



PRESIDENT: J Scott McCracken BA FSA MIFA

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

BULLETIN NO. 136

DECEMBER 2000

## PROGRAMME DECEMBER-MARCH



**Tuesday 12 December 2.30pm**

**British Library, guided tour**

Meet at **2.20** at the information desk. The Library is at 96 Euston Road. Nearest station St Pancras. Cost £5/£3.50. (Fully booked).

Coffee shop and restaurant available.

**Saturday 20 January 2.30pm**

**Snuff Mill Centre**

**Peter Tilley: 'The Kingston Project'**

This project, based at Kingston University, extracts details from censuses, parish registers, directories and similar sources for Kingston town in the second half of the 19th century. The information is being used to build up a picture of local families and life-cycles. The speaker will illustrate his talk.

(Drivers should use the Morden Hall Garden Centre car-park. Take the path across the bridge; go through the gateway towards Morden Cottage. The Snuff Mill is straight ahead.

Bus routes 118,157,164)

**Saturday 17 February 2.30pm**

**The Canons**

**John and Jo Brewster: 'The Story of Southwark Cathedral'**

The speakers are 'Working Friends' of the Cathedral, who give their active support as regular guides. Their talk will be illustrated with slides. We have booked a visit on 26 May, when the Brewsters hope to be our guides.

(The Canons is in Madeira Road, Mitcham, close to bus routes 118 and 152 and the Mitcham Tramlink stop. Use the leisure centre car-park.)

**Saturday 17 March 2.30pm**

**Mill House Ecology Centre, Mitcham**

**Martin Boyle: 'The Wildlife of Mitcham Common'**

Martin Boyle is Warden of Mitcham Common. The 185ha (460 acre) site is of particular interest for natural history conservation, supporting a number of different habitats. This is an illustrated lecture.

(The Mill House Ecology Centre is in Windmill Road, Mitcham, next to the Mill House pub. It is close to bus routes 118 and 264, and to the Tramlink stop at Beddington Lane.

There is a car-park.)



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



**Merton Historical Society will be 50 years old on 28 February 2001. Our Chairman LIONEL GREEN, who is a founder member, looks back, with**

## **FIFTY YEARS OF REMINISCENCES**

In writing these reminiscences of Merton Historical Society I find the memory plays ingenious tricks. Some events I remember so clearly and think I know when they took place, only to find that the Society records are at variance by several years. Even the locations change. I thought that the symposium where Miss Jowett spoke about Literary Associations of Merton, and Eric Montague on the Mitcham Workhouse and I reflected on Recollections of Old Merton must have been at the old library building in Kingston Road; but the records say it was at the Central Library in Morden Road on 22 March 1967.

It all began with the Festival of Britain in 1951. The former Merton & Morden Urban District Council set up a committee to organise events to celebrate the Festival. The District Librarian, Miss Evelyn Jowett, was asked to produce a history of the district. Coincidentally the WEA planned a series of lectures for the winter of 1950/1 by Mrs J.Saynor on local history. This brought together a band of like-minded people who were made aware of the rich heritage we enjoy, and, at the conclusion of the series, wished to continue the studies.

Stimulated by support from several District Councillors, and encouraged by the Clerk of the Council, Mr Harry May, the Merton and Morden History Society was founded on Wednesday 28 February 1951. Councillor V.Talbot was elected Chairman, with Cllr.S.H.Reeves Vice-Chairman. The WEA evening class provided our first Secretary, Miss E.M.Jowett, and our Treasurer, Mr S.E.Cobbett. The Committee consisted of our tutor, Mrs J.Saynor, and a student, Mr L.E.Green. Cllr.E.W.Warren was also elected to the Committee. Our first auditors were Cllr.G.S.Whitmee and Mr E.F.Dakin.

During the first year (1 March 1951) we had a talk by Dr Sheppard Frere about the mound in Morden Park, which he had inspected. He felt that it could well be a burial mound before being made into a garden feature, but only an archaeological dig would determine its age.

The first AGM took place on 2 November 1951 before the first anniversary, which is why the 50th AGM took place before the 50th birthday of the Society. Income consisted of 58 subscriptions at 2/6d (12½p) = £7.5s.0d, and expenditure on paper and postage was £3.8s.2d, leaving cash in hand of £3.16s.10d. I remember the Treasurer remarking that he thought we could afford to buy a spade to begin a dig in Morden Park. Mr Cobbett served the Society for 15 years as Treasurer, and then as Auditor.

There were 42 members at the first AGM, and the records state that after the business meeting Lionel Green gave an illustrated lecture on the Priory site, using an epidiascope. I have to confess that I do not recall this.

I do however remember the float that the Society organised in connection with the Coronation Carnival on 6 June 1953. This was a presentation of the marriage of Queen Eleanor to Henry III, and we won the first prize of ten guineas (see Bulletin No.118 June 1996). In 1955 the Society helped with the exhibition held to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar.

We had better summer weather in the 1950s, and went on long rambles in the heart of Surrey, visiting many historic sites, making full use of party rates on the railway.

Archaeological excavations began with Stane Street in Morden Park under Dennis Turner in the autumn of 1958 and the spring of 1959. I wasn't on Eric Montague's digs in Mitcham, but was thrilled to be present with Scott McCracken in 1976-8 as the foundations of the chapter house were uncovered. There seemed to be one significant figure at all the Society's excavations - Bill Rudd!

However, no reminiscences would be complete without reference to failures and disappointments. When Colonel Bidder revealed the outline of the priory church in 1922, Gilliat Hatfeild generously purchased the site of the high altar and conveyed it to the Urban District Council, to preserve it for all time. In 1958 this Society commissioned and paid for a commemorative stone to mark the site. This was sculpted by Mr Blackwell, and showed a ground plan based on Colonel Bidder's findings. The UDC erected the stone and laid out the surrounding garden. Colonel Bidder, then our President, came and unveiled the site on 25 July 1959. I recall the efforts made by Miss Jowett and Harry May and many District Councillors, who knew what was meant by "for all time". In 1986 the Borough Councillors made other arrangements, and this important historical site is now under Savacentre's car park. A bitter disappointment.



*The memorial plaque in the priory gardens, Station Road, shortly after it was unveiled.*

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 1999-2000

First of all I would like to offer my personal thanks to Eric Montague for handing over the chairmanship of this Society so painlessly having maintained it in such good shape over the previous years. And I thank each member of the Committee for their support and encouragement over the past year.

**Committee:** This has met on seven occasions dealing with wide ranging topics. Events included talks about Mitcham Cricket Green, Daughter Houses of Merton Priory, Early Croydon, the Hogsmill River, Jack Dimmer VC, and we even followed in the steps of Charles Darwin. The summer visits took us to Mysterious Wimbledon, Old Battersea House, Kensal Green Cemetery and we beat our bounds, east and west with walks along the Wandle and the Beverley. On your behalf, I thank our Secretary, Sheila Harris, for the efficient way she runs the affairs of the Society. Arranging speakers and guides. Booking venues for public meetings as well as for the Committee and workshops. Providing refreshments. Thanking everyone. When Sheila rings me about a problem she tells me how she has dealt with it and says, "Is that all right?"

Next year many of the committee members will be standing down having served for the maximum of three years. We have three vacancies to fill today and I hope that some of you will want to meet the challenges of the next three years.

**Bulletin:** The success of the Society is known far and wide and is spreading as other societies and organisations note the high standard of our quarterly bulletins. You will have noticed that each edition consists of sixteen pages. This is the vehicle for all members to publicise their interests and knowledge. Don't be put off with thoughts that others know more than you. We are all amateurs and we are all learning how much more there is to know. Our bulletin editor, Judith Goodman will help and advise if you need guidance.

If you enjoy the talks and visits which we arrange and if the subject or place is of particular interest to you, please offer to write up the event for the bulletin. Many hands make light work - but make the offer to Judith before the event.

**Publications:** I regard our publications as a very important part of the Society's activities and we are indeed fortunate in having our own "in house" publisher with Peter Hopkins who not only prints our bulletins but publishes booklets on Merton's history after checking by the Editorial Panel. The list of publications is long and varied with new titles added each year. There will be an opportunity for you to select your Christmas gifts in the coffee break!

**Workshops:** The idea of having informal gatherings for members to float ideas and interests was Eric Montague's. I find these meetings stimulating. They give a spur to original research and provide a place to share problems and gain encouragement. Later this afternoon you will hear of some of the subjects discussed.

**Subscriptions:** I must not steal our Treasurer's thunder but I would like to say a few words about subscription levels. There has been no increase for several years and as costs steadily increase we have to rely on income from publication sales etc. to cover them. If however, the number of members increases so will our income. In a Borough the size of Merton there should be at least 500 members. Speak to your neighbours! If you agree that the subscription is good value for the money, don't keep the good news to yourself. Meanwhile the annual subscription will remain at £6.

**Membership:** Bill Sole has relinquished his duties after many years as Membership Secretary and Mr and Mrs. Ron Davis nobly "volunteered" to take on this. It would assist them if you would use the official application form for subscriptions which will save them having to write names addresses etc. We greatly miss those members who have died and in particular this year, one of our Life Members - Miss Winifred Mould who was active for 95 years. She served this Society as Treasurer for many years until 1994 and then as Auditor. She died in June this year and the Society made a donation to charity.

**Storage:** We had to vacate our store at Morden Park Library when the building was closed in the Spring, but we have been offered space at The Canons, Mitcham. Our thanks go to one of our vice-presidents, William Rudd, for overseeing the move and overcoming inevitable problems.

**Other Organisations:** It has been an eye-opener to me to find that the Society is represented on so many organisations both local and national. They range from the Wandle Group to the Buildings and Preservation Trust and from the Surrey Archaeological Society to the S W London Archaeological Liaison Group. We are involved in Town Trail updates and regular planning enquiries, and giving talks to other societies. It would help to spread the load if more members offered to be our representatives. We support our Heritage Officer, Sarah Gould, in every way possible and supply items for her special exhibitions. We take as much as we give, to the Wandle Industrial Museum who provide the venue for our committee meetings and workshops. Many thanks.

## GOLDEN JUBILEE DINNER

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Society on 28 February we plan to dine together that evening, at historic Morden Hall, now a Beefeater restaurant pub. Partners are welcome.

We shall have an upstairs room, and the evening will begin at 7pm. The menu will be the £8.99 'Emerald' one, which offers three courses with plenty of choice. If you have an Emerald Card (for age 55 and over), you may wish to bring it, but we are being offered the discounted menu in any case. We shall be placing our orders individually at the table, and drinks will be extra. Please telephone as soon as possible with your name, and number of places required.

## VISIT TO OXFORD

Don't forget to tell Pat and Ray Kilsby if you plan to join the visit to Oxford, including Merton College, on Saturday 21 July 2001.

## IN BRIEF

- ◆ **Merton Local Studies Centre**, at Morden Library, is now open during longer hours. New times are: Monday to Friday 9.30am-7pm; Saturday 9.30am-5pm; Sunday closed.
- ◆ Effective from 1 January 2001, the **Sutton Archive & Local Studies Searchroom** will have new opening hours. These are: Tuesday 2-5pm; Thursday 9.30am-7.30pm; Friday 9.30am-12.30pm; 1st & 3rd Saturday 9.30am-1pm, 2-4.45pm; 1st & 3rd Sunday 2-5pm; Monday, Wednesday closed. The Searchroom is at the Central Library, St Nicholas Way. Tel: 020 8770 4745. Web address: [www.sutton.gov.uk/lfl/heritage](http://www.sutton.gov.uk/lfl/heritage)
- ◆ Following Lionel Green's article on the telephone service in Bulletin No.135, Bill Rudd has spotted a **VIGILANT number** still displayed over the door of F.J.Meadows Ltd of Greenford Road, Sutton. Congratulations on *your* vigilance, Bill!
- ◆ The refurbishment of **Morden Park House** is at last complete. It has emerged from its plastic wraps and opened as the Borough's new Register Office, in place of Morden Cottage. John Ewart's fine house of 1770 looks wonderful, inside and out, and the outbuildings and walled garden have been spruced up too.

***Morden Park, — near Morden; G. Ridge, Esq. A handsome quadrangular house, on a rising ground, agreeably diversified with extensive plantations of shrubs and flowers, and embellished by two sheets of water.***

from: *An Encyclopaedia of Gardening* - J. C. Loudon 1830 (1st ed. 1824) p.1067

- ◆ Work has begun at the **Merton Park station** site, where Crest Homes are already advertising new townhouses. Part of the planning agreement was that the old station building be restored as a dwelling. We look forward to that.
- ◆ At The Canons the current **Merton Heritage Centre** exhibition is 'The Glorious and the Dispossessed: life in Georgian Merton', which is on till 27 January. It will be followed by 'Chalkdust and Satchels', which looks at schooldays in Merton, and runs from 6 February to 21 April. A reprise of 'Poverty and Splendour', Tudor Merton, will be on display upstairs from 22 January to 11 February.
- ◆ LAMAS Transactions for 1999 has an article about **painted advertisements** in Islington, that is old advertisements painted directly onto the fabric of buildings. The writers have recorded 50 in their area. Hackney apparently has more. Do we know of any in Merton? Such relics should be photographed and documented before the developers destroy them.
- ◆ Just out! ***A Historical Guide to Merton Abbey Mills*** has been written by Kevin Leyden and published by The Wandle Industrial Museum. Large format, well illustrated. £3.95.



## BOOK REVIEW

Some ideas for Christmas presents - to give, or receive:

### **Discovering the Past 2: West Barnes & Cannon Hill** by Peter Hopkins

Like its predecessor this large booklet devotes a double spread to each separate theme. After useful discussions of four key periods in the early history of the district, and an explanation of Merton Priory's estates at the Dissolution, there are lucid histories of each farm and other piece of land that together made up the western part of Merton parish and the immediately surrounding area. For each there is at least one map, and throughout there are nicely varied illustrations. The narrative is clear, and this reader finds it particularly helpful that the outline of each land-holding is superimposed on a modern map.

Peter is modest about his own research, but no one else could have produced such an authoritative account. It will become an indispensable work of reference for historians of Merton and neighbouring districts.

The booklet, which is published by New Malden Evangelical Church, can be obtained by post for £2.50 (inc. postage) from Peter Hopkins or for £2 at the Society's indoor meetings or Merton Local Studies Centre.

**The Bridges and Roads of Mitcham** by E.N.Montague, Merton Historical Society 2000 pp60. Obtainable as above, £1.60 (members), £2 (non-members), postage extra.

**Mitcham Gardens of the 18th Century** by E.N.Montague, Merton Historical Society 2000 pp28. Obtainable as above, £1.20 (members), £1.50 (non-members), postage extra.

'Monty' has distilled his notes accumulated over some years on both these subjects into these two booklets, which are illustrated with maps and pictures, and fully annotated. *Bridges and Roads* deals first with the construction and maintenance over the centuries of Mitcham's bridges over the Wandle and the Graveney, and then with the history of its turnpike highways and its parish roads. The last section looks at some of the more romantic aspects of road travel in the past. There is a useful index.

In *Mitcham Gardens* he explores the surprisingly rich history of 18th-century horticulture in Mitcham, manifested by plantations, shrubberies, walled gardens, glasshouses and gravel walks, as local gentlemen vied with each other in this fashionable craze.

Clive Whichelow (see also note at the bottom of this page) has produced three new titles this year:

**Local Highwaymen** (£3.25) looks at the colourful story of highwaymen in south London and Surrey. Good stories, varied illustrations, a bibliography and a glossary to the language of the folk who used to 'ding the culls on the poll' and hope to dodge the 'nubbing cove'.

**The Local Mystery of Robin Hood** (£2.95) explores another area where myth and history meet. Why the local use of the name Robin Hood, and when did it begin? Entertaining, thought-provoking and well illustrated, including a map.

In **Secrets of Wimbledon Common and Putney Heath** (£3.25) the author examines lesser-known aspects of this large open space, such as the 19th-century tramway, the 'other' windmill, the horse races, the lost ponds, and many more. A map, plenty of pictures and a bibliography.

In Carlo Gébler's **Father & I** (Little Brown & Co £16.99 hardback) Father was Ernest Gébler; Mother was Edna O'Brien; the two sons were Carlo (officially Karl, after Marx) and Sasha. In 1958 they moved from Dublin to 257 Cannon Hill Lane, Merton (not Morden, as it says in the book). In 1960 Edna suddenly achieved international fame with her first novel *The Country Girls*. Ernest, who had written one successful novel long before, struggled fiercely to produce his prose, while ideas and words poured from Edna. The little boys went to Hillcross School and played on Cannon Hill Common. This is a vivid, sometimes painful, but sometimes wryly amusing memoir. Carlo Gébler is a novelist, and currently writer-in-residence at a prison in County Antrim.

### **'MYSTERIOUS WIMBLEDON'**

Clive Whichelow, a member of this Society, has pointed out that David Harrison, who led a walk for us under the above title (see Bulletin No.135), used information specially given him for this purpose by Mr Whichelow, as well as much material from books written by the latter and Ruth Murphy. These titles are as follows:

*Mysterious Wimbledon* by Ruth Murphy and Clive Whichelow

*More Mysterious Wimbledon* by Ruth Murphy and Clive Whichelow

*Pubs of Wimbledon Village (Past & Present)* by Clive Whichelow

The books are available from local bookshops and libraries. See also **Book Review** above.

## LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

**Friday 1 September 2000:** Don Fleming in the chair. Five members present, and one visitor.

It was a warm evening, and something of a summer holiday atmosphere pervaded a particularly relaxed and discursive session.

- ◆ **Nicholas Hart**, a member of Wandle Industrial Museum, struggled in with a collection of his grandfather's papers going back to the early years of the 20th century. They included research notes on the Pilgrim's Way in Surrey, and material relating to Caterham, as well as family photographs and ephemera. We were able to browse through them, knowing they would soon be going off to be deposited at Surrey History Centre. A reminder that we should all be glad that some people never throw anything away!
- ◆ **Sheila Harris** had an attractive oil-painting of the mill cottages at Watermeads to show us. The view, dating from 1952, is from the Grove Mill direction. The artist was a Clive Abbott, of whom nothing more is known as yet (can anyone help?). The picture was presented some years ago to the Wimbledon Society who have passed it on to Wandle Industrial Museum, as a more appropriate home for it.
- ◆ Lord Monson's memoirs were still occupying much of **Judith Goodman**'s time. She had obtained two portraits of him to use as illustrations - one as a child and one as a young man - and was now waiting for additional information from Eton and from the Society of Antiquaries to complete the biographical notes.
- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** brought along the second volume in his splendid *Discovering the Past* series (see BOOK REVIEW on page 5). This one, *West Barnes and Cannon Hill*, was to accompany an exhibition which he was staging for a church in Seaforth Avenue, and which was then to be displayed at West Barnes library.
- ◆ The six court rolls and 104 accounts rolls relating to Morden, held at Westminster Abbey Muniments, had now been microfilmed (cost £210.92). Of the two transcriber/translators he had first found one had been ill and the other had changed jobs. A new one was proving very slow (and hence expensive), but Peter was hopeful that he would speed up as he became familiar with the script. Barbara Harvey, author of a book on the Abbey and its estates, was to be lecturing there on 13 September. Peter would attend. He also reported that he had received the microfilm reel from the Bodleian that he had been waiting for.
- ◆ **Don Fleming** floated the idea of a Society outing combining a visit to Dr Johnson's house with a walk around Covent Garden. He went on to recommend Liza Picard's recent book on the London of Dr Johnson. He then reminisced entertainingly about his years in the removals business - all human life is there!
- ◆ The mother of a friend of **Lionel Green** had written recollections of her young life in the west country early in the 20th century, which he thought very well written, and valuable - altogether the sort of thing that should be encouraged.
- ◆ He had been to see Fanny Burney's *A Busy Day* at the Lyric and much enjoyed it. As a Dorking resident he has a special affection for Miss Burney and recounted the tale of how the play's text had disappeared for decades (generations?) before turning up in an American university library.
- ◆ The task of writing a report on the Beverley Brook walk (see page 8) had particularly impressed him with the complexity of the pattern of parishes and hundreds and their boundaries.

**Judith Goodman**

**Friday 20 October 2000:** Judith Goodman in the chair. Six members present, and one visitor.

- ◆ **Don Fleming** commented on the unusual plaque depicting Henry VII to be seen on the *King's Head* in Merton High Street, and wondered whether it was by William Morris. He wrote to the brewery, and had a reply from the Chairman but, although they were also curious, they had no information. Judy said that the plaque is not mentioned in the guidebook to Youngs' pubs, *Inn and Out of London*. The present structure dates from 1931, replacing an early 19th-century building. The tile pictures on the *Nelson Arms* nearby were made in 1910 at Poole Potteries.
- ◆ **Bill Rudd** brought along a selection from his Monasteries project, including pamphlets and guidebooks he has collected from the various sites, as well as his own photographs. Many of the black and white negatives he is now having printed have never been printed before. He intended to display a selection at the AGM.
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** was congratulated on achieving a B in her GCSE, which involved a project on Merton Priory.
- ◆ **Stephen Turner** has completed his transcription of Crawter's survey of Mitcham dating from 1838. The 1846 tithe apportionment was based on this survey, but the owners and occupiers of many of the smaller properties, listed in the 1838 survey, are omitted in 1846, being lumped together under "sundry owners and occupiers".

Steve also drew our attention to the fact that 1st Edition 25" Ordnance Survey maps can be downloaded from the web, and printed to a variety of sizes. See [www.old-maps.co.uk](http://www.old-maps.co.uk). He planned to have copies of the Mitcham map among the various research aids at the East Surrey Family History Research Day at the Canons on 18th November.

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** brought along the latest copies of the translations being made of medieval accounts and other documents in the Muniment Room at Westminster Abbey, in the Bodleian Library Oxford and Cambridge University Library. Another 100 or so rolls remain to be translated, but an initial glance through the documents suggest that it may be possible to follow some tenancies over a period of two centuries. Details are also given of which crops were sown in which fields, and which were uncultivated or lay fallow, for the decades each side of the Black Death. He hoped to bring some of the material to the AGM.
- ◆ **Judith Goodman** brought along a couple of books she had recently bought. *The Story of Congregationalism in Surrey*, published in 1908, describes the congregations in chronological order of founding, including the Merton church in Morden Road. (The memorial inscriptions recorded by the Society of Genealogists, have been published in the Journal of East Surrey Family History Society). The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 17 October 1808 reported the tragic story of the three daughters of William Attwood, print-cutter of Mitcham, who died of mushroom poisoning.

**Peter Hopkins**

**Workshop dates: Fridays 8 December, 26 January, 23 March at 7.30 pm at Wandle Industrial Museum.**

**All are welcome**

**ERIC MONTAGUE** again takes up the theme of the Scandinavian impact on Surrey, following a response from John Pile in the last issue to his article on the subject in Bulletin No.134.

I was pleased to see (Bulletin No. 135 pp10-11) that my note published in the previous issue, in which I attempted an overview of the evidence for Scandinavian raids and subsequent settlement in our part of Surrey, had prompted a contribution from John Pile. I recall from correspondence with him several years ago that he also had attempted to identify signs of Viking presence in Merton (without, I must say, convincing me!).

Admittedly, hard evidence in our corner of Surrey is sparse, and yet what we do know from the historical record of incursions during the ninth and tenth centuries makes it inconceivable that communities in the vicinity of Merton would have escaped the attention of Viking marauders. With this in mind, the reported discovery near the Wandle crossing in the late 18th century of broken weapons, human bones and "other exuviae of a battle" cannot be dismissed as just another Saxon cemetery.

Far from being "tantalisingly vague as to the exact site", as John asserts, Edwards, a reliable authority, makes it quite clear the discovery was in the vicinity of Merton Abbey, to the east of Haydons Road. None of the material was dated and, wisely, Edwards did not speculate as to the origin apart from seeing it as evidence of a "battle". John asserts that the Saxon origin of the remains "cannot be doubted", but in the absence of further evidence I think it is unwise to go this far. He also refers to "graves", which implies formal burial and leads him to speculate on Saxon settlement in the vicinity. Significantly, Edwards does not use the term "graves", and I think he was correct in his assumption that the discovery was of the scattered aftermath of a skirmish.

John digressed somewhat in his observations on the location and origin of Saxon settlements, but I would agree (and join issue) with him on a number of the points he makes. My intention, however, was to conclude by directing attention to the question of the Scandinavian element in the local populace by the early 11th century. Given the presence in London of merchants and others from across the North Sea, and the fact that for a time England was under Danish rule, it does seem to me that a degree of peaceful settlement of the Wandle valley by migrants of Scandinavian ancestry prior to the Norman Conquest is not an unreasonable assumption.

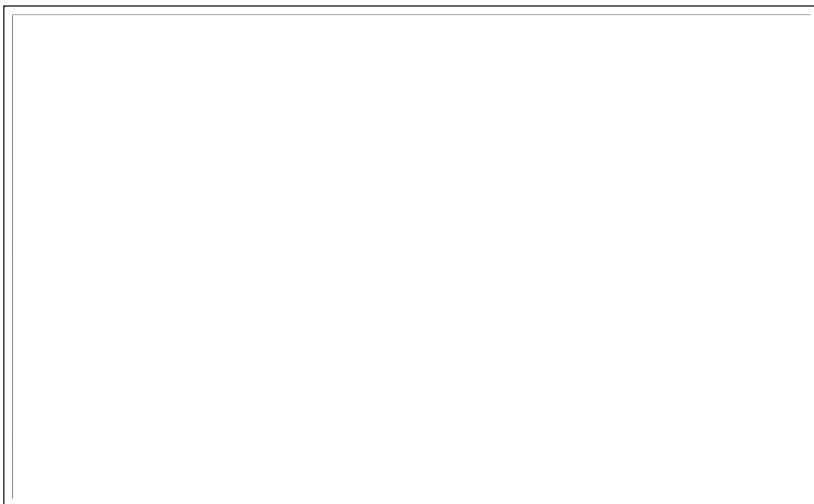
I agree the evidence to support this contention, at least in our area, seems virtually non-existent - hence my resort in the Bulletin article to the tentative suggestions that the Sweyns/Swains of Tooting, Mitcham and Morden *might* have been of Norse stock, and that the place names Biggin and Tamworth could have been brought south by immigrants from the Danelaw.

John's contribution to the discussion is most welcome, and I look forward to further comment from other readers.

**Further contributions would indeed be welcome, from John Pile or from anyone else with a point of view on this subject. - Editor**

## A WALK ALONG THE BEVERLEY BROOK

This river is not known for being the source of inspiration for poets, but down the ages it features as an ancient boundary which warrants attention from such societies as ours. The Beverley Brook formed the limits of the hundreds of Brixton, Kingston, Copthorne and Wallington. And of the ancient parishes, those of Merton, Wimbledon, Putney, Barnes, Mortlake, Kingston, Malden, Cuddington and Cheam. For this reason the Society decided to mark the Millennium year with a walk along the Merton boundary from Cuddington parish to Wimbledon. Twenty-one members and friends set out on 12th August, a glorious summer day, from Worcester Park station. At numerous points along the way walkers were regaled with detailed historical information on the area by Judy Goodman and Peter Hopkins.



*An old postcard view:  
probably Beverley Meads  
courtesy Robin Gill*

The earliest mention of the stream is in a charter of AD 693,<sup>1</sup> interpolated with relevant bounds in the mid- to late tenth century, which lists *Beferithi*; whilst another charter of 957<sup>2</sup> shows *Bæverithe* (beaver streamlet). A further charter of AD 967<sup>3</sup> specifically refers to an estate in Merton with a western boundary defined as *endlangeridde* or 'along the stream'.

We stood opposite the Huntsman's Hall, formerly the headquarters of the Worcester Park Hunt, established in 1886. Any hopes for sight of a babbling brook were ditched(!), but nevertheless it was here that the stream once marked the boundary of Malden and Cuddington. Green Lane connects Malden with Morden, and the brook flows beside it part of the way. We followed the bends of the brook as far as the water treatment plant (now closed) in Cheam on the Morden boundary. A large common to the south-east of Green Lane was known as Sparrowfield, and served the parishes of Ewell, Cheam, Morden, Malden and Cuddington. The enhanced flow of the Beverley turned north and the walkers pursued it on a parallel path east of the stream, although on Malden land known as Hyde Hill. This was part of Hobbalds Farm whose fields extended into Merton and Morden. This large estate was given to Merton Priory by William de Watton about 1230.

Walking northwards we crossed a boundary ditch into the Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields in Merton for another glimpse of the brook. This is part of a rectangular tract of land attached to the parish of Merton but surrounded on the south and west by Malden and on the east by Morden. Near here according to the bounds listed in the 967 charter was *Benanberwe*, suggesting 'barrow of Benna' close to the stream. The earlier charter of 957 lists the bounds of a Battersea estate with the name *Bæncesbyri* close to *Bæverithe* (beaver streamlet).

It is difficult to walk near Motspur Park railway station without being in some part of West Barnes Lane. Walkers heard about the 500-acre grange of Merton Priory, the West Barns, and of 'squire' Blake, who worked Blue House Farm from about 1850 and laid out Motspur Park road in 1865 as part of a grand plan. The south-west part of West Barnes Lane runs alongside the Beverley Brook as far as Blakes Lane. Motts Furze Farm is usually linked to an early 14th-century owner named Henry Mott, but it is tempting to link the site earlier with *gemot*, or 'meeting-place'.

The walk proceeded to the Kingston Bypass (A3) built 1924-27, where the stream disappears in a culvert, appearing briefly before passing under Burlington Road (B282). A large stretch of land between the river and Norbiton Common took the name Appledore (OE *apuldor* 'apple tree') and was owned by Merton Priory. The northern section, all in Malden or Coombe (Kingston), became part of Hoppingwood Farm (referred to later). Appledore became a section of Blagdon Farm, together with lands to the east of the Beverley which are now playing-fields.



In 1654 Rowland Wilson left money for the poor of Merton “out of my lands called Blackdens in Martin, Kingston and Malden”. We had glimpses of the old farmhouse through the summer foliage.

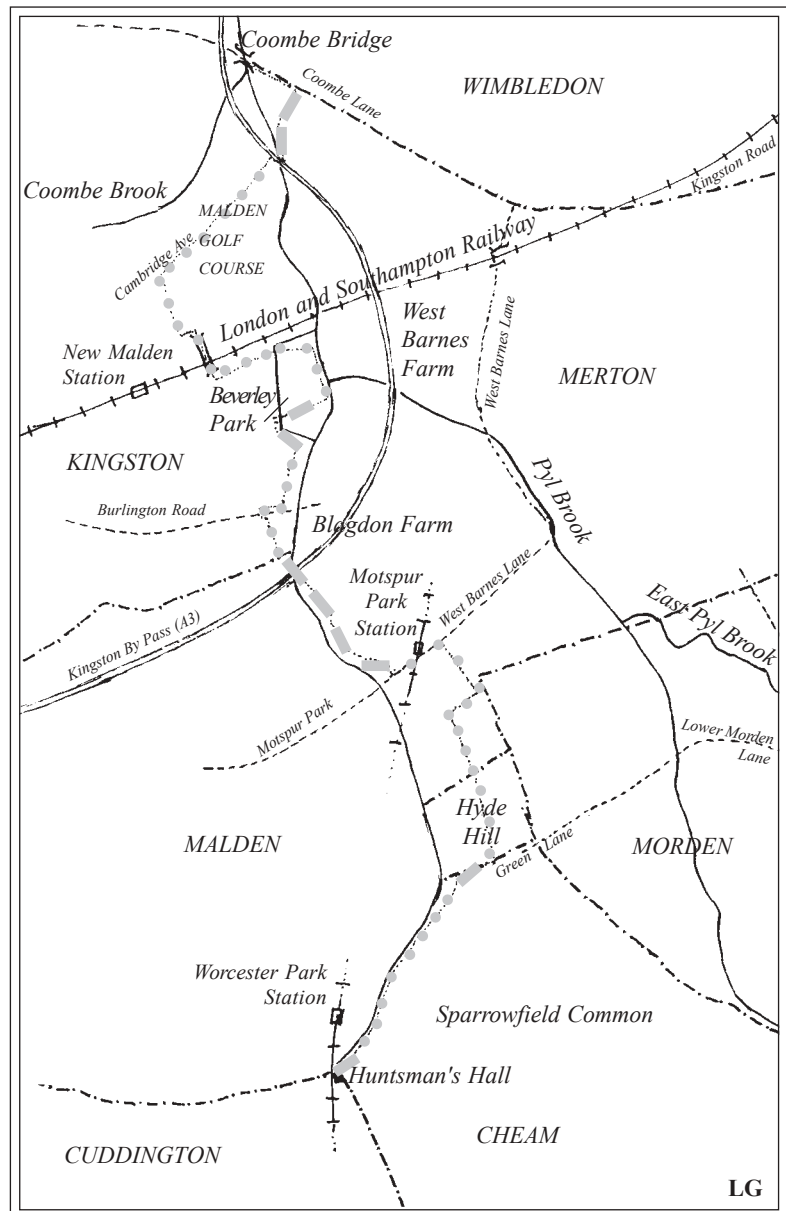
Beverley Road reminds residents of its presence, and the pleasant Beverley Park enables all to see a more noble brook, as the Pyl Brook joins the Beverley just south of the London & Southampton Railway main line. The Old English word *pyll* suggests a tidal stream, and even today the volume of water of the Pyl more than matches that of the Beverley. The combined streams pass under the railway and through the southern part of the Malden Golf Course. We feared that the golfers would not *brook* our intrusion and made a diversion towards Cambridge Avenue. This did enable us to see an original rail over-bridge built to straddle five huge water mains and four railway tracks. The building of the railway in 1836 bisected Hoppingwood Farm, which required the provision of this bridge. The land is now occupied by the golf course, Beverley Park and many houses. The Saxon charter of 967 confirms the ancient origin of this land called *Hoppingge*. It denotes a cultivated plot in marshland where wild hopshoots would have provided a palatable boiled vegetable.

We approached the Kingston Bypass again, via a public footpath across the golf course, where separate subways have been built for the brook and walkers close to Coombe Lane (A238). The walk finished by Coombe bridge, where we bade farewell to the Beverley Brook, leaving it to be escorted on either side by Wimbledon and Malden to Kingston Vale, across Richmond Park to Barn Elms Park. It’s good to leave some cake for another day!

- 1 W. de G. Birch *Cartularium Saxonicum* 1885-92 I No.82
- 2 *Ibid* No.994
- 3 *Ibid* No.1196

**Lionel Green**

**BEVERLEY BROOK WALK** ●●●●●●●●●●



## RIVER WANDLE WALK

About 24 members and others met Eric Montague at Merton Abbey Mills on Saturday 9 September. The weather was pleasant for our second 'beating the bounds' walk to mark the Millennium. Though we would be following today's main stream of the Wandle, an earlier course came down to modern times as the parish boundary between Merton and Mitcham. And more than a thousand years ago the *Hidebourne* (as it then was) marked the border of *At Mertone* at *Michamingemerke*.

Monty spoke briefly about the Wandle Trail, part of which we would be following. Construction and signposting began in the 1970s and there is now a clearly marked path from Waddon (and Carshalton) to Wandsworth. Of the four Boroughs involved, Merton had taken the lead. It was a pity that some of Merton's interpretation panels had been vandalised.

The millwheel at Merton Abbey Mills is one of only five left on the Wandle, and in 1853 was said to generate 15hp. The building is described as 18th century (though altered in the late 19th century) and is Grade II listed. When the site belonged to Liberty & Co the wheelhouse was used for rinsing textiles.

The stretch of river between Merantun Way and Windsor Avenue has seen many changes. Its first textile print-works was established in 1724. Ancell's "Great Bleaching Field" now lies under part of Merton Industrial Park. Bennett's innovative roller-printing mill of 1810 was followed in 1833 by the first of the Littler dynasty, whose fine silk-printing works was acquired by Liberty in 1904.

Fragments of the southern extent of the precinct walls of Merton Priory can still be seen near Windsor Avenue. The Priory must certainly have modified the river's course, for drainage at least. But who created the canalised stretch above Windsor Avenue? Perhaps one of the 18th-century industrialists with Wandle interests?

The Lombard Industrial Estate which abuts the river here was once the site of gravel-digging. Clay from the City & South London Railway extension in the 1920s was used as landfill, and development followed, principally in the 1960s.

Close to the east bank at Phipps Bridge once stood Homefield, a large house built by Robert Harland of W. Harland & Sons, manufacturer of paint and varnish from the 1850s to 1967. The housing of Homefield Gardens, laid out in the 1930s, marks the site of the house.

On the west bank was the japan works of Paul Addington, which in 1892 became Hadfields (Merton) Ltd, makers of paints. That site too has disappeared.

This area, close to the river crossing of the Roman road, has yielded important archaeological discoveries, such as the Romano-British burials at the Haslemere School site. There was a bridge here by 1535, but how much earlier? There was a print-works at Phipps Bridge, where Francis Nixon worked for a time in the 1750s before moving to Merton. An Irishman, he had developed copper-plate printing for textiles.

The straight channel upstream from the bridge was cut by John Anthony Rucker, who then had to pay £1 a year penalty. A City merchant with Wandle interests, he lived for a time at Wandle Villa, whose grounds adjoin the channel.

Here, on the east bank, the over-ambitious 'Patent Steam Washing Factory' enjoyed its short career early in the 19th century.

The "Phipps Mill" that once stood somewhere here was half-owned by the Priory in the 13th century, but disappeared some time in the following century. 'Pip' in various spellings is Old English for small stream, and a small stream does indeed join the Wandle near here, from Mitcham. 'Pyppes Mead' was bought by Richard Garth in 1564, and acquired by Gilliat Hatfeild from the Richard Garth of his time in 1874, so that it now forms part of the Morden Hall Park estate. Deen City Farm has been relocated to 'Bunce's Meadow', once a notorious spot for prize-fights and illegal gambling.

Tramlink's new level footpath crossing has replaced the 100-year-old footbridge that crossed the railway line of 1855.

The 124 acres (50ha) of Morden Hall Park was left to the National Trust in 1941 by Gilliat Edward Hatfeild, with the stipulation that the public should have free access to it. The low-lying northern part, grazed by cattle as late as the 1950s, is now managed as wetland and provides an area of flood relief. This is a good spot for wildlife. In particular, an island not accessible to the public, is managed as a reserve.

The main path led us past what may have been the location of Nicholas Davison's Merton mill, recorded in the 17th century and gone without trace. Near here is the point where the old parishes of Merton, Morden and Mitcham touch. The boundaries between Morden and Mitcham, and Merton and Mitcham, follow the small winding stream that represents an early course of the river. Metal posts survive from a Victorian three-way

crossing where channels meet, and a romantic Gothick bridge in burr-brick makes a pretty picture. The two white-painted iron bridges were made by Robert Legg of London late in the 19th century.

Morden Hall dates from c.1750 and may be a re-build. It served for many years as a school, a hospital annex and as council offices, and is now a restaurant pub. The curving avenue of limes and chestnuts from Morden Road to the house was planted by Gilliat Hatfeild around 1870. What is now the park is made up of small parcels of land that each once had a name, such as the field once called Small Profits. Monty reminded us that the estate had too rich a history to be covered in an afternoon walk. He has deposited detailed notes with the National Trust and the Wandle Industrial Museum.

At the conclusion of the walk Lionel Green, the Chairman, thanked Monty for a fascinating account of one stretch of our historic river.

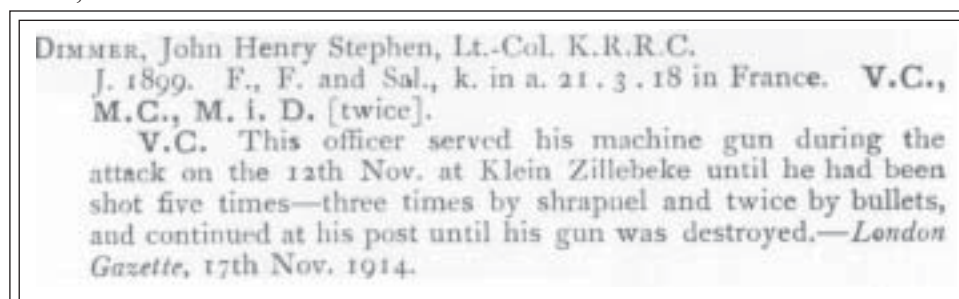
**Judith Goodman**

(The Society has produced several booklets which relate to this stretch of the Wandle, including: **Phipps Bridge, Phipps Mill and Bunce's Meadow; The Patent Steam Washing Factory; and Morden Hall.** Available at meetings, from libraries, or from Peter Hopkins.)

## **JACK DIMMER V.C.**

**the Evelyn Jowett Memorial Lecture for 2000, given by David Harrison at Merton Civic Centre on Thursday 12 October 2000**

In his introduction our President, Scott McCracken, paid a tribute to Evelyn Jowett, librarian and researcher, who was a gracious lady. He went on to remind us of the horrifying statistics of World War I, with 13,000,000 dead, World War II with over 53,000,000, and the Spanish Flu epidemic that killed 19,000,000 in 1918-19. The Wimbledon Roll of Honour had 9000 names of those who served in the first World War, of whom 1000 were killed, or died of their wounds.



*part of p15 of A Record of the Honoured Men of Wimbledon & Merton who fell in the Great War 1914-1918 London 1921*

David set the scene for his talk by showing us slides of old Wimbledon, from 1865 to 1910. My favourite was of Ely's and Russell's premises, with groups standing in the middle of the road having a relaxed gossip in the sunshine in 1905. Don't try this on your way home today, children!

Jack Dimmer was born at Lambeth in 1883, the son of a railway labourer, and later the family moved to Griffiths Road, Wimbledon. He was a shy, retiring boy, but still joined clubs and various societies, and he attended Rutlish School. He went on to join the army in 1901. With a talent for surveying and draughtsmanship, he may have spent time in the Royal Engineers.

In November 1914 he was a second lieutenant in the British Expeditionary Forces, serving with the King's Royal Rifle Corps.

Whilst in action he was wounded three times, but he fought on despite his wounds until finally his machine gun was struck. Only then did he retire from the battle-line to seek medical aid. It was for his courage on this occasion that he was awarded the Victoria Cross. Promotion soon followed.

While recovering from his wounds in England he resumed his interest in the Boy Scouts movement and other organisations.

During further service he won the Military Cross and was twice mentioned in dispatches.

Early in 1918 he married May Bayley-Parker, widow of the man who owned the Axminster Carpet Company. (The marriage was childless.) Three months later, back in France, as Lieutenant-Colonel in the Royal Berkshire Regiment, he was killed at St Quentin leading his troops into action on horseback. He was 34 years of age.

Our thanks to David for an interesting and entertaining evening.

We should also like to thank Sarah Gould, Merton Heritage Officer, for allowing us to use the children's library for David's lecture, and for all her support.

**Don Fleming**

**ERIC MONTAGUE has untangled another strand of Mitcham's history:**

## **THE ODWAYS, OR OTWAYS, OF MITCHAM - A MILITARY FAMILY**

Until recently I knew very little about the Odway family, who seemed to have arrived in Mitcham in about 1660, and apparently left the parish some 25 years later. In fact, this assumption is now known to be very far from the truth, and in the Odways, or Otways, as they are also known, we have an interesting family who not only made their home in Mitcham, but for over half a century played their part in the formative years of the British Empire.

The first Odway of whom I had become aware from consulting the more readily available local records was Francis, who the militia levy assessments for Mitcham show to have followed a "Mr Shelton" around the time of the Restoration as the occupant (probably the leaseholder) of a large house at Colliers Wood.<sup>1</sup> This we can identify as the Tudor mansion which replaced or incorporated the house known as 'Jenkingranger', of which there are records going back to the late 15th century.<sup>2</sup> During the 16th century the house had been the residence of the Rutland family, but in or about 1619 it passed into the hands of Theophilus Brereton. The Breretons seem to have moved away from Mitcham after Theophilus's death in 1638, but they retained ownership, leasing the house at Colliers Wood to a succession of tenants until some time during the reign of Charles II.

Within a few years of Charles's accession the name of Francis Odway, as the person liable to pay the militia levy, was replaced by that of Alexander Odway (who we can assume was a son). Unfortunately the tax assessment records (now at Surrey History Centre) cease in 1680, and nothing is known of the occupation of the "capital message" at Colliers Wood for the next 60 years. In 1664, while it was still the residence of Francis Odway, the house was assessed for tax on the basis of seven hearths, which places it amongst the more substantial properties in Mitcham (it was certainly the largest in the north-west of the parish) and one of a group of a dozen or so of comparable size occupied in the main by London merchants, lawyers or professional men.<sup>3</sup>

The second Odway of whom I was aware was John, to whom in November 1680 John Cranmer, lord of the manor of Mitcham, a major local landowner and a merchant in the City of London, granted a building lease of the "parcel of Ground called Cannons (heretofore 'The Grove') with the Orchard, Gardens, fish-pond, dove-house and appurtenances containing together 12 acres". The lease was for 51 years commencing the following Lady Day at a rental of £12 per annum, and Odway, who covenanted to lay out £250 in rebuilding the "manor House called the Parsonage", agreed to vacate on the expiration of the lease.<sup>4</sup>

The new house is readily identifiable today as the southernmost part of The Canons, off Madeira Road. In the Cranmer estate records from the early part of the 18th century it is frequently referred to as "the house that Odway built", which might be taken to mean that he was merely responsible for its construction. However, this is unlikely in view of Odway's willingness to expend £250 on the redevelopment and his taking a long lease. It is almost certainly not the correct interpretation, as we shall see below.

Locally records from the late 17th and early 18th centuries are not plentiful, and give no indication as to who actually lived at The Canons in the years immediately following its completion. Nearly 40 years elapsed before John Cranmer's son James noted in his estate book that in 1717 the property was in the tenure of a widowed lady, Mrs Cross, paying an annual ground rent of £12 - significantly, the same as that paid by John Odway. It was she, presumably, who had acquired the unexpired portion of the original lease from the Odway family, John (as we know) having died in 1702.

-----

Research conducted recently by Daphne Bradbury, a descendant of the Westmorland/Irish branch of the family, has provided us with much more information, and whilst questions both old and new remain unanswered, individual members are beginning to emerge as real people rather than mere names. The spelling of their surname has varied, but 'Otway' is to be found in documents from as early as the 13th century, and is now preferred by their descendants.<sup>5</sup> For consistency this is the spelling used from now on.

Contrary to my original assumption, the family was not entirely new to Mitcham, and a Thomas Otway(e), described as a 'husbandman', or tenant farmer, is mentioned in several wills during the latter part of Henry VIII's reign. Furthermore, an Otway marriage and two burials were recorded in the Mitcham registers early in the reign of Elizabeth I. The surname "Ottye" or "Ottway" occurs in two instances in Tooting early in the 17th century, but although there may be a connection - the name, after all, is not all that common - nothing has come to light to show conclusively that they were related to the Otways of Colliers Wood.

The baptisms of three daughters born to Audrey (or "Audriel"), wife of Francis Otway, are recorded as taking place at Mitcham between 1655 and 1663. The couple were married in 1640 at West Hoathly, in Sussex, and on the evidence of their son John being baptised at the church of St Dunstan, Stepney, in 1647, we can conclude



that they had moved to Colliers Wood from an address in London during the early years of the Commonwealth. When the Otways' second daughter was christened, in 1657, the parish clerk of Mitcham considered Francis merited being styled 'gent'. In 1661/2 (i.e. early in 1662 by our calendar) Francis "Ottway" of Mitcham, described as 'Innholder', contributed five shillings as a "Free and Voluntary Present" to the sum being collected in Surrey as a gift to Charles II.<sup>6</sup> As we have seen, Francis paid hearth tax in 1664, and presumably spent the remainder of his life in Mitcham. He died in September 1680, and his burial is recorded in the parish register.

No indication is given in the local records as to where precisely Francis Otway lived, but it would be perverse to place him anywhere than at Colliers Wood. We have seen there is evidence that he resided in the parish as early as 1655, but unfortunately this conflicts somewhat with the militia levy assessments, which do not list him as taxpayer until the early 1660s. An explanation could be that in the 1650s he was occupying Shelton's house (or perhaps merely part of it) on a sub-lease, and did not take over the property in its entirety (and hence acquire liability for tax) until about 1663. However, the transition to owner or lessee-occupation had certainly taken place by 1664 when the assessments for hearth tax were made. Otway's description as an 'innholder' in 1662 is interesting. Was he at one time using the rambling old house (or part of it) as an inn? Jenkingranger was of course situated on the major highway out of London leading to Epsom, which Pepys tells us was already a popular resort by the 1660s, on account of its mineral well and other attractions. Unfortunately the records of the Surrey licensing magistrates are incomplete, so, once again, we are left to theorize.

Before turning to what Daphne Bradbury's work can tell us about John Otway and The Canons, mention ought to be made of Ensign Charles Otway of the Duke of Monmouth's Regiment of Foot. He saw service in Flanders during the war between France and Spain for control of the Netherlands, and in November 1678 was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. The connection (if any) with the Mitcham Otways has yet to be demonstrated, but Charles is of interest in that many of John Otway's sons and grandsons, like him, followed careers in the army as commissioned officers.

John Otway was said to be "of Mitcham" when, in about 1670, he married Auria James. She was the 14-year-old daughter of Walter James, a member of a Kentish land-owning family whose alleged recusancy had placed them under threat of sequestration by 1610. In 1575 an ancestor, Martin James, Remembrancer of the Court of Exchequer, had acquired Romden Place (now known as Romden Castle), at Smarden in Kent, and on the death of her father in 1664 Auria, an only child and heiress to the family estate, inherited what remained of their houses and lands.<sup>7</sup> Title to Romden passed eventually to her son James, and successive Otways retained possession of the estate until 1786. The background to John and Auria's betrothal is not known, but her age and social standing, and the property she most likely brought with her, causes one to suspect that the marriage might have been arranged, as was so often the case, rather than purely the outcome of a romantic liaison.

The union was certainly fruitful, for Auria, who died in about 1698 whilst still in her mid-40s, gave birth over the space of less than 30 years to no fewer than 20 children. Thirteen of them, seven boys and six girls, survived her, and 12 were living when John's will was proved in 1702. With the exception of the eldest son, James, who was born in about 1672, and a daughter named Margaret, the names of all the children appear in the Mitcham baptismal registers. We are thus led to conclude that John and his family were resident in the parish from 1675 until at least 1698, when his youngest daughter, Hester, was born. This raises the question as to whether John and Auria, with their numerous small children, were living at Colliers Wood until about 1681, when the Canons would have been ready for occupation. There seems a strong possibility that John was prompted to negotiate the building lease with Cranmer as his father became increasingly frail, and termination of the latter's tenure of the Colliers Wood house could be foreseen.

Following the detection early in 1696 of a Jacobite conspiracy against the throne and life of William III, Parliament passed an Act of Association requiring holders of civil and military posts and all "citizens of substance" to sign a pledge of allegiance to His Majesty. John Otway's name was among the 182 signatures collected in Mitcham.<sup>8</sup> This is not only an indication of his standing in the community, but also confirmation that the Otways were still resident in Mitcham, presumably at The Canons, at least until the closing years of the 17th century. The fact that in Mitcham there were so many persons of "substance" affirming their loyalty to the King is also interesting. Cox, writing in 1700, described Mitcham as "a Village well inhabited and much frequented by the Citizens of London".<sup>9</sup> His observations certainly seem justified. Tax assessments made 30 years earlier show the parish had approximately 230 houses, from which we can postulate a population of a little over 1000. The 182 names on the oath roll would of course have included more than one signatory from many of the larger households, of which there were evidently several at the time - according to the *Index Villaris*, compiled a few years before the Act, "Micham" contained the seats of one baronet, one knight, and more than three "gentlemen authorised to bear arms". Living in the vicinity of Mitcham Common, we are told, were "three more gentlemen of the same calibre".<sup>10</sup>

In 1693 James Otway married Elizabeth Lightfoot at the church of St James, Duke's Place, in London. Three of their children were buried at Mitcham between 1696 and 1699, and two sons, Richard and Francis, were baptised at the parish church in 1700 and 1702 respectively. This suggests that even before his mother's death in 1698 James, with Elizabeth and their own growing brood, may have moved into the family home at Mitcham. By this time James had probably already purchased a commission in the army, for in 1699, when his daughter Elizabeth was buried at Mitcham, he was described by the parish clerk as "Capt. James Otway". The following year his servant James Whitehall was interred at Mitcham. James's career undoubtedly necessitated frequent absences from home, and we can imagine Elizabeth taking charge of the household at The Canons after her mother-in-law died. A picture of a close-knit extended family thus emerges, the house enlivened with children from two generations, plus parents, grandparents and their servants. Death, sadly, was not an uncommon occurrence. As we have seen, several of the children died in infancy, and John Otway, James's father, died in June 1702. There is also an entry in the parish register recording the burial in February 1708 of "Widow Otway" who, although we cannot be sure of the relationship, could conceivably have been Audrey, the wife of Francis Otway of Colliers Wood, and James's grandmother.

In all, six of John Otway's sons, five of them baptised in Mitcham, secured Commissions in the army. James, the eldest, appears likely to have seen service in the War of the Spanish Succession. He rose to become Colonel of the 9th (Norfolk) Regiment of Foot, and in 1725 was stationed in Minorca, where he died. He was buried in Smarden church. Francis, who was born in 1676 and died in 1701 (he was buried at Mitcham) secured the position of ensign to a Captain Sediere in 1697, serving in Col. Edward Dutton Colt's Regiment of Foot in the West Indies. He became second lieutenant 18 months later. John, the third son to live to manhood and who was born in 1682, held a lieutenancy in the 2nd Dragoon Guards from 1702 until 1706, when he became a captain in Lord Lovelace's newly raised Regiment of Foot. Charles, who was baptised at Mitcham in 1686, had what was probably the most colourful career of the five, serving in the North American colonies.<sup>11</sup> He was appointed colonel of Lord Mohun's Regiment of Foot in 1717, and retained the rank until his death in 1764. Otway's regiment, the 35th Foot, garrisoned Fort William Henry on Lake George (in what became New York State) in 1757, and two years later was on General Wolfe's right flank in the assault on the Heights of Abraham above Quebec. Stephen, John's fifth son to survive childhood, was 18 when he first appeared in the army lists as a second lieutenant in Colonel Charles Churchill's Regiment of Marines. He became a major in his brother's old Regiment of Foot in 1743, and was still serving in the same corps five years later. Finally, Thomas, who was born in 1695, held the rank of first lieutenant, also in the 35th Foot, by 1721, and had been promoted to captain three years later, when he was stationed at Fort St Philip.

In 1717 James became the sole possessor of Romden, having bought out his brothers. By this time the unexpired portion of the lease of The Canons had been relinquished, and the Otways had severed their connections with Mitcham.

Daphne Bradbury has traced the fortunes of the Westmorland branch of the family from c.1480 to the present day, following a trail that leads to Ireland, Canada, the West Indies, Australia and New Zealand. For her, the Mitcham research was only part of her quest, but it has provided us with invaluable information on the early occupancy of one of Mitcham's best-known 'heritage' houses.

1 Surrey History Centre. Mitcham Militia Levy Assessments 1655-80 LA5/8/1-2

2 Surrey History Centre. Court Rolls, Manor of Ravensbury

3 *Surrey Hearth Tax 1664* Surrey Record Society Vol.XVII (1940)

4 Surrey History Centre. James Cranmer's Rent and Memorandum Book 1717-49 3 470/-

5 Research notes compiled by Daphne Bradbury, 25 Forest Dene Court, Cedar Road, Sutton. November 1999

6 Transcribed by C.Webb and published by West Surrey Family History Society (quoted by Daphne Bradbury)

7 W.B. Worsfold 'Romden Place and its Restoration' *Archæologia Cantiana* (Transactions of the Kent Archaeological Society) XLIII (1931) pp.73-84 (quoted by Daphne Bradbury)

8 C.Webb 'The Association of Oath Rolls 1695' *Genealogists' Magazine* 21:4 (December 1983) (quoted by Daphne Bradbury)

9 T.Cox *A Topographical, Ecclesiastical and Natural History of Surrey* 1700 p.380

10 Quoted in E.Walford *Greater London - A Narrative of its History, its people and its Places* II 1884 p.528

11 G.D.Martineau *A History of the Old Belfast Regiment and the Regiment of Sussex 1701-1953* (quoted by Daphne Bradbury)

## CORRECTIONS

Some of the dates of death of the canons of Merton Priory at the Dissolution shown on page 7 of Bulletin No.135 were incorrect.

Those of John Hayward and John Martyn are not known, and the dates shown should be deleted. John Codyngton died in 1569, and Richard Benese in 1546. Please amend your Bulletin accordingly. The mistakes were the editor's, and she apologises to Lionel Green, who was the author, and to readers.

On page 15 of Bulletin No.134 for 'Middleton Hall' please read 'Middleton Road'.

**JUDITH GOODMAN wonders at the life and career of “a clever liberal woman”**  
**CHRISTINA STEEVENS**

For Bulletin No.122 (June 1997) I wrote about George Warrington Steevens, brilliant war correspondent for the *Daily Mail*, and author of *With Kitchener to Khartoum*, who died of fever at the age of 30 during the siege of Ladysmith in January 1900. Steevens and his wife lived at Abbey Gate House, which used to stand on the site of the Wimbledon Palais building - which has itself been pulled down this year. All I knew then of Mrs Steevens was that the poet W.E.Henley, a close friend of Steevens, described the marriage as “a thing apart from the ordinary course of human life, [which] was in the event as fortunate as in the beginning it had seemed bewildering”.

It is quite an odd story.

Christina Adelaide Ethel Athanasia Stewart was born (it is thought) in 1839, which makes her 30 years older than Steevens. Her mother, Mrs Duncan Stewart, when widowed in 1869 established herself as a London hostess. In her circle were society people (the ‘Gore House set’), stage people (Kean, McReady), artists (Landseer, Whistler), and writers such as Washington Irving and Henry James. The latter described her as “a rather picturesque & agreeable old lady”. Christina had her own salon along the same lines, and to James she was “a clever, liberal woman who invites me to dinner every four or five days”. She had married in 1852 James Alexander Rogerson of Wamphray, an elderly alcoholic Scotsman, who died in the same year as her mother, 1884.

In the following year Christina became a key figure in the scandalous divorce case in which Sir Charles Dilke MP was cited as co-respondent by Donald Crawford, a lawyer and politician. Christina was a close friend of Mrs Crawford, and also of Dilke, whom she warned ahead of the event that Crawford would file a petition, but before the trial she broke down and was unable to give evidence. The bizarre outcome of this trial was that though Mrs Crawford was found to have committed adultery with Dilke, the judge ruled that he had not committed adultery with her. Dilke finally invoked the Queen’s Proctor to re-open the case. However the verdict stood. In this second trial Christina was Crawford’s most important witness. (Christina’s lawyer brother acted for Crawford.) Despite the fact that no-one can be judged to have given reliable evidence, a great deal of promiscuous behaviour among the country’s rulers was revealed. Modern biographers have been hard on Christina and suggest that she acted as she did out of spite, as a discarded mistress of Dilke. Henry James took a more charitable view. “I am sorry to say that my old friend Mrs Rogerson has been much mixed up with the whole business, though rather by her misfortune than by her fault.” In any case the career of Sir Charles Dilke, once expected to become Prime Minister, was over.

Christina now devoted herself to good works, taking a house in the woods near Hindhead and running it as a holiday home for deprived children from the London slums. The publisher Grant Richards went to a party there: “I was told that my hostess was as clever as she was eccentric, that she was old, and that she wore her hair short like a man”. By now she was writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, which was how she met Steevens, who was then with that paper. They married in 1894, when he was 24. She gave her age as 45, but was probably 55. According to Richards, “[I]n spite of her years she possessed still a fascination that made most young men her slaves. Indeed George Steevens would be more than her slave ... Her husband he became. A remarkably entertaining and capable wife he must have found her. She did away with his shyness. The young Oxford Fellow of his college became a man of the world, a scholar who wore his learning with spirit and gallantry. They used to say at the time that Mrs Rogerson could have had any other of the clever young *Pall Mall* men as a husband had she not accepted Steevens. I could quite believe it to be true.”

They lived at Russell Mansions, Bloomsbury, briefly, before moving to the Gate House at Merton. This was an enormous house for a couple without family to occupy, but they entertained a lot. Richards went once with Steevens from Merton Abbey to call on H.G.Wells at 41 The Avenue, Worcester Park, and Mr and Mrs Wells returned the call, on their new tandem bicycle.

After George Steevens’ death Richards went to stay with Christina at Merton. She introduced her new manservant Jim to him. “George died in Jim’s arms, Grant.”

“Later I found Jim unpacking my things: ‘So you knew Mr Steevens well, Jim? Did you serve right through the campaign?’

“Lor bless you, Sir, I never set eyes on the gentleman as far as I know. That’s only Mrs Steevens’s way!”

W.H.Chamberlain who calls George Steevens ‘Charles Stephens’ says the widow “kept up the establishment, and turned it into a convalescent hospital for soldiers”, but the latter statement is not true. She published a book called *A Motley Crew* in 1901, which did not sell, and stayed on in Merton for a few years, probably until the house was bought for development around 1905. She died in 1911.

Let the last word be with Grant Richards. "Dear Mrs George! ... When I knew her and delighted in her society she was already of considerable age. It was, say, thirty-five years ago. Personally, I am not convinced that she is dead to-day. I don't see how she could die ..."

W.H.Chamberlain *Reminiscences of Old Merton* London 1925

Augustus J.C.Hare *Biographical Sketches* London 1895

Philip Horne (ed.) *Henry James: A Life in Letters* London 1999

Roy Jenkins *Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy* London 1965

D.Nicholls *Sir Charles Dilke: The Lost Prime Minister* Hambledon Press 1995

Grant Richards *Author Hunting* London 1934

Grant Richards *Memories of a Misspent Youth* London 1932

W.R.Trotter *The Hilltop Writers: a Victorian Colony among the Surrey Hills* Lewes 1996

I am grateful to John Pile for directing me to W.R.Trotter's interesting book, which contains a summary and bibliography of Christina's career.

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2000-2001

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

**Subscriptions became due on 1 October. If you do not pay by banker's order and have not already paid direct, your subscription is now overdue. Please use the form which was enclosed with the September Bulletin. Membership is £6 for one person, £3 for any additional member of the household. Cheques are payable to Merton Historical Society and should be sent to Mr and Mrs R Davis,**

.

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*