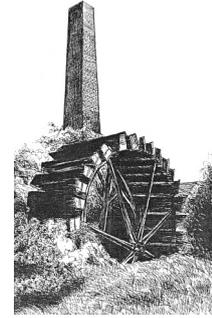


# WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



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# BULLETIN

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William Morris Day, St Mary's Church, Beddington.

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## WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM

### PRESIDENT

Harry Galley

### TRUSTEES

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

### OPERATIONS TEAM

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

# Editorial

## *John Sheridan (Guest Editor)*

I have taken on the guest editor role, at least for this edition. Having been accustomed to producing documents on my tablet, the most daunting thing has been to familiarise myself with the Microsoft Publisher software on my laptop.

My task was made easier by virtue of having inherited from Mick Taylor much of the content of this edition in an unedited form. As you know, Mick acted as guest editor for several years, having declined the role of substantive editor in the hope of finding someone naive enough to take it on.

My knowledge of the industries of the Wandle is best to the north of the Mitcham Bridge mills, and was acquired mainly by researching guided walks covering that stretch of the river. I look forward to familiarising myself with the Carshalton and Croydon stretches. In the meantime all ideas and contributions from readers for topics to cover in future editions of the Bulletin are very welcome.

Finally, best wishes from all at the museum to Alison Cousins as she recovers from her recent operation.

John Sheridan

**Cover Picture:** Auriel Glanville.  
Please see article on page 2.

## **Operations Team report – Spring 2023**

We are still undertaking a good variety of talks to new locations and with new topics. It was also noted that between January and March this year there was a 50% increase in the number of talks delivered compared with the whole of last year.

Visiting groups to the museum included Carshalton Rotary Club, the local Walk and Talk group, and members of the Merton Centre for Independent Learning ( all the way from the Vestry Hall !)

John Sheridan's series of walks recommenced, and Mick Taylor conducted walks for Sutton Mariners ( yes, we know it's landlocked) and with John for the Ronald Ross School around Wandsworth.

Our only school classes were from Liberty School but they were lively and well informed which was very rewarding.

The William Morris Day at St Mary's Church Beddington was a success with about 100 hand block prints done and several of our second hand books sold. (See page 1 for more information.)

A select few of us had a visit to Brixton Windmill ( a very well kept South London secret ). We were very envious of their brilliant shop which included distinctive items designed in-house. Access to the upper levels of the mill was a bit challenging though. We also enjoyed delicious cakes baked by the volunteers using the windmill's own flour. (See below for photos and a short article.)

Although three of us were registered to attend the annual Museum and Heritage Show at Olympia circumstances intervened and only Mick Taylor actually managed it.

The original Morris fabric swatch has now been returned after being professionally conserved and prepared for its final display in perspex on the periphery of the model of the Morris works. We are pleased to report that it is now on display and demonstrating one of the features of the block printing technique.

A local author has visited to use the wonderful resources left to us by Peter McGow. A book on Croydon is in preparation and we are delighted that Peter's legacy is being appreciated.

The museum survey for 2022/23 has been completed. We completed 2497 volunteer hours, engaged with over 1,000 people through talks, walks and group visits, had 410 visitors to the museum, there were 2075 followers on our various social media channels, and finally we noted that we were in a good financial position.

The only main acquisition was the latest Merton Historical Society book – The History of Fry's Metal foundries and the Tandem Works, by Michael J. Finch. This inevitably included contributions by our own Eric Shaw.

*Alison Cousins*

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## **William Morris Day**

On Saturday, 15 April, St Mary's Church, Church Road, Beddington, Surrey, opened its doors for a "William Morris Day". The church held a print workshop craft session led by the Wandle Industrial Museum with Mick Taylor and Roger Steele helping young people make their own colourful wood block prints to take home with them. In the afternoon John Hawks, trustee of the museum, gave a talk on the life and times of William Morris. One hundred and sixty-two people attended on the day.

The event formed part of the church's project "Restoring and Celebrating the Arts and Craftsmanship of St Mary's Church, Beddington", supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Another highlight on display was the church's William Morris organ screen, designed circa 1869.

Thanks to WIM volunteer Auriel Glanville for the photo and the information, extracted from her press release.

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## **Brixton Windmill visit**

A WIM group visited Brixton Windmill on 20 April. Built in 1816, it occupies high ground just off Brixton Hill, near Brixton Prison. A grain delivery was underway when we arrived, so we sat for a while with the Brixton Windmill volunteers in their purpose built shop/cafe/learning centre adjacent to the windmill and exchanged notes on the problems – and solutions – found in the operation of our respective buildings, artefacts and outreach activities. The Brixton Windmill Trust is well established and employs part-time staff, which means that a steady income from various sources is required. We offered to advise on the process of obtaining museum accreditation for the windmill. In return the windmill trust colleagues offered to advise on feasibility studies and funding sources for any major projects that the WIM might consider undertaking.

The windmill is a tower mill of three storeys and a cap on top to which the sails are attached. The cap can be rotated, in theory. Much of the redundant windmill machinery is still present, but milling is now done using more compact machinery on the first floor, dating from 1902. This machinery might once have been driven by steam power and is now driven by an electric motor.

One interesting point made in discussion was that it is likely that the Ashbys closed the windmill in 1862 and moved to their water mills at Mitcham and Carshalton because those mills had more capacity than the windmill, which would have run a maximum of two pairs of millstones. It is probably a myth that they moved because urban development in Brixton reduced the wind power available to the windmill.



WIM and Windmill Trust volunteers



Exhibition of old hand-milling methods



Roger Steele inspects the “modern” machinery



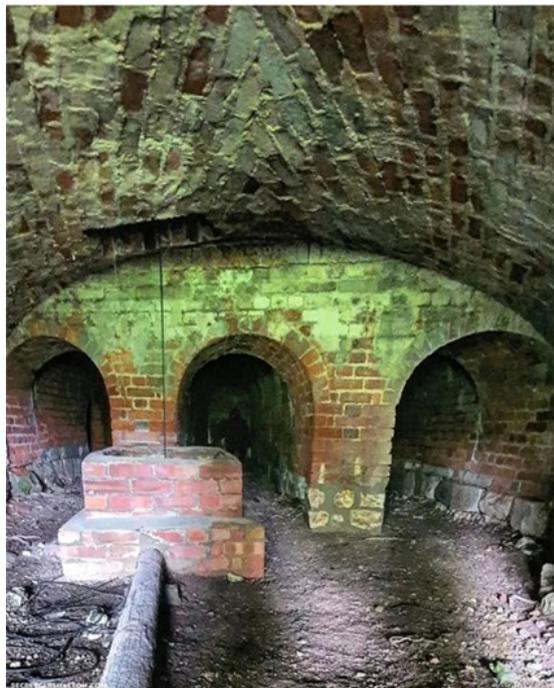
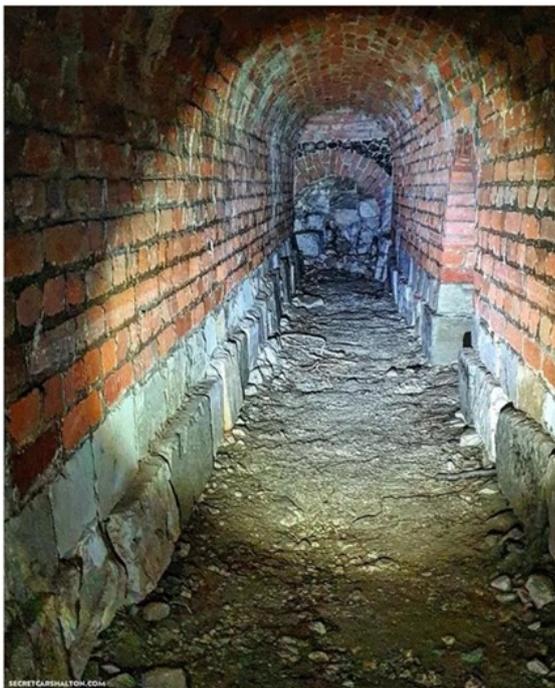
The upper floors

Photos: Auriel Glanville

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## Wandle spring head, Carshalton

The *Secret Carshalton* website recently ran a feature on a spring head that is said to be the most westerly source of the Wandle. The spring head takes the form of a well inside a brick-built structure of arches and tunnels dating from around 1700. It is situated in the grounds of St Philomena’s Catholic High School for Girls, SM5 3PS, and it is maintained by the Friends of Carshalton Water Tower. It is not open to the public. It appears that the structure was designed to divert spring water to supply an ornamental lake to the west of Carshalton Ponds. The lake is now dry but it appears on the 17<sup>th</sup> century Arundel Map.



The Wandle has many sources on the north-facing North Downs. Does anyone know of a more westerly source?

Spring head images reproduced by permission of *Secret Carshalton*.

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## **Riverside Business Centre, Earlsfield**

The Riverside Business Centre in Earlsfield is about to be redeveloped. The site is bounded by the River Wandle to the west, Garratt Lane to the east, Haldane Place to the south and Bendon Valley to the north. The plans cover the sites of the former Flip-Out Trampoline Centre and the adjacent car park as well as the business centre buildings.

The riverside buildings that are due to be demolished formerly housed the works of the Columbia Gramophone Company, A H Hunt Ltd capacitors, and the Airfix scale model kit company.

A long three storey building with large picture windows and white cladding faces the River Wandle and is clearly visible from across the river in King George's Park. This building was visible in aerial photographs taken in 1930. It was built for the Columbia Gramophone Company following a fire at their original works in 1918. By 2023 the surviving riverside buildings look tired, but it is possible to discern an industrial art deco aspect.



Reproduced by permission of Historic England. The site to the right of the works, which then contained a football pitch and a jumble of small buildings of the former Harrison Barber slaughteryard, now contains the 10 acre Henry Prince estate, which was formally opened in May 1938. On the left is the footbridge over the Wandle that connects King George's Park and Lydden Road.

A phasing strategy envisages the demolition of the existing buildings over the summer of 2023 and the completion of a new mixed-use development by June 2027. The buildings are not listed and the redevelopment is inevitable, but it is important to record the industrial heritage. A longer document than this article has been lodged in the museum's archive.



A modern aerial view copied from the planning application published online by Wandsworth Council. It clearly shows the buildings surviving from the 1930 photograph, and the trampoline centre and car park. The Henry Price estate (where the Mayor of London Sadiq Khan lived as a child) is on the right.



View from King George's Park, April 2023. Photo: John Sheridan

**The Columbia Phonograph Company** built a factory on the site in 1905 to make cylinders and to press discs for early phonograph machines. By 1913 the factory was using 60,000 gallons of Wandle water per day to cool its presses. The company became the Columbia Gramophone Company in 1917, but a fire in May 1918 destroyed the works.

The existing buildings are Columbia's rebuilt works, expanded throughout the 1920s to meet growing demand for dance and jazz records, and to incorporate the latest technology for pressing good quality shellac-coated records and, from 1925, for electrical recording to replace the old acoustic recording methods. In 1932, Columbia merged with HMV to create EMI, and operations in Wandsworth were transferred to Hayes.

**A H Hunt Ltd**, manufacturers of radio capacitors, was founded in 1901, became a limited liability company in 1922, and moved to Wandsworth in 1936, taking over and re-equipping the former Columbia works and expanding into the premises of some smaller, older firms that had closed down. At its peak the company employed more than 1,000 people. During the war the Wandsworth works had its own Home Guard platoon.

Records held in Wandsworth Archives describe the variety of types of capacitor made at Wandsworth, and include an album made in 1946 containing photographs of employees working in various departments, including the impregnation department, the silvered mica assembly department, and the air cleaned and conditioned rooms in which paper foil capacitors were wound. There was also a general office, a drawing office, chemical and electrical laboratories, and a staff dining room. The works closed in 1969, when the company was absorbed by Erie Electronics Ltd and production was moved to Croydon.

**Airfix** were a leading maker of plastic pocket combs in 1947, and in 1949 were commissioned to make a promotional plastic model of the Ferguson TE20 tractor. The difficulty of assembling the components of the model gave the company's founder, the Hungarian refugee Nicholas Kove, the idea of making and marketing models in kit form. The first kit produced for the mass market was a model of *The Golden Hind* in 1952. It was followed in 1953 by the "BTK" Spitfire aeroplane.

Airfix moved in to premises in a corner of the Riverside site around 1950, and expanded their works as their growing range of model kits became more popular. They submitted numerous planning applications, and took over and adapted the former Hunt premises after Hunt moved out in 1969.

*The Sunday Times*, 1 February 1981, reported that bankers had forced Airfix to call in receivers. The company failed because of the strength of the pound, which affected exports; a recession which inevitably affected toy sales; cheaper toy imports from the far East; the introduction of electronic toys, also from the far East; a reduction in the number of children in the population in the 1970s; and high interest rates which increased the burden of carrying stock between seasonal toy spending sprees.

The Airfix assets and brand were taken over by the American General Mills Company in 1981 and production was switched to France. The brand was subsequently taken over in 2006 by Hornby, who currently outsource manufacturing to India, with design and packaging taking place in the UK.



An Airfix model of an Aoshima Brewster Buffalo fighter plane, which operated mainly from the decks of US aircraft carriers and saw heavy combat use during the early months of WWII. It was also operated by Commonwealth Air Forces facing the Japanese in SE Asia. The model pictured here is about 60 years old, and may have had a few crash landings. Photo: Mick Taylor.

## Volunteer Focus: Chris Tanner



I was born at Hythe in Hampshire and soon moved to the New Forest. It rarely snowed there, and an early memory was the winter of 1962-63 when it seemed to a small boy that the world was one large snowdrift. Soon after this my family moved to Kingston close to Richmond Park. I left school at 16 and had a job operating a ruling machine, producing ledgers. Then I found the railway, which became my work home for nearly 30 years. My life on the railway was spent in the Sutton area as station staff. I joined because I wanted to work with people. My

roles included dispatching trains and supervising. As most people know I eventually gave up work due to my cancer.

Enter the museum into my life! The ops team suggested or nicely coerced me into perhaps volunteering at the museum, which I never regretted. Mostly I work at the shop with Eric on Wednesdays, plus cover some Sundays. It gives me the chance to share my enthusiasm for the Wandle. It is rewarding when the museum goes out to the people, by attending community events, where we meet people who hopefully will become future visitors.

As you may be coming to realise I like to have an open, quiet, space to relax. Where else do we see so much history and experience the change of seasons, in all its beauty and so accessible to an urban area.

Outside of the museum, without the arts life would not be complete, especially musical theatre, there are so many aspects of a production that can go wrong. However, when it is right, you can enter a world of pure bliss and create life-long memories.

My other love is Blackpool which people find difficult to understand. How could anyone resist the refurbished Art Deco seafront which looks out to America, the architecture, entertainment history and a pure tacky English holiday resort, full of faded glory. What more could you need in life!

## Merton Congregational Chapel gravestones

We recently received an enquiry from Cllr Caroline Charles (Ravensbury Ward) about six gravestones in the Merton & Sutton Joint Cemetery, propped up against a wall adjoining the council refuse centre. The gravestones presented a puzzle because they dated from the 19th century but the cemetery was only opened in 1947. So why were they there?

In 1953 the Urban District of Merton and Morden acquired the Merton Congregational Chapel, Merton Road. There were six graves in the grounds. Having satisfied themselves that there were no relatives who wanted to claim the remains, the council re-interred them in Carshalton and Merton & Morden Cemetery.



One of the burials was that of Thomas Withall, deacon to the church. A close reading of his gravestone discloses that he died aged 86 in 1841. Thos Withall was shown in the 1841 census, taken before his death, as living in Morden and working as a snuff maker, thereby giving us a link to the industries of the Wandle. According to the census he was 80 rather than 86, so perhaps either the census clerk or the monumental mason made an error. At all events, there was no retirement age or state pension in those days!

A later Withall was a partner in the firm Withall and Ellis, architects, surveyors, auctioneers and estate agents. Ellis's father was Frederick Startridge Ellis, publisher of the Kelmscott Press and a close friend of William Morris.



Melanie Nunzet's "Walk and Talk" group take a break at the museum.



## Dates for the Diary

- Friday 26 May, 6-8pm: book launch event at St Mary's Church Beddington, Church Road, Wallington, SM6 7NH. "The Church in the Park". The book is an anthology, designed in collaboration with Sutton Writers. It explores the art and history of St Mary's and Carew Manor through poetry and prose. Refreshments will be provided.
- Wandsworth Heritage Festival, 20 May to 11 June, [better.org.uk/wandsworth-heritage-service](http://better.org.uk/wandsworth-heritage-service); London Rivers Week, 29 May to 4 June, [thames21.org.uk/event](http://thames21.org.uk/event). The museum is contributing two free events to these festivals:
  - ⇒ Monday 29 May, 6.30pm: Talk by Mick Taylor – Apprentices, children and labour in the Wandle mills, at Earlsfield Library, 276 Magdalen Road SW18 3NY. Booking is advised via [heritage@gll.org](mailto:heritage@gll.org)
  - ⇒ Thursday 1 June, 2pm: Industrial heritage walk led by John Sheridan, from Earlsfield Station to the mouth of the Wandle. Fully booked.

- Saturday 3 June, 2pm: Croydon Green Spaces event – Mick Taylor is giving a talk on "River Wandle: From Industry to Homes".
- Saturday 10 June: New Exhibition Opening "Sport Along The Wandle". Details to appear the the next issue.
- Wednesday June, 7:30pm: Talk by Mick Taylor at Honeywood House "The Calico People".
- Sunday 25th June: Mitcham Carnival on Three Kings Piece.
- Saturday 8th July, 11am-5pm.: Wandle Arts Festival at the museum Work by local artists and photographers on sale, and live music, Mitcham Lower Green.
- Sunday 16 July, 2pm: industrial heritage walk led by John Sheridan from Colliers Wood station to Merton Priory Chapter House Museum via Wandle Park and Merton Mill.
- 26th July, 6:30pm-dusk: Community on the Green event on Mitcham Cricket Green.
- Tuesday 15 August, 10.30am: Talk by Mick Taylor on "Snuff and the Wandle" at West Barnes Library.
- Saturday 19 August: Merton Discovery Day at Merton Civic Centre, Morden.
- Saturday 19 August, 2pm: Merton Discovery Day industrial heritage circular walk led by John Sheridan from Merton Civic Centre to Morden Hall Park.
- Saturday 9 September: Mitcham Heritage Day.
- 9 - 23 September Wandle Fortnight.
- Sunday 17 September, 11am: industrial heritage walk led by John Sheridan from Morden Hall Park to Merton Priory Chapter House.
- Thursday 16th November: Museum AGM.

Some talks and activities may be subject to booking. Please check.



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

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

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

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

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

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Free Admission. Donations welcome.

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

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

You can find us on:

