



CHAIR: Christine Pittman

BULLETIN No. 236

DECEMBER 2025



Season's greetings to all our members

(from the archive: Night staff at Morden District Office under pressure to sort Christmas cards for delivery, December 1962. Photo taken at 1.15am by WJ Rudd) see p.11

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PROGRAMME DECEMBER 2025 – APRIL 2026

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

Saturday 10 January at 2.30pm – ‘Herbal heritage and local folklore’ – a talk by Roy Vickery

Saturday 14 February at 2.30pm – Celebrating Merton Historical Society’s 75th birthday

Saturday 14 March at 2.30pm – ‘Sir Patrick Kelly, a story that starts in Ireland, moves to Mumbai and ends in Wimbledon’ – a talk by Geoff Simmons

Saturday 11 April at 2.30pm – ‘Richardson Evans, conservation pioneer, local campaigner and benefactor’ – a talk by Michael Norman Smith

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 9 January 2026, 20 February 2026 and 10 April 2026 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.

YOUR NEW COMMITTEE

At our AGM on 9 November, the following were elected:

Chair: Christine Pittman

Vice Chair: Bea Oliver

Secretary: Rosemary Turner

Treasurer: Janet Holdsworth

Committee: Ian Aldridge, Bill Bailey, Irene Burroughs, Peter Hopkins, David Luff and Tony Scott

HAVE YOU PAID?

Subscriptions for 2025–2026 are now overdue. Please note that this will be the last issue to reach you if we do not receive your payment before the next *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.

website: www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT NOVEMBER 2025

This year we lost two of our most significant members – Dave Haunton, Editor of the *Bulletin*, former Chair and Vice Chair, contributor of articles on World War 2 in the borough, and our in-house expert on the war and coats of arms; and Michael Nethersole, a founder member from his childhood, along with his family, who were so active and energetic. We benefitted from the collection at his funeral, and have put that money towards our commissioning of a student to research the history of the Society, to be celebrated on the occasion of its 75th year in 2026.

Just one Committee member is resigning – San Ward, who has worked with us remotely, scanning slides, selecting photo collections for the home page of our website, writing the e-newsletter, posting on X, and offering opinions for the website group and for committee discussions. Thank you, San.

Our winter talks season, with its wide-ranging interests, featured dogs in London, the development of West Barnes and Motspur Park, paper conservancy, transport history in Merton Park, Liberty of London at Merton Abbey Mills, lost English country houses, and a bonus talk at Merton Priory, when Scott McCracken talked about the Society's excavations of the Chapter House and the saving of the site, so long ago. Summer visits were to All Saints arts and craft church, in Putney and a guided walk around Kingston pubs, many of which had disappeared.

Our publications programme was impressive: Peter Hopkins won the LAMAS local history publication award for volume 3 of his *Medieval Morden* series; we launched Karen Ip's book *Miss Tate and her almshouses* at Mitcham Parish Church in July with an entertaining and informative question and answer session, a musical performance and tasty catering, and The British Association for Local History reviews published in the *Local History News* were highly complimentary: they described *Memories of New Merton Board Mills* as 'a model publication: in addition to reviving the more distant past through documentary evidence, it is important for local societies to capture the recent past before it disappears' and praised the 'beautiful advertising material for the various herbs' in our publication *The physic gardens of Mitcham* – these were actually the author's own drawings. It is impossible to list all the subjects researched and reported in our quarterly *Bulletin*.

In April we had a display and book stall selling copies of *Trouble at Mill* at the West London Local History conference; our publication *Railways of Merton* was on sale at the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Motspur Park station in July; and we held our usual stall and displays at the Heritage Discovery Day in Morden library in August.

Our website group has now come to the end of its review, our postings on X will finish with the departure of San Ward from the committee, but we continue with regular postings on Facebook.

Our 6-weekly local history workshops, held at the Wandle Industrial Museum, have again covered a very wide range of discoveries and interests. I'm pleased to be able to report that we have had younger people joining us for these sessions, people who are new to the study of history but who realise that their research on the current state of the environment in their niche area, actually is the result of what has happened in the past, and they have come to us for advice and information on that past.

Next year, we celebrate the Society's 75th anniversary, with a slide show at our February meeting and a book launch in the summer – we recruited an A-level student, Carrie Lynott, to do the research, and if you would like to contribute your memories and experiences, please let me know before you leave today.

We continue to work alongside the Wandle Industrial Museum, the Chapter House at Merton Priory, the Heritage Centre in Morden Library and Mitcham Parish Church, knowing that we are all working in our own way towards supporting the local community through our common interest in the past. But all societies must change and adapt. It's for this reason that we no longer include 8-mile rambles in the Surrey Hills, archaeological excavations, model-making, historical re-enactments or amateur dramatic groups as part of our programme. We must put our energies into activities that are successful, in terms of numbers and costs involved and for which we have the resources. If we are to continue, we need more support in terms of administrative assistance, such as members who can use email to help arrange talks and visits, we need a new Editor, and someone with experience – or at least – an interest – in working on the layout of our publications and we are also looking for practical assistance with transport for people and equipment. None of these roles by themselves are particularly time-consuming, but there are several Committee members who are currently covering 2 or 3 roles. Please volunteer today or mention it to someone you know who is looking for an opportunity to do something useful and interesting.

AN AUDIENCE WITH SCOTT MCCRACKEN

On Saturday 27 September 2025, archaeologist Scott McCracken regaled a rapt audience of 120 people, in Merton Priory Chapter House Museum, with stories of how the priory was revealed after centuries hidden under textile bleaching fields and industrial sites.

Curator John Hawks hosted Scott in an interview format on a platform in front of a large map of the priory site. Scott explained that he had studied archaeology and anthropology in his home city of Toronto, before coming to England for postgraduate work. In 1975, having read *The Testimony of the Spade* by Geoffrey Bibby, he decided to concentrate on practical archaeology while teaching part-time at Birkbeck College and Oxford, archaeology being a popular adult education subject at the time.



At the same time the old Tooting, Merton and Wimbledon railway line, which ran over the site of the Chapter House, was being taken up, offering the opportunity for excavations funded by the Department of the Environment. Scott was hired to lead the excavations between 1976 and 1978.

The presence of the Chapter House had been known since 1921/22. Local antiquarian Col H F Bidder discovered part of its foundations while digging between railway sleepers – a local gardener was delegated to look out for trains. (A member of the audience, Matthew Hillier, said that passenger services were suspended between 1917 and 1923, and the only traffic would have been a couple of freight trains daily.)

Scott mentioned a somewhat flowery account of Bidder's rediscovery of the priory, which appeared mysteriously in the *New York Times* in 1926. (An account of the excavation had appeared in the Society of Antiquaries' *Archaeologia* Vol LXXVI, which might have found its way to New York.)

Scott and his team excavated the whole of the Chapter House in a single trench, which required the removal of the station platforms, much to the consternation of railway enthusiasts and Ordnance Survey mappers. The team found and re-excavated Bidder's infilled holes. They also undertook some work to the south of the Chapter House during the construction of the electricity pylon, which is still there today. The priory church site was not available for excavation at that time, as it was situated to the north of the Chapter House under Station Road and under land and buildings owned by Corfield Ltd's metal pressing factory. Scott told a story – possible apocryphal – of the firm having made fins for wartime bombs with the factory's address stamped on them.

There was little more to be done at the time other than erect a chain link fence around the Chapter House site to the south of Station Road, in the midst of the then semi-derelict industrial area. There was also a plaque on the other side of Station Rd, on a small site in front of the Corfield works canteen. However, Scott drew on a map the boundary of an extended priory site, and this was designated a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

The next opportunity for major excavations arose between 1986 and 1990, when Sainsbury's acquired their present site and demolished the industrial buildings. They erected a marquee to consult the public on their plan to open a Savacentre superstore. Scott became the project manager for the excavations and for negotiations with Sainsbury's, while working at the same time on another dig in Kingston. He had to inform Sainsbury's that works taking place within the scheduled ancient monument would require the consent of the Secretary of State, and that this could be obtained if they made suitable concessions. It was already known that Sainsbury's would be required to pay for archaeological excavations and a report. The question at issue was the method and extent of the preservation of the remains of the priory.

Meanwhile Merton Council planners had earmarked the route of the former railway for a relief road, to be built at Sainsbury's expense, to give access to the Savacentre and to relieve pressure on Merton High Street. The idea of elevating the relief road to expose the Chapter House foundations was alive, but Sainsbury's were opposed. The council were undecided. They knew the Savacentre proposal was popular and would regenerate the area. They would not have wanted Sainsbury's to walk away if confronted with the expense of a bridge over the Chapter House remains.

Sainsbury's broke the deadlock by requesting a public inquiry. Scott made the case that if the already exposed and preserved Chapter House remains were covered over, the result would be a net loss for the whole project – the Chapter House foundations were entire, the priory was of national importance, and Sainsbury's would in any case be free to cover the other partial remains once the archaeologists had left. That convinced the inquiry chair, and the construction of the bridge on Merantun Way was stipulated as a condition of planning approval. The cost to

Sainsbury's was about £3m at 1988/89 prices, but the Savacentre store was immediately profitable. Its design life was 25 years, but the Sainsbury's and M&S stores currently occupying the building are still going strong.

The negotiations with the Sainsbury's team, and their bankers and lawyers, were fraught at times, but David Sainsbury visited the site and was relaxed about the bridge. Sainsbury's were required to enclose and preserve the remains presentably, but not to sponsor a museum. That came later at the initiative of the Merton Historic Buildings Trust, later the Merton Priory Trust, with funding from the National Heritage Lottery.

More than seven hundred burials were discovered on the priory site. Thirty-two skeletons were found in the Chapter House: these burials included priors. Canons were buried in the immediate vicinity of the priory church and Chapter House. Some of the clerical burials were accompanied by a pewter chalice. Local people who could afford it were buried in the nave, others were buried in cemeteries in the precinct.

Fortunately there were no watertight coffins containing fluid. Bones had to be cleaned and photographed or drawn – not a simple task because the soil was clay-like. Scott took skeletons home on the underground in an Adidas bag for safe keeping overnight and delivered them to the Museum of London the following morning. Rumours swirled around the local area about the exhumations, and on one occasion while carrying a bag of bones Scott was recognised on the Tube by a child as 'the man who dug up the bodies'.

The Museum of London's task was to analyse the bones. The *British Medical Journal* published a spoof article about the prevalence of cases of diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis (DISH), or fusion of lumbar vertebrae, caused by a rich diet and excessive kneeling to pray. There did indeed turn out to be a number of cases of DISH. An account of the analysis of the bones appears in the 2007 MoLA monograph by Saxby and Miller.

One complete skeleton appeared to be wearing a chastity belt, which upon further analysis was revealed to have been a hernia belt. That skeleton was on display in the Museum of London for a while, until removed to storage by a director who disapproved of displaying human remains.

The remains of a finger were found in the base of a buttress supporting the apse at the north east end of the Chapter House. The apse having been a later addition to the original Chapter House building, the builders must have sliced through an earlier burial adjacent to the original wall.

Scott signed a burial licence authorising the Museum of London to retain bones deemed suitable for study. Other bones were to be reinterred in local cemeteries. MoLA still have many skeletons which have not been fully analysed, because analysis is resource-intensive, and new analytical techniques have emerged since the initial analyses were done. Strontium testing, for example, could reveal where people spent their childhoods.

Scott stressed that it was standard lawful archaeological practice to treat bones in this way in this country. A Catholic bishop had visited the site during the excavations when three graves were open. He conducted a short service and made no complaint, saying that their souls had already departed.

One floor tile became known as 'The dancing ladies'. Scott has still not seen a tile bearing a similar image anywhere else.

Scott described various encounters with criminals and vandals during the period when archaeology was underway and the former Liberty print works had been abandoned.

After dissolution, in 1538, most of the Merton Priory church stones were carted to Ewell to build Nonsuch Palace. The stones were used mainly as hardcore at Nonsuch. When Nonsuch Palace was dismantled in 1682-83, many of the stones were reused in the locality. Some, however, were excavated and found their way to the Museum of London.



Some Roman pottery was found during the excavations. The Roman road Stane Street passed through the north transept of the priory church, and may have provided part of the foundations. Stane Street crossed the Wandle near the site of the *Kiss me Hardy* pub, now closed.

Finally, the question was asked 'How did the archaeology survive?' The answer is that the site of the priory was forgotten over the centuries, the industrial buildings covering it did not have deep foundations, and much of the site was textile bleaching fields from the 1660s. Indeed, a bleaching field trench could be seen cutting through the Chapter House apse.

John Sheridan

VARIETY ARTISTES MEMORIAL IN STREATHAM PARK CEMETERY

The Streatham Park Cemetery is located in Mitcham. It features a memorial wall dedicated to music hall artistes and other entertainers who are interred there, and I recently went to see it.

There are 200 names on the wall, covering the years 1922-1944. At the top is inscribed 'Erected to the loving memory of the following Artistes of the Variety Profession'. The cemetery has a long connection with the Variety Artistes Benevolent Fund (now the Royal Variety Charity) and the wall was erected by them in 1924, and the chapel of remembrance was added in 1958 at their request.

The VABF paid for the funerals but the artistes were buried in unmarked graves, and so they built the wall. It would appear that the area behind the wall up to the path running across the cemetery was used for the artistes' burials. Most of the artistes buried in the area are from a bygone age: Lupino Lane, Florrie Ford, Tom Costello, Dorothy Squires, Brian Barder, Norman Clapham, Arthur Henry Cross VC and Charles Kunz. Will Hays has a grave with a memorial stone next to the wall, paid for by his family.

The Music Hall Guild of Great Britain and America obtained a lottery grant in 2009 to have the marble cleaned, a garden laid out and a museum set up in the chapel. As the names on the wall are all the performers' stage names, a research project was set up to explore the lives and careers of those listed there. The results would be displayed in the chapel museum. It looked a lot different from the photo that I saw from 2010 – the marble had become discoloured again and the garden was overgrown.

I contacted the Music Hall Guild and received a very helpful email reply, explaining that the shrubs in the garden had been attacked by insects during lockdown and they were trying to raise money to have it restored and also to have the marble cleaned again. Their hopes to have the chapel museum open in the summer of 2010 came to nought. When I eventually located the chapel museum, I was told that it was not open to the public as it was unsafe. I found a few memorials on the wall leading to it.

In 2010 they had also planned to unveil a plaque to Hetty King, a male impersonator who lived round the corner from the Wimbledon theatre. They were hoping to have a reception in the theatre and were also putting together a theatre production about some of the old performers.

The website www.arthurlloyd.co.uk lists the names of the people on the wall, and gives details of their careers. The site was named after Arthur Lloyd who was a Scottish singer, songwriter, impresario & comedian who wrote over a thousand songs. He was born on 14 May 1839 in Edinburgh and died there on 20 July 1904.

I discovered that there are extra plaques lined up against the back of the wall with additional names.

One is for the Ganjou brothers and Juanita who were 'the World's Greatest Variety Act 1929-1957'. It is very elaborate, showing them performing acrobatics.

I took a friend to visit there as she had two ancestors mentioned on the wall, George and Madge Belmont. She found their names and their grave numbers and the year that they died. The office gave us a map marking the position of their graves. Their real names were William George Hawkins and Edith Batchelor. William married Edith bigamously in Scotland. She was known as the handcuff queen.

Rosemary Turner



DEVONSHIRE DINING ROOMS CONCLUSION

In *Bulletin* 228, December 2023, I wrote about the research I undertook to show that a photo of the Devonshire Dining Rooms on the Merton Memories Photographic Archive was not situated in Devonshire Road, Colliers Wood, but in the local High Street.

By checking two of the advertised events, 'On the Warpath' at the Kings Hall cinema in Tooting and 'The Monk and the Woman' at the Wimbledon Theatre, I narrowed down the date to July-August 1912.

Enhancement of the street name on the building revealed that it was called 'The Pavement', and having ruled out five 'Pavements' still existing in London, including one in Worple Road, Wimbledon, I found that there was a small row of shops with that address in Merton Road, Mitcham, although the directories suggested the previous street went out of use around 1910. Merton Road, Mitcham later became High Street, Colliers Wood.

Using all available trade directories for this period in the Heritage Centre in Morden library, I was unable to locate the Devonshire Dining Rooms at this address, but did find 'James Devonshire, dining rooms', listed at 25 Abbey Parade, High Street, Merton in 1910/11.



However, Mr Devonshire and his dining rooms then vanished from the records, and I subsequently traced James Devonshire and his wife sailing to Australia on 28 March 1911, just a week before the census on 4 April 1911.

There I had to leave the research, not quite complete, until in August 2025 I had to leap off the 200 bus when I suddenly saw this building in Haydons Road, Wimbledon. There was the street sign 'The Pavement' on a building with the distinct moulding that appears between each property, and unusual window design. Although the sash windows themselves have been replaced in some places, the brickwork, stone lintels, frames and other features remain untouched along the row, numbers 108-122. I had found the Devonshire Dining Rooms.

Back to the trade directories I went, which showed the following:

1910/11 110 Haydons Road, Wimbledon: Mrs A Gould, dining rooms

1911/12, 12/13 and 13/14 110 Haydons Road, Wimbledon: John William Friend, dining rooms

In the census taken on 4 April 1911, John William Friend was recorded as living at 110 Haydons Road, Wimbledon: he was 50, and his profession was 'coffee and dining room keeper'. He lived there with his wife Jane Elizabeth Friend, aged 44, and they had been married less than a year. There was also a lodger, William Kendal, aged 29, who was a window cleaner.

Is that Jane Friend in the 1912 photo?

From 1915, the property is not recorded, meaning that it is empty and John Friend and his wife disappear from the records. It is probably impossible to find the connection between James Devonshire and John Friend, but their dining rooms were situated less than half a mile apart.

Out of interest, I can report that 110 Haydons Road is now an Italian café, and for sentimental reasons, I had a coffee there recently. Next door to the dining rooms in 1911-1915, at 108 Haydons Road, was George Hilliard, who had a fish shop – 108 is currently Golden House, Chinese food and fish and chips. At no 112 was Miss Jarvis, confectioner – now it is a convenience store.

John William Friend and Jane Elizabeth Friend married in St Stephen the Martyr Hampstead, Avenue Road, Camden on 1 June 2010. He was listed as being a bachelor, aged 50, a cook by profession, living in Spa Road, Bermondsey. Previous appearances in the records suggest he was baptised in St Paul's, Covent Garden in 1860, enrolled at St John's National School in 1868, aged 8, but was dismissed a month later for 'irregularity', and may have been in St Pancras Workhouse in 1902.

Jane Friend, formerly Larman, who married him at the age of 44, was born in Paddington, living in Acorn Row, NW London, and in the 1901 census, she was living in Chesterfield, Derbyshire with her sister and brother-in-law and their 6 children.

I have now tracked down the third poster in the window of the older photo - the Big Circus at Earl's Court was part of 'Shakespeare's World', a melodrama performed in August 1912. It is the story of one woman's love against another's jealousy and deals with circus life: the chief magistrate's daughter falls in love with Jack, the tightrope walker, and when she drops a white rose at his feet after a performance, the snake charmer is jealous. There is an outbreak of fire in the magistrate's house, his daughter appears at the window calling for help, but she cannot be rescued. Jack finds a long rope, ties it up, and walks the tightrope, rescues the woman and carries her down on his shoulder. He asks the magistrate for his daughter's hand in marriage, but the father refuses consent until Jack makes a fortune. Jack attempts a feat, walking up a rope to the top of a high tower, when he is almost at the top, a huge boa constrictor which has escaped from the snake charmer's box in the tower, slithers onto the rope. The magistrate's daughter pulls the animal back into the tower, Jack reaches the top, and they both appear in a window, holding the reptile.

So their story and my research both end on a positive note.

Christine Pittman

MHS 75TH ANNIVERSARY – STUDENT RESEARCHER

In February 2025, our committee agreed to the idea of celebrating Merton Historical Society's 75th anniversary in 2026, by commissioning a 'budding researcher' to prepare a booklet on our history.

We were lucky enough to attract the interest of an A-level student living in Ewell, with family connections to Merton. Her name is Carrie Lynott, and she has already started her research by visiting the Surrey History Centre, by collecting photographs, working her way through all the issues of the *Bulletin* (this publication is number 236) and she's now asking members for their memories.

It will be interesting for us to see how the idea of a local historical society has changed in line with social and political changes, to remember past members and to be proud of what we have all achieved.

Plans currently exist for a slide presentation at our meeting on Saturday 14 February, with perhaps a celebratory birthday cake, and for a book launch in the summer.

We invite everyone associated with the Society to contribute ideas, memories, photos and other documents. Please fill in the enclosed questionnaire, speak to any committee member at our monthly meetings, or email chair@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk and definitely put the February meeting in your diary – we'd like as many members as possible to join us.

HAVE YOU GOT A TALE TO TELL?

Ben Westmancott is working on a book, collecting oral histories from people connected with Fisher FC and the clubs that came before it. Fisher Athletic played their home games in Mitcham between 1967 and 1982 on land opposite what was the *Goat Inn*, (now the *Crown of Mitcham*) on Goat Road. He wants to make sure local voices of those who remember this era are preserved for future generations. Any members who might have memories, photos, or connections to share, and any advice or introductions would be hugely appreciated.

Contact Ben by email: ben.westmancott@gmail.com

MITCHAM'S NEW ELECTED PARISH COUNCIL IN THE 1890s

The First Election

Mitcham's first elected parish council met in December 1894. Under the terms of the Local Government Act of 1894, a parish meeting was called on 8 December at the Vestry Hall to elect the new parish council of 15 members. More than three hundred registered voters attended, and, after 33 nominations had been checked and questions put to the candidates, there was voting by show of hands, each voter having 15 votes but able to give only one vote to each candidate.¹ After the results were announced to the meeting, rules allowed for five voters to demand a secret ballot, and this was the case in 1894. Voting took place at the Vestry Hall and the Singlegate Board Schools on 18 December, so that the first meeting of the council could take place before the end of the year.²

The same Act enfranchised for parish and rural district elections those on the local or parliamentary register. The local register included qualified women. The Act provided that women should not be disqualified because of marriage, though – in a system rooted in property – a husband and wife could not both be qualified in respect of the same property. In Mitcham during the late 1890s approximately 2,100 people were registered to vote; of these 220 were women, who would presumably have been unmarried, widowed, or married with property in their own right by virtue of a legal settlement.³

In advance of the election a committee comprising the Vicar and Churchwardens of St Peter and St Paul called a meeting to draw up a list of candidates: 'trustworthy and honest citizens...representative of all the different interests in the Parish' who were 'capable of administering our Parish with efficiency and economy'.⁴ The committee published the list in the local newspapers along with the reminder to voters: 'An Elector can give One Vote to each Candidate but is unable to give any Candidate more than one Vote'. In the event John R Chart (not on the church's list) received most votes (586), followed by George Bidder (510) with Stephen Gregory in 15th place with 265.

The table below shows the men successful in this first election, with their occupations and addresses. It gives a small picture of village Mitcham at the time, professional men, along with local tradesmen, and a good representation of the market garden and horticultural worlds. The majority of these men were re-elected in subsequent annual elections and served three or four years. Those marked with an asterisk, nine of the fifteen, were included in the church's list of candidates.

Members of Mitcham Parish Council elected 1895 to 1900

Thomas Allen*	Market Gardener	Sherbourne House, Eastfields
George P Bidder*	Queen's Counsel	Ravensbury Park
William Catt*	Grocer	High St. Lower Mitcham
John R Chart	Corn Dealer	Upper Green
Charles Dungate	Gentleman	East Dulwich
Stephen Gregory*	Wood Sawyer	Pratt's Folly, Phipp's Bridge
Charles M L Hallward*	Journalist/Civil Servant	Simla Cottage, Lower Green East
William Harbour	Schoolmaster (Singlegate)	Park Road, Colliers Wood
George Farewell Jones*	Solicitor	Cedars Ave, Commonsides
John M Leather*	Florist	Nursery Cottage, Eastfields
Alfred Mizen	Nurseryman/Mkt Gardener	Brook Cottage, Eastfields
Edward Mizen	Florist/Nurseryman	Elm Cottage Eastfields
Rev Robert Richman*	Congregational Minister	Douglas House
John Stickings	Florist (on own account)	Railway Cottages, Lower Mitcham
Rev Daniel Wilson*	Clerk in Orders	The Vicarage

Notable absentees from the church's list who were to be active and influential on the parish council well into the next century were Alfred Mizen and his brothers. The first chairman of the parish council, George Bidder QC, died in 1896, and William Harbour the schoolmaster served only two years as a councillor.⁵ It is noteworthy that the early parish councillors were based in 'old' Lower Mitcham, and that only one member lived in 'new', North Mitcham. Presumably the East Dulwich resident met the Mitcham property qualification and chose to use his vote there.

Local Government Act 1894

In 1894 the top tier of local government in Surrey was the county council based in Kingston-upon-Thames, first elected in 1889. The next level down, following the 1894 Act, was the Croydon Rural District Council (CRDC), the successor to the Croydon Sanitary Authority. The CRDC's area stretched from Mitcham in the north to Sanderstead and Purley in the south. It was an elected body, with parishes returning councillors to the CRDC in proportion to their population. Mitcham was the largest parish and it returned four councillors to the CRDC; elections to the CRDC were held every three years. Qualified women could stand as well as vote in local elections: Miss Ruth Boobyer, of Baron House, Mitcham, was an elected member of the CRDC from 1894.

Mitcham Parish Council was one of six parish councils in the area of the CRDC, and, with 15 members, was the largest. The other parishes were Merton, Coulsdon, Beddington, Sanderstead, and Purley. Each of these, like Mitcham, now had an elected parish council alongside a parish meeting. The parish meeting had to be called at least once each year for the election of councillors.

For Mitcham, as the new arrangements were introduced, the key body was the CRDC's **Parochial Committee**. This was made up of Mitcham parish councillors alongside CRDC councillors elected for Mitcham, with one councillor from another parish council. In 1896 eight of the Mitcham councillors (including Alfred and Edward Mizen, and Rev. Richman) joined sixteen CRDC councillors to form the Mitcham Parochial Committee (MPC). This mix of parish and CRDC members was seen as a way to reduce misunderstanding and the friction between the CRDC and the parish councils which had happened previously. Over the following years Mitcham councillors on the MPC increased in number and gradually became responsible for its business.

The MPC met monthly at the Vestry Hall and reported to the CRDC. It received information on births and deaths; notification of the incidence of infectious diseases; approved the making up of new streets; approved action, sometimes in the courts, on reported instances of 'nuisances', insanitary, not-fit-for-habitation dwellings; and the removal of rubbish. Specifically, the CRDC resolved to delegate to the MPC: the week-to-week running of the allotments, the removal and disposal of 'house refuse' (at least once a week), and the cleansing of streets and pavements.⁶ This left the parish council with responsibility for arranging funerals at the burial ground, acting as trustee for local charities and their accounts, and for the lighting of local streets, and as a meeting place and a forum for the discussion of topical concerns.

The Condition of Mitcham

As mentioned above, MPC members received reports on aspects of public health – matters like infectious diseases, housing, and the supply of clean water. The content of these detailed accounts of the condition of the housing in which Mitcham's poorer, working class residents lived was often shocking:

Dr Mair (Medical Officer of Health) reported that he had 'made a house-to-house inspection of 12 cottages, situated near Phipp's Bridge, in the parish of Merton, and has to report that they are all without a proper water supply. For drinking water the tenants are supposed to go to an artesian well fountain in Merton Lane, Mitcham, which is about 200 yards from the nearest house, and probably half a mile from the furthest. Water for domestic purposes is obtained from the Wandle and the Pickle, which are in close proximity to all the houses, and are both more or less polluted. Several of the tenants admitted to me that occasionally the river water was made use of for drinking purposes, and in other cases the same receptacle was made use of for drinking water and the river water. A case of typhoid fever occurred in one of the houses last February, and I was satisfied that it was caused by the consumption of the river water. I am of opinion that the present condition is one most dangerous to the health of the tenants and recommend most strongly that the owners, Mr. Littler of Mitcham and Mr. Bates of Haydons Road, Wimbledon, should be required to provide a safe supply of drinking water... There are several other defects in the houses... in the case of one, occupied by George Addaway is quite unfit for human habitation. The house is a wooden structure, in an advanced state of dilapidation. The rooms are all in a filthy condition; the living room is paved with bricks and is occupied at night by three children, aged 9, 7, and 5'.⁷

Dr. Mair presented a special report upon the condition of certain dwellings at Eastfields, Mitcham, and under section 30 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, submitted certificates representing that the dwelling-houses known as nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14, Allen's or Ebenezer's Cottages, Mitcham, occupied by Messrs. Hall, C. H. Charman, Mrs. Sarah Jakeman, Messrs. J. Cannon, R. Lincoln, J. Clifford, Peter Gray, Jesse Legg, Mrs. Dyke, Messrs. James Bigg, C. Hide, G. Hawthorn, E. Fry, and A. Wyatt respectively, and belonging to Mr. Thos. Allen, of Eastfields, Mitcham, appear to be in a state so dangerous or injurious to health as to be unfit for human habitation.⁸

The minutes of the MPC's June 1897 meeting reported one case that the Inspector of Nuisances had investigated...‘a complaint with reference to the overcrowding at Grosvenor House, Western Road....and found that the premises are let out in apartments, a Mr Symonds occupying 2 rooms with his family of 6, aged 18, 16, 12, 10, 7 and 4 years respectively, all sleeping in one room, the air space being considerably below the standard required....(after visits from the Inspector and the Medical Officer of Health)they were informed that several children were now sleeping in another room. The owner informed him that he was now taking legal steps to evict the family from the house.’⁹

Mitcham's population in 1891 was 12,127 and rose to 14,903 in the 1901 Census, a 23% increase which aggravated the housing problem. The rise in the number of these kinds of official complaints about the condition of housing in Mitcham, led the CRDC, in 1897, to delegate its powers under the Public Health Acts to the MPC which became the sanitary authority for the parish.

The Housing of the Working Classes Act, referred to in the second report above, was the legal basis on which the inspections and instructions to improve housing conditions were based. That Act also enabled a parish council, with the agreement of the rural district council and the county council, to provide houses for working classes. In the autumn of 1897 Alfred Mizen moved at the MPC that the attention of the CRDC be drawn to the inadequate housing in Mitcham for the working classes. The motion went on to recommend that the CRDC obtain from the county council the certificate necessary to bring Part 3 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act into operation for Mitcham.¹⁰ The progress of this proposal through the CRDC and Surrey County Council is to be the subject of a future contribution.

- 1 This contrasted with voting in elections to school boards, including Mitcham's, at this time. Each voter had as many votes as places to be filled on the school board, but was able to spread their votes about the candidates as they wished. If a voter gave all their votes to one candidate it was called 'plumping'.
- 2 Elections to the parish council took place annually until 1903; after this every three years.
- 3 *Wallington and Carshalton Herald* 22/12/1894 and electoral registers at LBM Local History Collection.
- 4 *Wallington and Carshalton Herald* 15/12/1894.
- 5 Mitcham Parish Meeting Minutes 1894-1900 (Surrey History Centre).
- 6 Croydon Rural District Council Minutes, 16/04/1896 (Croydon Archives).
- 7 Mitcham Parochial Council Minutes 11/07/1895 (Croydon Archives).
- 8 Mitcham Parochial Council Minutes 5/10/1896.
- 9 Mitcham Parochial Council Minutes 15/06/1897.
- 10 Mitcham Parochial Council Minutes 19/10/1897.

Bill Bailey

More of Bill Rudd's photos of CHRISTMAS AT THE MORDEN SORTING OFFICE IN 1962



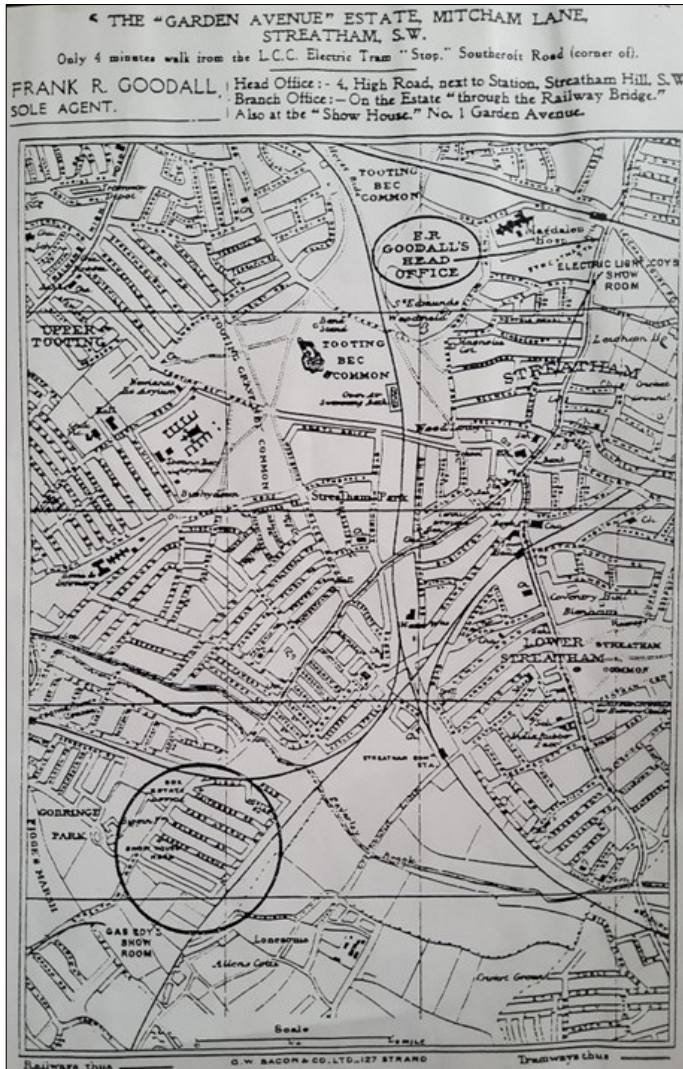
A welcome tea break for the night staff

*When packages were wrapped in brown paper
and tied up with string*



NORTH MITCHAM ALLOTMENTS

Allotments have roots in working class culture and have helped feed the families of workers in mills and factories, as well as being sources of pleasure and recreation. Their growth as a social phenomenon coincided with an increase in the urban population and improvements in working conditions in the 19th century, notably the eight-hour working day, half day working on Saturdays, and annual holidays. Many allotment sites are owned by local authorities or by Railtrack. The popularity of allotments has varied over time. They peaked during wartime, dipped in the late 20th century, and in recent decades allotment-holding has transcended class boundaries and has also attracted immigrant populations who want to grow their heritage foodstuffs.



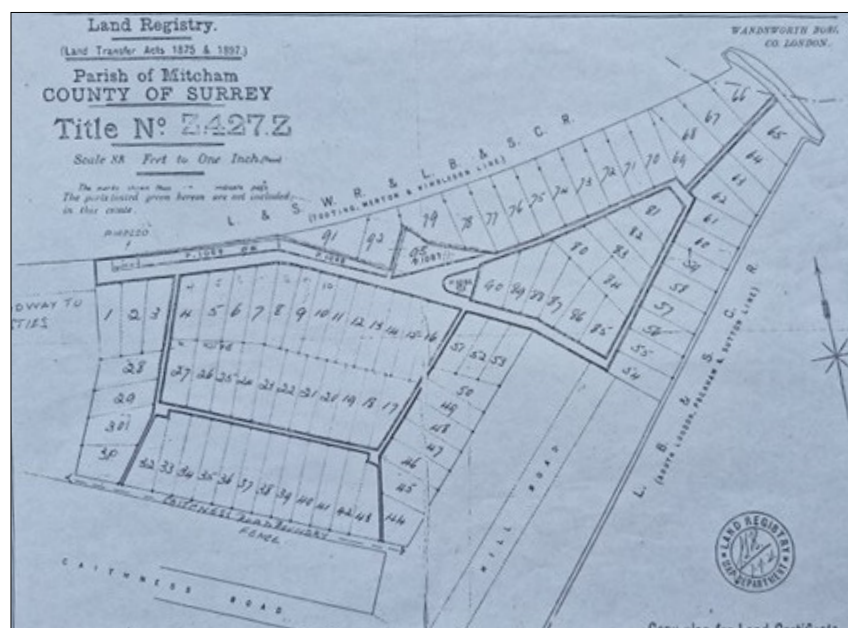
A gate giving access to these allotments is located at the end of Ridge Road, a cul de sac off the A216 Streatham Road, near the railway bridge and a few blocks south of the River Graveney crossing. In 1909 the land now occupied by the allotments was owned by Albert Casanova Ballard (right). He wanted to build houses there, alongside houses he was building nearby in his 'Garden Road Estate'.



Advertisements appeared in the *Daily Mail* in March and April 1914 for newly-built houses in Garden Road. The houses were marketed through Goodall of Streatham Hill and boasted two reception rooms, three bedrooms, a bathroom, a kitchen, electric lighting and the latest gas water heaters. Prices ranged from £270 to £450. Presumably the more expensive houses had enhanced specifications, such as extra bedrooms. The North Mitcham Plot Owners Association, which manages the allotment site, holds a copy of an undated leaflet advertising the houses at £250 in somewhat desperately gushing language, so perhaps Ballard had been obliged to reduce the price. No doubt houses in the other roads in the estate were completed over the following few years – they are certainly there now.

The reverse of the estate agent's leaflet defines the estate by circling the roads within it: Garden Road, Ridge Road, Caithness Road, Park Avenue, Melrose Avenue, Elmhurst Avenue, Beecholme Avenue and Hill Road (left).

However, Ballard was told that he was not allowed to build on the site at the end of Ridge Road because of the risk of flooding from the River Graveney. Ballard's solution was to divide that land into allotments and sell them individually under the terms of an indenture dated 24 June 1920. A plan of the allotments was lodged with the Land Registry in September 1921 (right). The indenture authorised trustees to collect money from allotment holders and required the trustees to use the money to construct and maintain paths, boundary fences and the gate. An annual subscription paid for upkeep of the common areas. If allotment holders were in default of payment, the trustees were entitled after due notice to seize and dispose of their plots in order to



pay the debts. To this day the trustees of the North Mitcham Plot Owners Association carry out the functions set out in the indenture, supported by an elected committee of plotholders.

It is not clear why Ballard disposed of the land in this manner. His intent might have been altruistic, but if so that only crystallised after his original intent to develop the land was thwarted. It is possible that he wanted to ensure that any subsequent property developers would find it difficult to acquire the land. He would have known that public pressure was building to culvert the Graveney in order to alleviate the risk of flooding. Indeed, there had been regular press reports of flooding from around 1910, possibly the result of surface water run-off from newly developed land. Press reports appeared in 1921 of plans to 'improve' the Graveney. According to the Association's archives, the Graveney was duly culverted in 1924. Part of the culvert was at the location where the Graveney borders the allotments. The river is no longer culverted at that point, but it is canalised in a deep concrete channel. There are no reports of serious flooding at the allotments in living memory.

The plots flourished in the inter-war years and there were regular flower and vegetable shows.

On 2 May 1919 the *Mitcham Advertiser* reported that Mr R C Lang, secretary to the committee of property owners in Garden Avenue, had asked the council to contribute towards the cost of making up Garden Avenue, owing to the increased cost of road-making. The council was unable to accede. The fact that the road was unadopted at that time might have alleviated the danger of flooding due to surface water run-off.

One plotholder, Mr F Bosomworth, paid a tithe redemption charge of 18s 8d in March 1926 in respect of plot no. 47. The association holds no other records relating to tithes. At the time of the tithe rentcharge apportionments in 1846, the allotment site was tithable arable fields owned and occupied by a William Fuller. Further research would be required to discover how and when tithe rentcharges for the remainder of the allotment site were redeemed or extinguished.

In 1940 rules in the indenture forbidding the keeping of livestock other than poultry were relaxed for the duration of the war. The remains of brick pig sties survive in one of the plots. It seems that pigs were kept illicitly for some years after the end of the war.

In May 1947 the War Damage Commission agreed to consider a claim for repairs to bomb damage to the main gate. This was the only bombing incident on the allotment site.

Two nearby allotment sites were closed in 1961, whereupon the North Mitcham allotments became the only local allotments.

In February 1963 HM Customs and Excise responded to a complaint about the cultivation of tobacco. The plotholder was advised not to grow excessive quantities.

The allotments were threatened in 1967 by the post-war plans for a system of London 'ringway' roads. A slip road would have gone through the middle of the site. The trustees refused to allow the road builders access to carry out test drills. The project was eventually abandoned. Some houses which had been compulsorily purchased are thought to have been transferred to housing associations.

The 1970s and 1980s saw a period of decline, with ageing and absent plotholders seemingly discouraged by the uncertainty about the proposed road. There was also a problem of trespassing and vandalism, which was alleviated when British Rail mended their fences in 1984 – the site is bounded on two sides by suburban railway lines. Surveys by trustees and levies for repairs brought some absent plotholders to light. An upturn in plot cultivation was reversed by a spate of vandalism in the mid-1990s, but the popularity of 'growing your own' prompted recovery and now the allotments are again popular and well-maintained by the trustees and an active committee.



The allotment office is housed in a hut on the site. There is no mains water and no electricity. Some old medicine bottles (*left*) and pieces of metal were unearthed in 2025 during the construction of a new waterless composting toilet for use by plotholders.

The author thanks Viv Shaw, Secretary of the association, for her time and for access to the association's records (*right, with scythe in front of the office*).

Postscript: Albert Casanova Ballard

Ballard moved to Plymouth in 1923, where he described himself as a 'inancier and landed proprietor'. He founded a boys' club, and in 1932 he became president of Plymouth Argyle Football Club. He later moved to Teignmouth where he died in 1942 aged about 75.

Sources: North Mitcham Plot Owners Association archives, British Newspaper Archive, Daily Mail Archive.

Photos: Viv Shaw, John Sheridan and North Mitcham Plot Owners Association Archives.

John Sheridan



PUBS OF KINGSTON GUIDED WALK 4 SEPTEMBER 2025

The day started wet and windy but by the time seven of us gathered for the start of the walk, the sun was out. Our leader was Kingston Guide, David Bridge, and the walk started in Old London Road outside the almshouses. David began by explaining that English ale was originally made by using barley and was a safer option than drinking water, and was often made by housewives. Hops came in from Holland much later and were then grown in this country.

We were told that after the Sign Act in 1393, public houses started displaying their names. There were different terms, such as ale house, inn and tap house, which historically had separate meanings and restrictions as to what was sold and what services were provided, in the same way that we might now refer to pubs, hotels and wine bars. In 1831 there were nine breweries in Kingston and we were shown a diagram illustrating how these breweries merged or were taken over. In 1840 a temperance movement started in Kingston which had an effect on the sale of beer. The bailiff books still survive and the bailiffs also acted as magistrates – their books are a useful source of information relating to the pubs.

David pointed out the sites of the public houses and gave us the details of their history. Brenda Hawkins was our photographer for the day, but as most of the pubs no longer existed, this was a difficult task.

Some of the pub buildings are now used as commercial and retail spaces, others have been demolished, yet a few still remain true to their origins, and after learning about nearly 20 pubs, we finished at the *Druid's Head*, a Grade II* listed hostelry dating from the 17th and 18th centuries, where we had a well-earned glass of beer.

*The Griffin, grade II listed,
now a commercial centre*



THE TRAFALGAR FREEHOUSE

In *Bulletin* 219, September 2021, we published an article entitled 'Clive Whichelow marks and mourns the closure of the *Trafalgar* pub'. With a brief history of the pub's existence, since 1868 at least, and noting its celebration of Nelson's connections with the local area, it seemed that the pub was to remain only as a local memory, along with so many other British pubs which were lost in the years after Covid-19.

And yet.....the pub was re-opened in 2023 as *The Trafalgar Freehouse*, and despite the threat of demolition, as part of the regeneration of High Path Estate, the pub has not only survived a planning application, but also an appeal by the developers against Merton Council's rejection of its application to demolish **and re-build** a heritage asset, on the grounds that it would cause substantial harm to the area's heritage and social value, as well as parking issues.

The *Trafalgar* has strong community support, with backing received during the planning process and a consultation questionnaire in November, it has now been granted funding by the Plunkett Foundation, to assist with the appointment of an advisor, who will help with the process that could lead to community ownership.



mhs-wjr-26-12 The Trafalgar PH High Path 04-63

A FORGOTTEN PART OF LOCAL HISTORY

John Hawks on the Wandle Industrial Museum's latest welcome acquisition

While Merton's history has become an essential part of my life, in the company of MHS's finest I could certainly never claim to be more than an 'honorary historian'. And as such, in contributing this rather offbeat item to the *Bulletin*, I feel I may risk bringing coals to Newcastle – except that this is all about bringing them **from** Newcastle!

My interest was only recently aroused by one of those delightfully unpredictable events. The Bexhill Museum is a fine dedicated building of 1914, virtually on the seafront and with a lovely seaside collection, including a wonderfully detailed town model. It's a must to see if you're ever in Bexhill, which alas not many of us seem likely to be these days – I hadn't been there for 75 years!

Anyway, I had a splendid excuse to go down there again when they contacted Mick Taylor at the Wandle Industrial Museum earlier this year. They were having a clear out, and one of their unwanted exhibits, a gift from a deceased resident's family, was a superb model of a ship – no, not in a bottle, this one, but in a six-foot glass case. They specially wanted the Wandle Industrial Museum to have it, not on account of its size, value or quality, but because it had no actual relevance to Bexhill (a key criterion for them), and was named, believe it or not, *SS Wandle*.



It belongs to a part of comparatively recent history of which very few people these days are even remotely aware. But it makes perfectly good sense when you think about it. 100 years ago all the main London gas and electricity companies needed huge and constant volumes of coal, and all had their own fleets of colliers – long, low steamships specially designed both to manage the difficult waters of the North Sea and to navigate the River Thames. These 'up-river' colliers (also nicknamed 'flat-irons') had a shallow draft so they didn't ground on the riverbed when fully laden, and retractable masts and funnels so they could travel safely under the Thames bridges.

The Wandsworth and District Gas Company was one of the major suppliers to the larger South London area, and between 1905 and 1959 three successive vessels named *SS Wandle* brought coal by sea from Tyneside and up the Thames to their gasworks at the mouth of the River Wandle. The first *SS Wandle* in the Wandsworth fleet was launched in 1905, and in 1915 had a famous wartime encounter in which she courageously repelled a German U-boat with her single gun. Large crowds gathered along the river all the way from Westminster to Wandsworth to cheer her return! Less happily, however, she ended up in 1917 being wrecked, when on her 500th voyage she ran aground off Flamborough Head.

Her replacement, the second *SS Wandle*, was launched in 1923 and plied the route steadfastly till 1932, when she was sold to another company. After this in 1942 she too was wrecked, not by enemy action but after an unfortunate collision at sea off the coast near Middlesbrough.

The third *SS Wandle* which replaced her in 1933 was the biggest of the three, and carried 2,200 tons of coal. As in the First World War, so in the Second, the North Sea was particularly dangerous for merchant ships, which had a vital wartime role, and many were armed to repel attack by air and sea. In 1940 and 1941 *SS Wandle* twice fired on and hit enemy aircraft and twice saw off German E-boats (special high speed attack launches). Then in 1942 she was attacked by a flotilla of E-boats, and her bow was completely destroyed by a torpedo. Amazingly she survived, and after extensive repairs she continued doing her vital work successfully from 1943 till 1959, when she was finally scrapped.

It's this last humble but rather heroic vessel that the exceptionally detailed model commemorates, and there could be no more suitable home for it than the Wandle Industrial Museum. But where in that small space to put it? The inspired answer was right next door in Mitcham's Vestry Hall, where Building Manager Julie Noel has given it a warm welcome and pride of place in the foyer - well worth dropping in for a look next time you're passing.

As a final curiosity, over the years a nice tradition arose – many of these colliers were named after the areas their various companies supplied with gas or electricity. As well as SS Wandle there were the SS Mitcham, Wimbledon, Wandsworth, Croydon, Chessington, Tolworth, Ewell, Kingston, Guildford, Woodcote, Dulwich, Sydenham, Bromley, Brockley, Southwark, Camberwell, Lambeth, Catford, Effra, Brixton, Kennington – and plenty more North of the River! All the names are listed in a rare and fascinating illustrated booklet *The Gas and Electricity Colliers*, published in 1984 by the World Ship Society, which can be seen at the Wandle Industrial Museum.



The SS Wandle III unloading at Wandsworth in 1933

NEW PUBLICATION FROM EAST SURREY FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

Mitcham St Peter & St Paul Monumental Inscriptions

Mitcham St Peter & St Paul Monumental Inscriptions

The monumental inscriptions for Mitcham Parish Church (St Peter & St Paul) are the result of over 3 years of hard work by many members of East Surrey Family History Society. Included here are MIs both inside and outside the church from 1583 – 1993.

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