

# THE WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

## NEWSLETTER

Issue 77

February 2012

### 1 NEWSDESK

#### Visits to the Museum

Despite the cold weather we have continued to open every Wednesday and Sunday during the winter months. Thanks are due to our willing band of volunteers who despite colds and 'flu have kept the doors open.

Since Christmas we have been pleased to greet 2 classes of year 2 children from Liberty Primary School making their first visit to our Museum. Although their school is named after Arthur Liberty, they did not know anything about him - hopefully they do now! In February we welcomed children from year 5 of Haslemere Schools making the first of 2 visits as part of project set up by Merton Priory Homes involving their Junior Warden Scheme. During March we expect visits from Wimbledon U3A, the Friends of the De Morgan Centre and the National Trust Group from Morden Hall Park.

#### Events

The Volunteers Christmas Party was again a happy and successful occasion.

#### Contents

1	Newsdesk	2
2.	Curators Report	3
3.	Archives Report	4
4.	Other News	5
5.	New Blocks	6
6	MAM & Priory Trust	7
7.	The River Wandle	10
8	Misplaced SIR Plaque	14



Figure 1 – Haslemere School's output using our new blocks (see article on page 6 below)

The New Year Lunch this year was a change of venue and time. Over 20 people enjoyed a carvery meal at the Toby Carvery at Park Place Mitcham. It was nice to see some people attending for a lunch that would not come out in the evening.

The next Volunteers Lunch is on Wednesday March 21st from 12pm.

It is hoped to arrange a volunteers and members to visit Kingston Museum's Exhibition The Hogsmill- A Journey Through Time. This will be about the Hogsmill River which rises in Ewell, flowing 6 miles to join the Thames at Kingston. There were supposed to be 13 mills along its banks producing gunpowder for the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic War. Also it has connection with 2 paintings by Millais and Holman Hunt so it should be of considerable interest to us. Details in the next Newsletter.

Make a note in your Diary for the dates of the Morden Hall Craft and Country Show from Saturday May 5th to Monday 7th May inclusive. We have booked our usual stall and once again Oakleigh Fairs have kindly given us a 50% reduction for our pitch. So please support us at our main fundraising event

## **MUSEUM NEWS**

### **2. Curators Report**

This new display for this year will reflect how the industries of the Wandle were connected with many areas of the world through the importing of the raw materials that were used by the mills.

### **William De Morgan**

Part of The De Morgan Centre's Lottery bid entailed working with another local history group. They nominated us. To comply with this they have offered us a panel for the museum, which they will design and mount and pay for. It is to go along the side the door into the office on the opposite side to the Priory display. We hope this will be set up by the middle of March.

They also wish to design a topic box that we can use with schools.

This too will be funded by the De Morgan Centre.

Meg Thomas

### **3. Archivists' Report**

The slide and photograph collections at last reflect the museum's true remit following our "weeding" sessions and it has been staggering to note what has changed in the last 20 years or so, let alone the last 100. Michael Taylor's excellent contributions are now our main source of current photographs, and future archivists will have the advantage of their locations being fully documented.

Recent requests for information have included the identification of a water mill depicted in a recently acquired oil painting by Joseph Fred Percy Rendell, done around the turn of the 19th century. We were also able to supply the purchaser with supporting documentation.

We have also been able to help a lady from Romsey to obtain information on Merton Place, its contents and sale, as part of her forthcoming publication on Emma Hamilton.

Users of the “library” will be relieved to know that there will no longer be a cascade of pamphlets every time a book is removed – they are now all in separate boxes. The oversize books have also been extracted and are now on a deeper shelf so that the titles are clearer. It does mean however, that there are now three possible places to look for the book you want.

Alison attended a day course at the RNIB in January, - “Shifting Perspectives: Access to the Arts, Museums and Galleries for Blind and Partially Sighted People”. Following a practical session on how it feels to be led around a building and what useful information needs to be given along the way, we tried our hand at describing a painting or object to a colleague and comparing their interpretation of it in return.

We also watched a Touch Tour recording at the V&A and saw how much tactile interpretation can give value to an oral tour. In the afternoon we all wrote a proposed tour of our collections for blind or partially sighted visitors. I have to say that the Wandle Industrial Museum scored really well against the “big guns” as we have very little behind glass, and can offer snuff and lavender to sniff, printing block surfaces to feel, wheels to turn, and much more. I think we should see if there is a demand for such a tour. ( A full report of the course is available at the museum.)

Alison & Jacqui

#### 4. OTHER MUSEUM NEWS

**Ravensbury update.** The court case is still continuing, with an extended date of 30 April for the parties to reach agreement or return to court.

In the meantime, the good news is that I have been nominated to the steering group of the Wandle Valley Landscape Partnership bid for HLF moneys, of which up to £150k could be used for restoration of the wheels at Ravensbury Mill.

Provided settlement of the court case is not too long postponed (the bid must be finalised by January 2013) this could mean we can hit the ground running on taking up the lease. Our task is to ensure this funding is not lost because of uncertainty over the outcome of the court case.

It is clear from the other aspects of this bid that we have the opportunity of working closer together with the Wandle Trust and the Environment Agency, who are looking to open up the river sufficiently to enable fish to pass up and down, despite the weirs. If we could combine this with a micro hydroelectric scheme using the mill, a quite exciting possibility opens up at Ravensbury.

Nicholas Hart

#### 5. New Printing Blocks

Thanks to Alison’s alertness, we have acquired a new set of printing blocks, especially for use by the smaller children who come to our workshops, but of wider use also.

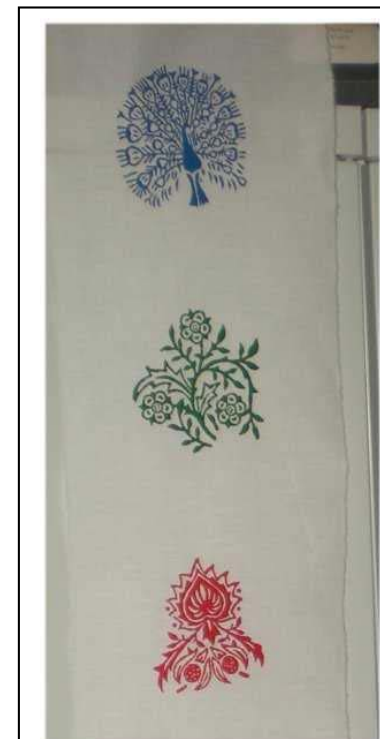


Figure 2 – The designs we will be using from the new blocks

The Victoria and Albert Museum has decided to arrange for the Indian craftsmen who make the wooden sari blocks still in use there to recreate elements of William Morris designs on small size wooden blocks, mainly for sale as curios in their shop.

As might be expected of such a combination of William Morris design, V&A expertise, and the skills of the Indian craftsmen, the result has been much better than that.

Alison spotted these, and immediately saw their potential, and I have now acquired 10 of these blocks, all fully capable of use as print blocks. I must thank Martie and the rest of the team at the V&A who were most supportive, and have given me a crib sheet showing the original designs from which each except was taken.

The team and I have now had 2 workshops with classes of younger children using 3 of the most appropriate designs from my collection. The results have been highly gratifying, so we are acquiring two sets of those three blocks for the Museum.

Sample prints are on display in the office, but the attached photo should give a good idea of what these look like.

As a result we can now tune our workshops much better to the needs of each group, using the 'real' blocks or the smaller as appropriate.

Mary Hart

## 6. MERTON ABBEY MILLS AND PRIORY TRUST UPDATE

Linking up with the note about the opening up of the Wandle to allow fish to move more freely up and down, Steve Llewellyn and Norman Fairey are now advising on eel ladders for a number of rivers around

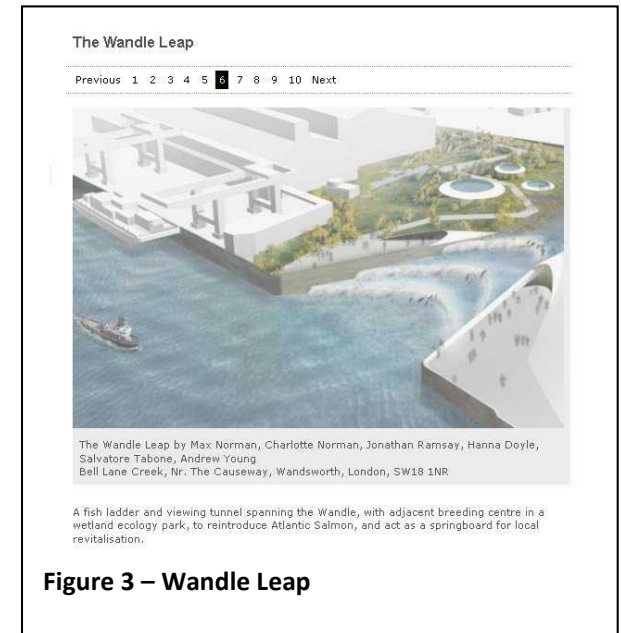
the country, based on the success of their design at Merton Abbey Mills.

Co-incidentally, a project by RIBA students shows how this kind of thing is exciting attention more widely.

The project, known as the Wandle Leap was to design an innovative entrance to the Wandle from the Thames, specifically allowing salmon to pass up the river while allowing pedestrians to walk underneath and view their passage. Whilst that part of the concept is somewhat

farfetched, the design looked fantastic, and is yet another nudge towards the mouth of the Wandle getting the priority treatment it deserves. The attached image is a bit weak, but please navigate to <http://tinyurl.com/85deemc> for a clearer version.

Meanwhile, the Priory Trust is gearing up for its new future now that the freehold has transferred to Merton together with the s106 moneys. The outline plan is to spend the second half of 2012 getting together an outline HLF bid, with the next 3 months to be spent pinning down the targets for that money.



In the meantime the Merton Papers project, headed by Richard Chelley is gathering momentum, and the realisation of these two projects together could secure Merton's place where it belongs in the pantheon of English Law.

On a lighter note, our congratulations again to the team based at the Mills which put together LB Merton's entry to the New Year's Day parade. To quote from Dave Saxby's Facebook page "MERTON PARADE CHAMPIONS AGAIN!

For many years now the London New Year's Day Parade has been a huge event, with worldwide TV coverage, transatlantic marching bands, fantastic exhibits, and the Piccadilly to Whitehall route thronged with an amazing half million people. Every year the London Boroughs compete to create the best float, in which Merton has a



Figure 4 – Merton's SIR horse

record second to none, with first prize twice, second once and third once in just the past six years. This year they did it yet again, winning joint first with a breathtaking float on a historic theme linking the Surrey Iron Railway with the 2012 Olympics. The centre piece was a giant puppet horse created and skilfully operated by students of the Wimbledon College of Art, followed by a dazzling children's dance routine with tennis rackets, and bringing hoops together to form the Olympic symbol. Dismal weather set in as the Parade finished, but not before the citizens of Merton had won the first prize of £7,000 for the Mayor's charities."

Nicholas Hart

## 7. THE RIVER WANDLE

From sparkling trout stream to open sewer to one of England's five cleanest rivers. It has been a roller coaster ride for our little river.

The great concern for the mill owners over the centuries has been to keep the flow of the river balanced, maintaining the supply while not allowing it to become too great and so flood the land along its banks. Prevention of flooding has been the concern of local authorities up to the nineteenth century. Looking at the river now it doesn't seem to be such a threat, but older residents still recall the river flooding especially in the Garret Lane area hence the river banks being enclosed in concrete along some stretches. Looking at the river now it does seem hard to believe that in the 1860's there were 340 million litres discharging daily into the Thames. By the 1970's it was between 113 and 120 million litres. Due to the pollution of the Thames and the nearness to London of the Wandle there have been many schemes to draw water from the Wandle to supplement London's supply. These

schemes were always vigorously contested by the mill owners. The first of these proposals was put forward in 1610 but the mill owners and mealmen of Surrey sent a petition to the Lord Chancellor and such was their power the scheme was abandoned. Another scheme that failed was put forward at the end of the 18th century when it was planned to build a canal from London to Portsmouth. Instead the Surrey Iron Railway was built. In 1849 there was another attempt to create a water supply from the Wandle. Plans exist for the construction of reservoirs at Wandsworth and Wimbledon commons, but they were never built. When Croydon Board of Health wanted to abstract water from the Wandle in the 1850's they were more successful, but only after a law suit was fought in the House of Lords. A leading railway company wanted to sink a well at Carshalton in 1906. But when the water level fell by a foot after only two days pumping the proposal had to be abandoned.

But this could not last, with the rapidly growing population of South London and the Wandle industries relying less and less on water power, it was inevitable that water would be abstracted from the river.

Concern for the condition of the river is not new. As early as 1578 industry was beginning to take its toll. Thomas Cecil of Brazil Mills complained that his trade was being ruined by mud and filth washed into the river from Garrett Lane, although Cecil and his fellow dye millers were themselves adding to the pollution.

The growth of industries especially along lower reaches caused the pollution to increase so that by the middle of the nineteenth century it was little better than an open sewer. The condition caused such concern that a survey was carried out by the Institute of Civil Engineers. The results were published in 1861. In the report Mr.

Simpson states 'it could not be denied that the Wandle is greatly polluted and it is time for this to be remedied not only here but through the country.'

The first steps taken to remedy this situation was the River Pollution Act 1876, making it an offence to discharge into a river or stream any solid matter so as to interfere with its flow or to pollute with sewage or factory waste. Unfortunately this act was very difficult to enforce for under it no offence was committed if the 'best practical and reasonable available means were used to render the discharge harmless' Nothing changes!

In spite of the little effect the act had, the condition of the Wandle did improve for many of the industries declined or moved away. The river had recovered so well by the early 20th century that when John Hobson wrote 'The Book of the Wandle' in 1913 he was able to list twenty-one species of fish to be found in the river. This happy condition did not last very long. As urbanisation increased water was drawn from the Wandle for domestic use (no mill owners to protest now), and with three sewage works discharging their effluent into the river the Wandle became less and less able to cope with the increased load. By the 1950's the condition of the river had declined so that there were many reaches where only the water hog louse and blood worms could be found.

