



MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

Issue 84



November 2013





1The waterwheel at Merton Abbey Mills in the snow of 2010 which we are using for our Museum Christmas card this year. Some are also available for sale through the shop.

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1 Newsdesk

Visits to the Museum

'Occasional' visitor figures have been good - In July 15, August 20, September 24 and in October 34 people.

Education We had 1 group visit from Celebrating Age, and two school groups. We have sent reminders to schools that the free sessions are still available.

Talks We have provided three talks to groups and have received requests for talks in the New Year.

Volunteers There has been one new Sunday volunteer. The Volunteers lunch held on 2nd of October was well attended, and it was a special pleasure to be able to use this opportunity to celebrate Eric Shaw's 80th Birthday, and for the Museum to present him with an engraved paperweight as an

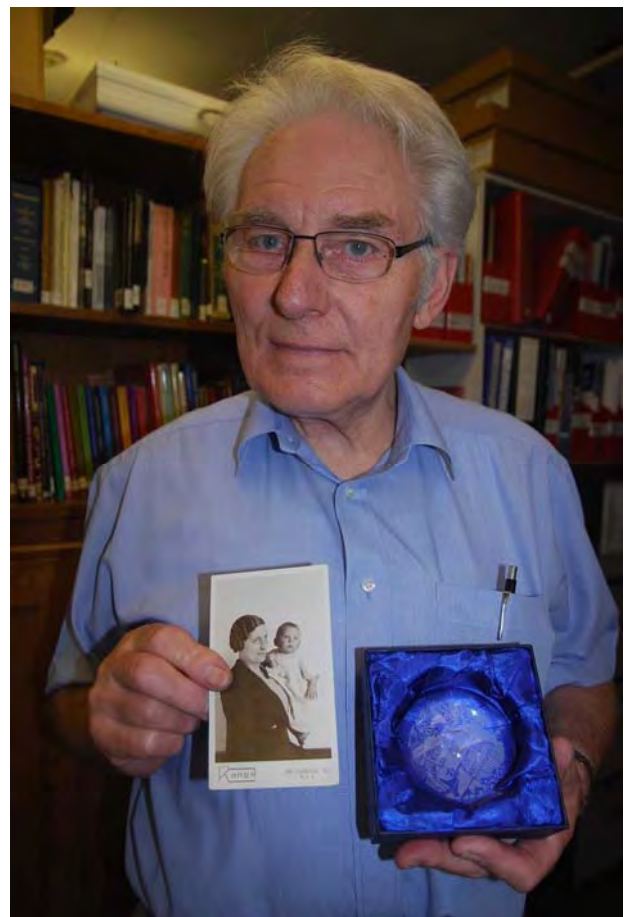


Figure 2 Eric proudly shows he engraved paperweight with Museum logo alongside a photo of himself as a baby. (photo: M Taylor)

acknowledgement of the many years he has spent at the Museum making our lives easier.

Outreach For Christmas last year the museum took part in a display of Christmas trees at the National Trust in Morden Hall Park. This helped us to promote the museum. This year, again, we have been invited to have a decorated Christmas tree at the Morden Hall Community Tree festival from 1st to 18th December. As the tree we used last year was much smaller than the others on display we asked volunteers if we could borrow a larger one and now have a six feet tree that will be decorated on 1st December so you will be able to see our entry in the Stable block from early December onwards.

AGM A successful meeting was held in October – see Report below under Museum News.

Subscriptions 2014: A subscription notice is included with the Newsletter.

Dates for your diary: Our New Year's lunch for Members and Volunteers is on January 9th at Park Place. Any one interested should contact the Museum, or fill in and return the invite form printed on the inside back cover of this Newsletter (to be received by December 18th to ensure we can book the right number of places).

A Merry Christmas to all our members, volunteers and readers.



Figure 3 Sheila Harris, with her engraved vase at the AGM (photo: M Taylor)

2. Archivists Update

We are looking forward to seeing the results of the digitisation of the photographs selected by Merton's heritage groups, including us, for the Merton Memories project in early December.

We are hoping that we can identify and add further information to some of our

own photos as a result. The new version of the Wandle Trail map needs more input as recent news articles regarding Poulter Park and Weir Road indicate possible changes. Persistent wet weather in early November meant that the river in Wandle Park Croydon defined itself as more than a dribble and can now be mapped exactly as it was in the A-Z Atlas and Guide to London and Suburbs of 1938.



Figure 4 The Wandle, above ground in Wandle Park (photo: P Cousins)

3. Other Museum News

Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM was again held in Raynes Park Library. The meeting was well attended with many familiar faces and some new faces. The general business of the AGM was dealt with in its usual brisk manner.

The next piece of business was to present Sheila Harris with a certificate recording her long service as Administrator to the museum, followed by the gift of a rose bowl engraved with the museum's logo.

Then came the usual pause for refreshments, beautifully prepared by Mary Hart, during this interval raffle tickets were sold. This year the raffle raised £90, so "thank you" to all the people who gave so generously.

Our guest speaker this year was Bob Steel, the author of the new book about the Wandle: The Wandle Companion.

He gave a very interesting talk on the source of the river and how the geology of the area shaped the river and produced the water qualities so necessary for the development of the silk printing industries.

We thank Bob Steel for his talk and all the people who attended this AGM as we celebrate our thirtieth year.

Meg Thomas



Figure 5 Sheila Harris with the Deputy Mayor and Mrs Sargent and our Chair at the AGM with her certificate. (photo: M Taylor)



Figure 6 Bob Steele with one of his slides (photo: M Taylor)

Christmas at Merton Abbey Mills

We hear from our friends in the Make Colliers Wood Happy team that there will be a Christmas version of Kidsfest at Merton Abbey Mills on 22nd December. The Colliers Wood chorus will be singing on the bandstand,

and we are told there will be many activities for children. Sounds like it is well worth a visit on the day. Full details have yet to be published, but should be available on their website soon at www.mertonabbeymills.org.uk

While on the subject of the Mills, visitors to the Wheelhouse may have noticed that wheel has not been working recently. Steve Llewellyn explains that the wooden spokes which hold the planks of the paddles in place had rotted too far for comfort, with a risk that a break during operation would have caused severe damage. He and Norman have now taken delivery of a load of 'greenheart' wood staves, cut to size, and will be replacing all the spokes over the next week or so, and the wheel should be turning by Christmas. The image here shows how the staves support the paddles.



Figure 7 The mill wheel at Merton Abbey (photo: Ed)

4 Triumph and Tragedy

Two weeks ago a night which should have been a triumph for Merton generally and two of its most active citizens in particular turned overnight into something much different.

At the Compact Awards that night, Merton was shortlisted for every one of the 6 awards, something no one else achieved, and ended by winning one of them, plus a special Chairman's award for overall excellence (presumably to avoid Merton sweeping the board by winning all of the individual categories!).



Figure 8 Our Chair, Andrew Wakefield, with his award. (photo: courtesy Compact Voice)

The first of these was a Leadership award, won by our Chair Andrew Wakefield, for his enormous contributions across an array of organisations, both local and regional and in particular for the working relationship he has forged between Merton Chamber of Commerce, which he chairs, and MVSC, whose chief executive, Chris Frost, is also regarded as one of the leading champions of the Compact.

Then Chris herself went up to receive the chair's special award on behalf of MVSC, which she had helped found and has led ever since.

For more details of these awards and how they were won, see:

www.compactvoice.org/2013awards

Who can believe that one evening she was fine and winning the Chair's Special Award and then the very next morning she was gone. It was reported that she had passed away in her sleep.

Ray Leyden, long-time Volunteer of the Museum said, " Chris Frost didn't just operate on the big stage to help the Voluntary Sector, she also worked on the smaller stage behind the scenes. When the Wandle Industrial Museum first moved to the Vestry Hall in the early 90's she let the Museum staff at the time share her office at no little inconvenience to herself until the Museum became established in the Vestry Hall Annex. It was a remarkable act of generosity and demonstrated she was prepared to help at every level to support others – the Compact in action even before it became formalised. She reappeared as our Compact champion in 2006 when we were at great risk of losing our grant."

"Thanks Chris, your good deed is not forgotten". (Our thoughts are with her family at this very difficult time.)



Figure 9 Chris Frost (photo: courtesy MVSC)

Editors Note. The Compact is summarised in the opening words of the document itself: "This Renewed Compact is an agreement between the Coalition Government, and their associated Non-Departmental Public Bodies,

Arms Length Bodies and Executive Agencies, and civil society organisations (CSOs) in England. The agreement aims to ensure that the Government and CSOs work effectively in partnership to achieve common goals and outcomes for the benefit of communities and citizens in England.”

The Government is represented in the Compact by The Office for Civil Society and the CSO’s are represented by Compact Voice and it is they who organised these awards.

5 Paxton’s Leather Works



Figure 10: Paxton's Leatherworks

Whilst working on the Merton Memories Project for the Local Studies Centre in Morden Library I come upon this photograph. The title of the photograph

was 'Paxton's Leather Works'. Not recalling having seen or heard the name before I decided to have a look at what I could find. Turning to the excellent documents of Peter McGow I managed to find some information.

In the section under Merton Bridge (Mill No 36) he states:

'On the schedule to the Wimbledon Tithe Map dated 4 February 1848, Henry Floud was named as the owner, and Christopher Robinson was the occupier of the premises. This situation was repeated on the schedule to a Deposited Plan, dated 28 November 1849, when the premises were described as Japan Leather Factory.

Two years later the occupier was James Paxton, who was described in the 1851 Wimbledon census returns as a patent leather dresser employing eight men and living at Wandle Bank. In 1853 Frederick Braithwaite visited Mr. Paxton's leather japanning works, "which are supplied with water from an Artesian fountain, rising about 8 ft. above the surface". In the 1861 census returns James Paxton was recorded as employing 10 men and a boy, and in 1871 he was employing 11 men. He was still employing 11 men in 1881, two of these being his sons James and Henry. By 1884 Henry Paxton was in partnership with his father. They were working together in 1891, and probably until James Paxton's death at Wandle Bank on 17 December 1899 at the age of 78.

Henry Paxton probably continued working at the premises for a few years, but they were in the occupation of Connolly Brothers, leather dressers, by March 1905, when they wrote to the Croydon Rural District Council, referring to the disposal of sludge from the Merton sewage works, just across the river from their works.

In the section under Merton Mill he states the following:

'An occasional reference has been made in this account to calico printing works situated a little way downstream from the corn mill, which were also part of James Perry's estate. In about 1838 these were converted into a

leather japanning works, which by 1851 were occupied by James Paxton, and by James and Henry Paxton, until at least 1895. The works were later taken over by Connolly Brothers, leather dressers, who were there by 1905. ‘

The photograph appears to show a waterwheel at a 90 degree angle to the river. It was taken around 1886. Peter McGow’s notes on the mills can be found on our web site. Go to Exhibitions>Mills and there is a link at the bottom of the page to Peter’s documents.

Mick Taylor

[Editor’s note: ‘Japan Leather’ is leather produced with a shiny black surface on one side. It is difficult to find out exactly what is meant by an ‘artesian fountain’, but it seems likely this only refers to water emerging from an artesian well with sufficient pressure to climb upwards through, in this case, an 8’ pipe, and it is the output from this that drives the overshot wheel in the picture. See for example <http://www.daleswater.co.uk/what-is-an-artesian-well/>]

6 Ravensbury

Once in a Lifetime Challenge; Ravensbury Mill

It was good to hear an upbeat report from our Chairman Rev Andrew Wakefield at our recent AGM 2013 that the Councillors and Officers have finally got behind us and have moved Heaven and Earth to honour the requirements of the Planning Agreement with S106 with the site owner, Secure Reversions and are now moving towards a final undertaking which will enable us to move from our temporary accommodation at Vestry Hall to our new permanent home, Ravensbury Mill, known as the last working water mill on the River Wandle.

It’s worth pointing out LBM are not doing it without good reason. There are serious financial benefits for Merton at stake. A slice of important history

woven within Ravensbury Mill, a grade 2 watermill building with unique under shot waterwheels will be saved and restored, it will finally fulfil Merton's Wandle Strategy document to house the Wandle Industrial Museum at Ravensbury Mill which will form part of an existing "market" (per URBED) that attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Wandle area each year to visit its long established heritage and cultural sites such as Merton Abbey Mills and Dean City Farm.

The benefit for the Wandle Valley is that it will finally have a Flagship Museum on the River Wandle to showcase its rich history and put it on a Pedestal. Let's not forget in its heyday there were at least 90 wheels operating on the Wandle (al though J..Hillier in his Old Surrey Water-Mills said, "No fewer than 200 working water wheels could be counted along its length" we do not know where he got his figures). In 1805 the Wandle was said to be, "The hardest worked river for its size in the world" (Malcolm) and it is only fitting that Merton has chosen the Waterwheel as its logo. The attractions along the Wandle have been likened to a, " A string of Pearls" and when Ravensbury Mill is up and running it will bring a new status to Merton and stimulate new inward investment.

The other key to underpin the future of legacy of Ravensbury Mill is that all of the four boroughs through which the Wandle runs are committed to the on going development of the Wandle Trail both as a valuable local resource and to encourage tourism. Their approach is supported by the London Tourist Agency. The Ramblers have estimated that up to 20,000 walkers are now using the Wandle Trail and contribute to its vitality. On top of this we have a new £200M infra structure investment in a modern Tramlink system on our doorstep to serve the Wandle Valley and with a Station just down the road will provide easy access for our Visitors to the Museum.This will ultimately bring recognition and financial benefits to the London Borough of Merton

Its also worth remembering, we the Museum have already carried out repairs to Ravensbury Mill, the metal collector grills fixed to the Mill pond walls to protect the water wheels and to the sluice gate structure. When the mill pond had been drained part of the housing construction programme, it became apparent that 2 of the oak posts runners holding the central sluice gates were rotten and the RSJ across the mill pond supporting the gears

which operate the sluice gates had rusted through. The repairs to these items had to be undertaken during the main site construction period while the pond was empty and I am proud to say that the Museum successfully fund raised for these repairs at the time.

At the beginning of this project we engaged “Business in the Arts” who gave professional expertise to produce a Business plan for Ravensbury Mill. They stated that for our on going success and to guarantee repeat visits we must restore the Mill to its former glory and provide first class displays and facilities for Visitors.

With this in mind, the next step when we gain occupation will be a bigger step but what will enormously assist our future fund raising efforts is that the Building will be in our possession and with peppercorn rent will be viewed as an important asset by major funders. The other benefit of having possession will be that we can show future funders around the building and they will be able to see this priceless building for themselves and will help to win the support we need. It will be a rich reward for all the Volunteers who over the years have freely given their time to the Museum, to see the wheels turning again

Ray Leyden



Figure 11 : The mezzanine floor inside Ravensbury, looking through the balcony to the wall through which the mill wheel drive shaft still comes. We can't wait to be there. (photo M. Taylor)

New Year Lunch Form

Wandle Industrial Museum

New Year 2014

Members and Volunteers Lunch

Name of Member/Volunteer

Name of Guest (if any)

Contact phone No

I/We would like to attend the Lunch at Park Place Carvery at 12.30pm for 1.00pm on Thursday 9th January 2014 at a cost of £15 per person.

A cheque made payable to The Wandle Industrial Museum for £_____ is enclosed to cover ____ people.

I/We understand that if this booking is not received by 18th December 2013 the place[s] cannot be guaranteed

(See overleaf for our full contact details)



A full colour version of this newsletter is available online at www.wandle.org. If any subscriber is happy to receive the newsletter by email, could you please send a request to 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