

NEWSLETTER NO. 9 - WINTER - 1995

THE WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

**The Vestry Hall Annexe – London Road – Mitcham –
Surrey CR4 3UD – Telephone: 081-648 0127**



Ravensbury Mills
(Rutters) Mitcham.
Illustration by Peter Harris

**Museum open every Wednesday 1 – 4pm
and first Sunday of each month 2 – 5pm**

The museum also welcomes schools and groups by appointment

ADMISSION: ADULTS 20p, CHILDREN & SENIOR CITIZENS: 10p

NEW PUBLICATION BY W.I.M. MEMBER ERIC MONTAGUE

**The Ravensbury Mills by E.N. Montague
for the Merton Historical Society**

This is a concise and well-documented history from the first mention of a mill at Ravensbury in the 1680's to the present day.

Originally, one mill was situated on the Mitcham bank of the river, a second mill on the Morden bank was added later.

In 1790 a "Water Snuff Mill" was insured for fire by Martin Pearkes, a tobacconist of London and fifteen years later the Rutter family of Mitcham and Morden took over the mills. There is an interesting account of the snuff industry which had connections with the physic gardens in Mitcham and Rutter's Mitcham Shag was a well known tobacco.

The last occupiers were Whitelys Products Ltd., manufacturers of rubber goods for sports equipment, and items as varied as cords for babies' prams and luggage straps.

The booklet has illustrations including a map of 1895 and all sources of information are noted in detail. It will be on sale in the Museum Shop price 75p

Marguerite Lee-Delisle

A Request for Helpers URGENTLY needed to help man our stall at The National Trust 3 Day Fair in Morden Hall Park on, Saturday, Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday, May 6th, 7th and 8th from 10.00 a.m. until 6.00 p.m. We especially need helpers on Bank Holiday Monday, but help would be appreciated on any of the three days. Please telephone the Museum 081 648 0127 and then a rota can be arranged. Helpers get free admission to the Fair. This event usually raises over £100 for Museum funds and with our forthcoming move to Ravensbury Mill it is important we get plenty of publicity. Help is also needed for our stall at Mitcham Carnival on Saturday, May 13th from 1.00 p.m. until 5.00 p.m. Museum staff will be on holiday that day so we need help transporting goods to the field and back. Please telephone the Museum if you can help in any way at this event.



RAVENSBURY MILL PROGRESS REPORT FEB. 1995

You will have seen that the two residential blocks either side of the Mill Pond are up and roofed with interior works now going on. Fairclough Homes are now turning their attention to the Mill building itself and to the rebuilding of the wing which is to house part of the Wandle Industrial Museum.

On the cold wet Saturday morning of December 3rd 1994, a number of the Museums' members inspected the Mill. By this time the Mill Pond had been blocked off and, under the guidance of our Engineering Adviser, Norman Fairey and his colleague from Abbey Mills, the pond was drained to inspect the three sluices under the two water wheels. It appears that the sluices being steel are in good order and only one of them needs repair. The water wheels themselves also appear to be in good order, although many of the metal paddles are rusted through and will have to be replaced. The two rubbish collectors built into the Mill Pond walls are badly damaged and will either need major repairs or replacing.

The Fairclough Homes site manager, Fred Stutchbury, asked us to look at the old goods lift in the Mill building, as it had to be removed to make way for the flats. Fred had to dismantle it quickly and offered it to the Museum if we could dismantle it and store it. Norman and his mate were thrilled with this challenge it being quite a hefty piece of machinery (of as yet unknown date but undoubtedly part of the historic fabric of the Mill). Norman and his mate returned during the following week with block and tackle and cutting tools and succeeded in dismantling it and storing on part of the site of the Museum.

Peter Harris, also returned to collect the old "Whitelys" signs. Both items of historic interest will form part of the Museum's planned display to illustrate the history of the Ravensbury Mill. Norman, in hiring the gear to dismantle the goods lift, incurred costs which we are requesting Fairclough Homes to cover.

Norman and his mate are now investigating the costs of repairing the one sluice gate mechanism and the restoration of the rubbish collectors. Again, we will be requesting Fairclough Homes to contribute to these repairs as both parties are beneficiaries.

A site meeting takes place on Thursday, 2nd February to discuss further the rebuilding and fitting out of the Museum. Fairclough's are now moving to this part of the site and hopefully after this meeting, some time scale for the handing over of the Museum will become known.

John Foley
28.01.1995



ONE DAY ON THE WANDLE

Making the video, "One Day on the Wandle" took six months. This may seem quite a long time for a one day cinema verite type film but there was no precedent for this type of activity and quite a bit of research and actual leg work had to be done.

At the local library a book called "The Lost Rivers of London" informed me that I had found the great survivor, The River Wandle. There wasn't another above ground river between the Wandle and London. Luckily I stumbled into the Earlsfield Library and found one of the few remaining copies of the 1988 printing of "The Wandle Trail". We were off, dragging my sometimes reluctant wife and new-born baby we walked the trail in stages over a series of weekends early in 1994. We discovered we had been married by the Wandle in Morden Hall Park. We found wildlife, old mills, an abandoned sewer farm, housing and industrial estates, and old manor houses. In short the wonderful mixed bag of past and present uses one sees along the Wandle. All the while on these walks I was scouting the river for the film trip.

I went looking for a group to join to sponsor the filming, also having the agenda of getting involved with my new local community. In the library I found the Bedside Christmas edition of "The Wandsworth Society Newsletter". There was an article about the Wandle Delta and the suggestion for a meeting of people who would be interested in discussing this area. I responded and found the just forming Wandle Delta Network and the well established Wandsworth Society supportive and willing to help.

With the guidance of Sheila Allen, Chairman of the Wandsworth Society, we contacted many people and organisations to gain support and advice on how we might best film the river. Wildlife supporters expressed concern and offered advice on how to avoid disturbing wildlife. There was concern that hordes of destructive Vikings in canoes would regularly attack the Wandle so we agreed that the video would not be about canoeing but would be a pure landscape film featuring only shots of the river.

A practice run was taken in June to see if it would be possible to make it down the river with a camera. At Carshalton Ponds we met for the first time Sally and Chubbly, expert canoeists and members of the Battersea Canoe Club, who had agreed to help on the trip. Carshalton Ponds was chosen as a starting point because of its beauty and the fact that the river ran continuously from the ponds. In the middle of June the site immediately down stream from The Grove was still in heavy construction being converted from a BP chemical factory site to a housing estate and the river still ran through the factory foundations and looked unnavigable so we set off at the downstream end of Beddington Park.

Private gardens of houses line both banks of the river from our starting point down to the confluence with the Carshalton Branch, so this section is rarely seen. Water cress grew in abundance in the river and surprisingly almost every garden had some sort of boat. We had to portage around the underground section at the confluence, but the water level was high and we paddled happily along until reaching the mills just above Goat Green.

In Ravensbury Park there is an extremely low bridge, we were delighted to find that even this one could be canoed under by pushing the boat down a little and pulling your way under. After Ravensbury Park, at the request of the Warden, we walked through the Morden Hall Park. Rejoining the stream by the railway bridge at the north end we continued up to Merton Abbey Mills, where we stopped for lunch.

From Merton Abbey Mills, the river changes dramatically. Up to this point the river had been mostly parks with water levels maintained by a series of weirs that lower during floods. From this point down the channels has been permanently deepened and either concrete or sheet pile channel put in to contain the river. The weirs that exist are angled making it possible to slide down them in almost any form of boat. The Wandle Trail also doesn't see as much of this section of the river so our tension level was still quite high as we didn't really know what to expect.

The Arndale Centre loomed ahead and we could see two rectangular black holes. These maws so worry local residents that they have asked to have them grated (of course as debris collected it would make a dam and flood the city centre, so they can't be installed). Then we were inside and it was black. Sally had brought a head lamp but it only seemed to punctuate the darkness without lighting the way ahead. After twenty minutes the gentle current pushed us under Wandsworth High Street into the light of day. From here it was a short trip to our destination in the Wandle Delta. We climbed out, went into the Crane Pub, washed up and had a beer.

17th July 1994, filming day came and everything seemed in order, the trip would be routine with the main order of the day being not to drop the several thousand pound video camera into the water and ruin it. We set off from Carshalton Ponds and immediately ran into low water. The new stream bed being built below The Grove wasn't finished as scheduled and we had to walk the stretch. Until we reached the Beddington inflow the water only floated the boats about half the time. Filming had to take place on foot for the shallow sections. Members of the Society waited for us at bridges to cheer us on as we made our way down stream. The trip took place just like our practice run from Goat Green onwards. There was a stop for tea at Merton Abbey Mills and a lovely party in the Delta at the end.

C. MacCraiger



**MEMBERS
EVENTS
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THE WANDLE TRAIL IN 1994

Our well attended (65 people) annual walk along the Wandle Trail on 28 December (one of the walks in the joint Ramblers' Association/National Trust week of Christmas walks) provided an opportunity to note the changes that have taken place during the year.

We walked "downstream" this time, starting from East Croydon station, to which the route is to be extended, following the incorporation of this extension into the London Borough of Croydon's Unitary Development Plan. There is still no Wandle Trail sign in place at current starting point, Waddon Ponds (Croydon Council have agreed to put one there).

In the London Borough of Sutton, Beddington Lane is one of the most difficult roads to cross on the whole route, and it proved necessary to don a fluorescent yellow bib to marshal our large party across. The new flood relief pond at the east end of Beddington Park provides an excellent view across to Carew Manor. At the west end, a short wheelchair-accessible circular route using part of the Trail has been opened.

A recent change to the route at Carshalton now takes the route beside a side stream of the Wandle with two ponds, away from the main road, and leads into The Grove across Westfield Canal. The crossing of Manor Road North can be difficult but at least a traffic island provides some shelter.

Upper Mill at Carshalton tells a tragic story: hardly had its restoration been completed earlier in the year, when it was burned down by vandals; its charred roof now rises forlornly above hoardings. Fortunately the waterwheel was spared. The BP Chemicals site nearby has now been demolished, and awaits a new section of riverside path. The Mullards factory at Hackbridge has also been demolished, and we hope to get a new footbridge here to open up a further stretch of riverside.

In the London Borough of Merton, more signs and information boards have been installed, the path beside Watermeads has been resurfaced, and a whole new section of riverside path (about three-quarters of a mile) north of Plough Lane has been opened. However, this does make the crossing of Plough Lane extremely difficult (yellow bib again). Another busy road (London Road, Morden) now has a traffic island for shelter, but a zebra crossing is really needed here. The Wandle Meadow Nature Park, a former sewage works, through which the route passes, has been opened. There is now a short section of Wandle Trail on the east bank opposite Watermeads, ending at a small nature reserve, but as it is currently virtually a dead end as far as Wandle Trail walkers are concerned, is unlikely to be used much until a proposed bridge at Bennetts Hole is in place.

In the London Borough of Wandsworth, an attractive new path leading into King George's Park can be used by Wandle Trail walkers, though it is rather off line, and the newly regraded riverbanks and realigned path here are a vast improvement. Unfortunately, there has been little progress on the two most frustratingly inaccessible sections along the whole route here: north of Trewint Street Bridge, and at Feathers Wharf (where the Wandle Trail should link with the Thames Path) - lack of funds is the reason given.

Colin Saunders
Co-ordinator, Wandle Trail Working Party
1 January 1995

SINGLE REGENERATION BUDGET GRANT FOR MERTON

It has recently been announced that Merton Council has been successful in its bid to the D.O.E. with a £3.7M, three year Single Regeneration Budget Grant for the Wandle corridor.

This is a tremendous achievement for Merton Council in the face of very strong competition for the bids. Neighbours, Wandsworth and Sutton Council were also successful with their Wandle Corridor Grants which will enable the three Boroughs to work together to promote economic growth by up-grading and rationalising the existing industrial areas in the corridor.

Merton Council recognises the importance and potential environmental and leisure purposes and we have been working closely with Merton Council for the restoration and the rehabilitation of Ravensbury Mill as a future Museum Hall for the Wandle Industrial Museum. To these ends Ravensbury Mill in Mitcham which is in an area of need in the Borough, is ideally located to benefit from this grant and we have identified a scope of works which is outside the Section 106 obligations of the developer, Fairclough Homes, and we are working with Merton Council to fund these works such as the full repair of the two magnificent water wheels and associated mechanisms as part of the Wandle Industrial Museum at Ravensbury Mill.

Ray Leyden
8.2.95

MEMBERS EVENTS - PAST AND FUTURE

Last Event On Saturday, 26th November 1994, seven members and friends met outside the Savacentre to walk round the site of Nelson's Estate. Passing various buildings and roads named after Lord Nelson, the walk progressed past the Nelson Gardens and Nelson Hospital and finished at St. Marys Church, Merton Park, where we saw Nelson's hatchment and sat on Nelson's Pew. We then returned to the Savacentre for a welcome cup of tea.

Next Event On **Thursday, 23rd March** there will be a talk and presentation of extracts from the video "One Day on the Wandle" by Craig MacCraiger - see Centre Pages - at the Vestry Hall, Mitcham at 7.30 p.m. We hope to see you there. This should be a very interesting evening.

Future Event On **Friday, 2nd June.** Eric Montague, well known, local historian and W.I.M. Member will lead a walk round Ravensbury Park and give us the history of the Park and of course Ravensbury Mill. Meet at 7.15 p.m. outside the gates in Wandle Road. Walk starts at 7.30 p.m.

Peter Harris, Trustee and W.I.M. Member, will be presenting this year's Old Mitcham Lecture based on the photographic collection of Tom Francis. This Lecture is on March 9th at Mitcham Library at 8.00 p.m. in the Library Hall.

MERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THURSDAY 16th MARCH at 7.30 p.m.

at Mitcham Parish Church

Mitcham Parish Church & People 1750-1900

A talk by Eric Montague

A collection will be taken in aid of the Restoration Fund.

Further information from Hon. Secretary - Mrs S Harris - 540 6656

**William Morris
Society**

Kelmscott House
26 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, London W6 9TA
Telephone : 081-741 3735

SATURDAY 11th MARCH, 2.30 p.m.

Pugin and Morris

An illustrated talk by John Purkis. Morris (and Ruskin) were Pugin's heirs in theory and practice, yet they both repudiated him and all his works. The 1994 Pugin exhibition - "A Gothic Passion" - at the Victoria and Albert Museum has shown us so many parallels to Morris's life and work that the resemblances between the two need to be freshly evaluated. John Purkis is an Open University Tutor, currently for the "Homer" course. He was first winner of the Peter Floud Memorial Prize 1961 for his essay: "The Icelandic Jaunt" He has written books on Wordsworth, George Eliot, Yeats and Romantic Imagery. At Kelmscott House.

Tickets £2.50 from the Society

SUNDAY 26th MARCH 3.p.m.

WILLIAM MORRIS BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

A social afternoon, entertainment, refreshment and commemorative cake, for members and friends. At Kelmscott House, 26 Upper Mall, W.6.

Tickets £5 from Society