The Rivers (Prevention of Pollution) Acts of 1951 and 1961, the increased public interest and the efforts of the Thames Water Authority to improve the Thames brought matters to a head. The G.L.C. then acted in three ways: Wimbledon Sewage Works was closed, Wandle Valley Works were phased out and its input piped to the sewage works at Crossness.

The largest sewage works was at Beddington. Beddington Sewage Works was founded in 1860 to cope with an area still largely a collection of villages, it was now completely overloaded and outdated. The only possible solution was to build a new sewage works. Work began in 1966, it was commissioned in 1969 but only came to full working capacity in 1974.

Of course the river didn't become a sparkling trout stream again overnight.

In the River Pollution Survey of 1972 the river was still heavily polluted and foam could be seen floating on the surface as it flowed through Garret Park.

But with the growing public interest in the environment and the dumping of industrial waste becoming unacceptable things were bound to improve.

Now things have come full circle and the Wandle is once again a sparkling stream with the occasional trout.

Meg Thomas



**Figure 5 – The Wandle at Ravensbury – a beautiful river in a beautiful setting**

## MISPLACED S.I.R PLAQUE

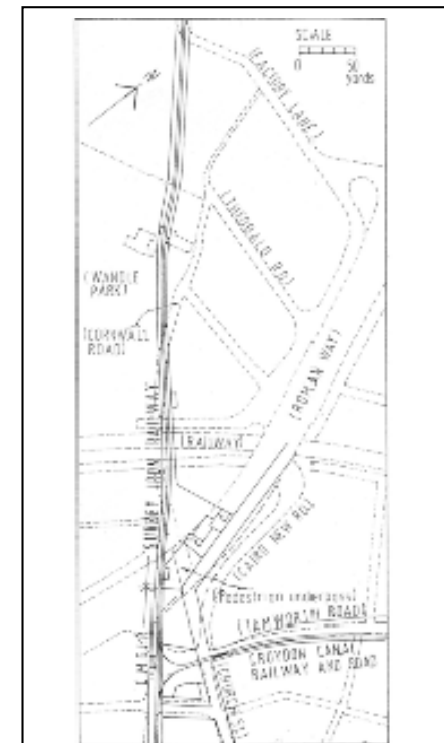
There have been articles recently in the local Croydon press about a 'Relic rising from Reeves Ashes'. The 'Relic' is a blue resin plaque of the Surrey Iron Railway seal (like the one in our museum) that was fixed to a wall of the Reeves Furniture Warehouse which was destroyed by arson during the riots last

August. It was one of a set that was put in place during the 2003 bicentenary of the founding of the Surrey Iron Railway.

It was found in the wall rubble and it is proposed to refix it to a wall there in a ceremony in October next.

One of the articles - Croydon Guardian - mentions that the route of the Surrey Iron Railway ran from West Croydon station to the wharf at Wandsworth. I have a few objections to that statement!

1 The tramway that ran from the West Croydon area was owned by the Croydon Canal Co. And ran from their basin, roughly



**Figure 6 – McGow map. This shows the junction of the SIR and CMGR underneath Roman Way, and the Croydon Canal junction a little lower down**

where the bus station is located now, to Pitlake and formed a 'Y' junction there with both the Surrey Iron Railway and the Croydon Merstham and Godstone Railway.

2 Therefore the Surrey Iron Railway terminated at Pitlake and not West Croydon and there was an end-on junction with the Croydon Merstham and Godstone Railway at that point.

3 In Peter McGow's paper on the tramways - also in our Museum [and accessible on-line]- the junction is shown located quite clearly well before the Reeves site. Therefore the plaque there should either replicate the Croydon Merstham and Godstone Railway seal or that of the Croydon Canal. The plaque fixed to the fascia of West Croydon Station should also replicate the Croydon Canal seal, not, as it does, the Surrey Iron Railway version.

I have previously mentioned this to Alan Suttie, (he was responsible for the manufacture of these plaques and I have great admiration for that initiative) and he did say that they would be changed, but so far they have not.

My main criticism is with the local press for these historical inaccuracies, but I suppose I, too, could be criticised for not pointing these out to them and also for not giving a 'plug' for the museum at the same time!

A modern map ((C) Bing) showing that the Reeves corner site is actually on a new branch of the line specially created for Tramlink, while the true path goes through the Church St line.

Eric Shaw, Jan 2012.



A full colour version of this newsletter is available online at [www.wandle.org](http://www.wandle.org). If any subscriber is happy to receive the newsletter by email, could you please send a request to [office@wandle.org](mailto:office@wandle.org). This helps us to reduce our costs.

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

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OPEN: Every Wednesday 1 ~ 4 pm;  
Every Sunday 2 ~ 5 pm.

(The Museum may be closed some Bank Holiday weekends)

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)