

## **MADELINE HEALEY has put together A PERSONAL HISTORY OF MORDEN HALL PARK**

My grandfather William Williams was born in Church Road, Mitcham, in 1883. He was the only son of John Williams who owned the butcher's shop next to the *Bull* inn. This shop had belonged to the Williams family since 1833. We can actually trace our family back to about 1748, so we have been in the Mitcham/Morden area since the time of the building of Morden Hall.

Sadly, when William was only 18 months old his father died. William's mother, Sarah Madeline, carried on the business for a while, but eventually she sold it and remarried. Her second husband was Abram Clark. He was at that time Head Stockman to Gilliat Hatfeild. This is where our family became directly connected with Morden Hall.

We are not quite sure of the date when Abram Clark became bailiff; it was probably about 1890. Gilliat Hatfeild bought more and more land and property as it came on the market. He wanted to build up his estate and become a country gentleman, as well as a tobacco and snuff merchant. The work of the bailiff increased, with more rents to collect, and buildings to maintain. Sarah Madeline, my great-grandmother, kept the books for him. When they were sent annually to London to be audited she was complimented on her neatness and accuracy (not alas something that I have inherited!). They moved into the old house that stood beside the river next to Ravensbury Mill in Morden Road. There William grew up with his three stepsisters, travelling to Wimbledon every day for school. Abram was very strict, and Sarah Madeline was very severe.



*The Bailiff's House*

Having served his apprenticeship as a carpenter at Harrods, William came to work for Mr Hatfeild in 1906. He worked on the estate as a carpenter, also helping on the farm as necessary with haymaking and harvesting, as did all the other men.

As Gilliat Hatfeild grew older he became more of a recluse. He employed two manservants to look after him. He rarely spoke to people. The house and park were kept very private. It is said that he never entered the snuff mills, even though they provided most of his income. His son Gilliat Edward travelled abroad and studied all aspects of the tobacco and snuff trade while he was still young. Before his father died in 1906, leaving £1.25 million, he had already taken over the running of the snuff mills. At this time Morden Hall Park was in its heyday.

### **By Madeline's mother, the late Mrs E M Sales (written in 1996):**

I was born in 1904 and brought up at Keeper's Cottage, or Lodge as it was then called. My father William Williams was then Estate Carpenter to Mr Hatfeild. Our cottage was on the Mitcham boundary of the estate. We were quite detached, as we had a high brick wall which ran alongside the road, and one that divided our ground from Wandle Villa. There was also a large stable, that one day collapsed without warning just as we had left for school, and so we missed all the excitement! The river ran on the other side. There was a paddock at the end with a lovely little brook running through it. It went underground from there and came up in Harlands private garden.

I had a brother and a sister. We had a happy childhood on the whole. We had the garden, the river, and there was also a brick building known as the Fish House. It was said that it had been used for fish breeding in its time. We had wonderful pretend games in there. Adjoining that building were two cattle sheds where the cattle came in when the fields were waterlogged.

The little brook gave us much pleasure. We used to catch sticklebacks, frogs and toads with our nets. We kept them in a pail of water until the evening when we would return them carefully to the brook. We never hurt any of the little creatures. Mr Hatfeild occasionally walked down by the river from the park. He would stop and have a chat. He was always interested in whatever we were doing.

The whole of our large garden was cultivated. Our parents worked very hard. We always had fresh vegetables and fruit. Our favourite was the large strawberry bed! We did not have the luxuries and comforts of the children of today, but we always had good food and warm clothing. During the 1914 war my father went into the army and my mother kept everything going. I suppose we were better fed than many. We had chickens and rabbits. I well remember the excitement when the chicks were hatched!

My grandparents, Abram and Sarah Clark, who lived at the Bailiff's House beside Ravensbury Mill, left Morden in 1916. They went to live at Westgate-on-Sea on the Kent coast, owing to my grandmother's ill-health. Mr Reuben Mears then took over and stayed until about 1942, when my father became Bailiff and moved to Ravensbury. The house was a large Georgian one by the river with a lovely garden. He lived there until he died at 80 years of age. My mother left there as it was too large for her. She went to live at Cranmer Farm Close. She was 101 years of age when she died. The Bailiff's House is no longer there sadly, and the lovely garden is now the entrance to Ravensbury Park.

I married in 1920 and left Keeper's Lodge at Phipps Bridge to live in one of Mr Hatfeild's cottages in Garth Road. In 1939 we moved into another cottage in Lower Morden Lane, where I still live. My elder son has written his memories of Ravensbury and the calico printing mill which stood over the river. It was a wonderful old mill still in working order.

I remember going to the flower shows in Morden Hall Park. It was the usual village show, with vegetables, flowers and cakes from the ladies. The Holborn School boys from Mitcham played in the band. We were allowed to walk in the grounds, and I particularly remember the kitchen gardens where, of course, the garden centre now stands. We were allowed to walk through the glasshouses, and I can recall the lovely smell in the tomato house. There was a gardener on duty at the entrance, I suppose to see that the door was not left open. Even now, whenever I enter a tomato house it takes me back to Morden Hall all those years ago.

Another happy memory is that of haymaking time. All the men helped with it and we used to take tea to our father. We children hurried home from school and mother would be waiting with sandwiches, cakes and hot tea to take. Sometimes we were in the stack-yard, which was at the end of Central Road. At other times they would be in the field. We loved it, especially when we were allowed to ride back in the empty wagon behind the big old horses. All that changed with the coming of the St Helier Estate.

After Mr Hatfeild's death my father was asked to look after the estate until the war ended. Mr Hatfeild's two nephews came up from time to time and took lunch alternately with my parents and Mr Moore the head gardener, and his wife.

I remember Mr Hatfeild's funeral. He was brought to the church, via Central Road, in a plain farm wagon, drawn by an old farm horse, and led by Harry Greenleaf. It was very moving. I believe it was his wish to have a simple funeral.

My family have worked for Morden Hall Park for many years. My grandparents, my father and my brother for Mr Hatfeild, my daughter in the National Trust shop, and my two granddaughters in the café - making five generations.