



PRESIDENT: J Scott McCracken BA FSA MIFA

VICE PRESIDENTS: Viscountess Hanworth, Arthur Turner, Lionel Green and William Rudd

BULLETIN NO. 133

MARCH 2000

PROGRAMME MARCH-JUNE

Saturday 18 March 2.30 pm
Barbara Webb

Snuff Mill Environmental Centre
'Millais and the Hogsmill River'

It was known that Pre-Raphaelite artist John Millais painted his 'Ophelia' (now in the Tate) with the Hogsmill as its setting, but where exactly on the river? In 1995 Barbara Webb determined to find out. In an illustrated talk she will describe her detective work and the solution of the mystery.

(For the Snuff Mill Centre drivers should park in the Morden Hall Garden Centre car-park and take the path across the bridge; go through the archway and turn right towards Morden Cottage. Buses 118,157,164)

Friday 14 April 8.00 pm
Jim Davison

Snuff Mill Environmental Centre
'Croydon: an Archaeological Update'

Our neighbouring borough has some important ancient sites. Mr Davison, a member both of Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society and the South-West London Archaeological Liaison Committee, will give us the latest news and ideas about early Croydon.

Saturday 20 May 2.30 pm

David Harrison
'Mysterious Wimbledon: a walk of History and Mystery'

Meet 2.15 at the *Dog & Fox* in the High Street for a Wimbledon walk with a difference. Mr Harrison is an experienced local history lecturer and guide. Cost £3.

Wednesday 14 June 11 am

Old Battersea House

Meet 10.45 at 30 Vicarage Crescent SW11 to see ceramics by William De Morgan, paintings by his wife Evelyn De Morgan, and much more.

Maximum number for group is 20.

The cost will be £2.50.

Old Battersea House is a 15-20 minute walk from Clapham Junction, or take bus 239.



The Society's events are open to the general public, unless otherwise stated.



LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Friday 10th December 1999 - Stephen Turner in the Chair - 8 members present

- ◆ **Lionel Green** opened with an outline history of the telephone service in Merton - obviously another item for a future Bulletin.
- ◆ **Eric Montague** mentioned research being undertaken at his suggestion by member Julie Garner on several puzzles concerning the Hampson family, major figures in Restoration Mitcham. Another little-known 17th century family, the Odways (or Otways), is proving of considerable interest, and will also merit publication. A correspondent in Australia has supplied details of the life "down under" of George Hall, the Mitcham lad deported for seven years in 1829 for stealing two geese. (See Workshop report 5.3.99). *See also this issue page 12 From Our Postbag 3.*
- ◆ We were pleased to welcome **James Vernon**, a descendant of Thomas Vernon, John Chart's master carpenter, responsible for carving the galleries of Mitcham church in the 1820s. Alas, Thomas's work and the cottage he lived in no longer survive, but James is hoping to uncover a little more information about his worthy forbear. *See also p.11 From our Postbag 2.*
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** now has more than enough information for the study she is to submit for her exam., and awaits guidance from her tutor on presentation.
- ◆ **Stephen Turner**, inspired by Peter Hopkins' work on the tithe surveys of Merton and Morden, is contemplating an analysis of the Mitcham register. A huge task, but one of great potential value to future researchers.
- ◆ **David Luff** reported having found a hitherto unknown coloured PC of a Merton footbridge. He also initiated a brief discussion on tramways, past and present, and the proposed redevelopment on the priory site.
- ◆ **Bill Rudd** is cataloguing his photographic collection of the 100-odd monastic sites which inspired the St. Helier street names. He has also received formal receipt from the Surrey History Centre listing the unique WWII Air Raid Precaution archive he deposited with them. Surprisingly, so much was discarded as "rubbish" after the war the records are sparse. Bill's donation was obviously appreciated. His assistance to the BBC, planning an item on the actor, George Cole, has not been used - a pity!

E N Montague

Friday 27 January 2000 - Eric Montague in the Chair - 8 persons present.

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** spoke about the walled garden at the Morden Hall Garden Centre. There are references to the garden, recently in the occupation of Abraham Goldsmid, in two leases of 1812 but none earlier. It is likely that the garden was created on a plot of meadowland called Horseleys, lying between Morden Hall and Morden Lodge. As Richard Garth had leased Horseleys to Edward and Robert Polhill in 1786, it seems unlikely that the Garths had created the garden for the Hall. It may have been formed by Goldsmid to serve his Morden Lodge. He also occupied other Garth property leased to the Polhills.
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** reviewed her progress on her project about Merton Priory. A floor plan of the priory from an undated leaflet in Merton Local Studies had been produced in connection with a fund to purchase land at the north end of the Priory church, to be laid out as a public garden. This fund is referred to in a SAS report in 1926. On this she had superimposed a plan drawn up by Evelyn Jowett, post 1951, showing the garden built for the Festival of Britain and the then existing station buildings and factories. A report by Dennis Turner in 1962-3 contains drawings of medieval tiles found during excavations near the Priory, similar in design to some at Westminster Abbey. Rosemary said that the tiles at the Abbey are too badly worn or inaccessible to photograph or draw, but she had photographed some Victorian copies in the entrance to the Chapter House.

Merton Priory tiles

from Dennis Turner's article in *Surrey*

Archaeological Collections Vol. 64 (1967) p.47.

Another arrangement of four tiles is shown
on p.10 of this Bulletin.

- ◆ **Stephen Turner** had copied part of the first draft of the 1838 Survey of Mitcham, containing the lands controlled by the Trustees and Heirs of Cranmer, and similar extracts from the 1846 Tithe Apportionment, for comparison. One of the plots in the 1838 Survey, No. 874, to the north-west of Lower (Cricket) Green, and now the site of the Methodist Church, was occupied by Gosling, Chesterman, Scott and Plumley who appear in the 1841 census. These characters are also in the List of Parishioners of Mitcham dated 1838, which gives details of their circumstances. These properties, like a number of others, have the names of the owners and occupiers detailed in the Survey whereas in the Apportionment they are listed under Sundry Owners - Sundry Occupiers.

- ◆ The 'Best of British' programme about George Cole had been shown some three weeks after the previous ones. **Bill Rudd** said that the material which he had sent to the BBC had not been used; in fact there was not much mention of Morden during the programme. Bill passed round photographs which showed the St. Helier Estate at the time George was living there, and pictures of No.1 (Willows) and No. 2 (Canterbury) schools which George would have attended. Bill also went to No.2 but was a year or two behind him.

Bill also had magazine cuttings with pictures of George Cole as a young man, and newspaper reports of trips to the coast for the school children of Morden. One bath bun and one banana was allowed to each child.



*Canterbury Road Secondary School - 1957 - W J Rudd
(formerly SCC No. 2 Central Boys' School, Morden)*

- ◆ **Sheila Harris** reported that three Wandle Walks were planned for the coming months. 27 February 2000 by the London Borough of Wandsworth, meet at Waddon Ponds, 9.30. 10 March 2000 by Wandle Heritage, meet at Earlsfield Station 10.00. Telephone 020 8545 3074. 1 April 2000 by London Borough of Merton Environmental Forum, meet at Watermeads 020 8545 3457. Do not forget Eric Montague's walk in September.

- ◆ **Judith Goodman** spoke about how William Morris voted in Merton. On 15 January 1889 there were elections for Surrey County Council. In the Wallington Division there were two candidates, Alfred H. Smee of Wallington and John Innes of Merton. Smee was returned, and was probably the one supported by Morris.

There was a vote in 1894 to form a District Council, for which John Innes was the returning officer and he also called the ballot. At this time William Morris had four votes as a ratepayer but did not vote. Innes had twelve votes, six as a ratepayer and six as an owner.

- ◆ **Eric Montague** had long speculated on the straight length of the Wandle through Morden Hall Park. After talking to Professor Crocker he concluded that it was cut to clear the water away from the mill as quickly as possible. A Nicholas Davison had leased a mill in Merton from George Garth from 1619/20 to 1630, and Eric had already identified an island in the present park as the likely site.

He then spoke briefly on the research being done on the Hampsons by Julie Garner. Eric showed a draft of Michael Reid's 'Notes of a Childhood in Mitcham' which it is hoped will be a future publication.

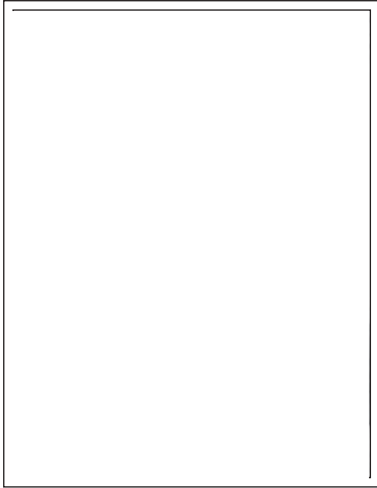
- ◆ Thomas Vernon was buried by the Revd. Richard Simpson in 1846. **James Vernon** had visited Downside Abbey, who hold some Simpson papers, to look at his diary to try to find out why 'Saint' preceded Thomas in the Register. But the first entry was three weeks after the burial. Mention was made of other Simpson papers in boxes now in the Local Studies Centre and of some in tin trunks formerly in Wimbledon Library of which the current location is not known. *See also p.11 From our Postbag 2.*

Stephen Turner

NEXT WORKSHOPS: Fridays 10th March and 5th May at 7.30pm at Wandle Industrial Museum

FROM DOWNE TO GALAPAGOS

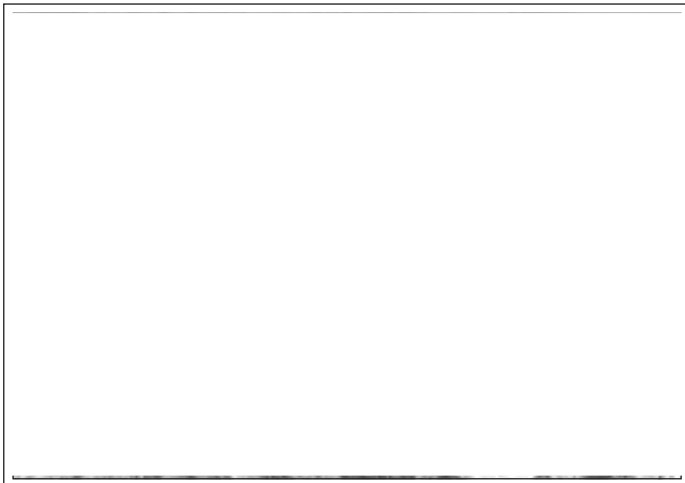
In spite of our January meeting clashing with a conference organised by our President, both were well attended. Only a few seats in the front row were left at the Snuff Mill Environmental Centre as Ray and Pat Kilsby led us in the wake of Charles Darwin.



Charles Darwin in 1858

In 1855 Darwin discovered that a young biologist, Alfred Russel Wallace, was working along similar lines to his own, and correspondence between them showed that they had arrived independently at the same conclusions about the process of evolution. In 1858 they presented a joint paper to a meeting of the Linnean Society, but it was not well-received. Darwin decided it was time to make public a summary of his research, and *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection* was published the following year. Darwin continued to collaborate with Wallace, who had a slightly more local connection, moving to Croydon in the 1880s.

Pat and Ray showed several views of Down House, which is now open to the public as a memorial to Darwin. Then they went on to show us slides of their holiday to Galapagos, via Havana, Cuba, and Quito, Ecuador. Their trip took somewhat less time than Darwin's, having been undertaken by plane rather than ship, but was no less interesting for that.



Down House from the rear

Darwin was born in Shrewsbury in 1809, and was educated at Edinburgh and Cambridge. At the age of 22 he volunteered to join *HMS Beagle* as unpaid naturalist on a voyage to survey the coast of South America. The voyage took almost five years, and by the time he returned to England his name was already well-known in scientific circles. This was partly due to the specimens he had sent home, but also because some of his letters had been published. Once home, he continued his researches, and published his *Zoology of the Voyage of the Beagle*.

In 1839 he married his first cousin, Emma Wedgwood, and in 1842 the couple moved to Down House in the village of Downe in Kent, with their two young children, and for the next 40 years, until his death in 1882, he continued to write about his theories from the seclusion of Down House.

Thank you, Ray and Pat, for an entertaining and informative afternoon.

Peter Hopkins

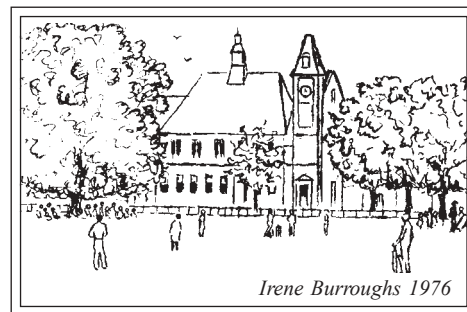
If you would like to join Pat and Ray on an even shorter journey, with a closer link with our local history, they are planning a coach trip to Merton College, Oxford next year. More details later.

Giant tortoises seen by Darwin at the Galapagos Islands. Darwin discovered that they were well worth eating as well as studying.

AROUND THE CRICKET GREEN

A packed audience at The Canons on February 12th heard Eric Montague demonstrate that the varied buildings around the Cricket Green, built for a wide variety of purposes, showed changing tastes in architecture from Tudor times to the present day.

The first was the *Burn Bullock* public house (originally the *King's Head*), with its 18th-century frontage and two false windows to keep the symmetry, but avoid window tax. The addition of the cornice, and changes to the eaves, have not altered its appearance very greatly. However, at the side of the building, nearest the Green, can be seen the earlier 16th-century building. The Mitcham Vestry met here for many years, and King Edward VII stopped for refreshment on the way to Epsom.



The Mitcham Cricket Clubhouse was rebuilt in the early 1900s after a fire, in the days when crossing the road to the Green through traffic was not a problem!

The next two houses were built for the master and mistress of Mitcham's first infants' school, which was behind them. As the school population increased the school was moved, and the houses became offices of a printing works, and the school the printing works.

The Tate almshouses were built in 1829 on the site of the Tate family's house, with money given by Miss Mary Tate. They were for 12 poor women, over 55 years old, members of the Church of England, who had never been on parish relief, living in the village. The almshouses have recently been modernised, and as Mary Tate Cottages are owned by a housing association.

The next house, built in the 18th century, was from 1830 the *Britannia* public house, and had its own cricket club, "The Old Buffers", which played on another part of the Green.

The next house was built as a small Wesleyan chapel, and John Wesley preached there. When the larger Methodist church across the Green was built this became a private house.

The police station, replacing one from 1885, contributes a 20th-century architectural style.

On the other side of the Cricket Green, Elm Lodge, built 1808, listed Grade II, has been for most of its life the home of the local doctor.

Mitcham Court has been the home of more than one Mitcham benefactor, who helped to preserve the Common from development, and later actively supported the golf club.

The Birches was built in the 1920s for Sir Isaac Wilson, a successful builder, who founded Wilson Hospital, among other local benefactions.

The White House, listed Grade II, built in the late 18th century, became the residence of a Dr Hartley, whose daughter wrote one of the first histories of the area.

Chestnut Cottage was originally a weatherboarded cottage with a thatched roof. It has been much altered over the years, and was at one time split into two halves with two staircases.

With the Methodist church we are back with 20th-century architecture.

Margaret Carr

IN BRIEF

- ◆ 'The Quiet Before the Storm' is the current exhibition at Merton Heritage Centre, which looks at life between the two World Wars. The Centre is open between 10am and 5pm on Fridays and Saturdays at The Canons, Madeira Road, Mitcham. Admission free.
- ◆ From 13 May to 9 July at Wandsworth Museum there will be an exhibition on the early watermills and windmills of Battersea and Wandsworth, called 'Turning Points'. Admission free. There are three Thursday evening lectures in May - on Young's brewery; Price's candle factory; and the Surrey Iron Railway. Ring 020 8871 7074 for details and tickets (£2.00). The museum is in the old courthouse in Garratt Lane, just off the High Street; open Tues-Sat 10-5, Sun 2-5.
- ◆ Well-known local historian Richard Milward is to give two (different) illustrated talks on West Barnes and Grand Drive: on Saturday 18 March at 8pm at the Paddock Allotment Garden Site clubhouse off Heath Drive, for the Friends of Cannon Hill Common; and on Thursday 6 April at 8 pm at Holy Cross church hall, Motspur Park, to raise funds for work in Africa. All welcome.

DAUGHTER HOUSES OF MERTON PRIORY

Lecture on Saturday 4 December 1999 by LIONEL GREEN, Chairman and a Vice President of the Society

It is no secret that for many years now Lionel has been steeping himself in the history of Merton Priory. He began his lecture by recalling how, nearly 50 years ago, as a very young man, he had been invited by Evelyn Jowett to contribute some chapters to *A History of Merton and Morden*, which she was producing at the request of the local Festival of Britain Committee. (He remembered that, in those more formal days, it was always “Miss Jowett” and “Mr Green”!) His contribution included a description of the priory. Now, at the end of the Millennium, he believed it was an appropriate moment to survey the daughter houses of the foundation.

After briefly outlining the state of the late Saxon church in England and the separate development of the minsters and the secular (i.e. not monastic) colleges, Lionel described the changes brought about by the Norman invasion. With so much redistribution of land, the new lords were soon setting up churches on their estates, churches that were recorded in the Domesday survey of 1086 as *æcclesiae*. These, as well as those given to the secular colleges, were served by priests - that is, clergy who had not taken monastic vows.

This rôle was soon taken on also by the Augustinian (or ‘regular’) canons, who were priests, and who arrived at this opportune time. Lionel pointed out, in passing, that one effect of their success would be that some church leaders began to be contemptuous of the canons of the secular colleges.

The order, established in France and northern Italy around 1060, took the name of St Augustine of Hippo, not because he was the founder (he died in AD 430), but because it followed the rules and advice he had formulated for religious communities.

Early daughter houses did not depend on the sending house, but were self-supporting from the start (in contrast to the Benedictine practice). In each case the initiative came from a local lord or bishop, who would apply to the mother foundation to send a few canons to establish themselves in the new house, which he would provide. Merton claimed to have founded six, but seven are listed in their records: *Tantona, Bothmsme, Ednesburch, Cirecestrensem, St Gregory of Canterbury, St Laud, Holy Trinity Thwinham*. Lionel went on to deal with the daughter houses of Merton in date order of foundation.

Taunton Priory was the subject of his article in Bulletin No.132 (December 1999), to which readers are referred.

By 1121 William Warelwast, bishop of Exeter, had become displeased with the prebendaries and ministers of the secular college at **Plympton**, near Plymouth. The reason for his anger was that “they would not leave their concubines”. He transferred them all to a new college at Bosham and invited canons from Aldgate and Merton to take over the buildings at Plympton. The new priory was given the same dedication as Taunton - St Peter and St Paul. Ralph of Aldgate was the first prior, and he was succeeded by Geoffrey of Merton, prior from 1128 to 1160. The bishop, when old and frail, joined the community, where he died and was buried. Geoffrey, after his own death, was remembered as a prior “of holy memory”.

St Gregory’s Canterbury had been founded in 1087 by Archbishop Lanfranc. As a house of secular canons it served the hospital of St John the Baptist, which survives today as an almshouse. When in 1123 William Corbeil of the Augustinian priory of St Osyth, Essex, was chosen as Archbishop, he reorganised St Gregory’s and invited canons from Merton to join the foundation.



Map showing sites of Merton Priory's daughter houses

There had been a Christian presence at **Bodmin** for 600 years before Merton priory was founded. But the Celtic tradition ended with the Saxon conquest of Cornwall in the tenth century, when King Athelstone of Wessex refounded a monastery, established by St Petroc, as a Benedictine house. By 1113 it had become a secular college, whose dean was Algar of Laon in France. Through Bishop William Warelwast Algar was later able to persuade Guy of Merton, who had been at Taunton, to come to Bodmin as prior. Guy was at once able to strengthen the religious life of the house. But not long after arriving at Bodmin, he died, from injuries received in a fall from his horse. Guy's funeral, which took place in Exeter cathedral, at the bishop's insistence, was attended by a multitude.

In 1128 King David of Scotland invited the canons of Merton to found **Holyrood Abbey**. The name came from the fragment of the cross that his mother, St Margaret, had brought back from the Holy Land, and David presented the relic in its casket to the new foundation. Alwin of Merton, who had been his chaplain since 1120, and later his confessor, was appointed as the first abbot and began the Holyrood Chronicle. He remained for 22 years, returning to Merton towards the end of his life. Holyrood was to become one of the most important of Merton's foundations. As at the mother house, there were royal lodgings within its fabric, and the new wing that replaced them in 1535 was the beginning of the royal palace of Holyrood.

The richest and greatest of all Augustinian foundations was **Cirencester Abbey**, founded by Henry I. Serlo, who was consecrated in 1130/1 as the first abbot, had been a canon of Merton and dean of Salisbury. Strangely, although the abbey functioned from this date, the church was not dedicated until 1176. Cirencester went on to establish c.1139 a daughter house of its own, at Bradenstoke in Wiltshire.

The ancient abbey of Sainte Croix at **St Lô, Normandy**, is traditionally said to have been founded by St Helena, who was the mother of Emperor Constantine, and who, according to medieval legend, was the finder of the True Cross. Damaged in repeated Viking raids, the abbey was rebuilt in 805 by Charlemagne, destroyed again in 888, and then replaced by a monastery for secular canons. In 1128, in order to stop the "scandalous behaviour" of the then canons, William of Evreux decided to make it a house of regular canons. In 1132 Algar, prior of Bodmin, became bishop of Coutances (once Constantiensis), and he brought in some canons from Merton. The first abbot is recorded as Theodoric or Thiery, "formerly prior of Meretonia". Although there was never a prior of that name, there was a Sir Teoldus, sub-prior of Merton, who died in 1173.

An early foundation existed within **Dover** Castle, attributed to Eadbald, king of Kent (614-40), and dedicated to St Mary. By 1086 there was also, within the castle, the church of St Martin, held by canons. In 1130 Archbishop Corbeil decided to remove the secular priests, whose corrupt life was "but typical of their class" and to choose a new site, well away from the distractions of town life. Using stone from a quarry at Caen, granted to him by Henry I, the Archbishop began an imposing new building, to be dedicated to both St Mary and St Martin. Corbeil, though already ill, asked the bishops of Rochester and St David to introduce some Merton canons to the new church. But the sub-prior of Canterbury objected, and the canons had to return to Merton. With Corbeil's death, they lost the support they needed; and the appointment of Theobald as archbishop saw Benedictine monks in occupation at Dover. However, Henry of Blois, bishop of Winchester, as papal legate, outranked the archbishop, and ordered the monks back to Canterbury. Dramatic times indeed!

The ancient name of **Christchurch** was *Betweenan*, later *Twynam Burna* ("between two waters"), becoming Twynham. A collegiate minster existed here before the time of Edward the Confessor. It was Ranulf Flambard, a curial cleric, and a great builder, who c.1096 began the great cruciform church, much of which still stands. However Flambard was committed to the Tower by Henry I. The foundation then went through uncertain times until 1150, when the bishops of Chichester and Winchester asked the patrons of Christchurch to convert the college into an Augustinian priory. Canons from Merton arrived; and the secular canons were allowed to retain their prebends for life, with the income then reverting to the priory. The church stands now as one of the most complete of the Augustinian order.

So, in total, Merton set up nine daughter houses, all within 33 years of its own foundation. These were established in important towns. At Taunton and Canterbury there were also hospitals - with St Bartholomew's in London, they were the earliest under Augustinian rule. Education played an important part at most of the houses. And extensive ranges of buildings were a striking feature, not forgetting the great new or re-built churches. All in all, an impressive achievement.

By way of illustration, Lionel used an overhead projector to show some detailed tables, drawings, plans and maps. As he led his large audience through the story of these foundations, with their complicated and interlocking histories, he shared with us the breadth and depth of knowledge that made this an outstanding event in the Society's programme.

Judith Goodman

LIONEL GREEN has drawn up a table of

CHRONOLOGICAL EVENTS CONCERNING THE BUILDINGS OF THE PRIORY AND THEIR USE BY THE CROWN.

- 1117 Chapel and claustral buildings constructed of wood on new site. (M&B. I. 245; Colker p 242)
- 1117 Founder's mother buried in priory church. (Colker p.244)
- 1118 Founder Gilbert provides a second wooden chapel much larger than the former one. (Colker p.243)
- 1118 Queen Matilda and Prince William visit the new Priory. (H.4)
- 1121/2 New church given royal protection. (M&B.I 243; H.12) Now 23 canons. (Colker p.243)
- 1125 "Beautiful & sturdy church begun". (Colker p 245). Founder Gilbert dies and buried in priory. Now 36 canons. (Colker p.245) Building work ceased.
- 1132 Completion of church in stone (took 15 years to build). (H.3/4)
- 1136 Claustral and other buildings completed. (*Decem. Script.* Col.1664; VCH Vol.ii p.95)
- c1156 Becket persuades Henry II to complete east end and transepts rebuilt further east (SAC 71 (1977) p.95; D Knowles *Thomas Becket* 1970 p.41)
- 1161 Infirmary chapel dedicated. (H.21)
- 1162/3 King assists 'works of the church'. (Pipe Roll- 6/62)
- 1165 King completes and endows the priory. (SAC 71 (1977) p 98)
- 1174 Feb. Altar of St John the Baptist dedicated. (H.26)
- c1175 ?Guest house built. Norman entrance arch now at parish church.
- 1194 Nov. Altar of St Stephen and St Nicholas dedicated. (H.49)
- 1196 Enlarged priory completed.
- 1197 Oct. Altar of the Holy Cross dedicated. (H.50 with date corrected)
- 1202 King John visits priory.
- 1204 King staying at Merton June 14-18. (H.60)
- 1208-14 England under Interdict.
- 1215 King at Merton (June 8) issuing safe conduct to barons for meeting at Runnymede.
- 1217 Priory providing accommodation and used for confirmation of Peace Conference at Kingston. (SAC 36 (1925) p.53)
- 1222 Dec. Storm destroys tower of church. (Ann. Monas.- Dunstable III 76)
- 1225 King gives priory 6 oaks from Windsor Forest 'for the work of their church'. (H.86)
- 1227 King gives priory 10 oaks from Windsor Forest (H.90) (?major repairs to tower and presbytery constructed. See also next entry).
- 1227 King at Merton - May/June. Lodgings for king and chancery provided (see 1258/9)
- 1229/30 King at Merton. (Cal. Lib. Rolls I (1226-40) p 153)
- 1232 Hubert de Burgh claiming sanctuary at High Altar.
- 1233 King at Merton. (Cal. Pat. Rolls III (1232-47) p 14)
- 1236 Parliament held at Merton. King and nobles accommodated Jan 20-27. (Cal. Pat. R. III (1232-47) p.134 &163).
- 1237 King at Merton at Easter. (Cal. Lib. Rolls I (1226-40) p.262; Close Rolls No.526)
- 1239 King at Merton. (Cal. Lib. Rolls I (1226-40) p.379)
- 1240 Stone memorial erected outside precincts to mark death of John Warenne, Earl of Surrey.
- 1241 The priory possesses its own quarry. (H.106)
- 1230x1260 Lady chapel built in the reign of Henry III. (Lambard *Topographical Dictionary* 1730 p 212)
- 1241 New silver seal depicts gothic style building.
- 1243 Severe tempest in June, "as had not been seen at Merton for many years before". (H.112)
- 1245/6 King at Merton. Christmas and Easter. (Cal. Pat. Roll Vol. III (1232-47) p 468/9)
- 1249 King at Merton (Cal. Pat. R. IV (1247-58) p)
- c1250 Major rebuilding of infirmary. (Monas. Res. Bul. 4 (1998) p.3). See 1161 above.
- 1252 May King at Merton. (H.124)
- 1253 Feb. King at Merton. (H.125). Silver statue of Blessed Virgin Mary ordered by King for Merton.
- 1255 April King at Merton. Gives cope of red samite to the priory. (H.130)
- 1255 Dec. 600 marks bequeathed to buy land to build chantry chapel in priory church. (H. 130)
- 1256 Jan. King at Merton. (H.131)
- 1256 Sept. King at Merton. (H.131)
- 1257/8 King at Merton (Christmas and Easter each year) (Close Roll Vol.X p 287 & 470/1)

- 1258/9 King's chamber and chimney and chambers for chancery and wardrobe repaired. (H.136)
- 1259 April King at Merton. (H.136)
- 1263 Murderer seeks sanctuary in church and thief in infirmary chapel. (H.139)
- 1264 Armed militia from London intent on destroying Chancellor's property at Merton.
- 1260x70 Chamber built in precinct *juxta Beaulieu* by Prior Gilbert. (H.193)
- Members of the Hansard family buried in priory church. (H.120)
- 1273 Archbishop Kilwardby of Canterbury consecrated at Merton. (H.154)
- 1275 Pippes Mill bought from Crown for £23-6s-8d. (H.157)
- 1286 Jan. Site near sacristy bounded by ditches granted to build house. (H.168)
- 1305 Prior forced to resign but given place of residence in the precincts. (H.195)
- 1310 Merton pleads that it is "manifestly oppressed with poverty". (H. 202)
- c1330-40 Windows inserted in Decorated style. (see 1867 below)
- 1346 King attends a play at Merton. (*Archæologia* xxxi p.43)
- c1380-90 Road access to area south of kitchen. (SAC 64 (1967) p 40 & 44)
- 1382 June Faculty granted to dedicate three altars and two smaller altars in church. (H.264)
- 1387 Sept. "Some dwellings...in deficient repair". (H.270)
- 1393 Lady Chapel and nave of church needing repairs. (H.284)
- c1394 Dormitories and old houses require repairs. (H.287)
- 1412 Henry IV holds Privy Council at Merton. (H.296)
- 1437 Nov. Henry VI crowned at Merton. (H.298)
- 1485 Cellarer occupying an upper chamber near the dormitory. (H. 305)
- 1485 "Great Chapel of Blessed Virgin Mary" within the priory church referred to. (H.306)
- 1530 Lower chamber of the infirmary referred to. (H.331)
- 1535 Sept. Commissioner Leigh at Merton.
- 1538 April Merton Priory dissolved.

Subsequent Events

- 1538 April Claustal buildings demolished and 3050 loads of stone taken to Cuddington to build Nonsuch Palace.
- 1538 May John Whytokers of Merton paid 13s.4d. for "uncovering the body of the church of Merton Abbey" (Dent p.272)
- 1538 Amery mills leased to William Moraunt. (H.338)
- 1541 Labourers on site sorting Caen stone for Nonsuch. (Dent p.49 &80)
- 1558 Derelict site granted to the reformed convent of Sheen.
Amery mills and gardens leased to John Benson.
- 1559 Three loads of stone supplied to St Mary, Battersea. (Churchwardens' Accounts)
- 1568 Abbey House and estate leased to Gregory Lovell. (Lysons *Environs*...I 1792 p 347n)
- 1571 Queen Elizabeth visits Abbey House.
- 1586 Merton Abbey and estate leased to Gregory Lovell for 21 years.
- 1609 Priory mill sold to Edward Ferrars.
- 1613 Priory mill bought by George Cow.
- 1624 Priory mill purchased by Rowland Wilson for £800.
Heavy flooding and attendant collapse of water management in 16th and 17th centuries. (MoLAS Report CCC 97 (1998) p.6)
- 1648 Priory buildings still existing. Parliament makes them secure against roving royalists.
- 1660's Precinct used as bleaching grounds.
- 1680 Merton Abbey for sale, containing "several large rooms and a fine chapel". (*Domestic Intelligence* May 1680)
- c1690 Flint walls contain 65 acres. Stream runs through and passes kitchen and drives a mill. "Here were seven rings of bells and several chapels" (J Aubrey *The Natural History...of Surrey* 1718/9 Vol.I p.226)
- 1724 Calico printing works set up in precincts. Chapel utilised as print room. (Thorne *Handbook to the Environs of London* 1876 p.247)
- 1733 G.Vertue visits site and reports "chapel entire". (BL Addtl. MS. 23086)
- 1752 Second calico printing works opened nearer the High Street, Merton.

- 1774 Stone coffins discovered and used as drinking troughs for horses used at Abbey Works. (Croydon PS 895 (821) COX 1844)
- 1797 Sculptured stone head with gilded head band found in precinct wall in grounds of Mr Halfhide. (Announcement by Society of Antiquaries 23 April 1803)
- 1815-20 Merton Abbey House empty.
- c1862/5 Western section of Abbey House demolished. (E Walford in *Gentleman's Magazine* June 1884 Vol.256 p.66)
- 1867 The last of seven chapels pulled down. (Jowett p.130. See c1690 above.)
- 1868 Merton Abbey railway built across priory site.
- 1914 June Abbey House demolished. House breaker discovers Norman arch, ashlar walls, heavy timbers, encaustic tiles and coins.
- 1919 Aug. Two stone coffins found during the laying of gas pipes along north side of Station Road.
- 1921 Skeleton found in grounds of Trafalgar Works (bones not coffined), and 14th century spur.
- 1921/2 Bidder's excavation. Church, cloisters and chapter house found. (SAC 38 (1929) p.49-66).
- 1923 Corbel with sculptured head found in precinct wall. (SAC 38 (1929) p.53).
- 1956 May Many pieces of worked stone found in river. (west of Savacentre)
- 1959 M. Biddle excavation at Nonsuch. Carved, painted and gilded keystone roof boss weighing 4½ cwt found. (Dent p.101, plate III. now on public display at Museum of London).
- 1962/3 Cobbled roadway beside ditch. See c1380-90 above. Tiles discovered. (Turner, SAC 64 (1967) p.35-70).
- 1971 Building stone and tiles from river. (Brooks, SAC 69 (1973) p.212/3).
- 1973 July M & MUDC and MHS arrange dedication of garden beside site of high altar.
- 1976-8 McCracken excavations. Chapter house site revealing two building phases.
- 1983 McCracken excavations. Infirmary site.
- 1986 Feb Planning enquiry for projected Savacentre on priory site.
- 1986/7 MoLAS excavations (Bruce & Mason). North transept and nave.
- 1988-90 MoLAS excavations (Bruce & Mason). Infirmary and reredorter sites
- 1992 MoLAS excavations (Saxby). Reigate stone footings of 16th century buildings along High Street with one aligned N-S. Tiles and medieval ditch found near High Street.

Abbreviations:-

Colker	M L Colker, <i>Studia Monastica</i> Vol.12 (1970)
<i>Decem. Script.</i>	R Twysden, <i>Decem. Scriptores</i> 1652
Dent	J Dent, <i>The Quest for Nonesuch</i> 1970
H	A Heales, <i>Records of Merton Priory</i> 1898
Lysons	D Lysons, <i>Environs of London</i> 1792
M&B	Manning and Bray, <i>History of Surrey</i> 1807-12
MoLAS	Museum of London Archaeological Service.
Monas. Res. Bul.	Monastic Research Bulletin, York University.
SAC	Surrey Archaeological Society Collections

SUGGESTED BUILDING DATES

Work involved	Dates	Style
Wooden church and buildings.	1117-24	
Rebuilding in stone.	1125-36	Norman
Reconstructed church, central tower and claustral buildings including chapter house and infirmary.	c1156-96	Late Norman
Restoration of tower. Presbytery, lady chapel, reredorter and great drain.	c1225-50	Early English
Building improvements including larger windows, floors repaved and additional buttresses.	1320-50	Decorated
Serious lack of maintenance but some floors repaved.	1385-1400	
Restoration.	1400-1410	?Perpendicular
Dormitory rebuilt.	15 th cent.	

FROM OUR POSTBAG 1:

BENNINGA & Co. LTD

Margarine Manufacturers, Mortimer Road, Mitcham

Members may recall seeing in the final issue of the *Merton Messenger* in December 1998 an item under the headline “Benno’s goal - a piece of cake?”, which recounted the quest of “Benno” Benninga of Sanibel, Florida, who is seeking information about his family’s former margarine factory in Mitcham. The firm is said to have been widely praised in the 1930s for its model working conditions. Mr Benninga, who understands his great-uncle Jacob Benninga was a prominent member of Mitcham’s now defunct Chamber of Commerce, is keen to make contact with anyone who may have known, or worked in, the factory, and might be able to provide some details of its final years.

I was able to provide Mr Benninga with details of the factory’s early history (it had been built in the 1880s as the private gas works supplying the Holborn Union workhouse in what is now Western Road), but could not throw much light on its more recent history.

In his letter of thanks Mr Benninga asks if it could be publicised that he is still hoping to make contact with someone who either worked at the factory (it did not close down till the mid-1960s), or has a relative or friend who was employed there. He is especially interested in the “inside management details, politics and personalities of the firm”.



Benninga's Mitcham margerine factory in 1932

Eric Montague

FROM OUR POST BAG 2:

THOMAS VERNON OF MITCHAM (1781-1846)

We have recently had an enquiry from Mr James Vernon of Croydon, asking if we could help solve a puzzle which has arisen during research into his family.

One of his forbears, Thomas Vernon, who was born towards the close of 1781, died at Mitcham on 3 June 1846 aged 64½. He was buried a week later in the cemetery adjoining the parish church of St Peter and St Paul in Church Road. The cause of his death is given on the death certificate as “decay of Nature”.

In the census return of 1841 Thomas Vernon was described as a “joiner”, and we know from John R Chart’s account of the rebuilding of the church by his grandfather (John Chart) between 1819 and 1822 that Vernon was in fact employed as head carpenter. He would have been in his late 30s at the time, and was responsible for the carving which embellished the front of the galleries. The timber was solid oak, and the task took Vernon 12 months to complete. Unfortunately his handiwork no longer survives, having been removed when war damage repairs were carried out around 1950, but part of the gallery above the north aisle can be seen in Plate 155 in *Mitcham: A Pictorial History*.

Thomas Vernon was obviously an active member of the church. In the 1820s the church had no organ, and singing was led by a string band in which Thomas played the violin. (Chart describes him as being “a good player”.) Thomas had a large family - there seem to have been four sons and four daughters - and lived with his wife Elizabeth, three years his junior, in a small cottage in Fieldgate Lane off Western Road. So much seems to be clear, and is supported by the records.

The mystery which is puzzling our enquirer is why, having apparently been merely Thomas Vernon all his life (as far as is known), his worthy ancestor should be styled “Saint Thomas Vernon” both on his death certificate and in the parish burial register. (Coincidentally, the burial was one of the last at which the Rev. Richard Simpson officiated before he resigned the living at Mitcham on being converted to Roman Catholicism.)

We have been unable to offer an explanation - can any of our readers suggest an answer?

Eric Montague

FROM OUR POSTBAG 3:

On a brief visit to the Local Studies Centre early last year, **Eric Montague** was introduced to a visitor from Australia. **The Revd R.J.Reid** was hoping to discover a little more about a Mitcham ancestor who, as a youth of 19, was sentenced in 1829 to seven years transportation for stealing geese.

As a result of this encounter, further research, and a brisk correspondence between here and New South Wales, ROGER REID, of North Epping NSW, Australia, is now able to relate the story he calls:

A NATIVE OF MITCHAM

This is the story of a young man of Mitcham who survived many hardships to become a founder of a large Australian family.

A happy event took place in Mitcham, Surrey, in July 1811. The arrival of an innocent child was duly recorded at his baptism, in the words:

“Hall, George Frederick, (born) 21 July 1811 Mitcham Surrey (Father) Nicholas Hall (Mother) Elizabeth”¹

Twelve years later, a family named Hall is recorded as the late occupiers of “a cottage valued at 8 pounds per annum, owned by a man called Woodyer”.² This cottage appears to have been located in Upper Mitcham on the main London road, close to the *Swan* public house. Nicholas (and Elizabeth) Hall may have been employed by James Moore, whose farmstead was a large provider of medicinal and aromatic herbs for the perfumery and cosmetic trade.

The next official record is of a not so happy event. Eighteen years after the baptism, George Hall, “late of Mitcham”, appeared before the Surrey Quarter Sessions at Kingston, indicted, in the company of James Warren, also of Mitcham, for having, on the 17th October 1829, stolen “two live tame geese of the value of twenty-five shillings belonging to Francis Howard”.³

A handwritten note on the foot of the form stated that James Warren was a convicted felon, having appeared before the same court on 27 December 1828. While this suggests that the young George may have been led astray by an older, more hardened, thief, we shall see that his later history tends to support the thought that, rather than easily led, he may have been a willing if unsuccessful participant. When Case 310, that of George Hall, late of Mitcham, labourer, came before the bench on 20 October charged with larceny, the court found him guilty and sentenced him to be transported for seven years.⁴

The scene now shifts to Sydney in New South Wales. The Shipping Intelligence column of the *Sydney Gazette* announced the arrival of a fresh cargo of convicts:

“From London direct on Thursday last, the ship Lady Faversham[sic], Captain Ellerby, with 178 prisoners. She sailed from Portsmouth on the 8th April, Surgeon Superintendent A.D. Wilson Esq. The guard consisted of 2 serjeants, 2 corporals, and 25 privates of the 17th Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Harvey of the 29th.”⁵

They disembarked the following Tuesday. The *Sydney Gazette* welcomed their arrival in these words:

“The prisoners of the Lady Faversham are generally a fine, able-bodied set of men, and among them, many farm labourers. These will no doubt be an acquisition to our friends up the country, who express their great need of this class of individuals.”⁶

Among these convicts was:

“30.1191 Indent No 122 Geo Hall 19 r&w Prot single Surrey Gardeners Boy Stealing geese Surrey QS 20 Oct 1829 7 years no former convictions 5’2” dark ruddy complexion Brown to grey hair Hazel eyes small perpendicular scar on left side lower lip”⁷

After disembarkation, the convicts were assigned to various forms of service, and some to “our friends up the country”.

“4552 Hall George 19 Lady Feversham 1830 7 years assigned to Geo Galbraith at St Vincents”⁸

This George Galbraith was at that time a mere 25 years old. He had come from Scotland with sufficient capital to be granted 2000 acres of virgin bush at what became known as Nerriga, on the Endrick River, about 190km (120 miles) south of Sydney and 120km (70 miles) north-east of what is now Canberra. This is still a very isolated locality, whose poor soils are suitable only for rough grazing of sheep. In those days the isolation would have been even greater, with no more than scattered groups of convicts and overseers on surrounding grants. The lack of people and the unworked wildness of the bush would have been enhanced by the contrast with Mitcham. From time to time there would have been skirmishes with the local aboriginal band, hostile at the takeover of their waterholes and hunting grounds, and at the abuse of their womenfolk. George Hall, with

some other convicts, would have helped clear the land, dig, sow and harvest a small area of grain, and mind the sheep and cattle.

The next mention of George Hall occurs about two years later. He had apparently fallen foul of his master, which is not difficult to imagine happening between two young men, especially if one is smarting under a felon's reputation and conditions, and the other conscious of his superiority and wealth. George had been sentenced to work in chains with a road-making gang, and had escaped. His recapture was advertised as:

“List of runaways apprehended up to 3 Dec 1832 ... George Hall, Lady Feversham, from the No 16 Road Gang”⁹

He was returned to another road gang, this time the No 9 Party. Had he belonged to a Sydney detachment he might well have been punished with ten days on the treadmill, or seven days severe labour. As he was a country escapee, where there were no such conveniences, he probably received 25 lashes! Within ten months he had bolted again.

“Absentees ... George Hall No 30.1191.22 Lady Feversham from Ditto [No 9 Road Party] since 11 instant”¹⁰

Apparently he was recaptured, and finally served out his term. No mention of the granting of his Ticket-of-Leave has been found. His Certificate of Freedom was granted on 7 September 1837, and announced in the *Government Gazette* of 11 October 1837. He did not pick it up until 20 March 1839, perhaps because he could not afford the fee of 5/-.

He travelled down to Adelaide, we know, because in the following year his Certificate was cancelled, returned to the authorities in Sydney, overwritten with the words:

“Transported for seven years from Adelaide 7 July 1840 by the Brig Christiana.”

From the *Chronological List of Convict Ships arrived Port Jackson 1788-1849* appears “the brig Christiana Lancaster Master arrived from Port Adelaide on 29 Aug 1840”. On board were four male convicts, one of whom was:

“40.1645 4 Hall George 28 R&W Prot single Mitcham Laborer House Robbery Tried Adelaide 7 July 1840 7 years 5'2" ... [description as before but with the addition of]... “mark of ulcer under left jaw”¹¹

Once again he escaped, this time from Pinchgut Island. This is now the stone-walled fortress, Fort Denison, in Sydney Harbour, which it became, late in the 19th century, in order to guard against a Russian attack. But the island was then no more than a rocky outcrop. There was no shelter from the weather, and water and food had to be brought from the shore. Hence its name and reputation.

This escape was also noted on that Certificate of Freedom.

“A runaway from Pinchgut Island vide letter 44/6700 in which is enclosed his Certificate of Freedom but which is now cancelled.”

The *Government Gazette* duly noted his escape under “List of Runaways”:

“Hall George Christina [sic] 29 Mitcham Surry laborer 5 feet 2 inches ruddy and freckled complexion ... lost a front upper tooth right side, small perpendicular scar right side of upper lip, horizontal scar on each eyebrow, mark of ulceration inside [sic] of left jaw, scar front of left side of head, mole back of neck, scar inside of right wrist, mole inside of left elbow, was here before Lady Feversham, 1830 for seven years, from Pinchgut Island since 22 ultimo [22 Jan 1841]”¹²

There are three things we learn from this description. For the first time his native place is named as Mitcham in Surrey. He is now described as being freckled. And third, we learn that he had been in some bad fights, losing a tooth and gaining scarred eyebrow ridges.

It is possible that, during this new period of freedom, he was the George Hall, bullock-driver, in the Maitland District, who got a John Applewhite into trouble.¹³

After three years on the run he was apprehended, according to the *Government Gazette* of 15 June 1844. But within 18 months he was again on the loose, this time a runaway from the Blackheath Stockade, some 100km (62 miles) west of Sydney, where he had been held, possibly while repairing the road across the Blue Mountains. This took place on 29 December 1845.¹⁴

No further report of his name appears in the *Gazette* up to the end of 1851. He had disappeared into the community, a successful “bolter” at last. His success was probably due to the rapid growth of the population, as thousands of migrants entered the country, lured by finds of gold.

Our story now turns to that of a farm labourer who appears in the Morpeth area, inland from the New South Wales port of Newcastle, both then within the Maitland District. Morpeth was the centre of a prosperous community of gentleman farmers, some of whom had vast sheep stations further inland. There was plenty of work for farm labourers, most of whom were ex-convicts.

It was in Morpeth that a George Hall met a Jane McMullen. While he claimed to have married Jane at Morpeth, there is no record of that marriage, which in itself would not have been unusual for those days. Since the first of their ten children, also a George, was not born until 1848, this appears to have been a smokescreen.

The family tradition is that George was of middling height. He was auburn-haired and fair in complexion, a colouring common to many of his descendants. His nickname was “the Red Bullock”, supposedly because of his colouring, perhaps also because it aptly described his build and personality. There is nothing that prevents this George from being George Hall of Mitcham.

Three further children were born before the family moved 50km (30 miles) south of Morpeth to Ellalong, on the southern border of the Hunter Valley. This was more marginal land, whose sandy soils were better for grazing horses, cattle and sheep than for crops. As this land began to be developed, there was increasing work, which attracted labourers, many of whom were known to have “scarred ankles”. Their fifth child, a son, my great-grandfather, was born there in 1854.

At that time George was described as a “farmer”. This does not mean he had his own farm, but that he worked in that way for other landowners. On occasions he is believed to have driven bullock teams like his son George and grandson Henry Roland, but, unlike them, he never owned a team.

In the electoral roll of 1871 George was listed as a “leaseholder” at Quarrybylong, a locality near Ellalong. This marked a rise in his fortunes, but perhaps only in that he housed his family in a hut belonging to someone else. He was then about 60 years old.

When George was about 70, his son William began to purchase 40 acres of land. When it was surveyed it had on it a hut worth only ten pounds. It was a slab hut. William did not have an easy time. The family memory is that he grew wheat on this small area, but “gave up, defeated by the rust”!

George and Jane lived with William in these their closing years. Their grandson Tom remembers being told that “Grandma Hall was a very big woman from southern Ireland. Grandfather Hall was from Northern Ireland [sic]”. When Irish troubles stirred they used to sit on either side of the open fireplace, “sucking their pipes, slanging each other, and not too choosy about the words they used”.

My grandmother Rose described her Hall grandparents as being “very poor, very rough, and very bad-tempered”. When Grandma Hall died, Rose, then 12 years old, told how she went dancing to her mother saying, “O good! Grandma’s burning in hell”. She was promptly silenced before her father heard. Clearly they were not her favourite relatives.

Jane may have had good reason to be ill-tempered. When she died, in 1886, the cause was recorded as “natural decay”, which her husband said she had been suffering for 20 years.

George died of “old age” on 9 May 1893. He maintained a veil over his background to the last. His son-in-law, in notifying the authorities, knew only his age and occupation, and all else, including Jane’s former name was “unknown”! If one and the same person as George Hall of Mitcham, he died less than three months before his 82nd birthday, bringing to an end the life of a very tough, strong and strong-willed man.

His ten children had large families, one having 18 children! Of those 18 there was one who went on to have 12. The next two generations have been less fruitful, but have helped to give George Hall several hundred descendants. We owe a great debt of gratitude to this native of Mitcham, and subsequent migrants. As pioneer settlers they struggled to build a life for themselves and for their children. We have reaped the benefit of their labours, their struggles, their tears and their joys.

1. International Genealogical Index
2. Land Tax records for Mitcham, 1823
3. File of Indictments No.310, at Surrey History Centre
4. Surrey Quarter Sessions Process Book QS3/5/14 p.252
5. *Sydney Gazette* 31 July 1830
6. *Sydney Gazette* 5 August 1830
7. Convict Indents microfilm reel 906
8. Index to Convicts arrived November 1828 - December 1832
9. *Government Gazette* 5 December 1832
10. *Government Gazette* 28 October 1833
11. *Chronological List of Convict Ships Arrived Port Jackson 1788-1849*
12. *Government Gazette* 19 February 1841

13. *Maitland Mercury* 15 April 1843

Wednesday, April 12: (Before the Chairman, Captain Day, Captain Hungerford, and A.E.Bundock, Esq.)

(Summary jurisdiction)

John Applewhite was indicted for having in his possession a stolen order for £6 13s. 9d., on the 14th January last, the property of Thomas Blakelock. Mr Purefoy appeared for the prisoner. It appeared that on the 13th January the prosecutor, who resides at Paterson, was returning from Patrick's Plains when he was stopped by two armed men and robbed of several orders, some money in notes and silver, and some goods from his dray. The prisoner was in Lumley's public house the night before the robbery at the same time the prosecutor was there; he is a blind man, and had a fiddle with him. He afterwards presented the order to Mr H.J. Cohen for payment, and two other of the cheques he delivered up after having denied first that he knew anything of them. He refused to say from whom he had received them, as he did not want to get any person into trouble. Mr Purefoy wished Mr Cohen's deposition to be read. This was done, and from it appeared that Mr Cohen had stated before the police bench that the prisoner had got the order from a bullock driver named George Hall, but when asked by Mr Cohen where George Hall lived he said he would get no other person into trouble. The check was not tendered to Mr Cohen by the prisoner, but by a young man in Mr Wiseman's shop, a ticket of leave holder, who said he had received it from the prisoner. This closed the case for the prosecution.

Mr Purefoy then addressed the jury for the defence, contending that there was no evidence whatever to show that the prisoner had any guilty knowledge of the cheques having been stolen. The jury returned a verdict of guilty.

The prisoner said he had received the orders from George Hall, but he had not the slightest knowledge of their being stolen; he had brought them to Maitland to get them cashed at the request of George Hall, who had promised to remunerate him for his trouble. He had been free thirteen years, and lost his sight in government service; he had never seen anything since he was free, and obtained a livelihood by playing upon a viola. He had no knowledge whatever of the notes having been stolen, and threw himself entirely on the mercy of the court. The chairman said he would allow the jury to reconsider their verdict after the statement they had heard from the prisoner. The jury adhered to their verdict, and the prisoner was sentenced to be imprisoned in Newcastle gaol for three calendar months.

14. *Government Gazette* 9 January 1846

ERIC MONTAGUE unearths a secret at **THE VICARAGE, 21 CHURCH ROAD, MITCHAM**

The Rev John Ansell has kindly sent me a sketch showing dry areas which became visible on the back lawn of the vicarage during the spell of hot weather we enjoyed last July. They are regular in outline, forming an elongated rectangle parallel to the vicarage, and, together with what could well be the footings of old garden walls, are clearly indicative of a former building on the site.

John asked if I knew of any buildings here prior to 1825, when it is understood the present vicarage was built, and I replied that I was pretty sure what he had noticed was the outline of the old parsonage. This is portrayed in a delightful watercolour by John Hassell, dated 1823, on which the words "Old Parsonage - pulled down 1826" have been written in pencil.

At the time of the Restoration Mitcham's "Parsonage House" stood on the site of The Canons. Its dilapidated condition (it was probably by then a very old building) was one of the causes of an acrimonious dispute which developed between the then vicar, Antony Sadler, and his patron, Robert Cranmer. By 1680, when Cranmer's son John entered into a contract with John Odway to build the present Canons house, a new vicarage had almost certainly been provided for the Rev John Payne, whom Cranmer had presented to the living in 1675.

Where this new vicarage stood is not known, but it was most likely in the vicinity of the parish church. It was here that in about 1789 Edwards, compiling his *Companion from London to Brighthelmston*, noted what he described as a "long low building" in the possession of the then incumbent, the Rev "Darbie" Myers.

The Rev Streynsham Derbyshire Myers (to give him his full name) died in September 1824, to be succeeded by his second cousin, Richard Cranmer. Richard died in November four years later, after which the vicarage was occupied by the Rev James Mapleton. On stylistic grounds alone one could hazard a guess that the central part of the present house (a typical Regency villa) was built some time during the 1820s. This can be narrowed down to between 1824 and 1828, on the assumption that it was constructed specifically for Richard Cranmer and his wife and their two daughters. It is, as we have observed, believed to have been erected in 1825, the builder being Samuel Killick, a well-established local man. It would now appear, from the evidence noted by John Ansell this summer, that the new villa was actually erected on what was the front garden of the old vicarage, and that the latter was demolished the following year, as the note on Hassell's watercolour asserts.

John Ansell is to be congratulated on his "field work", and thanked for bringing the markings to our notice. Perhaps it may prove possible at some time to test with a little judicious excavation the explanation we have offered.



Hassell's picture of the Old Parsonage

GROUNDWORK MERTON – CHANGING PLACES; CHANGING LIVES

Groundwork Merton is one of a country-wide network of ‘Groundwork Trusts’. These Trusts are independent charitable organisations set up to bring about environmental, social and economic renewal in areas of industrial decline.

Groundwork Merton has been working in the Borough of Merton for almost five years. We have carried out a huge variety of projects, ranging from the creation of children’s play areas on housing estates to running educational campaigns covering poetry writing and making bird and bat boxes. The main services we can provide are landscape design, community and youth work. Because work is carried out with the support of the local community, we find that the projects we implement are genuinely more ‘sustainable’ than they would have been otherwise.

Wandle Park

During the last few years we have been working with the Environment Agency and London Borough of Merton to restore the channel in the park. Originally the line of the River Wandle before it was diverted to supply Connolly’s mill, the river channel now once again follows the historic boundary between the parishes of Wimbledon and Mitcham. It has been re-connected to the Wandle (to guarantee a constant flow of water) and the concrete river walls have been broken out and the banks re-profiled. This channel already provides a home to a wide variety of invertebrates including water shrimps, and the larvae of damsel and dragon-flies.

We have also created a new reed-bed next to the channel, which treats the pollution entering the park via the surface water sewer (which formerly went straight into the channel). This reed-bed is an attractive landscape feature in its own right, and a heron has recently taken up residence there.

Pickle Ditch

Just upstream and next to the new Priory Retail Park, we are also working either side of Pickle Ditch (which also marks an historic boundary, this time between the parishes of Merton and Mitcham). This is a tributary of the Wandle and is not a ‘ditch’ at all, but a 6-metre wide river! Here we are leaving the concrete walls – but with the help of the Environment Agency, planting areas have been created on top of the concrete base, and then edged with long bundles of hazel faggots. This edging helps keep the planting in place during heavy flooding. The site is sensitive because it includes the only remaining stretch of Priory precinct wall, and we have been negotiating with the National Trust on the proposed improvements. Although there cannot be any public access to the wall, we have carefully cleared scrub vegetation in front of the wall, and there are now very good views of it from the car park next to the shops. As part of the new development, the former Brook Path has also been reinstated alongside the Ditch, and this extends the pleasant route along the river to Merton Abbey Mills.

This site has a long and rich history and to highlight this, we are installing on site small carved inscriptions hinting at some of the things which have happened there over the last two or three hundred years. These will be placed within the new flint walls enclosing seating areas overlooking the channel. When you visit the site, look out for these and also for the kingfisher, which is a very regular visitor indeed!

We are always looking for sponsorship, and for practical help with our smaller projects. To find out more about Groundwork Merton, or about our other schemes, please write to me at our new offices at Unit 14, The Apprentice Shop, Merton Abbey Mills, Merantun Way, London SW19 2RD.

Aileen Shackell – Principal Landscape Architect

IN BRIEF

- ◆ Peter Hopkins’ exhibition on the history of Lower Morden and Morden Park, produced for St Martin’s church in September 1999 for a diocesan Open Day, has been on display again - at Hatfield First School, for their Millennium week. You can get your copy of the accompanying booklet from the Society for £2.95 at indoor events, or £3.45 by post, proceeds to St Martin’s.
- ◆ Until late 2000 there is a special display called Christianity in Roman Britain, at the British Museum (Room 49). Admission free.
- ◆ The Imperial War Museum has a special exhibition to mark the 60th anniversary of ‘Spitfire Summer’, until late November. Harry Bush’s well-known painting *A Corner of Merton, 16 August 1940* will be on display.

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.

Printed by Peter Hopkins