



CHAIR: Christine Pittman

BULLETIN No. 228

DECEMBER 2023



David Luff's main Sindy display (with one Paul) at Heritage Discovery Day (see p.7)

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PROGRAMME – DECEMBER 2023–APRIL 2024

Saturday 9 December at 2.30pm

‘The History of Wandsworth Prison’

A talk by **Stewart McLaughlin**, historian and curator of the prison museum

Saturday 13 January 2024 at 2.30pm

‘Jane Morris – the Pre-Raphaelite Muse’

talk by **John Hawks** of Merton Priory Trust

(This is a change from the subject advertised in our brochure)

Saturday 10 February at 2.30pm

‘Papermaking along the Wandle’

talk by **John Sheridan** of the Wandle Industrial Museum

Saturday 9 March at 2.30pm

‘Sports along the Wandle’

talk by **Mick Taylor** of the Wandle Industrial Museum

Saturday 13 April at 2.30pm **‘The Richest of the Rich: Richard Thornton of Cannon Hill’**

talk by Heritage Officer **Sarah Gould**

*Meetings 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 19 Jan and 1 Mar 2024 from 2.30pm
at the Wandle Industrial Museum, next door to the Vestry Hall, Mitcham.**

Do join us. You don’t have to share any research unless you wish to.

Visitors are very welcome to attend any of our events.

YOUR NEW COMMITTEE

At our AGM on 11 November, the following were elected:

Chair: Christine Pittman

Vice Chair: Peter Hopkins

Secretary: Rosemary Turner

Treasurer: Janet Holdsworth

Committee: Irene Burroughs, Dave Haunton, David Luff, Bea Oliver, Tony Scott and San Ward

HAVE YOU PAID?

Subscriptions for 2023–2024 are now overdue. Please note that this will be the last issue to reach you if we do not receive your payment before the March *Bulletin*. A membership form was enclosed with the September *Bulletin*. Current rates are:

Individual member £12, Additional member in same household £5, Full-time Student £5.

If possible, please use online banking to pay your subscription, as banks charge us for cheques – details on the renewal form. But if that is not possible for you, cheques are payable to **Merton Historical Society** and should be sent with completed forms to our Membership Secretary.

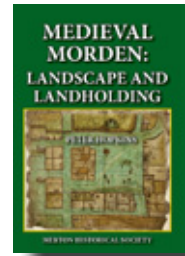
HAVE YOU READ?

The AGM Minutes, Treasurer’s Report and Chair’s Report are enclosed, on a separate sheet.

REVIEW: *MEDIEVAL MORDEN*

Peter Hopkins, *Medieval Morden: Landscape and Landholding*, Merton Historical Society, 2021, price £12.50 (£10 members) + postage £3.35. Softback, viii + 352pp, many illustrations and graphics. ISBN 978 1 903899 81 6

[This review by Dr Mark Page first appeared in *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 105, December 2023.]



In the Middle Ages the manor of Morden (in what is now south London) belonged to Westminster Abbey. The abbey's administration of the manor produced a substantial archive, much of which is still preserved in the abbey's muniment room, and it is to Peter Hopkins' great credit that after many years of transcribing and analysing the surviving manuscript sources he has begun to publish his findings. Three volumes are planned. The first, published in 2020 [price £7.50, members £6, + £3.35 postage], provided a study of the manorial economy between 1280 and the 16th century. The present volume is longer and arguably more ambitious, extending from Domesday Book in 1086 to the earliest maps of Morden in 1553 and beyond. It examines the ways in which the local landscape changed over time, and in particular the fluctuating landholdings of the tenants who populated the manor. In many ways the story told is a familiar one, though no less valuable for that. A period of population growth and agricultural expansion in the 12th and 13th centuries was halted from 1348-9 by the devastating impact of the Black Death and later outbreaks of plague, which altered the relationship between land, lords and people, and introduced new opportunities and challenges for those seeking to take advantage of (or merely survive) the very different economic and social conditions of the 15th and early 16th centuries.

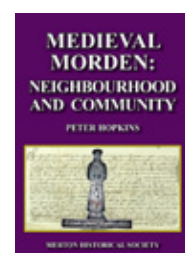
Morden's post-Domesday expansion is treated in considerable detail, and the resulting picture is a complex one. Hopkins seeks to explain how the manor's increased population was accommodated, scrupulously evaluating the available evidence, and suggesting alternative interpretations. The abbey appears to have reorganised its 300-acre demesne, consolidating its formerly scattered strips into discrete parcels of land separate from the tenants' open-field holdings. Around the same time new free and customary tenancies were created, either by reallocation of former demesne land, or by subdivision of existing holdings, or by the ploughing-up of common pasture. Probably all three strategies were employed, and in the process settlement spread to Lower Morden south-west of the parish church. The history of individual tenancies can be partially reconstructed, revealing the ways in which different families coped with changing circumstances. Before the Black Death land tended to remain within the family, passing by inheritance down the generations, though often subject to small-scale alteration. Additional housing was provided by a pattern of infilling familiar from more recent centuries, by establishing new cottage plots at the rear of existing tenements or by enclosing narrow strips of roadside waste to create long linear extensions similar to later ribbon development. By such means non-inheriting family members were given the chance to establish themselves in the community, building up smallholdings from the fragments of land circulating by gift, sale or lease.

The population was vulnerable to poor harvests and disease including the Black Death, one effect of which was to introduce greater instability in the relationship between tenants and their holdings. Land was no longer in such short supply, and was more likely to pass outside the family. Two trends already apparent before the plague accelerated significantly thereafter, with long-term repercussions. The accumulation of land in single ownership increased, so that by the 16th century a number of substantial farms emerged, producing goods for market and employing local labour. Outsiders also engaged more frequently in the buying and selling of tenants' holdings, a new element being the appearance of wealthy London citizens and courtiers for whom Morden's property market offered the opportunity for lucrative short-term investments. The outcome of those 15th- and 16th-century land transfers lasted long enough to leave an imprint on 18th- and 19th-century maps and documents, and in the final chapter Hopkins identifies the present-day location of many of the manor's late medieval farms, cottages and fields. The interest to the local historian of such detailed reconstructions is evident, though there is a wider relevance too. Long-term patterns of landholding and landscape change tell us much about how previous generations made a living and adapted their environment to varying economic and social needs. The transformation of medieval Morden, revealed here in all its complexity, makes for a remarkable and valuable case study.

AND NOW – the final volume:

Peter Hopkins, *Medieval Morden: Neighbourhood and Community* (2023) £12.50 (£10 members) + £3.35 postage.

All three volumes are available from Peter at 57 Templecombe Way, Morden, Surrey SM4 4JF. Email publications@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk to pay online or to arrange to collect a copy from Peter at home or at a meeting.



LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

23 June 2023 Six present, Rosemary Turner in the Chair

We welcomed John Sheridan who was joining us for the first time.

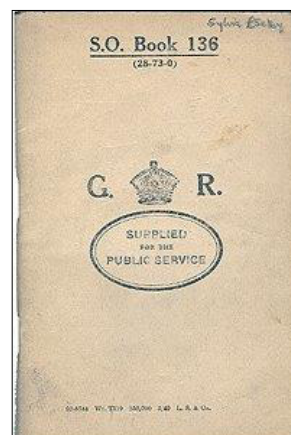
- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** had been re-thinking the plan of The Canons, following the MHS visit. The original house of 1680 had a NW extension, a later NE extension and a SE extension. An estate plan of 1815 at SHC shows the NW extension, but not the other two, so this must have been the location of the rooms about which Peter had been uncertain – the wash house at basement level, the parlour on the ground floor and the dressing room on the second floor. On our visit it was clear that the SE extension had been carefully matched to the original building in its external decorative features, unlike the NE one – even its windows differed, with curved tops rather than straight (*see photo on Bulletin 227 cover*). Hence the SE extension preceded the NE. Geoff Potter of Compass Archaeology had sent Peter reports on environmental analysis of samples from 19-21 Lyon Road, SW19. The first two samples were from trench 1 – the site of the westernmost of three linear ponds shown on the 1805 estate map of Merton Abbey. The second group of samples were from trench 2 – a large, previously unknown (apparently N-S aligned) water feature in the western part of the site. A C14 date indicates that the feature was infilling during the Tudor/Stuart periods (1508-1670). Evidence elsewhere (eg in Station Road) shows that the Priory's land drainage systems were breaking down at this time. This seems to confirm Peter's suspicions that the three ponds had begun life as monastic fish ponds, and that they were only part of a series that reached to the western part of the site. What surprised him was that the Merton ponds may have housed freshwater oysters and mussels, not just fish. [After the Workshop Geoff explained that freshwater mussels were not farmed for food but were useful in keeping the ponds clean!]

Compass will be monitoring works by the National Trust to rebuild two sections of the Listed Priory wall in Pickle Park, recording the work and the surviving wall footings, and checking the collapsed material for any significant stonework, etc. Plans are accessible on the LBM planning website.

- ◆ **John Sheridan** is researching the employment of children, and had been surprised to find in the Parliamentary archives some discussion about children working specifically in the Wandle mills.
- ◆ **Joyce Bellamy**, who pursues her interest in horse-drawn transport in Mitcham, was saddened to learn recently that the Box Sash Window joinery firm had left their premises just behind Vestry Hall, and that the site, owned by Merton Council, is likely to be re-developed. The last surviving stable block in the area, it still preserved some features of its time as a horse bus stable – including Staffordshire Blue brick floors, mangers, hay racks and partitions. (Note that the National Trust has stripped almost all of the original features from the stable block in Morden Hall Park.) It is amusing to note that, despite the presence of many horses, there were no manure heaps in Mitcham, as the 'product' was eagerly carted away by all the market gardeners.
- ◆ **David Luff** has train-spotted locally a (British Rail) Class 60 heavy freight diesel-electric locomotive, now operated by DC Rail, and built between 1989 and 1993 by Brush Traction of Loughborough. Brush had won a tender (maybe the only bidder) to build a replacement for the Class 5 heavy steam locomotive, with 'an availability of 98%'. Plagued by troubles, the design was eventually cured of all ills some seven years after the last engine was built – but the type never did achieve the specified 98% availability. David noted that DC Rail (formerly Devon & Cornwall Railways) are now part of the Cappagh group of companies, whose HQ is in Waterside Way, SW17. They used to have a yard in Station Road, Merton Abbey, in the 1970s, moving to the Plough Lane area in the late 1980s when the Merton Abbey site was re-developed.
- ◆ **Dave Haunton** spoke about Dalton Baker, a Merton lad who became a professional singer, and in the early 1900s was described as the 'greatest baritone in the world'. Born in Merton on 17 October 1879 and named William Henry after his brick-layer father, he early became a choirboy at the Anglo-Catholic All Saints Church in Margaret Street, Fitzrovia. In 1894-96 he was organist and choir-master at Chelsea Barracks (aged 15-17!) and then, 1896-1903, occupied the same two posts at St Mary Magdalen, Munster Square, Regent's Park (again Anglo-Catholic). He studied at the Royal Academy of Music, becoming ARAM in 1903. He then became a professional singer, adopting his mother's maiden name as 'Dalton Baker' (*c.1908 right*). He was sufficiently successful that in 1905 Edward VII commanded him to sing at a state concert held at Windsor Castle in honour of the King of Greece, alongside such then famous singers as Mary Garden (American soprano), Nellie Melba (Australian soprano) and Giovanni Zenatello (Italian tenor). He toured the USA in 1908, emigrated there in 1913, and moved to Canada in 1914. Based in Toronto, he flourished as organist, choir-master, conductor, singer and teacher, and indeed composer of classical music, until he retired in 1956. He died in Vancouver in 1970.



- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** brought along a mystery. This was a (blank) 'Science Exercise Book / Supplied for the Public Service', half foolscap size, each of whose pages were printed with lines on one side and graph squares on the other. Presumably produced for the Department for Education, with an 'E R' cipher (rather than 'E II R') above the title. [After the workshop, Rosemary found another, earlier, example with a 'G R' cipher (*right*), so the omission of the regnal number is Civil Service bureaucracy rather than accident.] A line at the bottom of the page in very small print reads 'Bks.78,000 12/55 A C & S Ltd'. Can anyone confirm that this is the size of print run and the date of printing? Or identify the printers? Or the customers?



Dave Haunton

25 August 2023 Nine present, Dave Haunton in the Chair

- ◆ **Peter Hopkins** reported on an email received from Stephen Wood, who sent photos of his great grandparents, taken in Morden Park, some time before 1888. These were William John Gilbert and his wife, Elizabeth, who were staying with Charles and Mary Gibson – Elizabeth and Mary were sisters. Charles Gibson was a gardener in Morden Park and lived in Morden Park Cottage with his wife and daughter, Mary.

Peter had also received two enquiries asking for the exact location of Nelson's house, Merton Place. He had produced three maps – sales particulars, dated 1823, showing the property, and then these details transcribed on the 1894 OS map, and Google maps 2023.

- ◆ **David Luff** mentioned the unmarked grave of Charles Benjamin Collett OBE in Gap Road Cemetery and spoke of the fundraising scheme in place to buy a headstone. Collett was a pioneering Chief Mechanical Engineer for the Great Western Railway from 1922 to 1941.
- ◆ **Joyce Bellamy** said that the General Giles Social Club in Mitcham were happy to display our posters, and commented on the sad state of some green spaces which were not being maintained.
- ◆ **John Sheridan** took us through the field books and maps, part of the Lloyd George Domesday survey of 1910-1915, which are now available online via *The Genealogist UK* magazine.
- ◆ **Mick Taylor** described a mysterious double line of bricks in Mitcham. They lie across the path to the running track, beside the bowling green. No maps had yet provided an explanation.

- ◆ **Rosemary Turner** brought along a large piece of parachute silk (actually rayon), which had previously been cut for making garments. Blurred pale red stamps on the fabric included a George crown with the letters 'AM' under it (Air Ministry) and 'Wm E Wright & Sons', with a possible Lot number. This was one piece of several, from at least two different sources, one finer than the other. One had a white cord attached; another had heavy radiating reinforcing seams (*right*). The war had cut off the supply of Japanese silk for parachutes, so an alternative fabric, originally known as 'artificial silk', was imported. It was officially made available for sale in 1945, before clothes rationing had ended, and sold off-coupon through army surplus suppliers. [Subsequently, Rosemary discovered that 'Wm E Wright & Sons' were an American firm who produced sewing trimmings before the War.]



- ◆ **Christine Pittman** explained that she had finally found enough evidence to show that the Devonshire Dining Rooms really had existed on High Street, Colliers Wood, and not on Devonshire Road, as previously stated on Merton Memories website. See p.14 for her full article.

- ◆ **Dave Haunton** had dealt with an enquiry from South Africa concerning a 'wireless transmitting station near Croydon aerodrome, near Mitcham'. It was inaugurated on 18 January 1920, sited just off Mitcham Common, between Beddington Lane station and the *Jolly Gardeners* (the isolated dark square in an otherwise empty field 3b, in map, *right*, kindly located by Mick Taylor), some 2.5 miles from the airfield. As an NDB (Non-Directional Beacon) it was the radio equivalent of a lighthouse, to assist pilots and navigators to determine their position. In early 1938 it was upgraded to a VOR (VHF Omni-directional Range), allowing pilots to actively discover how far they were from the transmitter.



Christine Pittman

Next Workshops Fridays 19 Jan and 1 Mar 2024 at 2.30pm at Wandle Industrial Museum. All welcome.

BEN ANGWIN has begun his investigation of

GEORGE SCHENCK: AN ART POTTERY MANUFACTURER IN MITCHAM

This article has a dual purpose: firstly to share with readers a fascinating and little-known episode in the history of modern art ceramics in Britain, secondly as a call for information related to an elusive local figure.

George Henry Theodore Schenck was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1832. No information has yet been found prior to him arriving in Britain. He first appears in the 1861 census, receiving British naturalisation in 1871. He worked as a Merchant's Clerk for several decades and he appears to have gone by names George and Theodore throughout his lifetime. For more than half a century, Schenck reappears in censuses, registers, and directories which connect him to businesses and locations in and around London, including Islington, Sydenham, Lewisham, Bloomsbury, Croydon, and Mitcham.

Schenck's connection to Mitcham is a curious one. He is first mentioned in a commercial directory in 1911 as an 'art pottery manufacturer': he reappears in Post Office directories of trades and professions in 1912 and 1914, and in Kelly's Directory for Surrey in 1913. All of these listings place Schenck at no.1 Nursery Road, Mitcham. Many of the properties on Nursery Road were demolished in the 1960s. Photographs, taken just before demolition (Merton Library and Heritage Service), and an OS map, surveyed in 1953, show that properties in Nursery Road, particularly those at the north end, towards Lower Green West, comprised Victorian cottages with workshop buildings at the rear. In 1912 Schenck's immediate neighbours included a beer retailer and a motoring garage, evidence of the diverse cottage industries in the street at the time. Genealogical records suggest the origins of Schenck's connection to Mitcham were through his second marriage. His first wife died in 1891, but in 1892 Schenck married Maria Amelia Hill (c.1843–1916) who was born in Mitcham. George and Maria did not live in Mitcham, however, but at 43 Addiscombe Road, Croydon, (five miles from Nursery Road), having relocated there from Lewisham at some time between 1901 and 1911. The same Croydon address is listed for both of their deaths, in 1916 and 1919, respectively. No children appear on the census entries for George or Maria, though they adopted a niece named Rosalie 'Rosie' S. Schenck (née Recanati, born c.1873) sometime in the 1890s. Curiously Rosalie listed her birthplace as Turkey and Italy on different censuses (presumably for political reasons). She married John Bowring in 1898, and was also living at 43 Addiscombe Road when George Schenck died in 1919. His probate record lists George's effects as worth almost £15,000 - equivalent to nearly £640,000 in 2023.

George Schenck also appears in central London directories in 1914 where he is listed among 'Art Pottery Manufacturers' at the somewhat dubious address of '56 High Street, Bloomsbury, WC'. Current research indicates this address was associated with a number of professions, which may suggest it was an office and not a ceramics workshop. In 1910 Schenck exhibited at the Salon of the Allied Artists Association (AAA), an exhibition held annually at the Royal Albert Hall. The AAA was an important exhibiting society modelled on European exhibiting societies whose members sought greater professional independence. Even as a mature art potter (he was 78 in 1910), and as a retired clerk, Schenck was closely associated with his modern artist contemporaries in ways which deepened again in 1913 when he began working with the Omega Workshops.

Established in July 1913, the Omega Workshops was a radical applied art and interior decorating enterprise led by some of the most famous names in modern British art. Founded by Bloomsbury group painter and art critic Roger Fry, and supported by fellow Bloomsbury painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant, the Omega's artist-decorators sought to introduce the 'spirit of fun' into modern homes by creating and decorating all manner of products. No surface was off limits. They produced printed and woven textiles, painted silks, knotted rugs, painted and marquetry furniture, stained glass, floor mosaics, painted murals, as well as wearable fashion such as tunics, dresses, pyjamas, artificial flowers, parasols, fans, and beaded jewellery. Another significant feature of the Omega's production was its modern ceramics which were inspired by native English pottery and ancient examples from Southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and East Asia. Shapes were often simple and hand thrown and glazed in a limited number of colours. Many of the early pieces were overpainted with Post-Impressionist figures and designs of abstract forms.

Schenck's connection to Omega ceramics begins in autumn 1913, when Fry, the group's founder and figurehead, took lessons from 'the old potter' (Schenck was then an octogenarian). Before discovering Schenck, the Omega's artists painted commercially produced blanks which lacked the imperfect and handmade qualities they desired. Correspondence between the artists tells us that they received tuition from Schenck, who also provided them with clay and a potter's wheel. Apparently only Fry achieved promising results and he persevered under Schenck's direction. Schenck then made several pieces copied from Fry's own early efforts.

These letters also reveal that the Omega continued working with Schenck well into 1914, when he would send consignments of fired ceramics to the Workshops' London studio at 33 Fitzroy Square for the artists to hand paint. On one occasion Fry brought an Omega Workshops patron, the wife of Germany's ambassador to Britain, to visit Schenck's Mitcham workshop. However, perhaps due to differences of ideas and possible limitations in Schenck's abilities, this professional collaboration ceased sometime in the latter half of 1914. In early 1915 the Omega's ceramics production moved to the larger premises of Carter and Co. in Poole, Dorset, (latterly famous as Poole Pottery) which was able to refine and expand production.

The Omega's early ceramic production under Schenck is of immense historical importance, because it represents the group's formative inquiries into the medium and arguably its most experimental. Surviving pieces produced during this period are often highly ambitious in the artists' exploration of form and in their unskilled application of glazes, overpaints, and metallic lustres. As such, these pieces can also vary in quality and in their success. Schenck's involvement within this story remains little understood beyond his elusive tuition and the use of his workshop on Nursery Road. More broadly, Schenck represents one of the few art potters who bridge the gap between traditional Arts and Crafts ceramics and the English Studio Pottery Movement. Even less is known about Schenck's own pottery, however, and no surviving examples by him have yet been located. There are vague recollections by Omega artists that he made mostly unglazed flowerpots and domestic pieces, but the titles of Schenck's works exhibited at the 1910 AAA Salon, which include a gargoyle and wall tiles decorated with fishes and a peacock, are more reminiscent of art pottery of the Arts and Crafts Movement and decorative items by the Omega Workshops. Without surviving examples or additional contemporary materials (such as photographs or written descriptions), a more accurate analysis of Schenck's art pottery remains difficult.

Information related to George Schenck is limited and disjointed, but it has been expanded and consolidated in recent months through research, kindly supported by members of the Merton Historical Society. Special mention must go to San Ward, whose genealogical knowledge has been indispensable. It is hoped that this article may lead to more discoveries through local history resources and members' knowledge.

[Ben is a PhD candidate in Art & Design History at Kingston University, London, whose subject is *The Omega Workshops (1913–19)*. He can be contacted at benjamin.angwin@gmail.com]

MERTON HERITAGE DISCOVERY DAY

We had a good time on Saturday 19 August. There was a steady flow of visitors; we sold £67-worth of publications, and handed out more than 60 of our new brochures. We found new homes for each item from our collection of stoneware jars and bottles, rescued 50 years ago from a dig on the site of the Phipps Bridge Youth Centre and stored in our archives ever since. It is good to know that they can now enjoy a new lease of life! Our free back copies of the *Bulletin* and early *Local History Notes* also proved popular. David Luff's display celebrating Merton's own supermodel Sindy's 60th birthday (*see p.1 & right*) was a great attraction, though the balloon David bought for the display escaped! Pam Belton kindly took the photos. It was good to meet several members of MHS and to be discovered by potential new members. Many thanks for assisting with the stall to Bea Oliver, Fiona and Dick Bower, Ian Aldridge, Dave Haunton, Peter Hopkins and especially David Luff who stayed all day. And, of course, particular thanks to Heritage Officer Sarah Gould for another amazing event – and also for accepting two large items from our archive, the old *Crown Inn* sign, now back on its original site, and the sections of the old wooden signpost from the corner of London Road / Green Lane / Central Road.



OTHER EVENTS WE ATTENDED

On Saturday 8 July, Wandle Industrial Museum hosted the third **Wandle Arts Festival** on what turned out to be one of the wettest days of the summer. MHS had a publications stall on the approach to the event, bravely manned amid the showers by Rosemary Turner, Ian Aldridge and David Luff. Unhappily, only passing trade noticed us, but we are assured that 'no books were harmed' on the day.

For **Mitcham Heritage Day** on Saturday 9 September, Tony Scott and Irene Burroughs manned our stall in the parish room of SS Peter & Paul Roman Catholic church, sharing the space with some photographic exhibitions. We sold £33-worth of our publications to a steady trickle of visitors, to whom we also offered free Mitcham *Local History Notes* and our brochures. Tony gave two guided tours of the building on behalf of the church.

{continued on p.10}

VISIT TO THE CHURCH OF ST MARY THE VIRGIN, MERTON PARK

On 13 July twelve Society members visited St Mary's Church, Church Path, Merton Park, SW19. Our morning started with a group photograph outside this beautiful 12th-century country church. Founded by the Augustinian canons, parts of the present building are said to date back to 1115, when it was built by Gilbert the Norman, Sheriff of Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and Surrey, [though the medieval account of the foundation of the priory, published by MHS in 2019 as *A Priory Founded*, explains that Gilbert in fact had demolished his first church here by 1121, soon after the priory moved to the site by the Wandle]. The roof of the nave is nearly 900 years old and the chancel dates from 1400. The two aisles were built in the 19th century to accommodate the population explosion. Admiral Horatio Nelson worshipped at St Mary's when he lived at Merton Place, and his wooden pew, once boxed in, is still there, with his funerary hatchment hanging at the side. Outside, opposite the main entrance in Church Path (the porch *right*), are 'Nelson's Steps', a mounting block where, it is said, he mounted his horse. Inside again, the 16th-century Lovell monument is in the chancel (*below, left*), while the Victorian south aisle has a splendid set of four William Morris / Edward Burne-Jones windows, installed to commemorate John Innes' life.



We then went outside to the churchyard where we saw the tombstones of two remarkable men. John Innes (1829-1904) (*right*), founder of the Merton Park Estate, was a British property developer and philanthropist who from the 1860s developed Merton Park as a garden suburb. There is a mature landscape in the area with many tree-lined streets and holly hedges, as holly was the emblem of the Innes clan. He left money in his will for the founding in Merton Park of an institution for horticultural training and research and this led to the establishment in



1909 of the John Innes Horticultural Institution. The John Innes Society is a thriving group today. William Rutlish (1605-1687) was a resident of the parish of Merton and Court embroiderer to King Charles II, becoming very wealthy in this capacity. He left £400 (about £61,000 today) in his will to build a school for the education of the poor children of the parish. Rutlish School is named after him and he is honoured to this day by pupils of the school when they visit the ancient church for a Commemoration Day service, when the Head Boy lays a wreath on Rutlish's tomb. The churchyard has a Norman archway, built around 1175 as the entrance to the guest house at Merton Priory; rescued and moved to its present site in 1935.



We enjoyed the many historic features and appreciated the various information cards provided, while some members reminisced on their own family connections to the church. Several of us explored some of the notable monuments in the churchyard (*left*, an impression by Rosemary Turner), armed with the free short trail guide downloadable at: <https://www.stmarysmerton.org.uk/page/10/our-history> Lastly we were served tea/coffee and biscuits by the lovely volunteer ladies in the church and so ended a delightful morning. Many thanks to our host Hazel Abbott and to the church for making us so welcome and supplying refreshments.

Auriel Glanville, photos courtesy Irene Burroughs

A WALK ON WIMBLEDON COMMON

‘Wimbledon ladies of significance from the worlds of Theatre, Literature and Politics’

On a sunny 10 August 2023 eight members of MHS met outside the renamed *Rushmere* pub on the Ridgway for this very enjoyable walk, led by member Michael Norman-Smith. The first address we visited was 4 Berkeley Place, a tall elegant three storey house, which was the childhood home of the actress Margaret Rutherford (1892-1972): the house bears a blue plaque with her name (*right*). She was in fact born in Tooting and her family went to India, but things didn't go to plan and Margaret was sent back to England to live with her aunt Bessie. Margaret attended Wimbledon High School and wanted to be an actress, but her aunt did not approve, so Margaret had to wait until the aunt died before she took up acting, in her forties. Wimbledon High School has recently named a new building on their site as the Rutherford Building. Margaret starred as Agatha Christie's Miss Marple in several films, and as the head-mistress in the St Trinian's films. She is remembered for her role as Madame Arcati in Noel Coward's film *Blithe Spirit*.



Our next address was Honey Cottage in Clifton Road, a tall building veiled behind an evergreen hedge. This was the home of Dr Gillian Hawtin who wrote books on local history such as *Off to School*. She typed the texts and drew the illustrations herself. She suffered from asthma, carried a crocodile handbag, and as a local figure, was considered somewhat eccentric. Her father disliked his own family: one of his brothers died of pneumonia and another sustained a head injury and died from a tumour. She was not popular with local historian Richard Milward, but she was friendly with a man who lived in a nearby street. He had a vast collection of books and Gillian Hawtin may have inherited many of them.

The walk went on to Wimbledon Common near the Rushmere pond, and under the shade of a large oak tree Michael Norman-Smith produced a small Womble toy to lead into the subject of our third ‘Lady of Significance’: Elizabeth Beresford the author of books about the Wombles of Wimbledon Common, which she created in the 1970s. She lived in Putney, and the stories had come to fruition as she and her children walked her dog on Wimbledon Common; Elizabeth made up the stories as they walked. However, her children couldn't pronounce ‘Wimbledon’, saying ‘Wombledon’ instead. The Wombles, the furry creatures with long snouts and unusual names such as Orinoco, kept Wimbledon Common litter-free but this idea of helping the landscape backfired, as children reading the books thought the Wombles were real and so would drop litter on purpose, to make the Wombles arrive and pick it up. Wombles are nearly real – local football team AFC Wimbledon has a Womble mascot named Haydon, while our guide has had his photograph taken with the Wombles for a fund-raising event for the Wimbledon Guild.

Our walk then took us across to Chester Road and along the edge of the Common past Cannizaro House and on to a house named ‘North View’, where a mural in the eaves shows the sun, white against a blue sky (*right*). We stopped at a house with a blue plaque showing the name of Josephine Butler, a distinguished campaigner, resident here for three years. Josephine produced pamphlets, books and letters including *Storm Bell* a monthly magazine. Her first article was on *The Education and Employment of Women* (1867). She came from a wealthy Northumberland background and rescued girls



from the workhouse, becoming called the Patron Saint of Prostitutes. In her rescue home she accommodated Rebecca Jarrett, who worked with William Stead, an editor who also lived in Wimbledon, to get the age of consent for girls raised from 13 to 16 years. He mounted a campaign in his journal and paid £5 for a girl he bought from her mother. Stead and Jarrett were found guilty of this procurement and Stead was sent to prison and Jarrett sent for hard labour.

The next address was another tall house with two gate-posts mounted with stone orbs. The writer who lived here was Margaret Oliphant, who was Scottish. She and her husband and family went to Italy, but her husband and then her daughter died, so Margaret returned to England with her sons. She wrote popular novels with titles such as *Hester* and *Miss Marjoribanks*. On her deathbed she saw from the window fireworks going off over Wimbledon Common to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria (1897).

Again standing under the shade of a tree, for the weather was getting rather warm, we faced the road leading past Kings College, where Michael indicated a cottage past the *Crooked Billet* pub that had been a holiday home for Marie Belloc-Lowndes, sister of Hilaire Belloc the famous writer. They were of French parentage. An author in her own right, Marie wrote an autobiography *I too have lived in Arcadia*. She also wrote *The Lodger*, which became the basis for several horror films about Jack the Ripper, including one by Alfred Hitchcock.

Along Southside we stopped to look at a building with a blue plaque for William Wilberforce, which had been the stable block for Lauriston House. Winifred Whitehead, the author who wrote about her life in *Wimbledon 1885-1965*, had lived at Lauriston House with her parents. Her father was Sir Arthur Fell, MP for Great Yarmouth, who notably died inside the Barclays Bank branch in Wimbledon.

Another Wimbledon author was Gwen Malcolm who lived in a large (eleven bedrooms!) house called Canisbay built on the corner of the Grange. Two of her books were *Memories* and *More Memories* written in the 1980s. She married into the Malcolm family. Her husband's business was in jute in Dundee, and her father-in-law gave the married couple a house. Edward VIII as Prince of Wales came to 'Deepdale', their house at the time, where he had a bath and notoriously shaved in the bath. A final memory was during WW2, when Gwen was bathing and the sirens went off. Her Portuguese maid banged on the bathroom door and shouted out 'Madam – you will be killed in the bath!'

Our final address was the home of Dame June Whitfield who lived in the Grange. June fell in love with the bay window on the first floor and the staircase of her house. Her mother Muff lived next door in the Coach House, separate from the main house. Dame June was an actress and president of the Carlton Club, active for 60 years. She had performed on a pier at Bournemouth in *A Bedful of Foreigners* and the venue had to be evacuated due to a bomb scare. The pier created strange sounds of creaking and the sea. She was Eth in *The Glums* on the radio, and of course starred in *Carry On* films, in *Terry and June* and *Absolutely Fabulous* on television. During the 'Crazy Gang' years of the 1980s, she was president of the Wimbledon football supporters club, which entitled her to visit the changing rooms. On the occasion of the 1988 FA Cup victory, she happily joined the celebrations there – while the team were still changing.

Norma Cox

VISIT TO WIMBLEDON MUSEUM

On 15 September, a group of members visited the Museum, which has recently re-opened after refurbishment and re-design. Museum Director Jacqueline Laurence explained that it was originally opened in 1916 as part of the Wimbledon Society, inspired by Joseph Toynbee's 1863 booklet *Hints on the formation of local museums*. Originally based on objects found within five miles of St Mary's Parish Church, it now covers the old parish of Wimbledon, and has a thematic approach, based around objects on display. Newly on display are 'Red Teddy', a 1932 toy that survived a V-1 bomb hit, and a rare 300-year-old elm-wood 'biscuit brake', a small table for beating dough to make crisp biscuits popular in Georgian times (*right*).

Note that there is a small reference library and a map collection. Museum collections manager Dr Pamela Greenwood will be happy to assist members with research enquiries.

Email her on: museumcollections@wimbledonsociety.org.uk



Christine Pittman

OTHER EVENTS (*Continued from p.7*)

Sadly, **Open House Weekend at St Lawrence Church, Morden**, attracted only seventeen visitors on Saturday 16 September and six the next day, probably because of the weather – rain and hail on Sunday afternoon. But we did sell four publications (for £13-50), including a copy of the final volume of *Medieval Morden*. Peter Hopkins was assisted by David Luff (full time, both days), Jenny Harper (Sunday afternoon) and Bea Oliver (Saturday lunch). Peter recommends that if you haven't seen the recently cleaned and restored 17th-century glass in the east window, do visit <https://stlawrencechurch.co.uk/the-east-window-project-2020/> to see the videos.

NORMA COX discusses some innovative local firms

ENDECOTTS, G H ZEAL LTD AND FOSTER ENGINEERING CO LTD THREE FACTORY SITES IN SOUTH WIMBLEDON

I enjoy looking for industrial sites and in South West London there are plenty. Recently I came across three more, two of which were in the Lombard Business Park, off Morden Road, SW19. The third was close by, on the other side of Morden Road in the Nelson Trading Estate. One factory, Endecotts, was still working, the second, G H Zeal Ltd, was no longer trading but the factory building remains, while the third business, Foster Engineering Co Ltd, had gone, its factory demolished and replaced by a B & Q warehouse and a Howdens Warehouse. I have studied the history of these three factories to record part of the industrial heritage of Merton.

I had seen the red-brick factory site of Endecotts in Lombard Road, SW19, for many years, for it is plainly visible from Morden Road, especially so from the upper deck of the no.93 bus travelling to and from Morden. The building is very pleasing to look at and has an art-deco feel in its style. The factory's name Endecotts is clearly seen in bold lettering on the fascia at the front of the building. In addition the name is spelt out in lettering descending the rectangular front of the building, close to the edge of its south side. (*right photo: Norma Cox 06/03/23*) At the rear of this building is the main factory block, built at right-angles, with its two floors and pitched roof. Endecotts is the world's leading manufacturer of quality laboratory test sieves, sieve-shakers and related laboratory equipment.¹



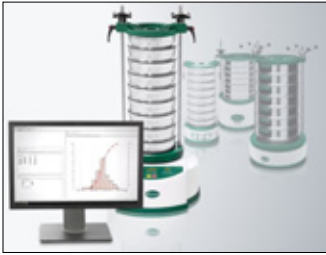
Endecotts Limited was started in 1936 by Arthur Endecott in Kingston Road, SW19, in a small workshop above Clegg's garage. The business later moved to larger premises, also in Kingston Road² as shown in this advert from 1952 (*left*).³ The company produced mesh filters and similar products to supply local industry requirements. During 1939-45 Endecotts supported the war effort by using their engineering skills to produce parts for the Ministry of Defence and other Government departments.

In the 1950s Endecotts manufactured sieves, filters, screens, grids and grilles of wire gauze, which were made to British Standards specifications and used world-wide. The gauze mesh for a 2-inch aperture ranged up to 400 mesh, equating to 160,000 apertures to the square inch; it could be made in phosphor bronze, brass, copper, stainless or mild steel. The size of sieves supplied ranged from 3-inch diameter up to two feet, in all materials. Another Endecotts product in the 1950s was a milk-filter used extensively by farmers in milk production, with a large proportion of the filters exported.⁴ Filters are made to customers' specifications for drawing or sampling and include grids and grilles for aircraft, beer screens for the brewing industry, hair-drying machine grids, laundry-screens for filtering spirit, loud-speaker grilles and filters for petrol, oil, water and air. The firm also carried out metal-spinning to customers' specifications, pressing and welding, all of which are incorporated within modern sheet-metal works for the production of these articles.⁵

Arthur's son Albert developed the business further and moved into a 10,000-sq.ft facility at 9 Lombard Road SW19. In 1965 the company needed more space, so a second floor was added above the ground floor, to provide that extra. (My husband Chris Cox used Endecott sieve-shakers to mix powders for analysis when he worked as an analytical chemist from the late 1970's to the early 1980's at Stanton Redcroft, the thermal analytical company based in Copper Mill Lane SW17.⁶)

Endecotts was acquired by the supplier N Greening, manufacturers of woven wire mesh. Greening's were then acquired by Johnson and Firth Brown in the 1970s, when Endecotts joined the light engineering division of Johnson Firth Brown, who in time became Firth Rixson PLC. Firth Rixson are specialist producers of ring-rolled products and heavy forged components for the aerospace industry.⁷ Endecotts were part of Firth Rixson for 27 years. Eventually considered as 'non-core' by Firth Rixson, Endecotts was acquired in September 2005 by the management team and external investors.

Endecotts became part of the Verder Group in 2010. Since then, the company has undergone a modernisation process and has released a completely new line of state-of-the-art shakers. Today the firm offers a wide range of high quality sieves in different sizes and materials and the levels of certification meet every national and



international standard and every industrial specification including ISO3310 and ASTM-E-II around the world. Some sieve-shakers are shown here (*left* courtesy Endecotts).⁸ Their Lombard Road address is the registered address of an active Private Limited Company, originally incorporated on 23 March 1965, and still trading today. The next accounts, made up to 29 December 2022, are due by 28 September 2023.⁹

My second factory site was G H Zeal Ltd, founded in 1888 in Wimbledon, which manufactured thermometers and scientific instruments. During 1899-1922 the business was located at 82 Turnmill Street EC1, and in 1921 was incorporated as a limited company. However, during 1950-1975, G H Zeal Ltd traded at 8 Lombard Road, Merton, SW19. This factory is seen in an advert from the 1956 Merton and Morden Official Guide (*right*). The company later moved close by to 8 Deer Park Road SW19 3GY.¹⁰ The instruments manufactured by G H Zeal Ltd involved thermometer tube-blowing, which was one of the few remaining hand-skilled crafts left in the world in the 1950s.¹¹ According to the 1952 Merton and Morden Official Guide, this craft 'together with other specialised processes were carried out by 850 operators who worked in two well equipped factories in Lombard Road which covered 70,000 sq. feet.' The company's registered trade-mark was a large letter Z intertwined with a serpent.



This trade-mark was similar to the ancient sign for health and medicine known as the Rod of Asclepius. In 1990 G H Zeal Ltd was taken over by RAPID9680 Ltd but still traded as G H Zeal Ltd until 2010.¹² The Zeal chrome plated thermometer case (*left* courtesy Science Museum) was the



type of thermometer case I remember from my childhood. Most Zeal thermometers and hydrometers were made of glass, and do not photograph well, but I have found an example of their packaging (*left* courtesy Science Museum).¹³ Zeal's rather impressive factory building at 8 Lombard Road still exists today (*below* photo Norma Cox 06/03/23).

G. H. ZEAL LTD.

EST.
1888

THE HOME OF ZEAL

In this Factory, just off the Morden Road, skilled operatives are employed in producing instruments of the highest quality, for all purposes, to be sent to countries all over the world.

The different patterns manufactured are too many and varied to be listed but a few general details are given below to illustrate the scope and range of G. H. ZEAL products.

Manufacturers of :

**THERMOMETERS, HYDROMETERS
and SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS**

Thermometers for all Industrial and Household purposes.
Clinical Thermometers for Rectal and Oral use.
Hydrometers-Specific Gravity, Density and all Arbitrary Scales
Thermometers for Oil and Petroleum Refining
"Engraved on Stem" Glass Thermometers
Thermometers for Brewing and Distilling
Glass Sheathed Insulated Thermometers
Glass Pressure and Vacuum Gauges
Mechanical Thermometers of all types. Hygrometers

LOMBARD RD., MERTON, LONDON, S.W.19
Phone: LIBERTY 2283-6 Grams: Z²ALDOM, SOUPPHONE, LONDON



My third factory site was Foster Engineering Co Ltd, mentioned in the Industrial section of Evelyn Jowett's 1951 publication about Merton and Morden.¹⁴ In fact Foster Engineering Company Ltd was founded in 1903 (and later renamed Foster Transformers) and is seen in an advert from the 1956 edition of the Merton and Morden Official Guide (*right*).¹⁵ This shows an aerial photograph of the Foster Transformers site and captures the sight of a steam-train passing on a single-track railway to the south of the factory. This line was the Tooting, Merton and Wimbledon Extension Railway and the train was heading east to the Merton Abbey Station (the line and station are both now demolished).¹⁶ Fosters Engineering became a private company in 1907.¹⁷ Fosters became known as Foster Transformers and Switchgear in 1952.¹⁸ They produced transformers and voltage regulating equipment 'for the distribution, regulation and control of electrical power to suit every purpose' as advertised in the Merton & Morden Year Book for 1956.¹⁹ Some of their switchgears and transformers are shown in adverts archived by the gracesguide website (*below, centre and right*).²⁰



In 1956 Foster Transformers became a subsidiary of Lancashire Dynamo Holdings Ltd and then in 1960 part of Metal Industries.²¹ In 1961 Foster Transformers were listed as manufacturing electrical engineers and dealers in electrical and wireless appliances.²² Foster Transformers Ltd advertised in the 1965 Merton and Morden Chamber of Commerce Trade Year Book. Foster Transformers was still listed in Kelly's Post Office Directory in 1979,²³ but it was not in the 1983 edition. Interestingly the welfare and comfort of their employees was noted in an advert from the Merton and Morden Official Guide 1952, which claimed that Foster Transformers had an excellent canteen and social and welfare services (*left*).²⁴

Industry has played a very important rôle in the lives of people in Merton and Morden and the two period factory buildings remaining in Lombard Road are reminders of a bygone age, especially when compared to modern industrial buildings. Today only one of the three factories studied is still in business and it is a world leader in its field. Recording industrial sites not only gives an insight into the businesses but also opens our eyes to the lives and history of the employees.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to gracesguide for British Industrial History information and images, to Sarah Gould and the London Borough of Merton for the use of information from Merton and Morden Official Guides, to Endecotts for the information from their website, and to the Science Museum Collection for G H Zeal Ltd information and images, which are printed under a creative commercial licence.

1 <https://www.endecotts.com/company>

2 As Note 1

3 Merton and Morden Official Guide 1952 ; p 54

4 As Note 3

5 As Note 1

6 MHS Bulletin No 225, March 2023; pp.4-5

7 As Note 1

8 As Note 1

9 Endecotts business details. <https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/00842205>

10 <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/people/cp3421/g-h-zeal-limited>

11 As Note 3

12 As Note 10

13 As Note 10

14 Wells, Elgin S, 1951. 'Industrial Merton and Morden' in *A History of Merton and Morden* by Evelyn Jowett (1951, Merton and Morden Festival of Britain Local Committee) pp.143-146

15 Merton and Morden Official Guide 1956

16 http://www.disused-stations.org.uk/m/merton_abbey/index

17 www.gracesguide.co.uk/Foster_Transformers

18 As Note 17

19 As Note 15

20 As Note 17

21 As Note 17

22 As Note 17

23 Kelly's Post Office Directory 1975

24 As Note 3 (Attached to map at end of booklet)

CHRISTINE PITTMAN entertains us while searching for

DEVONSHIRE DINING ROOMS – A MOVEABLE FEAST?

When I first saw this photo (*right*) on Merton Memories Photographic Archive, I was surprised to read that the shop was located in Devonshire Road, Colliers Wood – that road is now entirely residential, bar one corner shop, and dates from a later era. I was not sure there would have been enough passing trade to support commercial dining rooms, and my instinct told me that the photo had been taken somewhere on High Street, Colliers Wood.

I decided that it would make an interesting research project, and one that should not be too difficult to carry out, so I could report back at the next workshop. All I needed to find out was when the photo was taken, where it was taken and who owned the Devonshire Dining Rooms. It is now six months later, and I can tell you that I have found answers to those questions, more or less, but I still have no definitive proof. I have only what might be called ‘circumstantial evidence’.

The Date

The commentary accompanying the photo on Merton Memories pointed out that there was an advertisement in the window for Andrews Pictures, which was ‘an early cinema show held at Nelson Hall, Merton’. Cinema Treasures website listed the Nelson Hall Picture Palace as opening in early 1912, and closing in 1916, with the building later demolished. I could not make out the name of the film showing in the advert, so I turned to the poster for Wimbledon Theatre.

This gave me an interesting insight into early twentieth century theatrical taste – Wimbledon was advertising performances of *The Monk and The Woman*, a melodrama by Frederick Melville, which opened in the Lyceum Theatre in London’s West End on 28 February 1912. The good Brother Paul, who is charged with looking after the heroine Liane, squares up to the evil Prince de Montrale when the heroine takes refuge in the monastery, hiding from her unwelcome suitor. Monks disguised as soldiers suddenly unfrock and point their weapons at the villains, providing a dramatic coup de theatre, and the happy couple marry (despite him being a monk). The production toured to suburban and country theatres during 1912, and on 29 August 1912, lead actor Ronald Adair posted his Theatrical Card in *The Stage* newspaper as appearing for three nights in Wimbledon Theatre.

I failed to find anything about the poster advertising a ‘Big Circus’ at Earl’s Court, but happily, I was able to locate King’s Hall Picture Palace at 181-183 High Street, Tooting, from a comment in the reminiscences of James B Bass (MHS Local History Note 15). It opened on 30 January 1909 and was believed to be the first purpose-built cinema in Britain, still in existence until it was demolished to make way for flats and retail in 2012/13. (The current building, where there is a blue plaque, now includes a Thai restaurant and a gym.) The Palace was showing *On the Warpath*, a silent movie about an Indian chief, Arrow Head, dreaming of his past exploits as a Yuma brave saving his tribe from the Apaches, with the help of his Sioux girlfriend Red Feather. The film was released in the UK on 18 July 1912.

So everything points to this photo being taken in mid to late 1912.



The Dining Rooms

I had been checking Merton Road, Mitcham, as High Street, Colliers Wood, was known 110 years ago. It took me quite some time to go further down the road and include High Street, Merton, in my search through Kelly's Directories. And that is how I discovered 'Devonshire, James, dining rooms' in the commercial section of the 1910/11 directory. He was listed at 25 Abbey Parade. This was a row of shops with residential space above, first listed in 1908/09. Bingo! I thought, I have found him, my search is over.

I went straight to the 1911 census for more information on James Devonshire. He was not there. In fact, he was nowhere that I could see. By 4 April 1911, 25 Abbey Parade was an empty property, and James Devonshire was gone. Various suggestions from friends – he was dead, had been secretly murdered, or drowned on the *Titanic* – did not help. I persisted, and, by choosing the 'Australia' tab on ancestry.com, I was able to search through the records of shipping arrivals in Australia. I found Mr J Devonshire and Mrs Devonshire, arriving in Sydney on SS *Narrung* on 29 May 1911; a further search online told me that SS *Narrung* left London on 28 March 1911, seven days before the census – explaining why he did not appear in it. That is enough to convince me.

So now I have the owner of the original business.

The Location

It is now relatively easy to edit photos on an iPad and I was able to enhance the street sign above the shop name, and see that it read 'The Pavement'. Several false leads later, after I had pursued the five existing 'Pavements' in London, I found out that a small parade of shops on Merton Road, Mitcham, had until 1892 been known as The Pavement. Kelly's Directory wrote for 'The Pavement, see Merton Road', and listed numbers 5 to 1, The Pavement, on Merton Road between Briscoe Road and Walpole Road. (The shops were numbered from south to north, unlike the others.) In later editions, as more shops were built, these properties joined in the changing sequence of numbers on High Street, Colliers Wood, Merton. By tracking the numbers over the years, I guess this property is now 36 High Street, Colliers Wood, currently home to the South London Tamil Welfare Group.

Does that mean the building in the photo still stands on the High Street? Sadly, no – a postcard dated 1915 shows new shops, built on the same footprint. The one constant in all this is the pillar-box marked 'G R' (*right*) (as were early ones, not 'GvR' as later ones) which stood in front of the post office at no.2 The Pavement, and which is still there today in front of 34 High Street.



So I finally had the location, though not the actual building.

Conclusions

Had I known that I was setting off in search of a man who had left the country, a building that no longer existed, and an address that had vanished, I might have reconsidered my quest. I cannot find conclusive printed proof to match the photo, as Devonshire Dining Rooms do not appear again in Kelly's directories. But I do have a postcard from the late 1920s of 22 High Street, Colliers Wood, where almost identical signage shows the dining rooms of William Herbert Skeemer (*right*), and I like to think the business carried on in some form. A photo is just one moment in time, and that moment may not have been captured in any printed list, but it is still evidence. It is wonderful that this particular photo has survived and is available on Merton Memories.



A photo is just one moment in time, and that moment may not have been captured in any printed list, but it is still evidence. It is wonderful that this particular photo has survived and is available on Merton Memories.

My thanks to Merton Heritage and Local Studies Centre for their collection of printed works and online photos, and to Colliers Wood Library for access to ancestry.com on the public computers.

HUGH MORGAN of the Dorset Hall Group has a puzzle:

THE SECRETS OF DORSET HALL (3)

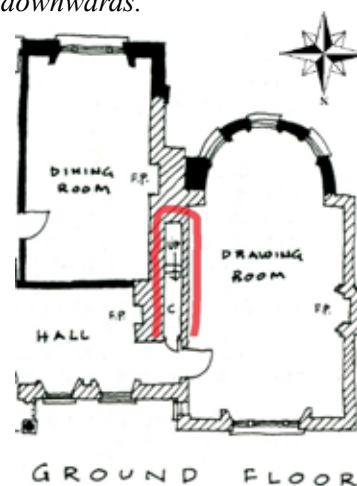
‘...under the rubble there are supposed to be steps leading downwards.’

Having spent his formative years at Dorset Hall, Paul Lamartine Yates was probably intrigued by the descending steps in the closet: knowledge of their existence was passed on to the authors of the John Innes Society 1994 booklet *Dorset Hall 1906-1935*. The illustration of the Ground Floor Plan in the booklet was compiled from information noted as provided by Paul: it includes the closet marked ‘C’ and the evident steps (marked in the extract from the plan, right).



The booklet also describes the house layout and how between the Drawing Room and the Hall lay ‘a narrow closet with steps leading down below ground’.

An investigation of the closet shows that the house wall has a stone section with ancient brick inserts (*left photo courtesy Dorset Hall Group*), a form of construction that does not occur anywhere else in the house. We know, from *A short history of Dorset Hall* by John Wallace (published in 1991), that in 1688 a farmer, Edward Hubbard, came into possession of this parcel of land on the Kingston Road, on which stood a single-hearthed cottage with courtyard and garden. In 1727 the Hubbard family ended their tenure and the documents surrendering their possession make clear that a second building had been constructed during their 39-year occupation – Dorset Hall itself. The cottage with a single hearth is not heard of again. What happened to it? Was part of the original cottage incorporated in the west wall of the new Dorset Hall and do the steps leading down therefore have a 17th century origin? The stonework in the wall suggest that this is likely, which raises the question where did the descending steps go? Did they lead to the legendary tunnel to St.Mary’s church?



[Editor: Towards a cool wine-store? Any other suggestions?]

LOCAL NOTES

The **Chapter House Trust** reports a successful 2023, hosting various events (Art Exhibitions, NT Precinct Wall Day, schools visits, and Merton Council’s networking session for the 2027 Borough of Culture Bid). The number of visitors (c.3000) and the value of donations were both much the same as 2022. Alas, the drains problem is still unresolved, with portaloos occasionally used as a temporary solution. The Chapter House is now closed for the winter, re-opening at the end of March with the Spring Art Exhibition. The new film of the Minecraft model will be available, and another Study Afternoon is planned, following the success of last year’s event. Chapter House Dog Toby is now 14, but, happily, still up for a game of chase the stick.

In 2023 the **Wandle Industrial Museum** celebrated its 40th year. After various early moves, in July 1989 their archive materials were moved to the basement of The Vestry Hall, Mitcham, and its annexe building, which became the Museum’s present home in 1991. Why not become a member, for £10 (Family £15, under-16 Student £5)? Full details are on the Museum website www.wandle.org

MHS is bound by the EU General Data Protection Regulation.

Please see the MHS website regarding how this concerns your personal data.

Letters and contributions for the *Bulletin* should be sent to the Hon. Editor by email to editor@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk.

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