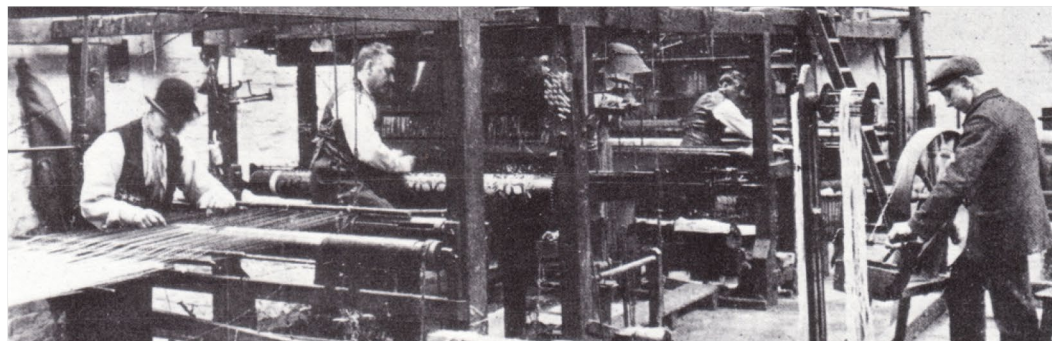


# Merton Working HERITAGE



## THE HERITAGE WALK

Merton Working Heritage is a heritage project based at the historic heart of Merton in Colliers Wood and Mitcham. The project focus is on local work and industry and the working lives of local people. As part of the project we have developed a heritage walk from Colliers Wood to Mitcham Cricket Green. The route follows the River Wandle and records the rich industrial heritage of the area.



This leaflet is a guide to the route for the walk with details on the industrial heritage sites. There is more information on our project, local working heritage and our events on our website: [www.mertonworkingheritage.co.uk](http://www.mertonworkingheritage.co.uk).

If you want to add any pictures or your working heritage memories please use our twitter feed [@MertonWorkHerit](https://twitter.com/MertonWorkHerit)



LOTTERY FUNDED

## SOURCES OF HERITAGE INFORMATION

**Merton Heritage and Local Studies Centre,**  
2nd floor, Morden Library, Merton Civic  
Centre, London Road, Morden, SM4 5DX

**Tel:** 020 8545 3239/4038

**Email:** [local.studies@merton.gov.uk](mailto:local.studies@merton.gov.uk)

**Opening Times:** Monday to Friday 9.30am to  
7pm, Saturday 9.30am to 5pm

**Wandle Industrial Museum, Vestry Hall  
Annexe, London Rd, Mitcham, CR4 3UD**

**Tel:** 020 8648 0127

**Email:** [office@wandle.org](mailto:office@wandle.org)

**Opening Times:** Wednesday 1pm to 4pm,  
Sunday 2pm to 5pm

## HERITAGE LINKS

### Local Heritage Organisations

**The Merton Historical Society:**  
[www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk](http://www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk)

**The Wandle Industrial Museum:**  
[www.wandle.org](http://www.wandle.org)

**Morden Hall Park:**  
[www.nationaltrust.org.uk/morden-hall-park](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/morden-hall-park)

**The Wheelhouse at Merton Abbey Mills:**  
[www.wandleheritage.org.uk](http://www.wandleheritage.org.uk)

### Archaeology in Merton

**The William Morris Site (and others):**  
[www.photoarchive.merton.gov.uk/collections/archaeology/32996](http://www.photoarchive.merton.gov.uk/collections/archaeology/32996)

**Link to a pdf document detailing Merton's past archaeology:**  
[www.merton.gov.uk/spg\\_archaeology\\_-\\_part\\_1.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/spg_archaeology_-_part_1.pdf)

**Merton Priory:**  
[www.mertonpriory.org/history/2.html](http://www.mertonpriory.org/history/2.html)

### Historical Photographs of Merton

**The 'Merton Memories' Council Website:**  
[www.photoarchive.merton.gov.uk](http://www.photoarchive.merton.gov.uk)

### Heritage Maps of Merton

**Merton Council:**  
[www.merton.gov.uk/environment/designandconservation/heritagemaps.htm](http://www.merton.gov.uk/environment/designandconservation/heritagemaps.htm)

**The Wandle Trail:**  
[www.merton.gov.uk/leisure/visiting/attractions/wandle\\_trail-4.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/leisure/visiting/attractions/wandle_trail-4.pdf)

### History & Heritage in Merton

**Merton Heritage and Local Studies Centre:**  
[www.arena.yourlondonlibrary.net/web/merton/heritage](http://www.arena.yourlondonlibrary.net/web/merton/heritage)  
**Brief History of Merton:**  
[www.merton.gov.uk/leisure/history-heritage/makingmerton.htm](http://www.merton.gov.uk/leisure/history-heritage/makingmerton.htm)

### Liberty's at Merton

**Arthur Liberty & The Liberty Store:**  
[www.microsites.merton.gov.uk/riverandcloth/node/400.html](http://www.microsites.merton.gov.uk/riverandcloth/node/400.html)  
**Digging Liberty - a Time Team archaeological dig at the Merton site:**  
[www.channel4.com/programmes/time-team/on-demand/33104-006](http://www.channel4.com/programmes/time-team/on-demand/33104-006)

[www.mertonworkingheritage.co.uk](http://www.mertonworkingheritage.co.uk)

### The River Wandle

**River Wandle Companion:**  
[www.wandlebook.co.uk](http://www.wandlebook.co.uk)

**Wandle Valley Park:**  
[www.wandlevalleypark.co.uk/projects/reflecting-the-wandle](http://www.wandlevalleypark.co.uk/projects/reflecting-the-wandle)

**Wandle Heritage:**  
<http://www.wandleheritage.org.uk>

**Living Wandle Partnership:**  
[www.wandlevalleypark.co.uk/living-wandle-partners](http://www.wandlevalleypark.co.uk/living-wandle-partners)



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# WORKING HERITAGE ON THE WALK

## 1 The River Wandle

The Wandle was famous for cloth making going back to the early 1300s, with records of milling going back to the Domesday Survey in 1086. Calico printing on cloth became popular here in the 1700s with mills set up north of Morden Hall Park at Bunce's Meadow, Phipps Bridge and Merton Abbey as well as to the south in Ravensbury Park. As well as the textile mills, water power was used to grind corn and wheat to make bread, tobacco to make snuff, making paper or even gun powder.

## 2 New Merton Board Mills

This was the site of a paper mill until it was demolished in 1985 and replaced by the Savacentre store (now Sainsbury's). These pictures also detail the former railway where the nearby Merton Abbey Station was closed in 1972.



## 3 Morris & Co Works

William Morris was the greatest designer of his day. In 1881 he opened a factory, where Sainsbury's is now. The factory was used for dyeing, cloth printing, carpet weaving and tapestry making. The buildings remained virtually unchanged until the factory closed in 1940.

Morris also designed furniture, stained glass windows, tapestries and wallpapers. He was associated with the Pre-Raphaelite group which included the artist Edward Burne-Jones and the painter Dante Gabriel Rossetti – famously working with Burne-Jones on stained glass designs. In addition to his design work, he was famous for his writing and as a socialist campaigner. He believed in using natural materials and motifs taken from nature in his work and wanted beautiful things to be available to everyone, not just the rich. When he died in 1896 aged 65, one of his doctors said it was caused by him *“doing the work of ten men in one lifetime”*.

## 4 The Wheelhouse

This waterwheel is the only remaining operating waterwheel on the river Wandle. Nowadays the Wheelhouse is used as a pottery workshop and gallery, and the wheel is used to turn a potter's wheel. It has also been modified to generate electricity and powers other machinery including a lathe and incorporates its own self-lubricating device.

## 5 Liberty & Co Works

Cloth printing on this site dates back to 1724, and in 1831 Edmund Littler took over the works for the production of silks and fine fabrics. By 1875 Littler's started to print goods for Liberty's famous Regent Street shop and eventually all of their printed output was exclusively for Liberty's. One surviving building from the early print works is the “Colour House” built around 1740-1750. This picture shows the site in 1963.

Liberty's bought the print works in 1904. Shortly afterwards a number of the earlier buildings were

demolished and were gradually replaced by new brick buildings. During the Second World War, part of the factory was leased to a company making aircraft parts for the war effort.

Production scaled down in the 1970s and the premises finally closed in 1982. Many of Liberty's buildings still survive today - the site is currently used as a market with restaurants and shops called Merton Abbey Mills.



## 6 Varnish Works

William Harland & Sons Ltd were paint and varnish manufacturers situated in Phipps Bridge Road. They were associated with Mitcham from the early 19th century, and the factory finally closed down in the 1960s. There were many other paint and varnish factories throughout Mitcham up until the 1970s.

## 7 Bunces Meadow

The area known locally as Bunce's Meadow was one of many local areas close to the river used as bleaching grounds in the early cloth industry. Bleaching began about 250 years ago and involved cloth being repeatedly washed in clean water and then 'bleached' by the sun. Many of the people involved in bleaching moved to the area from Holland and Belgium where the process had been perfected. By the late 1800s, chemical bleaching

started taking place inside factories instead of naturally outdoors and the old bleaching fields were often then used to grow water cress.

## 8 Morden Hall Park

This was the site of a family owned estate dating back to the 1700s and is now owned by the National Trust. In addition to the mills, the estate also originally contained a dairy with a working farm and cattle on adjacent land. Morden Hall, its cottages, the estate and mills were owned by the Hatfield family until they were bequeathed to the National Trust in 1941.

## 9 The Snuff Mill

The first snuff mill was built on the estate in 1750 on the east side of the River Wandle. It was first run by Peter Davenport and Nathaniel Polhill. Nathaniel was also an MP for Southwark in the late 1770s. During this time snuff was growing in popularity and to meet demand the West Mill was built in 1830. This new mill benefited from modern technology including a mechanical pestle and mortar to grind the tobacco leaves. The mill closed in 1922 and all the machinery was all sold for scrap in 1929, but a spare wheel remains in the park today.





## 10 Morden Cottage and Mill Cottage

The original owners of the Snuff Mill lived in **Morden Cottage** from 1758, but the Hatfields moved into Morden Hall when they bought it in 1865. When Gilliatt Edward Hatfield inherited it from his father in 1906, he found it too large for his needs and moved back into the Cottage.



Three generations of the Groves family worked in the snuff mills at Morden, starting with James Groves who is recorded as a 'snuff grinder' in Morden in 1861. He lived in **Mill Cottage** with his wife Rachel and their 10 children.



Records show that his son William and grandson John, and all other male family members, worked in the mill in different jobs. John continued to work at the estate after the mills closed in 1922 and remained there until his death in 1967. The Groves family lived in Mill Cottage for over 100 years, and the women of the family also found work on the estate.

## 11 Ravensbury Mill

The Mill building which spans the River Wandle on the south side of Morden Road, is the last of a series of mill buildings on the site, and was built in about 1800. On the Mitcham side of the river, a Mr Rutter produced snuff and tobacco for pipes, from 1806 until about 1925.

Later, Whiteley Products occupied the building and produced all kinds of sporting equipment from skipping ropes to starting gates for horse races. The Company left the site in the mid 1980s. This grade 2 listed building still has two water wheels, but they are not in their original working order.



## 12 Ravensbury Print Works

The site of the Ravensbury Calico Print Works is under the lock-up garages and flats to the north of the park. The print works were run by the Mauvillains, a Huguenot family from about 1690 to about 1740. A series of other families continued with the same industry on the site until the 1880s. Now, all that remains of the works today is a length of red brick wall and a backwater of the Wandle.

## 13 The Bleaching Grounds

Ravensbury Park comprises 16½ acres. 14 acres lie in Mitcham and the remainder in Merton. The two Councils then agreed to buy it and to preserve the land for a public park in 1930.

There is evidence that parallel ditches once crossed the open grass land (close to the Morden Road), suggesting that it was here that the bleaching grounds were sited.



## 14 Grove Mill

The present Grove Mill which is behind the cottage was built in 1907, it had previously been a corn mill but was then used for upholstery manufacture, and later for other light industrial uses until being converted into flats in 2003. The Crown Paper Mill was also formerly situated here by Mitcham Bridge along with Glovers Snuff Mill.



## 15 Mitcham Brewery

Mitcham Brewery existed from 1767. It was run by Attlees then Thunder and Little, famous locally for 'Mitcham Ales', and had several owners and names including 'Wandle Grove Brewery' and 'The Surrey Brewery' until the early

1900s. The site was then for various light industrial purposes until becoming the location of the new Mitcham Fire Station in 2015.

## 16 Surrey Iron Railway

The Surrey Iron Railway was the world's first public railway company, it was built in 1803; it ran on a track for horse-drawn carts moving goods up and down from the mills to each other and back and fro from the Thames in Wandsworth. The line ran on part of the route that is now used for the Croydon Tramlink.



## 17 Wandle Industrial Museum

The museum was founded in 1983. Its mission is to preserve, store, and interpret the heritage and history of the industries and people of the River Wandle. It includes exhibitions on William Morris, Liberty's and the Surrey Iron Railway.





