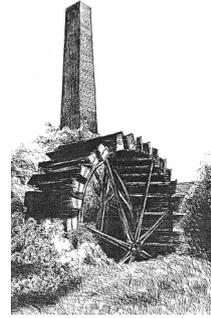


WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



BULLETIN



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These mittens were made by May Morris in 1905-6 but not designed by her .They show butterflies, leaves and flowers, silk rosettes and beads. See Page 14

WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

PRESIDENT

Harry Galley

TRUSTEES

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

OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

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

Editorial

Welcome to our first bulletin of 2020. We hope that you enjoy what we have included this time.

Is it me or are others disappointed when they hear people say there is no history in the area they live in?

Children at school seem to only get exposed to local history in Year 3. The schools that have recently brought Year 5 students to us have focused on the Victorians which has included William Morris. It is sad when there is such an amazing history and heritage along the Wandle Valley. There is never a month go by when I don't learn something new about the industries and people. That is why we hope that with our programme of talks, walks and workshop we can get more of the message out there that history exists on your doorstep.

Finally congratulations to our Trustee John Hawks on his award at the Merton Trustee of the Year event in November.

Best wishes,

Mick Taylor (Guest Editor)

Cover Picture:

The Deputy Mayor of Merton Councillor Edward Foley in front of one of the window panels of the museum decorated in the William Morris Wandle pattern. Three window panels have been painted as part of our "Improving the View" project. Find out more about the project in this issue of the bulletin.

Operations Team Report

We gave fewer talks around the Christmas period , but between us paid return visits to East Surrey Family History, Woodcote Probus, Spring Park group and Carshalton and District History and Archaeology Society.

After the electrical repairs were completed we noticed that the ceiling in the office was starting to sag and after several tons of redundant display furniture were removed, we realised why. The Council moved quickly to strengthen and support it so we may not have to go around in hard hats after all.

The picture here shows how the ceiling is now being held up by wires and metal brackets.



We had a visit from the Holiday Foundation Rambler's Group (*pictured below*) who were reckoning on the repairs at Mitcham Bridge being finished. Some hope.



On Sunday 17th November the ceremonial unveiling of the window panels took place with Deputy Mayor Edward Foley doing the honours. The mechanism to reveal 3 designs simultaneously was a triumph for intermediate technology. Find more about the unveiling on Page 13.

In November we held our usual AGM this time including a superb presentation by Fiona McKelvie of McBurney and Black, on “Textile Connections : Linen, Liberty and More”.



The new planters at the front of the museum were planted with a few bulbs by local charity Focus-4-1, who are based in Vestry Hall. Lavender will be added later.

On December 18th we provided a Christmas get-together for our volunteers and on January 8th we held our New Year lunch at the Carvery in Park Place, Mitcham which was well attended and much appreciated.



John Hawks gives thanks to all our members and volunteers at the New Year lunch.

We gave printing workshops to three classes from Cranmer School, who impressed us with their general knowledge, and two classes from Cricket Green School whose enthusiasm was rewarding.

Walk from Morden Hall Park to Merton Priory Chapter House

A group of nine people met at Morden Hall snuff mills for a guided industrial heritage walk on the morning of Monday 23 September. The Indian summer had just come to an end, but conditions for the walk were perfect and the rain did not arrive until 4pm.

A member of the group asked whether edge runner millstones, like those on display outside the snuff mills, were more efficient than the pestle and mortar machinery that was known to have been in use there. A scientific experiment would be required to furnish a definitive answer.

After inspecting the tobacco drying kiln and the surviving waterwheel, which is stationary because the water level is lower than when the mill was working and the paddles are now clear of the water, we went over to look at Morden Hall. It was separated from us by a moat patrolled by a heron. Once the manor house, now a wedding venue, the Hall has had several incarnations including, as one group member recalled, a Beefeater restaurant. From around 1870 the Hall, the snuff mills and the surrounding land were owned by the tobacco merchants Gilliat Hatfeild Sr and then Gilliat Hatfeild Jr who left the estate to the National Trust in 1941.

Onwards over the boardwalk, across the tram line and across a footbridge over a small stream that once irrigated bleaching grounds in Bunce's Meadow. We walked towards Phipps Bridge on a pleasant path alongside two parallel channels hidden among the reeds and shrubs. The far channel is Rucker's Cut, which from the 1760s supplied water to his calico printing works, known as the Phipps Bridge works. An auction catalogue of 1801 described several substantial buildings on the site of the works, surrounded by 35 acres of bleaching grounds and meadows. All that remains of the works is overgrown land around the Wandle channels, Wandle Villa and a former coachhouse.

We took a diversion over Phipps Bridge and a few minutes' walk to the right on Phipps Bridge Rd to see the Villa. Rucker lived there prior to his retirement in 1790. Gilliat Hatfeild Sr lived there until he acquired the Morden Hall estate. He replaced the derelict Phipps Bridge works with a fish house to breed fish so that he could indulge his fishing hobby. He is responsible for the fish weather vane over the entrance to the Morden Hall stable block.

Back across Phipps Bridge to the west bank, we continued north up the access road to Deen City Farm, across Windsor Avenue, from where you can see the building that provided the location for Sun Hill Police Station in the TV police drama *The Bill*, and on towards the Abbey Mills site. The “abbey” was actually an Augustinian priory, established nearby by Gilbert the Norman in 1117 and dissolved by Henry VIII in 1538. The Priory had its own monastic corn mill, situated near the present Bennets Courtyard development to the south of the William Morris pub. The modern development occupies the site of a former mill pond. Also situated nearby from 1801 to 1904 on Bennet’s Ditch was Bennet’s Mill, a textile printing works. Bennet’s Mill was established by John Leach – Bennet was his son-in-law – who had previously been in a partnership which ran a calico printing works on the adjacent Abbey Mills site. Leach was a pioneer in the use of copper rollers for textile printing. Bennet’s speciality was the printing of colourful patterned handkerchiefs dyed using madder, a red plant dye.

Edmund Littler took over both the Abbey Mills site and Bennet’s Mill in the early 1830s, and his family firm supplied Arthur Liberty’s new shop in Regents St from 1875. Liberty’s took over the works in 1904 and stayed until 1972. Most of the buildings on the Abbey Mills site were built by Liberty’s and their subsidiary Merton Printers. Traditional wood block printing was practised there until the 1950s.

The group looked in the wheelhouse, one of the older Littler buildings dating from around 1860, and observed the only working waterwheel on the Wandle. Member of the group were heard to agree that there was something mesmeric about the motion of the waterwheel viewed from behind. The textile rinsing spool once operated by the waterwheel is no longer connected, but the waterwheel operated a potter’s wheel until recently and still operates a small electricity generator.

Before making our way to the Merton Priory Chapter House we stood in the bandstand, through which the Roman Stane St was built nearly 2000 years ago, and discussed the history of the large site to the north, now occupied by Sainsbury’s and Marks and Spencer.

The Domesday Book described the area, known as the Merton Estate, as containing two mills, which were probably the Amery Mills, formerly situated on the south side of Merton High Street. The entrance to Sainsbury’s, near the footbridge over the Wandle from the High Street, was more or less at the centre of the Amery Mills site. Over the centuries

some of the main products of the Amery Mills were flour, copper, paper and finally cardboard and fibreboard. In the 20th Century the mills became the New Merton Board Mills, which expanded after the War to take over the site of the adjacent William Morris works which closed in 1940. The Board Mills closed in 1982 and were eventually replaced by the present occupants.

William Morris took over a seven acre site near Merton High St, in 1881. He undertook design, dyeing, textile printing, textile and carpet weaving, tapestry and stained glass manufacture at these works. Morris also designed wallpaper and furniture and was a poet, translator, novelist and socialist activist. Associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, he was a major contributor to the revival of traditional British textile arts and methods of production. We discussed some old photographs and illustrations of the William Morris works and some examples of his designs.

Nicholas Hart welcomed us to the Chapter House and explained the layout and history of the Priory, as well as the functioning of monastic establishments in the economy, society and intellectual life of the middle ages. We ended our visit with a group photo (below) of those who had stayed for a tour of the Chapter House.



This was the second of two walks lead by our volunteer **John Sheridan** during last summer.

The museum is hoping to be able to offer a series of walks taking in the historical and heritage aspects of the River Wandle from May until October. Details will appear in later issue of the bulletin and on our social media channels - see back cover.

John Sheridan

A Bit of Industrial History

Bob Bryson , a member of the Surrey Industrial History Group (SIHG) has made the museum aware of a document that had been handed to him via the Surrey Archaeological Society written by an A F Tullett titled “The Industries of the Wandle Valley”. Bob is donating the manuscript to the museum. He has written a summary of the document for the SIHG which he has kindly allowed us to reproduce in this issue of the bulletin.

References to a newsletter are for the Surrey Industrial History Group newsletter copies of which are at the museum.

The Industries of the Wandle Valley

Considering the industrial significance of this ten mile river I am surprised that there have not been more articles in the Newsletter about the industries along the Wandle Valley; especially as at one time the area was all part of Surrey. There is in fact a great deal of information about the subject on-line and at the Wandle Industrial Museum, which is well worth a visit. (See Venues listed in the Newsletter) The river Wandle is a tributary of the Thames and flows from Croydon and Carshalton to join the Thames at Wandsworth. The river falls some 125 ft over its length making it an ideal location for watermills since before the Norman Conquest.

I was reminded of all this when an original manuscript entitled “The Industries of the Wandle Valley, an introductory study by A F Tullett” was recently handed into the Surrey Archaeological Society, who passed it on to me. While I am sure all of the information it contains is now available from the Museum. The manuscript which is presumably unpublished is undated but appears to have been written between 1968 & 1970. What makes it particularly interesting is that the author, having located many of the old mill sites, goes on to describe what can be seen at the various sites at the time of writing. As the manuscript is now some 50 years old considerable more industry existed then than can be seen today. As I intend to pass the manuscript on the Wandle Museum, I am sure it will make an interesting project for someone to compare the fifty or more sites as described in 1968 with the current day.

I note for example that the manuscript describes two adjacent sites as being currently occupied by New Merton Board Mills Ltd and the Shirley & Warbey Box Co. Ltd. These were large factories making cardboard boxes in Colliers Wood employing about 500 people. At The South East Region Industrial Archaeology Conference in 2014 Meg Thomas, from the Museum, gave a talk on the industries along the river and she stated that the last paper mill on the river closed in 1980 and as you may have guessed the site is now a large Sainsbury's store.

Why the Wandle valley should become such a hive of industry is down to a number of factors as well as the availability of water power. In the days before the Industrial Revolution London was the major manufacturing area in the country with many small workshops behind shop fronts as well as larger premises like bell foundries and ship yards. Having your business situation on the Wandle close to the capital, but beyond the jurisdiction of the capital's guilds, made it easy to trade with such a large market without having to comply with their rules.

I don't intend to describe any of the sites in detail as this would take too long and I don't know the area very well myself. As I said earlier a great deal has been written elsewhere about the many mills along the river starting with the 13 corn mills recorded in the Domesday survey. It is however interesting to note the number of different types of mill that eventually crowded the river. According to the document passed to me; until the end of the 17th century flour making was the principal industry of the area with 9 mills recorded in 1779 and 14 in 1850. The author states that there were modern rolling mills at Waddon, Beddington and at Wandsworth but these ceased operation c 1950.

Another use of water power was for the fulling of cloth and making felt, the earliest dating from 1303. Felt making continued in Mitcham until 1914. Interestingly Huguenot refugees established a factory at Wandsworth for the production of felt hats and achieved fame as the sole suppliers of hats to the cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church. One of the felt mills became one of only two factories in England to produce felt cloth to cover piano hammers.

The third industry to arrive from 1571 onwards was the manufacture of dye stuff, with the introduction of mills to grind Brazil wood and logwood to produce a red dye. The last of seven such sites was established along the river by 1789. Two further industries to be established were

bleaching and calico printing. Bleaching fields were established on the river bank to dry natural calico treated with lime. Arthur Liberty and William Morris both established printing works using block printing techniques. Liberty used Littler's print works at Merton Abbey from the late 1870s and in 1881 William Morris opened his model factory at Merton Abbey, just down stream from the Liberty site. The works were large enough for him to be able to carry out weaving, dyeing, cotton-printing, tapestry and stained glass production on one site. Liberty's took over the whole site in 1904 and the mill continued printing Liberty fabrics until 1977.

By the mid 18th the Wandle valley had acquired the characteristics of an industrial area with the addition of five copper mills and five iron mills. Leather, parchment and paper mills were also established around this time. Connolly at Colliers Wood was well known for producing the leather for the interior of Rolls Royce cars. There were also oil mills to produce oil cake for animal feed and linseed oil as well as flock mills used mainly to manufacture the filling for mattresses.

One very individual industry associated with the river is that of snuff manufacture and the study given to me lists no less than nine mills in the upper section of the river associated with tobacco or snuff. According to the National Trust who now owns the site the prosperity of Morden Hall estate in the 18th and 19th centuries depended on its snuff mills. The western snuff mill now houses a small museum of the industry.

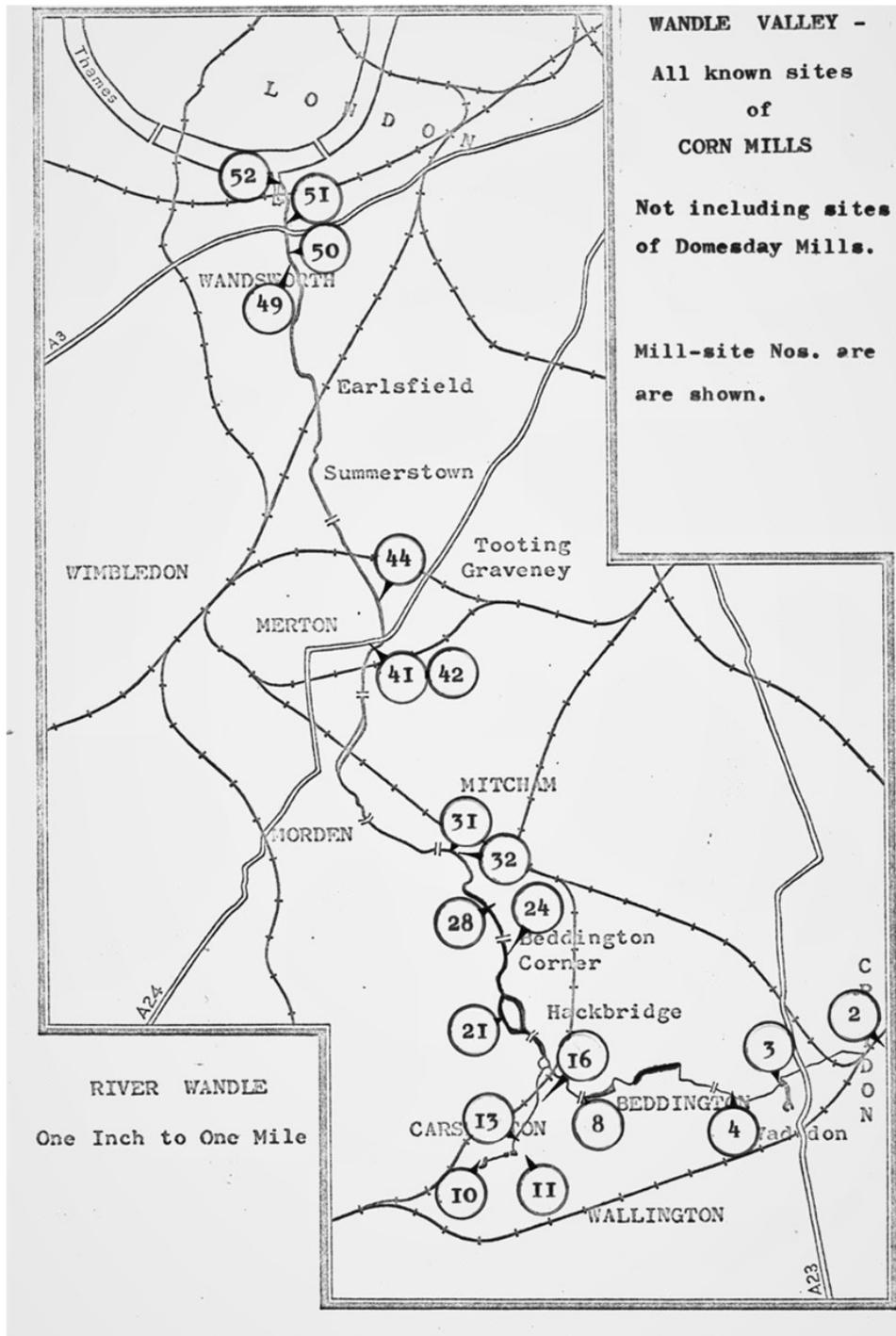
The snuff produced along the Wandle was often flavoured with herbs like peppermint and lavender, which was grown nearby. The lavender crop was distilled into lavender oil or sold in bunches in the London markets. The importance of the lavender industry to Mitcham was recognised by the inclusion of lavender spikes in the former borough coat of arms. One firm, Potter and Moore founded in 1749 still manufacture fragrances today, but in Peterborough no longer in Mitcham.

Such was the importance of trade along the Wandle valley that in 1799 a proposal was made to construct a canal from the Thames at Wandsworth to Croyden; however such a proposal was impractical as it would have interfered with the very mills whose trade it was intended to support. The alternative, a horse drawn railway, was selected and this opened in 1803. This was the first public iron railway in the world with a spur to many of the mill sites. The Surrey Iron Railway closed in 1846, just at a time when the mainline steam hauled railway system was being developed.

Sources

1. The Industries of the Wandle Valley, an introductory study, unpublished A F Tullett circa 1968
2. Watermills of the London Countryside, Reid Kenneth 1989
3. Industries of the Wandle, Wandle Industrial Museum
<http://www.wandle.org/thewandle/industries.html>
4. Mills on the Wandle, Peter McGow
<http://www.wandle.org/mills/millsindex.html>

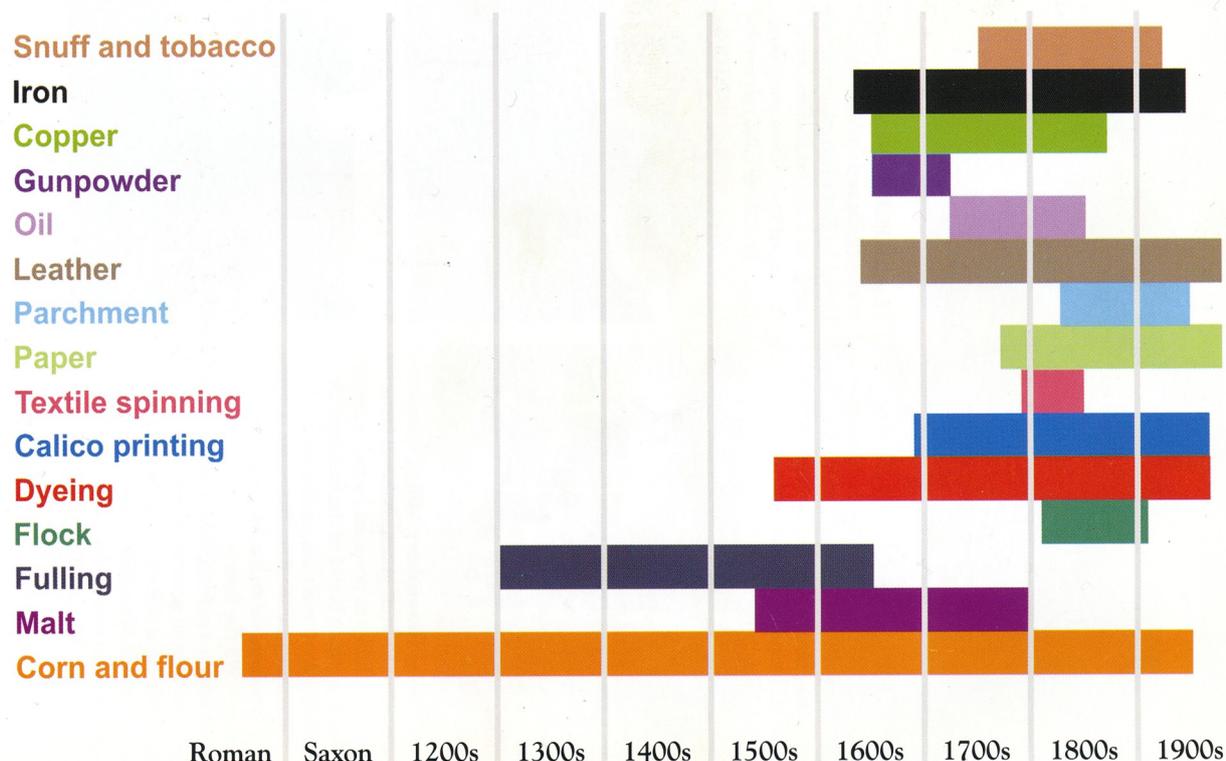
Map from manuscript showing location of 51 corn mills on the River Wandle



The SIHG article also included a copy of the back of Dave Saxby's *Mills of the River Wandle*, available at the museum, and a photograph of the inside of Connolly's Leather Works at Colliers Wood. Both produced below.

Timeline of Industries along the River Wandle

Taken from
'The Mills of the River Wandle'
by David Saxby



We've Changed the View!

In 2018 we were awarded a *Tesco Bags of Help* grant to *Change the View* to improve the external view of the museum. The work was brought to life in November 2019 when we unveiled the work that had been done by local artist Portia Dudley (**Morris up Merton**) and designer Dominic Fagan.

The panels on the side of the building were inspired by the William Morris *Wandle* pattern and were unveiled by the Deputy Mayor of Merton Councillor Ed Foley on the 17th November. Two planters have been added to the front of the museum and we look forward to seeing the bulbs and plants in their full glory shortly.

Our thanks go to Portia, Dominic and Siobhan Kneale who managed the project.



Portia Dudley, Councillor Ed Foley, Dominic Fagan and Siobhan Kneale.

This is only Stage One of the project. We are now looking to raise another £500 to be able to complete the other two panels on the Vestry Hall side of the museum. Further news of our fund raising activities will be available soon.

Mick Taylor

May Morris : Art & Life

This exhibition is currently on at the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh and displays textiles, embroideries and photographs lent by the V&A, the William Morris Gallery, the Society of Antiquaries (Morris's Trustees), the Ashmolean Museum, and a few from private collections.

May Morris was the younger of Morris's daughters and was born in 1862

The exhibition started with photos of May's childhood and some of her early watercolours including a small ink drawing of Kelmscott done when aged 15. It then moved on to her time at Morris & Co. where she managed the Embroidery Department when only 23 and kept a Day Book to record all work done during her time there. Jane had become an expert embroiderer, and originally produced her father's designs but latterly adapted the most popular ones. The company sold affordable embroidery kits – one on display was for £4.10. May left the company to concentrate on art embroidery, writing, teaching, and lecturing. She taught at the Central School of Art and Craft from 1897 and in 1910 undertook a tour of North America to promote the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Among the large embroideries on display was a bedcover "Acanthus" for which she had done several versions for different clients. This one had been exhibited in Paris in 1914 and used 6 different stitches on wool felt. Another was one panel of a bed hanging designed for her father's four poster at Kelmscott - pomegranates with a trellis background which took 3 months to complete. For another bedcover she used synthetically dyed thread which produced more vibrant and lasting colours, but like her father, she preferred to use natural dyes. One amazing embroidery called "Maids of Honour" was done on a fine transparent and very expensive mesh called a silk canvas which required the reverse side to be incredibly neat and no loose threads visible. An even more exotic example is of an alter super-frontal done between 1898 and 1899 in silks and gold thread on linen, designed by Philip Webb. He specified which colours she should use to achieve the impression of glass jewels along the border.

Other exhibits were of smaller items such as book bags, one on an indigo background using gold thread, made by both May and sister Jenny for their father for one of his mediaeval MSS. May also designed several book covers, including one for William Morris's poem, "Love is Enough".

Her own book on decorative needlework in which she encouraged her students to take their inspiration from historic examples, was critical of the modern machine embroideries. There were some tiny embroidered christening mittens inspired by Elizabethan designs and a selection of sofa backs. Another small framed item was an embroidery “Minstrel with Cymbals” based on a stained glass design by William Morris. One of only a few items with relevance to her stay at Melsetter in Orkney was a pencil sketch of a rowan branch, titled “Burn of Force”. A few items of jewellery were also on display – with a clear mediaeval influence and a few paintings of May at work, including one by Mary Annie Sloane which was recently discovered, of May spinning at Kelmscott.

Of her personal life there was little. She was a Socialist, and supported the women’s movement but not the Suffragettes. She had a keen interest in drama, especially Ibsen, and was in an interesting relationship with George Bernard Shaw – a Valentine card she sent him was on show. She did marry a Henry Sparling, but divorced after 9 years.

A sample of “Honeysuckle” wallpaper block printed for (but not by) Morris & Co. at Merton using 8 blocks was on protected display and suggested that although usually attributed to her father, the design that has survived is actually May’s.

At the exit, there was a small modern “tribute” tapestry done in 2019 also entitled “Honeysuckle” by Rudi Richardson, using wool on cotton warp.

Alison Cousins



Dates for the Diary

13th June 2020

It is Mitcham Carnival Day so unlike last year we hope to have a new exhibition in place at the museum. Watch out for news in a later edition of the bulletin and on our social media channels.



Accreditation Mentor: Chris Taft, British Postal Museum and Archive.
Museum Advisor: Yvette Shepherd, Museum of London (Docklands).

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.



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.



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 office@wandle.org

You can find us on:

