



# MUSEUM

## NEWSLETTER

Issue 86



May 2014

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## Newsdesk

### Education

The grant we were awarded to offer free school visits has come to an end. We were able to give 20 schools free visits – 4 of which have happened in the last 3 months, and are now trying to accommodate another 5 during June alone, despite this being already our busiest month.

### Talks

There has been an increase in requests for talks to adult groups. Meg, as our curator, was asked to give a talk to SERIAC, a great recognition for us as a Museum. Peter Cousins attended, and thanks to him for a detailed report of the proceedings – see below.

## **Volunteers .**

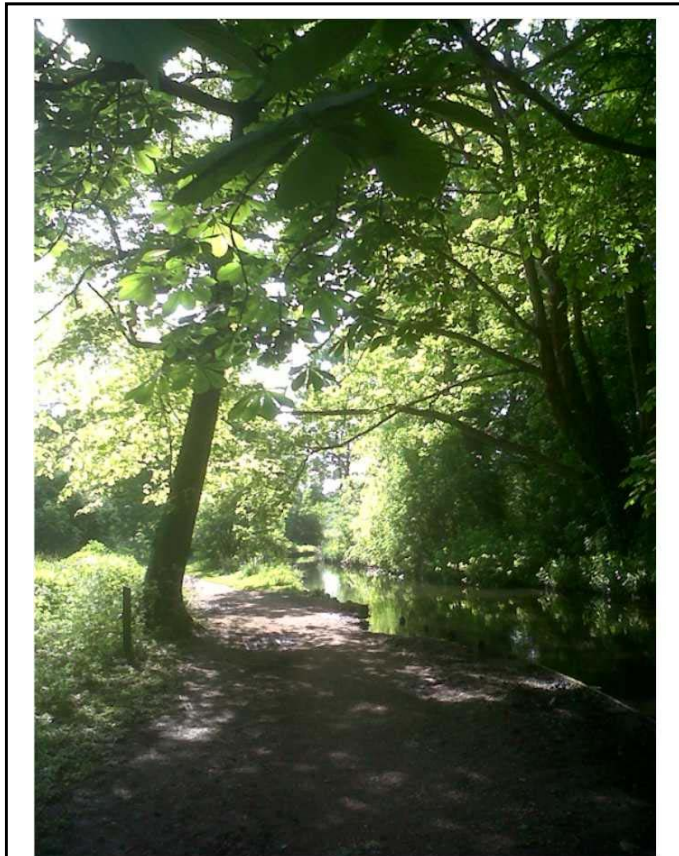
We had a very enjoyable Volunteers lunch in March, thanks to Mary again for all the catering and for the special bonus Easter Bag for all.

More volunteers are still needed to help with Sunday openings. Do please let us know if this is of interest.

## **Outreach**

The museum has taken part in Merton Memories; we must thank Michael and Alison for all their hard work, and for Alison's detailed report below.

We are part of the display in Merton Library called "Sharing Space"; again thanks to Michael (see Dates for your diary below). We had a stall at the fair in Morden Hall Park. We were very disappointed with the results even though the weather was very good. We were placed at the furthest point from the entrance in what we called a dead zone. One small plus was that on the Saturday an old Rolls Royce was parked next to us and we were able to remind visitors that the leather in the car was made on the



**Figure 1 Although not a picture of the May Fair, this view of the Wandle in Morden Hall Park reminds us of how lucky we are to have this on our doorstep. [Image NH]**

Wandle. Our thanks to the volunteers who made this possible.

## **Dates for your diary:**

19 May to 14 June, our exhibition in Merton Library 'Shared Space'.

14 June - Summer opening, continuing our link with Mitcham Carnival.

21 June - Open Day/Recruitment Day, (at the Museum)

## **Curators Report**

We have been looking at grants to engage a professional to help us plan for the future.

As you know we are an Accredited Museum, but it is now time to renew our Accreditation and of course things have changed.

So we have a new learning curve, fortunately we have support from our Museums Development Officer, Yvette Shepherd and our Mentor Chris Taft of the Postal Museum.

Now we have a new piece of equipment on which to show the slides we take to talks – and our chair will be pleased, because it behaves like a slide projector, but uses images from a USB stick – no more painstaking loading of slides into the carriages, then having to turn them round because you've forgotten they have to be back to front!

