



VICE PRESIDENTS: Viscountess Hanworth, Eric Montague and William Rudd

BULLETIN NO. 158

CHAIR: Judith Goodman

JUNE 2006

PROGRAMME JUNE-SEPTEMBER

Saturday 24 June 1.45pm

Visit to Royal Hospital Chelsea

Meet at the Chelsea Gate, next door to the National Army Museum in Royal Hospital Road. The guided tour of this superb and important building, designed mainly by Christopher Wren, will cost £2 a head.

Coach trip to Hughenden Manor on Wednesday 19 July

Details of this outing went out with the last *Bulletin*. There may still be places available, so telephone Ray Kilsby without delay.

Saturday 12 August 2.15 for 2.30pm

'Houses Round the Rushmere'

Meet at the War Memorial in Wimbledon Village, where the High Street joins Parkside. This informative walk will be led by member Cyril Maidment. No charge.

Tuesday 5 September 1.15 for 1.30pm

The Poppy Factory, Richmond

Meet inside the entrance at 20 Petersham Road, close to Richmond town centre. The visit is free, but donations are expected.

**The Society's events are open to the general public.
You are invited to make a donation to help with the Society's running costs.**

OUR NEW PRESIDENT AND OUR NEW VICE PRESIDENT

Your committee has unanimously invited Lionel Green to become our President and Eric Montague to become a Vice President. We are delighted to announce that both have accepted.

Lionel is a founder member of the Society, and contributed to Evelyn Jowett's classic *A History of Merton and Morden* in 1951. His knowledge of Merton priory and St Mary's church is unrivalled; his research, his writing and his enthusiasm continue still. We have recently published his *A Priory Revealed*. 'Monty', a member for nearly as long, is the unchallenged expert on Mitcham, and is widely known for his talks, for his publications, and for his willingness to help enquirers on any aspect of local history.

Both have always been active members of the Society, and both have served on the Committee, including being Chairman. We are glad, and honoured, that they have both agreed to accept their new posts.

JG

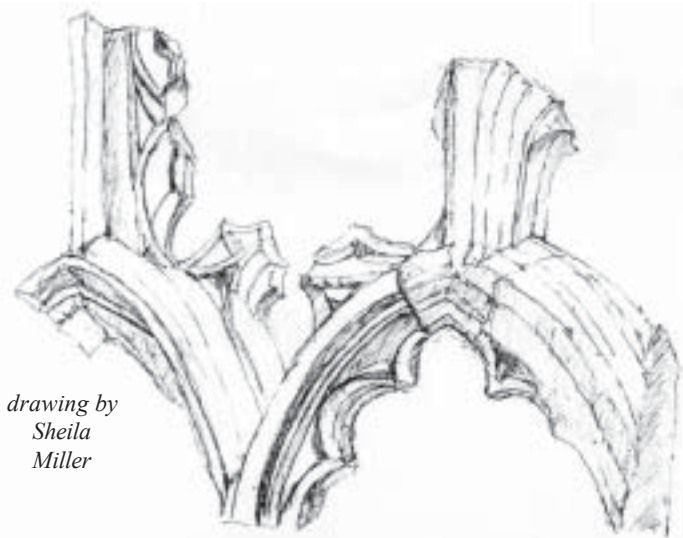
LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Friday 17 February. Seven present. Peter Hopkins in the chair.

◆ **Peter Hopkins** told us that the Society's website was very nearly ready, and he talked us through its layout. After explaining such (to me) unfamiliar terms as PDF (portable document format – I think) he invited us to discuss the content of some of the pages. At present, while still being developed, you will find us at dev.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk.

◆ **Sheila Miller** had visited, and been impressed by, the new medieval gallery at the Museum of London and showed us excellent drawings she had made of a fragmentary window arch from Merton priory on display.

◆ **Lionel Green** had been gratified to receive a very nice letter from Richard Milward about *A Priory Revealed*. Like Sheila Miller he was enthusiastic about the Museum of London's medieval gallery and we heard more about the arch fragment, the ceiling boss (much deeper than it looks in photographs) and the very damaged glass, all from the priory, on display there.



◆ Two group photos from the 1890s had been brought along by **Madeline Healey**. They have been owned by her family for many years, and she knew that they showed members of the Hatfeild family – Madeline's grandfather was the Hatfeilds' last bailiff at Morden Hall. When some Hatfeild descendants came to a National Trust event at Morden Hall Park last year they were able to identify some of the people in the photos for her.

◆ **Cyril Maidment**, always fascinated by maps, was looking forward to exploring the Wimbledon tithe map of 1850 on CD, which he had obtained from Surrey History Centre. He had also been superimposing Lionel Green's drawing of Merton priory on the site as shown on Google Earth.

Interesting photos he had brought along showed the Royal Standard, Singlegate School, Nos 4, 6 and 8 Merton High Street (between the Wandle and the bus garage), and this view that might, or might not, be the Mostyn Road/Green Lane corner before embanking to cross the railway line.

◆ **Judith Goodman** had received, on loan from Martin Riley of Suffolk, some extremely interesting material relating to the Leach/Bennett family of textile printers at Merton Abbey in the late 18th/early 19th centuries. Mr Riley is descended from the family, which was connected to the Smiths of Merton Abbey and to Elizabeth Cook, widow of the explorer. The papers consist mainly of letters from and to family and friends. Mr Riley would like to see the papers published, and thinks that the editing of them would be best done by this Society. An exciting prospect!

◆ **Peter Hopkins** had been looking again at the (1866 copy of) the 1805 map of the Merton Abbey estate, and reckoning that, even though there is no key, if the survey was done and written up in a logical way, it is possible to identify most of the buildings.

He reported that the Wimbledon Society had deposited their Merton Place documents at Surrey History Centre.

And lastly he recommended a new publication from Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society – Oliver Harris *The Archbishop's Town – the making of medieval Croydon*. It costs £3.75.

Judith Goodman

Friday 21 April. Nine present. Judith Goodman in the chair.

- ◆ **Sheila Harris** opened by telling us how her Cannon Hill Lane property is shaped on one side by the winding course of an old stream, now flowing underground. She and her late husband had informally parted with the oddly shaped far end of the tapering plot to a neighbour, and that arrangement has now been legally formalised. She had brought along the original plans dating to the early 1920s, when her house was built, a dossier of maps of various dates, and the slightly scandalous letters, connected with the first occupants, that she had found in her loft.
- ◆ **Graham Murray** introduced himself as a resident at Willow Cottages, off Goat (or Mill) Green, Mitcham. His interests lie in particular in the history of the Cottages and of the parchment works established nearby on the banks of the Wandle. He has already assembled a useful collection of maps and old postcards and photographs (several being of premises just outside the boundary of Mitcham, and therefore not in the local illustrations collection). Graham's research continues, and we hope to hear more from him.
- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** had prepared an article [see page 9] compiled from early 17th-century Assize Records, mentioning several members of the local gentry, and the fate of local felons brought before the courts.
- ◆ **Bill Rudd**'s chronicling of the changes in Morden's shopping centre continues, a task not made easier by the rapidity with which new businesses come and go. He is also tracing the appearance (and disappearance) of local post offices – a feature of our environment most of us once thought permanent [see page 12].
- ◆ **Cyril Maidment** reported on the new conservation plan being prepared by Merton Priory Trust. Inaccuracies in the draft text are still coming to notice (Lionel Green drew Cyril's attention to several errors in part 1 of the draft). Cyril's work on locating priory buildings has demonstrated that much of the area covered by the cloisters etc. is still open ground – could not this be marked by paving?

He also showed various plans and illustrations of Nelson's Merton Place cleverly superimposed on modern maps and pictures.

- ◆ **Madeline Healey**, on reading MHS's latest book on Mitcham, *Upper Green*, realised that No.3 York Place (at one time the Roaring Donkey beerhouse) had been occupied by her ancestors, including her great-grandmother, as a bookseller's and stationer's shop in the 1830s. Madeline's family connections are a never-ending source of local history titbits!
- ◆ **Lionel Green**'s Merton priory book and his work on the daughter houses of Merton has produced correspondence from Dr John Gosling of Salisbury. He was at one time a curate of Plympton St Mary, where he discovered the long-lost tomb of Bishop Warelwast – another eminent medieval cleric associated with Merton.



The Buck's Head and York Place – postcard c.1905

- ◆ The workshop concluded with **Judith Goodman** giving an entertaining account of her on-going work on the Bennett/Leach family papers. These included a graphic account of the Bennett household repelling burglars at their Merton premises in the 1820s by the effective use of a shotgun. Judith also showed photocopies of some delightful watercolour portraits of the family, and of a print of a young gentleman in the uniform of the Merton Light Infantry, a unit raised in the Napoleonic wars.

Eric Montague

As an experiment, the February workshop was held in the afternoon. We now plan to alternate evening and afternoon workshop sessions, to encourage more people to attend.

The next workshops will be on Friday 30 June at 2.30 and Friday 18 August at 7.30,
both at Wandle Industrial Museum.

All are welcome.

‘ST PANCRAS STATION, 1856-2007: A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY’

St Pancras station has been one of the landmarks of Euston Road for at least 140 years. Its life spans the times from the earliest railways to the present day, and it is likely to continue well into the future, as it has been chosen to be the London terminus of the Channel tunnel rail link.

The Society was very fortunate to have Roderick Shelton, an architect and historic buildings consultant, give an excellently illustrated talk on the history of the station at our March meeting. He is particularly well qualified to speak on the subject as he is consultant to London and Continental Railways, the consortium who are building the rail link and modifying St Pancras station to be the Eurostar terminus.

Kings Cross station was opened in 1851 by the Great Northern Railway, and for its first few years the Midland Railway ran its trains into London on the Great Northern Railway lines to Kings Cross or on the London and North Eastern Railway lines into Euston. Not happy with this situation, the Midland Railway looked for a site for its own station on the Euston Road. The station was to be bigger and more impressive than its competitors and to have a large hotel fronting on Euston Road.

The line to Kings Cross approaches the station from a tunnel under the Regent’s Canal and has quite a steep up gradient (1 in 100) to approach the station. The Midland Railway did not want this, and so decided to take the line over the canal and have a small (1 in 300) down gradient into their station. This meant that the platforms would be about 7m above Euston Road, and advantage was taken of this to support the whole station on cast-iron columns so as to form an undercroft. The train shed, booking hall and track layout were designed by William Henry Barlow, the Midland Railway chief engineer. The hotel was designed on a very lavish scale by Sir George Gilbert Scott.

Work commenced on the site in spring 1866 and the first ironwork was delivered a year later. As far as possible, materials used in the construction were local, or originated in the Midlands and were conveyed by the Midland Railway. The structural ‘engineering bricks’ were made on site from clay excavated when constructing the foundations, and the facing bricks used for the station and the hotel were brought by the railway from Bedford and the Midlands. The roof of the train shed was composed of glass supported by structural ironwork, and had great similarities to that of the Crystal Palace when constructed at Sydenham. The roof of the station was built as a single span to permit later flexibility in the layout of the tracks and platforms, although in its 140 years the layout has never been changed. At the time of its construction St Pancras station had the largest span ironwork roof in the world.

The speed of construction may be appreciated when it is realised that the last ironwork for the roof was delivered in July 1868, and the station was opened in September of the same year. Initially the parcels hall was used as a booking office until the booking hall was opened. There was a hydraulic goods wagon lift down to the undercroft which was used as a beer warehouse by the brewers of Burton-on-Trent.

Simultaneously with the construction of St Pancras station, Euston Road was dug up to construct the Metropolitan Railway (later to become part of the Underground system). The whole area was a gigantic construction project.

The Midland Grand Hotel was built at a somewhat slower pace. It was initially constructed up to the first-floor level, and building was stopped for a year or so. The hotel opened in the west wing only in 1873 and



Sir George Gilbert Scott's design sketch for the ground floor coffee lounge

the whole building was not completed until 1876. The materials used in the construction were expensive: fine-grained Mansfield red sandstone, Shap granite and white limestone. It is not surprising that the building went 'over budget', and Sir G G Scott was told to economise. It was designed to be seven storeys high, but was built to only five storeys to save money. Some statue niches were never filled, and some of the decorative stonework was not completed. In the end, Scott was sacked when he refused to economise further.

Both the station and hotel were very expensive buildings. A total of 60 million bricks were used in their construction. The hotel cost £437,000 and the station a similar sum. Today the cost would be many hundreds of millions of pounds.

The Midland Grand Hotel was probably the last big hotel in London to be built before the advent of 'modern' plumbing. There were very few toilets, and no baths. Each of the 400 bedrooms had a water jug and wash-bowl, and maids would empty the chamber pots and waste buckets from each bedroom down 'slop holes' in the corridor.

The Summerstown goods yard was laid out in the 1890s. In the first World War a lone pilot dropped five bombs on the station. One hit the tower and another landed on the cab road behind the station, and, in total, the raid caused more civilian casualties than any other single bombing raid during the whole of the war. The hotel was closed in 1935, as it was uneconomic to modernise it, and it was converted into offices for the railway company. It remained in office use for British Railways and its associated companies until closed as a fire hazard in 1985. It is now totally empty.

In the second World War the goods yard took a direct hit, and a bomb hit the station, went through the train deck and exploded in what is now the Thameslink tunnel beneath. The station was out of action for two weeks, and the glass roof was replaced by metal sheets. After the war boat trains to Tilbury started at St Pancras.

One of the factors which determined the choice of St Pancras as the Eurostar terminal is that it had spare capacity. The whole train-shed is now unused and the Midland Mainline services depart from temporary platforms at one side of the station, eventually transferring to the other side. Work is well underway to convert the station to the Eurostar terminal. The platforms will remain at the existing level, but the ticket hall, departure lounge and customs hall will all be in the undercroft, and connected to the platforms by escalator.

Mr Shelton concluded with a video of a virtual reality trip by a passenger entering the Eurostar station, passing through the booking hall and up the escalator to the train, and finally the driver's-eye view of the track as the train leaves the station. It was truly 21st-century technology supporting an excellent historical lecture.

Tony Scott

IN BRIEF

◆ **Merton's war memorial**, at the corner of Church Lane and Church Path, has recently been swathed in polythene and surrounded by scaffolding. The much-needed restoration and repairs are being undertaken by three young women, experts in this field. Work continues, at the time of writing, but it is looking much refreshed and its detail crisper.

◆ At Honeywood Heritage Centre, Carshalton, an exhibition **Carshalton Connections through Art** is on until 2 July. On show are works of art by Hassell, Yates, Tatton Winter and Frank Dickinson, among others, and writings by authors with Carshalton connections, such as 'Mark Rutherford' and Ruskin. Open 11-5 Wed-Fri and 10-5 Sat, Sun and Bank Holiday Mon. Tel: 020 8770 4297

◆ The Museum of London will be marking National Archaeology Week 15-23 July with many events on the theme of **The Archaeology of Tudor Life and Death**. Telephone 0870 444 3850 for information/booking.

◆ Wandsworth Museum is celebrating Tooting Bec Lido and the South London Swimming Group with an exhibition called **The Big Blue** till 16 July. Tel: 020 8871 7074. Website: www.wandsworth.gov.uk/museum

◆ The annual **Wandle Valley Festival** takes place on Sunday 18 June. In our area there will be a *Discovering Archaeology* exhibition in the Chapter House, together with 'digs' for children and demonstrations of hand-block fabric printing (10am-5pm); pottery making at the Wheelhouse (11am-4pm); family events elsewhere at Merton Abbey Mills; a *Merton Priory* extended exhibit at Wandle Industrial Museum (12-4pm); plus activities at Deen City Farm and Morden Hall Snuff Mill. Leaflets are available at local libraries, giving information of these and other activities along the whole length of the river.



‘LONDON PLEASURE GARDENS OF THE 18TH CENTURY’

As our Chairman said, this lecture was ‘a complete experience’. We were treated to delightful music as well as slides, when Michael Symes told us about the pleasure gardens of London in the 18th century.

Most of such gardens were in London, but some were in other places such as Bath, Birmingham and Manchester.

Spring Gardens was the earliest, going back to the reign of Charles II. These gardens were an important feature of leisure in social and garden history – ‘country in the town’. A place where men were able to accompany women in a ‘respectable’ environment, and they were also a reaction against Puritanism – a place for taking a stroll, for listening to music and for enjoying other entertainments, for assignations – and to see and be seen. Light refreshments were available, and the entertainments would include balls, supper parties, exhibitions and paintings on transparent sheets. Later, fairground attractions were added – these days such places could be compared with Regents Park or the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen.

The gardens were private enterprises, as opposed to royal parks, with a commercial purpose, and entrance fees were charged, often one shilling (5p). A cross-section of society attended. Usually they operated about three nights a week from May to September, when the weather was most suitable – generally speaking, it was not very warm in the 18th century.

Licences were required by law for music and dancing in 1752, and this caused some changes. The gardens were mostly closed down by the middle of the 19th century.

There were four main gardens in London – Cupers, Ranelagh, Marylebone and Vauxhall.

Cupers Gardens

These were opened in 1691, south of where Waterloo Bridge now stands, and the approach was by water. The name was often corrupted to ‘Cupid’s Gardens’. Again admission was one shilling – ‘no servants admitted’. On the whole it had a pretty unsavoury reputation, and watchmen had to be employed, especially later. In 1752 a licence was refused. It was connected with the Feathers public house on the riverbank, and run at first by Ephraim Evans. When he died his widow took over from 1741 to 1759. The firework displays were particularly spectacular. After the licence was refused Mrs Evans ran a tea garden in connection with the pub, and by 1759 the whole place was derelict.



View in Cuper’s Gardens, Lambeth – from W S Scott Bygone Pleasures of London (1948)

Marylebone

These gardens were south of where Regents Park would be later. It was a dangerous ‘out of town’ area, and armed patrols were necessary. From 1737 to 1776 John Trusler was in charge, and these gardens were a rather grander option. There were long walks lined with trees, and on these hung oil lamps for illumination. There was a bandstand, and an organ in the great room. Serious concerts were held here. The famous Dr Arne composed many songs, and conducted the orchestra, often playing music by Handel.

A ticket admitting two cost half a guinea (52.5p) Trusler’s daughter apparently made delicious cheesecakes and fruit tarts. For many years Torr  prepared spectacular firework displays.

There was a decline in popularity, and the gardens finally closed in 1777/8 and the site passed into the hands of the builders.

Ranelagh (then pronounced ‘Runnelow’)

These gardens were situated on the site now occupied by the Chelsea Flower Show. They opened in 1742. There was a huge Rotunda 150ft (46m) in diameter, with a fireplace. The admission was 2s 6d (12.5p). Refreshments

were available, and there were walks among the trees, a flower garden and a canal. It was 'classier' than other gardens and became fashionable for society people, who walked round and round inside the Rotunda. There were masquerades, concerts and vocal music, including the very popular song 'The Lass with the Delicate Air'.

Ranelagh finally closed in 1803, and shortly afterwards the buildings were demolished. The much admired organ went to Tetbury church in Gloucestershire.

Vauxhall

This, the most famous of them all, was situated north-west of the future site of the Oval. In the 1660s it was known as Spring Gardens, and the energetic Jonathan Tyers came on the scene in 1728 and reconstructed the whole 12-acre (5ha) site. There were trees with lamps along the walks, arcaded supper boxes, a small Rotunda, an orchestra (bandstand), a 'Turkish tent' and statues. Paintings in the boxes were by Francis Hayman and depicted scenes of sports, often with danger as a theme. There were tables round the orchestra, and food was served, including ham shaved so thin it was said that you could read a newspaper through it.

Admission was one shilling (5p), and a wide variety of people came – sometimes 10,000 could be present. It became difficult to keep undesirables out.

Vocal music was added to the attractions in 1745. Tenors such as Lowe, Arne and Incedon sang mostly sentimental ballads. James Hook was the organist for 45 years. One of the most famous songs was 'Sweet Lass of Richmond Hill'.

Things became more theatrical as time went on. The cascade shown at 9pm proved most popular. A curtain was drawn back to reveal a landscape with a miller's house and waterfall, with concealed lights. Flowing water with a turning wheel was seen, with foam at the bottom. The effect was created with tin.

Tyers died in 1767. He had amassed a large fortune and owned the Denbies estate in Surrey, where he laid out a garden with a temple of Death – there may have been an echo here of the themes of the Hayman paintings. As the years went on people and times changed. Vauxhall gardens became very run down and finally closed in 1859.

Altogether this was a fascinating talk and brought to life vividly the atmosphere of the recreation and entertainments so popular with all classes of society in the 18th century.

Lorna Cowell

SIR FRANK BRANGWYN RA (1857-1956)

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Frank Brangwyn. The naming of a new road, off Phipps Bridge Road, not so long ago, as Brangwyn Crescent, commemorates this artist. His reputation slumped after his death, as so often happens, but is rising again today.

Brangwyn's parentage was three-quarters Welsh, but the name is uncommon even in Wales. He was born in 1867 in Bruges, where his architect father had moved for financial reasons. However he grew up in this country, and, at the early age of 15 he was introduced by A H Mackmurdo, founder of the Century Guild, to William Morris, who took him on as an apprentice in his shop in Oxford Street. For two years he worked there, mainly transferring Morris's embroidery designs to fabric, to be sold as 'kits', and enlarging designs for wallpaper. This was a good discipline, but frustrating, and Brangwyn left, for the precarious life of an artist. Nevertheless Morris would always find some work for him to do when money was especially tight, and Brangwyn respected Morris's ideas and example for the rest of his life.

Brangwyn's talent and determination began to be recognised. It was primarily as a creator of large, colourful mural paintings in a very individual style that he became known. The Skinners' Company has a set of 15 of these around the walls of their Hall. Leeds City Art Gallery has a good collection, and a set intended for the House of Lords is in Swansea. Many provincial galleries have examples, and the William Morris Gallery at Walthamstow has a large collection of smaller works, donated by the artist.

It has been said that Brangwyn designed a few stained-glass windows for Morris & Co, but I can find no evidence for this, though two windows by him are listed in June Osborne *Stained Glass in England* Sutton Publishing, Stroud (1997).

Brangwyn was made RA in 1919 and was knighted in 1941 (neither honour would have tempted Morris!). He has always been respected on the Continent, and both Bruges and Orange have a museum devoted to his work. For many years he had a studio at Ditchling, Sussex, where there was an artists' colony, and before the second World War he moved there permanently.

Later this summer there is to be an exhibition devoted to his work at the William Morris Gallery.

JG

TONY SCOTT describes recent work at

THREE KINGS POND

Members may have noticed that during late February/early March the pond was drained and cleaned, by contractors working for Merton Council, and has also been made smaller. There were environmental reasons for this work.

The pond is a natural feature, and was noted on William Marr's map of 1695. At that time it was known as 'Heatherderry' and it clearly took its current name from the Three Kings public house (recently closed), which is known to have been in existence in 1823. The pond is fed and drained by the 'Western Ditch', one of the three main drainage ditches of old Mitcham. Up to perhaps as late as the mid-20th century, the Western Ditch was visible running alongside Commonsides East, possibly starting as an overflow from Watney's pond. Upon leaving the Three Kings Pond the Western Ditch ran across the Croydon road (Commonsides West) and fed three small ornamental ponds in the grounds of The Firs (known in Victorian times as Elmwood), which was a large house situated where the middle of Langdale Avenue is today. The Western Ditch then crossed London Road, very approximately following the present-day Raleigh Gardens, to make its way beside Western Road to join the Pickle Ditch and subsequently the Wandle at Merton Abbey.

Probably in the 1930s the Three Kings Pond was given a reinforced concrete bottom and vertical concrete sides, so that the water depth is 2-3ft (60-90cm). Even the island has vertical concrete sides. A stranger reading this description might be forgiven for thinking that the pond was devoid of wildlife, but this was not so. In more recent years gulls, mallard ducks, Canada geese and a pair of swans could often be seen on the water at the same time. Usually the swans departed at dusk, probably for a peaceful night on the Wandle, having had all the bread they could obtain from local children and their parents. Some years, however, the swans nested and bred on the island, and ducks bred there regularly. There must have been some useful-sized fish in the pond, for it was wonderful to see a heron perched on the 'No Fishing' sign in the pond, looking for its next meal.

The work which has recently been done is to make the pond more 'environmentally friendly'. Where the pond edge does not butt onto a road, the bank has been built out at a lower level, using wire baskets of coarse stones, and then covered in earth, and a reed and marsh grass 'turf' has been laid. This work has also been done around part of the island. The step up from the water for aquatic birds has been reduced from 18in (45cm) to 6in (15cm) or less, making it more user-friendly for chicks. The reeds *may* be a deterrent to Canada geese, which can tend to take over a stretch of water and crowd out other birds. Canada geese do not feed on the water, unlike ducks and swans, but instead graze on bankside grass, which is why they frequently held up the traffic in Commonsides East to get to the playing fields of the Three Kings Piece. As I write this in March, the pond is very slowly being filled by water from the Western Ditch, and I hope the pond will eventually be restocked with fish.



Photographed February 2006 by Ray Ninnis for our Photographic Record Project

Incidentally, as part of the associated work, the previously piped Western Ditch on Three Kings Piece near to the Beehive bridge has been exposed as an open ditch again, so as to improve drainage of the area.

THE ANNUAL LUNCH

On Saturday 4 March a good gathering of members celebrated 55 years of our Society's existence over a cheerful and chatty lunch. While several people attended who said they would not have come out in the evening for a dinner, others, we know, were missing because they are busy during the day. So we plan to alternate lunches with dinners for this annual occasion in the future.

JG

PETER HOPKINS has been reading about **LOCAL CASES AT THE SURREY ASSIZES DURING THE REIGN OF JAMES I (1603-1625)**

I recently purchased two second-hand volumes from the series *Calendar of Assize Records – Home Circuit Indictments Elizabeth I and James I*, edited by J S Cockburn. One volume is *Surrey Indictments James I* (1982), the other the *Introduction* (1986).

Assizes were the principal criminal courts from the early 14th century until their abolition in 1971. They also exercised a civil jurisdiction, and discharged important administrative, supervisory and political functions. The country was divided into six Circuits, and Surrey was part of the Home Circuit, which also included Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent and Sussex. Two assize judges, together with a small clerical staff, rode each circuit for a period of 17 days, which allowed just three days for Surrey. Assizes were held twice a year, during the Lent Vacation (February/March), at Southwark, and during the Long Vacation (July/August), usually at Croydon.

Once the date for each assize had been set, the sheriff had the responsibility of informing the county officers – justices of the peace, coroners and bailiffs of hundreds and liberties; of summoning jurors, for both the grand jury and trial juries; and of course for ensuring that the defendants, whether in prison or on bail, were produced.

Once an arrest had been made – either by the victim, or by the local community raised by the hue and cry, or by the local constables – the accused was brought before a local JP. He would examine the suspect and prepare a written examination to be used at the assize. He also took written testimony from those who had brought the suspect to him. Even if the examining magistrate was convinced of the suspect's innocence, he had no power to discharge the prisoner. He either had to have the suspect committed to gaol or release him or her on bail, though bail could only be granted by two or more justices sitting together. He also had the duty to bind over to give evidence against the accused anyone claiming familiarity with the circumstances of the offence. Although the examining magistrate was expected to attend the assize, he was not responsible for conducting the prosecution.

Jurors were selected from the freeholders of the county with properties valued at 40 shillings or more, later raised to 80 shillings (although these conditions were not always adhered to), and who were considered 'good and lawful men'. The majority only served once, and few were expected to serve more than three times. **Henry Carpenter** of West Barnes, Merton, was selected as a trial juror in 1613, but was unable to serve owing to illness – he died later that year. **John Hedge** of Mitcham served once as a trial juror, and **George Ethersolle**, also of Mitcham, served twice in the same capacity. However, shortage of suitable men meant that some served considerably more often than this – Henry Carpenter's elder brother, **Gregory**, twice served as a trial juror and eight times as a grand juror. **Henry Smith** of Morden served seven times as a trial juror and **Robert Hewett** of Mitcham a total of 13 times as a trial juror. Professor Cockburn suggests that, although frequent jury service might be due to public-spirit or to shrieval malpractice, there is a strong possibility that it might have been a result of deputising for others, perhaps for money – a 'juryman for hire' service!

The grand jury was a forerunner of the Crown Prosecution Service, determining whether the Crown had a sufficient case to justify a trial. It also had powers to initiate proceedings, presenting offences known to jurors personally or brought to their attention by the constables. These were mostly routine matters, such as repair of roads and bridges, disorderly and unlicensed alehouses, drunkenness and other local nuisances.

The trial jury had the task of listening to the evidence and delivering their verdict. But they usually had between six and eight cases to hear at one go, and only after that did they deliver their verdicts on each case! Unless they had prodigious memories they would have been very dependent on the 'guidance' given by the judge. Some did go against the judge's 'advice' and were promptly punished severely. Not surprisingly, these were rare events!

Over the whole period of the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I there was a total of 2795 people arraigned in Surrey – 2486 men and 386 women. Of these 60% of the men were convicted and 42% of the women. The jury did have the power to bring in a partial verdict – for example reducing an offence from grand larceny to petty larceny.

However, not all those convicted were hanged. Men who could read (or at least could recite Psalm 51:1) could claim benefit of clergy, and thereby have their sentence reduced to one year's confinement in the house of correction. This could, in principle, only be claimed once, so men were branded on their left thumb to alert future courts to produce the previous record, if they could. 52% of male convicts in Surrey successfully claimed this benefit over the two reigns. Women could not claim benefit of clergy at this time, but they could claim pregnancy. This was confirmed or otherwise by a jury of matrons, though it would appear that successful claimants (55% of female convicts in Surrey) were not always pregnant at the time of their conviction. Officially, pregnancy only delayed execution, and some women were hanged after giving birth, and others died in gaol, but most were released, often having served a discretionary gaol term of up to seven years.

39% of male convicts and 23% of female convicts in Surrey were condemned to be hanged, though even these might be reprieved and pardoned – the men, perhaps, to be conscripted into the army. Justices could recommend a royal pardon, particularly in cases of accidental homicide, in which case the convict would remain in gaol until the next ‘circuit’ pardon was issued for the release of all reprieved felons in the gaols of that circuit, which took place at intervals of three to five years. General pardons were not granted in cases of murder, highway robbery, rape, house breaking or horse stealing. Individuals might be pardoned on grounds of pregnancy, contrition, confession, turning king’s evidence, age (juveniles were often reprieved), or because the conviction was based on weak evidence.

Indictments of inhabitants of Merton, Mitcham and Morden

(numbers in brackets are those that the editor has given to identify each entry)

Turning to local cases, grand larceny was the most frequent indictment, especially the stealing of livestock:-

- ◆ In March 1610 **John Turnor** of Mitcham, labourer, was found not guilty of stealing an iron-grey gelding (valued at £4) from **Edward Jones** at Mitcham. (333)
- ◆ In March 1613 **Thomas Richards** of Mitcham, labourer, was indicted for grand larceny. On 31 Dec. 1612 at Mitcham he stole a bay horse (10s.) from an unknown man. He died in gaol before the case was heard. (573)
- ◆ In March 1614 **Isaac Homes** of Mitcham, labourer, was found guilty of stealing 4 sheep (13s. 4d.) from **Robert Hewett** at Mitcham, and was allowed benefit of clergy. (Robert Hewett was not a juror at this trial!) (645)
- ◆ At the same assize **John Broome** of Merton was condemned to be hanged for stealing a bright-bay gelding (£4) from **William Wollascott** and a brown-bay gelding from **Edmund Wollascott** in the previous August. (653)
- ◆ In February 1618 **Robert Peade** and **Edward Hawkins**, labourers of Merton, were indicted for grand larceny. On 20 Dec. 1617 at Merton they stole 2 black cows (£6) from **Peter Snell**. Peade was found guilty but allowed benefit of clergy. Hawkins had died in gaol. (909)
- ◆ In March 1619 **Robert Levett** of Abinger, and **Gilbert Charleton** of Shere, husbandmen, were indicted for grand larceny. On 26 Sept. 1618 at Mitcham they stole 13 sheep (£3 18s.) from **William Gilgrest**. Levett was found not guilty. Charleton was found guilty, but was allowed clergy. One wonders why they were so far from home. (1017)
- ◆ In March 1621 **William Cheyney** of Mitcham, labourer, was found guilty of stealing 14 sheep (£4 13s. 4d.) from **George Godman** at Mitcham. (1226) He was allowed benefit of clergy even though he had just been convicted of a similar offence at Croydon! (1213)
- ◆ In June 1621 **Henry White** of Mitcham, labourer, was found guilty of stealing a brown gelding (£1) from **Richard Carter** at Mitcham. On 15 Apr. 1621 before Francis Mingay, JP, **Walter Warrington**, porter, and **Nicholas Forman**, glover, of St Saviour, Southwark, entered recognizances to give evidence against White, and on 18 Apr. before Sir Edmund Bowyer, JP, **Richard Carter** of Mitcham, miller, entered a recognizance for the same purpose. White was condemned to be hanged. (1258)
- ◆ In July 1623 **Robert Stevens** of Morden, labourer, was found not guilty of stealing a brown cow (£2) and a red calf (5s.) from **Edward Stile** at Morden. (1488)
- ◆ In March 1624 **Francis Chitty** of Mitcham, labourer, was indicted for grand larceny. On 1 July 1623 he stole 19 yards of cloth (10s.) from **Thomas Rodes** and 25 yds of cloth (£1) from **Edward Honeywood**. He had died before the assize took place, but apparently not in gaol. (1599)
- ◆ In March 1625 **Robert Ofeild** of Mitcham, labourer, was indicted for grand larceny. On 29 Sept. 1623 at Mitcham he stole a black cow (£2) from **Evan Lloyd**. He was found guilty, but was pardoned by general pardon. (1700)

There were also two cases of burglary, a crime for which there could be no claim to benefit of clergy:-

- ◆ In March 1622 **William Waterton** of Mitcham, labourer, was indicted for burglary. On 22 Sept. 1621 he burgled the house of **Judith Barnham**, widow, at Mitcham and stole 2 cloaks (£2), 2 pairs of hose (£1), a hat (5s.), a gold half-unit (11s.) and 12s. in money belonging to **Robert Armstrong** and a doublet (11d.) belonging to **Robert Newington**. On 2 Jan. 1622 before Sir John Leigh, JP, **Robert Newington** of Mitcham, yeoman, entered a recognizance to give evidence against Waterton, and on 3 Jan. before Sir Nicholas Throgmorton and Sir John Leigh, JPs, **William Baseley** and **Richard Crosley**, husbandmen of Mitcham, entered recognizances for his appearance. Waterton was found not guilty. (1307)
- ◆ In July 1623 **Robert Cotes** of Mitcham, labourer, was indicted for burglary. On 16 Mar. 1623 he burgled the house of **Nicholas Tyler** at Buckland and stole a flitch of bacon (10s.), a sack (1s.), a pair of shoes (1s.), a pair of stockings (1s.), a knife (2d.), an ash staff (1d.), 1 lb of raisins (2d.), 1 lb. of currants (2d.) and 1 lb. of sugar (2d.). He was found guilty and condemned to be hanged. (1485)

This offence seems minor, but Cotes had previously been accused of highway robbery and murder, and had escaped conviction, despite three indictments and one guilty verdict as follows:-

- ◆ In July 1618 **Robert Coates** of Buckland, husbandman, had been indicted for murder. By an inquisition held at Reigate, 23 June 1618, before Thomas Mun, coroner, on the body of **William Dairye**, a jury found that on 21 June at Reigate, Coates cut Dairye's throat with a knife (2*d.*). However the jury found that he was not guilty, naming 'John Astrawe' as the killer. (A jury was not allowed to return a verdict of murder by persons unknown, but could name a fictitious killer, such as 'John Astrawe'). (967)
- ◆ In March 1619 a new indictment was brought against **Robert Coates** of Reigate, husbandman. This time he was indicted for highway robbery. On 21 June (1618) he assaulted **William Darey** in the highway at Reigate and stole from him £2 in money. He was found guilty, but remanded without sentence because the court wished to take advice on the indictment. (1007) At the next assizes the indictment was set aside because it did not clearly show the year in which the offence was committed, and so his conviction was quashed. (1055)
- ◆ In June 1619, the assize at which his previous conviction was quashed, he was indicted again for the same offence. On 21 June 1618 he assaulted **William Darye** in the highway at Reigate and stole from him £2 in money. On 17 June 1619 before Bostock Fuller, JP, **Nicholas Tyler**, yeoman, **Robert Bell**, husbandman, and **Richard Smith**, husbandman, of Buckland, entered recognizances to give evidence against Coates; On 20 June, **Richard Felton** of Betchworth, tailor, entered a recognizance for the same purpose; on 21 June, **Matthew Darye** of Leigh, husbandman, **Thomas Alchin** of Betchworth, gent., **John Brake** of Reigate, surgeon, and **Sarah Westbrooke** of Betchworth, spinster, entered recognizances for the same purpose; and on 22 June, **Thomas Woodman** of Reigate, husbandman, and **Agnes Westbrooke** of Betchworth, spinster, entered recognizances for the same purpose. But Coates was found not guilty. (1056)

Two other indictments for killing involved Mitcham residents:

- ◆ In July 1614 **Matthew Hawkesworth** of Mitcham, yeoman, was indicted for felonious killing. On 13 Sept. 1611 at Mitcham he stabbed **John Selman** in the head with a dagger (1*s.*) and killed him. He was found guilty, but allowed clergy. (701)
- ◆ In March 1622 **Anne Hore** of Mitcham, spinster, was indicted for infanticide. On 5 Jan. 1622 at Mitcham she gave birth to a female child which she immediately strangled. On 16 Jan. 1622 before Sir John Leigh, JP, **Margaret Smith**, widow, **Anne Smith**, widow, **Richard Tomson**, **Elizabeth Tomson**, his wife, and **John Glover**, labourer, of Mitcham, entered recognizances to give evidence against Hore. She was found not guilty. (1315)

Another case is referred to three times in the records among a list of discharged recognizances in March 1622. Bail had been granted to the two defendants but no further details are given (1344):

- ◆ **John Mathewes** of St Gregory by St Paul, London, shoemaker, **George Monnrux** of St Michael, London, tailor, and **William Stevens** of Morden, husbandman, to give evidence against **Hester Walducke** and **Lawrence Dodd**. Taken 20-22 Jan. 1622 by Sir John Leigh, JP.
- ◆ **Nicholas Mathewes** and **Humphrey Milles**, husbandmen of Morden, for the appearance of **Lawrence Dodd** of Morden, husbandman. Taken 22 Jan. 1622 by Sir Nicholas Throgmorton and Sir John Leigh, JPs.
- ◆ **Fulk Hughes**, glover, and **Abraham Horsely**, tallow chandler, of St George, Southwark, for the appearance of **Hester Walducke** of Morden, spinster. Taken 1 Feb. 1622 by Sir Edmund Bowyer and Sir John Leigh, JPs.

One case of recusancy involved residents of Merton:

- ◆ In July 1605 **Dorothy Crosse**, wife of **Sir Robert Crosse**, **Mary White**, spinster, and **John Smythson**, yeoman, of Merton, were among several people indicted for recusancy. They were proclaimed according to statute. (89) (Dorothy Crosse, of Merton Abbey, may have been the widow of **Sir Gregory Lovell**).

Grand Jury Presentments included an alehouse in Mitcham and road repairs in Merton:

- ◆ In March 1614 the grand jury presented that "**Evan Fludd** of Mitcham, victualler, keeps several masterless men in his house". (691) and a writ was issued in July 1614 for the production of Evan Fludd of Mitcham, victualler, at the next Surrey assizes, held in March 1615. (757)
- ◆ In March 1620 **Thomas Locke, gent**, **Mr Boroll**, **Thomas Hayle, gent**, **Michael Weston, gent**, **Mr Norton**, and **Mr Hunte**, all of Merton, and **Mr Fenton** and **Mr Bland**, of Wimbledon, were presented for defaulting on their obligation to provide carts for highway repairs. (1135)
- ◆ In July 1622 the grand jury presented that "the highways in Merton are greatly decayed and ought to be repaired by the parish". (1393)
- ◆ In March 1623 this was followed by an indictment of the inhabitants of Merton for not repairing the highways there. (1470)
- ◆ Writs were issued for the production of the inhabitants of Merton at the next Surrey assizes in July 1623 (1608) and in March 1624. (1672)

So, although Mitcham had the most indictments for felonies, Merton's inhabitants *en masse* found themselves on the wrong side of the law!

BILL RUDD traces the story of

MORDEN'S POST OFFICE

Now that the Morden London Road post office is tucked away at the back of a shop, at 8 Morden Court Parade I've been looking at my collection of directories to see when Morden got its first post office.

It was in 1891, and it was in Central Road. According to the 1891 census the P.O. clerk was Fanny Adam, the daughter of Thomas Wilkie Adam, baker, and his wife Charity, except that by then her father was a widower. The family, including a young son, Thomas Wilkie Jnr, were already living in Central Road in 1881. The four cottages next to the bakery were built in 1875. The post office was on the opposite side of the road, next to the Plough beer house. Both were swept away in the development of 1932/3.

The next post office was in London Road, by 1903, in one of the new-built Crown shops near the old Crown inn, which had been built in 1840 after the disastrous and fatal fire the year before. The inn had a front balcony and could have been an exchange point for mail coaches on the London-Epsom turnpike.

Like the one in Central Road this post office was described as a "town sub-post; M.O., S.B., and Annuity & Insurance Office". Charles Stent, sub-postmaster, was a baker. Letters were still arriving through Mitcham.

The Crown shops were already there in 1890, well placed for the housing development that took place at the end of the century. It is unclear which of the three shops the post office was – probably the middle one. The matter was solved with the arrival of the next occupant, Ernest Chennell and family, who we know were at No.2, though Charles Stent was still around. Chennell was a grocer in addition to being sub-postmaster. He was the entrepreneur who produced postcards of the local area, including two views of the shops, taken from opposite directions. One also includes a bakery, a house called Rosaries, and the village club and reading-room. The shops stood tall, with their upper floor front balcony and line of roof gables.

Ernest Chennell gave up the post office after 1927, but the family remained in residence. His wife Elizabeth Hannah died on 17 November 1939 aged 80. Ernest died on 20 February 1949 aged 83. His daughter Elsie Marion, living at Hall Cottage, Central Road, died on 12 May 1983 aged 90, leaving Morden a pictorial legacy.

The next post office was across Crown Road at 1 Mellish's Terrace, a corner shop integral with the house, in London Road, in 1928. The terrace was part of the end-of-the-century development. The first occupier was William Cockbill, shopkeeper, in 1903. Two other shopkeepers followed, until George A Taylor in 1925, who took up the post office from Mr Chennell.

The opening of the City and South London Railway terminus on Saturday 13 September 1926 (Ernest Chennell was a guest) brought about the long line of shops on that side of London Road, and a complete renumbering, in due course. The two sub-post offices remained where they were, in Central Road and London Road.

By 1934 the shops on the north or even-number side were complete from 2 to 86. There was a new Crown Inn. The Crown shops were numbered 96, 98, 100, and the corner shop was No.120. On the south or odd-number side shops stretched from No.9 to No.45. By 1936 the line was complete from No.1 to No.63. Shops were already in evidence in Aberconway Road and Cinema Parade. Morden cinema was open. The first shop was open beyond the bridge over the Underground railway, No.81, Morden Cycle Stores. And 89A, a flat, with 89B, business premises in a tiny room over the covered way to what later became York Close. The flat was entered by a side door to No.89, which was in fact the new crown post office. These last figures come from the electoral register for 1936, with the most important qualifying date, 30 June.

The shop numbers on the odd side of Abbotsbury Road ran from 1 to 23. Then a large gap before shops Nos 33 and 35. The reason for this gap is not known. The gap was eventually part filled with shops Nos 29 and 31 complete, like most of the others, with upper flats entered by flights of stairs at the back. No.27 appears in the electoral register effective dates 16 February 1959 to 15 February 1960. The all-important qualifying date was 10 October 1958. This was when the crown post office opened at No.25. It took up two shop fronts, leaving access to Flat 27 on the front right-hand side. The reason is clear. The large space at the back of the post office allowed vans carrying mail and security vehicles carrying money a safe place that could be secured.

Crown Post Office 25 Abbotsbury Road (1992) WJR



The war had stopped development on the odd side of London Road, which reached No.103. Alongside was an un-numbered building which (from my remembrance as a postman of delivering letters there in 1952) was occupied by Stanton Instruments. The line was eventually finished, rather different architecturally, to No.117.

The whole of the shopping centre, which included Morden Court Parade and Crown Lane, had survived the war and the lingering elements of rationing. It recovered to become a thriving commercial community.

But then, slowly at first, but in increasing numbers, familiar shops began to close down. The end of leases may have been a contributory factor. Whatever it was, a steady decline set in. The three-storey Co-op store was demolished and replaced with an office block and a ground-floor supermarket. Cafés, restaurants and takeaways of every hue, charity shops and increasing numbers of house agents took over. The cinema had disappeared. Morden acquired two more public houses, and an amusement arcade. Attempts at recovery failed. Shops continue to change management with monotonous regularity.

The shock came when it was announced that the post office was to close. People were surprised to find the supermarket was setting up a site in the store. Protests followed and a petition circulated, but to no avail. By November 1992 the local newspaper announced 'Your New Post Office'. The advantage given was the longer opening hours.

That should have been the end of it. After all other stores had been doing the same thing. We now know it was doomed to failure. In 2005 the supermarket changed hands, but plans to close the post office were already in process. The race was on to find alternative premises. In July T & T Food & Wine at 8 Morden Court Parade took it over. Since then they have knocked down the dividing wall with No.7 (a brief charity shop) and doubled their size, and appear to be doing well. Wish them luck.

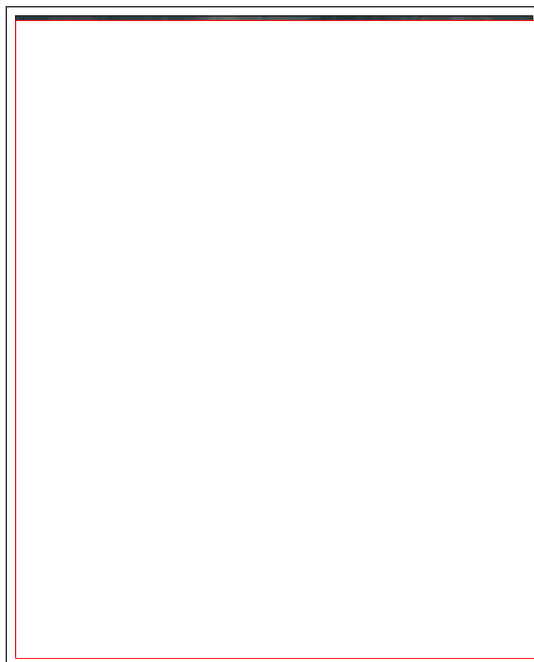
JOHN DONNE – of Mitcham

The news that the National Heritage Memorial Fund has pledged £750,000 towards the purchase (for £1.4m) by the National Portrait Gallery of a highly important portrait of John Donne is very welcome. At the time of writing there is less than a tenth of the price still to find. The portrait was on display in the exhibition *Searching for Shakespeare* which closed on 29 May.

Donne (1572-1631), poet, thinker, courtier, prose writer and cleric, is arguably the most significant person, certainly the greatest writer, to have lived in Mitcham. There are 97 quotations from him in my edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*. "Batter my heart, three person'd God"; "Death be not proud"; "O my America! My new-found-land"; "No man is an *Island* ... therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; It tolls for *thee*". And many more.

Five years ago Eric Montague wrote an article for the *Bulletin* (No.138) about Donne and his six-year residence in Mitcham, from 1605 to 1611. Though the location of the cottage where he lived with his wife and children has never been established for certain, a drawing exists which shows the building which, at least in the mid-19th century, was believed to have been what Donne mournfully referred to as his "little thin house", his "hospital", "prison", or "dungeon". In fact, while resident at Mitcham, Donne managed to escape pretty often. He kept lodgings in London and maintained his membership of two clubs, which he frequently attended, and whose meetings were certainly convivial. Moreover his Mitcham years, though stressful, were intensely creative, and saw the production of some of his finest work.

It was his family, hard up and socially isolated, who had the more dreary time in the Mitcham years. Poor Ann bore 12 children in her short life. The last, stillborn, was buried with her in 1617. She was 33. R C Bald in his *John Donne: a Life* OUP (1970) tells us something of the four children born and baptised at Mitcham. They were Francis, baptised in January 1607, who lived less than seven years and was buried at St Clement Danes; Lucy, baptised in August 1608, who died suddenly at the age of 18 and was buried at Camberwell; Bridget, baptised in December 1609, who married Thomas Gardiner of Camberwell and bore at least one child; and Mary, baptised in January 1611, who died aged three, and was buried at St Clement Danes. **JG**



TONY SCOTT outlines the history of SS PETER & PAUL CATHOLIC CHURCH, MITCHAM

(Some of the material which follows was included in Tony Scott's article 'The effect of the Oxford Movement on Mitcham' which appeared in *Bulletin* No.152)

The Catholic church in Mitcham stands in Cranmer Road at its junction with Madeira Road and Cricket Green. It is virtually opposite the stone obelisk which commemorates the finding of water in 1822 at a time of severe drought. The present church was opened on 2 July 1889 amid great celebrations, but Catholicism had been re-established in Mitcham nearly 40 years before that.

The Simpson family

Mitcham had become a Mass centre as long ago as 1853, when William Simpson (Jun.) and his wife Winifred invited the chaplain of the Faithful Virgin Convent, Upper Norwood, which had been established some five years earlier, to ride over to their house each Sunday to celebrate Mass.¹ At that time they lived in one of the houses at the Cricket green, probably Elm Lodge.²

William Simpson was born in 1819, the eldest son of William and Emily Simpson. Before her marriage the previous year, his mother was Emily Cranmer, a member of the family who had been lords of the manor of Mitcham Canons since 1656. The role of lord of the manor fell to William (Sen.) upon the death of his brother-in-law in 1828, but even prior to that date, he and his wife Emily were resident at The Canons, and brought up their four children there.

The family were all members of the Church of England, but when William (Jun.), the eldest son, went off to Trinity College, Cambridge, he became interested in the Catholic faith and was received into the Church in 1843. At about this time he married Winifred, daughter of Sir Edward Mostyn of Talacre in Flintshire, North Wales. The next son, Richard, went to Oriel College, Oxford, graduated and became an ordained clergyman of the Church of England. He returned to Mitcham in 1844 at the age 24 to become the vicar of Mitcham, a post under the patronage of his parents. Probably as a result of the Oxford movement of Anglo-Catholicism, partly led by John Henry Newman, Richard resigned the living in 1846, and within a month was received into the Catholic Church together with his wife.

The youngest son Robert was born in 1825 and at the age of 17 went to St John's College, Oxford, where he too became influenced by the Oxford Movement and became a Catholic in 1845, subsequently being ordained a Catholic priest. The only daughter of William and Emily Simpson and the youngest of the family was also named Emily. She was received into the Catholic Church in 1848 at the age of 22, and four years later entered the Franciscan Convent at Taunton where she remained until her death in 1883.

The early days

From early in 1853 regular Sunday Mass was offered in the drawing room of William and Winifred's home, Elm Lodge. After a few years they moved to the Manor House, a substantial property on the east side of London Road in a location now occupied by the Justin Plaza office block. Mass was said in an outbuilding of their house, and this was probably also used as a schoolroom, for while at Elm Lodge Winifred Simpson had started a small school class and had obtained some equipment from the sisters at Norwood.³ The numbers at the 10am Mass on Sundays grew steadily, with the congregation coming from miles around, since the nearest adjacent missions were at Croydon, Norwood, Wandsworth and Surbiton.

By 1857 plans were advanced for the erection of a chapel⁴ on land given by William Simpson (Jun.) which he had acquired in 1840, possibly as a 21st-birthday present from his parents. During 1861-2 a small brick chapel and a wooden building to serve as a schoolroom¹ were erected on this land at a total cost⁵ of £409, which was paid by William Simpson (Jun.).⁶ The location was next to the Tate almshouses in Cricket Green, where the playground of SS Peter & Paul's Catholic Primary School is today. The first resident Catholic priest in Mitcham, from May 1862 to October 1863, was Fr Robert Simpson, youngest son of the lord of the manor, who, quite possibly, lived with his parents in The Canons.

The chapel and the wooden schoolroom continued in use for their respective functions for over 25 years even though the schoolroom had been built as a temporary structure. By 1883 the school had expanded to about 50 pupils, and it was realised by many people, not least H.M. Inspector of Schools, that the building was inadequate and in a state of disrepair. As a result, from February 1886 the schoolroom was transferred to the chapel during the week, with Mass still being held there on Sundays. Furniture had to be moved in and out as the occasion demanded. This arrangement was sanctioned by the Inspector for two years only, expiring in May 1888.

The new church

By this date it had already been decided by Fr Thomas Reville, the 'parish priest', to build a new and larger church, and permanently convert the existing chapel into a schoolroom. Early in 1887 he had written to William and Winifred Simpson, who had temporarily moved to Torquay, possibly on account of William's health, asking for their help in obtaining a site for a new church. Winifred initially offered the present site to the Diocese on a 99-year lease at a rent of £3 per annum, but later decided to give the site to the church. The surveyor of the site was Robert Masters Chart, a local man, who had just completed the design for the Vestry Hall. He wrote to the Catholic Bishop of Southwark John Butt⁷ in November 1887 offering his services as architect of the new church, but he was not chosen. Instead it seems that a Diocesan decision was taken to employ experienced church architect Frederick Arthur Walters of 4 Great Queen Street, Bloomsbury, who, the previous year, had designed the Catholic church in Wimbledon. Eventually a simplified design in soft yellow London stock bricks, with a hammer beam style roof covered in tiles was agreed and tenders for the work were invited.

The cheapest estimate, from Buckle & Wheeler of Abingdon, Berkshire, was chosen. This was for a total sum of £2199⁸, a small fraction of the £33,000 which the Sacred Heart church at Wimbledon cost. Later various fittings, such as altar, altar rail, benches and confessional were ordered.⁹ It is not known when the site was cleared of the small cottages and the foundations dug, but we may surmise it was September/October 1888. In October Mr C Temple Layton, a leading parishioner who lived at The Croft, Commonsides East, wrote to Bishop Butt offering to provide a belfry costing £52 10s 0d and a suitable set of three bells, in addition to his promised £500 donation towards the cost of the whole building work.¹⁰ After some correspondence this offer was accepted by the bishop.

On 2 July 1889 the church was formally opened by the Bishop of Southwark in the company of two canons and 12 priests. After the ceremony the bishop, clergy and visitors were entertained to luncheon by Mr and Mrs Temple Layton. During the afternoon and on the following day a fête and fair were held in the grounds adjoining The Croft.

The cost of the church and presbytery, about £2350, although initially paid by the diocese, was eventually all repaid by the parish. For many years summer fêtes and Christmas bazaars were held to pay off the debt. Slowly it reduced, with typically £50 being raised per event. An indication of the time required is the fact that the consecration of the church as a whole, which could not take place until it was free of debt, was not held until June 1951.



from the cover of the centenary booklet

Sadly, William Simpson, whose wife Winifred had given the land for the new church, never saw it completed, for he died in June 1888 at the age of 69. It is not recorded that Winifred donated towards the building costs, but it would seem out of character if she had not done so. Her son William Francis Joseph Simpson married Mary Herbert in January 1891 aged 28 and resided in Mitcham. He and his wife became great benefactors of the parish, and he was a manager of the school from November 1895 until September 1917. After the first World War he made an annual allowance of £50 to the priest towards the running expenses of the parish.¹¹ This donation was continued by his son Philip Witham Simpson after William died in 1932. The P W Simpson Trust was set up in 1961 to perpetuate this annual donation, and even though Philip Simpson died in 1964 the Trust currently gives £500 per annum to the parish. A tablet marking the connection of William and Mary Simpson with the parish, and their outstanding generosity, can be seen in the church porch.

Later additions

A few major alterations have taken place in the church over the last 100 years. As the population of Mitcham grew there was a need to enlarge the church, and in July 1938 a new sanctuary, lady chapel and confessional were built so as to enable the congregation to expand to fill the whole floor area of the original church. The gas lighting was replaced by electricity in 1933. As a direct result of the Second Vatican Council the altar was moved so that the priest could face the congregation, and the sanctuary remodelled in the late 1960s. An additional entrance at the front was constructed in the centenary year of 1989. It is interesting to contemplate what changes might be made in the next 100 years.

References – All items are in the R C Diocese of Southwark archives unless indicated otherwise.

1. Robert Simpson *A History of the Mitcham Mission* (c. August 1879)
2. Merton Local Studies Centre: Tom Francis Lecture Notes of Old Mitcham p.67
3. As recorded in 'The Mission of Mitcham – the first 40 years', written in 1951 by an unknown author; in SS Peter & Paul Catholic Primary School archives
4. Letter to Bishop Thomas Grant, dated 19 October 1857, signature missing
5. Letter to Bishop James Danell, dated 9 August 1879 from Rev Robert Simpson
6. Letter to Bishop Thomas Grant, dated 1 July 1862 from Rev Robert Simpson
7. Letter to Bishop John Butt, dated 24 November 1887 from R M Chart
8. Letter to Bishop John Butt, dated 18 June 1888 from F A Walters
9. Invoice to Bishop John Butt, dated 23 August from F A Walters
10. Various letters between Bishop John Butt and Mr C Temple Layton
11. Various Episcopal Visitation reports on Mitcham (1916-1923)

We should like the *Bulletin* regularly to publish studies of places of worship in our area. As the old parish churches have been well covered elsewhere, our emphasis ought to be on the newer Church of England churches, the Roman Catholic churches and the non-Conformist chapels (we have 'done' Morden's mosque). We are grateful to Tony Scott for this article, and readers will recall that a few years ago Ray Ninnis wrote a very fine account of the history and architecture of St Olave, Mitcham. If anyone feels inspired to write about their local church or chapel please get in touch with the editor.

A CHANCE TO VISIT BLENHEIM

For his WEA branch Ray Kilsby is arranging a coach trip on Sunday 3 September to Blenheim. He expects to have some vacancies to offer to MHS members. There would be a pick-up point in Morden. A visit to a bus museum, which also houses some Morris cars, is included. Cost £22.

PETER McGOW and the Wandle mills.

Peter McGow of Croydon has been for many years researching the Wandle mills in a systematic way, making extensive use, in particular, of insurance policies and bankruptcy notices, which, as source material, have been under-used in the past. He is always very generous with his information and has helped many local historians in the Wandle valley. Now he has deposited a copy of his unpublished *Notes on the Wandle Mills* with the Wandle Industrial Museum. He has also permitted the Museum to scan the notes and place them on their website – www.wandle.org – where they can be freely consulted. Copyright is shared between the author and the Museum. Contact the Museum if you wish to consult the printed copy of this wonderfully informative dossier.



Mitcham Bridge from Glover's Snuff Mill – print c.1800

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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