



CHAIR: Christine Pittman

BULLETIN No. 237

MARCH 2026



*See p.15 – image: Carrie Lynott*

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## PROGRAMME MARCH – JUNE 2026

**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.**

### VISIT

**Friday 12 June from 12.30pm – William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow**

We are organizing an unguided tour around the current exhibition  
**‘Women in Print: 150 Years of Liberty Textiles’.**

You are invited to meet early and purchase lunch at the Gallery’s café to eat inside,  
or outside in the park.

**We plan to start our tour of the exhibition, and the rest of the Museum, at 2pm. Entry is free.**

The Museum is located at Lloyd Park, Forest Road, Walthamstow, London E17 4FF.  
It is a 10-15 minute walk from Walthamstow Central underground station (Victoria line),  
or 5 minutes by bus routes 34, 97, 215, 275 and 357.

Please book your place by email to [mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk)  
or leave your name with Rosemary Turner at one of our meetings.

Full directions will be sent to you by post or email. Please book your place before 12 May.

### LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS:

**Fridays 10 April, 22 May, 3 July, 14 August, 25 September, 6 November 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.**

## A LETTER FROM SCOTT MCCRACKEN

Scott McCracken has commented further on our report in *Bulletin* 236 of his talk about the Merton Priory archaeological excavations.

He writes: ‘Thank you very much for sending the December issue of the MHS *Bulletin* No 236 with the extremely well written account of the afternoon ‘audience’ at Merton Priory chapter house. Please convey my thanks to John Sheridan. There are three points I would like to clarify, however.

The Chairman in her Report mentions my talk “about the Society’s excavations of the Chapter House”. The chapter house was excavated by the SW London Unit of the Surrey Archaeological Society under my direction. The MHS was not involved.

The site of Merton Priory was scheduled by Phillip Walker, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, DoE. I simply assisted when mapping the area to be scheduled.

There always seems to be confusion between the chapter house excavation and the later Savacentre one.

The chapter house burials were studied by the late Dr Tony Waldron, Institute of Archaeology, UCL. Tony was the individual who identified DISH. I did not use the word spoof in regards to his *BMJ* article. The Savacentre burials were the responsibility of the Museum of London.’

John Sheridan explains: The *British Medical Journal* did indeed have a tradition of publishing humorous articles at Christmas. Dr Tony Waldron, who identified DISH (diffuse idiopathic skeletal hyperostosis) in monastic skeletons, wrote about his findings in *BMJ* Volume 291, 21-28 December 1985, in a serious article in which he speculated that the condition might have been caused by a luxurious monastic lifestyle.

**NORMA COX has been researching**

## **THREE MITCHAM MARGARINE BUSINESSES**

There were three margarine businesses in Mitcham in the years 1903–1971. Margaric Acid, which gives its name to margarine, was discovered in 1813 and was categorised as one of the three fatty acids which, when combined, formed animal fats. Margarine was a manufactured food substance and was discovered in 1869 and made from animal products. In the years around WW1 and WW2 margarine gained popularity as a butter-substitute and later in the 1950s its composition changed to vegetable oils because of animal shortages. Used for spreading and cooking, by the 1990s, margarine was considered the healthier food option.

### **Introduction**

Margarine was manufactured from vegetable oils such as sunflower oil, olive oil and palm oil, and these oils were later hydrogenated to create a more solid product. However hydrogenation led to the formation of trans-products and these trans-products caused health worries. By the late twentieth century butter was considered the less healthy option because it could clog the arteries with fatty cholesterol. Margarines, now known as spreads, were fortified with vitamins A and D, and vegetable oils such as rapeseed oil and olive oil, had health benefits with their anti-inflammatory omega 3 content.<sup>1</sup> Margarine was used for cooking and spreading and it was claimed that sponge-cakes made with margarine were lighter than butter-baked cakes. Echo margarine was a hard margarine, manufactured by Van Den Bergh, a company which had its origins in Germany in 1888. Margarine of the early twentieth century was hard and produced in large blocks for supply to bakers. Van Den Bergh merged with the Dutch company Jurgens in 1927 to form Margarine Unie in Rotterdam, which subsequently merged with Lever Brothers to form Unilever in 1930.<sup>2</sup>

### **Business One : George Pellarin et Cie**

The first margarine factory in Mitcham was at the Tower Works, in 1903, later known as Tower Creameries, and situated on Commonsides East, on the old workhouse site. This factory was occupied by the French company George Pellarin et Cie margarine manufacturers, for the packaging of margarine imported in bulk. In 1905 part of the premises were used by the General Motor Company Ltd for car production. Margarine packing was continued by Pellarin until 1910 and then the Tower Works were taken over by Mitcham Margarine Company for the production of margarine and edible fats when demand increased because of WW1 butter-rationing. After Armistice, margarine consumption fell because food supplies returned to pre-war levels. A new company later known as Merton Abbey Creameries was formed in 1922.<sup>3</sup> This new company took over the Tower Works together with the goodwill and machinery of the Mitcham Margarine Company.<sup>4</sup> In 1925 the site, which had been previously called the Woodite Works, was leased to the Castle Rubber Company of Warrington. Another industry took the whole of the former workhouse site when it was sold to Samuel Ward & Co, paint and varnish manufacturers.<sup>5</sup> In 1929 Unilever Ltd purchased Merton Abbey Creameries and from the 1930s the site of Tower Works was occupied by companies involved in margarine and butter, cheeses and cooking fats under various brand names. Margarine production continued here until 1932, when they were taken over by Mitcham Creameries. A new company, Surrey Creameries Ltd, was formed for processed cheese production. In 1937 Tower Creameries took over the old Tower Works for the manufacture of margarine and cooking fats.<sup>6</sup> However in 1941 a German bomb fell on the Tower Works killing fifteen men from the 57<sup>th</sup> Surrey (Mitcham) Home Guard including some young members aged 16 and 17.<sup>7</sup> One person's memory of the WW2 bombing of the Mitcham area was recorded when land-mines were being dropped near Thornton Heath. On the night the margarine factory in Mitcham was hit, the person didn't know about the casualties but remembered their garden in Thornton Heath being littered with margarine papers.<sup>8</sup> The Tower factory was later rebuilt and the last food manufacturers to occupy the site were Express Dairy Co Ltd and the Mitcham Maid Products Ltd. Both food manufacturers left the site in 1965.<sup>9</sup>

### **Business Two : W Brandis & Co Ltd**

Another Mitcham margarine company was W Brandis & Co Ltd who supplied margarine and bakers products. This company started as bakers, margarine and sundriesmen but they were not listed in the 1930 commercial directory.<sup>10</sup> In 1938 W Brandis, bakers' products were listed in the Commercial directory at 10 Commonsides East which was the same location as Tower Creameries and Mitcham Maid Margarine. W Brandis then moved to the James Estate in Western Road and in 1954 W Brandis was listed at 132 Western Road, the address of the disused Holborn Union Workhouse. There are images of W Brandis vehicles outside the Holborn Union Workhouse, which today is the ASDA store in Western Road. W Brandis had large amounts of olive oil stolen in 1948. Mitcham Foods Ltd of 2/10 Commonsides East produced margarine and cheese – these details were stated

in the 1963 Borough of Mitcham List of Factories. The factory site of Mitcham Foods Ltd is today named Talbot Close and this site is on the corner of Commonsides East and Windmill Road.<sup>11</sup> This was the site where Mitcham Workhouse had been located and was also the site of Hooper's Telegraph and India Rubber Company.<sup>12</sup> In 1971 W Brandis was listed in the Phone Book at Windsor Avenue SW19, on the Merton Industrial Park, South Wimbledon.<sup>13</sup> Mitcham History Notes showed W Brandis advertising for Representatives in 1938 and the reps, as they were called, would visit bakeries for business and offer large discounts.<sup>14</sup>

### Business Three : Benninga's

The third margarine factory was Benninga's British Margarine Produce Co Ltd, a firm with Dutch origins, located in Mortimer Road Mitcham in 1932. The factory took over the west half of the street (northwards) from the junction with Eveline Road and also included the ends of the back-gardens of all of the houses on the west side of Mortimer Road. Mitcham History Notes includes a map depicting the margarine factory site and photographs of the factory before its demolition.<sup>15</sup> The Benninga factory was on the site of the gasworks of the Holborn Union after the workhouse closed down. The factory was in use for many years before and after WW2. Over 100 people worked there in model working conditions. Jacob Benninga was believed to have been the founding chairman of Mitcham Chamber of Commerce.<sup>16</sup> Figure 1 (right, courtesy Merton Memories) shows a large vessel being delivered to the Benninga factory from Amsterdam via Hull in order to avoid import tariffs in 1938.<sup>17</sup> The factory produced margarine with brand names of Sunniface, Wayside and BBM (Butter Blended Margarine). They also made their own brand of lard called Lardex and Vitso which was a shredded beef suet.<sup>18</sup> Benninga left Mitcham in 1965.



In *Bulletin* 133, MHS members were asked if they recalled seeing an item under the headline "Benno's goal – a piece of cake" in the final issue of the *Merton Messenger* in December 1998 – this was a request from Benno Benninga of Sanibel, Florida, who was seeking information about his family's former margarine factory in Mitcham. He wanted to make contact with anyone who worked there. Benno mentioned the model working conditions at the factory and Jacob Benninga and the (now defunct) Mitcham Chamber of Commerce. Eric Montague gave early historical details of the factory (site) stating it was built in 1880's as the private gasworks of the Holborn Union. Benno requested that his letter be published so that he could make contact with someone, including relatives and friends, who had worked there. Benno was interested in the inside management details, politics and personalities of the firm.<sup>19</sup>

In *Bulletin* 162, David Roe reported on the increasing concerns about the close proximity of industry to housing in Merton, Morden and Mitcham. In January 1947 a newspaper reader described Garth Road as the "Black Country of Morden". Following a public enquiry, Benninga was refused permission to extend their margarine factory in Bond Road, Mitcham. The site had originally been used as a piggery and then as a gasworks and had been acquired by Benninga's in 1932.<sup>20</sup>

The following table attempts to simplify the changing companies involved:

Date	Manufacturer	Location	Details
1903	George Pellarin et Cie	Mitcham Tower Works, Commonsides East [former Workhouse site]	Margarine packer for imported margarine
1910	Mitcham Margarine Company	Tower Works	Took over Tower Works. Made margarine and edible fats
1922	Merton Abbey Creameries	Tower Works	New company formed, took over site and machinery of Mitcham Margarine Co

1929	Unilever	Tower Works	Jurgens and Lever Brothers merge to form Unilever. Bought Merton Abbey Creameries and took over Tower Works. Site shared with Mitcham creameries.
1932	Mitcham Creameries	Tower Works	Mitcham Creameries took over Unilever works on this site.
1932	Surrey Creamery Ltd	Tower Works	Made processed cheese
1932	Benninga and Co Ltd	Mitcham Factory Mortimer Road [former Holborn Union gas works site]	Manufactured margarines called Sunniface and Wayside
1937	Tower Creameries	Tower Works	Took over Tower Works to manufacture margarine and cooking fats
1938	W Brandis Ltd	Tower Works	Mitcham Maid Margarine already manufactured here
1941	Tower Creameries	Tower Works	Site bombed. Production ceased. Site vacant
1954	W Brandis Ltd	James Estate, Western Road [former Holborn Union Workhouse site]	Moved here
1963	Mitcham Foods	Tower Works	Margarine manufacturer
1965	Express Dairy Co Ltd and Mitcham Maid Products Ltd	Tower Works	Vacated in 1965
1965	Benninga and Co Ltd	Mortimer Road Factory	Vacated in 1965
1971	W Brandis Ltd	Windsor Avenue, South Wimbledon	Business site recorded in Phone Book

## Acknowledgements

The author thanks Sarah Gould and the London Borough of Merton for use of the image of the Benninga vessel being transported to Mitcham.

## References

1. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margarine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margarine)
2. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel\\_van\\_den\\_Bergh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_van_den_Bergh)
3. Eric Montague, *Mitcham Common*, Phillimore, 2001, p72-77
4. *ibid*
5. *ibid*
6. *ibid*
7. Irene Bain, *Some Memories of Tower Creameries Mitcham*, Merton Historical Society, 2010
8. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/63/a4010563.shtml>
9. Eric Montague, 2001, *ibid*
10. <https://www.mitchamhistorynotes.com/2023/08/01/w-brandis-co-ltd-margarine-and-bakers-products>
11. *ibid*
12. Norma Cox, 'Rubber industries of Mitcham'. *Bulletin* 233, Merton Historical Society, March 2025, p12
13. See Note 10
14. *ibid*
15. <https://www.mitchamhistorynotes.com/2016/01/13/benninga-margarine-factory>
16. Eric Montague, *Mitcham Histories 14: Upper Mitcham and Western Road*, Merton Historical Society, 2013, p93
17. <https://www.photoarchive.merton.gov.uk/collections/work-and-industry/51232-benninga-british-margarine-produce-co-ltd-mortimer-road-mitcham>
18. Eric Montague, 2001, *ibid*
19. *Bulletin* 133, Merton Historical Society, March 2000, p11
20. *Bulletin* 162, Merton Historical Society, June 2007, p11

## LONG AND STRAIGHT

The vast network of roads throughout the Roman empire is a miracle of engineering and construction that we can only admire, and to produce a new comprehensive online map of them all is a fine ambition. For their recent publication the Danish Itiner-e Project ([www.Itiner-e.org](http://www.Itiner-e.org)) should be given three cheers, because it's a huge undertaking, when what firm evidence there is after 2000 years is bound to be patchy. Archaeology has identified a great deal, and of course many modern routes are based on the original Roman ones, especially when the topography, whether mountainous or marshy, allows for little choice. But to be other than 'broad brush' is surely always going to be impossible.

So we shouldn't expect too much from their new map when it comes to our little corner of the network. Stane Street's 91km route from London to Chichester is pretty well known to us from history, from archaeology and from geographical evidence such as visible remains of earthworks. And where we don't have direct evidence, a century and more of informed or inspired guesswork has produced a convincing approximation – enough, for example, to explode the myth that Roman roads were always straight. They took the most direct route they could, of course, but this often meant adapting to local geography, notably in the case of Stane Street finding the most convenient gaps through the North and South Downs and avoiding the heights of Leith Hill. What's been reasonably established, though, is that whatever local variations there may be, the route of Stane Street never actually diverges more than 10km from a direct line drawn between London Bridge and Chichester, which is still impressive.

We know that Stane Street was virtually straight from the Roman London Bridge (about 27m East of the modern bridge) to Ewell, round which it diverted to avoid unsuitable ground. There are some points on this 24km section that are accurately known, others that have been established as very likely, and it's always been encouraging that the connection between these known points is more or less a straight line – with marginal allowances here and there to take account of local conditions (as in Clapham, where it deviated a few hundred metres to the West to skirt a marshy patch between Clapham Common Southside and Abbeville Road).

So we can surely be happy with the approximation of a straight line on the map – as part of it appears, for example, in Dave Saxby and Pat Miller's monograph on Merton Priory (*facing page*). It makes sense, by the way, that the Priory was built right on the main road as it was an important destination for the great and good, and Augustinian monasteries among their many other duties were guest houses too. Indeed it's believed that the Priory church was built literally on the road itself, causing a dog-leg diversion round the precinct before rejoining the route at Morden Road.

The Itiner-e map also adopts a straight line for the entire London section – which is fair enough, when anything more precise would be fanciful. What is disappointing, however, is that their straight line is different from ours! After the junction with the Brighton road at Kennington their line is consistently further East than the generally accepted one, with the result that it ignores all the archaeological evidence, principally the MOLA discovery in 1999 by Dave Saxby at the point where the road fords the Wandle – the site of the former *Kiss Me Hardy* pub (*right*).



Other discoveries are well documented in the MHS archive – *Bulletin* 114 (June 1995) reproduces an authoritative article by Bill Sole discussing in detail this part of the route, and *Bulletin* 132 (December 1999) features his conjectural map which includes the discovery in 1960 during building work on the site of the *Crown* pub in Morden (now part of the Civic Centre). Dennis Turner's 1958/59 excavations found convincing evidence of Stane Street crossing Morden Park, while Bill Rudd recorded strata when observing a new Post Office Telephones service chamber in the pavement of London Road near the vehicle entrance to the Park and Leisure Centre. Both of these investigations are summarised in the Society's *Local History Note* 3 of 1991 – freely downloadable at <https://mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/LHN-3.pdf>

Peter Hopkins also points out that the straight stretch of the A24, where it crosses the Pyl Brook by the *Lord Nelson* pub, formed the ancient parish boundaries of Morden, Cheam and Sutton. The crossing was historically known as Pylford and lies on the straight line from the *Crown* site towards Ewell.

One would have hoped that all these solid pieces of evidence would have been taken into account in the new map. So perhaps two-and-a-half cheers to our Danish friends after all – but good luck to them anyway for such a bold undertaking.

**John Hawks**

*(My gratitude for expert contributions from Peter Hopkins and from John Sheridan, who tells me that part of Stane Street was discovered in the 1960s at the end of his road in Stockwell!)*



Generally accepted route:  , Itiner-e suggested route 

MERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE 74<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 8th NOVEMBER 2025 at 2.30pm

1. Chair's welcome
2. Apologies for absence were received from San Ward, Janet Holdsworth, Geoffrey Loft and John Sheridan.
3. Acceptance of last year's AGM Minutes which was distributed with the December Bulletin was proposed by Bea Oliver, seconded by Tony Scott and accepted unanimously.
4. There were no matters arising.
5. Chairperson's Report (copy to be sent out with the December Bulletin)
6. Membership Secretary's Report – Rosemary said that we have 129 members at present. A number of subscription renewals have not been received. We have 24 new members, 6 resignations and as Christine said two deaths.
7. Treasurer's Report: Janet was unable to be there to present the accounts so Rosemary read her report. We have £18000 in the bank. We are using money to support special projects such as the digitisation of the Merton Manorial Court Rolls and a researcher preparing the history of the Society for our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Although the current subscription does not cover cost, the committee decided that, due to our financial situation, we would not increase subscriptions. The bank no longer charges us £5 a month for banking with them but still charges us 40p per cheque paid in. We received the money from the estate of Michael Nethersole and £100 prize money from LAMAS for Peter's book *Medieval Morden, Neighbourhood and Community*. Publications made a surplus of £556 as compared with a deficit of £764 the previous year. These differences balance out over the years.

Approval of the financial statement for the year 2024/25: proposed by Irene Burroughs, seconded by Alan Martyn and accepted unanimously.

8. Election of Officers for the coming year. Mick Taylor of the Wandle Industrial Museum took over the meeting and asked members to show their appreciation for the committee. He said that Dave Haunton would be greatly missed.

Chairperson: Christine Pittman – proposed by Bill Bailey and seconded by Malcolm Claridge.

Vice Chairperson: Bea Oliver – proposed by Tony Scott and seconded by Malcolm Claridge.

Hon. Secretary: Rosemary Turner – proposed by Malcolm Claridge and seconded by Fiona Bower.

Hon. Treasurer: Janet Holdsworth – proposed by Irene Burroughs and seconded by Tony Scott.

All agreed unanimously.

Appointment of the Hon. Accounts Examiner for the coming year, Robin Darbyshire: proposed by Dick Bower and seconded by Bea Oliver, and agreed unanimously.

9. Election of Committee for the coming year:

Committee standing for re-election:

Ian Aldridge, Irene Burroughs, Peter Hopkins, David Luff, Tony Scott - proposed by Alan Martyn and seconded by Jenny Harper.

Member willing to come on to the committee:

Bill Bailey – proposed by Peter Hopkins, seconded by Fiona Bower and accepted unanimously.

10. Motion of which 14 days' notice have been given. There were none.

11. Any other Business.

Bea reminded members that we are always happy to receive suggestions for talks and visits.

Tony asked if members were happy with our present venue. They were.

Meeting closed at 2.54pm. Attendance 31.

Merton Historical Society - Treasurer's Report year ended 31 May 2025

Statement of accounts 1 June 2024 to 31 May 2025

	2023/24	2024/25
<b>Regular income and expenditure</b>		
Subscriptions	£1,851.00	£2,026.13
	£1,851.00	£2,026.13

£624.40	Room hire	£651.20
£120.00	Speakers and outtings	£80.00
£968.94	Bulletin	£962.40
£145.00	Affiliation fees	£175.00
£0.00	Donations - heritage day	£0.00
£89.60	Bank fees	£81.20
£692.19	Secretary and others exes	£381.64
£130.99	Equipment visits	£0.00
£2,771.12		£2,381.44

<b>-£920.12</b>	<b>Result</b>	<b>-£355.31</b>
<b>£200.00</b>	<b>Less transfer from reserves</b>	<b>£0.00</b>

**Miscellaneous income and expenditure**

£84.00	Donations	£270.50
£0.00	Prize	£100.00
	Exceptional expenses	£1,000.00
	Less transfer from Special Reserve	£1,000.00
<b>-£196.50</b>	<b>Excess of miscellaneous income over expenditure</b>	<b>£370.50</b>

**Publications**

£2,186.72	£1,422.44	£1,014.32
	Sales	
	Costs	£447.64

<b>-£1,850.90</b>	<b>Surplus/deficit</b>	<b>£566.68</b>
	<b>Excess expenditure over Income</b>	<b>£581.87</b>

Merton Historical Society Balance Sheet year ended 31 May 2025

	2024	2025
<b>Cash</b>		
Current account	£18,013.12	£17,982.78
debtors/payment in advance	£28.20	£43.80
stock of books		
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>£18,041.32</b>	<b>£18,026.58</b>

<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Accruals	£1,055.92	£1,459.31
<b>Net assets</b>	<b>£16,985.40</b>	<b>£16,567.27</b>

<b>Accumulated funds</b>		
General reserve	£9,066.30	£7,185.40
Balance brought forward	-£1,880.90	£581.87
Surplus(Deficit) for year	£7,185.40	£7,767.27
<b>Balance at 31 May</b>		

<b>Special Reserve</b>	<b>£8,800.00</b>	<b>£7,800.00</b>
<b>Subscription reserve</b>	<b>£1,000.00</b>	<b>£1,000.00</b>
<b>Total reserves</b>	<b>£16,985.40</b>	<b>£16,567.27</b>

Approved by the committee and signed on their behalf by  
Janet Holdsworth, Treasurer

*[Signature]* 16/09/25

**Independent Examiner's report**

I have examined the above balance sheet and statement of income and expenditure for the year ended 31 May 2025 and in my opinion it is true and correct.

RV Darbyshire FCA

*[Signature]* 16/9/25

## **Merton Historical Society**

### **Notes to financial statements for the year to 31 May 2025**

#### **1. Accounting Policies**

##### **Basis of accounting**

The accounts are prepared on a cash basis, but modified where necessary for material items, whose exclusion would seriously distort the position shown by the financial statements. These are principally significant expenses unpaid at the end of the financial year.

##### **Subscriptions**

Subscriptions are accounted for on a cash basis. The Society's membership year runs from 1 October to 30 September. Accordingly, a part of the subscription is a prepayment at 31 May. However, the Society does not offer refunds for part year membership, and so no prepayment is reflected in these financial statements.

#### **2. Creditors and accruals**

Creditors and accruals reflect amounts for expenses incurred during the year for which the invoice or claim was only submitted after the year end.

#### **3. Publications and stocks**

- a. The society holds stocks of publications prepared over many years. Sales of these are made occasionally and some are sold at discounted prices. The stock is valued at nil for the purposes of the financial statements. The current potential sale value of the stock is £6,868 at an historic cost of £4,980

#### **4. Equipment**

The Society owns equipment for use at meetings – projector, lectern, computer etc. These have been fully depreciated and therefore do not appear in the balance sheet.

#### **5. Insurance**

Insurance is included in the BALH subscription fee of £90.

#### **6. Reserves**

£1000 has been allocated from the Special Reserve to cover the special project of digitisation of the Merton Manorial Court Rolls.

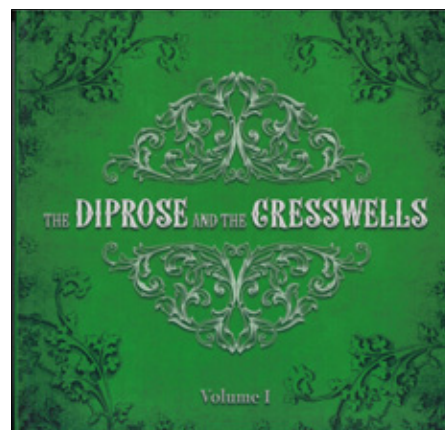
There has been no allocation from the Subscription Reserve this year.

## LOCAL HISTORY WORKSHOPS

### Workshop 17 October 2025 – 12 attended

◆ **Graham Diprose** explained that he had been involved in producing documentaries about the Thames. He mentioned Henry Tomp's first-ever photographic documentary. Graham has been involved in a project to source archival paper and pigment inks that will enable modern publications to last for centuries. He had produced a book on his family history using these materials. He is depositing copies of the book at record offices and offered a copy to our Society.

His grandmother's family name was Cresswell and they were tallow makers in Figges Marsh, Mitcham. His grandmother ran a laundry where Lidl is now situated. His 3x great grandmother mentioned a convict sent to Tasmania, and during lockdown he had researched this family member, shortly after receiving a letter from the Female Convicts Research Centre. We're hoping that Graham will write an article for us on his Figges Marsh ancestors, to be published in a future issue of the *Bulletin*.



◆ **Alex Bradshaw** reported on recent developments concerning the former NatWest Sports Ground on Turle Road, Norbury – now the site of the proposed Norbury Village housing, care home and sports development. The scheme has since been amended by the developer to include more housing, with five apartment blocks now rising to six storeys (353 homes in total including 150 houses). Despite local concerns, it was approved by Merton Council's Planning Committee in September and will next be considered for approval by the Greater London Authority (GLA) at Stage 2.

Covering about 22 acres, the site lies close to the London–Brighton Roman Road and may once have formed part of the Carew family's Manor of Norbury (1377–1859). The land later hosted the Streatham Steeplechase course, a golf course, and sports facilities, and between 1940 and 1943 was occupied by a heavy anti-aircraft battery operated by the 60th (City of London) Anti-Aircraft Brigade and the Home Guard. 1947 aerial photographs clearly show the substantial concrete anti-aircraft gun emplacements that once stood on the site. It has been largely unused for sport since 2007 although the Bowls Club remains active and is due to remain in place.

The plans also include demolition of the former Sports Pavilion, a building of local historical interest containing several war memorials, a bar, and one of the few remaining indoor skittle alleys in the area.

The GLAAS-recommended planning conditions have been included in the approved scheme. These require a staged programme of archaeological investigation and a public engagement programme designed to share results and involve the local community. This provides an opportunity for Merton Historical Society to register its interest with Merton Council and GLAAS, and to comment on the Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI) once it becomes available to help ensure the archaeological investigations are thorough and robust.

◆ **Bill Bailey** has continued his research on the Mitcham Parish Council election of March 1898, when the main issue was the adequacy of housing for the working classes in Mitcham. Those opposing council action to remedy the situation published a flyer urging voters not to vote for such 'building speculation' which 'experts' believed would result in a loss. A list of candidates opposing the plan to build appeared on the flyer. In response to this, *The Wimbledon News* reported at length on a Vestry Hall meeting in the week before the election, at which popular support for action was shown. *The News* also invited voters to cast their ballot for their list of candidates in favour of building 'Healthy Homes'. At the election those in favour of council action, led by the Mizen brothers, won a clear victory.

◆ **John Sheridan**, a volunteer at Merton Priory Chapter House, made us aware of a book in Wimbledon Museum's collection that has links with the Priory. It is a small book known as Paynell's Pandectes. Thomas Paynell was a canon at Merton Priory at the time of its dissolution in 1538. The book, a commentary on the Gospels, was published in 1553. Evelyn Jowett, who combined the roles of founding secretary of the Merton and Morden Historical Society with District Librarian for the former Merton and Morden Urban District Council, acquired the Pandectes in 1959. MMHS had considered acquiring the book to keep it in the locality but concluded that to do so would breach its rules – it subsequently changed its rules but never acquired the book from Miss Jowett. When she died in 1990, her executors gave the book, together with some other objects, to the John Evelyn Society, which later became Wimbledon Museum. The book is in store and in need of conservation before it can be displayed. There are hopes that funding can be found for conservation.

◆ **Peter Hopkins** had received from Geoff Potter of Compass Archaeology the following report

'Repair works to Merton Priory Precinct Wall, London Borough of Merton SW19 – Phase 2: An archaeological watching brief report and recording of repairs, October 2025, 8: Conclusions'. It states:

The programme of archaeological monitoring undertaken by Compass Archaeology from 27th May to 23rd June forms the most recent of a series of watching briefs on investigation and repair works on the Precinct Wall of Merton Priory. The works have enabled a greater understanding of the construction methods and design of the wall in this area, which lacked the substantial foundation pads cut into natural alluvium [and filled with packed gravel] observed at 101 Christchurch Road. Instead, a quite substantial stepped masonry footing was exposed in all four of the trial holes at a level of c 12.20m OD, whilst in trial holes 1 and 4 a deeper bedding deposit, perhaps cut into the natural by up to 0.20 to 0.25m, was encountered. The reasons for the difference between this and the more substantial pad foundation elsewhere are unclear, though may relate to local ground conditions and in particular to the course of the River Pickle. Conversely, a masonry step footing similar to that exposed during the present works was not uncovered at 101 Christchurch Road. So it appears that a longer, continuous trench for a wide but relatively shallow stepped foundation was preferred, with some areas of deeper crushed stone &/or gravel bedding in areas of uneven or particularly waterlogged ground.

The watching brief also revealed evidence for substantial repairs and rebuilding, most likely in the post-medieval period and following the Dissolution. Of particular significance were bricks that were discovered built into the core of the precinct wall (*right, photo Geoff Potter*) and that were broadly dated to between 1550 and 1800, postdating even the latest estimate for the original construction. The bricks also appeared to have been re-used so, although their exact date remains unknown, their use here could well be late 17th century plus. The brick inclusions were concentrated towards the southern end of the collapsed section, although occasional examples were noted elsewhere and with no other apparent difference in construction.



So although the rebuilding may have been localised – rather than the entire precinct wall – it is likely that continues throughout the area of Collapse 'A'. The stepped base may however be earlier, with the rebuild above this level – potentially later medieval date (?15th century), which would tally with the dates of some of the peg-tile recovered from the lower deposits in the trial holes – and also with comparative evidence presented by MOLA (2014) for the attribution of a later 15th century date.

Unfortunately the date of the deposits or the wall itself could not be refined further, with other material in the core of the wall comprising reused fragments of worked and moulded medieval masonry – as noted on numerous occasions in previous work and confirmed by the present watching brief. The presence of this material is somewhat enigmatic: it could be that it was derived from alterations and rebuilding works during the life of the Priory, or perhaps re-used from buildings that had been demolished following the Dissolution. Again, this could have occurred as part of the immediate clearance of the Church and adjacent buildings in the 1530s-40s, or – as is suggested by the brick dating – at a later date, perhaps from structures which had initially been repurposed following the Dissolution.

As noted above, some of the adjacent deposits contained medieval material, primarily peg tile. However, the deposits to the east of the wall were generally of quite recent date: in part this probably reflects the build-up of land after the eastward realignment of the Pickle (& away from the wall) in the early 20th century. This area has also been quite heavily disturbed by previous groundworks and trial pitting.'

Peter had been looking through some files he'd received from Lionel Green and discovered among them correspondence between Lionel and Clive Whichelow in 2004 about the appeal for funds to establish the memorial garden on the site of the Priory high altar. With these papers were cuttings from *The Times* in 1924, 1926 and 1927, written by Lord Onslow and Canon Westlake. Lord Onslow's letter indicates that the appeal was to raise funds to purchase from Messrs Corfield Ltd the whole of the north side of the church to be laid out as a public garden with the church plan suitably marked out, not just the site subsequently purchased by Hatfield.

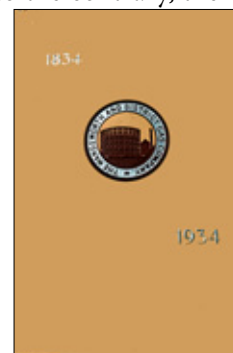
**Rosemary Turner**

## Workshop 28 November 2025 – 11 present, Rosemary Turner in the Chair

It was greatly encouraging to see three new members at the meeting.

◆ **Bill Bailey** returned to the history of Mitcham's Parish Council in the 1890s. [Readers may wish to refresh their memories by re-reading Bill's article in *Bulletin* 236]. At the election on 4 April 1898 15 members were elected, 11 of whom were on the 'Slate for Happy Homes' – set up to lobby for the provision of working class housing by the council. Most of the 11 were from the Singlegate end of Mitcham. This group, including three Mizens and three non-conformist ministers, had been lobbying Croydon Rural District Council for such housing and in December 1898 there was an enquiry in Vestry Hall where both sides were heard. Those against included a private builder, a Mr Wilson who claimed to be able to build 200 houses in a year. Dr Dodds, a Fabian dentist, was in favour. He later went on in 1909 to write about the provision of a National Health Service. The enquiry reported in January 1889 that, despite eloquent protests to the contrary, there was no reason to believe that private enterprise couldn't do the job.

◆ **Madeline Healey** brought along a booklet (*right*) published in 1934 which, amongst other items, gave the story of the "Epic of the *Wandle*", the first of three ships of that name which transported coal from Tyneside to Wandsworth and District Gas Company whose gasworks were at the mouth of the river Wandle. In 1916 the ship was involved in an engagement on Tyneside with a German submarine resulting in the disappearance of the submarine, some damage to the *Wandle* and injury to the fireman from a piece of shrapnel. Later in the year the ship and crew had a triumphal reception all the way up the Thames from Gravesend to Wandsworth. For more information on the third SS *Wandle*, see John Hawks' article in *Bulletin* 236, 'A forgotten part of local history'.



◆ **Peter Hopkins** reported that Compass Archaeology has been working on a desk-based assessment of 57 High Path – the current car wash site – opposite and immediately to the west of the High Path/Abbey Road junction. This site is of particular interest, as an excavation on an adjacent site revealed evidence of a watercourse which, C14 dates suggest, most likely silted up and went out of use during the 16th/17th centuries, so could well have formed part of Merton Priory's water management system. It is possible that it continues across the present site. Peter circulated extracts from the 1866 OS 25" map and the 1805 Merton Abbey estate plan, which depict various channels.

Peter also reported on an email received from Caroline Charles, a councillor for Ravensbury ward, asking for the Society's views on the Nurdin and Peacock Art Deco clock, which had been mounted on a tall white tower visible from the A3 and Bushey Road (*right, courtesy Merton Memories*). After demolition of the whole site several years ago, the clock was put into storage. Part of a subsequent approved planning application required the restoration of the clock to its former location.



Now that work has started on the site, the developers are less keen to comply with this condition on the grounds of the expense that would be incurred for repairs to the clock's mechanism. The group suggested that she might contact the British Horological Institute and the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers for advice.

◆ **Tony Dayan** had enjoyed a BALH online lecture by Andrew Ziminiski, a stone mason working for over 40 years in southern Britain, in particular on Salisbury Cathedral. The lecture looked at buildings and repairs, including the bad ones of the Victorian era and the 1860s and 1870s. He had published two books, *The Stone Mason* and *Church Going*, the latter of which would be useful for those going on a 'church crawl'.

◆ **Rosemary Turner** had further information on 297 Commonsides East Mitcham (see *Bulletin* 234). The planning consent for three buildings is still in place and includes the usual wildlife provisions. Mitcham Common Preservation Society and The Conservators of the Common commented on lack of information and the need for work, at the developers' expense, to the access track to the common. Eric Montague had mentioned that there had been a chemical works nearby from the early 1900s to 1940. In 1950 the council discovered that the works had filled a gravel pit with chemical at the rear of Tamworth Cottages with toxic waste. It was excavated and back filled with inert rubble and hardcore and left as an empty space. The 1910 Valuation Records noted that 'residents notice an unpleasant smell coming from the factory'.

**Janet Holdsworth**

**Next Workshops: Fridays 10 April, 22 May, 3 July, 14 August, 25 September, 6 November 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!**

## FAR FAMED CAKE COMPANY LTD

In all the time that I've been researching the shops that sprang up along Colliers Wood High Street at the beginning of the 20th century, one name has intrigued me – The Far Famed Cake Company (Depot). It seemed to be located at the southern end of a row of shops known as The Pavement – as it turns out, one of three 'Pavements' in the local area.

The Far Famed Cake Company (Depot) first appeared in the 1905-06 Trim's Directory, at 65 High Street. It is then recorded in Kelly's directories of Mitcham at 38 High Street, Colliers Wood, Merton from 1911 until 1925. It seemed to be located in a gap between buildings, sometimes with a street number and sometimes without. I wondered about it quite often, then one day I was waiting at the bus stop, and I realised that there it was – the gap, and the 'depot' building itself. (Photos 1 and 2)



James Bass, in his *Recollections of an Edwardian childhood*, recalled that when the fire station bell was rung, the horses, already harnessed, were brought from the Far Famed Cake Company, 'up near the Tooting Railway Bridge', to pull the local Fire Engine, which was located where the underground station now stands.

The empty space is now used as a customer car park by Burge & Gunson, plumbers' merchants, who have a large showroom across the road. I was given permission to wander around the car parking area and take photos, but warned not to go into the buildings, as they're deemed unsafe.

This card (Photos 3 and 4), bought on Ebay, uses the older address of The Pavement, and names 'Mr Thorne' as the recipient. It provides a place for orders to be made (if posted before 5pm) – there was a Post Office located at no 2 The Pavement, where collections were made at 8.20, 9.20, 10.10, 12.25, 2.35, 4.10, 7, 8, 8.45 and 11.40, and, presumably, there were just as many deliveries.



No. of Van.....		Telegraphic address "BISCUITS," London.	
Order from.....		s. d. s. d.	
1d. Puffs		1b. Jersey Sea t at 3d.	
1d. Raspberry Rolls		1b. Jersey at 3d.	
1d. Banburys, best		1s. Long Currant	
1d. Banburys, Large		1s. " Sultana	
1d. Khartoum		1s. " Seed	
1d. Mince Pies		1d. Scones, City	
1d. Eccles		1d. Do, Large	
1s. Custards		1d. Round Scones	
1d. Open Jams		3d. Do. Scones	
1d. Currant Cakes		1d. Pound Cakes	
1d. Ditto		1d. Napoleon Cakes	
1d. Seed Cakes		1d. Do.	
6d. Madeira Cakes		1d. Sponges	
6d. Sultana Cakes		1d. Do.	
5s. Seed Cakes		3d. Lennington Cakes	
1d. Currant—Best		8d. San Iwiches 6s. doz	
1d. Seed—Best		8d. Swiss Roll 6s. doz.	
1d. Cocoa Nut Cakes		1d. Bath Buns	
1d. Butter Cakes		Tins at 6d.	
1d. Brandy Snaps		Tins at 1s.	
1d. Gingerbread		Boxes at 6d.	
1d. Berlin Cakes			
1d. Short Cakes			
1b. Seed at 6d.			
1b. Genoa at 8d.			
1b. Genoa at 6d.			
1b. Seed at 8d.			
1b. College Cks. 4d.			
		TOTAL &	

*This Card must be posted before 5 p.m.*

There is also a telegraphic address 'Biscuits London' (strange, as the company only offered cakes on this card, not biscuits). Use of the telegraph peaked around 1900, and after 1911 it reduced significantly.

Who was Mr Thorne? The 1911 census lists William Thorn, age 44, living at '8 Swains Lane, 8 Robinson Lane, Tooting, Mitcham, Surrey', an address that comprehensively lists both street names and both districts, just to be sure. Swains Lane was the old name for Robinson Road, and Swains Road is now the tail end of Robinson Road, heading towards London Road, Mitcham. He was listed as a 'night porter, warehouse', and lived with his wife, a chocolate packer for Pascall, his son, 5 daughters and elderly widowed father. In 1921, William Thorne still lived at 8 Swains Lane, Totting (*sic*), still a 'night porter, wholesale warehouse', but working for Cook Son & Coy, in St Paul's Church Yard. By 1939, he was widowed, and living at 24 Swain's Road, Mitcham, with George Gilbert, who was a baker's roundsman, and his wife Annie. Was Mr Thorne responsible for preparing the Far Famed Cake Company's orders at night, ready for dispatch?

Census returns also lead us to Alexander Noall, who in 1901 was already living 'between 77 and 61 High Street, Colliers Wood', age 35, manager of a cake and biscuit depot, with his wife, 3 sons and 1 daughter. Did they live somewhere in the warehouse buildings? By 1911 Alexander Noall, age 45, 'depot manager, Cake company', is living at 38 High Street, Colliers Wood, with his wife, 3 sons, a daughter and a niece. Nowadays, this address belongs to the building on the right of the warehouse entrance. In 1921 he is still there, with his wife, 3 sons and a daughter, as 'depot manager for Far Famed Cake Company Ltd'.

Before being depot manager, Alexander Noall had appeared in the 1891 census as a commercial clerk, living in Abbott Road, Poplar – only 5 minutes' walk from the Far Famed Cake Company's factory which opened in 1881, in Fawe Street, Poplar, east London. Perhaps he was offered a promotion within the company, in exchange for moving to the other side of the city. He died aged 61, on 3 April 1927, at 75 Robinson Road, Colliers Wood, and left his wife £257/4/- in his will.

The location of a cake depot so far from the factory may be explained by the fact that small-scale baking facilities were expanded by companies such as J Lyons in the mid-1890s. Moving from small bakehouses, they purchased larger premises and large-scale baking started. For J Lyons, the new facilities had so much capacity that it was decided to sell bread to the local community from hand-carts operating from Cadby Hall, in Hammersmith. This was expanded dramatically and horse-drawn cabs were introduced to take the product further afield until the best part of London was being served. Cakes were added to their product list, as they stayed fresh longer than bread, and then biscuits, which lasted even longer. I imagine that the Far Famed Cake Company moved with the times, and used the Colliers Wood depot to distribute its products to south and west London.

Advertising materials for the Far Famed Cake Company were many and varied. Online, I have found the 1897 Jubilee medal for the '60<sup>th</sup> year of Her Majesty's Reign: Far Famed Cakes & Biscuits are the best', (photos 5 and 6) a garlanded cake tin, a shop counter display jar, a cake tin in the shape of an urn and a button hook in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, which rates a mention in the online article 'The fascinating lives of buttonhooks'.



The Far Famed Cake Company was bought by Fitch Lovell in 1950, then merged with another company to form Hales Trent Cakes in 1962, and in 1974 it was swallowed up by the huge company that was J Lyons & Co, famous for its teashops (1884-1980) and Lyons Corner Houses in the West End of London (1909-1977). Lyons itself was later purchased and broken up, being integrated into numerous larger multinational corporations, remaining only as a nostalgic brand.

**Christine Pittman**

The next edition of the *Bulletin* will contain a report on our 75th anniversary meeting in February and an invitation to all members to the launch of a book on the history of Merton Historical Society, written by our young researcher, scheduled for summer 2026.

## CAUSES FOR CONCERN

The committee of Merton Historical Society does not have the resources to campaign on planning matters, but we are very happy to hear members' concerns and to direct people towards reliable sources of historical information, either in print or in our research files. We're often alerted to issues by email, or at our 6-weekly local history workshops, and we do try to report on them in our *Bulletin*.

Recently there was concern for the replica weatherboarded cottage at 110 Christchurch Road, Colliers Wood, threatened with demolition on land now for sale. A full article was published in MHS *Bulletin* 140, December 2001 p14, written by Eric Montague, at the time that it was rebuilt. This is available on our website.



70 Christchurch Rd Colliers Wood; (above left: before renovation; Roger Armstrong collection mhs-ra-002; above right CP 2025)

Other developments which have featured in online groups are the West Barnes/Worcester Park gasholders and the surrounding greenspace, Majestic Way, Mitcham and Colliers Wood towers.

We must not forget local successes, though – these two weatherboarded cottages in London Road, Mitcham, are Grade II listed. Seen here in Eric Montague's photo taken in 1966 (*below, left*), their condition deteriorated and they were put on the Heritage at Risk Register in 2016, but they have recently been restored, and the second photo (*below right*) was taken by the writer in 2026.



Should any members have the time and experience to help with campaigns that threaten to destroy our heritage, please do get in touch with us. You don't have to be a committee member to join in our work. You can email for research advice to [mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:mhs@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk), write a short article for the *Bulletin* and send it to [editor@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:editor@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk) or come along to one of our local history workshops, dates on the website.

**Christine Pittman, Chairperson**

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

Letters and contributions for the *Bulletin* should be sent to the Hon. Editors,  
by email to [editor@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:editor@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk).

The views expressed in this *Bulletin* are those  
of the contributors concerned and not necessarily those of the Society or its Officers.

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