## ***Archives Report***

We had yet more donations from Judith Goodman – an extensive set of slides relating to all aspects of the Wandle. All are of superb quality AND immaculately documented. An archivist's dream.

We were also fortunate to be granted permission by the late John Wallace's sister, to use his sketch of Ravensbury Mill. It was interesting to compare the free style of this with the fine detail used by Peter Harris. John did several views of Mitcham, quality copies of which were done by London Guildhall Library and presented to the John Innes Society in Merton Park.

Janette Henderson's book on The Granges of Merton Priory was added in April and will be invaluable as an adjunct to our existing titles on the Priory.

Alison & Jacqui

## Other News

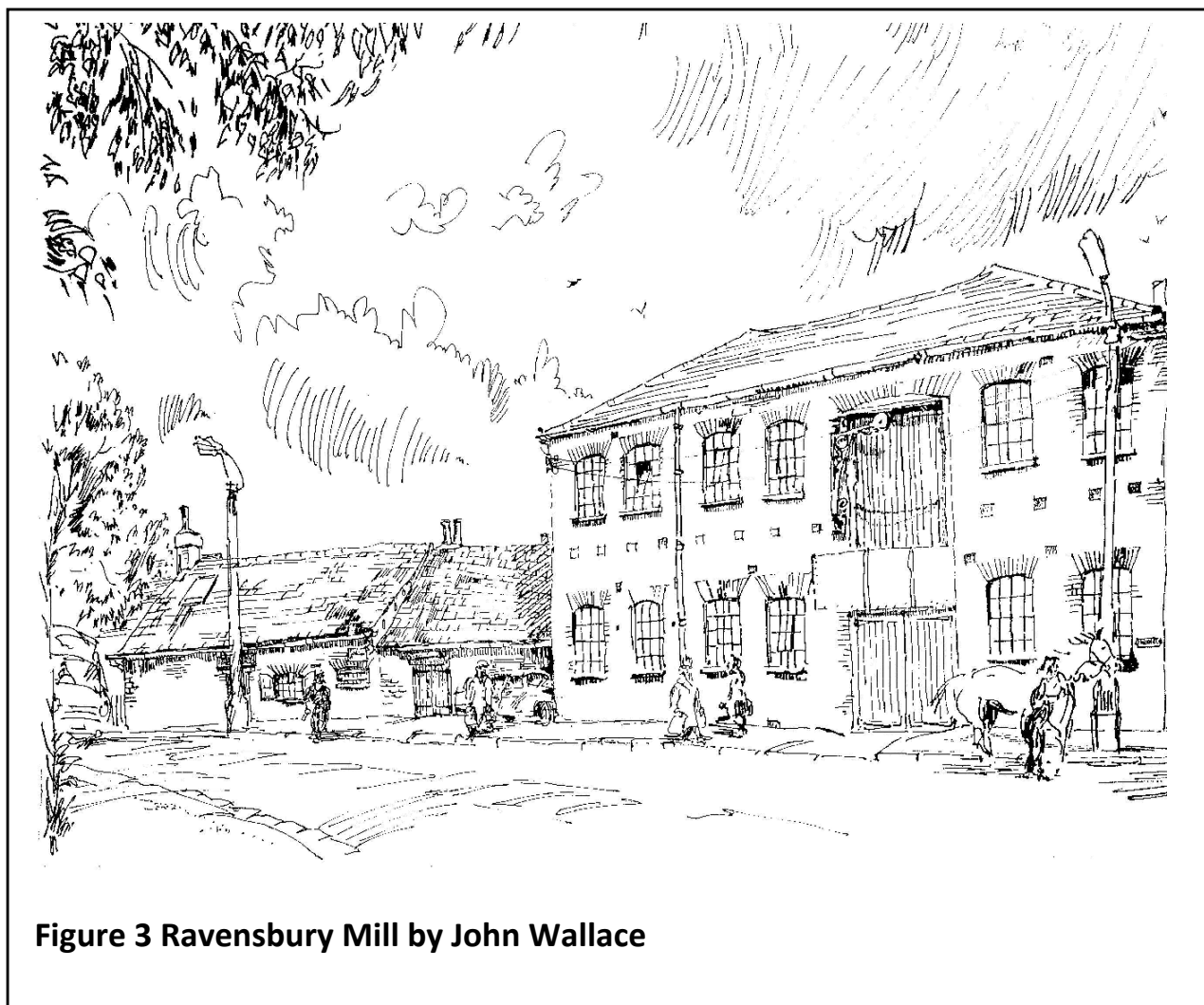
### *Ravensbury, then and now*

AS mentioned in her report, Alison, wearing her John Innes Society hat, has come across a drawing of Ravensbury Mill from the 1970's, the artist being John Wallace. At her request the artist's daughter has kindly given us permission to reproduce it, which I do here. For comparison I include a recent photo of Ravensbury from more or less the same viewpoint.



**Figure 2 Ravensbury Mill now.**  
*[Image NH]*

There are many interesting points of detail revealed by this drawing, and I draw your attention to the car parked on the pavement by the front door for example, as well as the clear evidence of a further door immediately behind the car. It is this kind of evidence that we may need in the future as we adapt



**Figure 3 Ravensbury Mill by John Wallace**

the mill to our needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

John Wallace ( b. 1947 d. 1995), worked for the GLC in the Architect's Department then joined D. Insall and Associates, an architectural practice specialising in the restoration of historic buildings. He took several weeks off work every autumn to do his drawings, the originals of which are in archival storage at the London Guildhall Library.

## ***Tideway Tunnel and the 'end' of the Westbourne River***

The opening of the Chelsea Flower Show is a good moment to remind everyone of the huge project which is the Thames Tideway Tunnel.

Information can be gleaned from its website at:

<http://www.thamestidewaytunnel.co.uk> .

Its particular significance to the Chelsea Flower Show and to the underground River Westbourne is that part of the enabling works is to be a new promontory sticking out into the Thames from the Chelsea Embankment opposite the entrance to Royal Hospital Gardens, under which the



**Figure 4 The Westbourne discharging into the Thames during a storm [Image G Thorburn]**

existing open pipe from which the remains of the Westbourne discharges into the Thames will be closed off, and the water culverted underground direct into the new sewer. The effluent that the Westbourne used still to discharge in flash flood conditions will now be kept from the Thames, but it means that the last visible remains of this important river will be the pipe running above the platforms of Sloane Square Tube station.

A good online introduction to the lost rivers, and how to find them, can be seen at: <http://www.weekendnotes.co.uk/londons-lost-rivers-stations/>

## ***Vanguard Way***

Thanks to Colin Saunders for letting us know that a fully updated edition of the free guide to the Vanguard Way has been published on the website [www.vanguardway.org.uk](http://www.vanguardway.org.uk) . It includes a comprehensive introduction to the route and detailed sectional route descriptions from north to south. A separate south-north version is also available.

Brand new additions are a section on the flora, fauna and geology of the route and a blog on flora and fauna that may be spotted along the way. The Vanguard Way Companion has also been updated, providing information about transport, accommodation and refreshments.

## ***Norman Plastow***

Norman Plastow's many years of service to heritage in Merton was recognised by the naming of a new gallery in the Wimbledon Society Museum in his honour, as reported in the Wimbledon Guardian of 13th March. We hope we may still take him up on his kind offers to let us consult him on our next HLF application for Ravensbury, where his skills and experience will be invaluable.



**Plastow - image  
courtesy of  
Wimbledon  
Guardian**

## ***Centenaries***

### **Merton Priory, then and now.**

There is some debate about which anniversary to celebrate, but it seems generally accepted that Gilbert the Norman brought the first canons to Merton, led by Prior Robert (or Rodbert), in 1114. By May 1117 they had moved to the new site we now know as Merton Abbey Mills. Now, 900 years later, a new tranche of building works is about to start – do please visit the Chapter House during its open days this year to track progress as the plans develop.

## **Magna Carta**

Next year will be the 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the granting of Magna Carta. Although, as a treaty between barons and King it had little longevity, its significance to the laws governing the rights of individuals against the state was huge, and remains with us to day. Hopefully much will be written about it, but its significance to us in Merton is that it was from Merton Priory that the free conduct passes went out to the barons, summoning them to Runnymede, and it is not too fanciful to think that it was the canons of the priory who helped frame the first draft taken to Runnymede, as the most eminent single institution of learning and the law of its time

## **Reports**

### ***South East Regional Industrial Archaeology Conference***

This year's conference was held in the Royal Russell School, Croydon, a public school opened in 1924 in extensive grounds near Addington Hills. The theme was (loosely) Croydon and the River Wandle.

#### **Handley's Brickworks**

Edward Handley MBE was the last proprietor of this company, based in Woodside, Croydon from 1915 to 1974. It was at one time the largest brickworks in the south of England, producing 1 million bricks a week. As the clay was so wet, the bricks had to be dried before they could be fired. This was done in large sheds using waste heat from the kilns. All deliveries had to be made by road as there was no practical rail access. After closure, everything was demolished, the land was de-contaminated and is now housing and an open space called Brickfield Meadows.

#### **A most industrious river**

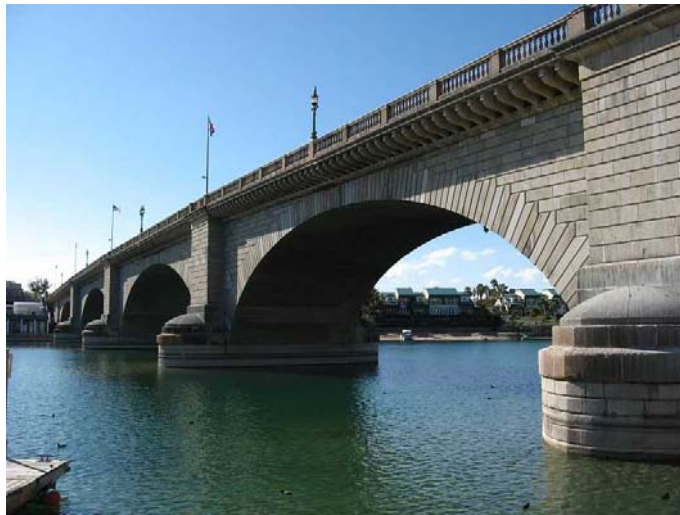
Meg Thomas of WIM gave the first presentation – a comprehensive account of the development and scope of the mills and industries of the River Wandle. As this is likely to be already familiar to our readership, there is little point in me telling you what you already know.



## The rise and fall of the Surrey Iron Railway (SIR)

Dorien Gerhold of the Wandsworth Historical Society worked from the Act of Parliament of 1846 which had to be passed to close the SIR, in which the company set out the whole economic history of the railway. The railway did well at first carrying chalk from the Merstham quarries on the 1809 extension, to limekilns at Wandsworth. The Croydon Canal was completed in 1809 and gave easier access to London. By 1814 railway traffic had fallen by half. The quarries closed in the 1820s, removing most of the rest of the traffic. The Croydon, Merstham & Godstone extension closed in 1838. The London & Brighton

Railway's plan to buy the SIR to use part of the route for its Croydon to London Waterloo line fell through. After closure in 1848, the dock at Wandsworth remained in use until 1923 when it was filled in by the gas company. The SIR had been over-reliant on the Merstham quarry traffic and had been unable to update its technology which had rapidly become obsolete.



**Figure 5. The 19th century London Bridge, now in the US, built with stone carried on the CMG and SIR Railways. [Image courtesy Wikipedia]**

## Early computing in Croydon

Danny Hayton of GLIAS showed a silent black & white film, made by the Accounting and Tabulating Machine Company in the 1930s, on the manufacture of early computing machinery in Croydon. Machines were made to order by hand and there were many women workers. Machine operators wore long hair, loose clothing, ties etc., and were exposed to moving parts of the machines. The footage of a spring being tested by ping-ponging it up and down

with a large nut on top raised a laugh. The machines were driven by punched cards, which were sorted first in card-sorting machines: each card had its metadata printed on it. The end product was a print-out of financial information. The machines evolved into accounting machines. The company merged with the British Tabulating Machine Company to form International Computers and Tabulators (ICT) in 1959 and moved to Whyteleafe.

### **If it's not a brick, what is it?**

Ron Martin of the Sussex Industrial Archaeology Society illustrated some of the different types of building materials that have been used since humans moved out of caves. Timber, was among the first, but ran short by the 15th century as so much was used to build ships and provide fuel. Bricks became universally popular, but stone was an alternative, originally undressed. Artificial stone started being used for landscaping, e.g. 'Pulhamite' (see walk, below), and artificial marble, e.g. terrazzo for flooring. Render could be marked to look like stone blocks or worked into patterns (pargetting). Flint was used where it was found (in chalk land), but was difficult to use for corners. Cast iron has been used for lintels, window sills, parapets, and pillars and window tracery in churches. Coade stone was very successful artificial stone for sculpture and decoration, and terracotta was used as brick. Bricks have been in use for about 5000 years. After the Romans left in 410AD, there was a 1000 year gap before bricks were used again in Britain. A brick is the size it is because it is the size of a man's hand, although a brick tax introduced in 1784 resulted in oversized bricks being made. Mention was made of the different styles of bricklaying, and that tiles were often used to imitate bricks.

### **Bugs & bows: fermentation industries in London**

Martin Adams was, until recently, Professor of Microbiology at the University of Surrey. London's brewing industry matured very early. A favourite drink was 'Entire Butt' 6% -7%, dark, hoppy and matured for a year. From its popularity with porters it acquired the name Porter. Whitbread's converted their Chiswell Street cellars into cisterns to hold porter. By the 1820s it was

replaced by mild, a less strong, un-aged beer. Pubs still showed the Porter and Entire signs outside e.g. Youngs. Hodgson's Bow Bridge Brewery, near the docks, brewed a strong, hoppy beer for the East India Company, ideal for transport to India that acquired the name India Pale Ale. Production moved to Allsopps of Burton on Trent. Vinegar brewing was an early use of fermentation. Champions of Old Street produced vinegar from 1710 to the end of the 19th century. Originally it was made in open air vats, until the quick vinegar process was invented, in which alcohol was sprayed onto a bed of wood chips and collected underneath. Sarsons is well known, as is Beaufoys of South Lambeth Road which closed in 1982. Their clock tower is still visible from the platforms of Vauxhall Station. Distillation of stronger alcohol, eventually lead to acts of Parliament to control gin drinking. Famous brands are Booths of Clerkenwell and William Nicholson (of Three Mills), who lent money to the MCC to buy Lord's cricket ground. Acetone can be created by fermentation. It was used to make cordite in World War 1, and Lloyd George wanted to take over all British distilleries, to make acetone. Because maize was the best raw material and it was not grown in Britain at the time, production went to Canada instead. Citric acid was made by Kembell Bishop using the aspergillus niger fungus. Alexander Fleming discovered Penicillin at Paddington Hospital in the 1920s and Norman Heatley worked out how to make it usable.

### **Underground London**

Nick Catford, journal editor of Subterranea Britannica, showed us some of the sites listed in his new book. Locally there are 3 former railway tunnels near Sandilands which are now used by Tramlink, air raid shelters at Whitgift School, and a waterwheel at Carshalton Water Tower. Other categories of features listed were:

Closed Underground Stations e.g. North End on the Northern Line, also known as Bull and Bush, which was built but never opened.

Cemetery catacombs e.g. West Norwood and Kensal Green which both have hydraulic lifts from the chapel to the catacombs. The latter has been restored.

Crystal Palace subway from the former High Level railway station under Crystal Palace Parade – to be restored.

Kingsway Tram Tunnel. This is being affected by Crossrail works, but will be restored when finished.

Camden Horse Tunnels & vault for the railway's winding engines.

Chalk and sand mines e.g. Dartford, Pinner, and Blackheath.

Royal Observer Corps Monitoring Posts from about 1955 to 1968: Bowes Park (Alexandra Palace), Knockholt.

Post Office Railway part of which will be opened to the public

Erith Underground Hospital which is still in use.

Government and Military HQs e.g. Oxgate at Edgware Road, and Paddock at Dollis Hill - an alternative cabinet war room.

**Afterwards**, I joined a guided walk into Central Croydon lead by Paul Sowan of Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society. We set off along the edge of Addington Hills beside the tram line. The gardens of Coombe Wood contained some rock gardens built with 'Pulhamite' artificial rock. There are many chalk pits in the area and the tram line uses the trackbed of the old Woodside & Croydon railway in part. We passed Park Hill reservoir and water tower and visited Queen's Gardens, a former railway cutting on the line to Central Croydon station (closed 1890). We examined Surrey Street water pumping station, before the lack of daylight curtailed the walk. Some walkers retreated to the Dog & Bull pub, a listed building from the 18th century, claiming to be Croydon's oldest pub, an earlier building dating from 1431. Others, like me, caught a tram home, exhausted.

Peter Cousins

30th April 2014

## ***Merton Memories– Discovery Days***

The launch of the Merton Memories project took place on March 22nd in Merton’s Civic Centre in the presence of the Mayor, the two local MPs, and Councillor Nick Draper. Sarah Gould, the Service Manager, Heritage and Local Studies, demonstrated the database and invited the Mayor to do her own personal searches. Unlike most of these online launches in the writer’s experience, nothing crashed or developed a response time of 30 minutes. Evidence of the Mayor’s pleasure is shown on the Council’s website.



**Figure 6 WIM stall at the Merton Memories launch attracting interest. [Image NH]**

This is a Heritage Lottery Fund initiative which has enabled digitisation of over 15,000 photos from the collections of the Merton Heritage Centre in Morden Library, as well as a small selection from our own archives, those of the Merton Historical Society, the Wimbledon Society, and several other heritage groups in the borough.

The Museum had a stall at both the launch and the subsequent Discovery Day on April 26th. On that day, we displayed photos of block prints and of locations where such work went on within Merton to coincide with the talk by Mary Hart on the same subject. Following a “lively” introduction by Sarah Gould, Mary showed examples of various fabric printing blocks



**Figure 7 Mary giving her talk at the Merton Memories launch [Image S. Vogel]**

from the last 300 years, along with some samples of their designs printed on silk. We were deeply honoured by the presence of our chairman at this talk. There were many other events and demonstrations, including a talk on the Merton Heritage Alphabet by Sarah Gould. William Morris featured under “M” and the Wandle for “W”, but Liberty lost out to “L” for Lavender.

Thanks to Michael Taylor for his superb additions to the photo displays and along with Pete Cousins and Roger Steele for helping to run the stall.

Alison Cousins

## **A Road of Old Slag**

Further to the article on iron smelting along the Wandle, and the question of slag disposal, the Romans, when they occupied the Kentish Weald, followed their iron smelting operations by using the resultant slag to ‘metal’ the London to Lewis road. Evidence of this can still be seen on the A264 Edenbridge to Tunbridge Road on the footpath to Hartfield.

Ivan Margery, author of ‘Roman Ways in the Weald’ also mentioned the use of iron slag as a metalling layer on the road beside the Lingfield/Tandridge Parish boundary.

At Fry’s Metals we either re-smelted our slag or disposed of it to another smelter on Humberside, depending on the tin content.

In the series of Mitcham Histories, No 9 Colliers Wood, it is mentioned that Tandem Works contributed to air pollution. Relatively speaking, this, of course, is true. But what isn’t mentioned and, to quote Michael Caine, ‘Not a lot of people know that’, the emissions from Fry’s were monitored and were generally within allowed limits, because the potential contents of these emissions were too valuable to discharge to atmosphere, so were filtered and recycled prior to discharge.

My interest in the weather started at about this time, because one of my tasks was to collect a discharge sample over a period of 24 hours.

I was not inclined to initiate a ‘Stack’ sample as I knew that 24 hours later I’d have to collect that sample for analysis from the platform sixty feet up the

side of the chimney, even if it was raining. I always waited for a fine weather forecast for the next 24 hours.

We also sampled the surrounding area atmosphere. The object was to determine the amount of lead in that atmosphere (this being in the time of leaded petrol).

Our emissions contained not only lead but some antimony and copper, while car exhausts only contained lead, so we could tell the source of that pollution. Our sampling was done at head height for this purpose, and we used to say about the local population 'If only they knew!'.

Our own blood, too, was sampled for lead, and we were issued with a pint of milk a day, presumably to stop the lead absorbing the iron, although I never really understood how,.

I always reckoned that beer would have had a better effect. I took my milk as UHT Long life. It made delicious custard.

Eric Shaw, March 2014



**Figure 8 The Red House.  
[image NH]**

## **The Red House – Worth another visit?**

The Red House in Bexleyheath that was William Morris's home for some five years is now owned by the National Trust. Last year they carried out conservation work partly funded by the Wolfson Foundation. During this work they made some exciting discoveries, including a brightly coloured ceiling hidden behind 150 years of grime and a Pre-Raphaelite painting in Morris's upstairs bedroom. The Red House is closed Monday and Tuesday but open the rest of the week. Tours are held every half hour. For more information just put The Red House into your search engine or telephone 020 8304 9878 Or should we arrange a new group visit for members and volunteers?

Meg Thomas



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.

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 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)