



PRESIDENT:
VICE PRESIDENT: Judith Goodman
CHAIR: Keith Penny

BULLETIN No. 205

MARCH 2018



Typical Blay houses in Elm Walk (see p.16, photo: David Haunton)

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PROGRAMME MARCH–SEPTEMBER 2018

Saturday 10 March 2.30pm

St James' Church Hall, Merton
'History of the Conservators of Wimbledon & Putney Commons'

An illustrated talk by **Simon Lee**, the Chief Executive

Saturday 14 April 2.30pm

St James' Church Hall, Merton
'For Valour – The Story of Merton's VCs'
An illustrated talk by **Sarah Gould**, LBM Heritage

NO VISIT IS PLANNED FOR MAY

Thursday 7 June 10.30am

Wandle Walk with Mick Taylor

Meet at gates to Watermeads (on A217 London Road near junction with Riverside Drive)
and walk to Honeywood Museum at Carshalton Ponds (2 miles approx.)

Wednesday 18 July 11.45am for 12.00

Tour of Ham House with Charlotte Morrison

Free for National Trust and Art Fund members, for others £9 concessions, £15 full. Pay on the day.
Please book with Bea Oliver

Wednesday 15 August 11.00am

Walk round Kingston with Charlotte Morrison

Meet outside the Church in the Market Place. £5 pp on the day.
Please book with Bea Oliver

Wednesday 19 September 11.00am

Kneller Hall (Military School of Music)

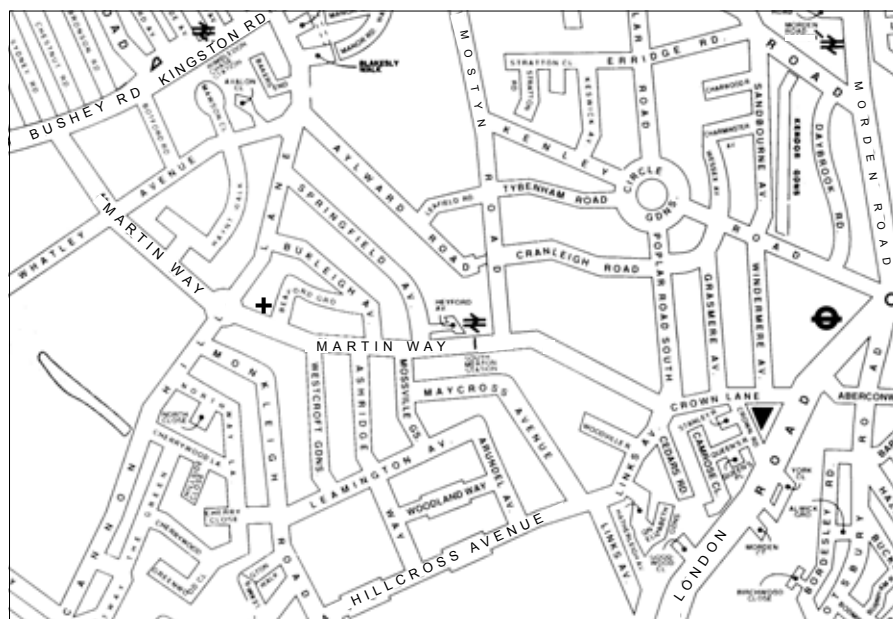
65 Kneller Road, Twickenham, TW2 7DN, near the Rugby Ground
Nearest stations Twickenham and Whitton.

£5 pp on the day. Visitors need ID for security (Freedom Pass is acceptable)
Please book with Bea Oliver

Note also Workshops at Wandle Industrial Museum, London Road
2.30pm on Fridays 2 March, 20 April, 1 June(tbc) All Members are welcome

St James' Church Hall is in Martin Way, next to the church (officially in Beaford Grove).

Buses 164 and 413 stop in Martin Way (in both directions) immediately outside. The church has a tiny car park, but parking in adjacent streets is free.



Visitors are welcome to attend our talks. Entry £2.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2017

Madam Vice President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am pleased to present to you my third report on the activities of the society and its committee. It matches the first two in that there is an element of eviction, or at least removal. Then, it was the need to remove artefacts to private storage; this year we found that the hall here at Christ Church would not be available to us after December. I make no comment on this – I know the other side of hall hire and understand the preference for an all-year, all-day booking. Fortunately, through the good offices of Alan Martyn, we have the use of the hall at St James, Merton, in Martin Way, Morden. Details will be circulated with the *Bulletin*.

Our programme of talks and visits has again been varied and interesting, thanks to the efforts of Bea Oliver. We have walked the Wandle (or at least part of it), viewed archives in London, learnt of the traditional crafts of bookbinding and admired the comforts and splendours of the Charterhouse. Talks began with prehistory and ended again with the Wandle and its mills. Numbers at talks have varied quite a lot. If Saturday afternoon really isn't the best time for 2018, please say so. The committee is going to consider how it might make better use of email to provide reminders of dates and to give other information to members.

The weather in February was so horrible that, as a reward for attending, tea was offered free to those who came, an experiment that has now become normal practice. You could, of course, save up the 30p's that would have gone on teas and buy an extra Society publication. The latest cover a wide time range: Eric Montague's account of excavations at Short Batsworth, Mitcham, in the 1960s has finally made it to the public gaze. Such is its detail and accuracy that it persuaded the Museum of London to accept three skeletons found there, that had for some years languished in a member's loft. The other new publication, *Justice to Men and Country*, looks good on our bookstands; modesty forbids that I make any comment on the quality of the work inside the covers. Allied with this the society put an accompanying reference document as a searchable file on the website, a first time for this form of publishing.

Online publication became possible with the new website. It is excellent: you can read articles on all sorts of local history and browse in the photographic collections. We have Peter Hopkins to thank for the immense labour of assembling the material and displaying it on the site, and the committee thought it right to make an *ex gratia* payment to his nephew for his professional expertise in setting up the website.

We have been present at events in the borough, most recently the exhibitions arranged jointly by the John Innes Society and by the church of St Mary, Merton. In May we had our stall at the very successful Heritage Day at Morden Library. This was another example of the organisational skill of Sarah Gould, who attends our meetings on her Saturdays off, even to the extent of speaking, as she will today after the formalities are over.

Tony Scott attends the Heritage Forum, and the society continues to make representations in connection with particular planning applications. We don't often appear on the winning side, but we did at least reach the front page of the *Wimbledon Guardian* [see p.12].

Your committee has spent time on administrative matters, such as revising the constitution that you have been sent for consideration. Some business just takes a long time, such as negotiations over copyright and the translation we hope to have of the Latin account of Gilbert, the founder of Merton Priory. One thing we do not have to do is organise the annual lunch, which is so ably done by Sheila Harris: the 2018 one is on Wednesday 28 February.

I want to thank our retiring treasurer, David Roe, who has exercised careful stewardship of our finances during the last ten years or so, during which time he revised and improved our insurance arrangements. David made his opinions on items of expenditure known, but always properly accepted the committee's decisions. We are very fortunate that Janet Holdsworth, a member and until now our Independent Examiner, has offered to stand for election as the new Treasurer.

I have already mentioned Peter Hopkins: he feels that it is time for him to give up car-driving, and this will affect the provision of a bookstall at meetings. He will continue to print and provide our books and leaflets, but others will need to offer a car and driver if we are to continue to exhibit our publications, even if not in quite the way to which we have become accustomed. Getting all the equipment here on a Saturday is also coming down to a decreasing number of willing car drivers.

While I am inviting offers, we would like to upgrade some of our publicity material, to make it more colourful and perhaps less wordy. Shops exist that can provide design advice, but if there is any member who has some skill in this area, their help would be welcome. I have before mentioned that some dry storage space would be useful – and anyone who makes an income by selling on Ebay could come in useful, if we have need to dispose of stored items.

So, a good year, though as ever with some challenges for the future. Looking at the *Bulletin* for December 2006, I find that the treasurer had resigned and that the committee had felt bound to examine possible new venues for meetings, because of overcrowding at the Snuff Mill at Morden Hall. The one selected for January 2007 was the church hall at St James, Merton. So, we shall meet there on 13 January 2018 to see if history repeats itself or just goes round in circles.

Keith Penny

‘THERE’S MORE TO MORDEN’

On Saturday 11 November, after the AGM, Sarah Gould gave us nearly an alphabet’s-worth of memorable facts and people of Morden. Nearly an alphabet because a certain amount of special pleading was necessary, while **Z** (*Zzzz*) marked Sarah’s hope that we had not all gone to sleep.

Agricultural origins, illustrated with an early artist’s impression, perhaps more idyllic than exact. The area was still mainly fields in the 1920s, with weather-boarded cottages and Morden Hall Farm was still a farm in the 1930s. George Parker **B**idder, of Mitcham Hall and then Ravensbury Park House, was the Junior QC in the court cases which resulted in the establishment of the Board of Conservators of Mitcham Common.

Crown House was the site of the *Crown* Inn, developed into Caters supermarket in 1964, and becoming Council offices in 1990.

Morden Hall **D**airy set up the milk bottling plant in Kenley Road.

St Helier **E**state was built in the 1920s and 1930s, employing Topham Forrest as architects. It proved useful to lay its own quite extensive light railway to move materials during construction, using 0-6-0 tank engines. It was rumoured that children playing on the Estate sometimes got lost because, though the houses varied in design, many looked the same to junior eyes.

Famous Names lived in Morden, such as George Cole, the actor and comedian, born in Tooting but raised on the Estate, and Amy Shuard, the 1950s soprano, born and raised on the Estate.

The **G**arth family (many called Richard), the lords of the manor of Morden, whose heraldic lions have been adopted on the modern coat of arms of the London Borough of Merton.

The **H**atfeild family of Morden Hall, local benefactors who owned much of Morden not owned by the Garths, gave Morden Hall to the National Trust (and requested no commemorative statue).

Industry was well represented with brick-making, paper mills and several varnish factories. There was music recording at Oak Records, while R G Jones, founded 1926 as one of the first sound engineering firms in the world, closed their Morden works (*right, from RG Jones website*) only in 2001 before moving to Wimbledon.

Joseph Bazalgette the far-seeing engineer-creator of the London sewers, lived in Central Road, before moving to Arthur Road in Wimbledon Park.

Keep off the Grass signs at public greens in Morden Recreation Ground (which was earlier part of Lodge Farm), various flower gardens elsewhere, and Ravensbury Park.

Morden **L**odge was occupied by Abraham Goldsmid, a rich Jewish-Dutch financier, friend of royalty (the Prince of Wales visited in 1806), of playwrights such as Sheridan, and of course of Admiral Nelson.

Morden Park House was originally a 18th-century stately home, which after a major refurbishment in the 1990s is now the local Register Office.

Nursing – the Catherine Gladstone Convalescent Home for women and children was established in Ravensbury Park in the 1920s, and there was a military convalescent home at the Grange.

Odeon – the first Morden cinema opened in 1920 (*right, from Merton Memories, courtesy LBM*), closing in 1973 when it became a B&Q. The *Gaumont* in Rose Hill opened soon after the *Odeon* and closed in 1961. It is now a bingo hall.

Public Houses were well established early on – the *Plough* in Central Road, the *George Inn* dates from the 17th century, and the *Crown* in London Road from about 1801.

Quest for knowledge – the Elizabeth Gardiner school in Central Road was founded in 1731, the Morden Hall Academy c.1830. Later schools established by the local authority were simply numbered from one to ten. No.1 school in the St Helier estate was built in 1935 (and was later Willows High School for Girls).

Religion is represented by St Lawrence’s church and the Baitul Futuh Mosque.

Stane Street passed through Morden, roughly on the line of the A24, and a small part was excavated c.1920.

Tobacco was ground in the Morden Hall Snuff Mills up to 1922, and in Ravensbury Mill until 1925.

The *Underground* arrived in 1928, and this is usually illustrated by the famous picture of new rolling stock being brought to Morden Depot on a trailer pulled by an ancient steam-powered tractor.

Victoria Cross was awarded to Henry Lysons (born in Morden Lodge) serving with the Cameronians in 1879 during the Zulu Wars.

Watermeads is one of the first National Trust properties.

EXtra-terrestrials – in the period 1983-97 there were surprisingly numerous UFO sightings reported from Morden. Though no little men.

Youth is represented by Morden and Carshalton children’s outings to the seaside eg. Littlehampton in the 1950s.

‘DEEDS NOT WORDS’

Discussion about the impact of women’s suffrage on life in the UK – **Saturday 3 March 2.30–4.30pm**

Guest speakers include: Dr Stella Moss, Kathy Atherton and Philippa Bilton; chair: Gwyn Redgers

Merton Arts Space, Wimbledon Library, 35 Wimbledon Hill Road, London SW19 7NB.

Admission **FREE**. For bookings visit: www.Eventbrite.co.uk or Tel. 020 8545 3239

‘MERTON PRIORY AND ITS HISTORIC SETTING’

A talk by Roy Stephenson, Museum of London’s Historic Environment Lead, to Kingston Upon Thames Archaeological Society on **Thursday 8 March 2018**, 7.30pm for 8pm, at **Surbiton Library Hall**, Ewell Road, Surbiton KT6 6AG, near the junction with Berrylands Road. Visitors will be asked for a donation of £3 towards expenses.

WIMBLEDON COMMUNITY ORCHESTRA (WCO) SPRING CONCERT

6.30 pm Sunday 25 March 2018 at **St James Church Hall**, Martin Way, Morden. **FREE Entry**

Programme: Berlioz *March to The Scaffold*, Grieg *Piano Concerto A minor*, Smetana *Vltava Symphonic Poem* and a medley of themes from the musical *Chicago*. Plus other Musical offerings including compositions by members ! Soft drinks, wines, snacks etc available in the Interval.

WCO is an amateur Community Orchestra (going five years now) playing Classical, Modern and Film Music. We are looking for more players to join us - especially Strings and Brass players of grades 4 - 5 and upwards. We rehearse at St James Church Hall every Saturday morning in term-time 10.30am to 12.30pm.

Contact: Rodney Kay-Kreizman (Publicity and 1st Violin) at rodneykreizman@gmail.com

‘THE COACH ROADS TO BRIGHTON’

On Saturday 9 December more than 30 members and guests braved the cold to hear a delightful talk by Geoff Hewlett. As a geographer, Geoff was interested in how the road from London to Brighton used by commercial stagecoaches became established, why it went where it did, and how it coped with the underlying geology. He first established that there were several roads, starting at various points in the City, but all branching out from Kennington once they had crossed the Thames. There were three main roads: the eastern and earliest, passing through Croydon, the central one, later the ‘classic’ one, passing through Sutton and Reigate, and the western, passing through Merton and Ewell. Further south, each road forked into two or more, which later met or split again, until there were five roads into Brighton below the South Downs. Not all branches were used at the same time; Geoff has walked the length of each, bar ‘some under the M23 and some in Gatwick Airport’. The geology varies between sands (dusty in summer, unstable in winter), Wealden clay (damp, and sticky in winter), and chalk on the downs (good surface, as water drains through it). The Merton route crosses all three – sands in Tooting, clay in Morden, chalk near Epsom Downs.

Whichever route was taken, early passengers would have to endure the best part of a day to reach Brighton, with ruts in the road giving a jolting ride and the risk of overturning. They could ride inside the coach, or on top, or in a basket hung at the rear. Initially the journey would comprise long stages with long stops for rest and refreshment. The roads were poorly maintained, parish by parish; though several were designated ‘Winter Road’, none was named ‘Summer Road’. Going up particularly steep hills the passengers would get out and walk up; usually in class groups, allowing a young lady and gentleman the possibility of a quiet talk without being overheard. Going down the same hills a shoe was placed under one of the rear wheels as a drag. As some passengers were well-off, guards were issued with pistol and cutlass to defend against highwaymen (Jerry Abershaw being our local example). The countryside was open and wild, as still evidenced by local place-names such as Streatham Common, Norwood, and Thornton Heath.

Turnpike trusts began in 1755, named for the pike (or bar) across a maintained road, which would be turned aside for cash. The pikes were soon replaced by gates. The best turnpike roads were in the north of England, surfaced with good stone; those in the south were less good until John McAdam, visiting Sussex in 1817, demonstrated the use of rammed layers of little stones as a road surface. This improvement came at the same time as better coaches, fitted with elliptical springs (invented in 1804 by Obadiah Elliot), giving a lower centre of gravity and lighter weight. Thus the coach could be drawn by four horses rather than six, at a faster speed, allowing more stages with shorter stops and a more comfortable ride.

All the coaches from London to Brighton passed through Kennington gate, the common place of execution for Surrey, with that sight and smell competing with hop warehouses and butchers’ shops. There were three gates in Merton – Singlegate at Colliers Wood; and Doublegates at the west end of Merton High Street, leading south through Morden or west towards Kingston.

Coach services, often named (eg. *The Age* and *The Comet*), usually started and finished at pubs, giving rise to the coaching inn, many of which themselves became famous. Examples include the *George* at the Elephant and Castle (still there and the only remaining galleried pub in London), the *George* in Crawley (popular as the Prince Regent used it when attending prize-fights on Crawley Downs), the *Kings Head* in Cuckfield (which moved across the road because of a ghost story), the *Jolly Tanners* at Staplefield (famous for its rabbit pie), the *Spread Eagle* at Epsom (the building is preserved, but is no longer a pub), the *Wheatsheaf* in Dorking (which had a cock-pit in a cellar, and reared giant hogs) and the *Old Cock* of Sutton (run for a time by ‘Gentleman Jackson’, the bare-knuckle pugilist).

Coachmen were mostly working-class professionals, though several aristocrats were brilliant drivers, such as Harry Stephenson, a Cambridge graduate with his own coach, and Sir Vincent Cotton, a notorious gambler alleged to have once lost £30,000 on a maggot race. Before c.1800 coachmen tended to be fat and boozy (they were unprotected from the weather, and needed multiple capes and frequent refreshment), but after c.1830 they learnt to be well spoken and polite in anticipation of a bigger tip. Young bloods often took lessons from the professionals, enabling them to visit Gentleman Jackson and boast of going a round or two with him.

There were of course accidents from various causes; rivalry between the *Phoenix* and the *Dart* caused a serious collision at Preston toll gate, the two coaches attempting to pass through a toll gate where there was only room for one. In Ewell in 1826, when a coachman had descended from his full coach, a boy accidentally gave the horses their start signal, they started with no-one in control and the driverless coach overturned onto spiked railings, injuring several people and killing others. By contrast, in Brixton in 1810 the wheels collapsed under an overloaded coach, and the outside passengers fell off – into a passing load of hay, with little injury.

Why did people go to Brighton? Mainly for health and recreation, taking the sea cure, supervised by bathing ladies with their curtained carts, but also for bull baiting and cock fighting, and of course to view the staggering Royal Pavilion. Most coaches arrived in Castle Square, at a blue-painted house (a red-painted one was the ticket office). There were comfortable hotels such as the *Ship* (then on the sea front though the sea has moved away a bit) and social assembly rooms patronised by the likes of Sam Johnson and Charles Dickens.

The end of the coach routes to Brighton was brought about by the digging of the Clayton Tunnel, which opened in 1841 and allowed railways access to the town, much faster, more comfortable and cheaper than the coach. Before 1842 there were as many as 36 coaches arriving per day, but after that date only two. Coaches were still in use on the side roads, but many owners sold off their stock, coach horses commanding a ready sale to farmers as they were well trained.

Geoff kindly answered a flurry of questions: the record time (in competition) for a fully loaded coach was 3 hrs 40 min London Bridge to Brighton; mail was usually carried separately, but was sometimes carried on normal passenger coaches; coaches almost all ran by day, though some slow long range ones up north did run at night; toll gates were all lighted by law; charges at Singlegate included droves of animals and loads of hay.

Geoff and his wife Elizabeth brought quite a number of copies of his excellent book, *The Coach Roads to Brighton* (Pen Press, 2014, £15), and I am happy to report that they sold out.

DH

*Map Copyright
Geoff Hewlett*

LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

Friday 27 October 2017 – Seven present – Dave Haunton in the chair

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** had spotted a reference to West Barnes, in the Surrey Record Society volume on the 1332 taxation, that predates by two centuries all previously known references. A document from 1292 explains that a local tax official for the Hundred of Brixton had made excessive demands which were noticed by his associates before any payments were made. However, he had used his position to receive 1000 herrings from a fish merchant and four bushels of wheat and four of oats from brother William de la Westberne of Merton, as well as 15 shillings from the Marshal of the Prince of Wales which should have gone towards paying for the prince's lodgings. The offender was sentenced to imprisonment but paid a fine. One Latin phrase proved difficult – *ut micus ageret*: three websites translated this as *gently doing*. Presumably not the medieval equivalent of 'greasing his palm' as this was a lay subsidy, so brother William would not have been liable for tax. Did it mean 'easing his way' referring to providing refreshment though Peter thought that 1000 herrings seemed very greedy.

Mention in the Greater London Historic Environment Record of 'Medieval waterside structures' of timber discovered on the Ravensbury Mill site in 1992 made Peter check the published report, as the earliest documentary reference to the mill here was late 17th century. The report said the timbers were of larch, rarely used in London prior to the 1500s, so the description 'medieval' is rather misleading. Brickwork found nearby appears to be mid- to late-18th century, which fits the documentary evidence.

Another misleading report was in *London Archaeologist* Autumn 2012, which compared Bronze Age finds west of Grand Drive – at Greenview Drive, off Fairway, and at the former Meadbrook site, now Meadowsweet Close – to evidence of Middle Bronze Age farming activity 'to the west' at the former Kings College Sports Ground, which, from another report in our archives, was in fact in Western Road, Mitcham.

Peter also checked the Portable Antiquities Scheme website and found a few interesting local items:

- a Mesolithic adze found in a garden somewhere in Figges Marsh Ward, sometime in 2014.
- a hollow copper-alloy shell dating from c.1650 found in Cricket Green Ward in 2008.
- an Iron Age gold stater coin apparently found in 1918 in Lower Morden Ward, though the grid reference is TQ2768 – the Ravensbury area. The PAS site refers to the Oxford University Celtic Coin Index, but that website is a 'work in progress' and he couldn't find the coin on it.

Peter had found further information online about 'Nelson's patent sideboard and dining table' (*see Bulletin 202 p.8*) for which he will write an article (*see p.13*).

- ◆ **Madeline Healey** had been taken to Great Fosters near Windsor to have afternoon tea for her birthday. She had noted in a leaflet about the venue that it was a Tudor tithe barn which was dismantled from its original site in Ewell Manor, Malden, taken down in 1930 at a cost of £4,000. No one at the workshop knew anything about Ewell Manor.
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** referred back to the Mitcham Workhouse and Eric's mention of a clock overlooking the common. She had noticed that in one of the photographs in *Old Mitcham*, one of the factory buildings referred to as the Woodite Works did have a clock that overlooked the common. The building was next to the former workhouse and is shown on the 1910 plan as part of the Tower Works.

Berkeley Teetotal Society – Peter had produced a set of maps for Rosemary, each covering one of the 20 Society districts. She had got side-tracked doing an article on some of the people in the photograph of the first 100 members (*see Bulletin 204 p.14*). She has been using the census to locate some of the people and has signed up to *Find My Past* to make it easier. She had noticed that in the 1891 census there is a crop of teachers and pupil teachers amongst the children of the 100 living in the Allen's House and Cottages in the Eastfields area. She wondered if they taught at the Holborn school. Keith suggested that it may have been St Marks School. Rosemary has now produced a table of the 100 so that she can add ages as at the 1891 census, occupation, addresses and whether they stayed members.

Revisiting her husband Steve's papers she came across a plan of the Brompton Nurseries, reportedly the first purpose built garden nursery. The site is now occupied by the V&A. The nursery was owned by George London and Henry Wise. George was gardener to William & Mary and the Bishop of Fulham. He produced parterres for stately homes all over the country including Chatsworth and Hampton Court but he very rarely gets a mention. One of Steve's aunts found a mention of him in John Evelyn's diaries regarding the Prince of Prussia damaging the Bishop of Fulham's garden, which had been designed by George London. As she and Steve's mother shared the surname, and both families originated in Norfolk, she hoped that they were related. George's name appears in books on gardens, but it is very difficult to find any mention of him when

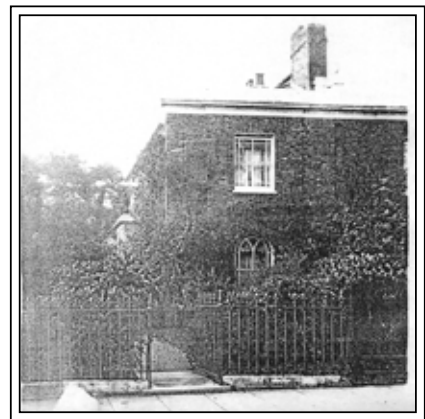
you go to the houses, much of his work being destroyed by Capability Brown. The flower London Pride was supposedly named after him.

- ◆ **David Luff** updated us on the Priory Wall. The National Trust had held a meeting about the wall but he had not been included so he does not know what resulted, but we now know that the National Trust owns a three foot wide strip of land along the wall on the Sainsbury's side, ie. it owns both sides of the wall. David had been in discussion with Cyril Maidment and John Hawkes about clearing away the soil built up on the service road. A support for the wall would have to be replaced because the ground is higher on the other side.

The Nurdin & Peacock Building demolition started on the day of the workshop. The tower is being removed but being retained in another position on the site. David said that there have been local concerns about the former Brown and Roots building since its renovation.

- ◆ **Judith Goodman** has received an enquiry about George Blay, a local developer in the 1930s, and she was looking for information. [**Norma Cox** has since written an article about George (*see p.16*).]
- ◆ **Keith Penny** had heard Dave Saxby mention a 'school' at Merton Priory during his talk to the Society in October. He suggested that we too easily read into the word lots of modern-day understandings, and that some written histories of the priory, even that published by MHS, used a lot of inference from other monastic institutions to fill out the narrative, when the written and archaeological evidence was not strong. Houses of canons were not identical to houses of Benedictine monks. The substantial study published by the Museum of London, *The Augustinian Priory of St Mary, Merton, Surrey*, was properly cautious about any school within the priory, but *A Priory Revealed* (MHS) implied that Merton had a song-school and a school run by the Almoner for outsider pupils, on the basis of an assumption that 'every monastery ran a song-school'. Much had been made of Thomas Becket's attendance at Merton, but a biographer wrote that 'he was successively, but intermittently, a boarder at the Augustinian priory at Merton in Surrey, a pupil at one or more of the London grammar schools and a student at Paris.' This did not suggest a life-forming course of study at Merton. A 'school' in medieval education was just as likely to be a place where a learned scholar taught a few promising young men, and Walter de Merton founded just such an institution in Oxford. Keith also pointed out that the priory lasted for over four hundred years, and it changed during that period; what was true of 1130 might not be so in 1530.

- ◆ **Dave Haunton** had been contacted by Joanna Banham, an expert in Victorian interior design, about the artist Dewey Bates. Joanna and Dave swapped notes on Dewey, and she asked if we had a picture of 'Ackworth', the photographer's house in Streatham High Road where Dewey lodged c.1880. Two taken c.1914 (*one shown right*) were kindly supplied by John W Brown (MHS and Streatham Society), with some further details: built in 1851, the house had five bedrooms, two staircases (one for the servants) and a large front garden. Jo's interest was centred on *The Portrait*, a painting by Dewey of an artist's studio (*below*), as shown by various details (paint-brushes, palettes, finished works) and items showing his expertise (Japanese screen, fringed tiger-skin rug, shiny taffeta dress). Jo now believes this was actually painted within 'Ackworth'. She has tentatively identified the principal figure as Florence St John, a singer and actress, who was previously painted by Dewey, and whose photograph for a *carte de visite* was almost certainly taken by Leonard Blake, the photographer who lived at 'Ackworth'.



Dave had noticed the *Scotland Yard* series running on Channel 81 (Talking Pictures TV). The series was filmed at Merton Park Studios, on a very limited budget. We disparaged Edgar Lustgarten's portentous commentary, the wooden acting, and sparsely-furnished interiors. Exterior shots were more interesting,

with general scene-setting showing 1960s traffic, or one of the Studios' two 'police' cars arriving in large back yards, and occasional brief scenes using identifiable Merton streets.

Rosemary Turner

1 December 2017 – Seven present – Rosemary Turner in the chair

- ◆ **David Luff** had observed a fish-counting exercise in the Wandle. Two fine nets were spread across the river, some 40 yards apart, and a line of nets-persons moved slowly between them (*right*), scooping up all the fish, which had been lightly stunned by a low electrical charge. Each fish was identified and later returned to the water. David was surprised at the size of some of them – several carp measured 18-20 inches long, so the river is recovering well from past episodes of poisoning.



‘Sindy trumps Barbie!’ cheered David as he showed us the set of stamps issued by Royal Mail on the theme of Classic Toys, featuring a Sindy doll (*left*) in the striped jersey shown on the cover of our *Bulletin* 199.

- ◆ **Dave Haunton** nostalgically viewed again, on Talking Pictures TV (Ch.81), *The Case of the Mukkinese Battle Horn*, a film with Peter Sellers and Spike Milligan. Produced at Merton Park Studios, this is a spoof on the Studios’ *Scotland Yard* series, and uses much of that series pre-credit sequence. The only outside view, of a tree-lined street (*below*) containing a small office or flats or school block with a modest entrance (*right*), could not be identified. Can you help?



- ◆ **Keith Penny** had seen a plan of plots of land on the Raynes Park estate while looking at a file in Surrey History Centre concerning what is now Holy Cross church, Motspur Park. The Diocese of Southwark purchased four plots for the erection of a mission room in 1908. Inspection of title deeds of a property in Adela Avenue showed how the vendor, William Furnage Palmer, placed conditions on the houses to be built on the estate: no house was to be erected on any of the plots 301 to 322 of less value than £350 or on any other plot of less value than £250; not more than one house might be erected on a single plot without permission; no hotel, tavern, tea garden or manufactory would be allowed, and no wines, beers or spirituous or fermented liquors could be sold in or upon any of the plots or in any building. The vendor had a right to break fences and forcibly enter any land to remove or dispose of any hut or building used as a temporary sleeping apartment.

Keith had mentioned at an earlier Workshop the registers of enlistment in the East Surrey regiment held by the Surrey History Centre. He had looked at the first in the series: names, occupations and physical distinguishing marks were recorded, but not addresses until late 1914. Of the roughly 2,200 Surrey men enlisted between 1 September and 30 November 1914, 91 enlisted at Merton (which then included Morden) and only 63 at Mitcham, although the population of Mitcham was over twice that of the other two areas put together.

- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** said that while she was researching people on the photograph of the first 100 members of the Berkeley Society, she was surprised to find how frequently they appeared in other Society publications, such as the *Mitcham Histories* and *Justice to Men and Country*.

For example, John M Leather, who was a nurseryman and florist at the time of the photograph, was later a nurseryman and pig keeper, while he was also an Overseer of the Poor and sitting on the Board of the Military Tribunal. Similarly, John Marsh Pitt, son of George and Priscilla, appears in the book along with his sons, who were exempted because they were Quakers. Later John Marsh appealed on his own behalf as the age of conscription was raised and he was then eligible for enlistment. Keith remarked that Mr Pitt had a lot to say all through the Tribunals. (*For more, see p.14*)

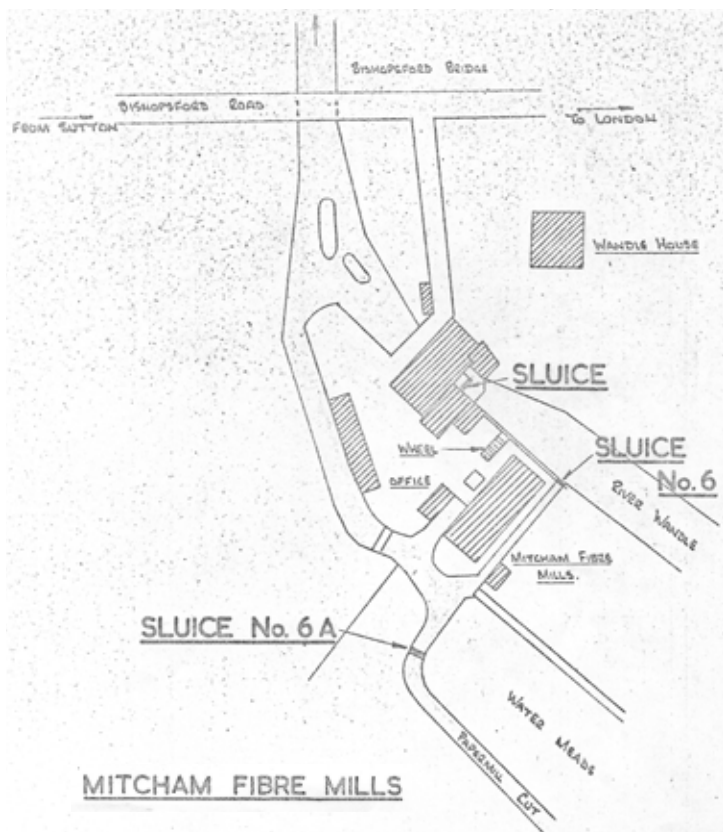
- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** reported that the latest *Surrey Archaeological Collections* (100, 2017) has a report on the wall paintings discovered at 120 Kingston Road, and an article on medieval potters in Surrey which cites the Morden manorial court rolls on our website, with their references to three named Cheam potters.

Peter had been in correspondence with a researcher at Hoare's Bank about George Matthew Hoare's residence at The Lodge, Central Road/Farm Road, Morden, in the early 1800s. In a 2013 publication she had confused this with Morden Lodge, the property adjoining Morden Hall. She had sent Peter an extract from a manuscript memoir by Mary Ann Prince, step-daughter of another member of the Hoare family, Henry Charles, written in 1861 but describing a short residence at The Lodge in 1824. She recalled 'the George Hoares kindly lent Morden to Papa for the time York Place [their London home] could not be occupied' while it was 'done up, painted &c'. She was not enamoured with the house: 'Morden was an ugly place. I remember the greenhouse which opened into the drawing room. There were some grapes, & I always used to wonder why Mamma said they were not ours but the G Hoare's ... I remember it was a trouble to get from London to Morden, the coach not passing near. I can remember dear Papa bringing me down.' The London coach would have stopped at the *George* inn (now a Harvester), next to the parish church, but presumably this was too far from the house for a young lady returning from her boarding school for her grandfather's funeral.

Peter had identified the entry for the *George* in the 1664 Hearth Tax register, having recognised the name of the occupant, 'Widdow Downes', from previous research (see *Bulletin* 196). The inn had only three hearths.

- ◆ **Judith Goodman** brought along a set of plans of sluice gates on the Wandle, numbered southward, from Connolly's Mill (1) to Stone Court, Carshalton (13) (*one shown here right*). Evidently used by some water management authority, they are not to scale and undated and Judy cannot remember who gave them to her. Dave Haunton undertook to enquire at the Wandle Industrial Museum. [David Luff later suggested that the plans are from a survey in the late 1930s for a flood-prevention scheme that eventually happened from the late 1950s onwards.]

David Haunton



**Dates of next Workshops: Fridays 2 March, 20 April
2.30pm at Wandle Industrial Museum. All are welcome.**

MHS LETTERS OF OBJECTION ON HERITAGE MATTERS

Though the Society is not normally a campaigning one, some recent planning applications have persuaded the Chair and Committee to write formal letters of objection to proposals, which are summarised below.

Rose Cottage (101 Hamilton Road, South Wimbledon, London SW19 1JG) [*since demolished*]

I write on behalf of Merton Historical Society to object to the attempt to demolish and replace Rose Cottage, a local heritage asset that could be restored and used. Its date and designer are known, and the building appears to have been the earliest built on land formerly part of Admiral Lord Nelson's Merton Place estate. Although not in original condition, it is still a demonstration of domestic architecture of its period.

According to the developer's summary, Historic England seems to think that, as long as there are some other survivors nationally from a period, it doesn't matter if Merton loses one. At least we can read their reasons, whereas the summary of the Borough Council's decision on local listing only repeats that 'it did not fulfil the criteria', though the Council's listing policy says that 'buildings older than 1850 (which are relatively uncommon in Merton) may be acceptable for the Local List, with less justification in terms of the other criteria. Historical associations (in terms of famous people or events) may also be relevant.' The present developers are able to proceed with confidence in part because that local listing did not happen. In the not dissimilar instance of 34-40 Morden Road it took an Inspector to deem them a 'non-designated heritage asset', after the Council had declined to list those properties.

Demolishing Rose Cottage does not make a 'positive contribution to the borough's historic environment' (Merton Heritage Strategy 2015-2020). The 'substantial public benefits' that need to be demonstrated if a heritage asset is to be demolished might be arguable if demolition were the only way to create housing, but it is not the only way, as the [previous] proposals showed. Rose Cottage can be lived in. That it has fallen into disrepair is not a good reason for demolition, merely a poor excuse.

The Society has previously been told that the future concept of 'heritage' in Merton will be one based on tourism. What tourism is there going to be if the Council allows rare buildings to disappear, in this case the only physical connection with the estate of Lord Nelson and, later, of Emma Hamilton?

Cottages at 34-40 Morden Road [Union Terrace]

I should like to object to the latest attempt to have these cottages demolished. Previous applications have rightly been rejected because of the historic significance of these 1820s cottages, easily seen parts of what was once the Merton Place estate of Lord Nelson. Yes, they are not in good condition, but that is never a good reason for proceeding to demolition. There is no evidence that local residents want the cottages replaced by an aparthotel. It should be possible to refurbish the cottages and leave them as examples of an earlier age of domestic architecture, and such properties, in decent condition, might be expected to fetch a good price. It is particularly important not to allow these cottages to go in the same way as Rose Cottage has been allowed to go, and developers should be told that simple repetition of an application doesn't make it any better.

Merton Hall

The proposed extension – despite the façade now being kept intact – would diminish its heritage and aesthetic value, leaving it and John Innes's Merton Park legacy vulnerable to unsuitable development and loss of character in the future. Although slightly outside the Society's normal remit, it is also worth saying that John Innes had local people in mind, whereas the proposed use by a Pentecostal church probably has no roots in the community, such churches being occupied by eclectic congregations gathered from a wide area.

(This letter was quoted on the front page of the *Wimbledon Guardian*.)

Abbey Mills (The Pavilions, Watermill Way, Colliers Wood SW19 2RD)

I note with some satisfaction that the reduction in height will allow a more pleasing gradation of roof heights on the site, but it is hard to see what else has changed. I see no reason to withdraw other comments I made in response to the first application. We accept that the buildings proposed for demolition are not of historic or architectural merit and that the owners may well wish to develop the site for an improved income. However, the proposed development shows no sympathy with the complex of low-rise buildings from the time of Liberty's occupation of the site. It towers over people and cannot add to the welcoming street-level ambience of Abbey Mills. The 'Landscaping and Public Space' sketch in the Design and Access Statement looks away from the new South frontage; at the outdoor tables you would be almost in a chasm, with the (still) high walls of the new building to look at above ground floor level.

A MUCH-MOVING MITCHAM LADY

Winifred ‘Winnie’ McAllan (née Braden), mother of our Wisconsin member DeAnn McAllan, celebrated her 100th birthday last year in Madison, Wisconsin, USA, with a large party (including children, grand-children, various partners, and even a couple of great-grand-daughters), the traditional birthday card and photo from Queen Elizabeth II, and Bagpiper Christopher Brand of the Madison Pipes and Drums, who played ‘Scottish, Welsh and British melodies’. ‘I’m a little bit overwhelmed today’ said Winnie.

Winnie was born at 33 Miller Road, Colliers Wood, on 12 December 1917, and sailed to America on the *SS United States* in 1953 with her husband George and their three children George Jr, DeAnn and Helen. At first they settled in Battle Creek, Michigan, to be with George’s brothers. George McAllan had served more than 20 years with the Royal Navy, and in the USA he worked for a railroad company. Winnie worked at several different jobs as well as being a homemaker. The family moved to Delton, Michigan, in 1966 and then to Florida in the early 1980s, where George died at age 73. Winnie then moved to California with her daughter DeAnn, and from there they both moved to the Madison area about a decade ago. DeAnn is a retired nurse and her main hobby is genealogical research.



Left: The Braden family, Colliers Wood, c.1930

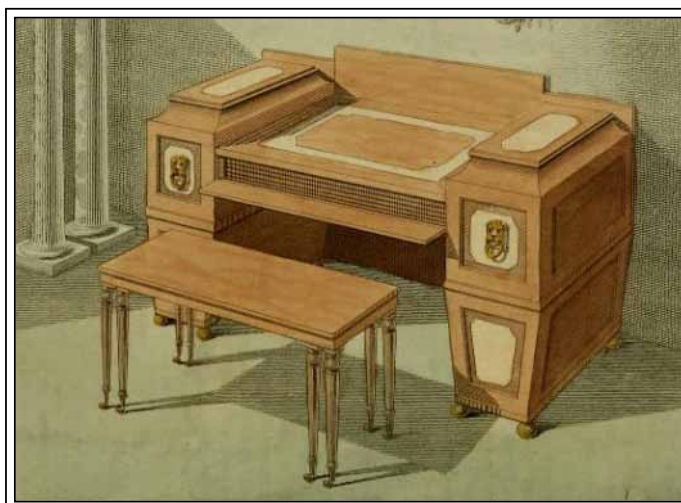


Right: DeAnn and Winnie a few years ago in San Francisco (note the Bridge)

Peter Hopkins has discovered more about

NELSON’S PATENT SIDEBOARD AND DINING TABLE

At a Workshop reported in *Bulletin 202 (June 2017 p.8)* I mentioned adverts in *The Times* 1800–1824 relating to Merton Place and its estate, including one for ‘Nelson’s new Patent SIDEBOARD and DINING-TABLE’. I googled this and found various references. A German publication from 1806 explained ‘They can be taken apart and reassembled in a few minutes, and afford the rare comfort of being able to enlarge them for two or more persons, up to one hundred, while they form a whole in every form’ and said that Nelson ordered it for the *Victory* but it wasn’t completed before his death.¹ However, an entry in *Ackermann’s Repository of Arts* for August 1809 says it was ordered for Merton Place just before his death, and its April 1810 edition included this illustration (right). A modern website says it ‘is now in the Nelson Museum, Portsmouth’ and describes it as a ‘sideboard complete with its table of seven leaves and ten legs ... so designed that the table when closed could be pushed into the heart of the sideboard and the loose leaves stored in a compartment above, masked by a falling front simulating a drawer’.²



¹ [Johann Christian Hüttner](#) *Englische Miscellen* 22 (1806) p.8

² <http://www.periodfurniture-carved.co.uk/history/part9/history-232.html> , accessed 21 September 2107

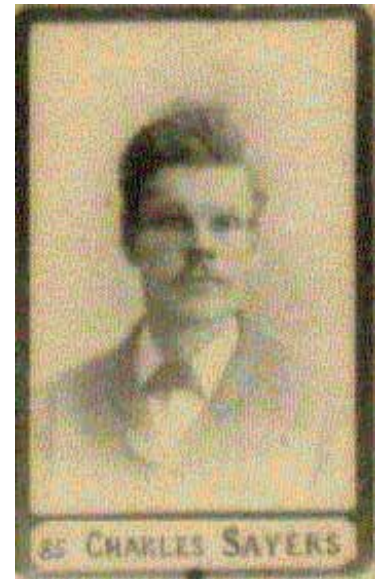
ROSEMARY TURNER explains how

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

I started by writing a little piece about members on the photograph of the first 100 members of the Berkeley Teetotal Society, but, as with my project on the Lodge Farm, Morden, I am getting side-tracked again. I find it so easy to go off at a tangent. I realised that looking into the Berkeley Society I would come across things in Eric Montague's *Mitcham Histories* but I am finding things in other publications too.

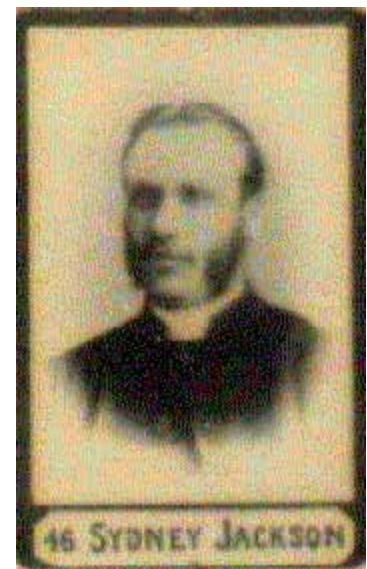
Member 85 Charles Sayers is a name that appears in Keith Penny's *Justice to Men and Country*. He attended the Tribunal to appeal on behalf of workers. Keith had had an enquiry from a relative of Charles Sayers asking about the location of a property where he had been living in 1916. It was the Rowan, Ravensbury Park, Mitcham, which Keith had found was renumbered 47 Wandle Road. On the census Charles Sayers was listed as a Carpenter, Joiner or Master Builder and he is doing work for the council in 1917. The *Mitcham Histories* just refer to his building firm Charles Sayers & Son Ltd., working on various Mitcham properties and buying Manor House. Their plans for the house did not come to fruition and it had a varied life, which ended after partial destruction by a fire in 1962. The site was developed and is now Justin Plaza.

Charles lived at various addresses in Mitcham, including several in Wandle Road. His wife came from Monmouthshire; he said that he was born in Surrey, but an earlier census says 'Clapham, Sry'. In 1881 he had been living in Tooting Graveney as a lodger with another joiner.



Out of interest I looked at an earlier census and found him with his parents Thomas (a wheelwright) and Louisa Sayers living in Mitcham. Both say that they were born in Mitcham and they give the birth place of all their children as Mitcham, including Charles. I could not find Thomas and Louisa in 1881, but I found their son Herbert as a scholar in Surrey at Rev. C H Spurgeon's Orphanage in Clapham Road. When I checked the deaths register indexes, Louisa Sayer, aged 44, (the 's' comes and goes) died in the June quarter of 1877 (this covers April, May and June). Thomas Hind Sayer, aged 46, died in the September quarter of 1877 (Jul, August and September). I wondered if there was an epidemic at that time. Thomas Hind Sayer was living with his parents, Thomas and Elizabeth, in the Causeway, Mitcham, on the 1841 census. I could not find the family in 1851, but Thomas Hind's wife Louisa Nightingale was living at the Copper Mills, St Mary Merton, as a visitor. It says that she was born in Mitcham, but Thomas Hind Sayers and Louisa Nightingale were married in Stepney registration district in the June quarter of 1855. The entries in the census do depend on who gave the information and how good their memory was or how bothered they were about the information being correct.

I got even further side-tracked by another member. Sydney Jackson was member 46 on the photograph. On the 1891 census he was 38 (so born 1855), a clerk in holy orders living at Prospect House, Mitcham. Place of birth is given as Surrey but on other censuses it says Battersea, Surrey, (Surrey extending up to the Thames at that time). With him were his wife Helen, who was born in Islington, and his two sons, Philip T E aged 3, and Arthur G aged 1. Also in the house was Eliza J Philips, widow, his mother-in-law, who was born in Holborn. He married Helen Philips the September quarter of 1886 in Wandsworth Registration district. The last member of the household was Robert E Marquis, widower 31, a gardener born in Cape of Good Hope Africa (though I could not find any more about him). I did wonder if Sydney had become a missionary and brought Robert back with him but found that not to be the case. I tried to find out which church he was attached to; he did not turn up in Crockford's, so I thought perhaps that he was a Catholic or Non-Conformist minister.



In *Mitcham Histories II The Cranmers, The Canons and Park Place*, Prospect House is described as No.9 Commonside East, an 18th century Grade II listed building, which had suffered several bouts of vandalism but is still there today (right, photo Dr R A M Scott). Earlier residents in the house included Thomas Pratt in the mid-1840s, one of the founding fathers of the Zion Chapel in Western Road, an Independent Calvinist Chapel. Then in the 1860s and 1870s Edward Cresswell, a local Methodist preacher, lived there. There may have been an Independent Dissenting Meeting House at the back of the house.



Peter Hopkins suggested that I googled Sydney Jackson and he came up via the *Carved in Stone* website. This lists the deaths of two of his sons and records that for years he was the Chaplain at the Holborn Union Workhouse. His eldest son, Arthur Gordon, survived the Battle of the Somme but was then killed in the Mesopotamian Campaign on 25 February 1917. He was awarded a posthumous Distinguished Conduct Medal. Sydney's younger son, Henry Stewart Jackson, died on the first day of the Somme 1 July 1916, aged 20. Both of them have memorials in St Mark's. Arthur also has a memorial in Iraq but Henry's body was never found. In the 1901 Census Sydney and Helen are still at Prospect House and Sydney gives his occupation as a Clergyman in the Church of England. The mother-in-law is still living there. Their son Arthur Gordon was a student at Christs Hospital School, Hertfordshire. I could not find out what happened to their son Philip. In 1911 they have moved to White Heather, Graham Road, and had now acquired a servant, while Sydney says he is a Clergyman in the estd (established) church. Arthur is back home and is now an insurance clerk, and they now have another son, Henry Stewart.

I decide to look at earlier censuses to see if I could find where Sydney studied. In 1881 I found him at Blythe Place, St Bees, Whitehaven, Cumberland. Sidney Jackson is a Lodger, single, aged 27, student in Theology, born Battersea. So definitely the correct one. He was living with Richard Ferguson, a retired farmer, and Elizabeth his wife both born in Cumberland. (Sydney's eldest brother was born in Cockermouth, Cumberland.)

In the same house, also as a lodger, was Sydney's younger brother Louis W Jackson, single, aged 25, student of Theology, born in Woolwich, which was correct. The family certainly moved around. On the 1861 census their father William was a sculptor and mason in St Mary Lambeth, employing one man and a boy. Both sons were living with their parents at the time. Sydney was still with the family in 1871 but Louis W had been sent to Surrey County School in Cranleigh.

On Google I found St Bees Independent School had been founded by Edmund Grindal, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1583, during the reign of Elizabeth I. Then on Wikipedia I found St Bees Benedictine Priory founded by the Norman Lord of Egremont, William Meschin, and dedicated to Archbishop Thurston of York between 1120 -1135. It has been the parish church since the dissolution in 1539. Wikipedia says 'from sculptural and charter evidence the site was a principal centre of religious influence in the west of the county, and an extensive parish grew up with detached portions covering much of the western lakes'. The buildings are Grade I listed. Finally I saw a link to the Theological College:

'In 1816 George Henry Law, Bishop of Chester, in whose diocese the priory then was, founded the St Bees Theological College. The monastic chapel which had been roofless since the dissolution was re-roofed to become the main college lecture room and library. The students were lodged in the village and the Principal was also the vicar of St Bees. The college was very successful, training over 2,600 clergy, but closed in 1895 due to falling numbers, with students going to larger establishments.'

The career of Louis has been much easier to trace, although he is not in Crockford's either. In the next (1891) census Louis William is in Knaresborough, Yorkshire, as the Curate of St Marys, Harrogate, while in 1901 he is in Egham as a clergyman of the church of England. Then in 1911 he is living at the Rectory of Middleton Saxmundham, Suffolk, as a Clergyman in the established church. In the 1939 Register he is at the Municipal Borough of High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire. The record is closed but the index reveals that Louis W Jackson, Clerk in holy orders, born 5 mar 1856, has retired. He has a married female doing unpaid domestic duties.

I have not been able to find when or where Sydney died: there are too many Sydney Jacksons.

NORMA COX has become interested in

GEORGE BLAY, THE RAYNES PARK HOUSEBUILDER

I first learnt of George Blay in March 2017 when I was researching a chemist's shop at 151 Cannon Hill Lane where I once worked. Mr George Blay was the builder of the houses in this road during the 1920s and 1930s.¹ Studying the trade directories for Cannon Hill Lane for those years, I was able to trace the progress of the building work along this road.² There was a great need for housing after WW1 and Prime Minister Lloyd George had proposed 'Britain to be a fit country for Heroes, with house building the principal thrust'.³ Mr Blay worked with the council to build well-proportioned terraced houses on the Cannon Hill Estate land, which he owned. The work was supported by government subsidies. Some of the houses were for sale and some were let. The council had to supervise his work and enforce a suitable density of housing per acre. He agreed to build, for freehold sale, houses at a cost of £675 per house, an arrangement with the Ministry of Health.³ The government subsidy varied each year and depended on the size of the houses. It was stated that Mr Blay was born in Devon.⁴



Mr Blay's houses are still very popular today. A friend of mine has recently moved into a Blay house at Orchard Close, Raynes Park (*right*). She had lived in a Blay house in Parkway thirty years ago and was so delighted with that house that when she moved again, she held out until she could own a Blay house. I decided to find out more about Mr George Blay.

The Raynes Park and West Barnes residents website stated that 'George Blay was the man most responsible for changing the rural landscape of Raynes Park' and also that 'he was born in Devon in 1880 and by 1914 he had a business in New Malden making and selling timber buildings'.⁴ In September 1924 he bought Raynes Park Golf Club, that had been on the western side of Grand Drive, and Cannon Hill Estate. In order to confirm that George Blay's birth details were accurate, the online UK census site was used.⁵ For the 1881 census there was a George Blay aged 6 months who was born in Reading in 1880, but there was no entry for George Blay of Devon. The next census of 1891 had a George Blay as a student of 11 years old and his birthplace was Reading. The 1901 census listed George Blay as a 21 year-old timber merchant traveller and his birthplace as Reading. The 1911 census had a George Blay aged 31 years who was a timber merchant and who was born in Reading. The ancestry website Rootschat⁶ had more details of a George Blay: he was born in 1880, this correlated with the birth date given in ref (4), and he married Olive Ingram in 1908 at Kingston-upon-Thames. He died on 25 July 1936 at The Manor House, Ditton Hill, Long Ditton, Surbiton. His funeral service was at St Mary's Church, Long Ditton. There were sufficient details now to find an obituary of George Blay.

The obituary in the *Surrey Comet* 29 July 1936⁷ stated that 'he was a timber merchant who built up a large business and saved Long Ditton Rectory. He started in a small way as a timber merchant and fencing contractor in New Malden'. An advert in the *Surrey Comet* 1909 advertised George Blay as a Timber Merchant,⁸ this showed that he was working in New Malden five years earlier than was previously thought.⁴ The obituary further stated that 'he died aged 56 years and he had become a very successful businessman in this part of the country. He had been in good health up until Saturday 25 July 1936 when he was suddenly taken ill and died within a few hours. He left a widow and three daughters, two of whom were married.' Mr Blay was a native of Reading and came to New Malden when he was a young man. He set up a business as a timber merchant and fencing contractor at Kingston Road, New Malden and the business was successful. 'After the war he made his first large venture when he bought Raynes Park Golf Course, which he let out for a time and later developed as a housing estate.'

In George Blay's obituary there was no mention of his war service during WW1. Unfortunately research into Mr Blay's service in the forces during WW1 was unsuccessful. It was possible that he did not get conscripted into the armed forces, as the work of timber merchants was considered 'one of the occupations scheduled as vitally important for war-work'. In List A published by the Ministry of Munitions, 'Occupations required for the production and transport of munitions' were exempt.⁹ There were no reserved occupations in WW1 and after conscription was enforced in 1916, conscripts could appeal against conscription at tribunals. Appeals against conscription were published in local newspapers but all of the tribunal details were later destroyed. However there are reports of tribunals from Thornbury, Gloucestershire which escaped destruction and three of the tribunal judgements give support to the theory that timber mill workers were exempt from conscription. The three saw-mill workers who were employed at Edmund Cullimore Saw-Mills, Thornbury, each received 'conditional exemption' from enlistment.¹⁰ The first was Mr Tom White aged 29 years of Saw Mill Lane, a circular sawyer and saw sharpener. His application, dated 03/04/1916, stated that 'he was the only man who can sharpen the circular saw and convert the round timber to planks'. The tribunal judgement was 'Conditional Exemption whilst employed'. The second man was Henry White aged 25 years, of St Mary Street, a Horizontal and Circular Sawyer of English Timber only (2 years). Single. His application for the tribunal was dated 26/03/1917 and it stated that he was 'Engaged in Certified Trade of National Importance. Conditional Exemption'. The third man was Edwin Wheeler aged 41 years of Gillingstool. He was Foreman Haulier with traction engine at Saw mills. His application was dated 23/07/1917 and he also was given 'Conditional Exemption'. Their work involved turning tree trunks into wooden planks, which would then be made into cases for transporting guns and ammunition to the front. In addition wood was essential for shoring up trench walls.

George Blay's obituary stated that he acquired interests in properties and businesses in New Malden and surrounding area. A report held at the Surrey History centre recorded the conveyance of 21,22 and 24 Woodside, Wimbledon, upon purchase at auction on 24 January 1918 between AG Smith (vendor) and George Blay (purchaser), dated 24 April 1918.¹¹ From the dates of the auction and conveyance it would appear that George Blay was in the UK and not 'at the Front'; this would support the idea that he was exempt from conscription. However there was a discrepancy in that George Blay's signature was not present on this document. In 1919 a transaction was recorded of Mr George Blay of New Malden who was acknowledged as Timber Merchant to Mrs S C A Hibbert,¹² he was therefore still living and working in New Malden in 1919. The obituary⁷ mentioned that 'at this time' (meaning after WW1), George Blay moved from New Malden where he was living at Westbury Road, to Link House, Raynes Park. Details in Kelly's Directory of Wimbledon 1920 lists George Blay (The Link House) at Blenheim Road East Side. He remained at this address until 1929. From the Kelly's Directories of Wimbledon 1932 -1938, George Blay was listed at 43, Lock-up Garages, Firstway, Raynes Park, and also in the Merton Commercial Directory of the Kelly's Directories of Wimbledon 1932-1938. Firstway was the first street built by George Blay in 1924³ and is first seen in Kelly's Directory of Wimbledon 1926. His obituary also stated that he arrived in Long Ditton 'about six years ago' which equated to 1930.⁷ George Blay liked tennis and he founded Raynes Park Residents Lawn Tennis Club in 1931.¹³ At the time of his death Mr Blay was developing the Mid-Coombe Estate which had an area of 35 acres.

His obituary mentioned that George Blay was also 'proprietor of Messrs George Blay of Honiton, one of the largest firms of saw-mills in the West of England'. This was George Blay's 'Devon connection'. A report from 1943 held at Devon Archives,¹⁴ showed that George Blay Ltd, Saw Mills, Honiton, Devon were still operating and still using the name of George Blay.¹⁵ This report was concerned with liability for an injury received by an employee at the Honiton Saw Mill. The obituary also stated that George Blay was a Managing Director of the Cannon Hill Estates Ltd, the company which he formed in 1924 and through which he did all preliminary works, building and selling. He was also a Managing Director of Merton Mansions Ltd, an estate company. George Blay built Merton Mansions, a development of 32 flats with a swimming pool, in 1929 at the corner of Bushey Road and Martin Way. This was the last block of flats built in London to be called Mansions.⁴ He was also a Managing Director of the Pitter Gauge and Precision Tool Co of Woolwich.

The obituary mentioned that George Blay had an interesting aviary at his home in Long Ditton and devoted a lot of his time to the birds that he loved. He was the president of the Oriental Pheasant Society and kept one of the finest collections of pheasants in the country. In addition he kept many unusual breeds of duck and had an ostrich. It was said that he did not involve himself in local affairs yet he had great interest in Long Ditton and worked hard to keep it rural. On several occasions he bought land that was up for sale, in order to prevent undesirable development, the Long Ditton Rectory being his last purchase. This building was an interesting 16th-century half-timbered house.

George Blay's funeral at Long Ditton church was conducted by the Rev R H Wilson (rector). As well as his widow, daughters, sons in law, brother, brothers in law and sisters in law, it was attended by three representatives of Cannon Hill Estates, one each from Honiton Saw Mills, the Pitter Gauge and Precision Tool Co, and the Oriental Pheasant Society, the Clerks of Malden and Merton Councils, the Clerk of the Governing Committee of Surbiton Hospital, some 15 other persons worth noting, and 'members of his household and garden staff'.⁷ He is buried in St Mary's churchyard, Long Ditton. His eldest daughter Doreen (born 1910) was later laid to rest in the same grave in 1984.¹⁶ According to Honiton records,¹⁷ George Blay had been a Freemason, and was about to leave for Sweden with his wife and family when he suffered a stroke.



George Blay 'built houses to a very agreeable standard because he appointed an architect to design them', this architect being Mr H G Turner. The houses did not have cellars or attics and the rooms were spacious and lofty.³ George Blay's scheme was vast, it was to build between 150 to 200 houses annually. He was able to introduce new buyers to the Building Societies, offering 85% mortgages which was a higher percentage than many lenders would offer at the time. For example, the sale of a house at 115 Bushey Road, Raynes Park, by George Blay (vendor) to Bernard Posner (purchaser) on 17 April 1926, for £865, involved the raising of a mortgage arranged by Mr Blay. The sale was completed 14 July 1926.¹⁸

My friend's house in Orchard Close is attractive with an oriel window as seen in the photo on page 16. It is well designed and evenly proportioned. It has a spacious entrance hall, a sitting-room, a dining-room, a kitchen and a recently added conservatory. There are three bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor. The house has not been altered inside and still retains attractive period features, such as the 1920 fireplaces in the sitting-room (*opposite, top left*) and dining room (*opposite, top right*), and streamline 1920's doors (*opposite, bottom left*). An interesting feature of the house is the stair-case banister, which has vertical wooden bars. These bars are new oak pick-axe handles from WW1 (*opposite, bottom right*), another reminder of the work of a timber merchant in WW1. My friend was told that 'George Blay had bought up the pick-axe handles as a job lot after WW1'.¹⁹

Indeed, these are mentioned in the interesting 1923 advertisement (*right*),²⁰ as well as other 'Government Surplus Stock' (never 'War Surplus') items for sale in Tyne Docks, South Shields. The advert refers to New Malden and Honiton, but also other George Blay sites at Highbridge (Somerset) and Belfast, about which we know nothing, as yet.

George Blay was a very astute businessman and built up a timber business in New Malden from 1908. In WW1 the work of a timber merchant was considered of national importance and was exempt from conscription,¹⁰ as it was essential for the transportation of munitions.⁹ There is evidence that George Blay had acquired an interest in buying and selling property in 1918.¹¹ A document at Surrey History Centre shows a mortgage between J T Chapman and Sidney Smith of 1 Furnivale Inn, London, and Henry Seward Cowdell of 26 Budge Row, London, Solicitors, for properties in Woodside, Wimbledon, dated 5 February 1894, is endorsed with re-conveyance to George Blay of New Malden, timber merchant, on 1 July 1924.²¹ Another record shows the conveyance of 22 Woodside, Wimbledon, between George Blay of Link House, Raynes Park, and Miss L J Perry of 4 Woodside, Wimbledon, dated 1928.²² As previously mentioned, George Blay was also involved in mortgage transactions.¹⁸ He therefore must have built up a large reserve of capital and with this, together with his timber and property experience and the country's great need for more housing, seized the opportunity to speculate and bought Raynes Park Golf Club. He developed the land and his legacy still lives on. Eighty years after his death his houses are still known as Blay houses and they are still very desirable.⁴



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APPENDIX 1: How many different house designs did Cannon Hill Estates Ltd build?

According to Jowett³ ‘Blay built houses which usually consisted of three bedrooms, bathroom, kitchen, hall and two reception rooms. Some houses had more bedrooms. Some of his houses were semi-detached which was characteristic for the period but more were built in short terrace blocks’. My friend’s house in Orchard Close, is typical and is in a short terrace. The house that she used to live in Parkway in the 1980s was ‘semi-detached and was “along the same lines” as the Orchard Close house, with everything bigger in proportion. The Parkway house had oriel bays on the side elevation in the two main bedrooms and two small windows in the lounge and dining room on the side wall’. The Raynes Park and West Barnes web site⁴ said that ‘[Blay’s] house styles were conventional for the 1920s, with plain leaded lights, and three vertical timbers in the gables over the bays. A [further] type of house on the Cannon Hill estate is seen in the two white-rendered, green-roofed detached houses at the junction of Southway and Parkway.’ My friend in Orchard Close remarked that these had ‘long thin coloured glass windows on the stairwell windows’.

APPENDIX 2: The streets built by Cannon Hill Estates Ltd.

These are given by Jowett³ as follows: Firstway, followed by Heathway, both turnings off Grand Drive, were completed by the end of 1924. In 1925, 34 houses were built on the Kingston By-pass as it traversed Grand Drive. In 1926, 21 houses were built in Greenway, preceded by Southway and South Drive (renamed Parkway in 1930). By 6 October 1926 George Blay reported to the council on the progress of Elm Walk, Grand Drive, Fairway, Linkway and Church Walk. In 1927 he was laying out Berrylands and Cannon Close. In 1928 he proposed building Meadowway and Crossway. In 1929 he was laying out Cherrywood Lane and The Green (but sold some of his land there to Bessant Brown Ltd who built some houses on it). He also reported completion of Meadow Close, Meadowway and Elm Walk. In 1930 he completed Parkway. Mr Blay had to press the council for the making up of the roads. By 1939 the remaining roads on the estate were completed with Westway, Westway Close, Kingsway, Brook Close, Coppice Close, Elm Close, Orchard Close, Oak Way, Woodlands and Eastway.

Acknowledgement

My thanks to Judith Goodman for information on George Blay’s obituary.

- 1 www.hidden-london.com/gazetteer/cannon-hill
- 2 Kelly’s Directory of Wimbledon. 1920-1936
- 3 Jowett, E M *Raynes Park. A Social History* (1987, Merton Historical Society) ISBN 0950148857
- 4 www.rpwresidents.org.uk/area/local-history/32-building-raynes-park-part1
- 5 www.ukcensusonline.com
- 6 www.rootschat.com/forum/
- 7 *Surrey Comet* 29 July 1936 (Kingston Local History Centre, Kingston upon Thames, KT11EU)
- 8 British Newspapers Archive online. Pers. comm. from Archivist Rachel Ponting on 02/10/2017, Devon Archives, Bittern House, Sowton, Exeter EX2 7NL
- 9 www.1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/topic/190699-ww1-reserved-occupation
- 10 www.thornburyroots.co.uk/war/ww1-exemptions-n-z
- 11 SHC 6047/6 Surrey Archives and History Centre, 130 Goldsworth Road, Woking GU21 6ND. Pers. comm. from Jane Lewis, Public Services & Engagement Manager, on 04/10/2017
- 12 Ref B464/25, North Devon Record Office. Pers. comm. as ref (8)
- 13 www.rprlrc.co.uk/about-the-club/history
- 14 Ref 8536B/E/24/32, Devon Archives. Pers. comm. as ref (8)
- 15 George Blay bought Honiton Sawmills from Mr Buckingham in 1917. Pers. comm. Margaret Lewis BEM, curator, Allhallows Museum, High Street, Honiton. EX14 1PG.
- 16 www.gravestonephotos.com/public/gravedetails.php.requested
- 17 Pers. comm. as ref (15)
- 18 SHC 7458/1. See ref (11)
- 19 www.ellisons.uk.com/Raynes-Park-and-West-Wimbledon
- 20 www.gracesguide.co.uk/images/c/cb/lm1923RA-Blay1
- 21 SHC 6047/2. See ref (11)
- 22 SHC 6047/8. See ref (11)

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