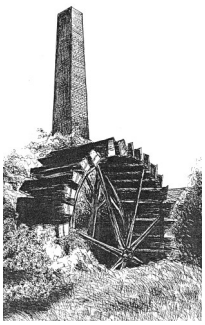
WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



BULLETIN



The late Ray Leyden (centre) in conversation with Harry Galley (left) and Nicholas Hart.

ISSUE 130 SPRING 2026

Contents

Operations Team and Archives Report	1
WIM Performance Report 2025-26	2
The Effects of the American Civil War on the Tobacco Trade	4
South East Region Industrial Archaeology Conference 2026	5
Women in Print Exhibition	7
Iron Railway Relics at Honeywood Museum	8
The Straightening of the Wandle	11
In Memorian, Ray Leyden 1947-2026	13
Dates for the Diary	15

WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

PRESIDENT
Harry Galley

TRUSTEES
Chair: Fr David Pennells, Nicholas Hart, John Harding, John Hawks.

OPERATIONS TEAM
Alison Cousins, John Sheridan, Roger Steele, Michael Taylor.

Editorial

The late Ray Leyden is an important part of the museum's history. We extend our condolences to his family and to his many friends who are associated with the museum. This edition includes a very personal tribute by Nicholas Hart.

The performance report reflects a tremendous amount of work by our volunteers, both in outreach activities and in the basic function of keeping the museum open and running.

Otherwise, I hope you will find this unusually long and varied edition to be of interest.

Finally, a correction: a statement on page 13 of Bulletin 129 that Purley was on the route of the Surrey Iron Railway was incorrect. Purley was of course on the route of the Croydon Merstham and Godstone Railway, which was the extension of the SIR from Croydon to the upper slopes of the North Downs. Thanks to Eric Shaw for spotting this slip of the pen!

John Sheridan

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Photos:
Page 1: Christine Pittman
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Page 10: John Sheridan
Page 11: Eric Shaw, John Sheridan
Page 13: Lionel Green/Merton Historical Society
Page 15: Mick Taylor

Operations team report

We have had some response to our Accreditation renewal application in that a little clarification was requested but the Grantium software which operates it is still not working efficiently and we are not sure if we are getting all the progress reports. But Mick Taylor has made our contacts at the Arts Council aware of this.

Our walks and talks are continuing at a regular pace, with the expectation that demand for the walks will increase for the summer. We have seen fewer school groups of late however.

We await an update of the results of the website renewal by local college students shortly and have firmed up an agreement with Deen City Farm for us to give presentations there which will enable them to raise much-needed funds.

A couple of us attended the Museums and Heritage Show at Olympia and evaluated a few possible new small and affordable items for the museum shop. We also signed up to the Heritage Volunteering Group which provides a network for volunteers across all aspects of the sector, not just museums. We discussed some interesting developments in provision for the hard of hearing and visually impaired visitors.



Mick Taylor (pictured right) attended an event at Wimbledon Library in support of Merton's initiative for the National Year of Reading. Alison Cousins was also there, representing the John Innes Society. The aim was to promote the work of local authors, not just local historians. But there was very little time after all the talks for more than a few sales.

A group based in the Vestry Hall (and its garden) who have been awarded a grant to work on natural dyes and dyeing visited the museum for a tour and talk. They gave us a very generous cash donation. The organisers have already used our printed resources to some effect.

An interesting donation was received from Carol Huntley of drawings and photos from her late brother. The sketches appeared to be by Vic Hines, whose portfolio is already on display in the museum, but include

some we don't have. It seems that both her brother and Vic worked at Brown & Root in Collier's Wood at some time. We have contacted Vic's son who is interested to see the additional drawings.

Although we are not yet in a position to purchase a collection management system we have two volunteers working on Access databases which can be transitioned in the future. One volunteer is adding Judy Goodman's digitised slides, the other cataloguing the snuff bottles to the required Spectrum standards. We don't yet have an overall valuation of the snuff collection but the initial response was that no item was of significant value.

One of our newest Wednesday volunteers, Nicoleta, has now left us.

In March we lost Ray Leyden who had worked tirelessly back in the 1990's to evaluate the option of a possible move to Ravensbury Mill and who had been a regular Sunday volunteer until early this year. A full tribute is elsewhere in this Bulletin.

Alison Cousins

WIM Performance Report 2025-26

This headline report on our outreach work, social media and volunteer hours covers the period from 1st April 2025 until 31st March 2026. The figures are included in an annual survey submitted to Museum Development South West.

Outreach Work



Talks – We gave 30 talks across the 12 months. These have been delivered in a wide area including such places as Cockfosters, Lingfield and Purley. Just under 1000 people attended these talks.

Walks – There were five walks during the year which were attended by 80 people.

Left: Alison Cousins delivers a talk to the Merton Historical Society about the calico printer William Kilburn.

Textile Workshops – We ran five workshops over the 12 months for schools. These reached 143 children and 40 teachers/helpers.

Events – We took part in the Merton 60th Birthday Celebration, the Civic Pride Volunteer Fair, Croydon Green Day, River Summit, Community on the Green, Merton Discovery Day, Wandsworth Heritage Festival, London Rivers Week and the Wandle Valley Forum's Wandle Fortnight.

Social Media

We have a social media presence on Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), Flickr, YouTube and Jigsaw Puzzles. We had an overall following at the end of the year of 3,028. Our main following is on Instagram, Facebook and X in that order. We do have followers from around the globe.

Our website has had 95,055 unique visits during the 12-month period.

Volunteer Hours

In all volunteers have given an estimated 2,304 hours working on behalf of the museum. That has enabled us to open on each eligible Sunday (ie. excluding Bank Holiday weekends) during the year bar one. Without our volunteers we would not be able to function. We saw 449 visitors during the period at 4.77 per day on average on the days we were open. Of these 61 were children. We opened for 282 hours during the 12 months.

Summary

Overall, the museum delivered a similar number of talks as the previous year but to far more people.

The number of workshops delivered for schools was disappointing.

Our following on social media has shown a small increase. We have a loyal band of followers in particular on Facebook.

The number of volunteer hours was just below that from the previous year. However it does show the commitment of our volunteers to the museum for which we thank them.

Mick Taylor

The Effects of the American Civil War on the Tobacco Trade

The American Civil War was fought between April 1861 and June 1865. The war took place when 13 states broke away from the rest of the United States forming the Confederate States of America. Two constitutional changes they made were (1) the right to hold slaves, and (2) a ban on taxes on international trade for the purpose of promoting industry. The second had irritated the agricultural exporters of cotton and tobacco whose taxes were used to develop Northern industry.

The North had been hurt by a severe economic downturn in 1857 whilst the South enjoyed high prices and harvests for its cotton and tobacco until 1861. Tobacco was a key export to Europe and the North, worth over $21m in 1860. It was the South who held the highest nominal wealth in land and enslaved people. By the end of the war the economic power and accumulated wealth had shifted to industrial leaders of the North – the Union. The war bankrupted the Southern states.

The war disrupted the UK tobacco trade by cutting off conventional supply lines from the Southern States. The result was a tobacco and cotton famine in Britain and Europe. This led to a reliance on stockpiles, increased prices, and the rise of risky high-profit blockade running. British private merchants from Liverpool and Bristol took part in this blockade running, carrying munitions and luxury goods to the South in exchange for tobacco and cotton.

Tobacco had continued to be grown by the farmers in the Southern States until the Southern government forced the farmers to grow food for the war cause to feed the army. The North was never starved of tobacco during the war because it 'conquered' some tobacco-growing regions of the South.



Tobacco leaves drying in a kiln

All of this action during the war would have had an effect on the amount of tobacco reaching the mills on the Wandle. They would have been paying higher prices. The quality may also have suffered. The supply may have improved towards the end of the war as the North took control of the tobacco states.



Morden Snuff Mills processed tobacco from Virginia, enriching the Hatfeild family and leaving Morden Hall Park as their legacy.

There were 3.5 million slaves working on the plantations at the start of the war. While the war resulted in the freeing of enslaved people many stayed on the plantations under sharecropping arrangements. The ex-slaves got a percentage from the sale of the crop. Others stayed for the sake of family or in hope of land redistribution. This, of course, meant that the growing of tobacco and cotton could return to its pre-war status.

My thanks to Gordon McKie for his help in researching this subject.

Mick Taylor

South East Region Industrial Archaeology Conference, 2026

SERIAC 2026 took place on 25 April at Stanley Arts (formerly Stanley Halls) near Norwood Junction station. Part of the venue is for hire as a performance and arts centre and part houses Harris Academy South Norwood. The main building was constructed in 1903 by William Stanley, inventor and manufacturer, as a technical trade school for boys. It is somewhat rambling and is described as 'Grade II listed Edwardian with Victorian sensibilities'. The interior contains a number of features and mottoes designed to prompt reflection on self-improvement.





Stanley Arts, South Norwood Hill SE25 6AB

Brief summaries of the talks

Robert Mason: Industrial Heritage Online. The speaker is currently building this online industrial heritage database out to cover the whole of GB. Pins on an online map link to text, pictures and internet links. There is a search function. There are levels of access for members of the public and for industrial archaeology society members who may add material subject to moderation. The database, here: www.industrialhistoryonline.co.uk, has recently gone live.

Dr Geoffrey Mead: Sussex Coast Industries. Various historical examples of primary (extraction of raw materials), secondary (manufacturing) and tertiary (services including transport and retail) industries. Included fishing, boatbuilding, smuggling and 'owling' (exporting without paying duties or taxes). Also the 'blue boulder men' who collected blue flint pebbles from the beaches to be sent to factories in the north west and the midlands to make glass and pottery.

David Perrett: West Ham Pumping Station Trust. This pumping station opened in 1897 to send Lea Valley sewage into the Northern Outfall, adding to the sewage pumped at Bazalgette's nearby Abbey Mills. West Ham Pumping Station closed in 1972. Two beam engines and 9 boilers remain in situ. Conservation is not possible at present because of asbestos which will cost £100k+ to remove. The trust would like in due course to open a heritage engineering training institution.

Jo Alexander-Jones: Industries of Reading. While Reading is known for its baking, brewing and seed businesses, others included Huntley Boorne & Stevens (iron and tinsmiths), The Reading Ironworks, Poulton Brickworks, and Serpells biscuit manufacturers.

Roger Davies: Brunel's Timber Viaducts. These tend to be associated with Cornwall, but occur over a wider area. They gave rise to maintenance issues. Their mean average life was 42 years, although two had active lives of 85 years.



A couple of Norwood images. The Jolly Sailor pub recalls the presence nearby of the Croydon Canal, which closed in 1836. It was replaced by the London and Croydon Railway. The Atmospheric Railway was a short-lived experiment using air pressure to push trains through a vacuum tube, but the leather seal kept failing.



John Sheridan

Women in Print Exhibition

The current *Women in Print* exhibition at the William Morris Gallery was conceived in partnership with Liberty Fabrics to mark the 150th anniversary of Liberty's and to showcase the firm's female textile designers over the years. The exhibition is also part of the gallery's programme to mark its own 75th anniversary.

The exhibition occupies several rooms on the ground and first floors. Entering the largest of the rooms, next to the café on the ground floor, you are confronted by a circular platform supported on pillars that look like rolled up lengths of fabric bearing Liberty designs. On the platform are mannequins wearing Liberty garments including a Mary Quant suit and an Althea McNish dress. The room is lined with wall hangings, images and examples of the work of some of the designers, display cases containing items such as old pattern books, and in the corner a 3D Liberty montage of everyday objects.





Mary Quant suit



Althea McNish dress. She favoured bold colours.

A small room on the ground floor features filmed archival and new interviews with some of the designers and a sales consultant, describing the design, creation and retail of printed fabric. The upstairs rooms contain more images of designers and their work. There are also descriptions of the evolution of design tools from pencil, ink and watercolour to gouache and felt tip pen to digitally engineered patterns, while stressing that hand drawing remains paramount. There are more 3D montages and, interestingly, a film dating from around 1970

made at the Merton Abbey Printworks showing operations including screen printing and, incongruously, scantily clad models moving around the works.

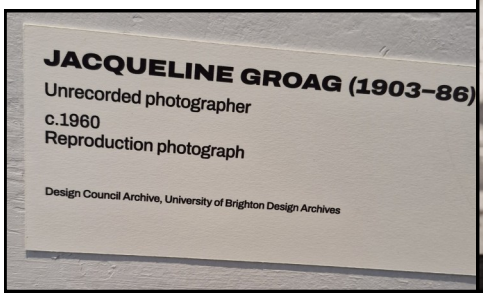








Some images from the exhibition.





The exhibition closes on Sunday 21 June and is well worth a visit. The William Morris Gallery with its permanent display is also noteworthy. The building dates from the 1740s, is Grade II* listed and was the family home of the young Morris between 1848 and 1856. It is about half a mile from Walthamstow Central station, in Lloyd Park, Forest Road, E17 4PP. Entry is free. Website: Home - William Morris Gallery

John Sheridan

Iron Railway Relics at Honeywood Museum

Mick Taylor and I visited Honeywood Museum in March to meet John Phillips, Chair of Friends of the Museum, and to examine some lengths of iron rail and stone sleeper blocks held at the museum. The rails are in storage, and the sleeper blocks are piled up in the garden.

The Surrey Iron Railway (SIR) opened in 1803 and the Croydon Merstham and Godstone Railway (CMGR) in 1805. The CMGR did not actually reach Godstone for want of capital investment. The 'railways' were horse-drawn plateways, with the flange to prevent derailment on the rail, or 'plate', rather than on the wheels. Plates were 3 feet long for ease of replacement if they broke under the weight of loaded wagons. They were secured to stone sleeper blocks by means of iron spikes. Similar plateways were installed within quarries at Merstham and Godstone to move stone and lime within quarry sites to storage and loading areas.

An article by Bruce E Osborne entitled *Early Plateways and Firestone Mining in Surrey*, in the Proceedings of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society, Vol 17 Part 3, dated February 1982, analysed some of the plates from the CMGR and from the Merstham and Godstone quarries. Osborne identified 11 types of plate, differentiated by design elements and embossed markings. He categorised the plates on display at various locations by type and likely origin. Eric Shaw's notes state that Honeywood's plates came from Wallington Library. Osborne categorised the Wallington Library plates as Type 3, from Godstone Hill Quarries. John Phillips corroborates Eric's statement and adds that the plates probably arrived at the then Beddington and Wallington Library before the local government reorganisation in 1965 that created the London Borough of Sutton, and that he is not aware of any accession records. Sutton Council opened Honeywood as a heritage centre for the borough in December 1990, and the plates and sleeper blocks would have been moved there around that time. Eric Shaw photographed the sleeper blocks at Honeywood in 1992.

Dating from 1803-06, Godstone Hill Quarry plates were an improvement on earlier plate designs. Design improvements might have been inspired by experience of Surrey Iron Railway plates breaking under the weight of heavily laden wagons. Godstone Hill Quarry plates were similar to CMGR plates, but unlike those plates were not embossed 'CM&G RY'. Some but not all CMGR and Godstone Hill Quarry plates were embossed 'OUTRAM & CO' or 'OUTRAM'. The Honeywood plates are not so embossed. It is likely that Outram manufactured the CMGR and the Godstone Hill Quarry plates. They had a contract with the CMGR, and the CMGR chief engineer William Jessop had a financial stake in Outram & Co. Outram probably had similar contracts with the quarry owners, given that the plates were similar. (Osborne pointed out that the Type 3 plates were not second-hand CMGR plates because there were slight differences.)



The sleeper blocks and one of the rails at Honeywood Museum

Outram & Co (also known as the Butterley Company of Ripley, Derbyshire) would have shipped plates and spikes from their Derbyshire works along the Grand Junction Canal to Brentford (where the final section is now the Grand Union Canal). The canal had opened in the 1790s. The canal barges would have continued their journey along the Thames to the Surrey Iron Railway wharf at the mouth of the Wandle, and the ironwork would have proceeded along the SIR to provide the materials for the construction of the CMGR and the quarry plateways.

The illustrations of the Honeywood plates show some design features. The flanges are arched for strength in the middle between the sleeper blocks at either end. There are also curved strengthening ribs on the underside. The feet which sat on the sleeper blocks are rounded and form half domes. The SIR and CMGR flanges were on the inside of the plates, but Osborne says that the Godstone Hill Quarry flanges were on the outside. He had visited the quarries and had seen this in situ. The plates would have been laid that way to protect the running surface from loose material. It is not possible to determine whether the flanges were on the inside or the outside by looking at the plates in isolation.

The CMGR construction contract provided for Outram to supply the stone sleeper blocks as well as the plates. Most of the blocks are of millstone grit which would have been quarried near the Outram works. A few blocks are of Reigate stone which could have been quarried at Merstham in the event, presumably, of local shortages of 'official' blocks from Outram.

The blocks are some 16 inches square and 9 inches deep. They have a central hole for a spike to hold two end-to-end plates in place. The holes

were made very roughly. Osborne says that wooden pegs were inserted in the holes and the spike was driven into the wood. Some of the examples at Honeywood appear to contain lead plugs, and one or two of these have neat square holes where a spike would at one time have been secured.

When the CMGR closed in 1839, most of the plates were auctioned in Croydon. Manufacturing industry was underway at that time and a gasworks had been in operation since 1827 to serve the local factories. So it may be assumed that there was a market for recycling plates in local foundries. Many of the sleeper blocks were sold to builders, but both blocks and plates were left unsold and unused in sufficient quantities as to be available for inspection to this day.



Eric Shaw's photograph taken in 1992, before the sleeper blocks grew moss and ivy.



The domed 'foot' where the plate sat on a sleeper block.

John Sheridan

The Straightening of the Wandle

This article was prompted by a casual remark I had made referring to a local legend about a forty-year court case in Stuart times regarding the straightening of the Wandle and a complaint by the mill owners from the original channel about the loss of water to power their mills.

I asked AI to see if it could find evidence of the case, but it failed. What it did find on our own website were the entries from Peter McGow concerning Amery Mills and Merton Mills, both confusingly numbered 34. Firstly, under Merton Mills he refers to a case from 1595 (L.C.C., Court Minutes of the Surrey and Kent Sewer Commissioners, vol. 1 (1909), pp. 15-16.). The case was brought to defend customary or prescriptive rights to the use of the Wandle's water based on long usage.

The case established that the historic rights of the mills on the Wandle were legally recognisable. The research did not show how long this case took to be completed.

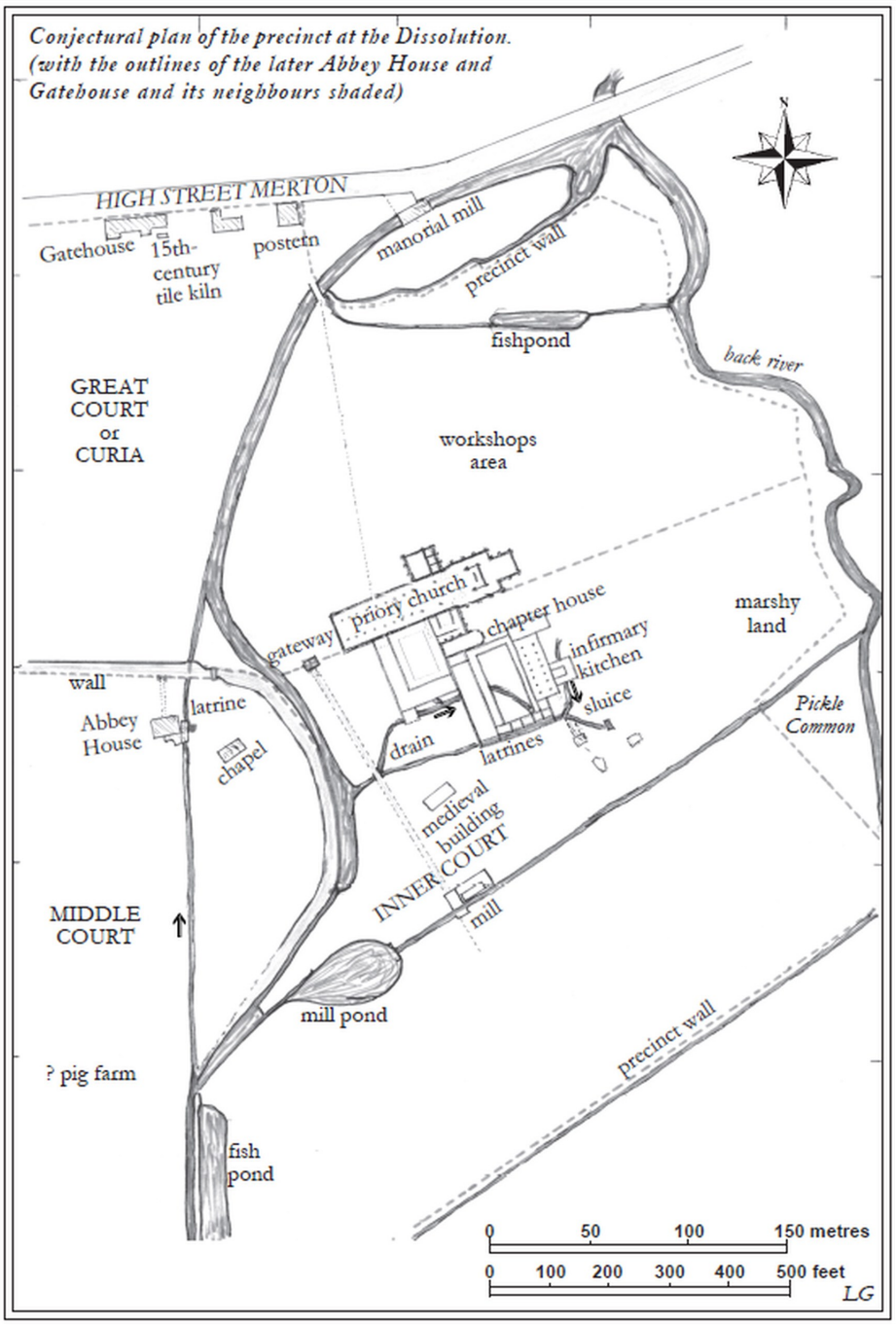
There was then a separate case in 1692 under Amery Mills which dealt with ownership of the same two mills as were involved 100 years earlier and their rights, and clearly confirmed rights concerning the control of the river's flow (Historical Manuscripts Commission, Reports No. 14, Appendix Part VI, pp. 347-9.).

In between these two cases an Act of Parliament was passed in 1665, known as the Divers Rivers Act, which includes a special section referring to the rights to straighten and use the River Wandle. I obtained a copy of this Act from the House of Lords and have created a typed version for easy access. I will be depositing these with the Museum.

I think these cases and the need for the Act evidence that for a considerable length of time landowners on either side of the Wandle were using their rights to change the course of the Wandle to suit their needs. It is a matter of English land law that properties adjoining a river have what's known as riparian rights and are deemed to own the course of the river, or in the case of divided ownership, one-half of the course. What has never been clear is whether or not the water is owned by the riparian owners or is separately a natural resource owned by the Crown.

Anyone looking at a modern map of the Wandle can see how many areas of it have been artificially straightened by landowners over the ages.

Going back to Merton Priory and what is now Merton Abbey Mills, examining Lionel Green's conjectural plan of the site is illuminating. It can be seen that the original main course of the Wandle is shown as running inside the western priory wall but with a small leat running straight North to serve as a waste disposal for the Abbey House. At some time in the late 16th century, according to McGow (McGow32), the land on either side of that leat was used by whitsters. The function of a whitster was the bleaching of cloth before it is dyed. They might have used a wheel of some sort to run the cloth through the river before being laid out to bleach—perhaps something like the waterwheel and rinsing spool in the Wheelhouse at Merton Abbey Mills. It is therefore highly likely that it was the straightening of this leat to provide a much stronger flow of water that gave rise to either or both of those reported cases. This is as much conjecture on my part as it was of Lionel's in drawing the plan!



That leaves open the point that it is highly unlikely the Romans would have caused Stane Street to cross the Wandle twice if they did not have to. It is more than probable that the whole of the western arms of the Wandle at this stage were of medieval origin, with the Pickle Ditch (referred to on Lionel's plan as the Back River) being the line of the original river course through this area.

Nicholas Hart

In memoriam, Ray Leyden, 1947 to 2026

While this article is principally about Ray Leyden's association with the museum, it would be wrong to pass up the chance to note his many qualities and wide range of activities beyond that association. He was much more modest than he should be, always ready to listen and a loyal friend. Author of a self-published book and the writer of three songs which have been recorded. Active as chair of his local Friends group and helping to organize the outings of Unite retired members group. A brilliant step-grandparent to his partner Valerie's grandchildren. Always ready to use his engineering and electrical skills for the benefit of anyone who needed his help. Deeply religious but not burdening others with his beliefs.

From the perspective of the museum it can be said that we only exist today because of Ray. Although the museum was founded by our life president Harry Galley and Ray's late brother Kevin Leyden, Ray came on the scene when it was facing terminal problems. He explains these in great detail in the museum's recording to celebrate its 40 years and this is still available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Obu3fW3R9Q&t=368s

In brief, however, three things happened about 35 years ago. First, there was the cancellation of the Enterprise Funding Scheme, which had supported the museum for its first five years leaving it penniless. Then it was discovered that the museum had signed an abusive contract for its photocopier, requiring funding which it no longer had. Then there was the fire in Hartfield Road, which made it necessary to find a new home. It was Ray, with his experience in negotiating contracts in industry and his interpersonal skills, who fought the battle with the photocopier company and solved that particular problem.

Then with the museum facing homelessness, it was Ray using those skills who found a home for the museum at Vestry Hall and then the move to the Annexe where we are today, in the process cementing the close relationship with the London Borough of Merton, which continues today.

Finally, it was Ray who negotiated that the occupation of the Annexe would be free of cost to us and obtained the additional small administration grant from the council that kept the wolf from the door. He took up the post of Company Secretary and ensured that the museum remained compliant with its statutory duties on top of his campaigning for it.

The great sadness for Ray was that he was also responsible for putting the museum in line for taking up the free property at Ravensbury Mill, which sadly never came to pass for reasons beyond his control. He and I had a 15-year battle with the freeholder and the Heritage Lottery Fund. He was persistent and meticulous in his approach and devoted to the project. It was not his fault that it never happened.

On behalf of the museum he was active in the Wandle Valley Forum, the Wandle Regional Park and the Wandle Group, keeping the museum's interest always to the fore.

The disappointment to Ray when the Ravensbury project had to be mothballed was so great that he stood down from an active management

role within the museum but continued to volunteer and was always there whenever required and whenever needed.

Ray was my friend for almost thirty years and for all that time he was the best kind of friend, never imposing but always there when needed. I will miss him, and the museum has lost a good friend as well as an important part of its history.

Nicholas Hart



Dates for the Diary

29 May: Talk by Mick Taylor to Wandsworth Historical Society, Friends Meeting House, Wandsworth High Street, 8pm, 'Around Wandsworth'.
30 May: Deen City Farm, Textile Printing History Workshop, 10am to 4pm.
31 May: Walk, Mitcham Tram Stop to Morden Hall Park, 12.00. Book by email to John.sheridan08@gmail.com.
9 June: Talk by John Hawks at Redhill Library, 5.30pm, 'William Morris'.
12 June: Walk, Earlsfield station to mouth of the Wandle, 12.00. Book by email to John.sheridan08@gmail.com.
15 June: Talk by Alison Cousins to the Clapham Society, Omnibus Theatre, Clapham Common, 8pm, 'Lavender'.
21 July: Talk by Mick Taylor, West Barnes Library, 10.30am, 'Royal Links to the Wandle'.
29 July: Community on the Green, 6pm till dusk, Mitcham Cricket Green.
18 August, Talk by Mick Taylor, West Barnes Library, 10.30am, 'The Watney Family'.

INVESTING IN VOLUNTEERS
IN THE WANDLE VALLEY

ACCREDITED MUSEUM

Accreditation Mentor: Emma Harper, Charles Dickens Museum Service.
Museum Advisor: Yvette Shepherd, The London Museum.

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

You can find us on: