions of s. 42 of the Partnership Act, 1890, or were only entitled to the value of their share in the partnership as of the date of August 4, 1914.

Atkin J. (at the original court case) took the latter view and held that the German company were not entitled to any of the profits or interest in the capital of the partnership since the date of the outbreak of the war.

The Court of Appeal by a majority (Swinfen Eady and Bankes L.JJ., A. T. Lawrence J. dissenting) reversed the decision of the learned judge upon this point, and held that the German company were entitled to a share of the profits made since the dissolution, so far as attributable to the use of their share of the capital.

The second court case *Perkins v Hugh Stevenson and Sons Limited* involved a case of personal injury and again had gone to appeal.

In September, 1937, Penkins was injured by an accident arising out of and in the course of his employment by Hugh Stevenson and applied for and was paid weekly sums by way of compensation under the Workmen's Compensation Act, 1925. However Penkins felt he was entitled to more and employed a solicitor in November 1937 to make

his claim which he made in March 1938. He continued to get payments until October 1938. Penkins lost his case and appealed and again he lost the appeal. The reason given was that he continued to receive payments after November 1937. If he hadn't continued to take the payments he may well have won the case.

We don't know what his injuries were and the final point of this is that the accident took place at 'at their factory at 8, Brook Road, Garrett Lane, Earlsfield'. My early 1980's A-Z doesn't list a Brook Road in Earlsfield so I am not sure of its location. It may well be that Hugh Stevenson had more than one building in the Summerstown area.

To finish this article I am going to go back to the world of cinema. The Great Grandson of Hugh Stevenson has written on a Roots Chat conversation 'Hugh Stevenson was my great grandfather. He was the father of Robert Stevenson, the film director (Mary Poppins and Herbie the VW, etc.).' He also continued to say 'The whole company was run into the ground by the "and Sons" and ended up being taken over by Bowaters in the 60's and then dismantled in the 80's.' His last comment on this conversation just about sums up the life of Hugh Stevenson & Sons Ltd 'The rise and fall of'.

If anyone would like the full details of the two court cases please contact me via the museum.

Mick Taylor

Editor's note. This is the longer form of this article as printed in our Newsletter.



Figure 8 - Group photo from the March volunteer's lunch



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;  
Every Sunday (except Bank Holiday weekends) 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