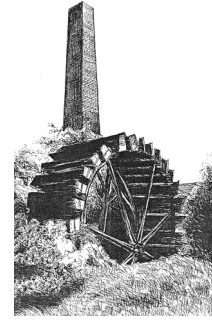


WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM



BULLETIN



The Rev Father David Pennells, Chair of Trustees of the Museum, opens the “Our Leather Industries” exhibition on 8 June, alongside Alison Cousins, curator of the exhibition.

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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,
John Sheridan, Roger Steele,
and Michael Taylor.

Editorial

Welcome to the Summer 2024 edition of the Bulletin! We have set down in this bumper edition a short (although rather long in terms of bulletin articles!) history of Merton Abbey Mills. John Hawks was on the spot throughout the Merton Abbey Mills story, and he has told the story many times in formal talks and informal conversations. Now we have a lasting written record from his perspective. We are hoping that in addition we can arrange for John to record his memories in more detail in a video for the museum's YouTube channel.

This edition contains a tribute to Chris Tanner, who sadly died in June. Chris was an inspiration in how he dealt with his illness, as well as being an assiduous and well-liked volunteer at the museum.

John Sheridan

Cover Picture: Auriel Glanville

Photos:

Page 1: Unknown, using Auriel's camera.

Page 2 (1): Unknown.

Page 2 (2): Ray Leyden.

Page 3 (1): Alison Cousins, with Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah's phone.

Page 3 (2): Ray Leyden.

Page 4: Wandle Industrial Museum.

Page 5: John Hawks.

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Operations team report

With Mick Taylor still needing to work from home during May and June, covering school workshops was a challenge but John Hawks and Auriel Glanville nobly helped out with Culver House, St. John the Divine (Stockwell) and St. Mark's schools. We also finally got access to Merton Park Primary after years of trying, and so by early July we had seen almost 130 children within the space of two weeks.

We also welcomed three U3A groups for printing workshops, museum tours and industrial heritage walks – one from Crouch End, one from Croydon and one from Orpington.

Johns Sheridan and Hawks continued to take on Mick Taylor's talks where he had been asked to attend in person and they also kept our flag flying with their own portfolios on subjects such as papermaking and William Morris (of course). John Sheridan also undertook a walk for the London Rivers Week on June 30th.

On May 21st we supported a UK Rivers Summit at Morden Hall. The delegates, who included “celebrities” and one MP, were focussed mostly on the pollution and quality of our waterways and crucial networking. A report of the event, setting out the background and agenda and listing the participants, is here:

<https://www.theriversummit.com/the-uk-river-summit-2024>



Auriel Glanville, Elly Platt, Dr Jack Hogan and Alison Cousins at the River Summit



Karen (left) and Alison at the Croydon Green Day.

On June 1st we had a stall at the Croydon Green Day in the foyer of the Clocktower, but it had been poorly advertised and most of the footfall was families going to activities in the children's library. Still, such events afford a chance to network with similar groups and Karen Ellis-Rees came along to help.

By some miracle our annual exhibition opened in time on Saturday June 8th featuring the embellished Moroccan skin and giving an overview of all the leather mills and works in the area. Tradition was broken in that there was no Mayoral presence and no Councillor was apparently able to attend either so the cake was ours to share !!!

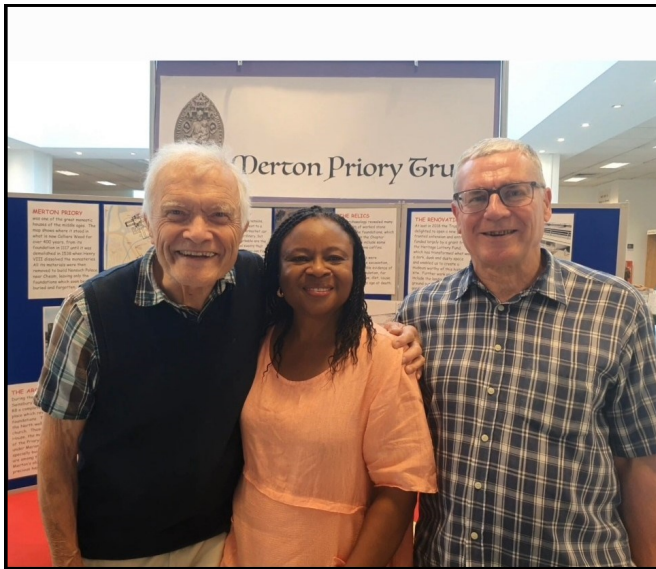


Mick Taylor and Roger Steele with a customer at the Community on the Green event

On July 31st for once the sun was shining on the annual Mitcham Community on the Green event which brought out many new visitors and we had a very successful evening. Mick Taylor returned to the team by then.

On the weekend of August 3rd/4th Deen City farm celebrated its 40th anniversary and Mick Taylor produced a display showing the history of the area for them to use.

The silk screen fabric from the designs identified as Osborne & Little originally rescued from the former Liberty works was removed from the screens and sent to the company for their archive. The remainder are being distributed or disposed of, much to the obvious benefit of local artists. Our thanks to John Hawks for their storage and management.



Merton Heritage Discovery Day:

- (1) Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Colliers Wood ward, Cabinet Member for Sports and Heritage, with John Hawks (left) and John Sheridan.
- (2) Cutting the cake to celebrate Merton Heritage Service's 30th anniversary with Sarah Gould, Heritage and Local Studies Service Manager (with flowers).

Merton Heritage's annual Discovery Day was held on Saturday August 17th and our stall featured a call for volunteers, showing our various activities. Like last year we offered a guided industrial heritage walk in Morden Hall Park. We did not offer any children's block printing this year, but our takings from the stall exceeded previous years.

Joining Benedict Konst, who joined up earlier in the year, and whom we share with the Chapter House, our newest volunteers are Joseth Fernandez Moreno, a young student who is brushing up her English, Patricia Galligan, a local artist, and Dr Jack Hogan of the South East Rivers Trust. But sadly a huge gap to fill is a result of the sad passing of Chris Tanner, a tribute to whom is elsewhere in this Bulletin. We are also currently without Eric Shaw, our longest serving volunteer, whose mobility issues are of concern and who has recently had to look after his wife Jean.

As yet there is no progress on the work to the front door or a go-ahead for the removal of sanitary fittings in the back storage room but a new boiler was installed in the kitchen.

Alison Cousins

The story of Merton Abbey Mills

The September edition of the Merton Historical Society's *Merton Mail* carried a short piece by John Hawks setting the record straight on the myth that William Morris had a connection with Merton Abbey Mills. This article sets out the story of Merton Abbey Mills in more detail.

The precinct known as Merton Abbey Mills is known to have been a calico printing works from 1724. John Leach, a partner, left in 1801 to set up Bennett's Mill (named after his son-in-law) just upstream of the present Merton Abbey Mills site where the Bennett's Court flats are now situated. Edmund Littler took over both works in the early 1830s. Liberty's bought out the Littler family in 1904 and replaced most of the old buildings. Liberty's moved out in 1972. A succession of textile printing firms took over the site until production ceased in 1982, following a fire. These firms demolished the buildings to the south of the site and filled in the old Bennett's Mill millpond during the course of the 1970s and early 1980s. Bennett's Court, constructed in the early 2000s, now sits on the site of the millpond.



Liberty's print works, 1960s. later redeveloped as Merton Abbey Mills.

Also in 1982 the New Merton Board Mills (NMBM) closed. Corfields had already closed in 1981. Sainsbury's acquired the extended disused site from Merton High Street to Bennett's Ditch, including the Liberty buildings, the former Merton Abbey station, the disused Tooting, Merton and Wimbledon railway line and goods yard, and part of Station Road. The first phase of the Sainsbury redevelopment was to construct the Savacentre hypermarket, now Sainsbury's and Marks and Spencer, on the former NMBM and Corfield site. Savacentre did not open until February 1989 because of a requirement for archaeological excavations on the Merton Priory site, and to construct a relief road, now the A24 Merantun Way, on the route of the former railway. There was a planning condition that the A24 be raised in order to conserve the foundations of Merton Priory Chapter House. Merton Priory Trust was formed in 2003 with a view to opening a heritage centre there, which finally came about with a Heritage Lottery Grant in 2018.

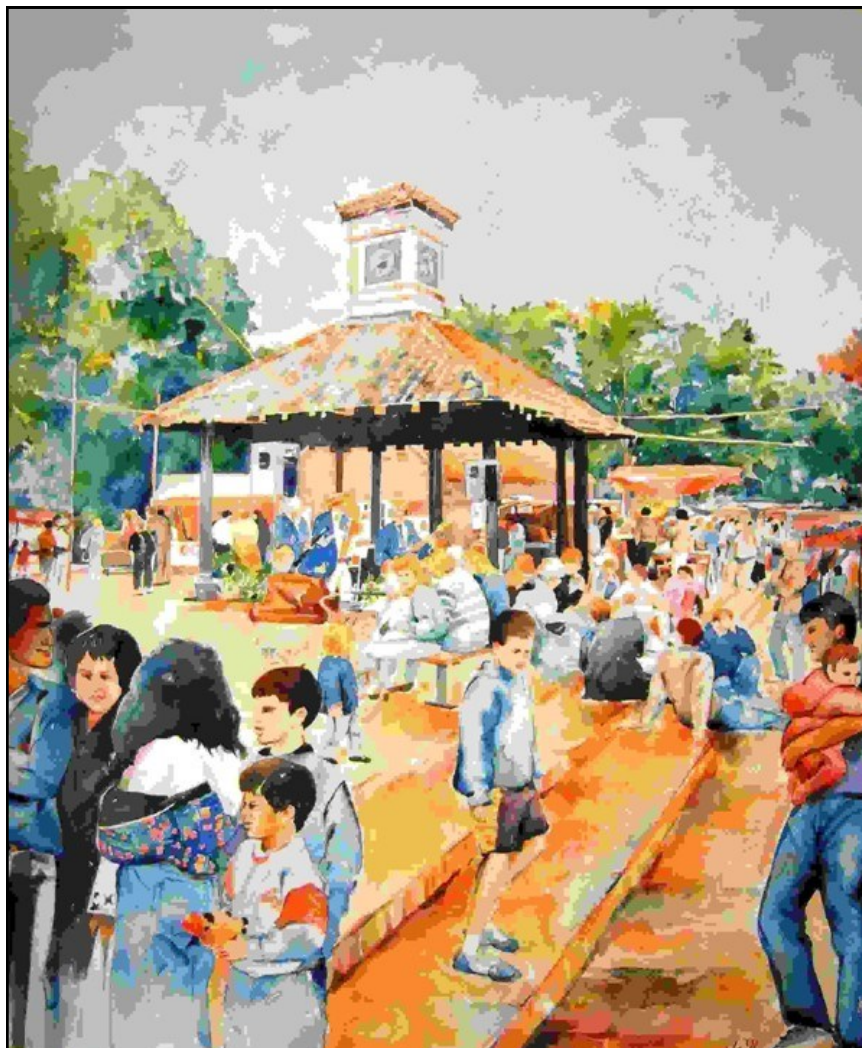
The second phase of the Sainsbury redevelopment began with the Liberty buildings. Following the departure in 1982 of the last textile printing firm, Merton Fabrics Ltd, the site had become derelict and subject to vandalism and fly-tipping. Sainsbury's had intended to demolish the Liberty buildings but happily two of them were listed and a planning inspector ruled in the late 1980s that the site should be saved. The ruling included a stipulation that an historical exhibition be included in the redevelopment. Opinions were divided on whether the Wandle Industrial Museum should move to the Liberty site. Sainsbury's ultimately rejected that proposal in favour of creating a display in the Wheelhouse.



The derelict site, June 1988.

Anxious for a commercial solution, Sainsbury's engaged Urban Space Management, a well known specialist company who from 1972 had developed Camden Lock as a successful arts, crafts and entertainment centre. Their brief was to revamp the remaining buildings on the Liberty site on this model, and John Hawks managed the project, both in the initial stages of renovating the buildings and marketing them to potential tenants and the public, and then, after the launch in 1989, managing the site until 2005.

It was originally intended to call the site *Liberty Mills*, a name not only historically entirely appropriate but also ideally memorable and catchy. Liberty & Co. were advised of this, and during the renovation a public exhibition was held on the site one Sunday in November 1988 to explain and advertise the concept. However, the first visitor to the exhibition was a solicitor with a writ from Liberty & Co prohibiting the use of their name for the new precinct. John had to think of a new name on the spot, and the site was rapidly renamed Merton Abbey Mills!



A painting of Merton Abbey Mills market in its heyday, artist unknown.

After the launch in June 1989, the development of the buildings continued, including the relaunch of the Colour House as a theatre, and of the old Block Shop as a riverside pub. The pub was marketed to a number of companies, including Young & Co, who refused the tenancy on the grounds that it was too small and too far from the road. Happily a good tenant was found, but its name had to be decided. *The Arthur Liberty* no longer seemed appropriate, even supposing Liberty & Co would have approved that name, and John's proposal to name the pub *The William Morris* was accepted. There is a frequent misapprehension that William Morris was based at, indeed had anything to do with, the present Merton Abbey Mills site, and this may well be partly due to the original name *Liberty Mills* being abandoned, and to the riverside pub being named *The William Morris*! The Morris & Co workshops were in fact a five minute walk downstream in buildings fronting Merton High Street and on the Sainsbury site.

As the "Camden Lock of the South" Merton Abbey Mills was outstandingly successful during the 1990s, with the arts, crafts, antiques and food markets, London's largest weekly car boot sale, "Abbeyfest" the annual summer music and drama festival, and a host of original events and promotions drawing over half a million visitors a year. This was largely due to Sainsbury's not continuing with what was to have been their third phase, a residential development on the land to the south of Merantun Way which instead was available as a large car park for Merton Abbey Mills.

When this land was finally sold for residential development in 2000, "The Mills" began a slow decline, and though still charming in its riverside setting, and with some attractive restaurants and shops, it is now rather a shadow of its former bustling, dynamic self.

Finally, people who are not local might not recognise the name *Merton Abbey Mills*, but for many years and well into the 20th century the wider local district was known as Merton Abbey; the downstream site leased by William Morris in 1881 was known at the time as Merton Abbey Print Works; and when William De Morgan's fine art pottery was situated in the 1880s in High Street Colliers Wood, he inscribed *Merton Abbey* on the base of his vases and plates. So there is good logic to the Merton Abbey Mills name!

John Hawks and John Sheridan.

Metropolis Water Supply

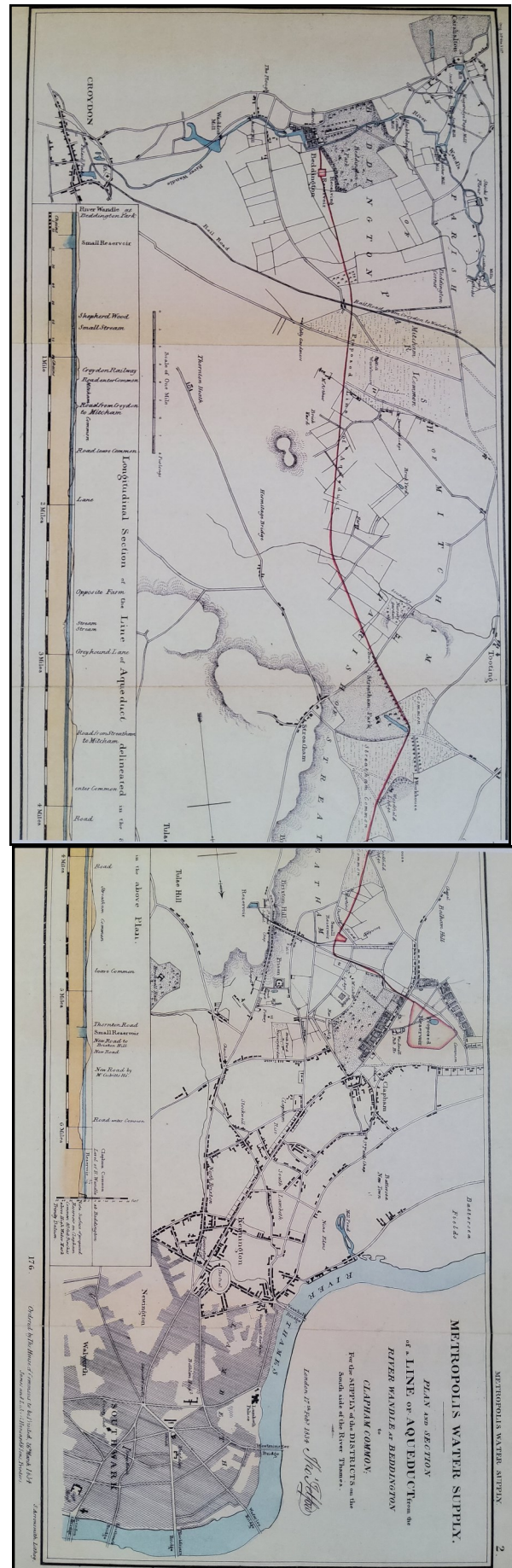
The museum has been given a copy of a map from Beddington to Clapham in two A3 sheets. The original drawing was made by the eminent civil engineer Thomas Telford in 1834 and published by the House of Commons.

The map shows the route of a proposed covered aqueduct (the red line in the images) from Beddington to Clapham Common, where a reservoir to supply south London with water without any pumping (except for some houses on Brixton Hill) was to have been constructed. The cost would have been £391,875. The “Longitudinal Section” across the bottom of the maps indicates some landmarks along the route.

It was claimed that the plan would interfere with no private dwelling or public establishment of any kind, and nor would it interfere with the existing water companies further than to give them a supply. It was acknowledged that there would be an unspecified increase in water rates.

Proposals to introduce a parliamentary bill to authorise the work were advertised in the press in November 1834 and November 1835. Needless to say the plans came to nothing in the face of opposition from Wandle millers and no doubt from the wealthy residents of the villas then surrounding Clapham Common.

John Sheridan



Stained Glass Windows

Further to a visit to **All Saints Church, Putney**, by a WIM group in February, the report in Bulletin 121 (Winter 2024) concentrated on William Morris's method of producing stained glass windows. One point not covered was the discussion with our excellent guide Liz Hamilton (parishioner and historian of the church) about the source of the glass. Mick Taylor has pointed out that the answer is given on page 178 of Fiona MacCarthy's book *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*. The glass was supplied by James Powell & Sons who 'make their glass in the medieval manner' - something that would have attracted Morris. Today the company is better known as Whitefriars Glass.

Mick also asked where the windows were made. The windows at the church date from between 1871 and 1923. At the beginning of that period William Morris had his family home, showrooms and workshop at 26 Queen Square, Bloomsbury. In 1877 Morris & Co opened new showrooms at 449 Oxford Street. In 1878 Morris and his family moved their London home to Kelmscott House, Hammersmith, where he used the coach-house for weaving and carpet-making. In 1881 the firm moved its workshops from the cramped Queen Square and Kelmscott House coach-house premises to the Merton Abbey site on the banks of the River Wandle. They remained there until 1940. So stained glass commissions were taken, discussed, designed and executed at various different locations over the period.

The stained glass windows in the baptistery at the West end of **Mitcham Parish Church** bear a manufacturer's mark in the green strip:



The photograph of the window was taken during the course of a visit to the church on 5 July arranged by the Merton Historical Society. Our excellent guide was the Vicar, the Rev Fr David Pennells. He and his team of volunteers also kindly provided refreshments to the visitors.

Alexander Gibbs & Co. was a British stained glass studio founded in 1858 when Alexander Gibbs (1832-86) split off from the family firm founded by his father Isaac Alexander Gibbs (1802-51) in 1848. The studio continued until 1915. It was first located at 38 Bedford Square and moved in 1876 to 21 Bloomsbury Street.

The medieval church was rebuilt in 1819-21 and opened in April 1822. The West end of the church was remodelled in the last quarter of the 19th century, with the organ and choir being moved from the West end to the chancel, a baptistery being created at the West end under the old organ loft, and both the main East and the West windows being replaced. The window in the baptistery at the West end, known as the Watson Memorial Window, was installed in memory of Harry Joseph Watson, who died in August 1874, so it might have been one of the first windows produced by the new studio in Bloomsbury Street.

Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Company were founded and issued their prospectus in April 1861, so William Morris could have been available to undertake the work on the stained glass windows at Mitcham Parish Church. It is not clear whether the firm was ever in contact with the church. Again, further research is required. Watch this space!

John Sheridan (with input from Fr David)

Claremont Landscape Garden



Ray Leyden came across this bust of William Morris at The National Trust's Claremont Landscape Garden near Esher. It was in a sculpture exhibition which ran until 14 July. The sculptor was Teresa Martin of the Surrey Sculpture Society.

Claremont Landscape Garden features an 18th century layout and is Grade I listed on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

John Sheridan

Chris Tanner 1958 - 2024

Unlike most of our volunteers, Chris approached us, finding us “by accident”, as he indicated in his final e-mail to the museum, and decided that he would like to help out.

Typical of Chris he very soon told us that he had retired early having been diagnosed with cancer. It was a situation he faced up to from the start and we were all on the journey with him as he underwent various trials to try and contain the disease.

But despite often long and unpredictable medical appointments, he would still come in if he could, and such sterling efforts continued even occasionally when he moved to the residential home, such was his desire to carry on as normal.



The last photograph of Chris, taken at his request outside the museum.

With his background working for SW Trains he was the perfect ally to be on the front desk with Eric Shaw on Wednesday afternoons. Eric recalls they discussed how to clear pigeons (and their deposits!) from station platforms and Eric’s failure to get his model railway to work properly which they agreed was due to incorrect wiring on part of the track. Chris was also a regular Sunday volunteer and interested in other forms of transport. Peter Cousins declared that Chris was the only other person with whom he could have a sensible conversation about buses.

Chris’s love of travel, even as his mobility decreased, was evident, and we shall recall his love of Blackpool every time we see his mug still in the kitchen cupboard. But at every opportunity Chris would frequently be “up the West End” at some musical or another, often enjoying repeat performances.

Chris died on June 23rd in St Raphael’s Hospice, to which he had given so much support over the years. Selections from his favourite shows were played at his service of thanksgiving on July 16th, which was attended by nearly all of our volunteers and one of our Trustees.

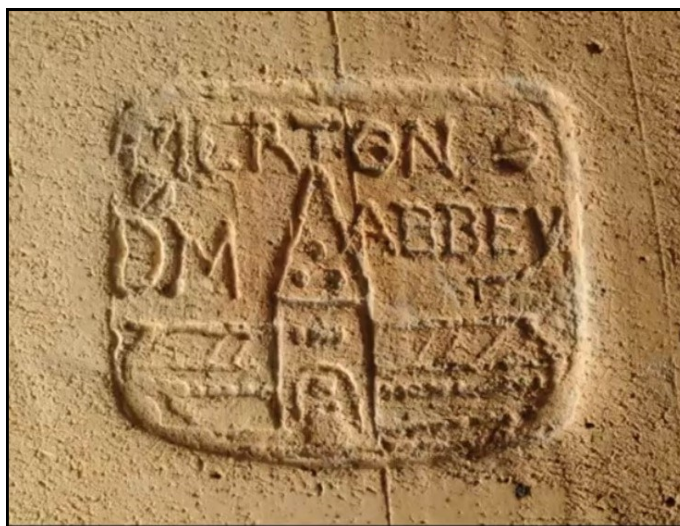
In August, the Tennyson Grange Care Home in Sutton, where Chris spent a few months earlier in the year, celebrated his life with recordings from the musicals and photographs of his beloved Blackpool for the residents to remember him by.

Chris was such a popular and easy-going person. We have been so lucky to have known him as a friend and enthusiastic supporter of everything we do in the museum. Let's hope his final journey was with a mode of transport of which he approved. Our condolences are with his sister Julia and her partner Barbara.

Alison Cousins

De Morgan Foundation

Sarah Hardy, director of the De Morgan Foundation, recently delivered an online lecture entitled *William De Morgan and Merton Abbey*, in which she acknowledged the work of the late Judith Goodman (see Bulletin 119, Summer 2023) in identifying the precise location of the fine art potter's Merton works. A recording of Sarah's talk is accessible for £5 through the foundation's website, at <https://www.demorgan.org.uk/>. Alternatively, for those who become Friends of the foundation at a cost of £30pa, this talk and many others, and back copies of the foundation's quarterly journal, are freely available.



De Morgan's Merton Abbey logo on the back of one of his tiles.

John Sheridan

Goat Bridge

We have seen updates from David Warburton of the London Borough of Sutton and Dr Jack Hogan of the South East Rivers Trust (SERT) on work currently underway to improve the channel of the Wandle generally and at Goat Bridge in particular.

The weir at Goat Bridge has been removed. The channel has been narrowed in places, creating a meandering channel. A new flood storage area and marginal habitat will be created. Over 200 tons of clean gravels have been added to the river bed. This creates an active river, rather than just the overwide, overdeep, stagnant 'pond' the river was, impounded by the weir. The project will enhance 500 metres of chalk stream habitat and give access to fish for food, refuge and spawning.



Goat Bridge improvements

SERT has organised a community event on 14 September when locals will have the chance to help plant the site with classical chalkstream species. Volunteers are being sought to help (see Dates for the Diary).

The project is the latest step towards SERT's wider ambitions for a "Wandering Wandle" whereby some man-made channels would be replaced by meandering channels situated in the lowest lying meadowland where the original channel would have flowed. This vision was set out in an excellent recent talk by Dr Jack: <https://www.theriversummit.com/recordings>. Realisation of this vision will depend upon decision-making processes and funding, but surely we would be remiss not to try to put right the most damaging aspects of our shared industrial heritage.

John Sheridan (with input from Dr Jack)



Dates for the Diary

14-29 September: Wandle Fortnight. More information and a diary of events here: <http://www.wandlevalleyforum.org.uk/wandle-fortnight.html>

14 September: South East Rivers Trust tree planting. Volunteers welcome. More information here: [Goat Bridge planting - River Wandle - South East Rivers Trust](#)

20 September: Guided industrial heritage walk by John Sheridan of the museum from Mitcham tram stop to Morden Hall Park. To book a place, please email John.sheridan08@gmail.com.

14 November: Wandle Industrial Museum Trust AGM: details to follow.



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,
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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:

