



CHAIR: Christine Pittman

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*Christchurch Priory from the south (Photo: Irene Burroughs 2024) See p.3*

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*Top: From the north  
Left: View towards altar  
Right: View towards west door  
Bottom: North transept  
On facing page: Top of a carved column*

TONY SCOTT (text) and IRENE BURROUGHS (photos) ask

## DID MERTON PRIORY LOOK LIKE THIS?

During the summer Irene and I spent a few days on the Dorset coast and we visited Christchurch Priory near Bournemouth. This is still in active use as the local Anglican parish church and is probably the largest parish church in England. We were struck by the remarkable similarity in size and early history between Christchurch Priory and Merton Priory.

Each of these priories was the residence of a group of ordained priests who chose to live as a community following the Rule of St Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Some hermits in the eleventh century were adherents to the Rule of St Augustine and had gradually grouped together into communities to form independent priories, which seems somewhat contradictory if they were hermits. In December 1243 at the request of hermits near Siena and Pisa, Pope Innocent IV began a process of unification of these independent priories and the Order of St Augustine was formally established in 1244. Those communities that had been following the Rule of St Augustine very soon became members of the newly formed Augustinian Order and its members became 'regular canons' (i.e. bound by a rule, 'regula' in Latin). Control of these priories was taken from the local bishop and given to the Superior-General of the Order. This was the situation in both Christchurch and Merton.

The building of Christchurch Priory commenced in 1094 under the direction of Ranulf Flambard, Chief Minister of King William II. In 1099 Flambard was appointed Bishop of Durham but the construction work continued under his successors. The priory was built in the village of Twynham, whose name means a hamlet between two rivers, and the site chosen was that of a Saxon church, probably dating from c.800. There was clearly a religious house in the village before 1094 because in the Domesday survey of 1086 it is recorded under Twynham that 'A priory of 24 secular canons was there in the time of King Edward'. Twynham was re-named Christchurch in the mid-twelfth century on account of the importance of its priory.

Merton Priory was founded in 1114 in the village of Merton by Gilbert the Norman, Sheriff of Surrey under King Henry I. Three years later, in 1117 construction of a large priory commenced on a different site close to the Wandle. Fifteen secular canons following the Rule of St Augustine were brought from the priory of St Mary, Huntingdon (founded in 1088), to reside at Merton.

The priory churches were of similar size; the length of Christchurch Priory is 311ft (91m) and the length of Merton Priory, as determined from its foundations, is slightly less. Both churches have north and south transepts, a tower at the crossing, a Lady Chapel at their east end and a cloister and Chapter House on the southern side of the church. Both were major priories from the twelfth century until their Dissolution in 1538, at which point their stories diverge.

At Merton, John Bowles (alias John Ramsey), the prior, on 16 April 1538 surrendered to the Crown the Priory and its 14 canons. That same year, demolition of the Priory buildings commenced, to provide material for the construction of Nonsuch Palace, Cheam, for King Henry VIII.



At Christchurch, John Draper, the prior, on 28 November 1538 surrendered the priory to the Crown. King Henry VIII had intended demolishing the building, but this was not done for two reasons: there is no shortage of good quality building stone in this area and, in any case, there was no Royal construction being planned locally. The priory initially stood empty and, in response to a plea from the townspeople that they had no parish church, the King granted the priory buildings to the churchwardens and inhabitants of Christchurch in perpetuity as their parish church. The formal grant was made by King Edward VI on 23 October 1548, just after the death of Henry VIII and the grant was confirmed by King James I on 12 February 1612. The church remains the Anglican parish church to this day. Obviously, the buildings have been maintained and renovated over the intervening centuries.

The photographs accompanying this article were taken in the summer of 2024 and show what Merton Priory **could** look like today if its demolition had not taken place in 1538.

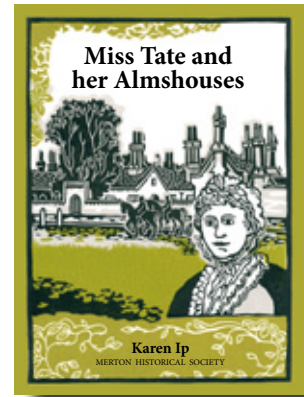
**References:** *Merton Priory – A Priory Revealed*, Lionel Green (MHS 2005).  
Christchurch Priory – Visitor information publications and website information.

## We have two SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS from our Chair

### **MISS TATE AND HER ALMSHOUSES**

by Karen Ip

We would like to invite all members to the launch of this book, our next publication, at 2pm on Saturday 5 July 2025, at St Peter & St Paul Church, Church Road, Mitcham CR4 3BP. Light refreshments will be served. There will be a question and answer session with Father David and the author, a chance to purchase a copy of the book and to see memorials to the Tate family.



### **WE ARE LOOKING FOR A RESEARCHER**

It has been proposed that Merton Historical Society engages a novice researcher to write a history of the Society, which will be celebrating its 75th birthday in February 2026. Originally known as the Merton and Morden Historical Society, which was formed in 1951, it was re-named in 1965 when the London Borough of Merton was created, and at this time it increased its area of interest to include Mitcham.

We would like to support a budding historian, who would be prepared to gather information and photos from our own Bulletins, from our website and Facebook pages, from local newspapers in the Heritage and Local Studies Centre in Morden library, from our own publications, and from our archive held in the Surrey History Centre in Woking. We would also value reminiscences by current members.

Over the years, the Society has been actively involved in archaeological digs, historical re-enactments, lectures, visits, guided walks, heritage days, publications and research, promoting the history of our area in person and online. Several of our publications have won London-based awards, and we work closely with other local heritage organisations.

The remuneration would be modest, and some expenses would also be covered. At the end of the project, we would like to be able to launch the published history in summer 2026, following an illustrated talk to members at our meeting on Saturday 14 February 2026.

Our Committee members would be happy to support and encourage our researcher, and provide guidance and assistance. In particular, we hold 6-weekly workshops, where members and non-members are encouraged to discuss the research they are carrying out. The project would suit a student of any age, or perhaps someone with a developing interest in local history.

Please contact [mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk) if you are interested.

**Christine Pittman**

# Motspur Park100

Saturday 12 July 2025



**A day of celebrations at West Barnes Library  
and Sir Joseph Hood Memorial Playing Fields**

<https://railway200.co.uk/activity/motspur-park-100/>

### **WANDLE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM**

On 14 June a new exhibition *Women of the Wandle* will be opened at Vestry Hall Annexe, London Road, Mitcham CR4 3UD.

## PROGRAMME JUNE – DECEMBER 2025

### SUMMER VISITS

**Tuesday 10 June 2025 at 2pm** – All Saints Church, Lower Richmond Road, Putney, SW15 – **guided tour of this lovely Arts & Crafts Church.** From Putney Bridge, catch 22 bus to last stop, or 378 bus to Comondale Road. Near the *Spencer* pub, east side of Putney Common. Booking essential.

**Saturday 5 July 2025 at 2pm** – **Launch of our latest publication, *Miss Tate and her Almshouses* by Karen Ip** at Mitcham Parish Church (St Peter & St Paul), Church Road, Mitcham CR4 3BP. Refreshments provided, question and answer session, and a chance to purchase the book.

**Thursday 14 August 2025 at 11am** – **Society of Genealogists**, 40 Wharf Road, London N1 7GS – guided tour of the library and archives. Booking essential.

**Thursday 4 September 2025 at 2pm** – **Historic pubs of Kingston** – **guided walk.** Meet outside the *Fighting Cocks* pub, Old London Road, opposite Cleave's Almshouses. Booking essential.

**All bookings (& cancellations): email [mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk)**

### AUTUMN TALKS

**Saturday 11 October 2025 at 2.30pm** – **'Blueprinting History: cyanotype printing on textile'**  
A talk by **Cathy Corbishley Michel**

**Saturday 8 November 2025 at 2.30pm** – **AGM followed by members' talks:**  
**Peter Hopkins** – Merton Court Rolls transcription project  
**Norma Cox** – researching local businesses

**Saturday 13 December 2025 at 2.30pm** – **'William Kilburn, botanical illustrator & eminent calico printer'** – a talk by **Alison Cousins**, Wandle Industrial Museum

*Talks are held in **St James's Church Hall in Martin Way**, next to the church.  
Buses 164 and 413 stop in Martin Way (in both directions) immediately outside.  
Parking in adjacent streets is free.*

### LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS:

**Fridays 13 June, 25 July, 5 September, 17 October from 2.30pm**  
at the Wandle Industrial Museum, next door to the Vestry Hall, Mitcham.  
Do join us, whether you wish to contribute, to ask questions, or just to listen!

**Visitors are very welcome to attend any of our events.**

## MORDEN LIBRARY TEMPORARY CLOSURE

Due to essential building engineering work, Morden Library will be closing for a period of seven weeks. The other six libraries in Merton will be open as usual during this time.

**Morden library will be closed from Monday 16 June – Monday 4 August 2025**

## ‘PAPER CONSERVANCY’

On Saturday 11 January 2025, Joyce Brown spoke of what she had learnt and practised over the ‘last umpteen years’ as an amateur (read unpaid) paper conservator. She began as a volunteer at the Wiener Library, generally helping and sorting in the office, but became interested in what a team of ladies were doing to render old documents more readable. They encouraged her, and taught her the basics. She later moved to a similar organisation preserving Polish and German identification documents from the Second World War.

The principles of paper conservancy are to document what you have done, ensure that it is capable of being undone, and document who holds the item. Joyce took us through the many tools of the trade: wheat paste (for glue), a table knife (to remove staples), spatulas (for separating pages or undoing folds or scraping), brushes, needles, pencil (never Biro), very thin Japan paper (for repairs, or backing a fragile item), smoke sponges (for cleaning), Bondina non-woven polyester material (for backing, or for support while drying out wet items) and weights with leather around the head (for unrolling and holding flat items that have been unrolled).

Joyce remarked that newspapers were never meant to be kept, so are often tightly folded, and that drying out (of glue, un-folded items, new supports. etc) takes most of the time. Once unfolded and conserved, such items should be kept flat as the sole occupant of an envelope. She warned that the results are never perfect.

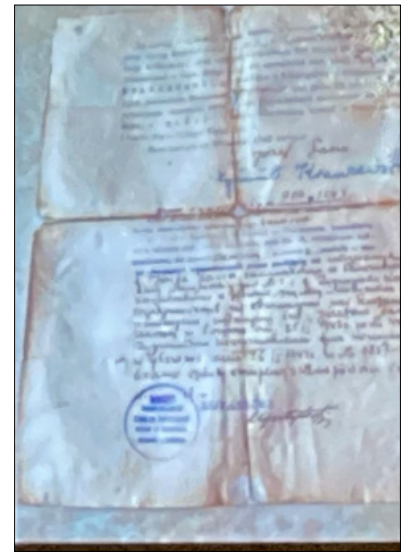
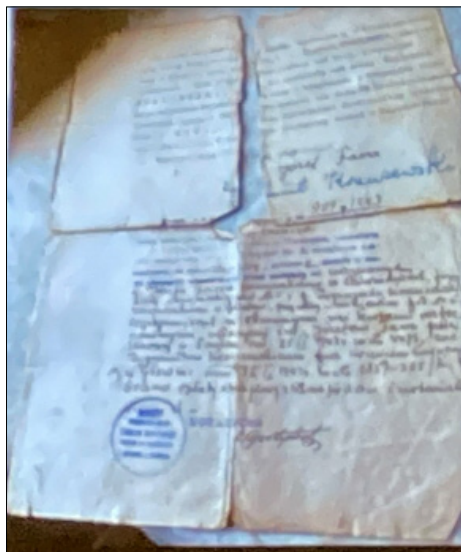
A few tips: items (especially photographs) that are stained may be dampened, left for a few days and then lightly scraped – but not for very long (*right Before and After*). Linen paper that has been stretched cannot, alas, be cured. If paper is printed on both sides, choose to preserve the side with the heavier print, but line it with paper that is thinner than the original.



She showed us photos of some of the items (read challenges) she has worked on. The star was a map of Crete c.1699 with tiny coats of arms in the border, but most were from the German occupation of Poland in WW2. These included posters, individual identity cards with yellow-metal grommets (which show if secure photographs have been tampered with) (*left*),

sewn papers unpicked, worn ID papers in four quadrants (*right Before and After*), whole newspaper pages and delicate repairs to torn pages.

Joyce claimed that as a paper conservator she was ‘at the bottom of the pecking order’, but confessed she had derived considerable satisfaction in having improved the items entrusted to her.



**Dave Haunton. The Screen Photos are by Irene Burroughs**

## ‘LOCAL RAILWAYS AND TRANSPORT AROUND MERTON PARK’

On a cold, damp Saturday 8 February, the audience were conducted by Bruce Robertson, MHS (*right*), on a journey around Merton Park, Morden and Tooting, enhanced with plenty of pictures and maps. Bruce is a railway enthusiast with comprehensive knowledge of our local transport history and remembers listening as a child in his bedroom to the sound of trains passing through South Merton Station.



Underneath South Merton Station there is a fast-flowing culvert, 8feet deep, part of the covered drainage system in that locality. In 1910 this station was included in a planned route for Wimbledon and Sutton Railways, but the First World War stopped any progress. Significant earth removal was necessary to build the station before the system finally opened in 1930. Part of the Sutton to Wimbledon line was named ‘the wall of death’ by the drivers having to negotiate a 1:44 gradient at the same point as a sharp curve!

There was a brief stop at Wimbledon Chase station, opened in 1929 and incorporated into the Epsom to Tooting route. Then on to Wimbledon station, with a photograph taken around 1880 showing the station and the ‘traditional’ trams outside. Moving to Dundonald Road, Bruce recounted an incident from 1910 where a carter and his horse moving through the level crossing crashed with a train, overturning the cart. The local signal box was demolished in 1982, with the last train through Dundonald Road on 31 May 1997, with the station emerging as a tram stop on 10 July 2005.

Travelling a little further on from Dundonald Road we learnt that Merton Park Station was originally named ‘Lower Merton’, but in 1887 Mr John Innes managed to change the name to Merton Park. The original signal box was built on stilts, illustrating this with a picture of the box and Kington Road level crossing, with the pedestrians ‘three bridges’, dated about 1900. Bruce explained the ‘single line token system’ with added detail

that the signalman rang a bell to warn the constable on point duty at the junction, while handing the token to the train driver. A photograph of this transaction was used as the theme for a popular 1930s painting / poster which Bruce displayed (*left*) (familiar to many, with at least one of our audience also owning a copy!), together with other railway memorabilia. The signal box was demolished in 1982, and one of the three bridges (Dorset Road side) was removed in 1980 and can now be seen at Corfe Castle station, Swanage.



Morden Road station, now of course a tram stop, was originally named ‘Morden Road Halt’ and was commissioned in 1898. Amongst the photographs shown was one of a sign displaying ‘9 miles to Whitehall’. Bruce read a newspaper report and displayed a photograph of a derailment on 28 September 1964 due to points tampering at Merton Abbey sidings, and so finally we arrived at Tooting station, opened in 1868.

The talk ended with a quick visit to Morden Tube station, opened in 1927, with a fascinating aerial view of rural Morden photographed in 1926, and pictures showing crowds waiting to board buses for Epsom Derby day.



Besides several interesting maps and plans, Bruce displayed his models of the Merton Park station building (*above*), here viewed from the platforms, and of a train used at the Express Diary site in Morden (*left*).

**Ian Aldridge**

**Photographs kindly supplied by Mick Taylor**

## TWO MERTON MILL SITES (and some UPHOLSTERY memories)

Information on the Internet mentioned a company at Grove Mill, Mitcham Bridge, which made horse-hair and fibre for upholstery from 1903. Grove Mill and nearby Crown Mill were previously known as Mitcham Mills. Mention of horse-hair brought back memories of an upholstery project the author had completed in the early 1990s, when she reupholstered a 1930s three piece leather club-armchair suite. She replenished the furniture's brown fibre filling with black horse-hair from a family mattress and also used some modern black fibre filling. The horse-hair from the mattress was black and relatively dust-free. The modern fibre filling was also black and dust free. The fibre in the club armchair suite was brown and a little dusty. Information on the internet indicated that horse-hair is still used in mattress production and can be black in colour. Horse-hair mattresses are seen on a specialist website.<sup>1</sup> There was no evidence that the mattress horse-hair or the three piece suite's fibre filling came from Mitcham but the history of the firm was interesting and unknown to the author. (The suite of furniture was completed by covering it with leather from Connolly's Leather business at Merton Mill.) [*Of course! – Ed*]



### Introduction

Grove Mill, Mitcham Bridge, was a flour mill for some 900 years, until in August 1902 its current lease came to an end. In 1903 the mill became a horse-hair business and became known as the Patent Horse Hair Co Ltd. Its product was used in upholstery until just past the firm's golden anniversary in 1953, when the business was bought out by a firm in High Wycombe.<sup>2</sup> (*left Grove Mill today*)

Merton Mill, Wandle Bank, had also been a flour mill, for over 700 years from the thirteenth century, until in 1905 it became a supplier of leather hides for upholstery. The business moved to Ashford Kent in the early 1990s and finally went into administration in 2002.<sup>3</sup> (*right Merton Mill, Wandle Bank, today*)



### Mitcham Hair and Fibre Mills 1903-1953



Information about the horse-hair business was first noticed by the author in a mitchamhistorynotes website which showed an O/S map of Mitcham Bridge for 1905.<sup>4</sup> The map also showed the Grove Mill, Mitcham Bridge, in use and the nearby Crown Mill, which was disused. The business was then known as the Patent Horse Hair Co Ltd and the product was used for upholstery.<sup>5</sup> The mitchamhistorynotes website also gave details of how this business changed its name to become Lyxhayr in 1905. A Lyxhayr advert which points out the product's hygiene benefits is seen here (*left*).<sup>6</sup> Eric Montague's *Mitcham Histories*

gives further information about horse-hair and the subsequent adulteration of the product by the addition of hogs' hair, in order to reduce the price, which caused concerns about hygiene. So there was a need for better hygienic standards in furniture filling materials, which led to the development of the new synthetic filling developed by a chemist called Mr Holmes and given the name of Lyxhayr by a colleague of Mr Holmes, a Mr William Wright Thompson. The author believes that the word Lyxhayr is a play on the word 'elixir' when the first letter L is sounded as 'EL' and this may suggest that Mr Holmes was a pharmacist, although pharmacists were called chemists in the early twentieth century. Lyxhayr fibre was a vegetable fibre, free from animal contaminants, and so would not support bacteria or fungal growth. Holmes selected fibres like coir and a substance called Algerian fibre, because of their tensile strength and the fact that they could be sterilised and coated with a synthetic coating. The process was patented and the new product could be curled and used in mattresses and upholstery.<sup>7</sup>

There was a fire at Grove Mill which gutted the building 'two years later' which equates to 1907; during the rebuilding of the mill, production was continued nearby at Crown Mill.<sup>8</sup> Newspaper reports recorded in the mitchamhistorynotes site mention a fire at Grove Mill in 1909.<sup>9</sup>

By 1910 the demand for Lyxhayr had increased so much that the lease of the Crown Mill had to be taken on by Lyxhayr as well.<sup>10</sup> The business was doing well and became known as Lyxhayr Manufacturers Ltd with W A Dickinson as Managing Director (MD), who was one of the founder members of the Bedding Federation which pressed for better hygienic standards in furniture and mattresses. In 1915 E B Hedger joined the firm as an office boy and worked his way up to be MD of the Mitcham Hair and Fibre Mills. In Merton's 'Carved in Stone project' there is a report about Lyxhayr which stated that "between 1914 and 1918 its (Lyxhayr's) entire output was used for the war effort, notably as stuffing for hospital mattresses used by wounded troops. Shipments (of fibre) were also sent abroad for use by Britain's allies."<sup>11</sup>

In 1919 the freehold of the Grove and Crown Mills, already on a long lease, was purchased by the Mitcham Fibre Mills from Sir Frederick Fowke.<sup>12</sup>

In 1940, at the height of the Battle of Britain, the steward of the manor of Reigate wrote to E B Hedger, who was then company secretary and manager of the mills, regarding the fee of £1 quit rent which was due annually.<sup>13</sup> The Manor of Reigate held the mills as a freehold tenancy upon payment of an annual rent.<sup>14</sup> The steward therefore suggested the matter might be resolved by the removal of 'manorial incidents' by voluntary agreement under provisions of the Law of Property Act 1922. However E B Hedger was under pressure from maintaining production under war-conditions and in addition Biggin Hill was nearby, such that he did not sort out the back-rent issue. In 1953 Hedger concluded his review of the success of Mitcham Hair and Fibre Mills but within a few years of its fiftieth anniversary, Mitcham Hair and Fibre Mills was bought out by a firm in High Wycombe.<sup>15</sup> 'At the same time' Grove Mill was sold to R F White and Co Ltd, a firm of toilet soap manufacturers and perfumiers whose products were marketed under the brand name of 'Jean Sorelle' and to whom part of the premises had been leased in 1930.<sup>16</sup> Peter McGow's history notes are held at the Wandle Industrial Museum. McGow stated that the fibre company (Mitcham Hair and Fibre Mills) vacated the site in 1959 when the Crown Mill was then taken over by C S Walker (Sacks) Ltd and the Associated Jute Company Limited.<sup>17</sup> Crown Mill was destroyed by fire in August 1964 and not rebuilt. R F White and Company vacated the Grove Mill in January 1975 and moved production to Peterborough. In 2003 a redevelopment scheme was started at the Mitcham Mills site which would provide accommodation and so Grove Mill was retained to be converted into flats.<sup>18</sup>

### Stone mill and rollers

The author had been discussing the change of use in these two Merton mills by the beginning of the twentieth century, when Mitcham Bridge mills changed from flour to horse-hair and fibre mills and the Merton Mill changed from flour to leather production. The author's husband commented that the grind stones were changed to metal rollers. It is reported that the replacement of grind stones with metal rollers happened in 1862 for Fison and Co who used combined roller and stones. By 1870's roller milling was gaining momentum in Britain.<sup>19</sup> Mick Taylor of Wandle Industrial Museum stated that after the 1907 fire all machinery in Grove Mill was renewed, but Eric Montague in his *Mitcham Histories 6* book does not say how or what was done. Mick Taylor says neither mill stones nor copper plate equipment was used in the fibre production, though tenter-hooks may have been used to produce the rope which was made of horse-hair.<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

The mention of the horse-hair factory prompted the author to research the Mitcham business at Grove Mill, as she had used horse-hair in an upholstery project. The author had visited Connolly's leather factory in 1991 to purchase three hides, fortunately, for this business moved out of London to Ashford Kent in the early 1990s. The re-upholstered 1930s leather club armchair suite is still in use in the author's home and a photo of one of the armchairs is seen here (*right*). It is interesting that two successful flour mills in Merton ceased producing flour in the early 1900s and turned their businesses to products used in upholstery. Was flour in the early 1900s being obtained from cheaper sources? Or was there greater demand for mattresses and furniture brought about and maintained as a result of the two World Wars? Or was the decision to change the products made at the mills purely a better business option?



### Acknowledgements

To Mick Taylor of Wandle Industrial Museum for his useful comments, for details of a Grove Mill photograph and for notes of P McGow about Mitcham Mills. The Lyxhayr advert is courtesy of <https://mitchamhistorynote.com/tag/wandle>. The photos are by the author, March 2025.

1 <https://mattressstuff.com/horsehair-mattress/>  
2 Montague, E.N. *Mitcham Histories:6 Mitcham Bridge, The Watermeads and the Wandle Mills*, Merton Historical Society (2005) pp.55-59  
3 Connolly's leather mill. <https://photoarchive.merton.gov.uk/collections/work-and-industry/97804-connollys-leather-works-merton-mill-colliers-wood?#:~:text=In%201905%20it%20was%20co>

4 <https://mitchamhistorynote.com/tag/wandle>  
5 As note 4  
6 As note 4  
7 As note 1, p.56  
8 As note 1, p.56  
9 As note 4  
10 As note 1, p.58  
11 Carved in Stone. <https://cis-photoarchive.merton.gov.uk/lyxhayr-fibre-mills>  
12 As note 1, p.58

13 As note 1, p.58  
14 Peter McGow *Mitcham mills: Reigate* Wandle Industrial Museum  
15 As note 1, p.58  
16 As note 14  
17 As note 14  
18 As note 14  
19 <https://new.millsarchive.org/2016/09/06/from-quern-to-computer-the-history-of-flour-milling/10/>  
20 Personal communication from Mick Taylor. Wandle Industrial Museum. March 2025

**GORDON MCKIE has wondered about**

## **THE CONSTRUCTION OF VESTRY HALL IN 1887**

Mitcham Vestry Hall was opened for the Parish of St Peter and St Paul in Mitcham, on Wednesday 18 May 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee. The building was originally intended to serve three purposes: to provide meeting rooms for the Parish council officials, known as 'vestrymen', a public hall and a fire station for the Mitcham Fire Service. After local government reforms, it would come to accommodate the Urban District Council from 1915, and then the headquarters of the Borough of Mitcham from 1934.

The construction of Vestry Hall had become necessary because the parish room was too small to accommodate all the ratepayers who wanted to attend parish meetings. Initially it was proposed that a small building that could accommodate up to 100 people should be constructed, at a cost of £150. But it became clear that a larger building was required to accommodate more people. A second set of plans were obtained for a building which would cost £1000 to construct.

The third proposal, which came to fruition, was for a building, costing about £3,500, to be built according to the plans of local architect Mr R M Chart. It was never in doubt that Mr Chart would be chosen as architect for the building, since he was the son of Edwin Chart, the Vestry Clerk, and this was a time when nepotism was seen as entirely appropriate. It was proposed that this should be built on the site of the former parish pound, lock up and stocks. The works were carried out by builder Mr E J Burnand of Wallington.

The exterior dimensions of the building were to be length 88 feet, breadth 35 feet and height, to the summit of the vane, 82 feet. The internal dimensions of the hall were to be 58 by 31 feet. There were to be three offices, two of which were for parish business and the third was to be rented out to the District Sanitary Authority. The hall was designed to accommodate up to 400 people and included a movable platform or stage. (An extension was added in 1929 to provide additional office space, at a cost of £15,000.) The building was constructed in the Queen Anne style using red brick, Mansfield stone and a slate roof, incorporating an illuminated clock tower at a height of 80 ft.

The clock tower was paid for by the 'Penny Reading Committee', who had raised £105 some years before by carrying out a series of successful 'penny readings'. These were a popular form of entertainment in the nineteenth century and consisted of public performances featuring readings from literature, poetry, and newspapers, as well as musical entertainment and recitations. Admission cost just one penny, making them affordable for working-class audiences and helping to democratise access to literature and culture. Today a commemorative brass plate can be seen in the lobby of Vestry Hall, in honour of the contributions made by the local Penny Reading Committee.

At Vestry Hall's opening ceremony, a party of local notabilities assembled outside the building, accompanied by a large crowd. A Mr Innes, on behalf of the ratepayers of the parish, thanked Mrs Bonsor, wife of the MP for Wimbledon, Mr H C Bonsor, for declaring the hall open. He added that they had all heard about 'the difficulties that had been connected with the raising of the building' and that one of these had been the decision about who should declare it open. Later that day, the local notables held a luncheon, presided over by Mr GP Bidder QC, president of the local Liberal Party (now commemorated by an epitaph on Mitcham Common, since he successfully saved it from development). Later that evening the party reassembled at Lower Green accompanied by a crowd of onlookers for a firework display organised by a Mr Pain.

By the time the Vestry Hall clock, known as 'Mitcham Ben', had struck twelve for the second time in its existence, the village had, according to the *Wallington and Carshalton Herald* of Saturday 21 May 1887, 'resumed its normal appearance'.

Sources: Mitcham History Notes (2004), E N Montague, *Lower Green West Mitcham* (2004, MHS)



*Photo E N Montague (July 1974)*

## WORKSHOP EXTRAS

- ◆ In mid-January Dr Mike Page of Surrey History Centre alerted me to a forthcoming auction of a Merton Priory seal attached to a medieval document, asking whether we would support their bid towards its purchase. We tried, but sadly the bidding soon exceeded £1200 and SHC had to withdraw, but images are still displayed on the auctioneers' website – [https://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/dukes/catalogue-id-srdu10185/lot-e0324c78-0911-4dd7-9895-b26800b326ba?utm\\_source=auction-alert&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=auction-alert&utm\\_content=lot-view-link&queryId=e47e3569af389d955a33c530772c1ac4](https://www.the-saleroom.com/en-gb/auction-catalogues/dukes/catalogue-id-srdu10185/lot-e0324c78-0911-4dd7-9895-b26800b326ba?utm_source=auction-alert&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=auction-alert&utm_content=lot-view-link&queryId=e47e3569af389d955a33c530772c1ac4). The seal is in excellent condition and the whole document is legible except the date in the bottom right.



The auction website described it as 'A MERTON PRIORY WAX SEAL probably 16th century, 8cm x 5cm, with an attached portion of a Latin document, possibly a rental agreement' but, on examination of the text of the document, with help from Katie Hawks with the translation, it proved to be considerably older and more unusual. It relates to the release from servile status of a villein and his progeny, together with the customary land he held of the priory. The location of his half-virgate holding is not given, but the names of several of the witnesses to the deed indicate it was in the priory's manor of Holdshott, Hampshire. Although the date of the document is concealed in one photo and out of focus in the other, the first three digits can be discerned – mcc – so clearly a date in the 1200s. The document was issued by Eustace, prior of Merton from 14 October 1249 until his death on 1 February 1263, in modern dating 1264, so it must have been issued between those dates.

- ◆ I have been purchasing digital images of the extant manorial court rolls for the Manor of Merton. Those from 1485 to 1666 belong to the Merchant Taylors' Company and have been deposited at Guildhall Library London and those from 1701 to 1928 are at the John Innes Centre in Norfolk – John Innes (of compost fame) having been the final lord of the manor. When the images of the latter arrived recently, I was delighted to see they included some office files of 1908-1909, of which I had been unaware, relating to the identification of the various former copyhold properties – information required by the trustees following the death of John Innes. They included a sketch map showing four properties that had eluded identification by the investigating lawyers. Two of these were the Rutlish Charity properties – the *White Hart* and the property at The Rush, now part of the Nelson Health Centre. Another [D] was a property described as the tenement on White Post Green, which the estate office was able to confirm as the property then known as Vine Cottage, in Kingston Road near the junction with Morden Road, shown on a 1913 photo on Merton Memories. But the fourth property [C] came as a surprise to me – the National School had been built c.1831 on a strip of manorial waste right across the end of what is now Melrose Road near the parish church, and not where I had assumed – on the site of the current old school building funded from a bequest of Richard Thornton, now part of a sheltered housing unit here. Shown on the 1875 OS map, it had gone by 1894 edition, which shows Melrose Road and the new school. According to the John Innes Society booklet *John Innes and the birth of Merton Park*, edited by Judith Goodman, the new school opened in March 1871 and the old school site was put up for sale. Melrose Road was laid out in 1891-2, with the first buildings two pairs of semi-detached cottages, Nos 1-7.
- ◆ At our December Workshop Charlie Alpera spoke about the planned development of the gasholders at Motspur Park. I sent him what information I had on the historic environment of the surrounding area, and he then enquired about the 'furze' fieldname that was common in the area, not least in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century name for Motspur Park itself – Furse Farm or Motts Furze Farm. West Barnes Farm included '100 acres heath and furze' in 1567, but this probably referred to grazing rights on the commons. Individual Fyrsey names in Morden and Merton first appear in our records in the late sixteenth century. Later these became Ruffett names and eventually Wood, so were probably former areas of arable land, abandoned to rough grazing after the Black Death, that gradually reverted to woodland. However, Charlie had found a reference in Malcolm's 1805 *Compendium of Modern Husbandry* Vol III: Surrey, that furze was being grown throughout the county as firewood for lime and brick kilns. He wonders whether this was the case in the Motspur Park area of Malden. As a birdwatcher, he is especially interested in the possibility that the Dartford warbler (known locally as the furze wren), whose primary habitat is gorse, would have been abundant here until furze was no longer cultivated. He has found plenty of county observations in the nineteenth century, but none locally in the twentieth, the rare exceptions being large heaths, commons and Richmond Park. Has anyone any thoughts on the matter?

JANET HOLDSWORTH has visited the attractions of the

## DEEP SHELTERS AT CLAPHAM SOUTH STATION

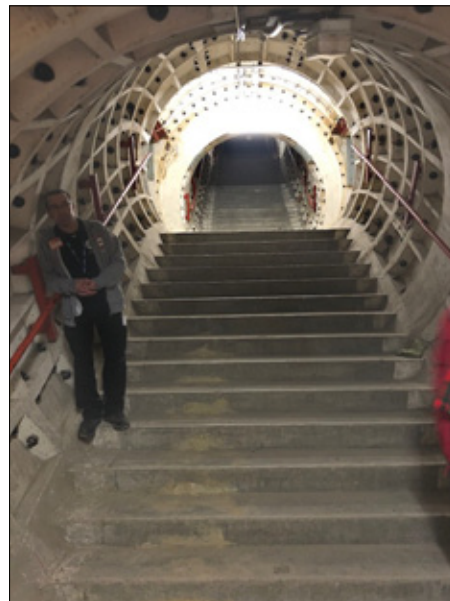
At a local history workshop David Luff alerted us to tours that the London Transport Museum will be running over the summer, into the deep level shelters built beneath Clapham South underground station and opened in 1944. It was judged unsuitable for an MHS visit, as there are 180 steps to go down (and obviously to go up again).

As it happens, Richard and I went on this tour just before lockdown in 2020, when I took these photographs of the deep level shelters. Individual shelters were named after successful British Admirals such as Anson, Beatty, Collingwood and Drake, so much better for morale than a mere A, B, C and D. Some were bare of furniture, others filled with wooden bunks. Decoration included wartime news photographs and a considerable number of colourful wartime information posters, reminding people that 'POTATOES feed without fattening and give you ENERGY' and that 'CARROTS keep you healthy and help you to see in the blackout'. Canteen prices were simple, with tea, sandwiches, cake and cocoa each at twopence.



Short personal memories are scattered around, presumably gathered from a period before these deep-level shelters were opened. 'It was very very primitive. The bunks were quite stiff, but in fact we didn't mind too much,' 'I particularly remember the [canteen] jam tarts – a real treat in those days.'

The tour is well worth the money and I do recommend it, though I agree it is not suitable for MHS as a group. From memory these tours get booked up very quickly. I can also recommend the Kingsway tram tunnel tour.



<https://www.ltmuseum.co.uk/whats-on/hidden-london/clapham-south>



## LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

8 November 2024 - Nine present, Rosemary Turner in the Chair

- ◆ **Christine Pittman** introduced us to an interesting Mitcham character. Charles Henry Maxwell Knight, the subject of a biography by Henry Hemming *M: Maxwell Knight, MI5's Greatest Spymaster* (2017, Preface Publishing) was born on 9 July 1900 to Hugh Coleraine Knight, a solicitor, and his wife Ada Phyllis, née Hancock, and was baptised at Holy Innocents Church, South Norwood, on 3 August 1900. In the 1901 census the family was living at 176 Selhurst Road, Mitcham, in what is now the London Borough of Merton, while the 1911 census gives the family's address as 33 The Mitcham Park, Mitcham.

Maxwell was obsessed with animals; he spent a lot of his childhood on Mitcham Common looking for animals and insects. He was sent to HMS *Worcester*, a training vessel for those going into the Merchant Navy, later signed up for the Royal Naval Reserve and survived the war. After various jobs, he aligned with the hard right in British politics, joined the British Fascisti and was head of its intelligence wing for a while. He was recruited by MI5 around 1925, and was particularly successful at recruiting other agents, including women, who had previously been discounted. The details of his career as a spymaster are all in Henry Hemming's book, but Christine will just repeat the suggestions that he was one of the models for the character of M in Ian Fleming's James Bond spy novels, and also inspired the character of Jack Brotherhood in John Le Carre's *A Perfect Spy*.

Following his retirement from MI5, Knight became well known as a BBC broadcaster on nature subjects, and was also featured on *Desert Island Discs*. He also published books, among them *How to keep an elephant* and *Bird gardening: how to attract birds*. Interestingly, his first book, published in 1962, *Animals and Ourselves*, was illustrated by David Cornwell, who became better known as John Le Carre.

- ◆ **Bethan Rigby** came to tell us about her new post-graduate project, to compile and examine a micro-history of Morden Hall Park. This will document the changes of land use of all areas within the Park, and the environmental consequences of such manipulation, including air pollution. She wonders if sudden inherited wealth by the owners (eg. from coffee or tobacco farming in Virginia) changed their view of their property and if this can be detected in changed land use.
- ◆ **Bill Bailey** spoke of his interest in local government arrangements, starting in the nineteenth century, when parish councillors were elected for three years by a show of hands. The electors had to have a property qualification, which meant that the same people elected or were elected time and time again. In theory, any five electors could demand a new election, but this hardly ever happened.
- ◆ **David Luff** showed us a map of the Pickle area marking two water channels he has identified as storm drains, which are still functioning.

- ◆ **Yvonne Delphine** came to recall for us the war-time tragedy that befell evacuee Patricia Ann Cupit. 'Little Pat' (*right*) was born in Lambeth on 19 October 1935 to her parents, Anne Julia Boyle and Leonard Claude Cupit. Apparently they were not married, as Anne had married William Parker in 1931, but not divorced him. She did however take Leonard's name and became known as Mrs Cupit.

In 1938 the family had moved to 54 Manor Way in Mitcham. With the outbreak of war, Little Pat was too young for formal evacuation, so her parents sent her to live with a family friend, a police officer in Brighton. However, the increasing threat of invasion in the south meant that Pat was recalled home, aged 4. The start of the Blitz on London again required her evacuation, this time to other friends, Albert and Flo Pask, who lived on the southern border of Norfolk, in the tiny hamlet of Riddlesworth. [So small that it does not appear in the AA Road Atlas of Great Britain – Editor.] Pat

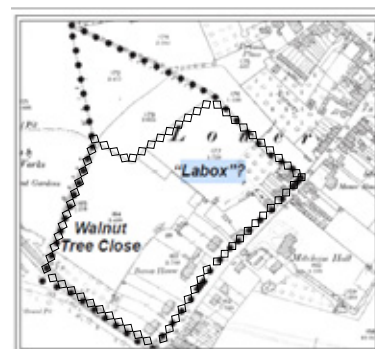


started to attend the local school when she was five, walking the mile or so by herself. Unfortunately, on 6 May 1942, aged six, she met Private James Wyeth, based in the local Army camp, who stabbed her to death. Wyeth had severe mental health problems and a history of violence towards women. He confessed to the murder, was tried, convicted and sentenced to death, but the Home Secretary revoked that sentence on the grounds of insanity, so he ended his days in Broadmoor in 1983.

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins**, having established that the Mitcham Grove estate could have been the centre of the Domesday estate of Wicford, is now trying to see if the Domesday estate extended further, by looking at the origins of neighbouring properties. He started with the later Baron House estate, on the corner of Morden Road and London Road, Mitcham.

In *Mitcham Histories 4* (Lower Mitcham), p.85, Eric Montague stressed Lady Blanke's mention in her will of 'my capital messuage and mansion in Mitcham, with a close of six acres, nine acres of copyhold land called Labox, and one little close of land lying over against my messuage on the other side of the highway that leadeth to the River of Mitcham, containing one acre and a half'. Subsequently (p.89) her nephew and heir, Sir Richard Ferrand, bequeathed 'my capital messuage and mansion in Mitcham, sometime the Lady Blanke's, and ... [everything] thereunto appertaining', and six acres in Mitcham called Walnut Tree Close, five acres in Carshalton and other property.

Monty attempted to map these properties on p.90 (*right, dotted lines*). However, Peter established that two parts (plots 133, 176) were freeholds of Vauxhall manor. Plot 172 was not part of the estate either, as an 1825 book of estate maps of Ravensbury copyholds showed the outline of the Baron House estate, confirming it occupied the rest of the area of Monty's map (*open diamond lines*). Labuck's nine acres was an as yet unlocated holding in the Eastfield, added by the Blankes, the three acres of plot 177 having been added by the Ferrands. It is unclear if Walnut Tree Close had also been an addition. Lady Blanke had entertained Elizabeth I on two occasions (1591 and 1594) so one would imagine a grand house in extensive grounds.



- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** had an email from a lady researching Ambrose Crowley, who concurs with many of Eric Montague's conclusions about the family links to Mitcham (*Bulletin 131*, pp.8-11). However, our correspondent can clarify that the Crowley connection was not through Ambrose's father-in-law Charles Owen, but directly through his mother-in-law Mary Owen. This is proved by the will of Francis Knight, who was buried in Mitcham in October 1674, 'leaving his mansion house and land in Mitcham to his son John and his heirs, in default of which to his daughter Mary, wife of Charles Owen, and her heirs'.

**Dave Haunton**

**20 December 2024** – We have only a restricted report on this workshop, its incompleteness due to the recorder now being unable to read their notes. Let this be a dreadful warning against delay.

- ◆ **Charlie Alpera** came to alert us to the planning threat to develop the West Barnes gasholder area. He is a full time student at Kingston University, reading Environmental Science, and since the Workshop has already published a book on the history and records of wildlife in the area, as well as an extended essay on *The Birds of Worcester Park and Lower Morden*. The book is *The Motspur Park Gas Holders and the Surrounding Greenspace: A History*. Subtitled *Worcester Park – Lower Morden – Malden*, it was published by Sparrowfield Birders in 2025, in a limited edition of 100. It was aimed at locals, and distributed for free.

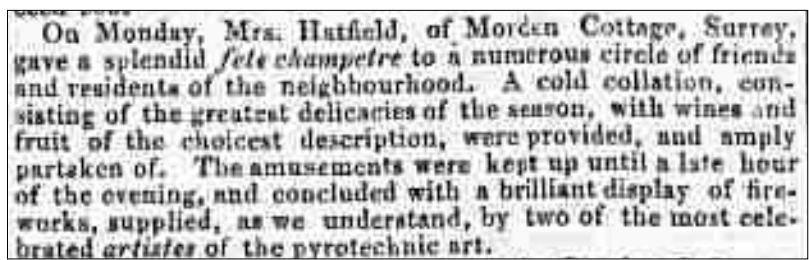
- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** noted that Rosemary circulated to the Committee a request from Eleanor Harding, National Trust Cultural Heritage Curator for Ham, Morden and Surrey Hills. Bethan Rigby, who came to our last Workshop, had suggested that she send us a report, produced for the National Trust, on the Hatfields' possible links to slavery through their involvement in the Virginia tobacco trade. The report was produced some time ago but the research questions posed have not yet been taken further. Eleanor and her colleague Sophie Clarke offer curatorial support to the Morden Hall Park team. They are working at the moment on how to develop their presentation of Morden Hall Park's history and they were pleased to see the resources on our website. In particular, Eleanor wanted to know if we are aware of any publications on Taddy & Co or tobacco processing along the Wandle, as they are struggling to find anything – which seems remarkable! Rosemary also forwarded this request to WIM and they are going to share what they have researched on the subject.

But Peter had had a similar enquiry a couple of years ago from the rector of Morden, as church authorities were advising clergy to investigate any local links with slavery in the light of the demonstrations in Bristol and elsewhere at that time, over heritage items that were deemed to celebrate slave owners as local patrons. Peter could not find any direct links with any Morden residents, though Mitcham and Merton have several! He had wondered about our snuff millers at Morden Hall and Ravensbury, as their raw material would have come from plantations worked by slaves, but there were no suggestions that they were directly involved in that aspect of the trade.

One thing mentioned in the NT report was a local belief that the last of the Morden Hatfields, Gilliat Edward, had been in Virginia on company business at the time of his father's death in 1906. Peter had heard something about this but it turned out that it was in the script of the Attic Theatre production at Morden Hall called *Fields Unsown*, where one of the imaginary soldiers convalescing there mentioned it in an imaginary conversation! Peter had dismissed it as authors' licence, but it seems to have been something already believed locally.

Peter consulted Bill Rudd's file on the Hatfields but could find nothing relevant, so decided to look through some newspapers downloaded from the British Newspaper Archive during Lockdown, which had items about Morden. Some news reports contradicted something Bill had maintained, and also something else that Peter McGow had not included in his excellent series of articles on Wandle industries, on the WIM website.

First, Bill had made notes on W H Prentis' 1970 book *The Snuff Mill Story: Morden, Mitcham, Merton*. Bill dismissed the suggestion that the Hatfields had lived in Morden Cottage before Gilliat Edward occupied it, but Peter found a report in the *Morning Herald (London)* for Wednesday 6 July 1836 that proved that his grandparents were living there at the time.



On Monday, Mrs. Hatfield, of Morden Cottage, Surrey, gave a splendid *fete champetre* to a numerous circle of friends and residents of the neighbourhood. A cold collation, consisting of the greatest delicacies of the season, with wines and fruit of the choicest description, were provided, and amply partaken of. The amusements were kept up until a late hour of the evening, and concluded with a brilliant display of fireworks, supplied, as we understand, by two of the most celebrated artists of the pyrotechnic art.

She would have been the wife of Alexander Hatfeild, whose daughter Eliza's marriage was reported as having taken place in Morden on 13 September 1837 – to Thomas Wright Wells Esq. However, in the 1838 Tithe Apportionment register it was James Hatfeild, who was recorded as the Garth's tenant of the snuff mills, cottage, house and outbuildings in 11 acres of ground – probably a confusion of names as Alexander's maternal uncle was James Taddy, the founder of the firm.

In addition, various newspapers including the *Evening Mail* of Friday 23 February 1838 reported a major fire at the Morden Hall snuff mills on 'Thursday last'. Apparently it started in a 'drying sieve', spread to the next door store-room and thence to the whole business, despite 'the most strenuous endeavours by the workmen to suppress the devouring element', later assisted by the villagers and inhabitants of Merton, Morden and Tooting. The mills were totally consumed, though immediately attended by the parochial fire service, augmented by the Farringdon-street and Waterloo-road fire engines (arriving three hours after the discovery), followed shortly by the powerful engine of the West of England, drawn by post-horses.

### 31 January 2025 – Seven present - Peter Hopkins in the Chair

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** had three contributions, each too detailed and/or complicated to summarise here, so the Editor has decreed that they appear together as a separate paper elsewhere (*see p.11*).
- ◆ **David Luff** had brought in a photograph of some strange vehicles which he had seen on the industrial estate in Durnsford Road (now published on the front page of our *March Bulletin*).
- ◆ **Joyce Bellamy** mentioned several concerns that she had relating to Mitcham. She felt that the council did not recognise Mitcham as a place: its conservation area is around the Cricket Green, founded in 1685, while Fair Green was the centre for markets and the fairground. There has been a horticultural society since 1882 and there used to be a Mitcham Society. The vestry hall has now been redecorated and features have been replaced. It has obtained local listing but Joyce thinks that it should be Grade II listed. The *Burn Bullock* has been stabilised. She is concerned about the *White Hart*, where planning permission has been granted but nothing is happening. It has squatters living in there. She has been trying to get the bench mark in the old Barclays Bank building recorded. It was used by the compilers of the ordinance survey maps.
- ◆ **Bill Bailey** reported on research into changes in Mitcham during the years 1894 to 1915, when its population grew from 12,000 to 31,000. The Local Government Act 1894 gave the Croydon Rural District Council's new, elected Parochial Council responsibility for public health, streets and their lighting, the weekly removal of 'house refuse', and allotments. The Act also required the election of the Parish Meeting which was to meet at least once a year to elect members of the Parish Council. Interest in the new bodies was lively at times of local unemployment and when the golf course was created on the Common. As the work of the Council increased, calls grew for a move to urban district status, which would give the Council greater powers. Resisted by some on the grounds of 'economy', this was accepted at the end of this period and the Mitcham Urban District Council met for the first time in April 1915.
- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** noted that the 1910 valuation does not give any extra information about the building opposite Mitcham station mentioned at the last meeting.

An enquiry arrived about the former Nat West sports club and land in Turle Road. The inquirer has no objections to the planning but wonders if there should be an archaeological investigation prior to building. The site includes a lot of open land, as well as the club house which a church has been using, but which has been left to rot. A lot of streams flow into the Graveney, so it may not be suitable for building on. Keith Penny

had been doing some research in that area and had sent Rosemary his notes, which mention draining the land prior to previous building work by Wates. The plans do include keeping some areas open for sports. Keith says that now there has been a reassessment, there is likely to be some fieldwork done if the development is approved. Following on from that there will also be a programme of public engagement where we will get a chance to see what they have found. Historic England are now onboard. Keith's notes show a golf course laid out on the area where Rosemary lives. It was originally farmland up to Norbury. The corner shop at the top of the hill was originally the Clubhouse. It would have been tricky playing on a hill but there was one near Caterham that had an even greater incline.

A second inquiry related to a cottage (no.297, *right*) at the end of an unmade road off Commonsides East, Mitcham Common. There is a planning application to demolish it and build three houses. Eric Montague gives it a very small write up in *Mitcham Histories 3: Pollards Hill, Commonsides East and Lonesome*, and says that the end of the building was plain, but Rosemary's photographs of it show there are now terracotta plaques all over it (*below*) on what appears to be a false front.



Eric calls the cottage 'Southcroft', but this is probably a typo for 'South Cot' as in the 1911 census, but not in previous ones. It seems to have several names over the years, possibly connected to Tamworth Villas as the occupants are gardeners and coachman when it

was first occupied, but after that there are a number of different unrelated occupations. Eric thought that it must be over 200 years old, as it is marked on a map dated 1801, and the developers notes agree with this. They also say it had previously been two cottages, which is possible, but not obvious on the earlier censuses. The census refers to it and Tamworth Villas as being on Mitcham Common rather than Commonsides East. Evidently permission to annex part of the common had not been sorted at that time. There is a photograph on our website that Eric took in 1972 but it is not very clear. The nearby Tamworth Villas (built 1907) also exhibit a few terracotta plaques (*right*).



Rosemary Turner

**Next Workshops Fridays 13 June, 25 July, 5 September, 17 October  
from 2.30pm at Wandle Industrial Museum. All welcome.**

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