

Wandle Industrial Museum

A 40 Year History of
preserving, storing and
interpreting the industries and
people of the River Wandle.

“We are where we are” – a modern expression which conveys our journey to our present building and also what we currently stand for.

This Chronology is mainly evidence-based, i.e. from documents in the information files, the newsletters and diaries. It is inevitable therefore that we do not have a complete picture of certain events or to have exact dates of when the many volunteers came and went along the way. It is hoped that the few interviews undertaken will fill this gap a little.

The foundation of the Wandle Industrial Museum is due to two people who had a common interest in The River Wandle and its industries. Harry Galley, now the museum's President, and the late Kevin Leyden wanted to preserve the river's rapidly disappearing heritage. The project started as an initiative headed by Merton Community Trust, under the leadership of the chairman Brian Shenton, assisted by Trevor Watling, which obtained funding from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) to establish a museum for this purpose.



Kevin Leyden signing museum papers.

<u>The Merton Community Trust Committee Members</u>	
<u>Chairman</u> Brian Shenton	Brian's main interest is in the Liberty Mill.
<u>Treasurer</u> Harry Galley	Harry's main interest is in raising money.
<u>Secretary</u> Kevin Leyden Trevor Watling	Kevin's main interest is in the heritage trail

<u>The Project Team</u>	
John Cook	Supervisor
David Luff	Silk Screen printing expert.
Roger Hardman	The Surrey Iron Railway
Susan Green	Historical dress
Tony Kinnon	The Paper Industry
Judith Mattick	The wild flowers, herbs, trees etc., along the length of the Wandle
Jonathan Yarwood	The artist on the team
Maheesh Patel	Our typist
Charles Ford	General interest
Haydn Stephens	Advisor on engineering problems
Frances Churchward	Interviews local people
Joan Mills	Newsletter

Merton Community Trust committee members and project team.

Four volunteers formed a committee and started to set up the museum in 1983. At this time there was no other industrial museum in the London area. In **May 1983** a Friends' Group was proposed with subs of £2 pa. and until temporary premises could be found. The Trust operated from Worsfold House in Church Road Mitcham but all the team could do was plan future projects as there was no display space. Temporary office accommodation at £30 pw for 6 months was found in St Mark's Church Wimbledon (pictured right) but this had to be extended to July 1984. The team was financed by MSC and aided by volunteer workers to do a feasibility study for a proposed industrial museum on the Wandle. Kevin Leyden and Brian Shenton lead on this. There was dissatisfaction with lack of cleaning of the rented room and how surly the caretaker was when asked to help and was thus reported to the churchwarden. In September the Friends' first newsletter was issued explaining the aims of the project and defined what their concept of an industrial museum might be.

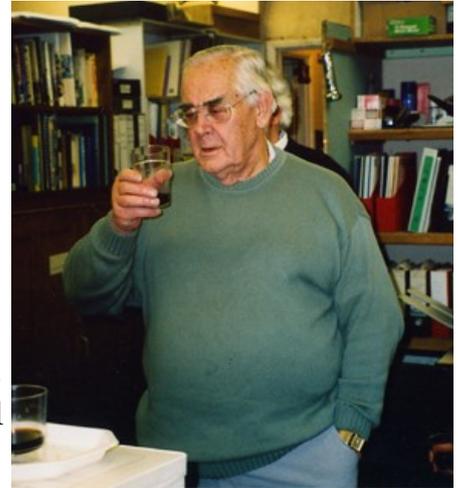


The first exhibition was opened by the Mayor on January 16th **1984** at Eagle House Mitcham (pictured left) and further locations planned using libraries and schools. In February Stephen Ashcroft was contacted re. the possibility of WIM using Park Lodge in Collier's Wood. As a former weigh house for the SIR it seemed appropriate but was fairly run down. By April LBM had agreed in principle and after some restoration this opened in August with WIM paying a reasonable rent. This site was therefore the closest the museum has actually been to the river. The MSC



Community Programme got funding for a further year. But there were still no display facilities so exhibitions were in local libraries etc. A public meeting on the future of the abandoned Liberty Print Works was planned. A proposal document resulted showing how each of the buildings might be used but it was clear that this would be more of a community workshop than a working museum. No GLC funding was forthcoming and public interest was

minimal. The inaugural AGM at the Six Bells pub in Collier's Wood was held for the Friends to elect officers and plan future exhibitions etc. There were c. 80 members of the Friends Group by July. The first committee meeting of the Friends was also held that month at which it was hoped that the GLC would finance the development of the Liberty site. This seemed to be the first mention of a Wandle Heritage Trail leaflet as improvements such as a version for disabled walkers was mentioned. P.C. Parkinson (aka PC Plod) raised £1,000 by doing a sponsored walk around the IoW for the museum. Following illegal dumping on the Liberty site (allegedly from the demolished Morden Co-op) a letter was sent to Guardian Royal Exchange to complain at the lack of security. No prosecutions were made as it became clear that GRE had wanted to demolish the machine shop and LBM announced they would only be able to take action after any destruction had actually taken place. Remember – this was a listed building. GRE had set a fee of £1,000,000 for the land and LBM had not actually got around to applying for historic building status. It was also believed that the removal of the railway had made access easier. During the year thanks to Charles Ford (pictured right), a museum volunteer, charitable status was gained and this had led to the hope that money raising might be easier but without a steady home, this made little difference.



In 1985 the project was housed at 8, Wilton Road, Collier's Wood, but these premises were soon needed for another purpose so LBM Lettings and Estates was contacted regarding the possible rental of 1, Hartfield Crescent Wimbledon, formerly occupied by Dean's Blinds. Computer equipment was obtained on loan from the GLC by October and the Council also supported funding for a curator. In April the Council gave Savacentre the go-ahead to build on the Priory site and justified it as saving an area of dereliction. In July Sainsbury's promised considerable financial support for the museum if they were allowed to develop Priory Park so WIM management agreed in principal but worried that some of the Liberty buildings would still be demolished.



The museum at 8 Wilton Road, Colliers Wood.



The edge runners arrive in Wimbledon.

In 1986 – edge runners were obtained with help from Kew Museum and Connolly's donated a machine buffer and shaver. "The Wandle Industrial Heritage in Merton" exhibition opened. The Friends voted on a proposal to convert their status as an independent voluntary association to that of full membership but considerable differences of opinion had developed between the Friends and the Trustees so with the final edition of their magazine in the summer the Friends disbanded. It had become clear that Savacentre management had not realised that WIM had expected them to restore the Liberty site. Hartfield Crescent was formally opened in May by Angela Rumbold, the local MP at the time.

The “opening” involved switching on the light to illuminate the stained glass panel. Opening hours were Tuesday – Friday and most Saturdays with free entry. Staff now included curator Pam Gimlett, Anne Melville for Education, and Matthew Davis for Publicity and over 20 part-time staff. Project packs were produced for local teachers and LBM provided additional funding to pay for a curator and rent of the premises. Kevin Leyden and Graham Maisey reported what repairs are needed at the Liberty site but gypsies had by now camped there. In September the firm representing Savacentre was contacted regarding concerns in the draft lease agreement for the site as WIM would be financially unable to maintain the listed buildings during the refurbishments.

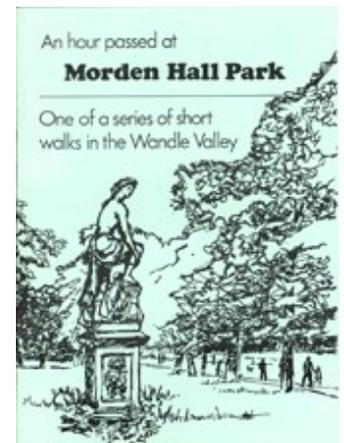


Pam Gimlett—Curator

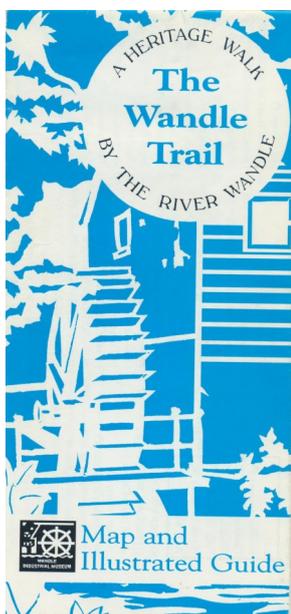
A very successful “Threads” exhibition was opened by Anita Harris who was in panto in Wimbledon in early 1987. The Dept. of the Environment expressed support for WIM’s bid for the Liberty site. In February a fire in the boiler room resulted in some damage and the need to seek new premises yet again. An ambitious full-day presentation was planned with Merton Institute of Adult Education on the Wandle heritage but it is not clear if this went ahead. Temporary accommodation for education and art activities was found in a Mitcham school. By June new



The “Threads” exhibition premises had been found in Hartfield Road, Wimbledon and in July “A Day on the Wandle” exhibition went on tour as the building did not afford public access. The now classic series of booklets “An Hour Passed in” was published. A “Travelogue” was produced for the MSC staff in the form of an analysis of the work to be done over the next year or so including an eventual tourist related A/V project. Conditions of service, time-keeping, behaviour etc. were also set out. By the end of the year Stage 2 of the Priory development was clearly to be residential, cafés and craft shops.



In August 1988 the Merton Community Programme ended with a farewell party at Crown House. Kevin Leyden writes to Urbed regarding Liberty Mills as repairs were under way, outlining possible facilities for a museum. The very first Wandle Trail map was produced for a walk by Colin Saunders in September.



In March 1989 Eric Shaw wrote to LBM Development Committee in his capacity as chair of the museum’s management committee expressing their concern at the cessation of the MCP programme thus threatening funding and a lack of secure premises. By the end of July the Hartfield Road premises had been vacated. In September Eric wrote again this time to DSMP Architectural Services about the possible redevelopment of Ravensbury Mill. Meanwhile, some equipment was being stored at the Vestry Hall, Mitcham and some at the stable block in Morden Hall Park. Sainsbury’s refused to discuss the museum’s plans any further but some blame may have been at the door of the owner of the Liberty site. Merton failed to push the matter despite an agreement being in place.

In **1990** a very overdue newsletter went out to apologise about the lack of communication due to difficulties in the last couple of years. During the 90's there was a period of consolidation, despite the expectation that the premises were still "temporary".and that Ravensbury Mill might be our ideal home. The amount of paperwork involved in the proposed project for this, and the detailed plans indicate what a massive and complex drive this was. The diaries reveal how the museum flourished in the Annexe. Visitors were keen to see the new set-up, we established liaisons with new professionals and groups. Visits were laid on for volunteers and members and the diary was a cornucopia of information about events around London.

In June **1991** the Deputy Mayor Marie-Louise de Villers officially opened the museum in the Vestry Hall Annexe. Maureen Willett of the Vestry Hall was publicly thanked by Ray Leyden (brother of one of the museum's founders) for her support in the refurbishment of the building. A new exhibition " Working the Wandle " was launched in July. "The Way Forward" report was produced to support the museum's business plan but was a very amateur production consisting mainly of newspaper cuttings with little original thinking other than working with schools. A brief reference at the end was made to Ravensbury Mill.



The opening of the Vestry Hall Annexe

The first newsletter from our new "home" appeared in Autumn **1992**. It was when a good core of volunteers was established as it appeared that being available on any day of the week was a requirement. Our presence was expanded into events such as the 3-day Morden Hall Park fair and the National Trust's Green Day. The Merton Historical Society were invited to hold their meetings at the museum.

By the following year (**1993**) Merton's Wandle Strategy and Heritage Strategy were published and articles updating the situation of the Wandle Trail (Colin Saunders) and "Mapping the Wandle" (John Viner) appeared. A group of Community Service Volunteers gave the exterior of the museum a new lick of paint.

Sheila Harris, a former teacher, was appointed in the Spring of **1994** as a part-time Administrator with a small salary. She produced a new leaflet for schools which was illustrated by John Viner and this resulted in an expansion of printing workshops and visits by local schools. Access to Ravensbury Mill enabled an inspection to take place.

The Museums and Galleries Commission (the awarding body at the time) granted Provisional Registration early in **1995** and a fundraising day held at Merton Abbey Mills on behalf of the museum in mid-summer. The newsletter listed all the current volunteers and their respective responsibilities. That autumn also saw a new format for the newsletter starting with a Newsdesk on page 1. There were reports of two significant pollution incidents in the Wandle. Croydon Museum donated the majority of the Jakson distilling collection to us.



Sheila Harris
Museum Administrator
1994—2013

In **1996** the Wandle Valley Partnership was launched and we were represented by Ray Leyden. The first Wandle Trail leaflet was produced by the museum. With the introduction of William Morris to the Merton Schools Curriculum Project (and the centenary of his death) school visits increased again. At the AGM that year there was a proposal to change the museum's name to The Wandle Valley Museum, but this was not carried.

Stephen Ashcroft steered the museum to join the Merton Chamber of Commerce in late **1997** and this was subsequently built on by the Rev. Andrew Wakefield. Funding was again sought from HLF early in the year and the team also worked towards full registration. Harriet Bazley joined to do archival and secretarial work.

1998 was quite a busy year. Although Heritage Lottery Funding had been refused for Ravensbury Mill, and been supported by both local MPs the effort was praised for its support for heritage and public benefit. We took a stall at Deen City Farm Open day and held our own very first one to great success. The edge runners, originally acquired in 1986, were eventually installed in Ravensbury Park. Over the Autumn Bank Holiday there was a break-in targeting the snuff bottles and boxes. Had Marguerite Lee-Delisle, the Hon. Archivist not had her suspicions about earlier visitors and hidden the most valuable examples, the results might have been worse. The museum participated in a special Science Day at Merton College organised by Merton Scientific Society. Nicholas and Mary Hart (pictured right) joined, and Mary became Membership Secretary and created 5 categories of members including “brick” members who were encouraged to sponsor a brick towards Ravensbury Mill. At the end of the year the death was announced of John Viner, a volunteer since 1984 and who had written the “Way of the Wandle “ poem and designed the Wandle Trail map and devised a new style of lettering.



In July **1999** there was a tribute exhibition to the late Peter Harris who had done so much for the museum and who had made generous donations of his drawings and collections. His block printing workshops were taken on by Mary Hart, who developed educational materials and a collection of relevant textile items to accompany them. She was supported by Auriel Glanville. Outreach developments were organised by Stephen Ashcroft and negotiations started for the lease of Ravensbury Mill.

In late **2000** Nicholas Hart instigated a domain name to enable the museum’s first website to be built by Michael Hart. A new administrative structure was established with a Management Committee, a Members’ Subcommittee, and a Finance and Fundraising Subcommittee. The Reverend Andrew Wakefield (pictured left) was appointed as a new Trustee and eventually became chair.



Very little occurred in 2001 save yet another HLF bid for Ravensbury Mill headed by Ray Leyden .

Good news for the start of **2002** in that full registration was achieved in January. It was also decided to apply for the Investing in Volunteers recognition. In July the headline in a local paper “It’s the Wonder of the Wandle” depicted Sheila Harris operating a model waterwheel. In the museum’s early days the local press provided much publicity for the museum. This was also the year in which the quarterly Volunteers meetings were established as a result of recent membership of Investors in People.

In April **2003** Merton Voluntary Service Council announced “budgetary re-assessments” i.e. likely budget cuts, but a council meeting developed into chaos and there was a quick rethink. WIM had stood to lose £3,500 and in response indicated that this would affect HLF bids, the Ravensbury project and all education work. The same year marked the bi-centenary of the opening of the Surrey Iron Railway and the museum produced a commemorative leaflet for this. It was also 20 years since the foundation of the museum.

Having already survived a fire and theft, in **2004** a leaky boiler caused a flood and the

building had to be closed for several weeks. However, this proved to be a blessing in disguise as the heating system had to be replaced and as displays were dismantled the opportunity was taken to renew them. Ironically someone attended a seminar on disaster planning shortly after. Roger Steele arrived. June saw the first ever Wandle Valley Festival, but sadly Kevin Leyden died just a few days before. We established a regular exhibition update every June by “diverting” the mayor to open it before leaving to open the Mitcham Carnival. The changes along the river over the years were reflected in the subjects of recent exhibitions, now under the curatorial guidance of Meg Thomas (pictured right), who had joined the museum in 1990.



Our HLF bid for a Project Planning Officer had not progressed by early **2005**, but on April 1st a certain Peter McGow stood at the door waiting for the museum to open, clutching his two-volume Mills of the Wandle. What a milestone that has proved to be. Merton Council tried to bring all groups together who were looking for lottery money. 2005 was the Nelson bi-centenary year and in memory of Peter Harris this could not be ignored. London’s Olympic bid was successful despite our chairman Andrew Wakefield declaring that he would eat his hat if so. Mary Hart put him to the challenge and baked a cake in the shape of a hat so that he was obliged to eat it in public.



In **2006** Jacqui Tucker (pictured left), a former local Headteacher became the new Hon. Archivist. A new sign was tested above the front door but there was some discord as to whether it met the relevant local regulations. Michael Hart resigned from the role of Webmaster. We joined the London Museums Group.

The lottery funding delay spread in to **2007** but we held a major new exhibition – “Young’s Brewery – End of an Era” to mark a year after the death of Sir John Young. Mick Taylor and Alison Cousins joined the volunteers at the end of the year just as the Accreditation renewal was being applied for.

We became involved with Celebrating Age in **2008** and mounted a display in the Vestry Hall to coincide with Volunteers’ Day. Again Accreditation was only provisionally awarded but professional advice was forthcoming in the form of a visit from the MLA.

A major Merton initiative called “River and Cloth” was launched in **2009** and we were involved with yet more printing workshops. A resulting wall hanging was donated and this is now on the exterior façade of the building.

A colour printer was purchased in **2010** but Harriet Bazley resigned. Eventually our full Accreditation status was achieved once more. A new Curatorial Advisor, Chris Taft, from the Postal Museum was appointed and served until 2020. It was a very busy year for visiting school groups and a very “lively” block printing session was held at Wandsworth Cubs’ HQ.

2011 brought the decision to open on every Sunday (bar bank Holiday weekends.) Volunteers supported a manic Kidsfest at Merton Abbey Mills and our new Museum Development Officer, Yvette Shepherd visited us. Electronic displays were introduced in the museum and Andrew Wakefield kicked off our social media involvement with tweets about our work. The New Year dinner became a lunchtime event but we lost Marguerite Lee-Delisle, who had

been the Hon. Archivist since the days at Hartfield Road.



The De Morgan Centre came in **2012** to contribute a panel and present a workshop on pouncing for us. A collection of smaller printing blocks was obtained to better suit activities with schoolchildren. Small “feely boxes” were made up, enhancing sensory challenges. We set up a refreshment stall (see picture left) as the Olympic torch passed the back of the museum and we took a stall at the Olympic Day and Community Fair. A major publication – “The River Wandle Companion and Wandle Trail” was produced by Bob Steele and Derek

Coleman. “Make a Difference Day” saw two local councillors help out in the museum and at the AGM our chair declared that by the next AGM the museum would be at Ravensbury Mill or not at all.

We celebrated 30 years in **2013** and a digital version of the Wandle Trail map was produced. Sheila Harris retired after 19 years as administrator. A selection of newly digitised historic photos was submitted to the Merton Memories project at the Local Studies Centre and we got on to FlickrR, Facebook and YouTube. This year also saw the start of the digitisation programme for our photograph collections. We joined the Mills section of SPAB and funded a few small projects at Ravensbury Mill.

A full index to the Mitcham Histories was published in **2014** – a research boon - and we collected some distilling bottles from a member of the Jakson family. The grant from the Ernest Cook Trust which had enable schools to have free visits, now ceased.

Our Newsletter became a Bulletin in **2015** complete with a new interpretation of the waterwheel as the logo, a new title heading and a new layout. Nicholas Hart stepped down as editor after 15 years and Mick Taylor took over after a few interim issues also starting up a Volunteers’ newsletter. Meg Thomas retired after 10 years as curator. We were now without a curator or administrator. Despite this we achieved provisional status for Accreditation and the website was upgraded. A new edition of our Wandle Trail map was produced as a print on demand version.

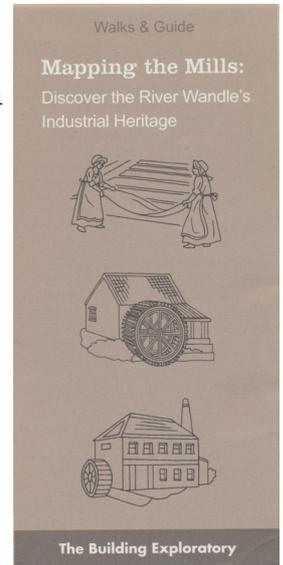
October **2016** saw the untimely death of our chair of Trustees the Reverend Dr Andrew Wakefield whose influence and enthusiasm gained the museum much credit and standing in the borough. An Operations Team was officially created to run day to day matters and report to the Trustees. Our premises were targeted by squirrels in the loft and vandals to the windows leading to the latter being boarded up by LBM. The Wandle Valley relief map got a new coat of paint and eventually full Accreditation was gained.

Our outreach activities started to increase in variety and number in **2017**, especially requests for talks which boosted our income. As a result of one workshop visit we received a panel of artwork from the Croydon-based Turf Project and this is also on the front wall outside. Steven Purvey joined as Administrator, the Teaching Support Packs were updated, and an audio app of the Wandle Trail commenced.



The boarded up windows of the museum after vandals had broken some of the panes.

In **2018** the results of our collaboration with The Building Exploratory (emanating from the Living Wandle Partnership) came in the form of the leaflet “Mapping the Mills” – so successful that we had to order a reprint in 2022. We obtained an Arts Council grant for more conservation grade storage material and the new GDPR legislation was adopted. Father David Pennels accepted the role of Chair of Trustees and Chris Tanner joined as a front of house volunteer. A grant from Tesco’s Bags of Help scheme was obtained thanks to the initiative of Siobhan Kneale, a museum professional. This was a project to adorn three of the boarded up windows and install planters at the entrance. An interpretation of the Wandle



design of William Morris was chosen and executed by local artists Portia Dadley and Dominic Fagan. Siobhan also helped set up Instagram and Twitter to our social media portfolio, updated Facebook and the FlickrR archive was established. Several new audio trails added to the IZI Travel package. Issue 100 of the Bulletin was a Wandle Trail special to mark its 30 years. A unique file of sketches and poems of the Wandle valley was donated by the family of Arthur Victor Hine.



Portia Dadley with Cllr Ed Foley who unveiled the decorated windows.

John Sheridan joined in **2019** to provide a new series of walks but Jacqui Tucker, by then the Assistant Hon. Archivist died in March. We were obliged to close in the Autumn while rewiring replaced the squirrel damage but meanwhile we bought a new large name board for the back door. A sagging ceiling was a temporary worry but checked by LBM and the new “windows” were unveiled.

Spring of **2020** brought the start of the “Covid Years” and we closed at the end of March. Roger Steele checked the premises regularly and we were able to re-open in August following all relevant national and LBM guidelines. During lockdown volunteers were not idle – Mick Taylor produced word searches and puzzles and our talks continued via Zoom and some were recorded for our YouTube channel. We held an outdoor exhibition for Mitcham Heritage Day but were forced to close again in December.

Spring **2021** saw the major acquisition of a section of verified original William Morris fabric, confirmed to have been printed at his Merton Abbey works. Sadly, Covid claimed the life of Peter McGow and his sister kindly gave us first pickings of his extensive research archive. In May we were able to re-open once again but lost yet another valued volunteer in Mary Hart, who had been involved in so many activities. Her printing blocks, textile books and collection of Liberty items were kindly donated by Nicholas Hart. But we gained a new trustee, John Harding. We launched our first Wandle Art Festival – all in the open air - which was a success. At the AGM it was agreed to drop fixed entrance charges in favour of suggested donations. The windows on the north side were given new panels. We were able to record in the various national museum surveys that Covid



The Colliers Wood Orchestra at the Wandle Art Festival.

had not affected us too badly.

Fiona McKelvie, a former Liberty employee who had been with us as a Sunday volunteer relocated to N. Ireland in **2022**. We shared premises with a pop-up enterprise in the

the Southside Centre at Wandsworth for a few months but with limited success. The gateway from the Guest House in the former Merton Priory was transferred to the Chapter House for a better display and interpretation. The final 2 panels with the Morris design were installed to complete the “Change the View” project.

By **2023**, in this 40th year of the museum, Eric Shaw was able to notch up the same number of years with the museum and received a long service award for this dedication from LBM. We are able to note that there is now a 50% increase in talks given between January and March compared to the whole of 2022 and more subjects are being added to the repertoire. Our carpet was given a deep clean, courtesy of LBM.

Finally:

From the nomadic early years the museum is still housed in “temporary” premises in the Annexe to the Vestry Hall in Mitcham. The emphasis of the museum’s work has very much shifted to outreach activities such as an ever-growing schedule of talks presented at ever-increasing locations. Schools are finding it difficult to fund transport to come to workshops so we are always prepared to take our education material and block printing to them. Social media is now an established success for us and has resulted not just in greater publicity, but several donations and a considerable amount of local information.

We continue to support local events and initiatives and would like to record our ongoing appreciation of the staff in the Vestry Hall.

As with many other organisations reliant on volunteers, it has been impossible to list every volunteer who has worked for the museum over the years. And now our numbers are gradually dwindling and average ages increasing so with a growing number of events to support we are often stretched to the limits. The dedication of our existing volunteers is therefore highly valued.



Accreditation Mentor: Emma Harper Welwyn Hatfield Museum Service.
Museum Advisor: Yvette Shepherd, Museum of London (Docklands).

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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:

