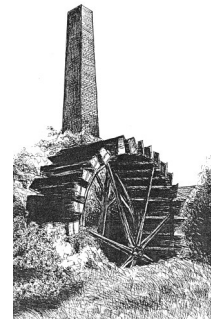
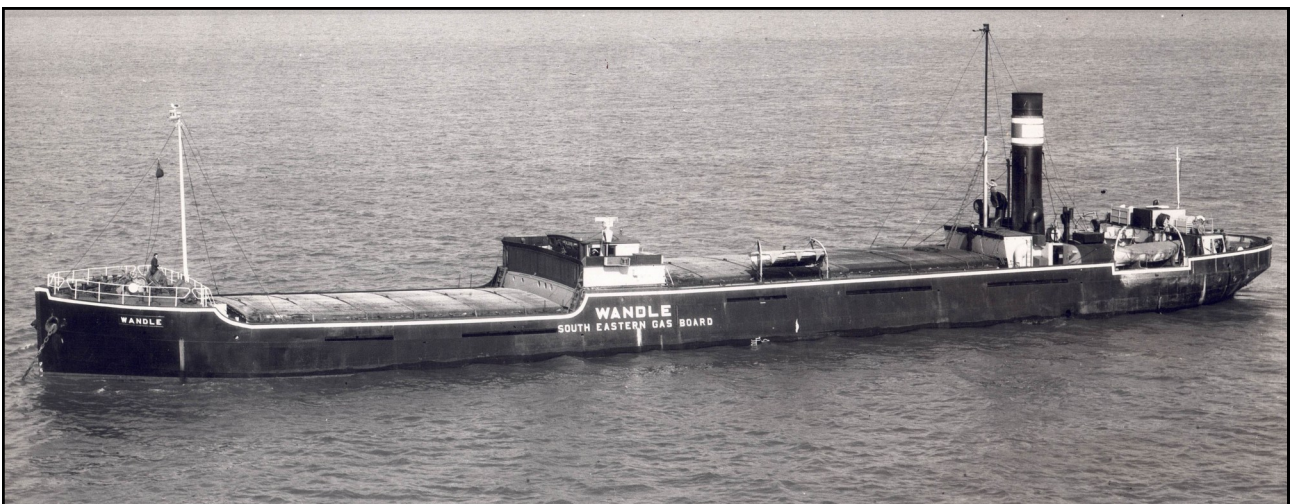


# WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



## BULLETIN



SS Wandle: the real thing and the model: see page 4

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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

In this edition we celebrate the acquisition by the museum of a large model of the collier “SS Wandle”. Thanks to John Hawks for driving to Bexhill Museum to pick it up, to the Vestry Hall manager Julie Noel for accommodating the model in the Vestry Hall foyer, and to John again for the entertaining article about his adventure.

That said, the highlight of this Bulletin has to be our volunteer Gordon McKie’s tremendous and important work on links between slavery and the Wandle industries. It is an absorbing long read, and a history that should be known and explained.

An account of an exhibition at Liberty’s to mark their 150th anniversary will appear in the next edition.

John Sheridan

### ***Cover Pictures:***

(1) The last photo of the SS Wandle, taken in 1959, came with the gift from Bexhill Museum.

(2) John Sheridan

Photos:

Page 1: Alison Cousins

Page 2 (1): Dawn Gibbons

Page 2 (2): Mick Taylor

Page 4: Gift from Bexhill Museum

Page 6: Gift from Bexhill Museum

Page 8: John Sheridan

Page 13: Christine Pittman



## Operations Team Report

Our usual round of talks, walks and outdoor events continued throughout the summer.

Pupils from St John the Divine School were given a workshop and were top of the class in identifying the pomegranate on one of the William Morris samples we show every school.

The wonderful weather helped the success of the Rivers Summit in Morden Hall. The summit was part of the London Rivers Week. This year there was a “Blessing of the Wandle” and we persuaded them to read the wonderful “Way of the Wandle” poem by our former volunteer John Viner.



The unorthodox ceremony in the margins of the Rivers Summit

John Sheridan also led two identical walks during the London Rivers week: the organisers’ website, [Putting Healthy Rivers at the Heart of the Community | Thames21](#), together with the museum’s social media, generated enough bookings to repeat the walk.

Mick Taylor, Roger Steele and Alison Cousins were all nominated for Merton Civic Pride Awards at the Volunteer Fair in the swish Chak 89 venue in Mitcham.

For Croydon's Green Day this year we offered a block printing workshop in the children's library as well as our regular stall and both were well supported.



The museum's stall at the Croydon Green Spaces Open Day at Croydon Central Library, with Alison Cousins and Mick Taylor.

Our latest exhibition featured women mill owners, many of whom are quite unknown. Changes in legislation during the nineteenth century enabled women to benefit from property formerly denied to them after the death of, or separation from, their husband. Mick Taylor presented the display and Gordon McKie did much of the research. Father David Pennells invited Joyce Bellamy to open the exhibition.



Joyce Bellamy delivers an impromptu speech after cutting the ribbon to open the exhibition.



As part of the Wandsworth Heritage Festival John Sheridan organised a local walk and Alison Cousins gave her *Wandle Portrayed* talk in Wandsworth library.

For once Community on the Green also enjoyed good weather and our takings were up on last year. A beautifully produced booklet - the Dave Lofthouse Tree Walk - was also launched that evening. Copies are available from the museum.

Merton's Discovery Day took place without Sarah Gould for the first time ever, but her volunteers and library staff coped well. It didn't feel as busy as usual and we subsequently discovered (and had suspected) that many people were unaware that there was a second floor.

Our visitors included a Silver Youth Group from Morden and the West London Ramblers (who brought their own refreshments!!) and an intrepid elderly lady from Australia who came to see some of our textiles, and who turned out to be an international judge for quilters.

Mick Taylor has taken part in meetings with the Industrial Heritage Group and with Yvette Shepherd, our Museum Development Officer, for ongoing Accreditation updates.

We went to the Liberty 150th anniversary exhibition on the top floor of the shop. The fabrics were the main feature and were dramatically draped. An article by Mick Taylor will appear in the autumn edition.

Work experience for two of the older pupils from Cricket Green School this term has been very limited due mostly to communication difficulties with the school.

Along with Wimbledon Museum we were asked to offer an intensive day for a pupil of the Ursuline Convent who allegedly was interested in an archivist type role. It appeared this was not the case and her interest was actually to become a criminal lawyer.

Our latest recruits have been much more enthusiastic though. Freddie Weaver was with us during his summer vacation from York University and took an interest in future plans for the Surrey Iron Railway display, and Lucy Crowley, as a media arts graduate, has joined us with plans to augment our social media portfolio.

Our prize acquisition has to be a model of the collier SS Wandle, which is housed next door in the Vestry Hall - details elsewhere in this Bulletin.

National utilities seem to have it in for us at the moment. There is a fault on the phone line, the water supply is frequently disrupted, but worst of all our gas supply has been completely cut off by the SGN works all around the Lower Green, which have also disrupted local traffic and impeded parking access. So no hot water for weeks.

**Alison Cousins**

## **A Day out at the Seaside - and a Fine New Acquisition!**

In Bulletin 124 (Autumn 2024) Alison mentioned we'd been offered a model of SS Wandle, a collier built in 1932 for the Wandsworth and District Gas Company. We're happy to say we now have this handsome and unusual new exhibit, and the Operations Team came up with the ideal solution to the problem of where on earth to put it. For this is no ship-in-a-bottle, but an impressive five foot long, and in a substantial glass case to boot.

The Museum is blessed indeed with good neighbours, and with manager Julie Noel's enthusiastic welcome the model now stands proudly in the foyer of the newly renovated Vestry Hall right next door - where it'll be seen and admired by a very much larger number of the public than we could ever hope for.



This drawing by G S Hoffman, 1933, of the SS Wandle unloading at the Gasworks wharf was part of the Bexhill Museum's gift.

Its origin is a little uncertain, but its generous donor was our colleagues at the Bexhill Museum. They came by it as a gift from the family of a deceased resident, and had housed it for a good while until space became a problem and it had to go - not that it isn't an excellent exhibit, but it has no connection with the town of Bexhill, and that's the *raison d'être* of their collection. A quick Google would have found them an accredited museum with "Wandle" in its name, and the rest is history!

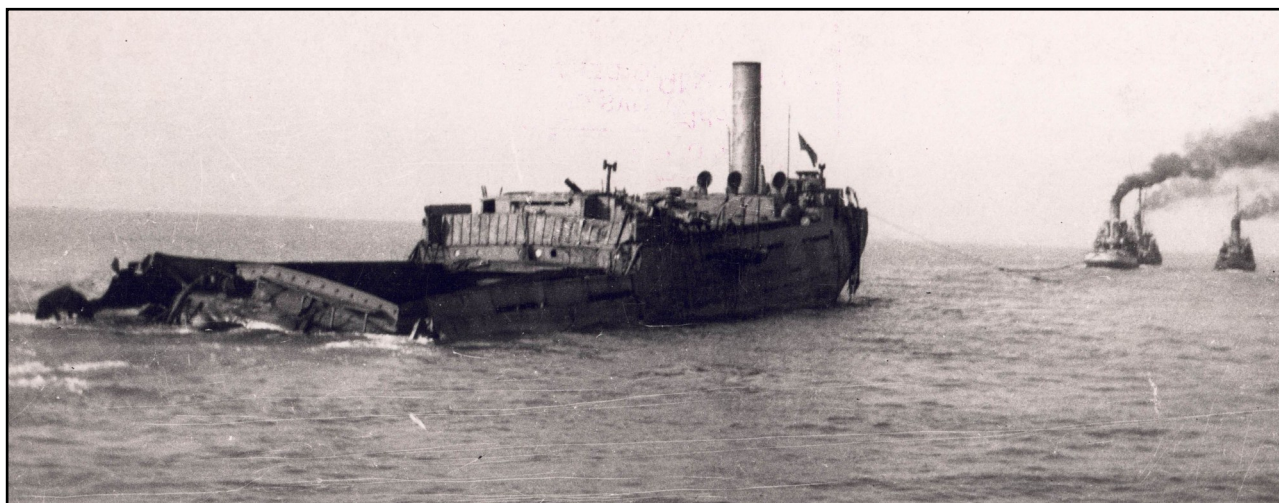
And a very pleasant little bit of history the day out was for me too. The plan was hatched to fetch the model in my ancient Volvo 240 Estate (the classic car whose extra length and square proportions long made it a favourite of antique dealers). As the day drew near, however, a back brake seized, and it had instead to be my current car – still a Volvo Estate, but of much more modest size. I knew it'd be touch and go, so I made a framework of 1x1 timber to match the size of the case, took out one of the back seats, rolled the front passenger seat forward as far as it would go, and glory be, it fitted with an inch to spare.

Bexhill-on-Sea isn't a place one finds oneself in that often – on the face of it it's "just another resort", without the busy cultural life of Brighton or even the faded grandeur of Hastings. But it has its own century-old charm, the Grade I "modernist" De La Warr Pavilion is still breathtaking, and the Museum itself is a fine, expansive dedicated building of 1914, virtually on the sea front, and boasting one of the best town models I've ever seen. The staff couldn't have been more welcoming and helpful, and in the midst of the summer's first heatwave the weather made it an unforgettable trip.

The SS Wandle certainly has its place in the industrial history of the Wandle - 100 years ago the Wandsworth and District Gas Company at its mouth was one of London's major power companies, all of whom needed huge quantities of coal to produce both gas and electricity. Many of them had their own fleets of steamships to bring coal from Tyneside and up the Thames – "up-river colliers" specially designed both to navigate the difficult waters of the North Sea and to travel safely up the Thames, which meant having a shallow draft so as not to ground on the riverbed (they were nicknamed "flatirons") and retractable funnels and masts so they could go under the bridges.

In fact during the period 1905 to 1959 the Wandsworth Company had three successive vessels named "SS Wandle". In both World Wars the North Sea was so dangerous for merchant ships that many were supplied with guns - in 1915 the first SS Wandle famously saw off a German U-

boat and was given a hero's welcome on her journey up the Thames. And in 1941/42 the third SS Wandle was in repeated action against enemy aircraft and "E-boats" (fast attack launches), until in 1942 her bow was blown apart by a torpedo. Amazingly she survived, was rebuilt, and continued plying her route steadfastly until she was finally scrapped in 1959. It is this humble but heroic third SS Wandle of which we have this beautiful model.



The bow-less SS Wandle under tow. The photo was part of Bexhill Museum's gift.

John Sheridan points out that the introduction of the third SS Wandle coincided in 1932 with the Company's filling in of the McMurray Canal. The intention was to build a bigger Thames-side wharf to accommodate the new ship's new greater capacity than its predecessors (it could carry 2,200 tons of coal).

Over the years a nice tradition arose - many of these colliers were named after the areas their various companies supplied with gas or electricity. So, believe it or not, as well as SS Wandle there were the SS Mitcham, Wimbledon, Wandsworth, Croydon, Chessington, Tolworth, Ewell, Kingston, Guildford, Woodcote, Dulwich, Sydenham, Bromley, Brockley, Southwark, Camberwell, Lambeth, Catford, Effra, Brixton, Kennington - and plenty more North of the River! All the names are listed in a rare and fascinating illustrated booklet "The Gas and Electricity Colliers", published in 1984 by the World Ship Society, which can be seen at the Museum.

Oh, and Bexhill was the birthplace of British motor racing, and hosted the country's first-ever motor race in 1902 - bet you didn't know that!

**John Hawks**



## **Links Between Slavery and the Wandle Industries**

From the 17th to the 20th centuries, the River Wandle was utilised to provide power for a large number of mills that processed various commodities, including tobacco and cotton. From the 17th to the early 19th centuries, the tobacco and some of the cotton was harvested by slave labour in the Americas and the Caribbean. Tobacco leaves were ground up to produce snuff, which was a popular alternative to tobacco smoking during the 18th and 19th centuries, especially among the higher echelons of society. Additionally, goods manufactured in Britain were traded on the African coast for enslaved people, who were taken to the 'New World' to work on the plantations.

While slavery provided the commodities which were processed in the mills, many businessmen, politicians and landowners became rich on the profits of slavery and some of this wealth was invested in the mills on the River Wandle.

### **The Garth Family**

The Garth family owned a number of mills and extensive lands adjacent to the River Wandle, between the mid-16th century and the early 19th centuries. The first in line was Richard Garth, who built a house named 'Growtes' in 1554 on land he had acquired, which would later become the Morden Hall estate. The Garths commissioned the construction of Morden Hall between 1759 and 1765 and developed the surrounding estate including the creation of waterways designed to manage the flow of the river. They were responsible for the construction and operation of snuff and tobacco mills that made a significant contribution to the local economy.

Their estate passed through several generations over 300 years, usually from father to son, but where this was not possible, to other relatives, some of them women, who became mill proprietors in their own right.

The Hall itself was let to various tenants over the centuries, at one point becoming 'a school for young gentlemen'. As well as profiting from tobacco harvested by slave labour, the Garth family acquired interests in the slavery business in Grenada, through their relationship with the Colleton family. John Colleton established a plantation named Haines Hill on the island between 1650 and 1660. By 1800 this was the property of Charles Garth Colleton, who bequeathed it to his brother Captain Thomas Garth RN.

Through her marriage in 1774 to Owen Putland Meyrick, who hailed from a wealthy Welsh landowning family, Clara Garth helped establish a strategic economic partnership between the two families. As the eldest daughter and heiress, she inherited the family's estate from her father, the then Richard Garth, in 1787. This meant that the lucrative snuff mills, and the Morden Hall estate, remained in the family's possession. Clara managed the tobacco milling business effectively, maintaining its profitability. Her position as mill owner and operator contributed to the inclusion of women in the management of substantial estates, at a time when women were generally excluded from business ventures.

## **The Hatfeilds**

By the 19th century, the Garth family's role in the industrial life of the Wandle began to decline, and in 1834 they leased the snuff mills to tobacco merchant Alexander Hatfeild. Alexander had married into and taken over Taddy & Co, which had been a major snuff producer. The profits of the business enabled Alexander's son Gilliat Hatfeild to acquire full ownership of Morden Hall and its estate, and lordship of the manor, by the 1870s. Gilliat transformed part of the estate into parkland, demolishing various modest dwellings in the process. Gilliat's son Gilliat Edward Hatfeild closed the snuff mills in 1922 and eventually bequeathed the parkland to the National Trust in 1941.



The western snuff mill in Morden Hall Park. Edge-runner millstones like the ones pictured here were housed in the east mill. The west mill used a water-powered pestle and mortar system to grind dried tobacco leaves.

## **Other Tobacco Merchants**

Several other businesses operated tobacco processing mills on the Wandle, especially those responsible for the production of snuff. The fast-flowing river was an ideal power source for large scale production of this commodity, as well as other products such as printed textiles.

Key industrialists refining tobacco in mills on the river included Edward Carlton, who commissioned the construction of Carshalton House in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Nathaniel Polhill was a merchant who operated a mill on the river from 1789, in partnership at first with a Mr Spencer and later, from 1810, with John Rutter. Polhill was not only a tobacco merchant, but a banker and member of Parliament as well. When he died in 1782, the business passed into the hands of his son, Edward Polhill.

Another tobacco processing operation was run by a Mr Glover who owned several Wandle mills, including Glover's Snuff Mill in Mitcham, which continued to produce the commodity until 1834. Glover's mill was also known as Raleigh's Mill: Sir Walter (1552-1618) popularised tobacco for smoking and had an estate in Mitcham, but he had nothing to do with the snuff mill. Snuff use in England did not become popular, and then only with the aristocracy, until after the restoration of Charles II in 1660.

Before its abolition, all tobacco merchants profited from slavery, whether they were directly involved with it or not, because the product was almost invariably harvested by slave labour.

## **Sir John Fellowes**

Sir John Fellowes (1670-1724) was an English financier who was one the founding directors of the notorious South Sea Company, which eventually collapsed in what was known as 'the South Sea Bubble'. His father was London merchant William Fellowes, and his mother Susannah was a member of the influential Coulson family.

Sir John was the heir to his mother's brother, Thomas Coulson. Upon his death in 1713, mill owner Edward Carlton owed money to the crown. With the accession of George I, his properties were granted by the crown to Sir John. Among the properties were a copper mill situated on the River Wandle, and the mansion, Carshalton House. Fellowes employed master builder and sculptor Giles Dance to develop the building, and the gardens were landscaped by garden designer Charles Bridgeman and nurseryman Joseph Carpenter. Fellowes added a third storey to the house.



While the South Sea Company boomed, Fellowes was one of its wealthiest directors. But when the company floundered, he was accused by the authorities of 'many notorious, fraudulent and indirect practices', and compelled to appear before a parliamentary committee of enquiry. He received such heavy fines that his fortune was all but completely depleted, although his sugar refinery businesses continued to operate until 1723 and he continued to reside in Carshalton House until his death in 1724. Shortly before this, confiscated assets belonging to Sir John were bought by Edward Fellowes, and upon his death they passed to his nephew Coulson Fellowes, who broke up the properties before putting them up for sale.

The copper mill, known as Carshalton Lower Mill, was purchased by Thomas Scawen, a nephew of Sir William Scawen. George Taylor, a plantation owner, born on St Kitts, purchased Carshalton Park from the Scawen family in the 1780s.

### **Mills Family**

The Mills family were London-based owners of plantations in St Kitts and of the slaves that worked them. While the family were not themselves mill owners, they were involved in the milling industries along the River Wandle and also invested in property.

Peter Mathew Mills inherited the family assets in the Caribbean from his grandfather, as his father Matthew was murdered in St Kitts in 1752. George Galway Mills, son of Peter Matthew Mills was elected to the House of Commons several times in the early 1800s, extending the realm of the family's influence into a new arena.

### **Carew Family**

The Carew family of Beddington, Surrey were significant landowners in the area over several centuries. They owned Beddington (paper) Mill from at least the early 17th century and possibly before that time.

Records show that Sir Francis Carew acquired the mill in 1610, shortly before his death. Thereafter, it came into the possession of his grandson Sir Nicholas Throckmorton Carew, who leased it out to local miller John Smythe in 1613. The terms of the lease refer to it as 'Bandon Mill' which is believed to be Beddington Mill. In 1690, ownership of the mill passed to Sir Nicholas Carew, the great grandson of Nicholas Throckmorton Carew. Sir Nicholas was a shareholder in the Royal African Company, which was without doubt heavily implicated in the slave economy.

The mill continued to be in the possession of the Carew family for several generations to come, including Sir Nicholas Hacket Carew and his daughter Catherine. By 1780 the mill became the property of Richard Gee, who adopted the Carew name. The family did not operate the mill themselves, but let it out to a succession of millers. During the 19th century Charles Hallowell Carew became the last member of the family to inherit the mill and its adjoining estate, which he was forced to sell when he was declared bankrupt in 1859.

## **John Anthony Rucker**

John Anthony Rucker (1719-1804), never married, but had many close relatives, who inherited large sums of money when he passed away. Born in Hamburg, he came to England around 1727, becoming a British citizen in 1744. His involvement in calico printing in Merton began around 1763, when he went into partnership with Francis Nixon and George Amyand, who had already established a printing factory (calico mill) on the river Wandle near Phipps Bridge in Merton, around 1756.

Rucker took up residence at 'Strawberry Lodge' in Carshalton in 1764. After Nixon and Aymand died in 1765 and 1766 respectively, Rucker continued the business on his own, and expanded it significantly, acquiring a 61-year lease on land owned by fellow mill owner Richard Garth, Lord of the Manor of Morden. He set up a new calico mill at Phipps Bridge, which is documented as having been established in 1788. This was an addition to several other calico printing mills, already located on the River Wandle, which had become a hub for textile printing businesses by this time.

The Phipps Bridge works required running water to power machinery and to rinse excess dyes, mordants and gum out of freshly printed textiles. To this end, Rucker created a 600-yard-long diversion of the river, which came to be known as 'Rucker's Cut'. In so doing he had a brush with the local Vestry, who required him to build a bridge over it, and maintain it for 61 years, at his own expense. The start of Rucker's Cut is the right hand fork of the channel, visible a short distance downstream of the cast iron bridge over the Wandle in Morden Hall Park.

'Wandle Villa', which exists to this day near Phipps Bridge, is thought to have been constructed by Rucker as early as 1770. In 1786, Rucker used the wealth he had acquired through the West Indian plantations to buy a property at West Hill, East Putney. He had the existing residence demolished, and in its place a mansion was built to Rucker's

specifications, by architect Jesse Gibson. Rucker had extensive business interests in the West Indies, investing in slave plantations predominantly in Grenada and becoming a co-owner of several such estates there with fellow slavery proprietor, John Harvey. In 1770, having accumulated a great deal of wealth, he became co-founder of a bank which later evolved into a predecessor of the Royal Bank of Scotland.

By 1790, Rucker was a substantive proprietor of slaves and plantations in Grenada, St Vincent and other islands. When he died childless in 1804, he bequeathed many of his slaves and estates to his nephew, Daniel Henry Rucker, as well as the property at West Hill. This was renamed 'Melrose Hall' by his nephew, who sold it in 1825 in a bid to avoid bankruptcy, but was declared insolvent six years later, in 1831. Today, Melrose Hall is the home of the Royal Hospital for Neuro-Disability.

Other parts of John Anthony's estate were left to various other relatives. He took care to ensure that bequests made to female relatives were for their 'sole and personal use' and would not be appropriated by their husbands. Although this included his business interests on the River Wandle, his ownership of plantations and the slaves who worked on them accounted for much of his estate.

## **Conclusion**

Many families who owned mills on the River Wandle from the 17th to the early 19th century were involved either directly or indirectly in the slave economy. Some were plantation owners, who had derived most of their wealth from these enterprises, while others invested in slavery or at least benefited from the cut price harvesting of commodities such as cotton and tobacco, carried out by slave labour. More generally, the raw materials and wealth generated by the slave economy were crucial to the progress of the British industrial revolution.

## **G J McKie**

Sources:

EN Montague: Mitcham Histories (Merton Historical Society).

Centre for the Study of the Legacies of British Slavery (UCL).

Habitats and Heritage.

Perplexity AI.

Wikipedia.



## Dave Haunton



Dave at a recent Merton Historical Society workshop in the Wandle Industrial Museum.

We were sorry to learn from Dave's family that he died in July after a short illness.

Dave was a member of the museum, of the John Innes Society and of the Merton Historical Society. At the time of his death, Dave was the editor of the MHS's quarterly bulletin, a role he had fulfilled for several years.

**John Sheridan**



## Dates for the Diary

**Wandle Fortnight:** 13-28 September.

**Sunday 14 September:** Illustrated industrial heritage walk, 12.00 from Mitcham tram stop to Morden Hall Park. Free. Part of "Wandle Fortnight". Please book places by email to [John.sheridan08@gmail.com](mailto:John.sheridan08@gmail.com).

**Wednesday 24 September:** Wandle Valley Forum annual meeting, 6.30pm, Merton Priory Chapter House Museum. All welcome.

**Saturday 27 September:** The distinguished archaeologist Scott McCracken will discuss the rediscovery of Merton Priory at the Chapter House Museum. Booking via Eventbrite. Free. 2.30pm.

**Thursday 20 November:** WIM AGM, Mitcham Vestry Hall, 7.30pm.

**Saturday 13 December:** Talk by Alison Cousins at 2.30pm at the Merton Historical Society, St James's Church, Martin Way, Morden, SM4 4AR. "William Kilburn - Botanical Illustrator & Eminent Calico Printer". All welcome.



Accreditation Mentor: Emma Harper Charles Dickens Museum Service.  
Museum Adviser: 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](mailto:office@wandle.org)

You can find us on:

