

NEWSLETTER NO. 12 • AUTUMN • 1995

THE WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

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

WILLIAM MORRIS AND THE MERTON ABBEY WORKSHOPS - SEE CENTRE SPREAD



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

ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION AND AGENDA 21

In 1992, an earth summit was held in Rio de Janeiro to look at the way in which the world environment could be protected. From this meeting came a move to invite local communities to promote and work towards sustainable development. This phrase calls upon people in their own local and regional areas to preserve the environment in such a way that whilst the needs of the present generation are met the needs of those to follow are not compromised by the destruction of that environment.

As with most international conferences, it all went quiet when the delegates left for home - except for complaints that all those high-minded speeches had not altered anyone's behaviour, which is pretty much true.

However, here in the UK, things were stirring. Six local authorities were asked to take part in a pilot scheme to look at producing a set of local indicators which could help the borough assess whether we were making any progress towards sustainable development. A group of Merton residents, workers and activists in the field of the environment was set up by the Council to work through mid 94 to early 95 and that group produced the report "Indicators for a Sustainable Future" in January '95.

The work of the group was then subsumed by the Merton A.I.M Environmental Concerns Committee and continues to monitor what is going on. The monitoring looks at water / pollution / nature / basic needs / work / health / transport / safety / education / community' participation / culture and seeks all the time to encourage people to meet local needs locally in a way that protects all these areas of concern for those to come in the 21st century, which is, of course, why the whole enterprise is called Agenda 21.

At least three members of Wandle Industrial Museum are involved in the Merton A.I.M and it's good to see the Museum not just helping to preserve our industrial heritage but also working to ensure a future for succeeding generations so that they can benefit from the stories and artefacts of the past which we treasure so much. Do contact me on 0181 542 1794 if you want to know more.

Andrew Wakefield



· A smoggy day in London Town - viewed from Epsom Golf Course. ·

THE WHITELY ARCHIVES

In June, Sheila and Peter Harris and I went up to Daventry in Northamptonshire to keep our appointment with Mr. I. Green, Managing Director of Whitely Products Ltd., former occupants of Ravensbury Mill. We had asked to be allowed to see their archives, in order to help us to set up a display on Ravensbury Mill.

Mr. Green produced several boxes of old papers and worked his way through them, showing us anything of interest. He gave us a substantial pile of material which he said we could keep, and arranged for photocopies of several other photos and documents. Altogether he spent about two and a half hours with us, and said that he had had an interesting morning.

Among these archives are several brochures and advertisements for their sports and fitness products. One brochure contains photos of 'Ravensbury Lil', a secretary who was persuaded to model the equipment.

There are several documents from the River Wandle Protection Association, mostly reports and minutes of meetings, and among the names of the committee is that of Colonel Bidder.

One of the most interesting items is a small expenses book dated 1851, which belonged to a Rutter's salesman. Rutter was the previous tenant of the mill and produced snuff.

Mr. Green also gave us some samples of rubber cords of varying thicknesses and one of their 'Flexten' skipping ropes.

These archives are in the process of being catalogued and will help greatly to provide information for an exhibition.

Marguerite Lee-Delisle



William Morris and the Merton Abbey Workshops

Next year marks the centenary of the death of William Morris, who died in October 1896 at Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, at the age of 62.

The Museum's interest in Morris derives from the fact that in 1881 he moved his craft workshops from Queen Square, in central London, to a seven acre site at Merton Abbey. For some time he had been looking for a new location for Morris & Co. in order to expand his business, and after considering locations in the Cotswolds and at Crayford in Kent, finally decided that Merton was best suited to his purpose. A print-works had previously existed there, and the buildings, improved and renovated, became ideally suited to the purpose of making woven textiles, carpets, tapestries, stained glass windows, printed chintz and silks.

The main group of buildings was situated in a triangular area enclosed by Merton High Street, Mill Road and the River Wandle, although the site also extended across the Wandle roughly over the area now occupied by Savacentre. The place already had significant historical associations, for here once stood one of the most influential priories in England - Merton Priory, founded in 1117 by the Augustinian Order, and very much an ecclesiastical power in the land. By the time Morris moved into the area the Priory had long been demolished, but the religious inheritance was perhaps unwittingly carried forward by the making of superb stained glass windows by the partnership of Morris and Edward Burne-Jones.



By John Viner

This period at Merton was one of prolific activity, and a variety of designers, including many famous artists from both the Arts and Crafts and Pre-Raphaelite movements worked there. The legacy of their unique talents is very much in evidence in the present day, and designs by Morris and his contemporaries embellish everything from stationery and biscuit tins to wallpapers and porcelain. Their availability nowadays at a reasonable price contrasts ironically, in view of Morris's commitments to socialism, with the fact that at that time the goods his Firm produced could only be afforded by the very wealthy. With the onset also of the Industrial Revolution, and the despoilation of large areas of rural England by industrial development and "dark satanic mills", his dreams of an Earthly Paradise became for most of the working population the stark reality of a Paradise Lost

After Morris died his partner John Dearle, an equally accomplished designer, became a partner and art director of the Firm. Not until 1940 did the works at Merton finally close down; by 1950 no traces remained of the workshops, and the area gradually declined into a wasteland of rubbish tips and scrap breakers yards.

In 1981 the silk printing works of Liberty & Co. a short distance upstream on the Wandle, also closed down, and a long involvement with textiles, spanning two and a half centuries from the earlier days of Huguenot silk-throwing almost to the present day, came to an end.



MUSEUM NEWS DESK

We are pleased to report that Museum Staff, Members and friends were able to take part in two fund raising and promotional events on Bank Holiday Monday, 28th August. One group participated in the Sutton Environmental Fair at Carshalton Park and another group attended The Merton Lions Fair at Morden Park. Between us over £150 was raised and we received much invaluable publicity about our move to Ravensbury Mill. Thanks to all those Volunteers who gave up their time on that day.

We are pleased to report a successful Fund Raising Day at Centre Court Shopping Centre on Saturday, 9th September. Once again £150 was raised on the sale of publications, games and the "Buy a Brick" for the new Museum Campaign. For a donation of £5 you can have your name inscribed on the walls of the Ravensbury Mill. If any Members would like to have their name included on the list please send your cheques to the Museum. So far £400 has been raised in this way.

The Annual General Meeting held at Chapel Orchard Day Centre on September 26th was a very successful evening, despite very bad weather. About twenty-five people attended and apart from the Business Meeting they were able to see a display of plans and photographs of the development of the Ravensbury Mill Museum site. After refreshments we had a very interesting and informative presentation by Tim Knight of the National Rivers Authority. A new publication "Merton and Morden A Pictorial History" was on sale and could be signed by the author Judith Goodman, local historian and Wandle Industrial Museum Member. Copies available in the Museum shop price £12.95.

MEMBERS EVENTS

PAST On Saturday 2nd September a small group of Members enjoyed a walk round the sources of the Wandle at Carshalton led by Peter Harris.

PRESENT A visit to Kelmscott House, 26 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, London home of William Morris for the last 18 years of his life, has been arranged for Saturday, 20th January 1996. We will meet at The Dove public house at 1.30 pm. We will then visit the house where we will have a short talk about Morris and see displays and visit the shop. The nearest tube station is Ravenscourt Park, which is on the District Line.

FUTURE We hope to arrange an on site visit to the refurbished Ravensbury Mill early in 1996.

Sheila Harris
13.10.95

HELPING HANDS AT THE MUSEUM

In our last Newsletter, we featured many of the volunteers who assist with various activities at the Museum. Here, to complete the list, are more who, for lack of space, we were unable to include in that issue, and to whom we are equally indebted for their help.

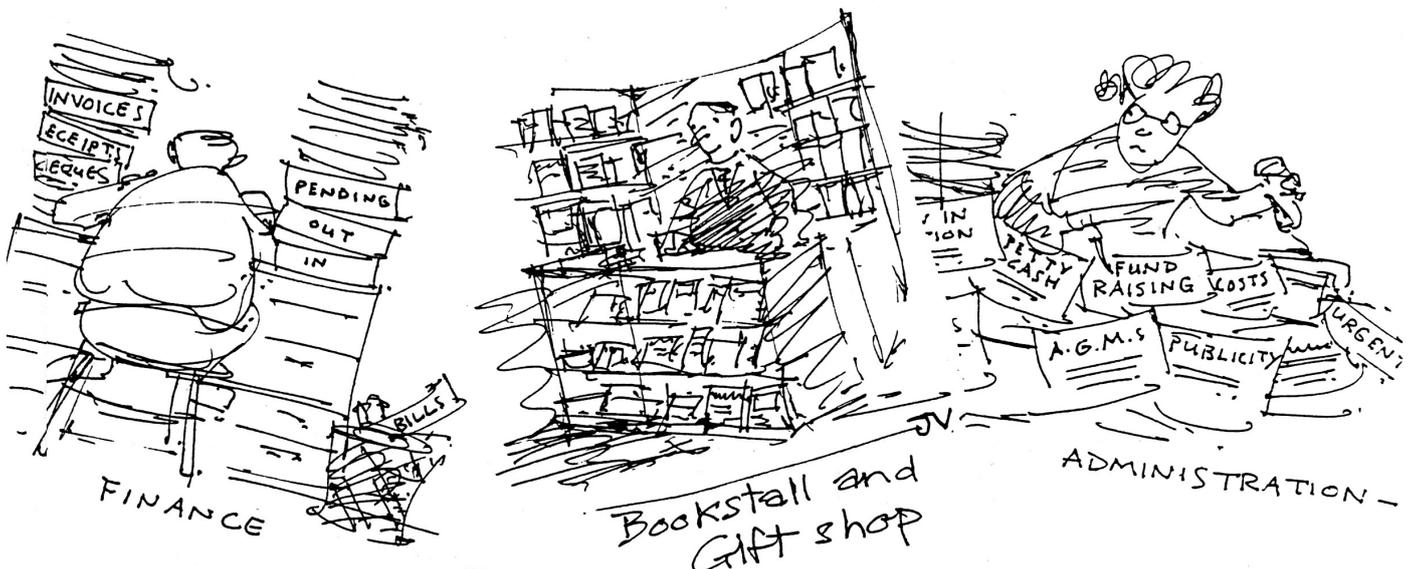
HARRY GALLEY Founder Member and instigator of the Wandle Industrial Museum, he is the senior Trustee and Chairman of the Management Committee. He is Head Teacher of Bond First School in Mitcham.

REVD. ANDREW D. WAKEFIELD, Vicar of St. Andrew, South Wimbledon and Industrial Chaplain for Merton. Chair of the Members Group Meeting, which plans events and edits the Newsletter, Member of the Management Group. A Member since 1991 when Stephen Ashcroft suggested he joined.

DEREK HUXTABLE helps manage the Museum Shop. He used to own his own shop, so the Museum Shop is a simple task to him. He is also actively involved with the Colliers Wood Community Centre.

SEAN LOVETT has recently joined us as a Volunteer Fund Raiser and has already made a very valuable contribution. Sean has a degree in Business Studies and experience in Marketing and will be an invaluable asset to us in our quest for funding to finance our move to Ravensbury Mill.

BILL VISICK has joined us in a temporary capacity to help us write a Business Plan for the Museum. He is on a Placement Scheme from "Business in the Arts" whereby people in Industry give a few hours of their time free to assist Arts Organisations with Business Advice. Bill worked in Marketing with I.B.M. and is now freelance. He will be with us for about six months.



MERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

President: Viscountess Hanworth F.S.A.

The Society grew out of the Merton & Morden Historical Society which was founded in 1951. It has always had a respected reputation for its publications on aspects of the Borough's history.

The Society also organises lectures and talks of local historical interest during the winter months and arranges visits and local historical guided walks during the summer months.

Meetings are held monthly from October until April, on Saturday afternoons during the winter months and on Friday evenings during the autumn and spring.

Our meetings are quite informal and do not pre-suppose a great knowledge of history, either local or national, so why not come along if you are interested in the history of your Borough?

Further information from: The Secretary,
Merton Historical Society,
100 Cannon Hill Lane
London SW20 6QW
0181 540 6656



William Morris Society



Saturday, 11 November, 2.30 p.m.

ARTISAN ELEMENTS IN THE MAKING OF WILLIAM MORRIS

Ray Watkinson on Charles Faulkner, George Wardle, Philip Webb – friends and associates of Morris – their artisan family background, their influence on Morris. Ray Watkinson is a distinguished Morris scholar, his most recent book is 'Ford Mador Brown and the Pre-Raphaelite Circle' (co-author Teresa Newman). At Kelmscott House

Tickets £2.50 from the Society

Saturday 2 December, 2.30 p.m.

'PERFECTLY MEDIEVAL AND PERFECTLY MODERN'

An illustrated talk by Peter Cormack on the Arts and Crafts Stained Glass of Christopher Whall and his Circle. Peter Cormack is Deputy Keeper of the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, co-author of 'English Heritage in Stained Glass', currently writing a book on the stained glass of the Arts and Crafts Movement. At Kelmscott House.

Tickets £2.50 from the Society

Saturday 9 December, 7.30 to 11 p.m.

YULETIDE PARTY

A buffet supper and seasonal entertainment. At Kelmscott House, 26 Upper Mall, W6

Tickets £6 from the Society
