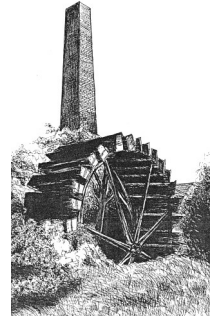


# WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



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# BULLETIN

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## WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

### PRESIDENT

Harry Galley

### TRUSTEES

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

### OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

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

# Editorial

Christmas is a thing of the past and Easter has just gone. Hopefully we are entering a period where the restrictions around the pandemic, in our country at least, can be eased.

The museum is set to reopen after the 17th May. All measures will be in place to ensure a safe environment..

There is sad news in this issue. Peter McGow who did much research into the mills of the River Wandle and the Surrey Iron Railway passed away in February. He has left us his legacy through his work.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the bulletin. As always do let us have your feedback and comments.

Best wishes,  
*Mick Taylor (Guest Editor)*

### *Cover Picture:*

This picture by Ray Leyden is, as many of you will recognise of the River Wandle in Morden Hall Park. This part of the river from the snuff mills is manmade. The picture gives you a feeling of what it could have been like along the Wandle Valley before industrialisation and housing development.

## **Operations Team Report**

Despite being closed since our last Bulletin was published there has been a fair amount of activity and planning as well as regular weekly visits to check all is well. There was a slight problem of rain ingress in our offsite archival store but this has now been repaired and no significant damage done. A new graffiti tag has now appeared on one of the boarded windows of the museum, but this has been reported to the Council and dealt with. Our main focus is to organise the summer exhibition, this time as an outdoor display of art depicting the Wandle. We also have a few talks booked for the summer months but all have backup plans in case we can't visit in person.

Mick Taylor has produced a short promotional video for the museum, starring all the usual suspects, and he regularly updates our social media input which receives positive and useful feedback, often leading to yet more enquiries. A visitor in 2019 who photographed our Surrey Iron Railway display donated a copy of *The Southern Way* magazine in which his article on "Railways of the Wandle Valley" appears. Mick also continues to circulate quizzes and new jigsaw puzzles.

The effects of Covid-19 on the museum was of interest to The Association of Independent Museums and Merton Council, the latter needing confirmation for audit purposes. We struggled to see the relevance of some of the questions but managed to provide data for both organisations.

We have purchased a small length of original Morris & Co. fabric depicting the "Flower Pot" design which was originally registered in 1883. This was block printed at the Merton Abbey works and came from the archive of Arthur Halcow Vestage. Our thanks to Fiona McKelvie for introducing us to this wonderful resource.

Our volunteer Eva Moody has been busy again helping to add new products to the shop area and has embellished some plain canvas bags with Morris fabric.

Our major acquisition however is a selection of books and maps from the extensive collection of the late Peter McGow, a tribute to whom appears elsewhere in this Bulletin. We are also organising the dispersal of items not applicable to the museum to other organisations based in the Croydon area. Our thanks go to his sister for giving the museum the first option on this library.

As members of the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society (GLIAS) we are entitled to attend the AGM, and Peter Cousins duly sat in on that. It was just a business meeting but via Zoom enabled a wider attendance than usual.

***Alison Cousins***

## **The Young & Co Archive: Review of an online talk by Emma Anthony (Wandsworth Heritage Service)**

Emma Anthony of the Wandsworth Heritage Service delivered a well-attended and well-received online talk on Thursday 26 February to members and guests of the Wandsworth Historical Society. Her subject was the Young & Co archive.

The Heritage Service has been funded by the William Allen Young Charitable Trust to catalogue the archive and make it available to researchers at the Lavender Hill Library. The project is behind schedule because of the pandemic, but Emma hopes that the work will be complete later this spring.

Emma began with a reflection on the value of industrial archives as evidence of human ingenuity and of the social and economic heritage of industry. She noted that 2021 marked the 190<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Young family presence at the Ram brewery.

As one might expect, the archive contains minutes of board meetings, correspondence, ledgers and legal documents. It also contains numerous photographs and scrap books, chronicling the day-to-day work and life of the brewery community. These formed the bulk of Emma's illustrations and talk. Topics covered included:

- Brewery crafts, such as cooperage, saddle making and blacksmithing
- Brewery machinery, including the beam engines
- The benevolent management style and employee loyalty, with long service awards reflecting a "job for life" culture; and children coming to the site to meet the animals, including a live ram, with John Young dressed as Santa Claus.
- However, personnel records also included misdemeanours, such as incivility and playing cards on company time. It seems that drinking beer on site was tolerated, but stealing it for consumption off site was not.
- Workforce demographics: the brewery was male dominated and the bottling plant female dominated.
- The heavy horses, which won numerous prizes. Generations of Youngs chairmen were champions of the shire horse for local beer deliveries and for breeding and showing.
- Celebrity visits: Robert Mitchum was photographed in the Ram Inn after filming. He was said to have consumed five pints of Youngs Special.

- The Queen's visit in 1981 for Youngs 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary. There are five albums of photographs, clippings and correspondence.
- Design records, including artwork for bottle labels.



Young's Brewery Yard in August 1976  
Photograph: Eric Shaw

In Q&A members of the audience showed their knowledge of latest developments at the site. Sambrooks Brewery are preparing to open a tap room and heritage centre. A collection of stone Surrey Iron Railway sleepers rests in the stables, and there are plans to reset them somewhere more prominent at some point in the future. The beam engines are two of only three surviving Wentworth beam engines; they have been restored to a turning but not a steaming state. An interesting talk, and a taster for the archive when it is made available. Inevitably, in view of the illustrated talk format, a little light on the economic forces and strategic decisions facing the brewery, but as Emma said, the archive will enable researchers to explore questions of that kind.

***John Sheridan***

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### **A Memory of the wall of Merton Priory**

This comment was made by a John Davies about the wall that surrounded Merton Priory following the post of a picture of the King's Head pub on Merton High Street on our Facebook page.

“Old Priory wall was the back wall of the parking lot, never really appreciated it at the time and inside the Board Mills they had to build around some of the wall that actually went through the building.”

John worked for Merton Board Mills/Shirley Box.

## Peter McGow



“**Books Do Furnish a Room**” wrote Anthony Powell in 1971. This approach to interior design could well have been interpreted by Peter McGow who sadly died earlier this year following a stroke at his home in Croydon. Our condolences go to his sister Jean, to whom he was very close.

Peter was a long-standing supporter of the museum, but his outstanding contribution was the generous donation of “The Mills of the River Wandle” – an unpublished work of immense scholarship and indisputable value to us. The standard response to any query on the anything to do with the mills is always “ have you looked in McGow ? “ It was also scanned and added to the website and an index of all names within it was also created by one of our volunteers. We don’t know why this work was never published, but I suspect the satisfaction of a project completed was all he needed. His work on The Surrey Iron Railway, also unpublished, has also proved to be our ”go to” resource on this topic and this too is on the website.

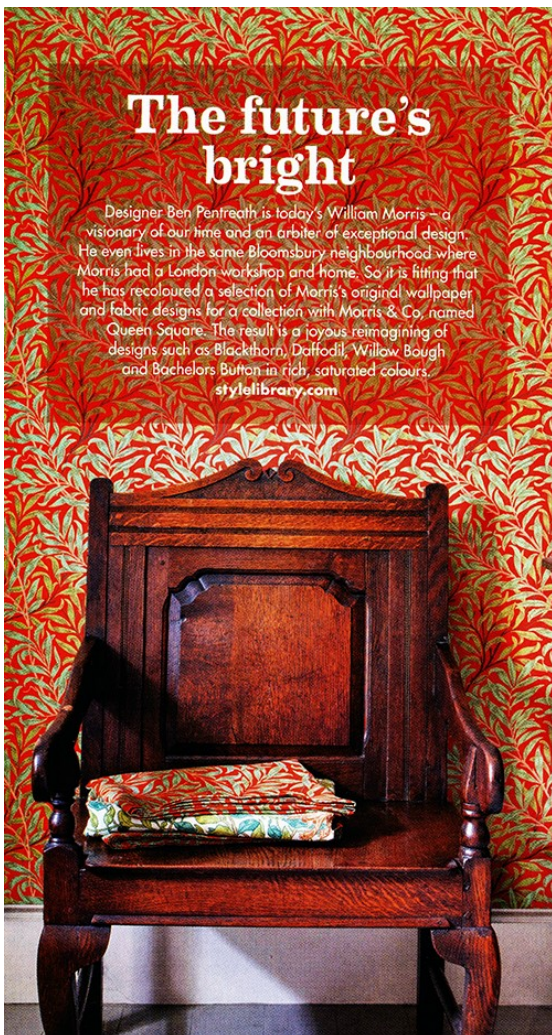
Peter was born in Dorking in April 1934 and educated at Dorking Grammar School. His national service was at Ruislip where he was a photographic interpreter. He lived with his mother in Dorking until moving to Croydon in 1979. He worked as an architectural assistant in several city firms but of course his focus was researching local history during his spare time. His sister said that his diary entries mentioned little else other than visits to libraries or museums, but she also recounted the many places to which he had travelled, including Canada and the USA, Egypt, the North Pole, and Antarctica !!

She also mentioned that he could never pass a bookshop without “just popping in” and of course not coming out empty handed. He was a true bibliophile – his book and map collection has a local history bias, with many antiquarian books of immense value, but also a considerable collection of books on trivia, curiosities, misinformation, and “things you didn’t know you didn’t know”, in addition to a fiction library filling much of his front room. In his effects were also several notebooks in which he had copied out in his neat hand writing, entire books, presumably what few he could not acquire himself. We are so grateful to Jean for offering the museum the chance to select from this vast collection.

He was a very modest, quiet, and private man, and we shall miss his annual visit to pay his subscription and have a chat over a cup of tea. To sum up, I think the title of the forthcoming book by Richard Dawkins applies so well to Peter - “ **Books do Furnish a Life** “.

### *Alison Cousins*

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This was spotted in the ‘**Homes and Antiques**’ magazine.

A summary of the text is:

The designer Ben Pentreath has been called “today’s William Morris”. He has recoloured a selection of Morris’ original wallpaper and fabric designs for Morris & Co. and so has called the collection Queen Square.

The colours are very rich and include such favourites as Willow Bough and Blackthorn.

You can see more about the collaboration between Morris & Co. and Ben Pentreath by going to: [www.sandersondesigngroup.com/morris&co/](http://www.sandersondesigngroup.com/morris&co/)

## The State of Our Rivers

Our volunteer and member Ray Leyden recently brought a BBC news item to my attention. The headline “Human damage done to more than half of all rivers worldwide”. It can be found at:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-56101167>

It included how rivers had been impacted by human activity – overfishing, water pollution and climate change. Rivers and lakes cover less than 1% of the planet’s surface yet are important to our ecosystems.

How has the River Wandle been affected? We know that at one time it was considered to be the best trout fishing river in the country. There were stories of birds coming out of the river coloured by the natural dyes used by the textile industries. Yet we also know that the introduction of chemical bleaching and chemical dyes changed this and led to pollution of the river. People today can still recall the mountains of foam on the river caused by the Merton Board Mills in Colliers Wood.

In the 1960’s the river was declared an open sewer and in the 1970 edition of ‘The New Shell Guide to England’ they wrote “the Wandle is virtually no more”.

Looking on the web one day I came upon a piece written by a Roger Beard in the Financial Times in May 1990. The link to it now seems to have disappeared. He had walked the Wandle and he gives some idea of what it was like then and the perception of it.

He gives a rather mixed view of the river and his walk along it. As a North Londoner he confesses to have not heard of the river and his wife, from South London, told him it was a sewer. He describes the stages of the walk towards the Thames as “progressively more difficult, with long stretches of the Wandle culverted and inaccessible, and all of it suffering from that peculiar obsession of modern man, dumping. The lower Wandle yields a rich harvest of old prams, bikes and bedsteads.”. Even today the dumping hasn’t gone away. The clean-up teams are always on call.

He certainly recognised the rich heritage of the Wandle with reference to the Carew family, the mill pond in Beddington Park, Mitcham Grove, the Watermeads, the Fisheries Cottages (he calls them the Fishermen’s Cottages) at Mitcham Bridge before arriving at waist-high grass in Morden Hall Park. The highlight, for him, of his walk was reaching



Merton Abbey Mills which hadn't long been opened. What he did point out was that the Liberty Print Works and those of William Morris were separate. He went as far as saying "The 'new' Merton Abbey Mills will rapidly become a must on the historic London visiting list.". I am not sure that this has happened?

Mention goes on of Merton Priory, Nelson's Merton Place and Connolly Leather Works before King George's Park in Earlsfield and the final appearance of the river "its closing stretches the town drain, conduited in concrete and lined with bedsteads, beer cans and the odd dead dog."

To finish he makes reference to a map of the Wandle Trail and to the museum, then based in Hartfield Road, Wimbledon. Of the map he says "not fully up to date". Since 1990 a number of maps have been produced, a great number of organisations have taken up the mantle of caring for the Wandle, and much work done to make it a place to enjoy today.

*Mick Taylor*

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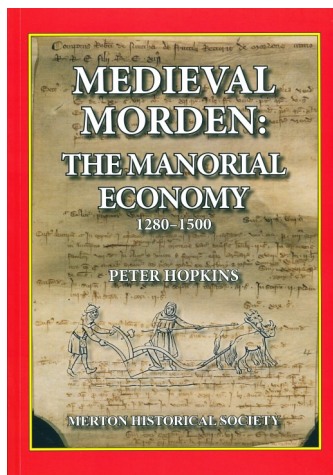
# Wandle Art Festival

Over the last two years the museum has been unable to hold its annual exhibition . In 2019 it was down to the squirrels and the loss of our electrics. Of course in 2020 it was caused by the pandemic and the resulting lockdown. This year we hope that with the restrictions easing, and the opening of museums after 17th May, we will be able to hold an exhibition.

Our plans are to hold an open air exhibition involving artists, photographers and those who work in any art format to take part. We will be asking participants to include elements from the Wandle in their work. There be an opportunity to speak about their work. If you know of anyone who would be interested in taking part then please ask them to visit our website and to download and fill in a 'Notification of Interest' form.

The exhibition is planned for the weekend of 10th and 11th July.

## Medieval Morden : the Manorial Economy, 1280-1500.



This is the first of three planned studies into various aspects of medieval life. The author is Peter Hopkins of the Merton Historical Society, so those of you who know Peter well would not be surprised to read that this is an extensively researched book and is the result of many years' work. It was published by MHS in 2020. The subject covers livestock, land, crops, the manorial buildings and equipment, staff management, and delightfully – crisis management (famine, weather, plague, etc.) Charts, maps, tables and accounts are on almost every page and these are also helpfully categorised on the contents pages.

It is not possible to do it full justice in a review of this nature, so I have just selected a couple of sections that interested me.

There is a detailed illustration of a medieval vertical water mill, and a note that in addition to their weekly labours, workers were expected to help with major activities such as cleaning out the mill pond. In 1312, this was deemed only to be needed every 10 years “if it is well cleaned”. The cost was 3/6d over 2 days.

Detail is taken to a new level in the pictograms for livestock numbers. Peter tells us that male livestock face right, and females face left. Now THAT's research !!

This wonderful book is available from Peter via the MHS website on which there is a more extensive review.  
( <http://mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk> )

*Alison Cousins*



## Dates for the Diary



### 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021 **National Mills Weekend**

As the mills will not be in a position to reopen during this weekend activity has been taken online. You can find out what is happening by going to: <https://www.spab.org.uk/mills/national-mills-weekend>

### 23<sup>rd</sup> May until 7<sup>th</sup> June 2021 **Wandsworth Heritage Festival**

The programme for this year's festival is currently being put together. There may be outside events as well as online talks. The museum is making a contribution to the events with a talk and a walk.

### 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> July 2021 **Wandle Art Festival**

This will be held at the museum. It will be outside and we are inviting all artists, photographers and those who work in any other artistic medium to take part. See page 7 for more details.

### 21<sup>st</sup> August 2021 **Merton Heritage Discovery Day** (to be confirmed)

This annual event went online last year. Hopefully it will take place this year in some, if not all, of its normal format. More information to follow.

### 11<sup>th</sup> September 2021 **Mitcham Heritage Day** (to be confirmed)

Last year this was one of the few events that was able to be held. The museum displays moved outdoors and we held talks on the Lower Green West - see picture at top of page. We will have to wait to see what this year can bring.

### 11<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021 **Wandle Fortnight**

No details yet. As soon as we have anything we will let you know.



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

A full colour version of this newsletter is available online at [www.wandle.org](http://www.wandle.org). If any subscriber is happy to receive the newsletter by email, could you please send a request to [office@wandle.org](mailto:office@wandle.org). This helps us to reduce our costs.

The Wandle Industrial Museum, the Vestry Hall Annexe, London Road,  
Mitcham, Surrey CR4 3UD. Tel: 020 8648 0127

**Company No 01792482, Charity No 288655.**



OPEN: Every Wednesday 1 ~ 4 pm;  
Every Sunday 2 ~ 5 pm.  
(The Museum is closed Bank Holiday weekends)

The Museum is also open to schools and groups by appointment.



Admission: Adults 50p, Children & Senior Citizens 20p

**The Wandle Industrial Museum would like to point out that the views of contributors to this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the Museum. We would be happy to give the right to reply to anyone who finds the content contentious.**

All contributions and news items gratefully received and appreciated - please feel free to let us know at any time - telephone or write or email to [office@wandle.org](mailto:office@wandle.org)

You can find us on:

