



PRESIDENT: J Scott McCracken BA FSA MIFA

VICE PRESIDENTS: Viscountess Hanworth, Lionel Green and William Rudd

BULLETIN NO. 137

MARCH 2001



PROGRAMME MARCH-JUNE



Saturday 17 March 2.30pm

Mill House Ecology Centre, Mitcham

Martin Boyle: 'The Wildlife of Mitcham Common'

Martin Boyle is Warden of Mitcham Common. This 185ha (460 acre) site is of particular interest for natural history conservation, as it supports a number of different habitats. 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.)

Saturday 21 April 2.30pm

Snuff Mill Environmental Centre

David Saxby: 'Recent Work on the site of Merton Priory'

The speaker is an archaeologist with MoLAS, the Museum of London Archaeological Service. He will bring us up to date with interpretation of this important medieval site. An illustrated lecture. (The Snuff Mill Centre, in Morden Hall Park, is on bus routes 118, 157 and 164. Drivers use the garden centre car-park. Take the path across the bridge; go through the gateway and turn right. The Snuff Mill is straight ahead.)

Saturday 12 May 10.45am

Barbara Webb: 'A Millais Walk'

Barbara Webb is kindly offering us this guided walk as a sequel to her lecture in March 2000. For details see page 16.

Saturday 26 May 2.00pm

Visit to Southwark Cathedral

John and Jo Brewster

Following on from their talk about the Cathedral on 17 February, the Brewsters offer us a guided tour. Meet at the Cathedral entrance.

(Southwark Cathedral is off Borough High Street, opposite London Bridge station.)

Saturday 16 June 2.30pm

Martin Boyle: Mitcham Common walk

This guided walk, led by the Warden of Mitcham Common, is a sequel to March's lecture. Meet at the Mill House Ecology Centre, Windmill Road (see above).



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



To mark the departure from the scene of a local landmark ERIC MONTAGUE has composed this obituary for a Mitcham pub: THE SWAN INN

A Swan inn at Mitcham is said to have been mentioned in the court rolls of the manor of Biggin and Tamworth in 1695,¹ but its location is uncertain and its subsequent history is unknown. Another Swan, occupying the site of the present Cricketers on Lower Green, and therefore within the jurisdiction of the manor of Vauxhall, was described in a guide published around 1800.² John Rocque indicated an unnamed building in the position of the present Swan near Figges Marsh in his map of 1741-5, but this was most likely a private house, presumably demolished by the time the inn (an early 19th-century building) was built.³

The last Swan inn appears by name in the land tax records for 1817, but 1808 is the first year in which the books carry an assessment which can be identified without question as the building demolished in 1999/2000.⁴ The inn's first landlord of note was George Smith, who presided over the establishment for a quarter of a century.⁵

The building of the Swan at Figges Marsh could well have been an enterprise encouraged by the profit to be made from the phenomenal increase in road traffic which was a feature of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Mitcham lay on one of the main turnpikes from London to Epsom and Brighton, and the site of the new inn, at the junction of roads from Streatham and Tooting, was well chosen, for it ensured that the hostelry became the first to be encountered by travellers approaching the village from the north.

From the time it was erected, i.e around 1807, the owner of the Swan was James Moore, lord of the manor of Biggin and Tamworth, but by 1846 he had evidently relinquished part of his interest to Anthony Harman, who also owned, or held on lease, the Six Bells at Colliers Wood.⁶ Moore lived at the manor house, immediately to the north of the inn, and was a major landowner in the village. On the far side of the house were the farm buildings and herbal distillery which, by this time, had won for the firm of Potter and Moore world-wide acclaim for the excellence of its essences of peppermint and lavender, as well as for a dozen or more other herbs grown for use in medicaments and toilet preparations. Summer visitors to Mitcham seldom failed to be impressed by the sight and scents of whole fields of roses, lavender and camomile, and the constant activity to be witnessed in Potter and Moore's yard was a source of fascination to travellers breaking journey at the Swan.

The end of the great era of coaching came with the development of the railway network in the 1840s and 1850s, and the steady decline in regular through traffic during the latter part of the 19th century would certainly have resulted in a gradual change in the Swan's clientele. An old photograph,⁷ probably taken in the late 1860s when the licensee was a Francis Foster,⁸ shows the Swan to have been a stopping place for carriers' waggons - a far cry from the stagecoaches half a century before, with their affluent passengers. On a few days each year, however, the inn was once more the scene of great activity, and for countless London families on their annual outing to the Epsom races the Swan was a familiar landmark and place of refreshment. For much of the year, however, it must have been what was, until recently, a 'local', patronised mainly by working people living close by.

James Moore died in 1851 and the bulk of his property was inherited by James Bridger, his illegitimate son. During Bridger's time much of the estate was sold, and it was probably in the 1860s or 1870s that the Swan was acquired by Nalder and Collyer, the Croydon brewers. One of their boundary markers, a limestone block with 'N.&C.' inscribed on one side and '1890' on the other, was incorporated in the wall on the northern side of the Swan, separating the forecourt from the adjoining alleyway.

Not unexpectedly, the structure of the Swan was much altered over the years, although the original 190-year-old building which formed the heart of the house could still be identified quite easily from the outside. Around 1890 Henry Vickers became the landlord, and it is almost certainly to his time that the ground floor extension of the bars might be dated. This necessitated abolition of the flight of stone steps which originally led up to the front door (and no doubt for some could prove very tricky to negotiate on the way down).

The inn was closed for a short period in the early 1990s following the temporary suspension of the licence occasioned by its having become the haunt of drug-dealers, but after refurbishment it was re-opened within a few years, under new management. Few patrons were now arriving by horse-drawn transport, and the old water trough by the inn sign had long since disappeared. The beer, moreover, was no longer from a local brewery, and it was many years since the floors were strewn with fresh sawdust before each opening time. Nevertheless the inn still contrived to retain something of its old atmosphere, and, as its second centenary approached, began to enjoy the loyalty of a growing band of 'regulars'.



The Swan Inn - from an old postcard

Sadly, the inevitability of change could not be withstood, and early in 1998 application was received by Merton Borough Council for planning consent to change of use. Demolition was proposed, followed by redevelopment of the site, in plans submitted in May 1996, and, with approval being given, the inn soon disappeared from view behind the contractor's hoarding. An archaeological assessment concluded that, in view of what was known of the history of the site, little of significance was likely to be disturbed within the 'footprint' of the proposed new buildings, and all signs of the Swan above ground have now disappeared.

1. Surrey History Centre. Court rolls of the manor of Biggin and Tamworth.
Merton Local Studies Centre. F.G.Price (ms) *Eagle House and Georgian Architecture in Mitcham*
2. J.Edwards *Companion from London to Brighthelmston II* (c.1789) 17
3. J.Rocque *Environs of London 1741-45*. This map is not accurate to the degree of detail needed to identify smaller properties.
4. Surrey History Centre. Land Tax records. Mitcham.
5. Merton Local Studies Centre. Copies of local directories (Pigot etc) 1823-55
6. Tithe commutation register and map 1846-7. Reference 80.
7. Merton Local Studies Centre. Tom Francis collection of local illustrations.
8. Numerous licensees can be identified from local records, e.g. William Puddick, recorded as a licensed victualler in the 1851 census; Francis Foster (1862-78); Samuel R.Bishop (1878-90); Henry A.Vickery (1890-); Mrs Alice Vickery (1895-); Frank C.Whittle (1918-); etc. All from the Post Office and Kelly's Directories.

A VISIT TO THE BRITISH LIBRARY

The British Library stands next to St Pancras station - two very different buildings. The Entrance Hall of the Library is full of light and space, something few libraries can boast. Although a British Library Reader's Ticket is needed for the 11 Reading Rooms, there is much of interest that needs no ticket.

Off the Entrance Hall are the Bookshop, the Ritblat Gallery showing treasures such as the Magna Carta and the Gutenberg Bible, other exhibitions, and - for me, the glory of the British Library - the King's Library. This is a hollow tower, glass-fronted on all four sides, containing George III's books, donated by George IV, for public use forever. The tower contains a loft and a stair for staff to retrieve any book; and is artfully lit to display the bindings and gold lettering on the books. The whole is 17 metres tall.

Our guide provided many statistics. The Library receives over 8000 items per day, and holds over 150,000,000 separate items. There is also a sound archive and a large stamp collection. We were shown a terminal of the trackway which delivers items from the basements to the reader - all done by barcodes.

To end we were shown 'Turning the Pages'. The room contains VDU screens, each with images of four 'treasures'. I chose the Lindisfarne Gospels. By stroking a finger across the screen from right to left one opens the book; stroke again and the first page turns. A 'zoom' square in the corner enlarges a piece of text or an illustration. To close the book, stroke from left to right. My childish mind was enchanted ...

Margaret Carr



MERTON HERITAGE CENTRE

The current exhibition, **Chalkdust and Satchels**, continues until 21 April, and will be followed by **Cat and Mouse**, the story of Women's Suffrage in Merton, which runs from May until late July. The Heritage Centre is at The Canons, Madeira Road, Mitcham (020 8640 9387).

NO PLACE LIKE HOME!

Surrey History Centre, Woking, is holding an exhibition on tracing your house history until 28 April. Admission free. For further information telephone 01483 594594.

WANDSWORTH MUSEUM

The Wandsworth Museum has an exhibition of **William De Morgan** ceramics from 7 April to 3 June. Admission free. For further information telephone 020 8871 7074

As ERIC MONTAGUE was unfortunately prevented by illness from speaking at our meeting in December last year (last millennium!), the text he had prepared appears below: A guest speaker from 1086 describes MITCHAM IN AD 1000

For my brief offering today I am adopting as my viewpoint the winter of 1086, and will tell what I have heard tell of my village 86 years ago, and what it is like today.

Early this year (1086) William of Normandy's commissioners came to Mitcham, having summoned the reeve and six elders (I was one of them) to a meeting. We had to give evidence as to who held the land in the time of King Edward, and who holds it now. They wanted to know how many heads of households there were, divided into villeins (farmers and craftsmen), and cottars (cottagers and smallholders). We had to give the hidal assessments and value of the holdings, then and now, the number of ploughs (an indication of the amount of arable), how much meadow and woodland there was, and how many mills. Talk about bureaucracy, but I suppose it'll get worse now we're in Europe!!

Of course, we didn't exactly volunteer the information, and kept our answers to the questions put. None of us, except the inevitable crawler, saw why we should tell these busybodies all our business, despite the presence of some men-at-arms. (The oafs probably couldn't understand what we were saying, but did look a bit menacing.) The French clerics wrote it all down. Of course, they made mistakes (they couldn't even spell the names of our vills properly, but then I must admit our Surrey accent is a bit difficult to understand). The draft was checked later by a separate group, so there can't have been any obvious errors. The whole lot has been sent to William at Winchester. All in one year! Of course, they couldn't have done it so quickly if the country hadn't been organised into our English system of counties, hundreds and tithings. The final account - 'Domesday Book' we are calling it - presumably meets the Conqueror's requirements. It had to be a summary - it'll be called The Exchequer Domesday, but I bet it stands as a record for all time - folks are already saying it's the only one of its kind in the World.

But I must now go back to the year 1000. It was beyond my time (I believe I was born in 1010). I do remember when we had a Danish king - Cnut was his name - and for 25 years under him and his son England was one kingdom with Denmark and Norway. Danish merchants have long been familiar in London, and in those days there was a lot of shipping passing between us and the Scandinavians. Some Danish families were living in parts of Surrey, and on the whole we got on well enough. I think the Sweyne family, who are big landowners in Tooting, came from across the North Sea.

Perhaps I should also ask if there are any Frenchies in the audience? Individually they are all right, but they take some understanding, in more ways than one. No? Then I can speak freely.

My people claimed to be ENGLISH through and through, although I must admit when I used to ask my old grandfather, he said his people were Middle Saxons from north of the Thames, and my mother's folk were from Wessex - near Athelney where Alfred sheltered from the Vikings. There was certainly some British and Irish blood further back. Mongrels, I suppose you might call us - the French do, but who are they to talk?

But I am still digressing.

My grandfather could of course remember the year of Our Lord 1000, when the World was to come to an end. Folks had been told Christ the Saviour would return to claim his own, but it didn't happen. Instead we suffered from weak kings, squabbling between Wessex and Mercia, and with the Scots causing trouble, not to mention fresh Viking raids. Being near the Thames we saw more than our share of looting - mostly by big blond louts out for anything they could lay their hands on. Hopefully things will now settle down under William and his Normans, who are partly Viking anyway. I must say they are a brutal crowd, but efficient for all that.

In the year 1000, as now, Mitcham and the adjoining vill of Wicford (as we call your Lower Mitcham) lay in the Hundred of Wallington. The hundreds are divisions of the county for various government and fiscal purposes, and were, I've heard tell, set up by Alfred the Great (but they may go back before that). Wallington hundred includes 13 townships and villages, including Cheam, Sutton, Beddington, Carshalton and Morden (but not Merton, which is in Brixton Hundred). Our meeting-place is at Wallington, and here trials and other legal matters are settled, and the tithing men from the vills around are accustomed to assemble and debate.

Place-names tell something of our beginnings. Literally, Mitcham, Michelham or *Mic Ham* is Old English for 'a big place', but here probably refers to the large area of fertile land to the west, within the bend of the Wandle. Wicford (or Whitford, as the Norman scribes wrote it) means the ford serving the place, the *Wic* element coming from the Latin *Vicus*. Sutton is the south farm, and Wallington comes from the farm of the 'Welsh', as the early Saxon settlers called the British already living here. 'Ing' is an early place-name element, so I reckon Wallington must go back a long way.

We have no village centre in Mitcham that you would recognise, and the various homesteads and farms are scattered over the whole area from north to south and westwards to Merton (the 'farm by the pool'). The boundary between Mitcham and Merton - the 'Michamingemerke' - is marked by the Hlidaburnan (you call it the Wandle) and has been recognised for hundreds of years.

For local matters we elders of Mitcham and Wicford still meet at the old folkmoot site in Mitcham. Many paths lead to this spot, and it is said that this is the burial place of one of the leaders long ago, who rallied the people, British and Saxon alike, to defend themselves in times of danger. Overlooking the moot site, which is surrounded by a low bank and ditch, stands the cross erected, I think, by the Holy Fathers from Chertsey Abbey. They have held lands in North Mitcham and in Tooting, either side of the Graveney, for well over 300 years. There is also a church at Tooting.

This brings me to the land-holdings in Mitcham. I cannot remember the names of any of the owners from around 1000, but it is recorded that in the time of the saintly King Edward of blessed memory there were some half a dozen men holding land direct of the King. None of these estates was particularly large, and there was no manor as such. You can work out roughly where these were from the hidal assessments and values, having regard to the good and bad land.

Brictric, with the biggest holding, ranked as a minor thegn and held his land direct of the King. It included most of north Mitcham to the Streatham and Croydon borders. Aelmer held much of central Mitcham, but for some reason the scribes merely put it down as in Wallington hundred. He also held the land direct from the King, and had other estates in Surrey. Edmer and Lank held estates in Wicford, along the banks of the Wandle. These were less extensive, but more valuable, because they were on rich alluvial soils. The other lesser landowners included Alfward (Colliers Wood), Wolfward (Biggin), Ledmer and some other men whose names I have forgotten.

In all, our two communities were made up of ten villeins, 16 or so cottagers and five 'slaves' or bonded men. With their families we totalled perhaps 150 - men, women and children.

What befell Brictric, Aelmer and the other landowners, I do not know, but they are no longer with us. Several of them, I suspect, took up arms and joined the *fyrð* when Harold Godwinson and his Anglo-Danish army returned south from defeating Tostig and Hardrada at Stamford Bridge. The new threat that autumn of 1066 was from William of Normandy - the Bastard, we call him, when there are no French around. They had landed on the beach at Pevensey with hundreds of heavily armed horsemen and swarms of hangers-on, all hoping for a share of the spoils. Harold's troops were tired out, and I imagine our lords with a few others from hereabouts fell with Harold and his housecarls on the slopes of Senlac Hill.

Except for Odbert, who held a mortgage on part of Brictric's land, and was free "to go where he pleased", none of our English landlords are with us now, and we have Normans in charge. Mostly they are absentees, having been granted extensive estates all over the kingdom by William, and we only know of them by name. Their holdings in Mitcham are either managed by bailiffs, or sub-let to other Frenchmen.

Life goes on, however, very much as it did in my grandfather's time, and with good arable and pasture we are kept busy. There are two large commonfields, east and west, and the south field near Beddington Corner, which is mostly meadow. The demesne farms of the landlords have enclosures and also strips in the commonfields, which we, the villeins and cottars, are required to work as part of our 'rent'. Other dues and taxes are paid in produce and livestock from the small garden plots or tofts we have attached to our houses, as well as strips scattered amongst the various furlongs in the open fields. Some of the villeins also have small assarts or enclosures.

Cottars are the poorest in the vill, having no lands of their own worth speaking of, and are hired labourers. Some are little better off than slaves. Villeins, even, can no longer go where they wish, as was the case in King Edward's time. Those who can, make a bit on the side part-time, following trades like shoemaking, smithying or rough pottng. Many of our womenfolk, apart from household chores and helping out in the fields, can spin and weave. We all rally round to help with building new dwellings, and in re-thatching.

In the time of King Edward, and presumably in the year 1000, there were water-powered corn mills, one at Wicford and the other on the Pipp brook, near the bridge you call Phipps Bridge. Both belong to the lords. They fell into disrepair after the Conquest, but have since been put back into working order, and are valuable assets to their owners.

Finally, a great boon to those of us with common rights, is the vast amount of rough grazing we share and jealously guard against trespassers. Situated mainly on the poorer land to the east, this provides fodder for our cattle, geese and other livestock. Turf and brushwood are our main fuels, gathered from the waste by those with rights of turbarry, plus what we may take 'by hook or by crook' from the lords' woodland, when permission is granted by the reeves.

THE KINGSTON PROJECT - a talk by PETER TILLEY on 20 January 2001

Peter Tilley came to the Snuff Mill to tell us about the Kingston Project. The aims of the Project are to build a comprehensive database containing information about people and buildings of Kingston between 1850 and 1900, to re-create the life-cycles of the residents of the town, disseminate the data to the community, schools and colleges and to publish the results to reach a wider audience.

The Project came about from a feasibility study Peter carried out as part of his degree course. Kingston University then offered to provide accommodation and computing facilities. Volunteers had to be found to do the work. Peter, having owned a software company before retiring, wrote the software for input and to produce the reports from the data.

At this stage the information from the available censuses has been entered and work is progressing with the parish registers. Eventually extractions from directories, newspapers, cemeteries, and other records will be incorporated.

One of the first slides Peter showed us was of a map of 1863 which was mainly open fields with some development in Kingston, Surbiton and New Malden. The census indicated the growth in the population over the period being researched: 12,144 in 1851 to 44,237 in 1891. Examples of the Enumerators Books showed where the data came from. One of the problems was the 19th century handwriting; confusion between the long 's' and an 'f', also between double 'l' and double 't' where the later were not crossed.

Peter talked about the information that could be obtained by analysing the data in different ways. Amongst the examples of occupations is an 'Ankle Beater'. This was a young boy who helped drive cattle to market. The main occupation of single women was domestic service, over 70% in 1851, which figure rose steadily over the period. An interesting point came from some graphs showing the numbers of men and women against their ages. Whilst there were roughly the same number of both sexes there were many more females than males in the 15 – 30 age group in the years 1861 – 1891, this was caused by the number in service. Some of the large houses had 8, 10 or more servants, Peter gave examples of the Duke de Charteris and Charlotte Finch. Many of these were not born in the area. Looking at contemporary advertisements for domestic staff general requirement was for 'country girls'.

There were a number of lodging houses in Kingston recorded in the census, many in relatively small buildings. Peter showed us pictures of Water Lane (1895) and Harrow Passage (1897) illustrating the areas. In 1851 and 1861 20 or more lodgers were recorded in one dwelling, in one case 53. The numbers were over 40 during 1871 and 1881. Interesting happenings occurred in 1891, "26 men, 9 women and 10 children went and refused information", at 44 Thames Street and buildings at the back 76 single men also went away refusing information.

In the earlier years of the census many of the children in the 7 to 11 age group had occupations, but in 1891 the lower age was then 10 years old. Peter suggested that this was probably due to the Education Act. He felt that younger children were still being employed but the parents were not declaring it to the Enumerator. The occupations seen included errand boy, farmer's boy, apprentice, page boy, servant and one occurrence of Drummer for 3rd Surrey Militia. In 1851 the most popular names were William, then John, for males and Mary, then Elizabeth, for females. This continued during the period to 1891 although the percentages reduced each time.

Peter then talked about the Benson family showing the changes in the household.

1851 Head, wife and 4 children

1861 Head, (no wife) and 5 children

Sarah Fisher (housekeeper) and 2 children

1871 Head, housekeeper (Sarah Fisher) and 5 children

1881 Head, wife (Sarah) and now all children have the name of Benson

Peter suggested that the wife originally went away between 1851 and 1861 and a housekeeper was taken on. The wife then died between 1871 and 1881 which made a new marriage possible to the housekeeper.

A pilot study of Bletchingley was carried out which incorporated extracts from the parish registers with the census. The life cycles generated from the data detail all the known events, from baptism to burial, in chronological order. Peter displayed some examples. Elizabeth Fielder, who had 4 different birth-places from 1851 to 1891. John Walter, aged 77, who re-married after his first wife died to a 20 year old girl. Two Collisters who only aged just over 30 years during the 50 years between 1841 and 1891, Mary giving ages of 9, 19, 25, 30, 35, 44 and Sarah 2, 11, 19, 26, 34, 39. Indented family trees may also be produced, at this time only for the male line as female change their name on marriage.

At the completion of the talk a number of the audience asked questions to which Peter responded.

Steve Turner

SOUTHWARK CATHEDRAL

A lecture by John and Jo Brewster at The Canons on Saturday 17 February

This was a most professional presentation, packed with information, but lively, amusing and brisk. By the end we felt we couldn't wait to go on the Brewsters' guided tour in May!

In contrast to the serenity of Winchester or Salisbury, Southwark Cathedral is in the very midst of noise and bustle, with commercial London right at its doors. And it has been so for many centuries.

There was a nunnery on the site in the 9th century, built with the proceeds of a ferry across the river. The story of the founding of the nunnery as told to John Stow by the last prior is somewhat macabre and grotesque. John Overs, who made a fortune from running the ferry, was extremely mean. He thought that if he pretended to be dead, his servants would fast until after his funeral, so saving money. He laid himself out, but the servants decided to celebrate instead. When he rose in his wrath they were terrified; one promptly hit him over the head, and killed him. His grieving daughter retired to a nunnery and used his money to found the church of St Mary, later renamed St Mary Overy (over the water), and bequeathed to it the income from the ferry.

Later it was a priory of Augustinian canons, as well as the parish church. Rebuilt after a fire in 1206, it was London's first Gothic church. By the 19th century the nave was in ruins and open to the sky. Much however remains from the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries and the nave was rebuilt 100 years ago. With the creation of the new diocese it became a cathedral in 1905, and is dedicated to St Mary and St Saviour. (Previously it had been in Winchester diocese, and then briefly in that of Rochester.)

After the Dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII the priory buildings and surroundings were used for many purposes, such as a Delft pottery, linen starching and monumental masonry. Southwark was outside the control of the City, and hence was also the site of bear-baiting, brothels and theatres.

There are many marvels to be seen inside. As you look down the long nave you see at the crossing the magnificent brass chandelier of 1680. Behind the high altar is the screen installed by Bishop Fox in 1520. The statues are much later.

The 13th-century retrochoir is the oldest complete part of the cathedral. Here several Protestant martyrs were tried in the reign of Mary Tudor. Of the four chapels, one is a Lady chapel; the others are dedicated to St Christopher, St Frances of Assisi with St Elizabeth of Hungary, and St Andrew. This latter chapel is now dedicated to prayer for those with HIV and AIDS. Another focus of modern thought is the memorial at the back of the nave to the victims of the *Marchioness* disaster in 1989.

Most tourists probably head for the Shakespeare memorial and the Harvard chapel. With the Globe and Rose theatres nearby, St Saviour's was the actors' church. Shakespeare's brother Edmond was buried here, as were John Fletcher and Philip Massinger. The Shakespeare memorial, by Henry McCarthy, dates from 1912. The Harvard chapel (Blomfield 1907) commemorates John Harvard, founder of the university, who was baptised here in 1607.

We were told about the windows by C.E.Kempe, a later follower of the pre-Raphaelites, who always put his trademark of a wheat sheaf in a corner. His fondness for borders of "ecclesiastical seaweed" was also mentioned!

When we visit the cathedral we shall see many other interesting things, such as the 'Nonsuch' chest, and memorials to a diversity of people, including Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop of Winchester, who helped translate the King James Bible, Wenceslas Hollar, who did a prospect of the Thames from the tower, Lionel Lockyer, a 'quack', and Abraham Newland of the Bank of England.

This lecture was given at The Canons, which stands on land given to the priory of St Mary Overy by the parishioners of Mitcham, and was farmed to provide revenue - so another connection with the Augustinian canons in the present Borough of Merton. This meeting was very well attended, and we all had an enjoyable and informative afternoon.

Lorna Cowell

MERTON PRIORY CHAPTER HOUSE

Service of **Nones** on Sunday 6 May at 3pm to celebrate the foundation of the Priory by the Wandle in May 1117.

All are welcome.

and "**Music, Minstrels & Instruments in the age of St Thomas a Becket**"

lecture recital by **MARY REMNANT**, on Monday 7 May at 7.30pm - £10 (£5 concessions)

LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Friday 8 December 2000: Ten members attended.

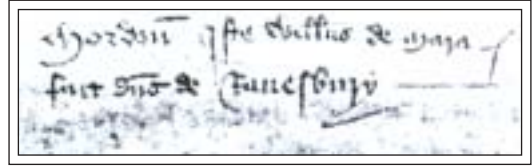
- ◆ **Lionel Green** began, with some events in the history of Merton Priory 1200-1240. When, in 1221, the bishop of London tried to conduct a visitation at Westminster Abbey the matter went to arbitration. One of the panel was the prior of Merton, and another had been a deacon here. St Edmund Rich (d.1240) had spent time at the priory. (see Lionel's text on page 13)
- ◆ *Merton: The Twentieth Century* has a picture of a bus in Hartfield Road on page 49. **Bill Rudd** speculated on the actual date that the photograph would have been taken. He referred to the make and model of the vehicle, but particularly to the advert for *Wild Justice*, a play at the Haymarket Theatre, and had written for information. This came from the Theatre Museum, who were able to say when the play had been presented.
Bill then mentioned the LAMAS item on page 4 of December's Bulletin about painted advertisements on buildings. By standing on the steps of Wimbledon Theatre one for Sears could be seen across the road. There was one for a cinema on the William Morris Hall in the Broadway. Members would keep a look-out for more.
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** showed her Merton Priory project to the meeting, which included many illustrations and maps. She was asked to consider depositing a copy with Merton Local Studies Centre.
- ◆ **Tony Scott** wondered why Sir Arthur Bliss Court in Mitcham was so named, as there did not seem to be any connection between him and this area. A plaque in the entrance had been unveiled by Lady Bliss, his widow. Investigations would be made. This led on to the renaming of the White Hart, a few yards from here, as the Hooden on the Green. A hooden is evidently a Kentish hobby-horse. Displays relating to the history of the building have been retained in a back room.
- ◆ **Don Fleming** had attended a talk in Sutton given by a policeman, who referred to people living in Wards. He wondered when the usage for the term for an area of a town came about. Don will research this. There was discussion on the police usage of 'manor' and 'patch'. [Ward: a division of the four northern counties of England and in some of the southern counties of Scotland. *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* 1996. Ward: district of a town. *Nuttall's Pronouncing Dictionary* c1900]
- ◆ Continuing on a previous theme (Bulletins 134 p.12, 135 p.15) **Judith Goodman** showed us copies of pictures by Harry Bush and his wife (see p.14). She then read an extract from the *Merton & Morden News* (1943) about pictures by John Piper for the British Restaurant in the Congregational Chapel, Morden Road, Merton (*illustrated right*). The pictures are believed to have been destroyed when the chapel was demolished to make way for a block of flats.
- ◆ Eric Montague showed an architectural report on the Canons, and said he hoped there would be an archaeological survey carried out on the grounds. There was a picture in the Local Studies Centre showing a number of outbuildings. Could this be done in conjunction with the Archaeology Weekend in July next? Eric then said that deeds that Peter Hopkins was working on gave details of the Mitcham Park Estate area, which enabled the history to be traced from medieval times. Following an enquiry Eric had discovered that the iron gate to Hadfield's works had been rescued by Jim Berry, one-time Director of Parks, and was now at Cannizaro. He showed a picture of it. Jim Berry's slides and notes have been deposited at Surrey History Centre.
- ◆ Continuing on from Judith's talk on 2 December, **Peter Hopkins** wondered if the area near St Mary the Virgin, Merton (tithe plot 80, refer to MHS Local History Notes No.12) may have been the original priory site before it moved to the banks of the Wandle. He also speculated that the 'circular' area (tithe plots 83-91) may have been a very early enclosure, with the church being located nearby. Peter said that many of the roads were mentioned in medieval documents, and read out a list of some 30 names.
- ◆ The Workshop discussed the new building taking place at schools in the Borough, and wondered if the planning permission included the requirement for an archaeological survey to be carried out, as many of the sites could have been in occupation for hundreds of years. The Chairman would write to the Planning Department.



Steve Turner

Friday 26 January 2001: Don Fleming in the chair.

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** produced a printout, from a microfilm acquired from the British Library, of the 13th-century document in the Merton Priory Cartulary referring to the construction of a new 'common way' through Morden in 1225, to which William de Mara and the prior of Merton had appended their seals. Peter was having difficulties deciphering this marginal comment referring to William de Mara.



- ◆ **Bill Rudd** reported on progress with the forthcoming exhibition, and drew attention to new offices behind Morden Underground station, for which the name Garth House had been chosen.
- ◆ **ENM**, writing up research notes for a thesis on the Civil War and its aftermath, had found mention of two 'mysteries' in Mitcham - the reported discovery of the body of a "Parliamentary officer", and the alleged finding of the "Swords of Mercy and Grace" in a back garden. Both will be written up for the Bulletin.
- ◆ In **Rosemary Turner's** absence, he also reported that she has located the Home Guard memorial plaque missing from the former Mitcham Creameries building (about which we had an enquiry). It is now in safe-keeping at the British Legion headquarters at Mitcham (*see below*).
- ◆ **Judith Goodman** has found a reference in a book on Charles Darwin to the Rev. Wharton's school at Mitcham in the 1850s. This will be the subject of a note in a future Bulletin.

At an exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery of portraits by the Dighton family she had learnt more about Robert Dighton (17?-1814), who painted Abraham Goldsmid of Morden in 1803, and Richard Dighton (1795-1880), who painted Richard Thornton of Cannon Hill in 1818. Joshua Dighton (1831/2-1908), one of three artist sons of Richard, was said to have lived and worked in Wimbledon and Merton in his later years. She had found him at various Wimbledon addresses - none in Merton, however - from 1880 to 1902. Though paintings of his (mainly equestrian) are known from as late as 1893, he was listed in local directories not as an artist, but a photographer. He died in Kingston workhouse.

- ◆ **Don Fleming** recounted the cautionary tale of a local history society in Wales, entrusted with a dresser, which was subsequently found by its owner to be a valuable antique. Sad to relate, when she asked for it back, it had been lost. In law, acceptance on temporary loan incurs responsibility, and the society (which carried no insurance) is now faced with a claim for compensation it cannot meet.

Don also described the results of recent research into the origins of 'wards' and, *inter alia*, of their importance in the provision of public services in 16th-century London. For those interested Don strongly recommends a book on London by John Schofield.

Eric Montague

Workshop dates: Fridays 23 March & 18 May at 7.30 pm at Wandle Industrial Museum.

All are welcome

THE MITCHAM HOME GUARD MEMORIAL PLAQUE

The Society recently received an enquiry about the present whereabouts of the plaque dedicated to the members of the Home Guard who were killed by a parachute mine in 1941 at the Tower Creameries, Mitcham Common. At the January meeting Eric Montague asked if anyone present had any information.

Responses soon came in, and I have been able to confirm that the plaque now hangs in the Royal British Legion, St Mark's Road, Mitcham.

The names on it are:

ANDREWS Frederick Percy
APLIN William Richard
BRANCH Charles Albert
HENSON James William Thomas
JONES William
KILBEE Joseph Stanley
LABRUM Charles James

LANGBEIN Harold Francis
MARRIOTT Aubrey Edgar
NEWSTEAD Frederick Albert
O'BRIEN Frederick Thomas
PEACEY Walter Joseph
SHARMAN Richard John
TAVERNER George Stephen

WHITE Arthur Frederick

Rosemary Turner

ARTHUR TURNER, Vice President

We have had to say farewell to another giant of the Merton Historical Society. On 2nd January 2001 Arthur Turner died aged 92. He was happily involved with the MHS and its activities for over forty years, and became the longest serving Chairman, from 1961 to 1977 and again from 1982 to 1985.

Always cheerful, with a great sense of humour and an inexhaustible supply of anecdotes, he guided the affairs of the Society along many channels, from walks to talks, and bulletins to books.

Sadly, events relating to old age and infirmity became his lot, first affecting his wife, who died two years ago.

The Society was represented at his funeral, when he was laid to rest with Madge. The view from the cemetery on the hillside at Stroud, Gloucestershire, is stunning. Opposite are the hills known as The Heavens.

LG

I joined the then Merton and Morden Historical Society at an exhibition 'Footpath to Pavement', put on by the Society as their contribution to the Merton and Morden Week, 19-26 May 1962.

At the AGM in November that year I enquired as to who were on the Committee, and found myself elected! And have been stuck with it almost ever since.

This was when I met Arthur Turner, who was chairman. From what I remember of him he was certainly in authority, but kindly and encouraging. He could be very persuasive to get members involved in something, like the architectural survey of the Urban District in 1963, but particularly in getting what he called 'new blood' on the Committee. He was full of praise for someone who had carried out some research or other worthwhile activity which enhanced the Society. Always cheerful and very friendly. He certainly had an influence on me, and I gained in confidence as a speaker, to advantage.

Goodbye, Arthur, and thank you.

WJR

BOOK REVIEW

A Historical Guide to Merton Abbey Mills ... but not the former Liberty Print Works.

On purchasing a copy of this guide I was most disappointed in finding the section of the former Printing Works here to be historically very inaccurate. This section - and I am only referring to this part of the guide - contains numerous mistakes. To list them all would end up as a rewrite, but I will give some examples.

The Long Shop is described as the first workshop built by Liberty's, in 1906, whereas a Wash House was built in 1905.

The guide states that the Apprentice Shop, or as it was more commonly known, the 1926 Shop, was the first workshop converted to screen-printing. Not so, as the Screen Shop was specially built for screen some 12 years previously, and planned some ten years before that.

Block-printing was not taking place in the Coles Shop in 1965, having ceased in 1957.

The Showhouse, a name invented to complement a false history in 1983, was in fact built for block-printing, and the side external staircase was a fire exit.

The section on screen-printing, on page 14, I am informed was not intended to represent the former printing works of Liberty. So just in passing, as I would assume that the vast majority of readers would never have seen the printing machine in the works, I would point out that these photographs were not taken at Merton.

On the whole the guide is a well laid-out book, but the reader must take into account that the section on the former Liberty Printing Works is not historically accurate, contains many mistakes, and is not an historical guide to the former Liberty Print Works.

David Luff

[The guide, which is widely available, costs £3.95.

David Luff, our trenchant reviewer, worked for Liberty's for many years, and has written his own account of the print works, which will shortly be published by the Society.]

MHS HAS JUST BROUGHT OUT THREE NEW PUBLICATIONS:-

The Cricket Green - No.1 of **Mitcham Histories** by E N Montague - £5.95 (members £4.80) + p&p £

Lord Monson's Schooldays: Reminiscences of Mitcham 1804-1809, with notes by E N Montague and Judith Goodman - £2.95 (members £2.40) + p&p £.

Merton Town Trails 7: The Canons to Eagle House (revised version 2001) - 15p + p&p 25p.

Available at meetings, Libraries or from our Publications Secretary.

**JOHN PILE replies to Eric Montague's item in the last Bulletin, and calls his article
SAXON MERTON, OR "BATTLES LONG AGO".**

My intention in replying at some length (MHS Bulletin No.135 pp10-12) to Eric Montague's article on Scandinavian influences in Surrey (Bulletin No.134 pp13-15) was to show that each item of evidence presented by Eric in support of a Scandinavian presence could have an equally probable explanation that did not rely on direct Scandinavian intervention.

The only question about which I feel there remains any real uncertainty concerns Edwards' reference in his *Companion from London to Brighthelmston* (1801) to "several pieces of spears, swords, human bones, and other *exuviae* of a battle". Eric is, I acknowledge, correct in locating this discovery in the vicinity of Merton Priory, although the exact location is not known. However, I must continue to question Edwards' interpretation of the find as evidence of a battle. Eric stresses the fact that Edwards does not use the term 'graves', and insists that the remains were "the scattered aftermath of a skirmish". Having checked the quotation from Edwards' book, it is clear that he was describing a discovery made about 20 years earlier, and probably on the basis of a second-hand report. Under these circumstances I think we must be allowed some doubt as to the disposition of the remains at the time of their disclosure. Edwards also tells us that the relics were discovered "in removing the ground to erect some buildings", so there is the added possibility that they were scattered by the workmen before they were brought to the attention of someone with sufficient interest to record them. In view of these doubts I consider it unwise to conclude that the remains were originally scattered on the field of battle rather than deliberately placed in a grave or graves.

It should also be remembered that Edwards was writing during the period of the 'Romantic Revival' in art and literature, when the chance discovery in the soil of weapons and human bones would be much more likely to suggest a glorious battle than a commonplace burial. Considering the evidence - such that it is - I remain convinced that Edwards' *exuviae* of a battle were the remains of a pagan Saxon inhumation, perhaps in an isolated grave or in a cemetery.

Far from feeling disappointment at (in Eric's words) "just another Saxon cemetery", I would be excited by the implications of such a discovery for the study both of the origins of Merton and for the siting of the 12th-century Augustinian priory. It is now generally accepted¹ that settlement in southern England during the early Saxon period was generally dispersed and did not coalesce into the more familiar pattern of nucleated villages with their open-field systems until later Saxon times. In Merton this may have meant a movement from a number of small sites scattered across the historic parish to form an enlarged settlement, itself, I would suggest, of early Saxon origin, in the vicinity of the present parish church of St Mary. The siting of monastic buildings is usually assumed to have been determined by purely practical considerations, but if Merton Priory were built close to a Saxon burial ground, is it not possible that the early discovery of some human remains, a memory, or perhaps a place-name indicative of a cemetery, could have influenced the 12th-century builders?

It is a commonplace that archaeology rarely provides the evidence to support specific events in the historic record, and I was therefore pleased to note that Eric is now less inclined to associate the Merton Priory find with either the murder of King Cynewulf of Wessex at 'Merantun' in 768, or the battle of 'Meretun' in 870/1 than he was in 1969.² Perhaps our research should now be directed towards the problems of Saxon settlement in Merton rather than to romantic visions of

"Old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago."

Wordsworth, *The Solitary Reaper* 1806

1. D.Hooke, in D.Hooke and S.Burnell (eds), *Landscape and Settlement in Britain AD 400-1066* University of Exeter Press (1995) pp95-114

2. *Surrey Arch. Soc. Bulletin* No.54, extracted in *Surrey Arch. Coll.* vol.67 (1970) p108

Footnote:

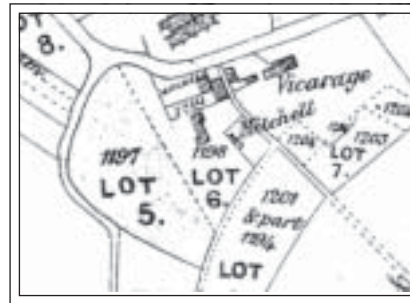
I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Judith Goodman's help in narrowing down the site of the Church Path burials, and to correct the date of the reference to 'Merantun' in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. This should be 786 and not 755 [757], (MHS Bulletin No.135 p10).

[Many thanks to Eric Montague and John Pile for their scholarly and courteously conducted debate, which must now however come to an end.

There will be further contributions from Monty on the 'peopling of Merton' in future issues. JG]

LIONEL GREEN reports on the first conference devoted to Surrey Archaeological Society's VILLAGE STUDY PROJECT

A successful conference was held at Leatherhead on 25/26 November last year, organised by the Surrey Archaeological Society and devoted to the presentation of the work of various groups on the origin of villages in the county. Our Society was well represented, and Eric Montague launched proceedings with an account of early Mitcham. The name suggests an area of rich soil on a bend in the river. Evidence of Romano-British occupation close to the River Wandle to the west of the parish has been found, as well as the early Saxon cemetery. An 1853 estate map reveals a circular feature near the parish church: a focal point for at least six tracks. Excavations in 1989 uncovered segments of a possible encircling ditch with fragments of Roman, Saxon and early medieval pottery. A church existed from the early 12th century, presumably where the present church stands. Other maps suggest that the layout of house-plots east of the church overlaid an earlier field system. This could be part of a planned development which was never completed.



From sale plan of James Moore's estates 1853

Peter Hopkins then spoke of early Merton and Morden, first describing their locations. The beginnings of Merton would seem to have been along the road to Kingston. A large island site between the church and the road was never developed, remaining arable land throughout the centuries. Peter wondered if this freehold site could have been the manorial centre which Gilbert the Sheriff had assigned to his new religious foundation when he rebuilt the church in 1115.

In Morden the presence of the abbot of Westminster's court in the east of the parish may have encouraged settlement by the Wandle. A cluster of properties around Morden church had rectangular boundaries pre-dating the modern route of the London Road. The talk was illustrated with an o.h.p., and by the use of triple overlays Peter was able to regress a modern map by removing the road, 16th-century farm buildings and known 18th-century changes, to reveal early tenement holdings. The open-field system continued until about 1650. A third settlement at Westmorden was established by the 13th century around a green, with a back lane between the southern tenements and the Southfield. On the north side a 12-acre croft had presumably once been divided between the three tenements there, though by Tudor times it all belonged to the central tenement.

Another member, Cyril Maidment, brought us firmly into the 21st century by means of a laptop computer and projector, pointing out features of Wimbledon with a magic pen. He was able to ring circles round the itinerant manor house and remove them without a squeak from any mouse. He reminded us that Wimbledon still had a village, and proceeded to show early maps 'computer corrected' to OS 1:5000.

Other villages examined included Nutfield (no village, but three commons taken into farms), Capel (a *capella* of Dorking), Shere (extensive parish between hills and the Weald), Ewhurst (began with a Roman road and villa, later small isolated farms¹), Hambledon (complex of north-south tracks, suggesting transhumance) and Thorpe (settlement restricted by flood-plain).

The second day was equally enlightening. Southwark did not flourish in Saxon times. All the Roman roads around the bridgehead fell out of use and were not reconnected until Norman times. At Ewell also no Saxon settlement was evident (though burials had been found). Horley consisted of countless parts owned by other parishes. The common was enclosed in 1812 and the railway arrived in 1850, fortunately close to the church and the Brighton road.

Dennis Turner, former President of the Surrey Archaeological Society and a long-standing member of this Society, summarised the findings. Rural settlement took many forms at different times and in different places. Dispersed farms often preceded the village and often remained so throughout the medieval period. Where an open-field system operated, it was normally associated with a village. Some villages clustered around a feature, whilst others were built either side of a main street. Often there were several centres separated by common grazing land.

The landscape had an important bearing on settlements throughout the centuries. An Anglo-Saxon name might suggest some settlement of that period, but not necessarily a village. The suffix for Croydon, Morden and Wimbledon refers to hills (the landscape), whereas Merton and Carshalton reflect some settlement (cognate with 'town'). Tooting, Beddington and Wallington may refer to settlements of followers of an individual leader (*ingas*).

This was an interim conference, for the work of the Village Study Project goes on.

1. There was little early medieval settlement at Ewhurst, but it possessed a church of c.1080, the advowson of which was granted to Merton Priory in the 12th century.

LIONEL GREEN has some more episodes to recount from the story of MERTON PRIORY:

Westminster turns to Merton

When Eustace de Fauconberg was made bishop of London in the spring of 1221 he tried to assert his jurisdiction over Westminster Abbey. The claim was rejected by Abbot William de Humez (or Hommet) on the grounds that the royal palace of Westminster included the abbey and was outside normal diocesan control.

The bishop appealed to the veteran archbishop, Stephan Langton (the first signature on the Magna Carta), and the matter went to arbitration. The bishops of Winchester and Salisbury were natural choices, but in addition two further prelates were chosen with the agreement of both parties. These were the prior of Merton and the prior of Dunstable, who was a former canon of Merton. The selection of two Augustinians to support or reject a claim involving the royal foundation of the Benedictine abbey of Westminster suggests great respect for them.

The result of arbitration was total exemption from the jurisdiction of the bishop of London for Westminster abbey and the parish and church of St Margaret. There was a sop for the bishop in that he was to have the manor of Sunbury and its church.¹ The success of the arbitration award soon turned to sorrow for Westminster, for Abbot William died on 20th April 1222, and Prior Thomas of Merton died in ?August 1222.

The chosen arbitrators were Thomas Willst who became prior of Merton in 1218, and Richard de Mores or Morins who left Merton to become prior of Dunstable in 1202. It says something for the high standard of education of Augustinian canons, for de Mores, like Becket, went to Bologna to study canon law. He wrote and taught before entering Merton as a deacon in 1201.² In the following year he was elected prior of Dunstable and priested on 21st September 1202.

The Annals of Dunstable

In 1210, Richard de Mores followed the example of Merton, and began writing annals to record a history of the times. It is from these annals that we learn that the priory buildings at Dunstable were completed in October 1213 and that there were severe storms in April and December 1222. The latter destroyed the presbytery and western towers at Dunstable, and the annals add further that in the same storm “the tower of Merton was blown down, and many buildings throughout England, a large number of persons losing their lives and much harm being done by lightning”.³ The annals often refer to Merton and to the promotions of canons at Merton.

St Edmund Rich

In 1234 Edmund Rich was appointed archbishop, and it was as if Thomas Becket lived again. Edmund was born in the year of the martyrdom of Becket and baptised in St Mary Colechurch, London, the same church as Becket. Like Becket he studied at Paris. Edmund Rich also spent time at Merton in retreat for a year 1213/4, “going in and out as one of the canons themselves”. Here he prepared for his lectures at Oxford. St Edmund Hall marks the site of his residence. Like Becket, the appointment to archbishop changed his life. But whilst Becket was transformed from a life of enjoyment of riches and hunting to a penitent servant of the Lord, Rich changed from a frail humble person into a bold uncompromising leader ready to fight both king and pope, at the same time being revered for his austerity and purity. Rich went into voluntary exile and tried to follow the examples of both Thomas Beckett and Stephan Langton living at Pontigny. Unfortunately Rich died at Soissy and his body was carried to Pontigny for burial. Even before his death, Richard de Mores at Dunstable was writing a Life of Edmund Rich.

After his death in 1240 the canons of Merton petitioned the pope for canonisation. Rich was speedily made a saint, only six years after his death. At that time he rivalled Beckett as the most popular saint in England.

1. John Flete *The History of Westminster Abbey* 1909 pp.101-2

2. A charter of Hubert Walter, archbishop, dated 1200/1 was witnessed by “Master Richard de Mores”, with no indication that he was a regular canon. (*Acta S.Langton* ed. K.Major, Canterbury and York Soc. 1950 p.50)

3. *Annales Monastici* (Rec.Pub.No.36) Rev.H.R.Luard (Ed.) Vol.3 1866. The dates in the annals were one year out. Luard has corrected them, and in this article they are corrected.

... ANOTHER PERSON’S TREASURE

Bill Rudd, who is in charge of the Society’s collection, has a plea to make. When spring-cleaning, or sorting your possessions for a move, or clearing out the house of an elderly friend or relative, don’t rush to throw away all those items everyone accumulates that seem of no immediate value or interest. They may not be rubbish after all!

Photographs, postcards, estate agents’ brochures, newspaper cuttings, event programmes, church magazines, school prospectuses, souvenirs, locally manufactured goods ... There is a huge range of material which has local interest and importance. No matter if it is ‘recent’ - it won’t always be. And if everyone chucks it out it will soon be rare. If you don’t want to keep such objects or haven’t the room to house them, please remember the Society and also Merton Heritage Centre (Sarah Gould 020 8640 9387). Your ‘rubbish’ could be very welcome.

JUDITH GOODMAN pays tribute to **THE ARTISTS OF QUEENSLAND AVENUE.**

Although these days estate agents irritatingly call the area in SW19 enclosed by Melbourne Road and Kingston Road 'Old Merton Park' (it actually post-dates Merton Park), it was developed before the first World War as the 'Station Estate', and mainly by speculative builders. The west side of Queensland Avenue however, an attractive terrace of ten houses, was designed by the local Arts-and-Crafts architect J.Sydney Brocklesby. Unusually, the houses at each end, No.1 and No.19, have an extra storey added, which consists in each case of a studio floor, with large windows on the north aspects.

From 1914 until the 1950s No.19 was the home of two very different artists, Harry Bush and his wife Noel Laura Nisbet.

Harry Bush was born in 1883 in Kemp Town, Brighton, the seventh child of eight. His parents, Thomas and Jane Bush, had been in the service of the Duke of Fife, who had then set Thomas up as a jobmaster, hiring out horses and carriages.

Noel Laura Nisbet was the youngest of six children of Hume Nisbet (1849-1923), Scottish artist, author, poet and traveller, and his first wife Helen, daughter of a sculptor. The Nisbets left Scotland in 1887 to settle in Harrow, where Noel was born that year. In 1888 they moved to Clapham. Hume Nisbet had been Art Master at the Watt Institute and School of Art, the fore-runner of Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. He encouraged his daughter, after schooldays at the Convent of Notre Dame, Clapham Common, to go on to the Clapham School of Art, where she won many medals and a scholarship.

Harry Bush was educated at York Place, Brighton, probably at what became the Technical College. Then, in 1898, his family too moved to Clapham. Harry entered the Victualling Department of the Admiralty in 1900, but left in 1904 to join the Carlton Studios, which produced posters. A colleague there encouraged him to enrol for art classes at the Regent Street Polytechnic. At an exhibition of student work he saw pictures by Noel and her elder sister Margaret, and decided to enrol at the Clapham School of Art where both young women were then studying.

In 1910 Harry and Noel were married, settling first in Battersea Park Road, and then in Walham Green. But, in 1914, Hume Nisbet set up both his artist daughters in Queensland Avenue, Merton, where a row of houses was under construction. Studio floors were added at an extra cost of £50 each. Apart from three years during the first World War, when Harry was in the army, and Noel with daughter Hazel, born in 1916, lived at Speen, near Newbury, the Bushes stayed at 19 Queensland Avenue for the rest of their lives. Their second daughter, Janet, was born in 1922. Meanwhile, at No.1, the other studio house, was Margaret Nisbet, who became quite well known as a portrait painter.

Noel had 25 works hung at the Royal Academy between 1914 and 1938, and Harry had 27 hung between 1922 and 1954. They both also exhibited regularly in the provinces and Scotland, and both had works purchased by public collections. Noel was elected to the Royal Institute of Watercolour Painters and to the British Watercolour Society, and Harry to the Royal Institute of Oil Painters.



19 Queensland Avenue

Harry was quiet, retiring and thoughtful. Noel was extrovert, energetic and charming. Harry became known as 'the painter of the suburbs'; Noel's taste was for legend, myth and fairy tale. But they were devoted to each other. As a Catholic family, they worshipped at St Winefride's, Wimbledon. Their elder daughter joined the order of the Teachers of the Holy Cross, taking the name Sister Anthony. Janet, the younger, married and moved away.

Many of Noel's paintings were medieval in atmosphere, with titles such as *The Dressing of the Bride* and *With Hound and Spear*. Typically frieze-like in composition, they have been described as ambiguous, sinister, fascinating, repellent, obsessive. For a time she turned, successfully, to illustrating books of fairy and folk tales. Quite different in mood is an affectionate portrait she did of *Harry Bush mending Dolls*.

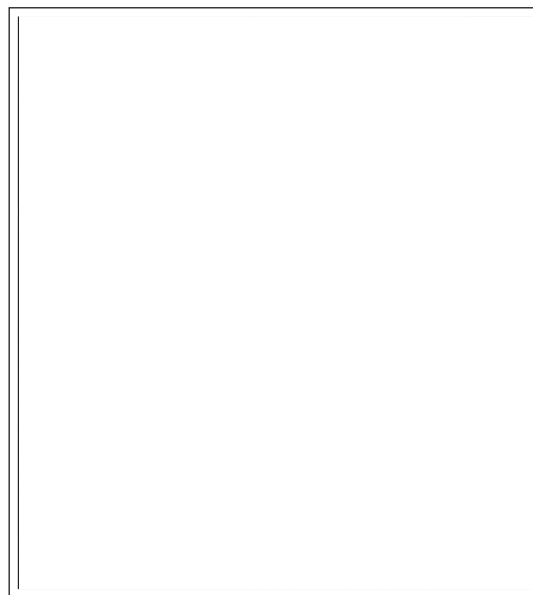
Harry was obviously good with his hands, as he also made models of sailing ships, one of which is at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich. He made some paintings of sailing ships as well. Other subjects included landscapes painted on holiday in Sussex and the west country, a view of a barracks interior from the first World War, now at the Imperial War Museum, and some still lifes. But what he is best known for are his pictures of suburbia, and the suburbs of south-west London were his area. There were some scenes at and near Bracken Avenue, Clapham Common, where his sister Ivy and her husband Ernest Kent lived at No.23, in an

attractive Arts-and-Crafts-type terrace not too unlike Queensland Avenue. And he painted a few views of Wimbledon Common and the Beverley Brook. However, most of his pictures are views from, and of, 19 Queensland Avenue. Intriguingly, however, he is on record as having done a sketch for a mural of Buckingham Palace, for the King's Cinema in Wimbledon Broadway. Did that ever materialise?

What is perhaps his best known image, *A Corner of Merton, 16 August, 1940*, was included in my pictorial book on Merton and Morden (1995). This picture is in the Imperial War Museum, to whom it was given by Janet (Bush) Locke, and is often on display. A large oil painting, it shows a bomb crater in the back gardens of houses in Brisbane and Queensland Avenues.

As well as two preliminary sketches for *A Corner of Merton* the museum also has another, smaller, oil painting (Catalogue No. IWM:ART 15662), which shows the back of an end-of-terrace house which has been bombed - the crater is clearly visible. Though Bush called it simply *Bombed House, Merton*, it is easily identifiable as No.2 The Path, seen from the back, as it would have been from the artist's studio. The houses in the background are early 19th-century ones in Morden Road, now replaced by the World of Leather warehouse. The distant trees are those of Nelson Gardens. No.2 The Path was never rebuilt. The original terrace now begins with No.4, and a post-war row occupies the site of No.2, together with some garden space. The view was one which Bush painted several times, at different seasons, before the war.

The Museum of London has two paintings, *December Sunshine* and *Laggard Leaves*, both probably from 1925 and both views from Bush's studio towards Morden Road. He did many views, painted at different seasons, of Queensland Avenue and of Bathurst Avenue (Clement and Muriel Newton at No.12 were friends), and some delightful interiors of his own house, such as *The Workbasket*, *The Christmas Tree* and *The Tiled Kitchen*. The last-named, which shows Janet



HARRY BUSH, *Bombed House, Merton*.

Reproduced courtesy Imperial War Museum.



The Kitchen Garden in October -oil painting by Harry Bush

Bush in the kitchen at No.19, was reproduced in a book on English domestic architecture, brought out to tie in with a television series.¹ A particularly attractive painting, *The Builders*, of c.1933, which was used as an auction catalogue cover picture in 1993,² shows the construction of Nos 23 and 25 Milner Road, as seen from Bush's studio. The earlier Milner Road houses form the background; a tree in spring blossom partly shields the construction site, where a horse-drawn dray has just brought some more bricks. This picture, which sold for £23,000 (twice the estimate) at the auction, has recently been used as an illustration in a book on London's suburbs.³ Another painting, of back gardens, titled *The Kitchen Garden in October*, was used in a book called *The Englishman's Country*.⁴

Noel suffered a series of strokes from 1947, but struggled on, teaching herself to paint with her left hand when her right one failed her. She died in 1956. Harry, who also painted until almost the end, died of cancer in the autumn of 1957.

Much of the information in this article came from the Bush and Nisbet files at the Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute, especially a Christie's catalogue of the studio sale on 28 September 1984.⁵ I am also very grateful to Angela Weight of the Imperial War Museum, and to Dr Lucy Peltz and Emily Stone of the Museum of London, for access to the two collections' Bush files and to pictures not on display.

1. J.Chambers *The English House* Thames Methuen, London 1985

2. *Modern British and Irish Paintings, Watercolours, Drawings and Sculpture*, Christie's, London 14 May 1993

3. A.Saint (intr.) *London Suburbs* Merrell Holberton/English Heritage, London 1999

4. H.Roberts 'English Gardens' in W.J.Turner (ed.) *The Englishman's Country* Collins, London 1945

5. *Paintings, Drawings and Watercolours from the Studios of the late Harry Bush ROI (1883-1957) and the late Noel Laura Nisbet (Mrs Harry Bush) RI (1887-1956)* Christie's, London 28 September 1984

‘A MILLAIS WALK’

A walk to explore some of the places associated with the painting of
Ophelia in the Stream by Sir John Millais.

- Leader:** Barbara Webb
- Date:** Saturday 12 May 2001
- Meet:** 10.45am at Malden Manor station, on the Chessington line. Train from Wimbledon 10.36am (it would be wise to check the time beforehand). Book return to Tolworth, which is one station down the line from Malden Manor, and is the one from which we shall return. Those coming by car can park free at Malden Manor station, and return there from Tolworth by train, or on foot (one mile).
- Distance:** About 3 miles, leisurely pace. Rough underfoot in places. Lunchtime refreshments about 1.30pm at Hogsmill pub (Beefeater), or bring picnic (sit on ground).
- Finish:** About 3.30pm Tolworth station.
If possible, we shall also visit Old Malden Church in the morning.
- NB:** There are no toilet facilities at Malden Manor station or the church.
People would find it helpful to have with them a copy of Barbara’s Millais book. If anyone would like one, please let Sheila Harris know, ahead of time, and Barbara will bring copies with her.

THE SOCIETY’S FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY

The next issue of the Bulletin will contain a report on the celebratory dinner on 28 February at Morden Hall. Too late for the December Bulletin was the announcement of the Society’s exhibition at The Canons from 20-25 February. Members were sent a separate mailing about this, with the Programme for 2001. The special sub-committee, consisting of Ellen Eames, Margaret Groves, Peter Hopkins, Bill Rudd (Chair) and Tony Scott, worked extremely hard and to brilliant effect. Full report next time.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

On Wednesday 28 February 1951 a public meeting was held at the old Merton & Morden Central Library in Kingston Road “to consider the foundation of a local history society”.

Four councillors attended, together with members of a WEA local history class, their tutor Mrs J.Saynor, and interested members of the public. Miss E.M.Jowett, District Librarian, proposed that:

A local history society be founded and that it be called the Merton and Morden Historical Society.

This was approved. She then proposed that:

The public meeting constitute itself the inaugural meeting of the newly founded society and proceed [*sic*] to adopt a constitution and elect officers for the ensuing year.

This was also approved. The first committee was as follows:

Chairman:	Councillor V.Talbot	Vice Chairman:	Councillor S.H.Reeves
Hon.Treasurer:	Mr S.E.Cobbett	Hon.Secretary:	Miss E.M.Jowett
Members:	Mrs J.Saynor		Councillor E.W.Warren

and **Mr L.Green**

By the time of the first AGM, on Friday 2 November 1951, there were 58 paid-up members, whose subscriptions of 2/6d a head had yielded an income of £7.5s.0d. Expenses - stationery and postage - came to £3.8s.2d, leaving a healthy balance of £3.16s.10d to take forward. Five meetings had been held, and a full programme was planned for 1952.

The rest is history ...

JG

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.

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