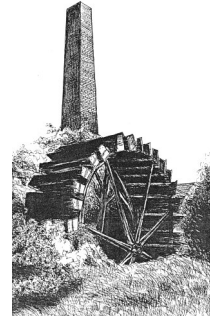


WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



BULLETIN



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WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

PRESIDENT

Harry Galley

TRUSTEES

Chair: Fr David Pennells,
Nicholas Hart, John Hawks
and John Harding.

OPERATIONS TEAM

Alison Cousins, Eric Shaw,
John Sheridan, Roger Steele,
and Michael Taylor.

Editorial

As the Operations Team report demonstrates, the museum has been active this winter despite a shortage of volunteers. We reached out to over 150 members of the public at the Honeywood House workshop, and to some 100 children on school visits to the museum. Do let us know if you are interested in helping out at such future events!

This edition contains articles about the Lower Mill at Wandsworth and the former British Rototherm works at Colliers Wood. Again, do let us know if you have any reactions to these articles. Incidentally, if you are interested in British Rototherm, you might like to look at Merton Historical Society Bulletin No. 190, published in June 2014 and freely available to view on their website (mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk/)

Cover Picture:

We have acquired this antique gouache painting of the mouth of the Wandle by C. Nodder. The artist was mostly active in the 1920s.

Photos:

Page 2: (1) Mick Taylor, (2) and (3) John Sheridan.

Page 3: National Library of Scotland.

Page 4: WIM Flickr archive.

Page 6: Auriel Glanville.

Page 7: (1) Merton Historical Society, (2) British Rototherm Ltd.

Page 8: John Sheridan; group photo by Mick Taylor.

Page 9: Mick Taylor.

Operations Team Report

We finished 2023 with a sudden rush of school visits. Firstly two with special needs pupils, from Greenholm School (Sutton) and Cricket Green (Mitcham) whose groups were small and the staff/pupil ratio was high. Then at the end of term 48 pupils came from Liberty School and then after we had closed for Christmas, Hatfeild School brought 46 children.

Cricket Green School have also asked us to take on a couple of sixth form students for work experience initially only for a month's trial as we shall have to monitor their abilities and their impact on our own work schedule very carefully. They have now had an introduction to all the basic tasks and are due to do their first full day on February 28th.

Over Christmas our front of house volunteer Chris Tanner was unwell and is now in residential accommodation in Tennyson Grange in Westmead Road, Sutton where he would welcome any visitors, but still hopes to pop in to the museum one day.

Early in the New Year Mick Taylor contracted an infection and further complications following a successful routine operation and was unable to attend the museum for a short while but at the moment is recovering well.

With that shortage of staff, plans to reorganise the displays slipped a little but visitors have been steady and unfazed by an empty fish tank.

On Valentine's Day a small group came from the Inland Waterways Association (South London Branch) and presented us with a generous cheque for £200.

Roger Steele once more organised our annual New Year lunch at the Toby Carvery in Park Place on January 10th and despite complaints at the lack of decent beer and slightly disappointing desserts we all enjoyed getting together, especially as we were joined this year by a few new (to the lunch event) faces.

On February 20th a mixed group of Operations Team members, one Trustee, 2 volunteers and a member of the museum paid a visit to All Saints' Church on the edge of Putney Common where we were treated to an excellent tour by Liz Hamilton. The church has a plethora of wonderful stained glass windows manufactured by Morris & Co. With the low winter sun coming in at just the right angle the colours were spectacular. See page 8 below for more on All Saints.

The “Offsite Archival Store” in Cannon Hill Lane is due to be cleared by the end of February at the behest of its owner. Most of the contents will reside temporarily in the Chapter House awaiting evaluation and removal to other interested organisations as well as the museum when space is available.

Alison Cousins

Rutter’s Mitcham Shag



This old metal advertisement was spotted in The Original Mancave barber shop on Upper Richmond Road, Putney. The Rutter family took over Ravensbury Mill in 1805. At that time the mill ground tobacco for both snuff and smoking. Snuff declined in popularity in the 19th century, when smoking was boosted by the introduction of the cigarette. By the 1890s Rutters were making cigarettes as well as snuff and pipe tobacco. Snuff production stopped in 1915. The award-winning Rutter’s Mitcham Shag, a pipe tobacco, was their most



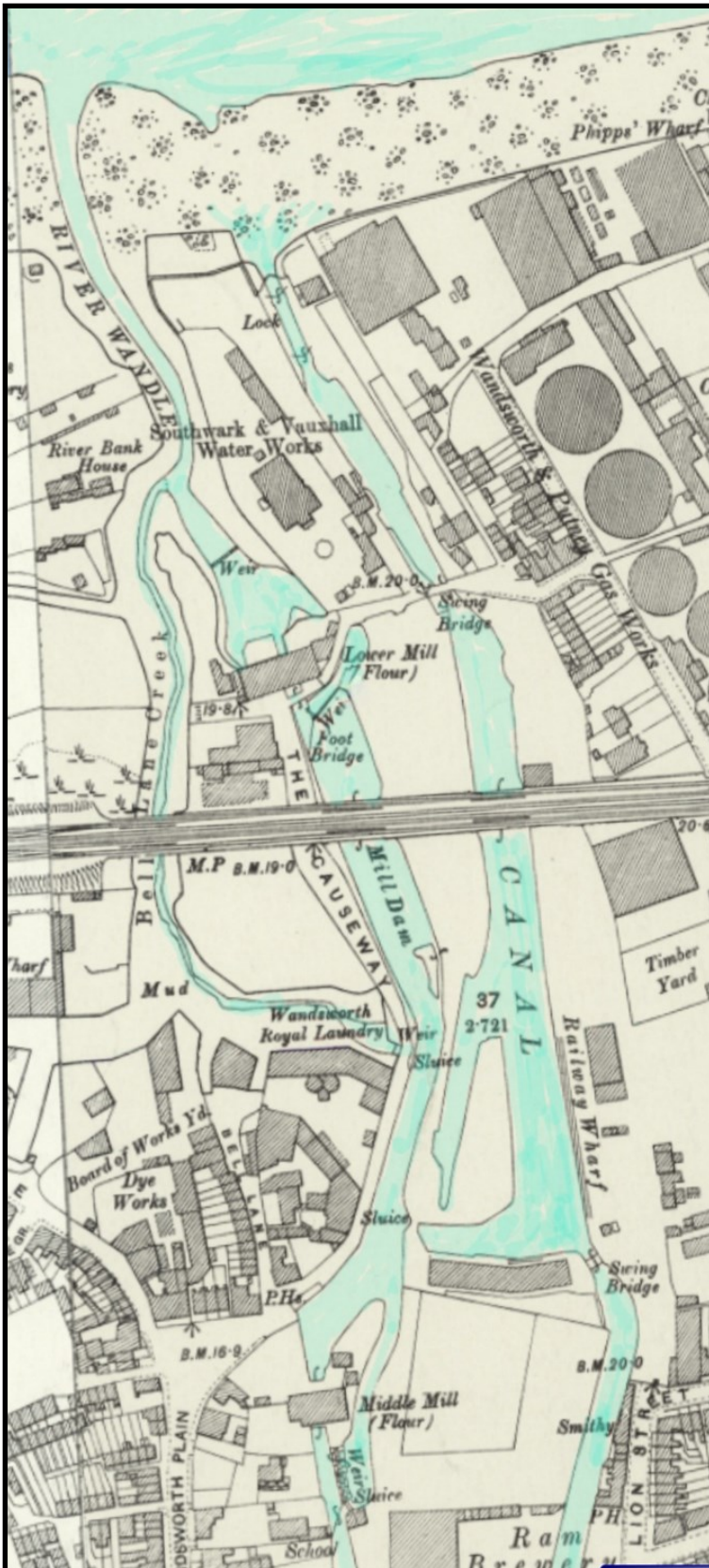
famous product. Rutters left the mill building in 1925 when Whiteley Products, sports goods manufacturers, moved in. They used water power until the 1960s and moved out in 1989. The building, now mostly converted to flats, still contains two waterwheels behind doors on the upstream side. When the building was converted in the 1990s there was an ambition to retain the part containing the waterwheels as a future home for the Wandle Industrial Museum, but there is no sign of that happening any time soon.



The sign was made in Birmingham: perhaps it predated the arrival of the local Corfield metal pressing and printing works.

John Sheridan

Lower Mill, Wandsworth: a tide mill



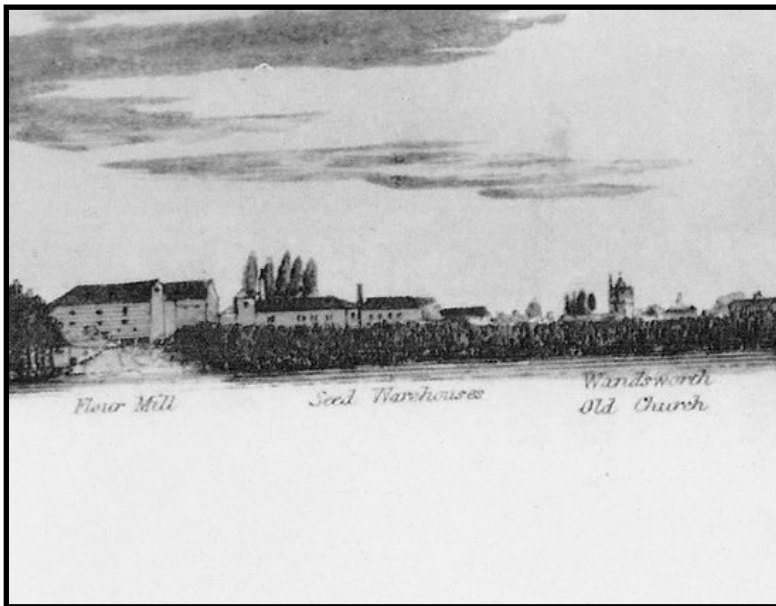
The Lower Mill, at the mouth of the Wandle in Wandsworth Town, was a tide mill for at least part of its working life. At a tide mill, water flows into the millpond as the tide rises through gates that open one way, with the flow. The gates act like valves, closing automatically at high water. The water empties from the millpond through the mill, passing through sluice gates in narrow channels to hit waterwheels at the required pressure and set the milling machinery in motion. The level of water in the millpond is augmented by the downstream flow of river water.

Once the ebb tide drops below the level of the water in the millpond, the mill can start working. A tide mill is at its most efficient when the tide is below the lowest point of the waterwheel. At other times the waterwheel is less efficient due to water resistance and churn. The wheel stops turning when the level of the water is the same in front of and behind the waterwheel.

Ordnance Survey, 1890s, by permission of the National Library of Scotland (<https://maps.nls.uk/>)

The map shows that the millpond extended as far upstream as the Middle Mill. The tidal range of the Thames at Wandsworth Bridge varies between four and six metres, so a large volume of water flowed in and out of the millpond twice daily.

According to Frederick Braithwaite, writing in 1861 in a paper for the Institution of Civil Engineers, the Lower Mill did not work for six to eight hours each day. Internet sources suggest that in general tide mills might have worked for around six hours twice a day, starting about three hours after high tide, and working hours could be prolonged by careful control of the flow and by switching waterwheels between breastshot and undershot operation as the water level in the millpond rose and fell. Historians of Three Mill Island on the River Lea, once the largest tide mills in the UK, believe that in medieval times those mills operated for 3-4 hours per tide, and that by the early 20th century better technology and improved water flow extended operation to up to 8 hours per tide.



Old drawing from across the Thames, showing the Lower Mill on the left.

Because the lunar day is 50 minutes longer than the solar day, the times of tides and hence tide mill working hours vary from day to day, and periodic night working would have been necessary at the Lower Mill.

The map gives rise to the question whether the millpond was supplemented by water from the adjacent canal when the mill was

working. The canal could have been allowed to fill up by opening the lock gates at its mouth when the tide was rising, and closing them at high tide. There appears to have been a sluice just downstream of the Middle Mill which could have been used to transfer canal water to the millpond. Flows from the canal to the millpond would have required careful management, however, when the canal was in use.

The canal and its wharf had been built to serve the Surrey Iron Railway,

which closed in 1846. After that, the canal and wharf were used by the gasworks at the mouth of the Wandle for coal deliveries, and Young's brewery had its own wharf at the end of the canal for deliveries of coal and grain. Young's would also have shipped beer across the Thames via the canal. From 1860 McMurray's Royal Paper Mills used the canal and wharf for deliveries of esparto grass and probably for despatching reels of paper across the Thames.

Nonetheless the canal would not have been in constant use, and it was probably seen as desirable to use the tide to change the water in the canal from time to time. This could have been done in a controlled way by transferring water to the millpond rather than simply opening the canal lock gates at ebb tide.

Another sluice and a weir connected the millpond to Bell Lane Creek. This appears to have been in the same position as the present sluice and weir at the head of Bell Lane Creek. Its purpose might have been to ensure that the millpond did not overflow at times when the Wandle was very full.

In 1889 the mill had three waterwheels generating 60 horsepower and a steam engine generating 25 horsepower, together driving 12 pairs of millstones. By the 1890s, though, the mill was used only for cleaning wheat prior to grinding at the Upper Mill. By 1900 the Lower Mill had been demolished. It is not clear whether the decline of the mill had anything to do with failures of water management at the mouth of the Wandle. It is more likely that the Lower Mill was rendered redundant by the fact that the proprietor of both mills had modernised the Upper Mill by installing roller milling equipment.

Peter McGow's notes on the WIM website (<https://www.wandle.org/mills/millsindex.html>) suggest that the Lower Mill was not always a tide mill. McGow cites instances in the 18th and early 19th centuries when millers complained about the lack of water flowing downstream to work the mill. In fact, Braithwaite's paper contains the only reference to the mill's having been a tide mill. Braithwaite is, however, an impeccable source. The absence of other references to the mill as a tide mill seems odd, but presumably the fact was simply taken for granted. It was clearly sensible for the mill to use the source of power to which it had exclusive access rather than to be at the mercy of every other upstream user of water power.

John Sheridan

Honeywood House workshop



On Saturday January 27th the Operations Team held an open workshop in a lovely light and spacious (if a little chilly) room at the rear of Honeywood House museum in Carshalton, with a display relating to William Kilburn, the textile printer whose mill was near Wallington Bridge. We also had our silk printing film running on a loop and offered for free the chance for visitors to do one of our small block prints.



On the previous Saturday The Mulberry Dyer from Yorkshire (a wonderful Fred Dibnah lookalike!!) had done a demonstration of the sources, techniques and processes of natural dyeing, so our session followed on well from that.

Our event had been well advertised so a total of 105 adults and 49 children visited us with most also doing a block print. Honeywood staff were most welcoming and helpful but our only regret was that we were too busy to partake of the delicious cakes that their café offered.

Gracie Keogh, 5

British Rototherm



Can you make out the words “Rototherm Thermometers” on the parapet of the brick-built factory on the right in the photo above (which was



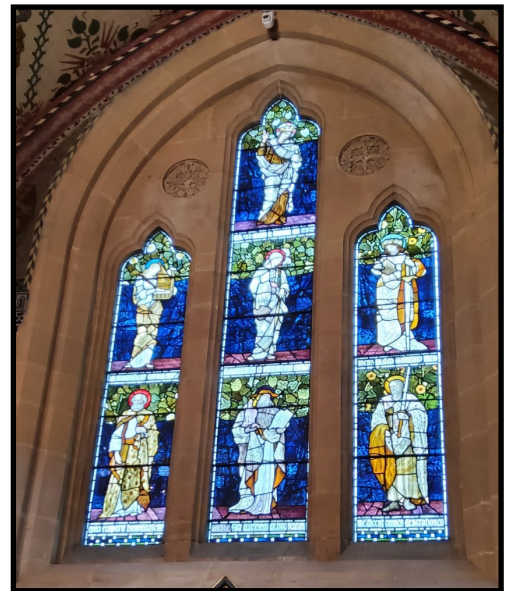
taken in 1968 by local historian Eric Montague)? British Rototherm, next door to the New Merton Board Mills at Colliers Wood, made bimetallic thermometers. The firm was located here between 1929 and 1969, when they moved to South Wales. They don't have an archive, but they kindly sent us the photo on the left of their stand at a trade fair, date and location unknown, exhibiting a variety of dial thermometers for industrial and domestic use. Presumably the thermometer on top of the stand was showing degrees Fahrenheit, not Celsius!

John Sheridan

All Saints Church, Putney

All Saints Church, Putney Common, was designed by G E Street and consecrated in 1874. Its most notable feature is its stained glass windows. Most of the figures depicted in the windows were designed in outline by Edward Burne-Jones, although a few were designed by William Morris himself. Morris undertook stained glass production at his Merton Abbey works. He would have devised the overall scheme of a window, drawing on medieval influences, and he would have designed the background behind the figures, including the repeating patterns at which he excelled. His craftsmen would have scaled up the cartoon designs to actual size using a grid, and would have cut, painted and leaded the pieces of glass to create the finished product. Their paintwork would have included inserting some of their own designs to complete the background.

Morris & Co were successful and prolific stained glass window makers. The production method suited Morris' arts and crafts philosophy, as distinct from the mass production and industrialisation that he hated.



The WIM party with Liz Hamilton (centre).

John Sheridan



Inland Waterways Association representatives presenting a cheque to Wandle Industrial Museum Operations Team members.



Dates for the Diary

Saturday 9 March: “Sport Along the Wandle” talk for Merton Historical Society by Mick Taylor, 2.30pm, St James’s Church, Martin Way, Morden. Guests welcome.

Friday 19 April: Circular walk led by John Sheridan, 11am, from Colliers Wood station, taking in Wandle Park, Connolly’s leather works, Morris & Co and Liberty’s at Merton Abbey Mills.

Monday 20 May: “The Wandle and its Water” Wandsworth Heritage Festival* talk by Mick Taylor, 6.30pm, Earlsfield Library, Magdalen Rd, SW18. Booking required, email Heritage@gll.org.

Tuesday 21 May: River Summit Festival, Morden Hall. The museum will play an active role. Booking and more information at <https://www.theriversummit.com/>

Thursday 23 May: Earlsfield to mouth of Wandle industrial heritage walk for Wandsworth Heritage Festival, led by John Sheridan, 11am, booking required, email John.sheridan08@gmail.com.

WIM volunteer Melanie Nunzet has advertised a series of walks. See <https://www.suttonwandleramblers.org.uk/> for more information.

*The Wandsworth Heritage Festival runs from Saturday 18 May to Sunday 9 June. The official programme has not yet been published.



Accreditation Mentor: Emma Harper Charles Dickens Museum Service.
Museum Advisor: Yvette Shepherd, Museum of London (Docklands).

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 is closed Bank Holiday weekends)

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

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Free Admission. Donations welcome.

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 office@wandle.org

You can find us on:

