



VICE PRESIDENTS: Arthur Turner and Lionel Green

BULLETIN NO. 122

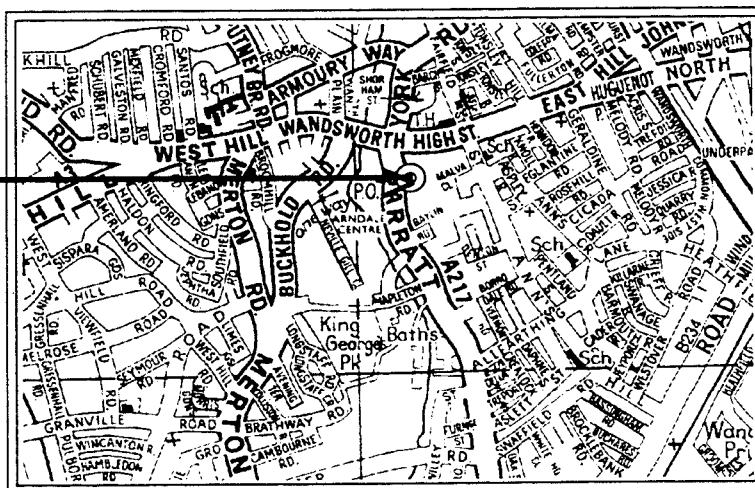
JUNE 1997

PROGRAMME JUNE - SEPTEMBER

Saturday 21st June - Visit to Wandsworth Museum. Meet at 2.15 pm outside the museum, 11 Garratt Lane SW18, for visit and walk led by Margaret Hunt of Wandsworth Historical Society.

Buses:

270 from Mitcham,
156 from Wimbledon.
The Museum is a few
yards south of the
High Street opposite
the Arndale Centre.



The museum, which occupies the Old Courthouse, houses permanent and temporary exhibitions relating to Wandsworth's history.

Thursday 10th July - Visit to the Houses of Parliament led by Dame Angela Rumbold MP (to be confirmed). Circumstances at the date of going to press make this event uncertain.

Saturday 23rd August at 2.30 pm - Visit to Steam Museum, Kew Bridge. Meet at museum.

At weekends some of the historic engines are 'steamed up', and there is always plenty to see at this much-praised museum. We need to know likely numbers ahead of time.

Nearest station Kew Bridge (from Clapham Junction). Admission £3.25 (£1.80 concessions)

Saturday 20th September at 2.15 pm - A Morden Walk, led by Bill Rudd. Meet outside St Lawrence Church, London Road.

Come and discover from our own 'Mr Morden' more about the church, the village, the suburb and the people.

Buses: 80, 93, 154, 293

CROYDON AIRPORT

On Saturday 22 February Doug Cluett came to The Canons Heritage Centre and gave us a talk on the history of Croydon Airport.

Unfortunately the time allowed for our meeting was not sufficient to view all the slides and cover the entire history of the site, and Doug ended his talk in 1939. Hopefully it will not be too long before he returns to complete his talk.

The area known as Croydon Airport had originally been the fields of Barn and Manor Farms, and had the world not been thrown into the turmoil of the 1914-18 war it might have remained so.

It was the need for an aerodrome close to London to combat the German bombing raids on London that led to the establishment of Croydon as a base for fighter aircraft. Once the bombing raids had been successfully dealt with Croydon became a training base for the British and Canadian Air Forces.

With the war over the site became an aircraft factory. The first passenger airliners were rebuilt from former bombers, and it was not until the 1930s that the first purpose-built passenger aircraft took to the skies.

In the 1920s it became London's first airport, with flights to a few select European destinations. These early airliners were small and had no air-conditioning, which meant that they had to fly fairly low and that the passengers had to wrap up well - or freeze.

The pilots were very hardy persons, and they all piloted these craft from open cockpits. They navigated around by following the roads and railways, and I guess that once they met the English Channel they just pointed south and hoped the wind did not blow them too far off course.

By the 1930s there was a quite substantial terminal building and a hotel close by, both of which survive today.

The design of the aircraft changed very little up till the outbreak of World War Two. All were biplanes, and looked quite antiquated when compared with the Dakotas and Constellations that were flying within a few years of the war. These latter airliners were originally built as troop carriers and were demilitarised to civilian use once peace had come in 1945.

Doug ended his talk with the outbreak of war in 1939, and we did not hear about the decline of Croydon Airport and its final closure, which probably could be an evening's talk on its own.

David Luff

THE STORY OF LOWER MORDEN

Around 120 people of all ages attended Bill Rudd's talk at St. Martin's Church, Camborne Road on 14th March. Bill gave us a fact-filled tour of the area's history from the earliest times up to the present, followed by a wonderful collection of slides showing the changes over the modern period. As always Bill fascinated us with his personal recollections and prodigious memory.

Next time we have a downpour we will call to mind Bill's graphic account of the storm of the summer of 1981, when the normally tiny stream of the East Pyl Brook in Morden Park rose to 4 feet, flooding Lower Morden Lane, and the playing fields of Hatfeild School, on which the new buildings now stand!



Bill chilled us with the gruesome details of the murder of Lily Allam. Born at No.7, Garth Cottages, Garth Road, she married her neighbour, John Allam, but abandoned him to live with another man at Forest Gate. When she decided to return to her husband, her lover cut her throat and then killed himself.

On behalf of the Society, the congregation of St. Martin's, who were celebrating the church's 40th birthday, and the many local residents who attended, thank you Bill. We look forward to your Morden walk in September.

Peter Hopkins

ANNE OF CLEVES IN SURREY

What a different picture of Anne of Cleves was given to us on Friday 18 April by Mary Saaler, from the usual one of the unprepossessing 'Flanders Mare'. If no beauty, Anne was obviously a strong-minded lady, and a survivor. Quite a feat in Henry VIII's court!

Her story starts in the late 1530s, a month after Queen Jane Seymour died after giving birth to the future Edward VI. The King was eager to marry again, and his chief minister Thomas Cromwell set about finding him a suitable bride. He was an astute administrator and was fully cognizant of all the necessary political factors to be taken into consideration. Francis I had been appealed to for suggestions, but was annoyed by Henry's idea of a 'beauty contest' of princesses in Calais. In 1539 John, Duke of Cleves, was contacted. Politically he was suitable, and he had two daughters still single. Sybilla, the eldest (married) daughter was beautiful, so perhaps Cromwell assumed the other two were also. Cleves was a small dukedom on the Rhine, north of Cologne, and hence controlled the river traffic. Such an alliance could be a counterweight to France and Spain.

Holbein was dispatched to paint portraits. They show the sitters in extremely elaborately embroidered all-encasing dresses with high necklines and all-enveloping headdresses. This was very different from the fashions current in England, with low necklines and gable headdresses.

The marriage contract was signed in September 1539, and in October Anne set out for England. When she arrived in Rochester on New Year's Day 1540 Henry was so eager to see her that he decided to visit her in disguise. The meeting was not a success. Anne ignored this strange man, as she had been brought up to do, and Henry was not impressed; but there was no way out of the marriage. On 6th January it duly took place at Greenwich. Anne wore another of her magnificent gowns. Henry was by now 49, somewhat gross, with an ulcerated leg, and unattractive to Anne, aged 24. It was thought the marriage was never consummated. Anne appeared in public for the last time in May. By July 1540 the divorce arrangements were made. She was to have the status of the 'King's sister', with an income, jewellery, plate etc and two manors, at Richmond and Bletchingley. Anne was much relieved, as she had expected to be executed! She gladly accepted the settlement. As soon as the divorce was announced Henry married Catherine Howard.

Anne lived at Bletchingley for 13 years. It was a typical double-courtyard Tudor manor house, although now only the gatehouse remains. Originally it had been built by the Duke of Buckingham. This style of housebuilding gave greater privacy to the occupants than the old medieval style. Sir Thomas Cawarden became Anne's steward at Bletchingley, but they did not get on. She was often at Court, and was on good terms with Henry, and the Princesses Mary and Elizabeth. However, when Henry died things changed. With Edward VI the extreme Protestants took over. Anne was actually a Reformed Catholic. Also there was great inflation at this time, so she found herself with much less money. She moved to Penshurst, and rented Bletchingley to Cawarden, although he was tardy in paying the rent! She also lived sometimes at Hever.

In 1553 Anne attended Mary's Coronation. In later years she lived at Dartford in a comfortable 'modern' house built by Henry in 1540. In 1556, during Mary's reign, Anne's staff were threatened because they were mostly Protestant.

In 1557 Anne died aged only 41. She left a detailed Will, which reflected her main interests of embroidery, sports and cooking, apart from bequests to her servants and charities. She asked to be buried as a Catholic, and her plain, simple tomb is in Westminster Abbey.

She was an intelligent woman, who quickly learned to speak English, level-headed, competent and sensible. She learned to make the most of what she had.

Mary Saaler showed us slides of the excavations being made by the Bourne Society at the Bletchingley Place site, where the cellar and an intricate double drain have been revealed. Since the site is just behind the original gatehouse (which is a private residence, Place Farm), it will not be possible to take the work much further, but some important finds have been made.

This was a most interesting and entertaining lecture.

Lorna Cowell

Editor's note: Mary Saaler's very readable book *Anne of Cleves* is published by the Rubicon Press and costs £9.95.

A BUILDING PRESERVATION TRUST FOR MERTON?

How often have we looked at a building or a set of buildings in the Borough which clearly have a long history but are now well past their prime and, quite frankly, are in a very poor condition? Morden Park House, a couple of houses in Church Road, Mitcham and possibly, The Canons immediately spring to mind. We may think, why does not some enterprising developer restore them and then sell or lease them? The simple answer is usually that it would cost more to renovate each building than could be realised by its sale when renovated.

A way out of this situation is to consider the establishment of a Building Preservation Trust (BPT), as was explained by Mrs Maria Perks, from the Architectural Heritage Trust in a recent presentation to the borough's Conservation Areas Advisory Committee (CAAC).

Building Preservation Trusts are charitable property developers or "restorers of last resort". They take on buildings which are either Listed or are in Conservation Areas with a view to develop or renovate them and then sell them on. They are area specific and there are 153 of them around the country. Each Trust is registered as a charity and as a Company Limited by Guarantee. The Directors of the Company are also the Charitable Trustees and have a personal liability limited to £1.

The way a BPT operates is firstly to commission a feasibility study (the Architectural Heritage Trust will give 75% of the cost) then they go out to tender for the building work which is paid for at market prices. The cost of the work could be covered by National Lottery money and government grants but since these are paid retrospectively the Architectural Heritage Trust will loan the money for two years at 5% simple interest. Additionally, each Trust may have a group of "supporters" who typically pay £5 pa subscription and who would receive progress reports and tours of the building as the work progressed.

The CAAC supported the establishment of a BPT in Merton and at a subsequent meeting, the Environmental Services Committee supported it also. It seems likely that a BPT will be established here with possibly the council providing office facilities.

Tony Scott

VISIT TO LONDON METROPOLITAN ARCHIVES

Nine members set off on 20 March to Northampton Road EC1 to visit the Greater London Record Office, but arrived instead at the London Metropolitan Archives, which none of us had heard of! The change of identity had taken place on 1 January. In the years since taking over the GLC's collection (much of it put together in the days of the LCC) the Corporation of London have made many improvements to the premises and to the services offered to enquirers. The new name represents this new phase in the establishment's history.

In order to encourage use of the collection the Archives hold 'at homes' for local societies, and our visit was in response to an invitation. After browsing through a temporary exhibition which included school and chapel registers, paupers' 'settlement' records, and a volume of the Newgate Calendar, we listened to a short account of the history and nature of the records, before being given a guided tour of search rooms and library. By the time this Bulletin is out the whole area will be 'open plan' - a main dividing wall had already been knocked through.

A functional rather than attractive building, it once housed a printing works. The specially strengthened floors were just what was needed for the safe housing of many kilometres of stacked shelves.

Most of the material in the Archives relates to the Counties of London and Middlesex, though records from 1965 onwards are also held for the outer London boroughs. Material relating to every aspect of London life is here: education, health, the law, the licensed trade, the sewers, the building industry - and of course birth and death! Parish records on microfilm are stored in self-service cabinets. Original material which has to be ordered arrives quite speedily at the desk. There are also large collections of maps, prints and photographs which can be consulted, and many books and journals are on open access (including MHS Bulletins!).

Anyone working in local history is likely to visit the Archives at some stage, but equally anyone just dropping in will find something of interest. And the staff are particularly helpful.

We travelled by Thameslink direct from Wimbledon to Farringdon.

JG

London Metropolitan Archives
40 Northampton Road
London EC1 0HB
Tel: 0171 332 3820

Mon, Wed, Fri
9.30am - 4.45pm
Tues, Thurs
9.30am - 7.30pm

THE FAMILY RECORDS CENTRE

St. Catherine's House has now closed, as has the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane. In their place is the new Family Records Centre at 1, Myddelton Street, London, EC1R 1UW.

Sources include:-

- ♦ indexes of births, marriages and deaths in England and Wales since 1837
- ♦ indexes of legal adoptions in England and Wales since 1927
- ♦ Indexes of births, marriages and deaths of some British citizens abroad since the late 18th century, including deaths in the two World Wars

certificates can be purchased of any entry in the above indexes

- ♦ microform copies of census returns 1841-1891
- ♦ microfilms of Estate Duty Office death duty registers 1796-1858 with indexes 1796-1903
- ♦ microfilms of registered copies of wills and administrations up to 1858 from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury
- ♦ Non-parochial registers 1567-1858
- ♦ Miscellaneous foreign returns of births, deaths and marriages 1627-1960.

Opening hours:

Monday	9.00am-5.00pm	Tuesday	10.00am-7.00pm
Wednesday	9.00am-5.00pm	Thursday	9.00am-7.00pm
Friday	9.00am-5.00pm	Saturday	9.30am-5.00pm

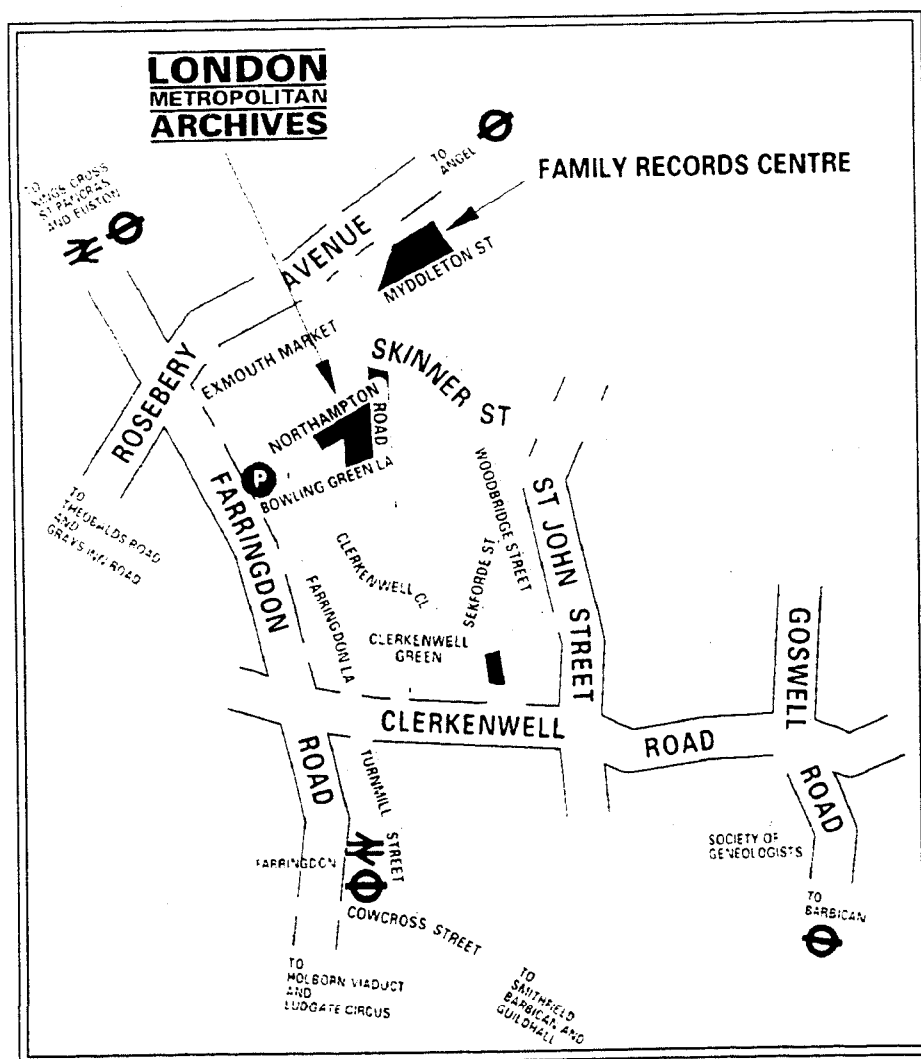
Farringdon Station (Thameslink from Wimbledon) or Angel underground station are a few minutes walk away. Buses in the area include 19, 38, 171A along Rosebery Avenue, or 63 along Farringdon Road.

Ring 0181 392 5300 for general enquiries

0171 233 9233 for Certificate enquiries.

All other material in the Public Record Office is now at Kew.

Peter Hopkins



LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS - REPORTS

Workshop meeting on 7th March 1997

Eric Montague in the chair.

Lionel Green spoke about *A History of Merton and Morden*, edited and mostly written by Evelyn Jowett in 1951, at the request of the Merton and Morden Festival of Britain Committee. Lionel himself wrote the chapters on the Priory, the parish church, and John Innes. Many photographs were specially taken by W A Cook, a local photographer, and the whole project was accomplished, amazingly, in a few months. Crucial to the enterprise was a WEA history class, held in the old Central Library in Kingston Road. Out of this class grew what is now the Merton Historical Society!

St Lawrence was Bill Sole's topic. He told us that the saint had once been a legate at Dijon, a key point on Roman land routes, and he wondered if Lawrence had ever come to Britain. He further speculated that Roman (soldier) surveyors *could* have camped on a spot near Stane Street, *could* have dabbled in the new cult of Christianity, *could* have dedicated some little shrine to Lawrence who had been martyred in Rome. Morden's church *could* have acquired its dedication in some such way. Couldn't it?

Peter Hopkins presented the Society with a copy of the booklet (editor PJH) produced by St Martin's church, Lower Morden, to mark its 40th birthday. Peter also produced a dossier on the history of Cherry Wood, an important survivor of the ancient woodland of Morden, which he has been examining as part of his study of land ownership and use in and near Lower Morden.

From Sutton Water Company records Madeline Healey had a copy of a letter of 1864 to Richard Garth. It gave estimates for laying on water to much of Morden, including Lower Morden, and went on to suggest that Garth become a shareholder in the company (would they have then knocked a bit off the estimate?).

Sheila Harris showed us a thesis on the Wandle, written in 1952, which had been given to the Wandle Industrial Museum. It included interesting pictures and newspaper cuttings.

Judith Goodman has been looking at the friendship between Nelson's household at Merton Place and the Goldsmids of Morden Lodge. Abraham Goldsmid was a great patron of music, and through him Nelson also was able to host entertainments of the highest quality. Both establishments were visited by the Prince of Wales and several Royal Dukes.

The steam washing laundry that once stood downstream of Phipps Bridge was Eric Montague's topic. Until now it has been assumed to have operated in conjunction with local textile printing works. But, in a detailed letter to Monty, Peter McGow of Croydon reports having gone through the bankruptcy and other business notices in the *Times* and *London Gazette* of the time, and discovered that it was a clothes and linen laundry - on a huge scale, and with a picturesque, if brief, history.

Judith Goodman



Workshop meeting on 25th April 1997

Lionel Green in the Chair.

Peter Harris showed some photographs of Merton Abbey Station, following on from Lionel's collection of photographs of Merton's railways shown at a previous workshop.

Peter also showed two pages from the *Illustrated London News* of 1893, advertising a Burne-Jones exhibition, which he bought at an antiques sale the previous week at Merton Abbey Mills.

Bill Rudd showed some of the objects he has retrieved from his excavation of the wheelwright's workshop in Morden churchyard, including an almost complete clay pipe, the bowl of another clay pipe, in the design of a hussar, and various pieces of pottery. He has taken two coins to the Museum of London for examination, and will report back on due course.

Peter Hopkins referred to the report by Sutton Archaeological Services on the late Neolithic/ Bronze Age pottery and flints found on the Meadbrook site in Grand Drive. The site was in the area known in medieval

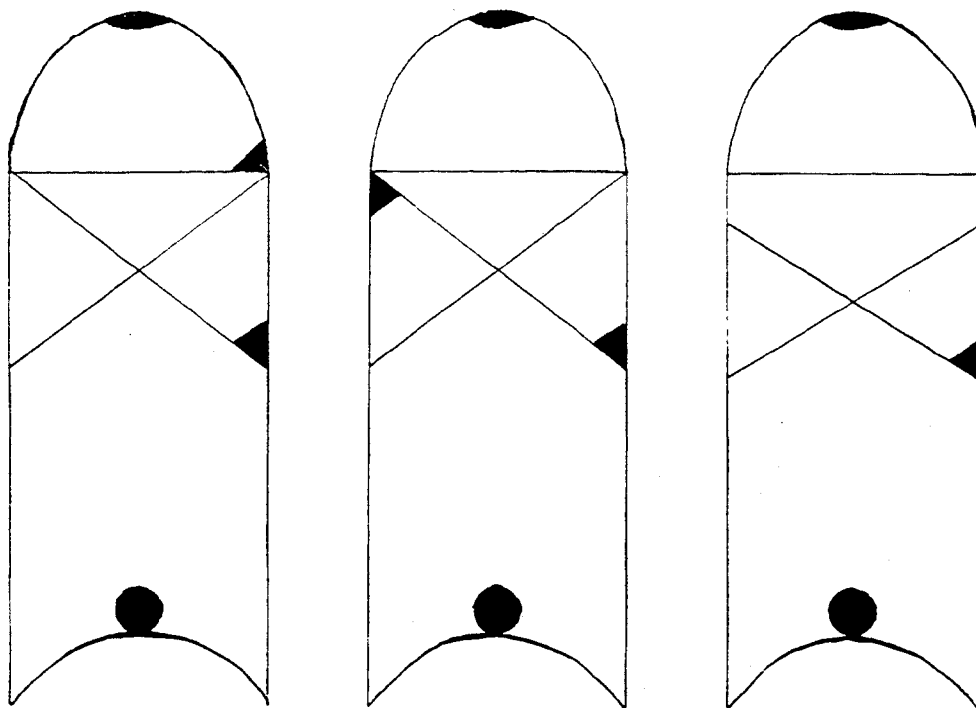
and Tudor times as *Twyrymead*, a name possibly referring to the fact that it was between the two rivers, the Pyl and the East Pyl, which probably converged at this point. There were no signs of habitation, and the finds were almost certainly deposited by flooding. The name *Blagdon*, for an area between the Pyl and the Beverley Brook, might suggest a site of ancient habitation nearby, and there is a reference in the Saxon charters to *Benanberwe* as one of the boundary markers of Merton, by the Beverley Brook, probably near the Joseph Hood Memorial Field at Mospur Park.

Judy Goodman showed photographs of the copy of the Saxon charters relating to Merton in a manuscript from Glastonbury Abbey now at Longleat. The battle of *Meretune*, sometimes thought to have been our Merton, was probably fought at Martin in South Damerham hundred in Wiltshire, which belonged to Glastonbury Abbey. It seems that the two Mertons have been the source of confusion for some centuries! She also showed a photograph of an oil painting of Merton High Street, painted by one of William Morris's weavers, William Henry Knight, which she has been able to date to 1881-86 by reference to the buildings shown.

Judy has also found mention of a full-length portrait of Abraham Goldsmid in a National Portrait Gallery publication called '*Regency Portraits*', which also tells of the origins of the plaster bust of Goldsmid on loan to Morden Library.

She also showed a copy of '*The Nelson Companion*' edited by Colin White, Curator of the Royal Naval Museum at Portsmouth, which unfortunately perpetuates many errors regarding Nelson at Merton. Her comments will be taken into account for the 3rd edition.

Lionel Green showed the swan marks of the Priors of Merton, and their successor at Merton, Gregory Lovell, as shown in one of the Loseley Manuscripts. Tame swans are said to have been introduced to England from Cyprus in the days of Richard I, about 1185. Swans were birds-royal and kept in semi-domestic state by 1250 and valued for every great feast. For such occasions the Close Rolls of Henry III contain many references. All swans were presumed to belong to the Crown, but others could own them if they were landowners or received a grant from the King or from prescriptive use. Owners could claim their own so long as the birds bore a recognisable mark. The earliest reference to swan marking is 1230. Swan upping still takes place at the end of July each year, when the cygnets, or 'clear-bills' have their bills cut with distinguishing patterns. Every swan's bill has a black knob at the base and a black nail at the tip. The marks were scratched or notched.



Swan marks of:

Priors of Merton

Gregory Lovell

Next workshop meeting: Friday 11th July, 7.30pm, Wandle Industrial Museum.

Peter Hopkins

JOHN F RENSHAW & CO LTD OF MITCHAM

Most members of the Society will be familiar with the three houses overlooking Figges Marsh at Mitcham, standing on the site known since the 1920s as 'Renshaws Corner'. Listed Grade II in view of their historic and architectural interest, but now somewhat dilapidated, they were erected in the mid-18th century, probably by Samuel Oxtoby, who was a local builder and landowner. For many years they were occupied as private houses and then, in the mid-Victorian period, the left-hand house became a girls' boarding academy, known as The Chestnuts. In 1898 the three properties, together with their gardens, a tennis lawn and a paddock extending back down the north-eastern side of Lock's Lane, were offered for sale by auction. The new owners were James Pain & Sons, the firework manufacturers, who used the houses partly for residential purposes and partly as offices. Shortly after the end of the 1914-18 war the former tennis lawn and the paddock were sold to John F Renshaw & Co Ltd, manufacturers of marzipan and bakers' confectionery, who were re-locating their works to Mitcham.

Founded in 1898 by John F Renshaw, the company had started life in a small office and storeroom at Great Portland Street. Steady expansion of the business soon dictated removal, first to larger premises in Fenchurch Street in 1906, and then again in 1912 to an old disused factory at Battersea. In 1920, when trade was once more in full swing after the Armistice of 1918, yet another move became necessary, and eventually, on finding a suitable site in Lock's Lane, then occupied by an old laundry and a few cottages, the firm erected what was to become by the early 1950s a large modern factory, world-famous for its marzipan and almond products. When, as Princess Elizabeth, the Queen was married in 1947 Renshaws were proud to manufacture one of her eight wedding cakes, and three years later they were granted the Royal Warrant of Approval to supply almond products to His Majesty King George VI.

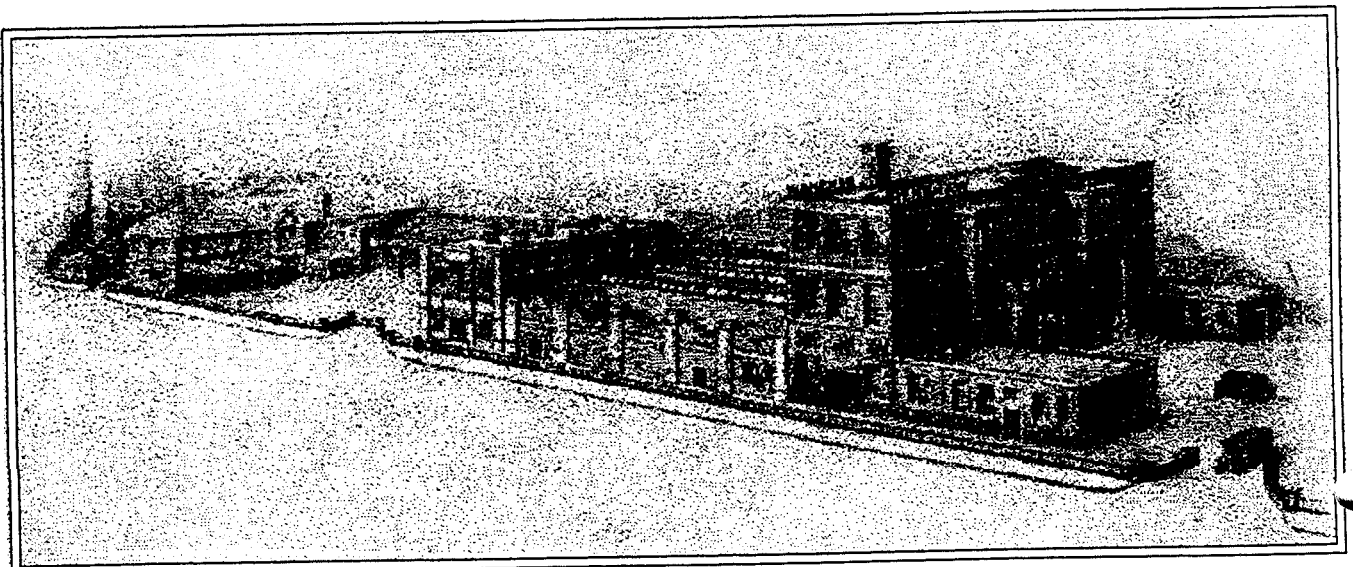
Sadly, after 70 years during which Renshaws had become very much a permanent feature of the Mitcham scene, the local press announced in 1990 that a decision had been taken by the company to close down the Mitcham factory, and to re-locate production elsewhere. After standing vacant for several years, the site was re-developed by Wimpey in 1995-6 as the 'Wordsworth Place' estate of maisonette blocks. The houses at Renshaws Corner were also purchased by Wimpey, but since the land on which they stand was not available for redevelopment the properties were resold for owner-occupation.

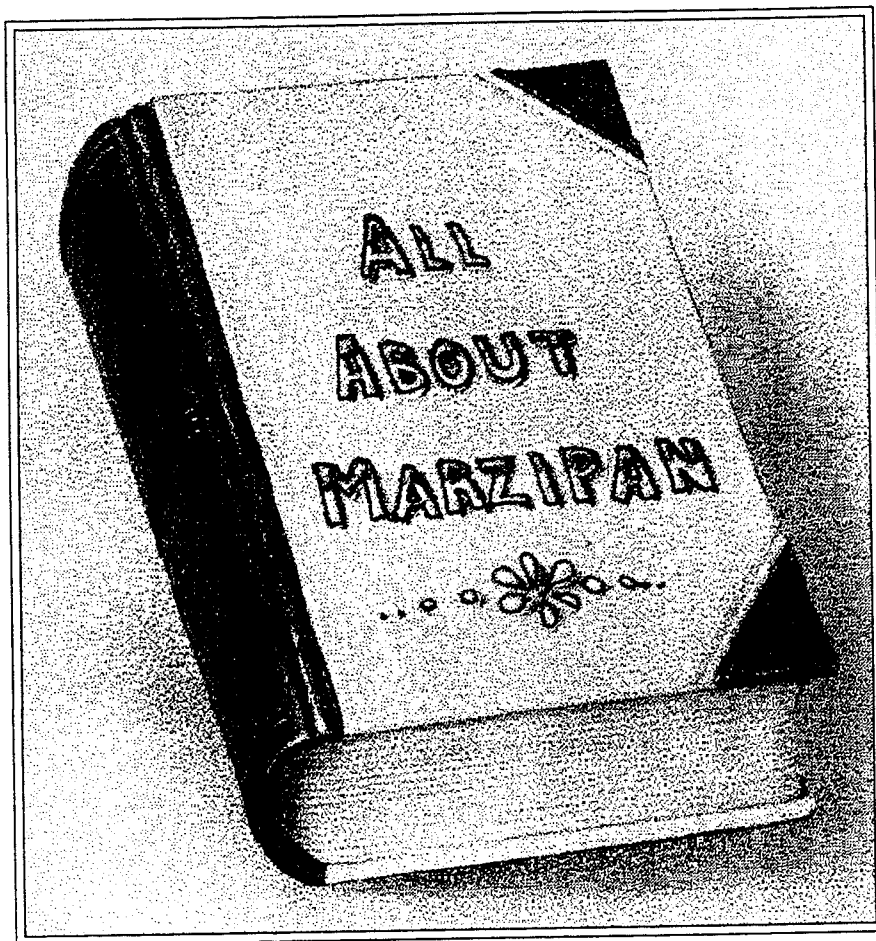
Although John F Renshaw & Co Ltd have left Mitcham the company has most certainly not disappeared from the wholesale market, and continues to supply marzipan and confectionery to the bakery trade. The name has not gone from the retail market either, and as most shoppers will know, the name Renshaw is still to be found in the supermarkets - for instance on pre-packed 500g blocks of coloured sugar icing marketed under the name of 'Regalice', and also on packs of that product which will always be associated with John F Renshaw & Co - marzipan.

E N Montague

[Editor's note: John F Renshaw & Co Ltd are still listed in the Merton phone book - at Unit 9, Merton Industrial Park. A visit revealed however that these premises are now occupied by Herald International Mailing Ltd.]

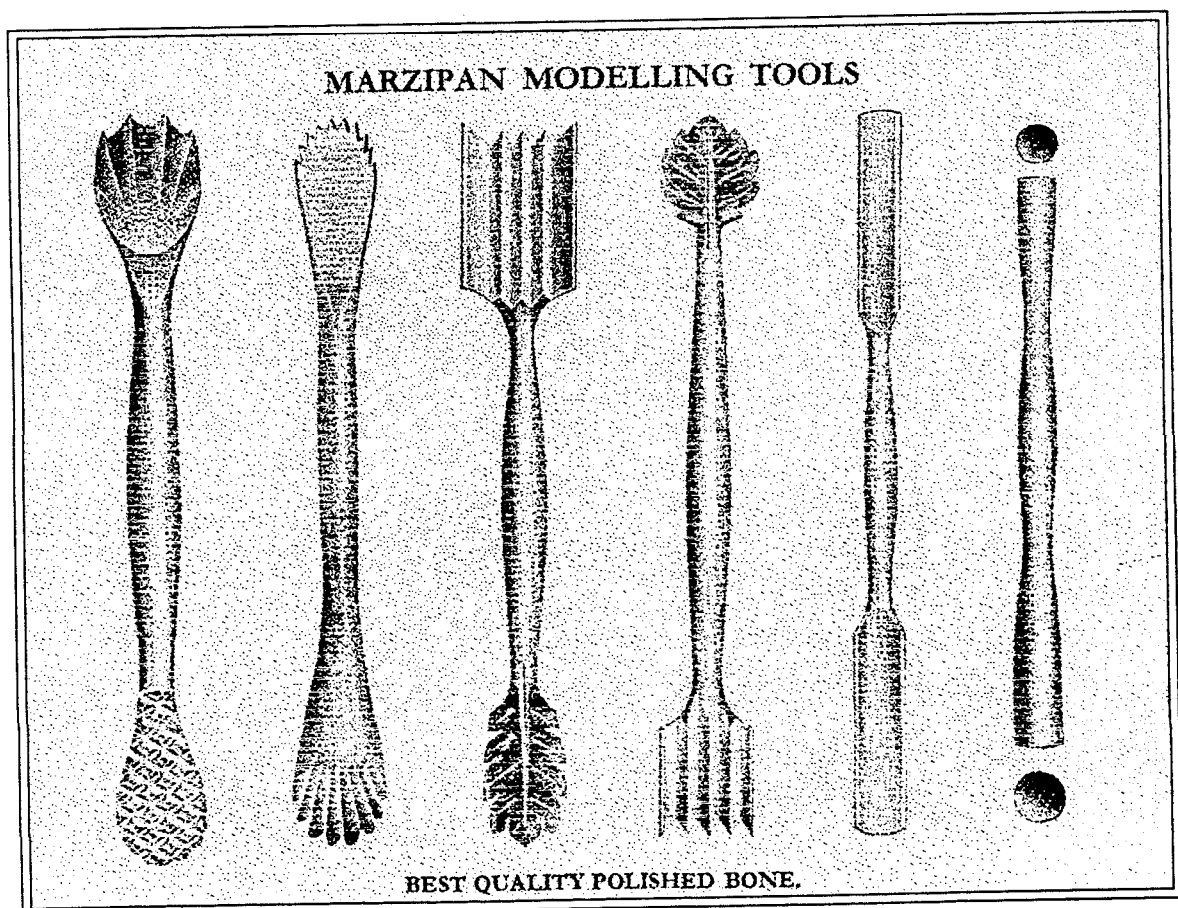
[illustrations are taken from *Marzipan*, an undated publication (?1930s) produced by Renshaws]
cover - *Renshaws Mitcham premises*





facing p35.- book gateau, made of Genoese cake covered with chocolate and lemon marzipan:
lettering in royal icing and fondant.

p45 - marzipan modelling tools



'A REFRAIN OF THE DEAR LONG AGO'

In the library of the John Innes Centre in Norwich is an odd little volume presented in 1925 to the then John Innes Horticultural Institution when it was still in Mostyn Road, Merton Park. The donor was Edward Merton Atkins (note the middle name!), and the gift was in memory of his mother, Mrs Maria Atkins, who had lived for more than 40 years at Grove Cottage, Morden Road, Merton, and who had loved Merton. Local directories support this account. William Atkins is listed in the 1851 PO directory, and from 1876-92 Mrs Atkins' name appears. The cottage, whose name if not its substance was enlarged after Mrs Atkins' time to Grove House, was replaced in 1952 by a Gospel Tabernacle. Barclays Bank is now on the site.

The book is entitled *Memories of Merton: a poem*. Published in 1868 by John Such of Cannon Street, it runs to 37 pages, plus introductory dedication. The author was Thomas Smith, about whom nothing is known - except, on the evidence of this book, that he was a rather bad poet! He knew Mrs Atkins however; the dedication 'To a Lady' is said to have been to her, and the context suggests that the acquaintance went back a long way:

*But yet 'tis our nature when backward we gaze
On the scenes we are leaving and ne'er more may know,
Like lov'd hearts departed we cherish those days,
Rememb'ring but good of the dear "long ago."*

There is sadly little real meat in the poem, which is mainly a florid exercise in nostalgia. At that date the eastern end of the parish was being developed quite fast, with small houses and businesses. Smith deploras the changes:

*For hark! I hear the ringing clink,
The vigorous trowel cleaves the brick,
And tells me the beleaguering foes
Just halt around thee ere they close,
And circle in one vast embrace
The things that were, - nor leave a trace...*

Approaching Merton in imagination he writes:
*I see thy road unchang'd, and still,
Descending Tooting's gentle hill,
The narrow defile leads the way,
And I am dreaming in the day.*

....

*I now the gradual slope recal,
That usher'd in the waterfall,
Which seem'd a prelude fair and good
To vocal shades of Collier's Wood:...*

A foot-note explains that this is a reference to Colliers Wood's famous rookery.

A 'factory lord' is not explained, but 'the merchant prince of Cannon Hill' is identified as 'the late wealthy Richard Thornton, Esq.' And Smith explains that the lines,

*This memoried spot - the turnpike gate -
Recals the hours of by-gone fate;
The scenes of anxious strife it knew,
When rival guards their post-horns blew*

refer to a long-past episode when rival omnibus companies competed for local custom (shades of our own times!).

Smith apostrophises the Wandle more than once:

*Sweet Wandle, hail! 'neath yonder arch
Thou sweetest on thy forcéd march,
and*

*Then haste thee, Wandle! speed thy course,
Thy wavelets sparkling quit thy source;
How gay thy mirror'd bubbles run
And leap, like dolphins in the sun,
From Carshalton in many a vein
To Beddington through park and plain:*

The couplet
*E'en though the miller, unbeguil'd,
Remains unchanged - Memory's child!*

refers to the flour mill at Wandle Bank, which had been for many years operated by Messrs. Child!

Smith tells the story of the Priory (calling it the Abbey), from its early days, *A thing of solid worth in wood*, through its 'destruction' under *the last Henry's ruthless hand* to the occasion when it became *The Roundhead soldiers' garrison*.

He then devotes many lines to Nelson:
*Dear MERTON! in thy home of calm,
Thy Nelson sought the healing balm:*

until

*Again the tocsins sound alarms,
Though lovers sigh, the nation arms,
And from his village once again
Goes forth the thunderer of the main.
Weep, MERTON, weep again those tears
That fell from thee in by-gone years,
Whene'er the tale be ponder'd o'er
How Nelson saw thy shades no more:*

He continues with some thoughts on the church and graveyard:

*Then seek the church's ancient walls,
Where many a monument recals
The noble worth of Merton's dead
Who live in deeds remember'd:*

.....

*So, Nixon, to thy praise is lent
The record of thy monument.
Thou gav'st the Merton printers' will
The perfect offspring of thy skill,
And after ages own that thou
Art worthy of remembrance now.*

And Francis Nixon is indeed remembered (for instance, see Monty's book on the local textile industry!)

Finally his thoughts turn again to the threat from the builders. He fears that *the fields of Thornton's land* will be lost, that the "*Leather Bottle*", *old in name* will no longer mark the limit of the village. Most of all he fears the invaders

*From Morden and from Wimbledon
[Who] hurrying come, in serried ranks,
In front and rear, on both thy flanks:*

When, in the future, Merton's very existence is disbelieved, he hopes his poem will survive,
*And then, though gone the minstrel be,
Say, MERTON, that he sung of thee,
And Time, whilst ringing out thy knell,
Shall echo from the sonorous bell
Thy poet's sigh - "Farewell, FAREWELL."*

JG

BRILLIANT AND BRAVE AND KIND

There are well-known postcard views from c.1900 which are usually captioned MERTON: NELSON'S HOUSE. The building shown is not Nelson's Merton Place, which was by then long gone, but the house known as Abbey Gate House. From the front it used to loom, unlovely, over Merton High Street. From the rear its more pleasing, creeper-adorned southern aspect faced the large ornamental grounds, complete with canal and shrubbery. Two cannon, now in Nelson Gardens, and several tubs of aloes, used to stand outside the loggia and garden room.* This was a large house, on three floors, each of eight or nine bays. The postcard views record its last years, when it was the home of a Mr and Mrs Steevens, who seem to have arrived c.1898. They turned out to be the last occupants of this house which is thought to have occupied the site of the Priory gatehouse, and even to have contained within its fabric some of the medieval masonry.

George Warrington Steevens was born in 1869 in Sydenham and educated at the City of London School. In an outstanding career there he shone at classics, became captain of school and was elected as 1888 scholar of Balliol College, Oxford. He went on to gain an Oxford double first in classics, at the same time achieving the highest honours in the classics BA of the University of London. He then, at only 24, was elected fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. A gift for brilliant conversation and writing which he had developed as an undergraduate he now extended to politics (liberal) and journalism. In 1893 he moved to London and joined the *Pall Mall Gazette*, under editor Henry Cust. He began to write also for *Blackwood's Magazine* and for *New Review*, for whose editor, W E Henley, he had already written during the latter's time editing the *National Observer*. Henley is probably best remembered now for his poem *Invictus* ('Out of the night that covers me ...') and for his friendship with R L Stevenson (he was the inspiration for Long John Silver!). But in his time he was a notable if turbulent figure in the newspaper world. He encouraged Steevens in his career and this friendship lasted until Steevens's death. In 1896 Steevens joined the new *Daily Mail*, whose founder and editor, Alfred Harmsworth, began to send him on special assignments. He covered the Bryan/McKinley presidential election for his paper, subsequently expanding his articles into a book, *Land of the Dollar*. This was followed by many other books, some based on his writings as a war correspondent in Greece and Egypt. The most popular was *With Kitchener to Khartum*, which went into 22 editions by 1900. Meanwhile, at the age of 25 Steevens had married a Mrs Rogerson, a widow much older than himself. This marriage Henley described as 'a thing apart from the ordinary course of human life, [which] was in the event as fortunate as in the beginning it had seemed bewildering'. In 1899 Harmsworth ordered Steevens to South Africa for the *Mail*, and there he joined the army in the defence of Natal. He died of enteric fever (typhoid) on 15 January 1900 in the siege of Ladysmith. He was 30 years old.

Several volumes of his short works were published after his death. The dedication reads:

*This Edition of his Works, the Wife
who knew his innermost thoughts
and wishes, dedicates to
W.E. Henley.*

MERTON, June 1900.

The first volume, *Things Seen*, has a memoir of Steevens by Henley and a dedicatory verse in memory:

*We cheered you forth - brilliant and kind and brave.
Under your country's triumphing flag you fell.
It floats, true heart, over no dearer grave.
Brave and brilliant and kind, hail and farewell!*

Principal sources: *Dictionary of National Biography*;
Memoir, W E Henley (see above)



* An identical rear view is shown as Plate 34 in Miss Jowett's *A History of Merton and Morden* (1951), where the photograph is credited to Richardson Evans, which is possible, but is dated to 1913, which cannot be right, as the house was pulled down in 1906. It was replaced by a roller-skating rink, later converted to an airship factory before becoming Wimbledon Palais, and, now, Furnitureland.

In *The Illustrated London News* of 16 July 1904 there is a full page of interesting photographs of the house and its setting - with some very misleading captions!

Judith Goodman

Letters and contributions for the bulletin should be sent to the Hon. Editor.
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