



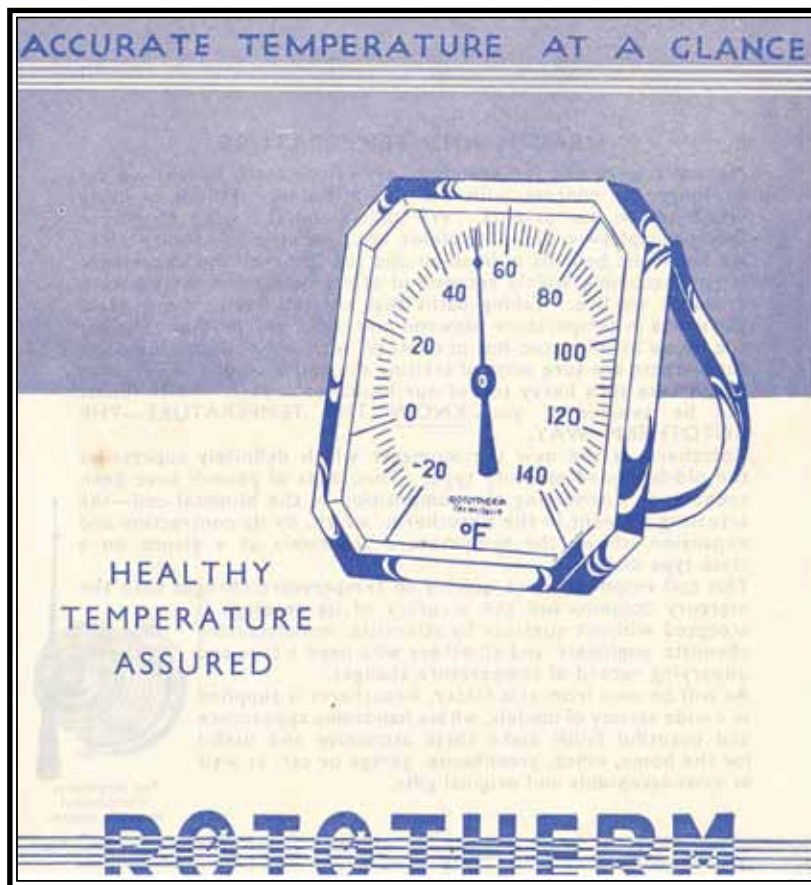
PRESIDENT:

VICE PRESIDENTS: Eric Montague and William Rudd

CHAIR: David Haunton

BULLETIN No. 190

JUNE 2014



*from an undated
brochure (courtesy
JG). See page 3*

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Programme June - October | 2 |
| The British Rototherm Co Ltd – a Life in their Times – John Sargeant | 3 |
| Local History Workshops: | |
| 14 March: the Pickle; <i>hoppyngge</i> ; ‘Squire’ Blake; the pipe organ at St Olave’s; a Mitcham churchyard monument; ‘Merton Historical Society Players’ | 6 |
| 25 April: the priory wall; a local architect; a Sunday walk in 1922; a Tudor will; the Mitcham Brewery; two artists | 7 |
| Down Lonesome Way – E Brinsmead Gough | 8 |
| Notes on ‘Down Lonesome Way’ – Keith Penny | 9 |
| ‘Thirty Years Caring for the Vestments at Westminster Abbey’ | 11 |
| ‘Worcester Park, Old Malden, and North Cheam: History at our Feet’ | 12 |
| Book Reviews: two books by David Rymill | 13 |
| ‘Merton Priory: Celebrating 900 Years’ | 14 |

PROGRAMME JUNE–OCTOBER 2014

Saturday 14 June 11.00am **St Mary's Church, The Avenue, Worcester Park, KT4 7HL**
Walk round Worcester Park and St Mary's, Cuddington

Led by archivist and local historian **David Rymill**

Parking at the Church; 10 mins walk from Worcester Park Station (where 213 bus stops)

Wednesday 30 July 2.30pm **Tollsworth Manor, Rook Lane, Chaldon, Surrey CR3 5BQ**
Tour of house (one of Merton priory's Granges) and garden

Talk by **Gordon Gillett**, the owner, and Tea

Ring David Haunton to book (£4 per head) and for travel arrangements

Nearest Station: Merstham

Friday 19 September 2.30pm **Cinema Museum, The Master's House, 2 Dugard Way**
(off Renfrew Road), London SE11 4TH

Guided tour (only way to see collection); places limited;

Ring David Haunton to book (£5 per head)

Nearest underground stations: (half-way between) Kennington & Elephant and Castle

Bus Routes 109, 133, 155, 159, 196, 333 and 415 stop within 3 minutes' walk

Saturday 11 October 2.30pm **Christ Church Hall, Colliers Wood**
'Housewives and Heroines of Merton'

Illustrated talk by Sarah Gould, Merton Heritage and Local Studies

Union Pen Co Ltd, 579 Kingston Road

Can you help researcher Peter Hinchcliffe? The 'Unique' Pen Co Ltd was established as a fountain pen importer in 1923 based in offices in Covent Garden. By 1931 the Union Pen Co Ltd had been set up at 579 Kingston Road to manufacture fountain pens in the UK for 'Unique'. They were manufacturing from that site until 1958 when the whole industry started to suffer under pressure from the increasing popularity of the 'Biro'. Peter believes the building was also occupied for at least part of that period by 'Marshall's Genuine Original Lysol', manufacturers of 'The worlds finest antiseptic'. He is particularly interested to know what happened during the war years. The Board of Trade placed severe restrictions on fountain pen production and he understands that during 1943 and 1946 Union Pen were working 24-hour days on war contracts, primarily the manufacture of bullets and shell casings. Ideally he would like some personal reminiscences, but would welcome any information from members with any knowledge of these companies

If you can help, please email Peter at petermarkhinchcliffe@gmail.com.

MEMORIES OF MERTON AND MORDEN

May 12 to June 14, 2nd floor, Morden Library, Merton Civic Centre

Step back in time with this display designed and produced by volunteers from the Merton Memories Project. Featuring images from the Library archives, the exhibition highlights many of the buildings and places of historical significance that you would see on a journey around the streets of bygone Merton and Morden.

(The display is on show during standard library hours: Mon to Fri 9.30–7.00 and Sat 9.30–5.00)

JOHN SARGEANT kindly found time, during his year as Deputy Mayor of Merton, to contribute this article, which is based on his short address at the Wandle Industrial Museum in June 2013.

THE BRITISH ROTOTHERM COMPANY LTD – A LIFE IN THEIR TIMES

When I was growing up my family felt we were just getting on with life. But it seems we were all caught up in some version of Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time*, whether we liked it or not. We were, along with generations of other families near the River Wandle, living through successive waves of energy, technology, and economic change. Businesses came and went, as they exploited new opportunities, and then faded as they



Miss Bolter in the Office 1938

In late 1929, at the age of 14, Elsie Bolter joined The British Rototherm Co Ltd, in Station Road. Still known exclusively as Miss Bolter, she was to retire from the company in 1975. The factory was located where Sainsbury's supermarket and M&S now stand. Its nearest neighbour was Corfields, well-known to households for their Crown Merton range of pots and pans, and to the aviation industry for their metal pressings and assemblies. Across the road stretched the marshalling yards alongside the line from Wimbledon to

were overtaken by superior technology, changing fashion, or simply cheaper competition. Local people were caught up in the 'music' for a while until, if you like, the band moved on.

Those waves of change around the stretch of the Wandle near Merton Abbey famously included waterpower for hundreds of years. In the late 19th century, while still a largely rural area, it was the workplace of William Morris and a wide range of craftsmen inspired by libertarian socialism and the Arts and Crafts movement. Then, after the first World War, many companies came together in the area to establish factories exploiting new technologies, materials and processes. And into this confluence of trends walked, amongst others, my Mum.



Merton Abbey Factory (the Union Flag was flown every day)



Pre-war display case, Factory Office Entrance

Elsie learned of the opening at the company through her sister. Eight years her senior, Doldie was the secretary of Len Edwards, the founder and managing director. Edwards was an energetic, charismatic individual, with an impressive house in Worple Road in Wimbledon. In the mid-1920s he had taken out a patent on technology exploiting the properties of the bimetallic strip. This simple device used the properties of two strips of different metals which, when heated, would of course bend towards the side which expanded less. It is perhaps remarkable that there was still an aspect of this property, which had been known for centuries and had been incorporated in measuring devices since at least the 19th century, that was capable of sustaining a claim with the UK Patent Office.

On the strength of the patent, British Rototherm grew to become a manufacturer of dial thermometers and other instruments to measure and control temperature and pressure. Its reputation with industry and

consumers meant that by the late 1940s there were over a million in daily use – rising to four million by the early 1960s. The company sold to aircraft manufacturers, shipbuilders, and industrial equipment manufacturers of all kinds. For domestic users there was an impressive choice of designs and materials. Rototherm was founded at much the same time that Bakelite began its UK operations; its domestic products used the material extensively, as well as a range of metals, for their decorative casings. (There were so many to choose from: in our house in Morden different designs would tell us the temperature in each room to the nearest degree.) Though basic by later standards, the Rototherm works were regarded as one of the most modern scientific instrument factories of their type, with sales throughout the UK and overseas, and a long-standing apprenticeship scheme that aimed to develop boys and give them permanent and progressive careers.

There was, to be sure, a family feel to the company. When Doldie left in the mid-1930s to start a family, Elsie replaced her as Edwards's secretary, but Doldie returned to the company for the duration of the war. In the late 1940s Doldie's husband Bill came to work for the company as a sales manager. (Before moving into the role he spent several months working at the factory bench, so that by the time he was selling the products he knew them inside out.) Many staff began and ended their careers at the factory. Some found it hard to leave: working in the packing department one summer holiday in the 1960s my sister Jane and I befriended many characters. One of them, an older man, with long service, and Arthur Askey to a tee, was asked to leave when it was discovered that he was in his mid-70s.

My mother's devotion to Len Edwards was complete, but she also wanted a family. By the mid-1940s she had worked full-time for Rototherm for 15 years, and had become a director of the company. Family legend has it that she decided that she would never start a family if she continued to work, so she took leave of absence. It may just have been coincidence, but my sister Jane arrived just in time to experience the terrible winter of 1946/7. But not long after I appeared in 1950, Mum was prevailed upon to start work again part-time, and soon returned to the firm. Before I was six she was working full-time again.

Even during the successful post-war years, life for UK light industry was never plain sailing. But as a child in the 50s and 60s my third-hand perception of British Rototherm was a place where crisis was never far away. As well as her formal role as the MD's secretary, it seemed Miss Bolter filled many roles where today there would be a permanent position, such as Human Resources. Frequently it seemed that it was all hands to the pump, as suppliers failed to deliver, equipment broke down, or shipment dates were missed. She would find herself phoning customers to pacify them, or giving a severe dressing-down to delinquent suppliers. Then there were the occasional hurried trips to the warehouse in De Burgh Road, Wimbledon, following break-ins.



Len Edwards, Company Founder and Managing Director



Factory Staff excursion on the River Thames



Office Party December 1960, The Crown Pub, Morden, soon to be demolished. Miss Bolter & husband standing on left

In retrospect Miss Bolter, and of course thousands like her, might seem passive riders of those waves of industrial change along the Wandle. However, for the individuals concerned, the day-to-day reality could be far more exciting: being part of Rototherm as it grew to be a market leader; working crazy hours and in scary conditions to complete orders and support the war effort with people you admire – there was no feeling to match it. The company expanded, with additional factories locally and in Nottingham, and with sales offices in Glasgow, Australia and South Africa. A sister company was established in Dublin in 1948, and a London office opened in Victoria's Lower Belgrave Street.

Conversely, as the business gradually began to fall behind, the effect could be quite demoralising. From the late 1950s competitors gained ground, equipment wore out, and customers moved away. Staff could find themselves holding things together as best they might, to compensate for deficiencies. People like our Mum could have moved to other jobs, with better pay and far less stress. But loyalty to the company was strong, and, in her case, loyalty to a much admired boss, and, in later years, his memory, was perhaps paramount. This was a generation of people that on the whole did not spend time polishing their CVs. With her deep sense of duty, Mum would work increasingly crazy hours through the 1960s, to the bemusement of our father, whose role in

Post Office Telephones was altogether less stressful. But I doubt she was fully appreciated by colleagues and staff. Dedicated and busy as she was, her nickname became 'Mother Superior'.

Len Edwards died in the mid-1960s, and Mum continued to be, on paper, the secretary of the new managing director. Around this time Rototherm became part of the Melbray Group of companies, a conglomerate comprising several disparate businesses, including hotels and foods. It is hard today to see the industrial logic behind this ploy. But for Rototherm, as with much of British industry at the time, the driving forces were its waning competitiveness, and short-term management thinking.

Firstly, in the late 1960s, it was decided to move the factory, with just some of the staff, down to Kenfig in Glamorgan, where labour was cheaper and government grants were available to boost efficiency. Miss Bolter managed the closure and transfer of the factory, and thereafter ran a small office with a sales and marketing manager based in Wimbledon Broadway, opposite Holy Trinity church, until she retired in 1975. Being perhaps unfamiliar with some labour practices, Rototherm experienced its first strike soon after it arrived in Wales.

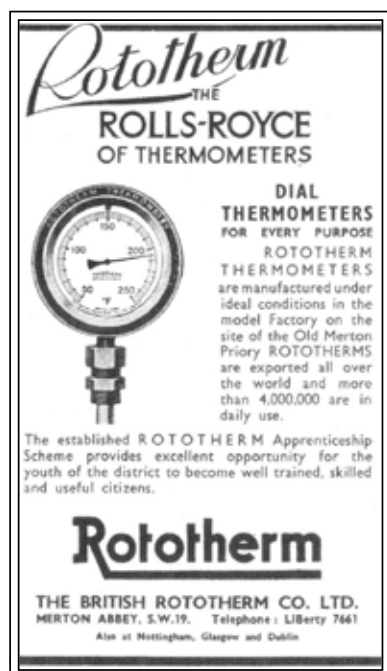
Secondly, Melbray was acquired by Tremletts for £5m in 1972. This company was an offshoot from, and in the same mould as, Slater Walker, the notorious 'asset-stripping' outfit which specialised in buying up companies, extracting the saleable value, and moving on, leaving the debris behind. Imagine the feelings of Rototherm staff on hearing that Tremletts were moving in, and reading in the Tremletts brochure: 'Take-over' is one of those expressions guaranteed to send a shiver down the spine'. For all the talk of 'family feeling' the direction of travel was clear. Ex-Slater Walker wunderkind Jeffrey Pike appeared, and invited all the staff to read Robert Townsend's *Up The Organisation*. This iconoclastic business book of the age urged companies to sweep away all their 'sacred organisational routines and focus on the bottom line'. It must have been a horrible time for an insecure Rototherm, struggling to establish itself in Wales, and aware that, for all the management-speak, cash generation was the only objective.



Tremletts brochure for Rototherm staff

Having acquired, but necessarily digested, Melbray, in 1974 Tremletts bought Tower Assets, a timber and furniture group run by a (surprise!) ex-Slater Walker man, also for £5m. This time the deal quickly went sour. It soon transpired that Tower was worth nowhere near as much as it cost. Tremletts lost £12m in 1974. As part of the elaborate compensation arrangements, Pike and others left the company.

British Rototherm continued, but for Merton Abbey the story was over – the music, such as it was, had moved on. While it was here, the company had evolved from humble beginnings to become something of a beacon of progress and excitement. But well before it received the attentions of Melbray and Tremletts it had slowly lost its way. In fact Rototherm was in many ways the exact opposite of Tremletts. It stuck to its core business, with long-serving employees, and maintained a very cautious approach to investment and debt. But, in all honesty, how successful could a single British manufacturing company be when its customers were all falling by the wayside?



But our story has two happy postscripts. Firstly, British Rototherm is again a company in its own right, still based on Kenfig in South Wales. Not only does it now export to 90 countries, it has exciting expansion plans, including acquisitions to add to the others it has undertaken in recent years. Its technical reputation is higher than ever.

Secondly, I have spotted a pleasing indication of Rototherm's reputation with the public. If you have the chance to visit Nuffield Place near Henley (now run by the National Trust), be sure to examine the workbench that Lord Nuffield erected in his bedroom in his later years, so he could tinker with metal-working tools late into the night. There, in pride of place, are no fewer than two Rototherms. The 20th-century William Morris understood their value.

For her part, my mother lived on until 2004 to become a proud grandmother. I suspect there always remained a British Rototherm-shaped gap in her life. Her appetite for paperwork never left her, and she would spend long periods in her 'office' keeping her affairs in order. Above the desk was one of her prized possessions, a photo of the young Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret, addressing the nation by radio, and of course there on the desk is, unmistakably, a Rototherm.

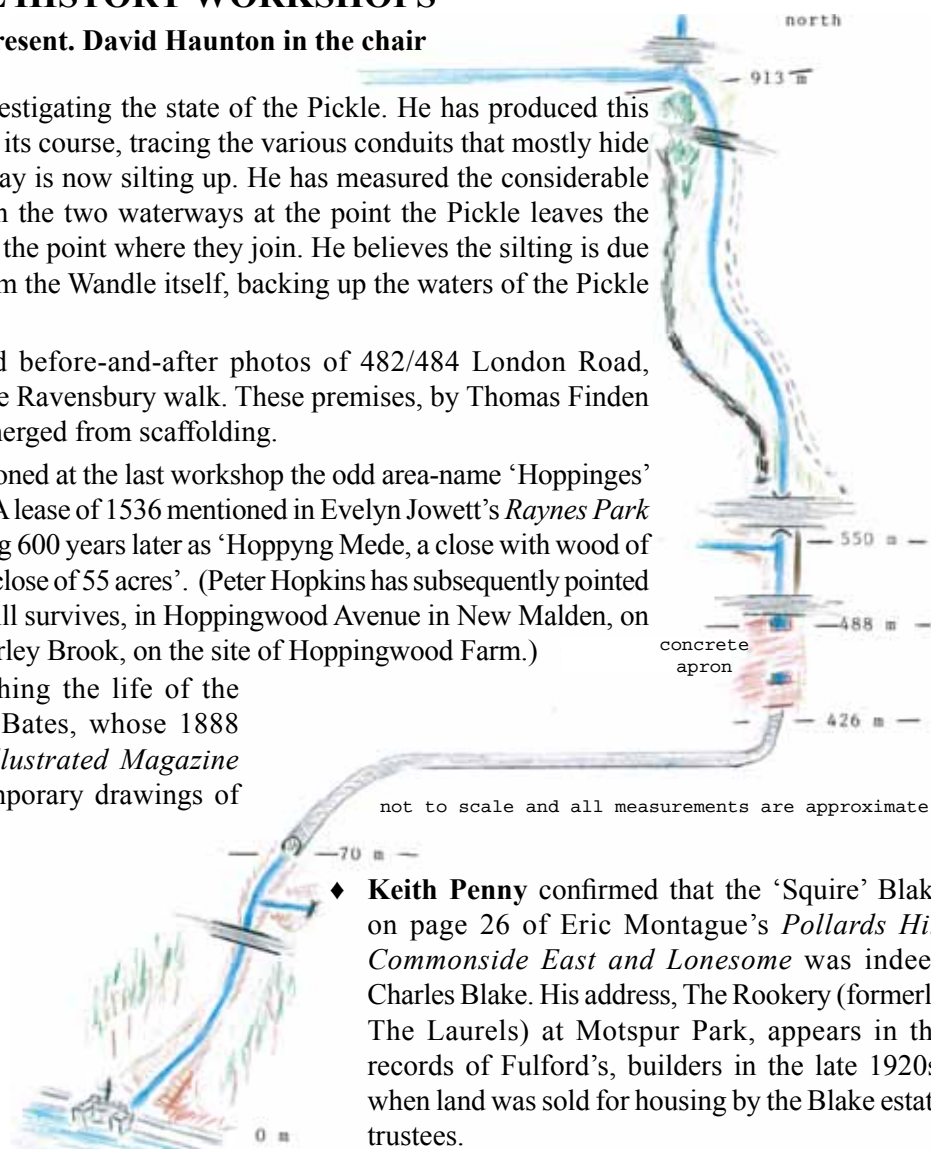
LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Friday 14 March – three present. David Haunton in the chair

- ◆ **David Luff** has been investigating the state of the Pickle. He has produced this interesting sketch-map of its course, tracing the various conduits that mostly hide it from view. The waterway is now silting up. He has measured the considerable height difference between the two waterways at the point the Pickle leaves the course of the Wandle and the point where they join. He believes the silting is due to the far greater flow from the Wandle itself, backing up the waters of the Pickle at Merton bridge.
- ◆ **David Haunton** showed before-and-after photos of 482/484 London Road, Mitcham, inspected on the Ravensbury walk. These premises, by Thomas Finden in 1828, have recently emerged from scaffolding.

Judy Goodman had mentioned at the last workshop the odd area-name ‘Hoppinges’ in a tenth-century charter. A lease of 1536 mentioned in Evelyn Jowett’s *Raynes Park* showed the name persisting 600 years later as ‘Hoppyng Mede, a close with wood of 45 acres’ and ‘Hoppyng, a close of 55 acres’. (Peter Hopkins has subsequently pointed out to me that the name still survives, in Hoppingwood Avenue in New Malden, on the west bank of the Beverley Brook, on the site of Hoppingwood Farm.)

David had been researching the life of the American artist Dewey Bates, whose 1888 article in *The English Illustrated Magazine* contained several contemporary drawings of the Wandle.



- ◆ **Keith Penny** confirmed that the ‘Squire’ Blake on page 26 of Eric Montague’s *Pollards Hill Commonsides East and Lonesome* was indeed Charles Blake. His address, The Rookery (formerly The Laurels) at Motspur Park, appears in the records of Fulford’s, builders in the late 1920s, when land was sold for housing by the Blake estate trustees.

Keith had brought photographs of the case of the pipe organ in St Olave, Mitcham, on which is a coat of arms, with a motto ‘audax atque fidelis’ (‘brave and also faithful’) (above). The organ was bought for the new church in 1930, when it was said to have been previously in a mansion in Essex owned by a family named Barclay. According to the College of Arms the arms had been granted in 1738 to Mary Goodhugh, eldest daughter of Richard Hills of Seale in Kent, and were to descend through the female line. However, Mary died childless. Keith could not find the motto in any reference book, but an internet search found it on a ceremonial axe presented in 1897 to the wife of Arnold Hills by the Thames Ironworks Federated Clubs of Canning Town. Mr Hills resided at Monkham, in Woodford, Essex, an estate that he had bought from the executors of a Henry Ford Barclay. A very helpful archivist at Redbridge Local Studies then revealed that there were pictures of the interior of Monkham on the English Heritage Archives website (right). And there it was – at the top of a grand staircase, as mentioned in a 1903 notice of sale for the house, a two-manual pipe organ, its case recognisable as the one now in St Olave’s, and complete with arms and motto. Monkham was demolished in 1930 and (presumably) the organ was purchased then by Rest Cartwright, who installed it in St Olave’s. The miniature axe qualified as a suitable present for the company owner’s wife, as full-sized ones were used to launch ships, especially in Japan, and Thames



Ironworks had built warships for the Japanese Navy. Genealogical research suggests that Arnold Hills was a collateral descendant of the 18th-century Richard Hills. (Arnold Hills turned out to be an interesting figure, but not connected with Merton! Keith would welcome any advice on the motto.)

- ◆ **Correspondent (1):** David Haunton had asked **Eric Montague** about an odd monument in Mitcham parish churchyard, the subject of a recent proposal for local listing. It comprises a low stone plinth supporting a horizontal cross-shape, the ends of which are inscribed: 'The Ancient Churchyard/was enlarged AD1855/ The new Burial Ground added/AD1880[?] and Extended 1909'. Monty told him that it had once supported a short column with a sundial on top. Has anyone a photo of the sundial?

Monty also pointed out that David had misled the Ravensbury walkers about the 'ornamental water' beside the Watermeads Estate in the north-east corner of the Park. This was not part of the Mitcham Grove grounds, but was dug by the local authority c.1975 as a reservoir or overflow in case the river flooded. (*Mea culpa* – DH)

- ◆ **Correspondent (2):** Our thanks to **David Golder**, one of the Parish Players at our AGM, who asked fellow Players if any could recall Merton Historical Society Players in the mid-1950s (see March *Bulletin*). Sadly, none could, but David's brother-in-law Mike lived in Morden at the time and although he doesn't remember there being such a group, he does remember three names from the cast-list of the play reading reproduced in the last *Bulletin*. Mike sent us this, but he cannot guarantee its authenticity, as it is just from his memory: 'Oliver Reed could certainly be real. He was born in Wimbledon, nephew of the film director Sir Carol Reed and grandson of Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree and was the right sort of age ... **Harold Carty** to my knowledge went to Rutlish School and was about 3 or 4 years older than me (so would have been about 80 now) ... After leaving Rutlish he became an airline pilot, married, and settled down in Banstead. He died relatively young ... **Derek Wright** was of a similar age ... and lived on Cannon Hill Lane opposite the Common and was a regular at St James's church.'

David Haunton

Friday 25 April – Seven present. David Haunton in the chair

- ◆ **David Luff**, ever vigilant on behalf of the (remains of) the priory precinct wall, reported the possibility of some pointing being done to part of the stretch beside Sainsbury's, though what was needed was structural work. He also showed us 100-year old photos of the wall to compare with his recent ones. Archaeologist Dave Saxby had been contacted by those responsible for the wall. David has also been taking photographs along the Pickle. He repeated concerns about the wall fragment, covered in ivy, in the garden of the Windsor Avenue maisonnettes.
- ◆ **Judith Goodman** had noticed an article in the local free newspaper about a chapel in Wilton Road, Colliers Wood, by local architect H P Burke Downing (1865-1947), and hoped to learn more about him. Among other work he was responsible for Pelham School (now Downing House flats), Singlegate School, St Barnabas, Mitcham, and the Merton war memorial.
- ◆ **Keith Penny** had brought along an account of a Sunday walk in 1922 from Streatham through Lonesome and Eastfields to Mitcham parish church (see page 8), which led to a lively discussion. He also noted the extraordinary number (more than 40) of sports grounds in Streatham/Mitcham at that time.
- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** had been looking at Spital Farm, held in 1538 by John Clerk (various spellings). Clerk's will, dated 1573, was an interesting document, and we speculated about his relationship with his wife. While he kindly allowed her to keep all the possessions she had brought to the marriage, the constraints his will placed on her ensured that very little otherwise would come to her. There must be a story there.
Peter reported that Sutton Archives have recently acquired an original copy of the Sutton Enclosure award of 1808-14 and map of 1815, a photographed copy of which he had brought to the meeting. He had also been allowed to photocopy the Cheam Enclosure map of 1806, which he, John Pile and David Rymill were investigating in an attempt to identify ancient manorial boundaries.
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** is investigating the Mitcham brewery, which stood on the site where the new fire station is to be built. Both brewery and house (The Beeches) are recorded in the 1910 Valuation.
- ◆ **David and Katharina Haunton** have been researching two artists. They have now found that George Augustus Wallis (1770-1847), born in Merton, married his Scottish wife at St James's church, Piccadilly. American Dewey Bates, son of a stockbroker, lived in Antwerp and Paris, as well as London. He drew scenes on the Wandle (see last Workshop report above).

Judith Goodman

Dates of next Workshops: Fridays 20 June, 8 August and 26 September at 2.30pm

At Wandle Industrial Museum. All are welcome.

The following article is from the *Streatham News* of 10 February 1922, and was passed to Keith Penny by John W Brown of the Streatham Society (and of this Society), to whom we are very grateful.

DOWN LONESOME WAY.

SUNDAY MORNING WALK TOWARDS MITCHAM.

BY E. BRINSMEAD GOUGH.

My Sunday morning walk took me through the by-ways round Lonesome, a descriptive name to an off-shoot of Streatham, lying towards Mitcham. The sun shone gloriously.

Down Greyhound-lane then – a road not so long ago an avenue of stately elms, traces of which are seen in a single row of stumps in a shabby hedge, past cottages and flats – as if in broad fields there had been little room for building.

Humble to a degree, these homes, yet not without pride to the dwellers, many of whom were out refurbishing frontages. Toddling youngsters made their way to the iron mission hall for Sunday school.

The itinerant vendor of vinegar (of all things) vied in crying his wares with him who sold news. A man in collarless ease was exhorting a terrier to go indoors when the sight of footballers turned me to their direction, and I was soon ploughing my way across turf to a forest of goal posts, for the targets of many clubs are hereabouts.

SMOKE FROM A FACTORY

Not caring to wait till a match began, I wended my way to a chemical factory, whose shaft belched forth smoke in a work-a-day fashion. So far the serenity of an old-time Sunday had been absent, nor was it lessened when a little later a steam exhaust hissed in unison to pulsating engine.

Further on were the remains of that derelict enterprise of spacious houses begun and never finished. No longer stand imposing columns supporting stone lintels to ambitious porches, which, in their broken state, remotely remind of ruined Pompeii.

Nearby was Streatham Park Cemetery, comparatively new, but already much begravated. Truly the population of London is great, and with each “God’s Acre” attached to her churches closed, nothing remains but to dot the fringe of her domain with capacious burial grounds.

Adjacent lay a last resting place for those of the Jewish faith. Here one observes the head stones bear sculptured hands where a Christian would engrave a cross.

£50 WARNING

Soon I came to piggeries, market gardens and an isolated firework factory.

Reading the warning to trespassers that a penalty of £50 would be incurred by a breach of this prohibition, I kept strictly to the outer fencing, and was rewarded by coming on a veritable sanctuary for birds.

Here rose a riot of trills from feathered songsters, particularly that of the thrush.

Through the clear air came pleasing tones of distant chimes. For the moment I thought St. Leonard’s or Immanuel of Streatham was calling, but it proved to be the old church of Mitcham, to which, in delight of listening, I turned my steps.

Over fields and across the railway between modest dwellings whose gardens received that weekly attention which the leisure of Sunday affords and so on I crossed the highway for Sutton.

The bustling contrast could not fail to be arresting. Here motors in all varieties were southward bound. “Who will o’er the downs with me?” was writ large on the face of each happy traveller.

Cyclists in goodly numbers could not resist the call of so fine a day. Walkers with set stride found the joy of life in every step; they knew they might journey far, for the ubiquitous omnibus would bring them back.

Stopping merely to glance at this familiar sight, my way lay beyond an old mansion – Mitcham House – now up for disposal (a sure sign of its giving way to the onrush of London’s myriads, for, I dare swear, serried rows of houses will rise in its stead) – and on past small shops till the Parish Church stood stately and alone.

Service was well advanced when I seated myself in one of the spacious galleries, the seventh person only in those many pews. Opposite was evidently the Sunday school of three dozen children and a few seniors. So struck was I by the small attendance, that I counted the congregation instead of chanting the psalm.

A liberal estimate was three hundred, and “it gives one to think furiously”, as the French say, as to what has come over our church that its hold has so weakened.

Here was a beautiful edifice, its stained glass, chancel, altar, and vaulted roof all breathing that atmosphere of higher things. The rich toned bells, competent choir and melodious organ, added their influence, and there was an excellent rendering of the service by its clergy – yet all combined could attract but a fourth of its seating capacity.

WHAT’S WRONG?

Are we gardeners, footballers, motorists and pedestrians so obsessed by hobbies that we cannot spare an hour or so for reflection in quietude remote from our world?

Service over, I paused to verify my watch by the century-and-a-half old sundial near by. Then I plunged into a poorish neighbourhood, where, oh irony, a shop blared forth a gramophone. That was enough! My rambling and ruminating were at an end.

I sprang on an omnibus and was quickly back in Streatham, after a morning of unusual pleasure in an exploration of Lonesome and beyond.

And KEITH PENNY adds:

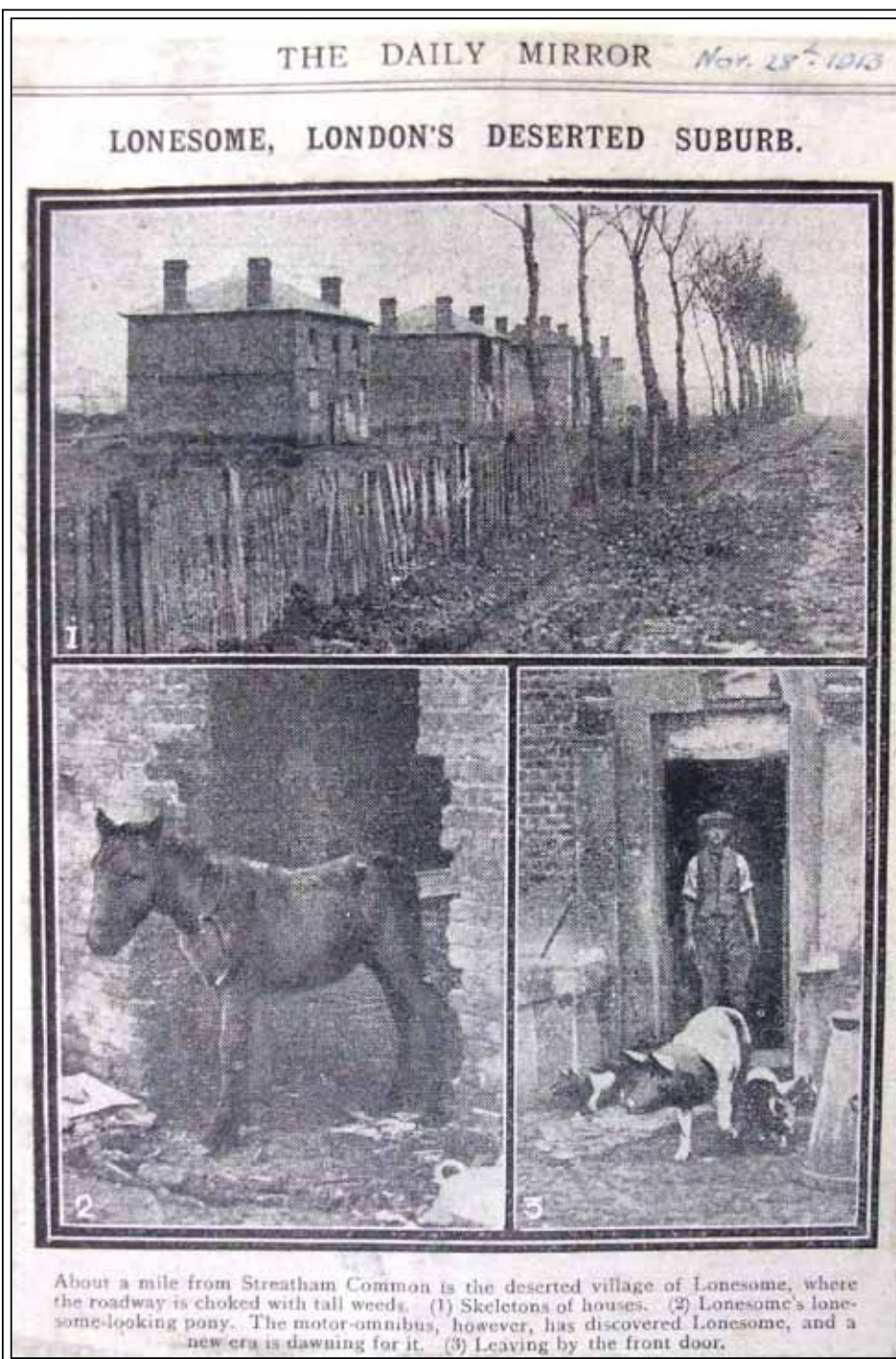
NOTES ON 'DOWN LONESOME WAY'

Remembered in 1936, Streatham Vale had been a narrow, muddy track: 'on each side of the lane were fields of flowers, chrysanthemums and pansies, with large patches of turnips, mangold-wurzel, carrots and other root crops'¹ 'A Cottage Tenant' remembered 'the unlighted fields and market gardens' of Lonesome.²

The chemical works belonged to Messrs Forster and Gregory. Established in 1852, it lasted to the mid-1930s, after which the six-acre site was used to complete Rowan Crescent. The 50 or so employees made pigments and solvents, some of which were hazardous and obnoxious, for the India rubber industry.³ With urbanisation and owner-occupation came complaints: one made in May 1928 to the Urban District Council led to an inspection which concluded that procedures would be in place by June to limit the chances of [ammonia] fumes escaping from the 'red antimony and arsenic sulphur plant'.⁴

Lonesome had been home to commercial activities that would no longer be welcome in a residential area: into the 20th century bricks were being made with clay from the north of Meopham Road; nuisance from piggeries to the north-east of that road was reported as late as 1939; in 1923 there was still a slaughterhouse in Grove Terrace.⁵ Less distasteful perhaps, by 1910 there was a gas-mantle factory between Meopham and Lilian Roads.⁶

After the chemical factory Mr Gough passed the remains of 'Blake's Folly', ten villas started in the 1860s, structurally complete but never finished inside. Built for 'Squire' Blake of Malden, they were never occupied. According to R M Chart, Blake was a 'fine looking man and a shrewd man generally, but he chose the wrong site at Lonesome'.⁷ The local and national press 'discovered' this ruined place at various times before the 1914-18 war. In the *Daily Chronicle's* article 'Deserted Village – Lonesome in Name and Character' the writer finds the 'village' after enquiring from a cycling police-sergeant. 'Right on the edge of Lonesome Wood is a double row of big houses, upon whose hearths a fire has never been lit, and over whose thresholds no footsteps has[sic] ever passed.'⁸ In 1913 the *Daily Mirror* published pictures, including one of pigs leaving through a house doorway (right).⁹ Demolition preceded housing development in 1927-8, although the carriageway retained a width not found elsewhere in the new streets.



The cemetery, owned by the Great Southern Cemetery and Land Company, began burials in January 1909.¹⁰ In March 1915 four acres of the land were sold for the Jewish Cemetery.¹¹

Gough's precise route is not clear, but he mentions Pain's firework factory and the Mizen market gardens. Pain's, accessed from Acacia Road, otherwise known as Firework Lane (a name with sufficient currency for it to be included in the legal definition of St Olave's parish boundary), lasted until 1966, to be replaced by the Eastfields estate. Mizen's were big local employers, growing culinary herbs, cut flowers and vegetables, mainly on the site now occupied by St Mark's Academy. Near the factory and market garden in Eastfields the Mitcham school board in 1903 opened Lonesome School, at a cost of £4,430, to the designs of R M Chart.¹²

The 'iron mission hut' for Sunday school is probably the Mission Hall at the junction of Lilian and Marian Roads, founded by Streatham Baptist Church in 1887.¹³ (The Church of England had the Good Shepherd Mission, then in the parish of St Mark, Mitcham, but always in the direct charge of Captains of the Church Army.) The building, on land off Lilian Road and to the south of Marian Road, was opened in 1906; it could accommodate 200 people.¹⁴

The 'humble cottages' seen by Gough were presumably the terraces in Leonard, Lilian and Marian Roads, whilst the flats were later 1-19a Greyhound Terrace. In 1922 the UDC dealt with a 'nuisance' at a house in Marian Road (insufficient water closets), in 1923 with defective ash-pits in Ebenezer Terrace (built c.1870), and with rats in the same road in 1931.¹⁵

Gough's walk in 1922 describes Lonesome as it was before the great urbanisation of about four years later. He sees it as an 'other' place, where fields and market gardens surround factories and undistinguished Victorian workers' housing; he disdainfully italicises '*flats*'. The only adult inhabitant individually mentioned is in 'collarless ease' (not Sunday best, but it is his day off); he is 'exhorting a terrier to go inside' – a polite version of the actual words?

At least until the 1890s the area, and the lane to Streatham, had a reputation as a place to avoid, even in daylight, by unaccompanied women or children.¹⁶ Gypsies used the route, and some Streatham people thought Mitcham people 'rough'.¹⁷ Visitors were uncomplimentary. The *Daily Chronicle* in 1906 noted disparagingly that in the 'village' there was one butcher's shop 'where meat is sold only in the form of sausages'.¹⁸ In 1926 a *Morning Post* writer came to the 'grimy mid-Victorian barracks, which is Lonesome'.¹⁹ The writer of 'Mitcham Notes' visited 'the jungle and swamp which is Lonesome'.²⁰

Lonesome was reached by the motor-bus by 1913,²¹ and London General began a local service from the *Greyhound* to Lonesome in 1921. The area stopped being lonesome when rows of houses were built along, and to the sides of, the thoroughfare renamed 'Streatham Vale' in 1924,²² and over the clay-soil fields to the east and south-east, where a pioneer settlement took its name from that of the field on which it was built – Long Thornton Park.

National newspapers quoted are from cuttings books at Wandsworth Heritage Service. Images courtesy of Wandsworth Heritage Service.

See also E N Montague *Mitcham Histories 4: Pollards Hill, Commonsides East and Lonesome* (2002) Merton Historical Society in association with Commonsides Community Development Trust pp20-32.

1. Article produced by St Andrew's parish (Wandsworth Heritage Service)

2. *Balham, Tooting and Mitcham News and Mercury* [News] 13.03.1931

3. *Red Book of Commerce* 1929 and *Kelly's Directory of the Chemical Industries* 1930

4. *News* 29.06.1928

5. *Transactions of Mitcham Urban District Council* [UDC], various dates

6. OS map, 1910 update. Gerald Morris in *Flashback on Mitcham* (Surrey History Centre) gives 1918 as the date.

7. *Sutton Advertiser* [Advertiser] 11.11.1926

8. *Daily Chronicle* 06.10.1906

9. *Daily Mirror* 28.11.1913

10. Company file in The National Archives

11. Meller and Parsons *London Cemeteries: An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer*

12. Mitcham School Board Minute Book 1900-1903 (Surrey History Centre)

13. *Streatham in Old Photographs*

14. *Advertiser* 26.05.27 and Ecclesiastical Commissioners NB 37/ 170

15. UDC

16. I C A Isaac *Vale Vistas* Streatham Society 1982

17. Comment from John W Brown, quoting his father

18. *Daily Chronicle* 06.10.1906

19. *Morning Post* 03.12.1926

20. *Advertiser* 08.01.1925

21. *Daily Mirror* 28.11.1913 and Isaac *op. cit.*

22. UDC 08.04.1924

‘THIRTY YEARS CARING FOR THE VESTMENTS AT WESTMINSTER ABBEY’

Rosemary Turner’s talk on 15 February began in 1984 with her recalling dropping in on some friends who were at Westminster Abbey, to see what they were doing. She has been going there every Wednesday ever since. The membership has changed over the years, and now only one other member of the group has served as long as Rosemary. Members have different levels of ability, and their task is to make and repair the Abbey’s vestments and other textiles.

The team, all volunteers, is called the Guild of St Faith, and it was formed at the beginning of 1981. They take their name from the only chapel within the precincts to be dedicated to a female saint, other than Mary. Previously the work had been done by one woman, who was employed by the Abbey. When she gave up, for health reasons, the Guild was formed.

Rosemary’s group was originally led by Hilary Cooper, who used to teach embroidery for Merton Adult Education. The leader now is Maureen Jupp, who was formerly a verger responsible for the vestments and the Guild. There used to be groups meeting on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, but there is no longer a Tuesday group.

The Guild meets in Infirmary Hall in the Little Cloister, which is where once the monks too frail to attend their daily duties would have lived. This medieval space has a stone-flagged floor (under the carpet), stone walls, stained-glass windows and a vaulted ceiling with a hole for smoke to escape, once upon a time. Heating has improved since waxworks, once stored there, were found to be cracking, but there are still medieval draughts.

The work is varied. It might be sewing on buttons; attaching the regalia of King Olaf of Norway to cushions to be carried at his memorial service; doing the same with Bobby Moore’s caps; sometimes repairing modern cassocks; sometimes conserving vestments made in the reign of Charles II; sometimes repairing pockets and linings; sometimes stitching with gold thread; and so on. A Union Jack was made into a curtain for the Queen Mother to unveil a plaque in memory of the people who worked in the secret service during the war. One of the Guild’s members and her husband had worked in that department.

When items can be spared long term a complete conservation can be undertaken, but more often it is a case of short notice and a quick repair. A few years ago all the groups collaborated in restoring the pall, given by the Artists’ Guild, which was used to cover the grave of the Unknown Soldier (detail right, showing part of a shield on the pall before repair, and the restored pall below).



Rosemary described herself as the ‘Bagpuss’ of the group, noticing items that are looking sad and bringing them back to life. Sometimes such things, because of their frailty, are destined to go into the Abbey’s museum, rather than back into use.

All sorts of things have been donated over the years, such as gold work from military uniforms. She was once asked to make a set of apparel using parts of an 18th-century sword regalia.



Over the years the Guild has done repairs on all the sets of vestments, and more recently

they have been making new sets, each of which consists of a huge number of items. So there is plenty of work for the foreseeable future. Rosemary and friends appeared in the BBC programme about the Abbey while they were working on one of these sets.

Rosemary’s well illustrated talk was warmly received by an enthusiastic audience.

Judith Goodman

‘WORCESTER PARK, OLD MALDEN AND NORTH CHEAM: HISTORY AT OUR FEET’

Christ Church Hall was comfortably packed on Saturday 15 March to enjoy a return visit from David Rymill, who first gave us a talk in March 2003. David, an archivist with Hampshire Record Office, is a long-term resident and historian of Worcester Park, an area which lies at the junction of three ancient parishes and three modern local authorities. Assisted by his parents Margaret and Bob operating two projectors, David took us through the history of the area from the earliest discoveries to the present time, illustrated with a wide range of ‘then and now’ photographs.

Flint tools from the Stone and Bronze Ages have been found in the area, but the earliest evidence of settlement was discovered during excavations in Church Road, Malden, between 1941 and 1951 in a field known as Lady Hay, which uncovered Iron Age flints, pottery and hut-circles within a boundary ditch of the early Iron Age, possibly from around 500BC. Settlement spread to the area near Malden Manor station, where excavations prior to the development of Percy Gardens in 1991 revealed post-holes, pits and pottery from a cluster of huts within a boundary ditch from the middle and late Iron Age, dating from the first century BC. By the early centuries AD settlement had extended to the vicinity of St John’s church and rectory in Old Malden, with evidence for the cultivation of wheat, barley and oats, the rearing of sheep and cattle, grinding of corn and weaving of cloth, as well as a possible musical instrument made from a perforated goose bone. The Roman road later known as Stane Street formed the eastern boundary of what is now Worcester Park, following the route of the present A24 from the border of Cheam with Morden at Pylford Bridge, towards Ewell. Anglo-Saxon place-names abound in the area, though it is difficult to identify specific settlement sites, but the name Malden – meaning the cross on the hill – indicates that Christian worship has continued for more than a millennium on the site of St John’s church, which still has some flint walls of the Saxon period. Excavations within Nonsuch Park suggest that Cuddington church was also of Saxon foundation. David is attracted to the suggestion that the name Motspur Park, from Motts Furze Farm, and the curious interlocking local authority boundaries still found near Green Lane School, might commemorate a Saxon ‘moot’ or meeting place at the boundaries of the parishes of Cheam, Malden, Merton and Morden, as well as the Hundreds of Copthorne, Kingston, Brixton and Wallington, though other interpretations are possible.

The oldest parts of the present Manor House at Malden date from the early 17th century, but it is probably on the site of earlier buildings. In the 1240s the manor was purchased by Walter de Merton, a lawyer who worked for Merton priory, where he is likely to have been educated, and who had been rewarded by the priory with the post of rector of Cuddington. Later he became Chancellor to both Henry III and Edward I, before being appointed bishop of Rochester. In the 1260s he founded a ‘House of Scholars’ at Malden to finance his nephews studying at Oxford, and in 1274 this became Merton College Oxford, the first self-governing residential university college in England. Merton College still owns the manor and has early maps and other documents in its archives.

Cuddington church, its manor house and its settlement had a less protracted history, falling prey to Henry VIII who decided to build Nonsuch Palace on the site in 1538, using stone from the recently dissolved Merton priory for its foundations. It was to be an elaborate hunting lodge, with a Little Park (now Nonsuch Park) surrounding it, and a Great Park across the old Roman road extending to (and somewhat beyond) the boundaries with Malden and Cheam. In 1606 Edward Somerset, 4th earl of Worcester, was appointed Keeper of the Great Park by James I, and he built a new Keeper’s house there, later known as Worcester House, the park becoming Worcester Park. A plan and survey of the house have survived, but no illustrations, so David showed a painting of a contemporary mansion, Quenby Hall in Leicestershire, to help us imagine its magnificence. It had probably been demolished by 1797 when a new mansion known as Worcester Park House stood on a new site near the present *Hogsmill Tavern*. Part of the garden wall of Worcester House was used by Millais as the setting for his painting *A Huguenot on St Bartholomew’s Eve*. Other large houses in the area were Fullbrooks near Old Malden Library (which survived into the 1920s, its grounds being used for fêtes), Tolworth Hall, just over the Hogsmill from the present *Hogsmill Tavern*, and North Cheam House – the original location of St Anthony’s hospital and later the site of Gleasons’ office block.

By the late 18th century the Great Park had been broken up to form several farms, and the area became indistinguishable from the older farms in the neighbourhood, such as Malden Green Farm, the 17th-century farmhouse and barn of which still survive. In the early 20th century it housed the Albemarle Shooting School, which in 1923 welcomed the Duke of York, later George VI. The photograph opposite shows the owner and his family posing for a promotional picture.

The railway brought development to Worcester Park in 1859 with the building of Worcester Park station. The Avenue was developed in the 1860s, but the first edition Ordnance Survey map shows that the ancient settlements



photograph Miss D Hacker

When the railway was electrified in 1925 the area became a centre for suburban expansion, being advertised as ‘a garden suburb’ and as ‘living in the country’! The large houses and farms – and Brock’s firework factory at North Cheam – have now gone, though some open spaces have survived, including Shadbolt Park and Auriol Park. But the sub-title of David’s latest book reminds us that history is still ‘at our feet’ in Worcester Park, Old Malden and North Cheam, as we will discover when David leads our walk on the morning of 14 June. Many thanks to David and his parents for a most enjoyable afternoon, and for inviting us to explore the area further in June.

Peter Hopkins



photograph Daily Press Photographic Agency

BOOK REVIEWS

David Rymill *Worcester Park & Cuddington: A Walk through the Centuries* (2000, The Buckwheat Press) £8.95 plus £1 p&p; **David Rymill *Worcester Park, Old Malden & North Cheam: History at our Feet*** (2012, The Buckwheat Press) £10 plus £2 p&p; (both books: £18.95 plus £3 p&p)

Lying across three boroughs and three parishes (in two dioceses), the Worcester Park area has been rather neglected by local historians. With these two volumes, David Rymill has now splendidly remedied that neglect. Both books are organised on the same plan: they conduct the reader on circular walks around the area, discussing the history and associations of each street and open space in turn. On our walks we read of Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon sites; medieval villages; the sweeping away of a complete village for the establishment of Nonsuch Park and Palace; the resurgence of farming; the coming of the railways; the subsequent explosion of suburban housing; wartime experiences; post-war changes and the Joint Computer Centre. All of this is topped by a splendid poem, *The Sabre-Toothed Tigers of Worcester Park* by India Russell, at the end of the second book. There are lots of well-captioned photographs, and the praiseworthy feature of several pairs of Ordnance Survey maps, ancient and more recent, bringing ‘then and now’ comparisons into sharp focus. An impressive range of sources is evident: apart from books, David has consulted local publications (newspapers, parish magazines, societies’ newsletters), many archives (national, newspaper, Surrey and Sutton), the Internet Movie Database, and other specialist websites. But his chief pride must lie in the staggering numbers of local people he has consulted – over 250 in the second book – many of whom he quotes directly, lending life and spontaneity to much of his text. Though the ground covered (literally) by each book overlaps to some extent, items and events which the earlier volume discusses in some detail are treated in a more summary fashion in the later one. David Rymill is to be congratulated on a wealth of research and learning, lightly worn and clearly and enthusiastically expressed. His books are thoroughly recommended.

David Haunton

PS The name ‘The Buckwheat Press’ is derived from that of the field where the first house occupied by the Rymill family in the area had been built.

Cheques payable to D R Rymill can be sent to 77 Cromwell Road, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 7JR

‘MERTON PRIORY: CELEBRATING 900 YEARS’

Forty-three members, guests and visitors gathered at Christchurch Hall on Saturday 12 April to celebrate 900 years since the founding of Merton priory in the Merton Park area at the end of 1114.

We began with a fascinating presentation by **Janette Henderson**, an Oxford Geography graduate who in 2012 obtained an MA in Archaeology from the University of Bristol. Janette has lived in Colliers Wood for the past 20 years and chose the **granges of Merton priory** as the subject for her dissertation. Merton priory was one of the largest and most influential monastic establishments, though little remains today on its original site or on its site by the Wandle following a change in location in 1117. But Janette’s challenge was to discover what if anything remains of the priory’s granges in the present landscape.

The word ‘grange’ [Latin *grangia*] originally merely meant a barn, but in the 12th century the Cistercians applied the term to self-contained and consolidated agricultural units each run by a community of lay brethren, with domestic and agricultural buildings and a chapel, often within one or more moated enclosures. The idea soon spread to other monastic orders including the Augustinian canons of Merton, continuing in many places until the early 14th century when most were let to tenants instead of being managed directly by the community. Not every monastic manor developed into a grange, but ten sites have been identified as possible granges of Merton priory.

Outside the main gate of Merton priory stood **Merton Grange**, mentioned in 16th-century documents when leased to tenant farmers. Its lands covered the eastern section of the parish/manor as far as Merton Park, and a substantial section became part of Morden Hall Park. At the opposite end of the parish/manor stood **West Barnes**, with the remnant of a moated site briefly surviving the building of Raynes Park County Secondary School in 1935 (now part of Raynes Park High School). Its lands reached from the Beverley Brook to the western edge of Cannon Hill Common. It is not known whether West Barnes was an independent grange or a detached part of Merton Grange.

Upton, on the outskirts of Slough, is called a grange in documents relating to the dissolution of Merton priory in 1538, though it had been let to tenant farmers for some years. A 14th-century open hall house (right) with a 15th- or 16th-century solar still stands next to the parish church, the tower of which includes 12th-century work.



(photographs by Janette Henderson 2012)

The priory’s grange at **Tollsworth**, in Chaldon, Surrey, is mentioned in a 13th-century document. Though this might just refer to a barn, a 14th-century solar and an early 15th-century hall house survive (left), and an earthwork to the south of the house is visible on mid-20th-century aerial photographs. We were delighted that the present owners, Mr and Mrs Gillett, were able to join us on this occasion, and are grateful to them for inviting the Society to visit their splendid house in July (for further details see page 2).



Holdshott, in Heckfield parish near Basingstoke, is never called a grange in extant records, but it has all the features of one – a previously moated site which had a chapel in the centre, a mill and fish stews. The priory owned this estate from 1208 until its dissolution in 1538, when it was valued at £38 13s 4d.

Merton priory held a hide of land in **Milton**, near Milton Keynes, during the reign of Henry II (1154-1189), but in 1247 it leased its lands here to Woburn abbey which was the major landowner in the area. Any grange here might have belonged to either monastic house.

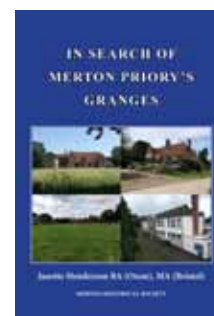
The priory also held several estates in **Kingston** from the 12th century, and this has led to the supposition that its Canbury estate had been run as a grange, though a 16th-century reference to ‘a vacant plot of ground where the grange had stood’ probably refers to a barn. Until the mid-19th century a large tithe barn stood on the site now occupied by Kingston railway station.

Similarly, a 1301 reference to a grange at **Eton** could be to a barn rather than a monastic grange, especially as it was so near to Upton. In 1443 the priory’s estates at Eton, in their possession since the 12th century, were granted to Eton College.

Two churches in **Tregony**, in distant Cornwall, came into Merton's possession in 1267 by exchange with the abbey of Valle in Normandy. At the Dissolution the priory was still receiving £6 13s 4d a year from Tregony rectory as the value of the tithes, but it was surely too far away to be run as a grange, and a local man was appointed to deal with the priory's affairs there in 1324.

'**Amerden Priory**', never actually a priory, has been identified as a possible Merton priory grange and is surrounded by earthworks suggestive of a possible moat but it is questionable whether Merton Priory ever had a grange there since there is no documentary evidence of this.

Janette has allowed MHS to publish her thesis under the title *In Search of Merton Priory's Granges*. At 70 pages rich in maps and photographs printed in full colour, it sells at £10 a copy, but is available to members at £8 plus £1.50 postage from Peter Hopkins, 57 Templecombe Way, Morden, Surrey SM4 4JF, or ring him on 020 8543 8471 to arrange collection.



After a break for refreshments – and a chance to buy Janette's book – we settled down for another absorbing presentation, by Richard Chelley on '**The Merton Priory Manuscripts**'. Richard, a Merton councillor, became intrigued with the priory when investigating the possibility of removing the electricity pylon that blights the area. Initial hopes to have the priory site recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site proved unrealistic, so Richard turned his considerable talents to the surviving manuscripts belonging to, or connected with, the priory for possible inclusion in the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. There is a wealth of documents in a variety of archives – Richard has identified more than 50 manuscripts from just the first two centuries of the priory's existence. These are being copied by Timothy Noad, a Herald Painter at the College of Arms in London and a Scribe to the Crown Office at the House of Lords, using vellum and inks matching the originals. They range from the famous Provisions of Merton of 1236, the first entry in the Statute Books (detail right), to brief notes recorded in the Patent Rolls and Close Rolls, such as the safe conduct issued from Merton in 1215 by King John allowing the barons' representatives to meet his representatives prior to the meeting at Runnymede and the granting of Magna Carta; from entries in the priory's own Annals to accounts by the eminent 13th-century chronicler Matthew Paris; from letters from popes and archbishops to a letter from one of the early canons of Merton. Four of these superb facsimiles were on display at the meeting.



But in addition to getting these documents copied, Richard has been investigating the story they tell. Why was Merton priory so influential? Richard highlighted the priory's reputation for piety and as a training ground for saints, and also as a centre of learning before the founding of a university at Oxford. The early canons were men of substance and learning – including a renowned Italian scholar; a chaplain to the earl of Huntingdon, later King David I of Scotland; and a former dean of Salisbury. These were the men chosen by kings, bishops and archbishops to head the eight daughter houses founded even before the first stone church at Merton was completed, two becoming abbots. It had close links with successive archbishops of Canterbury. In 1123 William Corbeil, archbishop 1123-1136, invited canons from Merton to found a community of Augustinian canons at St Gregory's, Canterbury, and in 1135 to set up a daughter house at Dover. Thomas Becket, a former student here, became a canon of Merton immediately before his consecration in 1162, passing several other important monastic houses en route! Hubert Walter, archbishop 1193-1205 and justiciar of England 1193-1198, similarly adopted the habit of a canon of Merton before his consecration. In 1213, following the closure of Oxford in the 'town versus gown' dispute, Edmund Rich, who was to be archbishop of Canterbury 1234-1240, spent a year or more in retreat at Merton preparing for his lectures, until the schools of Oxford reopened in the autumn of 1214. In that same year Stephen Langton, archbishop 1207-1228, stayed at Merton priory with the bishops of Ely, Lincoln and London on their return from exile; he was later to be the principal architect of Magna Carta. In 1236 Edmund Rich returned to Merton as one of the key figures behind the Provisions of Merton. In 1273 Robert Kilwardby, archbishop of Canterbury 1273-1278, was consecrated at Merton priory, while in 1282 John Peckham, archbishop 1279-1292, in a letter to his representatives at the papal court in Rome in 1282, listed the prior of Merton as one of five judges that he considered would be best to investigate a dispute about the archbishop's jurisdiction over various abbeys. Both Becket and Rich were to be canonised.

Becket's quarrel with Henry II led to the recall of students from the continent and the beginnings of university life at Oxford; Rich was the first regent master there. A later Merton scholar and clerk, Walter de Merton, was responsible for the beginnings of collegiate life at Oxford with the founding of Merton College in 1274, and when Peterhouse was founded at Cambridge in 1284 its scholars were to 'live together according to the rule of the scholars at Oxford who are called of Merton'.

Merton was also at the centre of political influence in its early years. When King John quarrelled with the Pope over the appointment of Stephen Langton as archbishop, he sent a deputation to Rome, one of whom is named in one document as Richard de Merton. John was only an occasional visitor but his son Henry III frequently stayed here, and paid for repairs to apartments that he used. After John's death the defeated French dauphin, who had been invited by rebel barons to take the crown of England, was brought to Merton to meet the papal legate, the queen mother and Henry's supporters, before being escorted to Dover. In 1232, the disgraced Hubert de Burgh sought sanctuary here when Henry III ordered his arrest (right, marginal illustration after Matthew Paris). In Henry's later years priors of Merton were summoned to Parliament.



Merton was also influential in helping to shape the English legal system. Three of the archbishops linked to Merton were key figures in the framing of three major pieces of legislation. Becket's downfall was due to his support of Canon Law, which clashed with Henry II's reorganisation of the English legal system. The 1166 Assize of Clarendon was to play a major part in that reform by defining the role of the jury and by creating roving judges – the origins of the Eyre and circuit judges. Langton was the principal architect of Magna Carta which, while confirming 'that the English Church shall be free, and shall have its rights undiminished and its liberties unimpaired', went on to enshrine within our constitution the rights of the common man that still reverberate throughout the world to this very day. Edmund Rich, author of the 1236 Provisions of Merton, followed in Langton's footsteps by crafting it in such a way that, whilst fulfilling the barons' demands, it also attempted to address some of the more unjust elements of the law – of its ten clauses, the first two concern the rights of widows while three others those of minors. Here too was the final rejection of Canon Law in England when the lords, objecting to the bishops' demands that in cases of illegitimacy Canon Law should prevail, yelled with one voice, 'We are unwilling to change the laws of England'. Seventy years later, when the Pope attempted to introduce inquisitors into England to try the Templars accused of heresy, it was declared that such tactics were not allowed under English Law, and most of the English Templars were instead sent to abbeys and priories to be disciplined, two coming to Merton. But Richard concluded by pointing out that it was not just the **text** of the Provisions of Merton that was so fundamental in the formation of our legal system. The **meeting** itself was a turning point in English government. Unlike Runnymede, where an unwilling monarch was forced to submit to his powerful barons, the Provisions of Merton were the result of debate. Ten months later a case was adjourned by the king so that 'Parliament' could determine the law – the first official use of that term. No longer could a monarch dictate the law. The spirit of debate – of *parliamentum* – that had been introduced at Merton had become the recognised system of government in England, a system valued today by over three billion people across the world!

These two presentations formed a fitting means of celebrating Merton priory's foundation 900 years ago, and we are grateful to both Janette and Richard for sharing their expertise with us in such an enjoyable way. Both speakers expressed their gratitude to the Society for the help and support they had received in their researches, but we are privileged to be involved in such works of scholarship. We are delighted that Richard has also agreed to the publication of his talk, and we are grateful to him for letting us reproduce two images in the meantime.

Peter Hopkins

CELEBRATING MERTON PRIORY, FOUNDED 900 YEARS AGO

To mark the founding of Merton Priory in 1114 the Wimbledon Society is putting on an exhibition, curated by Cyril Maidment, to celebrate this important centre of religious life and education, which also played a significant role in national politics. The exhibition examines the story of the priory from its modest beginnings, through its years of power and influence, to its destruction in 1538.

It will occupy the Norman Plastow Gallery at the Wimbledon Museum of Local History, 22 Ridgway, from 12 July to 31 August, on Saturdays and Sundays 2.30-5.00pm and Wednesdays 11.30am-2.30pm

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.

website: www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

email: mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

Printed by Peter Hopkins