



Commonside Lunch Club Memories

Nicky Interviewing Members of the Commonside Lunch Club on 22nd
July 2014

Nicky - *Have you seen any ducks and birds?*

Barbara - *On the river, yeah. I think they were ducks. Yeah.*

Nicky - *Because when there's wildlife, it shows that the river's healthier, doesn't it?*

Barbara - *Yeah*

Nicky - *So do you think there was more wildlife before, or do you still think...*

Barbara - *I don't really know.*

Nicky - *Which bit of the river do you live near? Do you live near here?*

Barbara - *I don't live far from it.*

Nicky - *So when do you see it? When do you go there? Do you...*

Barbara - *I don't go there now.*

Nicky - *So what sort of things did you do?*

Barbara - *Oh, blimey, I forget. You forget those years.*

Nicky - *But you enjoyed the ducks and the birds.*

Nicky - *Have you got any memories to share? Andy? Andy's got some. Brilliant*

Another voice - *He's the Wandle Man.*

Nicky - *The Wandle Man!*

Andy - *The Wandle. I mean obviously, I did a quite a study of Mitcham history while I was at school and of course the Wandle plays a bit part in that. I mean, way back when the monks were running the abbey at Merton, Abbey, they had trout ponds and salmon ponds running off the Wandle so it was clean enough then to have fish. But by the time I came along, back in 19 frightened to death, I was one of these little lads who used to wander down the Wandle with me little net and me bamboo cane and me jam jar and we used to get sticklebacks. We used to have to catch the sticklebacks and take them home and Mum say, "What you want them for? Put them away" But the very last thing, I went to school in West Monroe, which is not a million miles from the Wandle, and the last thing I actually made at school was a 14 foot plywood canoe, an actual proper canoe and of course I thought, where can I test this?*



Andy - *And of course the obvious place was the Wandle. So I am one of the rare few people who have actually probably boated on the Wandle because I actually had my canoe and I took it down there, mainly to make sure it wasn't leaking. And I found it wasn't. So then we just, then the school took me and a lot of other kids off to Wimbledon Park to test it properly. But, yeah, so been around the Wandle and, I mean I used to play on Phipps Bridge, which of course is where the Wandle runs through Bunce's Meadow, which is now Dean City Farm, that kind of area. So I was always, and Morden Hall Park was, again, a childhood haunt where, actually, in the autumn, when we went out for our conkers. But, very often, we were too busy looking where the trees were and we'd step back and end up going home in a rather wet state because we were in the Wandle.*

Andy - *But then, I can actually remember my Mum taking me to my doctor's because I'd fallen in the Wandle and "Is he going to catch anything?" And we had to have, you know, and the doctor said, "Well, as long as you washed him down, he'll be fine." You know; and we always were. But, yeah, the Wandle back in the sort of 50s, 60s was not clean, at all, would certainly not have had salmon and trout in it. But, yeah, again, I mean now it's getting better and better and better, you know, I mean like the Thames. The Thames, you know, has been cleaned up, and it's great. It's great to see it coming back to life and of course as it comes back to life, more plants, more fish, you know, and it's a living river again, which is great.*

Nicky - *That's fantastic. Whereabouts was it that you took your canoe?*

Andy - *I put it in at the bridge at the back of Phipps Bridge Road. You know, there's a folly, which I think is National Trust ground along there. I put it in there because that was the most accessible point. And I kind of went up along the back of Phipps Bridge, along there, and actually ducked under the fence, into Morden Hall Park. So I was actually, you know, ended up paddling through Morden Hall Park, till someone said, "Hey, what you doing there?" And I kind of turned round and went the other way and got out again. But, yeah, it was great.*

Opposite Merton bus garage, I think it's colliers wood high street or Merton road, but where the Sainsbury's shop is now, that used to be the Merton board mills and that was one of the early recycling places they used to bring the cardboard in pulp it all up and reconstitute it into more cardboard but obviously they used the Wandle water for this process and you'd walk along that and get covered in foam because the foam used to be anything up to about 2 foot deep along that bit and if it was a good wind it would blow the tops off and it was just like soapsuds yknow and it would blow and there'd be soap suds blowing all over the place in a high wind cos the mills were doing all this sort of stuff and of course obviously the cleaning agents were getting into the water which of course didn't do much good for the water, but that's part of what they used to do.

On top of that, the Wandle was used many times by the fire brigade to put out the fires in the board mills so they would literally come along with their pumps, stick them into the Wandle and squirt that over the board mills when they were on fire. Yeah, the Wandle's been used for all sorts of stuff!