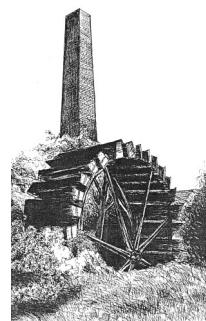
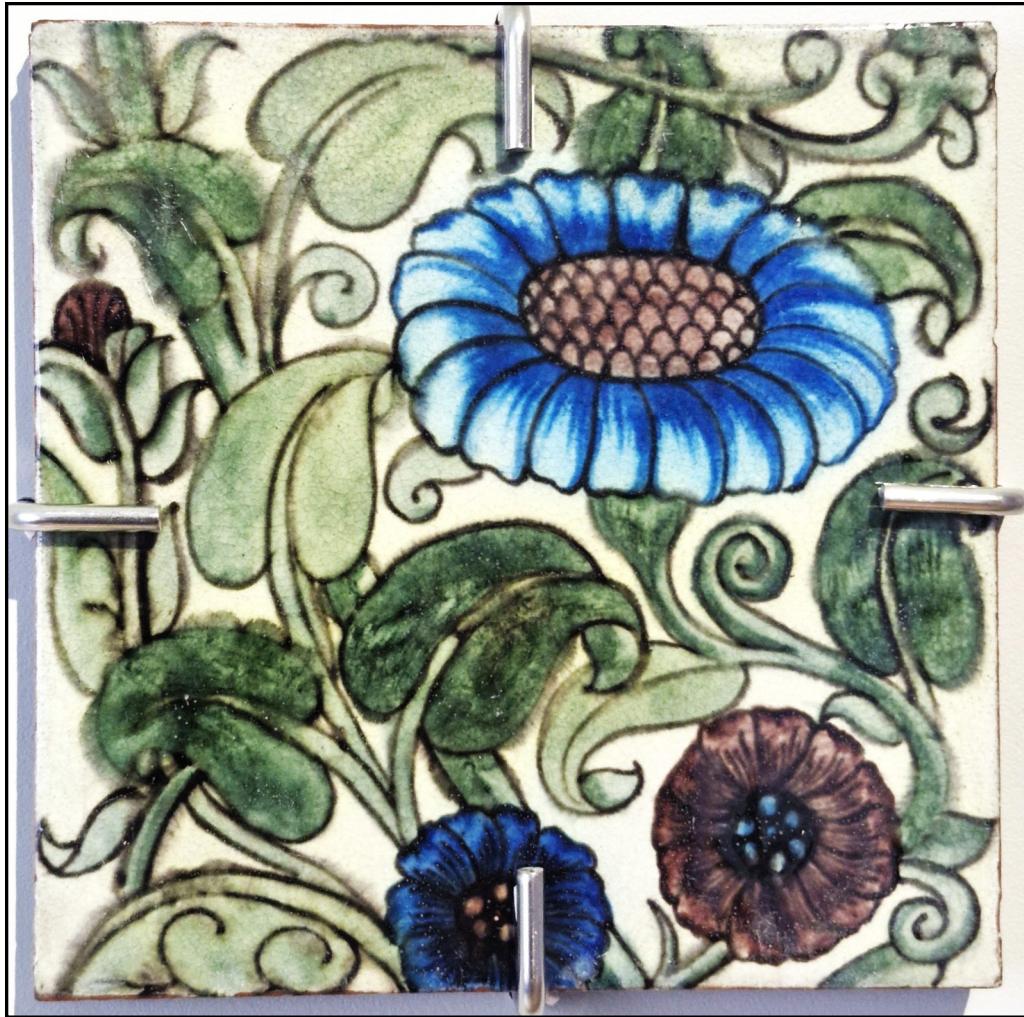


WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



BULLETIN



A William De Morgan 'Marlborough' ceramic tile at the
I am. We Are. Liberty. exhibition.

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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

In this edition Mick Taylor reviews the colourful exhibition at the Liberty store in the West End to mark their 150th anniversary.

Operations Team members visited the exhibition to take it all in and to seek out references to the Liberty Print Works on the River Wandle. Mick mentions the question whether William Morris and Arthur Liberty ever met. I believe they did know each other and will return to the question in a future edition.

Alison Cousins' Operations Team report covers our AGM as well as operational business. Alison is too modest to mention that AGM attendees greatly enjoyed the refreshments she kindly provided. Alison, Mick and Roger Steele deserve thanks for all their work towards the renewal of our accredited museum status.

There is quite a lot in this edition—not least the New Year lunch invitation—and I hope you will find something of interest.

John Sheridan

Cover Picture: John Sheridan
Photos:

Pages 1 and 2: Merton Council.
Page 5: Mick Taylor, John Sheridan.
Page 6: John Sheridan, National Library of Scotland [Ordnance Survey Maps - Map Images - National Library of Scotland](#)

Pages 7 and 8: WIM Archive (gift by Sallie Pennington).
Page 9: Mick Taylor.
Page 10: Mick Taylor, John Sheridan.
Page 11: John Sheridan, WIM Archive.
Page 12: Alison Cousins, John Sheridan, Mick Taylor.

Operations Team Report

The AGM was held on November 20th in Mitcham Vestry Hall's refurbished Training Room, now called The Mansfield Hall. The new layout worked well and despite the cold weather attendance was good. We were delighted to be joined this year by the Deputy Mayor, Shuile Syeda, who delivered a very fine tribute to our work and ambitions, describing us as a "dynamic hub".



Our trustees listen appreciatively to Cllr Syeda

The usual reports were delivered from the Chair of Trustees, the Treasurer and on behalf of the Operations Team. The support from our Accreditation Mentor and Museum Development Officer was much appreciated by all and there was the usual mutual admiration shown by the Trustees and Operations Team members and by both groups to Merton Council and the Vestry Hall staff in particular. All trustees had agreed to stand for a further year as had the Operations Team. The annual accounts were agreed and Axis Accountants were reappointed as auditors.

Roger Steele then presented an update on the health and condition of Eric Shaw, our longest serving volunteer, and read out an account from Eric relating how he came to be involved with the museum from its early days in Hartfield Road. A framed certificate of appreciation for his exceptional contribution to our work will be taken to his home.

The formal meeting was followed by a talk on "Riverfly Monitoring on the Wandle" by the distinguished naturalist Derek Coleman, co-author of the wonderful *River Wandle Companion*. Along with some extraordinary close-ups of river insects, Derek identified the various species which

are monitored and compared the results at Shepley Mill and Morden Hall Park, having said that the riverfly is not actually a “true” fly!



Derek Coleman addresses the AGM

Freshwater shrimps, mayflies and types of caddis fly are the main target groups warranting analysis, and trends of incidences over the last 15 or so years show considerable variation, with the inevitable gaps during 2020-2022 skewing the results a little. Some species are more susceptible to the effects of pollution than others – the diesel spill in February had not had the dramatic effect expected but a somewhat surprising contribution was that of flea repellants washing off dogs whose owners had allowed them

to swim in the river. One factor which had not been totally considered was the irregular seasonal surge of the bournes from the North Downs.

All present learned a great deal from Derek’s talk. He made it clear how much more there is to be found out, and how important the monitoring is for tracking the health of the river and the risks it faces.



AGM group photo

Turning to the more usual Operations Team matters, school workshops have returned for the Autumn – from All Saints Church of England School and Liberty School. The latter who arrived on November 11th had to have a break in their session so they could attend the memorial service on the Lower Green. Twenty-four pairs of muddy shoes contributed to the existing detritus on our ancient carpet – a challenge to remove it before the afternoon group arrived to sit cross-legged on the floor. Roger Steele had laid a wreath on behalf of the museum and the Vestry Hall staff at the service on Sunday November 8th.

Talks continue apace - to Purley Literary Society (reviving Eric Shaw's Surrey Iron Railway slides), Wimbledon WI, Morden Townswomen's Guild, Merton's Cameo Seniors Club and the local Silver Youth Group.

Local postgraduate student Bethan Rigby visited to discuss her work on issues connected with a history of Morden Hall Park, and Paige and Tara popped in from Merton's new Cultural Impact Team to introduce themselves and explain a little of what they are engaged to do. Natalie Parsons came from the Merton Memory Hub to discuss how we might use some of our artefacts with their dementia group in the New Year.

In September a very thorough building survey in respect of asbestos management for our building was commissioned by the Council but limited access to storage areas prevented a full analysis.

Although we will be holding our annual New Year Lunch as usual in January we have also invited all our volunteers to join us on Sunday December 14th for a Christmas get-together.

Since late summer we have been getting our Accreditation “ducks” in a row. We keep our policies and our forward plan under review anyway, but many documents need checking and updating before a final sign off by our trustees. Renewal of our accredited status will show that we continue to follow national best practice in museum governance and management. Our Accreditation Mentor, Emma Harper, dutifully went through the majority of the documents and subsequently visited us to go through her suggestions. Yvette Shepherd, London Museum's Development Officer for Organisational Health, also commented on our Forward Plan.

Steve Purvey has now completed the total upgrade of our computer installation and so far the “Do Not Switch Off” notice on the plug for the server has only been ignored once!! Our thanks to Steve for assembling the dedicated equipment amid the restrictions of our office space.

We are working with students from East Surrey College on a new improved website. We hope the work experience will be of benefit to them as well as to the museum. There might be more to report in the New Year.

Finally, the results of Museum Development South West's Annual Museum Survey were published recently. Their analysis of our economic impact is set out below.

“Wandle Industrial Museum – Economic Impact of Visitors figures 2024/25

Visitors number: 402

Total economic impact of visitors to the local economy: £10,979

Total economic impact of procuring goods and services: £871

Area median total economic impact of visitors: £667,129

National median total economic impact of visitors: £346,782

Area median total economic impact of employment: £88,392

National median total economic impact of employment: £86,210

Area median total economic impact of procuring goods and services: £74,593

National median total economic impact of procuring goods and services: £12,519”

The analysis was developed and operated by MDSW and PS Research, in collaboration with Museum Development England. It was funded by Arts Council England. For readers interested in methodology and interpretation, there is more at the link: [Annual Museum Survey 2025 - South West Reporting - Museum Development South West](#)

Alison Cousins

I AM. WE ARE. LIBERTY.

This was the title of an exhibition at the Liberty store in London celebrating their 150 Years – 1875 to 2025.

Operations Team members visited the exhibition independently of each other. We were greeted by a corridor lined with printed textiles hanging from frames. Like washing on a clothes airer they welcomed you to a range of colours and patterns. You first viewed a timeline of the life of Liberty. Of course, we took great interest in what there was about any links to Merton and the Liberty Print Works. We saw a couple of references:

1904

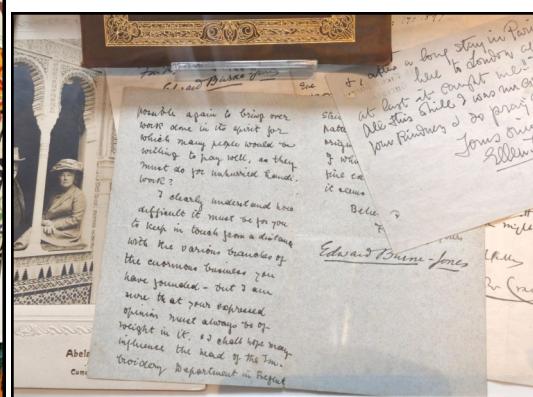
Liberty buys Merton Printworks – its own printing mill - where its world famous fabrics and silk scarves are block printed.

"I was determined not to follow existing fashions but to create new ones"

- Arthur Liberty



We looked at many of the patterns taking in their bright colours and varying shapes. Some of the textiles in the display cabinets were labelled with the name of the design and the designer, but disappointingly none of the hanging textiles were labelled. In fact, when Roger and I first arrived in the store we looked at some of the scarves that Liberty has for sale. I asked the question of a member of the shop staff if they knew who designed a particular set of Peacock patterned scarves. They did not know. Maybe we should not be too surprised, as Liberty historically has a policy of not crediting designers.



We were very pleased to see a display of tiles, many of them by William De Morgan and Morris & Co. Further on there was a display of personal items belonging to Arthur Liberty. Among these were two letters dated 1897 and 1898 to Liberty from Edward Burne-Jones. The correspondence was about Japanese silk.

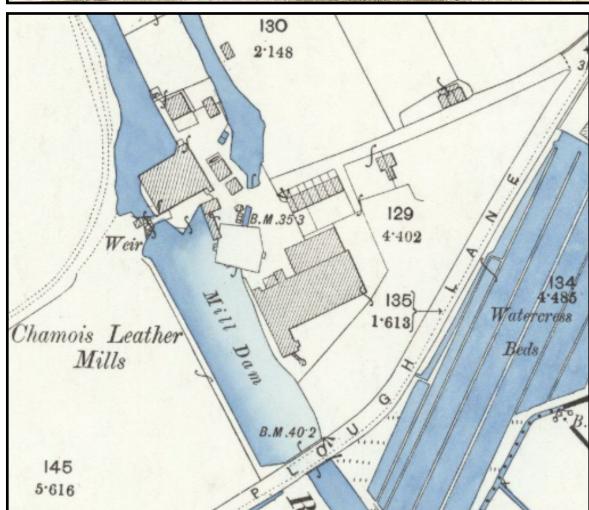
Leaving the passageway you entered the exhibition shop. The walls had a display of framed examples of printed fabric. It is highly likely that some of these, dating from the late 19th century and labelled as *Liberty Archive*, were printed by the Littler family in their works that Liberty took over in 1904. The family were well known for their paisley patterns and scarf and shawl work. The works site is now Merton Abbey Mills.

The exhibition was worth visiting. It was a surprise to see the tiles and in particular the letters from Burne-Jones. We go back maybe to that question whether William Morris and Arthur Liberty ever met? Also did Edward Burne-Jones meet Liberty? Today as in the Morris and Burne-Jones days, Liberty sells goods produced by many designers. It just seems a pity that many of the designers do not get the recognition they deserve. The exhibition was dismantled at the end of July and sent off to be displayed in Japan.

Mick Taylor

Memories of Chuter & Son

In Issue 81 of our Newsletter (February 2013), Mick Taylor gave us an insight into the workings of Chuter & Son who produced chamois leather on the site of the former Wimbledon Copper Mill. "The Old Coppermill" building still exists on Copper Mill Lane, near the AFC Wimbledon football stadium. The other former mill buildings have gone.



The Chuter site, 1890s. The building over the river housed the waterwheel.

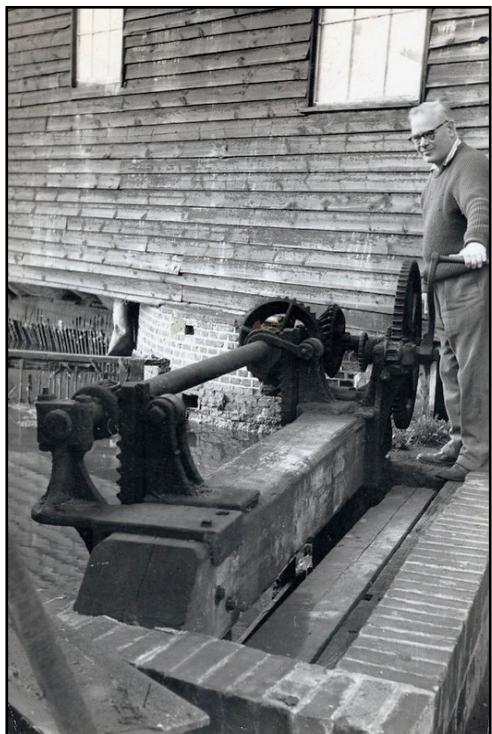
We have recently been in touch with Mrs Sallie Pennington, the daughter of Malcolm Pummell who was the manager and subsequent owner of the mill from 1935 until the late 1960s. She offered us a file of cuttings, photographs and personal recollections. The river was prone to flooding before Surrey County Council

eventually put in measures to alleviate this with the costs shared with Merton, Wimbledon, Beddington, etc. Sallie recalled that the flood alerts often came in the middle of the night requiring her to rescue their chickens from the water and bring them in to the kitchen where her father would shake their limp bodies in front of the fire to resuscitate them. Apparently it worked.



She comments on the state of the river in the late 1950s and noted that a fine trout had been caught behind their garden by a former resident and was still on display in a glass case.

Her donation also included a school project on the River Wandle – its sources, the geology of the Wandle Valley, its industrialisation and pollution. It is extremely thorough and a valuable resource of its time. She was able to visit mills which were still working as well as going to organisations such as the LCC's Engineers Dept. and the committee of the Wandle Protection Society.



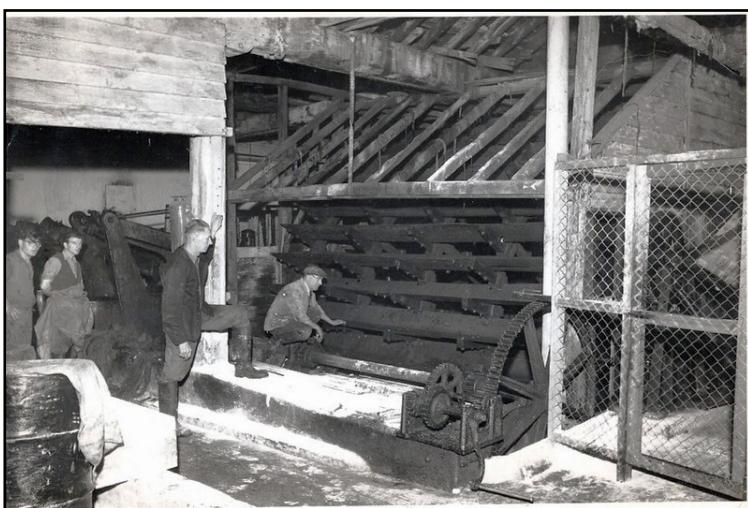
Malcolm Pummell opening the sluice gates

Also among the files are notes from Malcolm Pummell as to the maintenance and repair of the waterwheel. This was controlled by a wide sluice, and the water power from the Wandle was fed from a mill pond and controlled by 3 small sluice gates. After WW2, no-one was available to watch the gates and Mr Pummell often had to go out at night (clearly a family trait!) in the pouring rain and open them and alert controls downstream such as the Southern Railway power station. He estimated that he had seen a rise of 4 to 5 feet in 15 minutes if a storm raged and gates had been opened upstream. Several cuttings and photos show flooding in the area in the 1950's and 60's and children paddling and boating along the main road.

The build-up of mud in the mill pond was also a hazard. After a weekend away Mr Pummell came back having shut the gate to enable a build-up of water for a start on Monday. On being asked by the LCC engineer where his tractor was they found it submerged in the mill pond because it had broken down could not be removed.

An article in The Leather Trades' Review from March 18th 1936 recounts a tour of the works. Among the many cuttings in the file is a lengthy agreement dated 1909 between The Corporation of Wimbledon and Chuter and Son Ltd. as to the discharge of effluent from the works into the public sewer, and a conveyance document of 1931 restricting further industrial building and specifying that any future dwelling, stabling, or coach house must be for a single household only. The purchaser would also be liable for partial expenses of maintaining and cleaning the road and sewers outside the frontage of the property until the local authority took over such responsibility. Surprisingly that didn't deter any likely buyer.

Also included is an article from "London Electricity" – the LEB's magazine, for July-August 1955. The "Wheels Along the Wandle" section notes that Chuter's waterwheel was the last to be in commercial use and said to be the second largest in the country. It is described as being mounted on an eleven inch square iron shaft more than twenty feet long. With five cast iron compass wheels and forty-two paddles twenty-two inches deep and fourteen foot long, the resulting wheel was nearly twenty foot in diameter. The machinery it drove was specific to the chamois manufacture. This being an LEB promotion, the importance of a 6kw electrical generator was significant. Malcolm Pummell was aware of the balance between preserving this 200 year old wheel which provided free energy versus the sheer amount of factory space it took up to do so. He tells of a previous owner who tried to remove a flywheel which was mounted on the shaft in order to get its scrap value. By using explosives to remove it the roof was damaged and the money from the scrap had to go on roof repairs.



Working on the waterwheel

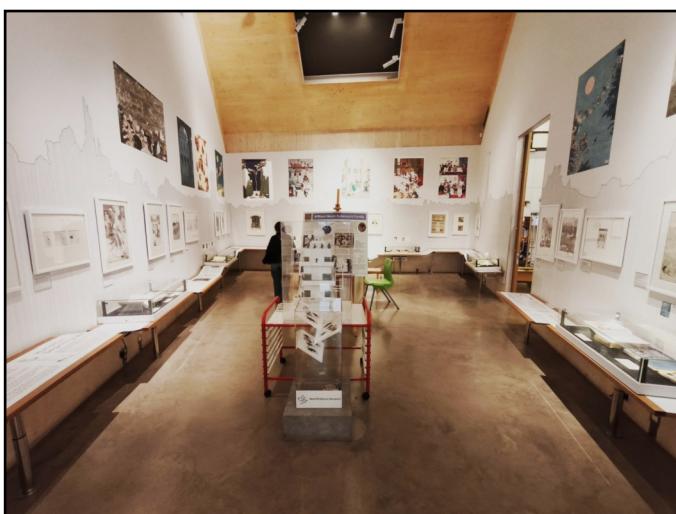
Following Mr. Pummell's retirement the family moved to Watery Lane in Merton Park, a location which, despite its name did not provide similar flooding challenges. He became a member of the John Innes Society where he was responsible for supervising the restoration and conversion of the Coach House in time for the 1977 Silver Jubilee.

Alison Cousins

A Bit of a Heath Robinson

On the last Sunday of September my wife Janet and I visited The Heath Robinson Museum. It is set in the delightful Pinner Memorial Park with its duck pond and former country home. The house known as West House was once the property of the grandson of Lord Nelson and Emma Hamilton. Nelson Ward was the son of their daughter Horatia.

West House and the museum are operated by The West House & Heath Robinson Museum Trust. In 2001 they started to raise funds to restore the house and build a purpose-built museum next to the house. The house reopened in 2010 and is now home to a nice café where we had lunch and which appeared to be well used by local residents. The museum opened in October 2016.



The museum has three main rooms. One has a permanent history of Heath Robinson. A second room is used for temporary exhibitions which are changed every four months. The third room is an activity room with models based on Heath Robinson ideas. These can be played with. There is a small shop area which also acts as the entrance desk.

Who was Heath Robinson and what is his link to the Wandle?

Born in May 1872 William Heath Robinson trained at the Royal Academy Schools and lived in Pinner from 1908-1918. He started life as a landscape painter before becoming an illustrator of children's and adults' books, Shakespeare plays and Kipling poems. He is more well known for his satirical magazine cartoons in which he made humorous comment on the two world wars and society. What was less well known is his work in advertising. He worked for around 100 clients. It is with this work that we find the link with the Wandle and in particular Connolly Bros, the leather curriers at Colliers Wood. Heath Robinson started work for Connolly Bros in the 1920's. Over a twenty-year period, he produced over 200 cartoons. These were used in advertising material given to clients of the company. A number of these were included in a booklet celebrating 50 years of Connolly Bros. They certainly give a wacky and hilarious view on the company and the production methods

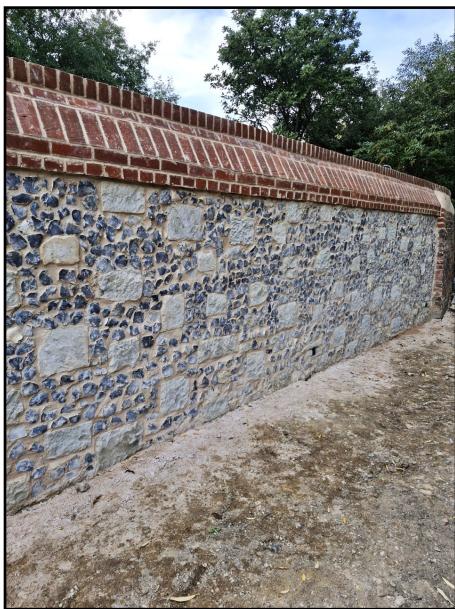
they used. A copy of the booklet is held by the museum. Heath Robinson became known as ‘The Gadget King’ and produced a book “How to live in a Flat” in 1936 which showed gadgets to make life living in a flat more comfortable. He also left behind on his death in 1944 the term “A bit Heath Robinson”.

Mick Taylor

Wandle Valley Forum AGM, 24 September 2025

The AGM was preceded by a tour of the Grade II listed Merton Priory precinct wall, adjacent to the Pickle Ditch to the east of Sainsbury’s. The National Trust archaeologist Natalie Cohen showed off a previously collapsed short section of the wall which the National Trust had repaired using the original flint and Reigate stone, with modern brick coping on top to protect the wall.

The repair rather accentuated the poor state of much of the rest of the wall, which is some 200 metres long. Vegetation grows behind and out of the wall. The raised ground level on the Sainsbury side appears to place pressure on the wall. The National Trust’s priority is to manage the wall in order to get it removed from Historic England’s At Risk Register.



In the longer term the National Trust would like to create a “Pickle Park” in the area between Sainsbury’s and the Priory Retail Park, but that is subject to a fundraising exercise which has yet to get off the ground.

The 30 or so attendees at the AGM in Merton Priory Chapter House Museum heard updates from the Chair, Tony Burton, on the Wandle Trail “missing link” and on Beddington Farmlands. Progress on these

matters was slow. The Forum had sought to ensure that lessons had been learned from the diesel spill into the Wandle in February. It was noted with satisfaction that the Mill Green mast planning application had been withdrawn. A few recent and forthcoming improvements to the Wandle Trail were noted.

Simon Edwards of TiCL launched the Forum's new *Wandle Trees and Tree Trails*. A map at the link: [Articles | Wandle Valley Trees Tree Trails | TiCL: Experience it, share it - TiCL it!](#) and on the TiCL app identifies special trees and tree trails in parks in the Wandle Valley. Tree trail booklets are available in the museum.

John Sheridan

Still from Jakson Mint and Lavender Growers

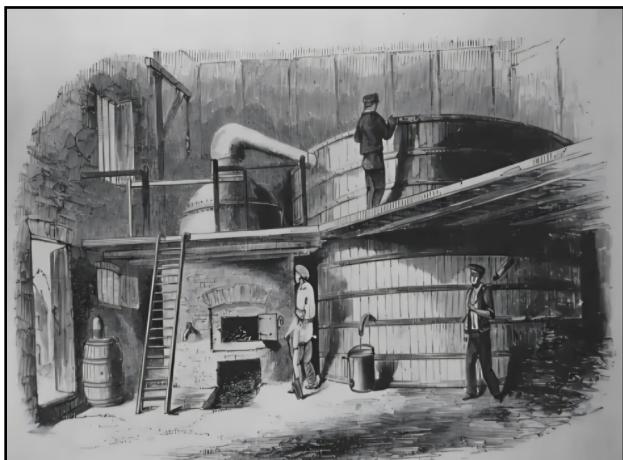
The Operations Team report in Bulletin 122 mentioned that part of a nineteenth century lavender or peppermint still had been installed in the Vestry Hall garden. There is no room for it in the museum.

We have photos of the still in the Vestry Hall garden and photos in the museum's Flickr account of the still in situ at Jakson's, but the equipment is incomplete in all these photos. The dustbin-sized cylindrical vessel in situ appears to be resting on a brazier, so it is reasonable to conclude that it was a still heated from below, rather than a condensing vessel.



Left: the still in the Vestry Hall garden. Above, in situ at Jakson's.

Alison Cousins' talk on lavender (YouTube https://youtu.be/OCSW_TThr_4?feature=shared) contains an image of a larger, earlier,



complete still. This shows the heat source, the still, the “swan neck” pipe from the top of the still, and a very large condenser tank. The tank might have been full of cold water to facilitate condensation of the Lavender/mint water and oil in the pipe. The condensate then dripped out of the pipe into the bucket at the side of the tank for separation of the oil and lavender/mint water.

Later stills had much smaller condensers with running cold water passing through them. The stills themselves would always have been quite large because they had to be stuffed with lavender or mint as well as water. The steam passes upwards through the lavender or mint and acquires vaporised oil and water as it passes into the swan neck pipe.



For comparison, here are photos from Vallauris in the south of France of a machine for crushing green oranges to obtain orange water (juice) and essential oil, and a still for distilling the flowers of the orange tree to obtain essential oil.
John Sheridan

Wandsworth Mills Development



The Berkeley Group is marketing this new development across the Wandle from the former Ram Brewery. It will include a 34-storey tower on the site of the former Middle Mill, on the corner of Wandsworth Plain and Armoury Way. Work on the site has begun. The extent of any archaeology is not clear. The original planning permission was granted as part of the Ram site redevelopment which is now complete and is shown in clear perspex in the model.

John Sheridan

Invitation to the Wandle Industrial Museum New Year Lunch 2026

Dear Member/Volunteer,

You are cordially invited to attend our New Year Lunch on Wednesday 7th January 2026 from 12:00 at Park Place, Commonside West, Mitcham CR4 4HB. Guests are welcome.

Cost is £20 per head for three courses. Wine with the meal will be provided by the museum. **We would be grateful for payment in advance.** This may be done by cash, cheque, made payable to the museum and sent to the museum, or by bank transfer:
Sort Code 16-32-45 and Account No: 12263437.

To confirm your place please reply by e-mail to treasurer@wandle.org or telephone 020 8648 0127 giving the name(s) of those who will be attending and the method of payment used.

We look forward to seeing you.



Dates for the Diary

Saturday 13 December, 2.30pm, St James's Church Hall, Martin Way, Morden SM4 4AR. A talk by Alison Cousins on William Kilburn, botanical illustrator and eminent calico printer. All welcome.

Wednesday 17 December: the last day the museum will be open this year. We reopen on Wednesday 14 January 2026.

Wednesday 7 January, 12.00 noon, Park Place, Commonside West, Mitcham CR4 4HB. WIM New Year lunch. See invitation above.

Tuesday 17 March, 10.30am, West Barnes Library, Station Road, New Malden KT3 6JF. A talk by Mick Taylor on Women of the Wandle. All welcome.

Tuesday 18 August, 10.30am, West Barnes Library, Station Road, New Malden KT3 6JF. A talk by Mick Taylor on the Watney family. All welcome.



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:

