

PRESIDENT: The Viscountess Hanworth. F.S.A

VICE PRESIDENTS: Arthur Turner and Lionel Green

BULLETIN NO. 119

SEPTEMBER 1996



FORTHCOMING PROGRAMME 1996

Saturday 28th September - Historic Pub Walk in **Mitcham**, led by Tony Scott.
Meet outside **Three Kings** at **1.45** for 2.00p.m. start. Finish at **Burn Bullock**.

Please note change of date from that originally advertised

Friday 11th October - Evelyn Jowett Memorial Lecture - **8.00p.m.**
William Morris in Merton by Judith Goodman
at the Snuff Mill Environmental Centre, Morden Hall Park.

Saturday 9th November - **AGM - 2.30p.m.**
followed by an illustrated talk on **Morden Hall Park** by Paul Rutter
at the Snuff Mill Environmental Centre, Morden Hall Park.

Saturday 7th December - **Surrey and the Picture Postcard** by John Gent
2.30p.m. at the Snuff Mill Environmental Centre, Morden Hall Park.

(Park in Morden Hall National Trust Garden Centre Car Park
and follow the path across the bridge and through the gateway)

STANDING CONFERENCE ON LONDON ARCHAEOLOGY



Saturday 5th October a conference on **Dark Age London** at the Museum of London
10.30-4.30.

Speakers include: Martin Welch on why the Croydon cemetery should be excavated, John Hines on the early Anglo-Saxon evidence, Bob Cowle on the Middle Saxon trading and manufacturing settlement along the Strand, Peter Rowsome on the exciting discoveries relating to Late Saxon London within the City walls, Lyn Blackmore on the crucial Anglo-Saxon and imported pottery sequences and James Rackham on the ever-growing contribution of environmental archaeology for the London region.

Cost £7.50 including tea and coffee.

Tickets available from P.E.Pickering, 3 Westbury Road, London N12 7NY.

Enclose a stamped addressed envelope and make cheques payable to SCOLA



46th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SNUFF MILL ENVIRONMENTAL CENTRE, MORDEN HALL PARK
SATURDAY 9th NOVEMBER 1996 at 2.30 pm.

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies for absence
- 2 Minutes of the last AGM held on 4th November 1995
- 3 Matters arising therefrom
- 4 Chairman's Report
- 5 Membership Secretary's Report
- 6 Treasurer's Report; reception and approval of the financial statement for the year, copies of which will be available at the meeting
- 7 Election of Officers for the coming year:
 - a Chairman
 - b Vice Chairman
 - c Hon. Secretary
 - d Hon. Treasurer
 - e Hon. Auditor(s)
- 8 Election of a Committee for the coming year
- 9 Motions of which due notice has been given
- 10 Any other business

NOMINATIONS for Officers and Committee members should be given to the Hon. Secretary 14 days before the AGM, though additional nominations may be received at the AGM with the consent of members. The Chairman and Vice Chairman have completed their three years in office, and so cannot stand for re-election. Three Committee members also have to stand down this year under the 3 year rule, so please consider standing for election. No previous experience required!

MOTIONS for the AGM must be sent to the Hon. Secretary in writing at least 14 days before the meeting.

THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY wishes to remind members that subscriptions are due on 1st October 1996:-

Single Member	£6
Additional Member of same household	£3
Student Member	£1

A renewal form is enclosed with this edition of the Bulletin. Please return renewal forms to the Membership Secretary, Mr. C E Sole, 2A Griffiths Road, Wimbledon, London, SW19 1SP, or he will accept subscriptions at the October and November meetings. Once again, we also have the option of a Banker's Standing Order. Members who pay subscriptions by Standing Order are requested to ignore renewal forms.

PAUL RUTTER has kindly agreed to join us after the AGM to give us an illustrated talk on Morden Hall Park. Don't miss it.

A WORD OF THANKS

This is the last Bulletin that Marjorie Ledgerton is editing for us. She hopes to be moving shortly, if all goes according to plan. I am sure you would all want me to express our thanks to Marjorie for all the hard work she has put into producing such an interesting Bulletin four times a year. Her well-known powers of persuasion have been put to good use, and she has managed to extract from more or less willing reporters and authors some excellent material.

No doubt she will find future outlets for her many talents in her new home, and we all wish her the very best in the future. We will miss you, Marjorie. Thank you.

Chairman.

LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Report on the meeting on Friday 24th May 1996, at the Wandle Industrial Museum:-

- ◆ Sheila Harris showed a Resource Pack for teachers on Merton Priory produced by the Education Department. It includes maps, plans, documentary sources and coloured photographs. Richard Stanley, the Humanities Adviser in Merton, is to be congratulated.
- ◆ Bill Rudd has been studying the Morden Parish Registers, and shared some interesting discoveries. There were several long periods of between 5 and 16 years when, although baptisms and burials are recorded as normal, there are no marriages registered.
- ◆ Judy Goodman showed an illustration from *The Builder* magazine of 1881 of "Homefield, Merton". This elaborate mansion, at Phipps Bridge, Mitcham, was built for the Harlands, and pulled down in the early 1930s. Judy also showed a booklet commemorating the opening of the church of St. John the Divine, High Path, in 1914. The church, which has a Morris & Co. window in the Lady Chapel, was one of the earliest with reinforced concrete foundations, which were a major feature in the booklet.
- ◆ Peter Harris showed us posters and postcards from the V&A exhibition on William Morris. The exhibition is highly recommended. A video produced by the V&A includes footage of the model of the William Morris Works in the Wandle Industrial Museum.
- ◆ Peter Hopkins has been trying to ascertain the true extent of Nelson's Merton Place estate. In September 1801 he bought a 52 acre estate from Charles Greaves, which was all on the Wimbledon side of the High Street, except for the house itself in 1½ acres in Merton. The following April he bought William Axe's 113 acre estate in Merton. Nelson left Lady Hamilton 70 acres of her choice. The rest was to be sold to meet his debts.
- ◆ Bill Sole followed up with a comment about the impracticality of the brick tunnel under the High Street joining Nelson's properties, as the area is liable to flooding. His main contribution related to the Wimbledon YMCA, which began some 150 years ago in rented property in Worple Road, before buying property in the Broadway.
- ◆ Eric Montague discussed the dates of John Rocque's maps of London and Surrey. Apparently different editions were produced, so we need to be careful in using the maps to date features shown on them.

The next meetings will be on Friday 18th October and Friday 29th November, starting at 7.30pm.

THE GREEN FAIR

Once again we attended this year's Green Fair at the London Road Playing Fields, and as is usual for this late June event we were treated to a glorious summer's day with very little wind. The fair is held on the open ground at the rear of the flats off London Road, Mitcham. It's a small event and one where we are not overpowered by the professional market traders. Our very small exhibition depicted the Liberty Site in its working days as a textile printers. Words and photographs with a few artefacts, one of which was a printing block, and surprisingly, considering you could actually 'have a go' at block printing at the W.I.M. alongside us, Bill Rudd gave a number of demonstrations of block printing throughout the afternoon to interested passers-by. Of course, the block we had was an original, complete with pins. The fair was very well attended, although our sales, totalling £12.60 might not reflect this, but we do sell specialised material, and we had none specific to this part of Mitcham. In fact, we had not made a penny before Margaret joined us, which just goes to show what a difference a pretty face can make.

The arena events change every year, with the exception of the sheep dogs, and this year we had a one-man-band singing all those songs we only admit to singing when we have had one too many!! Still, all the youngsters enjoyed it, singing and dancing as he played along. He also doubled as the Punch & Judy man. Now this is one show I still love to watch and can recommend to one and all, unless of course you disapprove of violence, as there is more here than was on the Sweeney on TV. All in all we had a great time as we do every year, and even this small fair gets a visit from the Mayor, who passed us by fairly quickly. He said he had to get to the arena to present the prizes, but I think he was trying to get there before the one-man-band finished, to join in with all those youngsters who were having such a fun time. Many thanks to Margaret Carr and the stalwarts of the M.H.S. outdoor sales team, Bill Rudd and Eric Trim.

David Luff

A 'MELANCHOLY OCCURRENCE' AT MORDEN

It didn't happen often that the quiet village of Morden found itself in the national press during the reign of Queen Victoria. However the *Times* of Tuesday 22 January 1839 carried a long report headed 'THE LATE FATAL FIRE AT MORDEN'. In the previous Friday's issue a short item had reported two lives lost in a fire at 1 a.m. on Thursday at the *Crown*, Merton [sic]. But by the time of the re-convened inquest into the 'melancholy occurrence', which was held at the *George* on Monday 21st, the man from the *Times* had sorted out the local geography.

The inquest had been first set for the Friday, but the *Crown*'s landlord had failed to attend. This was George Melton, who may have been a recent arrival, as it is a William Hall who appears there in Robson's Directory for 1838. Both men are listed in the Register of Electors for 1838 as leasing a house and land. Melton and the waiter, William Owers, attended the adjourned inquest, having been summoned by Police Inspector Dowsett.

References to the *Crown* appear in the Hatfeild Estate papers¹ from 1816. Well placed as it was on the road to Epsom, it was not just a local beerhouse. The inquest report mentions an upstairs dining-room with a balcony, a bar-parlour, a tap, and several bedrooms. Though the original news report states that the public rooms were lit by gas, candles were used elsewhere. As well as beer, gin, rum and brandy were kept, and 'a good deal of sherry'.

By his own account Melton had drunk 'rather freely' of wine during the evening. The occasion was some sort of post-Christmas dinner which he had provided in the dining-room for a number of persons, who had left about 11 o'clock. Melton then had supper with his wife in the same room, before they both went upstairs to bed. Others in the house were Richard Mills, the ostler; William Hutton ('Mutton' in the *Times*), the 13-year old postboy²; the waiter, Owers; and Ann Jones, the maidservant. A man named Smith and at least two coachmen stayed on after the diners had left, but do not seem to have slept on the premises.

Owers locked up the bar, taking the key with him, and extinguished the candles. A small fire was still burning in the parlour fireplace. He had put the pipes the company had been smoking into the pipe-cupboard, above which were both the candle-cupboard and the 'tubs' of brandy, gin and rum. He 'could not say' whether there was still lighted tobacco in any of the pipes at the time. Melton described Owers as 'a very sober man' to whom he could not impute the cause of the fire 'either by negligence or design'.

Mrs Melton woke about 1 o'clock, with the bedroom full of smoke, roused her husband and told him she thought the house was on fire. He said 'Nonsense' and went back to sleep, only to be woken again by screams from his wife who had opened the bedroom door. Smoke and heat prevented him from going downstairs, and, with his wife, he escaped by climbing out of the dining-room window and over the balcony into the road, assisted by people who had gathered outside. Melton maintained that they barely escaped before the floors fell in. He could not account for failing to give the alarm, except for 'fright and agitation' and 'not knowing what he was about'. He had been into Ann Jones's room, but could not remember what had been said, and had seen nothing of Owers, Mills or Hutton.

Ann Jones testified that she had managed to get out of the back door. But the waiter, Owers, who had been woken by noise and screaming, saw that the stairs were on fire, climbed out of the open front bedroom window, and dropped safely onto a cart of turnips in the road beneath. He grabbed a man in a smock-frock (probably the cart-driver), saying, 'Come to Richard [Mills], for he went to bed drunk'. They went to the back of the house, opened the window where the ostler was sleeping, and shouted until prevented by the smoke. But to no avail. Mills and little William Hutton, who must also have been asleep at the back, died. Melton disclosed on questioning that about £14 in gold and silver under his wife's pillow had been lost, as well as his own watch, chain, and seals. A cheque for about £40 and several bills of exchange had gone too. He had in fact lost everything but the nightclothes he had escaped in, and, if not alerted by his wife, would have lost his life too. James Lockett, of Lower Mitcham, local agent for the Sun Fire Office, testified that the *Crown* was insured through him, and that he saw property amounting to about £20 value retrieved from the ruins. The plate had been insured for £150 and the stock for £200. The whole amount of insurance was for £1000.

There seems to have been much local gossip about the fire, and the coroner asked the jury to 'dismiss from their minds any rumours they might have heard'. If they considered it to have been caused by design their duty would be to return a verdict of wilful murder. In the event, after half an hour's consideration they concluded 'that the deceased persons were accidentally burnt to death'.

In contrast to the measured report in the *Times* a racier account appeared in the hand-written pages of the *Mordonian Juvenile Gazette*³. This was the newspaper of Morden Hall Academy, the boys' school founded by the Rev. John White, whose son Thomas assisted him. The *Gazette* was written mainly by the boys, and subject matter was usually restricted to school matters. The *Crown* fire provided an exciting opportunity for a young reporter, whose style suggests a regular diet of sensational literature:

[Original spelling and punctuation in the following have been retained.]

Dreadful Fire with loss of life

At ½ past 1 on the Morning of Thursday last a fire broke out on the premises of the Crown Inn, Morden, Surrey, it is said to have originated in the bar in consequence of a lighted cigar having been left in a cigar box with other segars, it was discovered by a waggoner who was passing the house on his way to London, he immediately drew the wagon under the first floor windows & awoke the inmates by throwing bunches of turnips through the windows. The Landlord, Landlady, & Waitor upon discovering their alarming situation jumped in their night clothes from one of the windows into the wagon. The female servt. was just getting into bed when the alarm was given and had time to make their [sic] escape. The Ostler a young man who had been married five months⁴ & the Pot boy an intelligent lad of about 16 years of age we are shocked to relate were burnt to complete cinders. Two of our compositors in company with Mr.T.N.White visited the ruins (which are about three gun shots from Morden Hall) at ½ past 7 o'clock the following morning when the beams were still burning the two bodies were found about ½ an hour previous to the arrival of our reporters they were discovered in a cellar which is underneath the room in which they slept. The Landlord insured the Premises, Furniture &c. in the Sun Fire office only three months previous to the fire. His furniture it is reported was insured for twice its value. Those circumstances added to his sending to Mitcham for a Post chaise & leaving the premises and furniture (without even sending for an engine while the devastating element was raging to the utmost of its fury & while two human beings were burning in the flames). But we cannot forbear expressing our astonishment that two men should have been permitted to be burnt to death without exertions being made to rescue them from the devouring element the room in which they slept was the last in the house which was consumed & the window was immediately over a wash house upon which the Landlord mounted & endeavoured to arouse the two sleeping men who were so near eternity but no one entered their room to alarm them we fear they never awoke till the flames were so far advanced for them even to make an effort to escape as they were not seen neither were either of their voices heard.

An inquest was to have taken place on Friday last but was postponed till Monday the 21st. the result of the enquiry shall appear in our next sheets.

(In fact no further report appears in the *Gazette*.)

Several variations from the *Times* account can be noted - apart from the schoolboys' reckless disregard of the libel laws! For instance, was William Hutton a potboy or a postboy - or indeed both?

The Meltons seem not to have been seen again in Morden. The *Crown* was rebuilt as the building, familiar from many picture postcard views, which stood about where Morden Reference library now stands. It was replaced in 1932 by a 'brewer's Tudor' pub, which was demolished in the early 1960s when Crown House - now the Civic Centre - was built. As an appendage of Crown House the new *Crown* was sited where the old Village Club had stood. In 1995 its old name was lost when it became *Big Hand Mo's*, with a night club called Strikers.

1. SRO 85/2/136-140, 267, 297-9, 379-80, 440
2. The burial of William Hutton is recorded in the St Lawrence Burial Register for 1839. His death and that of Richard Mills were registered in the Croydon district in the March quarter of 1839.
3. Manuscript volumes held at Morden Reference Library.
4. It has not proved possible to confirm that Mills had recently married.

Bill Rudd and Judy Goodman

AN ASPECT OF NEW WIMBLEDON

On a stroll around any neighbourhood, aspects of local history reveal themselves. Houses fronting right on to the pavement of Haydons Road (once Heydon Lane) show that this ribbon development occurred before the advent of Town Planning. Shops in many small shopping areas can be seen to have been built in what were once front gardens, because the storey is well back from the shop front, but the sketch herewith of the small parade of shops just to the south of Cowper Road shows that these shops took over the front parlours of the houses.

Part of 'New Wimbledon' - the post-1850 development south of the main railway line - was the estate of small cottages, with small front gardens, developed in North Road, South Road and East Road off Haydons Road. For about 60 years there were five public houses within a radius of two hundred yards - the Bricklayers Arms, the Star, the British Queen, the Horse and Groom, and the Marquis of Lorne. Gas works and tramways came and went. Council estates have superseded the cottages.

Does hard work ever kill prematurely? There was a jovial little fellow who ran the greengrocer's in that parade, who used to get up at 3.30 every morning. We met again some years later when we were climbing the stairs to the cash desk on the third floor of the Co-op store in Tooting High Street. He told me that he was then 95, in reply to my query of why he was puffing. "It is time you were shot", said I. "That's right," he agreed, "They are still having to pay my pension."

Bill Sole

ST. LAWRENCE, MORDEN PARISH CHURCH

Whenever I have spoken to an individual or a group I have stated that, contrary to earlier published histories, the church was not rebuilt in 1636 but was substantially refurbished. The reason given that the parish registers, which started in 1634, run without a break to the present day, which would not be the case if the church was rebuilt. I now have to make a correction.

Recently I have made a study of the parish registers in order to try to work out what the population might have been in the 17th and 18th centuries. This has proved to be a trifle unsatisfactory. Though I worked from the calendar year not the church year March 25th Ladyday.

Imagine my surprise when I found that no baptisms, marriages or burials had taken place between October 1635 and April 1636; seven months. So the church was closed while the work was carried out.

The work comprised the refacing of an existing church in brick, starting under the East window and the windows of the south side of the nave - in the new-style Flemish Bond introduced into this country. The remainder is in traditional English Bond. The mullions (windows) appear to be the old windows reinserted. The westernmost window on the north side of the nave is very ill-fitting which would not be the case if it were new. The tradition that the East window came from the demolished Merton Priory is unproven.

Examination of the foundations of the tower prior to the building of the Church Centre showed, among a mixed bag of brickwork, two courses of Flemish Bond thus an indication that the tower was rebuilt - in a darker brick, the ground stage being filled with chalk. The vestry, in Flemish Bond, was built in 1805. The south porch is more 20th century rebuild. The corners are not stone blocks but cement rendering over old brick.

W J Rudd

A VISIT TO WIMBLEDON VILLAGE

Norman Plastow, of the Wimbledon Society, was the leader when 14 of our members visited Wimbledon village in sultry weather on Saturday 20th July. Prompt arrivals had a quick preliminary glance at the Wimbledon Society's Museum before the guided walk, which began outside, in the Ridgway. Norman told us that Wimbledon's puzzlingly remote parish church is sited on the line of this pre-Roman trackway, possibly an ancient trade route. The High Street, once known just as the Street, used to end at the bakery (now Gravestocks). Between that point and the Ridgway were 'fattening fields' for cattle being driven to London's markets.

Joseph Toynbee's monument, on a corner by the roundabout, used to stand in the middle of the road. He was an early E.N.T. specialist, surgeon to Queen Victoria, and philanthropist, who with author Thomas Hughes and others founded Wimbledon's Village Improvement Society, and in 1858 the Village Club and Lecture Hall. He died rather mysteriously, of chloroform poisoning, at his house in Parkside.

While most of the High Street buildings are from the 19th century, the *Dog and Fox*, Wimbledon's oldest public house, was known as *My Lord's Arms* early in the 17th century, and its central block is much earlier than the rest. Coaches used to run from here to London via Clapham. From the *Rose and Crown* (mid-17th century) the service to London was via Putney Bridge. The completion of that bridge in 1729 opened up Wimbledon as a rural but accessible residence for politicians and others with London interests.

A pair of 17th-century cottages (now a delicatessen) on the corner of Church Road contrast with the late Victorian fire station close by. On the west side the properties were once long narrow plots, each a smallholding with house and outbuildings, and next to Haygarth Place this layout can still be seen. The houses have long since been converted into commercial premises, some with attractive features, such as cast-iron 'barley-sugar' columns.

Eagle House, which dates from 1613, had Parliamentary troops billeted in it during the Civil War. In 1789 the Rev. Thomas Lancaster, curate of Merton, opened a school here, which he later named after his friend Lord Nelson. Not till 1860 did it acquire its stone eagle and its present name.

Samuel Mason, landlord of the *Rose and Crown*, married into the brewing and milling Watney family and was able in 1782 to buy The Green, complete with two houses. He used the land to build five more houses, together with some shops, and thus established his family's prosperity for the next century.

Wimbledon House, built c1700, was owned in its early days by a Huguenot, Sir Theodore Janssen, and by another financier, John 'Vulture' Hopkins, whose heirs, the Bond-Hopkins family, are important in the history of Merton and Wimbledon. The last owner was Sir Henry Peek MP, upon whose death in 1898, the property was sold for development. New roads were named after owners of the estate, including Calonne, Marryat, and Peek himself. Hamptons' estate office, built to handle sales of the new houses, still survives.

After passing 17th-century Claremont our route took us down Lingfield Road, laid out in the 19th century in what had been the grounds of Lingfield House, which ran from Southside down to the Ridgway. The east side was built up first, and the road has a wide variety of Victorian architecture.

Arriving back at the Village Club building, we looked at the Lecture Hall - still much used, and then spent the rest of the visit in the Museum. This has recently, with the aid of legacies and a grant, been entirely reorganised and refurbished. Displays cover natural history, geology and archaeology, key historical periods, and themes such as Wimbledon's manor houses, education, utilities, transport, and local government. Behind the scenes are hundreds of paintings and prints, and thousands of photographs, as well as many artefacts. The Museum is open from 2-5.30 pm on Saturdays, and admission is free.

Norman Plastow was thanked for an interesting and entertaining tour.

Judy Goodman

SURREY LOCAL HISTORY COUNCIL SYMPOSIUM

'Fire' will be a popular subject at this year's Symposium on Saturday 2nd November, from 10.30 a.m. at The Chertsey Hall, Heriot Road, Chertsey. Speakers include Ron Shettle on "The History of Fire Fighting with special reference to Surrey", Mary Scott Adams on "Phoenix from the Ashes, The Restoration of Uppark after the Fire", Brian Henham on "Badges of Extinction: Insurance Office Fireman's Badges and Fire Marks", and Dr. Ron Cox on "Captain Shaw, the First Chief of the London Fire Brigade". There will be a vintage fire engine on display, and several special exhibits. Tickets are £10 at the door. Light lunches are available at the hall at very competitive prices. There is also a bar. An extensive car park is immediately opposite, Chertsey Railway station is a 5 minute walk away and there are buses from Kingston.

CRYSTAL PALACE

As a prelude to our trip to Crystal Palace on the 11th of May, Ian Bevan from the Crystal Palace Foundation gave us a very interesting talk on the Palace. His talk was divided into two, the designer Joseph Paxton, and the building.

Joseph Paxton ran away from home when he was 16 and took work as a gardener in one of the large country houses. Adjoining this estate was Chatsworth House, the home of the Duke of Devonshire. So impressed was the Duke with Joseph Paxton's work, he asked him to come and work for him. Paxton accepted and it is said that he made a great impression on his first day at Chatsworth. Within a couple of hours he had organised the entire outside workforce, introduced himself to the household staff and proposed to the housekeeper's niece, whom he later married!

During his years at Chatsworth he built many greenhouses to his own designs and it was from these that later would come the Crystal Palace.

After 246 designs for a great exhibition building had all been rejected, Paxton submitted his own glass, wood and metal palace. It was accepted and in due course erected in Hyde Park for the duration of the Great Exhibition. After this period it had to be dismantled, as there had been no intention of it being a permanent structure. Originally its main transepts were of an oblong shape but due to protests from environmentalists concerning a number of trees which would need to be cut down, Paxton changed the central transept to a crescent shape and so enclosed all the trees at risk. When the exhibition was over the trees were once more in the open air of the park and undamaged.

The entire structure was built like a Meccano Set, with the four foot square panes of glass slotting into their metal frames. The support columns were hollow and used to remove rain water to the drains. The floor was of wooden boards that had gaps, through which the cleaners swept the dust and rubbish. The foundations were minimal and the whole structure only took six months to erect.

When the exhibition finally closed there were attempts to keep the Crystal Palace on site in Hyde Park. The public had fallen in love with it and, rather than see its destruction, a new home was sought. This was not an easy task, and finally Paxton formed his own company to oversee the move. At this time railways were the investment of the day and Paxton, a director of the London and Brighton and South Coast Railway, persuaded a fellow director who owned Penge Hall to sell him this land. The sale completed, the Crystal Palace was re-erected, much enlarged, on the top of Sydenham Hill. It now had two arched side transepts to complement the large central one. A 200 acre park was laid out with ornamental gardens and an extensive series of fountains and cascading waterfalls.

The Crystal Palace became the scene of numerous events. Every form of entertainment and sport has taken place there and the grounds were to see some of the most spectacular firework displays as a regular event. Ian described the Palace as the Disneyland of the day, but I think his comparison should have been that Disneyland is the Crystal Palace of today.

It appears that fires were a regular happening at the Palace. In 1861 the north transept was destroyed by fire, and the practice of sweeping the rubbish through the gaps in the wooden floor was a disaster waiting to happen. The disaster finally came on the night of the 30th November 1936 when the discovery of a fire was thought to be just another small one. Not so, this one was already out of control and totally engulfed the entire Palace. By the time the firemen got there it was a raging inferno and could be seen as a glow in the sky for miles around. The following morning found the Crystal Palace a mass of broken glass, twisted metal and burnt wood. The two towers that had served the water fountains had survived but they were demolished in 1941 on the pretext that it was being used by German bombers to find London. They certainly did not need these towers when they had that shining silver snake the River Thames to find their way over and out of London.

Attempts were made to rebuild the Crystal Palace after the War but they all failed. It is ironic, looking back at the post-war world, to see that what Bomber Command destroyed of Germany's heritage has been lovingly restored, but what the Luftwaffe only damaged of ours we went on to destroy and replace with concrete monstrosities. In such a climate the Palace had no chance of rising from the ashes, but not all is lost, and plans are afoot for a much smaller palace. If it does see the light of day, let us hope it will be a Crystal Palace worthy of Joseph Paxton.

Following Ian Bevan's most interesting talk, we paid a visit to the site on Saturday the 11th May.

Veterans of MHS outings will know that you sometimes get more than just the event of the day, for in the past we have been subjected to some of the most extremes of weather, violent thunderstorms and torrential rain being not unusual. I bet the only ones who can date the exact day during last summer (the hottest on record) when it rained all day were those who went to Painshill Park. This may have been why only 14 members turned up. True to form the previous week had seen a bitterly sharp cold wind blowing, but this had ceased by Saturday. The day was overcast but, on the whole, a rather pleasant day for walking.

The museum was specially opened up for us and later on returning we were shown a video which included footage of a Bank Holiday sometime in the 1930s with day trippers enjoying all the fun of the Palace.

Trevor, our guide for the afternoon was, like Ian, extremely knowledgeable on Joseph Paxton and the history of the Crystal Palace. All was recounted to us and more often than not in the exact spot where it had taken place.

Looking up from the bottom of the central walkway it is not difficult to picture the Crystal Palace standing high on the hill in front of us. Everywhere there are reminders of the past, although most are no longer complete. A wall that had once held the glass roof of the covered walkway from the railway station to the Palace; a mound, now just grass, but once the ornamental rose garden; and the brick remains of the tanks from the salt water aquarium. Motor car racing stopped here in the late 1960s due to the excessive noise levels, but part of the former circuit remain and are now used as roadways.

We stopped for a while at the bust of Joseph Paxton, and here Trevor recalled to us the life of Paxton and his connection with the Palace. From here we walked up the Grand Parade and then, via the aquarium, into the Palace, and on through to the main central transept where thousands had listened to music, watched a boxing tournament or a circus. We stood on the spot where the fire had first been spotted and then on to the tunnel to the former northern railway station, but unfortunately the gate was locked. Our guide did not have a key, so we were unable to gain entry, and we followed our rather embarrassed host back to the museum.

A most enjoyable afternoon, made even better by our guide, who pointed out all the historical artefacts that on our own we would probably have missed.

David Luff

MERTON'S TWIN TOWERS

On Saturday 22nd June 14 members of the Society were able to look down on the rest of humankind - from the roofs of the Civic Centre and the Lyon Tower. After a brief visit to the Council Chamber, and the promise of a future visit to see the Regalia, our guide, Gene Saunders, took us up to the roof, where we were able to view, and photograph, in all directions. For some of us it took a while to get our bearings, but once the more easily recognised landmarks such as St Helier Hospital and the IKEA building had been discovered, it was not long before others were being identified. Perhaps the most dominant features were the trees, which are less obvious at ground level, but it was fascinating to see the buildings and traffic like a model village laid out at our feet.

Having explored the view for some time, we visited the Mayor's Parlour, where a number of interesting items representing all aspects of our civic history were on display.

We then made our way to Colliers Wood where Joe McNalty of Brown & Root awaited us. We divided into two groups, as it was felt that not too many should be on the roof at one time. Many said they did not expect this visit to be as exciting as the Civic Centre, but in fact the views were excellent. We were able to see the Post Office Tower, Canary Wharf, the Houses of Parliament, and Westminster Abbey quite clearly, and those with binoculars could just make out the dome of St. Paul's. The closer views of Savacentre on the Priory/Merton Abbey site, and Wandle Park were splendid, and the view along Colliers Wood High Street showed the straight line of Roman Stane Street.

Although it was a cloudy day, the light was quite good for photographs, without overpowering shadows. Perhaps those who took photographs could display some at our AGM in November.

Our thanks to Gene Saunders and Joe McNalty and their colleagues for their hospitality, and to Eric Montague for suggesting the visits, and to Sheila Harris for arranging them for us.

Peter Hopkins

THE LOCK FAMILY AT MERTON

WILLIAM LOK (1480-1550)

The life of William Lok does not loom large in the history of Merton, but he had a colourful and eventful life that is worth recounting, and the fact that the Lock family had associations with Merton from 1499 to 1660 merits some investigation.

Generations of the family were mercers trading in London and Flanders. Many served the City as aldermen and sheriffs. William's forebears began the tradition in the reign of Henry VI when John Lok was engaged in a great deal of business for the royal household around 1460.¹ Another John Lok with his wife Jane, probably William's grandparents, began their association with Merton in 1499 when they acquired a lease from Merton Priory of property known as Merton Place² which was situated opposite the parish church. In London, William began to make his mark as a cloth merchant and married Alice Spencer. He followed his father Thomas's calling as a mercer, but Thomas died in 1507.

By now, exports of cloth were booming, attaining 93,000 cloths in 1508, as compared with 30-40,000 in 1460 and 60,000 in 1482. These were sent from London to Antwerp where they were re-shipped up the Rhine for the German and Italian markets. Wool prices were low at the turn of the century, but had soared by 1512. All Englishmen trading with the Low Countries, the business heart of northern Europe, were members of the Merchant Adventurers, but each traded on his own account within a framework of rules, many designed to minimise competition. As well as exports, the merchants imported quality material from the Continent. A record of May 1520 shows that William Lok supplied a cloth of silver for the queen's use (i.e. Catherine of Aragon). No doubt he helped to supply the king's needs at the Field of Cloth of Gold in that year.

The London premises of Lok were in Cheapside on the corner of Bow Lane. Perhaps as a pun on his name, his premises were at the sign of the Padlok.³ This was a large merchant's house with warehouse and a retail outlet. Alice had borne him eight sons and one daughter, and William no doubt wished to provide his growing family with a country residence away from disease, dirt and pollution of London, and where fresh food could be readily obtained. On March 14th 1521 Lok approached the Priory and arranged a lease on Brykhouse Close for 55 years. This was a tenement with other closes of one acre and a barn. Alice died in the following year and was buried at the Mercers' chapel in Cheapside. William soon remarried; Catherine (née Cook) most likely spent time in Merton bringing up, not only nine step-children but her own ten children born between 1523 and 1537. One of these was Rose, born in 1526, who had an eventful life, marrying twice and sharing the life of a protestant with her family, through the reign of Mary (1553-8), and living till 1613. When aged 85 she wrote her recollections of childhood which give an insight into the times of William Lok.⁴

In 1526/7, William was importing cloth of gold and silver for King Henry and supplying stuff for the court revels. In 1529 he was travelling in Flanders. Between 1532 and 1537 he was again at Bergen-op-Zoom and Antwerp undertaking tasks for the king including the despatch of regular letters of intelligence to both Thomas Cromwell and the king.

The sons of his first marriage were now reaching their twenties but most had elected not to become mercers. It may be for this reason that in 1532 Lok leased Merton Holts from the Priory for 32 years. This was a farm consisting of a tenement, closes and pasture which later became Merton Hall Farm. But perhaps more importantly there was a plague in London in September and Lok signed the lease on October 12th.

Henry VIII's repudiation, in 1531, of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon alarmed traders and affected trade through Germany. In January 1533 the king secretly married Anne Boleyn and in the following month a brief from Pope Clement VII was issued to be posted on the doors of churches in Flanders 'as near to England as possible'. This declared that Henry, under pain of excommunication, must restore Queen Catherine to the royal honours, and cease to associate publicly with Anne, and that within a month. Holinshed, in his *Chronicles of England*,⁵ informs us that William Lok removed one of these briefs from the door of a church in Dunkirk.

These briefs were probably posted by agents of the German Emperor, who was a nephew of Queen Catherine, without the Pope's knowledge, and the importance of the action cannot be compared with the burning of the papal bull by Martin Luther in 1520. Nevertheless the action pleased King Henry who rewarded William with £100 p.a. and made him gentleman usher of the chamber. On occasions the king would visit and dine with Lok in Cheapside.³

The Church was undergoing various influences and daughter Rose recalls an event of these times: "I remember that I have heard my father say when he was a young merchant and used to go beyond sea, Queen Anne Boleyn ... caused him to get her the gospels and epistles written in parchment in French together with the psalms.⁶ My mother ... came to some light of the gospell be (sic) meanes of some English books sent privately to her by my father's factors from beyond the sea; whereupon she used to call me with my two sisters into her chamber to read to us out of the same good books very privately for feare of trouble because those good books were then accounted heretical ... Therefore my mother charged us to say nothing of her reading to us for fear of trouble."⁷ On 19th May 1536 Queen Anne was beheaded.

In London there was much sadness and suffering through many causes. Rose recalls: "... then there was a plague in London, and my father and mother removed 7 miles of into the country where she was delivered of a chyld, fell sick and dyed. In time of her sicknes she fell asleepe and being awaked she smiled saying that she saw God the father and Christ at his right hand stretching forth his hands to receive her. And so dyed comfortably in the faith." (fol. 5) This was on 13th October 1537. The Dictionary of National Biography informs us that she was "buried at St. Martin Abbey, Surrey." If this were so the monument was transferred to the parish church where John Aubrey noted that on his perambulation in 1673 he found a brass plate in a marble gravestone bearing the words: 'Pray for the soule of Kateryn Lok, sumtyme the wife of William Lok, mercer of London...'⁸

In 1538 the Priory of Merton was dissolved. The disastrous effect on the villagers of Merton, following the loss of the priory cannot be recounted in a single paragraph and must await a fuller account in a future Bulletin. Their losses cannot compare with the gains enjoyed by astute court officials, business men and merchants throughout the land. In London, from 1525, William Lok had leased property in Hosyer Lane, (the lower part of Bow Lane), from a monastery known as Elsing Spital. This was a late foundation of the Augustinian Order, by a London mercer William Elsing who bequeathed properties in London to the priory in 1349, including that in Hosyer Lane. Existing leases with dissolved monasteries were allowed to continue, so that all Lok's holdings in London and Merton were secure. In May 1536 the priory of Elsing Spital was dissolved as a 'lesser monastery' (with income less than £200 p.a.). The eastern arm of the conventual church became the parish church of St. Alphage by the Wall being bought from the Crown for £100. The north aisle of the nave became four houses and other priory buildings became the dwelling house of Sir John Williams, the sole Master of the King's Jewels, but was destroyed by fire in 1541 and the jewels burnt or stolen.⁹ On 29th December 1537, Henry VIII granted the possessions of Elsing Spital in Bow Lane to William Lok. This probably means that he was allowed to purchase the "freehold". This is described as tenement with shops, cellars and solars, comprising two tenements united and built into one principal tenement. Lok, now a widower, began to reside there.¹⁰

William spent most of the summer of 1538 in Antwerp. On 7th August he wrote to the king, "I have provided the things of which you spoke to me at my departure."¹¹ Another agent, John Hutton, complained to Cromwell on 29th July and "wonders that Will Lok has been commanded to write news by the King, as he cannot be so well informed as (himself)".¹² By October he had returned and delivered Lord Lisle's doublet to Worley. On 2nd November the king made a royal grant licensing William Lok to purvey and export 300 tuns of beer.¹³ At the trial of Sir Geoffrey Pole and others on 3rd December 1538, the commission and indictment were proved by certain witnesses including William Locke, Gregory Lovell and Jasper Locke.¹⁴ Lok was certainly a man of many parts.

to be continued.

- 1 S.L.Thrupp *The Merchant Class of Medieval London 1300-1500* 1948 p.55; Cal.P.R 1452-61 p.511; Cal.L.Bk, K.
- 2 Manning & Bray I p.265. John had been Sheriff of London in 1460.
- 3 Letters & Papers X No. 981.
- 4 *The Recollections of Rose Hickman* are contained in BL. Addtl. MS 43827 fol. 1-18.
- 5 R Holinshed *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1587) Vol. iii, p.936.
- 6 Anne Boleyn owned several scriptural works including a 1534 edition of Tyndale's New Testament. Anne's own copy of 'The Pistellis and Gospelles for the LII Sondayes in the Yere ...' in French is in the British Library (Harl. MS 6561).
- 7 BL. Addtl. MS 43827 fol. 4v.
- 8 J Aubrey *The Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey* 1718/9 vol. 1 p.224.
- 9 On 26th April 1537 he took possession of 1163 ozs. of gold and silver plate from Merton Priory a year before its dissolution.
- 10 Schofield, Allen & Taylor 'Medieval Buildings and Property Development in Cheapside' in LAMAS Trans. 41 (1990) pp. 103/4, 108.
- 11 L & P Pt II No. 48. 12 L & P Pt I No. 1497. 13 L & P Pt II No. 967 (3). 14 L & P Pt II No. 986 (26).

Lionel Green

VISIT TO NONSUCH MANSION

Twelve members enjoyed a very interesting and informative tour of the Georgian service wing of Nonsuch Mansion House in Nonsuch Park, on a very pleasant afternoon in June, led by Gerald Smith of the Friends of Nonsuch.

Mr. Smith started his tour by talking about the house which was built for Samuel Farmer, M.P. for Huntingdon, who bought Nonsuch Park in 1799. The house is built on the site of an older building, and was designed by Jeffrey Wyatt in the Tudor Gothic style similar to that of Nonsuch Palace demolished in the late 17th century. The estate passed to his grandson, William Francis Gamul Farmer, who extended the Mansion House and won many prizes for his orchids and azaleas grown at Nonsuch. The estate stayed in the Farmer family until 1937, when it was sold to Surrey County Council. It is now administered by Sutton & Cheam and Epsom & Ewell Borough Councils.

We then walked round the gardens of Nonsuch Mansion designed by Thomas Whately, a well-known 18th century writer on picturesque gardens. He converted an old chalk pit into a dell of grass, trees and shrubs, and created terraces, a formal flower garden and a pinetum. The gardens today are still well tended and provide a peaceful setting for an afternoon stroll. It is thought that the first lilacs to come to Britain, came to Nonsuch brought by Sir Walter Raleigh.

After the garden walk we toured the service wing of the Mansion, comprising the laundries, kitchen and sculleries, and larders. Here the Friends of Nonsuch have set up displays and gathered together a fine collection of artefacts, including real fruit, vegetables and herbs to create the atmosphere of life in the servants' quarters.

Also on display are three individual panes of stained glass which were discovered in a dresser drawer in the kitchen. With advice from the V & A, they had the windows cleaned and restored. One shows the coat of arms of the Farmer family; another a coat of arms commemorating the marriage of Henry VIII and Jane Seymour; and the third is a painting on glass of a parakeet against a Dutch background by a windmill, painted by E. Margaret Pearson in 1776. She was the daughter of a bookseller in the Strand, Samuel Pearson, who was a friend of Dr. Johnson.

The Friends of Nonsuch hope to develop the stable block as an Education and Visitor Centre in the future. If you would like to visit Nonsuch Mansion, it is open to the public certain Sunday afternoons during the summer months from 2.00-5.00. Refreshments are available in the cafe. Telephone Sue Taylor 01372 724302 for details of opening.

Sheila Harris

GOODBYE

This then is my last 'production' for the Bulletin. I cannot thank enough all the willing (and perhaps not so willing) people who have supplied me with material over the years. Special thanks to Irene Bain for being so dedicated to addressing the envelopes that contained your Bulletins, to the distributors who plodded through the streets with local deliveries, and finally to Peter Hopkins who made the work of compiling the material into print so much easier when he took over.

I now introduce Judy Goodman to you as my successor, and I am sure she is going to produce a Bulletin which will be enjoyable.

Marjorie Ledgerton

Letters and contributions for the bulletin should be sent to the Hon. Editor.
The views expressed in this Bulletin are those of the contributors concerned and not necessarily those of the Society or its Officers.